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Missouri Botanical Garden
2345 Tower Grove Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63110

Dear Hiring Committee,

I am writing to express my strong interest in the Herbarium Digitization Assistant position at the Missouri Botanical Garden. With a Ph.D. in History from the University of Missouri (2024), certifications in Museum Studies and Geographic Information Science, and more than a decade of experience working with collections and archival materials, I bring a unique combination of technical skills, scientific understanding, and historical perspective to this role. My background in digitization, metadata management, and natural history—alongside my personal and scholarly engagement with herbarium practices, positions me to contribute meaningfully to MoBot's groundbreaking digitization initiative.

I have worked in federal, academic, and public-facing archives, including the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), where I assisted in the stabilization and rehousing of mixed media collections while ensuring compliance with federal accessioning and metadata standards. At Madison Historical, I led a digitization and cataloging initiative focused on oral histories, site documentation, and artifact collections. There, I trained student teams in archival handling, digital imaging, and descriptive metadata workflows—skills that translate directly to large-scale digitization projects involving both precision and scalability. My experience in natural history collections, including the handling of fragile and unique materials, has further refined my attention to detail and my appreciation for taxonomic, geographic, and cultural metadata.

As a historian of science and a longtime Illinois resident, I see herbaria as vital records of biodiversity and human interaction with the environment. They serve as invaluable scientific repositories but also reflect the evolution of taxonomy, collecting practices, and ecological change over time. My academic work explores the development of botanical classification and the cultural significance of early plant collecting. Through my University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener coursework, I gained firsthand knowledge of plant identification systems and taxonomic principles, enhancing my ability to understand and interpret herbarium data. I also maintain a small personal herbarium, deepening my appreciation for both the scientific rigor and curatorial care that herbarium development and preservationist work demands.

I am experienced in database platforms such as PastPerfect, Omeka, and ArchivesSpace and have worked with metadata standards including DACS and Dublin Core. I am confident in my ability to support imaging workflows, label transcription, and quality assurance efforts while contributing to the preservation and accessibility of the garden's collections. The opportunity to engage in MoBot's curatorial mentorship program particularly excites me, as I am eager to expand my hands-on taxonomic knowledge and deepen my curatorial skill set in a collaborative, mission-driven environment.

I would be honored to contribute to the Missouri Botanical Garden's mission to preserve and digitize one of the most significant botanical collections in the world. Thank you for considering my application. I welcome the opportunity to discuss how my experience, technical fluency, and interdisciplinary perspective align with the goals of this role and the Garden's broader conservation initiatives.

Sincerely,
Shannan Catherine Mason, Ph.D.