

Notes on the Morton Arboretum Library

By Ian MacPhail

The tenth anniversary of the opening of the Sterling Morton Library is an appropriate occasion to review the history of the Arboretum library and to describe its present collections. A library has been an important feature of the Arboretum since its beginning. When Joy Morton began planning for a midwestern arboretum in 1921, he engaged Professor Charles Sprague Sargent, Director of the Arnold Arboretum in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as a consultant. Sargent had established the Arnold Arboretum for Harvard University in 1873, laying the basis for its future greatness on the classic conjunction of living plant collections, herbarium, and library. He advised Joy Morton in the selection of basic botanical and horticultural works, providing numerous duplicates from the Arnold Arboretum Library and suggesting other sources. In the spring of 1922 Joy Morton authorized Professor Sargent to begin purchasing books for the Morton Arboretum. Numerous private English libraries were being broken up at that time, after the close of World War I, making possible the acquisition of many fine works. These, together with appropriate books from the Morton family's own collections, formed the nucleus of the present library and were housed in a library wing, added to the Morton residence at Thornhill in 1923, now designated as the Founder's Room.

After Joy Morton's death in 1934, his daughter, Jean Morton Cudahy, became Chairman of the Trustees. As a memorial to her father, she commissioned the building of the original portion of the Administration Building, completed in 1936, which included rooms for a small library and a herbarium. The rare books, many of them large folios, remained at Thornhill, and the responsibility for selection of new books was given to Lowell Kammerer. During the next quarter-century, the library grew steadily but at a slow pace.

In 1953, following the death of Mrs. Cudahy, her brother, Sterling Morton, became Chairman of the Trustees. He recognized the need to classify and bring together the dispersed books into a central library, but he died in 1961 before he could realize his plans. His widow, Preston Owsley Morton, appropriately chose to build a library addition to the east of the Administration Building as a memorial to her husband. Plans were formed with the help of her daughter, Suzette Morton Davidson, who had succeeded her father as Chairman of the Trustees. Harry Weese, Chicago architect, was commissioned to design the new library wing, and in October, 1963, the Sterling Morton Library was opened.

The completion of the new building marked the beginning of a surge of growth and vitality in the library. This became possible because of larger quarters and, for the first time, the appointment of a full-time library staff. The acquisition of books was accelerated, and programs to generate more interest in the library were initiated, including classes, lectures, and exhibits. The Librarian was Mary K. Moulton, a landscape designer by profession, who had had experience in several libraries. She was no stranger to the Arboretum, having been a



student in classes here for some fifteen years, especially those taught by May Theilgaard Watts. Out of her wide knowledge of botanical literature, Mrs. Moulton built up the collections to their present scholarly level. She had a particular interest in rare books and, encouraged by the Chairman, bought discriminatingly among the increasingly scarce classics of botanical and horticultural literature. Carol Doty, now Publications Coordinator, was Assistant Librarian. A few years later, Dr. George Van Schaack was appointed as Bibliographic Consultant, a position from which he retired last year.

In 1969, with increasing emphasis in research at the Arboretum, the library staff was again enlarged, and Ian MacPhail, the present Librarian, was assigned the administrative duties of the library and Mrs. Moulton was freed to give more help to library users as Reference Librarian and Curator of Special Collections. She continued in this capacity until her death in 1972. The present full-time library staff, in addition to the Librarian, consists of three other professional librarians, and a technical assistant.

Today there is no need for the library to continue expansion at the same rate as during the last ten years. We cannot compete with such great university-affiliated libraries as those of the Missouri Botanical Garden or the Arnold Arboretum. Our aims are more modest. We need to continue acquiring modern literature, of course, and we look forward to the Arboretum's greater role in research, in which the library will play its part. A solid foundation of the important texts of botanical and horticultural literature, old and new, has been laid. The coming decade should be one of consolidation: organizing our resources in ways that will make them more readily available and known to greater numbers of people.

THE COLLECTIONS

When the Sterling Morton Library opened in 1963, the book collections numbered less than 10,000, and 180 periodical subscriptions were received. Today, ten years later, the library has 20,000 volumes and receives about 450 periodical subscriptions.

The main interest of the library is in the literature of botany and horticulture, in particular that concerned with woody plants. An attempt is made to collect everything that relates to the woody plants that can be grown in northeastern Illinois. In general, those parts of the world that lie between the fortieth and fiftieth parallels of latitude north are likely, other things being equal, to have similar climatic conditions to ours — especially such areas as northern Japan, northern China, and the Balkan countries.

Woody plants of other parts of the world are also of interest, though there are some restrictions. The flora of tropical regions is of minor interest; similarly the vegetation and ecology of arctic or antarctic areas receives no emphasis. There are, however, books on the vegetation and flora of every state in the Union and of most European countries; books on public and private gardens of many of these countries; books on the practice of gardening, mainly in temperate zones; and detailed monographs on plants that grow naturally or can be cultivated in these regions.

While the literature of woody plants is the major interest of our library, a variety of related subjects may also be found. The Arboretum, with its trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants, pro-



Another view of The Sterling Morton Library.

vides a habitat for a large number of animals, birds, and insects. These, too, are of interest to the Arboretum and therefore to the library. The natural history of our area and of other parts of the world is represented on our shelves. Books on ecology and conservation are included. The history of botany, gardening, and the natural sciences also finds a place here in volumes on plant exploration, biographies of plantsmen, histories of gardens and fashions in gardening, and the introduction of exotic flowers and fruits. There are books on botanical art and nature literature. Landscape architecture, both in its historical and practical aspects, is substantially represented.

Apart from the general collections there are two major resources which are not accessible to the general public but which may be used for advanced studies by special arrangement. These are the rare books and the prints and drawings.

The rare book collection consists of some 3,000 volumes dating from the fifteenth century to the twentieth. The oldest book in the library is an edition of Pliny's *Natural History*, printed at Parma in 1481. Other important early books are the herbals of the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries, especially the great herbals of Fuchs and Brunfels in Germany; of Matthioli in Italy; of Dodoens in Holland; and numerous lesser ones in other countries, including Gerarde in England. Early editions of most of the major herbals are in our library and a cross-section of the lesser known ones.

The majority of our rare books, however, date from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries and reflect the time when new parts of the world were opening up under the spur of trade: the Far East, Africa, Australia, and the Americas. Seeds of exotic plants, and sometimes specimens of the plants themselves, were being sent back from these newly discovered territories to the botanic gardens of Europe, and to private collectors. This gave rise to a great wealth of botanical and horticultural literature, especially descriptions of plants and their culture, often accompanied by detailed illustrations, superbly hand-colored. Many fine examples of these books have been acquired by our library.

The collection of prints and drawings consists predominantly of illustrations of individual plants. Some original renderings are included such as a fine unpublished series of eighteenth century water colors by the Austrian flower painter, Barbara Dietzch, and six *Viburnum* studies by Margaret Stones, contemporary British botanical artist commissioned by the Arboretum. The collection also contains prints, that is, woodcuts, engravings, etchings, lithographs, and other examples of the many ways in which multiple copies of original drawings can be produced. These demonstrate a wide variety of styles and techniques as well as the work of hundreds of artists. This collection is under the custody of our staff artist, Nancy Hart, and its greatest present use is for the classes in botanical illustration that are a regular part of the Arboretum's education program.

THE STERLING MORTON LIBRARY AND ITS USE

The library's main desk and its staff offices are located near the front entrance to the Administration Building. Beyond this reception area is the Reading Room, entered through a glass-enclosed hallway. This occupies the entire main floor of the wing built in 1963, and is of striking design. On three of the outside walls, tall bookshelves alternate with full-length windows that look out on trees in the landscape. At the east end of the room, a door opens out into a little reading garden filled with plants named after or associated with people in the history of botany, thus tying some of the books in the library with living plants nearby. The garden was designed by Mrs. Moulton and is named in honor of Mrs. Watts, now Naturalist Emeritus at the Arboretum.

In the Reading Room, an arrangement of curved, free-standing bookcases incorporating a fireplace creates an oval central space. A couch and chairs before the fireplace lend a residential quality to the big room. Above the fireplace hang four colored engravings of water birds by Audubon. Reading tables provide places for a dozen readers. Natural materials have been used to effect a warm and inviting atmosphere: the terra-cotta color of the handmade floor tiles harmonizes with the native cherry wood of the bookcases and cabinets.

Within the inner oval are the reference and bibliographical collections, as well as the primary taxonomic sources. The shelving on the outer side of the oval and around the perim-

eter of the room accommodates the general collection for reading and borrowing. The floor below the Reading Room, closed to the public, contains book stacks for journals, a rare book room, a print room, an archives room, a microfilm and microfiche reading area, and a photocopying facility.

The library is of course primarily for the use of the staff of the Arboretum. It assists the work of the horticultural and taxonomic staff by providing the relevant literature for those whose task it is to grow and care for the trees and shrubs; it aids the Education Department by providing the texts and sources that the teachers and the students require; and it supports the work of the research staff by acquiring the books and journals that are necessary to their work.

The library is, however, also open to the general public. Anyone is welcome, with a minimum of formalities, to use the Reading Room. Laura Parker, Reference Librarian, provides reference services in person and over the telephone. Borrowing privileges may be obtained on request by anyone who has a need or desire to use books for home reading. In this way, the library can help people become more aware of the green world upon which our lives depend and the great dangers to which it is currently exposed.



The original Morton Library at Thornhill, now the Founder's Room.