

June 1, 2024

**Special points of interest:**

- **How to Sign up for a free subscription**
- **Dan Robinson's multi-century old Bonsai plants**
- **What is a Brentmoor Blonde?**
- **Why did Fincham write his conifer books?**

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# Bob's News & Musings

**ACS Cincinnati Edition**

As I complete this edition of my newsletter, which is more of a monthly magazine or journal, Thecla and I are getting ready to travel across the country to the annual meeting of the American Conifer Society in Cincinnati, Ohio.

I thought it would be appropriate to share some insights into the early history of the Society that would expand upon what is shared on the ACS website located at: [www.conifersociety.org](http://www.conifersociety.org).

I made that the feature article for this issue.

I will be displaying a couple of copies of this publication at the annual meeting to find more subscribers who may not have heard of it. I will also have extra copies of this page to hand out with subscription information.

**Why and How To Subscribe**

This is the 19th issue of Bob's News & Musings. I do it for a variety of reasons.

First, I have always been an educator and it is a way to continue being one. Besides, I enjoy writing.

Second, I wrote six books on conifers to preserve a tremendous amount of knowledge from my friends and from myself that might otherwise be lost. This newsletter shares some of that knowledge in a different way while also presenting new knowledge not found in my books.

Third, I do not make any money from this publication, but hopefully it helps me sell my books and creates more traffic for my website at [www.robertfincham.com](http://www.robertfincham.com).

There are two ways to obtain copies of my newsletters.

The first way is to simply sign up for them and join my subscription list. It is strictly confidential and newsletters are emailed around the first of the month and I use BCC to maintain confidentiality.

The second way is to go

to my website and download .pdf files of the past issues. Every few months I download the latest files to a page on the website. It is the simplest way to provide the back issues for new subscribers.



## ACS Beginnings

The American Conifer Society has been around for a while, since 1983, to be exact. It was not the first attempt to start a plant society focused on conifers.

During the late 1930s, Col. Robert H. Montgomery tried to generate interest in forming a conifer society. He was an active conifer collector who had established a world-class collection at his estate in Greenwich, Connecticut.



I believe he came up with the idea after Arthur Slavin reported on the status of cultivated conifers in the United States, which he presented at the International Conifer Conference held by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1931.

Slavin was the Chief Horticulturist in the Bureau of Parks, Rochester, New York. He mentions the extensive collections of conifers at the Hunnewell Estate in Wellesley, Massachusetts (the oldest pinetum in the United States) and the Arnold Arboretum in Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts (the second oldest pinetum) in his report. However, the report focuses on the Highland Park Collection (1896) and the Durand Eastman Park Collection (1912).

Hornibrook was busy updating his classic book on dwarf conifers. Montgomery thought the country was ready for a conifer society, especially since there were over 500 dwarf varieties described in Hornibrook's new edition. Unfortunately, his call to begin a conifer society generated little interest. There were several reasons for its failure.

Mainly, times were tough after the Great Depres-

sion, and the average person did not focus on creating a conifer collection. Collections were mostly being assembled on estates by people who could afford to purchase plants from large nurseries that imported European varieties or by well-funded arboretums establishing pinetums as part of their programs. The Parsons Nursery on Long Island was one such source, and many of the old specimens are in Northeastern Arboretums. The import restrictions of that time were not even a shadow of today's rules.

A second shortcoming was the lack of one or more committed people willing to devote the time and energy needed to establish this plant group. Even Colonel Montgomery had to focus on his accounting business. He had started a nursery to generate some interest in conifers. Still, the operation's management had no time to focus on starting a plant society, especially if they had little interest in such a project.

So, Colonel Montgomery's idea went into a dusty drawer, largely forgotten. It was a good idea before its time.

In 1951, Colonel Montgomery donated his collection to the New York Botanic Garden and moved to Coral Gables, Florida, where he focused on his palm collection at the Fairchild Tropical Garden, which he helped establish in 1937.

William Jenkins, a contemporary of Montgomery, publicized the idea of a conifer society in his Hemlock Arboretum Bulletin. The response of his readership was lackluster, and Jenkins was unable to push the concept forward.



## ACS Beginnings

Jenkins published a quarterly newsletter called The Hemlock Arboretum Bulletin from 1930 to 1950. He

### The Hemlock Arboretum At "FAR COUNTRY"

Germantown, Pa.

Bulletin No. 1 July 1, 1932

*"No other conifers surpass the hemlocks in grace and beauty."—Prof. Charles S. Sargent, Silva of North America, Vol. XII, P. 61.*

"Far Country" is located on the outskirts of Germantown, a part of the city of Philadelphia, on a plateau overlooking the Wissahickon Valley and surrounded on three sides by the lands of Fairmount Park. Here in the romantic gorges and rocky hillsides of the Wissahickon the Eastern Hemlock, *Tsuga Canadensis*, grows naturally and in great profusion. In the spring of 1931, with a foundation of numerous specimens of three varieties planted in the spring of 1917, I determined to establish a hemlock arboretum and bring together all the varieties which would grow in southeastern Pennsylvania. My list is not yet complete but I am giving it herewith in the expectation that there are other varieties which a little publicity may enable me to secure. The arboretum has been recognized by the Department of Agriculture.

While I lack the botanical and technical scientific training to get the most out of such a collection, I will be able to afford to students, botanists, horticulturists and nurserymen opportunities for comparative studies. I can determine which varieties are safely adapted to our climate and I may be able to introduce to my friends some new varieties which will give pleasure to them.

"Far Country" is located on Kitchen's Lane, West of Wissahickon

mailed it gratis to his subscribers and had a widespread readership among people interested in hemlocks. Many of these readers were horticulturalists who propagated and sold hemlocks or curators at various arboreta around the Northeast. However, it was not enough to jump-start a conifer society.

Things were relatively quiet in the conifer world until 1982, when William Gotelli donated a massive conifer collection to the United States Arboretum. He had purchased plants from nurseries throughout the Northeast and even imported many from Europe. When they outgrew their home, he wanted them moved to a location where everyone could see them.



It was a massive operation, and the collection quickly became world-famous in its new home. It was an opportunity to capitalize on the publicity and begin a conifer society. However, nobody was interested in creating a conifer society at that time. Montgomery and Jenkins were gone, and no individual had replaced them.

There was no widespread interest in conifers, and no

one was willing to step up and take responsibility to get things moving. One of the problems was finding a person who could move things along and possessed a good knowledge of conifers and their cultivars while having name recognition in the conifer world.

Eighteen years were to pass before the idea of a conifer society could move into reality from a hypothetical dusty drawer in Montgomery's former study. Gus Kelly, owner of Theophrastus Press, mailed his first issue of Dwarf Conifer Notes in January 1980. It was a free publication, which he sent to anyone who requested it. He tried to do four issues a year, but the timing of each was hit or miss.



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## DWARF CONIFER Notes

Volume I, Number 1

January 1980

Dwarf Conifer Notes is launched with the purpose of providing a focal point for dwarf conifer enthusiasts, hitherto scattered and lonely, to exchange information and discuss matters of mutual interest. With this first issue, I want to emphasize that there is no subscription charge. An expression of interest such as a post card or a letter will suffice to get on the mailing list. By mailing to the membership of organizations that may include dwarf conifer enthusiasts, I am trying to seek out those who might find this venture useful and interesting, but it does not follow that because you have received this first issue you will receive subsequent issues without some positive action on your part.

Humphrey J. Welch's Manual of Dwarf Conifers

Permission has been kindly given by the editorial board of the Bulletin of the University of Washington Arboretum to quote from a forthcoming review by Mr. Brian O. Mulligan of Manual of Dwarf Conifers. Mr. Mulligan is the former director of the Arboretum, and a member of the board of the Royal Horticultural Society, among other posts of honor in the horticultural world. I quote:

This is indeed the latest word on this fascinating group of small shrubs. It is written by a grower, propagator, and careful student of many years of experience among them. The amount of research and correspondence involved, as well as travel to the con-

Kelly was trying to follow in the footsteps of Jenkins and his Hemlock Arboretum Bulletin by merging a publication to report on happenings in the Northeastern conifer world with the operations of Theophrastus Press. According to one of his last issues (January 1983), he had 700 subscribers to the publication.

When Dwarf Conifer Notes first appeared, it created quite a stir. The center of the conifer world during the '60s and '70s was arguably located in the Northeast from Philadelphia north to Boston and east to the tip of Long Island. I became active during the mid-1970s as I discovered a strong interest in the fascinating world of garden



## ACS Beginnings

conifers. I spent many hours visiting with the people described in my book, *Gone but Not Forgotten*. I would spend Saturdays having intense discussions with Layne Ziegenfus. During school vacations, I cruised through New Jersey, where I visited with Don & Hazel Smith, Rudi Kluis, John Verkade, and John Vermeulem. I then continued to Long Island, where I spent time with Eddie Rezek, Joe Reis, Jim Cross, Alfonso Ossorio, Hank Weisenberger, Joel Spingarn, and Joe Burke. Other times, I headed north to see Al Fordham at the Arnold Arboretum and Syd Waxman at the University of Connecticut.

My regular visits helped create a web of knowledge and shared plants that later proved invaluable to creating a conifer society. However, something needed to happen to trigger things into motion.

I had a pen pal who had recently discovered he could use his 800 telephone number to talk for hours without breaking the bank. Jean Iseli was establishing a powerhouse conifer nursery on the West Coast. I could not determine if I was writing to a man or a woman when we communicated through correspondence. Several of my conifer friends were also in correspondence with Jean, and they were no help in

determining Jean's sex. The first time he called, I had my answer. He had a European spelling for his name.

Jean's enthusiasm for conifers was unreal. He attempted to create a wholesale nursery with a world-class conifer offering and planned to have many types of dwarf conifers in specimen sizes. He spent Sundays in contact with conifer friends all over the country. He was actively searching for every cultivar he could find and had collection lists from everybody I knew. He actively traded plants back and forth with collectors, and his enthusiasm was contagious.

Every Sunday, I spent over an hour on the phone with Jean. When Gus Kelly's [Dwarf Conifer Notes](#) appeared, Jean became excited about starting a conifer so-

ciety. He pushed the idea with every conifer collector, and interest began to build among us.

Jean felt that the significant collectors lived on the East Coast, and the geographic center was Long Island.



He had discussions with Joel Spingarn, and they decided that Joel's home would be the best place to bring people together for a special meeting.

They picked a Saturday in October for the get-together. Jean agreed to fly east with a few people from Iseli Nursery, which would occur on October 7, 1982.

Thirty-two people attended the meeting. It was an informal gathering where we were to decide whether or not there was enough interest to create a conifer society. Enthusiasm was high, and we agreed that two committees would be made to get things started. Somehow, I was to chair the most important committee. We met in December to determine a name for the Society, the bylaws for our operation, and a statement of purpose.



We did not want to exclude or discourage foreign memberships. Still, we were creating a society centered in the United States, so that the best name would be the American Conifer Society. Billy Schwartz and Harold Epstein had experience developing bylaws and brought samples for us to work with. It went much more efficiently than I had figured it would. We came up with an essential



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Jean Iseli  
HEAD GRUNT



## ACS Beginnings

starting list that we could use to get established. Our purpose for existing took the most discussion. We knew we wanted to create more interest in conifers and expand the Society into a worthwhile organization for educating the public and expanding the world of conifers, mainly those used in garden settings.

Two people on my committee were pivotal to our work. Billy Schwartz was an attorney from Philadelphia, and Harold Epstein was a significant person responsible for forming the then-American Rock Garden Society in the early 1950s. They guided us through the bylaws and statement of purpose for a conifer society. During the following year, Billy did all the legal work to establish the Society as a Class 3C Charity, a gift of unimaginable value since he did it gratis and registered us as a recognized entity in Pennsylvania.



When we held our second meeting at Joel's home on January 20, I reported the results of my committee's work. It was here that the Society got started. The group was smaller than before, but all the main characters were there, and I recall gathering in Joel's house in front of a blazing fire set in his fireplace to ward off the cold temperature of a typical January day.

Before we got underway with my report, John Verkade got everyone excited when he sat on an older chair, and it shattered. Luckily, we did not have to report that we had a casualty at our inaugural meeting. John was fine, we were relieved, and the work started.

The group accepted my committee's work and moved on to the next phase- financing. We needed money to start a society. It had to come from us. We agreed that the thirty-two people who met in October would be the founding members of the American Conifer Society in return for a donation of \$100.00. That was our seed money to get things started.

We needed officers and a Board of Directors for the Society. We decided the Board members would elect the officers since they had to work with the directors, and

the membership would elect the directors.

We drew lots to set up the first Board of Directors. That could have been a disaster if the people selected in this manner had wanted to be members while not being part of the creative process, either by being too busy on other projects or not capable of performing the needed work to move the project along.

Luckily, most directors were willing and able to perform the work required to get the Society started on a firm footing. By chance, my name was drawn as a part of this lottery approach, and for some reason, the other directors appointed me as Chairman of the Board. If my name had not been drawn, the development of the Society might have progressed differently.

Our first duty was to elect the officers. The election was sort of a "Who volunteers for this job?" kind of process. I became the first President of the American Conifer Society and Chairman of the Board of Directors. I got both positions because everybody at the meeting knew my passion for conifers and trusted my willingness to put out the effort required to create a viable society.



I had a good idea about my strengths and weaknesses and the people assembled at this meeting. They put me in charge, and I planned to do my best. Gus Kelly agreed to use his Dwarf Conifer Notes to advertise the creation of the Society and help us gain membership. We decided that annual dues were still to be determined, but anyone sending \$25.00 would be listed as a charter member of the Society. Annual dues would be separate from this donation.

The first area to "attack" was the most important in

## ACS Beginnings

creating a viable society. It was how to communicate with the membership. The first committee I established was one to develop a publication. I had to chair this committee since no one else volunteered. However, several people offered to work on it. Eventually, we came up with the idea of calling it a Bulletin; it would be published quarterly, and I volunteered to be the editor for the first issue. (I suppose I inherited that position due to chairing the committee.)

That first year was busy with committee and board meetings, but I survived it, and so did the American Conifer Society.

The Society is 41 years old (1983-2024) and stronger than ever. We created it with lofty goals and listed them in the official documents. It has met those goals, and the officers work to expand and strengthen them at every opportunity.

My personal goal was simple, and I worked hard during those first five years to establish it as an integral part of the Society. No one should have to be alone and experience a small part of the world of garden conifers when there are thousands of other people worldwide with the same love and interest.

The Society allows people who enjoy the simple pleasures of growing conifers in their gardens to share their experiences and knowledge through face-to-face contact at meetings, through the Quarterly as a writer or a reader, and the website as a contributor or a browser.

Politics comes and goes in the “upper echelons” of the Society, but the parts that affect individual members continue uninterrupted. Attendees always enjoy the regional and national meetings, and the Quarterly and the website are excellent sources of inspiration and information.

Hopefully, I'll see many of my readers in Cincinnati this month at the annual meeting of the American Conifer Society.

As a side note: In the picture of the group of people at the October meeting, I am hardly visible, standing in the back, shaded by overhanging trees. I always preferred

to be in the background during significant events. I surprised myself with the choices I made during the subsequent years concerning the soon-to-be American Conifer Society.





## Blast From The Past Continued From May Issue

### Chub Part 2

Randy Dykstra and Chub Harper collected and grew witch's broom seeds from a *Larix decidua* located in Lanark, Illinois. Seed from a witch's broom on a conifer will produce offspring which are 50% normal and 50% smaller plants.

To find unique and special new small conifers, the smaller selections must be grown and evaluated. In 1993, Randy and Chub had produced a number of smaller conifers, but didn't have the space to let them mature. Chub decided he would distribute some to his ACS friends and ask them to share after five years whether their gift plant had any merit.

Dennis Groh of Dearborn Heights, Michigan, was given one and after growing it for a number of years, Dennis recognized this plant as a superior, dwarf selection of this species. Gary Gee did the first propagation and the plant was provisionally named (Dennis Groh)

and could be found listed under that name.

In 2004, Dennis asked Chub to visit and see if he agreed this cultivar was unique. He told Chub he was interested in getting it propagated and wanted to establish a permanent name. Dennis wanted to call it 'Chub's Gift,' but Chub balked at the idea, saying that he already had enough plants named for him. Rather he suggested naming it, 'Pretty Carole' in honor of Dennis Groh's wife. (Many consider 'Pretty Carole' to be among the best of the Lanark seedlings.)

Photo: *Larix decidua* 'Pretty Carole' (a Lanark W.B. seedling) and Chub Harper. Image taken July 18, 2004 at the Groh home in Dearborn, Heights, MI. The cultivar was 11 years old on its own roots.

Thanks to Dennis Groh for sharing a story about Chub. Harper





## A Blast From The Past: Dick Bush

### Richard Bush Part One

I first met Dick Bush in 1982 when I visited Oregon for the first time. Later we spent a week together after the first annual meeting of the American Conifer Society in Washington, DC. Dick was lecturing about a technique he had developed for grafting Canadian hemlocks. He was traveling with his close friend, Jean Iseli. After the meeting I took Dick and Jean and Cindy Pease to visit a few of my conifer friends on the East Coast.

Dick was a good friend for many years and deserves recognition both as a nurseryman and as a strong supporter of the American Conifer Society. He passed away in March, 2009.

You can read more about Dick in my book, *Gone but Not Forgotten*, which is available on my website or Amazon.

If readers email me little stories or blurbs about their interactions with Dick, along with an attached picture if possible, I will publish those as Dick Bush: Part Two. I will include the contributor's name, unless they request anonymity.

Dick is the second person for this new feature. If you remember something about Dick as you look at this page, send it to me and I'll get it in the July newsletter.





## A Blast From The Past: Dick Bush





## Conifer of the Month

### *Pinus sylvestris* 'Brentmoor Blonde'

As the name implies, this cultivar originated in England on Brentmoor Road near Bisley, England. It was discovered before 2000 and eventually found its way into America.

According to Auders and Dibben, it is a slow-growing, thin-branched plant with a weak constitution with an annual growth of about 6".

I have been growing the specimen pictured here in my Puyallup garden for five years. I find it to be robust with a growth rate of up to almost 18" (50 cm) per year. The branches and trunk are not the thickest I have ever seen, but they compare well to most of the Scots pine selections.

Its spring growth is creamy white, and it puts on a great display when the needles expand. The color gradually fades to a light green, working its way

outward from the base of each needle. Almost 1/3 of each needle maintains the creamy white color (subdued a bit), into and through the winter.

I once grew a *Pinus sylvestris* 'Inverleith', which also flushed a creamy white color. It was a fast-growing selection that turned green by mid-summer and lost the white spring flush when it attained a large size. I shared it with Monrovia where it quickly lost its variegation when grown in a well fertilized and watered container.

A similar cultivar, *Pinus sylvestris* 'Candlelight' has a similar variegation, but I have found 'Brentmoor Blonde' to have a much stronger garden presence and better color retention. I grew this one in my Eatonville garden and when I got 'Brentmoor Blonde', I lost interest in 'Candlelight'.





## Conifer of the Month





## Tree of the Month

### *Acer platanoides* 'Golden Globe'

Two years ago, Gary Gee gave me a gift that puts on a great display in the garden. *Acer platanoides* 'Golden Globe' is what its name implies. A bright yellow globe of foliage that appears to grow about 6" per year. In ten years I suspect I will have a ball of yellow foliage about ten feet in diameter.

The leaves are bright yellow and put on a real show in the spring and early summer. The yellow fades a bit as summer approaches. I cannot give a detailed description since I grew this plant in a large container until last month. It now has a home in the ground and I suspect the growth rate will increase

and the resistance to sun scald will improve, especially since it is not bright yellow when the summer heat hits.

If I get a second flush of growth, I suspect it will be bright yellow against the faded yellow of the older growth. I positioned this plant at a focal point beside our deck where it can be enjoyed first-hand throughout the growing seasons.

Gary gave me a plant that he grafted at a height that nurseries use to produce what they call patio trees. I will keep it staked as the trunk thickens since a young plant with a mass of foliage can easily snap its trunk in a strong wind. A low graft would not be nearly as attractive as this particular selection.





## Tree of the Month





## Elandan Gardens

Elandan Gardens will be the first stop on the Western Region Rendezvous of August 10, 2024. The other stop, the Coenosium Rock Garden was featured in the May through September issues last year.

Situated along Highway 16 just outside of the city of Bremerton Washington, Elandan Gardens was developed by American Bonsai Master, Dan Robinson.

It was formerly an open landfill that Dan leased from the city and turned into what is perhaps the most unique Bonsai Museum in the world. He took an eyesore and turned it into a special piece of Northwest Alpine landscape. Dan displays masterpieces throughout the property.

Dan Robinson is an American Bonsai Master who has developed his own school of Bonsai which he calls Focal Point Bonsai Design.

Rather than create masterpieces that show per-

fection in their every detail, Dan produces masterpieces that show trees in their natural states while being maintained in a miniature state.

The more gnarly a tree appears, the more it is appreciated by Dan and his followers.

Dan has grown many of his masterpieces from seed, but he has collected most of them from the wild through careful and exhaustive practices. Many of his trees are hundreds of years old.

He not only loves miniaturized trees with twisted, contorted branches and remnants of once apical growth, but enjoys watching them grow on flat rocks with minimal soil.

Dan's unique Bonsai museum was over fifty years in the making with some specimens more than 1000 years old (determined by counting rings).

There are more pictures in my most recent conifer book, Artsy/Fartsy Conifers available through my website or on Amazon.





## Elandan Gardens





## Elandan Gardens



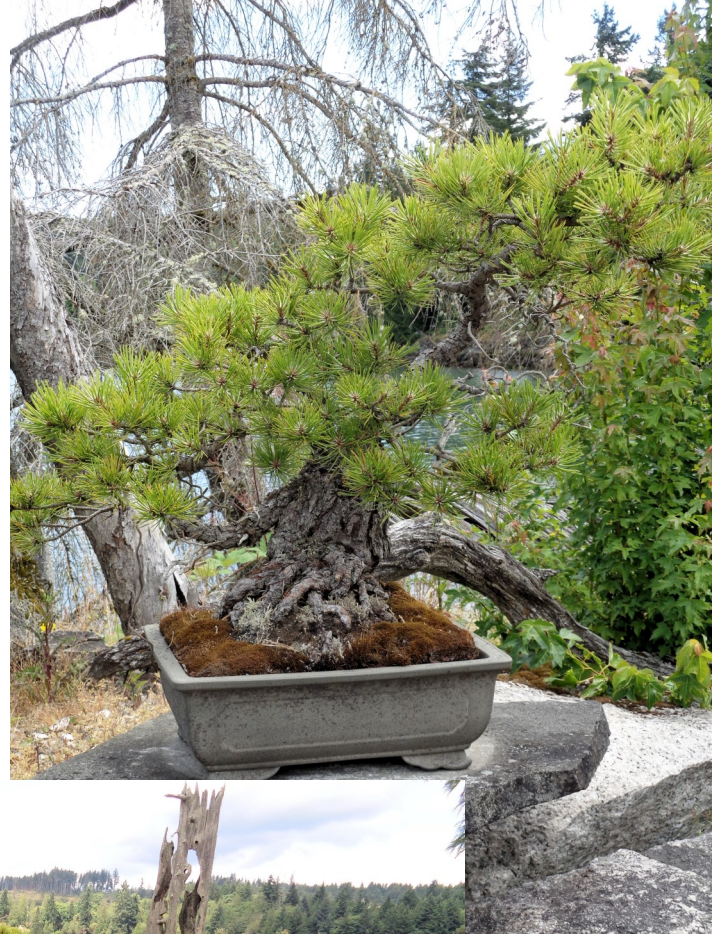


## Elandan Gardens





## Elandan Gardens





## Elandan Gardens



Page 18 Pictures: Top Right- *Pinus rigida* dates back to 1750

Bottom: An old and gnarly *Tsuga mertensiana*

Above left: Evergreen azalea of garden origin

Above right: Long time supporters of American Conifer Society, Dick and Riet van Hoey Smith enjoying Elandan Gardens



## Stack 'em Deep & Teach 'em Cheap Excerpt

### Middle School vs. High School: In This Corner of the Ring ...

After accepting a Tamaqua Area School District position in Pennsylvania, I gradually progressed into senior high school. First, I taught seventh-grade life science for one year. Then I transitioned to a role teaching earth science to ninth-grade students and assisting with the planetarium operation. Finally, my fourth year at Tamaqua saw me take over the complete function of the planetarium. It was an air-conditioned facility with a plaster dome and seating for up to sixty students. I had gone to the place called "The Palace" by the junior high school teachers.

High school teachers often denigrate the middle-school teachers who prepare their students for high school. First, they complain that the incoming ninth-grade students are not ready for high school. Then, unfortunately, they blame the middle-school teachers for that, although it is generally not due to a lack of adequate instruction on their part. However, sometimes the blame does belong to those teachers.

Hedley taught science to eighth-graders at Keithley Middle School in Washington State for at least thirty years. He was an avid reader of science fiction and a terrible disciplinarian. Hedley learned early in his career that students tended to listen and behave if he told science fiction stories. He had many problems whenever he attempted to follow a more traditional curriculum. A paraprofessional was assigned to his class more than once to help maintain discipline.

The science teachers at Washington High School constantly complained about the quality of the science background possessed by their entering

ninth graders. That changed after I started at Keithley. My eighth-grade science students were well-prepared for high school and stopped their complaints.

Even though I had taught in a high school for many years and produced well-prepared students at Keithley, I suffered from a misconception at Washington High School that middle school teachers are inferior to high school teachers. I discovered that sad fact when I applied for a biology opening at the high school. The principal refused even to interview me. When I confronted him, he said he was waiting to see if better applicants applied for the position. After I discussed this issue with the Superintendent, I got my interview, and of course, I did not get the job. I knew I was destroying my little chance for the position when I contacted the principal's superior, but I did not care.

Several of the new teachers at Keithley were not new to the profession. They were former Washington High School faculty who the district assigned to the middle school for various reasons. I knew several of them, and they were unhappy about what they considered a demotion. I believed it also showed a negative attitude on the part of the high school administration toward the middle school since they were not sending us the people they considered to be among their better teachers.

Unfortunately, there is always friction between middle school and high school teachers. Common complaints range from "students are poorly prepared for high school" to "high school teachers live in their ivory towers and get all of the credit for any successes."

Several years after I started teaching at Eatonville High School, the district's voters passed a bond is-



## Stack 'em Deep & Teach 'em Cheap Excerpt

sue. A large part of it was a complete rebuilding of the high school. That meant we had to move out of the building for two years. Portables were set up next to the middle school to house the high school staff and students.

We had an immediate source of friction in the middle school parking lot. It was too small for everyone to use. The middle school teachers felt we were visitors and should only use leftover spaces. I could not believe the arguing that resulted. After one week, we came to school and saw numbered parking spaces. The middle school staff had taken the ones closest to their building. Meanwhile, I had found a spot in the elementary school parking lot about a block away from our campus. The short walk was no big deal.

There was a double portable that housed elementary school students near their parking lot, which I would pass on the way to our middle school campus. One of our teachers would park beside it to save a few steps. Unfortunately, her actions stirred up a bit of a hornet's nest. There were only two parking spots by the double portable, and the teachers in those portables used them. That meant she was taking one of their spots. When told to cease, she ranted and raved at the elementary school principal, but to no avail. She had met her match and had to park near me.

Usually, that teacher had free reign to do as she liked. Her classes mainly taught themselves since she earned degrees through an online university during class time. Whenever asked about it, she would become very indignant and vocal. The principal could not handle such confrontations and tried to avoid them. He preferred teachers he could bully through their natural fear of authority. Since she was

also the president of the teacher's association, he feared retaliation.

The administrations at Keithley and Eatonville used joint training sessions in their respective districts on in-service days to bring the two faculties together. However, these sessions failed to stop or even lessen the complaining. I believe they were too rare to have any real impact.

This problem never manifested itself to any great extent at Tamaqua Junior and Senior High Schools. On the contrary, I believe the two schools worked together to a greater extent because monthly department meetings included faculty from both schools.

A lack of combined departments for junior and senior high school teachers and no transition program for failing eighth-grade students exacerbates any friction between the two schools. Throw in the middle school philosophy without adjusting to the high school philosophy, and a close relationship will never happen.





## Conifer Books Sold Out

I wrote my first conifer book in 2013. I believed it was time for an American to write a book about dwarf conifers. The Europeans had cornered the market on books about cultivated conifers and they focused upon the plants grown in that part of the world. Even Welch's book on dwarf conifers focused on Europe in spite of the time he spent in America doing research.

Dianne and I had started Coenosium Gardens in 1979. I propagated and grew the rare and unusual conifers while she handled the customer contacts and was the shipping department.

Over the years, we noticed how whenever a plant was featured in a publication or a new conifer book came onto the market, we got requests for plants that were only found in Europe. People were reading about these wonderful new conifers, but the books they were reading had European authors and focused upon plants grown in their part of the world.

Not only were the new (and older) books showing many plants not available to the readers, they were done in an encyclopedic manner with an alphabetical listing and a short blurb about how each plant grew.

I decided to write a book that was different from any other book on the market. My goal was to give two full pages to each plant described in my book. One page would have a description of the plant that included its history as well as a short story about something pertaining to the plant or its founder. The other page was devoted to one or more pictures of the plant.

I also limited the plants described in my book to plants that could be found somewhere in North America. Either I sold them through Coenosium Gardens at one time or another, or someone else had them available or a specimen existed in a garden or arboretum on the continent. If it was only available in Europe, I did not put it in my book, regardless of how wonderful the plant might be.

After I wrote the book using Microsoft Word, I decided I would self-publish it. I wanted this book to be completely a product of my own design and contain the

information I thought was appropriate to my philosophy. However, it was also expensive and risky.

I taught myself how to use Adobe In-Design, a professional program for designing all sorts of publications. I learned enough of it to muddle my way through the design and layout process for my first book. I made a few errors, but I consider those errors more of a demonstration that I am not infallible and human flaws do show up from time to time in my work.

One of the drawbacks of self-publishing with a local printer is the need for spending money up front. Print runs have to total 100+ books to reduce the cost per copy, which can lead to an initial investment of thousands of dollars. Then space must be provided to store the inventory, supplies for shipping must be purchased, and the product needs to be advertised.

I knew the book would suffer in a few minor ways as far as the editing and design were concerned. I could not afford to hire an editor nor a graphic designer so there would be some imperfections. I figured, "So What?" I was self-publishing a book with much valuable information and great pictures. It did not have to be a work of art as long as it was well-written and interesting with lots of those pictures and valuable information. There was, and still isn't, any conifer book like it.

Small Conifers for Small Gardens sold over a thousand copies and went through several printings with my local printer.

After having my sixth conifer book, Artsy/Fartsy Conifers printed in 2022, printing costs became too high for me to continue having a local printer processing my self-published books.

At the same time, my Small Conifers for Small Gardens inventory was down to just a few books and it was time to order another batch from my printer. I would need to invest several thousand dollars in the printing costs and raise the price of the book by almost \$15.00.

I investigated several print-on-demand services and discovered Kindle Direct Printing. I sent them the appropriate documentation for the book, and sales on Amazon



## Conifer Books Sold Out

continued uninterrupted for this book. The quality appears to be equivalent to what I had before and the book will be available for years through this provider, albeit at a higher price. I did have to remove the selling option from my web site and make it available only through Amazon. Copies are no longer signed by the author.

The inventory of my other conifer books has been shrinking and my three-volume set ([Special Conifers for Special Gardens](#)) is officially sold-out as of now. The cost of having them reprinted is prohibitive. They have a few design flaws that I may or may not fix when I move them over to join my dwarf conifer book exclusively at Amazon.

It will be several months before these books become available through Kindle Direct Publishing. I have added that project to my list of things to do.

All of my books fit my philosophy of two pages for each plant with a focus on plants that can be found in North America.

The two books that are still available have interesting story lines.

The second book I wrote, [Gone But Not Forgotten](#), was not a big seller like my dwarf conifer book. When I wrote it, I thought I might have a following who enjoyed my writing and would purchase my second book. It was a misjudgment on my part. I ordered too many copies and still have a small supply available. But it will eventually sell out as well.

I think most people believed it was a book about individuals and not plants. It is both. Many plants are covered in this book and there is even a section on beeches and another on a special village with a thousand small nurseries in Holland.

It taught me two things. First, mention people or history in a book's title and sales will drop off considerably. Second, pay a little more per copy for printing a smaller number of books to avoid maintaining a large inventory for a long time.

My most recent book, [Artsy/Fartsy Conifers](#) has had moderate sales. Perhaps the title has put people off. I

picked this title to shake things up a bit in the conifer world of publications.

There is definitely no book like it available anywhere. Conifers as art is the theme of the book and the title reflects that theme. I had a lot of fun writing it. When it sells out, I will probably add it to my KDP world.

All of my books are written for me. I enjoy writing them and I enjoy rereading them. They bring back so many memories that they make it all worthwhile. There is a cost to this process, but one of the uses of money is to provide pleasure. I could do single copies of each book and avoid what could be a high risk investment in each title. However, I figured I could recover my costs if I printed each book in quantity and make a small profit. Then I could use that profit to print other titles.

That has worked for me. My conifer books have been a business/hobby that has paid its own way and allowed me to share six books worth of knowledge with people interested in conifers.

Anyone who has not made these books the core of their conifer library, have missed a valuable resource for information about the world of cultivated conifers.





## Organization

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## Book Sales

1978	2023
Long hair	Longing for hair
8 Tracks	Cataracts
KEGs	EKGs
Streaking	Leaking
Acid Rock	Acid Reflux
Seeds and stems	Fiber
Stayin' Alive (the song)	Stayin' Alive (the goal)
Hoping for a BMW	Hoping for a BM
Going to a new, hip joint	Getting a new hip joint
Rolling Stones	Kidney Stones
Bell bottoms	Big bottoms
Disco	Costco
Whatever	Depends
Rock n' roll all night	Sleep through the night
Think you know everything	Think you know your name

## A Few General Comments



My first historical fiction book is done. The title is, A Squandered Army. I have done excerpts from it in earlier issues of this newsletter and more will follow. I need to get the artwork for the cover completed and then consider how I will publish it (local printer or Kindle Direct Publishing). It is about the Civil War battles of Franklin and Nashville.

The second part of the book, A Date With Infamy (working title) is written but has to be edited. It is set in the 1870s Dakota Territory.

Several shorter novels or a compendium of short stories have been written about the time period between the two novels.

As I complete work on these books, I have started writing an action/mystery novel with a unique twist to the main character. I hope to complete it this year.

My writing is more of a hobby than a "job" and so I do not write on a daily schedule. I write mainly for myself and try to do quality work that is interesting enough to be published for others to enjoy.

I prefer action in the books I read, so I include a lot of graphic action in my fictional writing. My completed historical novels are full of it. My mystery novel will have hot action sections, but they will be secondary to the plot.

Stay tuned for more information in future newsletters.

All but two of my conifer books have sold out. I hope to reprint them using Kindle Direct Publishing. That has worked well for my book, Small Conifers for Small Gardens. Read more on pages 22-23.