

Conservation icon, 100, to publish book

MacLeod looks forward to seeing long-lost 'McKinley Flora' in print.

By Cory Hatch

Three days after her 100th birthday, Louise Murie MacLeod smiled as she described her favorite Alaska wildflower, the Richardson's saxifrage or bear flower.

"B-O-Y-K-I-N-I-A," she said, spelling out the Latin name con-



MacLeod

MacLeod confidently in the dining hall of River Rock Assisted Living on Monday. "It was so changeable. The petals were mostly white, but in the center of each flower there was kind of a rose color. It's hard to de-

scribe those flowers, they're so complicated."

The Alaska Boykinia (*Boykinia richardsonii*) is one of roughly 100 flowers the conservation icon described in a long-lost manuscript, "McKinley Flora."

She wrote about the flowers roughly 50 years ago when she spent summers in Alaska's Mount McKinley National Park and Preserve, with her husband, Adolph Murie.

The manuscript was a collaboration between husband and wife: Louise (her friends call her Weezy) wrote descriptions of the flowers while Adolph (his wife called him Ade) trekked through the park to get the pictures.

"My mind was on the flowers," she said. "I was totally preoccupied with them. Wherever the flowers led me, wherever I found them, I stopped to examine them in detail.

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"I don't know why I did it," she said. "I just liked the flowers so well, I wanted to describe them for the public, and I wanted it just for Denali."

The book was considered for publishing several times during Adolph's lifetime, but it never came out. Recently, a National Park Service employee found the manuscript in an Anchorage, Alaska, storage unit.

Efforts are now under way to publish a book of Louise's descriptions coupled with her husband's pictures.

Talk of the book buzzed about the room at her 100th birthday party last Friday, as friends gathered at River Rock to celebrate her legacy as one of the founders of the modern conservation movement and a champion for Alaska's wild places.

Born Louise Gillette in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1912, Louise married Adolph Murie in 1932.

As newlyweds, the couple moved to the University of Michigan, where Adolph worked as assistant curator of the university's zoology museum. Sometime between 1932 and 1934, Louise took botany and geology classes. The botany classes stuck, she said.

"I learned the nomenclature of the plant families," she said. "It was really fun. I have a good memory for names, so that was an advantage, too."

In 1940, Adolph and Louise began spending summers in Mount McKinley National Park with their 5-year-old daughter and their infant son, friend and historian Linda Franklin said.

"She went with her husband for a total of about 25 summers, from 1940 and 1971," Franklin said.

One of two cabins the family lived in during those summers was remote, 50 miles by dirt road into the park interior. Louise was "there at the cabin taking care of domestic life," Franklin said.

In addition to tending to the kids — there was no running water, so she had to walk to a creek for water to



Louise "Weezy" Murie MacLeod, who just turned 100, smiles as friend Jeanette "Moosie" Woodling fits her with a birthday hat during a party Friday at River Rock Assisted Living. MacLeod is working on publishing a book she wrote some 50 years ago on flowers in Alaska's Mount McKinley National Park, now Denali National Park and Preserve.

wash diapers — Louise helped Adolph by typing his manuscripts.

"She'd do little walks with the kids," Franklin said. "It was on those close walks around the cabins when she started getting interested in [the flowers]."

Not only did the family write about and photograph the flowers, but Louise also used a contraption to press them between newspapers and blotters so as to preserve them.

"Every night, I took the blotters and put them in the wood stove to dry them out," Louise said.

She eventually shipped 11 or 12 cartons of pressed flowers to the Univer-

sity of Alaska.

By that time, Jackson Hole had become sort of a home base for Adolph and Louise, along with Olaus and Mardy Murie. The family bought the Murie Ranch in Moose in 1945.

Franklin estimates that Louise worked on the book in the 1950s and early 1960s. At one point, Louise found a publisher in Salt Lake City, but Adolph, who disliked cities and crowds, refused to make the trip for the interview.

"I was not confident at that time to go by myself," Louise said. "I was a little upset with my husband, but I didn't say anything to him."

Eventually, the manuscript was lost.

Louise's friend Mary Lohuis, of Jackson Hole, first rekindled interest in publishing the book.

"Almost three years ago, when I came up to Denali, I took pictures of the East Fork Cabin where Ade and Weezy lived," Lohuis said from Denali National Park and Preserve last week. "I took pictures of a lot of the wildflowers that were blooming. I showed all this to Weezy, and she said, 'I wrote a book on wildflowers.' I said, 'Weezy, where is it?'"

Lohuis contacted Kirk Dietz, curator at Denali National Park and Preserve, who began to search for the manuscript.

"I actually tore about my collections facility twice," Dietz said. "I had been on board for about a month and did not want to report that it was missing."

In the years before Dietz arrived,

"the collection had to be moved a couple of times," he said. "Certain things had been moved down to the regional office."

Eventually, Dietz drove the more than five hours to the regional office in Anchorage where he found the manuscript in a storage facility and brought it back to Denali.

"It's in perfect condition," he said.

Dietz found not only the manuscript but also all the research materials used to make the book, including Adolph's slides packed away in Kodak boxes inside of cigar boxes.

"You got to see what his lab must have looked like or the desk must have looked like," Dietz said.

Lohuis, who is helping organize the photos for the book's publication, said Louise's writing is perhaps the most remarkable part of the manuscript.

"You'd be amazed at her vocabulary and syntax," Lohuis said. "Latin names, she got them all."

At her birthday party last week, Louise Murie MacLeod sat in her favorite spot in front of the large fireplace in the dining room at River Rock as she accompanied local musician John Stidle in versions of "Home, Home on the Range" and other Western classics. Between songs, she held court for throngs of adoring well-wishers who were there to celebrate her legacy.

Now, with "McKinley Flora" set for publication, Louise's 100-year legacy continues to evolve.

"It's been a wish of mine for a long time," she said.



Louise Murie MacLeod's description of Alaska Boykinia

From "McKinley Flora"

"A large succulent plant with thick stalk, up to three feet tall; basal leaves are large, round, on long erect stems, the blade deeply corrugated, shiny green on top with bristly hairs beneath and the edges coarsely toothed; stem leaves are relatively small; large white flowers in loose clusters at top of stem have pointed petals that are tinged with dark red at the base. A prominent showy plant found widely over the Park in moist habitats. Blooms in late June and early July. It is relished as a food by grizzly bears and mountain sheep."

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