During the 18th century, John Bartram (1699-1777) was colonial America’s foremost botanist, naturalist, and plant collector. Not only did he cultivate the first larger botanical garden in Pennsylvania, but he also was an important node in a larger transatlantic epistolary network that included contacts such as Peter Collinson, Phillip Miller, John Forthergill, or the renowned Carolus Linnaeus. Bartram’s garden near the Schuylkill River was designed in a way to allow for large productions of wild plants. He organized his garden according to a plant’s respective needs (water, sun, soil, etc.) and did not apply a generic concept in the classification or systemic cultivation of his plants. In this sense, Bartram, as an industrious farmer, organized a first plant subscription service that was designed for international trade and furthered the commodification of plant life. Interestingly this coincides with developments in enlightened natural sciences that sought to observe, abstract and classify plants by extracting data from them and reproduce them as idealized thought models to unravel hitherto unseen systems that in return would explain plant life. That is why Bartram’s collection raised a certain interest among European scholars, merchants, and collectors who would order, subscribe, or even commission seeds, explorations, and observations from the American horticulturist. Bartram introduced up to 200 new North American species to England.

Bartram’s international network would eventually turn the American farmer into the King’s Botanist by decree of George III. He explored the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida and captured the natural setting of the St. Johns River in his travelogue. As a reward for his assessing of the works of international naturalists and for hosting international scholars, he became a member of Sweden’s Royal Academy of Sciences in 1769. This occasioned Linnaeus to refer to Bartram as: “the greatest natural historian of the world.” William Bartram, John’s son, would also make his name as an illustrator, explorer, and collector and would be of no lesser interest to international research networks and collectors. His Travels (1791) elevated him into the ranks of international zoologists. The book can be read both as a naturalist study but also as a historical document about the War of Independence, and as a poetic bridge between the aesthetics of Enlightenment and the poetics of Romantism.

John and William Bartram’s contribution to the specific American experience, however, has been undervalued in the field of Early American Studies and Transnational American Studies. The Bartram’s work, as a few scholars have shown in more recent times, provides rich material for studying the American experience during the eighteenth century, and for research in the History of Science, the American Enlightenment, and Postcolonial Studies. Their work illustrates the conflicted relationship between the Empire and the New World as both were dependent on patrons and found ways to express their own independence from their investors.

Both horticulturalists maintained an international network with a strong emphasis on Swedish naturalists, such as Linnaeus, Daniel SOLANDER, or John Weiksell. They encouraged the transit of cultures, as disciples such as Adam KIIN or Pehr Kalm crisscrossed the Atlantic to study the natural world of other continents. The conference seeks to study the rhetoric, media, and information networks both American scholars used to spread their ideas about the natural world. We aim at exploring how non-human actors (i.e. plants, print media, seed containers) and the enunciate possibilities of the colonial discourse bring to the fore a botanist’s identity, social function, and utility in the 18th century.
Wednesday, 27 March

Location: Engelska parken, 7-0043

9:00 am  Welcome

9:30 am  Thomas Hallock  
(University of South Florida St. Petersburg)  
Signings Nature, Memorizing  
Plantations: Public Memory on the  
Bartram Trail

11:00 am  Coffee

11:30 am  Linda Andersson Burnett  
(Linnaeus University)  
Colonial Ethnography and Linnaean  
Natural History: A Transnational History

12:15 pm  Lunch

2:00 pm  Christina Kullberg  
(Uppsala University)  
Archipelagic Knowledge:  
French 17th Century  
Natural Histories from the  
Caribbean  
Markus Heide  
(Uppsala University)  
William Bartram’s Travels:  
Domestic Imagination and  
Creole Knowledge  
Production

3:30 pm  Fika

4:00 pm  Hanna Hodacs  
(Dartmouth University)  
Atlantic Coffee or Chinese Tea – John  
Ellis (1710-1776) on the Cultivation and  
Consumption of Caffeinated Drinks  
Marcel Hartwig  
(Siegen University)  
Knowledge Media, the Bartrams, and  
the Transatlantic Trade of Plants

7:00 pm  Dinner

Thursday, 28 March

Location: Engelska parken, 7-0042

9:30 am  Stephanie Weiner  
(Wesleyan University)  
Form and Language in Natural  
History Poems

10:15 am  Coffee

10:45 am  Christopher Iannini  
(Rutgers University)  
The Natural History of Slavery?  
Final Discussion

12:30 pm  Lunch

2:00 pm  Guided Tour Linné Museum

4:15 pm  Fulbright Lecture (SINAS)

6:00 pm  Dinner

Location: Swedish Institute for  
North American Studies (SINAS)  
Engelska Parken  
Uppsala University  
Thunbergsvägen 3L  
Uppsala  
Sweden  
Room 7-0042/43

Enlightenment, Nation-Building, and the Practices of Natural History