

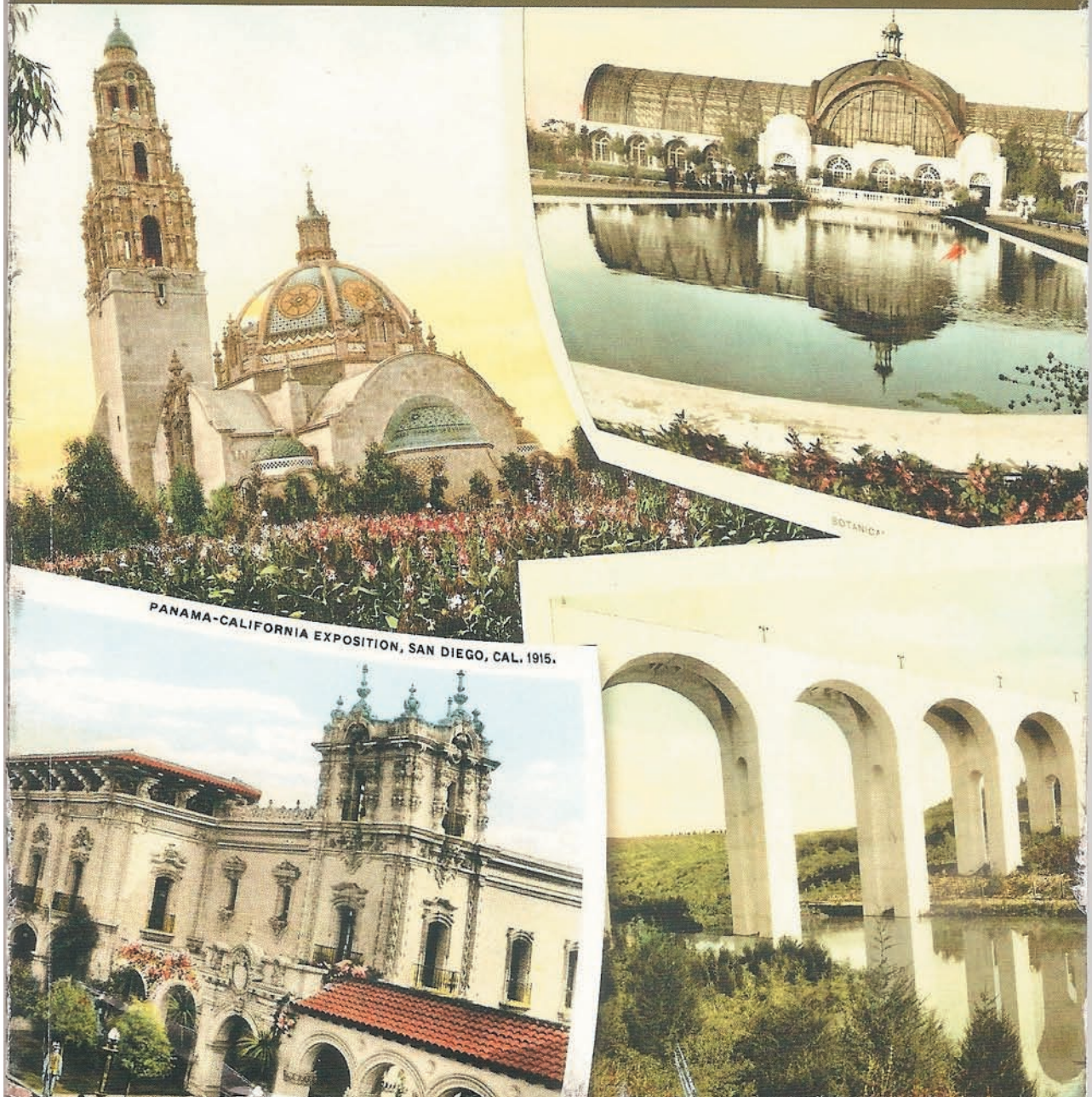
LIGHTNER, James (editor). *Parry's California notebooks, 1849–51 with letters to John Torrey. Charles Christopher Parry (1823–1890)*. San Diego Flora, San Diego, California: 2014. Pp vi, 170; illustrated. Price: US\$ 24.95 (hardback). ISBN 9780974998169.

LIGHTNER, James. *San Diego County native plants in the 1830s. The collections of Thomas Coulter, Thomas Nuttall, and H. M. S. Sulphur with George Barclay and Richard Hinds*. San Diego Flora, San Diego, California: 2014. Pp [ii], 54; illustrated. Price US\$ 9.95 (paperback). ISBN 9780974998145.

Charles Parry's notebooks record his work in California, and the editor, James Lightner, has interpolated Parry's contemporary letters to John Torrey. The transcriptions are appropriately annotated. It is an attractive small book of undoubted value to botanists and of more general interest. Parry's text describes the landscape, weather, plants and people. He is occasionally quite poetic: "A newborn moon hangs her crescent over the western hills and by its full orb'd light we hope to see our way to winter quarters on the Pacific." Among other matters, he carefully noted the food plants cultivated by the Yuma Indians – they relied on several varieties of beans of "excellent quality", and looked on maize "as a luxury". The notebook gives glimpses into the frustrations of a plant collector in California in the mid-1800s. The loss of a sextant when a pack mule ran away was only one of the misfortunes to deprive Parry of his scientific equipment – "a broken barometer and lost thermometer completed our feckless expedition."

The second booklet deals with plant-hunting by Thomas Coulter, Thomas Nuttall, George Barclay and Richard Hinds. I was particularly impressed that Lightner has identified Coulter's companions on the trek to the Gila-Colorado confluence. The group included Jonathan T. Warner, who wrote about the journey, as well as David E. Jackson and Ewing Young, men who "were tough and experienced" trappers. This adds significantly to the information my late co-author Alan Probert was able to unearth for our biography of Coulter (*A man who can speak of plants ...* : reviewed in *Archives of natural history* 23: 454. 1996). This volume concludes with a "selected" list of plants native to San Diego known to have been collected by the quartet, and an extensive series of notes. Colour photographs of some specimens collected by these men, now held in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, are among the illustrations.

THE JOURNAL OF
SAN DIEGO
HISTORY



THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

California Native Plants in the 1830s: The Collections of Thomas Coulter, Thomas Nuttall, and H.M.S. Sulphur with George Barclay and Richard Hinds. By James Lightner. San Diego: San Diego Flora, 2014. Tables, maps, photographs, and notes. 54 pp. \$9.95 cloth.

Parry's California Notebooks, 1849-51 with Letters to John Torrey. By Charles C. Perry. Transcribed, edited, and annotated by James Lightner. San Diego: San Diego Flora, 2014. Maps, drawings, photographs, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. vi + 170 pp. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Theodore A. Strathman, Lecturer, Department of History, California State University San Marcos.

James Lightner, a local writer and authority on San Diego native plants, has produced two books that will be of significant value to those interested in the history of scientific discovery in nineteenth-century California. The common theme that runs through the two works is the effort of botanists to catalogue the flora of California in the years immediately surrounding the American acquisition of the territory. While *California Native Plants in the 1830s* will most likely appeal especially to those interested in California's aboriginal flora, *Parry's California*

Notebooks will provide rich rewards to those more generally concerned with the state's early history.

The latter work, the more substantial of the two, consists of Lightner's transcription of the notebooks of Charles C. Parry, a young botanist who served on the Mexican Boundary Survey as it fixed the international border in the wake of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Lightner has also included in the book letters from Parry to John Torrey, the eminent botanist after whom Parry named the Torrey Pine. These letters, incorporated in chronological fashion among Parry's notebook entries, contribute significantly to the book by reinforcing and in some cases clarifying Parry's narrative of his travels and observations. Also included are photographs of herbarium sheets of several plants collected by Parry in California. Lightner's annotations reflect his expertise and extensive research while offering important discussions of, among other things, plant characteristics and historical figures.

Lightner also enhances the notebooks by providing a table of contents that serves as a sketch of Parry's itinerary during his time in California. This feature is especially important given the absence of a map designating Parry's travels, the inclusion of which would have made it easier for the reader to keep track of the botanist's peregrinations. This minor reservation notwithstanding, Parry's account of his travels makes for interesting reading. One is struck by several themes. First, Parry's observations suggest the real hazards that accompanied life in frontier California. Especially as acting surgeon during the Boundary Survey's journey from San Diego to the Colorado River, Parry catalogued the injuries, sicknesses (including several cases of syphilis), and deaths (most notably four drownings when a canoe overturned near the confluence of the Colorado and Gila Rivers) among the party. Second, Parry in several places observed the effects of the Gold Rush, even in then-remote San Diego: some soldiers deserted their posts to travel to the Sierra foothills, prices for food, labor, and livestock had increased, and the government increased salaries, a move designed, according to Parry, "to keep us from running away to the mines" (p. 7). Third, Parry evoked the social and economic transformations that had swept California over the past two decades. His visits to several missions led him to comment on the physical destruction of property that accompanied secularization, and he also observed several signs of the impending decline of the Californios, as when he noted John Forster's acquisition of the Rancho Santa Margarita y las Flores as payment for a debt owed him by Pio Pico. In remarking on such social developments, Parry was something of a "[Richard Henry] Dana with a microscope and a mule," as Lightner describes him (p. vi). As Lightner himself notes, though, Parry was hardly an impartial judge, and his discussion of the mission padres contains

THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

some of the disdain that characterized the observations of Dana. Nevertheless, some of Parry's observations are of real value; for example, he provided a detailed account of agriculture among the Yuma.

California Native Plants in the 1830s describes the visits to San Diego of four naturalists from the United Kingdom and discusses the plant specimens they collected in the region. Like the other book reviewed here, this publication includes high-quality photographs and extensive notes. Lightner has also compiled a list of plants collected by these four men. While this book will be of most use to those interested in the botany and natural history of the region, Lightner has written a brief but well-researched section that provides important context, including a discussion of changes in local flora caused by Spanish and Mexican settlement in the region and a sketch of secularization and its impacts. A similar introductory essay would be a welcome addition to *Parry's California Notebooks*, which includes only a brief preface.

James Lightner has performed an important service in producing these two works. His knowledge of – and passion for – his topic is evident in the care he has taken to shed light on these relatively little-known figures. For students of California history, Lightner's books are enlightening accounts of the opening of the territory in the years between Mexican independence and the first years of American rule. The end of Spanish trading restrictions helped bring figures like Coulter and Nuttall to California, while Parry's sojourns remind us that the gold rush-era emigration included not just prospectors and merchants but others intent on mining the region's less salable resources.

\$5.00 (Free to Members)

VOL. 43, NO. 2 • MAY 2015

FREMONTIA

JOURNAL OF THE CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

HIDDEN TREASURES OF THE TEHACHAPI REGION
THE FOUND LANDSCAPE: A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY
HABITAT RESTORATION FOR THE RIPARIAN BRUSH RABBIT
MISSION MANZANITA: IS THE SPECIES IN DECLINE?

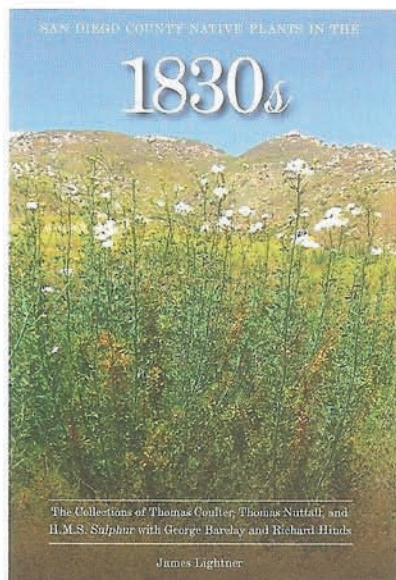
BOOK REVIEW

San Diego County Native Plants in the 1830s: The Collections of Thomas Coulter, Thomas Nuttall, and H.M.S. Sulphur with George Barclay and Richard Hinds by James Lightner. 2014. San Diego Flora, San Diego, CA. 54 pages, \$11.00, softbound. ISBN #978-0-9749981-4-5.

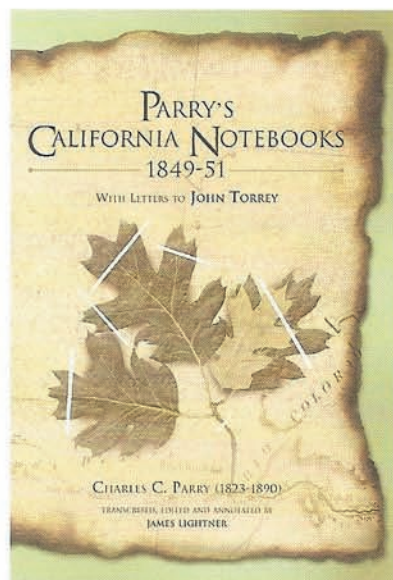
Parry's California Notebooks 1840-51 with Letters to John Torrey by James Lightner, ed. 2014. San Diego Flora, San Diego, CA. 170 pages, \$40.00, hardcover. ISBN #978-0-9749981-6-9.

San Diego author Jim Lightner has published two new books on the historical roots of California botany. The first, a small paperback focused on San Diego County, evolved from an extended lecture that Mr. Lightner presented to the San Diego chapter of the California Native Plant Society in early 2013. The book that grew out of that lecture is filled with fascinating anecdotes about San Diego County in the earliest days of exploration by scientists and trained plant collectors. Right from the start, the book grabs you. From the introduction:

For historians of California, the 1830s is the decade of secularization. Anti-Spanish sentiment, competition for wealth, and general anarchy conspired to ruin the Catholic missions. Sixty years of religious work unraveled in one unruly decade. . . . For botanists of California, the 1830s are the decade when famous United Kingdom collectors, including David Douglas, explored the territory and discovered hundreds of native plants. The west coast of North America became a rich new source of species.



The subtitle of the book, "*The Collections of Thomas Coulter, Thomas Nuttall, and HMS Sulphur with George Barclay and Richard Hinds*," drops names. All of these individuals took part in expeditions from the United Kingdom during the 1830s, and all were trained botanists who collected and observed in the same way we do today. Their journeys followed different routes, and hence they were



exposed to differing floras along the way.

In addition to a wonderful narrative, Lightner's book contains various illustrations including a number of excellent herbarium sheet images courtesy of the Kew Herbarium in London. The text is carefully annotated throughout and contains a useful list of native plants collected by the explorers between 1832 and 1839. This little book is a

quick read, but absolutely packed with information for California botanists and history buffs with an interest in this remarkable period in the state's history.

The second book, *Parry's California Notebooks 1840–51*, is a painstaking transposition by Lightner from the original, hand-written field notes that he discovered buried in the archives of the Iowa State Uni-

versity library. The notes read like a diary—one that I found hard to put down. In addition to presenting a detailed image of life in the mid-1800s, Parry was not afraid to record strong opinions: “March 7 – Leave for town again rather a disgusted individual.”

Both of Lightner's books are worthy volumes in any natural historian's library. All of us owe a debt

of gratitude to him for bringing these fascinating events to life from the archives. Had he not discovered them, and written about them, they might have well disappeared to the ravages of time. The books preserve much more than botanical notes of the day. They present a vision of California that is not entirely gone, to an audience working to conserve it.

—Vince Scheidt