

Centennial Meeting

MINUTES OF THE 922nd NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB MEETING
NOVEMBER 1, 1996

The following was provided by Lisa A. Standley, Recording Secretary



*Two 50+ year members meet -- Fred Steele (standing, right) greets Dr. Reed Rollins (past president, seated).
Ms. Kathryn Rollins is seated at right.*

The 695th meeting of the New England Botanical Club, Inc., being the 922nd since the original organization, met at the Harvard Faculty Club with 85 members and guests present. The Centennial Banquet departed from tradition by offering the social hour and cocktails before the dinner and meeting. Conversation was lively, and the organizers were hard-pressed to move the Club members on to the dining room. Tables were decorated with shiny metallic leaves and dried arrangements featuring the native, introduced, and garden flora of New England (with the exotics adding the most color). [A list of the 24 species used may be found at the end of this summary.]

Dinner was excellent, and featured orange-ginger-carrot soup, watercress and spinach salad with mushrooms and orange slices, sauteed chicken breast and lobster medallions with basil sauce, and fresh fruit tarts.

President Don Hudson omitted the usual reading of the minutes, old business, and gossip in order to proceed with the Centennial celebration. He introduced the long-term members (in addition to Dick Howard) in attendance: Dick Goodwin, Reed Rollins, Fred Steele, Dick Schultes, and Fred Taylor - all members for more than 50 years. Don thanked Nancy Eyster-Smith and Ray Angelo for their superb effort in organizing the banquet. Don noted that he felt like an old-time member, with more than 20 years of involvement in the Club. He treasures a copy of Vol. 3 of *Rhodora* that includes J. R. Churchill's account of an excursion to Mt. Katahdin, with the wonderful sentence " ... through farewell torrents of rain, submerged forests and corduroy roads, our little party dispersed, in the diverse directions in which pleasure or duty called" - a tradition that the Club's monthly meetings continue to uphold.

Les Mehrhoff introduced the evening's speaker, Dr. Richard A. Howard. Dick joined the Club in 1940, prior to receiving his PhD from Harvard in 1942. Former Director of the Arnold Arboretum and Science Director at the New York Botanical Garden, as well as Past President of the NEBC (1952-53), Dick is known for his research on the flora of the Caribbean. He also holds the record for speaking at commemorative Club milestones. Dick was the featured speaker at the 700th and 800th meetings of the Club.

The evening's presentation was entitled "An Illustrated History of the New England Botanical Club." Rather than speak on the early history of the Club, which was addressed by other speakers earlier in this Centennial year, Dr. Howard provided an overview of the environment in which the Club emerged. The latter half of the nineteenth century was rife with local learned societies. Many of the extant scientific organizations have their roots in this period - the American Philosophical Society, AAAS, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society were all founded at approximately the same time. The NEBC is unusual in that it had always included professionals and amateurs, focused on botany, held field trips, published a scholarly journal, and started as a "gentlemen's club". The NEBC is also unusual in that it has operated for a century without a change in name or organization.

Key prior organizations included the Linnaean Society, which sponsored the Lowell Free Lectures and Teacher's School of Science. The Linnaean Society became the Boston Museum of Natural History, and eventually was reestablished as the Museum of Science. Lyceums were self-help study groups and debating societies, which led to a lively industry in invited speakers to augment limited local talent. Emerson and Thoreau were popular traveling speakers. The Worcester Lyceum became the New England Science Center.

Natural History Societies were founded in several locations, including the Essex County Natural History Society which became the Essex Institute, now merged with the Peabody Museum. The Agassiz Association of Lenox contained 20,000 members at its peak, but expelled members who failed to supply exchange specimens. Scientific clubs, such as the Cambridge Science Club founded by Asa Gray, were organized to provide opportunities for good conversation and food. Botanical clubs were specialized scientific clubs, and included the Torrey Botanical Club (the oldest botanical club); the Connecticut Valley Botanical Society (open to women - reported to have "very animated meetings"); the American Botanical Club (now the Botanical Society of America, which restricted membership to professionals); and the Josselyn Botanical Club, founded in 1895, with Kate Furbish as Vice President.

The New England Botanical Club was founded a year later, in 1896, by seven professional and ten amateur botanists. The Club's founders, particularly George L. Goodale, had all been involved in other local scientific clubs and organizations. The goals of the founders were to organize a club to study the New England and alpine flora. The name of the Club's journal, *Rhodora*, was deliberately chosen to correspond with the goal of studying the flora in the natural range of *Rhododendron lapponicum*! Dr. Howard provided brief sketches of some of the Club's founding members: Joseph R. Churchill, a judge and banker; William G. Farlow, to whom we owe the current old herbarium building (he left his collection to Harvard on the condition that it be moved to a fireproof building); Charles E. Faxon, who drew the plates for Sargent's *Sylva*, despite his training as an engineer; George L. Goodale, who was a highly successful fundraiser and apparently tireless teacher; Edwin L. Rand, who focused on Mt. Desert, Maine; Charles S. Sargent, who entertained lavishly; Roland Thaxter, the first club president to offer travel talks; and Benjamin M. Watson, credited with introducing the Japanese honeysuckle.

The early years of the Club were prolific and occurred in an era of intense interest in the local flora. Mary Day, the legendary Gray Herbarium librarian, identified 61 private herbaria in New England in the early 1900's. Robinson cited 365 individual local floras in his edition of Gray's Manual. The first three years of *Rhodora* contained advertising both commercial and personal, including ads for travel on the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad that listed the plants that could be collected in large numbers along the railroad route, including *Pedicularis furbishii*.

Dick concluded with an eclectic list of NEBC Trivia: Graduate student awards were started in 1985; Harold St. John was, at his death at age 99, the oldest member - an honor now held by Wayne Manning, age 97; Bill Benninghof is the only member buried in Arlington National Cemetery; Six members have been university presidents (of seven universities); George Cooley is probably the only member to fall into a volcano. Notable doggerel include a March 1900 poem by Edwin Lothrop Rand entitled "Me Judice" : "... all our plants were indigene / in the youth of Walter Deane", and a suggested epitaph for Arthur Pease "Here lies not the peas but only the pod / Pease shelled out and went to God." Dick closed with a poem he commissioned Maurice Sagoff to compose in celebration of the Club's Centennial.

Banquet centerpieces contained 24 species. The centerpieces for the centennial banquet were collected and arranged by Nancy M. Eyster-Smith. Members spotted the following species in the arrangements, even under dim banquet lighting: *Aquilegia* sp., *Artemisia* cf. *vulgaris*, *Asclepias syriaca*, *Celastrus orbiculatus*, *Daucus carota*, *Eragrostis spectabilis*, *Helianthus tuberosus*,

Hypericum perforatum, Lespedeza capitata, Linaria vulgaris, Nelumbo sp., Oxydendrum arboreum, Phragmites communis, Physalis alkekengi, Polygonum cuspidatum, Rhus glabra, Rosa multiflora, Rudbeckia hirta, Rumex crispus, Schizachyrium scoparium, Solidago cf. gigantea, Spartina pectinata, Tanacetum vulgare, Typha latifolia.

The following poem composed for the occasion by bard, Maurice Sagoff, was read by banquet speaker, Dr. Richard A. Howard, at this Centennial Banquet meeting which was held at the Harvard Faculty Club on Nov.1, 1996.

Ode on the Centenary of the New England Botanical Club

If you've enjoyed the historical show
you'll surely be pardoned for feeling a glow
of real satisfaction and well-deserved pride
in what's been portrayed by each story and slide;
So here's to our Club! Though a hundred years old
its greater achievements have yet to be told ...;
We count in our membership leaders in Botany,
proven achievers; some Clubs haven't got any --
members of Fishing clubs may not have caught any,
Hunt clubs don't care if you never have shot any,
Teachers in Unions may hardly have taught any,
even some legionnaires may not have fought any!
But to our credit, our workers in Botany
truly have shown they are worthy of fame ---
I'll mention a dozen at random, by name:
there's Fernald and Merrill and Harris and Bean,
there's Bogle and Hodgdon and Walker and Pease,
Barrington, Weatherby, Nickerson, Crow,
Eaton and Knowlton and Ray Angelo;
if your name's not here with our sisters and brothers,
I'll add to the list the addendum -- "and others".

Our member's professional writings abound
in volumes of vital research: we have found
Botanical treasures the world never knew
as well as a gaggle of trivia, too;
For instance, one member has found that Linnaeus
once grumbled; "No matter how much they may pay us,
you can be sure that this wicked economy
shortly will lay a tremendous Tax on o me!"
(That derivation is open to question
but someone will find a more valid suggestion).

Now, is there a Club that can mark its Centenary
so free of corruption and scandal and venery?
Minds so devoted to pleasures botanic
that some of our spouses regard us as manic!
Some of this group are re-visiting Harvard,
some come to find out what's been lately "discovered";
some meet their old colleagues and thump on their shoulder

and tell them they don't look a single bit older!
Some come to relax and perhaps get a snoot-ful
but for most, the occasion is sober and fruitful --
A time to reflect on the glorious past,
and a time when our eye on the future is cast;
the next hundred years for the students of Botany
surely will chase any thoughts of monotony ---
challenges, problems, there will be no dearth
of issues that threaten the health of the earth,
but well in the forefront of progress will be
The men and the women of the N.E.B.C.



*President Dr. Don Hudson (standing, right) discusses the Club gavel (in hand) with banquet speaker Dr. Richard A. Howard (50+ year member and past president, seated at left).
Dr. Stephen Spongberg of the Arnold Arboretum is seated at right.*



The member of longest standing Dr. Richard Goodwin (joined 1930, seated at left) with Dr. A. Linn Bogle (past president, center) and Margaret Bogle (Managing Editor of Rhodora).