

At a Meeting of the
Faculty of Vassar College
held

December seventeenth, nineteen hundred
and seventy-five, the following
Memorial

was unanimously adopted:

It is all but superfluous, to say nothing of being hackneyed as well, to state that Sven Sward was an uncommon man. From 1954 until his retirement in 1975, he was, in addition to his regular duties, a highly respected and effective teaching member of first, the Department of Plant Science, and then, the Department of Biology. Throughout the years of planning and throughout all the architectural alterations in the plans, his was the only name that ever appeared on the drawings and it remained on the drawings nearly to the final set.

Although it was a difficult act to follow, Sven Sward took on the teaching of horticulture two years following the retirement of Henry Downer. Between Sven Sward and Henry Downer, Vassar has enjoyed the rare good fortune of having had half a century of distinguished and inspired teaching of the science, as well as the art, of growing plants. Though not a flamboyant man and given to letting the plants speak for themselves, Sven Sward still communicated his very special feeling for plants, be they weeds or orchids. Over the years, the horticulture course had quietly grown from a small handful of students to one of the most eagerly desired courses in the Biology curriculum. For the fall of 1975, nearly one hundred students, all prospective seniors, stood in line for hours to pre-register for the 16 available places. His abilities as a professional horticulturist may be equalled only at places like Kew Gardens or the greenhouses of Alsmeer.

Plants did have a special meaning for him. It seemed as though each one had for him its own particular spirit, each tree its own particular dryad. This feeling was communicated more by example than by precept. One merely had to observe him with plants. One story is told of him that illustrates this: One day while he was on his rounds of the campus, he found in the woods by Vassar Lake an American chestnut that had survived the blight and had produced a crop of chestnuts. His comment to his companion was, "This has been a good day".

In addition to the horticulture class, he had his other duties. He had been Superintendent of Grounds since 1952. You all know what that entailed. He saw to it that: snow was scraped from the roads and shoveled from the walks; lawns were fertilized and cut and in

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the fall raked of leaves; trees were trimmed and the ancient, tired, diseased and the departed ones removed - and as a consequence supplied firewood to the Vassar community; the horticulture greenhouses near Skinner were maintained, and thereby cut-flowers of a quality second to none were produced for the college.

His tree and shrub nursery over the years has helped to fill the gaps left by the casualties of the Dutch Elm disease, the Ash blight and Maple dieback.

There was not a tree on the Vassar campus unknown to him.

To an already remarkable collection of plants he had added many interesting specimens: The Maackia, a Manchurian specimen by Ely; Tilia euchlora, the Crimean Linden, between the New England Building and Avery; two Metasequoia glyptostroboides, the Dawn Redwood, a Chinese native, one by Strong and one by Olmsted. He propagated, by cuttings, the branch mutation he found on one of the Spruce trees near Main and the President's House. Those cuttings, now over twenty years old and all of three feet tall he had planted in front of the Olmsted Greenhouse. The four maples, now more than 20 years old in the Science Quadrangle of Chemistry, Physics and Biology were grown from seed and planted by Sven Sward. Acer griseum, the paperbark maple, also a native of China, he had planted in a copse of Japanese maples in the Dormitory Quadrangle. Vassar's only araleaceous tree, Kalopanax, a gift from the Harvard Arboretum, he had planted between Olmsted and Sanders Physics. The daffodils on the hillside on the east side of Sunset Lake are his doing. "The reason they look as though Nature had done it rather is because after the soil was spaded over and prepared, he stood in the middle of it and tossed handfuls of bulbs into the air; they were planted where they fell.

It is some measure of the man that although an old Georgia pecan had to be cut down when Olmsted was built, he threatened to nail the builders' hide to the Vassar Farm barn door if the Stewartia trees, one at each end of Olmsted, were harmed in any way. The two trees are there, hale and hearty.

In a way, this Memorial Minute is unnecessary. Sven Sward has dozens of living memorials, growing almost everywhere you may look, anyplace you may walk on the Vassar Campus.

Respectfully submitted,

Francis V. Ranzoni

Paul E. Pfuetze