

BASIL FRANCIS O'CONNOR, 1919 - 2009

Neil O'Brien

One of the Canterbury Botanical Society's most colourful and enduring supporters, Basil O'Connor, passed away on 6 July 2009. He remained active in the Society's affairs almost to the end.

Basil was born in Temuka on the 25 July 1919, the eldest of seven siblings. It was here that he received his early education, both primary and secondary, except for one year at St Bede's College in Christchurch. At St. Bede's he was school champion at Target Shooting.

Basil always had an interest in aeroplanes. He was so pleased when he obtained a job with Air Department in Wellington although he was later moved to the Health Department. It is likely that Basil would have pursued a career in aviation, but that dream was not realised.

After the start of World War 2, Basil was interned firstly at Balmoral Forest and perhaps at a camp in the North Island, as conscientious objector. This was a brave course to take as most people did not understand or accept such a decision. Basil was a man who had the courage to stand up for his convictions.

Later, he studied and received a Masters Degree in Psychology from the University of Canterbury. His son Michael remembers that he worked with Dr. Bevan Brown at the Christchurch Hospital where he also worked in association with Dr. John Dobson. Later, he set up his own practice in Christchurch as a psychologist. At the same time he worked as a Student Counsellor.

May 15 1952, Basil married Miss Myrtle Hilder, a nurse whose family came from Kaikohe. The couple lived almost all of their years together at their home in Merrin Street in Avonhead, Christchurch. The Canterbury Native Flora Society was formed following a public meeting on 28 November 1952. At the first meeting of the Society in February 1953, Mr. La Roche was elected Foundation President. It is not known when Basil joined this Society but he was its President from 1963 to 1965. At a meeting held at the O'Connor home in June of 1966 it was decided to change the name of the Society to the Canterbury Botanical Society. This change was confirmed at a committee meeting on 6 July 1966.

In 1970 Basil was once more on the Committee as immediate Past President. He led several field trips about this time: Lake Grasmere, September 1969, Kowai River, 1970 and Waimairi Beach.

Holiday time for the O'Connors often saw them heading for the Bealey where they did bush walks and Basil could indulge in his love of botany and photography. Wharareki Beach at Golden Bay was another favoured place at Christmas.



At Boulder Lake, north-west Nelson: left to right, Eric Banks, Michael O'Connor, Miles Banks, Basil O'Connor

From these times onwards, Basil remained a dedicated and staunch participant in all of the Society's activities up until a few months before his death. Few members could have attended and supported more meetings, field trips and camps than Basil.

At meetings, it was Basil who was usually first on his feet at question time. As a deep thinker, his questions were indeed singular and unexpected, often tinged with humour. Basil's other passion was photography, stemming from his teenage years. He was never without at least one camera, up to three on occasion. On field days and at camps, he was a pied piper in that the children of attending members seemed to find his companionship irresistible. However, they soon learned that there was a price to pay for his company and that, helping to carry his load of photographic gear. Not surprisingly Basil was a very accomplished photographer. At Show and Tell evenings members were always treated to a range of his latest efforts, usually botanical in nature.

It is to be hoped that his large collection of botanical photos will be preserved. Michael is at present cataloguing them.

Basil was a foundation member of the Hornby Community Care Centre and was involved with the Disturbed Children's Charitable Trust, raising money to help the McKenzie Residential School.

When at home, Basil could be sometimes found in his workshop turning wood, usually of native timbers.

The boundary of the large O'Connor home section was entirely planted with native trees and shrubs with smaller native plants in the flowerbeds.

For many years, Basil's other hallmark, a cream coloured, early model Kingswood Holden car, could be found at any place where botanists met.

Without a doubt, Basil O'Connor's many friends at Canterbury Botanical Society will miss him. At future outings this tall, camera-toting figure will be missing. He was a kindly man, always willing to share his not inconsiderable knowledge and experience gained over a long and productive life.

References

- C.B.S. Journal No. 11 April 1978. "Twenty five years on." L.J. Metcalf. Pp. 1-5.
C.B.S. Journal No 37, 2003. "Opening Address." N. O'Brien, pp. 8-10

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE GENUS *LILIUM* TO CANTERBURY – A BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT FROM EARLY RECORDS:

Don Bell - Patron of the New Zealand Lily Society (Inc.)

August 19th 1932

Sixteen people met at the office of the Canterbury Horticultural Society, Manchester Street Christchurch, to discuss the forming of a Lily Circle. This meeting resulted in the first known written record of a group of people who had a serious interest in the cultivation of the genus *Lilium*, its species and cultivars.

The first election of this newly formed group brought into existence the nucleus of the present New Zealand Lily Society (Inc.), the oldest lily society to be established worldwide. However, some time passed before this name

was adopted. The first committees had some well known old Canterbury identities on them such as Sir Heaton Rhodes, President, Dr. T. Fletcher Telford, Chairman, Miss M.E. Anderton, Secretary /Treasurer, Mrs. E. L King, Mrs. Stanley Foster and Miss L.Wilson.

The working committee comprised Messrs F.J.Shanks, H.E. Otley, M.J. Barnett (Director of Parks and Reserves, Christchurch City Council), G. Skellerup (Skellerup Industries Ltd.) and W.S. Young. The executive committee adopted the following rules and objectives with the view to encouraging the culture of lilies, the acquisition of bulbs and seed, plus assisting members with identification.

1. Charge a nominal membership subscription not exceeding five shillings to defray the costs of importing bulbs and seed from other countries.
2. To import seed of new species and cultivars from overseas.
3. Arrange for an exchange of bulbs and seeds between members. Assist each other with the exchange of pollen for hybridization purposes. Provide advice for those not familiar with hybridisation techniques.
4. Exchange cultural experiences in regard to the same *Lilium* species grown under varying situations.
5. Generally, to promote interest in the cultivation of Liliiums for commercial purposes, as well as for the amateur grower as New Zealand (referred to as the Dominion at that time) was considered to have special climatic conditions for lily culture, particularly in the ability with which seeds will ripen upon these plants.

September 1932

At this meeting of the Lily Circle membership had risen to 43, but unfortunately there is no record of names. Meetings were being held monthly and members were asked to bring a list of lilies growing in their gardens so that the Secretary could to enter these in to a 'register' - unfortunately these records have also been lost.

A sub-committee was formed at this time to deal with importing seed. Commendable caution was shown here when it was decided not to import any bulbs at this stage owing to the prevalence of disease overseas. In September 1932 the group had four pounds fifteen shillings in hand and it was decided to use these funds to obtain seed from England.

October 1932

At the October meeting a resolution was passed to change the name 'Lily Circle' to the New Zealand Lily Society and to have the name registered. But for some reason this was held in abeyance. At this meeting Dr. A.C.