



# The Arboretum

## RHODES COLLEGE



Summer 2011

Issue One

## Arboretum Recertification Follows Historic Pattern for Rhodes College

Ever since Rhodes College (then known as Southwestern) moved from Clarksville, Tennessee, to Memphis in 1925, efforts to beautify the 100-acre campus with trees and shrubs have been ongoing. The land, which had earlier been cleared and utilized as pasture, was given to the college by the Fargason family in memory of John T. Fargason. Aerial views of the campus from



Figure 1

1928 (Figures 1 and 2) show that sparse trees were present only in the southwestern corner of the area. To beautify the campus, additional trees were bought or received as gifts from Memphians. In the 1940s, the Memphis Garden Club planted six magnolias, and a survivor still stands at the southeast corner of Palmer Hall. This group also donated the azaleas that comprise the Hubert K. Fisher Memorial Garden, the annual site of commencement. A brief January 1927 letter by President

Charles E. Diehl, who had made the decision to move the college to Memphis, thanked a Mrs. Hume for a “beautiful little Cedar of Lebanon” that was planted in front of Palmer Hall and became over time a beautiful tree. Almost 10 years later, in 1936, an article in the Memphis Press-Scimitar reported on the continuing effort to populate the campus with trees. Also mentioned was the growing Rollow Avenue of Oaks. The avenue is named in honor of John A. Rollow '26 who devoted his life to the college as supervisor of property and engineer from 1926 until 1968. It was he who brought the oak seedlings from the old campus in Clarksville and planted them on the new campus. Oaks were also planted in the shape of an “S,” but over the years, many of the trees in this configuration have died.

In the 1950s Southwestern began a successful effort to establish an official arboretum by setting the goal of having at least 100 different species on campus. With the support of Dr. Peyton N. Rhodes, president of the college at that time, a committee composed of officers of Southwestern and the Lumberman’s Club of Memphis was formed to promote and maintain the arboretum. Dr. Arlo H. Smith, botanist with the



Figure 2

Biology Department, was named chairman of the joint committee to oversee the selection and planting of trees and shrubs. In addition, the Lumberman’s Club agreed to finance what would be the only arboretum in a three-state area. By September 1955, more than 1,534 trees of 62 different species had been identified



Kentucky Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*)





Plaques on the Rhodes campus identify tree species for those taking a tour.

and mapped. In 1956, 120 new trees of 40 species were added, meeting the goal set by the college. A Level IV Arboretum was awarded to the college for the first time. Records of President Rhodes' correspondence of that period clearly indicate the extent of the support of the administration for an arboretum for educational and scientific purposes. In a letter to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, President Rhodes wrote: "Specifically, we need both at present and for long range planning any varieties of holly and any broad leaf evergreens . . . . We expect to put out a number of additional varieties of trees, and we are particularly

interested in those indigenous to the South which we do not have."

Over the years the tree collection was maintained and expanded, even as storms and growth of the college took their inevitable toll. In 1994 a second certification for a Level IV Arboretum was initiated under the leadership of Biology Department botanist Dr. John Olsen. Emphasis was given to diversifying the species on campus, and rare species for this area were planted, such as the Kentucky Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioicus*) and Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*). The Dawn Redwood was thought to be

extinct for many years until it was rediscovered in a valley in China by a team from the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard. The trees at Rhodes were grown from seeds brought back from China. A total of 124 species were listed in the new recertified arboretum in 1995.

The most recent effort to renew Rhodes Arboretum certification began in 2009, involving a number of Rhodes faculty, staff and students. Since then, more tree species have been planted, a pamphlet of a self-guided tour with information on 40 different species has been updated and more than 123 tree species have been tagged. A list of those who participated in this project can be found at the end of this newsletter, and copies of the pamphlet are available at the Paul Barret Jr. Library. Currently the responsibility for overseeing the arboretum resides with Dr. Rosanna Cappellato of the Rhodes Biology Department. For additional information, please email [cappellator@rhodes.edu](mailto:cappellator@rhodes.edu).

*This newsletter is the result of the collaborative effort of Rosanna Cappellato and Lynn Conlee, with help provided by Elizabeth Gates and Terry Hill.*



The Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) in spring bloom on the Rhodes campus.

The recertification of the Rhodes Arboretum could not have been possible without the help and support of

**Tracy Adkisson  
Adam Alsamadisi  
Peggy Baxter  
Allie Dillon  
Brian Foshee  
John Olsen  
Kevin Sackett**

Members of the **Physical Plant** and the **Biology Department**.

