

Walter Kingsley Taylor, Eliane M. Norman. *André Michaux in Florida: An Eighteenth-Century Botanical Journey*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. Maps. 288 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-2444-8.



Reviewed by Melody Herr

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The French Wanderer in Florida

The counterpart of menageries, ornamental gardens in the eighteenth century symbolized their owners' taste, prestige, and far-reaching influence. Competing for the most exotic collections, the aristocrats of Europe sponsored expeditions to Asia, India, and the New World to furnish their royal pleasure grounds. At the Jardin du Roi, however, the botanists had an additional mission: identifying economically useful plants and acclimatizing them to French soil. The successful introduction of coffee and the cedar of Lebanon into France and its colonies demonstrated the potential of this enterprise and the head gardener, André Thouin, sent his apprentices around the globe in search of other plants to domesticate.[1] Making use of friendly relations with the newly independent United States, in 1785 the Jardin dispatched two botanists, André Michaux and Pierre Paul Saunier, to the New World.

As the senior partner, Michaux bought land in New Jersey for a nursery and left Saunier with instructions for shipping seeds and saplings to France. Then, with his teen-aged son, Michaux

headed for Charleston, South Carolina, where he set up a second nursery and field station. Over the next eleven years, he launched a series of expeditions covering North America from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi River, from the Hudson Bay to the Bahama Islands. The Americans soon came to call him "the French Wanderer."

In 1788, Michaux spent three months exploring Florida's east coast, and an English transcription of the journal from that expedition forms the principal chapter of *Andre Michaux in Florida*. The journal itself, barely filling seventeen book pages, is meager. Yet Walter Kingsley Taylor and Elaine M. Norman supplement it with forty pages of detailed descriptions of geographical features, asides on local flora and fauna, notes on the contemporary political situation, and biographical sketches of the individuals whom Michaux mentions. They supply maps of the botanist's route along with modern photographs of the places he visited. Then they track Michaux through the archives in the United States and France to gather correspondence regarding his American travels

as well as the journal recording his return voyage to France in 1796.

From these archival sources, Michaux's *Flora Boreali-Americana* (1803), and his botanical collection at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Taylor and Norman have compiled an exhaustive list of all the plants that the Frenchman identified in Florida. Stuffed into an appendix, the list at first glance seems odd. But then, both authors are biologists; and Taylor has published two volumes on Florida's wildflowers. Apparently, they consider this appendix the book's *raison d'être*. The rest is just supporting material.

The chapters on eighteenth-century botany and the colonial history of Florida serve only to introduce Michaux's expedition. His resulting publications and their reception receive barely a mention. The authors might have done much more to evaluate Michaux's contribution to the understanding of North American flora. Instead, they paste in his journals, letters, packing lists, and other memorabilia, including both a transcription and a photograph of his baptismal record. In short, *Andre Michaux in Florida* is a scrapbook. Readers looking for narrative will find it disappointing; however, botanists may well find it useful. Local antiquarians and amateur naturalists, undoubtedly, will enjoy paging through this album from a Frenchman's camping trip in the spring of 1788 along the Florida coast.

Notes

[1]. Readers are already familiar with the large literature on natural history during the Enlightenment, but E. C. Spary's new book *Utopia's Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) deserves mention.

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