

The State

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Mary Catherine Weir Rion

Naturalist wrote book for antebellum era



Staff Reports

Recognized as one of South Carolina's first female naturalists, Mary Catherine Weir Rion made her mark by writing a book for other women who loved nature and plants.

Rion's book — "Ladies Southern Florist" — is the only scientific book to have been written in the antebellum period by a S.C. woman, said David Taylor, author of "Anthology of Antebellum South Carolina Naturalists."

Rion was born in Sparta, Ga., in 1829. Her father, Samuel Weir, was a Pennsylvania native who moved to Georgia in sympathy of the Southern cause. He later edited the Southern Chronicle newspaper, which was published in Columbia.

After her father died, Mary Rion lived with the family of William C. Preston, president of South Carolina College, later the University of South Carolina.

Her husband, James Henry Rion, was the first honor graduate of the class of 1850.

He was a lawyer and they settled in Winnsboro, raising nine children.

One of their children, Hanna, followed in her mother's footsteps, designing gardens, writing books and becoming an acclaimed water colorist.

Mary Rion eventually moved to her father's home state, dying July 1, 1901, at the age of 72.