

## Breakout Session Record

**Amaneunsis/Student name:** Lisa Ford

**Date:** 13 July, 2005

**Institution:** Natural History Museum

**Title of Breakout session:** 'Wood specimens and illustrated sylvas'

**Names(s) of Breakout session leaders:** Dr Adam Bowett, Dr Lisa Ford

### **General themes discussed at the Breakout session:**

Francois Andre Michaux and illustrated sylvas, particularly the annotated *Histoire des Chenes* at Kew. The process of 'making' an illustrated sylvas: research, specimen-gathering, information-gathering, artistic production including correction and revision by botanists, engraving, content.

Wood use and the expansion of interest in wood use, sources, and propagation in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Securing timber supplies and issues of shipping.

Identification of woods, and the confusion over species; craftsmen, botanists and local use.

Tropical woods, particularly mahogany. Varieties, uses, misconceptions, identification.

### **Any other information about the session:**

In addition to the objects listed below, one of the breakout leaders provided color photos of

- 1) two of the original watercolors for F.A. Michaux's *Histoire des Arbres*, from the archives of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris.
- 2) Specimens from the Michaux herbarium in the collections of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris.
- 3) Annotated drawings and sketches showing suggested additions and revisions to the drawings for the *Histoire des Chenes* in the collections of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew.

## Object information

**Object title:** *Histoire des Chênes de l'Amérique, ou descriptions et figures de toutes les espèces et variétés de Chênes de l'Amérique septentrionale, &c.*

**Object date:** 1801

**Museum accession number of object:** BOTANY : BAUER UNIT SHELF J 7 1  
BOOK SHELVES; SPECIAL BOOKS 581.9(7) MIC Q (Vol.1).

**Description of object:** Early 19<sup>th</sup> century botanical survey of North American Oaks, with black and white illustrations.

**Function of the object?** To serve as a botanical register and illustrated record of various North American oaks, their characteristics, habitat and uses.

**Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?** It was sold and viewed in both Europe and North America.

**Who used it?** Projected audience would have been botanists, nurserymen, virtuosi, scientists, academicians.

**Original context of the object?** As a useful volume for those interested in identification of North American Oaks. Primarily intended for a scientific audience, or for amateur naturalists.

**The significance of the object?** The first book dedicated to a survey of just North American oaks. The Natural History Museum's *Histoire* was actually used as a stand-in for the volume at Kew, which could not be used for this session. That annotated volume is actually a completely unique and irreplaceable encapsulation of the publication processes of the Michaux, particularly Francois Andre, and as such is an object of great historical, social, and scientific significance in the study of botanical research and publication practice, and the biographical study of the Michaux.

**What questions did the audience ask about this object?**

Who were the Michaux?

Were the illustrations done using the specimens?

## Object information

**Object title:** *Histoire des arbres forestiers de l'Amérique Septentrionale : considérés principalement sous les rapports de leur usage dans les arts et de leur introduction dans le commerce*

**Object date:** 1810-13

**Museum accession number of object:** 1 (SHELVES) BOTANY 1810.

**Description of object:** Early 19<sup>th</sup> century botanical survey of North American trees, with colored engravings.

**Function of the object?** To offer basic identifications, both visual and in characteristics, of North American trees, as well as comprehensive information on their viability, material uses, and products.

**Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?** It was sold and viewed in both Europe and North America.

**Who used it?** The stated audience was farmers, landowners, artisans and the academic communities in Europe and North America.

**Original context of the object?** As a useful volume for those interested in the identification and cultivation of North American trees, and more importantly, in their various uses and products. Primarily intended for an audience interested in the propagation and utilization of the most useful and successful species on both sides of the Atlantic.

**The significance of the object?** A focused, and comprehensive, study of the then-known trees of North America. The English language version also included the ten most useful European species. This volume provided a useful base from which to select trees for cultivation in Europe based on their cultivability and usefulness. It is also one of the most beautifully illustrated of the botanical books, in terms of the skill and reputation of the artists, including Pierre-Joseph Redoute, France's finest flower painter.

**What questions did the audience ask about this object?**  
Where are the watercolors?

## **Object information**

**Object title:** Tropical wood samples from Belize

**Object date:**

**Museum accession number of object:**

**Description of object:** Samples of wood from various tropical trees indigenous to Belize.

**Function of the object?** To show the varying types, textures and grains of tropical woods, and the sorts of sample woods that were frequently used for identification.

**Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?** It was collected in South America, and presumably viewed in Europe.

**Who used it?** Probably botanists, naturalists, craftsmen, nurserymen.

**Original context of the object?** Wood samples are collected for demonstrating the particular color and qualities of a certain type of wood for the benefit of scientific study and material use and purchase.

**The significance of the object?** As a means by which botanists could properly and accurately describe and demonstrate the qualities of various trees, and by which craftsmen and merchants could identify the type of wood best suited for commercial purposes and ensure they were getting the proper wood.

**What questions did the audience ask about this object?**

How did early craftsmen identify different woods? Was there common terminology? Were wood terms being created by individuals or by nurserymen for commercial use or gain?

## Object information

**Object title:** Specimen of Quercus Rubra

**Object date:** 1801

**Museum accession number of object:** Clifford Herbarium, Barcode: BM000647423, Page No.: 448; HC Name: Quercus 4

**Description of object:** 18<sup>th</sup> century specimen of North American oak tree.

**Function of the object?** To serve as a botanical register and illustrated record of various North American oaks, their characteristics, habitat and uses.

**Where was the object used/viewed/consumed?** It was collected in North America and probably viewed in both Europe and North America.

**Who used it?** Projected audience would have been botanists, nurserymen, virtuosi, scientists, academicians.

**Original context of the object?** The Clifford Herbarium is a collection of dried plant specimens that belonged to George Clifford (1685-1760), a wealthy Anglo-Dutch merchant, and is composed primarily of plants then newly cultivated in Europe, but particularly through its connection with Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778), the 'father of modern botany' and deviser of the binomial system of scientific naming of living things that is still used today. Linnaeus worked for Clifford at the latter's estate, near Haarlem, between 1735 and 1737 and in that time Linnaeus described the plants growing there, and wrote the Hortus Cliffortianus, in some ways a precursor of his Species Plantarum (1753). A great many of the plants in Clifford's herbarium are type specimens for Linnaean names. As one among a large group of specimens collected by naturalists, botanists or virtuousi for use in identifying new species of North American Oaks. Primarily intended for a scientific audience, or for amateur naturalists.

**The significance of the object?** As a sample of a species of oak that might be previously unknown or unseen by the European botanists and naturalists who were attempting to comprehensively catalogue new trees discovered in foreign territories.

**What questions did the audience ask about this object?**  
Were the illustrations done using the specimens?

## Object information

**Object title:** Specimen of Quercus prinus

**Object date:** 1801

**Museum accession number of object:** Clifford Herbarium, BM000647422  
HC Page No.: 448; HC Name: Quercus 3

**Description of object:** 18<sup>th</sup> century specimens of North American oak trees.

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**What questions did the audience ask about this object?**