

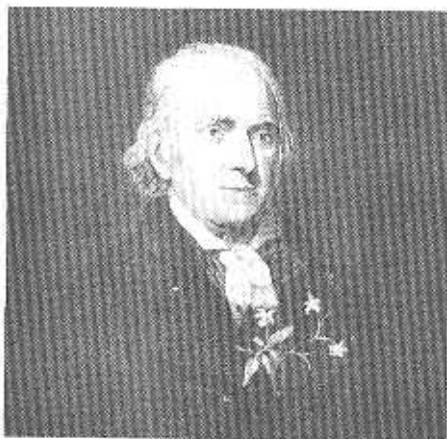
WILLIAM BARTRAM, Florida Native Plant Enthusiast

by Bunnie Graham

Two centuries ago William Bartram traveled Northern Florida by canoe and horseback recording the plants, animals, and Indians that he saw. His father, John Bartram of Philadelphia, had been appointed "Botanist For The Floridas" by King George III of England and had made a survey trip with his son, William, to the St. John's River in 1765-66.

The pair traveled through the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida classifying flora and fauna for shipment to England. During the next decade, William came alone to Florida, keeping a journal in lyric poetic style of the birds, flowers, wildlife, storms, springs, and Seminoles. His detailed account makes it easy to identify the trail he took and interesting to note plant material he observed beside orange groves, oaks, magnolias, and palms. Near Hontoon Island south of Deland, he documented loblolly bay (*Gordonia*), coontie (*Zamia*), cactus (*Opuntia*), canna, phlox, verbena, viola, etc.

Here, too, he discovered and sketched *Ixia caelestina*, a bluish-purple member of the iris family which



Portrait of William Bartram by Charles Willson Peale

blooms only from sun up until mid-morning.

Current interest in the travels of the Bartrams has led to the organization of Bartram clubs. The Bartram Wildflower Study Club is one such group, organized by Kathy Sample of Orange Park, to follow the Bartram Trail, to study the plants he mentioned in his "Travels", and to list today's plants growing on the Trail. The Bartram Trail Conference places memorial markers to locate the route

of America's first naturalist and artist. Nine monuments have been placed in Florida to date.

The author recommends two very readable books: **Exploring With The Bartrams** by Ann and Myron Sutton, and **Travels With The Bartrams**, edited by Mark Van Doren. The former has modern maps and illustrations, while the latter is an unabridged version of the actual journal kept by William as he traveled Florida collecting botanical specimens and observing "American Aborigines". He confounds the modern reader with his self-sufficiency and resourcefulness as he cooked dinner of leftover roast trout: "their heads I stewed in the juice of oranges which with boiled rice afforded me a wholesome and delicious supper."

William Bartram's writings provide precise and entertaining descriptions of the Eighteenth Century New World's geography and history, and a new-old perspective on our precious Florida native plants.

(Mrs. Hilda Kressman, P.O.Box 283, Trenton, Florida 32693 may be contacted for further information on the Bartram Wildflower Study Club.)