

Rollo T. Rexroat
(1893-1979)
Western Illinois University
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Rollo T. Rexroat a noted collector of west-central Illinois vascular plants from Virginia, Illinois died November 16, 1979 in Jacksonville, Illinois at the age of 86. He was born in Cass County near Virginia, January 6, 1893 and was a lifelong resident of the area. He was a veteran of World War I. He owned and operated Rexroats' general store, the oldest around the Virginia town square, and could be found working there daily.

West-Central Illinois has been fortunate in having some prominent vascular plant collectors who have not been professional botanists by training but as a result of their hobby became very knowledgeable people about the flora and whose knowledge and contributions often rivaled the professionals. Mr. Rexroat joins the list which includes S. B. Mead (1799-1880) a Hancock County physician, F. Brendel (1820-1912) a Peoria County physician, H.W. Patterson (1853-1919) a Henderson County printer and V.H. Chase (1876-1966) a Peoria County railroader. Mr. Rexroat collected most actively from 1953 to 1965 principally in Cass and Mason Counties but also with numerous collections from, but not limited to Morgan, Scott, Greene, Calhoun, Pike, Adams, Brown, Schuyler and McDonough Counties.

Upon entering and looking around Mr. Rexroat's store it is immediately evident by the hornet's

nest, duck decoys, stuffed birds, dried plant bouquets, guns, Indian relics, etc. that he was an avid outdoorsman and collector. He would go to the field once or twice a week in the afternoons when he could get away from the store as well as on Sundays. Although he originally learned and collected plants on hunting trips he later made special trips for botanizing. He estimated he drove about 40,000 miles and walked 50,000 miles (Winterringer, 1965). Sometimes his wife, Irene, would drive the car while he would scrutinize the roadside for plants ordering her to stop when appropriate. With his large friendly smile, battered hat, hand-made six foot long hickory cane to pull down unreachable tree branches and back-pack with field press, he would embark on his forays. He made his own presses of two types. One was a light field type which held about forty plants to carry in his back-pack (which was patterned after a World War I pack which he used originally but found unsatisfactory in part due to a draw-string top) along with gloves, plastic bags (he did not use a vasculum since it "was in the way"), insect repellent and notebook. The other press, which was heavier and held about fifty plants, was kept in the car where he transferred to it his field pressed plants. He dried his plants over an oil stove in his store in the fall and early spring and the rest of the year over light bulbs in an old porcelain refrigerator with the top removed. Although he did not use identification keys he was proficient in using the illustrations in Britton and Brown's Illustrated Flora of Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada and eventually could go directly to the family in the book. He could be found working with his plants in the rear of his store on a counter over which was suspended an unshaded light bulb. He meticulously recorded a diligent and accurate record of his collection data for each plant both on a slip of paper inserted with each pressed plant and also in a master record book. He recorded his finds and annotations in his copy of Jones and Fuller's Vascular Plants of Illinois and Jones' Flora of Illinois. His notes sometimes contained his own descriptive common name of a plant to remind him of its appearance as for example low beggars lice for *Circaea latifolia* Hill, Indian war club for *Carex grayii* Carey and coontail grass for *Echinochloa walteri* (Pursh) Heller. He routinely took his plants to the Illinois State Museum Herbarium (ISM) at Springfield where his identifications were verified or problem plants identified. He donated a set of his plants, which numbered about 11,000 specimens, to the Museum Herbarium. After his death his wife donated to the R.M. Myers Herbarium of Western Illinois University (MWI) his duplicate personal collection of about 8000 unmounted specimens which have been designated the R.T. Rexroat Collection. His collections include hundreds of county records, 18 state records, 20 species which had not been seen in Illinois for nearly a century and 40 more species which are infrequently collected (Dolbeare, 1973). Mr. Rexroat's conservation ethic was evident in that he would transplant plants that were to be destroyed by construction, pasturing, etc. but would always leave some plants never to take the last one.

Dolbeare (1973) and Winterringer (1965) have published biographical information (including a photograph) about Mr. Rexroat. The scientific importance of his collections has been noted by Dolbeare (1973) and Winterringer (1963, 1965). A summary, with bibliography, of Mr. Rexroat's state and county records as well as a list of his previously unreported fern and monocot plant county records has been compiled by Dolbeare (1973). Winterringer's (1965) apt statement "R.T. Rexroat is an excellent example of what the layman may contribute to science" is exemplified as students use his invaluable collections in their studies contributing to the knowledge of the States' vascular plant flora. A few acres of prairie in the Jenny Marr Dunaway Park at the southern edge of Virginia, Illinois was dedicated in his honor as the Rexroat Prairie.

LITERATURE CITED

- DOLBEARE, B.L. 1973. Plant Collections of Rollo T. Rexroat. Trans. Ill. State Acad. Sci., 66(3-4): 81-93.
- WINTERRINGER, G.S., 1963. A recent Illinois collection of *Sanguisorba canadensis* L. Rhodora, 65(761):80-81.
- WINTERRINGER, G.S., 1965. The amateur plant collector. The Living Museum, 27(6):427-428.