Botanizing’s Salem Legacy

After the 1820s, botany became the most popular science in America for recreational and pedagogical purposes. It remained popular throughout the century. That was certainly true at Salem Academy and College, building on the strong Moravian connections to the founding of the American botany community. Maria Steiner Denke (1792-1868) and Emma Lehman (1841-1922) taught the study of plants to generations of students. Not all the nationwide enthusiasm for collecting, identifying and preserving specimens was for the benefit of the science of botany. Then, as now, some enjoyed the self-discipline required by botanizing. Others felt that botanizing’s immersion in nature was a form of spiritual expression. Whatever the motivation for botanizing, one thing remained - and remains - the same in Salem: a love for plants.