

**The Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society, Inc.  
A Brief Early History**

Prepared to present at the Annual Conference, November 1, 2003

Kay Yatskievych, botanist-photographer and author of *Field Guide to Indiana Wildflowers*, showed slides and spoke about her book, then in process, to the Horticultural Society of the Indianapolis Museum of Art in the winter of 1992. She lamented that Indiana was the only state east of the Mississippi River without a native plant society. Afterwards, I announced to a small group that I would call a meeting to form a native plant society. Even though I didn't have a clear understanding of native plants, I believed that Indiana should not be without such a society and should join with other states.

The previous fall, Carolyn Harstad had been invited to speak to the Horticultural Society about wildflower propagation. In preparation, she asked Bill Brink for advice and borrowed some pertinent books from his extensive library. He encouraged Carolyn to get the Horticultural Society to organize a native plant society for Indiana, since there was none. Following her presentation, several members expressed interest and gave her their names, addresses and telephone numbers. She continued gathering names when speaking to plant and garden organizations. In late spring of 1992, Carolyn attended a wildflower workshop sponsored by the Garden Club of Indiana and chaired by Amy Little Mason, Terre Haute. One of the speakers was Dr. Michael Dana, a Purdue University professor of horticulture who had recently returned from a sabbatical leave at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, Texas. Both Amy and Mike had been thinking about organizing a native plant group and had their own lists of interested persons. Mike offered to maintain the growing list on his computer.

A year had passed since Kay's above-mentioned talk. It was mid-winter, 1993, at another Horticultural Society meeting. Sue Nord asked I if she had called the meeting yet to form a native plant society. I confessed that she had not, but promised to do so. Upon learning through the grapevine that fellow Trailing Arbutus Garden Club member Carolyn Harstad was interested in native plants, I called and told her the plan. Then, having read in the Audubon newsletter about a Bill Brink, who grew a prairie garden along the alley behind his Indianapolis home, I looked up the name in the phone book, found one on Central Avenue, and left a message on the answering machine. "If you're the Bill Brink featured in the Audubon newsletter, we're starting a native plant society. Let me know if you're interested. Hope you can come the 25th." Seven people, including Sue Nord, Chuck Gleaves, and Chris Turner from IMA, planned to attend the Thursday, February 25, 1993, meeting, but eight inches of snow fell that day and Bill Brink, with a borrowed four-wheel drive vehicle, was the only one who made it to the

Ingraham Broad Ripple home. Even intrepid Carolyn Harstad, later author of *Go Native*, was snowbound. Nevertheless, the nucleus of an Indiana native plant society formed.

When Carolyn was able to get out of her driveway a day or two later, she and I met. We compared notes and shared lists including one kept by Kay Yatskievych. I composed a letter to fifteen key individuals inviting them to attend an April 14 meeting. The letter stated in part, "It is apparent that the time is right for those of us in Indiana who care about native plants and wildflowers to come together and form a society...Whatever your interest may be – preserving and protecting natural places, developing your own native cultivar garden, photographing wildflowers, or serving as a professional or academic within our communities- you are wanted. Bill, Carolyn, Joe and I want this to be, to coin a current word, inclusive. Together we can do much to maintain the natural, wild beauty of Indiana." Carolyn wrote to native plant societies around the country for information about mission statements, constitutions and bylaws, newsletters, activities, etc. Bill Brink's landscaping company, *It's Great Outdoors*, contributed \$100 seed money.

March 29 Joe and I, Chris Turner, Peter and Carolyn Harstad shared a meal at the Harstad home and reviewed the proposed constitution and by-laws. Don Westerhaus, attorney, reviewed the document and made a few changes.

Peter Harstad, then Executive Director of the Indiana Historical Society, agreed to chair the April 14, 1993, meeting held at the Marion County Cooperative Extension office. Volunteering to serve temporarily in various capacities were Jeffrey Maddox, Jean Vietor, Bill Brink, Carolyn Harstad, and myself. Other supporters attending were Lee Casebere, Becky Dolan, Joe Ingraham, Becky Lomax, Sue Nord, Chris Turner, Bill McKnight, and Kay Yatskievych. The group listed possible goals and activities of a native plant society.

- Use native trees and shrubs.
- Understand how non-native plants can spread and become quite prevalent, particularly in natural areas.
- Promote native plantings in public spaces such as the IMA, the Water Company canal, and the White River State Park.
- Educate self and others.
- Organize plant rescue programs.
- Help people identify native plants.
- Conduct field trips.
- Promote maintenance of greenspace.
- Bring together a diverse group.

- Produce a newsletter.
- Create a strong political base for increased awareness.
- Work with DOT and the IN highway department for “no spray” areas.
- Eliminate the stripping of seed sources by well-meaning people.
- Learn to utilize native plants in our gardens.

At Holliday Park on June 6, 1993, the Constitution and By-Laws were ratified and Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society was adopted as the official name. \$10 entitled you to be a Charter Member, good through 1994. August 14, at a meeting held en plein air at Marian College, we elected officers: President, Jeffrey Maddox; Vice President, Bill Brink; Corresponding Secretary, Ruth Ann Ingraham; Recording Secretary, Anne Wilson; Treasurer, Jean Vietor. The society supported a vibrant first year. Members explored the wetland plants and ponds at Marian College, toured Purdue’s research plots of native forbs and grasses, and sponsored an auction and, with auctioneer Rolland Kontak, raised \$1,080. We hosted a wine and cheese reception to honor Mike Homoya and Lee Casebere, author and photographer, respectively, of newly released *Orchids of Indiana*, hiked in the remnant arboreal forest of Pine Hills Nature Preserve, and capped the year with a holiday celebration in the Harstad’s home. By year’s end, INPAWS had 149 members.

The following spring, the first volume of the acclaimed newsletter rolled off the press with the lead article, appropriately titled for this fledgling organization, “First Signs of Spring” by Kay Yatskievych.

Seeds were gathered in the early 1990s, sown in 1993, and flourished into the dynamic organization that continues today, November 1, 2003, when we celebrate the tenth year following the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society’s founding.

Ruth Ann Ingraham  
Co-Founder and Historian



Photo of the first six INPAWS presidents. From left to right, back row: Jeffrey Maddox, Carolyn Harstad, Ruth Ann Ingraham. Left to right, front row: Linda Oxenrider, Becky Dolan, Carolyn Bryson. Photo by Lee Casebere taken at the tenth annual conference, November 2003, at the Indianapolis Art Center.