

BROMELIANA

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SOME MORE BSI HISTORY WE CAN LEARN FROM

by Herb Plever

(I note here that I should have included in my February article the names of Ervin Wurthmann and Julian Nally of Florida and Adda Abendroth of Brazil as important contributors in the early years of BSI.)

Implementation of New Bylaws - After the adoption of the new bylaws that provided for voting representation on the board of directors for every region in proportion to their BSI membership, it took time for a new voting procedure to be set up. This took place in 1982 and new officers and some directors were elected. (Directors whose terms had not expired continued to serve out their terms.)

In 1982 the new board elected Nat DeLeon of Miami as President, Edgar Smith of Fort Worth, TX as Vice President, Connie Johnson of Miami as Recording Secretary and David Gardner of Corpus Christi, TX as Treasurer. Committee heads were designated and committees were filled. There was a feeling of optimism, but it was dissipated with the eruption of a controversy over judging schools and judging rules. Entering plants in a show enhances participation by members in local affiliates; there was world-wide interest in creating judging schools and training and certification of judges, so it was important for us to resolve this dispute.

New Crisis on Judging - Valerie Steckler, a director from New Orleans (later from Texas), had been designated head of the Judging Committee, and (supported by her committee) she arrogated to herself

the position of sole and exclusive teacher for judging schools. She presented the board with a schedule of schools in different regions she would teach. Needless to say, this caused much resentment and anger among expert growers in some affiliates (particularly South Florida) who felt they were equal to or better qualified than Valerie to teach judging.

Nat DeLeon and Connie Johnson demanded that affiliates be given authority to designate judging teachers and set up training schools that would be recognized by the Judging Committee. If their request was denied they would move to have Valerie Steckler removed as committee head. The Board of Directors was divided on this position; Valerie's position was supported by board members from Louisiana and Texas, her home base. Thus only a few short years after the previous crisis and potential BSI split, we were faced again with a similar problem.

Although we agreed that affiliates had the right to appoint qualified people to set up judging schools, David and Sue Gardner, David Benzing and I urged Nat to tone down the rhetoric and have patience while we attempted to get Valerie and the Judging Committee to be more flexible. Regrettably we were stonewalled by Valerie whose ego seemed to have overwhelmed her common sense. After an impasse of about 4 years it came to a head in 1986 and 1987. During this period local societies had begun recruiting judging teachers and were starting to organize unofficial judging schools, without seeking accreditation from the Judging Committee. So things

NEXT MEETING - Tuesday, March 3rd, 2015 **promptly at 7:00 P.M.** at the [Ripley-Grier Studios 520 8th Ave. \(between 36th & 37th St\) Room 16M](#)
THE LESSER KNOWN GENERA - Part 1 - Photos, descriptions and habitats of species plus cultivars in 14 genera, starting with sub-families *Brochinioideae* and *Bromeliodeae*, from *ACANTHOSTACHYS* to *HOHENBERGIOPSIS* that members are not familiar with, but will be interested in learning about. Please bring in

were quieter though animosity still simmered.

The Mulford Foster Award is given to a WBC host for mounting a standard show. At the board meeting at the 1986 World Conference in New Orleans, the Bromeliad Society of South Florida, offered to host the 1988 World Conference in Miami - and it was the only affiliate that was willing to host the WBC at that time. But the proposal was conditioned on the Board's agreement that the BSSF would receive the Mulford Foster Award even if the Judging Committee ruled that its show did not meet the requirements for a standard show. This presented a real dilemma: the board could either give up having a World Conference in 1988, or it would have to override the Judging Committee's insistence on strict conformance to the judging rules for a standard show.

A strong majority of the board felt that the continuance of World Conferences without a hiatus was more important than rigid adherence to judging rules, and they voted to accept the offer of the BSSF and its condition about receiving the Mulford Foster Award. Those of us who supported the vote felt that at last judging rules had been put into the perspective that they were valuable but not indispensable. BUT - that was not the end of this saga.

A few days before the board meeting in 1987 Connie Johnson called me and advised that BSSF had been notified by Valerie Steckler that if they did not put on a standard show in strict conformance the Judging Rules, they would be denied the Mulford Foster Award, notwithstanding the board's vote in 1986. Connie asked me what my position would be at the meeting. I replied that it was the first time I was hearing about it, and that we could both speak in opposition to that decision at the meeting. Connie told me that Nat DeLeon and several other officers were coming to the meeting and would ask to speak.

The leaders of BSSF did attend the meeting and Nat DeLeon did speak; he advised the board of Valerie's repudiation of the Board's 1986 vote. He said that if the Board did not adhere to its commitment, the BSSF would cancel the Conference - even it meant losing their substantial hotel deposit and having incurred other significant expenses. The chairman asked Valerie if Nat's report of her action was true, and she admitted it and said in justification that the board had no right to infringe on the Judging Committee's jurisdiction. I then made a motion that the board direct the Judging Committee to give the Miami show the Mulford Foster Award. I stated that

the issue was no longer about the Judging Rules but that the very integrity of the board in adhering to its commitments was at stake. The motion was seconded and before the chair could call for debate, a director said: "Call the question". A large majority of the Board voted for an immediate vote and there was no opposition, so there was no debate. Every director voted for the motion except Valerie who vote against it and Linda Harbert who abstained.

I must report that the Miami show was excellent. What was different was that each class of judged plants was placed in small, simulated habitats that a lot of work had created, instead of the usual unnatural display of plants on tables. Craig Allen designed the presentation for the judged show. Some judges complained that it was more difficult for them to inspect the plants, but for the attendees and the general public the presentation was very educational - and the plants were beautiful.

Of course there was chortling by some opponents of the bylaws change over our embarrassing brouhaha about judging. At the Miami 1988 World Conference a Californian who was still talking to me needled me about it, saying: "We never would have permitted such a controversy." It is true that when a small group of people at the top is in full control of events, such disputes are not allowed to break out publically, but in a diverse, democratic organization the thrashing out of different views benefits the organization - provided the participants respect each other's rights and avoid creating a war over issues. Also, my friend was wrong about the facts. There were several embarrassing squabbles in those early years of the BSI.

The Paint Brush Scandal – Dave Barry was one of the founders of the BSI and he was its first Vice President. He also was the owner of California Jungle Gardens, a large bromeliad nursery in Los Angeles. Ed Hummel was the owner of Hummel's Exotic Gardens, a large nursery in Carlsbad, CA. Hummel was a fabled hybridizer of bromeliads; he had a great nose for selecting and growing strong species clones that he used in hybridizing. Hummel was paranoid about keeping the parentage of his hybrids secret from potential competition. His reputation was high - and he was Barry's main competitor in California.

Sometime in the early 1960s Dave Barry, then President of BSI, circulated a cryptic article about a certain hybridizer who he alleged walked around his greenhouses randomly transferring pollen to pistils

with a small paint brush - without making any records of the parents. It was further hinted that the reason for the hybridizer's secrecy about parentage was that he had no records. It was clear to everybody that Ed Hummel was the certain hybridizer Barry was referring to. Hummel took the bait; he went into a deep rage and vowed that he would never again sell bromeliads to Californians. I don't know if Hummel later relented from his California embargo. Though Barry was acting as a businessman and not as BSI President, this scandal was an embarrassment to BSI.

The 1972 World Bromeliad Conference -

(I report on this event because I see it as a prelude to our efforts to get the BSI Board of Directors adopt democratic bylaws in 1979 that were finally successful in 1980. As I recount below some history of the conflict in hosting 1975 WBC, I also report on that Conference to show that it followed the Houston Conference template - but not the show design.)

The BSI leadership had long talked about putting on the first World Bromeliad Conference in Los Angeles in 1975 to celebrate our 25th anniversary. But they were upstaged by the Houston Bromeliad Society which proposed hosting a WBC in Houston in 1972. The first WBC was held in Houston, Texas on June 3-4, 1972; it was an excellent, well organized conference with fine plants and a huge center display with a theme that stressed the international character of BSI. The display was designed and mounted by the indomitable Fritz Kubisch who was President of the then Southern California Bromeliad Society.

The conference was presided over by BSI President Bill Paylen and Houston BS President Merriel O'Neal. A number of notables from abroad attended, including Bea Hanson of New Zealand, Dr. Richard Oeser of Germany and Marcel LeCoufle of Paris, France. There were displays by affiliates and a garden tour. The guest speaker was Robert Wilson; Patrick Mitchell was the excellent conference chairman and the late Marion LeBlanc was Master of Ceremonies. The conference brochure contained the following welcome: "... As citizens of the host city, we Houstonians extend to everyone the hand of hospitality and friendship. We hope that each of you will return to your homes with something gained. It is your presence and participation that will lay the cornerstone for future meetings such as this and the fellowship which is derived from them." (I say amen to that hope. Please note that Houston will host the

next WBC for the third time on June 13-19, 2016 when you can expect to enjoy their hand of hospitality and friendship and a great conference.)

The 1975 World Bromeliad Conference -

To coincide with our 25th Anniversary, Los Angeles now had three years to plan and organize a World Conference set for June 6-12, 1975. Kathy Dorr, BSI Corresponding Secretary and Assistant Editor of the Journal, was designated as the Conference Chairman and she quickly assumed full control in organizing the conference. Kathy chose Buena Park, CA as the venue instead of Los Angeles; she stressed its proximity to Disneyland (2 miles) and Knott's Berry Farm located in Buena Park and that Los Angeles was only 20 miles away. After the venue became known, a buzz started in bromeliad circles about a bitter, sub-rosa controversy between Kathy Dorr and Victoria Padilla about the site and program. At the conference I heard people expressing doubt that Victoria would attend. She did come and she graciously accepted a special award from the BSI.

I have always been fascinated at the very close bond between the two women whose personalities were different and opposite. Of course both were totally dedicated in their own ways to BSI and bromeliads. Victoria Padilla was formal, proper, charming and soft-spoken. Kathy was outspoken, occasionally slangy and humorous or sardonic and independent. She was a take-charge person - a smart, energetic organizer and officer, highly knowledgeable about bromeliad horticulture, and she wrote for the Journal - qualities that Victoria Padilla admired and needed in the BSI leadership. (Kathy drove a pickup truck with a loaded pistol in the glove box that I saw the year before when she took my wife and me on a bromeliad garden tour including a visit to Victoria.)

Notable guests from abroad who attended the 1975 World Conference were the great hybridist Grace Goode from Australia and Bea Hanson and Harry Martin from New Zealand. It had many events that make a conference memorable: Excellent seminars were given by Ervin Wurthmann, Dr. David Benzing, Dr. Robert Read, John and Mary Bleck and a very well-attended Bromeliad Culture Panel held in a large room. The panelists were Sue Gardner, Bea Hanson, George Anderson, Herb Plevier and Bob Burstrom. We also went on a nursery visit to Kent's Bromeliads, Fuchsia Land (run by Mike Kashkin) and Velco Imports which specialized in Tillandsias.

The judged show had a small number of entries. There were 4 or 5 modest displays by BSI and some local affiliates and a good display by Leonard Kent. An excellent pictorial display about Mulford Foster was mounted by Eloise Beach.

It seemed that the dispute had been resolved and relationships had mended. But when Kathy Dorr wrote a report of the Conference for the Journal (V. 25 No. 5 Sept-Oct 1975) entitled "The Twenty-Fifth Birthday Party", Victoria inserted the following parenthetic, bitter note immediately under the title: "(Editor's Note: Mrs. Dorr was in complete charge of this event, making all the decisions, appointing all her helpers, and setting up the program. We thank her most sincerely for putting on a beautiful display.)"

The Bromeliad Cultivar Registry - Don Beadle was BSI's first Cultivar Registrar, and in 1998 he produced a registry of known cultivars with histories in book form and digitally on his computer. Don tried to get the BSI to put it on the BSI website to no avail. Thereafter, when Derek Butcher became Cultivar Registrar he again tried to get the Board to put the BCR on line but was ignored by the leadership of BSI. So Derek turned to Michael Andreas who had created a new website for the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies and Derek worked with Mike to create a BCR on fcbs.org. It soon became a primary source for cultivar information and photos.

BSI President Joyce Brehm was our 1st female President and her deep devotion to BSI cannot be disputed. But she had an obsession about the BCR and was determined to reclaim it for the BSI by any means necessary. She did not approach Mike to transfer the BCR as webmaster (she thought correctly he would not likely agree). Instead she attempted to undermine him and insulted his abilities. This enraged Mike and many Floridians. Then Pres. Brehm led the Board to direct BSI Webmaster Nick Bethmann to quickly create a new BCR on our site. He did so but the Registry was inadequate in design, and it had limited data and no search engines. BSI Cultivar Registrar Geoffrey Lawn had primary jurisdiction over such actions, but his approval was not sought, nor was he even consulted. When he protested, Joyce impugned his competence. Michael reacted to this action by temporarily blocking sections of the BCR on fcbs.org and asserting that he, personally, owned the Registry. For many years this contentious issue persisted, roiling the Board and causing antagonistic

factions and disunity.

I see no point in reciting the myriad details of this sordid history, because now the issue has been resolved. Thanks to Director Eric Gouda, Derek Butcher, and Cultivar Registrar Geoffrey Lawn (and support from our current BSI leaders), we now have our own, official Cultivar Registry on the BSI website. It an excellent, right up-to-date resource for data and photos and with good search engines.

(It is sad to report that Michael Andreas has been hospitalized for several months with a serious illness. We all wish Mike a speedy recovery.)

The BSI has long been in disarray as a result of inept floundering on the part of previous administrations. The current officers and directors do understand the problems, but resolutions will take time. They are dedicated, unpaid volunteers and will do the job - with your help sooner rather than later. Some progress has already been made. The BSI is the glue that holds all of us around the world together through the Journal and our WBCs and it enhances contact between affiliates. With your participation BSI will be able to better serve our needs. Everyone reading this article should do what you can to get your local members (and officers) to join the BSI. Tell BSI what you think it should be doing that it is not doing now. BSI is the only game in town. □

IN MEMORIAM - We regret to report the passing of three bromeliad stalwarts and good friends: Dorothy Berg of Sarasota, Florida, Society activist and wife of the late Wally Berg, Felipe N. de Carvalho, co-founder of the Brazilian Bromeliad Society and Nat DeLeon, of Miami, Florida. Nat was the founder of the Bromeliad Society of South Florida, President, long-time director and Honorary Trustee of the BSI. **DUES** - Pay your dues by March 15 or you'll be dropped from the rolls and won't receive Bromeliana.

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