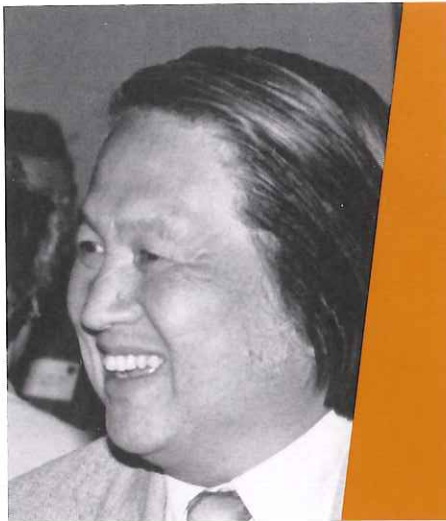


AABGA: The First Fifty Years

by Elizabeth Sullivan

This fall, the AABGA celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of its first official meeting. We thought this would be an appropriate time to interview people who have witnessed the growth of the Association during these first 50 years. We spoke with one of the Association's founding members, several past presidents of the Board, a key leader in public horticulture and the Association's first Executive Director. Here are some of their recollections of AABGA's past and their hopes for public horticulture's future.

Elizabeth Sullivan is the Assistant to the Director of the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta.

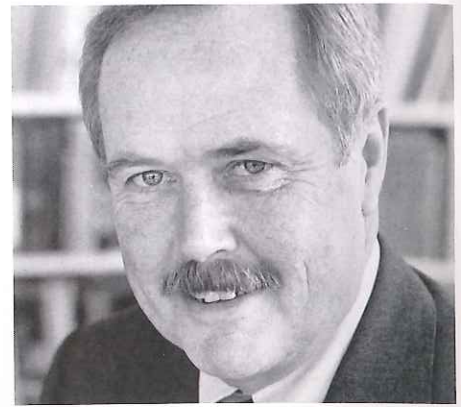


Francis Ching

Francis Ching is director emeritus of the Los Angeles County Department of Arboreta and Botanic Gardens. He came to LASCA in 1956 and moved through the ranks from grounds maintenance, research assistant, chief horticulturist, superintendent and finally to director in 1970, from which position he retired this year. Ching was president of the AABGA from 1980-1981.

Q Which AABGA annual meetings stand out in your mind and why?

A The meeting held here at Los Angeles State and County Arboretum in 1973 was really a landmark meeting for the Association. It was the first time in many years that the Association met independently of any other association and it brought together all the elements of public gardens—membership, public relations, administration, education and horticulture. Back in 1972, then president Joe Witt appointed a committee on future directions of the AABGA, and one of things that came out of that was that we should start having our own professional meetings, separate from those of any other organization, like the American Horticultural Society, with whom we had been meeting. We had to have our own meetings so that we could talk to each other on a professional basis and exchange information. A lot of people came to the 1973 meeting because they wanted to exchange information on education programs. LASCA was one of the first to develop education programs, and people wanted to learn from our experiences—how successful were our classes and workshops, how to cover costs and what to offer.



Roy L. Taylor

Dr. Taylor is president and CEO of the Chicago Horticultural Society and Director of the Chicago Botanic Garden. He is also an adjunct professor at the University of Illinois. Before coming to Chicago, Taylor was professor of plant sciences and director of the Botanical Garden at the University of British Columbia. Taylor presently serves as Chairman of the Accreditation Commission for the American Association of Museums. He was president of the AABGA from 1975-1977.

Q In your opinion, what challenges face today's public gardens?

A I think public gardens have a great opportunity right now to take a more active role in their communities. We are a unique resource, and in most communities that resource is underutilized. Arboreta and botanical gardens must face the challenge of educating the public as to what public gardens offer. For example, we can be a significant help in improving the quality of plant science education. Schools can use public gardens as living laboratories and classrooms, and communities can use them as a resource for alternative education programs. I think the other challenge we face is building good bridges between public gardens and other members of the museum community. We need to develop better relationships with museums so that botanical gardens and arboreta are recognized as integral players in the total museum community. There is great future ahead for public gardens, but we must look outward and not inward and accept the challenge.



Elizabeth McClintock

Dr. McClintock has spent much of her life researching the taxonomy and biogeography of California plants. She was Herbarium Botanist at the University of California, Los Angeles, from 1941-1947 and a curatorial staff member of the Department of Botany at the California Academy of Sciences from 1949-1977. McClintock continues to work as a Research Associate at the Herbarium of the University of California, Berkeley, and is collaborating on the Jepson Manual Project, a new flora for California being done by the Jepson Herbarium, University of California, Berkeley. McClintock was president of the AABGA from 1962-1963.

Q What changes have you seen in public gardens in the past 25 years?

A When I was president of the AABGA in the early sixties, gardens didn't have the community support that they do today. I think friends groups are becoming more and more important. The support botanical gardens receive from friends groups and volunteers in their communities has grown tremendously during the past 10 years. These people are highly motivated; they want to see their botanical garden promoted and well managed. Friends groups organize and sponsor various kinds of public programs such as plant sales, which are terrific fund raisers, and they play a key role in the education departments of many gardens.

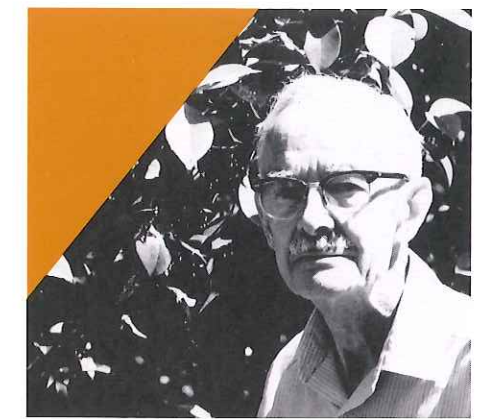


Donald Wyman

For 33 years Dr. Wyman was the Horticulturist at the Arnold Arboretum. His publications include *Wyman's Gardening Encyclopedia, Shrubs and Vines for American Gardens* and *The Saturday Morning Gardener*. A founding member of the AABGA, Wyman chaired the Association from 1940-1946.

Q What changes have you seen in public horticulture during the past 50 years?

A Horticulture is now accessible to nearly everyone, and I think that's great stuff. More and more people spend their leisure time gardening and visiting gardens. The man who used to spend his free time playing golf one day realizes that if he sticks certain twigs in the ground and keeps them moist, they will grow roots. Then he starts to learn about propagation, and he starts a garden with the plants he propagates. His wife gets interested and wants to learn more, so she goes to their local garden center which offers a wealth of horticultural books, from how-to books to solid references. Pretty soon the two of them are off visiting their local arboretum and learning about plants that grow in their area and choosing plants they want to add to their garden. The range of plants that are now available is remarkable. We have come a long way from the days when John Wister, Robert Pyle, myself and others would meet and discuss the problems of getting good plants into the country, past all the barriers the government put up.

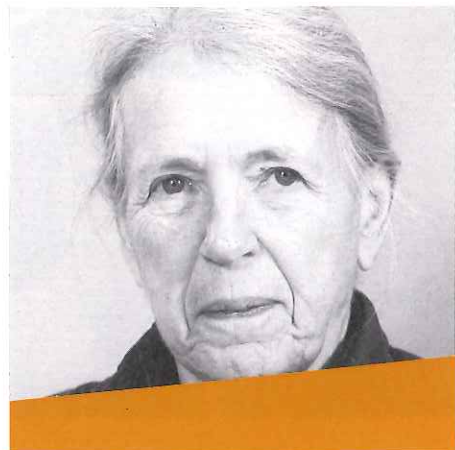


Brian O. Mulligan

A native of Ireland, Brian O. Mulligan left his position as assistant to the director at the Royal Horticultural Society's Gardens, Wisley, to come to the University of Washington in 1946 to be superintendent of its arboretum. A year later he became director of the Arboretum. Mulligan retired as director in 1972, but he still works there regularly as a volunteer. Mulligan was president of the AABGA from 1952-1953.

Q What do you see in the future for public horticulture?

A The future of public horticulture is evidently going to require more well-trained and properly qualified persons in all branches of the art, people capable of dealing with the increasing problems of unclean air and water, of bringing and maintaining green oases into cities and their suburbs while holding on to as many of our green and forested areas as we can. More work also lies ahead in finding and producing plants which will at least tolerate poorer growing conditions in and around our cities. Nursery people will have an important role to fill here, as will landscape architects and gardeners of all kinds and ages. The AABGA should be among the leaders in these objectives, cooperating with other like-minded associations wherever advisable.

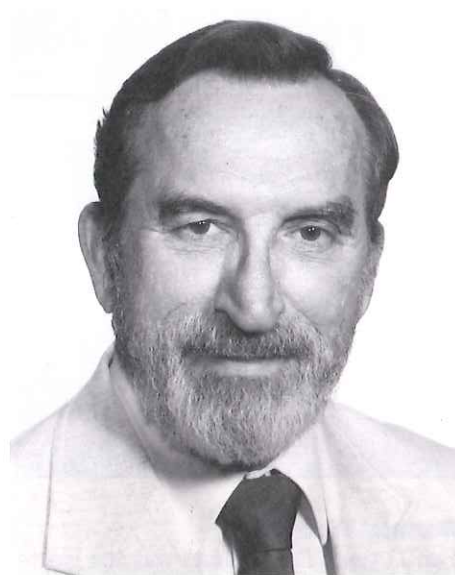


Mildred E. Mathias

Dr. Mathias has been a staff member at the University of California, Los Angeles, since 1947. She was Director of the Botanical Gardens from 1958-1968, Director of the Herbarium from 1968-1974 and a professor of botany from 1962-1974. She continues to teach as professor emeritus of botany. Mathias serves on the boards of numerous conservation and horticulture associations and is a frequent leader of trips to Costa Rica. Mathias was executive director of the AABGA from 1977-1981.

Q What responsibilities do you think botanical gardens should take on in the future?

A One of the things that I have thought about is that gardens should be looking at developing satellites. Satellites allow for testing plant introductions in different microclimates while maintaining the records in one centralized data base at the main garden headquarters. The Berkeley Botanical Garden has set up a sister garden relationship with the Wilson Garden in Costa Rica, and they have gotten grants from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust to computerize all the records in Costa Rica and send a computer specialist and their director down there to train people in Costa Rica to take over this work. Longwood Gardens sent their class down there last year, and the students went around and did a trail guide and wrote up the text. Longwood will be publishing that and sending copies to the gardens for distribution. I think a lot more of that servicing is going to happen. It provides an exchange back and forth between gardens in entirely different parts of the world. This is important if climates change as much as some people think they will.

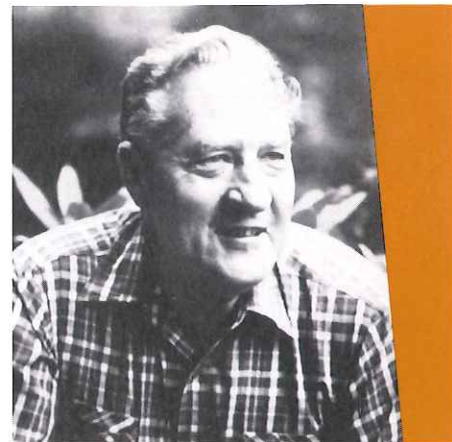


Joseph W. Oppe

Currently curator of the Mounts Botanical Garden in Florida, Oppe has also served as Director of the Dawes Arboretum, Director and College Horticulturist for the Scott Horticultural Foundation of Swarthmore College, Director of the Transition Zone Horticultural Institute and Director of the Dyck Arboretum of the Plains. Oppe was president of the AABGA from 1984-1985.

Q What do you see as the most critical period in AABGA's history?

A The little window in the early seventies—that's when it all fell into place. It was often said that much of what happened, happened on buses in those early days, going between gardens. The people involved in these discussions—Web Crowley, Dick Lighty, Sedgewick Moore, Francis Ching, Glen Park, myself and several others—were basically the ones who later on, around 1972, served on the ad hoc committee which I chaired to establish the future direction of the AABGA. From the midsixties until the early seventies, we developed a new perception of the Association and drew up a plan that would enable it to stand on its own and give public gardens the support they needed. Back in the sixties most gardens only offered garden club tours and such. Today gardens handle thousands of people, have thousands of members and offer a variety of programs. It's truly amazing, but the most amazing part is that back in the sixties we weren't really aware of how ready people were and how needy they were for the kinds of things public gardens could do.

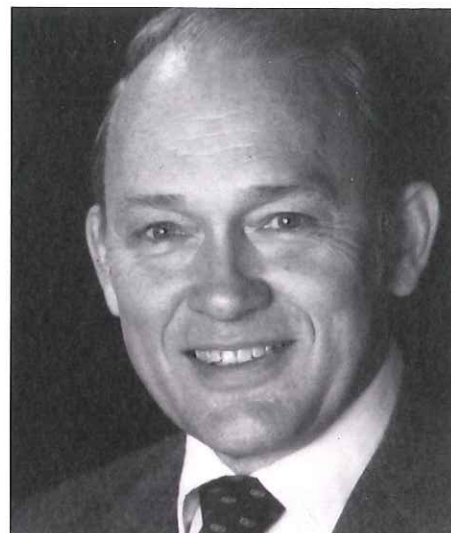


John L. Creech

Dr. Creech, a worldwide plant explorer, was Director of the U. S. National Arboretum from 1973-1980. He served as Interim Director of the Western North Carolina Arboretum from 1986-1987. Presently he is a horticultural consultant, free-lance writer, lecturer and tour leader.

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A Public horticulture as a national function better get its act together. There are too many leading organizations all of whom regard themselves as speaking nationally. AABGA looks on itself as a voice, and is a voice, for public gardens, but there is no one voice that covers all of horticulture. The reason that I'm concerned is that unless we get some kind of consortium, and we all speak from one viewpoint, we're never going to have any clout. A good illustration is the failure of the United States to actively have leadership in Expo 90, the international flower show in Osaka, of which I'm the American judge. Our exhibits are strictly local, whereas Canada has a marvellous environmental exhibit, Australia has a beautiful environmental plant exhibit, there are exhibits from all countries which reflect the national interest. I don't think that there was any common voice from American horticulture to put the pressure on our government to participate in the first international flower show in the Far East. There was a chance for us to demonstrate what our leadership might be in the environmental world.

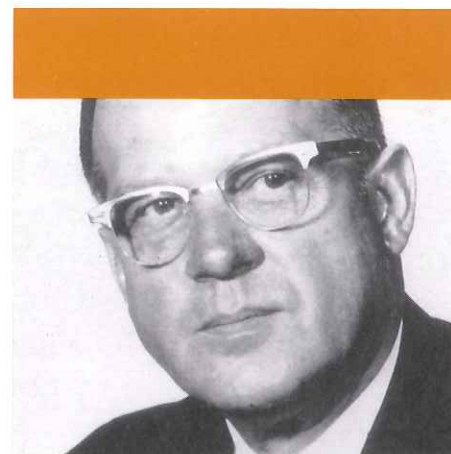


Richard W. Lighty

Dr. Lighty was in charge of research at Longwood Gardens from 1960-1966. In 1966 he became coordinator of the Longwood Graduate Program of the University of Delaware. In 1983, Mrs. Lamot du Pont Copeland engaged him to direct the development of her estate into a public garden and research site for plants native to the Piedmont region of eastern North America. Lighty was president of the Association from 1978-1979.

Q When you look back over past AABGA Annual Meetings, which ones stand out in your mind and why?

A The meeting at the University of Washington in 1972 was a turning point. We all sat around in a storage room because that was the only place we could find, and we just laid everything out on the table. It was a very exciting meeting. It really was the point at which the old guard stepped aside. It was as though they said, "We have confidence in these younger people. We've done our share, and now it is time for you young people with all your great ideas." I think that is very important in the evolution of an organization; after the Association puts faith in you and gives you power and you do what you think is right, then the proper thing to do is to step aside so the organization can move on to the next higher level. The AABGA has steadily moved on from plateau to plateau to plateau. Those of us at the beginning only dreamed that we would grow as much as we have. I have high hopes that the AABGA will continue this upward evolution.



John E. Voight

John Voight is the former Director of Botanical Gardens and District Park Supervisor for the Milwaukee County Park Commission, where for 48 years he managed over 3,500 acres including Boerner Botanical Gardens. Voight was president of the AABGA from 1960 to 1961.

Q What do you see as a critical period in AABGA's history?

A 1950 was a critical year for the AABGA. After being affiliated with the American Institute of Park Executives for 10 years, we surveyed our members and decided to strike out on our own. We thought we could best serve public gardens by becoming an independent association. In those days, most arboreta and botanical gardens merely tolerated the public. Little was done for those who visited the facilities. The AABGA therefore recommended that its members develop programs and interpretive materials at their gardens. Labelling was quite an issue. Plastics had come on the market, and gardens began to label their collections with engraved plastic labels. When we met in St. Louis in 1946, Clarence Godshalk, who was Director of the Morton Arboretum, brought along an exhibit of his experiments with labelling styles and techniques and spurred us on to update our own labelling systems.

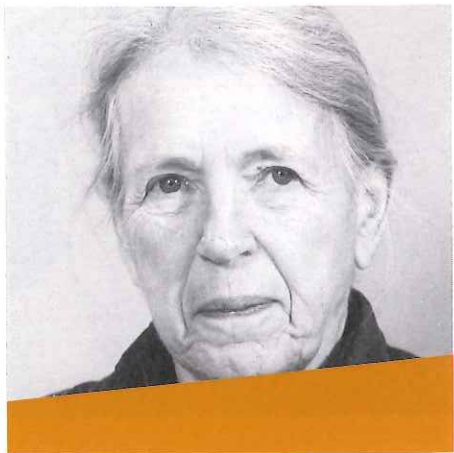


Fred Widmoyer

Dr. Widmoyer is a professor of horticulture and former head of the Horticulture Department at New Mexico State University where he has taught since 1963. He was Secretary-Treasurer of the AABGA from 1962-1980 and President from 1982-1983.

Q How did public gardens become accepted as official members of the museum community?

A About 1975, the AABGA became interested in developing an accreditation program and formed an accreditation committee which Henry Norweb chaired. We then met with the American Association of Museums which had already established its own accreditation program. We finally decided to have a cooperative arrangement with AAM for accreditation since its program was already in place. That led to a supplemental form for arboreta and botanical gardens that was part of the application for AAM accreditation. The word "museum" had to be redefined to include arboreta, botanical gardens and aquaria, so Francis Ching, Dick Lighty, Joe Oppe and myself discussed this matter with the newly formed Institute of Museum Services. By 1977, public gardens had museum status. The IMS then began to participate in our meetings and inform public garden people about funding opportunities and answer their questions on how to apply for IMS grants.



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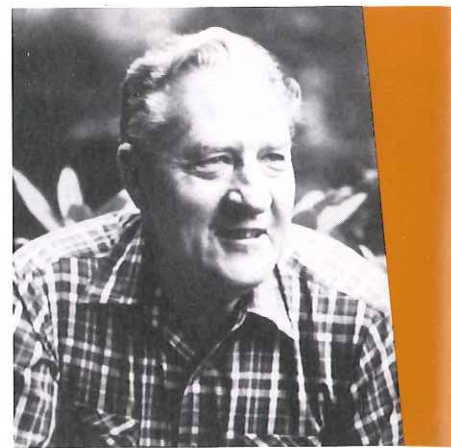


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