

# The Long Green Line

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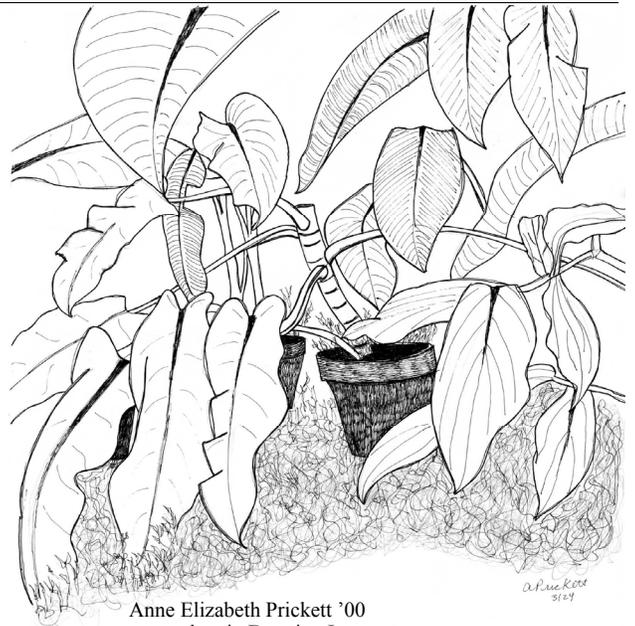
West Point cadets proudly declare they are part of the Long Gray Line stretching back to the first graduate of the academy. Conservatory Manager Rob Nicholson, when illustrating the educational mission of a botanical garden to the 1999 Horticulture class, compared the Long Gray Line to one hundred years of Horticulture students at Smith who make up the Long Green Line.

That analogy prompted this inquiry: What is the tradition of Horticulture at Smith College? From previous research and experience, I knew that Horticulture was a relative newcomer (c. 1900) to the well-established botany curriculum of an institution founded in 1875, in which its founder Sophia Smith specified that “all the education and all the discipline shall be pervaded by the Spirit of Evangelical Christian Religion.” I’d also seen careful yet stylized drawings of elephant’s ear (*Begonia* sp.), brake (*Pteris cretica*), chrysanthemums, and others from a Botany V (Horticulture) notebook of Emily Rankin Watkinson '11. I knew the Chrysanthemum and Bulb shows to be longtime traditions involving Smith students. Finally, as Laboratory Instructor in Horticulture, I know what students are currently learning about the art and science of growing plants. Perhaps I could find evidence of a trend in teaching horticulture, progressing from reflective contemplation of God’s work to active investigation of Nature.

With the help of College Archivist Nanci Young and the staff of the Smith College Archives, I found much interesting information on Horticulture, plus some surprises. In the first archival box relating to the Botany Department (which in 1966-67 merged with the departments of Biology, Microbiology, and Zoology to become Biological Sciences) was a 1947 article by Dorothy W. Woodruff that included this: “A description of the Botany Department cannot be left without a glance at the gardening and horticulture classes and the work done in the courses on Plant Materials and Planting Design.” Period, end of paragraph. The writer continues, however, by stating that the Botany Department responded to the World War I “Food for Victory” movement by “instituting a course in Horticulture, which has been part of the curriculum ever since.” In truth, Horticulture became part of the Smith curriculum in 1900, and the institution that grew out of Smith students’ helping Connecticut Valley farmers get in their crops during WWI was the Smith College School for Social Work.

The tradition of helping others was exemplified in World War II as well, when a local grower facing a labor shortage asked the Botany Department for help. A greenhouse of gardenias needed grafting, and Smith Horticulture students were recruited. According to Woodruff, “The girls returned to the college laden down with exquisite blossoms to the loudly expressed envy of their friends.” Fringe benefits are a Horticulture tradition to this day. Just ask any in the Long Green Line what is her or his favorite “cultivar” of *Coleus* × *hybridus* (syn. *C. blumei*, renamed *Solenostemon scutellarioides*). The coleus collection at Smith, maintained for a century, is a treasury of readily rooting material. To become true cultivars, however, they need officially approved and issued names—perhaps their nicknames would suffice: Patches, Freckles, Ruffles, ....

I wanted to find out if there were records of the first Bulb Show or the first Mum Show, and to determine the connection, if any, to Horticulture. A press release on the Mum Show from 1952 announcing the debut of mums by seniors Miss Margaret Knecht of Allentown, Pennsylvania, Miss



Anne Elizabeth Prickett '00  
student in Drawing I

Jean Richmond of Kenilworth, Illinois, and Miss Bernice Low of Singapore contained this clue, “An annual feature for over 50 years, this display was begun under Dr. William F. Ganong, head of the Botany department, and Mr. E. G. Canning, head of the Garden department.” This suggests that the first Mum Show was held in 1900 or 1901, coinciding with the beginning of Horticulture. A slightly earlier press release on the Bulb Show confirms that bulbs were potted by the Horticulture students, so the Horticulture–flower show connection seems solid. Indeed, in 1999, members of the Long Green Line not only potted up and ferried to the cooler a long line of green pots filled with bulbs, but they also genetically engineered plants, so to speak, by selectively hybridizing mums, potentially creating unique flowers to be seen nowhere else on Earth.

The earliest mention of the floral exhibitions were in the student newspaper, *Smith College*  
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### First Horticulture course description, 1900

**Horticulture.** A study of the principles of plant-cultivation, including the practice and theory of the care, propagation, and improvement of hardy and greenhouse plants, together with a systematic study of all the species and groups commonly cultivated. For the first half-year the laboratory work will consist of practical and experimental gardening operations carried on at the Lyman Plant House; for the second half-year it will consist of the systematic collection, identification, and classification of the principal kinds of cultivated plants. Mr. Ganong, theoretical and systematic part; Mr. Canning, Head Gardener, practical part. Source: *The Twenty-seventh Official Circular of*

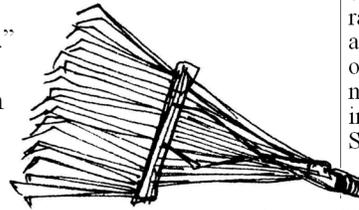
# The Long Green Line *continued*

(Continued from page 5)

*Weekly*, which was published from 1911 to 1947. Calendar listings for the Mum Show and Bulb Show in 1911 and 1912, respectively, announced exhibitions of chrysanthemums and of spring flowering bulbs and shrubs “by the students of the Class in Horticulture.” How quickly are traditions established that they require no explanation or further notation of “Tenth Annual” or “Twelfth Annual”!

My initial focus on the Horticulture curriculum was to find a change from passive teaching to active involvement. Instead my search revealed a dynamic equilibrium. The course description for Horticulture for 2000-01 is not dissimilar to that of 1900-01. I now believe that the stylized drawings from Emily Rankin Watkinson’s Horticulture notebook of 1910-11, which appeared to be the result of passive copying, were actually preprinted, perhaps with the assignment to find, to identify, and to research the plants depicted.

In 1909, the phrase “and elements of landscape gardening” was added to the description of Horticulture, and in 1912 a separate course in Advanced Horticulture and Landscape Architecture was offered. The landscape architecture branch of the Long Green Line,



Nadine Shapiro '00

## William F. Ganong on Horticulture, 1910

This course takes a hold upon the students, excites them in a devoted industry, and arouses a voluntary effort which shows how thoroughly adapted to their tastes and plans this subject is. This, of course, is explained by the fact that the subject is one of those rare ones which combines the scientific, the aesthetic and the useful, and is therefore one which ought carefully to be cherished. In fact there is, in my opinion, no subject whatever more appropriate in a college for women.

Source: “Report to the President and Trustees of Smith College,” by William F. Ganong, 1910.

bolstered by the merger of the Cambridge School Design with Smith in 1938, later suffered drastic pruning. What caused the number of Landscape Architecture majors to drop to zero by 1949-50? The retirement of Kate Ries Koch, the instructor!

As I celebrate one hundred years of Horticulture at Smith College, I keep coming back to the image of the Long Green Line. I envision the Long Green Line growing and spreading well beyond Northampton to become an immense green web. I imagine all the life-forms that have been touched by the works and ways of the Long Green Line. There is no doubt that students love Horticulture (see <http://www.smith.edu/czakrzew>). The instructors enjoy the course. Even parents are appreciative. In a 1950 letter to College Horticulturist W.I.P. Campbell, Virginia Arnold wrote, “If all the parents get as much out of your class in Horticulture as we did out of Edith (Arnold’s) course, you should be grateful. I have learned so much through her and we have had tremendous pleasure from her many plants.”

Let us hope that the next hundred years of Horticulture bring many more pleasures—and challenges. Indeed, how much we all love Lyman Conservatory may be put to the test with the upcoming renovations to that jewel at the center of the Immense Green Web.

*Send any recollections of your experience with the Long Green Line and subsequent work in horticulture to Connie Parks, Lyman Conservatory, for use in the sequel—The Immense Green Web.* ☞

### Tradition Trivia

How well do you think you know Smith traditions, past and present? To confirm whether the following are actual or fictitious traditions, see page 8.

1. Walk through the grotto once with a man, and he will want to hold your hand. Walk through the grotto twice with a man, and he will want to kiss you. Walk through the grotto a third time, and he will propose.
2. No one walks through the Greycourt Gates, because one who traverses the gate will either not graduate or not marry, depending on the direction.
3. Campus goers require lecture on care of grass, assisted by Grass Cops.
4. In the morning, place a note on trees in the old orchard to reserve them in order to hang your hammock for studying or sleeping.
5. Go to Mount Holyoke for science and Smith for humanities.
6. If an acorn falls on your head in front of Neilson Library, you will marry a man named William or Allan.
7. Every incoming Smith student receives an ivy (*Hedera helix*) on arrival at Smith.
8. The spring semester of Horticulture ends with a

### Course description for Horticulture, 2000

**202 Horticulture** Theory and practice of plant cultivation in managed environments, including applications to plant conservation, annual and perennial flowers, bulbs, plant propagation, evergreen shrubs and trees, planting practices, hybridization, insects, and diseases.

**203 Horticulture Laboratory** Practical application of horticultural practices and techniques to include soil preparation, propagation, using common hand tools, bulb planting, and identifying harmful insects and diseases.

**204 Horticulture** Continuation of 202. Includes study of house plants, epiphytes, vegetable gardening, herbs, deciduous trees and shrubs, design and planting plans, wildflowers, and advanced plant propagation.

**205 Horticulture Laboratory** Continuation of 203. Includes seed treatments, plant identification, flower arranging, advanced plant propagation techniques, pruning, and installation of planting plans.