

Of Plants and Brothers: The Early Environmentalists

BY ELIZABETH MOORS JODICE

Long before phrases like “go green” or “environmentally friendly” became part of our everyday language, several La Salle Brothers were engaged in extensive research about nature and the environment. Some of the stories we have gathered date back to the 1880s. Each of these Brothers have distinguished themselves as true environmentalists long before the term was even invented.

BRO. G. ARSENE BROUARD, FSC (1867-1938)

Bro. Arsene was a native of France, where he began to collect plants. He continued in this preoccupation when he moved to Mexico. Forced to leave France and Mexico because of government attacks on the Church and the anti-religious movement that followed, Bro. Arsene relocated to the United States in 1914.

In Maryland, he collected and classified about 1,200 plants—two or three of which were not previously known in the state. In Louisiana, he collected approximately 900 plants. About 60 of those species had never been found in Louisiana, while three had not been found in the United States before then. In 1926, he was transferred to New Mexico where he gathered many plants. Dr. Paul Standley, friend and collaborator, compiled the collection of



Muhlenbergia Arsenei, a monocot, is a perennial herb (rhizomatous) that is native to California, Arizona, Baja California, New Mexico, and Nevada.

1,500 plants of many different species and classified 70 as rare, 20 as very rare, 33 as previously unknown in the state, and one new plant named *Muhlenbergia Arsenei*.

Many well-known scientists held Bro. Arsene in high regard. He received several prestigious honors, including awards from the French government, the Paris Museum of Natural History, and the Mexican National Academy of Science.¹

BRO. MARIE-VICTORIN, FSC (1885-1944)

Bro. Marie-Victorin is well known as the founder of the Montreal Botanical Garden in Canada, where a statue stands in his honor. Ironically, the Brothers’ house at the time of his novitiate stood on the

same location where the garden is today.²

The start of his teaching career in 1903 was disrupted when he was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis—a condition that essentially started his botanical career because his doctor instructed him to give up teaching and spend as much time outside as possible. His educational work included creating

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a department of botany at the new *Université de Montréal*.³

Bro. Marie-Victorin also completed many writings, including a manual, *La Flora laurentienne*, which is 927 pages featuring species of flowering plants and vascular cryptogams, and a phytogeographical study of the region.⁴

He introduced the idea for a botanical garden in 1929. Following some progress, it took off in 1936 with the creation of the Municipal Commission of the Montreal Botanical Garden with Bro. Marie-Victorin as the director. Progress came to a halt with the outbreak of the war in 1939 and a change in provincial government. Bro. Marie-Victorin lived to see almost three-quarters of the effort finished and was confident it would be completed.⁵

Bro. Marie-Victorin also took frequent field trips for botanical exploration. Although he suffered a severe heart attack during one trip, he continued with less strenuous excursions. It was on one of those trips that Bro. Marie-Victorin's heart could not withstand a car crash and he died.⁶



Bro. Marie-Victorin in his Laboratory class.

BRO. ALFRED BROUSSEAU, FSC (1907-1988)



Brother Alfred, San Francisco District Visitor from 1944-1959, was a nationally recognized mathematician, as well as a scientist, photographer, musician, and amateur botanist. He began his career teaching in high schools, earned a Ph.D. in physics from the University of California, Berkeley, CA, and taught at Saint Mary's College in Moraga, CA.

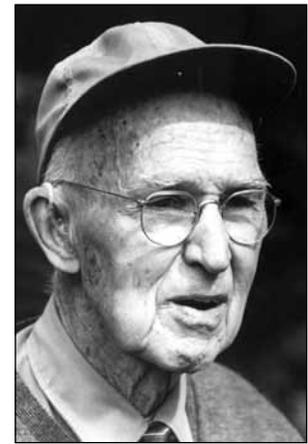
As part of a sabbatical in 1978, he took a yearlong camping trip through California, logging 47,000 miles as he studied and photographed wildflowers, fungi, and rocks.¹⁰ Between 1925 and 1988, Bro. Alfred took more than 12,500 photos of approximately 2,000



Astragalus curtipes; common name: Morro Milkvetch. Photo taken by Bro. Alfred in May 1981, San Luis Obispo, CA.

species. Bro. Eric Vogel, FSC (1927-2000) of Saint Mary's College in Moraga collected Bro. Alfred's slides and made them available to the public beginning in 1995 as part of the University of California's Berkeley Digital Library Project, which can be viewed at <http://calphotos.berkeley.edu/Brousseau.html>.¹¹

BRO. H. CHARLES SEVERIN, FSC (1896-1992)



Brother Charles had a long teaching career in Winona, MN at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, where he established the biology department. He began teaching in 1933 and continued his contributions until 1992. Bro. Charles was a lifelong student, an advocate of ecology and a teacher of environmental education. He wrote a textbook used in the United States and other countries on ecological study and environmental preservation.⁷

Despite his numerous awards, when asked what he considered to be his most significant professional accomplishments, he replied, "Any time I had a chance to work with people, that's the big thing. Anything else is incidental." Other accomplishments include establishing the Catholic Science Teachers Association in



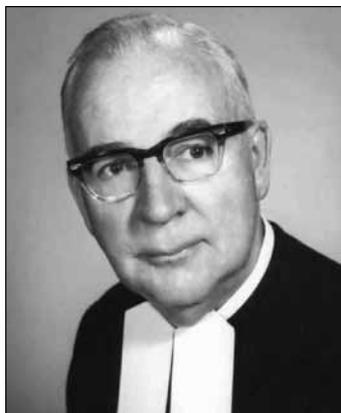
Bro. Charles was a lifelong student and advocate of ecology and teacher of environmental education.

Chicago, president of the National Association of Biology Teachers, writing biology tests for Catholic high schools throughout the United States, writing the first biology textbook published in the Philippines, and conducting summer programs for biology teachers.⁸

In Bro. Charles' oral history, Rory Vose, a biology professor, describes a walk on a bluff with Bro. Charles who fell and slid down a steep slope. "I was so afraid he had serious injuries so I rushed down to him as fast as possible," recalled Vose. "There he was, cut and bleeding but when he saw me he held up a plant that he had grabbed during his fall and said excitedly, 'I haven't seen one of these in years.'"⁹

His memory lives on at Saint Mary's through a scholarship and teaching award in his name.

BRO. AMBROSE GROBLE, FSC (1905-1999)



Brother Ambrose planted 198 trees on the campus of Lewis University in Romeoville, IL from 1979-1989 as part of a campus beautification project. One Brother remembers Bro. Ambrose watering each tree individually by hooking and unhooking a hose to various buildings. The trees have now matured and surround the Lewis University campus. In 2009 and 2010, Lewis was honored as a Tree Campus USA University for its dedication to campus forestry

management and environmental stewardship.¹²

Aside from his landscaping projects, Bro. Ambrose founded the archives at Lewis and was a certified archivist, one of the first to receive the credential. In 1994, Lewis' Board of Trustees named the archives the "Brother Ambrose Groble Archives" to honor his 30 years of service.¹³

BRO. AUGUSTINE KOSSUTH, FSC (1924-PRESENT)



Brother Augustine, who is called Gus, continued and enhanced the tree care initiative Bro. Ambrose started at Lewis University. He had some experience planting trees from his time as principal at Bishop Kelley High School in Tulsa, OK from 1979-84 where a donor would give the school tree seedlings to plant each year.¹⁴ In 1988, Bro. Gus became supervisor of groundskeeping at Lewis where he planted more than 300 trees on campus. In 1992, he received his Master Gardener Certificate. In the August 12, 1996 issue of Lewis' *University news*, Bro. Gus called groundskeeping a very satisfying vocation. "I have a great love for preservation of the environment," he said.¹⁵

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RECYCLING FACTS

ALUMINUM

- Aluminum can be recycled using 5% of the energy used to make the original product.
- Recycling a single aluminum can saves enough energy to run a television or computer for three hours.
- American throw enough aluminum away every three months to rebuild our entire commercial air fleet.
- Using recycled aluminum instead of virgin materials decreases water and air pollution and energy use by 95%.
- You can make 20 cans out of recycled material with the same amount of energy it takes to make one new one.

GLASS

- Recycling 1 glass bottle saves enough energy to light a 100-watt light bulb for 4 hours.
- In the coming decade, Americans are projected to throw away more than 11 million tons of glass bottles and jars.
- Recycling saves 25-30% of the energy used to make glass from virgin materials.

PLASTICS

- Americans throw away enough plastic bottles each year to circle the earth four times.
- Every hour, we throw away 2.5 million plastic bottles. (22 billion plastic bottles per year).
- Five recycled plastic bottles make enough fiberfill to stuff a sky jacket.

STEEL

- Every ton of steel recycled saves 2,500 pounds of iron ore, 1,400 pounds of coal, and 120 pounds of limestone.
- Enough energy is saved each year by recycling steel to supply Los Angeles with electricity for almost 10 years.

- The steel industry recycles nearly 19 billion steel cans into new products each year—about 600 cans recycled every second!

PAPER

- A 12-foot high wall could be built from NYC to Los Angeles with all of the office and writing paper thrown out in the U.S. each year.
- Recycling a ton of paper saves 17 trees.
- Every Sunday, the U.S. wastes nearly 90% of all the recyclable newspapers. This wastes about 500,000 trees.
- One tree can filter up to 60 pounds of pollutants from the air each year.
- Americans use more than 67 million tons of paper per year, or 580 pounds per person.
- More than one-third of all paper fiber used to make paper comes from recycled paper.

COMPOSTING FACTS

- Almost one-third of the waste stream by weight is organic waste like food, leaves, and grass.
- A 1000-square-foot area of lawn can generate up to 500 pounds of grass clippings in a single growing season.
- Use of compost can reduce the need and use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

JUNK MAIL

- Americans receive almost 4.5 million tons of junk mail per year.
- About 44% of junk mail is never opened.
- Every person in the US receives the equivalent of one and a half trees per year or approximately 560 pieces of junk mail per year.
- The average person gets 1.5 personal letters per week compared to 10.8 pieces of junk mail.

From www.thegreenteam.org.

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Brother Gus retired as supervisor of groundskeeping at Lewis in 1994 and worked for the Franciscan Sisters part time doing landscaping and grounds improvement before returning to Lewis part time doing groundskeeping.¹⁶ In 1999, he developed a campus tree walk, which is detailed in a brochure that shows the locations and describes each variety. Bro. Gus is now retired and lives in the Brothers' community at Lewis, where he enjoys seeing the trees thrive today. "I can look at every one of them and I can remember planting it. It feels good to see they survived," he said.¹⁷ ■

NOTES

1. Source: New Orleans-Santa Fe District Archives.
2. "Bro. Marie-Victorin, FSC," *The American Midland Naturalist*, March 1945, Vol. 33, No. 2: iv.
3. "Frère Marie-Victorin," *Rhodora*, October 1946, Vol. 48: 266.
4. *Ibid.*, 267.
5. *Ibid.*, 269-270.
6. *Ibid.*, 270-272.
7. "Brother H. Charles, FSC, Biologist, Teachers' Instructor for 57 Years." *The Christian Brothers Today*, November 1983, Vol. 4, No. 4.
8. Brother Charles: An Oral History (Winona: Saint Mary's College), pp. 10-11.
9. *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.
10. Source: San Francisco District Archives.
11. "About the Alfred Brousseau Project," *CalPhotos*, <http://calphotos.berkeley.edu/Brousseau.html>.
12. Source: Lewis University.
13. "De La Salle Hall of Fame Inductee." *(Lewis) University News*, November 4, 1996.
14. Source: Lewis University.
15. "Christian Brother Gus Kossuth: Nature Lover, European Traveler." *(Lewis) University News*, August 12, 1996: 4.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Source: Lewis University.