

History of ABS SoCal

Summarized by Betty Shor August 2005 mostly from chapter newsletters

Richard Haubrich founded the American Bamboo Society (ABS) in 1979, in association with a few other bamboo enthusiasts (Shor, Betty N., Aug. 1993, How ABS Began, American Bamboo Society Newsletter, vol. 14, no. 4, p. 1-3.) Haubrich was then a professor of geophysics at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in La Jolla, and became interested in bamboo just by enjoying the "graceful look and its year-round green leaves" of *Phyllostachys aurea* in the garden of the house he and his family were renting. Because he liked plants, he agreed to serve on the board of directors of Quail Gardens, and he urged that park (then owned and operated by the County of San Diego) to let him plant bamboo plants there. (In 1979 only two bamboo plants were in the ground at Quail: one *Bambusa oldhamii*, not very big, and a clump of *Bambusa multiplex* 'Alphonse Karr'.) The group agreed. Haubrich also obtained a permit from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to import bamboos. He, Bill Teague, Gilbert Voss (then botanist for the county at Quail Gardens), and Gerald Bol (northern California) collected bamboo plants in Mexico and Costa Rica on different trips.

Haubrich became acquainted with others who enjoyed bamboo, and this led to the formation of chapters of ABS elsewhere in the country. The Northern California chapter was founded in January 1982, the Caribbean (now the Florida/Caribbean) chapter was founded in October 1983, and the Northeast Chapter was founded in May 1989. Haubrich moved to Springville (central California) in late 1988, and it suddenly dawned on ABS members in southern California that they were orphans. Ken Brennecke (a computer programmer who is especially keen on bamboo), who had been one of the founders of ABS with Haubrich, called a meeting for October 1989. Eight people attended (number given in newsletter of Dec. 1990, but not names), and the Southern California Chapter was established the next month. (Other chapters have followed; there are now 10 chapters in the U.S. and two more trying to obtain enough members to be official.) The first officers were: Ken Brennecke, Chairman; Ron Kloetzli, Vice-Chairman; Shirley Yarnell, Secretary/Treasurer; George Shor, Newsletter Editor. Kloetzli enjoyed bamboo plants in his garden; he moved away from the area after a few years, but has returned. Shirley Yarnell was another backyard gardener who had a number of different bamboos, some quite large, in her property in Olivenhain; she moved away a few years later. George Shor was a professor of geophysics at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, whose son Don had a full retail nursery in Davis and began looking for bamboo suppliers, and so George and Betty got interested in bamboo. Shirley Yarnell asked to drop the treasurer commitment in February 1990, and George Shor agreed to do it. By March 1990, after a plant sale, the chapter had 39 members. At the end of its first year the chapter boasted 74 paid members, many of whom resulted from a feature article in the *Los Angeles Times* during the year. The chapter was incorporated in 1991, as a non-profit organization. Sometimes abbreviated to SCC for Southern California Chapter, the group more often calls itself ABS SoCal.

Sale of bamboo plants was a feature of the chapter right away. It promptly participated in the semi-annual plant sale of Quail Gardens on December 3, which ABS had been doing for several years. The March 10, 1990 sale was announced as "The first ABS/SCC bamboo sale and auction," but it was actually a continuation of sales held by ABS alone earlier. Money received by the chapter from these sales was kept in a bamboo account at

Quail Gardens. Sales were held in March (changed to April in 1996 because rain disrupted some March sales) and in September, and were often very well attended. At the chapter sales 70% of the sale price (after deduction of sales tax) is paid to the grower, the rest to the chapter.

From the beginning the chapter worked fairly closely with Quail Gardens, which was operated by the Quail Botanical Gardens Foundation from 1993, when county funds were discontinued. The board of Quail over the years allowed the chapter to use some space in the propagation house, agreed to let the chapter preempt the former tennis court for a reference collection of bamboos, and let the chapter build two small quarantine houses below the Ecke Building. The two organizations — ABS SoCal and Quail BGF — planned and planted the present bamboo garden in 1996, in an area that was previously nearly vacant. Quail receives income from the sale of bamboos that have been derived from plants belonging to the Foundation and from a percentage of all sales at the two annual chapter sales. Quail provides the water for all the plants there, including the bamboo reference collection, and they have provided potting soil at times. At various times a member of the bamboo group has been designated a liaison to Quail, and sometimes that person has been invited to attend Quail's board meetings. (Note: the Quail board chose to change its meeting times to a weekday evening some years ago, and, although open to Quail members, the meetings are rarely attended by any people other than the board.)

An early project of ABS SoCal was to maintain what they first called the "living library" and now call the Reference Collection. There was concern by some members that Quail Gardens might not be a suitable location indefinitely for the chapter's reference plants. How long would Quail let the plants be there? Would they consider that the plants belonged to them? (Note: any plants put into the ground at Quail belong to that organization, but the Reference Collection is in boxes or pots.) So the collection was first placed on the property of member Gary Stinson in Menifee (Riverside County). The group met at Gary's a number of times in its early years. He raised lovebirds in tremendous numbers in well-run nesting houses, and he very much appreciated bamboo just for its fine appearance. He participated in many work parties, was good at propagating, and was especially good at installing automatic watering systems. Stinson created a list of the plants in the chapter collection, which was published in the Dec. 1992 issue of the newsletter. (George Shor later maintained this list, but not perfectly.) Gary moved to Hemet in later years and no longer attended chapter activities.

Another early program (Feb. 1992) was establishing a library of publications about bamboo. A small section was allowed for the chapter to place its books in the library room of Quail Gardens, and the collection has been there every since (but has outgrown the space). Chapter funds have been used to buy some books; George and Betty Shor have donated some books, and George gave to the library the newsletters of other bamboo organizations that he received in exchange for the chapter newsletter. Shirley Yarnell was in charge of the library from May 1992, and when she moved away from the area in 1993, Michael Martin (who was a botanist at Quail) offered to take over. When Mike moved to Hawaii, Richard Neufeld tended the library. He disappeared, and at some time Betty Shor took over. She put a list of the books and some other library items on her computer.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture permit for collecting bamboo was in Haubrich's name before the founding the ABS SoCal, then was held by Gil Voss, who was the botanist at Quail Gardens until he moved to northern California. The permit in 1992 was renewed in George Shor's name for the chapter. The first quarantine space was provided by Quail Gardens before the chapter's founding, in one of their greenhouses near the propagation area. As soon as it came into being, the chapter began improvements in the greenhouse area: new benches, an overhead mist system, and individual drip lines.

In late 1991 Richard Neufeld traveled to Thailand and brought in many bamboo plants; he was a keen enthusiast of bamboo, who had begun a bamboo (and ornamental grasses) nursery in the area. He became especially adept at creating new plants by dividing tiny rooted branchlets of certain bamboos. He spent a great deal of time in the chapter's collection — a couple of times a week, sometimes more. He divided plants, and he watered everything regularly. A watering system was installed for the reference plants, but Richard preferred hand-watering, because he was aware that plants often get somehow off the watering system. He used the propagation area extensively for starting very small divisions, and he was fairly good at labeling everything.

In the 1990s Quail Gardens was working along the lines of phytogeographic gardens; that is, all the plants in an area were to be from the same part of the world. It was broadly assumed that bamboo plants that the chapter put into the ground would go primarily in the Asian garden. Some bamboo plants scattered within Quail had to be removed from certain areas that were designated for other specific regions, which was done primarily by members of the chapter in work parties. Such work parties usually provided a number of free plants to the workers, so they were quite well attended.

In those early days the chapter maintained divisions of plants in the propagation house and adjoining area of Quail Gardens, until it nearly overwhelmed the site (somewhat to the dismay of Quail's botanists and volunteers). There is where were kept the newly planted divisions from bamboos that belonged to the chapter, which were propagated for the two annual sales. Some of the chapter's reference plants were in the same location, and there was concern that reference plants would accidentally be put out for sale. By the latter part of 1993 the chapter was told by Quail that it could use the tennis court toward the north end of the property temporarily (but obviously for quite a while) for its Reference Collection. This became a major project: building a plastic-covered shade house (16 feet high) and laying out several rows for 24-inch boxes. Fortunately, one member, David Morse, was quite tall, and he did most of the fastening at the highest corners (in 1995 he was moved out of the area to Florida by his Navy unit, to be sorely missed by the local bambuseros).

A summary of the Feb. 1994 work illustrates the determination and competence of the chapter members:

"The February work parties were more for brown thumbs than green. On February 12, a small group convened for a morning of breaking concrete and digging holes in the old tennis court at Quail, for footings for our new shade house. On February 19, 11 of us including new members Timothy Keenan and Jon Updike, mixed concrete and set the tie-downs. There was a bit of miscalculation involved in the amount of concrete needed; Ken Brennecke went off and got as much more as he could bring in a half-ton pickup, but we

still ended with 1.5 holes unfilled. We also underestimated the time a bit; the job took from 10 AM to 3 PM. The time required to bail water out of the holes was not a major part of the delay, and the weather did cooperate: the rain stopped an hour before we started work. ..."

By the latter part of 1993 the chapter decided to begin providing plants to the Gift Shop at Quail. The trustees of the Gardens had asked if the chapter could provide the salary of one of their gardeners one day a week, to compensate for the cost of maintaining the bamboo plants there. So a fund was set up, into which was placed the income from selling bamboo plants at the Gift Shop. That was the intent, but it turned out not to be handled by Quail as efficiently as expected. But income was produced for the Gardens. In addition, Quail was receiving a percentage from the sale of plants at the two annual sales.

In July 1993 a meeting was held at the home of member June Linville in Costa Mesa. She had a remarkably fine collection of artistic bamboo objects, from Japan, China, the Philippines, etc. She had acquired some in those countries and had obtained more from dealers in imported art pieces. It led to an interest in using bamboo and displaying its art, so the next year the July meeting was scheduled at Quail as a craft display. A staff member at Quail helped with publicity, which resulted in a quite large turnout. June brought a number of her items, Linda Teague brought others, and Douglas Lingen came from Nevada City to demonstrate bamboo carpentry. Lingen's teaching extended to a class for a dozen people on Sunday, after the all-day Saturday demonstration. This became an annual feature for the July meeting through 2003: Lingen demonstrating and teaching about building with bamboo (except that his partner Reed Hamilton gave the class in 2002). Some members displayed art objects at this event for a few years. The event of July 1996 had a display of art and craft items and was attended by about 150 people, but the numbers were not that high in later years. George Shor enthusiastically added to the annual event in 2001 by arranging for music-composer Douglas Ewart to present his own music on his own hand-built bamboo instruments. Ewart returned each July for two more years. By then, attendance by the general public was not large, perhaps because publicity was not adequate.

In July 1994 *Sunset Magazine* had a feature article on bamboo, followed by a letter to the editor in the September issue in which George Shor provided information on the national and local bamboo society. His address was there, and the letters started pouring in; George and Betty Shor answered more than 500 letters (565 by Nov.) before the deluge slowed to a trickle after some months. To help on handling it, they wrote half a dozen one-page information sheets (i.e., how to remove bamboo, the difference between runners and clumpers, etc.), because many of the letters asked similar questions. The whole thing resulted in a number of new members for the chapter.

A summary in the January 1995 newsletter tells about a chapter meeting in November that illustrates how much work got done by members:

"Twelve members showed up at 10 AM, and most of them stayed and worked until nearly 3 PM. ...[participants listed] After a brief business meeting, people started on a very long work list. Seedlings that had come out of quarantine were up-potted. More bamboos were found for installation in the Reference Collection. Additional water lines

were created and installed. New culms were cut and put into the hot bed in the Propagation house to root. Junk and trash of all kinds were removed from the nursery. New plants were potted in the new shade house of the reference collection, and the area was swept clean. . . . Small runners that had been missed in last summer's anti-mite campaign were checked and either put back into stock or trashed."

The quarantine facility at Quail needed to be replaced, and the chapter decided in May 1995 to go ahead with a new pre-fabricated kit, at a cost of about \$3,000. By agreement with Quail, this was located in an out-of-the-way spot below the Ecke Building (from which water and power was available). The unit arrived June 1 — consisting of all needed parts for a 7'x8' greenhouse with an 8' extension — and a group of people worked for some days to get it set up on concrete blocks. Shor said: "There were the usual problems with any kit. While we made 3 copies of the instructions, sometimes people nailed first and checked later. Many small parts (nuts, bolts, and roofing nails) were dropped or walked away so we assigned Albert Hwang [junior-high age] to pick up lost parts. He found a lot." The group knew that there was a hurry, because some plants were about ready to arrive — and, in fact, on June 27 a phone call came that plants from Bali, Indonesia were at the Los Angeles airport. Ones from Japan arrived on July 8; a shipment from Madagascar arrived July 10. The chapter board decided to go ahead with a second greenhouse adjacent to the new one. Gary Stinson put this one together, to the same plan as the first one. The intent was to make sure that a problem, such as an infestation, in one greenhouse did not spread to other plants.

On Nov. 30, 1995, the chapter received its order of plants from China. They had selected about a hundred kinds to order from a grower there; Richard Neufeld and Ken Brennecke combined their orders with the chapter order, so the entire amount was considerable. Members of the chapter heeled in the dozens of plants and then potted them up over the course of a week. The last shipment of that year arrived on December 1: seeds of three species of *Dendrocalamus* from India. By that time, three greenhouses were full. While there was some loss among the plants from China, quite a lot did survive and come out of quarantine a year later (listed in Jan. 1998 newsletter).

In early 1995 Julian Duval became executive director at Quail, and he promptly began taking an interest in the bamboo plantings in the garden. During that year he urged that a bamboo display garden be planted, rather than continuing with the phytogeographic regions. Money was available in the bamboo fund that had been established from sales of bamboo plants at the chapter's sales and at the Gift Shop. Additional funds came from the SoCal Chapter, which also donated plants and many hours of volunteer time. Plans were worked out by Mike Richter (then Director of Horticulture at Quail), and Bill Teague of the chapter (and a volunteer at Quail) for the selected site. During 1996, "a donation of barrier materials by Deep Root, and donations of irrigation materials by Toro Manufacturing, Rain Bird, Dura Plastic, and Hunter Irrigation have offset more than \$5300 of expense," noted Duval (July 1996), who also wrote, "Edna Pulver, a good friend of Quail Botanical Gardens, graciously offered to sponsor a sculpture for QBG by James Hubbell, world-renowned artist." This distinctive San Diego artist/sculptor provided his sculpture, contributed to the design of the garden, and helped acquire some of the stone for the "hardscape." Chapter members installed barrier cloth around the existing clumps of *Phyllostachys vivax* and *Ph. makinoi*. Then they planted bamboos, all with hardware cloth beneath them to discourage gophers (it worked). Within a couple of

weeks they put 48 different kinds of bamboos into the ground, about 70 individual plants. All this was up against a deadline, because the annual meeting of ABS was scheduled at Quail in October of 1996. The garden was a great success for that meeting, and has been ever since. It was officially dedicated by Quail in November 1996.

At various times the chapter tried to negotiate a specific memorandum of understanding with Quail Gardens. This was under discussion in the early years of the chapter, and again was being talked about in early 1998. A final draft was agreed to by the chapter, but it was never formally accepted by the board of Quail. A full copy of the draft is in the May 1998 newsletter, p. 5. In the meantime, the chapter also tried to establish a procedure with the "Bamboo Fund" at Quail (summarized in March 2000, p. 3), which accumulated from chapter sales and Gift Shop sales.

Ken Brennecke had expressed interest from the beginning in establishing a research facility for bamboo. Board discussion of this came up in August 1993; in Sept. 1994 Brennecke reported on trying to work out an agreement with Quail for a joint research facility, but he abandoned that the next year. In February 1995 Brennecke had a professional fund-raiser talk to the board, but action was deferred. In April 1997, at Brennecke's urging, the board agreed to set aside 20% of the chapter's annual income into a reserve fund, for eventual use for research.

During the 1990s work parties accomplished a lot, but that somewhat let up when the need was mostly maintenance instead of creating something new. An example is a plea in the March 1998 newsletter, under the headline HELP HELP HELP:

"At our January meeting, it was recommended that we concentrate on work parties; taking care of our reference collection which is desperately in need of weeding, re-potting, fertilizing, and dividing, propagating bamboos in the ground at Quail Gardens, and generally increasing the supply of bamboos for our sales. We have enough work for 100 people to do. ... Even one helper would be great. We will give one pole or a small propagule to each person who comes to a work party. ..."

Richard Neufeld disappeared from the area for a while. Twice owners of land he was renting for his nursery had made him move because they had other plans for the land. Then members of the chapter heard that he had gone to work as a horticulturist at one of the resorts in Las Vegas. His absence from southern California left a gap in maintaining the chapter collection. Jim Rehor stepped into this spot, clearly stating that he wanted to obtain a large number of different bamboos. Neufeld reappeared briefly in 1999, then finally members of the chapter learned that Richard Neufeld died on 17 December 2003, at the age of 53 (obituary is in Feb. 2004 newsletter).

A new person who showed up was Eric Gigler, who during 1999 created a map showing the location of all bamboos at Quail Gardens. Employed nearby, he enjoyed spending his lunch hour among the bamboos. He took an old hand-drawn map that had most of the bamboos on it, and he created a new map on his computer of all the bamboos that he could find. This was immediately useful to the chapter and to Quail Gardens. Gigler also created a poster for the chapter sale of April 2000, which was well distributed, especially by chapter member Carol Jean Wolcott, who was active in Master Gardeners. At Brennecke's request, Gigler then drew number of examples of a logo for

the chapter, illustrated in the July 2000 newsletter, p. 8 (one of which was finally selected in 2005!).

A point of contention in the late 1990s was the acquisition of new plants from divisions made at Quail. People who helped when plants were being divided often took pieces home; Jim Rehor, who spent a great deal of time then maintaining and creating divisions from the reference collection, conferred with George Shor, and they adopted the system of having members pay a reasonable price at the Gift Shop for the acquisitions that were taken away. Some members considered that pieces of chapter plants were simply being stolen this way. It led to hard feelings. Brennecke settled down to create a voucher system (summarized in the newsletter of September 2000, p. 8), by which one could earn plants by helping at work parties. It was more complex than others were willing to accept, and so was dropped from discussion.

Brennecke's determination to establish a research facility came to a head in late 2000. He had proposed that he negotiate with an unidentified individual who might donate a fairly large piece of land to the Southern California Chapter. There the chapter could hold its own collection, keep its library, and build a research facility to operate. Others thought that the chapter could not afford to maintain such a program. Brennecke was voted down and then was not re-elected to the chapter board. (One meeting was confounded by not having a quorum, but a meeting the next month confirmed the election; minutes are in the November 2000 newsletter) The board then passed the following motion: "The Southern California Chapter wishes to remain based at Quail Gardens for the foreseeable future." This action was forwarded to the Quail Botanical Gardens Foundation.

The board at the October 2000 meeting also accepted Jim Rehor's "Rules for propagation", which allowed anyone who participated in a scheduled work party to receive a bamboo (rules are given in the November 2000 newsletter, p. 3). Rehor stepped down as curator of the Reference Collection of his own volition in 2001; at first Bill Wyman, Christian Lydick and Paul Stefanson jointly volunteered to tend the collection. In December 2001 a work party inventoried about two-thirds of the collection and created a spreadsheet. At a meeting in January 2003 Adam Derrickson volunteered to check the collection regularly.

In November 2003 George and Betty Shor resigned from their several commitments to the chapter, mostly for reasons of health and partly for burnout after many years. The posts they quit were: newsletter editor and mailing (G), membership (G & B), librarian (B), treasurer (G, including handling taxes and sales finances); holder of import permit (G). (George did not resign from his position on the board at this time.) George had put out the newsletter and maintained the membership records since Nov. 1989, and had served as treasurer since February 1990. Considering that neither of the Shors has been as active in ABS SoCal since that time, I think that this is a good place to end this summary, except for one final item:

Hosting the ABS national meeting in 2004 was foisted upon the Southern California Chapter by a couple of members of the national organization and, by officers in ABS, was designated to be held at Huntington Gardens in San Marino. The chapter board was reluctant at first, but at its January 2003 meeting it agreed to accept the commitment. This

required a great deal of effort from chapter members Bob and Vicki Dimattia, JoAnne Wyman, and others for the next year.

Presidents

The President of the Southern California Chapter is chosen by the board each year right after the annual meeting, from among their members.

Nov. 1989 – Sept. 1995: Ken Brennecke

Sept. 1995 - Sept. 1996: Charles Slezak

Sept. 1996 – Sept. 1997: Richard Neufeld

Sept. 1997 – Sept. 2000: Ken Brennecke

Sept. 2000 – Sept. 2003: Ralph Evans

Sept. 2003 (interim president) – Jan. 2004: Theo Smith

Sept. 2004 – July 2005: Theo Smith

Editorial Comment

An advantage to the Southern California Chapter was the professionalism of certain of its earliest members. Gil Voss was a trained botanist, competent in taxonomy and in horticulture; Ken Brennecke was a physical scientist, but he had a keen interest in the taxonomy and in adhering to correct botanical procedures; Kiyoshi Yoshida, plant grower, was very well qualified in growing and propagating bamboo; George Shor, another physical scientist, wrote readily and accurately as editor of the newsletter, and Betty Shor was a determined proofreader, who also had background in taxonomic rules. These people were more than casual backyard gardeners.