

History of the F-M Horticulture Society, 1977-2024

(By Ross Collins, October 2024)

The Fargo-Moorhead Horticulture Society, often nicknamed the Hort Club, began in 1977 in the modest greenhouses of North Dakota State University. It was originally established by Neal Holland, a professor of plant sciences, and Larry Chaput, a researcher and tree specialist. Other early members included Don Kinzler, now a *Forum* garden writer and extension service specialist, Dorothy Collins, then the *Forum's* garden writer, her son Ross, Brad Johnson, Shirley and Joe Manning, Bob Dew, Bob Longhenry, Art Jensen, Larry Mitich and Bayard Sleeper. (See a list of past presidents below.)

The club originally met in the greenhouses. As membership expanded, monthly club meetings moved to private homes.

A summer hort trip became an early feature of an informal club that was devoted to fun and learning among plant lovers, spouses and friends. Initially, trips relied on NDSU vans driven by Larry or Brad. The first trip, to Minneapolis, was coordinated by Neal. (See a list of summer trips below.)

Later trips required larger transportation, and so the group rented a bus and a driver. Trips usually left Fargo-Moorhead on Thursday and returned on Sunday. Features included visits to nurseries, tours of private and public gardens, a play or show, a dinner, and time to shop. Games including bridge became the main attraction during long rides on the bus, along with lunches packed by Brad and drinks packed by everyone. Typically, 20 or so members and guests joined the summer trips. Also featured were day trips to area greenhouses or gardens, and on several weekdays, tours of private gardens around the Fargo-Moorhead area.

In addition to the summer trips, the society offered public plant auctions in the spring and fall with choice plant material donated by members, and Brad as auctioneer. The spring auction in particular featured a large variety of perennials often hard to find in nurseries or catalogs.

In the winter, to avoid the busy holiday season, the club held its party in January, called the "January blast." Members brought homemade gifts for exchange based on numbers drawn in random order. Usually a gift was a useful garden item or homemade offering, but sometimes it was a "white elephant" that would come back year after year to dismay another unsuspecting recipient. Many older members remember the perennial moleskin pants.

Monthly educational meetings sometimes featured members making presentations of their own specialties, other times area experts who presented topics ranging from African violets to mushrooms.

As the new millennium dawned, some of the original members became no longer active in the club. These were sometimes replaced by younger members, and trips continued, but the group of active participants became smaller. The fall plant auction was a first casualty of a smaller group with fewer volunteers to coordinate the event or donate the plants. In 2012 Brad, who along with Larry had planned summer trips since nearly the beginning, decided to retire to Arizona and the Minnesota lake country. Tina and Chris Young took over trip planning, but it became more difficult to find enough members to cover trip costs. The last hort club trip, to Rapid City, was in 2016. Members continued to take one-day trips in the area.

The group had seen a loss of active members for some years before the pandemic of 2020. Meetings no longer attracted a group of more than about a half dozen, as many members had retired, moved away or died. But as it did to many social groups, the pandemic put the hort club temporarily out of business. And also as did many groups, the club failed to recover. A few members left were unable to rekindle the group at the force and enthusiasm it once had.

In September 2024 a group of core members met at the home of Stacy Nicholson. Based on an email vote from those who were still on the last dues-paying roster, the group voted to dissolve the society. A treasury balance of \$4,400 was donated to the Northern Plains Botanic Garden Society in Fargo in return for a bench and a plaque in memory of almost a half century of what was once one of the area's most active clubs for lovers of north-country gardening, with membership including some of the region's most well-known gardeners. Ross Collins, the last surviving original member still active in the club, acquired the club archives. He donated the material to the Northwest Minnesota Historical Center archives at Minnesota State University Moorhead.

Presidents of the society (some served multiple times)

**Indicates deceased, if known.*

Terry Adams.

Larry Chaput.

Dorothy Collins.*

Ross Collins.

Sheila Degrugillier.

Larry Fritz.

Iris Gill.

Neal Holland.*

Brad Johnson.

Phil Larson.*

Bob Kloubec.*

Bob Longhenry.*

Randy Mann.

John McCune.

Larry Mitich.

Stacy Nicholson.

Guy Paulson.
Julie Poseley.*
Bayard Sleeper.
Tom Van Raden.*
Chris Young.
Tina Young.

Summer horticulture trips

1979: Minneapolis (Neal Holland coordinated).
1980: Winnipeg (Brad Johnson and Larry Chaput coordinated 1980-2012).
1981: Minneapolis.
1982: Minneapolis.
1983: Winnipeg.
1984: Duluth.
1985: Minneapolis.
1986: Winnipeg.
1987: Medora.
1988: Minneapolis.
1989: St. Paul/Stillwater.
1990: Winnipeg.
1991: Rochester.
1992: Duluth.
1993: Sioux Falls.
1994: Omaha.
1995: Lake Minnetonka/Chanhassen.
1996: Winnipeg.
1997: Faribault/Waseca.
1998: Duluth.
1999: Regina.
2000: Minneapolis.
2001: Lake City/southern Minnesota.
2002: Winnipeg.
2003: Milwaukee.
2004: Sioux Falls.
2005: Mystic Lake/ Minneapolis.
2006: Duluth.
2007: Madison.
2008: Winnipeg.
2009: Omaha.
2010: Green Bay.
2011: Stillwater.
2012: Des Moines.
2013: Peace Gardens/eastern North Dakota (Tina and Chris Young coordinated 2013-2016)
2014: Milwaukee.
2015: Minneapolis.

2016: Rapid City.

2017: Minnesota lake country (one-day trip).