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Sadie F. Price: Artist, Botanist,
Author, and Naturalist

by
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Sarah Frances Price, Sadie Frances Price, Sadie F. Price,
 Sadie Price, Miss Price, Miss Sadie, and even Sarah P. Rys¹ are
 all names for one lady whose interests were as varied as the
 forms of her name. Miss Price instructed painting classes in her
 home; conducted nature classes which met not only in her home
 but also in the countryside; compiled collections of shells, of
 bird exhibits and watercolor paintings of birds, and of specimens
 of many types of plants; and wrote books and articles for journals,
 magazines, and newspapers on nature subjects. She devoted her
 adult lifetime to her many interests and made major contributions
 to botanical studies.

Sarah Frances Price, born in 1849, was the third child of
 Alexander P. and Marie Morehouse Price. Sadie's brother was
 Frederick and her sister was Mary E. Price.² Sources disagree
 about Sadie Price's place of birth. In a letter (March 23, 1937)
 to Miss Margie Helm, then a librarian at what is now Western
 Kentucky University, Dr. John Hendley Barnhart, bibliographer for
 the New York Botanical Garden, says, "Sarah Frances Price was
 born in 1849 (I do not have the exact date) at Leavenworth, Indi-
 ana."³ This statement concerning her place of birth appears to
 be false, because Mrs. Charles Crewdson and Dr. Harvey B. Lovell,
 each of whom has researched and written carefully about Sadie
 Price, state that she was born in Evansville, Indiana.⁴ Another

authority, Mrs. T. H. Beard, also gives Evansville as Sadie's birthplace.⁵ The dispute over her place of birth may have been the result of the Price family's moving to Bowling Green, Kentucky, when Sadie was very young. During the Civil War the Price family moved north; Alexander joined the Union Army, and Sadie attended St. Agnes Hall, an Episcopal church school in Terre Haute, Indiana, and graduated from that school.⁶

About the time that Sadie "reached maturity," probably about 1865 or 1866, her family suffered "heavy financial reverses"; both of her parents died, and Sadie lost her health.⁷ Although she never stopped trying to regain her health, she was bedridden for the next twelve years.⁸ During this twelve-year period, roughly from 1865 to 1880, Sadie taught painting classes. Mrs. J. O. Carson, a Bowling Green woman who was like an adopted daughter to Miss Sadie, remembered that Miss Sadie taught her painting classes even though she was confined to her bed and was in pain.⁹ The exact date of Miss Sadie's trip to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for six months of treatment by Dr. Weir Mitchell is not known.¹⁰ No records exist to describe the treatment that Dr. Mitchell employed, but whatever he did cured Sadie. She returned to Bowling Green, and when townspeople marveled at her recovery, she simply said that she "had been patched up."¹¹ Sadie did realize how fragile her health was, but she did not let her health keep her from her artistic and scientific work. On August 22, 1883, probably after her return from Philadelphia, the Bowling Green Gazette mentioned in a section called "School of Art" that

Miss Sadie had some "memorial panels which displayed artistic talent of very high order" exhibited at Smith's bookstore in Bowling Green.¹² The notice continued to say that Miss Sadie was starting a course in "theoretical and practical [art] lessons"¹³ in September, and the Gazette commended her instruction. Miss Sadie took her painting and art classes seriously. She was a clever and creative woman, and her ingenuity can be seen in "Atelier," a card game of artists with an artist's name at the top and three questions underneath on each card. Sometime between 1894 and 1898, Miss Sadie gave this game to Miss Florence Ragland, an eager follower. Miss Florence, as she was commonly known, probably used "Atelier" to teach her own students about artists. Miss Sadie continued to give drawing and painting lessons, but since she was now well enough to venture outside her home, she began to pursue her main interest—plants.

As a result of her interest in plants and her love of nature, several other members of the community wished to learn from Miss Sadie. Sadie began to conduct nature classes in her dining room.¹⁵ Mrs. Carson, the close friend of Sadie, recalled during an interview with Miss Marjorie Claggett that Mrs. Will Potter, Mrs. C. U. McElroy, Mrs. Bettison, and maybe Mrs. Alex Patterson were all members of one of Sadie's dining room classes.¹⁶ Miss Marjorie Claggett recounted that her father, Mr. John H. Claggett, another associate of Miss Sadie, urged to the point of insisting that his wife, Hattie Strange Claggett, attend one of Miss Sadie's nature classes.¹⁷ Mrs. Claggett did, and at the

end of her first session, Miss Sadie told her pupils to observe a bird and be able to name it at the next session. Mrs. Clagett did her homework, and when her turn came to identify her bird, she said, "I saw a blue jay." Everyone else burst out laughing. Mrs. Clagett had not taken bird watching as seriously as the other members had. Needless to say, Mrs. Clagett never attended any more nature classes.¹⁸ Miss Sadie's nature classes were for individuals who were genuinely interested in learning about birds, flowering herbs, trees, and shrubs.

Miss Sadie took three kinds of "excursions," nature outings to observe and collect plants for her herbarium ("a collection of dried plant specimens usually mounted and systematically arranged for reference"¹⁹): those which lasted an afternoon, those which lasted "a day or two," and those which lasted a week or more.²⁰ Many different people —sometimes in large

groups sometimes in small—accompanied Miss Sadie on her outings. Quite probably she carried with her a reliable manual such as Dr. Asa Gray's published in 1887²¹ and a vasculum (a tin, water-tight box with leather carrying straps which keeps plant specimens healthy until the gatherer returns home.)²²

Sadie took her afternoon excursions close to Bowling Green; two of her favorite expeditions were out the Glen Lily Pike and out the Dishman Mill Road.²³ Dr. and Mrs. J. O. Carson frequently

took Miss Sadie on these jaunts with their horse and buggy, because the doctor and his wife were fond of Miss Sadie and enjoyed the outings. The Carsons also knew that Sadie did not own a horse and buggy;²⁴ therefore she was not able to go out

alone. Sometimes Tommy Thomas and J. H. Clagett went on the short excursions with Miss Sadie.²⁵ Certainly Sadie enjoyed these trips with J. H. Clagett, because he was a knowledgeable ornithologist of Bowling Green and recorded birds for the Smithsonian Institute.²⁶ Mrs. Carson said that for trips which lasted one or two days, Sadie obtained a wagonette, a long stage-like wagon which could hold ten or twelve people. After the wagonette was prepared for the trip and her fellow travelers assembled, they would all set out, usually for Edmonson County. Mrs. Carson went on to say that she, Dr. Carson, General Sibert, and Sadie once rented a houseboat and went down the Nolin River, observing and collecting flowers on the bank;²⁷ this trip was one of the longer ones. Not all of Sadie's expeditions were easy ones. Sadie, Dr. Carson, his wife, and his daughter Louise went on an excursion to the "Gulf," which actually was the gulch of Edmonson County. Mrs. Carson referred to this trip as "one of the wildest." This group spent the night at Chalybeate Springs and the next day drove the buggy down to the "gulf." Because the gulf was eight feet deep, Dr. Carson unhitched his horse, led him down to the bottom of the gulch, climbed out, and then lowered his buggy to the bottom by rope.²⁸ Edmonson County was undoubtedly one of Sadie's favorite areas. She went there often with Bettie Patterson, who taught botany at Potter College, and they would spend time in the homes of Edmonson Countians. Occasionally, Florence Ragland accompanied Miss Sadie to Edmonson County.²⁹ Miss Sadie went on excursions with many different people to many different places in many different ways, but each

time the purpose was the same—to get new plant specimens for her herbarium.

All during the period of Sadie's excursions, she continued to establish her herbarium and to paint beautiful pictures of birds, flowers, and trees. Possibly she drew the trees and flowers while still in the woods, but the flowers may have been drawn from gathered specimens once she returned home. Miss Clagett said that her brother Argo and Arthur Underwood "got" birds for Miss Sadie to paint. Miss Clagett went on to explain that in this case "got" was synonymous with "shot."³⁰ An article written in 1964 about Sadie Price mentions Porter Mitchell as the third young man who "was credited with obtaining for her some rare specimens of birds."³¹ No one has been willing to say that shooting is equivalent to obtaining. However she acquired her birds, she must have been justified because her watercolor bird paintings are excellent. The two bird paintings which are now in the Kentucky Museum, "Song Sparrow" and "Chickadee," came directly from Sadie into the Clagett family probably between 1889 and 1895.³² These bird paintings remained in the Clagett family and for many years graced the walls of Kate Clagett Duncan's home in Bowling Green. Mrs. Duncan eventually presented her paintings to the Kentucky Museum. Sadie also gave Dr. J. C. Carson one of her bird paintings,³³ but its whereabouts are presently unknown. The Kentucky Museum is fortunate to have three of Sadie's untitled watercolors of three red tulips, a magnolia blossom, and a deer in the forest and another watercolor which she titled "The Old Footbridge over the Barren River."

Sadie painted the native birds and plants of Warren County from 1889 until 1893³⁴ and continued to add plant specimens to her herbarium for exhibition in the Columbian Exhibition of the Chicago World's Fair in 1893.³⁵ Mrs. T. H. Beard, in her 1963 article about Sadie Price, mentions that Sadie took to the Fair "her exhibit of birds, bird paintings, and 720 different plant specimens, drawings and paintings [watercolors] arranged in series by which they belonged in nature."³⁶ This article appears to be the only one to list a bird exhibit. If in fact Miss Sadie did have three Bowling Green young men shoot rare specimens so that she could paint, she, being a nature lover, surely had the birds stuffed. It is probable that these stuffed birds composed the bird exhibit which Sadie entered in the Fair. Mrs. Charles Crewdson, who wrote a sketch of Sadie Price, reports that Sadie's herbarium, which included "ferns, fungi, lichens and mosses,"³⁷ won her "first prize over more than one hundred contestants."³⁸ The 1903-1905 edition of Who's Who records that Sadie received an award medal and a diploma.³⁹ Possibly Sadie took her bird exhibit, her various watercolor paintings, and her herbarium; whatever she took obviously was presented very well. Miss Mary Price, Sadie's sister, sent the medal and the diploma to the University of Kentucky after Sadie's death.⁴⁰

From 1890 until 1903 Sadie compiled and published much information on many different subjects in books, journals, and newspapers. Sadie's works were published posthumously from 1903 until 1907 by Miss Mary Price. Sadie published two compilations: Songs from the Southland (1890)⁴¹ and Shakespeare's Twilights

(1892).⁴² During the years when Sadie was preparing for the exhibit, she was also formulating lists of the specimens; the list of her flowering herbs, The Flora of Warren County Kentucky (1893), "contained 714 species of vascular plants."⁴³ Between 1893 and 1903 Sadie found 255 new species⁴⁴ and added them to her list in a hand-written addenda. In 1895 Trees and Shrubs of Kentucky, another list, was published. Sadie's best known was The Fern Collector's Handbook and Herbarium (1897). Sadie was very proud that Henry Holt and Company published this book. While doing the botanical work in August 1898, Sadie collected land and freshwater shells, mainly in Warren County; she wrote "Mollusca of Southern Kentucky," (1900), which listed 151 specimens.⁴⁵ The article appeared in Nautilus, "a monthly devoted to the interests of conchologists."⁴⁶ The date for the publication of Sadie's "Kentucky Folk Lore" is not known; this writing is a collection of proverbs and superstitions which Sadie encountered when visiting in homes of Kentucky natives while she was on her excursions.⁴⁷ Perusing the Pennyrile Country (part one printed December 1906; part two printed January 1907)⁴⁸ is a detailed description of Miss Sadie's expeditions through the Pennyrile. The unusual title was inspired by an Edmonson County woman who once told Sadie that she wanted to go with Sadie and "peruse the country"; this phrase amused Sadie.⁴⁹ Sadie wrote numerous other articles; many of these were printed in The Asa Gray Bulletin, The Plant World, The Fern Bulletin, American Ornithology, The American Naturalist, The American Botanist, and several Kentucky newspapers.⁵⁰ Miss Mary Price submitted

several articles, including "Perusin' the Pennyrile Country," to journals and newspapers after Sadie's death from dysentery on July 3, 1903.⁵¹

According to Mary Price's records of Sadie's discoveries, Sadie discovered seven new species of plants;⁵² however, only five of these actually were named in Miss Sadie's honor.⁵³ Biological names consist of three parts: genus, species, and the author's name.⁵⁴ To get a plant named, a botanist must send type specimens, which include root, stem, leaves, flowers, and seed pods, to an author who usually works for or with an herbarium researching to make sure that the specimen is new; the author then characterizes or describes the plant, and he chooses a name for the specimen and publishes the write-up.⁵⁵ All type specimens are kept in herbaria.⁵⁶ Sadie sent type specimens to several herbaria: the National Herbarium of the Smithsonian Institute, the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University, and the New York Botanical Garden.⁵⁷ Miss Mary Price recorded "Clematis Priceae Small" in her list of discoveries; however, the specimen was named "Clematis flaccida Small."⁵⁸ The other plant discovered by Sadie but not named for her is the "Aster Kentuckiensis Britton."⁵⁹ B. L. Robinson,⁶⁰ curator of the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University, characterized and named the "Apios Priceae Robinson" in "A New Species of Apios from Kentucky" in The Botanical Gazette;⁶¹ one of Sadie's sketches of the specimen accompanied the article.⁶² John K. Small mentioned Miss Sadie's name in the characterization of the "Oxalis Priceae Small," which was included in his Studies of the Botany

of the Southeastern United States (1898).⁶³ Sadie also sent to J. K. Small her specimens of *Cornus*, which was named "*Cornus Priceae* Small."⁶⁴ The type specimens of "*Cornus Priceae* Small" are presumably in the New York Botanical Garden.⁶⁵ Miss Price's aster is the common name which is included in the characterization of the "*Aster Priceae* Britton."⁶⁶ In about 1899 "Miss Sadie Price found near Bowling Green a wild violet. . . ,"⁶⁷ but the violet was not named until 1903, when it became the "*Viola Priceana* Pollard."⁶⁸ In 1959 Mrs. J. O. Carson could remember several names of plants named in honor of Sadie, and Mrs. Carson very clearly "remembered Sadie's pride when the violet was named"⁶⁹ and explained that Sadie's pride was never boastful.⁷⁰ Perhaps it was the sweetness of the little violet, which is "purple in the center, shaded out to white,"⁷¹ that made her so fond of it. The type specimens of the "*Aster Priceae* Britton" and the "*Viola Priceana* Pollard" are in the National Herbarium of the Smithsonian Institute.⁷²

After Sadie's death, Mary Price became overseer for all of the collections and paintings. For a while Mary Price, working with the curator of the St. Louis, Missouri, Botanical Garden Herbarium, was trying to sell the bird paintings. Fortunately, Mary Price could not find buyers; thus, the collection of bird paintings remained intact. Many times during the correspondence between Mary Price and the curator, he reminded her that the St. Louis Herbarium was extremely interested in acquiring the complete works of Sadie Price.⁷³ It is no wonder that the St. Louis Herbarium wanted the Price collection: the bird paintings show the

subject in the natural habitat, on the nest or on the branch; the insect watercolors show all of the stages of life, and the plant sketches show largely the flowers with a cross-section of the seed pod or fruit in one corner.⁷⁴ Mary Price in her list of Sadie's collections recorded the Herbarium, which went to St. Louis, as having "2000 pressed plants—912 sketches."⁷⁵ Also, Mary Price listed 150 watercolor sketches of Kentucky birds as going to the Missouri Botanical Garden Library.⁷⁶ The curator in 1937 of the St. Louis Herbarium said that the collection of Kentucky plants "numbered 2,912 specimens of which there were 965 sketches largely in color."⁷⁷ The size of the collection probably caused Mary Price to estimate. Unfortunately, Sadie Price's collection did not remain in Kentucky, but it is certainly well preserved and appreciated by the Missouri Botanical Garden Herbarium.⁷⁸

After all of the effort that Sadie put into her nature studies of Southern Kentucky and all of the national recognition that she received through the herbaria and publications, it seems ironic that only a few Bowling Green citizens knew that Sadie "had a national reputation as an author, naturalist, and botanist"⁷⁹ and that Bowling Green made only a small effort to remember its once-famous citizen. This small effort took the form of a small article printed in the Bowling Green newspaper immediately following Sadie's death: "Miss Sadie was one of the city's most talented and intellectual women. . . . She was unquestionably one of the best informed women not only in Bowling Green but in the State."⁸⁰ An Illinois newspaper realized the

importance of Sadie's works more than the Bowling Green paper. The Illinois paper published a posthumous article about Sadie which described her as an author, naturalist, botanist, conchologist, and ornithologist, who left precise and complete works.⁸¹ But the Times Journal on July 11, 1903, ran a tribute which truly expressed a sincere appreciation for Sadie and her work: "She was a true highpriestess of nature, a vestal Virgin lifting reverently 'the rustling vail [sic] which God is weaving to screen His face from mortal eyes.' . . . With her, nature was not a fad or pastime, but a pursuit, a loving passion which enlarged into wide and accurate knowledge. . . . She was our pioneer in the scientific study of nature. . . ." ⁸²

Endnotes

- 1 Sarah F. P. Rys is the pseudonym used by Sarah Frances for a short story entitled "Conscience Money," n.d.
- 2 Mrs. T. H. Beard, "Sadie Price Resided in Cottage on 11th Street," Park City Daily News, 3 November 1963, p. 10, col. 2.
- 3 John Hendley Barnhart Letter, March 1937, Manuscript collection Price B P946, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- 4 See Mrs. Charles N. Crewdson, "Kentucky's Leading Botanist and Her Life Work," The Louisville Times, n. p., MS Price B P946 scrapbook; Harvey B. Lovell, "Bibliography of Sarah F. Price, Kentucky Naturalist," Transactions of the Kentucky Academy of Science (August 1951), 121-128.
- 5 Beard, p. 10, col. 2.
- 6 Crewdson, n. p.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 A summarized taped interview with Mrs. J. O. Carson by Miss Marjorie Clagett, January 29, 1959.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Crewdson, n. p.
- 12 "School of Art," Bowling Green Gazette, 22 August 1883, p. 3.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Game, MS Collection, Price B P946.
- 15 Summarized taped interview with Carson.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Marjorie Clagett, 1645 Chestnut Street, Bowling Green, Kentucky. Interview 7 December 1979.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1970).

- 20 Summarized taped interview with Carson.
- 21 Asa Gray, Gray's School and Field Botany, revised ed.
(Cambridge, Massachusetts: New York American Book Co., March 1887)
- 22 Interview with Clagett.
- 23 Summarized taped interview with Carson.
- 24 Interview with Clagett.
- 25 Summarized taped with Carson.
- 26 Interview with Clagett.
- 27 Summarized taped interview with Carson.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Interview with Clagett.
- 31 Beard, p. 10, col. 1.
- 32 If Sadie's bird paintings did enter the Clagett family between 1889 and 1895, then Sadie gave them to Maggie Clagett, John Clagett's first wife. It is also possible that Sadie gave the paintings to Luli Northcott, Maggie's sister, after 1895. Luli and Maggie were both friends of Sadie.
- 33 Summarized taped interview with Carson.
- 34 Lovell, pp. 121-128.
- 35 Beard, p. 10, col. 1.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Crewdson, n. p.
- 38 Beard, p. 10, col. 1.
- 39 John W. Leonard, ed., Who's Who in America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Men and Women of the United States (Chicago: A. N. Marquis & Company, 1903-1905), p. 1197.
- 40 Beard, p. 10, col. 1.
- 41 S. F. Price, Songs from the Southland (Boston: D. Lothrop and Company, 1890).

- 42 S. F. Price, Shakespeare's Twilights (Boston: D. Lothrop and Company, 1892).
- 43 Lovell, p. 121.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid., p. 122.
- 46 Sadie F. Price, "Mollusca of Southern Kentucky," The Nautilus: A Monthly Devoted to the Interests of Conchologists, 14 (7 November 1900), 75-79.
- 47 Sadie F. Price, "Kentucky Folk Lore," Journal of American Folk Lore, 14 (n. d.), 30-38.
- 48 Sadie F. Price, "Perusin' the Pennyrile Country," American Botanist, December 1906, pp. 76-81; January 1907, pp. 105-112.
MS Collection Price B P946.
- 49 Summarized taped interview with Carson.
- 50 List of Published works, MS Price B P946 scrapbook.
- 51 Lovell, p. 122.
- 52 List of discoveries, MS Price B P946 scrapbook.
- 53 Lovell, p. 122.
- 54 Interview with Clagett.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Photo file, "Price, Sarah F.," Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Lovell, p. 122.
- 59 Nathaniel L. Britton, and Hon. Addison Brown, An Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States, Canada, and the British Possessions from New Foundland and to the Parallel of the Southern Boundary of Virginia and from the Atlantic Ocean Westward to the 102d Meridian (New York: Scribner's and sons, 1896-1898), p. 439.
- 60 Lovell, p. 121.

- 61 B. L. Robinson, "A New Species of Apios from Kentucky,"
Botanical Gazette, (n. d.), pp. 450-3.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 John K. Small, "A Kentucky Cornel: John K. Small,"
Torreya, 1 (May 1901), 54-55.
- 64 List of discoveries, MS Collection Price B P946 scrapbook.
- 65 Photo file, "Price, Sarah F."
- 66 Britton and Brown, p. 439.
- 67 "Wild Violet Found by Miss Price Some Six Years Ago Is
Unlike Anything of its Kind ever Seen," Park City Daily News
13 April 1905, n. p.
- 68 Beard, p. 10, col. 1.
- 69 Summarized taped interview with Carson.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 "Wild Violet Found by Miss Price Some Six Years Ago Is
Unlike Anything of its Kind Ever Seen," n. p.
- 72 Photo file, "Price, Sarah F."
- 73 Interview with Riley Handy, curator of Kentucky Museum,
Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky. 12 December
1979.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 List of collections MS Price B P946 scrapbook.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 J. M. Greenman Letter, March 1937, MS Price B P946 scrapbook.
- 78 Interview with Handy.
- 79 "Some Interesting Things of the Late Miss Sadie F. Price,"
Times-Journal, 14 July 1903, n. p.
- 80 "Miss Price Was One of Our Most Talented and Intellectual
Women," vertical file obituaries, Kentucky Library, Western
Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- 81 "Some Interesting Things of the Late Miss Sadie F. Price,"
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