

# Takoma Horticultural Club

*A hardy perennial since 1916*



October 2016

## Fall Bulb Sale Sunday! October 2, 10 to 3 Takoma Park Street Festival on Carroll Ave

This year's sale features bulbs particularly well suited for the Takoma Park area. We will have deer and squirrel resistant bulbs as well as naturalizing bulbs, including varieties of daffodil, species tulips, allium (ornamental onions), crocus, and the native camassia. Paper whites and several "members' favorites" will also be on sale. Discount for club members!



Camassia blue melody, allium giganteum, tulip species humilis little beauty, daffodil tête-à-tête.



## Fall Plant Exchange, Members Only\*

**Sunday, October 16, 1-3 pm**  
**Heffner Park, 42 Oswego Ave.**

Just two weeks to the Fall Plant Exchange! The actual exchange starts at 1:30, so bring your **labeled** plants by **1:00** so we can make sure they are properly labeled, sort them and be ready to begin on time. The best labels include: Latin name, common name and plant requirements. Pot up your plants now and keep them watered so they look good for the exchange. Last minute potting can mean pathetic looking plants! Make sure the plants you bring are not considered invasive, such as common orange daylilies or English ivy. Do some research (Google) if you are not sure.

Since we each tell the group what we have brought, it speeds things up if you bring a list of your contributions...you can bring one plant or several. No plants to exchange? No problem! You are welcome to bring finger food, snacks, beverages and garden related items, such as gardening books, tools, interesting clean pots, garden art, cuttings, seeds, etc. These are the categories we use to organize the plants: Groundcovers, Grasses and Vines; House Plants/Tropicals; Perennials-Shade; Perennials-Sun; Trees/Shrubs; Annuals; Seeds/Bulbs/Cuttings; Vegetables/Herbs; Pond Plants and Miscellaneous Garden Items.

**\*You are welcome to join the Club or renew at this event.**

**Joining:** \$18 for the rest of 2016 plus all of 2017. **Renewing** for 2016 is \$12. Please bring a check made out to THC. *There will be no cash at the Exchange.* A form is on our website: [www.takomahort.org](http://www.takomahort.org). Check with me ([cagalati@rcn.com](mailto:cagalati@rcn.com)) if you are not sure about your membership status.

—Thanks, Carole Galati

### 2016 THC Executive Committee

*President:* Katherine Lambert

*Vice President:* (vacant)

*Treasurer:* Taffy Turner

*Secretary:* Barbara Henderson

*Director of Membership:* Carole Galati

*Webmaster:* Cindy Walczak

*Public Relations:* Kathy Jentz

*Listserv:* Anne Hardman

*Newsletter:* Eileen Schramm, Diane Svenonius

*Bulb Sale:* Nancy Newton

*100th Anniversary Committee Chair:* Kathy Jentz

# One Hundred Years of THC

This is installment ten of a monthly series giving glimpses of the Takoma Horticultural Club at various times during its history, drawn from a collection of newsletters, reports, ledgers and other materials made available through the help of Diana Kohn and Historic Takoma Inc. In this episode we commemorate Benjamin Y. Morrison, perhaps THC's most renowned member.



*Benjamin Yeo (B.Y.) Morrison, 1941.  
Photo: Hunt Institute for Botanical  
Documentation.*

This year marks not only the 100th anniversary of THC, but also 50 years since the death of **Benjamin Yeo (B.Y.) Morrison** (1891 – 1966), a remarkable member of THC. The son of founding member Lisle Morrison, B.Y. joined THC when he began work at the USDA's Office of Plant Introduction and Exploration in Glenn Dale, MD, after serving in the Army in World War I in the Camp Planning Division of the War Department. In 1926, he became THC's 10th president and in

1965, he was made Honorary President. THC named the year 1966—the club's 50th anniversary—"the year of Morrison."

Well known for his development and introduction of the Glenn Dale hybrid azaleas as well as for serving as the first director of the US National Arboretum, Morrison also made many other lesser-known contributions to horticulture and the arts. Irises were his earliest venture in plant breeding. While studying at Harvard, Grace Sturtevant, known as "America's first lady of iris," encouraged Morrison to breed irises and introduced his seedlings in her catalogue. (Sturtevant also named one of her early award-winning seedlings "B.Y. Morrison.") Morrison went on to be an early officer of the American Iris Society and later served as the editor of its bulletin for many years. Daffodils closely followed the irises. Morrison was said to have "done more than any other person to make the modern daffodils known and loved in many sections of this country."<sup>i</sup> Unlike his work with azaleas, his daffodil introduction and hybridization efforts largely took place in his garden on Piney Branch Road in Takoma Park, where many people came to admire his new cultivars. He brought his passion for the flower to THC, which formed a 15-member Narcissus Committee. The Committee's conscientious attempts at cross-breeding more than 400 varieties are documented in the 100+ page "1926 Report of the Narcissus Committee" in the THC archives.<sup>ii</sup> Morrison lectured widely and corresponded with thousands about his "beloved flower." He also edited four *American Daffodil Yearbooks* for the American Horticultural Society. In 1963, the Royal Horticultural Society of

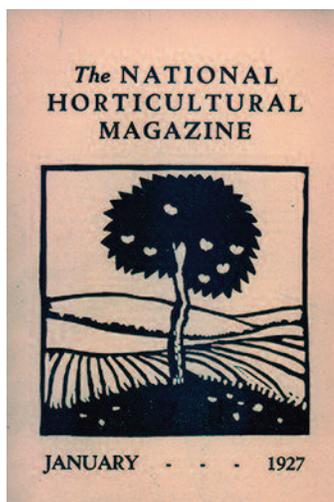
the United Kingdom awarded the Peter Barr (the 19th century horticulturalist credited with promoting daffodils in the UK) Memorial Cup to him.

His most prominent plant breeding efforts were the Glenn Dale hybrid azaleas. Starting in the late 1920's, Morrison worked for over 25 years to create these winter-hardy azaleas with large, colorful flowers suitable for the Washington, DC region. The program produced 454 new azalea cultivars, which were distributed from 1942 through 1954 to nursery growers, gardens and individuals across the US—and in Takoma Park and environs by Morrison himself, friends, and THC members. Legend has it that after the Glenn Dale station was directed to grow plants exclusively for the war effort, Morrison moved the azaleas to his yard in Takoma Park and walked the streets with a wheelbarrow full of seedlings to give to willing gardeners. THC has also donated Glenn Dale azaleas to parks in Takoma Park to replace those lost over the decades. At the US National Arboretum, the Glenn Dale Hillside was planted with 10,000 unnamed Glenn Dale hybrids from 1946 to 1948, and the formal Morrison Garden serves as the hub of the azalea collection.<sup>iii</sup> Ironically, B.Y. Morrison Park in Takoma Park has almost no azaleas.



*Glenn Dale azalea that THC member Clarence Casey obtained from Morrison, now growing in the garden of Casey's granddaughter Judy, also a member. Photo: Judy Casey.*

*cont'd on next page*



Left: "American Horticultural Society" magazine cover. Right: B.Y. Morrison's sketch of backyards in the village of Shinkakuji. Image: Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation.

The conceptualization and planning of the National Arboretum are also among Morrison's notable achievements. From 1937 to 1948, under the title of Acting Director, he designed the different areas of the property, laid out the roads, decided upon the places for the future headquarters building, the library, herbarium and greenhouses, and began the construction and the planting of the more important botanical and horticultural collections. He was officially named as Director in 1948, shortly before his retirement from USDA.<sup>iv</sup>

Morrison's abilities were not limited to horticulture and landscaping. He was also a skilled writer, editor, artist and musician. For 37 years—beginning in 1926 and ending in 1964, long after he retired and left Takoma Park for Mississippi—he applied these abilities to create the unique style and format of the *National Horticultural Magazine* (now the *American Gardener*) of the American

Horticultural Society in his volunteer position as Chairman of the Editorial Committee. The prints he created for the covers were the magazine's early hallmark and continued until 1954.<sup>v</sup> For several years during the World War II period, Morrison served as both president of AHS and editor of the magazine, in addition to his job as Acting Director of the Arboretum. The AHS called him the "guiding spirit of the organization during and after World War II." Today, the AHS confers the annual B.Y. Morrison Communication Award, recognizing "effective and inspirational communication—through print, radio, television, and/or online media—that advances public interest and participation in horticulture."<sup>vi</sup>

Further evidence of his artistic talents can be found at the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburg. There, 39 pen-and-ink and watercolor illustrations of grasses, irises, daffodils, and more are in the Art Department. However, the Archives of the Hunt Institute contain the "jewels" of his collection: sketchbooks and drawings in various media of Chinese and Japanese gardens and other scenes he encountered in his travels. Seven boxes of his correspondence, manuscripts, and other writings are also part of the archives.<sup>vii</sup>

In the musical arts, he composed an opera libretto and gave professional lieder concerts (a 19th century form of German-language sung poetry with a soloist and piano). His friend wrote that he was offered an opportunity to try out for the Metropolitan Opera.<sup>viii</sup>

It is no surprise that a colleague at the USDA said of him in 1931: "The fairies that stood sponsor at the birth of B. Y. Morrison must have been in doubt as to what special gift they should bestow upon him, so to give him a choice they placed within his reach Art, Music, Literature, and Science, whereupon he grasped them all and refused to part with any of them, but the feature of this many-sidedness which is of greatest interest to us is his love of flowers and his interest in plants."<sup>ix</sup>

—Nancy Newton

## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> Wister, J. C. BENJAMIN YEO MORRISON, Royal Horticultural Society, *Daffodil and Tulip Yearbook 1963*.
- <sup>ii</sup> For example, one member successfully crossed King Alfred with Crimson Braid to produce Marmaduke, which the nursery trade picked up as a named variety. On the other hand, King Alfred crossed with Loveliness failed to produce seed.
- <sup>iii</sup> Wister, J. C. BENJAMIN YEO MORRISON, Royal Horticultural Society, *Daffodil and Tulip Yearbook 1963*.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Rhododendron* Glenn Dale Hybrid Azaleas. U.S. National Arboretum Plant Introduction, Floral and Nursery Plants Research Unit. 2008. [www.usna.usda.gov](http://www.usna.usda.gov)
- <sup>v</sup> The Formative Years (1922 – 1938). *American Gardener*, Jan – Feb, 2002. <http://www.ahs.org/about-us/history>
- <sup>vi</sup> The War Years (1938 – 1947). *American Gardener*, Jan – Feb, 2002. <http://www.ahs.org/about-us/history>
- <sup>vii</sup> *Bulletin of the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Fall 1992.
- <sup>viii</sup> TP Maryland Library, Staff Posts Blog, August 23, 2010. B. Y. Morrison Park. <http://www.takomapark.info/library/mt/archives/002330.html>, citing *Hybrids and Hybridizers: Rhododendrons and Azaleas for Eastern North America*, edited by Philip A. Livingston and Franklin H. West. Harrowood Books, Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, 1978.
- <sup>ix</sup> J. Marion Shull, *Rainbow Fragments*, Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., New York, 1931, page 116, cited in Wister, J. C. BENJAMIN YEO MORRISON, Royal Horticultural Society, *Daffodil and Tulip Yearbook 1963*.

## Up Next

### Douglas Tallamy Speaks

Saturday, October 15 at 4 pm

Takoma Park Community Center

With other members of the "Natural Takoma" group, we're co-sponsoring a talk at the Takoma Park Community Center by Professor Douglas Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home*, on the topic of "Bringing Nature Home to Takoma Park". Dr. Tallamy is a professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware and a renowned speaker on the subject of biodiversity and native plants in homes and gardens. His talk will be free and open to the public, and he will sign books after the presentation.

### Groundbreaking for the New Centennial Park

October 27

With the help of a grant from the Takoma Foundation and plants provided by the City of Takoma Park, the Takoma Horticultural Club will design and plant a garden at the corner of Piney Branch and Philadelphia Avenue. A groundbreaking ceremony will take place on October 27; watch the listserv for details.

### Holiday Workshop

Wednesday, November 30 at 7:30 pm

Heffner Park

Make festive centerpieces to donate to St. Anne's Home for Mothers and Children in Hyattsville (and one for yourself). No experience necessary! Watch the listserv and our new Facebook page for further details.

## Thank You!

Centennial Donations reach \$2225! Just over 50% of our goal! Thanks to our generous contributors!

### Oak

Jeff Trunzo & Herman Goodyear  
Carole Galati

### Rhododendron

Taffy Turner  
Loretta Neumann  
Kathy Jentz  
Diane Svenonius  
Kit Gage  
Anne Hardman  
Melanie Isis  
Anonymous  
Joan Frye  
Lorraine Pearsall

### Aster

Anonymous  
Katherine Lambert  
Joanne Douglass Meikle  
Diana Vidutis  
Sharon Cohen  
Bridget Brodie  
The Craffords  
Elaine Emling

### Sedum

Frank Malone  
Cindy Walczak  
Jane Godfrey  
Diane Eggensperger  
Pat Cricenti  
Priscilla Labovitz  
Runa Musib  
Julie Evans

## What We Learned About the Past...and Future of THC



Panelists left to right: Nancy Newton, Diane Svenonius, Wendy Bell and Alice Giancola. Photo: Katherine Lambert.

An audience of about 20 gathered at Historic Takoma, Inc. on Sept. 21 for a panel discussion about THC's hundred-year history and what we can glean from it for the Club's future. Panelists were Wendy Bell, who served as President in 2008, and Alice Giancola, Club Treasurer for several years and President in

1999; Nancy Newton and Diane Svenonius moderated. Some takeaways:

Marcel said she "had thought of the Club as about gardening and being connected to nature and the earth, but listening to the dialogue she realized it's also about connecting to community..."

Alice and also Dodie (a member since 1996) both said: "It's absolutely critical for the Club to bring in new people, especially younger people who learn by joining in club activities."

From Justin, member of several garden clubs: "Social media is critical for drawing in and keeping active members..."

Nancy pointed out that "having been started by professional horticulturists, the Club was serious about its mission to give sound information on gardening to its members...the program was designed to educate..." through flower shows, sales, and landscaping assistance.

Jeff, who chaired the last Flower Show in 1999, recalled that shows had become very work-intensive and people were less willing to help on the many committees.

Wendy described her part on the seven-member committee that divided responsibilities and led the club in 2000 and 2001, when no one wanted to serve as an officer. Each of them took charge of a club function and kept things going smoothly.

The Club had high and low points in numbers and in energy over the decades. A document prepared by the Club archivist in 1964 spoke of the "demise of a once-grand institution." (It has managed to eke out another 50 years of existence.)

Alice: "Club members stepped in to keep public spaces attractive when the government couldn't do it...for example, the grounds of the DC Takoma Library, and public school gardens." During her tenure as treasurer, the Club kept a relatively small sum for operating expenses, and used earnings from bulb and plant sales to help fund several large community projects and five one-year scholarships for students of agriculture at UMD.

Katherine, current President: "Our recent mini flower show was loads of fun and should definitely be repeated."

One of the attendees was Joan Casey, whose grandfather Clarence Casey grew huge numbers of azaleas in the '70s in support of the City's successful effort to become "Azalea City".

According to a poster poll at the recent Centennial Celebration, members' favorite club activities are Plant Exchanges and Open Gardens.