

AHS 80th Anniversary: 1922–2002



≈ AHS Retrospective ≈

AHS IN TRANSITION: (1948–1960)

IN 1948, as America moved into a post-war economic and social boom, the Society's membership stood at less than 2,000, and its leadership faced important decisions about the direction of the organization. The next decade would see a transition from a mainly volunteer-run association to one run by a professional staff, and an expansion of the Society's publications and programs. "During that period some changes were made to try to bolster the Society's status and membership," says retired plant explorer John Creech, who was AHS president from 1953 to 1956 and later served as a director of the U.S. National Arboretum.

"These included publishing an interim newsletter to supplement the quarterly magazine, moving toward color photographs in the magazine, and hiring paid staff."

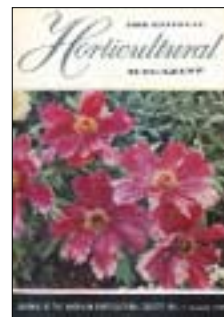
Until the 1950s, the Society had existed mainly through the efforts of a corps of dedicated volunteers, most notably the workhorse editor of the Society's acclaimed *National Horticultural Magazine*, Benjamin Y. Morrison. But Morrison was preparing to retire from his full-time position as director of the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., so it became clear that a successor needed to be found. In 1950, James R. Harlow, a Morrison protégé at the National Arboretum, was hired to assist him with the magazine.

Morrison retired from the Arboretum and moved to Mississippi in 1951, but with Harlow's help continued to edit the magazine until 1964, completing a 37-year tenure as a "volunteer" editor of what he had almost single-handedly turned into the most authoritative horticultural publication in America. In Oc-

tober 1954, the last of Morrison's hand-cut woodcuts of plants graced the cover of the magazine. In 1955 a new cover design debuted, featuring photographs or drawings of plants against a colored background.

BROADENING OUTREACH

The Society was particularly low on funds at that time, and for a while in the early 1950s, AHS headquarters was listed as 1600 Bladensburg Road in Washington, D.C., which, Creech says, was "a rented apartment above a flower shop across from the entrance to the National Arboretum." For the first time, a membership recruitment campaign was instituted in 1951.



broaden its outreach to members.

To supplement the quarterly magazine, a newsletter titled the "AHS Gardener's Forum" was launched in January 1957. John R. Deatherage was first editor of the newsletter, which came out eight times a year. Articles in the newsletter were shorter and less formal than those in the magazine, focusing on current horticultural news and keeping members abreast of Society activities and events.

In 1958, the Society sponsored publication of *The Azalea Book*, written by Frederic P. Lee and published by D. Van Nostrand Company of Princeton, New Jersey. The book, an expansion of an azalea handbook published in the January 1952 issue of the magazine, was among the

AHS Presidents 1948–1960

Henry E. Allanson (1947–1948)
Fred O. Coe (1949–1951)
Freeman A. Weiss (1951–1953)
John L. Creech (1953–1956)
Donovan S. Correll (1956–1957)
Stuart M. Armstrong (1957–1959)
Richard P. White (1959–1961)

best references on the topic available at that time and brought the Society valuable income in the form of royalties. A second edition was issued in 1965.

A year later, the Society instituted what has over the years become a favorite program with members—an annual seed distribution, now called the Annual Seed Exchange. According to Creech, this new program succeeded mainly because of the efforts of active volunteers Francis Patten-Knight and Grace P. Wilson.

IMPORTANT MERGER

As the 1950s came to a close, the Society's membership had increased to nearly 5,000, and it was negotiating a merger with the American Horticultural Council (AHC), a like-minded organization that had been established in 1946 to serve as an umbrella group for horticulture (for more on the AHC, see the AHS 80th Anniversary article in the March/April 2002 issue of *The American Gardener*).

The merger, seen as a way of pooling resources and talents from both organizations was approved in November 1959 and became effective January 6, 1960, with the hybrid organization going forward under the name of the American Horticultural Society. The Society's stated objective was "to promote and encourage national interest in scientific research and education in horticulture and all of its branches."

Next issue: *The turbulent 1960s*