

THE FIRST AMERICAN CACTUS JOURNAL

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A cactus society founded in Baltimore, N. Maryland, in 1889 ranks as the earliest of which we have any record. An earlier date is suggested by the *Cact. Succ. J. Amer.* 1 (8): 142, 1930 in a quotation from "Thomas Meehan's Monthly (Philadelphia) October 1881". Since the periodical of this name did not come into being until ten years later, 1881 is an unfortunate misprint for 1891, and the quotation is correctly reprinted in the same journal 45: 213, 1973. I mention it here only to lay the ghost once and for all.

The society had to wait five years before the appearance of the journal by which it is remembered, and during that period Europe also experienced a revival of interest in growing succulent plants. In Germany the publisher Paul Arendt launched a monthly journal for the newborn German Cactus Society which was destined to become the longest running and most successful of all journals devoted to succulents. It suffered only a brief interruption during the second World War and continues today. Much of this success initially was due to the appointment of Karl Schumann, one of the leading German botanists, as editor of the journal from 1892 up to his untimely death in 1904. In it he maintained the same high standards of authority and accuracy that distinguish his monograph of *Cactaceae* and other writings. However, it is not my intention to review European developments here except to establish the chronology: the first periodical is the *Monatsschrift für Kakteenkunde*, dating from 1891, and the society for which it was the mouthpiece was the second of its kind.

At the time that the Baltimore Society come into being, the leading American authority on cacti, George Engelmann, had been dead for five years, and there was nobody of his status willing or able to act as editor. Active in the field were the Brandegees, Katherine and T.S. Brandegee, who had their own botanical journal, *Zoe*, from 1890 to 1894, and C.R. Orcutt, who founded so many journals, mostly short-lived, that one marvels that he never devoted one exclusively to succulents. Before Schumann's monograph of 1897, the main works consulted on cacti would have been Engelmann's (conveniently reissued in one fat volume by Trelease and Gray in 1887) and Förster's handbook of 1846 which was revised and enlarged by Rümpler in 1886. On a more popular level, there was A. Blanc's influential "Hints on Cacti" of 1886, with many later editions (Mitich 1973) and William Watson's admirable "Cactus Culture for Amateurs" which also went through several editions in England from 1889 onwards. For the other succulents there was only Rümpler and Schumann's "Die Sukkulanten" of 1892. A big stimulus to publication had been the invention of the half-tone block in 1880, making possible the realistic reproduction of photographs, several early examples of which occur in the Baltimore journal.

As regards the plants available, the most noticeable absentees were those from the Southern Hemisphere. The popular cacti were those nearest at hand in the S.W. United States, many of which we now know to be among the least adaptable to cultivation (*Pediocactus*, *Sclerocactus*, etc.). Enough had come out of Mexico to whet the appetite for more, but the

immense wealth of South America, as well as South Africa for other succulents, remained largely untapped. Such South American cacti as were to be had at all were ordered from Haage and other nurseries in Germany, who were first to introduce them.

BCJ 1895 p. 72 lists 14 North American nurseries offering cacti, and the number was on the increase. First and by far the most influential was that of A.A. Blanc of Philadelphia (Mitich 1973); he was primarily responsible for starting the wave of popularity for these plants towards the end of the century, much as Haage was in Germany. Other great names of the period, both as field collectors and nurserymen, are McDowell, Anna B. Nickels and A.H. Alverson, whose memory lives on in the plants named after them.

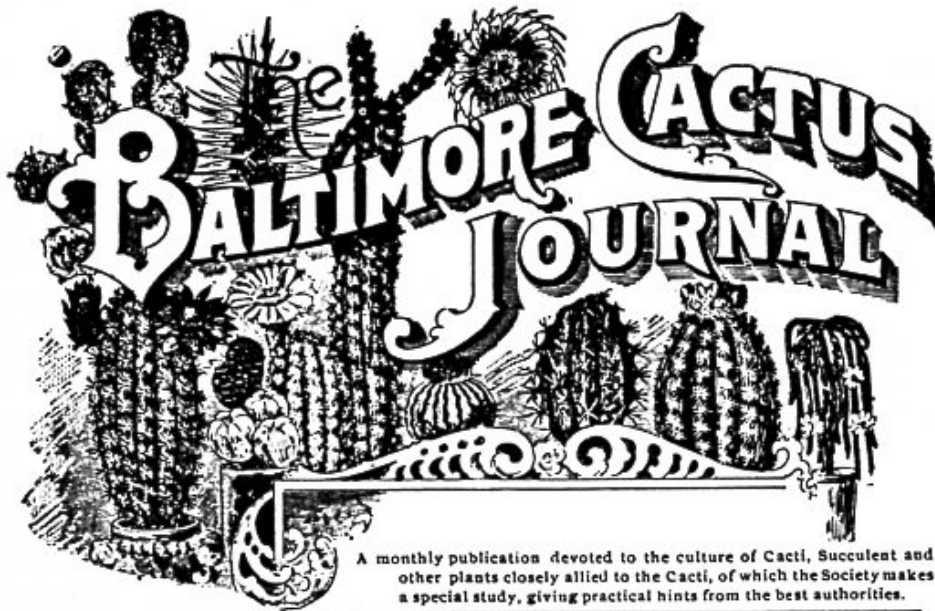
The BCJ began publication in July 1894 (fig. 1) on a monthly basis at an annual subscription rate of 25 cents, which was increased to 50 cents at the start of 1895. The officers of the society were then John A. Becker, president since 1889 and owner of the largest collection in Maryland; Fred W. Lantz an hon. secretary, also since 1889; Charles L. Seybold, superintendent of Carroll Park where display beds of succulents appear in p. 137 along with brief biographical notes and a history of the "Cactus Journal Company", under which title they were listed from journal No. 7 onwards. The editor was initially A.M. Cordray, but before the end of the first year he had to withdraw because of health and business reasons. No new editor was named, but the publisher of the journal is revealed under advertisements for the printing firm of Lantz and Arnold, so the Secretary Fred Lantz no doubt had a major stake in it.

As regards content, the journal has many similarities to some of the lesser periodicals current today. In the absence of a Schumann at the helm the course was popular rather than scientific: no new species were described or genera revised. Instead we have the familiar mix of articles on cultivation and answers ("Mr. Disgusted" makes an early entry with "Has anyone ever gotten rid of the mealy bug?") and a few meatier items like field notes from Mexico from McDowell and Nickels, and from California by Alverson. There are the humdrum but inevitable exhortations to pay subscriptions, canvass for more members and publicize the cause, and a great diversity of advertisements which make fascinating reading. We note a few reprints from other journals, and occasional digressions to orchids and non-succulent genera. For light entertainment there are cactus anagrams (made trickier by misspelling some of the names!) and for the glory of art there are poems, of which the following sample is fairly typical:

"If you like those spiny cacti,
That one sees in every land;
Take the Baltimore Cactus Journal,
And lay in a supply of sand."

(See BCJ p. 99 for the remaining four verses, if you insist.)

Perhaps it is as well that some authors coyly hide behind initials or pen-names - certainly for some of the more sensational items, such as "A Japanese [Native] Cactus" (p. 99); "The Flower of Death" (p. 105) and "A terrible Drink" [Cactus wine] (p. 167)! Not to be missed, either, is the account of the



Vol. I.

JULY, 1894.

No. 1.

THE CACTUS.

THIS class of plants recommends itself to the amateur more highly than any other we know of. Needing but ordinary care, it can be left for days and even weeks without water during the dormant season, and it will withstand all the heat and dust of the ordinary dwelling. To the busy housewife it offers a pleasing contrast to many varieties of flowers that need most careful and constant care to produce good results.

Many of the species are very interesting both in the manner of growth and in the great beauty and size of flower.

In the large and varied family of cacti, there is much to interest and instruct the most casual observer; while to the enthusiast, the desire to increase his collection of plants becomes almost a mania.

Of late years quite a large number of flower lovers have added these curious plants to their collections.

In many parts of Germany and England these plants have been collected and grown for years. The treatment they received however produced such poor results, that they did not grow in public favor as rapidly as their beauty and grotesqueness entitled them to. Under more favorable treatment, the growth of the plants, the beauty and number of blooms to be obtained from some varieties brought them into much greater prominence, and we confidently look forward to the day when at least a small collection will be owned

by all admirers of the beautiful in flowers.

Of the many hundreds of varieties now known, the greater portion are natives of the United States and Mexico, and of these many grow in such remote parts, that they are very difficult to obtain, and are consequently quite rare.

Visitors to the World's Fair were much pleased with the exhibit of cacti from Mexico, as also the splendid collection from Arizona and Texas, which includes some of the Candelabra Cacti, familiar to travelers in the more distant parts of our country.

No doubt many of the visitors saw then a collection of cacti for the first time in their lives, and who can tell the desires that may have taken possession of perhaps thousands who desire to possess a few of these wonderful plants.

Of the great multitude of plants under cultivation, the cactus occupies a sphere peculiarly its own, and while the plant in some instances is grotesque, and we may say often ugly, nature seems to make amends by giving it some of the most beautiful and fragrant flowers, many of them surpassed by none, save probably the bloom of an orchid.

Orchids—Some of these plants are becoming popular among amateur florists who have facilities for their culture. A few practical notes from any of our readers regarding their success with Orchids, the kinds, treatment, &c., would be interesting.

Fig. 1 First page of the Baltimore Cactus Journal, July 1894.



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Fig. 2 First page of the Sharon Cactus Guide, October 1896.

society's fifth anniversary on Jan. 16, 1895, when 75 members attended an orchestral concert, danced, and then marched in procession to a banquet hall where the menus were written in comic mock-Latin "cactus-talk" - a frequent jape today that turns out to be a lot older than one had imagined!

In addition to a few half-tone plates, the BCJ is illustrated by electrotypes (the publishers advertise there for sale) and include some of the famous blocks from the Blanc organization.

From the very start the BCJ had a hard struggle to make ends meet, which is hardly surprising even with the increased subscription of only 50 cents p.a. Issue No. 7 would have been the last, had not a group of members pledged financial support to save it from an early demise (p. 58). The society was "in a flourishing condition", they reported, "and the meetings. . . always well attended." Monthly journals continued for another year up to the twenty-second for April 1896 (Vol. 2 No. 10), when a more urgent cry went up (p. 294) that "We regret very much indeed to announce that the Cactus Journal has not received the support which it was promised when the project of publishing a paper in the interest of cactaceous plants was first announced. . . . We must have support to continue." Thereafter silence fell: no further issues are known to exist and we must assume that page 302 is the end. The run had been short - less than two years - but a substantial volume had been filled, and if the scientific content is minimal the historical value is great.

From Fred W. Lantz and his doomed BCJ of spring 1896 we now travel 250 miles to the northwest to the city of Sharon in Pennsylvania for a surprising sequel. Just five months later there appeared the first issue of "The Sharon Cactus Guide", also a monthly magazine at 50 cents a year, and very similar in format to the BCJ. Indeed, a side by side comparison of the first page of each (figs. 1 & 2) reveals an identically worded subtitle and opening article, and the Editor? "Fred W. Heinz". For the first four issues there is not one word about the Baltimore Society or its journal, although the general similarity of the two journals strongly suggests that they were the work of one and the same person. If so, why did Mr. Lantz change his name to Mr. Heinz? Is it just coincidence that instead of advertisements for Lantz the printer we now have half-page spreads for "Heinz Brothers, Seedsmen" and even "Heinz's Baked Beans" - a rather odd association with succulents, surely? Clearly we have run into a mystery that may never be solved, although a reader living nearer the scene may be able to do local research and enlighten us. At least one feature seems clear: if Mr. Lantz and Mr. Heinz are indeed the same person, he presumably had a difference of opinion with other members of the Cactus Journal Co. in Baltimore, moved to Sharon and doggedly set up his own "Cactus Guide Company", changing his name and that of the journal to escape the charge of infringing copyright. Internal strife within amateur clubs and societies is, unhappily, a well-known human failing, although we rarely find any record of it in the pages of their publications. Have we here hit upon the very first example in cactus societies?

If the theory of a stormy conclusion to Baltimore associations is true, then the breach seems to have been rapidly amended. The February 1897 issue of SCG (p. 5) reports a meeting of the Baltimore Cactus

Society and annual re-election of the officers, including "F.W. Lantz" as Hon. Secretary. Also (p. 6) the "additional list of nearly 300 new subscribers last month" seems to signify that the Baltimore membership now accepted the SCG as their own journal.

No further comment is needed on the contents of the SCG, because the pattern followed is exactly like that of BCJ. Eight issues totalling 64 pages in consecutive months appeared up to May 1897. How many further issues were printed it is impossible to say, because none is known to survive. SCG is even rarer than the BCJ, and the only recorded set is in the Huntington Library where I saw it in 1968 and am duly grateful to Myron Kinnach for showing it to me. Issue No. 8 contains no hint of impending demise: indeed, contributions are invited for the June number. By making public these findings I hope that somebody, somewhere, will unearth further issues: it would greatly serve the cause of cactus history to put them on record.

The rarity of both periodicals is itself something of a mystery. Were they, perhaps, printed in a very small edition? A single clue suggests the very opposite. In SCG No. 5 p. 6 the Editor begins: "In order to reach the two thousand mark the Cactus Guide has decided to reduce the subscription for the next three months to 25 cents per year. . . ." Can we really believe that Mr. Heinz already had an edition running into four figures - much larger than many European journals today - or is this a piece of smart journalism to convince doubters that they were already surrounded by converts? If so many copies were really issued, can they all have vanished without trace?

From the pages of BCJ and SCG we learn of the founding, or proposed founding, of other cactus societies in the U.S.A. First came the "Cincinnati Cacti Club" (sic!) (BCJ 130) formed in 1892 with "membership limited to fifty, and each one of the members has obtained about fifty varieties". A nice feeling for mathematical symmetry here, I think. We further learn that "In this city and immediately adjacent suburbs are 450 varieties of the cactus."

Third to come into existence was the St. Louis Cactus Association, founded on July 20, 1895 (BCJ 168, 171) and with 24 members by Feb. 1897 (SCG No. 5 p. 5). They state as their object: "To. . . clear up all doubt existing as to the names of certain cacti." Personally, I can't wait to learn their findings! They had the great advantage of the largest public collection of succulents then existing in the U.S.A. in the local Botanical Gardens (Henry Shaw's bequest), and several of the members are stated to have collections of over 300 specimens. Proposals also appear for the founding of cactus societies in Philadelphia, New York and Waco, Texas (BCJ 135), but I do not know if these ever materialized.

Friendly contact was maintained with the German society through A.A. Kleinschmidt, who campaigned on behalf of Karl Schumann for materials for his cactus monograph which was then in preparation. Britain, too, was awakening to the call of the succulent, and in BCJ July 1895 pp. 152-153 we read of the formation of a National Cactus Society in England. (Rowley 1966). An article on cultivation by its president, John W. Singer, was reprinted in full in BCJ 178-181, wherein we learn that there are "only 23 cultivators in England". The English journal, which mirrored those of America closely, also had a short run from Feb. 1898 to Jan. 1900. By then the cactus

wave has passed its peak and subsided as rapidly as it had arisen, and two barren decades and a World War had to intervene before the resurgence that surpassed all others and is with us still.

SUMMARY

In brief, we know for certain of five cactus societies that existed prior to 1900: those at Baltimore (1889), Berlin (1891), Cincinnati (1892), London (1895), and St. Louis (1895). Three journals from the period survive: the German (1891 onwards), the Baltimore Cactus Journal (continued as the Sharon Cactus Guide; 1894-1897) and the English Cactus Journal (1899-1900). Of these, only the German demands the continued respect of botanists, but that is not to dismiss the others as worthless ephemera. At a time when nostalgia is fashionable, they make fascinating reading. From them we gain an insight into the fervor with which people in different walks of life entered into this new and, to some, incomprehensible pursuit, the problems they faced in getting plants and keeping them, the thirst for new discoveries, new methods of cultivation and new sources of information. They were the pioneers who helped lay the foundations of the cactus society movement that

flourishes in so many countries today. The survival of these journals from near extinction is a cause for rejoicing. History is writ large in their yellowed pages.

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continued as:-

SCG: Sharon Cactus Guide, Sharon, Pennsylvania. 8 monthly parts, separately paginated. 8 vo. 64 pp. Oct. 1896 to ? (May 1897 the last surviving issue)

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