

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



November 2010

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, November 18, 2010** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco

November Program

Discovering Bromeliads on a Cactus Expedition

This month we will have **Peter Wan** giving a show of his first trip to Argentina. Several years ago when Guillermo Rivera started his plant expeditions, many of us from Northern California took this trip, prompted by Walter Teague. Many of our society members were on this trip. Guillermo had advertised this as a cactus photo expedition and he was surprised that so many of us were into bromeliads; his subsequent trips promote bromeliads as well as cactus. Peter is a great photographer and there are lots of bromeliads to be found in Northern Argentina, so do not miss this meeting.

November Refreshments

Roger Lane and **Peter Wan** signed up for refreshments this month.



I don't think this is a bromeliad that **Peter** is taking a picture of but you will see many bromeliad photos in his show this month.

October Meeting

Terrie Bert provided a fantastic slide show on bromeliads but she covered bromeliads from H to M – not A to L as your editor stated in last month’s newsletter. She packed a lot of information on each slide including habitat maps, plant photos, how to grow them, and random photos of different actors. We learned a lot about these plants but some are not suitable for personal collections, such as *Mezobromelia*. We discovered the significance of the actor photos only at the end of the show and it is a secret.

Terrie also brought wonderful plants for sale most of which your editor did not even see because they were already claimed by others when he arrived. Terrie graciously told us about the plants we purchased and how to grow them. And the prices she charged were incredibly reasonable.

Thanks to all of the members who donated many plants for the plant table. Most of us went home with many new bromeliads.

Mulford and Other Legends to Recall

Herb Plever wrote this article for the February 2003 *Bromeliana*, newsletter of the New York Bromeliad Society.

As I start to think about an article for this February issue, I realize that today is December 28th, Mulford B. Foster’s birthday. Having written, edited, and read many articles about him when he died, the date still sticks in my mind. On February 22nd Americans will celebrate the birthday of George Washington. Our first president and often known as the father of our country. But there are only a small number of people who remember Mulford, the first president of the Bromeliad Society and the man we often called the “Father of the Bromeliads” or “Mr. Bromeliad”. There are an even smaller number of us left who were personally touched by the pioneers I write about.

The legend of this incredibly talented intrepid naturalist-explorer is intertwined with that of other important bromeliad legends: his wife Racine and his friend Lyman B. Smith. I add to this triumvirate the name of Victoria Padilla. And since I am internationalist by philosophy and nature, I also think of the late Walter Richter, an honorary trustee of BSI from what was then East Germany and other legends from “down under”

who were influenced by and who followed Mulford: Muriel Waterman and Bea Hanson of New Zealand and W.B. Charley and Grace Goode of Australia.

What these legendary people had and have in common is their dedication to advance knowledge about bromeliads and enthusiastically making converts to the joys of growing them.

Mulford B. Foster (Dec. 28, 1888 – Aug. 28, 1978) was, to quote from Victoria Padilla’s 1978 *BSI Journal* obit (V. 28, No. 6, pgs 243-244), an “explorer, writer, artist, lecturer, botanist (*with no formal training as such Ed.*), naturalist, horticulturist, hybridizer, photographer, raconteur, bromeliad grower, bromeliad collector, gardener, Co-founder of the Bromeliad Society, President from 1950 to 1959, Editor (of *The Bromeliad Bulletin*) from 1951 to 1958, Director and Honorary Trustee.”

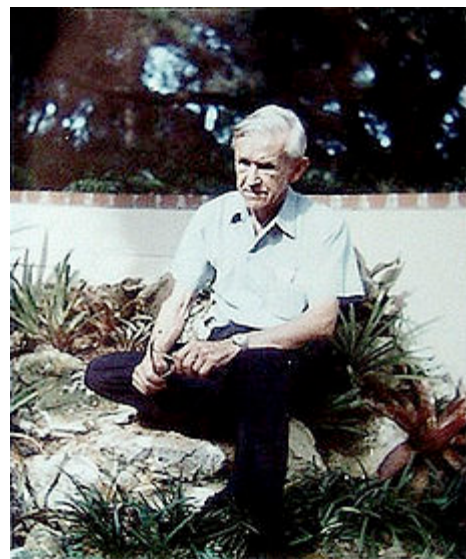


Photo of Mulford Foster is courtesy of Wikipedia.

Mulford and Racine settled in Florida in the 1920s and he “discovered” bromeliads in the Everglades while looking for snakes and again in 1934 while traveling in Mexico. His growing interest in the bromeliad family led him to travel (often with his wife Racine) over 150,000 miles through Brazil, Mexico, Columbia, Honduras, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Peru, Dutch Guinea, Ecuador, Trinidad, Cuba, Venezuela, and Jamaica. Many of these trips were under the auspices of the *National Geographic* magazine which published his reports and photographs.

Mulford discovered and collected **108 new species of bromeliads, about one-eighth of all the species then known and identified in taxonomy!** (Bromeliad species now exceed 2500.) He also rediscovered and collected almost 100 old species that had been found and described by the great 19th century explorer-naturalists like Andre and Glaziou, but which subsequently had been lost to horticulture.

Victoria Padilla described Mulford's remarkable talents and drive as a collector in his obituary: "A collecting trip with Mulford Foster to Jamaica was a revelation insofar as his knowledge of plants was concerned. He could identify every plant that he saw, no matter how mean or unobtrusive, and from a distance of at least 100 yards he could distinguish a Pitcairnia from a grass. When he saw a bromeliad on a tree, he did not wait for the boys to collect it, but was the first one up, chuckling in glee that here was another treasure!"

Racine Foster (1910-1991) was a legend in her own right. She roughed it with Mulford on many of those trips through forests, mountains, and deserts. She kept a journal with copious notes on the flora, fauna and terrain, catalogued them and the photographs taken, and she made the herbarium specimen pressings for all the collected plants which were later sent to their friend Dr. Lyman B. Smith for identification. All the collected plants were brought home to Florida and she had more than equal responsibility for growing them on and creating and maintaining seedlings and pups from the collections, especially when Mulford was away.

In 1945, Racine and Mulford wrote a widely distributed book called: "Brazil, Orchid of Tropics" which described the fascinating adventures of their collecting trips. They were such enthusiastic supporters of the BSI that they paid for the costs of printing and publishing the Bromeliad Society Bulletin. She contributed many articles to the Bromeliad Bulletin and Bromeliad Journal as it was later called. Racine succeeded Mulford as editor of the Bulletin for Volume 8, and she was for many years a copy editor of the Journal, a member of its editorial advisory board and a Trustee of the BSI.

The Fosters first lived within the city of Orlando, but they bought a 12 acre property out of town "in the country" in a forest of century-old live-oak trees where they established a home and a bromeliad sanctuary for all of the collected plants and hybrids, called **Bromel-La**. Racine's 1973

description (BSI Journal V. 28, No. 5, pg. 172) is most apt: "...it took us six years just to move the plants before the house for us was built...When people say: 'You are so lucky to have this place', we remind them that it took forty years of experience with plants and many sacrifices to buy, build and move from town. We wanted seclusion and privacy, so we made a perimeter around the property, a screen of Ligustrum, Yuccas, Podocarpus, Rhapsis Palms, Cycads, and various shrubs. And, while bromels have been paramount in our attention, from way back, we have had active interest in Cycads, Aroids, Palms, Amaryllis, etc.

"The natural clusters of trees determined the shape and location of the walks and ways for people as well as for the areas for bromeliads near trees, so they could climb up trunks, or so they could extend themselves in the sandy leaf mold open areas; this they did and now are growing in great masses crowding the trees...In town, we had raised thousands of seedlings from the collected species; this gave us the opportunity to bring many plants to Bromel-La in minimum space, and only now, years later, have some of these seedlings reached maturity; they are flowering and ready for identification. They are acclimated now, some happier on one side of a tree than the other...Bromeliads have an amazing adaptability...They do not mind being transported, dried out or starved; they can take abuse, half of which would kill many other plants."

Bromel-La was a fabulous Mecca for those who were fortunate to have seen it. I had met Mulford in 1963 and visited Bromel-La in the early '70s and in 1980 at the time of the WBC in Orlando. In 1985 when Racine kindly put me up for a weekend, I was able to appreciate Mulford's artistic sensibilities. I had time to study Mulford's paintings and drawings hanging on the walls and read some of his notes, writings, and even poetry. Besides his other accomplishments, he also created 13 beautiful, still popular hybrids such as *Aechmea* Foster's Favorite (*A. racinae* x *A. victoriana* v. *discolor*), *A. Bert* (*A. orlandiana* x *A. fosteriana*), *Billbergia* Fantasia (*B. pyramidalis* x *B. saundersii*) *B. Muriel* Waterman and *Tillandsia* Victoria (*T. ionantha* x *T. brachycaulos*).

But alas, Bromel-La is no more. Racine had hoped that the property could be donated to a foundation which could maintain it as a bromeliad sanctuary. Unfortunately, this was not done before she died in 1991 and the property

was sold. However, funds were raised for the creation of the Mulford B. Foster Bromeliad Identification Center at Marie Selby Botanical Garden in Sarasota, Florida. That important center has grown and carried on in the spirit of its namesake under the leadership and dedication of Harry Luther. [Since this article was originally published Harry Luther has moved on to the Singapore Botanical Garden. – Ed.]

Dr. Lyman B. Smith (1904-1997) is justly considered to be the father of modern taxonomy. In every field of human endeavor, there are only a few people whose contributions to the advancement of that field are so important that progress in that pursuit would be inconceivable without their work. Such was the contribution to the bromeliad family by Lyman B. Smith. After receiving a degree in taxonomy at Harvard, Lyman spent some 60 years studying the Bromeliaceae as member of the staff of Harvard's Grey Herbarium and later as Senior Botanist at the Department of Botany at the Smithsonian Institution. He was not content merely to analyze herbarium specimens and made many field trips to Brazil, Columbia, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Cuba where he studied bromel populations and collected specimens.

Spurred by these studies and the new and rediscovered species sent to him by the Fosters, Dr. Smith published hundreds of titles and descriptions of bromeliad species in books and plant journals including the BSI Bulletin and Journal. This work led to the completion and publication of his reorganization of the family in the monumental three volume Monograph 14 of the *Bromeliaceae* in *Flora Neotropica* (Smith and Downs) from 1974 to 1979. Even after this publication, Lyman, together with his colleague Dr. Robert W. Read, worked on updating and revising the Monograph, and in 1987 they published a 121-page supplement to include new taxa, nomenclatural changes, emendations and synonymies. Lyman continued to work every day even after he retired up to a few years before his death.

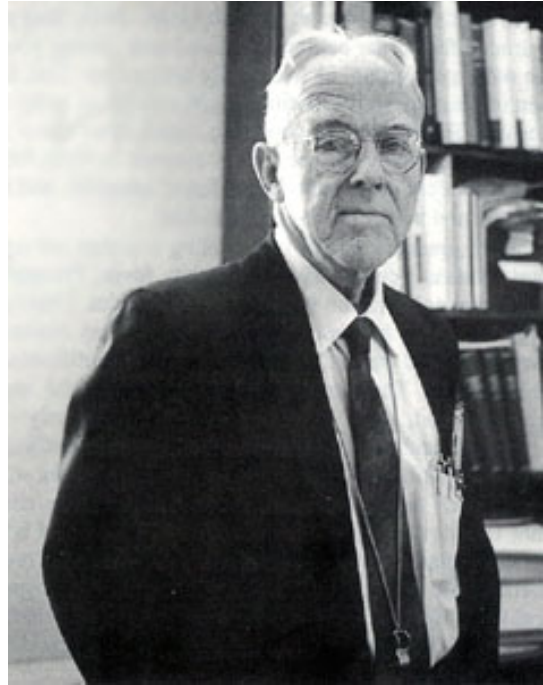


Photo of Lyman B. Smith is courtesy of Taxon.

In the formative years of our New York Bromeliad Society we were privileged to have Lyman as a speaker, teacher, and writer for our *Bromeliana* from 1963 to 1968 when he came up from Washington, D.C. to work in the herbarium of the New York Botanical Gardens. He would dine with us before the meetings and we got to know the person, a man of interesting contrasts.

He never lost his Boston accent. From his short, slight build you would never guess that he had been a champion collegiate wrestler. He was formally polite but kindly, brilliant yet modest, soft-spoken with a deadpan humor betrayed only by twinkling eyes, a patient listener with an open mind and a good teacher. We learned how to use the taxonomic keys, and he helped us understand that they were only guides to identification because there was as much art as there was science in taxonomy.

Victoria Padilla (1905-1986) was one of a group of California bromeliad fanciers who, together with Mulford Foster, founded the Bromeliad Society. She was its first Secretary (for 10 years) and then from 1960 through 1980 she was editor of the renamed *Journal of the Bromeliad Society*. As editor, Victoria introduced color photos and elevated the style and quality of the publication to a professional, scientific journal. During this period she was the dominant personality in the BSI, dedicated and passionate in her support for bromeliad education and the society through the *Journal*. In fact, for Victoria, the *Journal* was the

Bromeliad Society (perhaps more than its affiliates).

In addition to her great work as editor, Victoria Padilla wrote hundreds of articles for the Journal and published three important books: *Bromeliads and Their Culture*, *Bromeliads*, and *Bromeliads in Color*.

Walter Richter (1904-1997) grew up in Crimmitschau, Saxony surrounded by the tropical plants of his father's plant business. By 1930 he had established his own bromeliad nursery and later took over his father's business after his death. Such was his devotion to his plants that he managed to maintain his nurseries during the war period despite the economic hardships and political interference from the East German government which nationalized his business. His knowledge about the bromel culture and his great photographic and writing skills were on the highest level.

His great 1965 masterwork was *Zimmerpflanzen für Heute und Morgen: Bromelaceen* (Bromeliads: Houseplants for Today and Tomorrow). It was translated into English by Ada Abbendroth and reprinted serially in the BSI Journal 1967 to 1970. BSI also published most of it in 1977 in a book entitled "Bromeliads". In this pioneer work, Richter detailed how bromeliads from different habitats adapted to indoors and greenhouse horticulture. His writing and perspective flowed from the century old European practice of growing plants, including bromeliads, on window sills. Richter wrote many articles for the Bulletin and was an Honorary Trustee of the BSI. He created many famous hybrids such as *Billbergia Fascinator*, *Cryptanthus Mars*, *Guzmania Magnifica*, *Neoregelia Avalon*, *N. Takamura Grande* and *Vriesea Favorite*.

Today Australia and New Zealand are the most vital centers of bromel activity with many local groups and large memberships who grow stunning plants and write excellent publications. Regrettably, limited space only permits a few lines about the "down-under" legends. I hope to relate their work in a future issue. All were or still are Honorary BSI Trustees. Muriel Waterman from Auckland, New Zealand, had one of the earliest bromel collections down-under until her death in 1961. Bea Hanson who is still living but no longer active was the New Zealand Bromeliad Society's first Secretary and long time editor of its publication. [I believe that Bea has passed. – Ed.] W.B. Charley, now deceased, was one of the principal organizers of the Australian Bromeliad

Society. Grace Goode from Australia (who thankfully is still a living inspiration) is a great hybridizer and horticulturist. Her bromeliad garden is world famous.

Holiday Get-Together

Save **16 December** for our annual holiday potluck. This is always a fun event and we usually get to see some of our members who are unable to make most of the meetings.

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO (BSSF)

The BSSF is a non-profit educational organization promoting the study and cultivation of bromeliads. The BSSF meets monthly on the 3rd Thursday at 7:30 PM in the Recreation room of the San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. Meetings feature educational lectures and displays of plants. Go to the affiliate section of the BSI webpage for information about our meetings.

The BSSF publishes a monthly newsletter that comes with the membership. Annual dues are single (\$15), dual (\$20). To join the BSSF, mail your name(s), address, telephone number, e-mail address, and check made payable to the BSSF to:

Harold Charms, BSSF Treasurer, 255 States Street, San Francisco, CA 94114-1405.

BSSF 2010 OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT	Carl Carter	510-661-0568	carl.carter@ekit.com
VICE PRESIDENT	Bruce McCoy	510-835-3311	bruce.mccoy@gmail.com
SECRETARY			
TREASURER	Harold Charms	415-861-6043	Harold@States-Street.com
DIRECTORS:			
	Roger Lane	650-949-4831	rdodger@pacbell.net
	Marilyn Moyer	650-365-5560	MarilynMoyer@comcast.net
	Peder Samuelson	650-365-5560	Pedersam@comcast.net
	Peter Wan	408-500-2103	peterkwan@earthlink.net

BROMELIAD SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

The Journal is published bimonthly at Orlando, Florida by the Bromeliad Society International. Subscription price (in U.S. \$) is included in the 12-month membership dues: single (\$28.), dual (2 members at one address receiving one Journal -\$30). Address all membership and subscription correspondence to: Membership Secretary, Dan Kinard, 6901 Kelly Lane, Vista, CA 92084, USA, membership@bsi.org

BROMELIAD SOCIETY
OF
SAN FRANCISCO

Roger Lane
Newsletter Editor
551 Hawthorne Court
Los Altos, CA 94024-3121

We will be visiting Argentina this month!