

History of the Herbarium

An herbarium is an informative book of pressed botanical specimens



Today if we get sick, we have access to doctors and medicines both man-made and natural. In the past, people made their own medicines from the plants that grew around their homes. Therefore, it was important that plants could be properly identified. Information was passed down from generation to generation so children, especially girls, could learn science as well as how to safely take care of their families. To help teach children about the properties of local plants for food and medicine, kids created herbaria -- collections of dried pressed flowers and leaves that they made into reference books. These books became teaching tools as well as keepsakes of flowers and plants collected on outings with family members.

In addition to creating herbaria, Victorian children also dried and pressed flowers for decorative arts and crafts. They made bookmarks, cards and floral art to hang in their homes.

Today, surviving herbaria and floral crafts help to teach modern historians about the types of plants that grew locally in the past. The herbaria in Strawberry Banke's collection guide the Horticulture Department to understand more about how people used plants in the past as well as which plants most accurately depict those that grew here through the centuries.



See the handout called "Make Your Own Herbarium" for detailed instructions.