

Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association History

The seed for the formation of the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association (formerly, the Ohio Nurserymen's Association) was planted on January 9, 1908 by Mr. J. H. McNary in a letter to the nurserymen of Ohio.

In his letter, Mr. McNary wrote in part, "I have just learned that an effort is likely to be made this winter to change the present nursery inspection law. The State Board of Agriculture has expressed a desire to know what changes in the present law, if any, the nurserymen of the state desire. I hereby call a convention of the nurserymen of Ohio to meet on Wednesday, January 15, 1908 for the consideration of this matter, and also the consideration of the desirability of a state organization with properly constituted committees to attend to the interest of the nurserymen of the state in just such emergencies as this".

On January 15, 1908, nurserymen in attendance at this first formal meeting approved a motion to form a permanent organization of the nurserymen of the state to be called the Ohio Nurserymen's Association. Officers elected were J. H. McNary, president, H. N. Scarff, treasurer, Robert George, vice-president and W. B. Cole, secretary.

The new president appointed the following five nurserymen as the first board of directors: Robert George of Painesville, F. D. Green, Perry, E. G. Cox, Proctorville, John Siebenthaler, Dayton and A. R. Pickett, Clyde.

A motion was moved and carried that the annual membership fee be one dollar.

The second annual meeting of the ONA was held on January 13, 1909, in conjunction with the State Horticulture Meeting in Columbus. The financial statement for the year-old association showed income of \$39, disbursements of \$11.70, with a balance in the treasury of \$27.30.

While recapping the entire history of our association is not feasible, it might be interesting to look at some of the highlights of years gone by.

In 1911, during the fourth annual meeting (and quoting here from the actual minutes), "Mr. F. J. Dinsmore of the Farmers Nursery Company, Troy, read a very interesting paper on root gall and hairy knot."

Also, at this same meeting, the secretary of the State Board of Agriculture, Mr. A. P. Sandles, clarified a letter he had sent to nurserymen explaining the need for more funds for the inspection of nurseries. Mr. Sandles suggested a license fee of \$5 or \$10 for agents who sell nursery stock and a special tax of \$25 to \$50 per year for growers of nursery stock.

After a somewhat heated debate, W. B. Cole moved, with a second from T. B. West, that this association is opposed to the enactment of any law creating a special tax on agents or nurserymen. The motion was unanimously adopted.

Also, during the fourth annual meeting of the ONA, Mr. W. N. Scarff read a paper on the value of barnyard manure in small fruit growing.

By the tenth annual meeting, held on February 1, 1917 in Columbus, the treasury had grown to \$110.75 and the membership stood at 27. The hot topics of conversation at that meeting were the necessity of organization and cooperation, the necessity of raising prices to offset the increased operating expenses and to place the nursery business on the same basis of profit as other lines of business, plus more economical and profitable distribution of nursery products. By this time, Mr. Dinsmore of the root gall and hairy knot fame, was president.

During the ensuing nine years, from 1918 through 1926, ONA members were discussing such diverse subjects at their annual meetings as increased freight rates, prices, inventory of saleable nursery stock, foreign quarantines, credit and collection, shortage of labor, rotating nursery crops, how the wholesaler can help the retailer, better informed salesmen, the establishment of an arboretum on the campus of The Ohio State University, the objection of some nursery inspectors growing nursery stock on their own property, and improving conditions in the horticulture department at OSU.

During that period, dues were raised to \$5 per member in 1921 and remained unchanged until 1932. In 1923, a motion was passed to pay the secretary \$50 a year.

In 1927, the ONA celebrated its 20th anniversary and Mr. A. S. Buskirk, ONA president, called the annual meeting to order on February 1 at the Neil House in Columbus. Balance on hand was \$547.32. Mr. T. B. West indicated that a Mr. Dawes was planning to locate an arboretum on a tract of 350 acres of land near Newark.

At the banquet that year, speeches were given by professors Paddock, Hottes and Ries, also, Richard Faxon, Edmund Secrest, Harry Day, Art Cultra, T. B. West, Ed Jenkins, Clarence Siebenthaler and Howard Scarff.

It was in 1928 that Dr. L. C. Chadwick began the annual Ohio State University Nursery Short Course. However, it wasn't until 1931 that the ONA convention was held in conjunction with the OSU Nursery Short course.

At the 25th annual meeting, ONA members officially adopted its first constitution and by-laws on January 28, 1932. Dues were adjusted to \$10 for active members and an associate member category was added, with dues of \$5.

The 30th annual meeting of the ONA took place in January, 1937, at the Deshler-Wallick Hotel in Columbus where William A. Natorp was elected president. A new dues schedule, based on number of acres and ranging from \$10 per year to \$50 per year, was approved by the membership. The hot topics that year were the competition from farmers growing Christmas trees and the spread of the Japanese beetle.

Also a motion was made to have the ONA protest the ruling of the IRS that nursery labor be classed as non agricultural. Surprisingly, this motion of protest failed.

In 1938, the Ohio Chapter of the American Association of Nurserymen (AAN) was officially chartered with 22 firms comprising the membership.

The year 1947 marked the 40th anniversary of the ONA with the annual meeting held January 23 and 24 at the Neil House in Columbus. President Roger Champion presided. Concerns that surfaced during that meeting included an outbreak of Japanese beetle in Painesville, a need for increased teaching staff and research facilities at OSU and a fair labor practice bill and a shade tree control bill, both pending in the Ohio Legislature.

Speakers at the convention included author Louis Bromfield of Malabar Farms and a Mr. Oliver Hobbs who spoke on "experiences with the divining rod". So much for 1947!

During the fall of 1956, a move was afoot to hire an executive secretary and shortly thereafter, George L. Zeis was hired in that capacity.

The golden anniversary of the ONA was celebrated in 1957. Dave Metzger served as president during the annual meeting that year in which discussion centered on including landscape contractors into the association on the same basis as active members.

In 1958, a new executive secretary, George Gens was named to administer the ONA. Also, Dr. L. C. Chadwick was appointed to write *The Buckeye Nurseryman* (currently called *The Buckeye*) on a quarterly basis.

Between the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the ONA, from 1957 through 1967, member involvement grew as new committees were created according to the needs of the times. In 1958, the completion of construction and the first steps toward active operation of the Ohio Department of Agriculture Plant Pest Clinic in Reynoldsburg took place. John W. Baringer was Chief of the Division of Plant Industry at the time, with Harold Porter the Specialist-In-Charge.

It was reported in *The Buckeye Nurseryman* that the winter of 1958-59 was recorded as the most severe since 1936 in Ohio, resulting in mild to severe plant damage to nursery crops in many parts of the state.

At the 1959 OSU Nursery Short Course, a speech was given by an advertising executive entitled "A Layman Looks At The Landscape Business". In summing up his presentation, this gentleman said, "I think that there is a great area of sales potential waiting for the landscaping group that first explains to their potential consumers just how much joy and satisfaction they can realize by having their landscaping planned and executed by a professional".

He also suggested putting a tag on each and every bush, plant and tree that you sell that tells the following things: common name, botanical name, type of fertilizer and how often needed, how much water it needs, when it can be pruned and how much.

Ken Reisch, a professor in the OSU Department of Horticulture at the time, was appointed secretary-treasurer of the ONA in late 1960.

There was much discussion during the decade of the '60s on plant guarantees at the retail level, container grown nursery stock, the planting and maintenance of trees in downtown areas, the value of public relations to your business, water and sewer deferred assessments, direct use sales tax, Sunday sales, over wintering with plastic mulch, Dutch Elm disease and many other topics too numerous to mention.

In 1963, advertising was accepted for the first time in *The Buckeye Nurseryman*. In 1964, the ONA convention moved to the newly constructed Columbus Plaza Hotel, later to be known as the Sheraton. Dues ranged from \$25 to \$75 per year, and the trade show featured 56 booths.

In 1965, Warner Nurseries, Willoughby, fought and won a tax case that resulted in nursery production being classified as agriculture rather than the previous classification of non-agriculture. That same year, the Division of Plant Industry was investigating mislabeled roses. Also, a new law became effective to register landscape architects.

In 1966, the L. C. Chadwick Research Fund was inaugurated and in 1967, the first edition of the Nursery Stock Survey was published.

In January, 1967, the 60th anniversary of the ONA was celebrated. The membership stood at 285. Receipts for the year were \$11,000 with expenses at \$6,600.

The late '60s and early '70s saw continued growth in the number of members, income and services. Much of the success of the ONA during this period must be attributed to executive secretary, Ken Reisch.

In the fall of 1972, Ken was appointed associate dean of the OSU College of Agriculture and resigned from his ONA post. At that time, administration of the association was directed by the Ohio Hardware Association and executive secretary Pete Olmsted.

The ONA continued to expand membership and services through the '70s until Pete's untimely death in late 1976.

In 1976, the ONA board of directors, led by ONA President Dale Manbeck, decided the time had come to hire a permanent staff and created association offices in Columbus. Bill Stalter was hired as executive director in November, 1976. At the time, total income for the year was \$51,635 and membership was at 420.

In 1983, the ONA celebrated its 75th anniversary with total membership at 688 and income at nearly \$220,000.

Increased membership, additional and improved member services and expansion of the trade show marked the 10-year period from 1983 through 1993. In 1994, three major events took place.

1. The membership voted to change the name of the organization from the Ohio Nurserymen's Association to the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association to better reflect its members.
2. The association purchased its own office building in Westerville, a northeast suburb of Columbus.
3. The Central Environmental Nursery Trade Show (CENTS) moved to the new Greater Columbus Convention Center and expanded from 556 booths to 915. CENTS continues to expand. In 2002 the show featured 1357 booths occupied by 710 firms. The number of registered attendees totaled 13,035.

A new dynamic in trade show sales and attendance was seen in 2002. The internet has proven itself to be a useful tool in the way many companies in all sectors conduct their sales and purchases. Trade show booth sales and attendance have suffered due to increased internet commerce, not only in the green industry, but in other industries as well.

While trade shows are still an important venue for networking and one-on-one business to customer contact, the younger generation of business people, who have grown up with the internet, find it just as useful to conduct business electronically. That has forced trade shows to become more encompassing by increasing educational tracks, to use websites for virtual up-to-date show floor plans, online registration, the availability of free access to email retrieval, a convenient convention center, competitive hotel room rates, etc.

While CENTS suffered from external pressures throughout the early 2000s, the attendance in 2007 leveled off to just over 11,000 registrants with 1,252 sold booths occupied by 617 exhibiting firms.

Despite the downward trend in the trade show numbers, the ONLA has continued throughout the decade to introduce additional member services, refine existing publications, introduce new publications and continually update its website, onla.org. In addition, the association was a multi-winner of achievement awards from the Ohio Society of Association Executives for its various publications, websites and commitment to diversity.

At the 2007 ONLA Annual Business Meeting, the members present and voting, unanimously approved the first dues increase in twelve years. Dues for all Active Dues Categories 1-5 will increase by 25 percent across the board on January 1, 2008. Each year thereafter, dues will automatically increase by 3 percent annually. An amendment will be offered the voting members at the 2008 Annual Business Meeting to cap the annual increase of 3 percent after a three-year period, becoming effective on January 1, 2012.

The ONLA celebrated its 100th anniversary in January 2008. In late 2007, ONLA membership stood at nearly 1,700 with an annual budget of almost two million dollars. That year also brought staff changes as 20-year veteran Associate Director Erin Thomas and 31-year veteran Executive Director Bill Stalter both retired.

Today the administrative staff team of the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association is comprised of Membership & Certification Manager, Roni Petersen; Trade Show/Event Manager, Amy Eldridge; Communications Director, Amanda Domsitz; Education Director, Lisa Larson and Accountant, Karen Lykins.

The ONLA board of directors is comprised of nine voting members and two non-voting members. Three voting members are elected to two-year terms by the membership each January during the annual business meeting. Officers of the association board include the president, president-elect, immediate past president and the executive director.