



Roots & Branches

The Origins and Directions of the Ann Arbor Bonsai Society

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Clive Taylor's White Birch Forest



Clive at his home in Gibraltar



October 2012. Photo by Jack Wikle



Photo by Clive Taylor



Photo by Clive Taylor



2001 AABS Best of Show



2019 Hidden Lake Gardens. Photo by Jay Sinclair

[Enlarge Image](#)

Clive Taylor was a long-time member of the Ann Arbor Bonsai Society who became recognized as an expert in propagation and field collecting, and who would eventually become the subject of an article in Bill Valvanis' blog. As recently as August 2015, Bill who is internationally known as a bonsai artist, teacher and bonsai magazine publisher, visited Clive and was very impressed with what Clive had accomplished with dwarf Japanese maple stock acquired from him in the early 1980's. (See valavanisbonsaiblog.com/2015/08/ to read more about what Bill had to say then about Clive.)

A standout for years among Clive's many bonsai was his White Birch Forest. The fact that he passed on to Hidden Lake Gardens more photos of this planting than of any other trees in his bonsai collection seems to indicate this one was always a personal favorite. When exhibited at our AABS annual shows it consistently received a high number of the public's votes in balloting for the individual's favorite tree of the exhibit.

More recently, this planting became the subject of a recollection from Jerry Meislik. Jerry tells this story about when he and John Naka encountered Clive's forest. It was suddenly that John stopped talking. When he finally spoke, he said, "This is so wonderful; this is so wonderful." Jerry asks him "Why are you feeling this way?" John's response was, "When I was a child, I was raised by my grandparents on their farm in Colorado. And, on their farm was a birch grove. This reminds me of the time I spent on my grandfather's farm."

As noted below, Many of Clive's trees are now the property of Hidden Lake Gardens and often featured in the Bonsai Courtyard displays there. Last year, after acquiring the extra-large tray needed, this birch planting was transferred from the wooden box it had been grown in until regaining its health to the container it is displayed in above.

Jack Wikle wrote the following tribute when Clive passed in 2016

My first contact with Clive came in March 1980 when he wrote to me because he had been given my name as someone who might be able to tell him where he could buy bonsai pots. Then we met face-to-face when he attended the American Bonsai Society's Annual Symposium on the Michigan State University campus that summer. It was not long after this that Clive joined our Ann Arbor Bonsai Society. This was the beginning of our long acquaintance and "growing friendship."

In his early years as a member, Clive's attendance at our club meetings was somewhat unpredictable. But as the years passed, he became more regular at meetings and we could almost always count on him to bring multiple trees for our exhibits which added greatly to the quality of our shows. The buttonwoods and bald cypress trees he collected while wintering annually in Florida were always standouts. Also, he was one of the few Society members successful in growing white birch trees as bonsai. Some of us have theorized

that Clive's birches collected from rubble pile islands near the Erie mouth of the Detroit River are some kind of unusually stress tolerant hybrid.



Clive on a 1988 collecting trip.

To me, Clive always stood out as an extraordinarily observant and creative individual who watched what others were doing and was very quick in experimenting and adding innovations of his own. This began with rooting cuttings and soon progressed to experimenting with air layering and grafting. He took great pleasure in showing friends how he had joined two or three trees in a way that resulted in them fusing to become a single, very impressive individual. Although admittedly uncomfortable speaking formally to an audience, Clive was always at ease and extremely generous in sharing his experience and perceptions with individuals and the small groups that typically accumulated around him at meetings and exhibits.

Thick trunked Japanese maples with small leaves and dramatically flaring buttress roots were another Taylor specialty. Early in his bonsai growing adventure, Clive purchased, from William Valavanis, rooted cuttings of a couple of genetically dwarf and small-leaved Japanese maple varieties, *Acer*

palmatum 'Kiyō Hime' and *Acer palmatum* 'Koto Hime'. Over time he started many more of these maples by rooting cuttings and grew a number of them into very impressive, mature looking trees. Beginning some years ago, and accelerating more recently as his health was failing, Clive and his wife Clarice have been very generous in donating bonsai and related material to Michigan State University's Hidden Lake Gardens. Visitors to the Bonsai Courtyard there will typically find some of Clive's maples and other bonsai work on display.

Previous issues of this publication are located in the [History section of the AABS website](#)

NEXT WEEK: Nick Lenz: Bonsai from the Wild

HOW YOU CAN HELP WITH OUR 50TH CELEBRATION

1. To help us in this celebration effort, all Ann Arbor Bonsai Society members present and past, and all others wishing to contribute are invited to submit personal statements (60 words or less) to be published in our Yearbook. Each text contributor is also strongly encouraged to submit a favorite photo (with caption) of a bonsai tree or a bonsai activity to accompany his or her personal statement. (We can scan old prints or digitize color slides for anyone needing this help with old pictures.) [Upload Form is here.](#)
2. Let's all Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the AABS in style with shirts that have our commemorative logo printed on the front. Shirts will be available for purchase for \$20 each at our monthly meetings, at the Annual Club Show August 29-30, and at The Flower Market in Dundee, Michigan.



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