HGA Celebrates ... the 30th Anniversary of Its Incorporation

A History of the Hobby Greenhouse Association 1976-2006

Part I: 1975-1987 by Mary Sanderson

Somebody asked, "How did it all start?" The founder of the Hobby Greenhouse Association was an innovative young Californian named Wander Mall who purchased a hobby greenhouse only to find that after erecting his "transparent paradise," he didn't know how to operate it. Back in 1975 the information "pickin's" were slim.

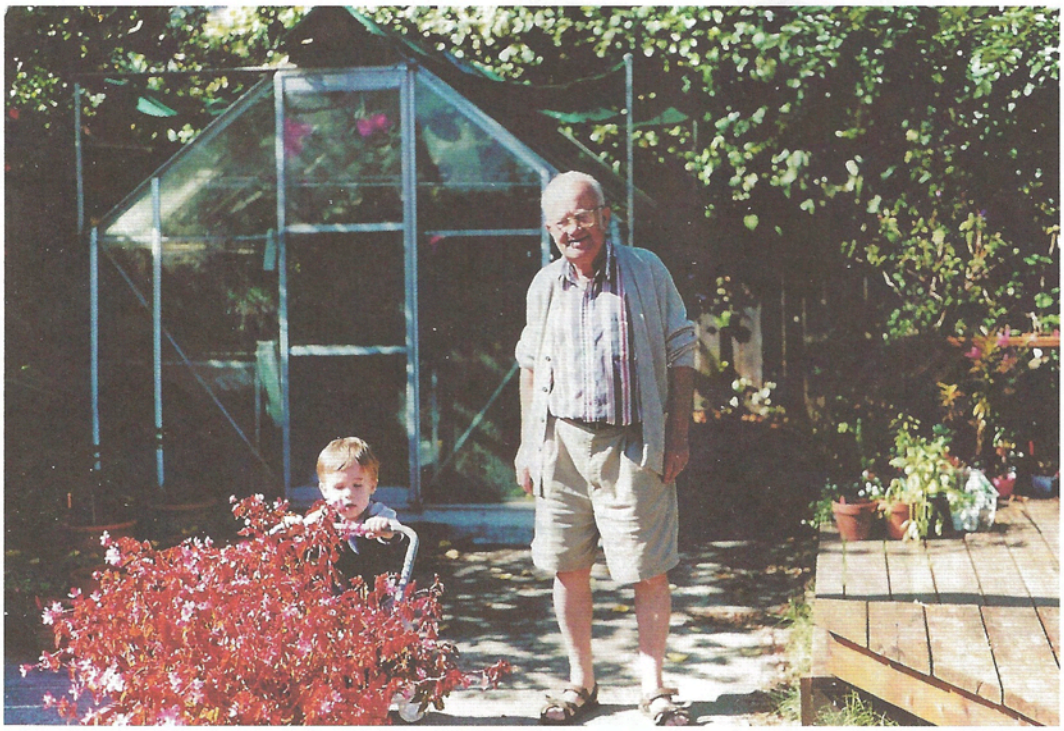
The tale that I am about to relate is full of woe, so get out your tissues!

Wander Mall decided that a club comprised of a few growers would be the answer to his dilemma. Growers could exchange ideas and knowledge and help each other. Basically, this would have been a great idea for a membership of thirty or forty people, but, alas, this was not what happened!

Mr. Mall wrote several letters to editors in order to get public response. It became apparent to him after several weeks that a lot of people liked his idea, and that there was no way he could handle the situation by himself. He appointed Rosalynn Littermann of Missouri and myself in Connecticut to help him. With the two of us, he thought he had the country covered. That's what he thought!

A couple of beautiful people (Doc) George and Katy Abraham liked his idea and promoted it via their radio and TV programs, and in their newspaper columns. In less than a month letters were pouring in from all over the country. We babes-in-the-woods were not prepared for such an influx.

Mr. Mall printed up a bulletin outlining his idea



Wander Mall and his grandson Nicolas play outside Wander's greenhouse

Wander Mall was born in Tripoli, North Africa (then an Italian colony) in 1928. In 1952 he went to England, where he discovered Kew Gardens, leading to a love of horticulture. In 1957, he and his wife Simone immigrated to Canada. In 1965, the family moved to California. He built his first greenhouse in 1970 and began the HGA in 1975. Wander died in 2004. He is survived by his wife and two sons.

and set the dues at $2.00 per year. People started joining, and usually with their request for membership came pleas for help:

"How do you get rid of white flies?"

"Is tea manure good for gardenias?"

"How do you handle shading in Colorado?"

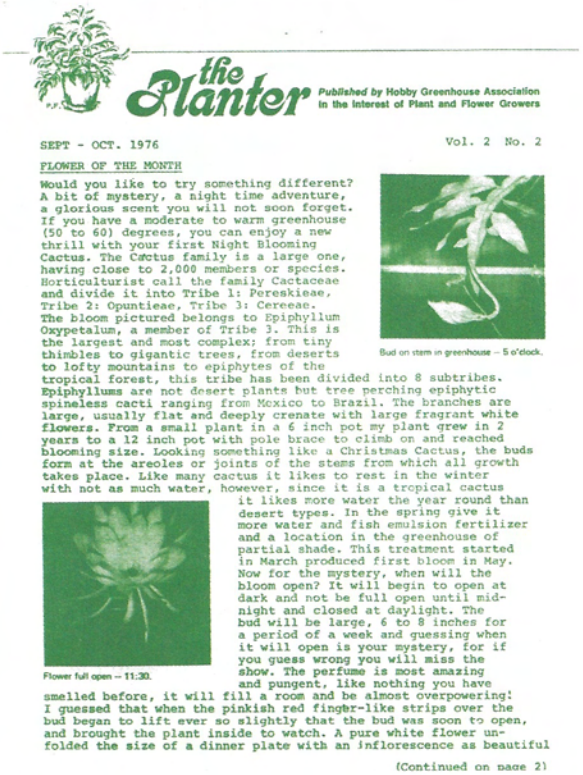
"What's the best heating system in Montana?"

And, so here we were, three people who were looking for answers to other people's problems. Something kept telling us to "forget it," but we were still confident and had stars in our eyes.

Dues kept flooding in. (Did you know that in some states you can't open a bank account for a club without a directors' meeting? How could we have a directors' meeting without directors?) We kept the dues in a coffee can. We spent our own funds at the rate of $30 or $40 a week just on stamps. Remember, stamps were 10 cents in the good old days.

Another problem was how to bring the membership together? There were members in Pennsylvania, Alaska, North Dakota, Georgia, and so on. A newsletter was the answer. The first efforts to produce a publication were pitiful. Then, Don Smyers of Ohio, a horticultural student, offered to be the editor. Great!

We needed a bulk mailing rate at the Post Office to stretch the money. We had no real problem getting the bulk rate, but little did we know that under this rate you must sort your own mail by city, street, state, zip code, stick on flashings, and bundle, tie, weigh, and haul the mail to the post office, load it on a mail truck, and carry it into the back of the post-office. Post office employees don't help with bulk mail.



the Planter Published by Hobby Greenhouse Association in the Interest of Plant and Flower Growers

SEPT - OCT. 1976 Vol. 2 No. 2

FLOWER OF THE MONTH

Would you like to try something different? A bit of mystery, a night time adventure, a glorious scent you will not soon forget. If you have a moderate to warm greenhouse (50 to 60) degrees, you can enjoy a new thrill with your first Night Blooming Cactus. The Cactus family is a large one, having close to 2,000 members or species. Horticulturist call the family Cactaceae and divide it into Tribe 1: Pereskieae, Tribe 2: Opuntieae, Tribe 3: Cereeae. The bloom pictured belongs to Epiphyllum Oxypetalum, a member of Tribe 3. This is the largest and most complex; from tiny thimbles to gigantic trees, from deserts to lofty mountains to epiphytes of the tropical forest, this tribe has been divided into 8 subtribes. Epiphyllums are not desert plants but tree perching epiphytic spineless cacti ranging from Mexico to Brazil. The branches are large, usually flat and deeply crenate with large fragrant white flowers. From a small plant in a 6 inch pot my plant grew in 2 years to a 12 inch pot with pole brace to climb on and reached blooming size. Looking something like a Christmas Cactus, the buds form at the areoles or joints of the stems from which all growth takes place. Like many cactus it likes to rest in the winter with not as much water, however, since it is a tropical cactus it likes more water the year round than desert types. In the spring give it more water and fish emulsion fertilizer and a location in the greenhouse of partial shade. This treatment started in March produced first bloom in May. Now for the mystery, when will the bloom open? It will begin to open at dark and not be full open until midnight and closed at daylight. The bud will be large, 6 to 8 inches for a period of a week and guessing when it will open is your mystery, for if you guess wrong you will miss the show. The perfume is most amazing and pungent, like nothing you have smelled before, it will fill a room and be almost overpowering! I guessed that when the pinkish red finger-like strips over the bud began to lift ever so slightly that the bud was soon to open, and brought the plant inside to watch. A pure white flower unfolded the size of a dinner plate with an inflorescence as beautiful

Bud on stem in greenhouse -- 5 o'clock.

Flower full open -- 11:30.

(Continued on page 2)

A 1976 issue of *The Planter*.

Mary and Lee Sanderson

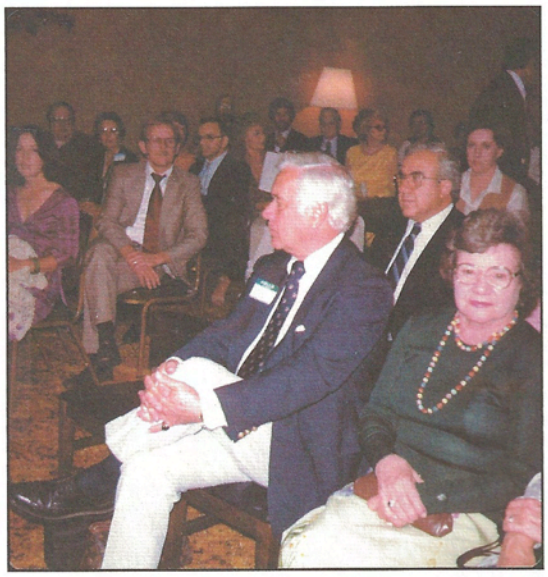
By this time, we had over 1,000 members. One here, two there, some out west, still others in Hawaii, etc. A group of ladies in Connecticut hand addressed *The Planter*. Sometimes we even collated them to save money! We had suddenly become publishers, mail carriers, garden authorities, and more.

We still needed a bank account, and we needed a Board of Directors. How did we elect a Board when nobody knew anyone else? We used the 3-W method: people "Who Were Willing." We were fortunate that excellent people came forward: Zelma Clark, Armack, NY; Bill Huber, Dallas TX; Bill Dettmer III, Quoque, NY; Marshall Westover, Vienna, VA; C.K. Hamilton, St. Louis, MO; Martha Pariott, Wichita, KS; George and Katy Abraham, Naples, NY; John Goff, Snowshoe, PA; and Percy Plumlee, West Lafayette, IN. We also gained advisors: Mary Mancebo, CA; John Newman, MI; Jan and Paul Sayer, WA; Hal Mayer, NV; B.F. Klein, CA and Martin Dairity, AL. These people were experts and helped answer the mail. Aaron Jensen volunteered to be Membership Chairman. A few lines in *Woman's Day* and *Changing Times* brought more new members.

About this time an official-looking letter arrived in P.O. 695, our box in Connecticut. It was dated Moscow, USSR. All the postal workers were waiting for me to pick up the mail. I felt perhaps the FBI and CIA were hiding behind one of the postoffice pillars.

The letter was from an A. Bochener, Director of Central Scientific Agricultural Library, Dept. of International Book Exchange, Moscow. He wanted us to supply him with *The Planter* and all our books at no charge. What a laugh! It was a break from the daily woes, however.

(1)



(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

1. Members attend the HGA Annual Meeting at Longwood Gardens, October 1979.

2. Joe Maritan, President from 1981-1982

3. Oct. 23, 1982 Business meeting. In Chattanooga, TN. Left to right: Tom Manning, Treasurer from 1978-1990; Bob Beyer, Chapter Coordinator, VP 1983; Kay Snapp, Secretary 1983 -1986; Wally Haigh. President from 1982-1886.

4. Al Maynard, "The Old Growineer." Columnist in *The Planter*.

5. Cecil L. Griggs, "The Armchair Gardener," columnist 1981-1988.

A truly ghastly experience occurred when some joker in Florida sold memberships door to door in Tallahassee. He did form a chapter, even had a meeting; however, he pocketed the money. The Tallahassee newspaper and local "finest" caught up with him. He had spent the money (over $800), but nobody had time to go to Florida and press charges. Instead, we provided Planters to all of the people who had paid for one year free of charge to let people know that HGA is an honest organization.

In 1976 Bernard York became President of HGA, and he and Attorney Ken Larson, and I incorporated HGA in Connecticut. We met at the Holiday Inn at the Pittsburgh Airport in Coropolis, PA. Each Director volunteered for a job. Bill Dettmer III secured our non-profit status. Joe Perlat became Secretary and helped answer mail. Derek Fell of Gardenville, PA, became Advertising Director. He furnished us with excellent articles for the newsletter and supplied photos and art work. He designed our invitation to join HGA and took care of much of the printed material.

Another person who came forward was Jerome Wexler, a noted photographer and botanist. His pictures were an insight into what happens as a seed develops, etc. Another garden writer who helped us was D.X. Fenton of Long Island. He involved many newspaper columnists in promoting HGA.

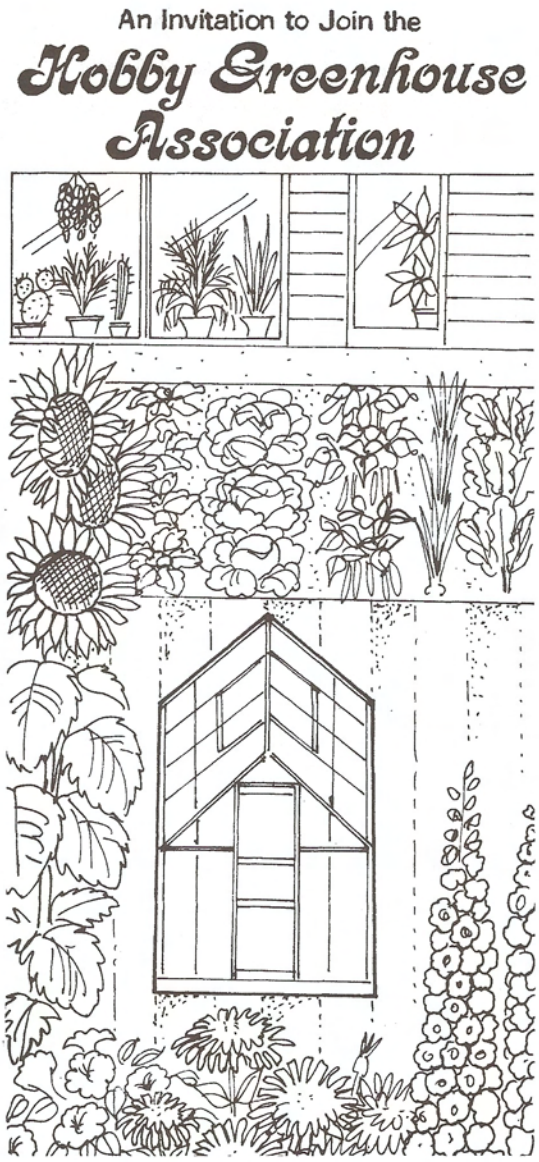
Cash flow was always a problem. Printing *The Planter*, postage, etc., kept us broke. Mr. York raised dues to $5.00. In the meantime, chapters were springing up and growing all over the place. We weren't ready for this stage in our development. We had nothing to offer chapters.

I'm trying to present the highlights of HGA along with some interesting and humorous facts. For instance, one day we had a letter from a member in the far west who wanted to know why the corn and pumpkins in his greenhouse failed to produce fruit! Speaking of pumpkins in a greenhouse, I once ordered some Dutch seed for a greenhouse vine. The flowers were gorgeous, but the vine would have been better for a 2-acre lot.

HGA at this point had members in Japan, Israel, and India. Articles in the *New York Times* were responsible. We were interviewed in New York by *Reader's Digest*; after which, their reporter came to see us in Connecticut. In an endeavor to be helpful, we showed the reporter pit greenhouses, attached greenhouses, conservatories, free-standing greenhouses, etc. *Reader's Digest* gulped down the facts, rewrote the article, and came up with data that was pitiful, giving all the credit to a Long Island dealer who had closed up shop.

Our third Annual Meeting was held at the Holiday Inn River-front, St. Louis. MO. Dr. C. K. Hamilton was host and Roslynn Littmann assisted him. Martha Parriott of Kansas, who was then Vice President, presided. People attended from Arkansas. Kansas, Utah, Texas, Florida. Missouri, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut.

At the meeting Derek Fell, noted garden writer, was



elected President; D.X. Fenton, a garden writer from New York, Vice President; Martha Parriott, Corresponding Secretary; Roslynn Littermann, Recording Secretary; and Thomas Manning[3], Treasurer.

Those present felt that our youthful organization needed publicity. We made plans to spread the word about our organizations aims and our desire to be of help to the novice gardener. We hoped to achieve a diversified membership who would correspond with each other, tell

B.Francis Klein, columnist and broadcaster. Writer of the nationally syndicated "Naturally Yours" column and articles in HGA magazines from 1978-1986.

Join ALL OVER THE U.S.A. & CANADA
Hobby Greenhouse Association $2 year
Corte Madera, Calif. 94925 — Wallingford, Conn. 06492

1975 Bumper Sticker

of successes and failure, and contribute to *The Planter*. Derek Fell assumed the task of publicizing our organization with plenty of know-how. Jackie Wisby of Kansas took over the Round Robins, and Joyce Smith became Membership Chairman.

(It should be noted that Joyce has been a staunch supporter and worker for HGA since its inception. Each of us owes Joyce a deep debt of thanks.)

Bill Martin of Colorado became editor of *The Planter*. His vast experience was a boon to everyone. People came forward to help, and Bruce Langmuir, John Newman, B.F. Klein, and Sue Ridgley added their abilities to *The Planter*. Articles came in from Anita Conners, Texas, and Elda Having, garden writer, N. Carolina. Carol Moch expanded her popular column. In 1979 "Hints from the Northwest" by Mrs. Paul Sayre appeared. Here again, we had a professional giving her help to others. Judy Oliver sent in articles with pictures that assisted many, and Rachel Major added her two cents. She, too, was an expert in her field, orchids. One problem remained — miles. Material had to be sent to Bill for editing and selection, then back to me in Connecticut to be printed and mailed.

We added new services and resources. Rose O'Kavage took on the Swap Shop. We added a slide presentation of beautiful Shaw Gardens of St. Louis to our resource materials, and Mary Jo Weale of Tallahassee donated slides of "how she erected her most interesting greenhouse." We had hoped to publish a book of flower recipes. Many were contributed but never enough for a booklet, so some were printed in *The Planter*.

Joe Maritan[2] of Kansas offered to publish a membership directory at his expense, which was certainly a wonderful gesture. It brought in many new members. Unfortunately, some of these joined just to get the directory and did not renew. The directory was a high point in our history. Joe, we sure thank you!

The following July, registration forms appeared in *The Planter* for the Annual Meeting to be held Oct. 6 and 7 at Longwood Gardens, Kennet Square, PA. The meeting was well attended. Members from Utah, New Mexico, and Canada came as well as those from eastern states. Those who attended will never forget the experience — the program, the gardens, and the mushroom burgers. (Kennet Square is mushroom capital of the world.)

All officers were re-elected at this Annual Meeting. It was voted to raise dues to $7.50 to help cover ever-increasing costs of postage and printing. Then, as now, money was needed and donations to the organization were received with much gratitude.

Pat Sisk became the proprietor of the Swap Shop. She added her talents to the pages of *The Planter* with articles on flower arranging. Ben Hardy of California, an orchid grower, began his contributions to the magazine. David White offered to help us with tips on vegetable growing (and also agreed to host the next Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh). Again we had experts giving members free help.

The meeting held in Pittsburgh was presided over by Derek Fell. Joe Maritan[2] was elected President; Claire Blake and D.X. Fenton, Vice Presidents; Tom Man-ning[3], Treasurer; and Bob Beyer[3], Chapter Coordinator. Claire Blake accepted the responsibility of rewriting the bylaws. When they were approved, a copy was mailed to each person as they renewed membership.

At this time Bob Beyer began a comprehensive program to bring the chapters and the national association closer. Many chapters were accepting members who did not belong to the national organization. A better relationship was needed to make HGA a solid organization. Bob knew this and did his best to make it a reality. I believe he was spanning the gap.

About this time, a fine gentleman from Boise. Idaho, began "The Armchair Gardener." Bless Cecil Griggs[5] and his words of wisdom gleaned from his 75 years and more of experience.

The next Annual Meeting was held in Kansas City, KS. The meeting featured a seminar on all aspects of greenhouse gardening and again was conducted by trained people. It was a tremendous undertaking and Joe Maritan and the Johnson Co. Chapter indeed deserve credit for its success.

Joyce Smith was appointed to the Board of Directors. Joe Maritan was re-elected President, with Wallace Haigh[3] and Bob Beyer[3], Vice Presidents; Kay Snapp[3], Secretary: and Tom Manning[3] continuing as Treasurer. (I feel that I should point out that Tom Manning has been responsible for mailing labels and a complete computer listing of the membership for some years.)

It should be noted here that all secretarial notes previous to this Annual Meeting were lost with the untimely death of both Roslynn Littmann and her husband in the Grand Hotel fire. The loss of these two wonderful

HGA

Here is our new emblem!

Congratulations to Larry Eckinger of Mich., for his entry which was chosen to be the best all around insignia.

Hobby Greenhouse Association wishes to thank all those who took the time to mail in their suggestions and ideas. The committee found it difficult to select from the fine entries. Each was unique and had great merit.

A big hand also to the Emblem Committee under the guidance of Miss Joan Eastman Bennett who gave freely of her time and talents, and to Dr. Mary Jo Weale, Mr. Ted Marston, Dr. M. Percy Plumlee, Mr. Howard Cross, Mr. Charles Fischer and Mr. F. Gordon Foster.

HGA is now open to suggestions from you the members. How would you like to see this emblem used? Would you like arm patches, lapel pins, Note paper, charms or what have you. Send in your suggestions today.

people was a tragedy to us all and a devastation to me. Rory was member Number Three. Both she and Elias contributed so much to HGA and their fellow man.

In addition to those already mentioned, several other people have donated so much time, effort, and money to HGA that I feel they should be given credit: Jim Soubrette, Bill Dettmer Ill, Don Brodmann, Doc & Katy Abraham, Joe Perlat, Marshall Westover, Gene Crane, Dr. Richard Duke, Bill Huber, J. Benton Jones, Jr., Ken Larsen, Bill Martin, Peg Spaete and many, many more. None of the people that I have mentioned in this history ever asked anything for themselves — they gave because they love growing and each of you.

On August 31, 1981, the Sandersons moved to Atascocita, TX. At this time Houston was boomtown U.S.A. Costs had skyrocketed. The cost of printing *The Planter* was $800 more than it had been in Connecticut. In the moving, several articles were misplaced causing much distress.

Ever move 1700 miles in August with a car loaded with plants, files, and a collie dog, and with the sun in your eyes all the way? The moving van with the rest of our belongings hit California first and arrived in Texas in October. Some items were never located.

After moving to the southwest, we realized why HGA did not keep its members in this area. We hadn't met their needs. Growing in this region as well as in the deep south and Great Plains is different — one item alone is the intensity of the sun, another is the different day lengths. We tried to start a chapter in Houston, but life here is unique: traffic, job patterns, youth, hard work, and intense competition. People spend weekends catching up on what they miss all week.

In 1982 Joe Maritan's job required more traveling and he felt he could not do justice to HGA, so he turned the President's job over to Wally Haigh. Wally's wife Tassie Haigh offered seed to the membership. She discovered how nice HGA members are as they corresponded with her. It was a happy experience.

Peg Spaete, Round Robin Director, 1982-1990

Our next Annual Meeting was in Chattanooga with Bob Beyer (3) as host. All officers were again re-elected. We discovered a fact of life — jobs are more demanding today than ever before. Everyone is too busy. Peg Spate took over the Robins, Resource Collection, and the Travel Display. Mrs. Rufus Holliday of Nashville Chapter took on publicity. Gene Crane had built a great chapter in Nashville.

HGA suffered another tremendous loss when "The Old Growineer"[4] passed on. Al gave so much to us all. He was totally paralyzed except for two fingers. It took him hour after painful hour to give us the articles. He was a man of talent, character, and love of flowers, life, and each member. How fortunate we were to know Al Maynard.

In 1983 I found it impossible to continue with *The Planter*; we had a health problem! A New York garden writer agreed to take on publishing the magazine. Unfortunately for HGA he did not understand the needs of our organization and membership. The experiment was a disaster.

In 1986 Wally Haigh resigned and a new Executive Board took over headed by Alan Craig as President. Jan Hale volunteered to become Editor of a new membership magazine called *HOBBY GREENHOUSE* (since rights to the name *"The Planter"* had been relinquished). Alan worked very hard to contact former members, increase the membership, publicize the organization, and fill vacancies on the Board of Directors.

In January 1987, Catherine Russell of Maryland was elected President, with Gene Crane as Vice President. Tom Manning continued as Treasurer.

Fran Meltzer, who has worked tirelessly this past year doing publicity and contacting advertisers, is now the Membership Chairman, succeeding Joyce Smith who has resigned but will remain on the Board. Jan Sayer is the new Secretary of HGA. They all deserve our support and help. They are doing an excellent job, but it cannot be done alone. An association is all its members, every one is important — you and you and you! Let's all get behind our new President and Board. Offer to help. Only you can make HGA grow and succeed. Only you can make *HOBBY GREENHOUSE* the best magazine. Only you can love plants enough to share this love with others.

How can you help HGA grow? Each of you have a home-town paper. They print letters to the editor. Write a letter to your editor inviting others to join HGA. In the beginning two people — yes only two — wrote letters to an editor and over 3.000 people joined HGA. There are tens of thousands of greenhouses in the U.S.A. Let's get all these people helping each other. You can swap ideas, hints, successes, failures, seeds, and the best thing of all, lasting friendships. I made friends I'll never forget.

When I suffered my husband's loss, I knew HGA members never forget. HGA members are the world's finest people — so invite your friends, your neighbors, and your townsfolk. Soon you'll have a chapter in your town. You will have the pleasure and fun the people in Nashville, Long Island, Memphis, Boston, Kansas City, and elsewhere have.

Join an adventure with HGA. ⌂

[Mary Sanderson was the publisher of HGA's magazine, *The Planter*, from the summer of 1975 to the end of 1982]

To be continued in the Fall 2006 issue