Staff Changes: Eighty Years of Experience Leaves the Garden

With the economy sagging and Smith College’s commitment to move forward with the new science buildings and other academic programs, the College offered an enhanced severance package in an effort to foster efficient approaches to management. An offer was made to employees who had a combined age and years in service of 70 or more and worked in the Botanic Garden, Public Safety, Residence and Dining Services, or Physical Plant. Thirty-one employees accepted the offer. A package was offered to faculty in August and the outcome of that offering is yet to be realized.

Three of the fourteen Botanic Garden employees “took the package.” Sue Schaffner retired on July 31. She tended to the greenhouse plants for over 30 years, surviving not only the current disruptive renovation, but also the previous one in 1981. Sue worked under four different directors and had propagated and cared for more plants than anyone else at the Botanic Garden. We recently caught up with Sue who stated she was going to take photography classes and catch up on her own garden (she’s behind 30 years on her weeding).

Maryjane Beach retired on September 26. She was at Smith for 25 years and was our receptionist, secretary, and bookkeeper (see her story on page 3). Residing in her brain and file cabinets is a host of facts that will be difficult for us to access. Maryjane will do more gardening, volunteer at the Food Bank, and do some child care. She is awaiting the birth of a grandchild that is expected this November.

Bill Belden, a Smith employee for 25 years, has been responsible for managing the gardeners and laborers who tend to the trees, shrubs, and gardens in the Campus Arboretum. Anyone who has visited the campus during commencement and reunion knows how dedicated Bill is to keeping the grounds in top shape. Bill will be retiring in December. Our next newsletter will have an article written by Bill.

We will miss these key employees dearly, both on a personal level and for their great institutional knowledge. Never has the Botanic Garden seen so much change in staff at one time. The package offered by Smith had an additional side effect. Because the garden staff (excluding management) is

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Staff Changes

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unionized, union-bumping rules based on seniority have caused numerous openings and shift changes throughout campus. The Botanic Garden had several changes in addition to the three members who are leaving. Nate Saxe, the Woodland Gardener, bid into the vacant greenhouse position and was accepted as Sue Schaffner’s replacement. His position as Woodland Gardener remains vacant and it is unlikely to be filled in the near future. Joe Stoddart, formerly a truck driver for the Physical Plant, left the Physical Plant, bumping out Kevin Forrestall, to become Garden Laborer/Spare Truck Driver. Kevin Forrestall then bumped out Maryanne Pacitti, to become gardener/laborer. Maryanne now works for the Physical Plant.

We have received permission to fill two of the three open positions. I will be restructuring our organization, reassigning work responsibilities, and prioritizing our responsibilities, since our staff will be spread quite thin trying to manage a huge conservatory and 125 acres of Campus Arboretum. We were moving in certain directions with some gardens, but shifts in personnel and capabilities will force another shift for some of the gardens. Gardens will need a maintenance review to make caring for them easier, even if that means removing some species. Gardeners who previously worked intensely in particular areas will need to cover more area. We will adjust the best we can and I am confident that we will continue to provide our most important product, educational opportunity.

Diane Bowman will also be leaving in October. Diane was half-time on a limited-term appointment, helping us with the Friends of the Botanic Garden administration, scheduling tour groups and volunteers, and in many other ways. We should know shortly who will be hired to replace both Maryjane Beach (who was also half time) and Diane Bowman. This will now be a permanent full time position that combines their responsibilities. We offer special thanks to Diane for her commitment to the team. Without Diane’s attention to detail many of you who have received personal thank-yous from me might still be waiting.

On behalf of the Friends of the Botanic Garden, I wish the best for our departing team members. When I began my position as Director in August of 2000 I knew I was lucky to have such a cohesive and experienced group. I will greatly miss those who are leaving. When I started here they all went beyond the call of duty to ease the challenges of my new job. It will be a great adjustment for all of us in the next few years. The departing staff love this garden and I’m sure they will be back in some capacity in the future—perhaps this time smelling the flowers rather than tending to them.
The View from My Office

I remember very clearly the first day I came to work at the Botanic Garden, 25 years ago. It was a hot sunny day in early August. I wore a sleeveless yellow dress and white high-heeled shoes, and I was nervous to the point of nausea. After 15 years as a stay-at-home mom, I wondered how I could possibly succeed in the business world. The first thing I saw when I entered the Head House was an enormous bouquet of flowers. My new boss, Director Greg Armstrong, was (not too happily) making a floral arrangement for a party at the President’s House. In those days the Gardens Department did double duty as the campus florist shop, a tradition that mercifully has been discontinued. I was shown to my office, a tiny closet of a room crammed with file cabinets of varying vintages and two small refrigerators, stacked one on top of the other. There was one window, in front of which was my desk. I sat down and looked out.

In the foreground, I saw a road, College Lane, running by the front of the Plant House. Beyond that was a sidewalk and a grassy slope. I could just see the roof of the Boat House and the tip end of a dock. There were trees—lots of trees, of every size and shape imaginable, and in a million shades of green. All was reflected in the smooth, black water of Paradise Pond. As I stared at this serene landscape, I became aware that it was alive. First, a pair of merganser ducks swam into view. Then a great blue heron stepped daintily along the shore of an island in the middle of the pond. Something large and dark swam in the water. An otter? A beaver? Both, I learned later, frequented the pond. A rowboat made its way laboriously toward the island. In it were two teenaged boys and a large lawnmower. I watched with amusement as the boys wrestled the mower out of the boat. Miraculously none of the three ended up in the water. I’m afraid I didn’t get much work done that first day.

As the weeks went by, I noticed the green leaves of the trees surrounding the pond turning color. At first they were a faint yellow. Then they became gold, orange, and blazing scarlet, standing out against the cloudless blue sky. Trees and sky were mirrored in the pond in a seamless double image. Then the geese came. I could hear them before I saw them, a great cacophony of honks. I looked up and saw a huge black V that came nearer and nearer until I feared they would fly right through the window and land in my lap. At the last moment they veered and dropped onto the pond. Amazingly, they were able to do this almost simultaneously, without crashing into one another.

Soon the leaves turned brown and fell off the trees, to be replaced with white tufts of snow. The pond froze and, one by one, skaters appeared: a couple of hockey players batting a puck across the ice and several families with small children who had trouble keeping their balance. They’d slip and fall, laugh, get up, and fall again. Then the virtuosos arrived, doing pirouettes, figure eights, and one-legged leaps. I could watch my own private Ice Capades!

Snow and ice melted, and the trees became tinged with a soft, hazy green. All of a sudden, one day it was spring. There were cherry blossoms, apple blossoms, and daffodils on the island. So much to look at … seed orders could wait a little longer to be filled.

The years have passed much too quickly. There have been changes. Some of the trees surrounding the pond have fallen victim to storms (and beaver!) and have been replaced. Hundreds more daffodils have been planted on the island. My office was renovated and I gained another window. Recently, all the offices were moved to the new addition on the other side of what had been the Head House. I now have a whole wall of windows, and my view has expanded to include the President’s Rose Garden.

Perhaps the biggest change has been the advent of computers. When I first came to the Botanic Garden, everything (correspondence, lecture notes, class handouts, inventories, plant accessions) was typed on a typewriter. A major project in those days was getting out the Index Seminum, a list of seed available for exchange with other botanic gardens. Since this list was “presenting our face to the rest of the world” it had to be perfect. No mistakes allowed! This meant that not only did I have to be precise with the spelling of plant names, but also I had to pay careful attention to the numbering. If I skipped or repeated a number, I would have to retype the whole list from that point on. To make matters worse, I also had to fit two columns on a page. This fell into the same category as typing a college term paper and having to anticipate how much space to leave for footnotes at the end of each page. In addition, the typeface on the typewriter had to be

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With sadness we brought out the heavy equipment and took down *Paradise Gate* (aka the Twig House) in June of this year. Although much beloved by the Smith community, it was becoming a fire and safety hazard. We kept it up for a year longer than originally planned due to the many requests to postpone the takedown. Here are some scenes from that day. The twigs were chipped up and used as mulch.

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**Paradise Lost**

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Photographs by Bill Belden

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**View from My Office**

(Continued from page 3)

changed periodically so that the Latin plant names could be in italics. It used to take me most of December to get the *Index Seminum* ready for printing at Central Services. Now, with the aid of a computer, the seed list is produced in a day or two.

Plant records were also typed. Information was put onto 5 by 8 cards and filed alphabetically. When a plant died, the card was moved to the “Dead File” and another card typed up for the replacement plant. We soon had an enormous storage problem. In the 25 years that I have been here, we gained nine new card files. Today all plants (both dead and alive) are recorded in a computer database. And a year ago a new position was created to ensure proper management of our collections.

While cleaning out closets in anticipation of the recent Plant House renovations, I came across reams of carbon paper. In earlier days this was the only means of duplication. When I think of how many times a day I now use the copier machine, I can’t imagine life without it. (I vow never again to swear when it jams or runs out of toner!)

The Friends of the Botanic Garden is a group that has been in existence for only 10 years, but it has become a source of tremendous support. With Friends’ donations the Botanic Garden has been able to plan many special events and purchase major equipment. The volunteers have also proved to be a valuable resource, guiding tours for school groups, filling seed requests, and staffing the new reception desk. Education of the public (as well as of Smith students) has become such a priority that the Botanic Garden now has a full time staff person devoted to education and outreach.

Another autumn is fast approaching and with it comes my retirement from Smith College and the Botanic Garden. I’ll miss the geese this year. I’ll also miss my friends and fellow workers, the laughs at coffee break, the excitement of a new plant arriving or coming into bloom for the first time. I’ll miss the Smith students, especially the ones that helped out in the office. Some of them I came to know and love as much as my own daughters. I’ll miss the smell of damp earth in the greenhouses on a cold winter’s day and the warmth of the sun on my back while sitting in the rock garden, taking inventory. And of course I’ll miss the view from my office.
A little boy comes running into the reception hall at Lyman Plant House yelling, “Mommy, you gotta see this thing near the bathroom—it’s big and purple and it smells nasty.” Not the thing a mother wants to hear shortly after she arrives for her visit to our first bulb show since the renovations. Reluctantly, and with little faith, the mother races up the ramp, child in hand, toward the restrooms. After turning the corner she is sensually accosted by a large strange-looking flower: a purplish brown spathe (large vase-shaped modified leaf) and spadix (collection of male and female flowers borne on an elongated axis) erupting from a six-foot stalk attached to a naked corm the size and texture of a human brain. And yes, it stinks like a bowl of month-old ground beef.

Why? It’s because this species, *Amorphophallus konjac*, a member of the curious and wonderful arum family, is pollinated not by butterflies, not by the wind, but by large carrion beetles fooled into thinking that the purple spadix is actually rotting meat. Frustrated, and covered with pollen, they march on in search of more rotten meat and if that too turns out to be another *Amorphophallus*, successful cross-pollination occurs. Many members of this plant family actually generate floral heat to help release the odor in a manner less like a flower and more like a mass of infected meat. Nature never ceases to amaze me.

Another curious feature of *A. konjac* is that it never has more than one leaf. Each year the leaf dies and is replaced by another one following a period of dry dormancy. Having one leaf is not bad when it is such a wonderful leaf. The leaf is an extravagant compound umbrella-like leaf resembling the canopy of a palm tree, sitting on a gorgeous variegated petiole. At maturity the mottled pink and olive leaf petiole can be as thick as a human arm and can reach five feet in height.

This year’s flowering specimens attracted many visitors, including several local photographers. Judy Messer, who has been photographing the Botanic Garden for many years, will have an exhibit of her Botanic Garden photos in the Church Exhibition Gallery next year (March 6 through June 12, 2004). Perhaps, this stinker’s portrait will be there in full stature, sans odor.

You may be wondering how Smith College got such a plant. It is an offspring of a plant that I acquired as a graduate student at the University of Maryland and have continued to propagate from small corm offsets to this day. I have since acquired a purple petiole variant, a pink petiole variant, a chartreuse leaf variant, and also discovered a spontaneous variegated mutation from my original plant. The variegated offspring “ebayed” me to a free vacation in England.

The Botanic Garden also has two plants of a related but much larger species, *Amorphophallus titanum*, which produce the largest non-compound inflorescence (flower stalk) in the plant kingdom. You can see amazing photos of Fairchild Tropical Garden’s plant at: [http://www.ftg.org/blooms/moreamorph.html](http://www.ftg.org/blooms/moreamorph.html).

I obtained one seed from Wilbert Hettersheid, a European botanist and the current guru on the genus. The other was acquired as a gift from the University of Connecticut from their collaboration with the Hettersheid group. If we continue to grow ours under optimal conditions, they should flower in about 3 to 5 years, when the corms are the size of a beach ball. The stinking flowers will reach out to the community. In other gardens where the titan has bloomed the crowds exceeded the Smith Bulb Show and the amount of press was nearly equivalent to a Martian invasion.

I’ve never been known to have conventional tastes in plants or, in fact, most other things. My *Amorphophallus* collection keeps me in contact with many interesting plant collectors. Now, a few select specimens reside in the Lyman Conservatory where they may someday amaze the sons and daughters of the little boy who showed his mommy the big stinker at this year’s Bulb Show. ❖

For more pictures of members of the genus *Amorphophallus* go to [http://www.aroid.org/genera/amorphophallus/amilist.html](http://www.aroid.org/genera/amorphophallus/amilist.html)
News from the President’s Residence Garden

Some exciting additions have been made to the gardens at 8 Paradise Road. In a generous gesture, two gorgeous tree peonies were presented to Carol Christ by the Smith College Club of Greenwich-Stamford. Called ‘Zhao’s Pink’ or ‘Zhao Fen,’ the plants will grow to four or five feet in height and display light to mid-pink flowers eight inches across. Flower form varies from a mounded, thousand-petal shape to semi-double, the latter displaying a heart of deep red carpels set off by golden stamens. The blossoms hold a delicate, sweet fragrance and are framed by the bold foliage typical of tree peonies. When mature, these plants will be the focal points of the borders fronting the house entrance. This will require some patience, as tree peonies are woody shrubs that require time to come into their full glory; once mature, however, they can live for several hundred years.

A Chinese tree peony has also been added to the medicinal plant collection in the herb garden. ‘Fen Dan Bai’ or ‘Phoenix White’ sports eight-inch pure white flowers with a golden center. Densely fragrant and slightly ruffled, the blooms resemble silk handkerchiefs waving in the breeze. Fields of this cultivar are grown in Sichuan and Anhui provinces of China, where the bark of the roots (dan-pi) is harvested for use throughout Asia as an anti-spasmodic. It is also thought to be effective as an analgesic, a sedative, and as a cure for dysentery. ‘Phoenix White’ is described as being closely related to Paeonia ostii, either as a form or as a cultivar of this endangered Chinese species. Named after the Italian botanist Gian Lupo Osti, this plant was overcollected in the wild by those interested in its curative properties. ‘Phoenix White’ flowered beautifully in the herb garden last spring, although the blooms were smaller than they will be once the plant becomes more mature and established. A field of these luminous white tree peonies must be a breathtaking sight, but perhaps not as enchanting as encountering a single wild plant growing in its native environment.

A visit by Carol Christ to the Smith College Club of Minnesota prompted another generous garden gift. The Club presented the President with Helleborus × hybridus ‘Heronwood Double,’ a truly exquisite rose-pink hellebore with large, full flowers nodding above glossy foliage. This delightful addition will be planted in the shady area of the back terrace, in the company of Epimedium grandiflorum ‘Dark Beauty,’ E. pubigerum, Anemonopsis macrophylla, and Aruncus aethusifolius. Hellebores also have an interesting background in medicinal plant lore. Employed by the ancient Greeks as a remedy for mental illness, the plant was categorized as one of the four classic poisons along with hemlock, nightshade, and aconite. Among other toxins, the hellebore contains a potent cardiac glycoside, bufadienolide hellebrin.

Two new roses have also been successful additions to the gardens. Rosa ‘Frederic Mistral’ is tall, robust, and disease-resistant with warm pink, very fragrant flowers. A ‘Romantica’ rose from the House of Meilland in France, the blooms are a classic hybrid tea shape with very thick stems ideal for cutting. The plants died back to within a foot of the ground last winter, as it snowed before winter protection could be added to the roses. Growth of this variety is so vigorous, however, that they had regained four feet of height by May, and were in full bloom by June. Rosa ‘Paul Bocuse’ is a ‘Generosa’ rose from Roseraie Guillot. The exquisite peachy-apricot quartered blooms appear in sprays on a very sturdy, healthy bush. Apparently quite winter-hardy, this rose is also disease-resistant, even after the copious rainfall of this past summer.

Picted beechn, Fagus sylvatica ‘Laciniata,’ at the President’s Residence, behind the elm trunk in the photo.

Fall is a lovely time at 8 Paradise Road. The fothergillas, Fothergilla major, blaze in red, yellow, and orange, and the cut-leaf beech, Fagus sylvatica ‘Laciniata,’ is a cloud of gold. Predictably, this gardener is already looking ahead to spring. Barring predatory intervention by rodents, there should be some lovely displays of tulips in April and May, and if we’re lucky, the tree peonies and hellebores will be blooming. Plan a visit!
his year marks the 61st anniversary of the Smith College Genetics Experiment Station, which opened in 1942. For 12 years the rare opportunity to engage in scientific research under the direction of Albert F. Blakeslee, Ph.D., attracted male and female students from all over the country and abroad. The Station’s history and its impact have largely been forgotten by the Smith community. Two of us, participants in this unique enterprise in the late 1940s, have collaborated to bring that history to light.

The Station was created at the behest of Albert Francis Blakeslee. It was the personal expression of his scientific drive and personality. The research carried out there dealt mainly with the genus Datura and is most often associated with Blakeslee’s name today. But this remarkable man’s research interests varied from molds to man, from fowl to flowers. He never stopped asking questions or attempting to answer them.

Unfortunately, we know little about his childhood beyond that he was born in Genesee, NY on November 9, 1874. He attended school at East Greenwich Academy in Rhode Island where his Methodist minister father was principal. After earning his bachelor’s degree cum laude at Wesleyan in 1896 he taught school for three years, followed by graduate school at Harvard, receiving his master’s in 1900 (the same year Mendel’s work was rediscovered) and his doctorate in 1904. His initial research interests were in the identification and classification of the mold genus Mucor. His discovery of mating types (heterothallism) in bread mold led to a grant that enabled him to go to Germany for two years for further studies and led to the naming of the mold Phycomyces blakesleeanae in his honor.

He returned to Harvard for a year and then joined the faculty of the Connecticut Agricultural College at Storrs (now the University of Connecticut) as Professor of Botany. There, he taught botany and looked for a new research interest. In 1911 he coauthored New England Trees in Winter, a bulletin later published as the book, Trees in Winter. It is still cited by arborists today and was on a resource list at the July 2003 Woody Shrub Conference in Philadelphia. Gathering material for the book led to Blakeslee’s first experiments in plant genetics. He began searching for naturally occurring mutations, identifying them in sugar maple, Acer saccharum; bellwort, Oakesia sessilifolia; adzuki bean, Phaseolus angularis; and black eyed Susan, Rudbeckia hirta. Although the variations in Rudbeckia were later shown to have been mistakenly identified as genetic, he continued his interest in the genus until his death. At Storrs he taught what was probably the first undergraduate course in genetics in this country. His innate curiosity coupled with his attendance at poultry shows led to his discovery of a relationship between egg laying and pigmentation in domestic fowl. This correlation changed agricultural practice by allowing early culling of nonproductive birds.

A year (1912-1913) at the Carnegie Station for Experimental Evolution at Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island led to an invitation to join the staff. Agreeing to go for two years, he remained for 27 (1915-1942), the last years as Director, where he proved to be an excellent administrator.

Blakeslee’s research was enormously productive during the years on Long Island. He continued his investigations on molds and on Datura, which he had begun in Connecticut. He was the first to demonstrate the effect of colchicine on chromosome doubling, producing tetraploid races of Rudbeckia hirta. Commercial growers and breeders continue to use colchicine today to produce tetraploid flowers and vegetables. He investigated genetic variation in humans, as reflected in differences in ability to smell and taste. In 1919 he married Margaret Dickson Bridges, a Smith alumna of 1906. That connection was partially responsible for Smith inviting him to be the Neilson Professor of Botany when he retired from the Carnegie Station in 1942. The one-year invitation was extended and he spent the remainder of his life as Visiting Professor.

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Albert Francis Blakeslee

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and Director of the Smith College Genetics Experiment Station.

Blakeslee was a commanding figure, dignified, aristocratic, with sharp features, piercing eyes, gray hair and beard, the perfect picture of authority. When he wanted something from the College, he usually got it. When he came to Smith in September 1942 the Botany Department provided him with space in Burton Hall, at that time surrounded by wide lawns and old elms. He was given three rooms including a large laboratory classroom, his office across the hall, and a small basement room without a window. But he wanted a new greenhouse on campus close to Burton Hall. The College built him one. It is still there though changed somewhat. It was attached to the Lyman Plant House by a Camellia Corridor in the 1980 restoration, which glassed over a lane to the greenhouse dump heap. Now it is surrounded in part by a new corridor that leads back to laboratories and classrooms.

Dr. Blakeslee never missed an opportunity to arouse curiosity or illustrate science in daily life through his studies of human variation. When invited to dinner as faculty guest at a college house, he enjoyed testing his hostess’ and her friends’ ability to smell certain flowers (often freesia or nasturtium) or to taste certain chemicals. And if ice cream were the dessert (and it usually was) he might cover his with pepper, inviting the students at the table to do the same, challenging them to taste the pepper, thus illustrating the effect of mouth temperature on the ability to distinguish flavors. No question about genetics was too trivial to answer with his typical courtesy.

Many of his fellow faculty members were not so charmed. He did not fit the Smith mold, with his authoritarian manner and his ability to obtain whatever he needed for the Station. Where all professors were addressed as Mr., Miss, or Mrs., he was always Dr. Blakeslee. His international reputation and honors were exceptional for the faculty at that time. It is noteworthy that he belonged to 30 scientific societies and had been president of six of them. He was one of the founding members of the American Society of Human Genetics. As President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science he argued that society should recognize the exceptional man when he is young and give him opportunity to prove his scientific talents. Clearly, he extended this to women at Smith where his encouragement helped many of us to pursue scientific careers.

Dr. Blakeslee always seemed to be in a hurry. But he always had time for students and made sure they enjoyed every possible professional opportunity. At scientific meetings, he would take us in hand, introducing us to all the major geneticists of the day. He instituted the Four College Genetics Conference so students and faculty interested in genetics had an opportunity to meet each other, hear major lecturers and keep abreast of the latest developments. He arranged trips to the Arnold Arboretum and similar institutions, packing us in his old car and driving us around the countryside, since often we had no way of getting there otherwise. After Mrs. Blakeslee’s death he invited his students and associates, one by one, to accompany him to concerts at John M. Greene. When rooms were difficult to find at Commencement, he invited family members to stay at his home, afterwards organizing a celebratory picnic for the whole group.

When Blakeslee died in 1954 he left money to Smith for the continuation of the Station. Unfortunately, faculty at that time were opposed to this and so...

The Blakeslee Legacy at Smith
Three endowments at Smith College carry the Blakeslee name. The most important is the Albert F. Blakeslee Endowment, managed by the National Academy of Sciences. This fund, created by Albert Blakeslee himself, supports teaching and research in genetics at Smith. The income is used to provide stipends for summer research students, research grants for faculty, and funds for equipment purchases. Each year, students and faculty publish scholarly papers that carry an indication of support from the Blakeslee Endowment. Every three years, members of the National Academy of Sciences visit the College to review our use of the income from this endowment. Currently, the endowment provides over $100,000 per year to support genetics research at Smith College.

The Albert F. Blakeslee Memorial Fund, managed by the College, was donated by members of the Smith Sigma Xi chapter and other friends. The fund’s income is used to support the annual Sigma Xi Blakeslee Lecture. The speaker is always an influential scientist from any discipline in the sciences.

The Margaret Bridget Blakeslee Memorial Fund, created by Albert Blakeslee himself, supports teaching and research at Smith College. The Margaret Bridget Blakeslee Memorial Fund is also managed by Smith. Margaret Blakeslee was Albert Blakeslee’s wife, and this fund was established by an anonymous donor following her death. The income subsidizes the regular meetings of OBND (Out But Not Down, a group of emeritus faculty members) and funds the annual Phi Beta Kappa speaker and the Sigma Xi initiation dinner. Additionally, it supports other events that foster a sense of community at the College.

It should also be noted that some of Albert Blakeslee’s work is regularly included in our introductory genetics courses with mention of his time at the college.

Steven A. Williams, Gates Professor of Biology and Robert B. Merritt, Professor of Biology
Smith College Genetics Experiment Station

It is impossible to describe the Smith College Genetics Experiment Station solely in terms of Dr. Blakeslee. The professional staff included two assistants who accompanied him from The Carnegie Institute’s laboratory at Cold Spring Harbor: Amos Avery to care for the plants and maintain the greenhouse and Sophie Satin to direct the laboratory and supervise the students. The staff was supplemented by student assistants seeking master’s and doctoral degrees and undergraduates doing honors research. Over the years this group consisted of both male and female, and American and foreign students (from India, France, Greece, Canada, Chile, Holland, and Germany). Two senior researchers, both plant physiologists, were part of the team, one from France, Jacques Rappaport, and later, Jacob Rietsema from Belgium.

By 1948, when we were students, the laboratory was crowded and busy. Rows of desks had replaced classroom benches. By current standards it was primitive, but it was very productive. Miss Satin was established in one corner with her microscope and her desk. Growing in racks on the warm and sunny window ledges were tiny plants that had been dissected and grown in plant tissue culture and had now advanced to agar media. Plants bearing micrografts of older embryos were scattered on other windowsills and benches.

Students and assistants used the desks for research: dissecting pollen tubes, making drawings of embryos, or preparing stain. The room smelled of acetic acid from the acetocarmine used to stain the slides and of the paraffin-gum arabic used to seal them. There were stacks of books and papers on every desk and in winter, coats hanging and wet boots piled near the door.

Dr. Blakeslee also shared the laboratory, often doing the micrografting at a bench near the window. His office across the hall from the lab contained his books and journals. The desk was piled with papers, reprints, letters, an assortment of seed packets, and pieces of paper with notes to himself. Only Blakeslee, or more likely Miss Satin, could find anything there.

The room in the basement had been put to good use as a “sterile” room where embryos were dissected and cultured in sterile media. There was an incubator in that room. We also had access to the departmental autoclave, drying ovens on the second floor, and a room with desks where students could study and write. The greenhouse on campus contained specimen plants of *Datura*, beautiful, ornamental plants, with large white flowers. Only a few steps from the lab, it was in this greenhouse that most of the interspecific crosses were made.

Subsequent to his arrival at Smith, Blakeslee built a complex of three greenhouses on the Lyman Estate, where his summer planting plots were located. The Lyman Estate, a large property on South Street, was within walking or
First Blush

Rob Nicholson

The ultimate reward in growing plants is the chance to see flowers spring forth in a profusion of shapes and colors. We often measure our waiting period in years or decades for some woody species grown from seed, so those of us in the conservatories should not complain about a mere four or five year wait.

Such was the case for a spectacular bulb grown from seed that we purchased in 1998 from an excellent South African seed house (www.silverhillseeds.co.za). *Cyrtanthus obliquus*, known as the Khysna lily or Justifina in South Africa, is native to the southern and eastern Cape and Natal. From the bulbs grow a cluster of 1¼" wide straplike, gray green leaves that measure 12 to 18" long. In July our patience was rewarded when a single 18" stalk arose from one of the largest bulbs in the pot, sending forth a dozen beautiful 2" pendant blossoms; conical tubes of orange and yellow with flushed green at the tips. It was the first time any of our staff had ever seen this beauty.

The Succulent House has been drastically changed since the renovation with the addition of a rock outcropping to the center bed (where the oversized *Cereus peruvianus* formerly grew). We have begun to plant this with various rarities that we have grown from seed or purchased from reputable dealers. The Huntington Botanic Garden has a mail-order catalog of choice cacti and succulents (http://www.huntington.org/BotanicalDiv/IS12003/catalogIntro.html) grown specifically for this sale. Since many of these have location data that details where the mother plant was collected they are excellent additions to our succulent collection. Two of these plants, both of the milkweed family (Asclepidaceae), are flowering simultaneously although they come from different corners of the globe.

*Matelea cyclophylla* is native to Mexico and original material was collected in the state of Queretaro. We received a small plant in 2002 and it was planted in the New World section (north side) of the center bed. From a swollen stem base (caudex), clad in beige corky ridges, arose a short stem capped with a few heart-shaped leaves. This August the plant shifted gears and the stem suddenly elongated into a six-foot vine and flowers began to form. These are a striking 1" wide star, of deep chocolate brown, with fine white hairs on the surface and a tiny white star in the center. Though they look like a Parisian confection, they betray their seeming edibility with a slightly fetid smell. This aroma is nowhere near as rank as their cousin genus *Stapelia*, and unlike *Stapelia*, they have yet to draw flies.

Often flowers can be so small as to be missed. Another addition to our rock outcrop also came by way of the Huntington Botanic Garden, *Larryleachia cactiformis*. Native to southern Africa and formerly in the genus *Trichocaulon*, this species and a few others were recently moved into a new genus named for English-born South African botanist Larry Leach (if John Le Carre ever needs a name…). These at first glance could pass for bumpy spineless cacti but are again members of the milkweed family. Atop this gray green carbuncled pear of a plant come tiny flowers, only 3/8" wide, exquisitely beautiful stars of pale yellow with maroon spots. This plant was only in the ground for a matter of months before it rewarded us with a first flush of blooms.

As our collections grow and feature more rare species, the Lyman Conservatory becomes a wondrous collection of plants and flowers that students would be hard pressed to see anywhere else. These first time bloomers help to show why “the routine of gardening” is a phrase seldom heard at the Smith Botanic Garden.

Genetics Station

(Continued from page 9)

The greenhouse was a room with benches used for grafting, experiments, and record keeping. Amos Avery, a longtime (1926-1954) associate of Dr. Blakeslee, supervised the greenhouse. He not only cared for the plants and taught the students about their care, but also was expert in his knowledge of growth and form, readily identifying new variants in the greenhouse or field.

A small frame house contained Mr. Avery’s office, the extensive seed collection of *Datura* and *Rudbeckia*, and a microscope for pollen viability counts. There were a number of large fields on the estate that were planted with experimental plants every year. In the spring Mr. Avery and Dr. Blakeslee supervised the students as we planted out flats of seedlings in orderly rows. After long, snowy winters the opportunity to work in the fields surrounded by blooming trees and tall pines was much welcomed, and the group was in good spirits as we planted the seedlings for the summer’s research.
Mapping Campus Trees

Tess Matulonis ’04

Most summer jobs begin in the same way. You roll out of bed, head for the shower, and realize that you have no idea whatsoever what you might be up to today, and that this is perfectly fine. It’s a money-making venture, possibly your last before you hit the “real world.” The only thing for certain is that you have carefully selected something that has nothing to do with Proust, Shakespeare, statistics or anything remotely resembling your major. That is what I thought, until I had to write an article detailing my summer adventure and why an English major was doing anything with trees, flowers, and shrubs in the first place.

An English major has a plethora of choices for summer employment: intern at a publishing firm, shadow a community college professor, try to work for an impressive publication in a huge and exciting city, or… work with plants. I saw the summer stretching out ahead of me, and I pictured myself gussied up in hose and heels, heading to the office. Any gardener worth her salt would have made the same choice to trade those heels for sandals and head off to play in the dirt!

The Botanic Garden has always been a delight for me and many other women for whom it provides a sanctuary to study, write, read, or just get away from daily academic pressures. By day you will find us camped out beneath the trees with a pile of books. By night you might catch a couple stealing a kiss under the canopy of the mighty Ginkgo biloba. But how many of us really know what we are sitting under, or why that tree is so significant to the flora, fauna, and humans who share this campus? Growing up in Vermont I could identify maples, oaks, and many common woodland trees, but I had certainly not been exposed to many of the wonderful species that we enjoy here on our campus.

For an entire summer, and now continuing into the autumn, I have been working on a tree-mapping project with Tracy Omar, the Botanic Garden’s Collections Manager. We have archives of our history in the buildings that surround us and in the files of letters and photographs of the men and women who have gone before us, yet most of us have no idea of the historical and biological record alive in the flesh of Smith’s trees. The Botanic Garden has long maintained detailed records about the plants in its collection. The goal for our project is to accurately map the location of the plants on the Smith campus, and tie that information to the plant database. This will be invaluable for managing the plant collections. It could also provide a way for the public to locate particular plants they want to see. One long-term goal is to be able to create, on request, different walking tour maps of the campus arboretum.

To that end, Peicha Chang ’03 and I worked with Tracy through the summer to develop a system for measuring and recording tree data and entering that data into BG-Map, our mapping software. Starting on central campus, we measured trunk diameters at breast height and tree canopies, and recorded other information, such as reproductive and health status, and any special characteristics. We worked hard together to develop a system that would yield the most accurate data. (We had an older campus map where nothing was exactly where the map indicated that it should be!) Everything had to be measured, including every path and tree, and we had to find the most efficient way to sift through mounds of botanical data on file.

Each tree has its own story. Working with field notes, pictures, the computer database, and all the older plant records on index cards, we began piecing together the puzzle of Smith’s landscape. Tracy was invaluable, helping us look up strange specimens and identify leaves and bark. Before long, I was able to recognize more than 40 trees by sight and knew their Latin, as well as common names. Working with John Berryhill, our Arboretum Assistant, I discovered that the Paulownia behind College Hall was lucky to be among the first botanical institutions around the world that received seed from those trees.

The possible uses for the data we are putting together are varied. Ecology and biology students might explore which species have done well in particular habitats on campus. History majors might get an idea of what trees were standing when the first Smith women matriculated. Apparently, you might even teach an old English major a new trick or two. I think that the most important benefit will be helping to preserve our old trees. As Smith continues to build, grow, and expand, we would do well to nurture the natural guardians of our past—who knows what they might have witnessed?

As the fall progresses, I look forward to unlocking more mysteries in the still uncharted territory away from central campus. I await the satisfaction of placing the rare oak trees by the stables on our maps, and learning to use the GPS system to map the Japanese and Woodland Gardens. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to be a part of a project that takes Smith in a new direction and carefully marks its past. And, I can say, without a single regret, that I never wore a single suit or pair of stiletto heels all summer.
Historic Preservation Award

The renovated Lyman Conservatory and Plant House scored a place on the list of Historic Preservation Awards given annually by the Northampton Historical Commission.

Awards are granted to local construction and renovation projects that successfully complement the existing built structure. Vice-chair of the Northampton Historical Commission Valerie Lavender, Smith class of 1997, presented the award to Carol T. Christ during a ceremony on May 14, 2003 at the Botanic Garden. The Commission is a mayoral-appointed group committed to preserving and complementing the city’s built environment. “The Commission is excited to publicly acknowledge the particular projects that have contributed so successfully to what will be our physical legacies to those who follow,” said the event program.

Prior to its opening on May 9, Lyman Conservatory had undergone a two-year, $5 million renovation that restored and modernized its twelve greenhouses, expanded classroom and lab space, and added offices, a wheelchair lift, as well as a new reception area and the Church Exhibition Gallery, just inside the building’s entrance. The Conservatory, originally designed by Lord and Burnham (builders of the Palm House at England’s Kew Gardens), has become an essential resource to the college. It is an internationally acclaimed research and display facility, attracting some 60,000 visitors a year.

The Lyman Conservatory was one of two Smith construction projects honored by the commission. The Brown Fine Arts Center also made the list for its renovation and expansion. Other Northampton award winners include Sylvester’s Restaurant, a popular downtown establishment; Café Casablanca at 16 Main Street; and several private properties.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the many volunteers who donate their time in support of the work of the Botanic Garden. Their efforts enable us to provide educational tours of our facilities for local schools and other groups. Additionally they are now staffing our reception desk on weekends and helping with many other projects, including the mapping of the garden, our international seed exchange, photographically documenting our collections, and hosting our special events. We are truly indebted to the following people who have been so generous with their time during the past year:

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The Chronicle of Higher Education Features the Lyman Plant House

Our facilities received national praise in the Architecture and Facilities Section of the September 5, 2003 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education. “Houses of Cypress and Glass,” by Lawrence Biemiller, recognized our successful Plant House restoration and our commitment to maintaining a botanical collection for education purposes. For those of you who are subscribers to The Chronicle, you can read the article online at http://chronicle.com/chronicle/archive.htm

Phalaenopsis, drawing by Marie-Laure Couet ’06
The Botanic Garden of Smith College is grateful to our supporters who help make our work possible. We wish to express our sincerest thanks to the following contributors who have given so generously in the last fiscal year, from July 1, 2002, through June 30, 2003.
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Please accept our sincere apologies for any omissions or misspellings and advise us of any errors so we may record and publish corrections.

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Daphne M. White  

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**The Ceremental Horse (1996)** by Leonard Baskin  
Gift of Sarah Franklin, Class of 1982, in memory of her mother, Susam Botsch Franklin. Installed in the new reception area of the Lyman Plant House.

Leonard Baskin was one of several artists commissioned to create part of the FDR Memorial in Washington, DC. The monument is a series of outdoor rooms, each depicting a different period or important event in FDR's life. Baskin's portion was FDR's death. He made a life-size bronze frieze of the funeral procession, with horses pulling the open wagon on which the president's coffin lay. The sculpture at the Botanic Garden is a smaller-scale version of the lead horse in the procession. "Ceremental" refers to ceremony surrounding death.

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### Individual & Dual Members continued

Louise Wickware  
Constance P. Wiesman  
Staunton Williams, Jr.  
Lisa Wilsher  
Sherry Wilson  
Corinne M. Wingard  
Brenda Wolfe  
Carol Woodruff  
Rosalyn S. Zakheim  
Dr. Ann S. Zartler  
Robin Zitter

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### Educators

Anne Beckwith Blake  
Elizabeth Catelli  
Sue Chaffee  
Cynthia B. Driscoll  
Ms. Joanne Foster  
Virginia Gary  
Paul Hopkins  
Marian Lauterbach  
Renee H. Lincoln  
Douglas V. Mac Brien  
Faith Silver Simmons  
Jan Spearance  
Alison Stern  
Jennifer Werner  
Mrs. Leighton C. Wood

---

### Student Members & Recent Alumnae

Christine Chung  
Jean Clarke-Mitchell  
Beth and Janine Denoncourt  
Jennifer Farley  
Jeri Hise  
Marsha Janson  
Caroline Kellogg  
Autumn S. Kidd  
Valerie Lavender  
Jane Linsley  
Geoffrey W. Locke  
Ann Lynch  
Sabine Rhyne  
Ilina Singh  
Susan Wasch

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### Drawing by

Sarah Sanchez '06

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### Gift-in-Kind Donations

Sarah Franklin  
Shirley Nelson  
Joan Throckmorton  
Dorian Rogers Winslow

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### Other Donations

M. Woolan
**Calendar of Events — Fall 2003**
All events are free unless noted otherwise

The Friends of the Botanic Garden are invited to attend a forum sponsored by the Environmental Science & Policy Program:

**Feeding a Growing World: Is There Room for Genetically Altered Organisms?**
Thursday, October 2, 2003
7 pm Wright Hall Auditorium

**Panelists:**
Brian Halweil of The World Watch Institute
Dr. Channapatna Prakash of Tuskegee University & www.AgBioWorld.org
Jeffrey Smith, author of *Seeds of Deception*

**Moderator:**
Laurie Sanders '88, naturalist & host of WFCR's *Field Notes*

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**Annual Fall Chrysanthemum Show**
November 1 - 16, 2003
10:00 am to 4:00 pm Daily
Lyman Conservatory

A Smith horticultural tradition returns!
An outstanding display featuring mums trained into cascading forms rarely seen outside of Japan, as well as large specimen flowers.

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**Opening Lecture and Preview of the Chrysanthemum Show**
Friday, October 31, 2003, 7:00 pm
Neilson Browsing Room

**Urban Landscapes, A Case Study**
Lecture and slide show by Clara Couric Batchelor ’72
M.L.A. 1976 Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Chair of the Friends of the Botanic Garden of Smith College.

Following the lecture, please join us for a reception and refreshments. Preview the Mum Show in the Lyman Conservatory, which will be illuminated for the occasion.

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**Workshop: Poetry, Drawing, and Creative Journaling**
Tuesdays, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
October 7, 14, 21, 28, November 4, 11
Cosponsored with the Smith College Museum of Art

In this series of sessions participants go on exploratory walks in the Art Museum and the Lyman Conservatory (alternating weeks), focusing on close looking and describing. We will read contemporary writers, write poetry, and draw. Emphasis is placed on learning to give ourselves over, as fully as possible, to what we see.


Advance Registration Required:
Limited to 15
$100 - non-members
$75 - members (Museum or Garden)
$50 - students
For more information call: 585-2781

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**Smith Chrysanthemums: Hybrid Alums**
November 1 through December 23, 2003
Church Exhibition Gallery, Lyman Plant House

An exhibition featuring Chrysanthemum Shows at Lyman and the hybrids created by Smith College horticulture students from the early 1900s to the present.

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From an article in *The Sophian* November 7, 1985

Martha Mercaldi
hybridizing mums in 1968
Lectures of Landscape Studies 100
Issues in Landscape Studies
Mondays, 2:40-4:00 pm, Seelye Hall 106

Sept. 8 Nina James, Mellon Fellow in Landscape Studies, Smith College
What Isn’t Landscape Studies?

Sept. 15 Max Page, Assistant Professor of Art History, University of Massachusetts
Out of Ground Zero: Reflections on Rebuilding after 9/11

Sept. 22 Paul Wetzel, Research Associate in Biological Sciences, Smith College
More Than Mosquito Cesspools: Wetlands’ Importance in the Landscape

Sept. 29 Janet Milne, Associate Professor, Vermont Law School
The Landscape and the Law: The Visible Effects of Invisible Law

Oct. 6 Dean Flower, Professor of English, Smith College
Inscribing the Oxbow: Local Landscapes as Text

Oct. 20 Domenico Grasso, Professor of Engineering, Smith College
The Wealth of Nature

Oct. 27 Lynden Miller (Smith alumna, class of 1960), Public Garden Designer, New York City
Making Magic in the City: Restoring New York City’s Parks and Gardens

Nov. 3 John Moore, Associate Professor of Art History, Smith College
Versailles: The Universe of Louis XIV

Nov. 10 Martha Schwartz, Principal of Martha Schwartz, Inc., Cambridge, MA
Quik, Cheap & Green

Nov. 17 Harry Dodson, Landscape Architect, Ashfield, MA
Masterplan for Buffalo Bayou and Beyond: A Green Heart for Houston

Nov. 24 Beth Meyer, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Virginia
Site Citations: Grounding the Modern Landscape

Dec. 1 Leslie King, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Smith College
Factionalism and Change in the Sierra Club: The Great Immigration Debate

Dec. 8 Gary Orlinski, Site Specific Sculptor
Nature, Culture, Sculpture

All lectures are open to Friends of the Botanic Garden free of charge
**Garden Gifts Order Form**

You can see pictures of all these items on our web site:  
[http://www.smith.edu/garden/giftorderform.html](http://www.smith.edu/garden/giftorderform.html)

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<th>Item Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Botanic Garden T-Shirts with Logo</td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>Willow Green, Slate, Eggplant, Teal, Natural, or Royal (L &amp; XL only) 100% Cotton, S, M, L, XL, 2XL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Botanic Garden Sweatshirts with Logo</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>Teal, Maroon, or Natural 100% Cotton, S, M, L, XL, 2XL</td>
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| Botanic Garden Canvas Tote Bags with Logo                      | $10   | Open Tote—18"×19"×4½" Green or Navy  
|                                                               |       | Zippered Tote—22"×15"×5" Black or Natural |
| Botanic Garden Aprons with Logo                                 | $15   | 24"×28" with two pockets, Forest Green |
| Centennial T-Shirts                                           | $15   | “A Century of Women on Topsoil” Brown or Forest Green, 100% cotton, S, M, L, XL |
| Botanic Print                                                  | $25   | *Theobroma cacao* (chocolate tree) from Lyman Plant House, 7" × 10" Limited signed edition by Pamela See ’73 |
| Botanic Garden Mugs                                            | $5    | White ceramic with black logo |
| Orchids and Artists:                                          | $5    | *Five Centuries of Botanical Illustration from Peter Schoeffer to Blanche Ames ’99* A 20 page booklet (1991) |
| Postcards – Set of 6 assorted cards                           | $3    | Bulb Show, Capen Tulip Garden, Mum Show, Olmsted Campus Plan, Lyman Conservatory in Fall |
| Note Cards – Set of 6 assorted cards                          | $8    | Conservatory in Winter, Bulb Show, Bat Flower, Silky Stewartia Flower, Frog in Pond, Broccoli ‘Romanesco’ |
| Botanic Print                                                  | $25   | *Theobroma cacao* (chocolate tree) from Lyman Plant House, 7" × 10" Limited signed edition by Pamela See ’73 |
| Mugs                                                           | $5    | White ceramic with black logo |
| Orchids and Artists:                                          | $5    | *Five Centuries of Botanical Illustration from Peter Schoeffer to Blanche Ames ’99* A 20 page booklet (1991) |
| Postcard Sets                                                 | $3    | Conservatory in Winter, Bulb Show, Bat Flower, Silky Stewartia Flower, Frog in Pond, Broccoli ‘Romanesco’ |
| Note Card Sets                                                | $8    | Conservatory in Winter, Bulb Show, Bat Flower, Silky Stewartia Flower, Frog in Pond, Broccoli ‘Romanesco’ |

**TOTAL** $__________

Members of the Friends of the Botanic Garden take 10% off the total

**TOTAL ENCLOSED** $__________

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<tr>
<td>Virginia Woolf Broadsides</td>
<td>$75</td>
<td>Lithograph designed by Enid Mark on the occasion of the Virginia Woolf Conference held at Smith in June 2003. Includes photos of the gardens at Monks House and a quote from a letter written by Virginia Woolf to Ethel Smyth, April 7, 1931. Please make checks payable to the Mortimer Rare Book Room, Smith College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please make checks payable to The Friends of the Botanic Garden and send to: The Botanic Garden of Smith College Lyman Plant House Northampton, MA 01063 Attention: Garden Gifts</td>
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Viola sp. by Susan Vitolo ’03
Woodcut done in studio art class.
You are invited to join

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ALL MEMBERS RECEIVE

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♦ Invitations to show previews and receptions

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* local elementary or secondary teachers
** graduated within the past 5 years

Name: ________________________________  Class Year (alumnae)

Address: _____________________________

City, State, Zip: _____________________

E-mail: ______________________________

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