

Carrie Phinney Sweetser (1863-1952)

By Rhoda Love

Carrie Sweetser was a watercolorist, a life-long diarist, and her botanist husband's devoted travel companion. She was married for fifty-two years to Albert Raddin Sweetser (1861-1940), professor of botany and founder of the University of Oregon Herbarium in Eugene. Her surviving paintings, photographs, and diaries provide a vivid picture of a Northwest botanist's life in the early twentieth century.

Carolyn Knowles Phinney was born in Centerville, Massachusetts, on September 11, 1863. She married Albert Sweetser in Centerville on February 29, 1888. During the summer of 1892, the Sweetsers taught at a boys' camp at Rangeley Lake, Maine, where Carrie kept an illustrated journal that survives in the University of Oregon Libraries.

In 1897, the Sweetsers came to Oregon, where Albert's first teaching post was at Pacific University. He moved to the University of Oregon in 1902, and the couple remained in Eugene until their deaths.

On botanical exploring and collecting trips, the Sweetsers took many photographs, and Carrie painted wildflowers and fungi. The photographs and 337 of her paintings are in the University of Oregon Libraries. The paintings have not been publicly displayed for many years.

Albert Sweetser died in 1940; Carrie lived for another dozen years, passing away in Eugene September 9, 1952, at the age of eighty-nine. The couple had no children, but they are survived by the descendents of George Phinney, Carrie's nephew, whom they raised as their son.

Sources

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