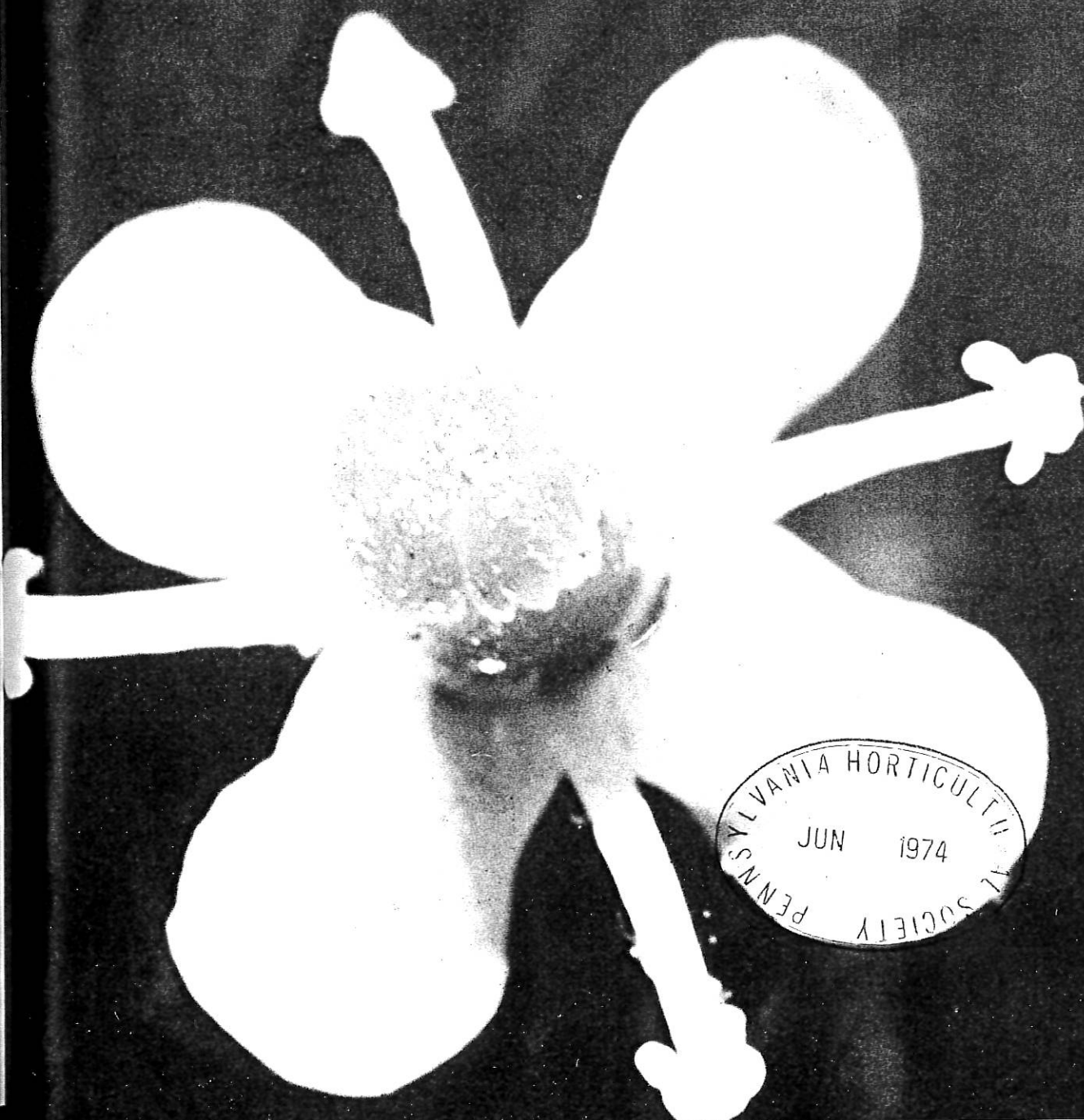


MORRIS ARBORETUM

JUNE 1974

BULLETIN 25 (2)



History of the Andorra Nursery

by John C. Swartley

In the Andorra Nursery catalogue of 1893, which is the earliest one discovered at this writing, the editor, presumably William Warner Harper who signed himself Business Manager, stated that the name came from "the former gentleman's estate". The gentleman was Richard Wistar who, in about the middle of the century, chose a high, wooded hill as the site for a country home. It reminded him of the sunny little country in the Pyrenees called Andorra which has constantly remained independent since 805 A.D.

Although Mr. Wistar never built his house on the hill-top, he did plant many trees, notably magnolia, beech and fir. According to a letter recently received from LeRoy R. Dukenfield, who worked for Andorra Nurseries for many years as sales manager, the land (120 acres) belonged to the Houston Estate. Mr. William Warner Harper, in 1886, leased these 120 acres for the purpose of establishing a nursery. The Wistar Tract consisted of 80 acres.

According to Mr. Dukenfield, the property was bounded on the north by Northwestern Avenue and Barren Hill Road, on the south by Wissahickon Drive and Bells Mill Road, and on the west by an imaginary line one-half way to Ridge Pike.

Mr. Harper was born in 1867 and only nineteen years of age when he founded Andorra Nurseries. Previous to that time, he had been employed by the Yates Nursery, on Germantown Avenue, Chestnut Hill, as a salesman. John Howes Humphries was Book-keeper for the same nursery. Mr. Humphries apparently followed Mr. Harper to the new venture.

It is not known how Mr. Harper built up such an inventory of nursery stock. It is known that the 'Estate' sent him to England to purchase different

varieties of plants. For instance, he purchased a large number of London Plane Trees. At that time, they were known as "*Platanus orientalis*", now known as *Platanus acerifolia*. The double row of trees bordering the Woodward Property near the McCallum Street Bridge, were planted by Mr. Harper. Most of these trees have succumbed to canker stain disease.

There is also a legend that Henry Dreer, well-known center city florist and seedsman, received a thousand small plants of *Cryptomeria japonica lobbi* from Japan. These had been sent by mistake, in lieu of 1000 foliage plants we presume. We do not know whether Mr. Dreer knew their identity. We do know that Mr. Harper did and acquired them from his good friend, we hope at a most reasonable price.

Mr. Dukenfield writes that these plants were still quite small when he joined the company in 1915. The Cryptomeria Avenue off Hart's Road came from this source.

The 1893 catalogue, entitled "Choice of Hardy Trees, Shrubs, Plants, Roses and Fruits", was quite comprehensive. This catalogue included brief descriptions, prices and cultural directions. Under "Brief Suggestions to Planters", Mr. Harper stated that "the most common error is that of planting too deeply" which still applies today. The listing of ornamentals was imposing, including 48 species and 21 varieties of evergreen trees, 86 species and 48 varieties of deciduous trees and 97 species and 39 varieties of flowering shrubs. As a comparison, the latest available catalogue, 1940, entitled "Andorra Handbook of Trees and Shrubs", has 114 pages, 92 full page illustrations, complete table with mature height, color, texture, useful life, and cultural requirements, but no prices. The list included 47 species and 46 varieties of evergreen trees, 111 species and 40 varieties of decidu-

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ous trees, 37 species and 41 varieties of evergreen shrubs, 164 species and 33 varieties of flowering shrubs, 42 species and 20 varieties of vines, besides lilac and clematis varieties. Also included in this catalogue were three additional pages of perennials according to season of bloom with height and color of bloom indicated.

A catalogue of 1895 was similar to that of 1893, but carried a full page advertisement on the back cover, the subject being the "Andorra Brand of Canada Unleached, Hard-wood ashes, Nature's Complete Fertilizer. Barrel of 200 lbs. — \$2.50 or \$20.00 per ton. Recommended application — 1000-1500 lbs. per acre."

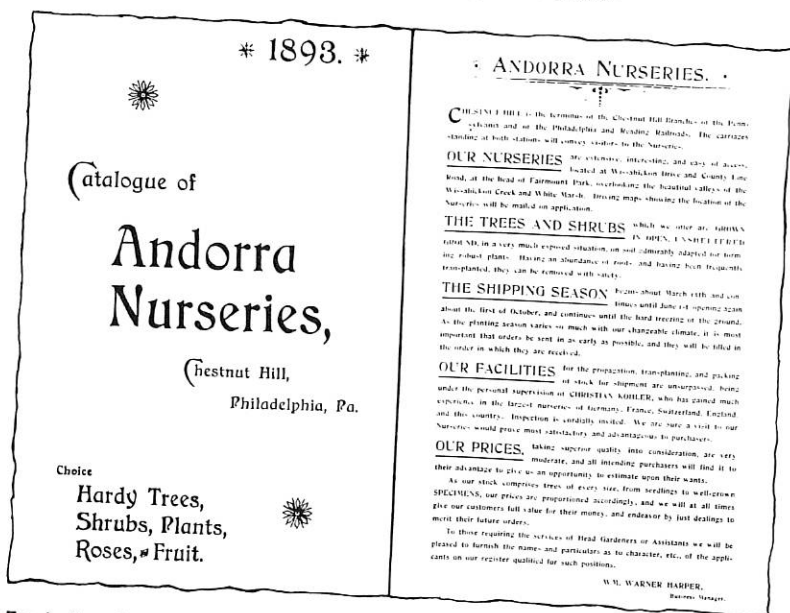
In the 1900 Catalogue and Price List, the acreage was reported to be 500 and William Warner Harper was given the title of "Proprietor". To give an idea of price, Sugar Maple, 1¾ to 2 inch caliber was \$1.75, and Japanese Andromeda, 1½ to 2 inch was \$1.50.

dodendrons, Ghent azaleas, magnolias and Carles' viburnum in this manner. This was before modern techniques made it possible to grow these plants effectively from cuttings.

In 1926, Andorra was incorporated with Mr. Harper as sole proprietor and President, William Frazier Harrison as Vice President, and Mr. Humphries as Secretary.

Stock was sold to employees, but the lion's share was held by Mr. Harper and Mr. Harrison's father. This was a period of great expansion. Mr. Harrison's father, called the "Sugar King", was the sugar refinery owner, and builder of Grey Towers, now Beaver College.

An additional 400 acres was purchased including land across from the Whitmarsh Country Club and properties along Ridge Pike from Barren Hill to Cherry Lane and west to Spring Mill, then north to Joshua Road.



Facsimile of the cover and frontispiece of the Andorra Nursery Catalogue, 1893.

Beginning with 1903, the Company issued smaller catalogues of trees and shrubs, roses and fruits for the trade. In 1917, a large catalogue entitled "Suggestions for Effective Planting", appeared and the nursery area was reported to be over 1000 acres. Prices had not increased greatly; Sugar Maple, 1½ to 1¾ inch caliber was \$2.50 and Japanese Andromeda, 1½ to 2 inch was also \$2.50. Through the years Andorra Nurseries has been noted for growing a wide variety of quality material.

For many years, Andorra maintained one of the largest layering beds in the country, propagating rho-

When Mr. Harper died in 1934, Mr. Harrison became President and Mr. Humphries, Vice-President. These were depression years. For instance, in the early 1930's, Joseph Schwab had been employed as a plant protection expert. The next year he was offered a job as salesman. If he refused this they would accept his resignation. They felt it was more important to sell plants than to protect them unsold in the nursery. Mr. Schwab was given the Wilmington territory where some DuPont executives still had good incomes. It was hard going at first, but he made a success of the job and later became nursery superintendent. In this

position, and in selling, he remained with Andorra until it was sold.

In the 1920's, Towson Nurseries near Towson, Maryland, was started as an off-shoot of Andorra. Apparently Mrs. Harper was a Garrett of Baltimore, a well-established and well-to-do family. She had a nephew, William Garrett, who was interested in the nursery business. Mr. Harper cooperated by helping him to set up Towson Nurseries. In the beginning they collected boxwood for resale, but a severe winter killed three-quarters of their stock. Then carload after carload of nursery stock was shipped to Towson to give the business a fast start. Meanwhile a capable propagator, Edward Saurbrey, was hired and another successful nursery was on its way.

Mr. Dukenfield has kindly supplied me with the list of staff of Andorra Nurseries in 1942.

Officers

W. Frazier Harrison, Pres.
J. Howes Humphries, V.P.
F.E.L. Killen, Sec.
L.B. Prince, Treas.

Landscape Dept.

Arthur M. Paul, L.A.

Production Dept.

Joseph Schwab, Nur. Sup.
Archie Lightkep, Propagator

Directors

W. Frazier Harrison
George D. Widener
W.B. Read
B.F. Mechling, Jr.
Frederick L. Ballard
Gerald Ronon

Sales Dept.

LeRoy R. Dukenfield,
Sales Mgr.
Jean H. Cojan
Donald Mackubbin
Walter L. Skoglund

*... crabapples in bloom
on the old Andorra Nursery site.*

Later in 1942, Mr. Harrison died and was followed by Mr. Paul as President. Mr. Paul's widow is still living, though in very poor health. According to a recent indirect statement from her, Arthur M. Paul was a mainstay of Andorra Nurseries for over 40 years. Before he became president he was in charge of sales as the company's landscape architect.

Sometime during World War II the office was moved from the original site to the old Andorra Inn, Ridge and Butler Pikes. The reason given was to avoid the Philadelphia wage tax.

After Mr. Paul died in 1953, the business was taken over by the Liberty Real Estate Bank with policy decisions being made by Thomas Brackin as President, from his office in the bank, with day-to-day affairs implemented by Clinton H. Brown as Vice President. Donald Miller was Secretary-Treasurer from 1956-1961. The last few years, Andorra Nurseries operated a garden center at two successive locations east of Dale's Food Market. A changing world caught up with this far-flung nursery operation; expensive sewage operations were required on the property. So, finally, on June 2, 1961, Andorra Nurseries was sold to Harry Kravitz, a developer, bringing to an end a great nursery.

It is interesting to note that trees, planted by Andorra in nursery rows many years ago, may be observed in Lafayette Hill and other developed areas.



Koller