



The Ottawa Orchid Society – The Early Years

The Ottawa Orchid Society developed from the chance meeting between Dr. Tom Leadman and Grant Bailey in November 1976. In September 1993 Tom Leadman wrote the following description of the founding of the Society.

“The emergence of the Ottawa Orchid Society (OOS) came about in an unusual and simple way. I was just finishing up my afternoon office work when the phone rang and someone named Grant Bailey was on the line. He asked if I was expecting a shipment of orchids and I said I was. Apparently the Customs had sent my order to him as they knew that he was expecting a shipment from somewhere in the USA. He insisted on bringing the shipment down to my office, which I thought was very kind of him, particularly since there was no duty on the parcel. The orchids were the ones I had ordered – four mule-eared Oncidiums, two of which I still have.

We got down to discussing orchids and when I told him that I had a greenhouse with some, he asked if he could come out and see them and could he bring a friend. I was very happy to have them come – so Grant came and brought Paul Powers with him. They had never seen a greenhouse full of orchids. We talked about various plants and how to grow them and they wanted to know a lot more about them. This was November, 1976.

I had been a member of the Southern Ontario Orchid Society (SOOS) for a couple of years at the time of my meeting with Grant and Paul and I knew they would be very impressed if they could see the the SOOS show table. We made a trip to Toronto and saw what a ‘show table’ could be. They were soon wondering about starting a club in Ottawa. Naturally, I went right along with them on this. We agreed to question likely enthusiasts to see if they would be interested in an orchid club or society.

A date of March 19, 1978 was set for a meeting in Room 156 of the National Archives on Wellington Street. Some of those in attendance were M. J. and Nora Gorman, Frank Sellers, Bruce Craig, Bertha Burrows, Hans Bode, Grant Bailey, Paul Powers and myself. A tentative committee was formed to select a President, etc. The following people were elected to the first committee:

*President – Tom Leadman.
Vice President – Frank Sellers.
Membership Convener – M. J. Gorman.
Treasurer – Grant Bailey.
Secretary/Editor – Paul Powers.*

Several meetings were called in 1978, and in April of that year members were asked to bring plants for a show table. This was probably our first show table. By this time the membership was growing.

In May, 1979, the club decided to enter an exhibit in the annual Southern Ontario Orchid Society's Mothers' Day Flower Show in Toronto. This was our first entry in a show outside of Ottawa. It was organized and staged by Joe Reiss, and Bertha Burrows won an American Orchid Society award for one of her plants. For several years after that we exhibited in Toronto on Mother's Day at the SOOS. Also in 1979 our club's first greenhouse tour was launched (May 6, 1979), and is now a regular feature.

In April, 1980 and 1981, we displayed orchids at the Ottawa Horticultural Society's annual flower show at the Rideau Park United Church. This stimulated more interest in orchid culture and brought in more members.

On April 2nd, 1982, the Club held its first orchid show at the then new City Hall. The turnout was far more than we expected and everything went very smoothly and well. The show was moved to Carleton University the next year in order to have plant sales at the show. (Buying and selling was not allowed to be carried out at City Hall).

The club meetings by then had moved from Wellington Street to the Ottawa Citizen Building. The first meeting there was March 9, 1980."

Grant Bailey, in writing his memories of the formation of the Society, described the trips he and Tom would take to Toronto to attend the meetings of the Southern Ontario Orchid Society, thus:

"Up early Sunday morning, drive to Toronto for the Southern Ontario Orchid Society meeting, and then home again,-- happy, tired, and poorer. It was on these jaunts that Tom spoke of the need of an orchid society in Ottawa. 'It's just a matter of time until this disease spreads to Ottawa', he would venture. (He was a medical doctor.) 'Why, we could even have the inflicted from Toronto come and give us treatments.' – yep, the whole thing was laid out in his mind. But the two of us and a couple of friends did not a club make.

It was on one of those Toronto trips that Paul Powers came along. The topic came up again, and plans were laid to assemble all the orchid growing enthusiasts we knew,

in one place at one time, to see if the interest would be sufficient to hold regular meetings.

The Ottawa Horticultural Society, Carleton University, Algonquin College, Agriculture Canada, and The Citizen were all notified of our intention to meet at 2:00 p.m., March 19, 1978 at the National Archives. Ten, invited, known growers and five "unknowns" showed up to bring the total attendance at our first meeting to fifteen addicts.

Tom Leadman, Paul Powers, and myself (Grant Bailey) served as a triumvirate to guide the proceedings until the fall of 1979 when we adopted our constitution and held elections.

In the spring of 1980 we held our first show as part of the Ottawa Horticultural Society's established spring flower show, having a mass display of orchids at one end of the hall. (If I may express a jaded opinion,- it palled all those African violets by comparison.) We repeated the event in 1981 before having our own show in 1982."

Nora Gorman, wife of M. J. Gorman, the first O.O.S. Membership Convener, wrote that at the first meeting

"There were many interesting discussions as we were all feeling our way into the world of orchids. George Hart was able to answer many questions as he had grown orchids in Jamaica for many years and was very knowledgeable.

Our first effort at a large show was a huge success. It was held at the City Hall and we included Societies from out of town. As we couldn't charge admission we had a box for donations and did quite well. The weather was dreadful, icicles were hanging from the roof and we had sleet all day long. One lady standing in line asked us what was she going to see. Apparently there was something on view every weekend and she went all the time. I hope she enjoyed what she saw that day. We were amazed at the crowd that came for the two days."

The following year, 1983, our Orchid Show was held on April 16th and 17th in the Commons Room at Carleton University. In 1984 it was held in the same location on April 20th, 21st and 22nd. The first year we had American Orchid Society judging was in 1986, with some judges from Toronto and some from the Detroit area. We stayed at Carleton until 1990 when we moved the Show to the R.A. Centre, chiefly to be wheel chair accessible. That location satisfied our requirements until they decided they no longer wanted us because we did not bring in sufficient money for their businesses such as restaurants. In 1997 we made the big move to the Sportsplex for our Orchid Show.

Executive

Of course we have had many members of the executive over the years but it is obvious that most of those willing to serve the Society in this way have a life-long interest in it. We will only name the presidents, but this in no way belittles the work of the treasurers, secretaries, show chairmen, and committee members who have served us well over the years.

The presidents, starting with the first, have been: Tom Leadman, Paul Powers, Grant Bailey, Bill Arthurs, Marilyn Light, Peter Gauer, Jeanette Arthurs, David Cooper, Douglas Vye, and, last, but definitely not least, Jean McDonald.

Meeting locations

The first meetings were held in Room 156 of the National Archives on Wellington Street. In 1980 we changed our location to the Ottawa Citizen building where we met first on March 9th. The reason for the move from there is explained in this article from Spike of September, 1986:

“Our meeting place at the Ottawa Citizen Building on Baxter Road has served us extremely well over the years. However, as our Society has evolved and grown, the space available was starting to close in on us, to the point where we began to think of alternatives . In addition to the space problem, the Baxter Road facilities were not the best for conducting slide shows, etc. because of poor lighting conditions. However, we would have carried on there had not the Citizen administration advised us that we could no longer book the facilities on a yearly basis, but had to reapply every three months. The uncertainty of our meeting place on practically a month to month basis was the straw that did it. Consequently, we applied to the McNabb Community Centre to hold our meetings there from now on – and they accepted us.”

The McNabb Centre on Percy Street was very satisfactory for us until parking became such a problem we found it necessary to find a new location. Our most recent move, as of September 12, 1999, was to the Tom Brown Arena.

The newsletter

Throughout the twenty-five years of its existence the format of the newsletter has remained much the same; a reminder of the upcoming meeting, award winners of the show table at the previous meeting, news of any orchid shows attended by representatives of our Society and what awards they won, and orchid cultural advice. One innovation was the orchid crossword puzzles created monthly by Bill Arthurs while he was editor.

The first newsletter was simply named “Newsletter of the Ottawa Orchid Society, Volume 1, Number 1, October 1978”. It was edited by Paul Powers and consisted of three pages. On the first page was a call for suggestions for an appropriate name. Paul suggested the name “Spike.” He proposed that the initials could stand for “Special Patter Initiating Knowledge and

Excellence.” Spike, of course, is also another name for an orchid inflorescence. Needless to say, the name has stuck and continues to grace the front page of our newsletter to this day.

The Society cattleya logo, used for our pins and printed on the upper, left-hand corner of the front page of Spike, was designed as a Society pin by Jane Delroy. It was first used on Spike in September 1993.

We have not had many changes of editor. After Paul Powers, Bertha Burrows was appointed, by the executive, to the position in January, 1981. When Bertha resigned because of her upcoming marriage to John Boucher, Bill Arthurs took on the job as of March 1986 and continued until September 1991. Rick Sobkowicz’s first edition was October 1991, and thankfully he and his creativity continue still.

Other interests

Our early members did not concentrate solely on orchids, forsaking all other plants. There is a record of Joan Moggridge organizing a train trip to Montreal on May, 24th, 1980, for members to attend the Floralties International Flower Exhibition, which was a big attraction that year. The anticipated cost of the train trip was \$13.00.

A popular event for many years was the annual Society picnic held mid-summer in a member’s garden. One particularly popular location was Helene Martin’s, with its pretty stream at the back of the property.

Membership

The first newsletter gives the membership dues: \$10.00 for a single membership, and \$12.50 for a couple.

As has already been mentioned, the founding members turned out for the first O.O.S. meeting in 1978. By 1981 we had 61 members and by 1982 there were 99 members. Our Orchid Shows, and the coverage of them by the media, and exhibits that we staged in various Ottawa area locations, gave us much needed publicity which resulted in many new people coming out to our meetings.

It is interesting to note that the Ottawa Orchid Society has just recently assigned the number 1000 to its newest member.

The first fifty membership registrations in order of their enrolment, were as follows: (1) Dr. Tom & Lorna Leadman, (2) Bruce & June Craig, (3) Paul M. Powers, (4) M. J. & Norah Gorman, (5) Frank Sellers, (6) Robert & Dina Showman, (7) Joseph and Claire Reiss, (8) Digby McLaren, (9) John Fowler, (10) Don & Pat Cranstone, (11) George Hart, (12) Hans & Ruth Bode, (13) Bertha Burrows-Boucher, (14) John Ingles, (15) Henry Steger, (16) Dr. W. I. Illman, (17) J. Bryan Kemper, (18) Dr. Stan & Vera Handzel. (19) Dr. T. Jay Powell, (20) Grant &

Kathy Bailey, (21) Don & Helen McVey, (22) Bill & Beverley Mantell, (23) George & Muriel Smalley, (24) Dr. John Arnold, (25) Therese Lupien, (26) John & Carol Mitchell, (27) Malcolm Park, (28) Carel Amey, (29) Marvin Matusiak, (30) Allen Barry, (31) Phillip & Ellen Tilney, (32) Clarke & Joan Moggridge, (33) Michele Carvonis, (34) Hazel Munroe, (35) Stan A. Boswell, (36) Bill Templeton, (37) Don & Beverly Lethbridge, (38) John Marshall, (39) Dorothy Walters, (40) Mike & Mary Psutka, (41) John Stairs, (42) E. Marilyn Moffatt, (43) Ewen Todd, (44) John Lemieux, (45) Romana Bencina, (46) Cecil E. Lester, (47) Cliff & Diane Scott, (48) Bill & Jeanette Arthurs, (49) Benny & Rosalind Tilbenny, (50) Joe & Anne Shuger.

Why does Grant Bailey, one of the three originals, have membership number 20? He says it was because he did not have the \$12.50 available at that first meeting; but we suspect he was just too busy to write down his own name until last.

Conclusion

We hope this gives a brief picture of the early history of the Ottawa Orchid Society. There are likely many others with stories to be told and perhaps theirs could be added to this to make a more substantial overall history. And may the Society continue to grow, ever grateful to our early dedicated members and volunteers.