

Flower Highly Developed Plant Organ

In the large angiosperm group are included all the flowering trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants of our present-day forests, fields, farms and gardens.

The name "Angiosperm" means "encased seed" and describes the reproductive characteristic of all flowering plants. Their ovules are born and develop into seeds within special protective structures called ovaries located at the center of the flower.

Another feature which distinguishes this plant group is that the cambium cells of its stems and roots produce highly specialized supporting and conductive tissues.

Because most encased seed plants have flat, broad leaves, they present to the sun an extensive and efficient food manufacturing surface; another decided advantage in their growth and survival.

HOWEVER, THE outstanding feature of a typical angiosperm plant is its flower. This is the most highly developed and efficient seed-producing organ that has thus far been evolved in the plant kingdom.

A flower began many millions of years ago with several specialized leaves and short stems. Over the millennia these have been specially modified for the production, support and protection of its male and female organs.

Its parts are also tuned to the fertilization process and to the development and dispersal of its seeds and fruits.

A BRIEF STATEMENT about the early evolutionary seed-bearing plants was given in last week's column, including the fact that by middle Cretaceous times, about 100 million years ago, the fossil record already shows a number of families present, which were the ancestors of today's flora.

Among these are leaves and

fruits of the non-tropical broad-leaf trees as well as species of the magnolia, laurel, sycamore, beech and chestnut families.

Such was the floral explosion that followed the development of the encased seed that the above species were only a small part of the abundance and diversity of plant families which were to culminate in the flora of the Tertiary period of some 90 millions of years ago.

Throughout the Dakota sandstone laid down in this period are found more than 800 species of which 90 per cent are flowering plants.

WHENEVER I HAVE the opportunity to visit one of our major museums of natural history, I always stand in amazement before the fossil plants displayed and classified in the vast cases which hold the rich flora of Tertiary times.

Now added to the earlier species are such families as horsechestnut, oak, fig, holly, willow, birch, elm, mulberry, grape and water lily.

By the end of the period, walnut, persimmon, maple, dogwood, eucalyptus and many species of sedges and herbaceous plants were also prevalent.

In some areas great hardwood forests already stood tall. Higher mammals became the dominant animals, and in the Wyoming prairie a small hoofed animal called Eohippus set down his hoofed foot on a new plant called grass.

TO THIS SCRIBE one of the most moving of fossils displayed in a case at the Smithsonian is simply labeled "An unnamed fossil of the Tertiary."

And so I must stand and ask, "On what protected shore did its five-petaled shape unfold? What color washed over its fragile form, and what fragrance did some singing wind carry away from its small perfection?"

FOSSIL PLANTS of the recent Pleistocene period, which began about one million years ago, increasingly resemble today's flora.

During this time drastic climatic changes induced by four glacial periods were responsible for shaping many of our present-day shrubs and herbaceous plants.

Some of these had to alter their structure and habits to survive and reestablish themselves inch by inch, as a seed travels, during the recurring interglacial periods.

This final test left our most highly developed seed plants, the dicotyledons, in first place in today's flora. Because of their obvious advantages in both structure and habits, they bypassed the declining conifers about the time of the beginning of our present geologic period.

THEY ARE ALSO obviously superior to their fellow monocots on such counts as the abundance and arrangement of their floral structures and their pollination and seed dispersal habits.

By Lydia King Freese
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Next week we will write about man's dependence on the encased seed plants.

THANKS TO THE "Nature Now" reader who enclosed a copy of the Feb. 20 "Bluebird Column" with her order to the Grand Rapids Museum for a Bluebird Box!

The chairman of this project of the Grand Rapids Audubon Society was very appreciative of the number of orders he received from the Birmingham vicinity and sent a box to your columnist as a token of appreciation.

Correcting a sentence in last week's column, the copy should have read:

"The ancient conifers, which had their beginnings in the PERMIAN PERIOD which began some 200 MILLIONS of years ago, followed this early seed-bearing flora and were closely related to it."

OU Offers Arts Events This Week

A student-faculty Fine Arts Festival, plus an exhibition of etchings and lithographs by Pablo Picasso, are on the calendar this week at Oakland University, Rochester.

John Gillespie, 1094 Kenneway, Birmingham, is co-chairman of the festival, along with fellow student Roger Bailey.

Special music, drama and dance activities began Monday and will continue through Sunday.

THREE PROGRAMS are being offered at 8:15 p.m. today, Friday and Saturday in the I.M. Theater. They offer the brass choir, concert and readings, and music and dance, respectively.

A staged poetry reading of W. H. Auden's "For the Time Being," directed by Prof. John Blair, will be given at 8:15 p.m. Sunday in the I.M. Theater.

Showing of a collection of original prints by Pablo Picasso coincides with the festival week. About 50 works, which are available for purchase, opened for exhibit Monday and continue through March 30.

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Potpourri

By JULIE CANDLER
Special Writer

We snatched a pencil from the shirt pocket of a "Shipwreck Party" guest Saturday night and started writing. The guest had abandoned ship sans britches andavec shorts.

The sinking was a 41st anniversary celebration at the Chestnut Street Playhouse of the Village Players. The shipwrecked people didn't seem to care about being rescued—ever.

We had gone for all play and no work. But we grabbed the pencil and started taking notes on an old program when we saw Gerry Ferree wearing a barrel.

WORN OVER LONG white underwear, his O-line ensemble featured a sportive-looking bottle attached at the waistline and containing the message "Help, Help."

Other decorative touches included a "Lodge for President" sticker and a non-functioning water faucet. He wore a Rudolph Reindeer nose and curly brown beard.

His hat was wide-brimmed straw. Also worth noting were about 80 other funny get-ups. Richard Ditsche's black wig could have come from a Beetle who hadn't been to a barber for six months. With it, Ditsche wore a painted moustache, occasional blackened teeth and a naval officer's uniform. He looked like the Admiral of Pontiac wearing a barrel.

THE POTPOURRI SCHOOL of Thought hereby awards the honorary degree of Doctor of Decorations to Dave Zeese and Don Nagel. They turned the Playhouse into a blue-green marineland, with colorful fish floating from the ceiling and life-size paper mermaids lighting guests toward the halls.

The skilful party decorators beamed a bluish light onto seaweed, fish nets and mermaids in the Playhouse lobby. The underwater effect was created so beautifully that we walked in the door and said, "Glub, glub."

THE AFTER-DINNER show zipped along at the speedy pace of a Ward Tolkien-Bill Kegel collaboration. Donna (Mrs. George) Ryder wrote the clever script. Kay (Mrs. George N.) Hilfinger sang "I'd Like To Get You on a Slow Boat to China" so sensationally that every man in the audience wanted to let her.

Applause nearly capsized the entire shipwreck after the Players' peppy president, oldtimer LeRoy Braisted, belted out a professional "I've Got an Awful Lot of Living to Do."

To party cochairmen Mr. and Mrs. George Ryder and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Netze, we say, "We had a very nice time at your party."

We liked the reason Mrs. Elliot Higgins gave for wearing a luxurious, gold-budded net velvet jacket and slacks to the shipwreck. Boasted Diantha, "I was on my yacht!"

FROM OUR POTPOURRI correspondent in Tokyo is piped the happy word that Professor William White of Franklin is almost entirely recovered from near-total paralysis.

He has been in a U. S. Air Force Hospital since December. A rare and paralyzing disease attacked him as the family began Christmas holidaying in Japan.

The Whites are in the Orient this year because the Wayne State University journalism prof is a Fulbright teacher in a Korean university.

The title of Alina Saarinen's book got twisted around in this column recently. We're pretty sure we wrote "The Proud Possessors" because we know that's the title.

But when it came out in print, a reader tells us, it said, "The Proud Professors." To Mrs. Saarinen, we apologize.



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