

Newsletter of the American Conifer Society Central Region

THE CONIFERITE

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If you weren't at the Conifer Connection Weekend in Lexington, Kentucky, here's what you missed:

by Tess Park & Byron Baxter
Photos: Robin Mann

Dr. Bill Fountain, Professor of Arboriculture and Landscape Management at UK, was the primary source of our venues and Byron Baxter, Central Region ACS President, organized and orchestrated the event. Bill had a UK van that seated ten and gave a travelog to those that rode with him.

The early arrivals on Friday morning met at the host hotel, the Clarion Hotel & Conference Center, in Lexington. The several that gathered at 9:30 A.M. departed for Thoroughbred Landscape Products to see and learn all about mulch. Thoroughbred's owner Steve Creech, Bill Fountain, and Kevin Collard conducted a master class on soil science. All in attendance were educated on topics ranging from the importance of beneficial living organisms to why buffered pH is so important to understanding your soil's condition. It was a great educational experience.

Lunch was on our own and many more gathered at 1 pm at the Clarion to car-

van to Springhouse Nursery & Gardens where we were greeted by owners Richard and Debbie Weber. Richard was one of Professor Bill's "best and brightest" students and the two imparted a great deal of plant education as we toured.

Springhouse is a garden center providing landscape design, and The Barn is a great venue for weddings and special gatherings complete with a beautiful display garden for those special occasion photo ops. Richard gave our group a history of the property and how the business has evolved over 24 years as we toured the lush gardens which included a nice variety of conifers. Some attendees arrived early to shop to find a few special plants.

We could have stayed longer in this beautiful place, but it was time to head out to South Farm of the University of Kentucky's College of Agriculture on the outskirts of Lexington. There we had an educational tour of the high tunnels that grow food crops in a greatly extended growing season. Farm manager Steve Diver explained several designs and fea-

tures of each of the types of high tunnels and how they can have crop soil rotation by moving the tunnels, thus controlling soil fertility and pest reduction. He told of several annual plants that could be planted to improve the organic content of the soil for organic natural fertilizer and weed reduction through competition. The drip irrigation is an integral part of this growing method, conserving water and reducing fungal diseases.

But the afternoon hours quickly slipped away and all that education worked up an appetite! It was on to BJ's Brew House in front of the Fayette Mall. We had reservations for around twenty attendees and everyone was busily socializing with their tablemates and telling lots of conifer tales. Renewing old friendships and getting to know new conifer lovers was the highlight of a very pleasant day.

On Saturday, we had breakfast buffet included with our stay and departed the hotel at 8:00 A.M. for the Lexington Cemetery. This was a kind of pre-tour to grab a map of the big trees and get a glimpse of what we might tour later in the day. We were actually on our way to The Arboretum, State Botanic Garden of Kentucky, which is 100 acres of Kentucky native plants & horticultural selections on the University of Kentucky campus.

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Tess Park and a very large and old basswood tree.

It was an excellent showcase for displaying landscaping plants around the home that grow well in that area in both sunny and shady locations.

But after an hour tour and restroom break, it was time to head to Botherum Home and Gardens. This 1851 neo-classical mansion was built by John McMurry (architect) for Madison C. Johnson as a shrine to his late wife, Sally Ann née Clay. Over the decades, as many historic homes do, it suffered some horrible disrepair. When the current owner took a semester or two of landscape classes at UK, he bartended a party at the house and fell in love with it. But his immediate destination was spending 20 years in New York City as a self-taught landscape designer with marvelous instincts.

Upon one of his return trips to visit parents in Kentucky, he learned that the run-down house was on the market. He took the plunge and rid the house of several families of raccoons and began restoring the once elegant home. He moved to Lexington with his landscaping design entrepreneurship, then spent all his spare time as carpenter and general repairman to resurrect the one-acre

property and home. It is now the beautiful home and gardens of Jon Carloftis, noted landscape designer. We spent an hour-and-a-half touring the gardens and the home, but no one wanted to leave the tranquil garden that was exquisitely designed and restored with its many “rooms”.

But it was time for lunch at West 6th Brewing and adjacent Smithtown Seafood. We enjoyed some unique craft beer and informal seafood and side selections. Our plans to visit a horse farm and arboretum fell through at the last minute, so we were able to return to the cemetery for a much more in depth guided tour given by Dr. Bill Fountain.

This 170-acre historic cemetery was established in 1849 and is best described as an arboretum-cemetery. It was developed at a time in American history when wooded cemeteries were in vogue. We saw the champion American linden, numerous bur oaks and other species that predate European settlement. The day was warm but had a nice breeze and with the aid of the big tree map, we shade-hopped from one majestic tree after another for the whole afternoon.



Richard Weber, owner of Springhouse Gardens, conducted a tour of his beautiful demonstration garden and historic tobacco barn that is now a wedding venue.

Most of us adjourned to the hotel to refresh and meet back up with the group at 5:30 P.M. for dinner at Ramsey's, followed by virtual garden tour slide shows and a plant auction. We had a great educational virtual tour of nurseryman Kevin Collard's high tunnel vegetable farm production that grows year-round crops that he sells to local restaurants, his nursery clients and local customers who want fresh, locally grown vegetables and salad ingredients. We also had a small auction of about a dozen conifers and ginkgos donated by Byron Baxter, Jay Park, Bill and Elizabeth Eagleson. Tony Wetzal donated homemade Cornelian cherry jelly and a special tool for sharpening pruners.

The Conifer Connection weekend was a great time to socialize with new and old friends and gain a whole new perspective of growing vegetables, seeing nursery display and private home gardens, and visiting arboretums with awesome trees.



Above: 2010. Right: Nine years later.

Give them enough room to grow

“The usual (planting) mistake made is in not realizing that the pretty little shrub you have just turned out of its 5-gallon container hopes to live for several hundred years and become a tree 30 m or more high, with an equal or possibly greater spread. Of course you, the planter, will not live to see this development, but a hemlock, if it takes to you, will increase in height (and, correspondingly, in spread) by well over one foot annually. So please give it space! Especially is this true of the ‘Sargent’ hemlocks, whose spread will be much more than their height. They look (like) such attractive ‘garden plants’ when bought, but planting such a tree unless you can guarantee it fifty feet clear space in every direction in perpetuity is asking for trouble, anxiety, and — eventually — anguish for the owner. Not you, perhaps, or the chap you sell to, but someone, eventually.” — *“The Cultivated Hemlocks,”* by John C. Swartley, Timber Press, 1984



You are cordially invited to join the fun,
hospitality, and learning, at the
American Conifer Society meeting in
Clinton, Iowa, June 25-27, 2020.
R.S.V.P.

As I started to write about next year's ACS convention, I wondered if the above invitation would be more fruitful than the usual ho-hum description of speakers and garden tours.

We need something catchy, but what can be said about a meeting in Clinton, Iowa, population 25,000, on the banks of the Mississippi River, only 285 miles north of the 2019 meeting in St. Louis, pop. 2,807,338, where only 110 people showed up?

Let's start with the conifers. One of the highlights will surely be a tour of the Bicklehaupt Arboretum, an ACS Reference Garden with more than 2,000 named trees and shrubs, more than 500 of them conifers. If you haven't yet seen the convention promotional video at <https://youtu.be/2hjfgPhmGeU> do it now. Even if you don't plan to attend, you're sure to enjoy the drone photos of the Bickelhaupt.

Jeff and Lora Rathje's garden has evolved considerably since it was on the 2008 tour. They now concentrate on dwarf and intermediate conifers, along with troughs and a rock garden displaying miniatures.

Randy and Karen Dykstra have suffered Addicted Conifer Syndrome since the 1970s — they worked with both Chub Harper and Jerry Morris, so you just *know* they have some special specimens.

Jenni Grantz was bitten by the conifer bug when she was an intern at the Bickelhaupt in the early 2000's. Now she and Scott have a nice collection themselves, which we'll see on the Friday tour.

And that ain't all, folks!

Saturday will include the Quad City Botanical Garden in downtown Rock Island, Illinois. This garden features a rare conifer collection donated by Chub Harper.

From the street, you wouldn't even know there's a two-acre secret garden in the backyard. Jepswood Gardens consists of about 150 conifers, plus hostas and more, including an osage orange hedge planted by the CCC in the 1930s.

And then, Lona and Ray Pribble invite us to their half-acre park-like backyard in Geneseo, Illinois, where we'll see hostas, cutting and fairy gardens, and of course, conifers.

Still not enough to convince you to attend? Okay, here's more:

Panayoti Kelaidis, Denver Botanic

Gardens Senior Curator and Director of Outreach, will tell us about the Stephen Long Expedition, the first to identify and name Rocky Mountain conifers, 200 years ago this year.

Dr. Jeffery Iles, Professor and Chair of the Department of Horticulture at Iowa State University and Dr. Laura Jesse Iles, Director of Iowa State University Plant & Insect Diagnostic Clinic, will speak on "The Doctors Are In... and There Will be a Second Opinion; Diagnosing Woody Plant Problems Ain't Easy." Yes, they're related. This could get interesting.

Bob Fincham, a driving force in the formation of the ACS and first ACS president, will expand on his book: "Gone But Not Forgotten" and Martha Smith, University of Illinois Extension, will speak on "Colorful Conifer Craze: Beyond Green!"

Of course, there's more to life than conifers. You might enjoy the buffet lunch cruise aboard the 750-passenger paddle-wheel riverboat, Celebration Belle II, and the Friday lunch at Eagle Point Lodge, high atop a bluff with one of the most scenic views of the widest part of the Mississippi River. If not, you can look forward to the auctions that will end the party Saturday evening.

By the way, all of this comes *after* the 16-session Conifer College held separately from the convention. You'll find registration forms for both events in this issue of *The Coniferite*.

— Jerry Belanger, Editor



The Jeff and Lora Rathje garden is just one of many attractions to be savored at the 2020 Regional AND National ACS Convention in Clinton, Iowa next June. The spectacular 16-session Conifer College will be held separately, but also in Clinton and just the day before the convention. Registration forms for both are in this issue of *The Coniferite*.

Learn a lot in a day at Conifer College

What would you like to learn about conifers: how to grow them from seed, why they grow the way they do, or how to prevent winter injury? Or would you like to know more about rock gardening or popular companion plants such as Japanese maples?

Whatever your interest, you are almost certain to find it covered in one or more sessions of the **Conifer College** to be held in Clinton, Iowa, on Thursday, June 25. With 16 separate presentations, plus a Q&A session with a panel of experts, you can expect to learn more in one day than most people learn in a year.

Speaker bios and curriculum summaries have already appeared in *The Coniferite* (March 2019) and were repeated in the *Fall Conifer Quarterly* (November). More complete descriptions are available at conifersociety.org.

Note, however, that a registration form is included in this issue of The Coniferite. That's important, because classes will be assigned on a first-come basis: the sooner you register the better your chances of getting your first choices.

Another element of discrimination you should be aware of: those who register for both the convention and the Conifer College will be given preference for class assignments. A word to the wise.

Notice: ACS Membership Directory is in the works

If you've been waiting for an updated ACS Membership Directory, make a note of this: an up-to-the-minute (as of Dec. 31, 2019) version will be available in January, for a small fee. The actual cost will be determined by the number of copies ordered, so please make your interest known by contacting David Speth at sspeth@excel.net.

Soaring costs of printing and postage have made it difficult for organizations like ACS to provide such services, but since camaraderie is so important to so many members, a small cadre of volunteers has worked to pull together a complete listing of U.S., Canadian, and foreign as well as corporate and institutional members, noting which gardens are open for visits. ACS Reference Gardens are included.



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Getting ready: A group of volunteers showed up ready to work — even bringing their own equipment — at the Bickelhaupt Arboretum in Clinton, Iowa, in anticipation of the 2020 ACS Convention to be held there next June. Left to right: Don Cummings, Dennis Hermsen, Tom Whittenbaugh, Randy Dykstra, Gary Whittenbaugh, Rich Gosnell, Ian Fudge, David Horst, Ed Rinderspacher. Helpers who were absent when photo was taken: Jeff Rathje, Cruz Lopez, Dave Vogel, Dave Boeckmann and Margo Hansen.

If it happens to snow where you are . . .

Prevent snow load damage

Last winter we had some very wet, heavy snow loads and the conifers were going to get pretty bent in the predicted 6-8" snow. So, I went "brooming," not to find witches' brooms but to take my broom or rake handle and go underneath the loaded branches and gently lift up or tap to dislodge some of the heavy snow. I actually went out twice. Once after we had a few inches and again after the snow finished the next morning so that they didn't get overly bent. I did this especially because the next storm that passed was predicted to begin with freezing rain and I did not want the conifer limbs to stay bent for an extended period until the ice melted off. Pines are especially brittle to heavy snow load, but arborvitae that are not pruned to a single leader are also a high risk as well as *Chamaecyparis*, which are many times multiple leader pyramid shapes. A leaf blower might be too powerful, so I just went "brooming"! — *Tess Park, ACS Member since 1997*