ON ONE OF THE EXCELLENT FIELD TRIPS OUR chapter has sponsored this spring, the May 4 trip with Lucy Clark and Clyde Golden to the Cedar Creek area, we saw the rare *Fritillaria brandegeei* (Greenhorn fritillary), the species named for Katharine Layne Curran Brandegee (1844-1920). Though the flowers were past their prime, what we saw of the fritillary — and Clyde’s beautiful photos of it on the Calflora website — inspired me to return next year to see it in bloom. Similarly, when Lucy told me a little of the remarkable woman for whom it was named, I was inspired to find out more about her.

Katharine was born in Tennessee, but her family moved west, settling near Folsom, California. Katharine taught school, and at the age of 22 married Hugh Curran, a constable. Widowed after eight years of marriage, Katharine went to San Francisco to attend medical school. This was a bold move. Female medical students had a hard life at the time, but Katharine persevered, receiving her M.D. degree in 1878.

The pharmacological courses Katharine took as a medical student sparked an interest in natural history. Her work impressed a professor, Hans Herman Behr, who trained her in botanical work. Finding it difficult to establish a medical practice, Katharine worked at the herbarium of the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. Katharine founded and produced the Academy’s bulletin, but was given the title of “acting editor,” since it was unseemly for a woman to be editor of a scientific journal. Nevertheless, her journal gave West Coast botanists a place to publish their findings, and earned respect for Katharine. Unlike most women scientists of her time, who tried not to make waves, she was not averse to conflict, criticizing poor plant descriptions and fighting the idea that East Coast science was superior.

When Katharine met *Townshend Stith Brandegee* (1843-1925), a civil engineer-turned-botanist, it seems that she met her soul-mate. Well-suited, they would accomplish their most important work together. They were married in 1889, and spent their honeymoon walking from San Diego to San Francisco collecting plant specimens.

The next year Katharine founded *Zoe*, a private scientific journal, but under her husband’s name — it was funded by his inheritance, but also benefited from the “credibility” of a man’s name. In *Zoe*, “unladylike” Katharine railed against “bad science,” refuted anti-Darwinism, and promoted exacting standards for describing and identifying plants.

Katharine made numerous plant-collecting trips throughout the West, with and without her husband. She spent weeks at a time in the Sierra, even camping alone at 10,000 feet. It is said that on a trip to Baja California with her husband, she (shockingly?) rode astride her mule rather than side-saddle, and wore pantaloons and leggings. She was known to dress unconventionally, not for style but for comfort.

Between 1894 and 1906, the Brandegees lived in San Diego, where they continued their plant study, built a herbarium, and created the city’s first botanical gardens. In 1906 they would move back to Berkeley and donate their world-class plant collection, as well as their botanical library, to the University of California.

Soon after their marriage, the Brandegees had met and encouraged *Alice Eastwood* (1859-1953), an enthusiastic young teacher who wanted to do botanical writing. Katharine had arranged for Alice to work at the Academy’s herbarium and for her own salary to be paid to Alice. In doing so, she had set Alice on the path to becoming a renowned botanist in her own right. Alice would, in 1908, name a rare plant she found growing in the Greenhorn Mountains after a rare woman—her mentor, Katharine Brandegee—calling it *Fritillaria brandegeei*.

*Fritillaria brandegeei* — Greenhorn fritillary