



The Bancroft Library

University of California • Berkeley

REGIONAL ORAL HISTORY OFFICE

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

N. Floy Bracelin

THE YNES MEXIA
BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS



An Interview
Conducted by
Annetta Carter
1965, 1967

Mexianthus mexicanus

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

N. Floy Bracelin

THE YNES MEXIA BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS

An Interview Conducted by
Annetta Carter
1965, 1967



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

This oral history is open for research. No permission is required to cite or quote. It is recommended it be cited as follows:

N. Floy Bracelin, "The Ynes Mexia Botanical Collections," an oral history conducted 1965 and 1967 by Annetta Carter.

Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1982.

Copy No. 2

Because articles by and about Mrs. Mexia and her botanical collections have appeared in diverse publications, pertinent bibliographic citations are presented herewith.

- Bartram, E. B. Mosses of western Mexico collected by Mrs. Ynes Mexia. Jour. Wash. Acad. Sci. 18:577-582. 1928.
- Bracelin, N. F. Itinerary of Ynes Mexia in South America. Madroño 3:174-176. 1935.
- _____. Ynes Mexia. Madroño 4:273-275. 1938.
- _____. Ynes Mexia. Science 88, No. 2295:586. Dec. 1938.
- Carter, A. M. The Ynes Mexia collections and N. Floy (Mrs. H. P.) Bracelin. Madroño 23:163-164. 1975.
- Copeland, E. B. Brazilian ferns collected by Ynes Mexia. Univ. Calif. Publ. Bot. 17:23-50. 1932.
- Mexia, Ynes. Botanical trails in old Mexico -- the lure of the unknown. Madroño 1:227-238. 1929.
- _____. Three thousand miles up the Amazon. Sierra Club Bulletin 18:88-96. 1933.
- _____. Camping on the Equator. Sierra Club Bulletin 22:85-91. 1937.

Annetta Carter
Research Associate, Herbarium, Department of Botany
University of California, Berkeley
September, 1982

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview 1. 15 November 1965 at Mrs. Bracelin's home, 2214 Vine St., Berkeley.

I. Mrs. Bracelin's early acquaintanceship with Ynes Mexia.	1
II. Mrs. Bracelin's employment in the University of California Herbarium and Mrs. Mexia's early botanical expeditions.	5
III. Mrs. Mexia in South America.	8
IV. Mrs. Mexia's unpredictable moods.	11
V. Mexia family history.	13

Interview 2. 3 May 1967 at Mrs. Bracelin's home, 2214 Vine St., Berkeley.

VI. Biography of Mrs. Bracelin.	17
---------------------------------	----

INTRODUCTION

In 1929, as an undergraduate student in need of part-time employment, I was sent by Professor Richard Holman (Department of Botany, University of California, Berkeley) to the University Herbarium, then housed in the Hearst Mining Building, where there was an opening for a student assistant. Dr. E. B. Copeland was Curator of the Herbarium at that time, but it was Mrs. N. Floy Bracelin ("Bracie") who interviewed me for the position. In her warm and friendly manner, she made me feel at ease in the interview and soon, for several hours a week, I was preparing botanical specimens for inclusion in the Herbarium. Later, as a graduate student, I alternated semesters as teaching assistant, practice teacher and Herbarium assistant.

It was "Bracie" who first broke me in on these other aspects of Herbarium procedure and who impressed me with her meticulous attention to detail and her great capacity for work well done. At that time, she was processing Mrs. Ynes Mexia's valuable South American plant collections as well as carrying on routine curatorial work in the University Herbarium. In the early 1930's, it was Mrs. Bracelin who, because of her wide correspondence concerning distribution of the Mexia collections and her extremely outgoing personality, was better known to many curators of herbaria throughout the world than were some of the curators of our own Herbarium.

In the mid-1930's the Herbarium budget provided funds for only one non-Academic assistant. With a change in administration, it was decided that the Herbarium Assistant should be a person with botanical training; the position was ably filled by Miss Ethel Crum. Thus, Mrs. Bracelin lost her full-time position. However, she continued to process the Mexia collections and also developed considerable skill for drafting scientific charts. She was granted working space in Life Sciences Building until the early 1940's when the residue of the Mexia collections and her Blake Garden collections were turned over to the Herbarium.

It was through Mrs. Bracelin's processing of Mrs. Mexia's botanical collections that they were made available to botanists for study and to enhance our knowledge of the vegetation in the areas where Mrs. Mexia had collected. Many species previously unknown to science were based upon the Mexia collections.

My friendship with "Bracie" continued through the years. Eventually, I became a full-time Herbarium staff member and at the time of my retirement (1968), I held the title of Principal Herbarium Botanist. During the latter half of the 1960's Mrs. Bracelin decided to turn over to Bancroft Library all of the Mexia correspondence and documents that she had. About this time, it occurred to me that it would be valuable to record some of "Bracie's" recollections of Mrs. Mexia as well as to obtain some biographical material about "Bracie" herself. Although she was bed-ridden, she graciously consented to my taping conversations with her.

I procrastinated in having the tape transcribed, and even longer in readying it in the form preferred by the Oral History Office. To the Staff of the University of California Herbarium goes the credit, and my thanks, for the rendition in final form of this interview with Mrs. Bracelin.

Annetta Carter

Interview 1: 15 November 1965.

At Mrs. Bracelin's home, 2214 Vine Street, Berkeley, California.

I. MRS. BRACELIN'S EARLY ACQUAINTANCESHIP WITH YNES MEXIA.

Carter: Did Mrs. Mexia come to the Herbarium and meet you, or did you meet her outside the Herbarium?

Bracelin: No, I was a member of Dr. Bryant's¹ school. No, it was more than a school. He carried his people on and Mrs. Mexia went to him and I did, too.

Carter: That was when he was in the National Park Service?

Bracelin: Well, no, it was part of the University. The University was giving "Six Trips Afield".

Carter: That was what Mrs. Kelly² took over later?

Bracelin: [The tape is unclear here. Mrs. Bracelin is trying to say that Mrs. Kelly attended Dr. Bryant's classes and later, when they became too large, she assisted him. When Dr. Bryant left to enter the National Park Service, Mrs. Kelly continued to give the popular "Six Trips Afield" for University Extension Service.]

Carter: Well, she carried it on for years and years.

Bracelin: Oh, she did, and did a very good job of it! And Mrs. Mexia came to these "Six Trips Afield", and I went, too, -- oh for a number of times.

Carter: When was that? Back in about 1925? Because I knew you in 1929 and she [Mrs. Mexia] had already been on her first expeditions by then.

Bracelin: Yes, she had before I saw it [her specimens]; her first one being '29, no, '25. I wasn't saying it properly. But she was

¹Harold C. Bryant. Ornithologist. Lecturer and Instructor, University of California Extension Division, 1916-1930; Asst. Director and Chief, Branch of Research and Education, National Park Service, 1930-1939; Superintendent, Grand Canyon Nat'l. Park, 1939--

²Junea Kelly. For many years she was Instructor for the popular University California Extension Division course: Six Trips Afield.

doing, partly trying to get some way to get some information. That's what she was after, getting information. Of course, Dr. Bryant had a lot of information to give.

Carter: Had she been on any other field trips when you met her?

Bracelin: Yes, in '26.

Carter: The trip to Mexico, the first trip to Mexico?

Bracelin: In '25. And that one she went to first with Roxy³.

Carter: And Ferry⁴ from Stanford.

Bracelin: It was only Roxy, the two women.

Carter: Then Roxy joined Ferry later.

Bracelin: Yes.

Carter: I read that journal.

Bracelin: Well, Mrs. Mexia and Roxy didn't, naturally, didn't get on the best way. [Laughter.]

Carter: They're very different personalities.

Bracelin: Oh, extraordinary. Mrs. Mexia wanted to have all the help she could get so when she went on trips there would be a purpose behind it. She loved to have a trip and to see things and do things, but there had to be a purpose behind it.

Carter: She liked to go as a tourist, but she wanted something more than that?

Bracelin: Well, she didn't care for people that way. She didn't care for people in the way that you and I do.

Carter: She wanted to be doing something useful that would get some results from her travel?

Bracelin: She said that she talked to Dr. Bryant, and he advised her and guided her.

³Roxana S. Ferris, Curator, Dudley Herbarium, Stanford University.

⁴Gordon F. Ferris, Professor of Entomology, Stanford University.

- Carter: He was a wonderful person to do that.
- Bracelin: He was a wonderful person, just wonderful. He spoke of Mrs. Mexia and Miss Morse⁵. Dr. Bryant said that Miss Morse and Mrs. Mexia and I were his best students.
- Carter: I bet you were, too. Had you been working in the Herbarium long then?
- Bracelin: Not at all.
- Carter: You hadn't started in the Herbarium then?
- Bracelin: Not at all. January 1st, 1928. We'd been out the day before on a field trip and she came up to me and asked me if I wouldn't like to come over to the University with her. You know everything she did always had to be hidden. You sort of call people.
- Carter: A little mystery to it.
- Bracelin: Yes. So I went up. It was the first of the year and we went upstairs and she had a key.
- Carter: That was when the Herbarium was still in the Hearst Mining Building, upstairs.
- Bracelin: That was in 1928. Was it in '28? No, '27. And [Sentence not ended.]
- Carter: Because you had been working there for more than a year when I first met you. You knew your way around when I first met you.
- Bracelin: Yes. I guess I didn't at first. I didn't know anything about it and Mrs. Mexia--it was very funny--she said "Well, Bracie, dear, don't you think you would like to come over here and come with me and talk with me and maybe you'd like to do this. I think you'd like to do this."
- Carter: Without saying what it was?
- Bracelin: Finally, she asked me if I'd come the next day. Well, I thought that was all right and she had a young girl who was a very close friend and besides that Mrs. Mexia had treated them almost like they were children, her children, and so she helped for the 1925 [collections].

⁵Miss Elizabeth E. Morse, retired teacher and benefactress of University of California Herbarium's mycological collection (Mycologia 48:439-442. 1956).

Carter: On the Mexican material?

Bracelin: Yes. And Mrs. Mexia and this girl did that on the 1925 material, but she hadn't finished them all when I took it up.

Carter: That was laying out for sets [duplicates for distribution] and all [preparing labels]. Who had determined those 1925 [collections]?

Bracelin: Miss Eastwood⁶ had done a lot of it, a great deal of it. And Mrs. Mexia, with Miss Eastwood's help, had decided on doing some of it herself, and I'm not sure how many of them were correct. So those [collections] started [my work with her] and I stayed there most every day for part of the time and pretty soon I was doing it all and finding that she didn't know what to do. The blind seeing for the blind, you know?

Carter: Well, had she had any courses in botany yet?

Bracelin: Yes. She had had some that she had taken. I think that they were very small courses but not really very fine ones. But they helped her a little, but she was not the type of person that could sit down and do a thing of that type, like you could go in and do those. They have a different meaning to you. But not Mrs. Mexia. She wanted to get out and see things.

Carter: Do the collecting and let somebody else take care of the [material]?

Bracelin: Yes. It was almost at once that I took over.

Carter: With her materials?

Bracelin: Yes.

⁶Alice Eastwood, California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, California.

II. MRS. BRACELIN'S EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
HERBARIUM AND MRS. MEXIA'S EARLY BOTANICAL EXPEDITIONS.

Carter: Then later Dr. Copeland⁷ put you on the Herbarium staff?

Bracelin: Well, I had been doing it for quite a while. Dr. Copeland begged me to do it [accept position as Herbarium Assistant], begged me to take the job, and I said, "well I'm doing this for Mrs. Mexia and I don't think she wants it disturbed," but he just begged me to take it for quite a while. So finally I said "Oh all right." I'd go for half-time and he said no I could do it all and at the [same] time I could also take care of her work. But I didn't do it that way because I didn't think that was honest.

Carter: But still the specimens were accruing to the University, weren't they? Or was she selling all of them?

Bracelin: I had to sell as many as I could. She had sold some ahead of time. She sent some to Michigan.

Carter: To Dr. Bartlett?⁸

Bracelin: Yes.

Carter: United States National Museum?

Bracelin: No, I got that up. And of course she sent to Gray Herbarium [Harvard]. And a little for this and a little for that.

Carter: You organized it so it went much more smoothly?

Bracelin: Well, I couldn't see what was happening, what she was doing. What was she aiming for? So I began changing it.

Carter: Getting it into good organization.

Bracelin: And of course she was glad I did it, though of course she never said that to me. That was what she was glad of--having me take over.

Carter: I'll bet she was.

Bracelin: She didn't want to. Oh, once in a while she would come in and say "Oh, I'll write that letter," or "I'll do that". But of course they were her letters, if she wanted to, but oftentimes they weren't properly done.

Carter: But all this time she was planning her next trip while she was working on her Mexican material?

⁷Edwin B. Copeland, Curator, University of California Herbarium, Berkeley.

⁸Harley H. Bartlett, Professor of Botany and Director of the Botanical Garden, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Bracelin: Well, she just had to go somewhere. The next thing was [sentence trailed off].

Carter: Did she go to Alaska after Mexico?

Bracelin: Yes.

Carter: After the first Mexican trip?

Bracelin: Yes. She had [gone on] the last [second] Mexican [1926], the big Mexican [expedition]; she had done that and done it better. But then she reached a state where she was just sort of bogged down, but not telling anybody. About that time she went to Alaska. She had Frances Payne⁹ with her for about two months.

Carter: That was when Frances was just a student, wasn't it?

Bracelin: No. She was working on her Master's and she was teaching at the time.

Carter: So they went to Alaska together?

Bracelin: Well, for part of the time and then they separated, but friendly.

Carter: Well, did she think that Alaska wasn't as much her dish of pie as Mexico?

Bracelin: No. Having gone and seen, it really didn't interest her very much. And of course, she didn't [collect] a big lot of numbers, or anything of that sort. Frances had time and got a lot of them. And of course they were turned in for her [Mrs. Mexia], because she was paying the bill.

Carter: I should think that she would have had more of a home feeling for Mexico than for Alaska.

Bracelin: Oh, she did have, definitely, but, she wanted to see Alaska. So she went around and up to the Mount McKinley area for three months, I think I'll have to look it up, well, you can't be out very long times in Alaska, you know.

Carter: Unless you stay through the winter, and that's not collecting time.

⁹Frances Payne, biology teacher at Alameda High School who was working on her Master's Degree in Botany at University of California, Berkeley.

Bracelin: Not very well. Then she was here, and again it was awful. In fact, she was funny. I used to laugh at her when [sentence trailed off]. She would have been shocked if she had known I was [laughing] because I had different ideas. After all, I think that you would recognize that I had a different temperament than she.

Carter: Certainly a different background.

III. MRS. MEXIA IN SOUTH AMERICA.

- Bracelin: Yes. She came back, and very soon after Alaska she decided she was going to South America. She talked to Dr. Copeland and some others. She wrote some letters and it was decided that she would go to Viçosa.
- Carter: Viçosa in Brazil?
- Bracelin: Well, Viçosa was the place she went to.
- Carter: It's a province of Brazil, isn't it?
- Bracelin: No, it was a town almost, it was an agricultural college. She had gotten from Mrs. Chase¹⁰ some answers and she went to that place because it would be a very good place. Finally, it was decided that she ought to stay around the season.
- Carter: After she got there that was decided or before she went?
- Bracelin: Well it was practically before she went but they made arrangements and they took her into the whole place. They were lovely to her. But with her difficult temperament I don't think she could fit into it at all, and I think there were some difficult times. Mrs. Chase went there with the idea of going along and working with her because there would be two people to help.
- Carter: The work goes much faster if two work together.
- Bracelin: Yes. She thought that, but Mrs. Chase was a very dominant person. I never met her but I got information that two people with that sort of temperament didn't work [together] very long.
- Carter: They didn't go along a parallel line very well.
- Bracelin: Mrs. Chase went on as would be expected by her and her way was very fine.

¹⁰ Agnes Chase, Agrostologist, United States National Herbarium, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

- Carter: She went and did a lot of collecting.
- Bracelin: In South America. She had worked in Vigosa before. In fact, she was a friend of the head of the Agricultural College, and of other people there.
- Carter: That made a wonderful introduction then.
- Bracelin: That helped Mrs. Mexia. And at first they were certainly very lovely to her but I think later it became rather strained. But she did stay through a year.
- Carter: Mrs. Mexia did?
- Bracelin: Yes.
- Carter: And she just worked out from that area? She didn't take any long trips?
- Bracelin: No, not long, but a day or two or something like that.
- Carter: So that was sort of her introduction to South America before her big Amazon trip?
- Bracelin: Yes. She went from Viçosa up the Amazon.
- Carter: In that first year she did? Or did she go back again for her big Amazon trip?
- Bracelin: It was after, because she went from Viçosa and then she had to go back to the main town.
- Carter: Ríó de Janeiro?
- Bracelin: Yes. She went back there for a week or two or something like that and then she went up the Amazon.
- Carter: That was a long trip, the Amazon trip, wasn't it?
- Bracelin: A very long trip. But she didn't stop at a lot of places. I used to be surprised at that because she could have done some things that I would have thought were better but I [sentence trailed off].
- Carter: She wanted to push on and see around the next bend, probably.
- Bracelin: Yes. She went to Belem on the first where there's a [sentence trailed off].
- Carter: An agricultural station there?
- Bracelin: Yes.
- Carter: Dr. Foster¹¹ was there one year.

¹¹Adriance Foster, Professor of Botany, University of California, Berkeley.

- Bracelin: Oh, was he? There was [sentence trailed off].
- Carter: Where the rivers come together?
- Bracelin: Yes. There were two of those. There were some interesting things in that area where she [collected].
- Carter: Where she collected a lot of plants?
- Bracelin: Yes. She collected some places. Not as much as you'd expect, for a person of that sort. She really didn't do as much there. She went to Belem and stayed there for a while and she went down to some of the little places around Ford. Ford has a big [place], I think its rubber, and cars. She went to see that or some parts of it at least. And they were very nice to her and helped her quite a bit. But she didn't do as you or I would expect. She would say well here's a place where I could get a thousand specimens right now and no doubt she could have.
- Carter: But she didn't do it?
- Bracelin: Not that way. She took some, but she didn't stay there as I would have expected.
- Carter: When she went up the Amazon, she just went by herself with native guides and boatmen, didn't she?
- Bracelin: Well, that was when she got up to Iquitos, but she stopped up the Amazon to [sentence trailed off].
- Carter: As far as the big boats can go?
- Bracelin: Yes. There are a lot of very fine things there although a lot of it was gone when she saw it. It was once a wonderful place.
- Carter: An agricultural area or? . . .
- Bracelin: No. A city. She stayed a while there and along the Amazon she stopped at four or five places for just hours.
- Carter: Instead of days?
- Bracelin: I was always surprised. Instead of taking some of the things that would be so interesting, I would think, she would get some awfully silly little things.
- Carter: Plants or artifacts?
- Bracelin: Artifacts. Awful silly ones.
- Carter: They just appealed to her, I guess.

IV. MRS. MEXIA'S UNPREDICTABLE MOODS.

Bracelin: Yes, they would because after all she was a peon. Mrs. Mexia really was a peon. Because every now and then she would . . . well, for example, Beryl Kautz¹², you knew her . .

Carter: Yes, in Zoology, I knew her.

Bracelin: The poor girl was helping to take care of herself and her sister on a teacher's [teaching assistant's] salary, \$70.00 a month, was all she was getting. So she was at the point where every penny counted.

Carter: That was when she was a teaching assistant.

Bracelin: Yes. And Mrs. Mexia would make her come and see us whenever she was free, and stop out in front of the building [Life Sciences Bldg.]. One day--oh, I was disgusted, I was thoroughly disgusted! We had to go outdoors and sit down on the ground and have some sandwiches.

Carter: Wasn't it a nice day for it?

Bracelin: Yes. It was pretty nice. And we were sitting on that circle in front of the building, I don't know if its still there, and Beryl was teasing Mrs. Mexia a little bit, and she said something, and then Mrs. Mexia showed herself. She reached at her with a great big knife and jabbed her and ruined the stocking, of course, and cut her leg. Afterwards, I said "Now listen, this is terrible, and you've got to buy two new pairs of stockings for that girl. She cannot afford this! Look what you've done to her." And it was bleeding, you know. It wasn't too serious.

Carter: She didn't mean to, did she?

Bracelin: No. She was mad for the moment.

Carter: But she didn't mean to really puncture her, probably.

Bracelin: You see that was the Mexican in her. At times she'd be violent, maybe for a few seconds and that was the background in her. When she did that to Beryl, and Beryl was in such a state, oh, - to have a piece of bread, was something you didn't waste.

Carter: That was in the Depression times, wasn't it, in the '30's?

Bracelin: Yes. And she was trying to earn enough to feed herself and her sister. Her sister was sick.

¹²Beryl Kautz, graduate student in Zoology, University of California, Berkeley.

Carter: Did Mrs. Mexia buy the stockings?

Bracelin: I said "We're going down and buy those for that girl." She could see that that was the sort of thing I wouldn't stand for, because that was terrible. So we got the stockings. I liked Beryl very much. She was odd but she was an awfully nice girl. And she was advancing herself, she was trying to get her Master's and I thought it was a terrible thing to do. I would never have come out to do another thing for her [Mrs. Mexia] if she hadn't replaced the stockings. And she knew it, too.

Carter: Did she give them to Beryl Kautz or did you have to give them to her?

Bracelin: No. I thought she ought to do it because she was the one who injured Beryl. I thought it was better if she thought she was doing it. I didn't want Beryl to think I was doing it, because that wasn't important. That's the sort of thing I would see a few times. She [Mrs. Mexia] seemed to like me more than most people.

Carter: Well, you did so much for her and you understood her.

Bracelin: Yes.

Carter: Understood her moods and her whims, and went along with her whenever possible.

Bracelin: One time, Dr. Goodspeed¹³. . . [Sentence trailed off.]

¹³T. Harper Goodspeed, Professor of Botany and Director of the Botanical Garden, University of California, Berkeley.

V. MEXIA FAMILY HISTORY.

- Carter: Was Mrs. Mexia born in Mexico or in the United States?
- Bracelin: She was born in Washington, D. C. Her father was ... what was he called ... sometimes she would tell you everything and other times she wouldn't tell something she ought to tell.
- Carter: And it wouldn't slip out by accident?
- Bracelin: No. Well, once in a while it did sometimes. Her father was consul or maybe he was more than that in Washington, D. C.
- Carter: From Mexico?
- Bracelin: And I have a picture showing him and all the others, consuls, or whatever they were, from the Latin American countries. She wouldn't tell those things. And I wouldn't try to find out.
- Carter: It's nice to know a person's private history, especially if they're doing things that are going to go down for posterity.
- Bracelin: Her mother's family was in the ministry [Baltimore, Maryland].
- Carter: You mean religious not political?
- Bracelin: Yes. And, oh what a country it was! But he [Mrs. Mexia's father] had something like eleven leagues in Texas that were given to him in the Mexican way and she told me that they had these eleven leagues and they lived in Texas for a number of years.
- Carter: When he wasn't in Washington?
- Bracelin: He was there and various children were there.
- Carter: Was she the oldest child?
- Bracelin: There was one sister who she, in a letter that I have, said that she and Mrs. Mexia were the only legitimate children. There were ten or eleven or twelve of them [illegitimate].
- Carter: Well, that happens all over the world.
- Bracelin: But this was quite common, and the sister was, evidently, a very lovely lady in a nice way.
- Carter: She isn't the one who lived in San Francisco later? Wasn't there a relative living in San Francisco?
- Bracelin: Not that I ever knew of. She was living in Philadelphia. She lived there nearby until she died.

Carter: Then Mrs. Mexia didn't actually grow up in Mexico. She grew up in Texas or did they go to Mexico some, too?

Bracelin: Oh yes, Mexico and back. She went to Catholic schools in Washington, D. C. and some other ones. Then they'd go back to Mexico.

Carter: Mexico City, or some other part of Mexico?

Bracelin: Yes. He had a lovely big home there and they had a hacienda just beyond Mexico City. They had some lovely property there, and I judge lots of servants.

Carter: This was before the Revolution, before 1910 probably?

Bracelin: Yes, I suppose so.

Carter: Because he must have lost a lot at that time, if he had so much.

Bracelin: Well, oh they had lawsuits and everything. It was a terrible mess, evidently. But he left his places in Texas to Mrs. Mexia pretty much as far as I was able to see. Of course, I never went into the details. She had some of these half-brothers and sisters. One brother, evidently, was fighting the whole thing very much because his father was dead and the mother was dead several years before. They wanted certain properties and things like that.

Carter: But they didn't die until Mrs. Mexia was an adult?

Bracelin: No. Her parents died before the 1920's, I'd say.

Carter: So before you knew her they had already passed away?

Bracelin: Oh yes. They were gone and she owned the property down in Mexico. She sold it, she told me for \$25.00 an acre and they found oil on it afterwards. But she'd sold it so there was nothing she could do about it. The property was Mexican. In one of the places it became American [Rio Grande area?]. In Texas it was Mrs. Mexia's property then. I don't know just how far down in Texas they went. As I was reading some of the letters I understand that her grandfather and grandmother and a sister were friends of the Emperor.

Carter: Maximilian?

Bracelin: Yes. Some of the things I read were written by the Mexias. That was the grandparents and the aunt.

Carter: Those must have been interesting.

Bracelin: Well, I put them all in Bancroft [Library] because I didn't think they should be lost. There was nothing to stop me from throwing them all away but I didn't think it should have been. I think the grandparents and their sister were friends of the Emperor and his beautiful lady. From things I read it sounded as though they were entertaining. Her grandfather knew Santa Ana and they were friends and then they were on different sides later on. She used to tell about this. They were at war, Santa Ana and his people and General Mexia.

Carter: He was a general?

Bracelin: Oh yes. Both his father and grandfather. Her grandfather was there fighting at the time and they ran into each other and Mexia said "Well if the cases were turned what would you do?" Santa Ana said "I'll give you five minutes to live." Mexia was killed right there. I'm not sure if Santa Ana was killed too, but I think they both were.

Carter: Mrs. Mexia's grandfather?

Bracelin: Yes. I think that was in northern Mexico. It really was exciting in lots of ways. I've always wanted to write it up.

Carter: So every once in a while she'd drop bits of family history that you could fit in piece by piece?

Bracelin: No. All of it was put into my hands after her death.

Carter: You mean all the letters?

Bracelin: Everything that she had. I had a lot of them at the University for a long time but I didn't tell people because some people would have thought that that would be interesting to just go into and I didn't think it would be. I gave the important ones to the University and on some of them I made notes.

Carter: You've already given those to the Bancroft?

Bracelin: Yes. Because I thought that should be. I told Mrs. -- I've forgotten her name, but she's no longer there anyway -- that I didn't want it just passed around anywhere because there are still some Mexias around. I don't know who they are. There was someone while Mrs. Mexia was alive that was down the peninsula a ways. A cousin or a half-cousin or a half-brother -- one of them. It was a lady. Mrs. Mexia saw her evidently once in a great while. They seemed to be friendly but not close. A man wanted to write up Mexia things and came to me or rather wrote to me. I gave him some help.

Carter: Was he writing up the family or just Ynes Mexia as a botanist?

Bracelin: The family. He never sent me the manuscript and I thought he ought to. I still have his letter. Maybe I could chase it up. I suppose he did some things that could bring some things out that I didn't know anything about. Very possibly. There were some people down either in Mexico or in some other southern part of the country. There were these people -- they were nice people, white people [sentence trailed off].

Carter: Well, color doesn't make any difference.

Bracelin: No. Going back they probably didn't like some things, at various levels. I don't know how much each person knew about things. There are papers over at Bancroft that show quite a number of those things. I gave them in. I did keep copies of things she had had, that belonged to her father or her grandfather or somebody like that. I kept notes of them.

Carter: The originals are in Bancroft? That's wonderful.

Bracelin: Oh yes. They're there. I was sure that was where they ought to be, and I told Bancroft that I didn't want some of these things just handed around because supposing the relatives heard some of these things, they'd be horrified, you know. Apparently they're very nice people and they wouldn't like to have all of that known. So I said that I didn't want them just handed out.

Carter: Well, I'm sure they don't do that.

Bracelin: People come in for historical studies and some of them could go in and write that all up. I didn't want that done and I'm not sure what finally happened to them. The lady that was in there for years--she's been gone for two years now, I think--she's retired, a very lovely person. If I wanted to get any of those things out, I could, but I wanted to have them safe. Then the idea of my having to do all these things by myself and then I go and get a bump on my head. I could show you a book that I wrote copies in, but we wouldn't start this [the tape recorder] going that way and then just walk off and leave it.

Interview continued on May 3, 1967 at Mrs. Bracelin's house.

VI. BIOGRAPHY OF MRS. BRACELIN.

Bracelin: My interest in botany was greatly enhanced . . . the work with those plants was an inspiration, and I know it was for you, Annetta, because I loved every minute of it. I worked morning, afternoon, and evening [sentence trailed off].

Carter: You worked hours longer than anybody else.

Bracelin: On weekends, and it was simply wonderful for me. And, of course I reached out and took the Blake Garden¹⁴ which Mrs. Mexia didn't like one little bit because it wasn't hers. From there I reached for other things. I loved every minute of it.

Carter: You did a tremendous job in the Herbarium¹⁵. And all these extra things that you did, too.

Bracelin: Yes. I guess I would be right now, too, if I could.

Carter: When did you become interested in botany?

Bracelin: Well, I wanted to take botany courses in high school. But my mother decided that she would decide what I was going to do. She decided I was to study anatomy and medicine and I was to be a doctor. And I could be later, but she introduced me by taking me to see the autopsy of a man that I had helped to take care of. His body was found after he was killed. It was found three weeks later. My mother said I had to go to that night autopsy. And I had to go. When my mother said something, I had to do it. But I certainly didn't want to go on with medicine, and yet I could have later, very easily. I have a good interest in it, and I have a little bit of knowledge about it.

Carter: Well, you have a good scientific mind. Where were you born?

Bracelin: In Star Lake, Minnesota.

Carter: That's a nice name.

Bracelin: Isn't it beautiful? It was shaped like a star. My mother's father had the first, or the biggest, or the oldest or something like that, saw mill up in Minnesota. Of course, at that time it was just woods, everywhere. Not that I can remember it, but I know that was it.

¹⁴ Blake Garden, the home of Mr. & Mrs. Anson Blake, Kensington. Now University of California property. Mrs. Bracelin made a large collection of the exotic cultivated plants here. Duplicate herbarium specimens were distributed to other herbaria.

¹⁵ Herbarium--University of California Herbarium--at that time housed in the Hearst Mining Building but transferred to Life Sciences Building in 1930.

Carter: What was your name, your maiden name?

Bracelin: It was N. Floy "Burfield." My mother took her name back after she was married because she wanted to keep her father's name, and that was Burfield. But I was born under "Parry".

Carter: Well, lots of people in Mexico use the combination of names so you can tell what the history of the family is. That's a common practice in Mexico.

Bracelin: My mother told me I was to keep the "Burfield". So, of course I did.

Carter: Until after you were married?

Bracelin: Yes. And then, of course, I stopped it. I was told that the day I was born, my grandfather took a ruler and pulled the hair out and measured it. He said it was more than an inch long. That's what I was told, but I don't remember that, for some reason. I didn't do all the things I wanted so much to do because my mother decided what I was to do. Like she decided I was to be a doctor, period. There was no ifs, or ands, or buts.

Carter: How did you get out of that?

Bracelin: That autopsy was enough. I can still smell it. I was only sixteen. I can't imagine a mother doing a thing like that for a teenager. I just can't imagine it. But, of course, I was brought up to be a nice little girl.

Carter: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Bracelin: I had a brother that was two and a half years older than me. And that was all. We didn't have any interests in common.

Carter: Lots of brothers and sisters don't.

Bracelin: No. Not at all. And my mother's interests were so foreign to me that that wasn't helpful either. And perhaps I was the one that was wrong. You never can tell.

Carter: Lots of children don't see eye-to-eye with their parents, or the parents eye-to-eye with the children.

Bracelin: I really think I could have done a number of things. I've shown that I can, because the drawing I did for years and years. Really and truly this is a joke, a downright joke. Dr. Evans¹⁶ came in to me one day and [sentence trailed off].

¹⁶Herbert McLean Evans, Professor, Department of Anatomy and Director, Institute of Experimental Biology, University of California, Berkeley.

Carter: Herbert McLean Evans?

Bracelin: Yes. And brought me a beautifully drawn graph. He said, "I wish you'd copy that." I said "I've never done anything like that in my life." He said "Well, I wish you'd copy it." "All right, I'll copy it." And I didn't have anything to do it with; I had a ruler and a pen, ordinary pen. And I worked and worked at it. And he gave good criticism. And he looked at it. And he said "All right, after this, you're going to draw all of our graphs."

Carter: This was after you'd left the Herbarium?

Bracelin: I was working on the Mexia collection and the Blake collection.

Carter: When you had that room downstairs in the corner? [Life Sciences Bldg.]

Bracelin: Downstairs. He told me hereafter you're going to do it. I said "Oh dear, well, I guess I'll have to learn how."

Carter: So you did and have been doing beautiful graphs ever since.

Bracelin: Except now. I have to give him credit for that because he did it. And he gave me good criticism. As a matter of fact, I thought one day a while ago I've never taken a job except when I was asked, "Would I do it?" I didn't realize it until recently. Someone would say "Will you do this?" And I'd say "Sure." Like the Laboratory¹⁷ wanted me to do bacteriology about which I knew almost nothing.

Carter: Down at Western Research Laboratory?

Bracelin: Yes. I said "Sure, I'll work at it, and if I don't know I'll ask." Of course, lots of the things I couldn't do because it needed a lot of training. But they would let me do lots of things they wouldn't let one of the men who boasted of his doctor's degree and his experience all over the Orient and so forth.

Carter: Well, they knew you were a good responsible person, reliable.

Bracelin: This fellow, one day we were working on botulism and you don't monkey with that. We inoculated 30 or 50 cans of beans or peas or something like that. I didn't do the inoculating. No, I didn't do that at all. The fellow who was the head of it did the inoculating--he wasn't taking any chances. And he was right. Then we had to leave them out in a cold room at night. The next morning we were to move them into minus ten. This fellow called me and said "Bracie, will you go down and see if Bagley has done that? I can't trust him to put everything back the way it should

¹⁷Laboratory. Western Regional Research Laboratory, U.S.D.A., Albany, California.

be." So I went down and I said "Is this where you had all these cans?" "Yes." I said "Oh, that's where they are." I went back upstairs. The lid blew up, and the director and the head of the department--Whew--because that might have killed thousands of people.

Carter: Had he put them in the wrong place?

Bracelin: Left them over where it would be just cool and they were supposed to be in -10. So they said to me "Would you please change things?" Because they'd see if it could be used. They didn't let him do it. After all, if you're going to work with anything like that, you have to be reliable.

THE YNÉS MEXÍA COLLECTIONS AND N. FLOY (MRS. H. P.) BRACELIN.—Except for the dedicated and meticulous assistance of Mrs. Bracelin, the extensive Mexican and South American collections made by Ynés Mexía might never have been distributed. Once her beautifully prepared and carefully documented specimens reached home base, Mrs. Mexía had little interest in them other than the excitement and satisfaction of having obtained species new to science. Mrs. Bracelin said, "She [Mrs. Mexía] loved to have a trip and to see things and do things, but there had to be a purpose behind it." Mrs. Mexía and Mrs. Bracelin became friends in 1927 when they were both enrolled in Dr. Harold Bryant's "Six Trips Afield", a University of California Extension course. At that time Mrs. Mexía had made two collecting trips to Mexico and from the second one in 1926 [cf. Madroño 1:227-238. 1929]

she had brought back extensive collections that were still not completely processed. In January, 1928, "Bracie", as she was known to friends, took over the processing of the Mexican and subsequent South American collections—preparing labels, sending sets to specialists for naming, arranging sales, and, finally, distributing the duplicates. In this connection, Mrs. Bracelin built up a wide correspondence and acquaintanceship with botanists throughout the world. Before her death, Mrs. Bracelin deposited all of the records of the Mexía collections, much of the Mexía correspondence, and information about the Mexía family in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The first set of the Mexía collections is deposited in UC. Mrs. Bracelin published the following articles treating Ynés Mexía and her collections:

Bracelin, Mrs. H. P. Itinerary of Ynés Mexía in South America. Madroño 3:174-175. 1935.

———. Ynés Mexía. Madroño 4:273-275. 1938.

Inasmuch as Mrs. Mexía had arranged to bring her Mexican collections to the University of California Herbarium at Berkeley, Mrs. Bracelin worked on them there. In May, 1929, Dr. E. B. Copeland, who was at that time Curator of the Herbarium, employed Mrs. Bracelin as an Herbarium assistant. In the early 1930's Bracie helped Dr. Carleton R. Ball in working up his willow collections for the revision of the genus *Salix* in the western United States. Later, she set herself the task of making a collection of the exotic plants growing in the Anson and Anita Blake estate (now the property of the University of California, Berkeley). With duplicates, her 1392 garden collections amounted to about 20,000 sheets, all of which were distributed to herbaria expressing an interest in cultivated plants. After leaving the University of California Herbarium, she perfected her skills as a scientific illustrator (specializing in the field of graphs and charts). From January, 1940, to July, 1943, Mrs. Bracelin was an assistant in the Botany Department of the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, and after that, until her retirement in 1960, she was on the staff of the Western Regional Research Laboratory, U.S.D.A., Albany, California.

Mrs. Bracelin (née Nina Floy Perry) was born 24 March 1890 at Star Lake, Minnesota. She died in Berkeley, California, on 8 July 1973. She is remembered as a cheerful, friendly person, ever helpful to others, with a great capacity for work that was well done. Four plants were named in her honor: *Cordia Braceliniae* I. M. Johnston, *Fuchsia Braceliniae* Munz, *Salix lasiolepis* var. *Braceliniae* Ball, *Vochysia Braceliniae* Standley.—ANNETTA M. CARTER, Department of Botany, University of California, Berkeley 94720.

YNES MEXIA

Ynes Mexia, the daughter of General Enrique A. and Sarah R. (Wilmer) Mexia, was born May 24, 1870, in Georgetown, Washington, D. C. Her father, the son of José Antonio Mexia (a Mexican general under President Santa Anna) was at that time resident in Washington as a representative of the Mexican government. Her mother, Sarah R. Wilmer of Maryland, was of the family of Samuel Eccleston, Fifth Archbishop of Baltimore. A large part of her childhood was spent in Texas where the family owned an eleven league grant upon which the town of Mexia, Limestone County, is now located. Her early education was obtained mainly in private schools in Philadelphia and Ontario, Canada. Later, she attended St. Joseph's College, Emmetsburg, Maryland, and the University of California, Berkeley. She was married in Mexico to Agustin A. de Reygadas but later resumed the use of her maiden name. For considerable periods during the earlier part of her life she lived in Mexico but for the past thirty years has been a resident of San Francisco.

Mrs. Mexia's interest in botanical collecting began in 1922 when she joined an expedition led by Mr. E. L. Furlong, then Curator of Paleontology, University of California, Berkeley; on



Fig. 1. Ynes Mexia.

this occasion, however, she made only a few permanent collections. Her first important collecting was done on a second expedition to Mexico in 1925 in company with Mrs. Roxana S. Ferris, of Dudley Herbarium, Stanford University. During the thirteen years following she made three additional expeditions to Mexico, one to Alaska, and two to South America, collecting a total of about 8800 numbers, approximating 145,000 specimens. She was collecting in the mountains of the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, in 1938 when she became ill and was obliged to return home. Her health did not improve and death followed on July 12, 1938.

Mrs. Mexia's collections were always carefully prepared and her field notes unusually detailed. Many of the regions she visited had been but little explored botanically and although studies upon her collections are not yet completed they have yielded a large number of species new to science. At present there have been described two new genera, *Mezianthus mexicanus* Robinson (Compositae) and *Spumula quadrifida* Mains (Pucciniaceae) and about 500 new species (mostly spermatophytes) of which more than 50 have been named in her honor. A brief résumé of her collecting expeditions with approximate numbers of specimens obtained is given at the end of this article.

Published accounts of Mrs. Mexia's expeditions and special reports upon her collections have appeared as follows: Ynes Mexia, Botanical Trails in Old Mexico—the Lure of the Unknown (MADROÑO 1: 227–238. 1929); Three Thousand Miles up the Amazon (Sierra Club Bulletin, 1933); Camping near the Equator (Sierra Club Bulletin, 1937); Edwin B. Bartram, Mosses of Western Mexico Collected by Mrs. Ynes Mexia (Jour. Wash. Acad. Sci. 18: 577–582. 1928); E. B. Copeland, Brazilian Ferns Collected by Ynes Mexia (Univ. Calif. Publ. Bot. 17: 23–50, pls. 1–8. 1932); Mrs. H. P. Bracelin, Itinerary of Ynes Mexia in South America (MADROÑO 3: 174–176. 1935).

In the San Francisco Bay region Mrs. Mexia was well known as a lecturer, having appeared before many scientific organizations. Her accounts of botanical explorations were vivid and entertaining, and because of her skill in photography, were unusually well illustrated with views of the general topography and plant associations of the regions visited.

Mrs. Mexia has been a member of the California Botanical Society since 1915. She was a member also of the Sierra Club, the Audubon Association of the Pacific, the Sociedad Geographica de Lima, Peru, a life member of the California Academy of Sciences, and an honorary member of Departamento Forestal y de Caza y Pesca of Mexico.—Mrs. H. P. BRACELIN, Berkeley, California.

BOTANICAL EXPEDITIONS OF YNES MEXIA

MEXICO

Western Mexico: September 15 to November 19, 1925; Sinaloa; expedition with Roxana S. Ferris, Dudley Herbarium, Stanford University; 500 numbers, 3500 specimens.

Western Mexico: September, 1926 to April, 1927; states of Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco to 6000 feet elevation in Sierra Madre; 1600 numbers, 33,000 specimens.

Northern and central Mexico: May to July inclusive, 1929; Chihuahua, Mexico, Puebla, Hidalgo; expedition led by Mr. E. L. Furlong, Department of Paleontology, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena; 315 numbers, 5000 specimens.

Southwestern Mexico: October 31, 1937 to May 20, 1938; states of Oaxaca and Guerrero; 700 numbers, 13,000 specimens.

ALASKA

Mt. McKinley National Park: June to September, 1938; first general collection of the Park flora; 365 numbers, 6100 specimens.

SOUTH AMERICA

Brazil and Peru: November, 1929 to March, 1932, inclusive; Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, Viçosa and Diamantina, state of Minas Geraes; Amazon and other river courses in states of Pará and Amazonas; Transandean Peru, upper Amazon and Santiago river valleys, Departamento de Loreto; accompanied for a short time by Agnes M. Chase, Division of Agrostology, United States Department of Agriculture; 3200 numbers, 65,000 specimens.

Ecuador: September, 1934 to September, 1935; coastal plains and eastern Amazonian slope of Andes, northern highlands and Columbian border; expedition for the Bureau of Plant Introduction and Exploration, United States Department of Agriculture to search for palms, cinchonas and soil-binding plants and to make a general collection; 900 numbers, 5000 specimens.

Peru, Bolivia, north central Argentina and Chile: October, 1935 to January, 1936, inclusive; Andean highlands; expedition of the University of California Botanical Garden led by Dr. T. H. Goodspeed; 300 numbers, 1900 specimens.

Peru, Chile, Argentina and Ecuador: January, 1936 to January, 1937, inclusive; southern Chile, Straits of Magellan, Tierra del Fuego; Peru, Cuzco, Machu Pichu, Cerro del Pasco; Ecuador, Esmeraldas; 1000 numbers, 13,000 specimens.

Regional Oral History Office

THE BANCROFT LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720