

## Fedor Bucholtz, mycologist and his herbarium

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**Abstract:** Beginning shortly after the death of Fedor Bucholtz in 1924 correspondence was initiated by Roland Thaxter with Alexander Bucholtz, mycologist Fedor Bucholtz's son, concerning the purchase of his father's herbarium and library. This began an exchange that lasted for six years and resulted in the purchase of the library and part of the herbarium of Fedor Bucholtz for the Farlow Reference Library and Herbarium of Cryptogamic Botany. About 5200 specimens and about 800 books and reprints were received. These purchases are documented through correspondence, which also throws light on the difficulties Bucholtz and his family endured in the wake of World War I.

**Kokkuvõte:** Fedor Bucholtz – mükoloog ja ta herbaarium

Peagi pärast Fedor Bucholtzi surma 1924. aastal algas Roland Thaxteri kirjavahetus ta poja Alexander Bucholtziga isa herbaariumi ja raamatukogu ostu kohta. See kestis kuus aastat ja päädis raamatukogu ning osa herbaariumi ostuga Farlow' käsiraamatukogule ja Eostaimede Herbaariumile. Saadi umbes 5200 eksemplari seeni ja umbes 800 raamatut ning separaati. Ostu dokumenteerib kirjavahetus, mis heidab valgust ka nendele raskustele, mida Bucholtzil ja ta perekonnal tuli taluda Esimese maailmasõja tõttu.

“HISTORY IS THE ESSENCE OF INNUMERABLE  
BIOGRAPHIES” *Thomas Carlyle*

On February 24, 1930 the last shipment of Fedor Bucholtz's herbarium specimens arrived in Cambridge, USA from Moscow. This ended a venture that had begun six years earlier when Roland Thaxter, then curator emeritus of the Farlow Library and Herbarium of Cryptogamic Botany at Harvard University, entered into negotiations to purchase the collection. This, as is the case with many histories, is a cryptic story that is told in correspondence and by piecing together stray findings. In this piecing some of the aspects of the life of mycologist Fedor Bucholtz are documented along with the extraordinary set of circumstances and misfortunes that brought Erast Parmasto to ask in America about a set of Bucholtz specimens discovered in 2010 in Estonia.

Fedor Vladimirovič Bucholtz<sup>1</sup> was born in Warsaw, Poland on 28 October 1872. He completed his studies in Moscow under Prof. I. N. Gorozhankin in 1895 and spent 1896 and part of 1897 studying under E. Fisher in Bern, Switzerland and R. Hartig in Munich, Germany. By 1897 he was lecturer in botany at the Riga Polytechnic Institute and was later appointed professor in 1907. His work focused on the plant pathogenic fungi, particularly rusts but also including other leaf pathogens, and hypogeous fungi on which he produced several papers.

Roland Thaxter (1922) called his research on sexual reproduction of *Endogone* admirable. He became dean of the Agricultural Division of Riga Polytechnic Institute in 1912. A monograph of *Endogone* was presented for his doctoral thesis to Moscow University in 1913. With the outbreak of World War I Bucholtz and his family were evacuated to Moscow. He carried with him at least part of his herbarium and library. These materials were mostly left behind when he took up the position of invited professor in botany at Tartu University, Estonia in 1919. There he organized teaching and scientific research in the Institute of Botany, as well as similar activities at the Tartu Botanical Garden. He founded the Phytopathological Cabinet of the University, was Vice-President of the Tartu Naturalists' Society and editor its Transactions. For a more detailed overview of his war years see Parmasto in this volume. A photographic portrait is reproduced as Figure 1.

In the years immediately after the war it was reported to him that his herbarium and library in Moscow were sold or lost to looting. Sophie Satin<sup>2</sup> reported to Roland Thaxter on 23 November 1923 that Bucholtz had suffered a stroke of paralysis and that there was no hope of his recovery. He died 30 April 1924 at the age of 51<sup>3</sup>.



**Fig. 1.** Portrait of Fedor Bucholtz from the Farlow Library Archives. The date of the photograph is not indicated but Alexander Bucholtz sent it to Roland Thaxter.

This brief biography hints at a tangled story that we can elaborate from letters and documents at the Farlow Library and Herbarium. Sometime prior to May 1921 Roland Thaxter was preparing his paper, *A revision of the Endogoneae* (Thaxter 1922) and, in striving to assure that his identifications were accurate, he wrote to Bucholtz regarding *Endogone ludwigii* which had been described by Bucholtz. We do not have Thaxter's letter to Bucholtz but we do have Bucholtz reply in German of 22 May 1921 from Estonia. In it Bucholtz regretted that he could not directly compare specimens since his library and specimens were not with him. He wrote of the hardships he and his family had suffered and of the suffering of his fellow scientists in Moscow.

On June 23, 1924 the correspondence picks up again but with Alexander Bucholtz<sup>4</sup>, Fedor's son, who was writing from Ithaca, New York in the USA. Fedor Bucholtz had died a month earlier. The topic was the possibility of purchasing the Bucholtz herbarium for Harvard University. Young Bucholtz asked what price Thaxter would pay for the collection that consists of about 2200

specimens including collections of hypogeous fungi. Thaxter was particularly interested in obtaining the hypogeous fungi and in a note in the margin of Bucholtz letter Thaxter wrote that the value would depend on contents, particularly the hypogaei. Thaxter was clearly intent upon acquiring these fungi.

As letters continued it became more clear what the circumstances were surrounding the sale. Alexander's mother, Claudia Bucholtz, was in financial difficulty and on 3 March 1925 young Bucholtz elaborated in a letter to Thaxter, "My father after he left all his collections, library and private property in Moscow was unable after the revolution to locate them. To [sic] the same time notices reached him informing about the destruction by decay [and] selling in bookstores of his collection and books. This made him believe that his life work was lost forever.... This shock was too hard for him and having no hope to continue his life work he became in a few years a gray haired old man and died being just 51 years of age. In 1923 I had the possibility to pass to Moscow where I through an accident located his collection and library in a small provincial town in a fair good condition. This happy news although was too late for my father and he died a few months later."

The correspondence continued through 1925 and involved discussions on both specimens and books. Lists were exchanged and offers were made and accepted. \$500 was agreed upon for the specimens and \$700 for the library. Cables confirmed the sale. The library was received in Cambridge in 1926 and was incorporated into the newly created Farlow Library at Harvard University.

A word might be appropriate here about the establishment of the Farlow Library and Herbarium of Cryptogamic Botany. When William G. Farlow died in 1919 he gave his exceptional personal library to Harvard in order to establish the Farlow Reference Library, which was to be housed along with Harvard's cryptogamic herbarium. Roland Thaxter was designated by Farlow to see that terms of his will were followed. At this same time, with the financial help of Farlow's widow, Lilian Horsford Farlow, the library and herbaria were being augmented through acquisitions from around the world. To this end many private collections were acquired including the fungus collections of N. T. Patouillard, F. von Höhnelt and E. A. Burt among others. In the lichenized fungi the G. K. Merrill herbarium was added and in the bryophytes the M. Fleischer

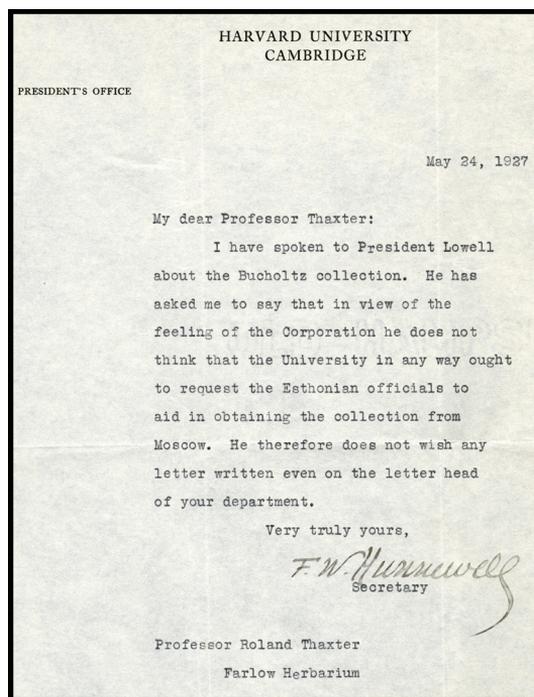
and the V. Shiffner herbaria were acquired. The acquisition of the Bucholtz herbarium was part of this expansion and related to Thaxter's own interest in *Endogone* and other hypogeous taxa.

Although the purchase of the herbarium was finalized a major obstacle remained. On 23 December 1925 a letter from Alexander who remained in the USA explained that there were difficulties in gaining release of the materials. He wrote, "I heard from my mother that there exists some regulations in Estonia according to which the export of valuable artistic and scientific goods is permitted just with a special permission of the Estonian Department of Education." Despite these regulations plans moved forward for packing and shipping; an advance of \$100 was provided to Claudia Bucholtz for this purpose.

These regulations prove to be a major setback, as did the politics of the time. In a letter to Thaxter (26 August 1926) Alexander Bucholtz commented on one of the problems, "My mother is still waiting for the arrival of the part of the Herbarium which is in Russia and the Estonian Ambassador at Moscow who was responsible for the transport of the goods suddenly became a "bolshivick" and went into the Soviet Service.<sup>5</sup> This has considerably delayed the whole matter and my mother has to start the whole thing over.... It is very difficult at present to deal with the eastern countries and I regret very much that it has caused us so much trouble and delay." A. Bucholtz also mentions that he had spoken with David H. Linder, then mycologist at the Missouri Botanical Garden and nephew of William G. Farlow, who suggested his cousin, William R. Castle Jr., Assistant Secretary of State in the USA, and also a nephew of Farlow, might help.<sup>6</sup> There is some correspondence between William R. Castle Jr., then Under Secretary of State, and Mrs. Farlow. At this time some of the collections were in Estonia and others in Moscow in the care of Professor Mikhail Golenkin (1864–1941), Director of the Moscow University Botanical Garden, 1902–1930. Alexander Bucholtz plans for the transfer of the materials involved these diplomatic interventions. One aspect of the intervention did not succeed. An attempt was made to enlist the support of the president of Harvard, A. Lawrence Lowell. Lowell did not approve but he did bring the question to the Harvard Corporation, the governing board of Harvard University (letter to Thaxter from F. W. Hunnewell, Secretary, 24 May 1927). This letter is reproduced as Figure 2. Much of the remainder of 1927 was devoted to these various negotiations. There are no letters from 1928.

Correspondence resumed early in 1929 but it was clear that the situation had not improved. Materials were still in Estonia and in Moscow. Special permits were required to ship any of the materials and these could not be applied for without putting the collections and those who have protected them in danger. "At the present state of affairs in Russia where people are held in a constant suspense of terror this may be the main reason" (A. Bucholtz to Thaxter 13 Feb. 1929).

By the end of the summer of 1929 a thaw seems to have occurred. Alexander Bucholtz

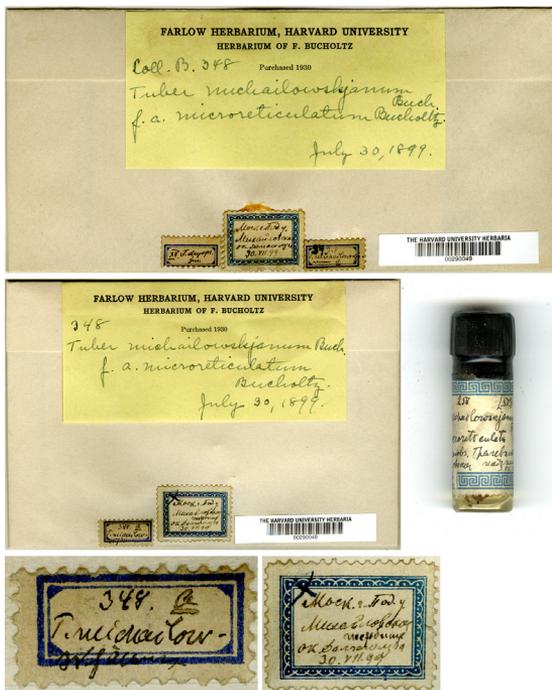


**Fig. 2.** Letter to Roland Thaxter with instructions from Harvard President A. Lawrence Lowell.

wrote that he had received notice of shipment of specimens from Moscow (Bucholtz to Thaxter 21 August 1929). These were probably sent as regular exchange between herbaria at the request of Bucholtz. Eleven bundles of specimens were said to be sent from Estonia as of 10 March 1930, and along with the materials from Moscow the transaction was more or less complete. A statement of expenses was included and a check was issued to Claudia Bucholtz for \$488.75 in payment for the herbarium. In the end the Farlow Herbarium received about 5200 specimens. Questions of missing specimens dominated the correspond-

ence for several months. The specimens were dried, some were in small vials in liquid, and there were specimens embedded in paraffin for microtome sectioning. They were specially labeled and inserted in to the General Fungus Collection of the Farlow Herbarium. Examples of a vial and labels are shown in Figure 3.

In a fitting end to this exchange Claudia Bucholtz wrote to Thaxter on 29 April 1930 from Riga thanking him for the purchase and for his patience. She spoke of the “exceptionally difficult situation created by the Russian revolution.” As a final comment she wrote, “I hope that the work of my husband as represented in his herbarium will serve the purpose he was striving for, namely, to help others following after him to add their contributions to science in the field in which he made his.”



**Fig. 3.** Specimens and labels from the Farlow Herbarium collection of F. Bucholtz, all *Tuber michailowiskianum* Bucholtz. Packets show the special labels made for the collection indicating the date of purchase. The handwriting on those labels is that of the curatorial assistant at the time. Small stamps on the packets and the vial are in Bucholtz handwriting. Stamps at bottom are enlarged.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Erast Parmasto for encouraging me to become involved in this project and for his knowledgeable help throughout. Lisa DeCesare of the Harvard Botany Libraries archives helped me access materials. Genevieve Lewis-Gentry, curatorial assistant in the Farlow Herbarium, ably assisted in the search for specimens.

## REFERENCES

Thaxter, R. 1922. A revision of the Endogoneae. *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 57:291-344, plates I – IV.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The surname is sometimes spelled Buchholtz but in all family correspondence it is spelled with a single h.

<sup>2</sup> Sophie Satin (1879–1975) was a Russian mycologist and geneticist. She left Russia for Riga in 1921 and then for New York. She worked with A. F. Blakeslee at Cold Springs Harbor, New York and later at the Smith College Genetics Experiment Station in Northampton, Massachusetts all in the USA. She was cousin and sister-in-law of composer pianist Sergi Rachmaninoff.

<sup>3</sup> The biographical information presented here is drawn largely from C. G. Lloyd, *Mycological Notes* 73:1322. 1924, and also from Erast Parmasto (personal communication).

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Bucholtz (\*23 October 1900), graduated Riga City Russian Gymnasium 1919, entered Tartu University Law Faculty 3 September 1920. He was an Estonian citizen since 11 October 1920. He took his last exams in February, 1922. In May, 1922 as a student of the Faculty of Law he has been awarded the free ticket presented by the United Baltic Corporation that enabling to travel to the U.S. America and back, for purposes of study. Was crossed out from the Tartu University students' list 1 November 1923 (Estonian History Archives, EAA.2100.1.1248). The above is provided through the courtesy of E. Parmasto. In a letter of 9 April 1927 to R. Thaxter Alexander Bucholtz explains that he graduated from Cornell in 1926, having specialized in Botany under the direction of Dr. L. Sharp, Dr. K. Wiegand, Dr. A. Ames, Dr. O. Curtis and Prof. H. H. Whetzel. He spent 1926 and 1927 at Cornell as a research assistant in plant physiology with Dr. B. M. Duggar and began graduate studies in 1927 at the Shaw School of Botany, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo.

<sup>5</sup> The official who might have been handling this and other claims from Estonia was probably Ado Birk (1883–1942) according the E. Parmasto (pers. com.). Birk was Estonian Ambassador to the Soviet Union 1922–18 June 1926. Parmasto also provided information from correspondence from 1921 or 1922 in the Estonian History Archive between the Rector of Tartu University and the Estonian Embassy in Moscow regarding the petition for return of Bucholtz specimens to him.

<sup>6</sup> The Farlow family history is complicated here. William G. Farlow was the uncle of both David Linder and William Castle.