

# In the Beginning

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I had no initial plan to develop any sort of plant society. In the late 1970s and early 1980s I was very enthusiastic, and frustrated not to find various rare plant species (in particular oaks, but they were not then a priority for me). I was volunteering in the greenhouse at the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Public Museum. At that time the Museum had a list of plant societies, which proved useful in finding a few items. Most notable was the American Fern Society, with its excellent spore exchange. This spore exchange prompted my first serious international correspondence.

I continued to search for rare species, but most (especially *Quercus*) could not be obtained from commercial sources, even as seeds. I contacted many arboreta, but they were not very helpful. I had read about the successful work done by John Bartram with his English correspondent Peter Collinson, and wanted to work in a similar manner. I just needed to find a "Peter Collinson" of my own.

Eventually, I had my name and address listed in an arboricultural journal in England, seeking correspondence and seed exchange. A few replies were received, most promisingly from Susan Cooper and Michael Frankis. Soon there began a very productive exchange of many seeds. Mostly, they asked for *Quercus* — and so did I.

A few months later, I asked Ms. Cooper if we might find more

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species of oak if we announced the introduction of an "International Oak Society" which really did not exist at that time. She agreed, and several publications included the announcement. Soon we had a small but serious group of exchangers, with participants from several other countries. Those early international members included Daniel Dumont of Belgium, Stephane Brame of France, Stelian Radu of Romania, JRP van Hoey Smith of Holland, and Istvan Racz of Hungary.

Then Nigel Wright proposed to begin a newsletter, and Guy Sternberg worked with him to expand the idea into a journal. Mr. Wright prepared the first issue with the articles contributed by Mr. Brame, Mr. van Hoey Smith, Mr. Sternberg, and Mr. Radu, plus a reprint from the California Native Plant Society journal *Fremontia*. All are republished with corrections here. He did all the work himself, and it was very well received.

In the beginning, there were no formal memberships and no budget or dues. But that first attempt to distribute a journal brought in more participants, and Mr. Sternberg used this increasing interest to organize our first conference at the Morton Arboretum in Illinois. It was attended by approximately 200 people, many of whom became members.

Since that time, we held our second conference in California and we have incorporated. As of this writing we comprise approximately 500 members.

There is a web site and member data base, the journal *International Oaks*, the newsletter *Oak News & Notes*, annual Oak Open Days in Europe, and triennial conferences with major seed exchanges and worldwide participation. Those conferences have become the greatest assemblages of oak enthusiasts and experts (and oak seeds!) in the world. We have taken on a much broader focus, with many of the foremost authorities on oak-related topics listed among our members.

As you read this issue of *International Oaks*, please consider our mission statement. What priorities do you think the International Oak Society should emphasize? How can you participate in the achievement of our goals? The organization is fueled by the interests and vitality of each of its members. The officers and board of directors who have volunteered their valuable time to serve us need our help to make it most successful.

*Editor's note: We asked Mr. Roesch for this historical account of our beginnings so that it could be recorded in this commemorative republication. He still lives in Wisconsin, and he has participated in each of our triennial conferences. He remains an active and enthusiastic ambassador for oaks. We owe the existence of our organization to the idea, persistence and energy of Steve Roesch.*