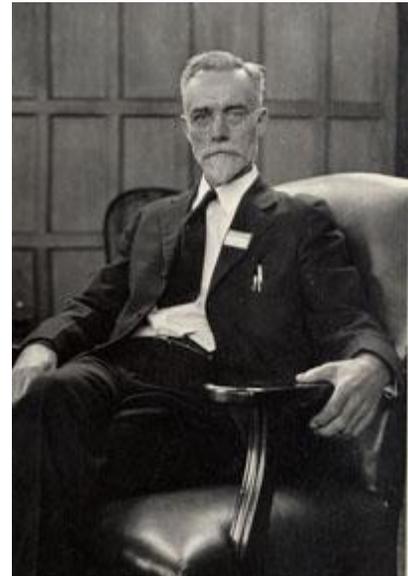


Albert Spear Hitchcock (1865–1935)

Albert Spear Hitchcock became Assistant Chief of the USDA's [Division of Agrostology](#) in 1901. His prior experience included curating the [Missouri Botanical Garden herbarium](#), teaching botany at both Washington University (St. Louis, Missouri) and Kansas State Agricultural College (Manhattan, Kansas), and botanical exploration of the West Indies.¹

In 1905, Hitchcock and his colleague [Charles V. Piper](#) decided to exchange responsibilities at the Division of Agrostology, and Hitchcock took over the Division's Grass Herbarium.² [Agnes Chase](#) later related – to illustrate how “his devotion to [the Grass Herbarium] was demonstrated even before he came to be in charge of it” – that when Piper turned down the chance to purchase [Lamson-Scribner's](#) private herbarium in 1905, Hitchcock purchased it himself, and in 1913 sold it to the government for the same price he had paid Lamson-Scribner.³



A. S. Hitchcock, 1926. Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

In 1928, Hitchcock was appointed principal botanist in charge of Systematic Agrostology.⁴ He devoted himself to the taxonomy of grasses, publishing numerous revisions of grass genera and regional grass floras.⁵ Hitchcock filled over 45 field notebooks during extensive plant collection expeditions, visiting “every state in the Union,” as well as locales throughout Asia, Africa, Central and South America, Canada, the Caribbean, and Europe.⁶ A true “plant hunter,” Hitchcock's devotion to botanical collection is best illustrated by this account of his methods during a collecting trip in the Gulf:

I waded through water almost up to my knees, pushed my wheelbarrow, and still managed to keep my collection dry. The mosquitoes were very bad. I had to put on my coat, put cheesecloth around my head and a pair of extra socks on my hands. My shoes had worn through and my feet were blistered.... But, for all the discomforts, the collecting was magnificent, and I felt fully repaid.⁷

Early in his career at the USDA, Hitchcock formed a collaborative working relationship with Agnes Chase, and the two published many influential works on grasses, together and separately. Hitchcock is best remembered today as the author of the authoritative [Manual of the Grasses of the United States](#), first published in 1935. In a tribute to Hitchcock

written after his death, it was said “his love of the grasses was so spontaneous and so strong that he never wasted an opportunity to extend his knowledge of them.”⁸

For more information on Albert Spear Hitchcock:

Chase, Agnes. “Obituary – Albert Spear Hitchcock.” *Science* 83, no. 2149 (March 6, 1936): 222-224.

Washington Biologists Field Club. “Albert Spear Hitchcock.”
<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/resshow/perry/bios/HitchcockAlbert.htm>

Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. *Hitchcock-Chase Collection*.
<http://huntbot.andrew.cmu.edu/HIBD/Departments/Art/HitchcockChase.shtml>

Archival Collections related to Albert Spear Hitchcock:

Smithsonian Institution Archives: United States National Museum, Division of Grasses, Records, 1884, 1888, 1899-1965. (SIA RU000229)
http://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris_arc_216795

Smithsonian Institution Archives: Albert Spear Hitchcock Field Notes, 1905-1918. (SIA Acc. 12-054) http://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris_arc_310000

Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. *Hitchcock-Chase Collection*.
<http://huntbot.andrew.cmu.edu/HIBD/Departments/Art/HitchcockChase.shtml>

Selected Publications by Hitchcock on Grasses:

Hitchcock, A.S. *Bermuda Grass*. USDA, Division of Agrostology, Grass and Forage Plant Investigations, Circular 31 (1901).

———. [*Methods Used for Controlling and Reclaiming Sand Dunes*](#). USDA Bureau of Plant Industry Bulletin 57. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904.

———. [*North American Species of Agrostis*](#): USDA Bureau of Plant Industry Bulletin 68. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905.

Hitchcock, A.S., and A. Chase. [*The North American Species of Panicum*](#). Contributions from the U.S. National Herbarium No. 15. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910.

Hitchcock, A.S. *[A Text-Book of Grasses with Special Reference to the Economic Species of the United States](#)*. New York: Macmillan, 1914.

———. *[The Genera of Grasses of the United States: With Special Reference to the Economic Species](#)* USDA Bulletin No. 772. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1920.

———. *[A Manual of Farm Grasses](#)*. Washington, DC: the author, 1921.

———. *[Methods of Descriptive Systematic Botany](#)*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1925.

———. *[Manual of the Grasses of the United States](#)*. USDA Miscellaneous Publication 200. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1935.

———. *[Manual of the Grasses of the West Indies](#)*. USDA Miscellaneous Publication No. 243. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1936.

———. *[Manual of the Grasses of the United States](#)*. USDA Miscellaneous Publication No. 200, 2nd ed. Revised by Agnes Chase. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950.

¹ Agnes Chase, "Obituary – Albert Spear Hitchcock," *Science* 83, no. 2149 (March 6, 1936): 222.

² *Ibid*, 223.

³ *Ibid*, 224.

⁴ Harry Baker Humphrey, *Makers of North American Botany* (New York: Ronald Press, 1961) 109-110.

⁵ Chase, 223.

⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷ Hunt Institute of Botanical Documentation, Hitchcock-Chase Collection, Albert Spear Hitchcock biography.

< <http://huntbot.andrew.cmu.edu/HIBD/Departments/Art/HitchcockChase.shtml> >

⁸ F. A. McClure, "Dr. Albert Spear Hitchcock – An appreciation," *Lingnan Science Journal* 15, no. 2 (1936): 305–306.