BOOK REVIEW


Every so often we are privileged to have a great work like the “Agreeable Landscape.” This work vividly brings us to the vanquished wetlands of the Santa Cruz Valley obliterated by the now million-strong urban sprawl of greater Tucson, Arizona. The back cover of this information-packed book tells that “John Russell Bartlett found that it presented an agreeable landscape: irrigated fields, fine grass, and a winding line of tree canopies down the valley of the Santa Cruz River at Tucson, southern Arizona, in 1852.” Dr. Mauz’s precision documentation of the demise of a riverine empire nested in the upper reaches of the Sonoran Desert provides verifiable detail that mirrors the impact of exploding human population in arid lands around the world. We have all heard how fragile wetlands are, especially in deserts, but this volume, largely anchored by botanical specimens, explores new dimensions.

This work is primary research built on a wealth of historic information, specimens, on-the-ground fieldwork, modern geography and more—a vast knowledge uncovered and succinctly interpreted. The author personally tracked down an almost “hidden” wealth of specimens in distant herbaria and carefully studied and interpreted each and every one, tying them to the “bigger picture.” Read through or just turn to any part of this book and you will be impressed by the underlying scholarship and joy of discovery. You will meet the botanical collectors and others who provided the foundation material that will connect you to a paradise lost. You will meet men, and some women whose voices got through, who were witnesses to the demise of wetland lifelines. Funding agencies and institution administrators should take notice of the priceless value of life’s heritage preserved in herbaria.

The species accounts (annotated flora catalog) provide encapsulated interpretations the flora. And again, I have to tell you that the power of this volume is the attention to detail, scientific accuracy, and original interpretations. Just in case some botanists care to quibble about identifications, the specimens are carefully cited making the work verifiable even if there is disagreement in the ever-changing scene of botanical taxonomy. The detailed table of contents, many illustrations, and index are especially welcome.

This important volume should be essential for higher education curricula in the 21st century, especially in western North America. It should be required reading for any attempts at wetland restoration. “An Agreeable Landscape” sets a model for studies of desert river ecosystems anywhere in the world.—Richard Felger, University of Arizona Herbarium, Tucson, Arizona, U.S.A.