

Allen Curtiss - Narrated by Jonathan Damery

One of the people that I became aware of when I was doing this project was this man named Allen Curtiss. Curtiss began sending plant material to the Arboretum almost as soon as the Arboretum was established. I think the first plants from him came in 1873. And he had been a correspondent of Asa Gray, who was sort of the leading North American botanist at the time, working at Harvard. And Curtiss was a farmer-turned-botanist, and he lived down near Liberty, Virginia, and had initially reached out to Gray, because Curtiss was working on sort of a checklist of the plants in eastern North America, and trying to compile a list, which Asa Gray was also really interested in. He was working on *The Flora of North America*. So the two of them had a real connection and bond over that.

But Curtiss, interestingly, first began learning plants from his mother, Floretta Curtiss. And in the 1870s, the two of them, after Allen's father died, moved to Florida. They actually did a farm swap, where the Curtisses traded their farm in Virginia for a farm in Florida, and the Florida farmers moved up to Virginia.

So they moved to Florida, they bought a sailboat named the *Magnolia*, and they went sailing down the eastern coast of Florida. There are these amazing stories of the two of them where Allen is jumping out to study plants, and his mother Floretta is jumping out to study algae. And she became a real expert of algae in Florida. But along the way, they're shooting alligators with pistols, they're swatting mosquitoes, it's a real kind of pretty amazing mother and son story. And later on, Allen Curtiss actually became a more professional collector, and I don't think he really farmed. And he was collecting for the U.S. government in various ways. And while he was on his own collecting trips, he would collect algae for his mother to study. I think it's such an amazing story.