# The International Plant Propagators' Society and My Nursery Career — Blast From the Past©

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At the turn of the century, my grandfather told me he collected *Rosa canina* stems in the wild and budded them to order. As a boy, growing up during World War II in Europe, my father's nursery was destroyed by an inundation of 3 ft of water and a severe winter that killed all stock. During the war my first crop was tobacco plants from select seed. I sold the plants wrapped in newsprint to the farmers. These events impacted me, yet were all influential in my development as a nurseryman.

After the war, when I was 16, I went to horticultural school while working in a fruit tree nursery that taught me to bud and graft (scars are still on my fingers). They were generous to teach me. The information about soil management gained at the horticultural school still comes back.

My father decided to go to North America where we were fortunate to land in an area that had nurseries. He and I worked at this fruit tree nursery that sold rosebushes as well. During the depression my dad burned 30,000 rose bushes twice over. He vowed he would never grow roses again. Yet, ironically, it was the one of the first items we propagated in Canada.

We had growing pains — literally. We had no where to turn for information. In Europe, we had reports of the first auxin trials in Boskoop during the War (IAA). Little did they know that it was done in the U.S.A. at the same time. Some of these we tried in the fruit tree nursery in Holland on rootstocks.

We started to root conifers with these imported growth powder regulator soak methods. The Canadian nurseries were rooting some conifers, but a lot of layering methods were still done. We plugged along, buying lining out stock from Europe and rooting some material. Slowly our nursery started to take off. The roses adapted to the climate and now the cold storage that was used only for fruit could also be used to store roses.

I was introduced to a new organization — International Plant Propagators' Society (I.P.P.S.) — and attended my first meeting in the Rochester, New York. The first president was Jim Wells (Fig. 1). Because of it we were one of the first to have a mist propagation set up. We visited some members in New York State and we were off. Only the government in Ottawa had a mist propagation unit. Auxins and mist propagation were the talk.

The Motto, "To Seek and to Share" was and is not just a nice slogan, but rather a backbone for the reason of being. In this unselfish Society this slogan is the foundation of the success of the organization and of its members. Yes at those first meetings I met some old Dutch growers who were opinionated and could talk with authority in the how and why we propagated in a certain way. But the entire group was compassionate and understanding — something that the world of modern business isn't.

I have witnessed the rapid exchange of new methods. Spray materials ARE ever developing. The container operation was pioneered in the cold area near Chicago by Hills nursery. At one time we had no plastic. It was to become one of the building blocks of nursery production. The use of plant hormones and automation of many things (airing watering, shading, misting) are ever increasing. Electronic-directed structures for plant propagation have evolved from sash greenhouse, underground pits and barns, to the mist propagation, poly plastic, and lastly tissue culture in all of their applications. These have changed the industry and to me the I.P.P.S. meetings were the catalyst for further research by the universities and learning institutions who freely share their progress. The I.P.P.S. was and still is the center of seeking and sharing.

**Figure 1.** Jim Wells.

Yes, information is easier to get via our computers. However the person-to-person exchange of ideas and papers that are presented contribute to the cutting edge of horticultural information for the nursery industry and the horticultural departments of the various learning institutions. It is amazing that the information that is shared is unique. Most other industries envy our approach. I.P.P.S. is now represented at many chapters throughout the world!

The future brings with it many new challenges. Breeding genetically altered plants may need new methods to propagate; breeding for disease resistance and new colour habits in plants when combined with genetically altering

will give challenge to propagate these new plants in an efficient manner in a changing environment.

The I.P.P.S. membership — a dependable host of friends — has given me more than can be measured by dollars. Our nursery has grown to a modern propagating facility, largely because of the application of ideas and methods gained at the many meetings, tours, talks, and publications of the I.P.P.S. The idea of "Seeking and Sharing" is as valid today as ever in a "me first" environment. The need for plants in a world which is experiencing climate change is hardly met. The benefit for the environment is understood by an increasing amount of people. China with its air pollution is planting 750,000 trees per mile on a four lane highway (I counted!).

The feeble effort of some spades, hoes, and a borrowed cultivating horse and later the friendly advice of fellow propagators slowly resulted in our serving the public with healthy and fine plant material to enhance the concrete world of cities where most people live.

I am grateful to God and to the fine members of I.P.P.S. who helped and interacted with us. They continue to live up to the noble cause to "Seek and to Share." My hope is that the I.P.P.S. can mean as much to you as it has and still is to me.