

AHS 80th Anniversary: 1922–2002



≈ AHS Retrospective ≈

AHS IN TRANSITION: (1960–1972)

AHS Presidents 1961–1972

Donald Wyman (1961–1962)
Henry T. Skinner (1962–1963)
Russell J. Seibert (1963–1965)
John H. Walker (1965–1967)
Fred C. Galle (1967–1970)
David G. Leach (1970–1974)

WITH THE MERGER of the American Horticultural Society (AHS) and the American Horticultural Council (AHC) in 1960, the long-held vision of a national umbrella group for American horticulture was finally realized. The new constitution and by-laws contained the best policies and most cherished ideals of the two organizations. The motto “For United Horticulture” appeared on the masthead of the Society’s quarterly periodical, which was renamed the *American Horticultural Magazine*.

The 1960s was a turbulent period in the United States, but with the leadership of a who’s-who list of horticultural luminaries, the Society forged ahead with several significant projects; these included cooperating in the development of the first USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map, creating a special facility to maintain computerized plant records from national botanical gardens and arboreta, and initiating a special service to answer members’ gardening questions.

HARDINESS MAP

The first edition of the United States Department of Agriculture Plant Hardiness Zone Map, published in 1960 by USDA in cooperation with the Society, was a landmark event, providing gardeners for the first time with detailed information on what plants would survive winter temperatures in different regions of the continental United States. The map was the brainchild of a 1953 AHC committee chaired by Henry T. Skinner, the second director of the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C.

PLANT RECORDS CENTER

The Society’s most important project of the 1960s, however, was the development of the AHS Plant Records Center (PRC)

in 1968 at the Tyler Arboretum in Lima, Pennsylvania. Funded by grants from the Longwood Foundation, the project was the first attempt to computerize plant records for major American arboreta and botanic gardens.

The idea for the PRC was developed during the 17th International Horticultural Congress held in 1966 at the University of Maryland. After the American Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta (AABGA) conducted a feasibility study, the project was turned over to the Society. “In time, we hope to store in our data banks...information on hundreds of plant collections, both public and private, throughout the United States, to make available to gardeners everywhere a vast amount of plant knowledge never before



David G. Leach, AHS President from 1970 to 1974.

recorded in one unit in quickly retrievable form,” wrote AHS President Fred C. Galle in the Summer 1969 AHS newsletter. This plan never came to fruition, however, because the very technology that made the PRC feasible soon rendered it obsolete. As computers became smaller, less expensive, and easier to use, public gardens began maintaining their own records.

GARDENER’S INFORMATION SERVICE

In early 1969, a special committee began investigating how to handle the overwhelming number of gardening questions coming in from AHS members nationwide. Soon afterwards, the Society’s Gardener’s Information Service (GIS)—a network of experts who could provide authoritative answers to an array of gardening problems—came into being. Because questions had to be mailed out to the experts, however, it often took weeks for responses to arrive. Since that time, this popular member benefit has evolved considerably; thanks to a toll-free hotline and e-mail, many gardening questions are answered the same day they are received.

PUBLICATIONS CHANGES

After nearly 40 years as editor of the Society’s magazine, the legendary B.Y. Morrison retired in 1964 and died two years later. In 1972 the magazine was renamed *American Horticulturist* and—with the idea of attracting a wider variety of members—redesigned in both size and format to look less like a professional journal and more like a magazine. In 1968, the Society’s newsletter, the “AHS Gardener’s Forum,” also got a facelift and was renamed “News & Views.”

MOVE TO ALEXANDRIA

In 1971, with David G. Leach, a renowned rhododendron breeder and author taking office as 22nd president, the Society relocated its offices from Washington, D.C. to Alexandria, Virginia. This move, precipitated by the need for more space to house a growing AHS staff, foreshadowed the Society’s next big step—the establishment of a permanent headquarters at George Washington’s River Farm in 1973.