

# Pioneer Botanist William Cusick: His Dark and Silent World

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(Adapted from an essay that will appear in *Plant Hunters of the Pacific Northwest*, edited by A.R. Kruckeberg and R.M. Love)

Botanist William Conklin Cusick (1842-1922) was a pioneer in every sense of the word. As an eleven-year-old lad in 1853 he walked across the plains with a covered wagon train from Illinois to Oregon's Willamette Valley. In 1872, when he was thirty, William and his younger brother Frank became two of the earliest settlers of the Powder River Valley in eastern Oregon. Beginning at that time, and for four decades until overcome by nearly total deafness and blindness, Cusick undertook the pioneering botanical explorations of the remote Wallowa and Blue Mountain ranges in the extreme northeast corner of our state.

## Crossing the Plains

William Cusick was the oldest child of Robert G. and Sarah H. Cusick, people of Scotch-Irish ancestry whose forebears immigrated to this country shortly after the Revolutionary War. At the age of eleven he traveled west by covered wagon from Illinois with his parents, siblings, uncle, aunt, cousins and an 82-year-old grandmother; as the oldest boy in the pioneer party, William drove the oxen during the six-month journey. Arriving in western Oregon in October 1853, the Cusicks settled in the Willamette Valley near the town of Kingston, Linn County, where William's father took up a 320-acre claim. William had a keen memory of the westward journey and especially its flowers. He later recalled a beautiful pale purple sego lily: "We got to the south pass of the Rocky Mountains, which was then the eastern line of Oregon, on the 4th of July. I remember seeing *Calochortus nuttallii* growing among the sage brush in the valley of the Snake River" (St. John 1923).

For a farmer's son of those times, William received a good education. From age four to eleven he attended a country school



William Conklin Cusick at about age 23 when he joined the Union Army and was stationed at Lapwai, Idaho. A.R. Sweetser Papers, Ax 75, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries.

in Illinois, and when the family settled in Oregon he continued his public school studies. As a lover of plants, he no doubt enjoyed his walks to the local schoolhouse through the tall grasses and native wildflowers of Kingston Prairie. At age 20 he transferred to the now extinct school of La Creole Academy at Dallas, Polk County. After graduation, he taught school for two years and then, in 1864-65, attended Willamette University in Salem where he studied math, algebra, physics, and geology (St. John 1923, Lange 1956). Although he received no formal training in the study of plants, his knowledge of geology was no doubt a help to him during his later botanizing.

## Army Life

In December 1864, near the end of the Civil War, 22-year-old William joined the Union Army as a volunteer. However, he was not sent to battles in the east, but instead spent periods

in army camps in western Idaho and eastern Oregon. His rank was Sergeant in the 1st Oregon Infantry, and he was originally assigned to the Quartermaster Corps at Lapwai, Idaho, where it was the duty of the Infantry to keep an eye on the Nez Perce Indians. However, the Native people remained quiet and Cusick had time on his hands, so he sent to Portland for Harvard Professor Asa Gray's *First Lessons in Botany* and, as he said, "...studied it pretty carefully one winter." He also stated years later, "I was interested in plants as early in life as I can remember but I had no book on botany until I was 22 years old, a soldier in the US Volunteer Service" (Lange 1956). Cusick was discharged from the Army in 1866; but his service made him eligible for a Government pension which was helpful to him throughout his life. After his discharge, he settled near Salem and returned to

teaching. However, at the early age of 24, his hearing began to fail and he was forced to abandon his profession.

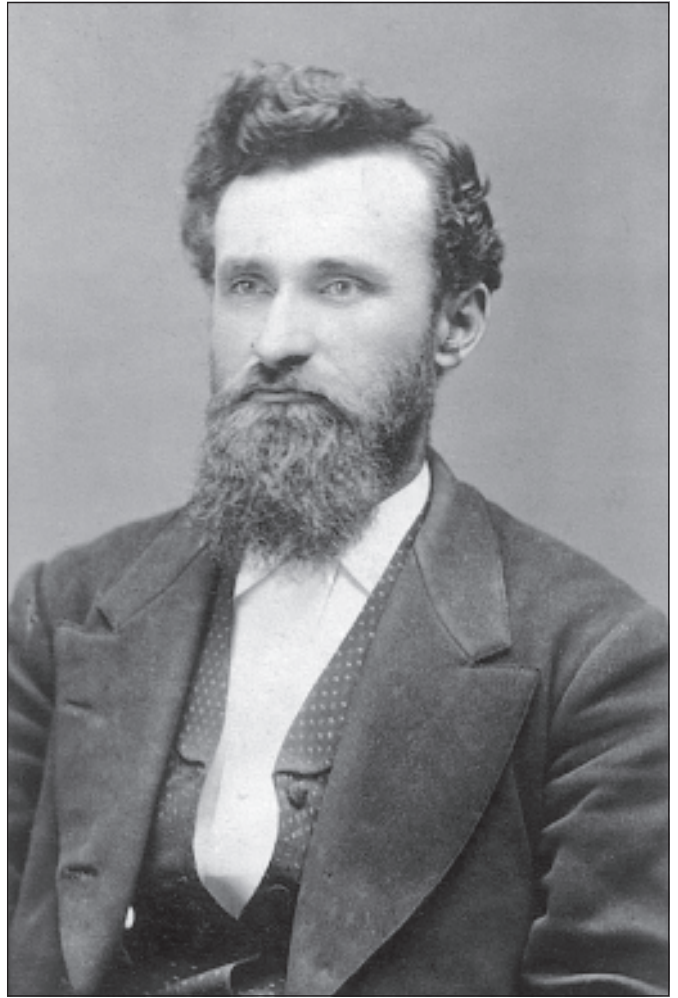
### The Powder River Ranch and Early Botanizing

Unable to teach, William moved to the Powder River Valley in eastern Oregon with his younger brother Samuel Franklin (Frank) in 1872. The brothers (30 and 25 years old, respectively) took up adjoining homesteads on Cusick Creek in Thief Valley of Baker County. Although the exact location of the Cusick property has not been verified, their homesteads may now lie beneath the waters of Thief Valley Reservoir. This region of rolling sagebrush-covered hills has a view of Elkhorn Ridge in the Blue Mountains to the southwest. Together the brothers cleared the land of brush and constructed log buildings. Local settlers began small-scale irrigation projects along the Powder River; however, the river's flow often dwindled to little more than a trickle by midsummer.

For a number of years, although William may have noticed the nearby wildflowers, he was no doubt too busy with ranch work to think about botany. This changed the day he chanced to meet Dr. Reuben D. Nevius, the wandering minister-botanist for whom the genus *Neviusia* (Rosaceae) is named (St. John 1923). Nevius founded churches in Baker City, Union, and LaGrande between 1873 and 1875 (Powers and Nelson 2001). The minister taught William various botanical techniques, including how to collect a scientifically useful specimen, how to keep records, and where to send specimens for identification. More importantly, Nevius almost certainly told Cusick that money could be made by selling pressed plants to eastern US and European herbaria and to wealthy private collectors, all of whom were eager for specimens from the unexplored regions of North America. This meeting apparently inspired Cusick, because records at the Gray Herbarium at Harvard show that he sent his first plants to world-famous botanist Asa Gray for identification in 1878, six years after moving to the ranch. That same year, Gray named *Veronica cusickii* for Cusick, the first of many species the Harvard botanist would name for the eastern Oregon collector.

When Cusick started collecting in the Blue and Willowa Mountains, he was able to leave the ranch for only short periods. During 1879 and 1880 he collected in Baker and Union counties; his labels mention Big Creek, Catherine Creek, Trout Creek, Sparta, and the Snake River. Much later he described an early trip from the Powder River ranch to Eagle Creek meadows in the Willows. He left home with a saddle horse and spent two hard days collecting. He started back late the second afternoon, leading his horse loaded with "plunder," arriving at the ranch at midnight – a 50 mile walk, mostly in darkness (Eggleston papers, UO Archives).

After Cusick had been sending specimens for several years, Asa Gray must have become curious about this little-known rancher in the Powder River Valley who was finding so many new species. He apparently convinced his herbarium assistant Sereno Watson, then in his mid-sixties, to travel west to meet Cusick in November of 1880. The Cambridge botanist had some typically western adventures before finding the Powder River ranch. These were the days before the railroad came to the area, and, having reached La Grande by stagecoach, Watson hired a saddle horse and rode to the town of North Powder. On enquiring



William Conklin Cusick at around age 35 when he first began sending plant specimens to Asa Gray at Harvard University. A.R. Sweetser Papers, Ax 75, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries.

there, he learned that he should have turned off at the village of Telocaset. Retracing his steps he reached the small hamlet after dark. There a French woman gave him some quilts to sleep in a haystack. After a cold wet night, Watson finally found his way to the Cusick ranch in Thief Valley. By this time, Frank Cusick was married to Rebecca Ashby who apparently informed Watson that William and her husband were away in the mountains, so the weary easterner remounted, followed their trail, and eventually caught up with them there. Watson spent three days at the Cusick ranch, instructing William in the art and science of collecting, recording, and preserving botanical specimens. He also brought a gift for Cusick, a copy of his two-volume *Botany of California* by Watson, Gray and Brewer, for which the young rancher-botanist was most grateful (Eggleston papers, UO Archives).

### “Everything on My Back”

Inspired by Watson's visit, Cusick began botanizing in the Blues and Willows whenever he could get away from the ranch for a few days. In 1881 he first visited Eagle Creek, later stating, “I went afoot and carried everything on my back” (Eggleston papers, UO Archives). He walked from Medical Springs to Cornucopia,

collecting at Sanger Mine, East Eagle Creek, Kettle Creek, and Two Color Creek, traveling east as far as the Snake River. At one point he “stayed all night at a Chinaman’s cabin.” As a result of this summer’s collecting he was able to send over 200 specimens to the Gray Herbarium in October. However, he still had not found paying customers for his plants. The situation improved marginally when he began to correspond with Harry Patterson, an Illinois printer of botanical labels (Kibbe 1953). Patterson provided him with lists of patrons who might be willing purchase his specimens, and Cusick began to find some buyers (Lange 1956). In 1882 he botanized the Imnaha River region, and the following year he published a short note on Oregon forest fires

in the *Botanical Gazette* (Cusick 1883).

Cusick took his first botanizing trip to Steens Mountain in southeast Oregon in 1885. Arriving there, he was surprised to find that Thomas Jefferson Howell of Portland was also collecting plants in the region that summer. Later, Cusick appeared miffed that Sereno Watson identified the Howell specimens before his own, writing to Watson, “I do feel somewhat mortified that Mr. Howell got the start of me. ...Of late years I have

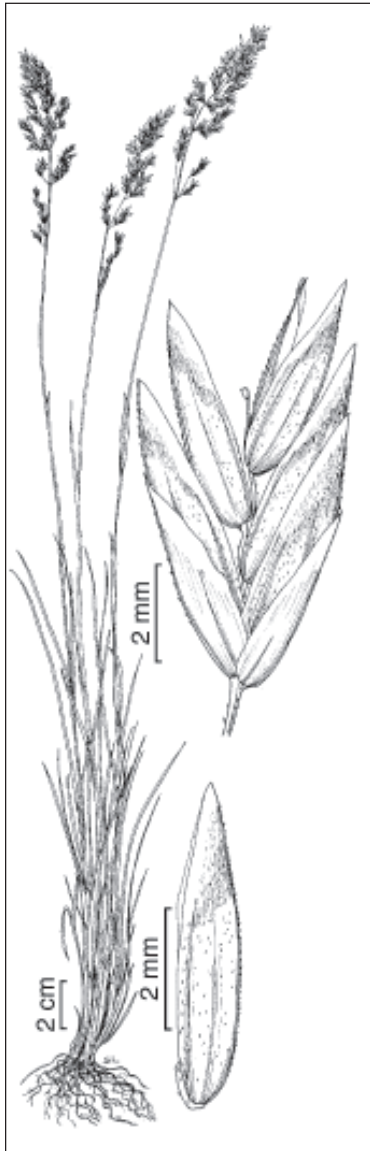
felt more anxious to make good specimens and get such as may settle doubtful points than to get those that are new and have no other merit” (Eggleston papers).

### “Ponies and Presses”

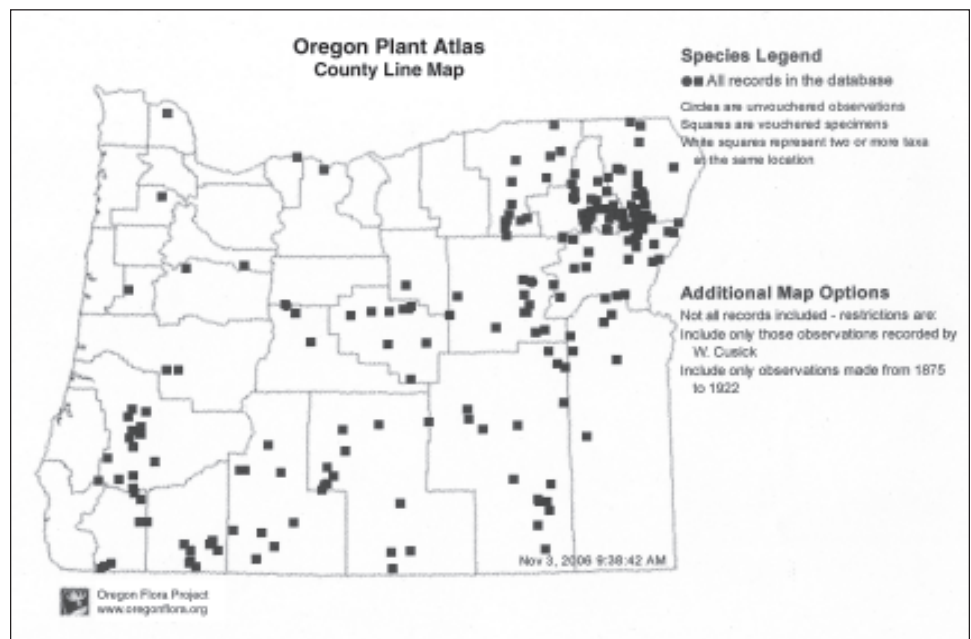
In 1886 Cusick decided that finally he could botanize for a full season; perhaps he stepped out of his Powder River cabin on a sunny morning in April, gazed at the receding snows on the Elkhorns and at the wildflowers beginning to appear amid the sagebrush at his feet, and made the decision. On April 25<sup>th</sup> he wrote to Asa Gray, “I expect to put in the entire season botanizing, something I have never yet been able to do. Last fall I was taken with a severe attack of pleurisy. I still have a cough which I fear has come to stay. So I am not able to work. I shall take my ponies and presses and travel over the mountains and plains...” (Eggleston papers).

He collected that spring in the Powder River area and then as far south as Malheur County. His travels took him by Baker and Auburn, crossing Powder River at McEwen, to Whitney, down Trout Creek to Burnt River and Oxbow Trail, then to Ironside, Hereford, Auburn and back home. In the summer he botanized the Grande Ronde Valley, Cornucopia, and Hurricane Creek. Harold St. John of Washington State College reported that Cusick gathered his specimens in sets of twelve, arranging to sell his duplicates.

Cusick was a brave man to botanize the wild Wallows alone or with only a pony. In those days, grizzly bears still roamed the mountains; the last one was killed there in 1937 (Battaile 1998), and Cusick was a deaf man. Describing these trips, St. John wrote, “Cusick never carried fire arms or fishing tackle as he felt that when unmolested the wild animals would not trouble him, and



Cusick’s bluegrass (*Poa cusickii* subsp. *cusickii* Vasey), illustrated by Sandra Long for the *Flora of North America*. Named by the Washington DC agrostologist George Vasey, Cusick collected the type specimen in Baker County, May 1885, on “north hillsides of Powder River, near the mouth of Magpie Creek.” Illustration copyrighted by Utah State University, reprinted with permission.



Map of Cusick’s collecting stations. Cusick has around 4,500 specimens in the OSU herbarium, thus most map dots represent a number of species. Lists of plants collected at each site can be obtained by clicking on the dots at the website ([www.oregonflora.org](http://www.oregonflora.org)). Courtesy of the Oregon Flora Atlas Project.



that he was too busy with his botanical collecting to waste any time in fishing. He would load his botanical outfit and camping materials on a pony and start off into the most rugged mountains, or with a team of horses and a wagon into the bleakest desert, and be gone for weeks at a time.”

### The Cusicks Move to Jimmy Creek

It is not known why the Cusicks decided in 1887 to give up their ranch in Thief Valley and move approximately 10 miles north. Perhaps it was the difficulty of obtaining sufficient water from the Powder River in the summer. Local farmers could expect no help from the federal government; President Grover Cleveland was known for his reluctance to aid the country’s agriculturalists. Also in 1884, the railroad had come to the Powder River Valley, bringing ever more settlers and cattlemen as well as loggers who began to fell the pine forests on the slopes of the Blue Mountains. Whatever the reason, William, along with Frank and Rebecca Cusick and their three children, decided to start over, and purchased undeveloped land in Union County on Jimmy Creek near Craig Mountain. The new ranch, where they subsequently lived for nearly 30 years, was about six miles south of the town of Union. The brothers bought adjoining land; William’s 120 acre plot, located in Township 5S, Range 39E, Sections 11 and 14, was said by Harold St. John to consist mostly of pastureland. The purchase price was \$150.

The remains of the Cusick ranch can still be seen today. With permission from the present landowners, one can view a small log cabin, a large old barn constructed of squared-off logs, and an aboveground root cellar of good-sized stones and cement. The roofs of the cabin and barn have collapsed. Sagebrush covers the surrounding hills and large willows border Jimmy Creek and a few persist near the home site.

### Husband and Father

The Cusick brothers’ move to Jimmy Creek meant they had to begin again to build a homestead; thus, since William could not easily be spared to take the botanizing trips he loved, his collecting slowed for a number of years. In January of 1888 Asa Gray died in Cambridge and Sereno Watson took over the task of naming new plants collected by western botanists; Watson is known to have named at least six species for Cusick. The following year William did some collecting in the Blues near Anthony Lake, and in 1890 he published a brief note on *Ribes aureum* in the *Botanical Gazette* (Cusick 1890). Then began an episode in his life for which there is little precise information and existing records are vague and confusing.

In October 1892 William Cusick, age 50, married Mrs. Emma A. Alger, postmistress for the town of Union (St. John 1923). Sadly, Emma died only 4 months later, in February 1893 at age 43. Emma was a widow who had borne eight children (five boys and three girls), only two of whom were still living. When she died, Cusick took on responsibility for her two sons, Philip and Oscar Alger, later adopting the latter as Oscar Cusick. There is, however, a mystery here. Several existing records state Emma died a year later in 1894, but her gravestone in the Union Cemetery bears the 1893 date, and some records list the year of the marriage

as 1891. Whether Emma lived for only 4 months or for 16 months after their marriage, it was surely a hard time for the family. Had Cusick fallen in love with and married the widow only to have her die unexpectedly, or had he married a friend, the already-ill Emma, in order ease her mind by taking responsibility for her orphaned sons? Cusick never wrote about this episode in his life and now, nearly 115 years later, we are unlikely to learn the truth.

Here is how Harold St. John described this period in Cusick’s life: “When his wife died he was left with a mortgaged home and two children by her former marriage, Philip Alger aged 18, and Oscar aged 9 years. He supported Philip at the Oregon Agricultural College until, when nearly ready to graduate, the young man left to be married. Young Oscar Alger, he adopted as Oscar Cusick. This younger boy was also sent to college, but he too left before graduating to get married. ...it was these responsibilities which kept Mr. Cusick from doing more botanical work during this period of his life.” From 1892 through 1895, William did almost no botanizing other than a brief foray into the Wallows and a bit of collecting near the town of Union. It is also possible that about this time his vision began to fail. Nonetheless, thanks to the encouragement of an enthusiastic younger botanist, William did eventually return to the work he loved.



Type specimen of Cusick’s shooting star (*Dodecatheon cusickii* Greene), housed in the OSU Herbarium. Botanists have long complained about the brevity of Cusick’s labels, especially his sketchy geographic information. This one reads: “1889. Pale purple. Dry (unreadable) ridges, 4,000 ft. June.

## Charles Vancouver Piper and Cusick's Return to Botany

In 1896 Cusick began corresponding with 27-year-old Charles Vancouver Piper, recently hired as the botany professor at Washington State College in Pullman, who was writing a flora of the Palouse Country. Piper apparently made the first overture to Cusick and in August visited the Cusick ranch on Jimmy Creek from which the two men made a weeklong collecting foray into the Wallowas. Cusick was 54 and this was his first major botanizing trip since his marriage and Emma's death. The stimulation of meeting and corresponding with the enthusiastic Piper seems to have spurred William to resume collecting. In 1897 he botanized Malheur and Harney counties as well as the Blues and Wallowas, Logan Valley, Sumpter Valley, and the Valley of the Grande Ronde River. He visited Steens Mountain and the Alvord Valley again in 1898, traveling as far as the Santa Rosa Mountains of Nevada. Returning north, he collected in the Wallowas and along the Snake River. That year he promised Piper he would concentrate on collecting willows.

William's stepson Oscar was very ill in the spring of 1899 and Cusick cared for him at the ranch from April to July. Once the boy had recovered, the botanist explored the Seven Devils Mountains of Idaho, the Wallowas, the Snake River area, and Anthony Creek. This year and again in 1900, while collecting near Wallowa Lake and the east fork of the Wallowa River, he made collections at a site he called "Keystone Basin," a name that cannot be located on either old or recent maps of Wallowa County, leaving us with another unsolved mystery.

### A New Century and New Adventures: "Lost a Horse"

The first three summers of the twentieth century were productive ones for Cusick. Starting in early May 1900, near Powder River, he visited Willow Creek, Cow Valley, and Juniper Mountain in Malheur County. By late May and June, he was in the Wallowas. On August 4, he was at Wallowa Lake; that same day he again visited the mysterious "Keystone Creek" where he collected the type of *Lomatium greenmanii*. By this time Sereno Watson had died and Cusick had begun sending many of his unidentified species to C. V. Piper in Pullman for identification. The following year, 1901, with his stepson Oscar, Cusick took one of his most ambitious trips thus far, exploring Oregon's eastern and southeastern counties. It was an astonishing itinerary for a deaf and partially blind man and a teenage boy. Traveling with a horse team and wagon, they botanized the Snake River, Malheur River, Steens Mountain, Barren Valley, Mann Lake, Alvord Valley, Harney Valley, Buck Mountain, Burns, Prineville, Logan Mountain, Black Butte, Camp Polk, Ochoco River, Silver Creek, Wagon Tire Mountains, Christmas Lake, Sycan Valley, Abert Valley, and Cow Valley. Among other difficulties on this trip, one of their horses died. William reported that they arrived home in debt.

In 1902, now 60 years old, Cusick undertook the longest collecting trip of his career. Accompanied by his brother Frank's son, George Cusick, he botanized a large area of central and southwestern Oregon. This was a remarkable sojourn. The two left the Jimmy Creek ranch on June 3 and headed south to Baker, and from there via Huckleberry Mountain to Prairie City and

Dayville on the John Day River. By June 12 they were beyond Prineville heading for Black Butte. From the head of the Metolius River they traveled to Sisters, Bend, and the Deschutes River. They then moved across lava fields to Beaver Marsh, then south to the Williamson River, camping at the Klamath Indian Agency before moving on to Klamath Falls. Next they headed west across the mountains and arrived at Ashland on July 14. From there, the two moved to Grants Pass on the Rogue and then to the Applegate River. By July 24 they were botanizing on the Illinois River twelve miles from the mining settlement of Waldo. They continued south to the California border in the Siskiyou and then back to Kerby, camping near the Opera House. By August 6 they were heading back to Grant's Pass, Medford, and Ashland. One night they camped at Dead Indian Summit. Next came Butte Creek and Lake of the Woods. By August 20 they were starting for home via Fort Klamath and the Williamson River. Around September 4th they were on the way to Prineville and, from there, back to Union County via the route they had come, arriving at Jimmy Creek around September 10th. I have covered this trip in some detail as Cusick's nephew George kept a daily journal, preserved in the Eggleston papers, that provides the only truly accurate itinerary we have for one of Cusick's botanizing trips. George, however, was apparently not thrilled with the adventure; he later complained that he would not be eager to botanize with Uncle William again as he had been given no free time to fish!

### Slowing Down: "Hardly a Green Thing Left"

Following the strenuous trip to the Siskiyou, Cusick did less botanizing for several years. His eyesight and hearing were growing steadily worse at this time. In 1903 he visited a niece at Whitman College and collected a few specimens along the Walla Walla River. The following year, Charles Vancouver Piper left Pullman for the Agriculture Department in Washington, DC; nevertheless, he continued his active correspondence with Cusick. William's financial situation must have been troublesome, as around this time he applied for a government job on the Wallowa Forest; however, now 63 years old, he was turned down on the basis of his age. At this time he wrote to Piper: "In a few days I hope to go for a week or so into the highest Wallowas. Have not been there for 4 or 5 years. The sheep are crowding in there now they say there is hardly a green thing left" (Eggleston papers).

For a number of years William had been mulling over what we would today call the floristics of the part of Oregon he knew best: the Blue and Wallowa Mountains. He found himself in disagreement with geographers who often lumped the two ranges as a single unit. Both his study of geology and his intimate knowledge of plants convinced Cusick that the ranges had distinct origins and unique floras. In 1906 and 1907, he again botanized in those regions, gathering information to test his theory. At this time he wrote to Washington State College botany Professor Rolla Kent Beattie, stating that he hoped to confirm his hypothesis through a close study of his own collections as well as of those in the University of Oregon Herbarium in Eugene. During the next two years he continued to collect and explore the area gathering floristic data. In 1908 he pursued his research in the Grande Ronde Valley in June, and the Wallowas in August. During the next two years he undertook a systematic study of the western

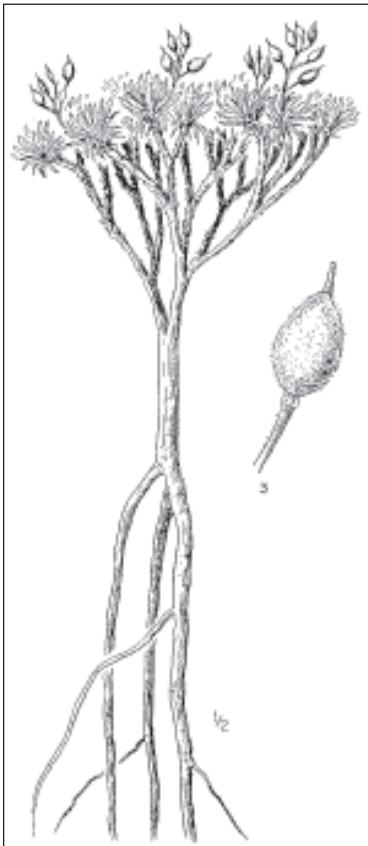
slope of the Blues, an area where he had noted species he felt were more common west of the Cascades (Eggleston papers).

### Cusick Sells His Beloved Herbarium

In 1910, at age 68, Cusick traveled to the University of Oregon Herbarium in Eugene to make good on his plan to research the differences between the floras of the Blue and Willowa Mountains. At this time the UO Herbarium was only seven years old, having been founded by botanist Albert R. Sweetser in 1903, the year the University purchased a collection of 10,000 herbarium sheets from Thomas Jefferson Howell of Portland (Love 1996). Howell, like Cusick, had traveled west in a covered wagon, and had been collecting since the 1870s, botanizing extensively throughout western Oregon (Kruckeberg and Ornduff 2003). It was the western specimens in which Cusick was most interested; he was unfamiliar with this flora and wished to test his theory that the Blues contained floristic elements from the west not found in the Willowas.

Cusick wrote to Charles Vancouver Piper from Eugene in January noting that he had been working at the University of Oregon “nearly all winter.” He later wrote to W.W. Eggleston, a

colleague of Piper’s in Washington, DC, that while in Eugene he suffered an attack of “nervous prostration.” We do not know the details of his illness; however, it is likely that at this time, Sweetser proposed to William that he might wish to sell his large collection to the University. The thought of being without his cherished pressed plants at the Jimmy Creek cabin may have caused Cusick great unease; on the other hand, there can be no doubt that he needed the income. In addition, he may have felt he was being disloyal to Piper who perhaps hoped that Washington State College would eventually be the recipient of the Cusick herbarium. Whatever took place in Eugene that year, Cusick’s herbarium of 10,000 sheets was purchased by the University of Oregon in 1911, doubling the size of their collection. The purchase price is not known (Wagner 1994).



*Cusickiella douglasii* (A. Gray) Rollins (formerly *Draba douglasii* Gray), illustrated by Jeanne R. Janish in *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest*. The new genus was named for Cusick by Reed Rollins of the Gray Herbarium in 1988. Illustration by Jeanne R. Janish, reprinted with permission from *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest*, published by the University of Washington Press (1969).

### Cusick’s Second Herbarium

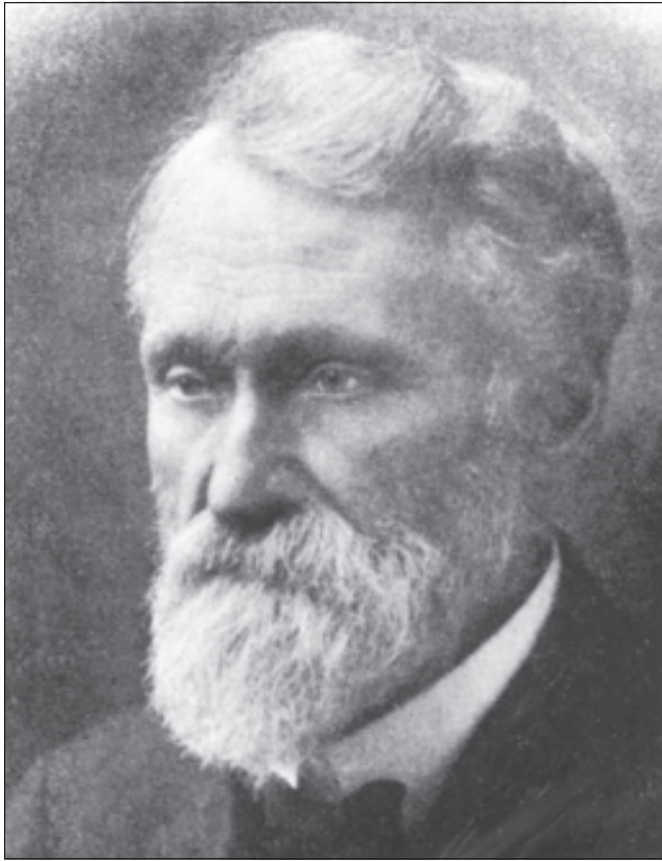
In 1913 Woodrow Wilson was the President of the United States and war was looming. This year Cusick wrote, “I am 71 years old, nearly blind with cataracts of the eyes and quite deaf.” By this time he had moved west again, and was living in a Soldier’s Home in Roseburg and collecting heavily in western Oregon. He later stated that his move to Roseburg, against the wishes of his family in Union County, was to enable him to devote time to studying the flora of Douglas County. Cusick’s large western Oregon collection would be his final major botanical undertaking, and he spent parts of three years amassing many hundreds of new specimens, which he eventually sold to Washington State College in Pullman. During this period, William began to correspond with the previously mentioned Willard W. Eggleston, an agronomist with the US Bureau of Plant Industry in Washington, DC, and a colleague of C.V. Piper. Eggleston was to become a great admirer of Cusick and eventually the most important compiler of the latter’s correspondence and a major chronicler of his life. Cusick wrote to Eggleston from Roseburg that it was his habit to collect three specimens of each taxon, one intended for sale to the University of Oregon in Eugene; it is not known, however, if the University purchased these sheets. Oregon Flora Project records show Cusick collections from Douglas County for 1914-1915, but many of these were apparently acquired by Oregon State College in Corvallis rather than by the University.

### Old Age: “Outclassed by a Blind Man”

About this time, after approximately 43 years, the Cusick brothers gave up ranching. William’s younger brother Frank Cusick and his family retired from the hard outdoor life on the farm and moved to a house on Catherine Creek on the outskirts of the town of Union. William followed and lived with his brother’s family. His long botanizing trips were now over. In February of 1916 he was hospitalized at La Grande where he underwent three difficult and basically unsuccessful cataract operations. A month later he was still in the hospital where his doctor hoped that with a powerful hand lens he might have 50% vision in one eye. Also this year, perhaps not realizing the extent of William’s handicap, C.V. Piper, writing from Washington, DC, asked for Cusick’s help in compiling a flora of the Blue Mountains. Eggleston was collaborating on this project and both younger men were attempting to map Cusick’s various collecting routes to try to pin down the exact locations of his botanical finds. Piper asked for more detailed locality data from William and sent Eggleston to Union with maps on which they hoped the elderly botanist would mark his collecting sites. Eggleston, who was 21 years Cusick’s junior, arrived in Union the first week in September. At this time Cusick was 74 years old, almost totally deaf, blind in one eye, and with only marginal vision in the other. However, inspired by the presence of his visitor, he insisted on a field trip to Strawberry Mountain to look for a certain red monkeyflower.

Eggleston wrote, “With his eyes in the condition I have told you, it would seem impossible for him to continue his field work. However, he wanted to go to Strawberry Lake . . . for a red-flowered *Mimulus* that he had seen there a number of years before, and I





Cusick at age 80. This is the photo that Cusick sent to his friend Charles Vancouver Piper after their last field trip together. Photo courtesy of Washington State University Libraries, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections.

went with him and was surprised at the courage and persistence he showed even with such a handicap. After driving [the horses and wagon] from Prairie City to the north end of Strawberry Lake, we found the lake entirely surrounded by a great 'burn.' It was hard traveling for a man with good eyes and sound legs. Personally I have always prided myself on being a good woodsman, but I found myself outclassed by this blind man. It was getting dusk before we found our plants, and with 4 or 5 miles to get back to the team, but he persisted until the *Mimulus* was discovered and we both got back intact."

On April 2, 1917, the United States entered World War I, but it is unlikely this event made much difference to the 75-year-old botanist, now living with his brother's family in Union and unable to botanize unless accompanied by a companion who could act as his eyes and ears. A year later, the Cusick family received a telegram from Eggleston at the US Bureau of Plant Industries inviting Cusick to join a team that planned to survey the flora of the Blue Mountains. The answer from Cusick's nephew went out by return telegram: "William cannot accept your offer as I am unable to find anyone trustworthy to go with him." A sad moment indeed for the aging botanist. However, despite his overwhelming handicaps, Cusick's memory for plant locations was as keen as ever. In 1919, he wrote, probably with the help of a family member, to Piper with instructions for locating a specific population of a rare grass that had been named for him; the final sentence is particularly poignant, "I will give you the exact locality

of the type of *Puccinellia cusickii*. Go to Ed Fickle's house 3/4 of a mile east of Union. Ask him to show you the old footpath (not used now) to Union on the north side of Catherine Creek. 50-100 yards before you come to his line fence you come into the colony of the grass. I think you will find it in considerable abundance. I have for 4 or 5 years done almost nothing at botany. I would need someone to go with me, but that I can't get" (Eggleston papers).

### **Sale of the Second Herbarium: "In every sheet you will see a blind man."**

In the summer of 1921 Charles Vancouver Piper paid his last visit to Cusick, during which the two went together to Hot Lake northwest of Union and made a small collection. Piper later wrote to Cusick identifying species they found: *Ranunculus acris*, *Helianthus nuttallii*, *Amelanchier cusickii*, *Cicuta douglasii* and *Tissa sparsifolia*. The reference to Nuttall's sunflower, *Helianthus nuttallii*, apparently reminded Cusick of an incident from the past, and he replied to Piper: "...Dr. Gray first called my specimen *Helianthus nuttallii*. I called his attention to the fact that the new species has stout succulent roots with a sweet juice. This and other things caused him to change it to *Helianthus cusickii*." Cusick also remembered clearly that he had collected his namesake sunflower in 1885 in the hills west of Vale, Malheur County. With one of his letters to Piper this year, Cusick enclosed a photograph of himself in old age (Eggleston papers).

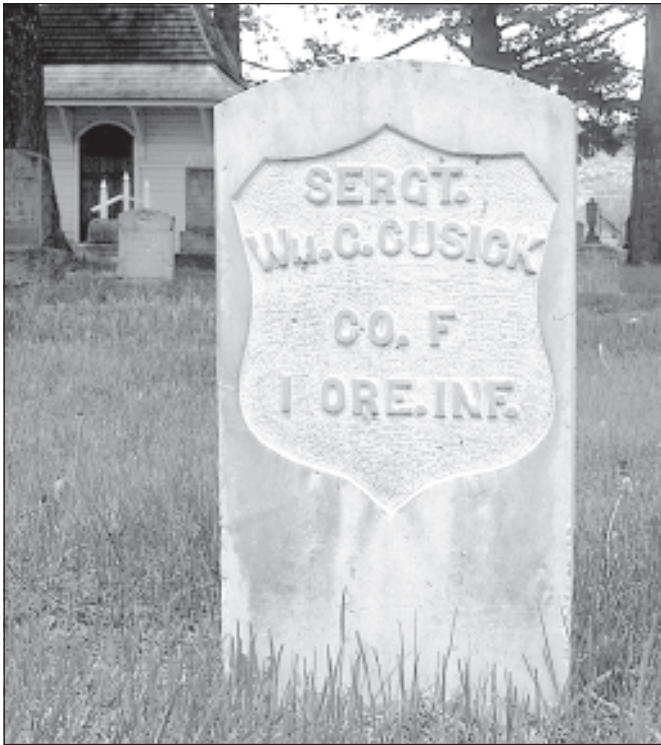
By the fall of that year Cusick had suffered a stroke and could no longer study his collection. At this time he wrote to Washington State College offering to sell the herbarium for \$500. In response to his offer, Cusick was visited in Union by young professor Harold St. John of Pullman, who had taken Piper's place as Curator of the college herbarium. St. John found that Cusick's new collection had grown to around 6,000 sheets. Pleased with what he saw in Union, St. John agreed to the asking price and authorized the purchase. Apologizing for his sometimes-indecipherable labels, Cusick had written earlier, "In every sheet you will see a blind man." Later St. John described his visit to Cusick, "His sight and his strength had begun to fail, but his enthusiasm was as keen as ever. Together we talked of a future trip to the alpine slopes of Eagle Cap, or the rugged ravine of the Imnaha, though it was evident at the time that he would never make another long collecting trip" (St. John 1923).

In 1922, when Cusick was 80 years old and in his final year of life, he received what may have been his last letter from Piper asking for a Blue Mountain plant list. The aged botanist replied, "I am very sorry to say I can do nothing for you in regard to the plant lists as I have given no attention to botany for 4 or 5 years, and while I think I have some of the B. M. lists I do not know where they are." The letter was written for him by Frank's wife, Rebecca (Eggleston papers).

### **Death of an Old Soldier**

On Saturday, October 7, 1922 William Conklin Cusick, nearly 81 years old, died at his brother's home in Union. He was survived by Frank, by a sister in Scio and two half-sisters. His stepson, Oscar Cusick, had died of tuberculosis at the age of 23 in 1907.

William's funeral took place the next day at the Union Presbyterian Church, of which Cusick was a long-time member. He was later eulogized by both Harold St. John and Erwin Lange, the latter writing, "No collector of national note was more modest than Cusick. He avoided publicity and only his extant letters and two short articles leave a record of his work. His outstanding work in botany was well known and understood by botanists of America and Europe, yet his neighbors were hardly aware of his greatness. ...in 1929 the United States Geographic Board in Washington, DC, named Cusick Mountain in the Wallowa National Forest in his honor."



William Cusick's grave in the Pioneer Cemetery in Union, Oregon. Photo by Julie Gibson.

At least one person in Union was aware of the importance of William Conklin Cusick's botanical work. Reverend B.S. Hughes, Pastor of Cusick's church, wrote to the Department of Agriculture about a year before Cusick's death, requesting an account of the botanist's life. Cusick's friend, W.W. Eggleston responded with an eight-page biographical sketch, emphasizing the significance of William's contributions to botany. Fortunately this summary of Cusick's life as one of Oregon's most important pioneer botanists has been preserved in Eggleston's files and is available in the University of Oregon archives. Whether the information was included in Cusick's funeral ceremony is not known.

William Conklin Cusick was buried as a soldier, rather than a botanist. He is interred in the Union Cemetery, lot number 43, near Emma's grave. His handsome white grave marker reads: "Sergeant W.C. Cusick, Company F, 1st Oregon Infantry." Perhaps a more appropriate epitaph might have been these words written by his friend and fellow seeker of the elusive monkeyflower, W.W. Eggleston: "It will be a long time before a botanist will know the Blue Mountains as well as William Cusick."

### Genera named for Cusick: The Tangled History of *Cusickia* and *Cusickiella*

In 1908 Cusick was paid one of botany's supreme compliments when M. E. Jones named a new genus in the Carrot Family *Cusickia*, in his honor. Sadly, the name, like many others proposed by Jones, did not stick, and today the genus is submerged in *Lomatium*. Exactly 80 years later, however, Professor Reed Rollins of the Gray Herbarium at Harvard named the genus *Cusickiella* in the Mustard Family for our tireless collector (Rollins 1988). *Cusickiella douglasii* is a tough, woody, white-flowered crucifer that has usually been known as *Draba douglasii*. Cusick collected the plant in Union County near the Snake River in 1880. Asa Gray named his collection *Braya oregonensis*, but it was soon realized that this was the same species Gray had named *Draba douglasii* in 1867. The German botanist O. E. Schulz at one time called the plant *Cusickia douglasii*; however, since the genus *Cusickia* had once been proposed by Jones, the rules of botanical nomenclature decreed that the name could not be used again. Hitchcock retained the tough little desert mustard in genus *Draba*, where it remained until Rollins happily resurrected the Cusick name in 1988. *Cusickiella* differs from *Draba* in usually having a single seed per silique, and cotyledons which are incumbent with respect to the radicle.



Cusick's monkeyflower (*Mimulus cusickii* (Greene) Rattan) is one of the showiest of the Oregon species named for Cusick. Flowers and leaves are relatively large for a desert annual, with the magenta-red-yellow corolla up to 3.5 cm. in length. The ovate leaves are glandular-pubescent. Note the sandy-rocky habitat. One early Cusick collection now housed at the OSU Herbarium was found at "Deschutes Bridge," on June 19, 1885. Photo by Michael Charters.



## Plants named for William Conklin Cusick

The first botanist to name a plant for Cusick was Asa Gray, who named *Veronica cusickii* for the eastern Oregon collector in 1878; happily, this name has endured to the present. Many other well known botanists have also named plants for Cusick over the years. The list includes Sereno Watson, C.V. Piper, E.L. Greene, M.E. Jones, M.L. Fernald, P.A. Rydberg, George Vasey, Alice Eastwood, B.L. Robinson, Coulter and Rose, Philip Munz, C.L. Hitchcock, and Reed Rollins. It is estimated that over 60 taxa have, at one time or another, borne the Cusick name. At present, the Oregon Flora Project recognizes 27 plants named for Cusick in the Oregon Flora Checklist. Arranged here by family, from desert parsley to speedwell:

**Apiaceae:** *Lomatium cusickii*, Cusick's desert parsley.  
**Asteraceae:** *Aster cusickii*, Cusick's aster; *Chaenactis cusickii*, Cusick's false yarrow; *Helianthus cusickii*, Cusick's sunflower; *Pyrrocoma carthamoides* var. *cusickii*, narrowhead goldenweed. **Boraginaceae:** *Hackelia cusickii*, Cusick's stickseed.  
**Brassicaceae:** *Arabis cusickii*, Cusick's rockcress; *Cusickiella douglasii*, cusickiella; *Draba cusickii* var. *cusickii*, Cusick's draba; *Lesquerella occidentalis* var. *cusickii*, Cusick's bladderpod. **Cyperaceae:** *Carex cusickii*, Cusick's sedge.  
**Fabaceae:** *Astragalus cusickii* var. *cusickii*, Cusick's milkvetch; *Lathyrus nevadensis* ssp. *cusickii*, Cusick's peavine; *Lupinus lepidus* var. *cusickii*, Cusick's lupine; *Trifolium eriocephalum* var. *cusickii*, Cusick's woollyhead clover. **Lamiaceae:** *Agastache cusickii*, Cusick's horsemint. **Liliaceae:** *Camassia cusickii*, Cusick's camas. **Malvaceae:** *Sidalcea cusickii*, Cusick's checkermallow. **Poaceae:** *Poa cusickii* ssp. *cusickii*, Cusick's bluegrass. **Polygonaceae:** *Eriogonum cusickii*, Cusick's buckwheat. **Primulaceae:** *Dodecatheon cusickii*, Cusick's shooting star, *Primula cusickiana* var. *cusickiana*, Cusick's primrose. **Rosaceae:** *Amelanchier cusickii*, Cusick's serviceberry. **Scrophulariaceae:** *Castilleja cusickii*, Cusick's paintbrush; *Mimulus cusickii*, Cusick's monkeyflower; *Penstemon cusickii*, Cusick's penstemon; *Veronica cusickii*, Cusick's speedwell.

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Rhoda Love has published biographical articles on several Northwest botanists, including Louis Henderson, W.N. Suksdorf, William Hudson Baker, A.R. Sweetser, Lilla Leach, and Lincoln Constance. She has been an NPSO member since the 1970s and was a board member for over a quarter century. She suggested the name *Kalmiopsis* for our journal, explaining that it seemed fitting for the publication to bear the name of a beautiful endemic Oregon shrub, which was discovered by one of our state's foremost women botanists.

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