A brief history of horticulture at Cornell University

The Early Years

Cornell University was chartered in 1865, but its first year of operation was the academic year of 1868-69. Horticulture was a sub-department of Botany from 1869 until 1888. Albert N. Prentiss, Professor of Botany and Horticulture, gave lectures on horticulture in the first academic year of Cornell's operation. Professor Prentiss continued offering instruction in horticulture and a course titled Principles of Horticulture was offered in the 1877-78 academic year with a course titled Practical Horticulture being offered in the following academic year. Apparently teaching was the primary occupation of faculty in the early years.

The University's Agriculture Department suffered birthing pains until the arrival of Professor Isaac P. Roberts in 1874 and horticulture did not prosper as a discipline until the arrival of Liberty Hyde Bailey in 1888 as Professor of Experimental Horticulture and Chair of the newly created Department of Horticulture. He offered a course in General and Experimental Horticulture during the winter and spring terms of 1888-89. In 1889-90, Dr. Bailey gave courses in general horticulture throughout the year and these included Principles of Pomology and Vegetable Gardening with three hours of laboratory work a week. Similar courses were given each year from 1890-91 to 1909-10. Additional courses on Literature of Horticulture, Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture, Greenhouse Construction and Management, and Botany of Cultivated Plants were listed in 1896-97, and a course in Plant Breeding (Professor John Craig) in 1903-04. The first course in Landscape Gardening was given in the fall of 1893 and in 1896 a course titled Floriculture was given by L.H. Bailey and E.G. Lodeman. When Professor Bailey became Dean of the Agriculture Faculty and Director of the Cornell Agricultural Experiment Station in 1903, Professor John Craig was appointed Chair of the Department of Horticulture and served in that position until his death in 1912.

Professor Craig must have been an innovative administrator like Bailey as a Department of Landscape Art was established in 1906 chaired by Bryant Fleming until 1915 followed by co-chairs E. Gordon Davis and Ralph W. Curtis until 1923. A Department of Freehand Drawing was established in 1908 chaired by William C. Baker. This department was merged with the Department of Landscape Art in 1917.
Horticulture Divided at Cornell

Dean Liberty Hyde Bailey wrote in his 1912-13 Annual Report, "The old Department of Horticulture has now been divided into three more or less natural units. One of these units is Pomology which was separated some years ago. At present floriculture and vegetable-gardening are being separated as coordinate departments. This means the enlargement of the floricultural and vegetable-garden¬ing work and expresses the desire of the College to ade¬quately serve these great interests in the state." At this point, the history of these three “natural units” will be described separately until they once again came together as a Department of Horticulture in the year 2000.

Floriculture

Edward A. White chaired this newly established department from 1913 to 1939. The Department of Floriculture was expanded to include Landscape Art and Drawing and renamed the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture in 1922. An arboretum had long been a desired addition to the University and one was established in 1935, later to be known as the Cornell Plantations, with assistance from the Civilian Conservation Corps. In recent years, faculty members from the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture have served as Directors of the Cornell Plantations.

Laurence H. MacDaniels was moved from the Department of Pomology to chair the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture in 1940 and he served in that position until 1955 when he was replaced by Kenneth Post who, unfortunately died in the same year he was appointed and Professor MacDaniels once again served as chair until 1956 when he was succeeded by John G. Seeley who chaired the Department until 1970.

A Landscape Architecture Program was accredited within the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture in 1968 and soon thereafter the graduate program in Landscape Architecture became a joint program between the Colleges of Agriculture and Life sciences and Architecture, Arts, and Planning. A separate Department of Landscape Architecture was established in 1997.

The Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture was chaired by James W. Boodley from 1970 to 1975, by Carl F. Gortzig from 1975 to 1988, by George L. Good from 1988 to 1997, and finally by Thomas C. Weiler from 1997 to 2000 when it joined with the Department of Fruit and Vegetable Science to become the present Department of Horticulture.

Pomology

With the separation of the Department of Horticulture by Dean Bailey in 1912, Charles Wilson who had charge of the Sub-department of Pomology under John Craig became head of Pomology. He served in this capacity until he was appointed Commissioner of Agriculture in 1915. He was followed in 1915 by William A. Chandler who came to the College in 1913 as a professor of research in pomology. Chandler served as head until 1920 when he was appointed to the newly created position in the College of Vice-Director of Research. Arthur J. Heinicke, who in 1916 received the first Ph.D. in Pomology at Cornell was appointed to head the
department in 1920 – a position he maintained until 1960. Heinicke was also appointed Director of the Geneva Experiment Station in 1942, a position he held until his retirement in 1960.

Melvin B. Hoffman chaired the department from 1960 to 1970. He was followed by Louis J. Edgerton who served as chair until 1975 when Walter J. Kender replaced him and served until 1982. Gene F. Oberly served as chair until 1990 when Pomology joined Vegetable Crops to become the Department of Fruit and Vegetable Science.

**Vegetable Crops**

The Department of Vegetable Gardening was established in 1913, with Paul Work as Instructor and Superintendent of the Department. This was the first department of its kind established in an educational institution in the United States. In October 1918, H. C. Thompson was appointed Professor of Vegetable Gardening and became head of the Department in 1921. In 1931, at the request of the Department the name was changed from Vegetable Gardening to Vegetable Crops and Professor Thompson continued to serve as head of the Department until 1951.

The administration of the Long Island Vegetable Research Farm was transferred to the Department in 1946. From that time it evolved to the Long Island Horticultural Research Laboratory in 1977 and to the Long Island Horticultural Research and Extension Center in 1999.

Henry M. Munger headed the Department from 1951 to 1966 after which the position devolved from Head to Chair. Edwin B. Oyer served as chair from 1966 to 1971 with Henry Munger again serving as interim chair in 1971-72. Jimmy L. Ozbun chaired the Department from 1972 to 1975. He was followed by Robert D. Sweet who served as chair until 1982 when he was followed by Elmer E. Ewing who served from 1982 to 1990 when the Department joined with Pomology to become the Department of Fruit and Vegetable Science.

**Fruit and Vegetable Science**

As noted above, this Department was formed in 1990 with Elmer E. Ewing continuing to serve as chair until 1996. He was followed by H. Christian Wien who served as chair until 2000 when Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture joined to form a Department of Horticulture once again.

**Horticulture Reunited**

H. Christian Wien continued to chair the newly established Department until 2002 when Marvin P. Pritts was appointed. The Department has an academic faculty of 38 professionals served by a staff of 42 who assist in the administrative, teaching, research and extension functions of the Department. Seventy two (72) courses are listed under the Horticulture heading in the 2009-2010 Courses of Study for the University. In addition, the Department sustains comprehensive research and extension programs serving the Land-Grant function of the University. Additional facilities at Ithaca include greenhouses and growth chambers; test gardens; a teaching orchard, laboratory and sales room; a turfgrass and nursery field near the campus; and a research orchard near Lansing and a vegetable research farm near Freeville. An Urban Horticultural
Institute was founded in 1980 with the explicit mission of improving the quality of urban life by enhancing the functions of plants within the urban ecosystem.

**Horticulture in The New York Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva, New York**

The New York State Agricultural Experiment Station was chartered in 1880 and became operational at Geneva, New York in 1882 with E.S. Goff appointed as horticulturist. Although some wanted the station to become a model farm, it was decided that the focus would be agricultural research. The collection of vegetable seeds and fruit cultivars began immediately. By July 1, 1896 2,823 varieties of 16 kinds of fruits were established on the station. The year 1896 was also the first year of the appointment of Whitman H. Jordan as Director and he soon organized the research into departments and a Department of Horticulture was created. After U.P. Hedrick became station director in 1928, fruit breeding became the most prominent feature of work at the station.

NYSAES was not part of Cornell University until 1923, although the two entities collaborated on research and had agreed to a division of labor regarding crop responsibilities. For example, Geneva scientists worked with processing vegetables and Ithaca with fresh market vegetables. Ithaca scientists worked with weeds in vegetables and Geneva scientists focused on breeding.

The department continued until 1930 when Director Hedrick divided Horticulture into separate Departments of Pomology and Vegetable Crops. From 1942 to 1953, AJ Heinecke was chair of pomology in both Ithaca and Geneva, as well as director of the Geneva station. He was succeeded by John Einset who served as Geneva chair from 1953 to 1971. Pomology became Pomology and Viticulture in 1972 to recognize the substantial effort directed to grapes. Walt Kender was chair of both the Ithaca and Geneva Departments from 1972 until 1982, succeeded by Roger way from 1982 to 1984.

A seed testing program was organized in 1912 following the passage of the seed act by the New York State legislature. A Division of Seed Investigations was established in 1936 and was joined with Vegetable Crops to become the Department of Seed and Vegetable Sciences in 1974 under chair Morrill Vittum. This Department was joined with Pomology and Viticulture, reuniting as the Department of Horticultural Sciences in 1984. The joint department was chaired by first by Gary Harman (1984-1985), then Robert A. Anderson (1985-1990), Hugh C. Price (1990-2003), Alan Lakso (2003-2005), and Alan Taylor (2005-2010).

A Geneva sub-station was established at Jamaica, Long Island in 1894 to serve the counties in the lower Hudson Valley and Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island. The principal stimulation for this sub-station came from the Long Island vegetable growers to cope with their insect and disease problems. An additional state appropriation was enacted on April 1, 1922 after which the Long Island Vegetable Research Farm was established near Riverhead in Suffolk County on Long Island. The farm was managed by the Experiment Station at Geneva until 1946 when its management was transferred to the Department of Vegetable Crops at Cornell.
Other branch stations were established at Fredonia, New York in 1909 and at Highland, New York in 1923. The station at Fredonia was in the heart of the western New York grape-growing region and provided a base for research on this crop. In 2009 a new grape research facility opened in Portland, NY to replace the facility in Fredonia. The laboratory at Highland is in the Hudson Valley and serves as both a research and extension center for tree fruits in this production area. H.B. Tukey was the initial horticulturist.

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences announced Aug. 1, 2018, the renaming of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station (NYSAES) to Cornell AgriTech.

The new millennium

Pritts continued to serve as Horticulture chair from 2002 to 2015 when he stepped down and was replaced by Steve Reiners. In 2010, the Department of Horticulture in Ithaca and Horticultural Sciences in Geneva merged into a single Department of Horticulture. Associate department chairs based in Geneva were Alan Taylor (briefly), Susan Brown (2010 until assuming NYSAES director position in 2015), Stephen Reiners (briefly before assuming Horticulture Section chair). In 2012, greenhouse and farming operations were transferred to the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station.

In 2014 the Department of Horticulture became the Horticulture Section within the new School of Integrative Plant Science (SIPS). Four other Departments also joined the School as Sections: Crop and Soil Sciences (now Soil and Crop Sciences), Plant Biology, Plant Breeding and Genetics, and Plant Pathology and Plant-Microbe Biology. Alan Collmer served as SIPS’ first director, followed by Christine Smart starting as interim director in 2016 before being appointed to a 5-year term in 2017.

Edwin Oyer 9/09 (updated by Thomas Björkman, Ed Cobb and Craig Cramer)