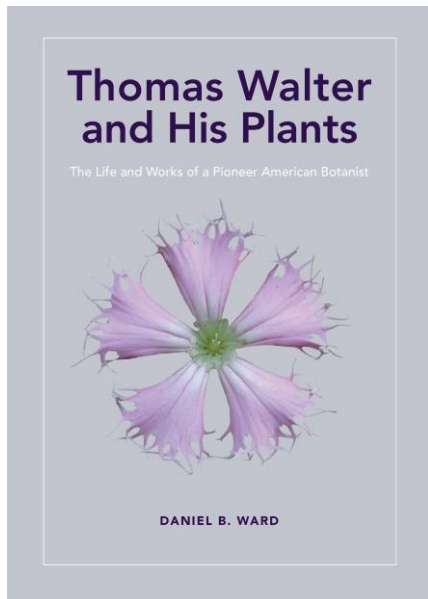


NYBG

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Thomas Walter and His Plants: The Life and Work of a Pioneer American Botanist, Now Available from NYBG Press, Updates a Landmark of American Plant Science

Combining Biography and Botany, Author Daniel B. Ward Tells the Story of Walter's Life And Sheds a Modern Light on His Groundbreaking Work on the Plants of South Carolina



Bronx, NY—Giving a landmark achievement of late 18th Century American science new life for the 21st Century, ***Thomas Walter and His Plants: The Life and Works of a Pioneer American Botanist***, by Daniel B. Ward, is now available from The New York Botanical Garden Press. Part biography, part botanical detective story, *Thomas Walter and His Plants* gathers what is known about the life of Walter, who is believed to have been born in about 1740 and died in 1789, and painstakingly updates the species names of his *Flora Caroliniana*, the first scientific treatment of the plants of South Carolina's coastal area. Among the 1,056 species Walter identified are such familiar trees and plants as spruce pine (*Pinus glabra*), blue beech (*Carpinus caroliniana*), myrtle holly (*Ilex myrifolia*), and the cabbage or sabal palmetto (*Sabal palmetto*), depicted on the state flag of South Carolina.

“Walter’s botanical work has been appreciated, if incompletely known, among the successors of his science,” Ward writes. “But the man behind his work has remained a vague shadow, with few primary sources to document his life. . . . It is now time to put on record what can be said about Thomas Walter and his botanical achievements.”

Walter, an Englishman by birth, gained title to some 4,500 acres of land in South Carolina starting in 1769, including a large rice plantation on the Santee River, inland from the port city of Charleston. Although deeply involved in the politics and business affairs of his agricultural community, he found time to study the works of Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, who devised the classification system that scientists still use to name plant and animal species. Walter used that knowledge to name and describe the region's plants in *Flora Caroliniana*, published in 1788, making it the first flora written in America to employ Linnaeus' classification system.

The self-taught botanist, however, left no physical specimens of the plants he described, including some 400 species that were new to science. That has posed an enormous challenge for later researchers, who have had to deduce what species Walter was referring to based primarily on his written descriptions. Adding another layer of complication, plant researchers have rearranged how species are grouped together as they have learned more about the evolutionary relationships between plants, leading to the renaming of many species since Walter's time. In *Thomas Walter and His Plants*, Ward has sorted through Walter's descriptions and other evidence to identify as authoritatively as possible all 1,056 species in *Flora Caroliniana*, a testament to the enduring importance of Ward's accomplishment.

"The impact of Walter's work as to the scientific names we use for the plants of the American Southeast can scarcely be overstated," Ward writes. "It is surely permissible to claim that in no natural setting in coastal South Carolina can one be out of sight of one or more of the plants named by Thomas Walter."

Thomas Walter and His Plants is published as volume 115 of the NYBG Press series Memoirs of The New York Botanical Garden, which focuses on taxonomy and floristics, especially of plants of the Western Hemisphere, and as number two of the Press' Heritage Series, a new subseries of the Memoirs that will focus on the history of botanical science.

About the Author of *Thomas Walter and His Plants*

Daniel B. Ward, Ph.D. (1928–2016) received his doctorate from Cornell University in 1958 and began his career as a staff member of the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station and curator of the station's herbarium at the University of Florida, Gainesville. He later joined the faculty of the university's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, retiring in 1995. An important thrust of his work was plant nomenclature, through which he was influential in determining and stabilizing the scientific names of many species of plants found in the southeastern United States. In addition to *Thomas Walter and His Plants*, he was the author of *Rare and Endangered Biota of Florida Volume Five: Plants* and *Big Trees: the Florida Register*.

About The New York Botanical Garden Press

Since 1896 The New York Botanical Garden Press (nybgpress.org) has been publishing books and journals based on original research by scientists from around the world. The mission of NYBG Press is to put information in the hands of those engaged in exploring, understanding, and conserving plants and fungi. Areas of focus include floristics, systematics, economic botany, ecology, evolution, conservation, and ethnobotany. A growing list of books for general readers includes field guides and botanical history.

Ordering Information: *Thomas Walter and His Plants: The Life and Works of a Pioneer American Botanist* is available through NYBG Press (\$59.99, hardcover). To order, go to nybgpress.org or call 718.817.8721.

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The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants, an educational institution, and a scientific research organization. Founded in 1891, the Botanical Garden is one of the world's preeminent centers for studying plants at all levels, from the whole organism down to its DNA. Garden scientists conduct fundamental research on plants and fungi globally, as well as on the many relationships between plants and people. A National Historic Landmark, the Garden's 250-acre site is one of the greatest botanical gardens in the world and the largest in any city in the United States, distinguished by the beauty of its diverse landscape and extensive collections and gardens, as well as by the scope and excellence of its programs in horticulture, education, and plant research and conservation. Learn more: nybg.org

The New York Botanical Garden, 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458

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