Welcome Dave Dion! Our New Gardener and Assistant Arborist

John Berryhill

As Capen Garden approaches its 100 year anniversary, we are very excited to welcome its newest steward, David Dion. Dave brings an exceptionally broad skill set to the newly crafted Gardener and Assistant Arborist position that will blend garden development in Capen and Trudy’s Gardens with arboretum work on campus.

Dave began his formal education in horticulture at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture with an associate’s degree in landscape contracting and he continued at the University of Massachusetts, finishing with a bachelor’s degree in urban forestry in 2004. With this education and some landscaping and arboriculture experience, he soon started his own company, Dion Tree and Landscape in Westfield, Massachusetts.

Dave came to us from Westfield Technical Academy, where he taught horticulture to high school students since 2011. It was this teaching experience alongside his impressive background, which includes an arborist certification from the International Society of Arboriculture and a permaculture design certificate, that made him a standout candidate. Dave not only has the capability to operate successfully within many aspects of horticulture, but also has the ability and drive to share that experience and knowledge with other plant lovers. The eclectic nature of the new position he is filling should give him a chance to show us all what a rare talent he is in the field. So far, he has not disappointed. Dave started with us midway through our summer internship program and immediately showed his natural ability to make the most of student experiences in our gardens. We are proud of our efforts to provide valuable experiential learning opportunities to students in our gardens, greenhouses, and arboretum, and Dave is joining us at the perfect time as we look to expand on our successes.

As I mentioned, the position of Gardener and Assistant Arborist is new. Although we don’t have a great deal of information on how the duties maintaining Capen Garden were handled in the garden’s infancy (see Emerson Barry’s article on page 8), for decades it has had a single gardener whose primary responsibility was care of that space. In recent years, the breadth of that individual’s duties were expanded, but this latest incarnation of the position requires a great deal more with regard to horticultural capability and student engagement. Dave will be working with other Botanic Garden staff to further develop the garden and maximize its aesthetics and value as a teaching garden. He will also, primarily in the colder months, be working closely with Ben Green, our chief arborist, to perform tree work and achieve our goals for arboretum stewardship.

Dave is described by his former and current colleagues as a generous and team-first worker with a love of learning and sharing his experience. Although he is going to be more mobile than his predecessors, he can often be found working in Capen Garden. His kindness, gentle sense of humor, and love of plants make him a pleasure to meet and talk to. If you are visiting the garden, please say hello and welcome our new friend and colleague.
Dear Friends,

Winter is a bittersweet time of year in New England for gardens and the people who love them. The vibrance of summer is gone. The fleeting brilliance of autumn foliage is past. The annuals have been nipped to the ground by frost. The persistent demands of the spring and summer garden—seeds that need sowing, pots that need to be transplanted, and garden beds in need of constant weeding, watering, and deadheading—has been replaced by a nagging worry that something has been forgotten! But it hasn’t. We are simply entering the season of reflection.

We have time to think again. We are afforded the luxury of slowing down. There is time now for new discoveries and appreciations: the surprising beauty of hoarfrost on spiny milkweed pods persisting on the stem, the waving tussocks of grasses making snow angels in snow drifts, the beautiful geometry and weight of oak tree trunks and branches on full display less their leaves. It is in this season that I am especially thankful for the lushness and the warmth of Lyman Conservatory.

We’ve seen a lot of change over the last few months, even as the gardens have slowed down. We’ve welcomed three new faces to our staff and said goodbye to a beloved friend, volunteer, and plant donor (see article about Cliff Desch p. 4). We’ve invested in the health of our accessions records by upgrading our collection management system (see p. 12) and we’ve invested in the health of our arboretum by bringing leading experts on tree care and safety to campus to train our arborists (see p. 6).

In the midst of all this change, I can’t help but feel a heightened sense of reverence for the history of this place and the people and plants that have come before me. After all, it’s hard to know where you are going without knowing where you have been. I am grateful for your support in this work—work that on its surface is just about plants, but in reality it is about people. I look forward to sharing the journey with you. I hope this winter season affords you the time to reflect and rejuvenate, and I hope to see you at this spring’s Bulb Show March 2–17, when spring comes early to Lyman.

Cheers,

Lyman Conservatory in late November, as the cold weather moves in

Photograph by Sarah Loomis
Introducing Our New Manager of Education

I believe that plants have the power to inform and challenge our worldviews, to restore and delight us, and to ultimately change our lives.—Sarah Loomis

The Botanic Garden’s new Manager of Education is no stranger to Smith College. Sarah Loomis joined the Botanic Garden team in August, but previously worked in Smith’s Center for the Environment, Ecological Design, and Sustainability from 2011 to 2013. When asked about returning, Sarah said, “I’m thrilled to be back. I’m starting my new role at an exciting time, as the Botanic Garden is responding to growing environmental and social awareness and has reaffirmed its deep commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity in the field of horticulture. I am excited to use our collections to explore pressing issues of the day and I look forward to continuing to align our educational programming, interpretation, and outreach in this work.”

Sarah arrives with a wide range of horticultural experiences to share. After completing her BA in environmental studies at Skidmore College, she worked at the Delaware Center for Horticulture leading a horticultural reentry training program for incarcerated and previously incarcerated women. She went on to serve as the Audience Engagement Facilitator for the Wagner Free Institute of Science, a Victorian-era natural history museum in Philadelphia. Most recently, Sarah led communications and marketing efforts at Food Connects in Brattleboro, Vermont. She is also the owner of Harrow, a small-scale flower farm and floral design studio in Northfield, Massachusetts.

“Sarah has an amazing ability to think big about who we are and how to be an effective and compassionate source of inspiration in our community, while also keeping us organized and focused on outcomes,” says director Tim Johnson. “She never loses track of our visitor-centered approach to programming.”

New Postbaccalaureate Fellow in Garden Outreach Innovation

Anyone who sees me in a garden can tell that plants energize and excite me. I love sharing my knowledge and enthusiasm with others.—Melissa DiTucci

The Botanic Garden welcomes its first Fellow in Garden Outreach Innovation, Melissa DiTucci, to the staff. This post baccalaureate fellowship was created as a collaborative effort between Smith’s Con-way Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the Botanic Garden, with a goal to increase student engagement at the Botanic Garden and to foster diversity and inclusivity within our programming.

As an alumna of Mount Holyoke College, Melissa is intimately familiar with a women’s college setting and feels passionate about the benefits of this approach to education. It was at her alma mater that her relationship with plants really began. Jimmy Grogan, our conservatory curator, worked at Mount Holyoke during Melissa’s four years and can attest to the countless hours she spent in Mount Holyoke’s Talcott Greenhouse exploring its plants and finding her place among them.

After completing her degree in biological sciences and environmental studies at Mount Holyoke, Melissa was accepted into a yearlong immersive internship at Longwood Gardens. There, she worked within the education department engaging, teaching, and creating programming for K–12 students.

“Melissa brings a deep passion and incredible enthusiasm to her role. We feel lucky to benefit from her previous experiences and look forward to watching her creatively approach student-centered programming at the Botanic Garden,” says Sarah Loomis, manager of education.
In Memoriam: Dr. Clifford Desch

In October, we lost one of our Botanic Garden Volunteers, Cliff Desch. Cliff became a volunteer in January 2014 and generously shared his vast plant knowledge with us and with many student visitors. We will miss him greatly.

Cliff was a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Connecticut (Hartford campus) and conducted research on morphology and taxonomy of parasitic hair follicle mites of mammals in the Department of Plant, Soil, and Insect Sciences at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. He was an active member in many plant groups including the Cactus and Succulent Society of America, the Succulent Society of South Africa, the Magnolia Society International, the Rhododendron Species Foundation, and, as a life member, the American Rhododendron Society (ARS). He also belonged to the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) since 1974, the same year he began sharing plants with the Botanic Garden, beginning with 15 species of Lithops, also known as living stones, native to South Africa. I came to know Cliff initially from the Connecticut Chapter of the ARS and the Berkshire Chapter of NARGS.

Cliff gardened in Conway, Massachusetts, since 1977. His extensive knowledge was partly based on growing many plants from seed resulting in mature specimens (some rare) self-sowing and often hybridizing in his woodland. The massive rhododendron display, best seen in spring, was a highlight for many visitors. Cliff traveled for his academic work and obtained seed from contacts established during his trips to Asia, or collected personally when permitted. Many cohorts of Rhododendron keiskei and R. yakushimanum were grown from seed he obtained from plants growing wild in Japan. He re-created (as gardeners do) successful habitats from around the world.

Within the high shade of mature white pines, Cliff also maintained a mature rock garden with picturesque (old) dwarf conifers, a sand bed, a moss garden, a bog garden, a small water garden, and many containers. His 25 x 12.5 foot cool greenhouse was ringed on the outside with raised alpine beds. For countless years he kept detailed temperature records in his greenhouse, which was filled to capacity with a large collection of cacti and succulents, orchids, carnivorous plants, vireya rhododendrons, cycads, and assorted others. Cliff’s generous sharing of seed and plants with the Botanic Garden resulted in 148 accessioned plants from nine countries. Today we still maintain 28 accessioned plants from seven countries, most of them housed in the conservatory.

During his time as a volunteer at the Botanic Garden, Cliff led many tours and regularly attended volunteer meetings. He was an expert on rhododendrons and gave a presentation on them at one of the meetings. He generously offered his home in Conway as the venue for the volunteer potluck his first summer as a volunteer. Those who attended will remember the tour of his property, a truly enchanted forest!

One of my favorite memories of Cliff is from July of 2016 when he joined me on a visit to Hawley Bog, in Hawley Massachusetts, for seed collection. It’s always good to have company in the field. On a portion of the boardwalk, Cliff squatted down to look at a pondweed (Potamogeton). As he bent forward for a closer look, he somersaulted into the bog. When he stood up he was covered with muck with his eyes peering out. Oh, how I wished the camera was not left in the truck! Thankfully he was unhurt and the above image of him after being partially hosed off says he still enjoyed the day.

Cliff still smiling after his impromptu dip in Hawley Bog
Photograph by Elaine Chittenden

Cliff with his beautiful rhododendrons at his home in Conway
Photograph by Elaine Chittenden

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Yams in London: My Summer at Kew

Since 1994, the Muriel Kohn Pokross 1934 travel/internship fund has sponsored two Smith students as interns at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. Emma Kelley ’20 and Lucy DeBolt ’20 were the 2018 recipients, spending their summer engaged in plant research in London.

In the summer of 2017, I applied to be the education intern at the Botanic Garden. At the time, I had no idea that this experience would spark a love of plants, and take me 3,000 miles away from Smith. I worked under Madelaine Zadik, the education and outreach manager. After hearing about my interest in genetics, Madelaine encouraged me to apply for the Kew summer internship in which two Smith students fly to London to spend 10 weeks at Kew Royal Botanic Gardens conducting plant genetics research. Before I knew it, I was heading over to England.

For my project I worked with Dr. Juan Viruel, who was then finishing a postdoctoral fellowship. His project involved creating a new tree of life for the genus *Dioscorea*, commonly known as yams. *Dioscorea* is a pantropical genus with approximately 650 species. One hundred million people depend on yams as staple foods in Africa alone. Some species of *Dioscorea* also produce the steroid diosgenin, which is used in a variety of pharmaceuticals that treat hormone imbalances. Despite the economic importance of *Dioscorea*, many of the intragenus evolutionary relationships remain unresolved. To uncover these relationships, as well as to look at the evolution of a few key traits across the genus (such as diosgenin production), Dr. Viruel was compiling a new phylogenetic tree that included more species than previous models. This tree will tell us more about the radiation of the genus and the evolution of certain traits; it will also help to identify wild relatives of the currently cultivated species and will have implications for both plant breeding and conservation policy.

To conduct this phylogenetic analysis, Dr. Viruel required a DNA sequence for every species included in the tree. That is where I stepped in. For the first 2 weeks of my internship I was based in the Kew Herbarium, a historical collection that houses some 7 million specimens from all over the world, where I collected samples for DNA extraction. This involved removing a small amount of leaf material from each dried, pressed plant on a herbarium sheet (called a voucher specimen), while maintaining the integrity of the historical sample. If I did my job right, it would be impossible to tell that any leaf material had been collected at all. Once all the samples were collected I moved to Kew’s Jodrell Molecular Laboratory, where I worked for the remaining 8 weeks of my internship.

In the Jodrell lab I extracted the DNA from the dried leaf tissue, a multiday process taking me from dried leaf to isolated DNA. After the DNA was extracted, I prepared the DNA for sequencing. This meant targeting and amplifying genes of interest (such as those involved in diosgenin production) to ensure that the DNA could be “read” by the sequencing machine and translated into strings of As, Cs, Gs, and Ts (shorthand for the four nucleotides that make up DNA, adenine, cytosine, guanine, thymine). When not in the lab, I spent time learning about bioinformatics, the science of analyzing biological data, by visually assembling the chloroplast genomes of various species of *Dioscorea*.

During my time at Kew, I was exposed to the world of research outside an academic setting, and to the extraordinary breadth of plant research being conducted around the world today. I also got to work in a truly international environment with researchers from Great Britain, Spain, Italy, South Africa, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands. With fellow Smith intern Lucy DeBolt ’20, I explored London and was able to take day trips to explore the English countryside. We also attended the Kew Intern Programme 25th Anniversary Party hosted by the Smith College Club of Great Britain, who I would like to specially thank for their support of the internship program. It was a very special experience, that has me now planning a career in research, and that began with the encouragement of Madelaine Zadik almost a year ago.

Congratulations to Jessie Blum ’15

We are thrilled to hear that former Botanic Garden intern, Jessie Blum has recently been hired as the Greenhouse Supervisor at Mount Holyoke’s Talcott Greenhouse, a position that was left vacant when we hired Jimmy Grogan as our conservatory curator. Jessie graduated in 2015 with a degree in Environmental Science and Policy and a minor in Biology with a plant focus.

Make sure to check out the Mount Holyoke Spring Flower Show this March and if you see Jessie, make sure to say hello!
How Many Franklin Trees Do We Really Have?

John Berryhill

If you were to ask me how many Franklin trees (Franklinia alatamaha) are at the Botanic Garden of Smith College, I would confidently reply, “Four.” If you were a plant geneticist, however, you might question my answer—not because you are doubting my ability to count, but because most Franklin trees are clones of the exact same tree. Only an extremely small number of genetically distinct individuals (or genotypes) of F. alatamaha exist.

In 1765, legendary American botanist John Bartram and his son encountered a small grove of trees new to Western science along the Altamaha River in Georgia. They collected seeds and a few specimens, naming the species after their friend Benjamin Franklin. This small cluster of trees was recorded once more in 1803 and the species was never found again in the wild.

Fortunately, since it propagates easily, this beautiful member of the tea family (Theaceae) has become popular in gardens and landscapes around the world. However, the Franklin tree’s robust numbers in cultivation hide the concern that botanists have with its lack of genetic diversity. A deep gene pool increases the resilience of any species and without this diversity the Franklin tree is extremely vulnerable. The Irish Potato Famine is perhaps the most well-known example of how a ubiquitous clone can be no match for a pathogen or similar threat.

Our current exhibit in the Church Gallery at Lyman Plant House, entitled Vanishing Acts, is a compelling look at tree species around the world facing the threat of extinction. The inclusion of many Smith College campus trees in this exhibit, like dawn redwood (Metasequoia glyptostroboides) and the popular Christmas tree Fraser fir (Abies fraseri), may surprise you. Like the Franklin tree, they appear quite common in the landscape or at tree farms. In the wild, these two species are dangerously close to the fate of the Franklin tree, and their limited numbers and existing gene pools need robust protection.

So how many Franklinia genotypes does Smith actually have? We will soon find out! Heather Gladfelter of the University of Georgia is focusing her PhD research on determining the genetic diversity of cultivated F. alatamaha trees. She reached out to us and about 100 other botanical gardens and arboreta to solicit leaf material from our specimens. The genetic material from these leaves will be analyzed to determine the number of distinct genotypes. In the coming year we will learn just how genetically diverse our collection of trees is.

Stay tuned…. I promise a short follow-up in an upcoming newsletter! In the meantime, if you have have not seen our Vanishing Acts exhibit, please come visit. It will be vanishing on January 18, 2018.

Experimenting with the Botanic Garden

Each year, we invite Smith faculty to apply for Curricular Enhancement Grants. These grants support faculty in designing new courses or modifying existing ones to incorporate Botanic Garden-based learning into their curriculum. In the spring of 2018, Assistant Professor Randi Garcia of Psychology and Statistical and Data Sciences utilized the Botanic Garden as part of her Research Design and Analysis course.

Randi Garcia

The new interdisciplinary program at Smith known as Statistical and Data Sciences (SDS) trains students to think with data and to communicate the information gleaned from data to impact the world. In courses from Communicating with Data to Data Journalism, students work with large, complex datasets. Sometimes these data are found online, often in various stages of disrepair, and sometimes the data are in carefully engineered relational databases, for example, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), or data streaming in from Smith’s MacLeish Field Station.

In my course SDS 290: Research Design and Analysis, students create their own data from carefully designed experiments, becoming intimately familiar with the data generation process. They then think carefully about how to extract as much information as possible out of these very small data sets. While the world is increasingly full of enormous complexity, I am charged with creating a modernized experimental design course that will serve students in meeting the challenge of conducting research and analysis when they leave Smith. Receiving the Botanic Garden’s Curriculum Enhancement Grant allowed me to engage my students in collaborating with a live, evolving campus institution to answer real research questions.

In the spring of 2018 students in SDS 290 conducted experimental studies in close collaboration with director Tim Johnson, retired manager of education and outreach Madelaine Zadik, and other Botanic Garden staff.

(continued on page 11)
April Fool’s Day of 1997 was not funny at all. In fact, for much of central New England, it was quite awful. A thick blanket of heavy, wet snow had fallen overnight on newly opened tree buds, causing them to hold more snow than normal. The result at Smith College was a devastating scene of broken limbs and trunks everywhere you looked in our arboretum and the surrounding area. As a lover of trees, I was heartbroken. I had been working for the Botanic Garden just over a month and already the place had been permanently scarred.

Misfortune struck again in late October 2011, when many of our trees had not fully shed their leaves and crushing loads of wet snow created what some described as a war zone on campus. Again, it made me sick to see my beloved trees so badly damaged. This time, however, I saw the event through the eyes of an arborist, who in addition to caring for our trees felt a heavy responsibility to make them safe for the Smith community. While severe storms are an occasional fact of life in New England, I felt determined to learn from the experience and to ensure that we are doing everything we could to protect both our trees and our campus community.

The lessons I learned from 2011 have shaped my current approach to tree risk management. Today, we work to mitigate risk through proactive pruning of our larger tree canopies and close monitoring of our younger trees to watch for and manage developing structural weaknesses. Our job is made easier with the recent addition to our staff of Dave Dion. We now have three certified arborists on our team, all of whom have a Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) certification from the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), having undergone an advanced training in the latest and most effective methods for tree risk assessment and communication around this topic.

This year we were able to advance our risk management practices considerably. We feel very privileged that the New England chapter of the ISA chose the Botanic Garden of Smith College to host their three-day TRAQ training for 2018, as well as a two-day advanced tree risk assessment training. These two early August events brought together accomplished arborists from throughout the Northeast, not only to use our arboretum as the teaching tool it was intended to be, but also to discuss some of Smith’s more complicated tree health issues. The trainings were led by Mark Duntemann of Natural Path Forestry along with three of his colleagues from Italy, namely, Giovanni Morelli, Stefania Casperini, and Leonardo Cristofori, all of Arboricultura Estense. Mark is an arborist and tree risk consultant with a rare wealth of experience in tree risk management planning, while Giovanni and Stefania have dedicated their lives to understanding the physiology and nature of old trees. They are also two of only about forty people in the world who are trained and capable of performing a pull test on a tree, a demonstration that was one of the highlights of the TRAQ training.

A pull test is used to compare a tree’s response against the stress response of a healthy tree of the same size. The process involves applying up to 4 tons of force (using a rope and winch) to the side of a tree at the center of its mass. Using software and sensors, testers then monitor movement in the tree and can determine if the particular specimen appears healthy. During the TRAQ training, we also took sonic tomography readings, which use sound waves and sensors placed across the diameter of the trunk to produce an image that differentiates healthy wood from decay and cavities. Additionally, we used a resistograph, which detects decay by measuring resistance to an 18 inch long, ⅛ inch wide drill bit.

We looked at some of our more complicated trees with this arsenal of gear and expertise. We were delighted to find that some trees with trunk morphology which (Continued on page 9)
Demystifying Olmsted and Company’s Role in Campus Design

Krista Smathers '18

Since the inception of Smith College in 1871, the campus landscape has been repeatedly developed and expanded, demolished and destroyed, retrofitted and utilized to meet the needs of the college. It is a campus that did not come together all at once, nor one that has been unified by a single style. Instead, the unique aesthetic and experiential visions of numerous designers have guided the many commissioned landscape plans of the campus. But, it is Frederick Law Olmsted’s contribution to the landscape’s history that looms largest in the background and foreground of the campus collective identity. The goal of my project was to both explore the accuracy of this identity and examine why it is one that has persisted throughout time.

As a student of architecture, I find the noncohesive building styles found on campus intriguing in terms of aesthetics, and also in terms of bureaucracy. In taking on this project, I was particularly interested in identifying not only the decision-makers behind the physical aspects of the campus, but also historical influencers of Smith’s planning theory. I came to the realize that campus identity is interdependent on Smith’s physical and conceptual built environments, and that sometimes the strongest influencers were those who contributed ideological plans as opposed to physical realities.

The 1893 Olmsted #1 map is often described as “The Olmsted Plan”. With the initial goal of analyzing the role of Olmsted in campus design, I began by reviewing the extent to which the original 1893 two-dimensional plan by his firm Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot, was realized in three-dimensional reality. To do so, I used mapping software to digitize the original plan and to then overlay maps of the current campus paths and buildings, as well as earlier Sanborn and college commissioned maps rendered before and after 1893. The resulting compilation allowed me to track the changes to the campus between the years of 1892 and 1895, right before and right after the Olmsted plan was completed, as well as compare today’s campus to the Olmsted plan.

My analysis revealed that nearly all of the curving paths which appear in the Olmsted map, and which are often attributed to Olmsted’s vision for the campus, were present in 1892 before the Olmsted map was published; Olmsted appears to have simply adopted them into his plan. The most notable changes to pathways on campus between 1892 and 1895 were restricted to connections between the then newly constructed Lyman Plant House and existing paths, and paths between the emerging cluster of buildings surrounding College Hall.

Accurately describing Frederick Law Olmsted’s influence on the Smith College campus is challenging. As one delves into the details of his work and properly scopes his impact, it becomes clearer that the question, how did our campus landscape come to look as it does?, cannot be answered by looking to Olmsted alone. The Smith landscape is a result of competing visions and their compromised manifestations, and cannot accurately be attributed to the work of any single individual. Throughout its history, Smith College leaders commissioned numerous
landscape master plans, even if not directly labeled as such. While the Frederick Law Olmsted map is our most celebrated landscape plan, Olmsted’s son John Charles Olmsted had a much more tangible impact on the college campus than his father, as he continued to work on landscape planning at Smith for nearly a decade. Plans from the Smith College Archives also include John Nolen’s 1915 imagining of Smith in rectilinear pathways and courtyard and 1936 maps and sketches from the college’s first and only landscape architect in residence, Dorothy May Anderson.

Countless influencers have left their imprints on the campus, but over the course of the college’s 147 years, their accomplishments and their shortcomings have been consolidated and editorialized to create simplified narratives of campus development centered on Olmsted. There are several reasons that this plan is often emphasized: the lasting fame of Frederick Law Olmsted, its popularity as a propagandistic image for the College, and its reputation as a colorized and aesthetic capturing of Smith in the early years. What should be learned from this project, is that Olmsted’s plan, and all plans in fact, should be read as just that—plans. They exist as the aesthetic and experiential conceptual goals of the landscape architect rather than unequivocal reality. They create conversation, garner thought, guide project planning, and attempt to reconcile the past with the present. Ultimately, the parts of these plans that are implemented, and that come to shape our experiences of campus, depend on the collaboration between project architects and the internal stakeholders: the Board of Trustees and senior leaders; the groundskeepers, gardeners, and curators; and the student body. In this way, campus design is, at its core, a community practice.

Risk continued

(Continued from page 7) suggested cause for concern were healthy and did not present an unacceptable risk. This was the case for our largest bur oak (Quercus macrocarpa), which sits on the south side of Seelye Hall. This tree has an old decaying wound. From a simple visual assessment it is impossible to determine the extent of the decay, making a confident risk assessment challenging. The tomography, resistograph readings, and a root plate excavation revealed that, despite some decay, there was still an approximately 8 inch thick wall of healthy wood around the base of the oak. This clarified some issues for us, but it was the pull test that revealed just how strong that 8 inch wall really is. The results indicated a stronger tree than even the tomography would suggest.

In addition to deeper examinations of large specimens, we are currently reshaping our entire approach to tree risk management. Institutions like ours have not, to this point, formalized tree risk management plans. From the conversations I have had with tree stewards at peer institutions, it appears that, more often than not, tree risk management plans are informal, reactive, and lack input from arborists trained in risk assessment. We wish to do better and are now in the process of crafting a formal, proactive tree risk management plan. When implemented, we hope this plan will make the most of our resources and perhaps even serve as a model for other institutions looking to maximize tree safety on college campuses.

I am so glad that there seems to be a ubiquitous human need to live amongst large trees. Doing so does mean accepting some uncertainty and some risk, but as with anything, the right information and good judgment can make that risk as low as is reasonably practicable. I feel confident that our new plan will serve our very special collection of trees so they can be protected for years to come.
Developing independent projects for our summer interns is a process of matching student interests with meaningful, practical initiatives that advance Botanic Garden goals or those of our community partners. This summer, with two students interested in permaculture, and no such efforts in development here on campus, we reached off campus to connect interns Rachael Drinker (Smith ’20) and Leala Machesney (UMaine Orono ’19) with the skills-building experiences they sought.

Rachael worked at Smith’s MacLeish Field Station in Whately with field station manager Paul Wetzel to develop a new agroforestry demonstration site near the MacLeish apple orchard. Agroforestry seeks to modify the species diversity in a forest area to increase production of food, fiber, and medicinal plants while maintaining a forest’s ecological services. Rachael analyzed the site, created a two-phase installation plan, and then planted such species as highbush blueberry (Vaccinium corymbosum), chokeberry (Aronia melanocarpa), ostrich fern (Matteuccia struthiopteris), and wintergreen (Gaultheria procumbens). The project also entailed designing and building a trail linking the food forest to MacLeish’s Bechtel Environmental Classroom, and creation of interpretive signs to be posted on the woodland edges.

Meanwhile, just up the road from the Smith College campus, Leala worked at the Grow Food Northampton Community Farm to support the development of a productive conservation riparian strip along the Mill River in Florence. This project seeks to address a common issue for farms: river floodplains provide excellent soils for agriculture, but rivers need vegetative buffers to protect streambanks and habitat corridors. How can riparian edges be agriculturally productive and still maintain conservation best practices? Leala’s work included propagation and installation of elderberries (Sambucus canadensis), shrubs which will provide berries for syrup but do not require annual plowing of fields. Leala also developed a floristic analysis of the area, highlighting valuable species to manage for (oak trees, black-eyed susans) and manage against (knotweed, bittersweet).

Leala and Rachael worked together on both of these projects, so that each of them was able to gain experience with both an upland and a river floodplain application of productive conservation techniques. And all 11 summer interns had the opportunity to participate in work days at both MacLeish and the Grow Food Northampton farm, transplanting, clearing invasives, and installing desirable species, thereby extending the learning opportunities to the whole team.

Capen Garden: Smith’s Historic Living Lab

Capen Garden is one of several outdoor gardens at Smith College. Tucked away in the northeast corner of the campus, it is both a living lab for students and a space for the community to visit and enjoy. The garden is set up as a series of outdoor rooms and includes plantings of annuals, perennials, vines, trees, and woody shrubs. Additionally, it features a rose arbor, a knot garden, a meditation circle, and a historic gazebo named in honor of Jill Ker Conway, Smith’s first woman president, which is surrounded annually by tulips planted in memory of Mary Mattison van Schaik ’31.

I’ve been interested in Capen since I first began studying at Smith. I started researching the house and garden as part of a project for one of my landscape studies classes. I was excited to have the opportunity to further explore the history of the garden through my 2018 summer internship with the Botanic Garden. I

Master plan for Capen Garden circa 1940 Image courtesy of the Smith College Archives
wanted to learn about Capen Garden’s original design and how this has shifted and changed throughout time.

Over the course of the summer I researched this history with the help of the Smith College Archives and Botanic Garden staff. I discovered that Smith acquired the property that Capen Garden sits on in 1921. It was once part of a preparatory school established in 1877 by Mary A. Burnham. This school was created at the urging of Smith College President Seelye, who wanted an institution that could prepare young women for the academics of Smith. The school was later taken on by Bessie Capen, who left her position at Smith teaching chemistry and botany to become principal. Capen renamed the school Miss Capen’s School, and she is the one who left the property, in part a gift, to Smith College at the time of her death.

We know very little of what the garden originally looked like, but we do know that when Smith took it over in 1921 the college redesigned it. However, we have no records of what this redesign consisted of. The earliest plan of the garden in our archives is from 1940.

While we do not have an actual plan to reference, we do have records of how the garden was used from 1921 through the 1940s. During the 1920s and 1930s, half of the garden was divided into individual garden plots which students then cared for. Here they learned how to grow and harvest cut flowers and vegetables and even used the plots to study propagation and growth of grass.

In 2005 the college renovated and redesigned Capen again, this time with a goal to increase its accessibility and visibility. Today, under the stewardship of Dave Dion, the new Capen gardener, the garden continues on both as an important living lab for students learning about horticulture and as a place to come to relax. As Capen Garden looks ahead to its centennial year as part of the college, it remains a space where students can take ownership of their education and can learn horticulture the best way—with their hands in the soil.

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**Experimenting Continued**

(continued from page 8)

Through these projects, students learned critical professional skills needed in consulting with partnering organizations and working in data science teams.

In one experiment, students tested if water salinity and seed nicking affected the germination rates of various species of milkweed plants. Another team, interested in how subtle changes in the Botanic Garden’s website could influence students’ perceptions of the Garden’s inclusiveness, created altered versions of the Botanic Garden’s homepage and randomly assigned these to students visiting the site. Another team, generously cut loose on the Botanic Garden’s Instagram account, tested if the content in the posted images—namely, the presence of flowers or people—as well as the presence of hashtags, influenced the number of “likes” a post received. The constellation of skills needed for these real-world projects—coding, photography, survey construction, writing, data analysis, participant recruitment, and teamwork—necessitated an “all hands on deck” approach, where every student was included, because everyone needed to be involved for success.

The Botanic Garden provides an ideal space for students to explore data collection. As a public-facing campus institution, it offers a supportive environment for students to put theory into practice. This collaboration is modernizing the experimental design course at Smith and is contributing to the interdisciplinary vision of the SDS curriculum. We look forward to continuing to use the Botanic Garden as a resource, so keep an eye out for SDS students at Lyman this spring.
New Plant Records Database at the Botanic Garden!

Elaine Chittenden and Polly Ryan

With over 8,500 live plants in our collection the Botanic Garden must have a robust database to keep track of them all. When we accession a plant, that is, when we bring it into the Botanic Garden collection, we give it a unique identifying number. Additionally, we record information such as where we acquired it, whether it is an endangered species, and where it grows wild. We also keep records on each plant’s health, growth rate, location(s), and phenology over the course of its life, making accurate records and a well-designed database key to successfully maintaining a collection!

We recently transitioned to IrisBG, and this fall both students and staff are busy learning the program. We made the decision to move to IrisBG because of its user-friendly interface, the ease with which you can map and remap plants, and the *index seminum* module, which will facilitate our ability to participate in the long-standing tradition of botanical gardens and arboreta sharing seeds and plants with each other via mail order. But the real power of this database is that we can provide ready access to accurate data and information to visitors, scientists, and scholars.

Questions are potentially unlimited at an academic institution. Now students and staff working in collections and performing inventories can easily get the answers they need. Does the Botanic Garden grow *Amorphophallus*? (We do! We have 12 live types.) How many plant families are found in the conservatory? (There are 186, including nonvascular liverworts, ferns, gymnosperms, and flowering plants.) Where did the Botanic Garden get all those rhododendrons? (Too many places to list here! We have 262 unique varieties). These and many other questions can be answered using IrisBG.

We want to hear from you!
Will you take our brief survey?
garden.smith.edu

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Please contact us (413-585-2742 or garden@smith.edu) if you are interested in volunteering. Information and applications are online: garden.smith.edu/Friends/volunteer-application.pdf
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