

Leaflet

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Margo Bors

Two reasons to celebrate the Helen Crocker Russell Library of Horticulture



Strybing Arboretum Society members, trustees, and volunteers celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Library concurrent with the 34th annual meeting of the Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries this April.

Plants & People: A Regional Perspective

by Barbara M. Pitschel, Head Librarian

April was a double-header month for the Helen Crocker Russell Library of Horticulture (HCRL), as we celebrated the library's 30th anniversary and welcomed the 34th annual meeting of the Council on Botanical and Horticultural Libraries (CBHL) to San Francisco. CBHL is the leading professional organization in the field of botanical and horticultural information services, dedicated to collecting, preserving, and making accessible the accumulated knowledge about plants for present and future generations. About 60 people from libraries of botanical gardens, universities, museums, and government agencies throughout the United States and Canada were co-hosted by the libraries of Strybing Arboretum Society (SAS) and the California Academy of Sciences (CAS) for their first Bay Area conference in more than 20 years. The theme was "Plants & People: a Regional Perspective."

Our vision was to make this conference significant, special, and meaningful by presenting key people in relevant fields to share their concepts, viewpoints, and accrued wisdom. We capitalized on our working relationships with people and institutions representing the conservation, horticulture, botany, restoration, history, and documentation infrastructure of the San Francisco Bay Area. They were eager to help present a clear picture of how all these disciplines work together within our region to serve the common goal of responsible and ethical management of the landscape.

Since we were in the beautiful San Francisco Bay Area, we decided to structure our program as much as possible as a series of on-site seminars. We visited gardens, natural areas, libraries, archives, and herbaria, where we gained information in a show-and-tell setting. In a letter of thanks, Judy Reed, New York Botanical Garden, expressed it well: "Tours were like outdoor lectures. The one at Muir Woods was like a graduate course!"

Plants & People



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The meeting was based at the Canterbury Hotel, a downtown slice of old San Francisco, where copies of *The Canterbury Tales* in the night-stands and a greenhouse-restaurant were perfect for book and plant people. We were the only conference scheduled during that week and meeting space was dedicated to our needs.

A popular pre-conference workshop presented by information specialists from Missouri and New York Botanical Gardens addressed the many aspects of a digitization project. Contrary to popular belief, scanning is just one of many issues involved in digitizing unique and specific collections. Project scope, audience, ownership of materials, preservation, access, and metadata analysis and standards are equally important. A book bazaar and reception formally opened the conference at Lehr's Greenhouse Restaurant. A diverse group of authors, publishers, and booksellers set up displays and sales among the succulent hors d'oeuvres. HCRL's updated bibliography of children's books—increased from 500 to 1100 titles—debuted here.

In a keynote presentation the next day in Golden Gate Park, Dr. Ann Dennis introduced CalFlora, a web-based resource for information, population location, and digital images of California native plants. To serve conservation and research needs, both SAS and CAS have been contributing photographs to CalFlora. CBHL's 2002 Annual Literature Awards were presented to *Lichens of North America* (technical) and *Bamboos for Gardens* (popular). Steve Sharnoff gave a touching overview of the work he and his late wife Sylvia did to create their amazing photographs for the lichens book. Tours of the CAS Library, Biodiversity Center, Herbarium, and Botany Department were followed by lunch at the National AIDS Memorial Grove and an inspiring presentation by Jack Porter about the history, growth, and operation of this tranquil and moving place. SABG and Conservatory of Flowers Director Scot Medbury and special assistant Jim Henrich followed with a fascinating behind-the-scenes tour of the Conservatory of Flowers restoration efforts in progress. Informational and inspirational tours of Strybing Arboretum & Botanical Gardens (SABG) were led by horticultural staff members and library-friendly docents.

For Strybing, the highlight of the conference was Wednesday evening. We hosted a festive celebration attended by several

hundred well-wishers to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the original Library dedication on April 11, 1972. A very special commemorative tree—*Schima wallichii*, a monotypic Asian evergreen in the Camellia family (Theaceae)—was planted by the six past and present Strybing librarians in attendance. The evening also celebrated an exhibition of beautiful photographs of California native plants by members of the California Native Plant Society's Yerba Buena Chapter.

Conference attendees were included as guests at the CAS Wednesday evening members' meeting, specially targeted to our audience's interests. Dr. Tom Daniel fascinated everyone with his slide presentation about early Bay Area botanists, the remnant populations of local native plants, and an ongoing project that will result in a new, expanded flora of San Francisco.

A day in Berkeley started with beautiful and information-packed tours of the Regional Parks Botanic Garden of native California plants. A visit to UC Berkeley Botanical Garden included lunch, visits with key staff, and docent-led tours of the gardens. Participants had the rich opportunity to visit the Environmental Design Library and Archives, the Biosciences Library, and the University and Jepson Herbaria and to see rare and significant collections. In the evening, visitors enjoyed a little local color, with host-guided visits to

interesting restaurants around San Francisco. Several groups ended the evening with a lively and scenic cable car ride back to the hotel.

Friday morning saw panels on "Working With Volunteers" and "Children's Collections and Services" coordinated, moderated, and presented by meeting participants. Exceptionally stunning afternoon tours of Filoli Gardens were led by director of horticulture Lucy Tolmach and members of her skilled horticultural staff. A visit to Filoli libraries included a great treasure of the Filoli collection, the Banks *Florilegium*, which consists of 738 botanical engravings of plants collected by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander on Captain Cook's first voyage around the world in 1768–71. Besides their intrinsic beauty, in many cases these were the first scientific drawings of plants from New Zealand and Eastern Australia.

On Friday evening, the traditional banquet that closes the meeting was held in the fascinating CAS native ecosystem exhibit hall, Wild California, where we shared a beautiful evening complete with regional ambiance, a delicious dinner, and congenial company. Long-time CBHL member Los Angeles Arboretum librarian Joan DeFato received the highest-possible CBHL honor,



Betsy Flack

(l to r) Barbara Pitschel, Diane Zuentd, Kim Ginther-Webster, Kathleen Fisher, Jane Gates, Margot Sheffner, and Larry Currie line up behind the *Schima wallichii* planted in honor of the event.

the Charles Robert Long Award for outstanding service in the field. Dr. Frank Almeda, CAS botanist and SAS board member, presented a fascinating after-dinner talk accentuating the biodiversity of the Mesoamerican region, with special focus on Costa Rica. He highlighted the productive CAS/SAS collaborations that have brought our botanical and horticultural strengths together to accomplish our conservation and preservation goals.

Many participants took advantage of three optional post-conference tours. A wine country trip to Sonoma and Napa counties included an incredible garden tour, lunch, and wine-tasting led by Peter Newton at his vineyard estate, an introduction to Asian plants and their conservation at the unique Quarryhill Botanic Garden, and other garden and winery visits.

Dick Turner organized a very special tour to the private gardens of East Bay horticulturists: Ruth Bancroft's Garden Conservancy treasure of succulent plants; the garden of Katherine Greenberg, librarian, landscape architect, and president of the Mediterranean Garden Society; Ron Lutsko, creator of Strybing's award-winning native plant garden; and the Maybeck property of Roger Raiche and David McCrory, who created Strybing's Entry Garden. Savvy attendees realized that it is not possible to privately recreate this experience.

The nature tour began with an awe-inspiring visit to Muir Woods led by noted ranger/naturalist Mia Monroe, followed by lunch and wildflowers atop Mt. Tamalpais. A tour of Judith Larner Lowry's wildland-interface garden, the inspiration for her book, *Gardening with a Wild Heart*, followed. A beautiful drive along coastal bluffs in glorious spring weather concluded at the San Francisco Presidio, our new national park, where Pete Holloran showed us Lobos Dunes rare plant restoration, nursery, and Crissy Field wetlands.

It pleases me to share the great success of this meeting with our readers. It is impossible to individually thank everyone who worked so hard to make it happen, but particular acknowledgment goes to my conference planning committee: CAS Academy Librarian Anne Marie Malley, CAS User Services Librarian Lawrence Currie, SAS Associate Librarian Kathleen Fisher, former SAS Head Librarian Jane Potter Gates, City College of San Francisco librarian Brian Lym, and *Pacific Horticulture* editor Richard G. Turner, Jr. Co-hosting was a great experience for the library staffs of both SAS and CAS, as it enabled us to strengthen existing bonds and to build more bridges between our two institutions. Dozens of outstanding presenters, organizers, volunteers, and staff contributed their efforts to make the conference a resounding success. Innovative concepts were presented and a great deal of useful information was made available for people to take back as a working model for adaptation to their own areas. And the whole week was cast in an atmosphere of show-and-tell on-site beauty.

As I go into the next year serving my term as CBHL president, and as Kathleen Fisher takes on the task of chairing the CBHL Resource Sharing Committee, we look forward to supporting our lodestar organization, which will, in turn, strengthen our abilities as individual institutions to better serve the information needs of our patrons.



The Librarians have just planted a *Schima wallichii* in honor of the Library's 30th Anniversary and CBHL's 34th Annual Meeting. (l to r, wall) Bookstore Manager and former Assistant Librarian Margot Sheffner, former Assistant Librarian Larry Currie, Head Librarian Barbara Pitschel, retired Head Librarian Jane Gates, Kim Ginther-Webster, Diane Zuendt; (l to r, front) Associate Librarian Kathleen Fisher, and SABG Director Scot Medbury.



Head Librarian Barbara Pitschel (l) and retired Head Librarian Jane Gates (r) discussed life at the Library during the 1980s when Jane was the head librarian and Barbara was the assistant/associate.



SABG Director Scot Medbury takes a walk on the Library Terrace garden wall.

Photos by Betsy Flack