

Presidential Biography

Mary M. Peet

President of ASHS, 2007–2008

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Mary M. Peet grew up in Silver Spring, MD, and received a PhD in plant physiology (plant breeding minor) from Cornell University in 1975. An ASHS member since 1980, she had received her bachelor's degree in biology in 1969 from Hiram College in Ohio, and a master's degree in botany in 1972 from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Peet worked 5 years at Duke University with the eminent water relations researcher Paul Kramer before joining the North Carolina State University Horticultural Science Department in 1980. She has worked on tomato nutrition, physiological disorders, and carbon dioxide and heat stress effects. In 1990 she became interested in organic and sustainable agriculture, and received recognition for a 1996 book, *Sustainable Practices for Vegetable Production in the South*, as well as for related websites and videos. Other research programs included grafting and high tunnels for local and organic tomato production, and a collaboration to analyze heat stress resistance in tomatoes transformed to dampen cytosolic reactive oxygen species.

Two of Peet's PhD students and a MS student have received awards. Since 1990 she has had 63 grants funded, including collabora-



tions with Biological and Agricultural Engineering, Plant Pathology, Entomology, and Plant Biology. She has extension responsibility for greenhouse vegetable production, received a State Friend of Extension Award, and has served on the NC Greenhouse Vegetable Growers Boards since the 1980s. She has taught courses in field and greenhouse vegetable production and been active in local and national distance education initiatives. She has visited greenhouses in 19 countries, given more than 100 professional presentations, including keynote addresses, has been

on the editorial and scientific advisory boards of nine ISHS symposia, and published two books, eight book chapters, and more than 110 other articles. Her 63 journal publications in ASHS journals, *Plant Physiology*; *Plant, Cell, and Environment*; *Journal of Experimental Botany*; and *Physiologia Plantarum* have been cited more than 1000 times. She served on the ASHS Board of Directors, beginning in 2003, as Research Division Vice President. In 2009 she was named as ASHS Fellow.

In August 2009, Peet began work as National Program Leader at USDA/NIFA in Washington, DC, in Plant and Animal Systems, with responsibility for organic agriculture. She provides national leadership for state and federal activities relating to horticulture and organic agriculture; provides administrative oversight and national leadership for the Integrated Organic Program, which includes the Organic Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) and the Integrated Organic and Water Quality Program (IOWP); and serves as the contact person for federal agencies, states, industry, land-grant universities, and nongovernmental organizations in addressing issues relating to organic agriculture.

So That's Why I Think ASHS Will Still Be Around for a While

ASHS 2008 Presidential Address: Mary M. Peet

Orlando, FL, 23 July 2008

Looking back at presidential biographies, starting with Liberty Hyde Bailey, I have been impressed with what a distinguished group they, or I should say, we are. It's an honor, but also humbling to be giving the presidential address today. I also noticed that ASHS presidents have been remarkably long-lived and active. Liberty Hyde Bailey, who I'm going to talk about a little today, was born in 1858, published a book in 1943, and died in 1957 at the age of 99. Walter Reuther, who was born in 1911, gave the presidential address at the 60th annual meeting in 1963. As far as I can tell, Dr. Reuther and all but 12 of the 45 ASHS presidents since 1963 are still alive. So hopefully I have some time left to catch up in the distinction category!

But counting on 90-year-olds, distinguished or not, to lead ASHS is probably not a great strategy to get us to our bicentennial. What does bring people to horticulture? How do we attract the next generation? In my case, it was pretty much happenstance. There was a PhD assistantship available in the Vegetable Crops Department at Cornell when I was looking for a program in the early 1970s. In Bill Kelly's vegetable physiology class, I became interested in how hard it is to make vegetables grow the way you want and look good.

During the 1970s Cornell had a great group of faculty and students, including my advisor, Jim Ozbun, and co-advisor in plant breeding, Don Wallace. In the Vegetable

Crops Department, faculty included Len Topleski, Elmer Ewing, Pete Minotti, Bob Sweet, Roger Sandsted, and Ray Sheldrake, and fellow students included Bill Lamont, Chris Wien, John Gerber, and Larry Hiller. So, certainly, great teachers like Bill Kelly and great departments like Cornell will continue to bring people to horticulture from all backgrounds, but will that be enough to get up to that bicentennial without relying on the 90-somethings?

The title of my address is "So That's Why I Think ASHS Will Still Be Around for a While." ASHS has been remarkably successful over the last few years in re-inventing and re-marketing itself to stay in the rapidly changing scientific society and publishing

business and I'll be mentioning some of the great things going on, as will our executive director, Mike Neff. As we evolve as a Society (maybe even becoming the American Society for Specialty Crops!), I'm going to suggest some things we should protect, just as organisms conserve certain features necessary for survival in their DNA even as they evolve.

Originally, I was going to address the question of whether we would have a bicentennial in 2103. That now seems a little too visionary, so I'm going to talk a little about 1973 when I attended my first ASHS meeting in Raleigh, NC. And then we're going to think about what an ASHS meeting 35 years from now in 2043 might be like, and what we need to start doing and keep doing now to make that 2043 meeting happen. A student receiving a PhD in 2043 could attend the bicentennial in 2103!

I've been thinking about what is the same between the 1973 meeting and this meeting. There is actually a lot that is the same. We are not meeting "virtually" yet. We still have a conference that everyone flies or drives to; we still have oral sessions, awards, business meeting, and a presidential address. Fred Davies talked in his presidential address about the social fabric at these meetings—renewing friendships, networking, catching up, making contacts, and exploring new research partnerships—and that hasn't changed since 1973. In 1973 we complained about overlapping sessions, high costs, and getting articles through journal review! Arguably, in fact, we have less to complain about in 2008. Meeting registration costs haven't gone up for eight years, poster sessions have freed up schedules to some extent, and manuscript review is faster, if not kinder! Membership charges haven't gone up in the last 10 years and are lower than for most other scientific societies. So the 1973 president, Charley Hess, or any other attendee, would feel pretty much at home at this meeting, and his address on horticulture and education is equally applicable today. The number of ASHS members today is actually about the same as in 1973, but with a higher percentage attending conferences.

Perhaps even such luminaries as our first president and founder, Liberty Hyde Bailey, would feel at home. A little culture shock, but I think after a while he would like some of our new tools for communicating. I can imagine Liberty Hyde Bailey with a horticulture blog, a wiki, or walking around the Cornell campus with his new G3 iPhone talking and posting pictures of campus plants on his Twitter account! Wouldn't you want to be a Facebook friend or at least a fan of Liberty Hyde Bailey? Those postings would be fun to read, but maybe he would have had so much fun with electronic toys that he never would have gotten around to founding ASHS, not to mention his many other contributions to botany and horticulture!

And that is somewhat the dilemma that we have as a society, and especially as a Board

of Directors. There are a lot of worthwhile activities and services to our members and the horticultural community at large that we could undertake, but which ones will get us through to that 2043 meeting in St. Louis? Which are dead ends or interesting sidelines that tie up member and staff time and energy, as well as funds, but don't really get us anywhere and are eventually dropped? Clearly, we need to set priorities.

Looking back again at the 1973 meeting, technology has been one of our best investments. In 1973 members had to mail a copy-ready form typed in a small blue rectangle. No email, no FedEx, no fax! Truly the dark ages! And guess what—you only got one form and had to use a typewriter. Corrections were a big deal. Online registration and abstract submission are really appreciated by those of us who remember those days. We have more symposia, colloquia, and workshops and fewer oral sessions than in 1973. To me the meetings and ASHS as a whole seem more egalitarian and participatory, and more responsive. Maybe this is because it's easier now to access information on our website, and to provide input, but then 35 years does change one's perspective! So if any of you potential 2043 attendees out there think ASHS could be more open, welcoming, or otherwise improved, let your Board members know. Volunteer and become part of the solution, as we said in the 1970s!

In 2008, there are fewer of us in horticulture departments at land-grant universities, our traditional membership base, although total membership is about the same. In 1973 there had never been a female Board member or winner of a major award, as far as I could tell by quickly perusing the records. The first ASHS Fellow award to a woman, Burdean Esther Struckmeyer, was in 1972, although I didn't know it at the time. We have still only had two female presidents since 1903, both from North Carolina State University. After Esther Struckmeyer in 1972, there were only a few Fellow awards given to women in the 1980s: Charlotte Pratt in 1981, then Barbara Webster in 1987. There were more in the 1990s and as of 2008, we have a total of 20 out of 463. As far as I can tell, the first female Board member was Barbara Webster as Finance Committee chair back in 1986–87.

In 2008 we also have more international members. For example, in our July listing of 81 new members, I counted 25% from outside the United States and Puerto Rico. There are more Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists, and ARS events are an important component of the schedule. There are fewer graduate students at the meeting today than in 1973, a reflection of lack of funding for assistantships and travel, rather than interest, in my opinion. This will make it hard to train today the advisor of the advisor of the advisor of that 2043 PhD recipient. So we all need to start writing those SCRI grants and industry needs to come up with more matching funds!

Planning and getting around at meetings is easier with the website and the new "My

Planner" feature and because meetings are held in hotels rather than on college campuses. Who misses dorms without air conditioning, phones, elevators, or individual bathrooms? Remember when you didn't even know when your talk was supposed to be given until the printed program arrived? Talks might be scheduled on the other side of campus from other talks you wanted to hear so they were over by the time you figured out where to go? Back then if you didn't get the program before the meeting or forgot to bring it, you had to plead for an "extra" copy when you registered? Actually, this year's program was mailed a little later than it should have been, so maybe that's the same as in 1973, but the technical program was available online. We are also looking at investing in a new integrated system to produce the program more easily and faster and with more cross-referencing. We address the problem of conflicting sessions somewhat with the presentation podcasts, posters, symposia and colloquia, and hard work on the program, but otherwise, that's a perennially tough problem to solve. But in some ways a good problem!

So, what about that meeting in 2043? Will ASHS still be around? Will we still travel to meetings? Will we have to buy or save up carbon credits? Or will we be skyping, using webinars, or otherwise meeting virtually? More importantly, what are the factors that might keep us from some form of meeting in 2043?

First area of concern: Declining membership is certainly a challenge. Although our numbers are about the same as in the 1970s, a little under 3000, they are lower than in our peak of 5000 in 1990 and fairly flat as we go into a period where we baby boomers are at least thinking about retiring—if the stock market ever goes back up! We can't count on all being as active as Norm Childers in our 90s. New members have increased; we just also have more non-renewals. As libraries pick up online subscriptions, we may need additional membership incentives.

We also need to think about how many members we really need and what we need them to do. Memberships do not generate income for ASHS, but a society with no members would need a new financial model! Our peak membership in 1990 was 5000, and 3000 is pretty comfortable. We are now at 1957 active members and 2821 total members. A high percentage of our members come to meetings. Do we need 10,000 members? A sustainable grower in Chatham County said he calculated that he only needed 100 good customers at the local farmers market to stay in business, so that's what he worked for. Not that we want just to stay in our comfort zone, but let's think about what is the number for us that we really need and work toward it—even if it's not as high as that of the Tri-Societies or Southern Nurseryman Association, or the Ohio Short Course!

Second area of concern: College branches don't participate as much at the national

meeting as regional meetings. Fewer clubs register and some activities haven't changed much since 1973.

Third area of concern: Industry division corporate and individual memberships. The issue is probably more involvement than actual numbers because we just counted and about 10% of our membership has an industry affiliation.

Fourth area of concern: regions. Only two regions are currently operational, although we hold reserves for the Western Region. Regions are dependent on volunteers, and increases in airfares, fewer flights, and higher gas prices also work against even regional participation.

Fifth area of concern: Reaching outside our base of land-grant university scientists, teachers, and extension workers, although we are more ethnically and gender diverse.

To get ready for 2043, the challenge for all of us—but especially those of you likely to be at that 2043 meeting—is to set priorities.

I would now like to highlight a few of the recent accomplishments that I think will help us get to 2043.

Number 1 is the National Issues Task Force. This was started as a member initiative with Tom Björkman coming to the podium at the business meeting in New Orleans and asking why we weren't more involved in promoting a horticultural agenda on Capitol Hill. Tom is now the chair of the task force and we have a very able legislative consultant, Jonathan Moore. I hope you are all reading Jonathan's excellent columns in the newsletter each month. He is currently working on other Capitol Hill initiatives and reading through the entire Farm Bill "Bible" for any "nuggets" that might be of interest to our members. Success has many fathers, and I think we can claim credit for the additional consideration of specialty crops and applied research in the past few years. Interest in this area was also shown by member participation and interest in the stakeholder workshop I organized for the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) at the 2005 Las Vegas meeting. Those recommendations were submitted to the plant and pest biology workshop spon-

sored by csrees in 2005 and 2007, and are generally along the lines of what has been funded. Certainly we can claim credit for giving our members a "heads-up" on the Specialty Crop Research Institute (SCRI), which is good with a short timeline, and offering them a place to meet CSREES program leaders like Tom Bewick to ask questions. Don't be too hard on him about the short turnaround time, though; Tom has really worked hard for specialty crops since he has been National Program Leader.

I think our journals are the most critical "need" to getting us through to 2043. These are literally our bread and butter, our *raison d'être*, and more to the point, they support the society financially. All of the other revenue streams—memberships, conferences, and services—cover costs, but don't contribute to the bottom line. Just as you are what you eat, for a scientific society you are what you publish. The scholarly publishing business is anything but a gentlemen's club these days, with cutthroat business models and aggressive competition, especially from the European "for profit" publishers. We have been ahead of the curve compared to some of our sister scientific societies in moving the journals to HighWire Press, which handles more than 2000 journals. This conversion was a substantial initial investment, but has paid ample dividends. With potential site licensing to ARS, one million readers will have electronic access to our journals! Our impact factors are up, and we are also getting revenue from joining the copyright clearance center. Submissions to all three journals are way up, and we are printing more pages than ever. We have been able to keep page charges at the same level (\$100/page for ASHS members) for the last 20 years only because we print more pages. People have asked if electronic peer review means the quality has gone down: we feel we have maintained quality while decreasing the review time. Our acceptance rates, if anything, are down. We just had our fastest ever review and acceptance of three days.

Another positive and important advantage to publishing in our journals is the new press release feature. Articles from all three jour-

nals are selected; we pay a science writer to produce press releases, which are then distributed to the media. The response to this feature has been overwhelming and we are now subscribing to a service that tracks all the media use of these press releases. And each one lists our journals and our authors as the source of information! They say there's no bad publicity, but this is great publicity and outreach both for individual authors and the Society. We can provide these listings to all those who want to document impact of their articles, for example.

For our Society, it really is publish or perish, and what we absolutely, positively have to do to survive to 2043 is to keep publishing high-quality journals with a high impact factor. So I think in 2043 we'll still be publishing journals!

For my second prediction, I think we will still have involved, energetic, and active members. It may be 1000, 5000 or 10,000, but this year I have seen more new initiatives, increased excitement and energy in all three divisions, and less negativity than ever! Not only are there new initiatives, but also in many cases they involve partnerships between divisions and with outside groups. We have new working groups, a new certification program, a new public horticulture section in *HortTechnology*, new website designs, podcasts, and many other exciting new projects.

For my third prediction, I think we will be more diverse in terms of gender, nationality, and ethnicity than we were in 1973 and than we are today. Although we are and will be the American Society for Horticultural Science, we are open to all, not only for membership and publication, but also for service on boards and all other Society activities.

For my fourth prediction, I think we will still be active in legislative issues and will continue to advocate for the research, education, and extension needs of our Society.

I would now like to thank the membership, my fellow Board members, and especially the Headquarters staff for all the help and support they have given me over the past six years.