

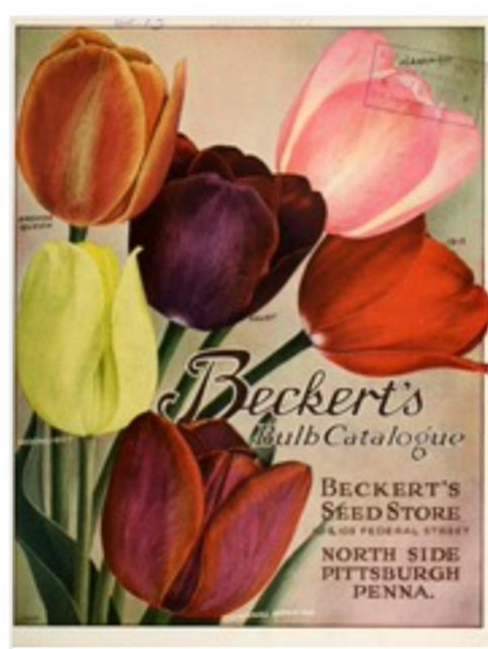
Oshawa Horticultural Society



Issue #2 – The First Decade – The Dirty-Thirties

90 years ago, on the 23rd of February 1931, the **Oshawa Horticultural Society** took root and this time it flourished. It did not take long for the Society to begin to make a difference in Oshawa, then a city of a population of little less than 23,500. Their first priority was to promote good horticultural practices and to encourage more people to take up gardening and to become members of the Society.

They did this through an emphasis on Civic Beautification and organizing horticultural competitions, recognition and awards. As described in Issue #1, large, ornate trophies were solicited from local businesses and prominent families to be awarded to the best in a wide range of categories. Annual flower shows were organized along with garden tours that included judging and awards. Inspirational guest speakers were featured at Society Membership Meetings.



Typical Seeds and Seed Catalogues of the Day

Often the speakers shared films and photos of tours of prominent gardens in Europe as well as North America. Tours were organized through R. S. McLaughlin to see first-hand what he and Adelaide had achieved at their Parkwood Estate. Despite the fact that many of the Society members were well off, great effort was made to encourage schools, service stations, local businesses and private citizens to plant decorative gardens and to have them judged for public recognition and trophies.

Food Insecurity



While Oshawa was better off than many other parts of Canada, it was recognized that many were struggling with keeping their families fed as



jobs were scarce and times were tough. The Oshawa Welfare Society establish garden plots to be used by the unemployed to plant and cultivate vegetable crops to help feed their families. Verna Conant recommended that the OHS provide an award for the best kept garden as an added incentive, however the OHS was not in a position financially to do so but did provide moral support to the initiative.

In the 30s there were many other challenges:

Horticultural Pests of the Day



Schoolkids cutting across lawns and wrecking hedges

Roving dogs digging up flowerbeds



Board members were recruited to visit schools to encourage respect for private property and OHS horticultural efforts to beautify the City.

Others were recruited to lobby for tougher dog control by-laws.

Government Funding for Horticulture

The OHS Board also was active in lobbying the Ontario Government to retain the level of funding for the Ontario Horticultural Association and subsequent grants to Societies that had been halved in recent years. The OHS received a grant of \$75 per year to help with operating costs.

NEWS OF THE DAY

Local Garden

Pilgrimages

June to September

Local residents are invited to make pilgrimages to the gardens of selected OHS members over the summer.

Details will be in the

Oshawa Times

Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a journey, often into an unknown or foreign place, where a person goes in search of new or expanded meaning about their self, others, nature, or a higher good, through the experience. It can lead to a personal transformation, after which the pilgrim returns to their daily life. [Wikipedia](#)

General Meetings

featured speaker with "well-chosen remarks", tea and baked goods, magic lantern slide shows, live music including local boys playing harmonicas and a closing with "God Save the King".

Children's Aid

Buildings

Centre Street South

OHS Members created, planted and maintained gardens there at the expense of the Society and with donations from members such as Verna Conant

New Public Park

NW Corner, Bond St. and Ritson Rd

The Oshawa Horticultural Society will create a grassed park and gardens on a parcel of land provided by the CNR at a cost of \$1.00 to the City of Oshawa.

The Society will also cover the cost of a man to maintain the park.

Photography Competition

Oshawa Horticultural Society

Capture the beauty of your own gardens, plants and landscaping to share with our members. Cash prizes will be available, and photographs will be used for our future presentations. Watch for details in

the **Oshawa Times**



City of Oshawa

Tree Planting Plans

The Oshawa Horticultural Society has been asked by the City of Oshawa to do a survey of trees on the streets of Oshawa and to make recommendations regarding where trees should be planted in coming years. OHS has also been asked to advise in the planning and creation of a tree nursery for the City of Oshawa to meet their need for tree stock in coming years. It is anticipated that 75,000 trees will be planted throughout the city in the near future.

Memorial Park

Garden of the Unforgotten



The Oshawa Horticultural Society continues to plant and maintain these gardens to honour our fallen soldiers as part of their Civic

Beautification Initiatives. The Society was successful in lobbying for floodlights to be installed at the memorial to allow local citizens to pay their respects and enjoy the park during evening hours.

OHS Presidents in the 30s

1931 W Gordon Bunker
32-34 A L (Mike) Bouckley
35 Fred T Lamble
36-37 Wm R Alchin
38-39 Marshal E Coakwell

January 1933 OHS Meeting

150 members and friends gathered to hear John Hall of Toronto speaking on House Plants, Lilies and Gardens of Oshawa with slides.

City of Oshawa

Water Filtration Plant

The Oshawa Horticultural Society continues its work on gardens at the Water Filtration Plant

Familiar Names

There were quite a number of well-known Oshawa names that appeared in the legers containing the minutes of the OHS meetings in the 1930s. In my first instalment, I mentioned Verna Conant whose name appears often as a liaison with the City and various community organizations. In 1938, W F Tonkin became V. P. The Tonkin name was familiar to me and I reached out to Dave Tonkin who I knew through the Oshawa Historical Society, to get some background on Mr. Tonkin. It turns out that he was a relative of Dave's and he shared the following:

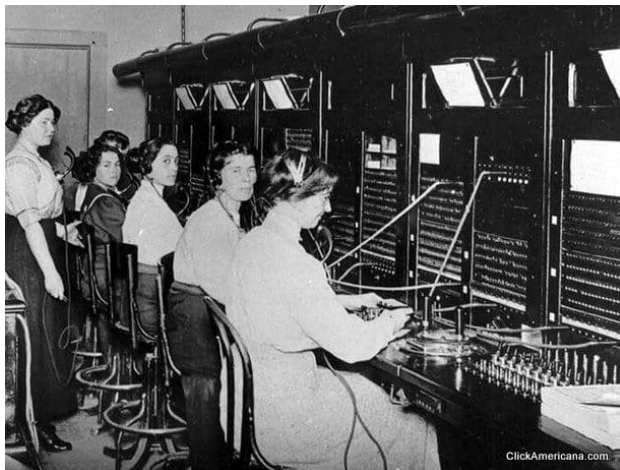
That would be Norval Frederick Tonkin. He would be an older first cousin of my father. I believe he was born around 1895 and he would have grown up at the southwest corner of Simcoe St and Taunton Rd. (East Whitby in those days) I have been told that Norval worked in the GM office for many years, and he owned a house on the south side of Adelaide Ave where it intersects with Golf St.

My grandfather William H. Tonkin left the teaching profession in the early 1900's to operate a florist and gardening business at 83 Ritson Rd S. He built two greenhouses at this location and the property extended south to Olive Ave. My father told me he delivered plants using his bicycle to various locations including Parkwood. I believe that my grandfather and Sam McLaughlin knew each other from an early age. It would appear the business struggled in the latter years. Both my grandparents worked in the greenhouses right up to their deaths one week apart in 1930.

David got back to me to share the photos below from one of their family albums. They show the greenhouses mentioned above which are reminiscent of the Parkwood Greenhouses of the time.



Speaking of the Parkwood Greenhouses, one of the Directors in 1936 was John Sargent whose address was Parkwood, Simcoe Street N. The Oshawa City Directory lists Mr. Sargent as a Superintendent at Parkwood and it is likely that he was involved with the greenhouses and gardens. At that time, Sam McLaughlin donated \$100 to the work of the OHS and often opened his gardens and greenhouses for tours by the OHS members.



Side Note: Most phone calls at that time went through a central switchboard as dial phones were not common. The operator would ask for the name and number of the person you were calling. The OHS leger shows that Mr. Sargent's phone number at Parkwood was 3. An important and easy number to remember.

Options Committee

An early committee listed was the Options Committee and that term confused me quite a bit. It soon became clear that this committee served as a broker to make bulk purchases each year of bulbs, seeds, both annual and perennial plants at reduced rates. There was great excitement at spring meetings when that year's "Options" were received and distributed.



RMG Virtual Exhibit

Follow the link below to see more pictures of Oshawa in Bloom during the early years.

Oshawa in Bloom

Help Us to Celebrate Our History

I received this lovely note back from member Lisa Weiss about her family's recollections of the early days of the OHS. Please feel free to share your family memories and photos as well.

John Weiss was a Hairdresser. He remembers Verna Conant having done her hair for many years. He often visited her for tea and she would reminisce. The man who started the National Geographic magazine was a friend of Alexander Graham Bell and a friend of hers. She showed John the largest collection of Geographic Magazines, first old editions even in black and white without pictures. The Conant's owned all the property from the 401 to the lake. Apple Orchards. Due to taxes they kept selling off their lands.

Mrs. E.D. Smith was dressed by our friend the Canadian Couturier Robert Irwin. She travelled frequently to Scotland where the Castles were bitterly cold at any time. He lined all his gown designs with silk undergarments to keep his client warm.

Joyce Hart was a client for many years. She married late in life. She did the most beautiful hand smocking for our little daughter who is now 60 years old.

We look forward to the rest of the year for more Memory Gems.

Lisa Weiss

Oshawa Horticultural Society



Watch for the third instalment in April when I take you through life with the Oshawa Horticultural Society during the 1940s - the War Years. Merle Cole