

BROMELIAD SOCIETY OF SAN FRANCISCO



October 2004

NEWSLETTER

Our next meeting will be held on **Thursday, October 21, 2004** at 7:30 PM
Recreation Room, San Francisco County Fair Building, 9th Avenue at Lincoln Way, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco

October Program

Bromeliads of Northwestern Argentina

This month **Peder Samuelsen**, photographer extraordinaire, has prepared a very entertaining show of digital slides with musical background of the trip that some of our members made to Argentina last October. Although the bus tour was advertised as to show us lots of the native cactus, Argentina is also loaded with lots of wonderful bromeliads. Our first stop on the tour was to see many *Puya spathacea* in full bloom. We also saw many dyckias and deuterochonias, but the real treat was the Tillandsias that occur in northwestern Argentina. We were really excited to find our first Tillandsia: *T. duratii* – only to discover later that we would be seeing it for the next few days. Be sure to come to a fine show and see photos of these and many more bromeliads we discovered.



Here are some of our members at last year's visit to member's gardens. From left to right are **Dorothy Dewing, Tom Koerber, Francine Henderson, Peder Samuelsen,** and **Barret Bassick.**

October Refreshments

Stacey Michaels and **Brian Ransom** signed up for refreshments in October.

November Refreshments

No one has yet signed up for November refreshments. Any volunteers?

September Meeting

Bruce Holst visited us last month between hurricanes from the Selby Botanic Gardens in Sarasota, Florida. His slide showed covered the research he has been involved with over a large area of the Brazilian Amazon. This work is a cooperative effort with local botanists and also involved student interns. They are exploring some of the remaining virgin forests and Bruce is hoping to continue his investigations this fall.

Bruce also was gracious to bring several species from Selby that we added to our plant table. Unusual new species also bring out the larger bills from the wallets and helped pay for Bruce's trip here.

San Miguel Greenhouse is Closing

Pamela and Jim Leaver are closing their San Miguel Greenhouse in Concord on **November 1**. They have a large supply of bromeliads available at very reasonable prices. If you are interested, please call them at (925) 933-7908. Pamela also wants help in identifying many of her Neoregelia hybrids. So if you know your neo hybrids, visit their greenhouse and go home with lots of plants.



Aechmea Bert is one of Mulford Foster's hybrids. Photo by Pam Koide is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.

Mulford and Other Legends to Recall

This article is by Herb Plever and is reprinted from 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, this 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."

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 Guiana, 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 of 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 the Tropics”, which described the fascinating adventures of their collecting trips. They were such enthusiastic supporters of the BSI that they paid for the 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 this property, a screen of Ligustrum, Yuccas, Podocarpus, Rhaps 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 are 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 also 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 Gardens 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.

D. 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 which 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.

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 Crimmitaschau, 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 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 indoor 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, *Neoregelia* 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. 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 hybridist and horticulturist. Her bromeliad garden is world famous.



photo CSJ Vol. 15 #2 p57
Cryptanthus Mars and *Neoregelia* Avalon (below) are Walter Richter hybrids. Photo is courtesy of the Florida Council of Bromeliad Societies.



© Michael Andreas
 Neo Avalon
 Geoff Johnson
 1998 Mothers Day Show, BSCF

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 \$12. To join the BSSF, mail your name(s), address, telephone number, and check made payable to the BSSF to: Harold Charns, BSSF Treasurer, 255 States Street, San Francisco, CA 94114-1405.

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