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MYRTLE R. WOLF: Memories of Early Years
and Development of the California Native Plant Society
1966-1991

An Interview Conducted By
Mary Mead
1991

[In fulfillment of requirements for
Sociology 048, Oral History Methods
and Techniques, Vista College, Berkeley
Instructor: Elaine Dorfman]



MYRTLE R. WOLF
1988
Bear Valley Reservoir
Photo Taken By Peggy Grier

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HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Historical Events and Trends

<u>Dates</u>	<u>World</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Local</u>	<u>Personal</u>
1929-38	Depression years			College education
1940-45	World War II			Marriage/Family Teaching/ Counseling/ Volunteer
1965			CNPS Founded	
1969-70	Vietnam War		People's Park Riots Berkeley Hills Fire	
1978		Proposition 13 Passed		
1991			Oakland Hills Firestorm	
Future				Peace Garden Project Washington, D.C.

OUTLINES FOR INTERVIEWS

First Interview:

- A. CNPS founded in 1965 in Berkeley, California
 - 1. Circumstances around its founding
 - 2. Early members
 - 3. When Myrtle heard about and joined CNPS
- B. Early activities and structure of CNPS
 - 1. Early activities
 - a. Myrtle's participation
 - 2. New chapters form
 - a. How each chapter functions
 - b. State meetings
 - c. Formation of local chapters
 - 3. Publications, local and state
- C. Threatened closure of Tilden Botanic Garden in 1978
 - 1. Effects of Proposition 13 on Tilden garden
 - a. Role of CNPS in preventing closure
 - b. Myrtle's role
- D. Current activities of CNPS
 - 1. Status of CNPS
 - a. Changes over the years
 - 2. Income and budget
 - 3. CNPS projects
 - 4. Locations of plant sales
 - 5. Level of cooperation among chapters
- E. Myrtle's personal activities and interests
 - 1. Activities outside CNPS
 - 2. Myrtle's role in horticultural groups
 - 3. Personal feelings towards preservation of plantlife

Second Interview:

- A. Original and early members of CNPS
 - 1. Specific individual members
 - 2. Personality difficulties during early years
- B. Miscellaneous topics
 - 1. CNPS activities following 1991 local firestorm
 - 2. People's Park, 1969
 - 3. Women mentors and work opportunities in 1930s
 - 4. Myrtle's current impressions of CNPS

INTRODUCTION

Myrtle and CNPS
By Susan D'Alcarno

The annual sale of California native plants is the important event of the year for CNPS's East Bay Chapter (in earlier years called the San Francisco Bay Chapter). It was while working at my first sale, in the mid-seventies, that I met the famous Myrtle Wolf. As a volunteer at Tilden Botanic Garden, I had heard so many stories about Myrtle's "green thumb", her enthusiasm, her warmth and helpfulness that I expected to see her hovering a few inches off the ground. I was a little taken aback to meet a gray-haired, jolly-faced lady with her "tenny-runners" planted solidly on terra firma.

During that first sale I was assigned to help Myrtle sell the native plant seeds and bulbs the "potters" had collected or ordered during the year. Listening to her explanations of where and how and when to plant all these treasures, I realized how much I had to learn about native plants and from whom I should learn. From that time, I joined the legions of admirers hoping to gain even a little of Myrtle's vast knowledge.

Since that meeting, I have come to know that Myrtle has earned all the high praise and complimentary adjectives that are used about her--and more! Yes, she does have a halo--what's so delightful is that it's just ever-so-slightly askew.

Whether standing beside Myrtle at a CNPS potting session, attending a board meeting, or on a field trip with her, life is never dull. Not only is it possible to learn an enormous amount about propagating native plants (she's one of the best)--she helps make it fun. She also knows just what to do to improve a botanic or private garden, or solve an administrative or environmental problem, and loves to share her enthusiasm for a field of wildflowers.

I remember on one CNPS field trip four of us were spending the night in a motel in Mojave, California. Coming back from a day wandering around in creosote bush scrub, we had just had a lively discussion about the "dreaded" tick. After her turn in the bathroom, Myrtle came out pointing to her chest, her face askew, asking "what's this?" As we peered, it "jumped", sending us all two feet in the air with a screech! Myrtle almost fell down laughing. She had found a piece of lint in the bathroom and put it on hoping for just such a reaction.

So you see, it isn't just Myrtle's knowledge that makes her so special--it's her whole approach to life. To quote Bob Ornduff on the occasion of Myrtle Wolf Day at UC Berkeley Botanical Garden,

"Myrtle Wolf is a refreshingly modest individual, a person of sensitivity, dedication and warmth. She is also a mover and shaker! When she thinks something needs to be done, it gets done." And it gets done efficiently, unobtrusively and with a sense of humor.

Myrtle is "one of the patron saints of horticulture." She is not only a member of the California Native Plant Society but was elected a Fellow and Life Member in 1987. She is an active member of the California Horticultural Society, a Life Member and Honorary Trustee of the University of California Botanical Garden, a founder of the Tilden Regional Park Botanical Garden support group, a supporter of Strybing Arboretum, Friends of the Jepson Herbarium and many others. She contributes time and money to many organizations, and, as importantly, ideas and suggestions. She has also had some beautiful horticultural selections named after her (they are usually pink, her favorite color).

As the Assistant Manager of the Jepson Manual Project, I am grateful to Myrtle for so many things. Besides giving her wise counsel, she introduced us to our wonderful illustrator, Emily Reid; she suggested we ask Warren Roberts to head our Horticultural Council; she encouraged Margedant Hayakawa to lend her support; she both helped us find financial support and contributed to the project. Truly, she is one of the most important people involved in the Friends of the Jepson Herbarium.

If you multiply these contributions to just one project by the numerous organizations she belongs to, you get some idea of her generosity. But most of all, I appreciate Myrtle's friendship. She is the best of friends, as so many of us know.

9 December 1991
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

A good friend, Patty Brown, a member of the California Native Plant Society, has frequently told me about her activities in CNPS. Invariably she has mentioned the name Myrtle Wolf and followed up with "you must meet Myrtle!" So when an opportunity came along to do an oral history on a subject and person of my own choosing, I immediately thought of CNPS and Myrtle Wolf.

Myrtle has been a long-time member of the Berkeley community. Her personal achievements and strong community involvement are well-known by the many local horticultural groups and individuals who, like her, have devoted their efforts towards the preservation of plantlife. With her extensive knowledge of botany, her delightful sense of humor and her gift for making learning fun, she has served as a mentor and an inspiration to both children and adults in her desire to educate us about natural plantlife in the Bay Area.

My first contact with Myrtle was by phone. When I explained that I wanted to interview her concerning the founding of CNPS and her involvement in the organization, she was very enthusiastic and immediately willing. We met three times: on 3 October for a pre-interview planning session, and on 17 October and 30 October 1991 for two taped interviews. There were several subsequent brief meetings to exchange materials and short phone conversations to clear up minor details.

The first time I arrived at Myrtle's home in Berkeley, I was immediately struck by her garden. The house sits between two streets so that it rests in the center of a large encompassing garden, full of native plants--light, lively and varied. When Myrtle opened the door, she seemed a spirited extension of the garden, and her gracious manner made me feel at once welcome and comfortable.

Myrtle dresses and lives casually, as if she just stepped inside from working in her garden. Whenever I was there, the phone rang frequently, and it became apparent that she leads a very active life as a volunteer for various horticultural groups. She gave serious attention to our interviews with obvious great respect for the subject of the California Native Plant Society. Yet when I asked her about her personal involvement and achievements, she became more modest, and it became a challenge to draw her out in this regard. At the close of the first interview, Myrtle pulled out two commemorative binders containing tributes to her outstanding work. I could see it was much easier for her to show me evidence of her contributions and achievements rather than talk about them.

Myrtle was always well-organized during our interviews with prepared notes to help her remember certain dates and events. She was articulate about the facts but sometimes graciously reluctant to discuss the difficult personalities and situations inherent in any long-standing organization. Aware of her reluctance, she kindly provided me with names of people who might be able to provide the information I was seeking.

At the close of the interviews, we would spend a few minutes catching up on current local events (such as the recent firestorm in the Berkeley/Oakland hills) and mutual acquaintances, and I learned that she is a very genuine and sensitive woman as well as playful and humorous.

I also learned that her health had been compromised recently, and although she down-played her condition, occasionally her fatigue and discomfort quietly showed themselves, particularly during our first interview. She insisted she was well enough for taping and desired to continue nonetheless.

Throughout the interview process and during subsequent brief meetings and phone discussions, Myrtle's enthusiasm, cooperation and helpfulness were always abundant. It was a pleasure to have interviewed her.

In editing the transcripts of the interviews, for the sake of continuity there were some rearrangements of the text along with some deletions of repetitious material.

CHAPTER I. THE FIRST YEARS: FOUNDING OF CNPS

[Interview 1: 17 October 1991] ##

Regional Parks Botanical Garden at Tilden

Mead: Myrtle, you have been a member of CNPS, the California Native Plant Society almost since its founding. It's my understanding that the organization was formed in 1965. Can you tell me what you know about the circumstances around its formation?

Wolf: It was founded by a group of botanists and nature lovers to support the botanical garden at Tilden of the Regional Parks Department. The botanical garden was the C.C.C. [Civilian Conservation Corp] campsite during the thirties and early forties. It's an area of great beauty in the Berkeley hills with many very fine native California trees and shrubs. The California Forestry Department had their little nursery there.

When the land was bought up by the Regional Parks system, the California Forestry Department gave their remaining stock to the botanical garden. It's all native trees and shrubs. At this time, the Regional Parks system felt that the botanical garden was actually not very practical. They did not realize that it was such an appreciated part of the Parks Department.

Early Members

Wolf: There was a small group of people, many of them from the University [of California at Berkeley], a chemist Leo Brewer, a botanist Larry Heckard, plus many nature lovers who knew the park and knew that area where the Tilden Botanical Garden was located, rallied about and had meetings, went to the Parks Department and protested the closing of the botanical garden. This was in 1965. This group of botanists, plant lovers, hikers, and conservationists was a relatively large group. I don't have the names of all the people who were in this group, and I do not know of any extant list.

- Mead: Do you remember some of the key people in the group besides the ones you just mentioned?
- Wolf: James Roof was then the Director of the Botanical Garden, so he was an important early person. Mary Wohlers and Mary Rhyne--the Frugés, Susan and her husband who was then the head of the UC [Berkeley] Press.
- Mead: It sounds like there was quite a variety of people involved.
- Wolf: Yes. There were professional botanists, and many of them knew the botanical garden there. By their firm protests and cooperation with the Parks Department, the Tilden Botanical Garden was saved from being closed.
- Mead: In doing some research recently, I found an article in the East Bay Express of February 1990 about the Tilden Botanical Garden. In it there was mention of someone named William Penn Mott who was an East Bay Regional Parks Director. The author states Mott had proposed at one point to move the Tilden Garden to the Oakland hills, and it was at this point that the Friends of the Garden formed and successfully prevented that from taking place. From this group, CNPS apparently evolved. Is this an accurate account?
- Wolf: William Penn Mott was very political. This was just an absurd suggestion that the botanical garden be moved to the Oakland hills because--actually this particular spot in the Regional Park at Tilden for the botanical garden is unique. There were so many native natives--the beautiful bay tree California laurel, redwoods, Ceanothus, Arctostaphylos that were native which grew there from the beginning. The terrain, the stream going down in the middle of this garden, through a little canyon-- this was just all politics on William Penn Mott's part.
- Mead: Do you remember some of the activities of this group to educate people about the garden?
- Wolf: Well, they had these public meetings at the garden, and they went to the board meetings of the Regional Parks Department protesting the closing of the garden. This

Wolf: group was so effective, they felt like they should organize into a supporting group of conservation to preserve California native plants. This was the beginning of the California Native Plant Society.

Myrtle Joins CNPS

Mead: At some point, you heard about CNPS. How did you come to know about it?

Wolf: In 1966, I met an old friend and former teacher at the Berkeley Horticultural Nursery. I was just down there looking at plants, and she told me about the group. Her name is Leon⁹ara Hohl Strohmaier. She had been my T.A. when I was a freshman in 1932 at UC [Berkeley] in the first botany class I ever took. We became very good friends and still remain very close friends. She was with this organization, and she told me about this splendid new society that was being formed called the Native Plant Society and urged me to join it, which I did immediately. That was in 1966, and in that year I participated in a plant sale to raise money to help support the Tilden Botanical Garden.

Mead: So you had taken some botany courses at UC Berkeley. Can you describe your education a bit more? Was it related to your interest in native plants?

Wolf: I was a botany major. That was my declared major when I was a freshman in college. I grew up loving plants and having a garden. I had a garden when I was in high school. I came from a family of garden-loving people, and we indulged in outdoor activities, picnics and hikes. There was just an innate knowledge of conservation that I grew up with.

CHAPTER II. EARLY ACTIVITIES AND STRUCTURE OF CNPS

Early Activities

Mead: What were some of the activities of the local CNPS chapter in the early years, and how did you participate?

Wolf: In the early years, as now, we organized routine monthly meetings with scheduled speakers and slides which were of an educational nature. We participated in organized plant count hikes, and we assembled data that had to be coordinated throughout the state. Of course now with computers, all of this is becoming much more accurate and much easier to do. We send in status reports to the U.S. Forest Service and the Fish and Game Commission. There is now a statewide scientific advisory committee that coordinates all of this material. Throughout the years, especially since 1973, I have participated in these events.

Very early, I guess even the first year of formation of the group, there was a plant sale planned which consisted of people just bringing their plants that were native that they had in their gardens. It was quite a hit or miss thing. I don't remember how much we netted in those early sales, but it was kind of a jolly sharing thing.

Mead: Was it initially meant to raise money or just share different kinds of plants, or both?

Wolf: We always did a lot of sharing of plants during the year, but for the sale it was specifically to raise money for the organization. Our first two or three sales were down at Lakeside Park in the gardening center at Lake Merritt [Oakland, California]. We did a lot of soliciting of native plants from the local nurseries. At that time great amounts of material were brought in by other CNPS chapters that were beginning to spring up.

Formation of CNPS Chapters

Wolf: Sacramento was the first chapter which developed almost immediately after the mother group here in Berkeley was formed. During the latter part of that same year, the

- Wolf: first chapter was Sacramento. They participated in our plant sales for many years. The Gualala chapter, which was also an early chapter, would bring marvelous redwood understory plants down for our sales.
- Mead: So the Sacramento chapter was formed nearly the same time that the Berkeley chapter was formed, or a little after-- was this also in 1965?
- Wolf: Yes. Actually, the mother chapter of CNPS was formed in the early part of 1965 in Berkeley. In December of 1965, the Sacramento chapter was formed.
- Mead: Did this spur some interest in creating a state office for CNPS in Sacramento, or did that happen later?
- Wolf: That happened much later. The first CNPS state office was on Ellsworth Street in Berkeley and remained there until 1973.
- Mead: So shortly after the local chapter of CNPS was formed, other parts of the state wanted to form their own chapters. Did that spring up gradually, or how did those come about?
- Wolf: There was a rather rapid sequence at first, as the organization gained notariety. After the Sacramento chapter, there was rather rapid development in the late sixties and early seventies of local chapters being formed.
- Mead: Is each chapter fairly autonomous, and when do they come together on a state level?
- Wolf: They are autonomous, but they're all working for the same goal which is conservation of our native plants, protecting them. Each chapter has its own projects in its surrounding counties, going out and doing specific education through schools, through public meetings. Then once a year there has always been a meeting of representatives from each chapter coming together, pooling their resources, pooling their knowledge and being supportive to one another.

Wolf: Now we have twenty seven chapters from Northern to Southern California, and all of them have queued into what is now our data base of information with formal inventories of rare and endangered plants. We have become very effective because now we are integrated with the plant section of the California Fish and Game Commission and California Nature Conservancy. We are working with them, pooling our data collection.

At the first we used the botanists of these organizations, but now we are able to hire three trained botanists of our own to collect material and print these rare and endangered plant inventories which are used by very many individuals such as building site contractors. It is very effective legislation to prevent overlumbering and overgrazing, destruction and filling in of wetlands, a terribly important part of our food chain in California.

Mead: It sounds like these chapters work fairly well together, that they cooperate in a joint effort towards these ends. Have you ever encountered any problems with the chapters coming together?

Wolf: Once a year there is a a two-day meeting. Since the mother chapter did reside in Berkeley for so many years in the beginning--after 1973 when the state office moved to Sacramento, it was decided after a couple of yearly meetings there to come back to Berkeley. The meeting place is at the Men's Faculty Club on the [UC] campus. There are reports from each of the chapters, and the agenda for the next year, what in general is going to be focused on, methods are traded about data collection and educational problems that are working in various areas.

There is a general good feeling of cooperation and exchange of materials. There is no rivalry that I discern between what the different chapters are doing or accomplishing. It's a cooperative statewide network which is working, I think, very well. After all, it is mainly a volunteer group for preservation of our environment and of course plants being the absolutely essential living things on earth.

CNPS Publications

- Mead: Has there been a way of sending to all the members some information about upcoming events, current issues or matters on the state agenda?
- Wolf: Yes. We have two state publications, The Bulletin [of the California Native Plant Society]¹, and the journal which is called Fremontia¹ which the members of all twenty seven chapters receive.
- Mead: Were those created fairly early on?
- Wolf: I really don't remember the date of the first issue of Fremontia which is a series of articles on different areas of interest. In our state office, we have people who are in engaged in planning and research, and that material comes to the individual chapters through The Bulletin and through articles in Fremontia.

Formation of San Francisco Chapter

- Mead: It's my understanding that at some point the original chapter in this area was comprised of San Francisco and the East Bay. At some point apparently there was a split, and the San Francisco chapter became a separate chapter. Do you remember how that came about?
- Wolf: The Bay Area chapter was actually a part of the mother organization until 1973 when the mother chapter moved to Sacramento from Ellsworth Street in Berkeley. Actually, we didn't call ourselves the Bay Area chapter at that time. We just called ourselves CNPS. When the mother group moved to Sacramento in 1973, then we formulated our charter which was known then as the Bay Area chapter which comprised Alameda and Contra Costa counties--well, all of the cities around the Bay Area, and I think Marin.

So our Bay Area chapter was formed officially in 1973, and it had 200 members. Then the people from San Francisco found it harder and harder to come to our monthly night meetings and committee meetings. So in

¹See Collateral Documents

Wolf: 1987, the Bay Area chapter was split. The San Francisco group, called the Yerba Buena chapter which was San Francisco and part of the peninsula, formed their charter and split off from the Bay Area Chapter.

CHAPTER III. THREATENED CLOSURE OF TILDEN BOTANICAL GARDEN

Effects of Proposition 13 on Tilden Botanical Garden

Mead: In 1978 Proposition 13 was passed. Can you describe what kind of an effect this had on the parks system and particularly the botanical garden at Tilden?

Wolf: There was a great crunch at that time, and the Parks Department again decided that the botanical garden was one of the frills of the Regional Park Department that could be shut down. We did not make money as some of the concessions in the Regional Parks--the pony rides and the merry-go-around and other concessions which were an income. The Parks Department felt that maintaining the botanical garden with a director and four or five full-time staff was too expensive. They voted to shut the garden down.

There was a serious outcry of people who knew and loved Tilden Botanical Garden. I remember that I went to a Regional Parks Board Meeting, and I must say with tears streaming down my cheeks, I said it is like closing the public library to close a botanical garden that is used by so many people, by so many school children. It was a teaching botanical garden. It was a place for families. It was decided that they would put a paid turnstile on the botanical garden which they did in the spring of 1978. ##

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Wolf: So for three months there was a paid turnstile placed in the garden. On weekends, I monitored the garden. I saw people come up to the garden entrance with children, with their picnic baskets, and turn away. I don't remember how much the Parks Department collected during those three months, but CNPS made a proposition to them. We would earn that amount of money, the same amount of money that was collected in the paid turnstile, if they would leave the botanical garden open. We had very strong support from UC Botanical Garden, from the [UC] Botany Department, and from the Department of Natural Resources.

Wolf: Professor [Robert] Ornduff who was Chairman of the Botany Department and Director of the UC Botanical Garden said at that time, "This is an unique botanical garden. So many of the trees and shrubs were native here when the garden was opened, and the supplementation has been excellent." Actually Tilden Botanical Garden is an extension of the UC Botanical Garden. The working relationship was very close. Students from the UC Botany Department use the garden at Tilden as they used the UC Botanical Garden just down the hill.

We knew that we could do this [raise the money] just from selling seeds, because we had been selling native plant seeds. Wayne Roderick was then Director of the Tilden Botanical Garden. He assured us we would be able to give the Parks Department as much as they had collected per month prorated by the turnstile. At that time, CNPS had rallied mightily to again save Tilden Botanical Garden.

Our plant sales, by 1978, were going very well. We had our growing grounds then under a big old redwood tree down at the foot of Marin Avenue where the U.S. Department of Agriculture had their laboratories. By then, we were having a little spring sale. So we said we would give our spring sale to Tilden, which we did. I was chairman of that first spring plant sale in 1979. We made an alarming amount of money on that spring sale, with good publicity that we had through Sunset magazine, the local newspapers and radio announcements. We had excellent publicity, and it went over well. There again Tilden Botanical Garden was saved by CNPS.

Plant Sale for Tilden Botanic Garden

Mead: You were the chairman of the spring plant sale that helped the Tilden garden so much. Would you describe a little bit more the activities that went into the preparation of that sale?

Wolf: Well, we had a regular weekly meeting date of volunteers. It's the function of the chairman to make sure that soil is mixed ahead of time, that pots are clean and that there is material to work on, which means carefully

Wolf: taking cuttings and preparing them to be rooted, the planting of seeds and transferring of the seedlings from two-inch pots to four-inch pots to gallon containers which is our main saleable form. We got much of our cutting material from Tilden Botanical Garden, also from the UC Botanical Garden, and from the gardens of members of the volunteer groups who came to do the work. These weekly work sessions go on throughout the year. A little nursery plot is set aside in the garden to house and care for these plants, which means watering them, feeding them, grooming them, and getting them ready for sale.

Mead: This is done by individual members at home?

Wolf: No. We started that procedure by working in a little space given by the Director, Wayne Roderick, in the botanical garden at Tilden. From the proceeds we built a little lathe house. That stock is for sale for the support of the botanical garden.

Mead: So you actually use the space to grow plants?

Wolf: On site, for this sale, for the botanical garden at Tilden.

CHAPTER IV. CURRENT ACTIVITIES OF CNPS

Current Status of CNPS

- Mead: In 1978, the organization was very successful in saving the garden at Tilden from being closed. How has the status of CNPS evolved since that time?
- Wolf: Because of the sincerity and accuracy [of CNPS], the State Office of Planning and Resource has discovered that we are a valuable and inexpensive resource because of the seriousness with which the committees from the different statewide chapters were collecting information. Now, we really have this contract with the U.S. Forest Service and California Fish and Game, so that our status reports are scientific and much used. There is an excellent rapport and cooperation between us and the state offices.
- Mead: What kinds of major changes have you seen in CNPS since the early years?
- Wolf: Well of course the organization has just become much more structured and well-organized. Our state office has grown. We've gotten to the place where we can hire trained botanists and equipment. We have been given grants which make it possible to do very scientific studies connected with our projects, especially the rare plant project. All of the state colleges and universities in California know and cooperate with CNPS.

Income and Budget for CNPS

- Mead: One of the chief sources of income for the local chapter is the plant sale. What are some of the other sources by which you earn an income?
- Wolf: We have a statewide income through the sale of our very beautiful colored posters. Each chapter sells them, and of course there's no overhead in storage and sales because each chapter has a poster committee that gets them from the state and houses them and distributes them.

Wolf: The Nature Company for many years handled them, also stationery stores handled them. We sell them at fairs where we have our educational committee set up to solicit members and where there are usually teaching exhibits. We have T-shirts which is a good source of income. We write for grants and have been given very substantial grants to do our projects.

Mead: Does each chapter have its own budget and then the state have a budget as well?

Wolf: Actually, there are the same dues for each of the twenty seven chapters. We have membership dues, then each chapter has its own money-raising methods, and this varies according to the area where the chapter is located, what the local problems are in conserving the area, whether it's a meadow area, or a grassland area or a woodland area or chaparral or whether it's preserving the forest. We have a great deal of input into the preservation of California forests.

Mead: You've described how CNPS raises money for projects. What kinds of projects does CNPS promote? How is that income spent?

Wolf: Our organization is divided into a number of committees [pulls out a recent "Bay Leaf" newsletter¹ for the East Bay chapter which lists the committees]. There's a conservation committee which deals with local issues and statewide issues. Once a year, after our plant sale where we earn all of our precious money, we have a meeting and look at our budget.

Each of the committees asks for a certain amount of money. The conservation committee has their projects divided into what they want to do for the state, mainly legislation and collecting data which all costs money, and what they want to do as a local project in conservation, doing something for the immediate community such as the help with the fire devastation of plants. Then there is the rare plant committee that goes out on weekends and does plant counts, specific plant counts, to determine whether or not a plant is on its way to extinction and what protection it should have statewide and locally.

¹See Collateral Documents

Wolf: Of course those forays cost money, the reporting, the lecturing to various state groups--all of that means a budget is necessary. Then there is a committee to control escaped exotics. For instance, locally we do a great deal in bashing broom. Broom is rampant. In the Santa Cruz mountains the broom from the Mediterranean countries has taken really such a hold on the mountains. It is decimating the Ceanothus, our wonderful wild lilac that is endemic and unique to California.

Mead: How did the Mediterranean broom come to be here?

Wolf: All of the explorers brought seeds. All the people who trekked westward--everybody had a pocketful of his favorite seeds. So we have a great intermix of eastern and central United States plants in California besides the European imports. Another plant that is rampant are certain plants of the pea family which grow very readily here--the morning glories, and these are not endemic plants.

This committee also publishes literature for farmers and landowners. So the escaped exotics is another way in which we spend our money. Then we have a formal donations committee that gives scholarships to horticultural departments of colleges. Actually, our chapter sends out a notice to the horticultural departments of all the colleges and junior colleges and community colleges and universities in Contra Costa and Alameda counties. We also give scholarships in San Francisco County.

The donations committee also gives contributions to projects that are going on at Menzies Garden, that beautiful native garden in San Francisco which is so strategically located for visitors to California. If they ask to see California wildflowers or native plants, that is a unique place to take them. Many visitors don't come to the East Bay, they come only to San Francisco. I've had houseguests who have visited San Francisco, and we've had many since I was married to a former European, and always took the time to run them in to beautiful Golden Gate Park and into the Menzies native garden.

Wolf: Another committee is our education committee which has a program that goes into public schools, into elementary schools, teaching them about plants and the importance of plants. That is becoming more and more successful.

Mead: How is that accomplished?

Wolf: We contact the teachers and ask them if they would like to have a demonstration from CNPS in their classrooms about botany. Of course most teachers are anxious to, but first we interview the teachers and make sure that there is some preparation to set the stage for third and fourth graders. Many of the elementary teachers haven't had any biological sciences. If the children aren't prepared in some way, just psychologically even, it's harder to carry on.

Our first project was called "Grocery Store Botany." We would just go to the grocery store with a basket and get various fruits and vegetables, of course vegetables are fruits, too, and we would have a very simple botanical vocabulary which we would give to the children. Then with the meetings with the teacher, there would be followup programs.

We participate with our exhibits and videos that we take to fairs, local and state fairs. This is all done by volunteers, but of course it takes money to make videos, mount posters and make screens. The education committee gets a substantial allocation of our income. Then we have field trips, and there is some expense attached to them. We give money to keep printing these beautiful posters--we have a series of five now. Publicity costs a certain amount. The publication of our monthly "Bay Leaf" newsletter--there is cost in printing and mailing it. We have about \$50,000 a year to spend in our chapter which is one of the most active in the state.

Mead: It sounds like it's a very well-organized and comprehensive way of spending the income.

Wolf: Yes. Ultimately it all boils down to education of the public about our heritage of the wonderful diversified flora of California and its importance to the state.

Past and Present Locations of Plant Sales

Mead: Going back to the plant sales, they were originally held in the garden center at Lake Merritt?

Wolf: The first two or three plant sales were at the gardening center at Lake Merritt. The plants were just grown by individuals and taken there, and we solicited native plants from the local nurseries. And I must say the Oakland and Berkeley nurseries were very kind to us. Berkeley Horticultural Nursery was one of our really good mentors.

Before the chapters started peeling off from the mother group, and after our sales at Lake Merritt, we held the sales at the Brazilian Room, inside of the Brazilian Room if it was raining or outside. By then we had established a place called the nursery which was at that government research station at the foot of Marin Avenue. Each government facility was supposed to do something for the community, and they gave us space under a big redwood tree. We put down flat black plastic and wood chips, and our office was a huge, huge metal garbage can where we kept our labels and our pens and our records. We started formal propagation there. We set up a little bench and hauled soil in, and mixed the soil in washtubs.

We collected huge gallon-size metal cans from the public school cafeterias so that we began to get a little more uniformity in our planting cans. The day before the sale we had to haul all of those gallon and four-inch cans up to the Brazilian Room. Our sales increased greatly then. We got quite a corp of propagators who would come every Tuesday and work down there. Of course we had to take turns to water the stock.

Mead: Are the sales still held at the Brazilian Room?

Wolf: No. That really was a great labor because any unsold material we had to take back to our little nursery. Then there was lots of vandalism down there, although there was a chain-link fence. We began to look for a more permanent site.

Wolf: One of our members was teaching at Merritt College, a community college which had just been built--his name was Emil Labadie. We got permission to haul our plants over there. The first sale that we had at Merritt was in the students union. John Matthews, a building contractor, was then president of CNPS. He got us rolls and rolls of plastic which we put down on the carpeted floor of the students union. It took us three days to get the room ready, then take our plants in, carefully avoiding water spillage and soil spillage. It was a very great labor, but it was a pretty successful sale. We decided not to do that again. It was just too hard work.

Then we were invited by the [Merritt College] Horticultural Department to use a corner of their beautiful grounds, and we were given a corner of the greenhouse and the lathe house. So the next year we had our materials all in one place, and our potted plants ready for sale all in one place. We took them out on the lawn, away from our potting site, but it was a beautiful October day and the gardeners had turned on the automatic sprinklers on, and the lawn was wet, and a lot of our cans were floating in a quagmire [laughter] by ten o'clock when the sale opened. But the sale was still more successful than the one before. ##

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Mead: Do you remember when you housed yourselves permanently at Merritt College for the plant sales?

Wolf: It was probably--it was about 1979.

Mead: So you had really been struggling up to that point with taking things to and from various sites. It must have been a real pleasure to have everything in one place.

Wolf: Oh, yes. This was really the beginning of serious organization, collecting plastic pots, doing away with the heavy clay pots and the makeshift gallon fruit cans that we had collected from schools. We could have uniformity in what we were doing now that the sales were held right at our nursery.

Wolf: We have excellent organization, and it's a two-day sale now which has burgeoned into a very well-organized nursery setup. We have that wonderful facility of using a corner of the greenhouse at Merritt. We give them plants for their grounds and help identify their native garden. There is an excellent working relationship between their horticultural department and CNPS projects.

Controversy and Cooperation Among Chapters

Mead: Sometimes in organizations of this size one encounters differences of opinion among its members. What is your experience of this during these years?

Wolf: We grew like topsy from the beginning of CNPS whose origin really was a group of naturalists getting together to save the extinction of Tilden Botanical Garden. In those early days, there was little history recorded. Records were not kept. As a matter of fact in trying to find out when the charters were granted for each of the twenty seven chapters that we have, there are just scanty records of this. There is a little bit of bickering about who did what, but overall I think there is not a great deal of politics in CNPS.

Mead: So any internal difficulties do not have a serious affect on the functioning of CNPS?

Wolf: Occasionally at the yearly meetings there is a little bit of controversy over whether or not we have a president of the state organization from Northern California or Southern California and whether we should spend more money on forest preservation or wetlands preservation or trying to stop the building of a roadway through a rare and endangered species of a plant.

CHAPTER V. MYRTLE'S PERSONAL ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS

Activities Outside CNPS

Mead: You have an education in botany and a very special interest in the preservation of plantlife. What other local societies or groups besides CNPS are you involved in?

Wolf: I have always been very active in horticultural groups. Actually in M. Nevin Smith's 1991 A Guide to Ornamental Plants for Coastal California with Cultural Notes, he described me in a section he named for me as "one of the patron saints of horticulture" [laughter] which I consider a great compliment.

Mead: What groups have you been involved in?

Wolf: Actually I've been actively involved in the California Horticultural Society. Of course CNPS is one of the three organizations in which I've been constantly and very actively involved. I'm a life member and a Fellow of that organization. My number two organization is Friends of UC Botanical Garden in which I'm a life member and an Honorary Trustee. And of course [I'm a member of] the Regional Park Botanical Garden at Tilden.

I belong to the American Rock Garden Society and go to all of their meetings all over the United States, and I'm very active in the Western Rock Garden Society. I'm active in and work with the Friends of the Strybing Arboretum at Golden Gate Park. I'm a member and go to the meetings of the Society for the Pacific Coast Iris and the Sidney B. Mitchell Iris Society which is the Berkeley-located iris society.

I work for the committee of the National Peace Garden which is being planned and built at Haines Point in Washington [D.C.]. Because I was reared as a Quaker, I feel very strongly about this support. I belong to the foundation of the Pacific Horticultural Journal which is housed here in Berkeley, and I do work for them. For the

Wolf: last few years I have been active in the Friends of Jepson Herbarium under the direction of Dr. Heckard who is just finishing up the revision of Willis Linn Jepson's A Manual of Flowering Plants of California.

Mead: This is a very impressive list of groups that you're involved in. How would you characterize your involvement? Is it more along the lines of actually preserving plantlife or is the involvement more political?

Wolf: Actually my function is that of a mentor. I have been described as a mentor and a facilitator, getting people together, collecting money for UC Botanical Garden which very greatly needed a place to display their alpine plants which were dying in pots. I collected the money by going around to friends, I must say, and organizations--I belong to all of these organizations and I'm known in them, and all these plant organizations are willing to help each other. CNPS gave a very substantial sum to this project of developing the fell-field which is rock outcropping of alpine area. This was finished two years ago at UC Botanical Garden.

I've just finished a project of collecting \$40,000 for a serpentine area in the UC Botanical Garden. There again, our local chapter of CNPS, the East Bay Chapter, contributed very substantially to this project which is just starting now. Since we get much of our cutting material from UC Botanical Garden for our nursery project of CNPS, there is a very fine relationship existing between the two organizations. We hold our monthly lecture meetings in the classroom of the UC Botanical Garden. There is a very fine relationship that exists between all these local organizations. There is to my mind no competition, no bickering [among them]. ##

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Mead: Myrtle, you have been describing some of the ways you have been involved in various horticultural groups. How do you envision your involvement with the preservation of plantlife in the future?

Peace Garden Project, Washington, D.C.

- Wolf: I have very high hopes for this Peace Garden in Washington [D.C.]. When the president of this project got this idea, she was taking her grandchildren around Washington to see the historical sights. She was struck by the idea that so many of the memorials were war memorials. She, being a great good gardener, Elizabeth Ratcliff is her name, felt that there should be peace monuments, not just war monuments--and how better to express this through plants.
- Mead: Is she from this area?
- Wolf: Yes.
- Mead: When did she come up with this idea?
- Wolf: Actually this is a relatively new project. It can't be more than five years old.
- Mead: How did you become involved in this?
- Wolf: Well, Elizabeth is just a long-time old Berkeley friend that I've known.
- Mead: Is this garden coming to fruition through efforts of local people here?
- Wolf: It isn't just local. Now it's national. There is a very large contingency of eastern people. This will not be a native garden, of course. This is just going to be a peace garden. Actually she organized a competition, and the winning landscape gardener who designed the garden has it in the shape of an olive branch--it's very beautiful.
- Mead: Do you remember the name of the designer?
- Wolf: No.
- Mead: This project, then, is underway in Washington?
- Wolf: Yes. The land has been granted through an act of Congress, and it is to the money-raising stage.

Mead: Is that something you are also involved in?

Wolf: Yes. I'm helping raise money for this project which is now a national project. Her idea was to have peace emphasized and garden emphasized.

Personal Feelings Towards Plantlife Preservation

Mead: From your description, you have a very strong commitment and ongoing interest in the preservation and education of natural plantlife. On a more personal level, where do think this comes from? What kinds of personal feelings do you have about the preservation of plantlife?

Wolf: I was reared in a family where nature is important, where my parents had a great appreciation of nature. We went on nature walks. One of my first memories is my scrapbook of pressed flowers. It was a child's book of mashed, dried flowers that we pasted down, that had the names of the plants underneath them. I was fortunate enough to have good teachers who had little nature studies during my elementary school years.

I remember a wonderful biology teacher that I had at Berkeley High who was a plant lover, and who actually I suppose had quite a bit to do with my declaring a major in botany when I went to the university. Usually freshmen put down a major and change it several times before they end up, but I stuck to mine. I loved my botany classes, I knew my botany professors very well some of which are still alive and are very dear friends of mine.

Mead: Did you grow up in this area or relocate?

Wolf: I was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and my family came here when I was very young. I was three. My father bought quite extensive farmlands in the Sacramento Valley in Winters. He worked for United Fruit. He was in an inspector. We had that fruit farm in the family until my father died. We moved to Berkeley when I was in junior high school, so I went to junior high school, high school and the university here. Our vacations were usually touring national parks. It was an outdoor family where we were aware of plants and animals.

CHAPTER VI. EARLY MEMBERS OF CNPS

[Interview 2: 30 October 1991]##

James Roof

Mead: Myrtle, there are names of people involved in CNPS which have come up in your discussions. I'd like to get your impressions of these people. Let's start with James Roof. He was the Director of the Botanical Garden at Tilden?

Wolf: Yes, he was the first director of the Botanical Garden at Tilden Regional Park. Later, he was President of CNPS.

Mead: How would you characterize him?

Wolf: He was a very vigorous person, and actually the Tilden Botanical Garden probably would not have had its very strong first start without James Roof. He took over the Forestry Department's gifts to the botanical garden and planted them well. He was kind of an eccentric old bachelor who really loved the garden so much. He felt very possessive of it. He did some rock work that was not very beautiful there, but the plants have grown over it and softened it, as plants do--often taking care of architectural flukes and mistakes.

James Roof became President [of CNPS] about ten years after the East Bay chapter was formed. He knew a lot, and he was a great conservationist, but he was very dictatorial. At that time, during his presidency, a lot of unpleasant things happened. He really wasn't a very good president. He made great contributions as a member, but he was too dictatorial. That was the time when our chapter really did not grow because there was all of this infighting and lack of decisions in going forward which occurred during Jim's time. Shortly after that, Jim, by this time, was nearing retirement age. Because of his inability to discuss things and his dictatorial manner, the Parks Department wanted to get a new director for the botanic garden.

Wolf: I don't remember exactly what year that was, but it was around 1975 or 1976 that Wayne Roderick came in as the next director. He came from the UC Botanical Garden. He had been in charge of the native area at UC Botanical Garden for about four or five years. He was very well-qualified and certainly a much easier person to work with. Tilden [Botanical Garden] flourished greatly under Wayne Roderick's leadership.

Mead: Going back to James Roof, do you remember anything specific about the problems that arose during his leadership?

Wolf: He made the conservation plans, the plans for designating which plants would be rare plants, which would be endangered plants. He was knowledgeable, but any organization has to have democratic input, and there were hurt feelings and withdrawals. It really was a time when Tilden Botanical Garden was not progressing, and certainly CNPS, which was just getting its land-legs and taking off, was greatly altered and not doing the good work that CNPS was able to do under his leadership.

Mead: Was James Roof one of the original members of CNPS?

Wolf: Yes.

Wayne Roderick

Mead: Then he was succeeded by Wayne Roderick and you say that the garden flourished under his leadership. How would you characterize Wayne Roderick?

Wolf: He is very much loved. He is very friendly and caring. He is very energetic as a retired person. He is always willing to lead field trips for children and older people. He always volunteers for leading the groups that are the hardest, that nobody else wants to do. He is a very sharing person, very much loved by all the plant community.

Mead: Most recently there is a Steve Edwards as present director.

Wolf: Yes. When Wayne Roderick retired, then Steve Edwards, who had been on Wayne's staff during his college years, took over. He is very well-qualified--he has a Ph.D. in paleobotany really, but he is an excellent botanist. He does very extensive community work and is a member of CNPS. He does not participate as actively in CNPS as Wayne, and as a matter as [actively as] Roof who was too much in evidence. He is cooperative with CNPS and with UC Botanical Garden. There is excellent interaction and support between UC Botanical Garden and Tilden Botanical Garden.

Mead: How would you characterize Steve Edwards?

Wolf: He is much more formal than Wayne. He is doing a lot of reorganizing and updating of the records that Wayne just was not able to do.

Other Charter and Early Members

Mead: There are a couple of other names in association with the original CNPS group. How about Leo Brewer?

Wolf: Leo Brewer was a charter member. He was a chemistry professor at the university [UCB]. Leo was active, he still is active. He was actually a bulb specialist. At our last sale this year, in October, Leo was the one who collected the bulbs that we sold. He has a contact in Holland. He sends the native bulbs, and he sends seeds, especially of bulb natives, to Holland. They're grown there, and then he buys them back. Of course as conservationists we are allowed to collect a few bulb seeds, but we certainly frown on digging.

Mead: Lawrence Heckard--was he a charter member?

Wolf: I don't know. He may have been. We really do not have a record of who the charter members are. I would rather suspect that he was because he is a very active botanist. He is the Director of the Jepson Herbarium at UC which houses just native plants.

Mead: Was that established under his direction?

Wolf: No, it was established under Professor Jepson who was one of the early botanists at UC who wrote our bible on native plants, A Manual of the Flowering Plants of California, meaning Washington, Oregon and California. That book is being revised under the leadership of Larry Heckard.

Mead: There were several women's names that you mentioned. Mary Wohlers?

Wolf: Mary Wohlers. She definitely was a charter member. She was full-time and very active at that time in the organization. She did a lot for the formation of the chapter but withdrew during the presidency, I believe, of James Roof. There was really much infighting at that time which was very destructive and unpleasant.

Mead: She was uncomfortable enough to leave.

Wolf: Yes. There was some controversy between her and Ledyard Stebbins. Ledyard Stebbins was a professor in genetics at [UC] Davis. He was very active in the mother CNPS group that moved to Sacramento. Actually he was instrumental in establishing the first chapter, the Sacramento Chapter.

Mead: Was Mary Rhyne an early member?

Wolf: Mary Rhyne and Mary Wohlers were very active in those early days. That was during Roof's and Stebbins' very great activity. I really don't know the details of the controversy, but it was very serious and jeopardized the organization greatly, this disagreement on principles and how to run the organization. I've never gotten this straight. Warren Roberts, who is the manager of the [UC] Davis arboretum at the present time knows more about that era. I really don't know about it, and I'm reluctant to probe. I don't want to know because that's all done and past, and we just want to get ahead now.

Mead: Was Warren Roberts a charter member, then?

Wolf: No, no, an early member. He's a much younger person.

Mead: He was also involved in the things going on at this time?

Wolf: No, he wasn't too much involved in it, but he knows Ledyard Stebbins, and he knows Mary Wohlers and Mary Rhyne. He has sifted through this. I really have never wanted to hear about what happened. I think that Warren Roberts has the best understanding of these very bad days when there was controversy.

Mead: Another name mentioned was Frugé, Susan and her husband?

Wolf: August.

Mead: He was head of the UC Press when you met them?

Wolf: Yes.

Mead: They were original members of CNPS?

Wolf: I've never heard Susan say that they were charter members, but they were active. I think that August was [eventually] state president [of CNPS]. Both of them were very active in that early mother chapter that was in Berkeley, from which all of us split off later.

Mead: What about Leonora Strohmaier?

Wolf: She was a charter member. She has told me. She has been recording secretary of our chapter for over 17 years, and she has the minutes of all of the meetings which she has kept accurately and kept filed. Those [records] are in the hands of our recent past president, David Bigham.

Mead: Robert Ornduff, where does he come in?

Wolf: Robert Ornduff is a younger person, kind of a contemporary of Warren Roberts, and for 18 years he was director of the UC Botanic Garden. I think that during all that time he has been a member of CNPS and very supportive. He has not been active in the organization, but he is very supportive, and he will speak very freely. Actually our monthly meetings that we have--we always have kind of a hard time finding a hall that isn't too expensive to meet in, and he has given us permission to meet in the classroom at the UC Botanic Garden as long as we pay for a gatekeeper, guarding the gate, so that the deer won't get in at night.

Natural Hazards to UC Botanical Garden

Mead: That raises the question of whether the gardens are ravaged and have problems with the wildlife.

Wolf: Oh greatly, greatly. The UC Botanical Garden is totally fenced with a chain-link fence. Occasionally deer do get in by breaks in the fence or slight openings at the base of the fence or someone leaving a gate open. Even in the daytime, of course the gates all have to be open so that people can go in and out of the garden, deer also are around then looking for succulent things to eat. They do great damage in the garden. That's a very bad situation. Of course we have skunks and raccoons that also do damage in the garden, but since we are located in the Berkeley hills, there is just no way to fence out the rabbits and the raccoons. But we do have a chain-link fence against the deer.

CHAPTER VII. MISCELLANEOUS TOPICS

CNPS Activities Following Firestorm Damage

Mead: I want to shift to a different topic right now. Almost two weeks ago [20 October 1991] there was a large fire in the Berkeley and Oakland hills. It prompted memories of the 1970 fire in the Berkeley hills. What impact, if any did this have on CNPS, and did CNPS become involved?

Wolf: We have been asked for lists of fire-resistant plants. Of course not all native plants are fire-resistant. This is a misconception that the general public may have. The Berkeley and Oakland Park Departments have contacted CNPS as well as the botanic gardens at UC and Tilden for help in giving landscape architects and individual homeowners lists of plants that are fire-retardant. This consists of Mediterranean plants, Australia and New Zealand plants as well as California native plants. This is something that is going on now. It also went on after the great north Berkeley fire in 1923 which burned most of the houses north of the [UC] campus.

CNPS Unofficial Involvement in People's Park

Mead: There were some student riots in Berkeley in the late sixties. Were the functions of CNPS ever impacted by the events of those times?

Wolf: There was some controversy at People's Park with some of the mavericks trying to take over the University's property there. They started plantings, and they unofficially asked members of CNPS what would grow in People's Park without water or much care. But

Wolf: that was a very informal kind of information that was given out by a very few members. Nothing ever official was done about that.

Women Mentors for Myrtle

Mead: In relating your personal history you mentioned that you had a biology teacher in high school who had a real influence on you and contributed to your decision to study botany at the university. Do you recall the name of this person?

Wolf: Yes. Her name was Eula Lucille Burke. She took us on field trips when field trips weren't so popular as they are now. She took us to Golden Gate Park to the Academy of Sciences where another woman botanist worked as an early plantswoman. She knew Lester Roundtree also.

Mead: Who is Lester Roundtree?

Wolf: She was an early 1920s field collector. She wrote several books on California botany. Burke saw to it that her classes knew what was going on currently, and she was very enthusiastic. She knew the people at the Academy-- I can't recall the name of that wonderful, gentle woman botanist. I can see her with her long sweeping skirts.

I remember her name. It was Alice Eastwood. She was someone who was working at the Academy of Sciences, a botanist. She took us back to the herbarium and showed us how her herbarium worked. That is a name associated with the Academy of Sciences that is very important. She was a very serious, well-known botanist. She was hardworking and did much to further the work. I must say she gave a very positive aspect to women in science. Women have been very much neglected in both biological and physical sciences.

Work Opportunities for Myrtle in 1936

Mead: In your own personal experience, have you run across any problems in this regard?

Wolf: When I finished my master's at UC Berkeley in 1936, I had to get a paying job. There was nothing I could do in pure botany. I was offered a job in the Forestry

Wolf: Department which was then in Berkeley--before it moved to Davis. I was assigned a little cubicle to count pine nuts, but I could not do this. The whole treatment of women then in the Forestry Department was very demeaning.

Mead: Were women actually working in the Forestry Department at that time?

Wolf: Yes, but it was very unusual. There were no other women in the department here in Berkeley at that time. Well, we've come a long way. My first job was at Mills [College] with Professor [Howard E.] McMinn doing laboratory work which was interesting. He was doing chromosome counts in a genetics project on lily roots and tobacco. This was before electron microscopes, and the chromosomes in these two species were rather large and could be seen with a compound microscope with oil immersion lenses. I did microtechnique work.

What is a Native Plant?

Mead: How would you describe what a native plant is? How would one know that some plants are native and some are not?

Wolf: One wouldn't know unless he had some botanical training. If I just go up to the water company's property in back of me and stake out a foot square, I may not find one native plant there. There are eucalyptus trees which are not native, they're Australian imports. But the Monterey pine on one corner of this square is a native plant.

Mead: Is it a matter of having a collection of records gathered by people early on?

Wolf: Well, yes. The early explorers were very much interested in making lists with detailed descriptions of their characteristics of what they found when they first came. All these early explorations that Lewis and Clark made west from Harvard University, they always had a botanist along. They were always hoping to find some food plant or medicinal plant that wasn't grown in the East or in Europe.

Wolf: John C. Fremont, an early explorer, was a great botanist. He wrote in his journal every day a description of a plant that he had encountered growing here before there was any introduction of exotics from the East or Middle West or Europe. Of course now that California and the whole west coast is so highly populated, we have had introductions from all the other continents. Because of our equitable climate here, things flourish. For instance, a lot of the Australian plants flourish better here than they do in Australia [laughter]. That's what the Australians say about the eucalyptus.

Myrtle's Current Impressions of CNPS

Mead: Is there anything you can think of, over the course of our discussions, that you would like to add to?

Wolf: I just want to go on record as saying that I really think CNPS is one of the most satisfactory, important organizations in a fast-growing state. We've decimated much because of not having the chance to plan. I really feel ever grateful that we now can now exert some influence politically and can raise money so that we can fight some of the problems such as the decimation of wetlands that people think are no-good lands.

Mead: Do you have any final impressions or comments that you would like to make about your involvement with CNPS?

Wolf: Well, I think CNPS is a very important organization in the state of California. It is a serious group. It is a respected group, and I think they are doing fine work in this overcrowded state where plants and the total environment is being hard put upon.

Mead: Do you have any personal feelings about where you see things going or what you would like to see happen in this state?

Wolf: I think the direction that CNPS has taken in the Endangered Plant Program in cooperation with the California Fish and Game Commission and the State of California Natural Diversity Data Base which incorporates

Wolf: Nature Conservancy, a strong group nationally as well as in this state, points us in the right direction. We do have a good relationship with them. We do cooperate with them. They do come to us. We are coordinating and correlating our data base materials. CNPS is a strong state force, and we should continue our efforts cooperating with the State of California. I like the feeling of being associated with and working with and putting my energies into this group.

Mead: Myrtle, I would like to thank you very much for a most interesting and informative look at CNPS and your specific involvement in it. Thank you.

Wolf: Thank you. ##

COLLATERAL DOCUMENTS

COLLATERAL DOCUMENTS INDEX

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CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

san francisco bay area chapter



February 23, 1987

Lawrence Heckard
 Fellow Committee Co-Chairman
 California Native Plant Society
 c/o Jepson Herbarium
 Department of Botany
 University of California
 Berkeley, California 94720

Dear Dr. Heckard:

We, the undersigned, wish to submit the name of Myrtle Wolf for your consideration as a CNPS Fellow. She is a longtime member of the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter, as well as a highly respected member of numerous other horticultural societies. It is largely due to her tireless effort and great generosity that our chapter has flourished these many years. She has been mentor to many in-coming presidents and vice presidents. She has, on occasion, singlehandedly kept our plant sale activities going. As well as her advice to plant sale chairs year in and year out, her expertise in propagation, which she regularly shares with others of the propagation crew, has, to a great extent been responsible for the success of our plant sale program.

When the Regional Parks Botanic Garden at Tilden was threatened due to Proposition 13 funding cuts, it was Myrtle, among others, who rallied to start the Volunteers to the Botanic Garden, with its plant sale activities culminating in a Spring sale on the grounds of the Botanic Garden. The sale of books, Fremontias, posters, and other related items was instigated in the Information Center of the Garden. These efforts have resulted in numerous improvements there, such as a projector and screen for slide shows, lighting, office equipment, propagation green house, path improvements, etc. She has also

Dr. Lawrence Heckard
Re: Myrtle wolf

February 23, 1987

steered interested benefactors to make significant donations toward improving the quality of the Garden. Among her many other gifts and talents, she has written a textbook on botany for the elementary level. Her love of our native flora and the esteem others hold for her is witnessed by several native varieties named on her behalf. Her behind the scenes work has been felt by many and appreciated by all. It is our heartfelt hope that the Committee will honor her as a CNPS Fellow. The Committee's confidentiality would be appreciated, and please feel free to contact us for further information if the need arises.

Sincerely,

Patricia Allen

Patricia Allen
President

Peggy Grier

Peggy Grier
V.P., Plant Sale

John Danielsen

John Danielsen
Treasurer

Grace Currier F.A.

Grace Currier
Secy., Corresponding

David Bigham

David Bigham
Adm. Vice President

Linda Price

Linda Price
V.P., Plant Sale

Leonora Strohmaier

Leonora Strohmaier
Secy., Recording

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Myrtle Wolf, CNPS

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Tape 3, Side B	28
Insert from Tape 2, Side A	31

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<u>Minutes</u>	<u>Topics</u>
Tape 1, Side A	History of Tilden Botanical Garden Possible closure of garden in 1965 Group of concerned people rally to keep garden open
5 minutes	Some of the key people in group: Roof, Brewer, Heckard, Wohlers, Rhyne, Fruges Tilden garden saved from closure Activities of group to educate public CNPS formed by members of this group Myrtle hears about CNPS from Leonora Strohmaier and joins in 1966 Myrtle's activities during first year in CNPS
10 minutes	Myrtle's background education and interest in botany CNPS activities in early years Plant sales for income Early location of plant sales at Lake Merritt
15 minutes	Early chapters of CNPS: Sacramento, Gualala State CNPS office in Berkeley until 1973 Development of chapters throughout state Statewide meeting once a year
20 minutes	Cooperation among chapters CNPS publications, <u>Bulletin</u> and <u>Fremontia</u>
25 minutes	Formation of Bay Area chapter in 1973 Formation of San Francisco chapter in 1987 Effects of Proposition 13 on Tilden Botanical Garden

30 minutes Tilden garden again threatened with closure
Myrtle speaks at a Regional Park Board meeting

Tape 1, Side B Paid turnstile installed in garden for income
CNPS makes proposition to eliminate turnstile
Ornduff's support for garden
Garden is saved from closure
Spring plant sale income donated to garden upkeep

5 minutes Myrtle is chairman of plant sale--her function in that role
Preparation for plant sales

10 minutes Current status of CNPS with US Forest Service and Fish and Game Commission
Changes in CNPS since early years
Sources of income for CNPS

15 minutes Chapters' management of income
Little difference of opinion among members

20 minutes Myrtle's early work in botany following education
Myrtle's involvement in multiple horticultural groups; her role as mentor

(30 minutes) Recent projects for which Myrtle has raised funds

Tape 2, Side A Myrtle's involvement in Peace Garden, Washington, D.C.
Elizabeth Ratcliff initiates project on a national scale

5 minutes Myrtle's personal feelings and experiences around preservation of plantlife
Brief description of living in Sacramento Valley when young

(10 minutes) Personal impressions of CNPS

Tape 2, Side B	Blank
Tape 3, Side A	Myrtle's impressions of early CNPS members
	James Roof
5 minutes	Wayne Roderick
	James Roof
	Steve Edwards
	Wayne Roderick
10 minutes	Steve Edwards
	Leo Brewer
	Lawrence Heckard
	Mary Wohlers and difficulties with Roof
15 minutes	Ledyard Stebbins
	Mary Rhyne
	Internal controversy within CNPS during early years
	Warren Roberts' association with Roof, Stebbins, Rhyne and Wohlers
	Susan and August Fruge
	Leonora Strohmaier
20 minutes	Robert Ornduff
	Problems with wildlife damaging the Tilden Botanical Garden
(25 minutes)	Original site of CNPS plant sales at Lake Merritt, then Brazilian Room in Tilden
	Early CNPS nursery on land donated by US government
(30 minutes)	Sale and nursery site eventually at Merritt College in Oakland

Tape 3, Side B	Permanent site of sales and nursery at Merritt College in 1979
	1991 Berkeley/Oakland hills firestorm and CNPS involvement
5 minutes	People's Park and CNPS involvement, 1969
	Eula Lucille Burke, influential high school botany teacher
	Lester Roundtree, early woman botanist
	S. F. Academy of Sciences herbarium
(10 minutes)	CNPS projects: committees of conservation, plant counts, escaped exotics
(15 minutes)	Committees of donations, education and publicity
20 minutes	What is a native plant?
(25 minutes)	William Penn Mott's involvement with Tilden Botanical Garden
	Alice Eastwood, Academy of Sciences botanist
	Lack of jobs for women in Forestry Department in 1936
30 minutes	Myrtle's final impressions of CNPS

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INTERVIEWER'S BIOGRAPHY

Mary Mead, the interviewer, holds a master's degree in Clinical Psychology from John F. Kennedy University. She has also received training in oral history at the Oregon Historical Society and currently at Vista College with Elaine Dorfman. Her counseling experience led to an interest in the biographical process and oral history in which she has been involved for several years. She has lived and worked in the Bay Area for nearly thirty years.