

Arboretum News

Winter 1999

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE CALIFORNIA ARBORETUM FOUNDATION

The Next 50 Years of Plants and People - California Arboretum Foundation 1998-2048

Ethnobotany

by Jim Bauml

For most of the 1.5 million years that we humans have occupied our blue planet, we have lived in a closer, let's say intimate, association with our natural environment. Except for all but our most recent modern era, and then only in the most "developed" parts of the world, our very survival from day-to-day has required a very different set of skills including a detailed knowledge of plants, animals, water locations, and other natural resources.

Over vast stretches of time, our ancestors discovered by trial and error which parts of different plants were edible, or edible when processed, and which were poisonous, or beneficial when used in moderation. They learned when plant and animal resources were available throughout the year and where to find them. They discovered how to preserve and store edible resources for lean times or barren seasons. Woven leaves and sticks become shelter, and plant fibers were used for personal coverings. Intrepid pre-scientists also discovered that certain plants and fungi could deliver them for a time into other unseen worlds and inspire a sense of wonder. Eventually, some 10,500 years ago, the interaction of humans and the natural environment gave rise to agriculture, the mainstay of the major civilizations in human history.

Today, we still interact with many plants, albeit mostly in more indirect ways. However, many cultures still maintain strong connections with their local plants. From these botanical riches are gleaned the necessities of life: food,

clothing, shelter, and more. Many people are currently involved in recording this valuable body of knowledge, both for the benefit of those who have preserved the information within their cultures as well as for the benefit all of humanity. This is the art and science of ethnobotany.

The term ethnobotany was first used in 1896 by the American botanist John W. Harshberger for the study of plants used by "primitive and aboriginal" people. The science has moved through various phases since those early years. Other, more recent definitions focus on the range of interrelationships between plants and people, and others stress the coevolutionary nature of people/plant interactions and their biological bases. Another definition describes ethnobotany as simply "the botany of a culture other than ours."

Ethnobotany is the study of plants useful to people. Or, in another sense, it is the ongoing relationship between people and plants. It may be considered a hybrid between anthropology and botany, but ethnobotanical studies can also incorporate elements of geography, history, linguistics, pharmacognosy, chemistry or archaeology. Important ethnobotanical contributions have been made by experts in these latter specialties. Ethnobotany also is concerned with the interactions between people and plants including how they organize and name their natural environment.

Ethnobotany has become almost a household word through such movies as

"Medicine Man" and "The Serpent and the Rainbow" and books such as the imaginative series by Carlos Castaneda starting with *The Teachings of Don Juan*, Wade Davis (*The Serpent and the Rainbow* and *One River*), and Mike Plotkin (*Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice*). Other, more



Photo: Frank McDonough

Seed pod of T. cacao, source of chocolate.

academic books on ethnobotany have been published recently, with its acceptance as an established branch of study.

On the broadest scale, all plants are useful and essential, as they capture the sun's energy through photosynthesis and convert it into carbon-based molecules that are the building blocks of life. But on a more specific level, ethnobotany is concerned with the myriad of plants which are used directly or indirectly to serve human needs. Of these, probably the one of greatest interest to most people is medical applications, and this is,

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From the CEO

May you enjoy this season of thankfulness, merriment and new beginnings.

Winter in this part of the country is new to me. Instead of winter clothing, major home heating, and snow tires, I am looking forward to a cool, dry winter with acacias, cassias, daffodils, and magnolias showing their glorious blooms. Hallelujah!

Changes continue to abound at The Arboretum:

STAFF: Permanent additions include Ross Varone (the new voice of The Arboretum), Gracie Guillen (tour guides, cashiers, and a host of other responsibilities), Jennifer Williams (my assistant) and Julia Garibay (film shoots and special events assistant). A hearty welcome to these highly qualified people who have sought out work at the Arboretum and are helping to take it to the next level. Nadia Balaz is now our Special Events Coordinator in the new Special Events Division, which combines events and location work.

MARKETING: I am proud to announce that we have hired the marketing group CMS. Susan Dawson and Minnie Scott, our contacts, will focus on marketing, advertising and development. Watch for image changes and coordination of all Arboretum outreach activities.

PLANTINGS:

The staff at the Donald M. Kendall Sculpture Gardens at PepsiCo's World Headquarters have arranged the transfer to Arcadia of over 5,000 rhizomes of Japanese iris, *Iris ensata*. This collection includes over 40 varieties of the beautiful spring-flowering plant. We planted the majority of them in our Bog Garden, just west of the Bauer Pool. If all goes well, we should have a great display of bloom during May and June and some equally great events to celebrate it. Some iris will be available at the Baldwin Bonanza

RETREAT: The CAF Board of Trustees is developing plans to sponsor a workshop on the future direction of the Arboretum. We will focus upon developing a prioritized wish list for a "master plan." This implies a lot of planning and development, which, of course, means increasing our membership, grant writing and other fund raising activities to pay for new programs, buildings and services to the community at large. Please consider this as the "new" beginning of something of which you all will be proud.

So when solicitations are made, please continue to be enthusiastic supporters of our future.

Peter C. Atkins

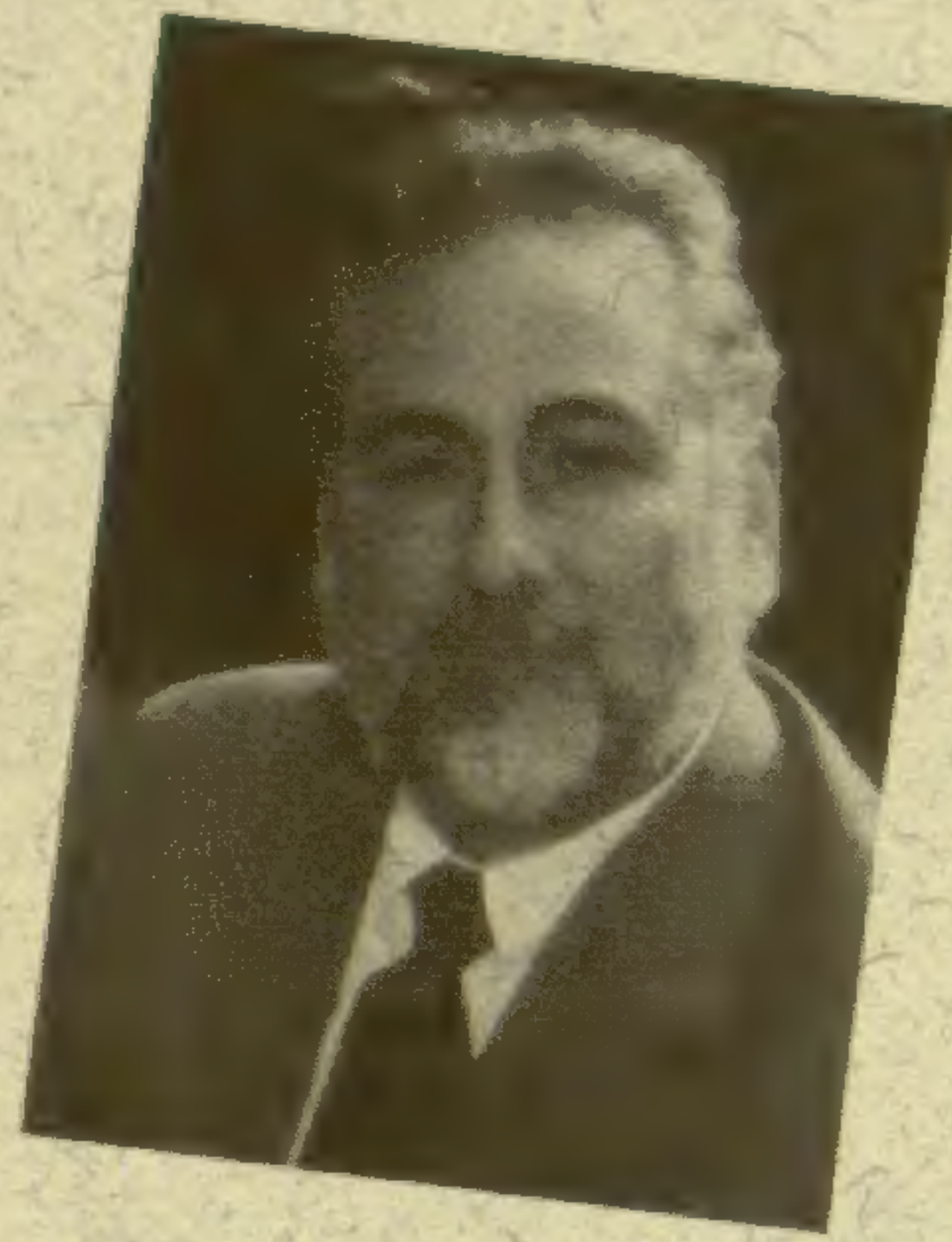


Photo: Clyde Reavis

Ethnobotany

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indeed, a large and important component of ethnobotanical studies. Just one such example was the rediscovery of quinine, from the *Cinchona* tree, by missionaries in Peru from Indians who knew its properties. It is a potent anti-fever compound still used around the world to combat malaria. The continuing rise in interest in medicinal herbs in the Western cultures is a strong indication of the increased popular consciousness of the long heritage of medicinal plant use. In fact, the first European botanical gardens sprang up around medical schools where medical herbs were cultivated for use of faculty and students. These were the so-called "physic gardens."

There is an abundance of plants at the Arboretum with stories that deserve to be told. A visit to the Tropical Greenhouse provides several examples. Just inside on the left is the famous allspice (*Pimenta dioica*) from Tropical America whose fruits are the allspice berries. The "jerked" foods of Jamaica, where the tree grows wild, feature the flavor of the berries. The broken leaves also have the same enticing aroma, said to be reminiscent of a mixture of nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon. Just across the path is a grove of the colorful Hawaiian ti plant, *Cordyline terminalis*, native to Tropical Asia and Oceania. The cooked roots are very sweet and are eaten, used to sweeten other foods, or fermented in water and distilled into a potent beverage. The leaves have been eaten as a potherb and used to wrap other foods before baking them. That the plant itself is also valued as an ornamental in tropical regions is shown by the many color forms in existence. In the small pond at the entrance is an enormous clump of black-stemmed taro (*Colocasia esculenta*). In Hawaii, taro tubers are processed into the semi-fermented food poi or sliced and fried

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Along Arboretum Paths

Along Arboretum Paths will take you to a different part of the Garden each issue.

To continue in the South American section:

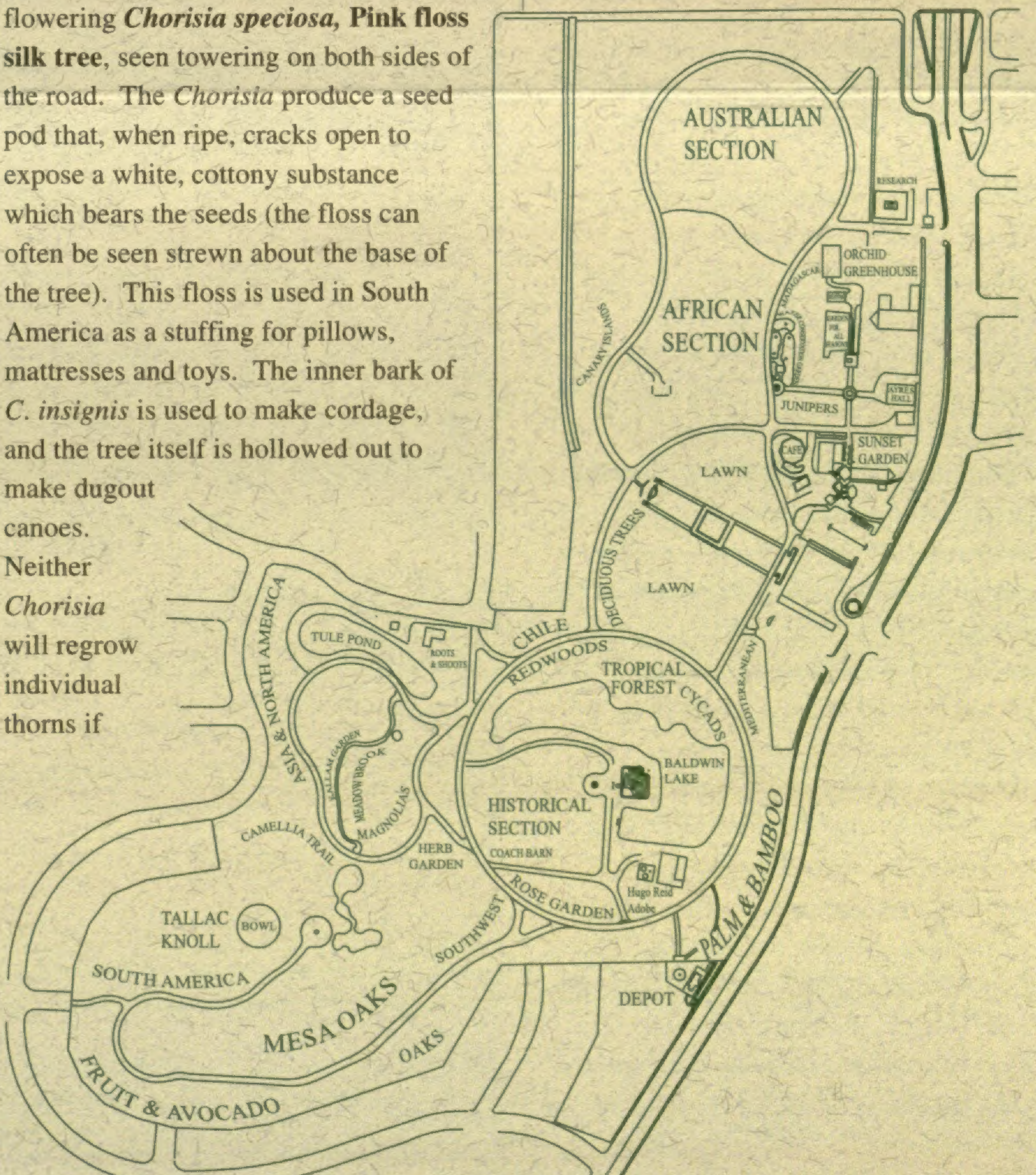
... On the right, across from the *Escallonia*, is a deciduous shrub native to tropical South America called *Caesalpinia pulcherrima*, **Dwarf poinciana**, **Bird of paradise bush**, or **Peacock flower**. This shrub produces its red-orange blooms while the weather stays warm. A short distance up the road on the left is a bush that produces a round, bottlebrush-like, flower in reddish pink; this is *Calliandra haematocephala*, **Pink powder puff**, native to Bolivia. Also on the left, before the intersection, is *Pereskia sacharosa*, **Uncactuslike cactus**, which is native from Paraguay to Argentina. This leafy, deciduous plant more than earns the title "cactus;" all one need do is look between the leaves and notice the 1-2 inch spines it produces. *Pereskia* sends forth stunning pink flowers throughout the year.

Next to the *Pereskia*, on the corner, is *Thevetia peruviana*, **Yellow oleander**, which is a South American relative of common oleander (*Nerium*) and the tropical *Plumeria*. All parts of *Thevetia* are poisonous, which earns this plant one of its common names: **Be still tree**. The oddly shaped triangular seed of the yellow oleander is carried as a talisman or charm in the Caribbean and is the reason this plant bears yet another common name, **Lucky nut**. *Thevetia* produces trumpet-shaped yellow flowers all year long.

Ahead, on the right, is a medium sized tree with a bulbous trunk, avocado-like seed pods, and a beautiful ivory colored flower; this is *Chorisia insignis*, **White floss silk tree**. You might also notice some vicious looking thorns adorning this tree's trunk and branches, a characteristic shared with the pink flowering *Chorisia speciosa*, **Pink floss silk tree**, seen towering on both sides of the road. The *Chorisia* produce a seed pod that, when ripe, cracks open to expose a white, cottony substance which bears the seeds (the floss can often be seen strewn about the base of the tree). This floss is used in South America as a stuffing for pillows, mattresses and toys. The inner bark of *C. insignis* is used to make cordage, and the tree itself is hollowed out to make dugout canoes. Neither *Chorisia* will regrow individual thorns if

they are lost or removed. Nearer the road, on the right, is a smaller, delicate tree adorned in early spring with funnel-shaped lavender blooms, *Tabebuia impetiginosa*, **Pink trumpet tree**. Somewhat inset, to the right of the tram road, is a large tree that has pronounced scars from large limbs it has lost; this is *Erythrina falcata*, **Seibo**. *E. falcata* produces graceful clusters of bright red blooms from late winter to spring. This particular tree is one of the largest of its species in California. Further up the knoll on the left can be seen a variety of *Erythrina* species, many of which possess oddly shaped blooms in various shades of crimson.

by Nelson Holmes



The Queen Anne Cottage

by Sandy Snider

The study of history is a challenge. Quite often, the more we poke and prod, the less likely it is that absolute truths will remain absolute. So it is with the story of the Queen Anne Cottage, the fanciful guest house of Elias Jackson "Lucky" Baldwin. For years it was accepted as truth and unhesitatingly offered as history that the red and white Baldwin cottage was designed in 1881 as a home for Lucky's third wife, the lovely Jennie Dexter, whose stained glass portrait graces the Cottage's front door. Jennie died of tuberculosis in 1881 at age 22, and, as the story goes, in mourning for the loss of his young wife, E. J. ordered the cottage which was to have been their home instead converted into a guest house and Jennie Dexter memorial. The State Landmark plaque in front of the Cottage cites the 1881 date.

While a touching story and even plausible history, this long-accepted version of the Queen Anne Cottage background is probably not true. By the time the Cottage was designated for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985, new evidence indicated that the actual building date was 1885-86 and that the intended mistress of the house was to have been Baldwin's fourth wife, Lillie Bennett. E. J. and the sixteen-year-old Lillie were married in the spring of 1884, and the Cottage, designed by Lillie's father Albert A. Bennett, was quite likely intended as a honeymoon cottage for the newlyweds. Period newspaper articles indicate the building date. "The new cottage *being built* [italics added] for Mr. Baldwin is situated on a knoll next to a large lake," commented *Pacific Rural Press* in the spring of 1885. "Baldwin's Belvedere," as the *Los Angeles Times* (May 8, 1886) referred to the Cottage, would be "ready for occupancy" in the summer of 1886. "On the bank of the lake," noted the story in the *Times*,

"has been erected a beautiful cottage of four large rooms and bath. From the main drive a handsome shaded arbor leads up to the marble steps which rise to a marbled floored verandah. Furniture and bric-a-brac have been brought from the proprietor's rooms at the Baldwin Hotel in San Francisco. Marble mantels of Parian whiteness with deep-set grates — in which it is intended to burn gas, made on the premises from naphtha — lend an air of solid comfort. . . . It is, however, in the

windows that the aesthetic hand of the artist found scope. . . . One of these contains a fine portrait of Byron, another of Shakespeare, a third a bathing scene. . . . Mr. Baldwin has also chosen to perpetuate a memory of the former Mrs. Baldwin, nee Dexter, not only by having almost a life size portrait of the lady, as she appeared in the halcyon days of maidenhood, hung in the bedroom, but in having a copy made on the glass that forms one of the doors. . . .

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Cottage Open House

Enjoy holiday decorations and more history during docent-led tours of the Queen Anne Cottage on Saturday and Sunday, December 11 and 12, from 1:00 to 4:00 in the afternoon.

Volunteer Bob Travis and his Santa Anita Model A Club will exhibit their vintage automobiles on the Cottage grounds during Open House. Other talented volunteers will demonstrate the art of holiday wreath making using natural materials collected from the Arboretum grounds.



Welcome New Members

In addition to those already acknowledged for joining the California Arboretum Foundation in fiscal year 1998/99, we welcome the following to The Arboretum Family.

Mike & Lori Macchia
 Elisabeth MacCurdy
 Mr. & Mrs. John MacKay
 Ms. Mildred MacMillan
 Mrs. Cyndy Makowka
 Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Malone
 Ms. Lola Malone
 & Miss Mindy Gorge
 Ms. Jeanette Mamakos
 Ms. Denia Mandt
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 Ms. E.R. Meza
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 Ms. Lyla G. Miller
 Mr. Jeffery Miller
 Mrs. Tommy Ann Miller
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 Ms. Jane Mills
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 & Ms. Valerie Badjian
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 & Tamara McDonald
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& Mrs. Judy Smythe O'Rourke
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 Ted & Stacy Oh
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 Mr. & Mrs. Louis Orecchio
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 Craig & Maria Paup
 Harvey Pearson & D. Wensing
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 Ms. Marcia Reitmeyer
 Mrs. Donna Rench
 Wanda & J.R. Renner
 Mr. & Mrs. Repko
 Ms. Patricia Reynolds
 Ms. Judith A. Richmond
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 Ms. Nancy Watkins
 Ms. Anne Watson
 Mr. & Mrs. Mark Watson
 Mr. & Mrs. Jim Weiler
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 Mr. & Mrs. Robert A. Westerholm
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 Mr. & Mrs. L. Richard Wicklund
 Sue Wilcox & Edna M. Wilcox
 Mr. & Mrs. Steven Wiles
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 Mrs. Nancy S. Williams
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 Mrs. Norma Zagorsky
 M.C. Zamarripa & Stuart Katsh
 Mr. Edward Zareh
 John K. Ziegler
 Mrs. Ann M. Ziol
 Martin Zitnick

Queen Anne Cottage

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The artisan in charge of the fitting up says he has performed similar service in Bonanza Flood's house at Menlo Park, where the windows were considered fine, but do not compare with Baldwin's, though made in Europe, while the latter are of San Francisco manufacture."

Why was Jennie Dexter perpetuated in glass and why did her portraits adorn a house intended for another? It is known that E. J. and Lillie separated sometime in 1885 and, though never divorced, they nevertheless maintained separate residences thereafter. The Cottage was most likely, then, designed as a honeymoon cottage for Lillie Bennett but, upon deterioration of his marriage, Lucky Baldwin simply designated the Cottage a guest house and filled it with memories of his great love, Jennie Dexter. Wyatt Earp, a personal friend, and Sarah Bernhardt, the famous actress who performed in the Baldwin Theater in San Francisco, were among remembered guests over the years.

With the death of Lucky Baldwin in 1909, his daughter Anita (born in 1876 to Jennie Dexter) closed the house and disposed of all furnishings. Fortunately, Anita removed and stored in the Coach Barn such detachable components as the stained glass windows, black walnut doors, marble fireplace mantels, the hearth tiles, and the encaustic tile entry floor. All of these items, plus original bathroom fixtures and the exterior marble walkway were returned to the Cottage during restoration in 1951-53. Refurnishing was coordinated by Maurice Block, retired curator at The Huntington Library and Art Gallery, using appropriate period pieces, while from the Baldwin family came original paintings, including the life sized oil portrait of Jennie Dexter that had captured the attention of the *Los Angeles Times* reporter in 1886. ❁

Ethnobotany

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into taro chips. Around the world taro is a major crop plant, especially in the tropics, grown for its edible tubers, leaves, stems, and sprouts. The Greenhouse also contains a large chocolate tree (yes, chocolate DOES grow on trees), *Theobroma cacao*, native to Tropical America. The name *Theobroma* appropriately translates to "food of the



Photo: Frank McDonough

Flowers of the cacao tree form directly on trunks and branches.

gods." The orange, football-shaped fruits contain the seeds that are processed into the sweet, dark, universally prized ambrosia. And in the same corner climbing on a support is the vanilla vine (*Vanilla planifolia*), a true orchid, whose hand-pollinated flowers mature into a pod which is fermented to yield the distinctive flavor found in ice cream, soft drinks, syrups and confections we enjoy.

The stories behind the useful plants at the Arboretum are a means of connecting visitors with these specimens in the collections. With this in mind, a great deal of effort went into the development of large-format engraved signs that were set out in the Tropical Forest exhibit. These signs are both entertaining and educational and make the featured plants assume a special value. In the same way, many of the new plantings in the renovated Herb Garden, now being planted, will be interpreted with special signage.

My own ethnobotanical field work was conducted among the Huichol Indians of Mexico. One goal of this work

was to serve the Huichol themselves by preserving an important part of their cultural heritage for future generations. My second goal was to learn about plants that might have potential uses as new foods, medicine, forage, and other applications. Thirdly, the study contributed to the knowledge of the vegetation of the region, in this case a largely undocumented floristic zone in western Mexico. Herbarium collections from that study

included new species, range extensions, and other collections that have been incorporated into the regional study *Flora Novogaliciana*. This work continues today with a project to document dye plants and their preparation, almost a

lost art in the culture, and a project to document the plants known and used by these Indians on the annual pilgrimage from their mountain homelands to the central desert of Mexico.

Today, 100 years since the term "ethnobotany" was coined, we respectfully refer to "primitive" cultures as "preliterate", and helpful native associates are "consultants", not "informants" as in the past. And the Convention on Biological Diversity provides for equitable sharing of financial benefits accruing from plants discovered and removed from a certain geographic or cultural context. Ethnobotany continues to gain in importance, with its practitioners documenting botanical knowledge that is being lost at an alarming rate. The Arboretum is helping our visitors to appreciate the ethnobotanical heritage of the cultures whose plants we display. In the future, we will continue to feature useful plants with classes, signage, and special programs, communicating the important role that plants have had and still have in each of our lives. ❁

Turn Your Membership Benefits into Blossoms in Your Garden!

JUST IN TIME FOR WINTER PLANTING ... all members of the Foundation receive a 10% discount at the following nurseries:

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PLAN AHEAD - SAVE THE DATES

Baldwin Bonanza XXX Party & Plant Sale Friday, May 5 — Sunday, May 7, 2000

We need small garden carts and wagons for this major fund raiser for The Arboretum. If you are able to assist with a donation, please leave a message for Sylvia Guerrero at (626) 821-3222.



Out of Our Past

☛ THIRTY YEARS AGO there was a fire in the historical area. To quote a photo caption in *Lasca* (Los Angeles State and County Arboretum) *Leaves*, May 1973, "On December 26, 1969, a fire swept by 70-mile-per-hour winds cut through the center of the Arboretum producing scenes like these in the vicinity of the Queen Anne Cottage which, fortunately, escaped with only blistered paint. The trunks of *Washingtonia robusta* palms in the area still show scars from the fire."

☛ DID YOU KNOW that the Arboretum once had its own TV program? "Green Leaves," a series of 13 half-hour programs, appeared on KNBC at 11:30 on Sunday mornings in 1968-69.

☛ AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, a national search was on for *Camptotheca acuminata*, an uncommon tree from China. The Arboretum had a specimen donated by Arcadian Willard Hagen, as well as a second tree propagated from the first. The original tree was sacrificed to medical science so that an extract, camptothecin, could be evaluated as a cancer treatment. ☛

Plant Quiz

1. Marshmallows once were made with mucilage from the roots of what plant?
2. In the 1920s, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture promoted a fiber crop. If you grow it now, you're in trouble. What is it?
3. Poinsettia is named for _____.
4. A new amusement has puzzling paths cut in grain fields. The words for the paths and the grain sound the same. What are they?
5. Pineapples grow in Hawaii but where do they come from?



Answers: 1. Marsh mallow 2. Hemp (corn) 3. Brazil
ambassador to Mexico 4. Maze and maize
(marijuana) 5. Dr. J. R. Poinsett, first U. S.

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California Arboretum Foundation

*A non-profit corporation benefiting
THE ARBORETUM of Los Angeles County*

301 North Baldwin Avenue • Arcadia, CA 91007-2697

Hours: The Arboretum is open 9:00 am to 4:30 pm
every day but December 25.

Arboretum Information: (626) 821-3222

Plant Advice: (626) 821-3239

Plant Science Library (626) 821-3213


*The Arboretum of Los Angeles County is jointly operated by
the California Arboretum Foundation and the County of Los Angeles.*

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Peter C. Atkins

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