

Carl Sandburg, The Confederate States of America, and the UNC Herbarium

by Herbarium Natural Science Technician Carol Ann McCormick

This summer Rickie White, Regional Vegetation Ecologist with NatureServe, spent many weeks in the University of North Carolina Herbarium identifying and mounting plant specimens that he and fellow botanists Alan Weakley, Tom Ferguson, and Anne Ulinski had collected at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site in Flat Rock, North Carolina. In addition to managing the antebellum home, the National Park Service preserves the 264-acres of surrounding pastures, rock outcrops, forests, and woodlands. NatureServe is working collaboratively with park service staff and volunteers to update the herbarium at the park and to attempt to collect and to voucher at least 90% of the vascular plants located in the park.

As Rickie glued and sewed herbarium sheets, I asked him to tell me about the Sandburg Home. I learned that Carl Sandburg, poet and essayist whom I'd always associated with the Midwest, moved to Flat Rock, North Carolina in 1945. Lilian Sandburg used the pastures around the antebellum house to raise champion goats, while Carl continued to write. The house, Rickie had learned, was built ca. 1838 by Christopher Gustavus Memminger, the first Secretary of the Treasury of the Confederate States of America. Memminger, a banker from Charleston, South Carolina, built this house in the mountains of North Carolina to escape the summer heat of the coast.

The name "Memminger" rang a bell in my mind, and being neither a Sandburg scholar nor deeply informed about Confederate fiduciary matters, I was confident it was a *botanical* bell. A quick look in our Herbarium database confirmed that we have dozens of specimens collected by Edward Read Memminger. Indeed, Rickie and I were excited to learn that Edward Memminger's collections dated from the 1880's and that most were collected around Flat Rock, NC. Mere coincidence??

Rickie conferred with Warren Weber, the Chief Resource Manager of the Carl Sandburg Home, and found that Edward Read Memminger was Christopher Memminger's son. Edward was an avid botanist and built his own house, "Tranquility" just down Little River Road from his parents' home. Tranquility still stands today and Edward was still living there when Sandburg bought the old family home. He gave Sandburg an album filled with the history of the home and the Memminger family – this album is preserved in the collections of the Historic Site. Edward Memminger died in his 90's in 1948. After Carl Sandburg's death in 1967, his home was acquired by the National Park Service in 1968.

Edward Read Memminger collected many species near Flat Rock: *Aralia spinosa* (Devil's Walking Stick), *Arenaria glabra* (Appalachian Stitchwort), and *Sarracenia rubra* (Sweet Pitcherplant) to name just a few. As the UNC Herbarium is electronically catalogued, no doubt more Memminger specimens will be found. Historians at the Sandburg home were under the impression that Memminger's specimens went to UNC-Asheville, so Rickie and I will search that herbarium as well.

I recently asked Rickie what cool plants he'd found at the Sandburg Home Historic Site, and he mentioned *Thermopsis mollis* (Allegheny Mountain goldenbanner), which the NC Natural Heritage Program lists as a "significantly rare" species. Sure enough, when I checked Memminger's collections, he'd collected it from "open mountainsides, Flat Rock, North Carolina" in 1886. Using Memminger's collections as a guide, Rickie White hopes to find (or, shall I say "re-find") other interesting plants at the Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site.