

EARLY REMINISCENCES

Richmond Afford

Fifty years is a milestone for any organisation and even more so for anyone who may have survived the same span of time and can look back at the activity and events that helped to sow the seeds of its foundation.

So with these memories revived I have been prompted to make brief comment on my own and brother Tom's contribution, but more particularly on those of my uncle, John Attwood, who fired us with enthusiasm in those early days. He was mentioned briefly by the late Lucy Moore in her inaugural Lucy Cranwell lecture. He was a self taught amateur who lived and worked in the King Country, but who spent most of his spare time exploring the National Park area, keeping in touch with everyone with botanical interest. Old correspondence reveals constant and humorous connections with the N.Z. Alpine & Rock Garden Society and the Native Plant Preservation Society in Wellington and his tireless collection of seeds and specimens for cultivation by them. His highest and softest regard however was kept for Lucy Cranwell who would seek his company and guidance whenever she made a sortie into his area, the Park. Later in early 1940 he and I were to meet up with Lucy on Stewart Island where she was studying bog pollens and we went off to Mason Bay to concentrate on collecting. This may digress somewhat, but reverting to my search amongst the old records, I have brushed off Cheeseman Prizes in 1934, 1935, 1936 and 1937 with visions of the work that went into gaining them, the cultivation of a wide variety of native plants, the hiring of a large covered truck to convey them to the steps of the Museum, the struggle to carry them up to the exhibition hall and the setting up of the displays. My uncle would arrive on the overnight train from Ohakune with crates of alpine material sufficient to fill one complete bay with a reproduction Alpine scene. Our reward was a prize and hand shake from the Mayor of Auckland Sir Ernest Davies or the Museum Curator Sir Gilbert Archey. We were dedicated youngsters joining in field trips and entering into correspondence with Lucy on numerous botanical questions. She was tireless in her energies, replying personally or through her Native Wildflower Circle in the newspapers. Saturday mornings were devoted to helping her with the museum herbarium and with any luck she would give me a ride home if she was spending the weekend at her bush retreat in the hills above Henderson. I remember the car running out of petrol and having to push to the nearest garage, fortunately not too far distant, but it was all great fun. During this period the family, with the aid of plants collected by my uncle transformed a blackberry gully into a patch of bush, still existing today, and brother Tom gained first prize for pressed plants in a competition held throughout the schools New Zealand wide, his reward being membership to the Forest and Bird Protection Society, of which he is still a member.

Lucy however was the core of a very lively band of enthusiasts who inevitably formed the nucleus of the Botanical Society, perhaps not quite as we know it today, but nevertheless a foundation of incredible vitality that would be hard to match anywhere. I personally may never have fulfilled the botanical aspirations my Uncle and Lucy held for me in those days due to the war and other considerations but I would like

to think that people such as my uncle, John Attwood and many other enthusiastic amateurs will always be remembered as that small but solid rock upon which the Auckland Botanical Society was founded.

Received 8 July 1987.

FROM BETTY ALLEN

In a recent letter, Betty Allen (nee Molesworth) recalled the conception of the Auckland Botanical Society. "It does not seem 50 years since Lucy Cranwell and Sir Alexander Johnstone sat in Lucy's office in the Museum one evening after it closed, to discuss the possibility of forming a botanical society for Auckland. I was there with pencil and paper to take notes. It sounded a wonderful idea then and has proved to be so. Not surprising as Lucy was at the helm to start it off. - - - long may the society prosper in the years to come." Mrs Allen was the Society's first secretary. She was botanist at the Auckland Museum from 1944 to 1947. Subsequently she has worked extensively in Malaysia and has published on the ferns and on the useful plants of that region. She now lives in Spain where she is continuing her wildflower studies.