

Hidden Lake Gardens and the Ann Arbor Bonsai Society: A Special Relationship



Two views, spring and fall of the perimeter of Hidden Lake Garden's Bonsai Display. Photos by Jack Wikle.

Happy 75th Anniversary to Hidden Lake Gardens! In 1945, Harry A. Fee, an Adrian businessman donated the original 200 acres to Michigan State University. The Gardens have since grown to become one of the top Botanical Gardens in the Midwest according to the Saturday Evening Post.

Public bonsai display at Hidden Lake Gardens (HLG), the growth of our Ann Arbor Bonsai Society, and the metamorphosis of bonsai art at Matthaei Botanical Gardens from a closet bonsai collection to an outstanding public display has been closely linked for years.

As you will read below, Jack Wikle was a bonsai enthusiast before he arrived at HLG as its first Education Specialist early in 1968. It was to be some six years later, June 1974, that Jack, conscious of the time saving potential in driving to Ann Arbor instead of attending bonsai society meetings in East Lansing, joined the quite new, less than four years old, Ann Arbor Bonsai Society. At that time, he also accepted the responsibility of serving as our Society's Vice President and Program Chairman. This office continued five years for Jack until he was elected President in 1979.

Display of bonsai at Hidden Lake Gardens began shortly after the hiring of Jack Wikle as the Gardens' first education specialist in 1968 – the year Conservatory construction was completed. Already a bonsai hobbyist at that time, Jack readily accepted an offer to display a few of his little trees in one corner of the Conservatory's Temperate House. This greenhouse-bonsai exhibit continued for five years.

In 1973, to better display Jack's bonsai along with ferns, begonias and other plants known to thrive in containers in outdoor yet sheltered environments, a Lath House was built at the end of the Temperate House. The expanded Wikle bonsai presence made possible by the new structure proceeded without interruption for fourteen growing seasons, late April through October, well into 1987.

It was through her bonsai interest that Elsie G. MacCready first became involved with Hidden Lake Gardens. After participating in an introductory bonsai workshop here in 1974, she began working as a volunteer in the greenhouse, and later assisted as a tour guide for visiting children's groups. Through the years, her donations of time, plants and equipment all distinguished her as a true friend of Hidden Lake Gardens. Elsie also became active in the Ann Arbor Bonsai Society and in The American Bonsai Society as well, eventually serving as an officer of the national organization.

After her death in 1987, Elsie's family gave her bonsai to Hidden Lake Gardens and initiated an endowment fund made up of donations from the MacCready family and friends to support this collection as a memorial to Elsie.

Following acceptance of Elsie's bonsai, Jack Wikle took home his personal trees and took over the nurturing of the new collection. Then in 1989, Jack, now receiving national recognition for his bonsai artistry and involvement in the American bonsai community, retired from full-time employment at the Gardens. At that time, arrangements were made for him to continue caring for Hidden Lake Gardens' bonsai – except for daily watering to be handled by the Conservatory staff.

—Large Gift To Benefit Small Trees At Hidden Lake Gardens

In late September, Bill and Lois Haselwood of Tecumseh, Michigan, generously gave

giving presentations throughout the continent, and is recognized internationally for

Dateline: 10-26-2000, Tipton Michigan.

More than 150 nature enthusiasts attended the bonsai courtyard dedication on Sunday,

October 22 at Hidden Lake Gardens in honor

of Jack Wikle, who is known worldwide for his bonsai growing efforts begun in the mid-1960s

Because of the generous donation from Bill and Lois Haselwood of Tecumseh, funds were available to construct the bonsai display courtyard and replaced the lath house in honor of Wikle, who has been the education coordinator at Hidden Lake Gardens from 1968 into early 1989.

Hidden Lake Gardens is located on M-50, seven miles west of Tecumseh, Michigan.

Bill Haselwood, a Tecumseh neighbor of Jack Wikle, used to interrupt his evening walks from time to time to talk with Jack and watch the work on Jack's bonsai. Even so, it was quite unexpected when Bill and his wife, Lois, approached the Gardens' administrators late in 1999 with an offer to fund an expansion of the bonsai display in honor of Jack Wikle and in appreciation of his work over the years at Hidden Lake Gardens.

The present Lath House, replacing the crumbling structure built twenty-seven years earlier, and the new courtyard bonsai display space were both gifts from the Haselwoods constructed in year 2000.

With the greatly expanded display opportunity resulting from the Haselwood gift came a need for more volunteer assistance. The quality of display experienced by visitors today would not be possible without the willingness of these helpers and without the, now twenty-year, active support of HLG Conservatory Manager Diane Faust.



*Diane Faust, Hidden Lake Gardens' Conservatory Manager,
pausing for a moment with a few trees that needs some attention.*

Photo by Jack Wikle.

Today, bonsai in this highly varied collection range from a few years in age to well over 100. Some of the standouts are native Michigan tree species such as American larch (tamarack), American Beech and white-cedar. Others are non-native kinds now popular around the world as bonsai subjects. Some 20 or so trees from the collection are displayed in the courtyard each season from May through October.

Today Jack continues part-time work as a curator for the Hidden Lake Gardens bonsai collection.



A Jack Wikle teaching moment, sharing with the eager-to-learn volunteers. Photo above and below by Jay Sinclair.

With the passing of time, gift bonsai from a variety of other sources have also enriched the Gardens' bonsai collection. Among these gifts are five bonsai donated by Doris Stevenson in memory of her late husband, Leo E. Stevenson; individual bonsai from Dr. Thomas Kosmyna and from Eunice Corp; and five bonsai from Jack Wikle. Two exceptionally large and well-developed bonsai were gifts from Howard Wright.

The large stones enhancing this courtyard display were gifts of Elsie MacCready's husband, Douglas, who remarried after her death, and his present wife Carrie.

Additional gifts continue even to this day. In 2012, Bill Heston's donations, include his Larch Forest that is a visitor favorite. Clive Taylor's donation of his collection to the Garden in 2015 included his Birch Forest that was featured in an earlier edition of this newsletter. And then in 2016, Chuck Bailey gave his collection that further upgraded the variety and quality of the HLG bonsai collection. Supplemented by smaller donations ranging from individual items to several trees, the HLG collection continues to be an ongoing source of fascination to its audience and pride to the HLG staff and volunteers who maintain it.

The Art of Bonsai is a yearly event that takes place at Hidden Lake Gardens since 2013. This one-day event held on Sunday in September takes place in various location around the Gardens. The bonsai display takes place in the lower level of the Visitor Center featuring many bonsai artists from all over the state of Michigan and northern Ohio. Artwork inspired by bonsai can be found in the upper level. And the Gardens permanent collection of bonsai is open to the public. Workshops and a panel of experts are available to provide inspiration, beginning instruction and to answer any questions you might have about the bonsai.



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

NEXT WEEK: Bill Struhar: Storyteller, Raffler, and Tree Guy

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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