

Brandywine Bonsai Society History

The Society was started in September of 1967 when Winnie Bloom, who worked at Beaver Valley Nursery on Rt. 202, called a few people to exhibit bonsai at the nursery for the weekend. Those asked to show included Eleanor McVay, Helen Stewart, and Doris Froning. There was much interest shown, so an informal group met in October and it was decided to form a society to delve into the art. A man named Ron (don't remember the last name) was elected as President, but in three months time he was transferred to North Carolina so Doris Froning took his place and was president for five years.

At the beginning we decided to be informal and to this day we have no formal rules and no by-laws. The president and other officers serve for a few years until the jobs become tiresome and then someone else takes over. Recently we have had a nominating committee.

We have met at various locations over the thirty years. We started at Beaver Valley Nursery, then met at the Grange Hall that used to be on 202 in the divide between North and South 202. We also had meetings at the Longwood Meeting house, Vincenti's Cannery at Rosedale, the Kennett Grange No. 19 and Longwood Gardens. For many years we met at the Fronings' home in Kennett Square. For the last several years, we have met at the meeting center of the Brandywine Town Center on Route 202.

The Society has exhibited and won prizes at the Delaware Flower Show and one year exhibited at the Philadelphia Flower Show. For about twenty years we have had a yearly exhibit at the Brandywine River Museum. We also have a yearly club exhibit at Longwood Gardens and club members staff Longwood Garden's Bonsai Expert in Residence several times per year. In addition, a series of members have taught beginning and advanced bonsai courses at Longwood Gardens.

Over the years, Brandywine Bonsai Society has been visited by many bonsai masters. Our most famous visitor was John Naka, who came numerous times to give demonstrations and do workshops. Other 'name' visitors are listed separately. Our own members have contributed mightily to our success. Jack Billet, Dennis Donald, Doris Froning, Rob King and Pat Morris have done many programs and workshops. Others include Joe Jacobs, Lee Shipman, Charlotte Smith and Charlie Mitchell.

Travel to other bonsai points of interest can be an important way to grow. Our trips have included Swiss Pine Gardens and bus trips to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the National Arboretum. We've also had digging trips to Boucher's Tree Farm, Nature's Way Nursery and the Grant farm. BBS is very active in the MidAtlantic Bonsai Society annual meeting and is always well represented at other national bonsai meetings.

The Society is growing and making plans for the future. We have around sixty enthusiastic members who know we learn from being together, talking pruning, wiring, and once in a while killing a tree. But don't we have fun doing it.

(Adapted from Dorie Froning's 1997 history of the Brandywine Bonsai Society)