



The Midwest Bonsai Connection

A Newsletter Published by The Midwest Bonsai Society

September/October 2000

President's Message

As we approach the end of the year, I want to thank and congratulate my fellow officers and directors for their contribution to a successful kick-off event in March at the Flower and Garden Show, followed by an exhibit in August which set new records for attendance and artistic quality (to say nothing of its financial success). In particular, I would like to thank Jim Fairchild for his innovative programming at our monthly meetings. His "hands on" approach resulted in some stimulating audience participation, particularly at the October meeting on the various techniques employed by our members in over-wintering their trees. I think the Society is well-served by a board of directors which has devoted considerable time and talent in making the many hard decisions we faced this year. The success of our effort to bring Mr. Nakamura's donation to the Garden despite obstacles which, at times, seemed too hard and expensive to overcome, stands as the highlight of the year.

Prior to the business meeting in February, the board will hold its next meeting to consider and act on a budget for 2001, and to draw up a list of priorities for the Society next year. One item which will continue to occupy a high spot on that list will be fundraising with respect to our goal of eventually endowing a curator for the Garden's permanent collection. Another item will be continued efforts to establish a mid-year event. Here, the Board has formed an exploratory committee to look into several options for displaying trees in May or June at a prominent public location. Other priorities will include continued efforts to improve the quality and content of the MBS newsletter and long-range planning for the silver anniversary in 2002. As discussed in the November meeting, the Board is also investigating the possibility of creating a history of the Society, based on archives accumulated over the years. There will no doubt be other items on the list.

Clearly, this is an ambitious agenda, and to accomplish all of the goals we set for ourselves, we will need the enthusiastic support of our membership. This year, I was impressed by the number of members who volunteered their time and energy at the Flower and Garden Show and the annual exhibit. It was a great improvement in the level of support we have seen in some previous years. In 2001, I would like to go further still, as we embark on new projects which will inevitably draw on the resources of our membership for management and staffing. I hope that more of you will find time in your busy schedules when you hear a call for volunteers.

For now, let's enjoy the Christmas party on December 9, and then look forward to the challenges we face next year. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish all of you a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

Steve Snoke

Taxodium Distictum

The Taxodium Distictum (Bald Cypress) craze hit the Midwest Bonsai Society about 1980. Suddenly everyone was working on Bald Cypress. We had some incredible trees. I believe most were dug in Florida from the everglades so that would make them Taxodium Distictum Nepans. After several years I never saw another one.

I thought these trees were perfect bonsai material and was disappointed with their quick disappearance from the collections of those that had worked on them. I had made several trips to Florida to try and find suitable material to work on. Many that I dug and brought home survived for several years however they all slowly declined in spite of everything I did until they finally wound up crackling in my

From the Editor

The October MBS meeting was very well attended—we had to go hunting for chairs. The meeting was more or less a forum on how to care for your bonsai to get them through the long, cold Midwest winter. Although the discussion focused mostly on the outdoor variety of trees, some advice was given for tropicals. Our more experienced members shared their own techniques and gave a number of tips regarding protecting your plants from hungry critters, pests and diseases. We do this every Fall season for the benefit of our newer members, but I always learn something new.

The November meeting will be our last regular club gathering of 2000 (boy, where did this year go?) but we will get together for our annual Holiday Party on December 9, 6-10 pm. This potluck feast will be held at Winnetka Community House, 620 Lincoln Avenue in Winnetka. Everyone is encouraged to bring their best pot luck dish to share, and be sure to bring spouses and children too. We'll raffle off various items, we'll share good food, drink a toast or two for the holiday season, and you'll have plenty of chance to meet and visit with all the bonsai enthusiasts and their families. We always have a great time, so don't miss this.

Finally, I'd like to inform you of the current status of the newsletter. At this time we will be issuing a bimonthly newsletter. This will give us more time and resources to produce a publication that will be twice as informative and better designed. On "off months" we will send out

(Continued on page 2)

The Growth of the Bonsai Artist

I went to the Bonsai Show at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Those trees are really beautiful! I didn't want to spend \$1500 for a finished tree, but I bought a stock tree and a bonsai pot and special scissors from Japan and wire-cutters and soil and now I can do my own tree.

After buying all that stuff, I decided that it might be a good idea to take one of the workshops offered. For \$85 I will get a tree and a pot and instruction, so now I will have one bonsai tree and will know how to do the other one!

I found the place where they were holding the course. Somebody pointed to a bunch of trees and said, "Pick out a good tree."

I froze. What is a good tree? All those trees looked like a jumble of branches to me. How any tree could grow such a bunch of branches and be so young, I couldn't figure. All those trees looked good and they all looked bad. How am I supposed to pick a "good" one?

I grabbed one of the trees and sat down at one of the tables. One of the volunteer helpers came and looked at my tree. "Boy," she said. "That is really a dog." She went and got another tree for me. I guess she knew what she was doing. I couldn't tell the difference between the tree I picked out and the one she picked out.

Then the instructor told us to find the front of our tree. This was difficult for me. I had a tree that had four fronts, four backs and four sides as far as I could tell.

Then the instructor was kind enough to explain about "branch one," "branch two," and "branch three." I am looking at a jumble of branches. Not one of those branches had a label on it that said "branch one." By his definition, I counted no less than 5 of "branch one" and at least 7 of "branch two."

The volunteer came along and told me what the front of my tree was. Then another volunteer came along and told me that another side was the front. I became a little confused but was afraid to say anything.

Then the instructor came along and he picked still another front. He cut off a bunch of branches and said, "This is one, this is two, and this is three and it is the back branch." I guessed it was the back branch because it was in back.

Then he said, "Cut off this, and this and this and this, but be sure to leave this and this and this and this." He pointed to all of these and I immediately forgot which had to be cut off and which had to stay. I became totally immobile for fear that I would cut wrong or leave wrong.

Then a volunteer came along and cut off a couple of branches and then another came along and lopped off a couple of branches. The tree was starting to look a little bare. Somehow it did not look like the trees in the show very much.

We still had to put the trees in the bonsai pots provided. The instructor showed us how to shape the wire to hold in the screen. After several tries, I think I got it. At least, when I held the pot upside down, the screen did not fall out.

Then we had to wire the trees into the pot. That wasn't too difficult once I caught on how to do it.

Then the instructor came by again, picked up my tree and the pot almost fell off. He made me put the tree in high enough in the pot and then he wired the tree in so that it was firm. I was afraid that he would stop all the circulation in the roots, but he didn't seem concerned. He then cut off another branch, and then wired a branch. He then handed me some wire and said, "Here, wire this branch just like I did the other one."

I tried. Lord, I tried. The wire became a live thing in my hands, fighting me every inch of the way. I was terrified that I would injure my poor little \$35 tree and even smash it into toothpicks. Finally I got the thing wired. The instructor came by and said that I had done a good job of wiring. I'm glad he said that because one of the volunteers was about ready to change what I had done. I could tell her to leave my tree alone.

I took my little tree home to nurse it, to feed it, and to water it and bring it out of its recent stress. Suddenly, I remembered that I had purchased another tree and all of the stuff to turn it into a bonsai. I felt a little sense of panic, but I realized that, with all of the instruction I had just received, it would be easy to transform my other acquisition into a bonsai.

When I had been home for a few days and had regained my strength from the trauma of the workshop, I faced my other tree. I faced my other tree! It had no front! It had no branch marked "one!" It had no branch marked "two!" There was no instruction sheet.

Bravely, I closed my eyes, rotated the tree, and jabbed with my finger. This was to be the front! Therefore, this branch was "one" and that branch was "two" and I could start to do my very own bonsai unaided.

I trimmed that tree and wired that tree and put that tree in a pot all by myself! It was a great feeling!

NEXT MONTH - A TREE DIES, A TREE LIVES, AND WE START A NEW TREE.

Larry Larimer

(From the Editor—Continued from page 1)

postcards reminding you of meetings and any other special events coming up. As always, we ask for any suggestions for articles you like to read. Also, calling all artists out there—black and white sketches or digital photos of bonsai related subjects will bring our newsletter pages to life. Here's your chance to get your art in print (we will give you credit and, for your artistic protection, we will mark your items "copyright.")

Hope to see you all at the party.

Susan Babyk

Calendar of Events

- **November 3, 2000, Madrid, Spain.** The Asocioación Club Bonsai Madrid will conduct their free annual bonsai. For further information: E-mail to:arturomiguel@eresmas.com
- **November 3 - 6, 2000, Oakland, California, USA.** The Golden State Bonsai Federation will host their Year 2000 GSBF Convention. Details are available at their website at: <http://www.gsbf-bonsai.org/gsbf2000/index.htm>
- **November 4 - 5, 2000, Fort Myers, Florida, USA.** The Bonsai Society of Southwest Florida will host "Bonsai in the Tropics". For further information: E-mail to:MGoff17250@aol.com
- **November 6, 2000, MBS Monthly Meeting at 7:30pm.** Meetings are held at the Chicago Botanic Gardens in Glencoe, IL, located 1 mile east of I-94 on Lake Cook Road. This month's meeting will feature Brian Dodd's photographs of the Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection.
- **December 7 - 9, 2000, San Juan y San Martin, Argentina.** The Asoc Rosarina de Bonsai & Municipalidad de Rosario will host a bonsai. For further information: E-mail to:bonsaimaster@uol.com.ar
- **December 8 - 10, 2000, Cape Town, South Africa.** The Cape Bonsai Kai will celebrate 30 years of bonsai involvement with a convention and a mini-show. For fees and further information, Tel/Fax **27 **21 797 8972.
- **December 9, 6-10 pm. MBS Annual Holiday party** will be held at Winnetka Community House, 620 Lincoln Avenue in Winnetka. Everyone is encouraged to bring a pot luck dish to share. Raffle, good food, and plenty of chance to visit with all the bonsai enthusiasts and their families.
- **December 15 - 17, 2000, Cape Town, South Africa.** The Cape Bonsai Kai will host a bonsai show. For further information, Tel/Fax **27 **21 797 8972.

fireplace. I could not understand why the trees I dug and left in Florida at my house did well and yet the trees that came to Chicago eventually died. I resigned myself to accepting the fact that they did not like indoor bonsai culture in the North and I stopped any further effort.

The thing that puzzled me was the fact that many golf courses and even the Chicago Botanic Garden had Bald Cypress in their landscape designs and the trees were vigorous. These trees are fast growers, have beautiful foliage and apparently able to survive the infamous Chicago winters.

After several years of studying the habits of this tree, reading about this tree and talking to nurserymen who grow it, this is what I found out about these trees and I'll pass it along to you. It appears that this species deserves a second look, especially for the beginner. I stress here that I believe this is a great tree for beginning bonsai enthusiasts. It's a fast grower, develops a nice trunk, has good looking bark and pretty leaves. In addition to the esthetic qualities it is very hardy in the Chicago winters, withstands drastic pruning and can produce buds on old wood - very important for developing good branch structures quickly. It is also relatively bug resistant and lives a long time if you're reasonably nice to it. The biggest drawback is that if it dries out, even only once, it will die. The good news is that you can leave it in a bucket of water and it'll do fine.

In early August I was on patrol at Schwartz Nursery in Addison. I've gotten some nice material there over the years. I was close by so I decided to stop in. Eventually I found a section of Bald Cypress about 8 to 10 feet high in 15 gal buckets. I checked the trees over carefully for good branch structure in the lower part of the tree. I had in mind a tree standing no higher than 36". I found a likely candidate and bought it. The nurseryman said it would have to be delivered because there was no way I could get it into the car. I asked for large cutters. I proceeded to cut the tree just above the lowest branches to the astonishment of the personnel. I was sternly warned that I had just voided the warrantee. Oh well, so it goes...lost another warrantee.

Fig 1.

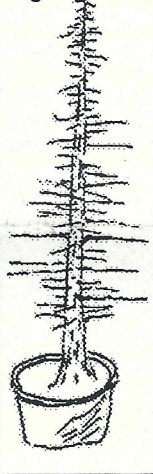
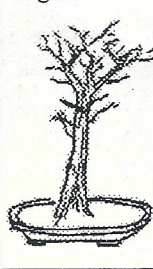


Fig 2.



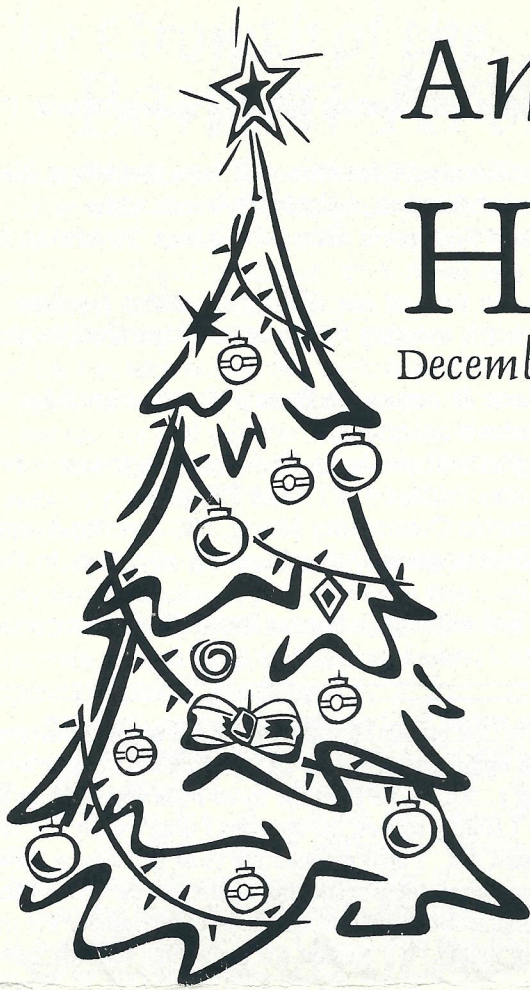
The first month I left the tree in it's original container and did nothing but remove all the branches I didn't want. See Fig.1. The more I cut the more buds appeared on the trunk. I simply rubbed off the ones I didn't want and kept the ones I did. I also pinched the ends of the new leaves off to encourage new branching on the leaves. I also wired the branches both old and new. As of November the tree is doing nicely. It's outside for the winter and this spring I'll put it into a bonsai pot because the trunk is the diameter I want.

In considering a design for the tree I used several sources. I saw the Bald Cypress in Washington at the National Collection at the National Arboretum donated by Guy Guidry. I also saw the tree donated to the Pacific Rim Collection by Vaughn Banting. I prefer the style developed by Vaughn because it more closely resembles the trees I see in the Cypress forests in Florida. Both trees are spectacular but I prefer the "flat tops" style. See Fig. 2.

There have been several articles recently published in *The Journal of the American Bonsai Society*, Winter 1999. This is an excellent and comprehensive series of articles written by Gary Marchal, Dale Cochoy and Andrew Walsh. If you have any interest in *Taxodium Distichum* this is the definitive primer on collecting and developing this tree. An article also appeared in *Bonsai Today*, Issue 33, 1994. This article was written by Vaughn Banting and features a discussion on design and styling techniques. Both of these articles should be consulted and studied in order to maximize the potential of a selected Bald Cypress.

In summary, don't miss out on working with this tree. It can be found in many nurseries in the area. The *Taxodium Distichum* is a northern variety that should be used up here. The *Taxodium Distichum Nutans*, found in Florida should be avoided if you're going to keep the tree up in the North. The local nurseries will undoubtedly have the Northern variety. I paid about \$85.00 for my tree and I thought that was a good price. Have fun and good hunting!

Scott Clark



Annual Holiday Party

December 9, 6-10 pm.

Mark your calendars. The Holiday party will be held once again at the Winnetka Community House, 620 Lincoln Avenue in Winnetka. Everyone is encouraged to bring a pot luck dish to share. There will be a raffle, good food, and plenty of chance to visit with all the bonsai enthusiasts and their families.

Directions from I90:

Take the East Willow Rd. exit. Turn left onto Green Bay Rd. Stay straight to go on Oak Street then turn right onto Green Bay Road. Turn right onto Elm St., turn left onto Lincoln Ave. (These directions are from MapQuest.com)

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