

International Oaks

The Journal of the International Oak Society

25th Anniversary Issue

Issue No. 28/ 2017 / ISSN 1941-2061



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FOREWORD

Happy 25th!

I remember it well. It was the 1980s. Personal e-mail usage was not yet a part of everyday life. Pocket cell phones were science fiction and social networks were not even a remote fantasy. Overseas telephone calls via the trans-Atlantic cable were expensive, unreliable, and often difficult to hear when one could get through at all and someone at the other end of the world actually had a telephone to use. That telephone had a rotary dial, a long, coiled cord, and a handset heavy enough to be useful as a mortal weapon. We had paper, postage stamps, and the ball-point pen, and we made the most of them.

Several people from the US, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, had created an informal network for seed exchange (specifically, acorn exchange). We needed to expand our group to increase our opportunities to obtain germplasm of this greatest of tree genera. In 1992, one of us, Steve Roesch, our driving force, suggested that naming our little group of oak nuts might attract additional participation and confer some credibility. And thus the International Oak Society was born with Steve Roesch, Founder; Susan Cooper, Co-Founder; Guy Sternberg, Co-Organizer; and Nigel Wright, who, suggesting it would be helpful to begin a periodical publication, became our first Editor. Six members contributed to the first issue, compiled as a photocopied, hand-stapled, 16-page document that was sent out to those already on board.

At that point, I suggested that a conference meeting and a discussion of possible incorporation as a legal non-profit corporation seemed to be the logical next step. We spent the next year working with the education staff of The Morton Arboretum to spread the word, recruit speakers, and sell trade booths to raise funds. I made some of those trans-Atlantic cable phone calls (with my trusty rotary-dial phone) to places like Romania and Turkey to persuade international speakers to participate. They were promised that we would generate enough revenue from trade booth sales to cover their plane fare, and that was a promise we were very lucky to be able to keep. We wrote letters and more letters (mostly in longhand and on a manual typewriter) to everyone in every country whom we thought might be interested. I remember spending many hours on the phone recruiting participation from across the US during a time in our history when long-distance calls were billed by the minute and private conversations sometimes compromised by party

lines serving several households.


It came together in October 1994, just two years after we began as an organization with our name and our first publications, and it was successful beyond our dreams. The Morton Arboretum's Thornhill Conference Room that held about 175 people was filled, and many more stood outside the door to listen to this gathering of oak experts from around the world present their information. They also had come for the now-famous seed exchange, which already was a massive event even at that first gathering. Some of those people were excited enough about this that they decided to stay for a post-conference meeting that resulted in the formalization of the International Oak Society that you know today.

We elected a steering committee (Allen Coombes, Nigel Wright, Amy Larson, Peter van der Linden, and myself) for the purposes of our incorporation and we also planned for additional conferences at three-year intervals. Annual conferences would have been beyond our capacity to organize and beyond the capability of most people to attend, but holding one every three years would allow everyone to plan and save well in advance for them and to gather en masse during the conference years for these grand triennial reunions.

After our third conference (North Carolina, 2000) our membership was spread through 31 countries. Our Journal, THIS Journal, named *International Oaks* in 1998 (Issue No. 8), grew over time into what you hold in your hands today. In 1997 we created a newsletter, *Oak News & Notes*, and, in 2014, an electronic newsletter, *The Cupule*. In 2002, a web site was created; in 2007 it was redesigned and augmented in functionalities, and again, in 2012, with upgrades that have made it one of the best online resources of any plant society. The IOS also became the International Cultivar Registration Authority in 1998. Today, in addition to the triennial conferences, ever broader and more rewarding, annual Oak Open Day events and tours on different continents provide opportunities for members and non-members to meet and share their love of oaks.

Friends from around the globe help each other and host each other in a constantly increasing network. Since then, my oak motivations have led me to visit more than 20 countries, some several times, virtually all with tremendous help and guidance from other IOS members. The oak collection at our arboretum, Starhill Forest, has become the most comprehensive accredited one in North America, again with such help. Many others in many countries have benefitted similarly, and oaks worldwide have attained the prominence that they deserve.

Where do we go from here? Let your imagination run wild, as we did more than 25 years ago, with the knowledge that you will continue to see new surprises that no one can predict at the present time. But always remember how it started, as a dream shared by a few people who had never before met face to face, and for the most part had never even shared a phone call. We didn't realize that it couldn't be done, so we just did it.


Guy Sternberg