



Spring 2026 Newsletter | Volume 38 No. 2

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JESSICA HSIUNG - Bridging the Gap between Data and Comprehension

By Joan Butcher

Images kindly provided by Jessica Hsiung

Jessica Hsiung is a Scientific Illustrator with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). Her duties require artistic talent, scientific knowledge, and the very highest level of precision. The beautifully rendered illustrations she creates are primarily of specimens from the natural world, done



Jessica Hsiung, Scientific Illustrator at AAFC, holding an illustration of the beetle *Neomida bicornis*. Agri-info, AAFC

in aid of the scientific research associated with AAFC's Canadian National Collection of Insects, Arachnids and Nematodes (CNC). This collection is one of the five largest of its kind in the world, serving Canadian scientists who are looking

into problems in areas such as agriculture, biodiversity, genetics, and biological control.

LOVED ART AND PICKING UP BUGS

From very early childhood, Jessica loved to create art and crafts. She recalls that at age two or three she drew "a portrait of my grandma and she was so amused by it that she cried, because I had noticed and included details about her like her perm and her earrings that made it actually look like her." Jessica was also very curious about how things in the natural world



Pandora Sphinx Moth, by Jessica Hsiung.

worked, and was keen to "look at plants and pick up insects. I collected caterpillars, moths, pill bugs, and loads of pine cones of different shapes and sizes. I did make sure to release live creatures after a brief time."

These interests led her to study for a B.A. at the University of Toronto with specialties in Fine Art History, Visual Studies, and Biology. She became aware of scientific illustration as a possible career when in 2008 her mother found out about a workshop held in Hastings, Michigan given by the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators (GNSI). While attending this formative event, she had the opportunity to draw a mouse from life (caught humanely and let go), take field trips to the zoo to sketch animals, dissect rat cadavers and learn about their anatomy, and explore different mediums and techniques to create scientifically accurate illustrations. People from GNSI "were very supportive and helpful in introducing me to this career."



Brazilian Diamond Weevil (*Entimus imperialis*), by Jessica Hsiung.

Jessica went on to receive a Postgraduate certificate in Science Illustration from California State University Monterey Bay. The program often involved going on field trips to sketch nature and helped hone her

Continued on page 4...



Message from the President Message de la présidente

Dianne Caldbick

*President, Friends of the Central Experimental Farm
Président, Les Amis de la Ferme expérimentale centrale*

I've heard it said that there's really no off-season for gardeners, that winter is the *planning* season, as we look forward to welcoming the spring *planting* season.

This is certainly true for the Friends of the Farm. Our Board of Directors has devoted these winter months to reviewing our progress on the objectives set in 2025 and looking ahead to what we want to achieve in pursuit of the FCEF mission in 2026 and beyond.

Overall, we feel we had a good year in 2025. The gardens and the Arboretum looked lovely, reflecting the hard work of our wonderful volunteers. Our 2025 CelebriTree program added 23 new trees to the Arboretum's collection, with all the trees 'adopted' within minutes of the program's launch. New peony beds were dug and planted with special varieties from long-time FCEF volunteer Bill Wegman's first-rate collection. And plans were developed and work initiated to replace the aging wooden arbours and pergolas in the Ornamental Gardens. All this was accomplished by working closely and collaboratively with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Jeremy DiZazzo and his dedicated team.

The FCEF also worked hard in 2025 to expand public awareness and appreciation of the Farm. We organised eight tree tours and 12 garden tours, and we launched a Speaker Series devoted to the history of the Farm and the ongoing research that it hosts. The Board also turned its attention to enhancing governance of the organization,

revising and updating the FCEF Bylaws and the Investment Policy, for example.

But there's much more to be done. In looking ahead to what we want to achieve this year and beyond, the Board has revisited our objectives and considered where best to focus our energies. We're anxious to share our thinking with you and to receive your feedback. To this end, we hope that you'll join us at the **FCEF's 2026 Annual General Meeting, on Tuesday, June 9**, as we explore our accomplishments, opportunities, and priorities.

In the meantime, we look forward to getting back into the Farm's gardens and Arboretum to embrace the joys of the planting season. Come and linger at the Farm, and say hello to our volunteers as they begin their work. If you're interested in joining their ranks, please drop in to our Volunteer Recruitment Day on April 11. I hope to see you there.

Happy spring!

J'ai entendu dire qu'il n'y a pas de basse saison pour les jardiniers. L'hiver est dédié à la planification, alors que nous nous réjouissons à l'idée d'accueillir la saison de plantation au printemps.

Ceci s'avère tout à fait vrai en ce qui concerne les Amis de la Ferme. Durant ces mois d'hiver, le conseil s'est penché sur le progrès réalisé selon les objectifs ciblés en 2025. Puis, tenant compte de l'avenir, il a formulé ce qu'il désire réaliser dans la

poursuite de la mission des Amis en 2026 et par la suite.

De façon globale, nous estimons que 2025 a été une bonne année. Les jardins et l'Arboretum ont fière allure grâce à nos dynamiques bénévoles. Dans le cadre du programme Célébrons les arbres 2025, 23 nouveaux arbres ont rejoint la collection de l'Arboretum, et en quelques minutes suivant le lancement, tous ont été adoptés. De nouveaux massifs de pivoines ont été creusés pour y planter des variétés particulières provenant de la collection de premier ordre de Bill Wegman, un bénévole de longue date avec les Amis. De plus, des plans ont été élaborés et le travail amorcé pour remplacer les tonnelles et pergolas vieillissantes des Jardins ornementaux. Tout ce travail a été accompli en étroite collaboration avec Jeremy DiZazzo et son équipe spécialisée d'Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada.

En 2025, les Amis ont déployé d'admirables efforts en vue de hausser la conscientisation et l'appréciation de la part du public relativement à la Ferme. Des visites guidées ont été tenues, dont huit à l'Arboretum et 12 dans les jardins. Il y a eu aussi le lancement de la série des conférenciers dédiée à l'histoire de la Ferme et la recherche continue dont elle assure la gestion. Le conseil s'est également penché sur de possibles options pour améliorer la gestion de l'organisme et faire la révision et la mise à jour des règlements touchant les Amis, ainsi que la Politique de placement, par exemple.

Il reste encore bien du travail à faire. Alors que nous passons en revue ce que nous désirons accomplir cette année et par la suite, le conseil a pour sa part revu nos objectifs et a pu déterminer à partir de quel point nous devons diriger nos efforts. Nous avons bien hâte de vous faire part de notre point de vue et de recevoir vos commentaires. À cette fin, nous vous invitons à prendre part à **l'Assemblée générale annuelle des Amis le mardi 9 juin**, alors que nous évaluons nos réalisations, nos opportunités, nos objectifs.

Entre-temps, nous sommes heureux de retrouver l'Arboretum et les jardins de la Ferme et, de plus, ressentir la joie qui se dégage en cette saison de plantation. Venez à la Ferme, attardez-vous un moment et saluez les bénévoles qui entreprennent leur travail. Si vous désirez faire partie de ce groupe dynamique, l'occasion vous sera présentée le jour du recrutement le 11 avril prochain. Au plaisir.

Joyeux printemps!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Volunteer Recruitment
Saturday, April 11

Plant Sale
Neatby Building parking lot, Maple Drive, Sunday, May 10, 8 am to 1 pm, rain or shine.

Used Book Drop-off
May 23.

Used Book Sale
May 30 and 31.

Annual General Meeting
Tuesday, June 9.

Garden Party
July 25, 3 to 5 pm.

Arboretum tours
To be announced.

Ornamental Gardens tours
To be announced.

Stay tuned to our [2026 Events page](#) and our [Facebook page](#) for more details.

Members, You're Invited!

Celebrate the summer and the Friends of the Farm with us! Please save the date for the first-ever Friends of the Farm summer garden party, which will take place on Saturday, July 25, from 3 pm - 5 pm. Enjoy refreshing gelato and cold drinks, visit the gardens, mix and mingle with fellow members, and hear from the FCEF Board of Directors.

We appreciate your membership and support for the Friends of the Farm. This event is free for all FCEF members. Non-members can attend for a suggested donation of \$20.

We look forward to seeing you there! If you have any questions, please contact Liz Lumsden, communications@friendsofthefarm.ca.



GROWING FOOD

The very popular spring lectures by the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carlton, hosted by the Friends of the Farm, continue this spring. The remaining virtual lectures will be held on April 14 and April 29. This year's theme for these timely, informative presentations is "Inspired Gardening – Growing Food."

Growing Unusual Edibles: Successes, Failures and Learnings

– Claire McCaughey
Tuesday, April 14, 2025

Tiny Gardens Big Harvest

– Judith Cox
Tuesday, April 29, 2025

Lectures start at 7pm and will be held online. A link for each lecture will be emailed to registered participants by 12:30 on the day of the lecture. Fees for individual lectures are \$10 for FCEF and MGOC members and \$12, for non-members respectively.

Check for more details at the lecture page on the Friends' website. Contact info@friendsofthefarm.ca for further information. To register, click [here](#).



'French Breakfast' radish, by Faith Fyles (see page 10).
Library and Archives Canada, 1993-239DAP



Greetings from

Liz Lumsden,
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Hello! If we haven't yet had the pleasure of meeting, my name is Liz Lumsden and I have been the FCEF Communications Director for

the past year. I'm thrilled to be a part of such a wonderful group of dedicated volunteers. It's been a joy to meet so many people who share my passion for this amazing green space in the heart of the city.

I bring to this role more than 15 years of experience in communications, specializing in media relations, strategy and event planning. I'm currently managing communications for a national agriculture association.

In the past year, we've achieved positive media coverage of our new publication, *Pathways to the Trees*. I hope to further expand public awareness of the significance of the Farm as I continue on in this role. If you aren't already, please follow our social media accounts on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn, and help spread the word!

We have some ambitious goals for improving and increasing our communications, and I'm always looking for volunteers to help us achieve this. If you have expertise in social media, websites, design, or marketing, please reach out to me and get involved.

Liz Lumsden | communications@friendsofthefarm.ca

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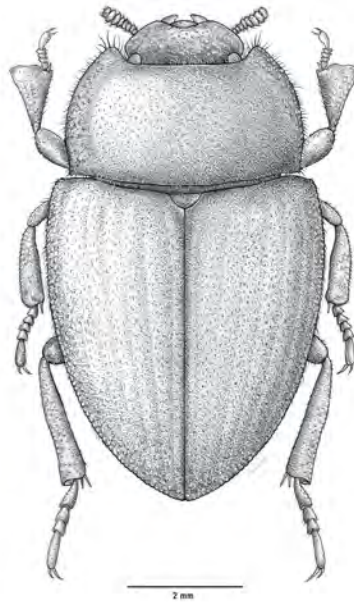
ability to learn through observations. This was followed by a Masters in Medical Art at the University of Dundee in Scotland. This area of Scotland, including Glasgow and Edinburgh, is renowned for anatomy museums and medical programs. She spent significant time at Dundee attending surgeries and doing sketches inside the operating rooms. Half of her class time was spent in the Forensic Art program. "I had the opportunity to learn about forensic reconstruction . . . and we were able to learn through cadaver dissections and labs," she related. "This was one of my favourite parts of the program."

Her internships, at the Royal Ontario Museum and in the entomology department of the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC were very focused on illustrating for research publications. This type of work held great appeal for her. After graduating from the University of Dundee, she held a position at the McGill University Health Centre as a medical illustrator. When a posting for a job as scientific illustrator at AAFC appeared in 2017, she decided to apply. Kudos to those responsible for making the wise decision to hire her.

WELL-SUITED TO HER WORK

As is evident from the selection of Jessica's illustrations that accompany this article, her drawings are astonishingly true to life and demonstrate impressive artistry. Being a scientific illustrator is clearly her vocation, and she very eloquently describes her approach to the work.

"I enjoy the accuracy of scientific illustration blended with aesthetics to create something that both science- and art-minded people can appreciate. Scientific illustration is a form of visual



communication. It's a language in its own right that bridges the gap between data and comprehension. What fascinates me is that every creature, plant, or microbe has something unique about it. As an illustrator, I love discovering those details and translating them into illustrations. As a curious human, I love learning all about every subject I draw. That is also why I am never bored in my work. At AAFC, I get to illustrate a variety of plants and insects across different orders. Each illustration . . . teaches me something new."

"Scientific illustration isn't always the main attraction. It often works quietly, supporting the research by making complex ideas clearer and more accessible. I think my career in this field and on the Farm has suited me very well. I am happy to . . . support the valuable scientific research done at AAFC."

LEFT Darkling Beetle (*Ephalus latimanus*), by Jessica Hsiung. **RIGHT** Pollinator Plants & Insects, by Jessica Hsiung.

You can find out more about Jessica Hsiung's work in an [article from AAFC](#) titled "The fine art of science: Visualizing research through art."

Also, two of Jessica's works will be on exhibit at the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum this spring. "The Art of Science: A hundred years of agriculture illustration on the Central Experimental Farm" will showcase her work alongside that of Arthur Kellett, Frank Hennessey, and Faith Fyles. This small exhibition is a companion to the Ottawa Art Gallery's "Faith Fyles: In Full Bloom" which opened March 7 (see article page 10).

Joan Butcher is the Newsletter's assistant editor.

The Art of Science Exhibition

The Ottawa Art Gallery's "Faith Fyles: In Full Bloom" exhibition opened March 7 (see page 10). A companion exhibition will open shortly at the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum ([check the website for details](#)). It is entitled "The Art of Science: A hundred years of agriculture illustration on the Central Experimental Farm" and includes work by Faith Fyles and Jessica Hsiung (see page 1). Other artists include Arthur Kellett and Frank Hennessey.

Arthur Kellett began work at the Farm in the entomology division in 1913 and succeeded Fyles as the botanical artist in the horticulture division in 1931. He painted many of the beautiful creations of famed hybridizer Isabella Preston, such as her Stenographer lily 'Grace Marshall'.



Frank Hennessey worked in the entomology division from 1921 to 1941 and illustrated many of the division's publications on insects. Known for his Canadian landscape painting, his art is in the collection of the National Art Gallery.



LEFT Preston lily 'Grace Marshall', by Arthur Kellett. *Ingenium*. **RIGHT** Spruce budworm, by Frank Hennessey. *Department of Agriculture, Bulletin 37, 1924*.

United Nations International Volunteer Year

2026

Friends of the Central Experimental Farm



FRIENDS OF THE FARM AND THE UN INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER YEAR 2026

Many and varied activities will be held in association with the Year of Volunteers and communities are being encouraged to host celebratory events. The Friends of the Farm is in the process of planning special ways to honour our volunteers. One way to do this is to capture moments in photographs and posters. Our publications are highlighting various volunteers and their unique stories. As well, our annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon will have special features. We would love to have your ideas on ways to celebrate the International Year of Volunteers so please do not hesitate to offer them.

The UN has set inclusion as a focused theme for 2026.

The Friends of the Farm can be proud of our racial and cultural diversity, and we aim to continue increasing that representation.

There are millions and millions of volunteers around the world, each with their own reasons for volunteering, organizational goals, and aspirations, as well as their varied challenges and accomplishments. On the one hand, the Friends of the Farm, with our 200-plus dedicated volunteers, is a single group with an exclusive aim of sustaining a National Historic Site in Canada's capital. But on the other hand, we are connected to all those millions and millions of global volunteers. We are bonded simply by being volunteers in a worldwide community of volunteers. There is a certain honour in being part of such a community.

VOLUNTEERS: THE VALUE OF ONE; THE POWER OF MANY

International Volunteer Year 2026 provides an opportunity to express our gratitude to those who give of their time and talents, whether in our local communities or the global stage. It reminds us that together, every contribution, no matter how big or small, is important and helps build a resilient and caring society. Further, it gives us an opportunity to reflect that it is not only the specific way we give, like our work with the Friends of the Farm, but the very fact that we give that is inspirational.

Christina Fiedorowicz is Volunteer Director for the Friends of the Farm.

IMAGE CREDIT: Theshlen Naidoo, Sooters Photography, 1996 Custom Photo Lab

International Year of Volunteers 2026

By Christina Fiedorowicz

The General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) proclaimed 2026 as the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development. The resolution was co-sponsored by 54 Member States with the objective of recognizing the vital role of volunteers and their contributions around the world. It was declared “a testament to the unwavering commitment and dedication of volunteers across diverse sectors, advocating for positive change and actively shaping a sustainable future.”

The UN celebrates all forms of volunteerism including formal or informal and local or global. The aim of having a special year to honour volunteers is to strongly convey the importance of volunteering, thank those volunteers who give back to their neighbours, community, and society, and recognize them as a “global force for change.” The UN International Year of Volunteers will promote volunteerism worldwide, with the hope of encouraging more people to join some volunteer activity.

The idea of an International Year to recognize volunteers was first considered by the UN in 1996. Japan initiated the process which eventually led to the UN declaring the first International Year of Volunteers in 2001. The specified aim at that time was to elevate the recognition of volunteers globally and offer networking opportunities and other ways to help volunteers accomplish their goals. The

International Volunteer Year 2026 is the second such celebration. The focus on sustainable development this year is a link to a broader goal of the UN agenda for 2030, which places more emphasis and accelerated action on sustainable development globally.

HOW MANY VOLUNTEERS ARE THERE WORLDWIDE?

Estimates of the number of volunteers worldwide are varied but the consensus is that about 2.1 billion people volunteer every month, through formal and informal means. Now that is an impressive number! Another report estimates that about 14-15 per cent of the global population volunteers monthly, making it a significant global activity.

CANADA'S ROLE DURING INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER YEAR 2026

Canada has the distinction of having one of the highest volunteering participation rates in the world. About 40-45 per cent of Canadians aged 15 years and older volunteer in a given year, some 10.4 million Canadians. Again, these are impressive statistics. Canada's commitment for the UN International Volunteer Year 2026 is to highlight that volunteers “bind communities together” and to focus on civic engagement, addressing social and economic challenges, and promote Canada's Volunteer Awards.

CelebriTree: Three Years Later

By Elizabeth Atkinson

As Chair of the Friends of the Central Experimental Farm's CelebriTree program, I am pleased to report on its continued evolution. Launched three years ago as a pilot initiative to re-introduce donor-sponsored plantings to the Dominion Arboretum, the program has matured steadily: in 2025 we added 23 new saplings, bringing the total number of CelebriTrees to an impressive 60. What began as a small experiment is now a popular way for people to mark important events and loved ones while augmenting a nationally significant living collection.

Over the past three seasons we have learned a great deal — about species selection, establishment care, and the administrative systems that make timely plantings and donor communications possible. Working closely with the expert staff of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) has been central to that progress: their expertise leads tree selection, planting technique, and ongoing maintenance, and our Committee has focused on streamlining processes so that sponsorship, tagging, and the donor experience is more straightforward. The program's structure features a ten-year sponsorship, on-site species tags with QR codes linking to honouree stories, and charitable receipts for donors. This helps ensure each dedication is informative and meaningful.

Like any outdoor planting program, CelebriTree has encountered environmental challenges. Drier conditions and regional pest pressure affected some of the young plantings in the 2025 season. Our response has emphasized measures that tangibly improve establishment success: targeted supplemental watering, mulching, careful siting, and close monitoring during the first years of growth. These practical steps, together with AAFC's and the Arboretum team's stewardship, have helped most new trees through their vulnerable establishment phase. This winter's heavier snowpack will be helpful principally as a source of spring soil moisture when it melts — an important factor for young root systems.



This Weeping Birch sapling on Heart Island is watched over by the magnificent, mature willow. The photo was taken in July 2024, about 14 months after its planting as a CelebriTree. *Elizabeth Atkinson*

We have also invested in improving the donor and visitor experience online. The [CelebriTree web pages](#) now make it easier to learn about the program, view the interactive map of current dedications, and read the stories that accompany each tree. I encourage members and visitors to explore the collection both in person at the Dominion Arboretum and via the program pages. The combination of on-site interpretation and digital storytelling is one of the features that makes CelebriTree distinct.

Looking ahead, interest in the program remains strong and we are excited to build

on what we have learned. The Committee will meet this winter and spring to finalize plans for the 2026 season, so do watch for the program launch and application information in September. Thank you to everyone — donors, volunteers, staff and partners — whose contributions have made this program a success. I look forward to seeing many of you among the trees in the years ahead.

Elizabeth Atkinson is the Friends of the Farm's Program Director.

Tracking Bloom Times in the Arboretum

By Bill Joyce



As you walk through the Arboretum this spring, if you notice folks carefully inspecting branches with newly emerging foliage, you may very well be witnessing some citizen-based science in action. Again this year, volunteers will fan out across the landscape and document both in words and photographs the exact time that different tree species come into bloom.

Citizen science is a widely used term to describe various projects in which members of the public who often have no formal training participate in data collection to support a scientific study. This approach is commonly used in environmental monitoring.

Why is it important to track the bloom time of plants from year to year? Documentation like this allows for comparison from year to year. Obviously, Ottawa experiences early springs and late springs, but tracking these data over many years gives us reliable evidence on longer-term trends. With a changing climate, these data tell an important story.

Another very practical reason to track bloom time is that it allows us to share the news publicly. The Friends of the Farm receives many calls each year asking when different species will be in bloom. Magnolias, cherry trees, and crabapples are among the most frequently asked about. The tracking efforts of the volunteers will allow us to have very detailed information to share. Stay tuned for some social media

posts spreading the word that bloom time is starting for various species. If you have never seen the magnolias and crabapples at their peak bloom in the Arboretum, you are in for a treat.

The flowers of the apples, pears, cherries, and magnolias are beautiful, showy, and obvious. The Bloom Time Project, however, tracks the bloom of other trees as well. Volunteers learn how to spot maple, oak, linden, hawthorn, birch, and other deciduous trees' blooms. Some of these are not technically flowers at all and some trees have distinct male and female blooms growing on the same tree. Species such as holly and ginkgo have distinct male trees and female trees. Evergreens produce male and female cones instead of flowers and rely on the spring breeze for pollination. Did you know that some trees such as Witch Hazel flower in the fall rather than the spring?

If you would like to learn more about how to look for blooms on trees, a good starting point is the Friends of the Farm publication *Pathways to the Trees at the Central Experimental Farm*. Pictures of blooms are included in the description of most featured trees. Copies are available [online](#) or at the Friends of the Farm office.

If you would like to join the ranks of the volunteers who will be tracking bloom time in the Arboretum, please visit the Friends of the Farm website where you will find an [online application form](#). A training session will be held in early April.



TOP People frequently ask the Friends when the magnolia flowers are in bloom. **ABOVE** Red flowers are a feature of the Korean Maple. Photos by R. Hinchcliff

Please say hello to the bloom time volunteers if you see them in action this spring.

Bill Joyce is the Friends of the Farm's Office Manager and the volunteer team leader for the 2026 Bloom Time Project.

The Germination Laboratory of the Seed Branch, 1907.
Library and Archives Canada, PA-042586 (Lloydlangston article)

Women's Work

By Blaine Marchand

(International Women's Day was March 8. This is Part 1 of an article about the role and contribution that women have made to the work of the Central Experimental Farm.)

The phrase "Behind every great man is a woman" acknowledges the unspoken role women play behind the scenes. This certainly was true in the early days of the Central Experimental Farm, a time when women were not employed in the federal public service and, when they finally were, only for tasks that were deemed too menial for men.

In the late 1800s, Canada, a primarily agricultural country, was facing challenges. The country was in the grip of the Long Depression of 1873-1896. Many farmers chose to leave the land and production declined. Yet demand for agricultural goods increased. A parliamentary review committee, struck in 1884, recommended that an experimental farms network be established to support agriculture. The *Experimental Farm Stations Act* was signed into law on June 2, 1886, designating Ottawa the central location, with other stations in Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and B.C. The goal was to undertake research on new farming methods and to communicate the results to farmers through regular bulletins.

AMATEUR BOTANISTS

The first leaders at the Farm were William Saunders, Director, and James Fletcher, Dominion Entomologist and Botanist. Both had emigrated from England, and were highly intelligent, curious men, self-taught in botany and entomology. To undertake his duties, Fletcher began an extensive correspondence with amateur and professional collectors in Canada and worldwide. He would have been aware of the earlier important contributions made of Canadian plants by female amateur botanists, such as Christian Ramsay, Countess of Dalhousie, wife of the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia and Governor General of Upper and Lower Canada in the first half of the 1800s, and Lady Anne Mary Perceval, who resided at Spencer Wood, a large estate that she and her husband, a customs collector, had in Sillery, Quebec.

Among Fletcher's correspondents was Catherine Parr Traill, whose work he praised. (*The friendship between Fletcher and Traill is described by Patricia Jasen in the Winter 2025 issue of this newsletter.*) He described her 1885 book *Studies of Plant Life in Canada; or Gleanings from Forest, Lake and Plain* as "one of the greatest botanical triumphs which anyone could achieve." He was in communication with other women, such as pioneer British entomologist Eleanor Ormerod.



Christian Ramsay (Lady-Dalhousie), 1837. Portrait by J.W. Gordon. *Wikipedia*

Fletcher knew that these 'amateurs' were his equal in knowledge and provided valuable information to him. But equally, he welcomed specimens and notes from enthusiasts who are now long forgotten, such as a Mrs. Pepplewell of Glen Robertson, a Miss Alice Williams of Victoria, and a Mrs. D.W. Stewart of Renfrew.

COLLECTING SEED

Fletcher embodied the Farm's important goal of reaching farmers. He involved them in his research as they would receive, grow and report on the successes and failures of seeds. Women farmers were a key component of his activities. The samples they sent him allowed a fuller understanding of seed viability in different

regions of the country and the range of insects that could devastate crops. These women would collect and label their specimens, including detailed notes. This allowed Fletcher to build the Farm's Herbarium collection of native plants and insects. In one of the annual Farm reports, he cited that data sent in by the women was carefully looked at and preserved for potential future applications.

Fletcher, however, increasingly came to realize that crop devastation required a more coordinated and active response and that the Department needed employees with scientific training. One of the first university-trained scientists hired in 1902 was George H. Clark who realized that weed seed often mingled with agricultural seed, which resulted in poor crop return and lower soil fertility. Legislation to control the quality of seed imports and exports was passed into law and a Seed Division was created at the Farm with Clark as its head.

Although earlier, in 1881, a Royal Commission had recommended women should be allowed to work in the fledgling federal civil service, it remained almost exclusively male. Positions available to women, who had limited access to higher education, were classified as third-class clerical roles. By 1886, only 24 women held permanent status in the federal public service, all as postal clerks. Roles deemed appropriate for women were largely restricted to functions as matrons, cleaners, or specific clerical positions. In its report, the commissioners had stressed that women, unlike men, were by nature suited to routine and repetitive work. Wages were low and there was no chance for promotion.

SEED TESTING

The new seed legislation required growers and salesmen to submit samples to the Farm for analysis and grading. In addition, random samples were taken by seed inspectors and sent to Ottawa, and farmers were asked to provide seeds. This generated an enormous volume of material. While oversight of the lab and the workload was "man's work," the actual analysis of the seeds was considered suited to a woman's temperament. The purity examination required women to examine 18,000 to 40,000 seeds at least twice for impurities. As impurities could resemble seeds, careful scrutiny was necessary. In addition, women germinated seeds – 100 planted in soil and a second group placed between blotters in a germinator where temperature and moisture could be controlled.

Clark explained in correspondence with the-then Minister, J.H. Grinsdale, that "Men do not take to the detail work of seed testing. It is very fine and close work, very trying on the patience. It is essentially women's work." In 1907, a laboratory was

opened in Calgary and another in Winnipeg in 1918.

As seed analysis was seasonal, the women were hired for six months at a monthly salary of \$60. If they performed well and were hired for a second season, their pay increased to \$75 a month. If they worked for a third season, it became \$87.50. But any increase was granted only on the recommendation of George Clark as Seed Commissioner. A permanent position was not guaranteed.

The exception was Mary Florence Hartley who began in 1902 at an annual salary of \$500. In 1909, she became the first woman to be given responsibility for the Calgary Seed Branch. In Clark's view, this position recognized her years of training and her skill in determining seed purity and success in germination. She supervised the other women in the laboratory and was an assistant to the male head of the laboratory. Nine years later, her salary was increased to \$1300 and she was made permanent. Despite this, her designated level never changed. She remained with the Seed Branch for 35 years, retiring in 1937.

On the very day that Mary Florence Hartley was appointed in Calgary, George H. Clark wrote to the Minister with a request that "a lady clerk of exceptional qualifications, including a complete university science course" be considered. This was Faith Fyles, who had graduated from McGill with a B.A. in 1900.

(Part 2 will explore the career and important contributions of Faith Fyles, Irene Mounce, M.Sc., and Mildred Noble, PhD.)

In the spring, gardener and author Blaine Marchand will lead a tour of the Ornamental Gardens, showcasing the work of Isabella Preston and Felicitas Svejda. More information on the date and time will be forthcoming on the Friends website and in Farm Notes.



ABOVE Sarah Agnes Saunders was an accomplished botanist. She collected this orchid in London, Ontario, before moving to Ottawa with her husband William, the first director of the Farm. All the specimens she brought to Ottawa are held at the Farm's National Collection of Vascular Plants. *Image provided by National Collection of Vascular Plants (DAO), © His Majesty The King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, licensed under the Open Government Licence – Canada.*

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FAITH FYLES: In Full Bloom

[An Exhibition at
the Ottawa Art Gallery](#)

March 7, 2026 – September 27, 2026

By William Knight

On March 7, 2026, the Ottawa Art Gallery (OAG) opened its doors to “Faith Fyles: In Full Bloom,” a retrospective exhibition that charts the history of the Central Experimental Farm’s artist-botanist ([profiled on pages 6-7 in this Friends of the Farm newsletter](#)). The exhibition includes more than 50 works by Faith Fyles, including pomological and botanical watercolours, scientific illustrations, and other works that she produced while working at the Central Experimental Farm between 1910 and 1931. The body of work on view at the OAG is the fullest and most diverse representation of Fyles’ art career ever to be mounted.

Most of the exhibited works—including 24 individual paintings of apples alone—are drawn from a large CEF art collection at Ingenium (Canada’s Museums of Science and Innovation). The exhibition also includes rarely seen and newly discovered works by Fyles from Library and Archives Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). In addition to these works produced by Fyles during her CEF career, there are Faith Fyles-related art and objects on loan from family members.

The OAG exhibition frames Faith Fyles as an Ottawa artist who worked in a long tradition of botanical art produced by women. Contemporary

TOP Arthur Kellett (and perhaps Faith Fyles) created glass slides, such as this one, at the CEF for public presentations on horticultural and agricultural topics. *Ingenium Library and Archives. DAG-1-720*

women artists also feature in the exhibition, showing that this tradition continues in new ways and forms.

This exhibition, a feminist recovery project, follows Faith Fyles’ career from seed analyst to botanist and, in the final decade of her career, as artist for the Horticulture Division under its director, W.T. Macoun. Fyles had to navigate a bureaucracy that underpaid women relative to men, often forcing them to choose between careers and marriage.

EXHIBITION RESEARCH

The exhibition, in process since the spring of 2025, has provided an opportunity to better understand Fyles’ working life and output. The Ingenium research team, which includes assistant curator Cedric Brosseau and Carleton University PhD candidate Casarina Hocevar, has sought to uncover the day-to-day rhythm of Fyles’ art production on the Farm, as well as the intended purpose of her paintings. This research, which includes investigating the history of CEF apple breeding, also draws on artist/curator Cindy Stelmackowich’s considerable knowledge of, and curatorial experience with, Fyles’ oeuvre.

Richard Hinchcliff’s research ([see page 9 of Winter 2026 newsletter](#)) has also been key. Unbeknownst to either of us, Richard and I were both seeking information about the CEF’s large orchard, the site of the federal agriculture department’s apple breeding program between the 1880s and the late 1960s.

Indeed, the CEF orchard rather haunts us. Apple trees once covered a large acreage between the NCC Parkway and Carling Avenue, the extent of which can be seen in historical aerial photographs available in several archives. Uprooted entirely at some point in the early 1970s, this orchard was home to an astonishing number of apple varieties that were used to develop new ones through cross-breeding experiments, including apples like Lobo which are still grown and eaten today.

This forgotten Ottawa landscape feature can be understood as a “Ghost Orchard,” a term coined by Kingston, Ontario writer Helen Humphreys. Humphrey’s book [by that name](#) is a reflection on apples, orchards, and fruit breeding, and the loss of diversity in orchards and apple varieties.

With Humphreys’ inspiration and Hinchcliff’s research, we have made progress in recovering the CEF’s “ghost orchard” and can better visualize the landscape of Fyles’ art production. We speculated that Fyles may have procured many of the apple specimens that she depicted in her paintings directly from the orchard.

Did she walk out to the orchards with W.T.



Faith Fyles, botanist and artist at the Central Experimental Farm (CEF), 1911-1931. *Topley Studio, Library and Archives Canada, PA-204728*

Macoun to select the best specimen of a Melba apple, for example? Did she bring them back to her office/studio, slice them in half, and quickly capture the apple’s features and colours before they browned?

While these questions may seem trivial, answers to them would tell us more about Fyles’ working methods and help us better understand her role as an artist documenting apple-breeding on the CEF, in what is now the heart of Ottawa.

WHY PAINT PORTRAITS OF FRUIT?

This research has also sought to answer one big question, why paint portraits of apples and other fruit? We speculated that Faith Fyles was following American practice. Between 1886 and 1942, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) commissioned artists, many of whom were women, to create colour illustrations of fruit (Helen Humphreys discusses these artists in *The Ghost Orchard*).

These paintings, according to the USDA, were part of a “national register of fruit”¹ and were used to accurately depict the colours and shapes of fruit, particularly apples, before colour photography could record them in detail. The USDA reproduced these “pomological” artworks in bulletins, yearbooks, and other publicly available printed materials to keep growers and gardeners informed about new varieties of fruit being produced in the US. Like her American colleagues in the USDA, Fyles produced her fruit paintings in a standard format: each painting is done on cardstock, measuring 15cm x 23 cm, and depicts apples in the round and in section. The painting also bears the name of the variety and other annotations such as hybridization information, as well as Fyles’ graphically elegant signature.

These similarities suggest that Fyles' paintings fulfilled the same function as the USDA pomological collection: an illustrated colour record of new varieties for registration purposes. This is confirmed in correspondence between W.T. Macoun and E.S. Archibald, the Farm's director, in 1918-19. Macoun noted the USDA's practice of recording fruit varieties in watercolour paintings, and recommended the CEF adopt this practice, as it would help those engaged in breeding work across Canada identify varieties against a visual standard.

Macoun and Archibald agreed that Faith Fyles was the person most suitable for this position. Macoun advised Archibald that Fyles would accept a transfer from the Botany Division to the Horticulture Division on the condition that it would not "injure" any opportunities for future promotion. (For more detail on Fyles' transfer, see Lloydlangston's article in the list of References.)

One difference between the USDA paintings and the ones Fyles produced is that her apple paintings did not circulate as the USDA ones did in publications. Of the hundreds of apples paintings that Fyles created, her painting of the Melba variety is one of the only ones ever published, appearing as a full-page colour plate in the CEF's 1925 publication "Cultivation of the Apple in Canada." (This painting is now apparently lost: it is not registered in the LAC collection nor the *Ingenium* one.) If these paintings were not intended for public circulation, then, what was their purpose?

Perhaps the paintings constitute, as Hinchcliff has suggested, an internal record of CEF's apple-breeding program during Macoun's tenure. Did her painting, for example, provide the visual evidence for a Melba apple to accompany its "Certificate of Record, New Variety" (a LAC document) from the Canadian Horticultural Council?

Whatever their function, Fyles' paintings are now an important historical record of the apple varieties bred on the CEF through its breeding program during a period when the Canadian government began to more closely regulate the fruit industry in Canada.

OTHER ARTWORK BY FYLES

Exhibition research has also revealed little-known works that Fyles produced while

working at the CEF. These include technical botanical illustrations with annotations and crop marks that document their preparation for reproduction and printing. Several of these appear in the exhibition to demonstrate Fyles produced scientific illustrations and art in different formats and media.

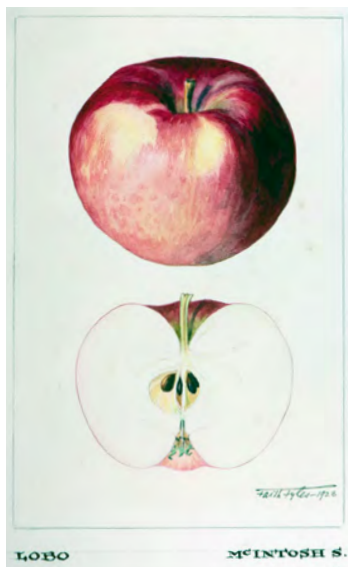
The exhibition also includes beautiful works that Fyles produced in the Botany Division for her major published work, *Principal Poisonous Plants of Canada*, published in 1920. This work was intended to help farmers identify poisonous plants and shows Fyles working in array of formats and styles. The publication includes eight watercolour paintings, four line-drawings, and 32 photographs of botanical specimens. She also created small graphic ornaments that appear at the end of each chapter.

One of the outstanding original paintings included in the OAG exhibition is of a False Hellebore (*Veratrum viride*). Some of the botanical specimens collected during Fyles' expedition to western Canada—now housed in national herbariums on the CEF and at the Canadian Museum of Nature—are exhibited, either as reproductions or in their original form.

Other works include photographs. We know

that Fyles made photographs as part of her CEF work: there are several included in *Poisonous Plants* and we believe that her photographic work may have extended to the production of "magic lantern" slides—square glass-plate images that could be projected during presentations, like an early version of PowerPoint. Fyles may have also deployed her painting skills in hand-tinting these black-and-white images. Several magic lantern slides, drawn from the large *Ingenium* collection, are exhibited at the OAG.

This exhibition has been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to bring Faith Fyles into closer focus. We have made discoveries and raised new questions about Fyles and her CEF career. The exhibition has also been a rich, creative collaboration between the Ottawa Art Gallery and *Ingenium*, two distinctly different types of museums; together we have explored the rich connections between art, science, horticulture, and women's history through the lens of one Ottawa artist, Faith Fyles, working on the CEF.



Faith Fyles painted this Lobo apple in 1923. W.T. Macoun had named the variety, which grew from McIntosh seeds he planted at the CEF in 1898. *Ingenium*. 1987.2404



TOP A section cut from a McIntosh apple tree from John McIntosh's apple orchard in Dundela, Ontario. The orchard, which dates from 1811, was the source for the McIntosh variety, which W.T. Macoun used to breed new apples at the CEF. *Ingenium*. 1987.2109.001 **ABOVE** This slide projector was used on the Central Experimental Farm in the 1940s. *Ingenium*. 1987.0421

William Knight is Curator of Agriculture and Fisheries at Ingenium with the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum as his home base.

FOOTNOTE ¹ US Department of Agriculture, "The Pomological Watercolor Collection," *Issues in Science and Technology* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2022). This collection, held at the USDA's National Agricultural Library in Maryland, contains 7,497 watercolor paintings, 87 drawings, and 79 wax models created by 21 artists.

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DOUG SHOULDICE: Always Fun and Full of Activity

Doug Shouldice, a member of the Friends of the Central Experimental Farm for 25 years, died in January, aged 81. He served as vice president and then president from 2005 to 2008.

Born and raised in Ottawa, Doug was a teacher, business department head, and night school principal for the Ottawa Board of Education (now the OCDSB). He was a long-time football official and served on the board of directors of the Central Canada Exhibition Association (Super Ex) for over 25 years.

In his final newsletter message as president of the Friends, he wrote: "It gives me great pride in having been able to represent The Friends organization, and the people who make up The Friends. I have spoken to groups numbering two to 700 people and everything in between. I've represented The Friends at community groups and with politicians and bureaucrats at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. With the opening of the Merivale Road Shelterbelt, I was our representative with Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson. I travelled to Prince Edward Island to speak to the AGM of The Friends of the Farm at the Charlottetown research station."

His connection to the Farm began as a child, when "a visit to the Farm was always fun and full of activity." Although most of his time at the Friends' office was spent doing administrative work, "the fun is still there, and the energy never stops."

Doug's energy, sense of fun, and love of the Farm was contagious. And he brought warmth and humour to us all. Our deepest sympathies go to his wife Joan and family.



LEFT Doug with Governor General Adrienne Clarkson at the opening of the Merivale Road Shelterbelt, 2005. **ABOVE** Doug at the Friends of the Farm's Victorian Tea, August 2006. *Photos by R. Hinchcliff*

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