Historical and Scientific Use of *Trillium erectum*

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Trillilum erectum. aka: Beth Root or Birth Root, is an herb easily identified by its three sepal and petaled flowers, varying in color. This is one of the very first flowers to come up in the Appalachian forests of springtime. It's hard to imagine that Trillium on the endangered plant list, according to the United Plant Savers. It literally carpets the floors of the Western North Carolina forest, and I have seen it with my own eyes

There is a surprising lack of scientific evidence on *T. erectum*, which is quite curious, considering its popularity throughout history. It's important to note that anecdotal and historical evidence of herbal usage is just as important as scientific research, which to me, validates what we have already known. It is exciting to read about new discoveries for herbal applications; yet plant medicine that has withstood the test of time, throughout various parts of the world, amongst different cultures, and for similar applications, are worth being noted.

In herbalism, the practice of organoleptic identification, using the senses to positively identify a plant, is an important skill, which should be utilized frequently. According to Hutchen's book, Indian Herbalogy of North America, "the root has a faint fragrance of turpentine and a peculiar aromatic and sweetish astringent taste when first chewed, but becomes bitter and acid, causing salivation." (Hutchens 1991)

T. erectum was one of those herbal "drugs" prepared by the Shakers, a religious group originating in 18th century England, that immigrated to the US in 1774. They believed

in “community ownership, pacifism, dancing in worship, equality of the sexes, celibacy, and living simply.” They used, collected and sold a variety of herbs to the public, and were most famous for their extensive line of medicinal herb products.

“In colonial America, *T. erectum* was widely used by Native Americans to facilitate childbirth. It was introduced to the medical profession by Stephen W. Williams, M.D. in the 1820 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine as a plant worthy of further research, with unique hemorrhage-reducing, pain-relieving and sedative qualities. However, at the time it was widely used by herbalists whom competed with medical doctors, hence the medical profession dismissed it’s potential. Most writers of the period suggest all trilliums could be used for the same purpose, yet only *T. erectum* is listed in most reference works. (Foster 2014)

According to Maude Grieve, one of history’s most respected eclectic herbalists and author or the 1931 publication, A Modern Herbal, tells us that *T. erectum* has been used successfully for hemoptysis, hematuria, menorrhagia, uterine hemorrhage, metrorrhagia, leucorrhoea, cough, asthma, and difficult breathing, and is said to have been much used by the Indian women to promote parturition.

Modern day studies on *T. erectum* were so obscure and hard to find (most dated back to the 1940's or on species other than *erectum*) that I eventually surrendered my time consuming search, in hope that one day, someone in the scientific realm will give *T. erectum* the attention it deserves.

RESOURCES:

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