

CHAPTER FOUR: WAR'S END AND NEW BEGINNINGS

The war in Europe officially ended on May 8, 1945; but you just don't go home the day after. It takes months to demobilize a great military machine in orderly fashion. And there was still a war to be won in the Pacific; many troops were already being transferred to this new arena. But to the weary men and women waiting to embark for home, and to their families impatiently looking for their return, those were the longest months of the war.

On September 8th, Albert wrote from Nurenberg, Germany: "...tomorrow morning I start my westward homeward trek, so this is my last letter from Europe. Das ist alles von Europa! WE HOPE!!!" However, it was October 11th before he finally departed aboard the Victory ship, St. Albans. Nine days later he set foot on his native soil after an absence of nearly two years. At last he was safely home, and like countless other couples and families everywhere, our joy knew no bounds - shadowed only by sorrow for those thousands upon thousands whose loved ones would never come home again.

Dr. Coker had always planned that Albert would be a member of the botany staff upon completion of his degree after the war. He was also counting on my continuing as curator of the herbarium. A few weeks before Albert's return to the states, a letter arrived from Dr. Couch saying they hoped he would come back to Chapel Hill to continue his interrupted graduate studies, and asking that he let them know as soon as possible what he wished to do. After two years of intensive training to become a combat engineer, followed by two more years of active duty overseas, Albert felt he had retained little of the botany he once knew so well...perhaps he should consider farming, or possibly some phase of engineering. I reminded him that he had always found his greatest happiness in roaming the fields and woods, collecting and studying plants. I felt certain it would all come back to him very quickly, once he began his studies again. His farming/engineering fantasy soon evaporated. We drove down to Chapel Hill to talk things over with Dr. Couch, and before long Albert was all set to begin work early in January, with the opening of the Winter Quarter. Now for a place to live.

Housing was extremely tight. So many veterans were coming back to school, taking advantage of the financial help offered by the G.I. Bill of Rights, that it seemed every available space on campus and in the village of Chapel Hill was taken. The dorms were bulging, and even the "Tin Can" served for a time as an emergency barracks. To quote from a 1977 newspaper article on the razing of that famous landmark to make way for a new gym: "When World War Two veterans returned to campus...it housed them, bunk to bunk, double deckers, exactly as they had lived in military camps the world over." Victory Village had not yet been built. Veterans with families found apartments extremely scarce, and kitchen apartments almost non-existent.

The Carolina Inn was renting some of its rooms and suites, so Dr. Couch managed to get us a third floor bedroom-livingroom combination. This was to be our home for the next seven months and we were indeed thankful to have any place to live. Sometimes I couldn't help thinking how lovely it would be to have a kitchen, eating out was so expensive. "Our dinner today cost \$1.35 for the three of us (I wrote my folks); the roast beef alone was 35 cents." (!) We set our new 2-burner electric hot plate on a couple of up-ended orange crates, added a card table, and presto, a corner of the bedroom became our kitchen and diningroom. Refrigerators were not to be had, and until we were able to buy an icebox sometime later, providing daily bread literally became providing bread daily. Like so many other wives and children on campus, David and I walked uptown every day for whatever we might be lucky enough to find at the corner grocery. Sometimes it was a little ground meat or a small roast, or if we were really lucky, a pound of white margarine. If you wanted it yellow, you colored it yourself. Even if I had been able to find a baby-sitter, I would have had little time to work in the herbarium that spring.

Early in January, 1946, I wrote home that " the herbarium looks the same as usual, but there is plenty of work to be done. I think I will be able to do some now and then...". The graduate student serving as part-time curator had just left to marry her returning soldier-fiance. Dr. Couch would have been very happy to have me take over, and I would have been very happy to oblige; but until I could find some reliable care for David, I would be able to work only a few hours now and then when Albert was free to stay with him. Dr. Couch temporarily resolved this untenable situation by granting Albert the title and pay of part-time curator while employing him mainly as assistant in under-graduate labs. So for a time Albert gave most of his attention to running the labs where he was sorely needed that spring, due to the heavy enrollment of veterans and the serious lack of teaching assistants. Thus for a couple more years until he received his PhD, the work of the herbarium continued its slowed down pace, carried on mainly by graduate women, with oversight by Albert.

Work at the Shrub Farm had slowed down, also, during the war years. After Albert and I took stock in April to see what was in bloom, I remarked in a letter to my parents: "It's too bad the place had to be neglected for four years. If Albert and I could have continued our collecting and care during that time, we would have a wonderful array of native shrubs by now." There had been some casualties but the remaining plants were "quite vigorous and healthy-looking". Bellwood, azaleas, coral honeysuckle, yellow jessamine, vacciniums, and hollies were all in bloom and presented a colorful display. Of course the farm had not really been neglected, for Dr. Coker had sent his gardeners out to water and mulch when needed, and had done his best to add new shrubs from his trips. I was referring to the absence of the systematic collecting and planting that we had been carrying out up to the summer of 1941 when Albert was called into the Army. We had prepared a list of shrubs native to the Carolinas and from this list we planned our collecting trips to

specific areas where we knew the plants could be found. We were also building up family plots as fast as possible.

After Albert was drafted in 1941, I still went out locally for shrubs, taking along either Charles O'Kelly or Bob Rabb to help dig and "lug". Dr. Coker always brought back something from his trips to Hartsville, S.C. Twice in the spring of 1942 when Albert was home on leave from Ft. Belvoir, we took trips far afield and each time brought back and set out a packed trailer-load of shrubs. During that spring and early summer, I spent many hours at the Shrub Farm taking careful notes, making measurements of growth, jotting down observations and descriptions, while directing the weeding, watering, and mulching. As I wrote Albert, "The Shrub Farm is essentially a living part of the herbarium." Hopefully, some of our observations and comments would add to the value and authenticity of the shrub book that Drs. Coker and Totten had been working on for several years.

Now, after four long years away from Chapel Hill, it was so good to tramp the fields and woods again, studying and collecting plants. David and I went along on the easier trips, but for the more strenuous excursions (such as following New Hope Creek for 18 rugged miles), Albert's companion was Maeburn Huneycut, a young taxonomy student who was doing a problem on seed plants for his M.A. under Dr. Adams. He was quiet, eager to learn, and most important, very slender. The three of us fit quite comfortably in the one seated Beagle, with David on my lap or standing up in front of the dashboard.

One day in May we decided to introduce Maeburn to a favorite area of ours, the Big Savannah near Burgaw, made famous by Dr. B.W. Wells of State College in Raleigh, N.C. (now North Carolina State University). The other members of Maeburn's taxonomy class wanted to go along too. They were beginning to feel a little envious of their classmate who was always bringing in such interesting plants from far afield. (In this class was a certain Clyde R. Bell, who is presently better known as Dr. C. Ritchie Bell. He later became the first Director of the N.C. Botanical Garden). Dr. Couch helped us secure a University station wagon, and thus was born the fore-runner of the countless class field trips that Albert has "executed" over the past forty years. He even set a precedent which, no doubt, all of his students will recognize: "We will leave promptly at 7:00 a.m." - he did **not** mean 7:01!

We took our time going through the sandhills, stopping often since everything was new to most of the students, and we wanted them to see and learn as much as possible. So it was nearly six o'clock when we reached White Lake. It was at that time still a beautiful, clear lake with white sandy bottom, bordered with shrubs and cypress trees, unspoiled by human habitation. What a sad contrast today's overbuilt exploitation presents. We just had to wade awhile in those warm, clean waters that gently washed over the white sand, before we traveled on to Wilmington for the night.

The next day we arose early to catch the opalescent sheen of the morning sun on the ocean. For Maeburn and David, this was their first chance to "See the big wadder flapping!" as described by the latter, his little voice excited and shrill over the roar and boom of the breakers rushing ashore. We spent the morning around Wilmington and Wrightsville collecting aquatic plants. By now the students didn't mind getting into the muck and mire, as evidenced by Bell's wading out hip-deep into a marsh to collect a beautiful white spider lily that none of us had seen close up.

On our way home we stopped at the Burgaw savannah, made famous by the great botanist, Dr B.W. Wells, author of "the Natural Gardens of North Carolina." In this book he describes the highlight of our trip as "...the famous area near Burgaw, in Pender County, comprising fifteen hundred acres, a local district which some day should be made into a state park." This was an enormous meadow with acres of orchids of every hue from pale lavender and pink through deep rose and even white, with blue iris scattered throughout, and generously sprinkled with orange polygalas and yellow star grass. We probably did not realize at the time how privileged we were to behold such beauty, soon to be turned into farmland and destroyed. Finding the unique Venus Flytrap was an exciting climax to the day, as we turned homeward. We finally reached Chapel Hill about 9:30 p.m., tired and grimey, but happy over all the new places visited and new plants seen and collected. Everyone agreed that it had been a most successful and pleasant adventure.

Albert and I had been waiting for months for an elusive kitchen apartment in the building next to ours for which we had been told we were "next in line" at least three different times. So we finally decided early in August to accept the Burlage's offer to move into their little cottage about a mile from the campus. David was fed up with "tree-top" living on the third floor of the Inn after two years of comparative freedom to roam his grandparents' farm with its swing, chickens, cow, dog, Fordson tractor, and other delights that made up a little boy's Seventh Heaven. The move to a ground-level cottage saved from ruin all our dispositions. An electric refrigerator was a wonderful bonus indeed, as was a nice garden spot down by the creek.

At the end of two happy years, on June 4th, 1948, Albert became Dr. Albert Radford, and David's little brother John turned sixteen months old. About that time our landlord startled us with the news that he planned to sell the cottage, but we were not prepared to buy. So thanks to Dr. Couch again, we were lucky enough to get a first floor corner apartment on campus in one of the wooden barracks in the new Victory Village. Sadly, we had outgrown "Beagle, but we would always cherish fond memories of our trips together. We bought a much roomier Jeep station wagon, but it had no character - we just called it "the Jeep."

That fall a minor crisis arose over the location of the Shrub Farm. Rumor had it that it lay in the path of improvements to the University golf course. Also, according to Dr. Coker, it had been flooded to a depth of two feet a couple of times during the war. He observed

that "...it will be impossible for us to go on with this collection in its present position." He decided to have Albert and me supervise the transplanting of as many of the shrubs as we could to the old drug garden site in the Arboretum. We hated to see them moved, but could think of no alternative. Perhaps some day we could start anew in a better, more secure place with room for expansion.

By 1948 the herbarium had grown to a collection of many thousand specimens, most of which had been mounted, sorted, and properly filed, and the unknowns identified. At last it was possible to take a good look at the herbarium and note its strengths and weaknesses. The Ashe and Harbison collections were largely woody, as were the many specimens collected during the writing of the Coker-Totten tree books. On the other hand, there were numerous gaps in the collections of herbaceous species that needed to be filled - legumes, mints, grasses, sedges, lilies, composites, and aquatics. A number of these have small, inconspicuous, flowers, are difficult to identify, and not the favorites of all taxonomists.

After nearly six years of partial care, the herbarium was sorely in need of a full time curator, again one with special abilities, training, and native talents to do the job at hand: someone with keen eyesight, a good memory, and a love for collecting in all sorts of places. It would also help a good deal if he were already familiar with a number of these herbaceous plants. Albert certainly seemed well-qualified for the job.

Born in Augusta, Georgia, the eldest of nine children, he learned very early the meaning of hard work and sharing. He found his recreation in playing baseball, shooting marbles, fishing in clay-hole ponds and creeks in the area, or wandering through cottonmouth-infested swamps. Though few of his friends went beyond high school, he early realized that education could make a difference in one's future. So after high school he attended Augusta Junior College. The Dean encouraged him to apply for a scholarship to Furman University. He entered as a junior math major. He needed only one more course to complete his science minor, but upon finding that only general botany was available, he balked. He wasn't about to take that stuff! He judged all botany courses to be like freshman biology at Junior College - dull and utterly boring. However, just to get it overwith, he reluctantly changed his mind and registered for the course the next day. To his great surprise he found Dr. Ives to be a wonderfully inspiring teacher, and soon realized that botany was what he wanted to study the rest of his days. He took every botany course offered during his two years at Furman, plant physiology, ecology, local flora, etc., all taught by Dr. Ives. Albert switched his major to botany, became Dr. Ives's lab assistant, and spent many hours in the herbarium checking identifications and writing labels.

Needing one more course to complete his major, he signed up for a summer term at Mt. Lake, Virginia, taking plant taxonomy under the renowned Dr. Jack Fogg of the University of Pennsylvania. By the end of summer, from class work and independent

study, Albert could recognize over 1,000 species of plants, checking them off in his weather-worn copy of Gray's Manual.

Dr. Ives always sent his best students to Chapel Hill for graduate degrees in botany, students such as Don Ritchie, Leland Rodgers, Hiden Cox, to name a few. Apparently he encouraged Albert to go too, for Dr. Coker told me with a pleased little grin that we were getting an excellent field man to work in the herbarium that fall of 1939, one of Dr. Ives's students. Now, nearly ten years later, in 1948, the student that Dr. Ives had turned on to botany was faced with the problem of combining three jobs: curator, instructor, and collector of plants for the herbarium. Albert was already teaching a freshman botany course every fall, winter, and spring quarter, plus one summer school class. He could handle the herbarium work with the help of several good assistants.

As for the field work, he would be out at every possible chance, over weekends, on Saturdays and holidays, and later when he began teaching graduate students, on class trips with them. On some weekends and especially in summertime, there were family trips, just the four of us in the "Jeep". At other times, Albert rarely ever lacked for enthusiastic fellow travelers such as Bill Pendergrass, Leland Rodgers, Ted Browne, Charlie Miller, Jim Duke, or John Haesloop. So he seldom had to go alone, and this was a relief to me. I had reason to be concerned whenever I saw them leave with the geology boat tied on top of the station wagon. That meant they were going to explore the Trent, the Cape Fear, the Neuse, or some other river. I was not too happy about that because Albert had never learned to swim. And he seemed especially fond of collecting aquatics and botanizing around islands in the mouth of some river!

On one such trip, Jim Duke, Bob Johns, and Albert put a motor on their boat and went over to Smith Island some four miles from the mainland to botanize for several hours. On their way back, the motor died. They had to row the remaining two miles to shore, buffeted by rip tides and rather high waves. Of course they never wore life jackets! Those trips were anything but dull. The narrow escapes, the interesting sights, the close encounters with snakes, alligators, and once with sharks, would fill a book. Albert brought back bags of plants from every trip that took hours to identify, press, and label. The empty spots in the herbarium were beginning to fill up and the value of the herbarium as a taxonomic center was steadily increasing.

During the summer of 1950, there was talk of developing a new shrub garden near the junction of Mason Farm Road and Country Club Road. Dr. Totten had been discussing the idea with Albert since it seemed the latter would have a lot to do with the planning. "Albert thinks that it should become a showplace for the state as well a place to carry on experimental work on our native shrubs. It would be a great thing to have them all growing together in one area." I wrote in a letter home. This from a later letter: "Clyde Bell likes his job at Hartsville but I think he would like nothing better than to be here teaching or doing some kind of work in the department. Dr. Coker has mentioned his

being a good one to head up the shrub farm; Albert hardly has time for it. To do it right would take all one's time...Albert would still have something to do with the planning. Dr. Totten wants to call it a Botanical Garden and have it take in about 40 acres, with three pools for aquatics."

It is interesting to note that Dr. Coker had been thinking along these lines even before 1950. I recently came across a paper he had written in October 1944 entitled: "Important and Useful Fields for Research in the Plant Life of the Southeastern States." He set forth two proposals, the first having to do with the herbarium (more about that later), and the second with a tree and shrub collection. He stated: "We propose the establishment at Chapel Hill of a really adequate collection of living trees and shrubs of the southeastern states." He went on to say that there is nothing like this in existence, though the need for it has been recognized for decades by the more "enlightened southern scientists." He saw such a collection as serving the advancement of pure science while leading to important economic results through plant breeding, the improvement of varieties, and the use of native shrubs as ornamentals in our gardens.

Three years after Dr. Totten's mention of a Botanical Garden, I made this note: "Dr. Wyman from Arnold Arboretum was here to look over the site for the Botanical Garden, so Albert, George R. Cooley, Drs. Couch, Totten, and Carroll Wood were out all morning with Dr. Wyman." Mr. Cooley, a financier from the state of New York, had long been very interested in botany. For many years until his death in 1986, he would stop by on his way to and from Florida to visit the department. Nearly always he would leave a generous check with Albert to be used for anything he needed for the herbarium.

By 1950 Dr. Coker was no longer able to drive. Mrs. Coker chauffeured him to Davie Hall now and then where he did a little work. Sometimes she drove him out to the Village to see the children and me. By fall we had moved to a little house on Purefoy Road near the lot we had bought earlier and on which we had a nice garden. The Cokers drove out there several times to see us, and I was always glad to have some fresh vegetables to give them. It saddened me to see Dr. Coker looking so pale and thin. Yet he remained cheerful and seemed interested in everything. The last time they drove out, his nurse was with him and they stayed only a few minutes. "Dr. Coker looks like a shadow...", I wrote my parents. He died on June 27, 1953.

The graveside service on the first of July in the old Chapel Hill Cemetery, conducted with simplicity and dignity, was attended by a great number of his family and friends. Thus ended the days of a very talented man, whose life was filled with useful study and a wide range of accomplishments. He was always searching for the truth, always loving his work and the study of plants. No one knows how many times he gave a young person a helping hand or contributed generously to a worthy cause. He was quite handsome, with the look and bearing of an aristocrat, yet sincere and approachable. I count myself fortunate indeed to have known him both as teacher and friend, and to have had the opportunity and

privilege of working with him for so many wonderful years. Fond memories without number I shall always treasure of both Dr. and Mrs. Coker.

By the close of 1955, Albert had made 129 collecting trips over a seven year period, adding 5,738 numbers and 8,600 specimens to the herbarium. He had collected in every province of the two Carolinas, explored many areas, and had become familiar with numerous species in their natural habitats. It had been a great learning experience in which his geology background proved invaluable. He had come to share the vision, long held by Dr. Coker, of what needed to be done in the field of botany in the Southeast.

In the 1944 paper referred to earlier, Dr. Coker had clearly defined that need as being a "field and herbarium study of southeastern plants, both high and low, to find out what we really have here." He further stated that although endowed with a "flora of exceptional richness, compared with other sections of the country...our knowledge of what it encompasses is by no means complete. Before the Civil War this section had taken the lead in several sections of botany, but since that time we have fallen sadly behind the northern states." He concluded by saying that here in Chapel Hill we have an "ideal location for the advancement of such studies and have made considerable progress, as shown by our herbarium and publications." He was concerned that botanists from the north were coming down to study the flora of our area and returning to publish their findings in northern journals. He didn't particularly object to their coming to enjoy our flora, but he was greatly disturbed that we as southern botanists were not doing a better job of studying the plants of our own region. During his own administration, Dr. Couch also felt most strongly that research on the southern flora should be a major endeavor of the Botany Department.

By the late 1950's, Chapel Hill had indeed become an ideal location for the study of southern flora, due in no small part to the growth and increasing value of the herbarium. An ambitious program "to find out what we really have here" was now gathering momentum. The scope and intensity of that effort, soon to be undertaken by a mere handful of mostly "southern" botanists, even now almost overcomes one with astonishment. Dr. Coker's long-held vision was about to become a reality.