

Department notes

GEORGE H. SPALDING

AT NINE o'clock every morning the telephone would start ringing in the small office at the rear of the Arboretum library building. It would signal the start of George Spalding's twice-a-day telephone service: two-hour periods in the morning and afternoon given over to taking calls from homeowners seeking guidance, advice, or just reassurance on the buying, planting, or care of a plant. This was George Spalding's daily routine for the past seven of his 25-year-association with the Arboretum. It was no wonder that to thousands of amateur and even some professional gardeners he was the Arboretum's familiar botanical information consultant, the person to call with the same confidence they would call "Information" or "Weather." And if the calls got stacked up, as they frequently did, people could come to see him personally, outside those morning and afternoon telephone hours. One reason the calls would get stacked up was because of George Spalding's personality. Always a plantsman, his concern that a horticultural or botanical question or problem be satisfactorily resolved would prompt him to pursue the matter beyond a yes or no response to whatever point he felt would leave the caller with the feeling of having found direction and resolution. To the serious gardener these are important

considerations as George Spalding knew.

Two other facets of George Spalding's long career with the Arboretum were his contributions to this publication and his intimate knowledge of Arboretum history, knowledge that found expression in *A History of LASCA, The First Twenty-Five Years*, a book he completed early last year that was published just in time for the gala anniversary dinner of last February. That book and articles in the June and December issues of *Lasca Leaves* were the last he would write. George Spalding died on January 12, the result of a lung infection flaring up from a long history of respiratory ailment. His passing was hard to believe. It seemed unreal not to encounter his friendly, jovial figure around the grounds. Four days later a memorial service was held in the Arboretum lecture hall with members of the staff and many of his friends in attendance. It had been arranged with two close relatives: his sister, Mrs. Elliott Darrow, and his brother, Delman, both of whom had flown out from the East. The service began with a prayer by Dr. Holmes Ambrose of the local Church of the Shepherd, followed by a moment of silent prayer. Then, Dr. Ambrose sang a hymn that Mrs. Darrow had selected. Arboretum director, Francis Ching, followed with a few remarks and the reading of a poem. Dan Martel, staff plant recorder who had been hired by George Spalding 18 years earlier, played a cello solo in his memory. Two old friends and co-members of a longtime informal group of plantsmen called The Leaf Eaters, Elmer Lorenz and Philip Chandler, spoke fondly of their friend. Then, after a hymn and benediction by Dr. Holmes, the service ended. Mrs. Darrow and Delman Spalding adjourned to the Arboretum's Seminar Room where they met George's friends and co-workers. In unfamiliar surroundings, and under sad circumstances, they talked graciously with



George H. Spalding

each person and one could see and appreciate the effort they were making to help everyone carry the loss more easily.

George Spalding was a bachelor at the time of his death and it would be no unkindness to any of his friends to say that his closest companion was his dog, Maggie. Robert Erny, a part-time Arboretum tour guide who had shared his home for a period, and who had visited him in the hospital the night before he died, stayed at his apartment for a few days so the dog would not be uneasy. Maggie has now found a home with two of George's friends, Elmer and Hilda Sade-man who works in the California Arboretum Foundation office. George would have been pleased with this arrangement.

Elmer J. Lorenz, one of George Spalding's oldest friends, gave the following eulogy at the memorial service on January 16.

"I consider it a real privilege and great honor to have been asked to participate in this memorial service for George. However, at a moment such as this, what does one say about such a close and treasured friendship as I had with George?

How can I express the real feeling of loss? Words are merely utterances that we make—they are without emotion or feeling and cannot possibly express what one really feels within. I know that the few words I speak here today will fall far short of expressing the real friendship I had with George and its joy and meaning to me.

"We all knew George in different ways, some as members of his family, others as co-workers, those who had business dealings with him, and some as friends with mutual interests or just friends that George loved to chat with. So, no matter what our relationship with him was, we all had one thing in common and that was a great love and fondness for George, and we all treasured his friendship.

"Taking the Book of Time and thumbing back through the years to almost 23 years ago, I still can recall very vividly my first meeting with George in the pink house on Old Ranch Road that served as the office for the Arboretum. My wife and I had often heard and read about the 'new' Arboretum and decided one beautiful California spring day to visit it. At

this first meeting with George we learned that he was the director, horticulturist, propagator, publicity man and in charge of any other duty that might happen to come along at any given moment. After talking with George for a while about the new Arboretum, we tramped over the grounds of the still undeveloped area. It was then I first realized George's vast knowledge of plant materials and his great enthusiasm for the future of the Arboretum. He was vitally interested in the dual role the Arboretum should play in the botanical and horticultural world.

"As time passed, our bonds of friendship became stronger and I realized more and more that the Arboretum was much loved by George; it was a vital part of his whole being. He gave much of himself to these beautiful grounds. George has served more years than any other employee. Probably a great many people do not know that he planted many of the trees that now contribute to the beauty of the Arboretum grounds. George was widely respected as an authority in the horticultural world. His knowledge of varied plant materials and their requirements was constantly drawn upon by amateur and professional gardeners alike.

"George's horticultural background included training at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture and the New York Botanic Garden. His knowledge was further increased by his employment at the famous Wayside Gardens in Mentor, Ohio, and the well known, but no longer existing, Paul J. Howard's and Eastgate Nurseries. He served many years on the Board of Directors of the Southern California Horticultural Institute and was its president for two years. George was also active in the Iris and Geranium Societies. However, his favorite group was one called the 'Leaf Eaters'—a group of six who gather monthly at various member's homes for dinner and talking 'shop' — that's plants, of course! —

"George contributed much to the horticultural world through his lectures and writings, his last being, 'A History of The Los Angeles State and County Arboretum—The First Twenty-Five Years.' He was frequently referred to as Mr. Arboretum.

"During World War II, George served with the Marines in China. While serving in China he adopted a small Chinese boy. After the war, George continued to send support for his 'son,' but during the years the communists took over China, George lost all contact and never heard from his 'son' again.

In later years, as illness began to envelop George, more and more he became less active with plants and was unable to attend meetings of large groups of people because of the danger of his contracting the respiratory infections and the danger to his lungs.

Stamp collecting, and particularly collecting Plants on Stamps, became an important activity in George's life. Collecting Plants on Stamps became a substitute for George's previous activities in the plant world. Although this new phase of gardening could not completely replace the old activity, it did help. George and I would go on plant hunting expeditions in various stamp stores looking for rarities. We pored over many an album looking for a new 'species.' Going over these countless books of stamps was like tramping over barren ground looking for a plant treasure. Every once in a while we would be rewarded by finding a real gem.

The years are racing on and while our memory may grow dim on many things, we will never forget the friendship of George H. Spalding and all he offered each of us.

And as the Book of Time closes, George, we won't say goodbye, but just Shalom, and may God be with you until we meet again."



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