Order Out of Chaos: The Growth of Botanical Science in Nineteenth Century St. Louis

Nuala F. Caomhánach, University of Missouri-St. Louis

Document Type
Thesis

Degree
Master of Arts

Major
History

Date of Defense
3-20-2013

Graduate Advisor
Steven Rowan, Ph. D.

Committee
Professor John Gillingham

Dr. Peter Raven

Abstract
This thesis places the botanical community in nineteenth century St. Louis back in the center of the development of botanical science in the United States. Historical models have been focused on east-coast centers, favoring the research of closet botanists in Philadelphia and Harvard University. By reevaluating the scientific research of collectors and residents in St. Louis it reveals the crucial role the community played in the emergence of a particularly American form of botany. In its early development, visiting naturalists explored and sent their collections to Philadelphia to be classified. By mid-century, resident botanists, such as Dr. George Engelmann, collaborated closely with the cities in the east. He exchanged plant material, books and botanical knowledge with Asa Gray in Harvard and John Torrey in New York. The desire of the community to raise the intellectual and cultural status of the city culminated in the founding of the Academy of Science in St. Louis and the Missouri Botanical Gardens. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Garden, under the directorship of Dr. William Trelease, transformed into a world renowned botanical institution. Trelease lead the way for subsequent directors to create an institution for the discovery and education of plants and their environment in order to preserve biodiversity and understand nature. This thesis is an attempt to place this unique botanical community onto the historical stage in the development of science in the United States.

Recommended Citation
https://irl.umsl.edu/thesis/173