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GLEN SPELMAN WINTERRINGER (6 OCTOBER 1906 – 31 JANUARY 1974) Kathleen Marie Garness¹

We owe so much to the work of previous generations of botanists, and often their work is almost forgotten. One of these Illinois botanical luminaries was Glen Spelman Winterringer, who was manager and ultimately Curator of the botanical holdings at the Illinois State Museum from 1949 to 1973 (Figure 1). According to the ISM database, Glen collected an impressive 22,391 specimens in the field for their herbarium during his tenure! And were it not for his untimely tragic death in 1974, it's likely he would have collected many more.

Glen grew up in Arcola, IL, in a house on West Washington St. (Arcola, IL Census 1910, 1940), with few amenities other than a wood burning cook stove. Glen's father, John Winterringer (born 1871) ran a drayage business, hiring out horse-drawn wagons and transporting goods from one place to another. When his first wife Flora died and left him with two young children, he married Martha (Mattie) Elizabeth Spelman in January 1906. Glen was born exactly nine months to the day later, and his younger brother, Ray, five years after that.

Glen lost his father when he was only 12 and Ray was 7, so Mattie largely raised the children on her own, working as a seamstress making graduation gowns. She also worked in a factory making traditional brooms from broom corn, the industry that put Arcola on the map. Glen graduated from Arcola High School in 1925 and served in the U.S. Army as a Technical Sergeant (U.S. Army Enlistment Records 1938-1946). He graduated from Illinois College in Jacksonville, then spent time teaching high school in Arcola and soon after earned his Ph.D. in botany from the University of Illinois at Urbana in 1949. His mentor and dissertation advisor was Dr. Arthur Vestal. His brother Ray went to Purdue to become an electrical engineer. But they always made sure their mother was comfortable – even installing indoor plumbing and electricity in the house for her, along with a gas furnace and eventually a modern electric range.

Arcola is quintessential small town America. In Glen's nephew Lee's words, "follow the Illinois Central South railroad tracks east to some churches, and then



Figure 1. Glen S. Winterringer, date unknown.

west to where Grandma and the boys lived. You could walk from Grandma Mattie's house to downtown Arcola to shop." The clip-clop of the Amish horse drawn carriages on the cobbled brick street was – and still is – a familiar sound. And there is still a hitching post behind the Arcola newspaper! Honesty, excellence, enterprise, were all qualities Glen absorbed in Arcola.

Hired by the Illinois State Museum (ISM) in 1949, Glen was promoted to Curator of Botany in 1956. He lived nearby, on south Second Street in Springfield. He helped design the exhibits at ISM, making sure the botanical specimens used were correct and well-placed.

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It was his mission to get a record of what occurs and where, collecting many new species for the museum. Consequently, Glen spent most of his days out in the field, looking for new species and occurrences of native plants, often in remote areas, without any of our now-essential navigational aids, such as cell phones and GPS units. Fortunately, his memory of species and locations was encyclopedic. In this regard, Dr. Winterringer continued the legacy of botanists such as Dr. Vasey, Elihu Hall, John Wolf, Dr. George Fuller, and Vestal, all of whom contributed to the holdings at the Illinois State Museum and other agencies.

In addition to his 22,391 collections deposited at the Illinois State Museum, the University of Illinois herbarium has 49 specimens Winterringer collected or was a co-collector. He also deposited specimens at the Field Museum, Iowa State University, Utah State University, J.F. Bell Museum of Natural History Herbarium, Mississippi State University, Missouri Botanical Gardens, New York Botanical Gardens, Eastern Illinois University, University of Arizona, University of Colorado, University of Florida, University of Mississippi, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Western Illinois University.

Interestingly, Glen's mentor, Dr. Arthur Vestal, was brother-in-law to Dr. Norma Pfeiffer, who discovered and described *Thismia americana* (thismia), an Illinois endemic species known only from the Calumet region (now considered extinct). Glen sometimes botanized nearby the historic thismia population in Riverdale, Illinois. Was Glen trying to relocate this cryptic plant? We'll never know!

Outspoken and hardworking, Glen became noted for his research and collaborated with staff at the Illinois Natural History Survey and with universities nationwide. The community of scientists and botanists with whom he worked, and the natural areas he loved, were like another family to him. Glen's publications on Illinois flora inspired many people to get out and look for uncommon species as well as reminding people of plants they had seen outdoors. Readers would sometimes contact the museum to inform the staff of new locality records for species, particularly orchids. Such interactions led Glen and other museum staff to become aware of a need for providing educational resources to the public. A noteworthy outcome of this realization is the meticulously-researched *Wild Orchids of Illinois* (Winterringer 1967). Two of his notable orchid collections that contributed to this volume were *Spiranthes grayi*, now known as *S. tuberosa* (littie ladies' tresses), recorded from on a rocky ledge on Williams Hill one mile west of Herod, Pope County, 17 August 1948, and *Hexalectris spicata* (crested coral root), found on a rocky hillside near Prairie du Rocher, Randolph County, 13 July 1949. Neither species previously had been recorded for Illinois. A similar contri-

bution on aquatic plants of Illinois (Winterringer and Lopinot 1966) discussed how species distribution had been greatly affected by created ponds and lakes.

According to colleague Ed Armstrong (Illinois State Register, 4 February 1974), Glen collaborated with Drs. C. Neville Jones and George Fuller in the preparation of *Vascular Plants of Illinois* (Jones and Fuller 1955) and five years later he and Dr. Robert Evers compiled collections data from many botanists resulting in a supplement to this volume, *New Records for Illinois Plants* (Winterringer and Evers 1960). This contribution filled many species distribution gaps for the Illinois flora.

As a conservationist, Glen was very concerned with the loss of natural areas. His paper with Victor Shelford, *The Disappearance of an Area of Prairie in the Cook County, Illinois Forest Preserve District* (Shelford and Winterringer 1959) described in detail the degrading human influence on our natural areas, and also discussed the impacts of the absence of fire in our prairies once development accelerated. According to Shelford and Winterringer (1959), the consensus of expert opinion at the time recommended burning every three years, with one third of the prairie burnt each year so as to avoid impact on the animals in the other two thirds.

Glen was an enthusiastic supporter of younger botanists, such as Dr. Charles Sheviak, whose authoritative work *An Introduction to the Ecology of the Illinois Orchidaceae* (Sheviak 1974) was a much-needed addition to our literature, and Dr. Robert Mohlenbrock, who recounts that "We spent quite a bit talking about blufftop flora of southern Illinois, which was a specialty of his. He introduced me to the famous Springfield Horseshoe for lunch on one of my visits." Winterringer is credited in several of Dr. Mohlenbrock's volumes of the native plants of Illinois.

Glen also knew Illinois botanist John Schwegman. John remembers "I moved to Springfield in January of 1972, just before he retired, and my office was just across the street. I was interested in unique small plant habitats like sandstone glades and seep springs and I would go over and visit with him and Al Koelling who was training to take over when Glen retired. We discussed the sandstone glades of southern Illinois that he studied for his dissertation. Sometimes I would go over at noon unannounced and he would be napping on a big table they had in the herbarium to lay out plant specimens (Figure 2). Koelling told me that it was common for him to take a noontime nap on the table! Glen told me that he had always wanted to see Australia and one of the first things he did upon retirement was to visit Australia."

What sort of person was Glen? His nephew Lee spent many a summer in Arcola and visited Glen at least once at his house in Springfield. Lee even went botanizing with Glen once at Illinois Beach State Park for two days. Lee recounted how Glen 'was a cat person'



Figure 2. Glen in Illinois State Museum herbarium, July 1967, standing by specimen sorting table which on occasion would accommodate his noontime nap.

and 'single-minded' in his focus. "We got along pretty good, though." In later years, Glen developed a reputation for being cantankerous, but most of his close colleagues overlooked that because they understood him and his passion for conservation of natural areas.

Glen married late, in his mid-50s, to Bernice Ruth White, but the marriage didn't last. Evidently, it takes a very patient sort of person to marry a peripatetic botanist! Glen retired from the Illinois State Museum in 1973. He loved to travel and greatly looked forward to his planned trip the following year to Australia, surely an enjoyable trip. Alas, on the return flight, departing from Auckland, New Zealand, his plane crashed during a thunderstorm in Pago Pago, American Samoa – a scientist's life tragically cut short.

His publications include the following:

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