

A History of the Arboretum Foundation and Its Unit Council

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Lee Clarke has been an Arboretum Foundation member since 1947. She has served on the Unit Council, the Arboretum Foundation Executive Committee and on the Board of Directors.

The history of the Arboretum Foundation is the story of a long progression of volunteer efforts by a great number of people from all avenues of life. They have all shared a common goal — to help support, by means of volunteer hours and funds, a world-class arboretum in Washington Park. A history of the Arboretum Foundation should consist of a look at these efforts that have spanned the fifty years of its existence from 1935 to 1985.

Although an Arboretum Society was started in Seattle in 1930, it really began in 1935, when the Park Board of the City of Seattle and the Regents of the University of Washington drew up an agreement formally giving the University of Washington a lease in Washington Park to establish an arboretum and botanical garden. An organization called the Arboretum Foundation was formed in order to assist in the financial support for the Arboretum, and to help pay for the maintenance and improvements of this dream in Washington Park.

The first Board of Directors of the Arboretum Foundation was chosen in June of 1935 with W.J. Douglas as chairman. The main purpose of the Arboretum Foundation was to collect special funds, gifts and endowments to promote the idea of an arboretum in Seattle. It was hoped, that after its establishment, the Arboretum Foundation could assist in acquiring plant collections. On a trip to England, Donald Graham, one of the original founders of the Foundation, "discovered" Brian O. Mulligan. In 1946, Mr. Mulligan was appointed as Superintendent of the Arboretum, to serve as assistant to the Director, Dr. J.H. Hanley. However Dr. Hanley resigned six months later and Mr. Mulligan was made Director. (see article "Brian O. Mulligan", in this issue of the *Arboretum Bulletin*).

Until March of 1938 the Arboretum Foundation (whose membership now totaled 2,000) had offices in downtown Seattle; these were moved to the Arboretum grounds when the



Unit Council plant sale, October, 1963.

photo Don Normark

W.P.A. constructed new buildings in Washington Park. It's hard to believe the demolished buildings of our recent acquaintance were ever new!

In the early 1940's Mrs. Donald Graham felt the women in the community should become involved in the Arboretum, and she organized the first Unit. The Units were patterned after the children's Orthopedic Guilds.

The first plant sale was held in 1947 in a tent in Rhododendron Glen. For the Arboretum Foundation and its Unit Council nothing is too much to tackle if it is for the benefit of the Arboretum. Thousands of volunteer hours have

gone into the plant sales over the years and many experiences have become permanent and treasured memories. I once witnessed a determined plant poacher, clutching a bright orange *Fritillaria imperialis* and running for the parking lot pursued by a very angry bulb sale chairman. There have been the crowds surging through the dropped ropes at precisely 2 p.m. on opening day, pushing a grocery cart straight for a treasured plant they had lined up to capture. Plant sale workers have always been their own best customers, coming home from the sale with \$40 worth of plants for their own gardens. They have reasoned that by purchasing



The old Arboretum Foundation offices.

photo: White Marten

a special rhododendron or penstemon, they will be able to share cuttings from it for the next plant sale. Through the plant sale and spring bulb sale the Arboretum Foundation has been able to give funds to the Arboretum for its maintenance and new projects.

For many years, every spring, members of the Arboretum Foundation gathered for a momentous cleaning and weeding of the Arboretum grounds. It was called Work and Fun Day and both was had in great abundance. There was always a hat parade at noon, and the most outlandish, homemade contraption you could design for your head could win you a prize, usually a very special Pat Calvert Greenhouse specimen of great value.

One of the most successful Arboretum Unit Council activities has been the Guide Program (now being conducted by the Center for Urban Horticulture.) For years Joe Witt and Brian Mulligan handled the tours until there became so many, that in November of 1961 the volunteer guide service was begun. Just in time too, because 1962 was the year of the Seattle World's Fair and the Arboretum was a tourist attraction. Also in 1962, when the Japanese garden was

opened, Mrs. Kenneth Sorrells held classes to train Japanese Garden guides.

Through the years, the Arboretum Foundation and its Unit Council have managed to accomplish a great many things. Numerous educational programs have been offered, very often given by members who have expertise in certain fields. In June, 1972 the Arboretum Foundation organized a symposium called "The Urban Arboretum in a Time of Crisis" which was held on the University of Washington campus. Several well-known horticulturists from other arboreta came to speak at this well-attended event.

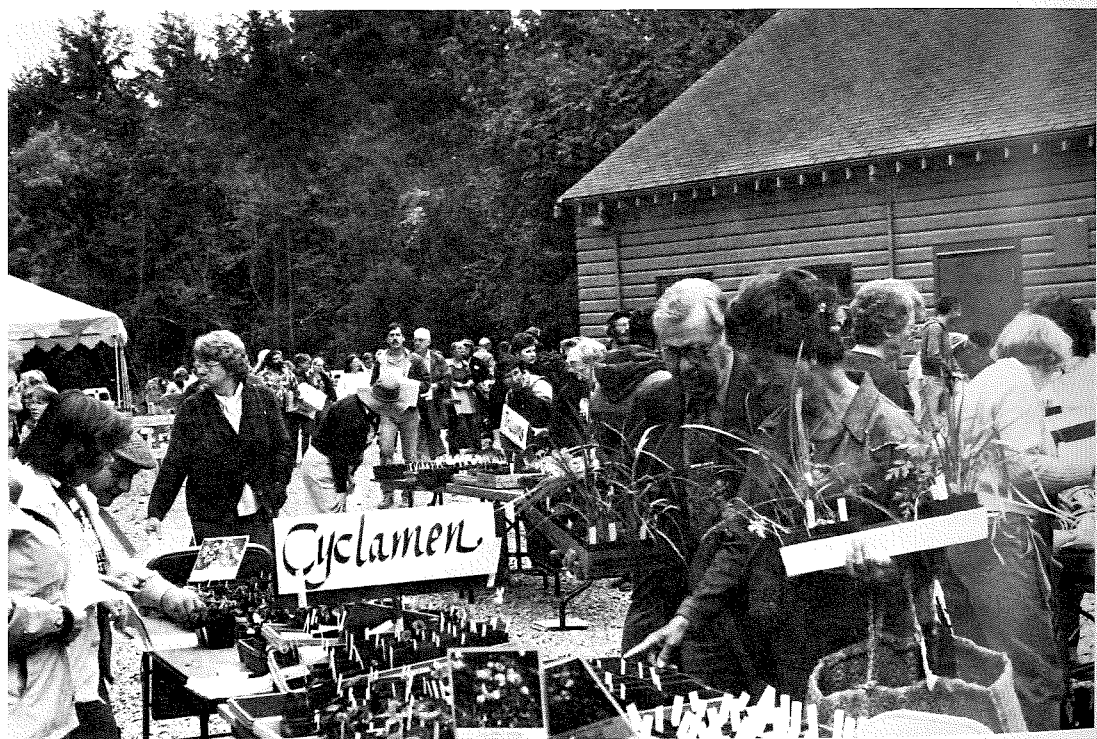
For many years the Unit Council sponsored the Hort-Affair, which was open to horticultural students from all over the Seattle and King County area, with lectures in the morning, followed by tours of the Arboretum in the afternoon. Hort-Affair is now run by the Center for Urban Horticulture with the help of the Unit Council and Arboretum guides.

Another interesting project was the seed exchange, handled by Unit 25. Seeds of unusual plant material from the Arboretum are mailed all over the world to other arboreta in exchange



Work and Fun Day on the rock Garden, April, 1956.

photo: E.F. Marten



Unit Council bulb sale, 1985.

photo: Joy Spurr

for equally interesting seed. For years members of Unit 25 didn't dare catch a cold — one sneeze into a packet of "5 only" seeds of some rare and exotic treasure from the mountains of Tibet could mean deep trouble. (The seed exchange is now performed by a group of volunteers organized by Van Bobbitt and Jan Pirzio-Biroli.)

This history would not be complete without mentioning the Pat Calvert Greenhouse which supplies plants for the plant sale and is used to train great numbers of people how to propagate from cuttings. In October, 1958 the Unit Council went to the Arboretum Foundation and the University of Washington to ask permission to build a greenhouse in response to a demand for more classes in propagation. Plans were drawn and it was completed in 1959. Tuesday was determined to be 'Greenhouse Day' and 26 years later this tradition still flourishes.

From 1975 to 1977, Dr. Hubertus Kohn from Western Washington University in Bellingham, requested help in collecting specimens for a frost hardiness experiment he was conducting. The Arboretum Foundation financed the project and the Unit Council did the leg work of cutting specimens of borderline tender plants (like *Eucalyptus* and *Taiwania cryptomeriodes*), packing them in plastic containers and putting them on a Greyhound bus for Bellingham. Amongst other financial support, the Foundation supplied Dr. Kohn with freezers for his experiments.

For several years after Brian Mulligan's retirement in 1972 the Arboretum was in limbo and lacked direction. Joe Witt was a reluctant acting director, his real love being the position of plant curator. Clearly a new director was essential to the future of the Arboretum. In 1978 the Arboretum Foundation offered to pay part of a new director's salary for five years, if the University of Washington would begin the hiring process. The following year, Dr. Harold Tukey was hired as head of the Center for Urban Horticulture

and Director of the University of Washington Arboreta programs.

The late 1970's and early 1980's should be called the hearing years. There were hearings on Montlake, 'tot lots', fences, building footprints, bike trails, joggers, dogs, kids on sleds versus plant lovers, horticulturists, education classes and bird watchers. The Arboretum Foundation helped support by endorsement and testimony, the University's efforts to keep non-horticulturally related activities out of the Arboretum.

Though progress is slow, the public is gradually becoming aware of the charm of Seattle's 'best kept secret', the Arboretum. The latest effort to involve the public in appreciation for our favorite garden spot, has been the Summer Stroll. This year it was held on Foster's Island, complete with music, food, balloons, bonzai displays and guided tours.

As time has passed, the Arboretum Foundation, comprised of old friends and new, has seen good times and bad. There are so many names to remember, people who have come and gone and left their mark in the pages of history of the Arboretum Foundation. Names like Donald Graham, Joe Witt, Bob van Denburgh, Pat Calvert, Pat Ballard, Lorreta Slater, Ted Rathje and so many more. But with love and dedication we have realized one of our goals — the building of the new Visitor Center. When the new building is completed, at the end of the year, the Arboretum Foundation will present it, as a gift, to the City of Seattle, and a new era of expanding the plant collections and improving the Arboretum in general will continue. We look to the future with renewed enthusiasm, and especially hope that a whole new generation of young men and women will join our ranks and share the enjoyment of working in, and learning about, our Arboretum in the years ahead.

