

An Early History of The Northwest Orchid Society

The following text came from the "Seventeenth Annual Spring Orchid Show" brochure. The Show was held at Washington Mutual Saving Bank, 2nd & Spring, March 8-10, 1965. The article is entitled "Fifteen Years of Progression".

"The Northwest Orchid Society was founded in 1947 on the groundwork laid by the Puget Sound Orchid Society, formed a few years earlier. Mr. Thomas C. Kirkwood had moved into this area from California, bringing a fairly large greenhouse, a stock of orchid plants and a wealth of knowledge in the growing of orchids. He was the "spark plug" in the formation of the new society. To Mr. Kirkwood is due the credit for fostering orchid growing among amateurs in Washington.

For the first seventeen months the Northwest Orchid Society meetings were held at intervals; however, two successful orchid shows under the sponsorship of the Orthopedic Guild were held at the Olympic Hotel during this period.

The Northwest Orchid Society became affiliated with the American Orchid Society in February, 1949. In the summer of 1949, several prominent members decided the infant society was ready to stand on its feet and should be fully organized with by-laws, duly elected officers, and a permanent meeting place and date. The recommendations of this group were presented to the membership and approved. In the fall of 1949, the Northwest Orchid Society was underway."

This was a year of pioneering -- the objectives being to attain a membership of 100, starting a society library and the issuance of a society bulletin. The first editor was Mr. D. J. Torrance.

With the original objectives attained, the society felt it was capable of sponsoring a show on its own and in March, 1950, the Third Annual Spring Orchid Show was held in the auditorium of the P. I. Building. This undertaking entailed much effort, but with the cooperation of an enthusiastic membership, the show was a success both from attendance and financial standpoints. Exhibits were received from Massachusetts, Tennessee, England and Thailand. This was the first show at which American Orchid Society award judging was held and two plants were awarded: C. Stalin 'Ashcroft' AM-AOS and Cym. Santa Barbara AM-AOS. These were the first Awards of Merit given in the Northwest.

Another notable event during the year was the donation of the Mr. W. J. Pilz orchid collection to the Seattle Park Department. The transaction was negotiated through the Northwest Orchid Society.

The first year ended with the annual dinner at the Rainier Club. It had been a year of hard work, but the dinner plant exhibit table gave a good indication of the quality and quantity of plants to be seen in the future.

During the ensuing five years, the society grew and prospered. Each year a successful show was held. The Puget Sound Orchid Society was merged with the Northwest Orchid Society in the Spring of 1952. In January, 1953, the Northwest Orchid Society affiliated with the Orchid Digest Corporation and in March, 1954, Mr. Joseph Peacock was elected Vice-President of that organization.

Perhaps the outstanding event in the history of the Northwest Orchid Society was the Fifth Annual Western Orchid Congress held September 1-4, 1956, in Seattle. The Congress was sponsored by the Orchid Digest Corporation with the Northwest Orchid Society as host. The American Orchid Society Board of Trustees was a guest of the Northwest Orchid Society and held its fall meeting while in Seattle attending the Congress. This was the first time an Orchid Congress had been held in the Pacific Northwest and delegates from 22 orchid societies west of the Mississippi attended. Some 250 registered for the Congress.

The Congress included an orchid show. There were many social events and the programs featured a series of lectures, forums and panels -- the moderators and speakers being prominent orchid authorities. The climax of the Congress was a boat trip to Kiana Lodge and a salmon barbeque. Those who attended this Congress still talk about the wonderful time they had in the Northwest.

1957 saw the establishment of Orchid Digest Regional Award Judging in the Northwest.

For the 1958 Spring Show, it was decided a change in location would be desirable and with civic thought in mind, the location was changed to the Seattle Art Museum with the Museum participating in the financial returns.

At the start of the fiscal year 1958, Ribbon Judging was initiated at the monthly meetings with a Hi-Scorer Trophy being awarded at the end of each quarter to the exhibitor having the most points in the Novice-Amateur and Private Grower classes. This innovation greatly increased the quality and quantity of plants brought to the monthly exhibit table.

1959 was "ladies year." All of the officers and a number of the Trustees elected this year were women members of the society. Mr. G. Ferguson Beall and Dr. Jackson K. Holloway, charter members of the Northwest Orchid Society, were elected honorary Life Trustees.

Having served as Trustee and Executive Vice-President, Mr. G. Ferguson Beall was elected President of the American Orchid Society in May of 1960. The Northwest Orchid Society felt highly honored to have one of its members elected to this position and feted Mr. Beall with a dinner at the Sunset Club.

Again wishing to recognize services rendered, the society honored Mr. Joseph Peacock, a charter member, by electing him an Honorary Life Trustee in September, 1961.

After several years' lapse, the Northwest Orchid Society Bulletin was again published under the editorship of Mr. E. K. Field.

With the ever-increasing number of orchid growers, the need for additional judging areas was necessary, resulting in Seattle being selected by the American Orchid Society as the Northwest Regional Judging area in April, 1964. Judging is held each month and growers from all over the world are privileged to send flowers here for judging.

Mr. William E. Farrell, having served as Vice-President of the Orchid Digest Corporation, was elected President in September, 1962. Again, the Northwest Orchid Society was honored by having the capabilities of one of its members recognized.

The following year an American Orchid Society Flower Evaluation Class was formed, the purpose being to instruct members to better evaluate blooms of both species and hybrids. In 1963 Mr. A. L. Smith was appointed Chairman of Judging for Orchid Digest Corporation for seven regions which comprise all Orchid Digest affiliated societies west of the Mississippi. Again the Northwest Orchid Society received merited recognition.

April, 1964, in appreciation for many years of valued service to the society, Mr. and Mrs. D. J. Torrance were elected Honorary Life Trustees of the Northwest Orchid Society.

With the formulation of plans for the 1964 Spring Orchid Show, it was felt an address more centrally located would give the general public a better opportunity to view these lovely blooms; consequently, the 1964 Spring Orchid Show was held in

the Main Office of Washington Mutual Savings Bank. The 1964 show being an outstanding success, it is being repeated again this year.

Looking back over the past fifteen years, the interest and growth in the hobby of orchid growing has been phenomenal and there is every indication that this interest will continue to grow.”

~ Original author unknown, data entry by Joff Morgan