

Horticulture's Place in K-State History

Care to guess which department in the College of Agriculture was established first? If you said horticulture, you're right. It was created in 1871, when the Agriculture Department split into the Farm Department and the Horticulture Department. It has changed names 11 times, including four times as the Horticulture Department.

In preparation for the university's sesquicentennial — Stu Warren, head of the now Department of Horticulture, Forestry and Recreation Resources — recruited professor emeritus Chuck Marr to research and record the department's history.

Marr spent many hours poring over documents in University Archives and talking to fellow retirees to write *A History of the Horticulture Department at Kansas State University 1870–2012*.

According to Marr, horticulturists influenced Kansas State Agricultural College from its very beginning. Orchard and fruit garden classes first appeared in the college's course catalog in 1864, and horticulture was the first area of emphasis in agriculture that was identified by its own budget line.

In the early years, the salary for the professor of horticulture was second only to the college president. However, appropriations from the state legislature for operations were sparse. One year, the legislature budgeted \$250 for horticultural activities for the entire college, while appropriating \$1,400 for tobacco for prisoners in the state penitentiary.

Elbridge Gale, a minister with a passion for horticulture, purchased 40 acres of land near Manhattan in 1856, where he established an orchard and experimented with a wide variety of plants that would grow in the area.

Gale was appointed professor of horticulture and superintendent of the orchard and nursery in 1870. He and the regents looked for nearby land with better soils for growing crops. The land was purchased initially for agricultural purposes, but the regents chose to relocate the entire campus from its original location, at what is now the intersection of College and Claffin avenues, to the current campus location.

Edwin Popenoe was appointed professor of horticulture in 1879. At that time there were no textbooks or journals and few experiments. The Hatch Act of 1887 created an agricultural research emphasis at land-grant universities. Popenoe authored several experiment station bulletins on insects of fruit and later became head of the Department of Entomology. He also helped implement a general landscape plan for the campus and led significant expansions of gardens, orchards, and plant material evaluations.

In 1885, noted landscape designer Maxmilian Kern of St. Louis was hired to design a landscape plan for the K-State campus, creating the circular drives and main entrance to the campus.

Some familiar names, characters, and varieties also have roots in horticulture.

David Fairchild, son of university president George Fairchild, traveled the world searching for plants that could be grown in the United States. He brought back hundreds of important plants, including alfalfa, nectarines, dates, cotton, bamboos, and the flowering cherry trees in Washington, D.C.

In the 1950s, plant breeder C.V. Hall developed and released several melon varieties. His Crimson Sweet watermelon became one of the most popular watermelon varieties in the world.

Horticulture professor George Filingier wrote and self-published a book to support Manhattan's centennial in 1955. A 30-foot statute of the book's "larger than life" character Johnny Kaw stands in the southeast corner of Manhattan City Park.

The diverse department now offers a variety of undergraduate courses, with majors in horticulture, park management and conservation, and wildlife and outdoor enterprise management, and graduate degrees.

The department also includes the Kansas Forest Service; research units at Manhattan, Olathe, Haysville, and Chetopa; oversight of the K-State Gardens; and training for Master Gardeners and other groups.

For more horticulture history, read *Then and Now* on pages 6 to 11 and access Marr's document at <http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/doc3506.ashx>.



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