

FRIENDS *of the* Central Experimental Farm

Winter 2023 Newsletter | Volume 35 No. 1

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How the Friends Began

by Peter Elliot

It is now 35 years since the Friends were formed. Founding father Peter Elliott recalled how it happened in this article from our Spring 2008 newsletter. Peter served as General Manager of the organization until his retirement from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in 1995.

In 1965, I began work as a chemical technologist at the Food Research Institute of Agriculture Canada. Housed in the Dairy Building directly across from the Main Barn, I watched busloads of tourists coming to see the Showcase Herd, the Ornamental Gardens and Arboretum.

I got involved with the Ottawa Tulip Festival in 1977 and became President from 1978 to 1982 ... In 1982, I was seconded to Parks Canada to be the program coordinator for the 150th anniversary of the Rideau Canal, at which time I helped to get the Friends of the Rideau Canal established.

When I returned to Agriculture in 1985, I was asked to organize the centennial program for the national Experimental Farms system, to occur in 1986. After that was over, I had been out of Research for so long, there was no job for me!

THE IDEA FOR THE FRIENDS

Meanwhile, changes were taking place

in the Research function. Ornamental Gardens and Arboretum funding was under reconsideration, as they were no longer research functions. The Showcase Herd was also threatened. The public in Ottawa were expressing concerns ...

To resolve such concerns, I put together a proposal for a public/Agriculture Canada partnership, called the Friends of the Central Experimental Farm. This grabbed the attention of the Deputy Minister and the executive of Agriculture. The concept had emerged from my interest in tourism and the need to retain the Farm for public enjoyment. My experience as founding member and President of the Friends of the Rideau Canal also helped. With the help of Alan Gratiyas, former Executive Director of External Affairs at Agriculture, we got the organization incorporated and were on our way. In effect I had created my own job!

With the connections I had made in the tourism industry, such as Ben

Babelowsky, and with senior people in the Department who were retiring, such as Ron Halstead and Tom Anstey, I was able to put together a Board of Directors for the Friends. Bob Cook agreed to be our first President. Bob, who had been a senior advisor to Bill Davis, Premier of Ontario, had recently retired as General Manager of the St. Lawrence Parks Commission.

EARLY INTEREST

There was, however, no money in the kitty. My wife Dianne was a bit upset when I wrote a personal cheque for \$200 for the incorporation but came around when I explained that if it didn't happen, I wouldn't have a job!

The Deputy Minister, J.J. Noreau, wondered if we could perhaps get 50 people interested. Friends of the Farm set up a display at the Ottawa Exhibition and signed up about 60 members. Later that year, we set up our

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PHOTO ABOVE:

Building 72, home of the Friends of the Farm.

NEW TIMES,
NEW PEOPLE

ÈRE NOUVELLE,
NOUVEAUX VISAGES



ERIC JONES

President, Friends of the Farm | Président, Les Amis de la Ferme

This year the Friends of the Farm have taken giant steps to renew.

We added five new Directors to the Board: Elizabeth Atkinson, Dianne Caldbick, Cheryl Hutcheson, Janice Tayles, and Heather Webster. They are bringing new skills and insights to our efforts. We also added volunteers to help with office and technical concerns.

This was all capped by the hiring of a new staff Office Manager, Aline Michaud. Aline takes over from Shelley Guilfoyle, who served us well in 2022.

Many thanks are due to Deborah Higdon-LeBlond who was instrumental in the search and selection of the new appointees. Deborah has harangued us and campaigned for our cause over the past few years in order to bring our operations up to speed. Our organization has been fortunate in having such a fierce and committed advocate. Now she's going to switch to savouring the best of France for a couple of years and we expect to hear of her experiences from time to time. Salut, Deborah!

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, our landlord and partner on the Farm, is also in a renewal period. Pierre Huppé, Chief of Grounds Maintenance, and Jean-Pascal Gratton, Supervisor of the Arboretum and Ornamental Gardens, have both departed and are slated to be replaced in the new year. At the managerial level, Cory Reaney retired and was replaced by Mélanie Houle, the new Integrated Services Manager, and Paul Massey, the new Manager of Real Property. These positions and the people who fill them are all important to the Friends and we look forward to forging strong relationships with them.

BILL C-23

For further info, see:
<https://www.heritageottawa.org/news/bill-c-23-good-start-needs-strengthening>.



Also, we can't forget that it's a crucial time to renew support for the Farm. We all need to keep an eye on Bill C-23 to see if it will add to the protection that the Farm sorely needs.

LOI C-23

Voir d'autres informations au lien suivant :
<https://www.heritageottawa.org/fr/news/loi-c-23-un-bon-debut-mais-doit-etre-renforce>.



Enfin, n'oublions pas l'essentiel maintenant consiste à renouveler notre appui à l'égard de la Ferme. Nous devons garder bien en vue le projet de loi C-23 afin d'y intégrer la protection dont la Ferme a grandement besoin.

Au cours de l'année, les Amis de la Ferme ont fait des pas de géant en vue de se renouveler.

Cinq nouveaux directeurs ont été nommés au conseil d'administration : Elizabeth Atkinson, Dianne Caldbick, Cheryl Hutcheson, Janice Tayles et Heather Webster. Elles apportent de nouvelles compétences et connaissances aux efforts que nous avons déployés. Nous avons aussi accueilli des bénévoles qui apporteront leur soutien en ce qui concerne les questions d'ordre administratif et technique.

Le clou de tous ces changements demeure sans contredit l'embauche d'Aline Michaud, en tant que directrice du bureau du personnel. Cette dernière succède à Shelley Guilfoyle, qui nous a rendu de grands services en 2022.

De profonds remerciements vont à Deborah Higdon-LeBlond, qui a joué un rôle déterminant dans la recherche et la sélection des nouvelles personnes nommées. Elle nous a talonnés et fait campagne au profit de notre cause au cours des dernières années, nous incitant à mettre à niveau nos opérations. Notre organisation a beaucoup de chance de pouvoir compter sur une avocate aussi acharnée et engagée. Pour le moment, son attention se tourne à savourer les fins délices de la vie « à la française » pour quelques années. Nous comptons bien qu'elle nous régale d'anecdotes de temps en temps. Salut, Deborah!

Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada, notre propriétaire partenaire à la Ferme, vit aussi dans une période de changement ou renouvellement. Pierre Huppé, chef, Entretien des terrains, et Jean-Pascal Gratton, superviseur de l'Arboretum et des Jardins ornementaux, ont tous deux quitté leurs fonctions et l'on prévoit que ces postes seront pourvus dans la nouvelle année. Sur le plan de la gestion, deux gestionnaires ont été nommés suivant le départ de Cory Reaney, soit Mélanie Houle aux Services intégrés et Paul Massey aux Biens immobiliers. Ces postes et les personnes qui les occupent revêtent une grande importance pour les Amis, et ils espèrent bien établir de solides liens avec eux.

UPCOMING EVENTS 2023



Master Gardener Spring Lectures, 2023

The very popular spring lectures by the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton, hosted by the Friends of the Farm, will return this year. They will be virtual, on Tuesdays from March 7th through to May 16th.

A theme that links the six lectures is "Creating your Garden with Nature." They will cover everything from taking stock to needs and dreams, and from fostering biodiversity to creating your own garden design.

DATES AND MASTER GARDENERS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- **March 7**, with *Judith Cox*
- **April 4**, with *Rebecca Last*
- **April 18th**, with *Candace Dressler*
- **May 2**, with *Agnieszka Keough and Claire McCaughey*
- **May 16**, with *Josie Pazdzior and Adair Heuchan*

All lectures start at 7pm and will be held on Zoom. The Zoom link will be forwarded by noon on the day of each lecture.

The prices for the series of 5 lectures are \$45 for members and Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton, and \$55 for non-members.

STAY TUNED!

For more details on Spring Volunteer Recruitment, Plant Sale, & Used Book Sale!

Use the QR codes below:

2023 Events Facebook



Watch for more details at ...
www.friendsofthefarm.ca/fcef-annual-events/master-gardener-lectures/

FLASHBACK TO 1886

GLUE FACTORIES ON THE PROPOSED FARM

Two glue factories were on land targeted for a proposed new experimental farm in Ottawa, according to an August 1886 survey.

John B. Lewis conducted the survey at the request of the Minister of Agriculture, John Carling. Recently, a copy of his survey was kindly donated to the Friends of the Farm by Ewart Bowlby, vice president of Fairhall, Moffatt & Woodland, Ontario Land Surveys. This company, prior to some ownership changes, is the one originally established by Lewis.

The survey by Lewis covered the 465 acres to be acquired for the original Farm, the boundaries of which were the Rideau Canal, what are now Carling and Fisher Avenues, and in the south a line approximately at Cow Lane. The survey includes the owners of the various lots and the few buildings that existed.

Of interest is an old and a new glue factory towards the western boundary (Fisher), close to the northern concession line (Carling).

Horses have a lot of collagen in their bodies, which is a key ingredient in animal glue. "Ready for the glue factory" became a common expression in the 18th and 19th centuries to describe a dead, unwanted, or inferior horse. Because of the smell, people were unhappy living near such factories; hence the location of these ones in the 1880s well away, at the time, from the city. They were removed when the land was acquired for the Farm.



A Place to Wander in and Reflect

by Blaine Marchand

“Beautiful. Just perfect,” enthused Pamela Burns after she unveiled a brass plaque honouring her late husband John T. Connor, whose generous bequest made possible the restoration of the water feature in the Rock Garden in the Ornamental Gardens at the Farm. In addition to his bequest, his obituary requested that donations be made in his memory to the Friends.

For many years, the water feature was non-functioning. It was one of the “to do” projects that never was undertaken. But as John T. Connor had wished the funds to the Friends be used to enhance the gardens at the Farm, reviving the water feature seemed like the perfect fit.

The cascading sound of water can be heard once more. Along either side are dressings of river stone, rocks, and boulders. A small Chinese pagoda graces the top while here and there new plantings by the Rock Garden team enhance the site. In the small pool, Koi fish are a shimmer of orange and black and white. Based on the number of people stopping by or posing to take selfies, this revived feature is a place of reflection and tranquility, a fitting tribute to a man who accomplished many things.

Born in the Maritimes, John and his parents came to Ottawa in the early 1950s. The family home was along the Rideau River, close to the Central Experimental Farm. A rural oasis, the open fields were an invitation for

childhood exploration. He had many memories of the Farm from back then. In addition, he and Pamela shared a passion for gardening and created green sanctuaries at their home in Ottawa as well as in their country place. When travelling, the couple made sure to visit botanical and historic gardens.

The Farm was also important in the life of Pamela’s parents. Her mother, Judy Burns, was a founding director of the Friends of the Farm and, as a member, often kept her daughter and son-in-law informed about the Ornamental Gardens and Friends’ events held there.

“John believed gardens should be a joy for everyone, Pamela said. “They are beautiful spaces for people to wander in and reflect.”

Blaine Marchand is director of gardens for the Friends of the Farm.



PHOTOS ABOVE:

FIRST IMAGE: Plaque to honour John T. Connor.

BOTTOM IMAGE: Pamela Burns at the ceremony to unveil the plaque by the Rock Garden’s water feature, October 2022, with Pat and Robert Stuart. Robert, a Friends of the Farm board member, volunteers in the Rock Garden. *Photos by Heather Webster.*

A National Historic Site for 25 Years

Twenty-five years ago on February 4, 1998, a ceremony was held at the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum to designate the Central Experimental Farm as a National Historic Site. Such designations were made by the minister responsible for Parks Canada, on the advice of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board. The Board had recommended the designation the previous September.¹



The Farm was designated a national historic site of Canada because:

- “As a cultural landscape, the more than 400-hectare farm in the heart of the Nation's Capital reflects the 19th-century philosophy of agriculture and carefully integrates an administrative core and a range of other buildings with arboretum, ornamental gardens, display beds and experimental fields in a picturesque composition;
- Since its establishment in 1886, the farm has made significant scientific contributions to agriculture in Canada by uniting scientific experimentation with practical verification, as exemplified by the development of the hardy strains of wheat that were so influential in expanding Western Canadian agriculture; and
- A rare example of a farm within a city, the Central Experimental Farm has become a symbol of the central role agriculture has played in shaping the country.”

At the ceremony in 1998, an *Ottawa Citizen* reporter asked Andy Mitchell, Secretary of State for Parks Canada, whether the designation would protect

the Farm from future development. He replied that while the property would not be frozen by its new status, “whatever change processes take place here, they would take into account the historical values, the historical integrity of the site as part of their considerations.”

A report by a Standing Committee in 2017 on “Preserving Canada’s Heritage: the Foundation for Tomorrow,” concluded that “...the federal government must better address the way it protects and manages its own national historic sites and heritage buildings.”

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Following the designation, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) adopted a Management Plan for the Central Experimental Farm to guide its evolution. The plan’s objectives included, for example, “To strengthen the research identity of the Farm, as the most important path of continuity between its past, present, and future,” and “to ensure the commemorative and ecological integrity of the cultural landscape and its cultural and natural resources.”

AAFC has begun a review of the Management Plan to see if changes are needed in how the site is managed in order to meet the plan’s objectives, and to consider—among other things—the impact of developments such as the new hospital, expansion of the Canada Agriculture and Agri-Food Museum, the future of the Dominion Observatory complex, the proposed Canadensis Botanic Garden, and increased high-density zoning along Carling and Baseline.

Friends of the Farm, as a member of the Central Experimental Farm Advisory Council (CEFAC), is participating in this review. President Eric Jones chairs CEFAC.



¹ New proposed legislation Bill C-23 will change this designation from “national historic site” to “historic place.”

For further information on Bill C-23, see: <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-23/first-reading>.

Celebration Bench Program Comes to an End

By Shari Haas and Kate Harrigan

As far back as May 2012, the Friends of the Farm were considering projects to commemorate Canada's upcoming 150th anniversary. The 'FCEF 2017' committee, convened by President Eric Jones and consisting of Friends board members, various volunteers, and AAFC grounds staff had many projects to suggest. These were described in detail by specific champions and evaluated by the group. A 'Celebration Bench' program in the Arboretum was one of the proposals offered by Kate Harrigan, a new Friends member and volunteer, who was particularly passionate about public access and enjoyment of the Arboretum.

The aim of the bench program was to provide attractive, comfortable seating for rest and reflection in the most desirable Arboretum locations. The Arboretum already had green wooden-slat benches that were spread out in various areas each summer by AAFC grounds staff, but these are more utilitarian and movable amenities. The new benches would add much appreciated views at select locations, provide pleasant places to rest, be funded by private donations to commemorate a loved one, and include a dedication plaque. Considering the success of the Arboretum tree donor and Shelterbelt donor plaque programs, which no longer exist, new Arboretum benches seemed a

Continued on next page...



The first bench to be installed in the Arboretum, thanks to a donation by E. Neville Ward, looks out towards Dow's Lake.

HOW THE FRIENDS BEGAN ...

Continued from page 1...

booth at the annual Chrysanthemum Show and attracted 300 new members. The DM was delighted! We had funds to work with, lots of willing volunteers and ideas to pursue which would address the concerns of the CEF and Agriculture Canada.

We started talking to the Museum of Science and Technology about taking over the Showcase Herd, which is what eventually happened. The herd is now part of the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum.

We wanted the public to have a stake in the Arboretum and with Trevor Cole, Curator of the Arboretum, came up with the Trees in the Arboretum program. The opportunity to make a donation for a plaque against a tree was very popular and the program was very successful.

ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

Trevor Cole had begun the creation of a Hosta Garden, and this was moved along by dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers with the Friends, such as George Vorauer, who brought in Wally Parsons as the second President of the Friends of the Farm. Wally, at the time, was Vice President of Neilson Dairies.

We supported the Ottawa Field Naturalists Club's proposal for a wildlife garden, we prepared a brief to Agriculture Canada on the naming of buildings and roads, and we started looking at getting the Farm designated as a heritage site.

We were fortunate to be able to attract many active volunteers. Many people had moved into apartments but still wanted to work in a garden as they had done in their own homes. We also benefitted from generous corporate members.



PHOTOS ABOVE:

FIRST IMAGE: Peter Elliott, seen here in 1996, was an employee of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada when he founded the Friends of the Farm. **SECOND IMAGE:** Peter Elliott, 2013.

logical and welcoming addition. Many arboreta, city parks, and foundations across Canada feature dedication benches in their outdoor spaces. Several tasteful oak benches were already in use at the Ornamental Gardens, in the style of National Capital Commission (NCC) approved benches around the city.

THE BENCH PROGRAM BEGINS

By the end of 2012, the 2017 Committee accepted several potential projects for further investigation and refinement which included the Arboretum benches. From 2012 to 2016, not all but some of these projects were completed, including the Arboretum tree tours and Richard Hinchcliff's gorgeous garden book *Blooms, An Illustrated History of the Ornamental Gardens at Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm*.

It would take another few years for the Arboretum bench program to become a reality. In late 2016, board member Matthew LaCompte took over the project to spearhead its final stages. In January 2017, Board President Judy Dodds and vice-president Kate Harrigan presented the bench program to AAFC and received conditional approval to go forward. Many program issues were resolved including bench type and manufacturer, number and placement of benches, installation contractor, and donation contract details.

As a result, the project was approved, sponsorship sought, and the first installed Celebration Benches were available to donors in 2019. Two of these benches were installed in the Shelterbelt area with plaques noting that they were a gift from Shelterbelt donors. The other three benches were installed in the Dominion Arboretum. Fast forward four years to 2022 and 18 benches have been installed and are being enjoyed by both the donors who sponsored the benches and the general public who visit the Farm.

CELEBRATION BENCH PROCESS

As the current Bench Coordinator for a period of just over 15 months, commencing in late August 2021, I (Shari Haas) would like to share a few of my personal experiences with the Program. Thanks to the work of my predecessors, especially Deborah Higden-LeBlond, the Celebration Bench process was well defined and documented.

In a nutshell, AAFC informed the Friends how many sites could be made available to donors for installation the following year. A call for donors went out with a set time for donors to apply, which meant an approved application had to be accompanied by a cheque for the full sponsorship amount, a complete leap of faith by the donors. It was a fascinating part of the project, hearing about the different reasons why donors had chosen the Bench Program to commemorate their loved one.

We then worked with the donors to obtain the approved text for the plaque – four lines of text per plaque. This was one of my favorite parts of the project as it wasn't always easy to convey the message that the donors wanted while adhering to space restrictions and other guidelines for the plaque. For example, it was not possible to inscribe all the lyrics of the song "You Are My Sunshine" on a plaque, as one donor wished. But working together, we managed to craft a message that conveyed the essential meaning, while staying within the allotted amount of text. Interacting with the sponsors in this way certainly stimulated the brain and imagination. The site locations were then confirmed by AAFC to the Friends and site allocation choices then shown to the donors.

My partner in crime on this project was my spouse, Rick Haas. If site allocation had been left up to me, heaven knows where the benches might have been placed. I am truly hopeless with GPS and directions in general, and the Farm is so vast. But since the permitted locations had been identified by AAFC, Rick walked around with the six donors individually and choices were made in order of approved application date. He enjoyed being involved and getting to hear the reasons why the donors made their specific site location choice.

Due to COVID, there were some manufacturing delays which caused a few delivery challenges and problems with scheduling installations, but I am very pleased to say that the Bench Program has been a true example of how teamwork truly does make dreamwork. Many thanks for everyone's help, including Board members Eric, Deborah, and Randy Taylor, Marc LeBlond, CEF staff throughout the years, and the installer.

The following quote from one of our donors is a tribute to both the Team's efforts and the ultimate success of the Program:

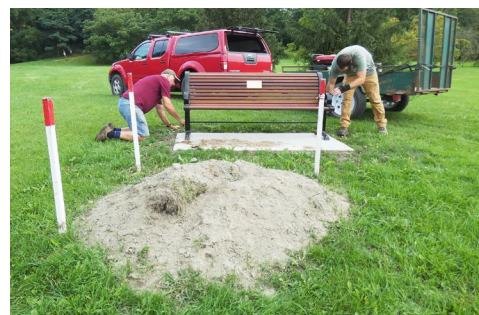
"Thank you so much for your work on the Benches program. It is a great program and your engagement from the beginning to the end made it all a pleasure and a rewarding experience for us all. Over time it will become a gathering place for friends and family. It is already popular with Carleton students which is a pleasurable discovery and reinforces my association with the campus"

NATURE AT ITS BEST

I have one last story that I would like to share. It occurred during last summer's installation, when our installation contractor Lucas brought his crew in to lift the grass and remove the soil so that the bench pads could be poured the next day. The soil was then piled to the side of the bench site for removal the following morning.

When Lucas returned the next day, to his great surprise a turtle had made a nest in the pile of soil during the overnight hours. To let nature take its course, the soil was left in place until the baby turtles arrived and left the nest.

In closing, the Celebration Bench Program has officially come to an end and the Friends would like to welcome all to pay a visit to the Arboretum to



enjoy the peacefulness of the Farm and to enjoy the natural beauty that it offers, and perhaps to take a moment of reflection or meditation on a "Celebration Bench."

Shari Haas managed the Celebration Bench Program during 2021-2022. Kate Harrigan championed the idea for it and got the project started.

PHOTO ABOVE:
Empty turtle nest. Randy Taylor.

Arboretum Tree Tours of 2022

Arboretum tree tours in 2022 attracted many participants. The six separate tours, each with a special theme, had to be limited to ensure the distancing required by COVID-19.

THE TOURS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

TREE FLOWERS IN THE DOMINION ARBORETUM | Tour leader Zoe Panchen reported on this tour in our Summer 2022 Newsletter. We were in luck with the timing for some of the showy tree flowers like magnolias, as well as many smaller—but not less beautiful—flowers that fill the Arboretum in spring.

LOWLAND AND SHORELINE HABITAT TOUR OF THE DOMINION ARBORETUM | Leader Owen Clarkin explored the habitat niches of lowland and shoreline areas of the Arboretum. Factors making these areas distinct include soil wetness, land contours, and the microclimate of Dow's Lake.

TREES ON THE CENTRAL EXPERIMENTAL FARM CAMPUS | Roman Popadiouk guided this tour of trees planted near the Ornamental Gardens and Main Lawn of the Farm. He highlighted examples of landscaping design (in keeping with the picturesque style of the Farm) and Farm-developed cultivars.

ENDANGERED TREES OF THE DOMINION ARBORETUM | On this tour, Owen Clarkin highlighted some of the threatened (vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered) species at the Arboretum. He discussed factors which had led to their endangerment and possible steps to help preserve and restore them.

NUT TREE TOUR OF THE DOMINION ARBORETUM | This tour was offered jointly by the Friends and the Eastern Canadian Section of the Ontario Nut Growers Society. The tour leader was Owen Clarkin, who examined oaks, walnuts, hickories, buckeyes, and other nut trees, and identified what makes their nuts distinctive.

AUTUMN TREE COLOUR IN THE DOMINION ARBORETUM | Once again we were lucky in timing this walk during the beautiful extended fall season. Robert Glendinning guided the tour around the reds, yellows, purples, browns, and other pigments of Arboretum trees as the green faded away.

ARTICLE PHOTOS:

TOP: The endangered trees tour with Owen Clarkin (right) **BOTTOM LEFT:** Robert Glendinning and the autumn tree colour tour. *Eric Jones.* **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** Roman Popadiouk leading a tour of the Farm campus area. *Patricia Jasen.* **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Nut tree tour participants. *Eric Jones.*



ARBORETUM TREE TOURS WILL BE BACK THIS YEAR. They are typically offered every month from May to November and are guided by local experts. Space is limited. Watch for them at <https://friendsofthefarm.ca/fcef-annual-events/arboretum-tree-tours/>.

For more details on Tree Tours use the link above or scan the QR code:



Peony tour participants. *Marilyn Whitaker.*

Ornamental Garden Tours 2022

This year was a popular one to explore and learn about the Ornamental Garden's collections of lilacs, peonies, irises, and daylilies, as well as the Rock Garden, perennial borders, and the Macoun Memorial Garden. As always, scheduling the tours to coincide with bloom times, which are influenced by the vagaries of Ottawa springs, was a challenge. Nonetheless, the challenge was met, and several interesting and enjoyable tours were given by our experts in the garden volunteer teams.

AMONG THE TOURS WERE THE FOLLOWING:

On the **LILAC TOUR**, people learned from Maura Giuliani and colleagues on her volunteer team about the history of lilacs at the Farm, the various types of lilacs growing there, and plant hybridizer extraordinaire Isabelle Preston.

The fourteen separate **IRIS** beds that host the collection of Siberian, Isabella Preston, and the 'Thorpe' irises, as well as various irises developed in the early half of the twentieth century were the colourful focus of a tour led by Carol MacLeod and Linda Butcher.

The varieties of **PEONIES** being grown at the Farm, including the largest collection of A. P. Saunders peonies in North America and the Inter-sectional Itoh peonies first hybridized in 1948, were the subject of another tour, guided by Blaine Marchand. In addition, Blaine gave four other tours to various horticultural groups in the region.

The **MACOUN MEMORIAL GARDEN** occupies the footprint of the residence of W.T. Macoun, Dominion Horticulturist from 1910 to 1933. Participants on the tour of this garden, led by Polly McColl, saw many perennials and shrubs favoured by Macoun. As an added bonus, the tour also covered the **PERENNIAL BORDERS**, which allowed participants to learn about the various types of perennials typically grown in botanical gardens, including both new introductions and old-time favourites.

People on the tour of the **ROCK GARDEN** heard from Annie Creighton about this unique type of gardening, ideal for small city properties. They discovered the garden's history and were introduced to the types of plants growing there – alpine, sub-alpine and woodland. Many spent a quiet moment of reflection by the cascading stream of the restored water feature.

A tour of the **ORNAMENTAL GARDENS** was presented in French in June by Jean-Charles Charron, a volunteer with the peony team. The tour took about 75 minutes and most of the questions were about specific flowers. People on the tour were impressed, they said, with the number of volunteers and the many hours they work to keep the gardens at their best.

TOURS OF THE ORNAMENTAL GARDENS WILL BE BACK THIS YEAR.

Come and join in. Space is limited, so watch for them at <https://friendsofthefarm.ca/ornamental-garden-tours/>.

For more details on the Ornamental Garden Tours use the link above or scan the QR code:



In the Footsteps of Ancestors

Suzanne Saunders and her daughter Brittany Shaw visited the Farm in October. Suzanne is the great-great-granddaughter of William Saunders, the founding father of Canada's Experimental Farm system. He built the Central Experimental Farm into an internationally renowned research institution beautifully situated within a picturesque landscape in the heart of Ottawa. Sir Charles Saunders, who also lived and worked at the Farm, was Suzanne's great-uncle.

Suzanne, an award-winning journalist in California, and Brittany, a Silicon Valley high-tech company manager, are descendants of the third child of William and Sarah Saunders, Henry S. Saunders. Henry was a successful chemist, musician, archivist, bookbinder, and botanical artist. At a young age, he and his brother Will ran the family drugstore in London, Ontario. He later played cello with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, amassed a notable collection of Walt Whitman memorabilia, and bound over 3,000 books.

Suzanne and Brittany first toured the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum, where they visited the Cereal Barn (Building 76). This was the site where Charles Saunders tested new cereal varieties in his milling and baking rooms and discovered the famous 'Marquis' wheat. The Museum's Director-General Kerry-Leigh Burchill, who served as their tour guide, drew links between the educational function of the original Farm, which was to help Canadian farmers, and the current museum's function, which is to educate Canadians about present-day agriculture practices and associated critical issues like sustainability and climate change.

After a visit to the offices of the Friends of the Farm, Gardens Director Blaine Marchand escorted Suzanne and Brittany around the Ornamental Gardens. Suzanne explained she was "an avid



gardener," a trait that continues to run in the family. Her three brothers, "also in Northern California, have a wine vineyard, commercial organic farm, citrus orchard, and enough home-grown vegetables for the neighbors." Viewing the beds of peonies in the Ornamental Gardens which were bred by Suzanne's great-uncle A. P. (Percy) Saunders, she noted how William had instilled both an intellectual curiosity and a cultural appreciation in his children. Blaine related this to Percy's genius in creating new peony colours, which involved bringing a scientific approach and an artistic sensibility to his hybridizing experiments, knowing what colour combinations would create those new colours.

Will Knight, Curator of Agriculture and Fisheries at Ingenium, joined us on Blaine's tour to discuss archival collections of Saunders artifacts and images. Suzanne showed him the knighthood medallion received by Charles for his discovery of 'Marquis'



PHOTOS ABOVE:
TOP: Henry S. Saunders. *Western University Archives.* **BOTTOM:** Suzanne (right) and Brittany beside a photograph of William Saunders at the William Saunders Building

wheat. Along with the medallion were instructions on how to behave at the award ceremony and how to wear the medallion.

Suzanne and Brittany were especially keen to visit the William Saunders Building. Research Scientist Scott Redhead and colleagues welcomed them and showed them around, pointing out various portraits of William and Charles. Scott, Anissa Lybaert, Kelsey Joustra, and Jennifer Wilkinson then provided a tour of the vascular plant collection and the mycological herbarium. One specimen they displayed was an orchid collected by Suzanne's great-great-grandmother Sarah, wife of William Saunders, in the 1870s, before the Central Experimental Farm was established. Another was the famous 'Marquis' wheat.

It was a great pleasure to have Suzanne and Brittany here to explore what continues to be a working farm with delightful gardens and grounds. Their enthusiasm and curiosity in tracing the steps of their forefathers was a joy to see. In appreciation, Suzanne subsequently wrote that the "tours and conversations were extraordinary opportunities, which remain fresh and so very meaningful. I am especially pleased that with Brittany joining us, a younger generation of Saunders has a better understanding of the magnificent contributions of our ancestors."



PHOTO ABOVE:
Scott Redhead and Suzanne at the mycological herbarium. R. Hinchcliff.

Les Jardins de Métis. Photos courtesy of Alexander Reford.

HOW ISABELLA PRESTON AND LADY BYNG SHAPED

Elsie Reford's Gardens

By Alexander Reford

Last year, Les Jardins de Métis celebrated the 150th anniversary of the birth of its founder, Elsie Reford. To mark the occasion, a group of authors joined us in writing her history for a new book *Elsie Reford: 150 Objects of Passion*. The book uses 150 objects that Elsie Reford owned, collected, and gifted to tell her story. Her gardens are at the heart of the story, but the book also recalls her contributions to public life in Montreal and Canada over the first five decades of the 20th century.

The research took us into our own archives as well as those of other institutions to learn more about Elsie Reford and the context in which she showed herself to be so original and so daring a gardener.

One of the discoveries is the degree to which her success as a gardener was helped by her friendship with two important figures in Ottawa horticulture – Isabella Preston and Lady Byng (Marie Evelyn Byng, Viscountess Byng of Vimy). Without their precious help, Elsie Reford's gardens would have been much the poorer in its ambitions and collections. Byng was an important figure in rock-gardening. Preston was an accomplished hybridizer. They helped Elsie Reford create one of the most impressive ornamental gardens in Eastern Canada.

Elsie Reford was born in Perth, near Ottawa, on January 23, 1872. She spent most of her life in Montreal, where she died, aged 95, in November 1967. Her gardens were 600 kilometres downstream from Montreal, on a shoreline estate overlooking the St. Lawrence River in Grand-Métis. She began her gardens in 1926 and developed them over three decades. Embracing the salt air, the gardens were much aided by the cool summers and heavily snowed winters. The climate allowed her to "adventure in gardening", trialing perennial plants

that had yet to prove their hardiness in this Nordic environment.

Sourcing plants for the Canadian climate was one of the challenges faced by early horticultural enthusiasts. Inspired by the books of Gertrude Jekyll and the garden envy she experienced visiting gardens in English and Scotland, Elsie Reford sought plants to populate the beds she was creating along a stream that flowed through her property. Fortunately, her timing was perfect because new hybrids were being developed by Isabella Preston at the horticultural division of the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa.

Preston was already an accomplished hybridizer when she arrived at the Farm in 1920, having showed her talent for nearly a decade at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, Ontario. Her hybridizing skills created about one hundred hybrid lilacs, the "stenographer" lilies series, and various crabapples in a "rosybloom" series which she launched. Preston is justly revered for her achievements as a hybridizer (her Creelman lily, for instance, was awarded a coveted Award of Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1934) and for being an exemplar for women of science in the federal public service. For more information on her life and achievements, consult the article by Edwinna von Baeyer entitled "The



Horticultural Odyssey of Isabella Preston,” in *Canadian Horticultural History*, Vol. 1, No.3, 1987.

From her order books, we know that Elsie Reford obtained Preston hybrids for her growing gardens. We also know that Preston’s accessible 1929 book *Garden Lilies* was part of her reference library. And as she started to publish articles about her gardens in 1939, Elsie Reford singled out Preston’s lily hybrids for special praise:

“Of our Canadian hybrid L. x ‘G.C. Creelman’, it is difficult to speak with restrained enthusiasm, for it is a magnificent Lily — an adjective applicable to all its parts ... As the length of the trumpets is never less than nine inches, if the full beauty of the flowers is to be revealed the bulbs should not be planted closer than 18 inches to two feet. These Creelman Lilies have shown no preference with us for soil or position: in a grouping in full sun with *Acer palmatum atropurpureum* the effect is strikingly handsome, but wherever they may be, they will dominate in majestic beauty. All lovers and growers of Lilies are laid under a debt of gratitude to Miss Isabella Preston for this splendid achievement in hybridization.”¹

A Christmas card sent by Elsie Reford to Isabella Preston the same year included a photograph with a hand-written note that read: “some of your lilies at Grand Metis 1939. I wish you a happy Xmas & New Year with many results hoped for in your undertakings.”¹

A decade later, writing for the yearbook of the North American Lily Society, she praised another Preston hybrid:



“For a true golden color, Miss Isabella Preston’s L. ‘Coronation’ stands alone. It is quite a strong grower with us, and never is it passed by unnoticed nor does it ever fail to arouse admiration. Whether it be this lily or any of the brilliant class of *Stenographer* lilies so vigorous and happy in their flame and salmon and orange hues which remind us of what we owe to Miss Preston’s scientific knowledge, to her penetration and patience and industry, it is still with that magnificent hybrid, ‘George Creelman’, that her name is forever and most triumphantly associated.”²

We know more about Elsie Reford’s friendship with Lady Byng because of the portrait Byng left of her time in Métis in her autobiography, *Up the Stream of Time*. Written while Lady Byng was living in Ottawa during the Second World War and published in 1945, Lady Byng reserves some enthusiastic praise for time spent in Métis:

“Grand Métis, lying at a point where the river is thirty-fives miles wide, has been one of my havens of refuge I have seen grander sunsets on that stretch of curving shore than anywhere else in the world, I think. Wild, stormy, blazing in crimson, gold, and orange and green, they stain the sky, while an unearthly stillness reins, though the rocks are crowded with gulls and cormorants. The latter’s long necks outstretched against the sky line suggest the crenellated battlements of some fairy fortress. Over it all broods that silence in which ducks quack sotto voce, as if fearful of breaking its peace, the low cry of loons comes moaningly landwards; while the faint



tinkle of the Métis River as it hastens impatiently seaward falls on the ear. The sunset’s glory flames arrogantly for a final moment when the Western sky spreads forth a fleecy bed of clouds for the sun’s escape from the pursuing globe of a full moon, rising apace in the eastern sky. One realizes at that moment the full meaning of “The peace which passeth all understanding”.

Byng was an accomplished gardener when she arrived as the consort to her husband, Viscount Byng of Vimy, to take up his position as Governor General in 1921. She had transformed the property of their home at Thorpe Hall from “an Essex swamp into a wonderful water garden, blazing with the brilliance of iris and poppy”.³

Lady Byng quickly marshalled her formidable energy to re-shaping the gardens and grounds of Rideau Hall. “In three years, she accomplished what normally it would have taken five years to do, and her joy in it was not lessened by the fact that she would have only a short season to enjoy it before returning to her own English gardens”, is how Alice MacKay described Lady

PHOTOS ABOVE:

LEFT: Portrait of Elsie Reford. **MIDDLE:** Lady Byng and Viscount Byng of Vimy, Governor General of Canada. **RIGHT:** Isabella Preston with her lilies. Reford included Preston hybrids in her gardens.

¹ Richard Hinchcliff, *Blooms. An Illustrated History of the Ornamental Gardens at Ottawa’s Central Experimental Farm*, Friends of the Central Experimental Farm, 2016, p. 84. ² Elsie Reford, “A Lily Garden in the Lower St. Lawrence Valley,” *The Lily Yearbook*, No. 2, 1949, p. 73. ³ *The Gazette*, 1 July, 1920. ⁴ Alice MacKay, “Lady Byng’s Au Revoir to Canadian Horticulture”, *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, November, 1926, in *Canada’s Home Rideau Hall and the invention of a Canadian home*, 2004, p. 81.

Byng's horticultural achievements in the pages of *Canadian Homes and Gardens* in November, 1926.⁴ The Lady Byng rockery at Rideau Hall was one of her horticultural legacies, illustrating her special interest in rock gardening and rock plants. When the Byngs left Canada in October 1926, they returned to Thorpe Hall where Lady Byng built her "Canadian garden", made up of plants she had discovered in her tours across the country.

Byng met Isabella Preston and was sufficiently inspired by her work with Siberian irises to attempt her own hybridization efforts. The links between

Lady Byng and Isabella Preston are worth exploring to see what else might be revealed about the overlap of these two horticultural leaders during the five years they were in the Nation's Capital.

Lady Byng was not simply a garden enthusiast. She promoted gardens and gardening and forged connections between gardeners. Lady Byng visited Métis just as Elsie Reford was embarking on the construction of her gardens, providing inspiration and advice. She invited Elsie Reford to the first-ever rock gardening conference held in London, England in 1936 by the Alpine Garden Society and the

Royal Horticultural Society, under her presidency. Elsie Reford was one of a handful of Canadians in attendance. And while she herself did not speak, her friend and fellow Montreal gardener Cleveland Morgan did, presenting her garden in his slide presentation on "Rock-gardening in the Province of Quebec". The paper, published in the conference proceedings, lauded Elsie Reford and vaunted her special skills and success of her microclimate, one that Morgan wished to have had for his remarkable garden on the Lake of Two Mountains in Senneville where humidity and summer heat were his constant enemies.

The intersection of this trio of horticultural enthusiasts illustrates one of the great strengths of gardeners – their eagerness to share their passion and willingness to collaborate. The archives may reveal more about these remarkable women, each blessed with great talents used for the betterment of Canadian horticulture. They were part of the same adventure to grow perennial plants in a Nordic environment.

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Elsie Reford was 54 years of age when she began her gardens.

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