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The North Carolina Commercial Flower Growers' Association: Its History and Purpose

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When Wayne Crowder, president of the N.C. Commercial Flower Growers' Association, called and said the Board of Directors wondered if I would write an article endorsing membership in the Association I decided I would take the request a step further and tell you about the history, purpose, and activities of the Association. I searched through the minutes of Board and annual meetings; I read the charter of incorporation; I read the by-laws, and I interviewed three of the people who were very much involved with the beginning of the organization. I also asked a couple of people in the new generation of growers what the Association means to them. I learned much more than I could possibly tell in this article.

On February 25, 1957, six N.C. growers and salesmen who had just attended the Tri-State Growers' meeting in Shelby discussed the advisability of forming a growers' association in North Carolina. They had been meeting with the N.C. Retail Florists' Association but the growers apparently felt they

were just a minor part of that organization and wanted their own identity, their own meetings, and their own bulletin. On March 18, an organizational meeting was held at N.C. State College. Present at that meeting were James Melton, U.L. Patterson, Sr., Tom Wetmore, J.B. Webster, Jr., Gene Edwards, James Weaver, Herb Ellington, Ray Benston, and Jerry Rusby. Representing N.C. State College were Fred Cochran (head of the horticulture department), Jack Gartner (my predecessor), Ed Mattson (extension specialist for woody ornamentals and floriculture), and John Harris (extension specialist-in-charge) (Figure 1). Gene Edwards, after the February 25 meeting, had obtained copies of the by-laws for flower growers' associations in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. An unofficial membership drive had also begun in the three-week interval, 46 firms or individuals had expressed desires to join such an organization, and \$167.50 had been collected in advanced dues. Fred Cochran assured the growers and salesmen that the "horticulture department would

be behind them 100 percent and help them in any way possible.”



Figure 1. Jim Weaver and Fred Cochran were present at the organizational meeting. Photograph taken March 17, 1990.

On April 29, 1957, a Certificate of Incorporation was filed with Secretary of State Thad Eure. The first article of incorporation states that the name of the corporation is North Carolina Commercial Flower Growers' Association, Inc., the second article states its purpose:

To advance the interests of the florist industry; to collect, preserve and circulate valuable and useful information relating to the business of flower growing; to properly collate, distribute and publish such information; to promote economic and production research to improve the quality of the product; to standardize grades; to promote betterment of markets; to facilitate the adjustment of controversies and misunderstandings between the members of this corporation and outsiders; to maintain integrity, good faith, good will and just and

equitable principles of business in the industry; and to strive in all ways to promote the best interests of its members.

Article three states that the corporation shall have no capital stock and shall be open to all individuals, partnerships and corporations of good reputation who are engaged in the production and sales of flowers, plants, seeds, and accessories.

The first meeting of the Board of Directors was held on May 23, 1957 at the Sir Walter Hotel in Raleigh. It was reported that 93 individuals or firms had joined and James Weaver, Jack Gartner, and John Harris were given the assignment “to lay the groundwork for publishing a monthly bulletin”. At a Board meeting on September 9 they reported that the bulletin would come out every two months. At that meeting the growers already recognized that some liaison was needed between the N.C. Commercial Flower Growers' Association and the N.C. Retail Florists' Association and that representatives from both organizations would attend each other's meetings. That recommendation has never been observed and to the best of my knowledge no communications link between the two associations has ever been developed.

A legislative committee was appointed at the September meeting. Fred Cochran stated that \$120,000 were needed by the horticulture department; the legislative committee went to work to get favorable legislation passed.

On May 18, 1958, the Board met once again and the directors decided to send letters to members asking for contributions to a research fund. It was also reported that Gene Kamprath of the N.C. State College Soil Science Department had been developing a system for greenhouse soil testing (no charge) and Fred Cochran urged the directors to have members “give this system a good trial.”

On April 13, 1959, the director discussed a joint exhibit with the N.C. Association of Nurserymen. It would be tried at the N.C. State Fair and if successful, it might lead to the establishment of a Spring Home and Garden Show; "It was agreed that such a show would be a great thing for our industry." This show did materialize, and it was held at Dorton Arena for a few years; I remember helping with some of the exhibits. The Raleigh News and Observer refused to give it any publicity, however, so attendance was never as high as expected or deserved and an elderly lady fell over a chain which had a sign "do not enter" and litigation seemed likely, so the nurserymen and flower growers became disenchanted with the show. (*The Charlotte newspaper promised to support the show if it moved there and it became the highly successful Southeastern Flower and Garden Show*).

At the April meeting, Fred Cochran talked about the efforts being made to get a new greenhouse to replace the ones being torn down to make room for the round classroom building, Harrelson Hall. Copies of the request for funds were distributed to the directors, along with a list of state legislators. Members were urged to contact their legislators, to relay the request for new greenhouses. Perhaps no grower worked harder than U.L. Patterson Sr. to make these greenhouses a reality and when I arrived at N.C. State College in 1961, Martin McIntyre and I had the opportunity to plant the first crops in some of those "modern" facilities (Figure 2).

On May 20, 1962, the need for a floriculture extension specialist was discussed. Hugh Smith from Cornelius moved that the Association draft a petition requesting such a specialist and the motion passed. A research fund committee was also established, and the growers agreed to contribute one-tenth of one percent of their gross sales. The idea was good, and innovative for its time, but never

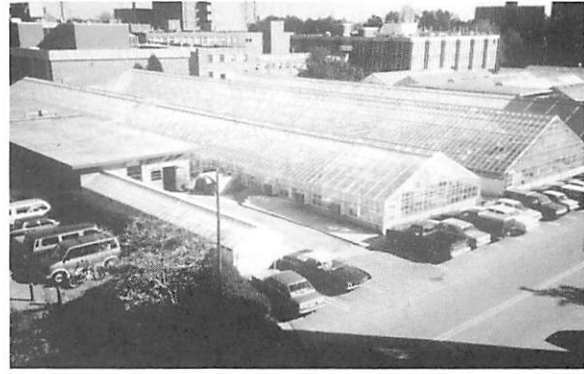


Figure 2. Much of this greenhouse range perhaps never would have been built at N.C. State University without the strong support of the Association. Photograph taken March 21, 1990.

did develop further. N.C. State University personnel were reluctant to push for its enforcement.

In 1963, the floriculture extension specialist position was announced and Joseph W. Love moved from Rutgers University to become our first full-time specialist. Bryson James had been doing "double-duty" for flower growers and nurserymen and he became the nursery crops extension specialist. Joe remained as the floriculture extension specialist until June 30, 1989, when he retired. Doug Bailey assumed the position on January 22, 1990.

On June 23, 1965, Fred Cochran announced that Paul Nelson had been employed to fill the position vacated by the retirement of Glenn Randall. A Research Trust Fund Committee was once again appointed, with Gene Edwards from Wilmington as chairman. J.C. Delk and John McCormick were other members of the committee. The flower growers approved the donation of money to the department so I could build a 21' x 100' Gothic greenhouse at the "Method" station (Research Unit #4). That greenhouse was the latest "state of the art" covered with rigid PVC which turned black in nine months and was replaced by fiber glass (*that green-*

house was torn down in 1987 and replaced with a double-layered polyethylene film house, new benches, and heating and cooling systems [Figure 3]. Most of the money was donated by the N.C. Commercial Flower Growers' Association).



Figure 3. Funds for this house came from the Association.

On August 3, 1966, Jimmy Melton of Hubert, Henry Swart of Castle Hayne, and John McCormick of Sanford were appointed to meet the dean of the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Brooks James. Representatives from the N.C. Association of Nurserymen were also to be present at the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the vacant position in ornamental plant pathology and to express the need for assistance in entomology, agricultural engineering and economics. This delegation met with Dean James eight days later. The dean told them that, effective September 1, Robert Aycock would be engaged 90 percent of his time in research pertaining to the diseases of floriculture and nursery crops (Bob and I worked together on the control of *Phytophthora* root rot of azaleas and his strong feeling of cooperation towards horticulture continued after his appointment as head of the Plant Pathology Department. He had been at the Castle Hayne Station working on gladiolus diseases

before he came to Raleigh and had already proven his expertise and interest in floriculture).

Dean James said he was now aware of a deficiency in the area of entomology research and extension in ornamental horticulture and floriculture and a special bill would be presented to the state legislature requesting the necessary funding. In the next biennium the administration would seek money for a faculty position in agricultural engineering, to give assistance in "greenhouse construction and mechanical advances". The Advisory Budget Committee turned down all floriculture requests and half of the requested funds from the fruit and vegetable growers.

On November 19, 1969, the flower growers voted to help organize the N.C. Horticultural Council and that council was formed on December 4. John McCormick was appointed to the Executive Committee and Jimmy Melton was appointed chairman of the projects committee.

Four resolutions on pesticides were passed by the Horticultural Council in 1970. Those resolutions showed the strong concerns of these growers' groups for the safe and sensible use of pesticides. Some environmental organizations in 1990 are preaching those same philosophies as if they had just been considered. Space does not permit the printing of those resolutions here but I will send copies of them to any individual who desires to read them.

Important items considered by the Association in 1970 were:

- Funding for a horticulture student recruitment brochure (approved, and M.E. Gardner edited an outstanding brochure, perhaps the best developed at that time by any horticulture department).
- Campaign by members to contact the

N.C. Advisory Budget Commission to urge their approval of the Horticultural Crops Request for the 1972-73 budget.

- *Membership drive.*
- *Legislative Committee.*
- *Scholarship Committee - to formulate the criteria for the awarding of an annual scholarship.*

On May 20, 1971, "Doc" Oliver, Pine Level, wondered if it would be feasible for us to record presentations at our short courses, complete with the needed slides. Nineteen years later tapes and even videos of talks have become available at many short courses throughout the country, but not yet at ours.

In 1973 a critical fuel shortage threatened to cripple the flower industry in North Carolina, the nation, and much of the world. On November 28, 1973, the Association sent telegrams to Washington to make certain that national leaders were aware of the extreme necessity for fuel in commercial floriculture. A high priority was placed on the fuel needs of the greenhouse industry and to my knowledge no North Carolina flower grower lost a crop because of a shortage of fuel. Growers also cooperated by instituting fuel-conserving practices.

At a board meeting on January 23, 1975, the directors suggested the following topics for the next short course: economics (cost and return/ft²), computer analysis, fuel conservation, minimum night temperatures, and HID lighting. On June 18, 1975, the Association, the N.C. Association of Nurserymen, and the N.C. Association of Landscape Contractors joined forces to gain legislative favor in repeal of the *ad valorem* tax on container-grown plant material.

Throughout the years, minutes of the Board meetings showed approval of funding for field trips by students in the floriculture

courses at N.C. State University and for the flower judging teams coached by Joe Love. To my knowledge no request was ever rejected or reduced in amount. Many of the students who went on those three-day field trips or were on the judging teams are now members of the Association or working in many different positions in commercial or academic floriculture throughout the U.S.

All the efforts of the Association have resulted in the creation of faculty positions in plant pathology and entomology, and those achievements have enabled N.C. growers to have access to the best information available on the control of pests. The Association also was instrumental in getting a faculty position in agricultural engineering. The Association, in cooperation with the N.C. Farm Bureau, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and N.C. State University, has shown a leadership role in organizing the Floral Marketing Expo, a very innovative and successful annual event.

Throughout the minutes of the many board and business meetings, one can see the contribution of funds to the university, so a piece of equipment could be purchased which would not have been purchased otherwise. The items have ranged from sophisticated laboratory equipment to computer terminals and scanning equipment. The digital scanner was purchased recently so we could improve the capability of our computer graphics for publication of the Bulletin, and its use is demonstrated in Figure 4. That line drawing from the *Greenhouse Grower* (May, 1989, page 74) was readily duplicated by Doug Bailey, editor.

Also, throughout the minutes, one can read about membership drives. Many different campaigns have been tried but not all have been done as thoroughly or as enthusiastically as they might have been. Growers throughout the state have been beneficiaries of the efforts of a relatively low number of people. Right

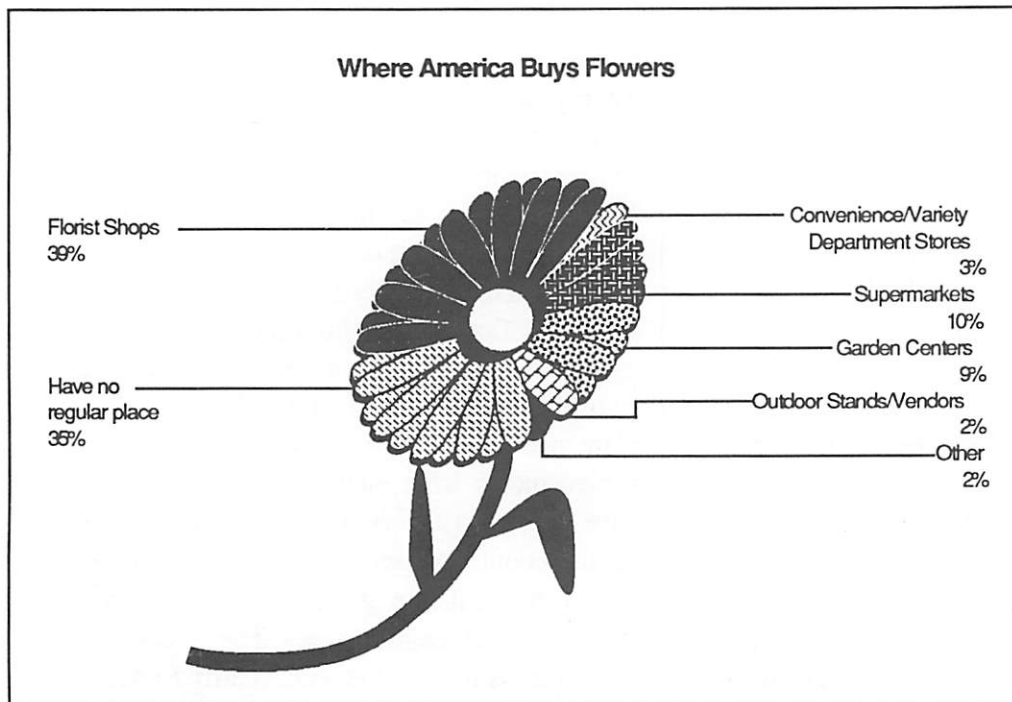


Figure 4. The reproduction of this graph was made possible with equipment purchased by the Association.

financial support from the industry is increasing as government funding is declining. I decided I would end this article about the history and purpose of the Association by interviewing three of the key individuals who helped organize the Association. Then I asked two growers of the new generation what they

now Association leaders are working hard to convince the state legislature that commercial floriculture is truly agriculture. John Carroll, Carrolls' Greenhouses in Raleigh, called me after he had read Wayne Crowder's column in the February issue of the Bulletin and he thought we had proved the status before. We had, but new government leaders get elected, look for more tax revenue, and the Association has to prove what was already verified. Such items take the time and hard efforts of a few leaders, but all growers benefit.

Campaigns to raise funds for floriculture research at N.C. State University also have come and gone. The drive for research funds has never been sustained. There once were just a couple of us much involved in research pertaining to floriculture but now we have a large program encompassing horticulture, plant pathology, entomology, soils, marketing, and agricultural engineering. The informal method of granting money is now not so feasible or equitable, and the need for

thought the advantages were in being members.

One noon hour I had lunch with John McCormick, former owner and manager of Carolina Wholesale Florist in Sanford and now an executive of the Golden Corral Corporation (Figure 5). John was on the first Board of Directors and had served as treasurer of the Association for many years.

John gave several reasons why he was glad he was a member. He said he appreciated the chance to get to know people in the industry and to discuss mutual problems. Association members, through short courses and the Bulletin, could learn what was happening in the industry. He was pleased with what the Association had been able to do for the university, and with the return they received from those contributions. He then summed up his feelings by saying he just truly enjoyed the many good times and the many good friends he had because of the Association.



Figure 5. John McCormick, one of the "original" directors of the Association.

Those sentiments were repeated by Jim Weaver and Fred Cochran as we sat in the kitchen of the Weaver home one Saturday afternoon. Jim had been on some of the key committees even before the Association was formally organized. He had been on the staff in the horticulture department at N.C. State College before he became a commercial grower so he had a keen appreciation for academic as well as commercial floriculture. Fred Cochran, as head of the horticulture department, could see the mutual benefits of a successful growers' organization and he promised the industry leaders that the department would enthusiastically support their endeavors. He had worked on Easter lilies with Sam Ensweller and he had a strong interest in floriculture, though he was a vegetable crops breeder. He wanted the department to have outstanding greenhouse facilities and a strong floriculture program. He was department head when I came in 1961, Joe Love in 1963, and Paul Nelson in 1965.

Talking to Jim Weaver and Fred Cochran gave me a real sense of the fascinating history of the department and the N.C. Commercial Flower Growers' Association and I wish I could properly report that history.

On Sunday, March 18, I went to an open house at Cyn-Mar Greenhouses in Pine Level where a wedding show for retail florists was conducted by the wholesale portion of the firm. I asked Mike Renfrow what the Association meant to him (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Mike Renfrow from a new generation of growers involved in the Association. Mike is at Cyn-Mar Greenhouses in Pine Level.

Mike said he didn't know what the flower business would be like without the Association because he had married into a greenhouse family which was active in the Association and "would not want it any other way." He valued the good exchange of information which was made possible with everyone getting together.

I also wanted to hear how young ladies felt about the Association so I went to Fairview Greenhouses outside of Raleigh and

asked Susan Rollins for her opinion about being a member (Figure 7). Susan, who is on the board of directors, said she found the Association to be very helpful, as it gave her a chance to get together with other growers and discuss problems they all have. Two of the topics she had recently discussed with other growers was finding a supplier of some plants and health insurance plans. She was pleased that the Association was promoting the industry by participating in such events as "Goodness Grows in North Carolina" at the State



Fair. While Mike Renfrow married into a greenhouse family, Susan grew up in one. Fairview Greenhouses once had the word "Kennels" in its title and when I first visited JoAnn and Tom Dewar, I think the kennel had as many dogs as the greenhouse had plants. Now someone else owns the kennels and their greenhouses have expanded, and they have added a nursery and a garden center. Susan and Fairview Greenhouses typify many of the people and firms in the Association in 1990.

The N.C. Commercial Flower Growers' Association has been in existence now for 33 years. Six of the thirteen people who were at the organizational meeting have passed away. Three generations of industry people have been involved in the Association, as exemplified by the late U.L. Patterson, Sr. being one of the founders, Blanche Teele having served as a director and secretary, and grandson Rusty now very active in the Association. Many serious matters have arisen and been solved in the 33-year period and there are many more challenges ahead. I like the way John McCormick expressed his attitude about the Association, and I would agree with him wholeheartedly--the Association meant "good times and good friends." Those attributes of the organization are as precious and vital today as they were in 1957 and in the intervening 33 years.