

Longenecker Horticultural Gardens

It all began with the first lilac plantings made on Good Friday 1935 under the direction of Prof. G. William Longenecker, the first Director of the new UW Arboretum. With the support of the Madison Garden Club, the new lilac collection grew to become one of the largest in the upper Midwest in the years that followed. Other woody plants were added in an effort to evaluate new and promising trees and shrubs for their adaptation to Wisconsin conditions and for their aesthetic merit. Beginning in 1942, Madison's West Side Garden Club supported an Ornamental Crabapple Collection, now considered the most up-to-date collection in the world.

A master plan developed by Longenecker was approved by the Arboretum Committee in October 1957. This included a Shrub Garden, Tree Display Area and Pinetum. Under the direction of Prof. Longenecker as curator, the Viburnum Collection and Shrub Garden were planted prior to his retirement in 1967. That year, what had been known as the "Horticultural Area" was dedicated as the Longenecker Horticultural Gardens in his honor.

I succeeded Prof. Longenecker as curator in the fall of 1966 with the direction to complete the planting of the Tree Display Area and Pinetum. After 38 years of guiding its development, conducting plant evaluations with graduate students, utilizing the plant collections in my teaching and working with wonderful volunteers (most are WHPS members), the Longenecker Horticultural Gardens is now the premier collection of woody plants in the state and one of the finest in the Midwest. Most of the 2500 taxa of woody plants in the collection are cultivars of proven merit for Wisconsin landscapes.

With the support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a Master Landscape Plan was developed by Buettner & Associates, Inc. in 2004. Development would include way-finding, pedestrian circulation, structures and some rearranging of the plantings.

What about the future? While the university has provided the maintenance of the Longenecker Horticultural Gardens for 70 years and most plantings have been generously donated by nurseries and other institutions, there is no provision for a future curator nor support for the development of the 2004 Master Plan.

Looking toward the future, Betty and I have initiated a Longenecker Horticultural Gardens Endowment Fund with the University of Wisconsin Foundation. The contributions to this fund by the Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society over the past five years and from several WHPS members have been deeply appreciated.

—Ed Hasselkus, Professor Emeritus, Horticulture Curator (Volunteer), Longenecker Horticultural Gardens