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Leave for State

Among Birmingham high school graduates leaving for Michigan State college recently were Roger Schmidt, son of Dr. and Mrs. Henry S. Schmidt of Kimberly; John Shaffer, son of Dr. and Mrs. Joseph H. Shaffer of Rastown drive; Don Bosworth, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles G. Bosworth of W. Fourteen Mile road; and Ron Barber, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald G. Barber, of Yorkshire.

Have You Met

The former city commissioner of Huntington Woods who has just moved to Birmingham with his family? Douglas Mcintosh who resigned from the HW commission due to the move, is manager of the Detroit branch of the Shaw-Walker company. Mr. and Mrs. Mcintosh, Douglas, Jr., 16, Alan, 11, and Mary Anne, 18 months, are living at 430 Woodlake road.

NATURE NOW

Our Plentiful Ferns Link Us to Ages Past

By LYDIA KING FREHSE
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

By late September much of the tangled wealth of summer's foliage is beginning to fade.

Now, the ferns die as gracefully as they have lived. For the most part their fronds are already dry and broken. Only a few of those found in our range, including such species as the Christmas fern, and the several varieties of the evergreen wood fern, keep green throughout the winter under the protection of the covering snows.

The lineage of these ancient plants goes back some 250 million years when their foliage was the dominant feature of the Coal Age swamps. Then their kind, girdled the earth. This we know because they have left us a wide belt of coal as their contribution to our mechanized age.

Even today ferns are widespread and some varieties are found everywhere except in the desert and the Arctic regions. There are some 6,000 described species in the world.

In my correspondence with former students and campers, I often read this line written from a far-off land: "Today I saw the bracken fern."

OF COURSE these plants are

most prolific in the hot and moist climate of the tropics where growing conditions are similar to those that existed in the ancient swamps. Ferns have an interesting life cycle. They reproduce by microscopic spores, instead of growing from seeds as do our flowering plants. These spores ripen in small fruit dots on the back of the fronds or they may be born on separate fronds set aside for this purpose.

Like a seed, which is a complete embryo capable of growing into a new plant, a spore must first produce an intermediate growth-stage. In the case of the fern, this is called a "prothallium." It is a small and heart shaped status, whence its common name indeed is sobered for or grown beneath the ground. It in turn produces the male and female cells from whose union the new fern grows.

In the meantime, the prothallium acts as a nurse being to nourish the young plant until its new root system is established.

A FEW SPECIES of fern reproduce vegetatively. Among these is the walking fern which "walks" by attaching itself to the ground at the tip of its long slender leaf.

Have You Met

The Johnsons, enthusiasts who live at 1844 Haynes? They are the Robert T. Chapels, who moved with their two year-old daughter, Pamela Anne, from Farmington this summer. Chapel is the owner of the general manager of "Flamingo Pools," division of Briggs Beauty Craft Co. of Birmingham, makers of swimming, wading and garden pools.

where a new plant becomes established. Another in this group is the beautiful bullet bladder fern of our moist woodlands which produces tiny "bulbs" at the axis of the veins. These germinate to new plants where they touch the earth.

Because ferns are reproduced by wind blown spores they can become established in all sorts of odd places—in rock crevices, on high cliffs and walls, in trees and on old roof tops.

While most species require rich soil and abundant moisture, some of the above such as the cliff brake, seem to grow out of the bare rock. Like all plants which have survived millions of years of earth's changes, they have learned to adjust to many harsh environmental demands.

PERNS, BECAUSE of their beauty and grace, make an interesting study for the amateur as well as the professional botanist. Almost any woody place will yield 15 or 20 common varieties which, with the aid of a good manual, can be mastered in a single season.

In my own state we are fortunate indeed to have our native species so well described by the late Cecil Billington in his "Ferns of Michigan."

Another interesting little fern book is that written by Farida Wilay which gives an identifying

key based on the designs made by the vascular bundles in the fern stems. These can be seen with the aid of a hand lens if a frond is cut off near the earth. Although this is not a fool-proof method of identification, (some of the designs are very similar) it makes an interesting approach to the subject which might lead to a more accurate study.

Of our Michigan ferns, the bracken (or brake) is our hardest and most common species. It carpets the fine barrens and roadsides of our northern coniferous forests and lends itself to so wide a variety of other habitats that it is generally dispersed all over the world.

THE BRITTLE fern is the smallest species and is also the earliest to appear in spring. In the Osmunda family, which includes the royal, the interrupted and the cinnamon ferns, we find some of our largest and most graceful ferns. These generally grow in rich and moist woodlands and swamps or along the banks of streams.

Our rarer fern is the hart's tongue. It grows in only a few localities in the entire United States. However, since the publication of Mr. Billington's book, it has been identified in upper Michigan. Observing this unusual plant was one of the highlights of last

August's foray of the American Fern society.

IN THE OLDER days, before science had banished many superstitions, ferns were credited with strange powers. If one carried a fern "seed" in his pocket he could become invisible at will. Biting the first fruiting fronds of an Osmunda would insure the biter against leishmaniasis for a year. If the moon were gathered at the full of the moon one could unlock a blue door with its front.

Although these superstitions are long since lost in the light of truth, for beauty and grace the ferns yet stand unrivaled in the world of plant life.



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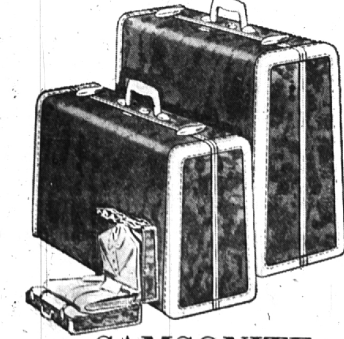
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