

Hyams, Charles Walter ^[1]

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by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 1988

1863–8 Nov. 1941

See also: [Oconee Bells](#) ^[3]

Charles Walter Hyams, botanist and mineralogist, was born in Statesville, the son of [Mordecai E.](#) ^[4] and Caroline Hyams. The catalogues of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts for 1898 and 1899 report that he was educated at [Trinity College](#) ^[5] and the University of Tennessee, but recent inquiries suggest that there are no records to support this. As a youth Hyams joined his father on long trips through the Appalachian Mountains in search of botanical specimens, and he was instrumental in the rediscovery of [Shortia galacifolia](#) ^[3].

In the school years 1897–98 and 1898–99 Hyams was instructor in botany at the [North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts](#) ^[6], and from 1899 until 1901 he was instructor in botany and entomology. During the first two years he was also botanist at the North Carolina [Agricultural Experiment Station](#) ^[7], and botanist and entomologist during the last two. Minutes of the trustees further indicate that he was elected "Assistant to the Professor of Horticulture and Arboriculture and Botany." In these positions Hyams was the author of several reports. [Publications No. 150](#) ^[8] of the Agricultural Experiment Station (13 June 1898) pertains to 833 varieties of medicinal plants collected and used in North Carolina; the Station's *Eleventh Biennial Report* (1898) contains information on botanical investigations made by him, as do the annual reports dated 30 June 1900 and 30 June 1901. [Publications No. 164](#) ^[9] (19 May 1899) deals with 2,685 species of flora in the state, and *Bulletin No. 177* (December 1900) is entitled "Edible Mushrooms of North Carolina." The executive committee of the board of trustees of the college dismissed Hyams on 9 Apr. 1901, but there is no indication of the reason for this action.

Remaining in Raleigh, Hyams was employed for a time as a storekeeper with the Internal Revenue Service and his wife as a teacher. Their names last appear in the city directory of 1903, and it was around this time that he returned to Statesville. In 1907 he was tried, convicted, and sent to prison for two years for stealing a great many books from local lawyers and selling them to an unsuspecting collector in Raleigh. In 1910 he was living with his family on West End Avenue, and the census of that year listed his occupation as mineralogist and his job as "mines." Apparently soon afterwards he became a recluse, living alone in a very small house adjacent to the Wallace Brothers Herbarium where his father had once been employed. Despite this and his unkempt appearance, Hyams's scientific knowledge and his ability as a conversationalist made him welcome among lawyers, teachers, and clergymen in the town. He frequently contributed pieces of scientific and literary interest, particularly poems, to the local newspapers and in 1923 published in [pamphlet form a tribute to Edgar M. Hallyburton](#) ^[10], the first American soldier captured in [World War I](#) ^[11].

Hyams's wife was the former Maggie Barrett, and her father, Robert G. Barrett (b. 1830), lived with them in Statesville. At his death, Hyams was survived by three children: Margaret, of Winston-Salem; Mrs. D. B. Kanoy, of Charlotte; and Mrs. George Petrella, of Washington, D.C. He also left a brother, F. D. Hyams, of Charlotte. His funeral was conducted by the pastor of the local Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and included the reading of an impressive poem, "When I Die," written by Hyams for the purpose and left with the clergyman ten years previously.

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Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press. [16]

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