

AHS 80th Anniversary: 1922–2002



From the President

by Linda D. Hallman

AS WE REVISIT the formative years of the American Horticultural Society, it strikes me how much the reactions of the Society's members during the 1930s and 1940s, a time of great national crisis, parallel the feelings we have today in the wake of last year's terrorist attacks.



Crises have a way of bringing people together, and this feeling seems particularly strong among the already close-knit community of gardeners.

Whatever their specialty—from rock gardens to roses and herbs—all gardeners share a common bond as caretakers of the soil and nurturers of plant life.

Given the prevailing national spirit of togetherness, this is a good time to seek better ways for our many gardening and horticultural groups to communicate and interact. Studies tell us gardening is the true national pastime, with more than 70 million active participants. Many belong to gardening groups, but this tremendous pool of enthusiasm, expertise, and vitality they represent is dissipated by the lack of an effective way to share knowledge and resources at a national level.

It is our hope at AHS that we can serve as a unifying force and link between plant societies, flower and garden shows, garden clubs, Master Gardeners, and gardening organizations. We will be working closely with regional gardening groups at both our Great American Gardeners Annual Conference in Seattle and the 10th Annual Children and Youth Garden Symposium in California this summer. We hope you will join AHS at one or both of those events.

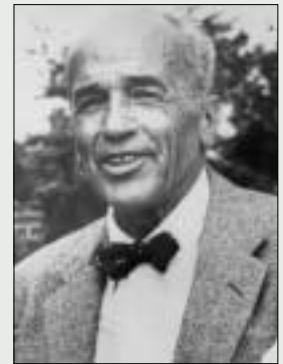
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The War Years (1938–1947)

As the world hovered on the brink of war in 1938, the indefatigable Benjamin Y. Morrison was serving as both president of AHS and editor of its acclaimed magazine. The next decade would see a lull in the Society's activities and slow steps by some members to develop a separate organization to serve as a national umbrella group for American horticulture.

"In the difficult financial times during and just after the war, it's fair to say Morrison was the society," says John L. Creech, a former AHS president and director of the U.S. National Arboretum. "In that period, the activities of the Society were closely entwined with the scientific staff at the National Arboretum and the Beltsville, Maryland, research facility." In addition to writing many articles himself, Morrison—who was director of the National Arboretum at that time—persuaded many of his co-workers to contribute articles and photographs to the magazine.

Although the main focus was on the magazine, one important development during this period was the Society's institution of a Silver Medal—a forerunner to the current National Awards program.



B.Y. Morrison, the guiding spirit of AHS during and after World War II.

United Horticulture

While the Society was going through lean times, several people active in the Society were pursuing the idea of forming a separate organization that would serve as an umbrella group for horticulture. This movement actually got its start in 1927, when rosarian and horticultural publisher J. Horace McFarland proposed a movement toward a union of all horticultural interests in this country under the name "United Horticulture." A committee was appointed to "discover some way of coordinating the decidedly overlapping activities of our many organizations."

In 1946, "United Horticulture" came to fruition under the auspices of the American Horticultural Council, which was officially formed during the First American Horticultural Congress—a precursor to AHS's current annual conference—held in Cleveland, Ohio.

The legendary Cornell University horticulturist Liberty Hyde Bailey delivered the keynote address at that first meeting in Cleveland, expressing the hope that "a great United Horticulture might have a speaker signify what is best, get people together to talk matters over, to hear a speaker who can pronounce sound opinions with authority, to bring plants and compare them, what their merits and demerits are. It is a wonderful thing to bring together this harmony of understanding."

The Council was established to "unite by friendly association leaders in the American horticultural world." From 1948 until the end of 1959, when it merged with AHS, the Council served as a forceful coordinating organization for horticulture in this country.