

June 28/94
revision 1

The People and the Times: The Founding of the CSLA
Humphrey Carver

It is fifty years ago and I am sitting with my old friends, a small group who met for a year or two before we started the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects.

Howard Grubb is sitting beside me. He is a tall man who sits very, very straight and when he looks at you it is absolutely straight in the eye with a kind of quizzical expression as if wondering what you are thinking about. He is obviously the senior person in this group. Beside him is his wife Lorrie, a lovely person; and somehow I always think of her as an aristocratic person. She is, you notice, wearing a hat like ladies used to do in the garden and the hat has beautiful coloured flowers around the brim.

Beyond Mrs. Grubb is Vilhelm. He is rather shy and does not look you right in the eye like Howard does. Vilhelm is the Dunington-Grubb's junior partner and really he is their son: that is, he was just like a son to Howard and Lorrie. On my left - the other side of my elixir - is Carl Borgstrom, my old friend, the person from whom I learned so much. You can tell right away that he is Swedish: he has fair hair, a tan and a sort of outdoors look. Beyond Carl Borgstrom is Gordon Culham. He is a very solemn, impressive looking person and you might suppose that he was a professor of law at Harvard or something like that.

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Culham, Borgstrom, Howard Grubb, Vilhelm and I are all about six foot five - the sort of people you don't like to meet in the middle of the night on a dark road. I mention this because the next person is very small. It is little Helen Kippax, a small and round person who comes from Brantford. Perhaps the people I have spoken of so far are a little tweedy. But sitting on the extreme right is Edwin Kay and he looks a little different; more like a businessman. He has a moustache and wears a black business suit with a watch chain across his waistcoat. And then on the left is Frances Steinhoff, and she is a very nice person. I don't know her quite as well as the others because she left our group and went to live in Vancouver.

Now the thing about this group of people is that we are a very mixed lot. We didn't come out of a school of landscape architecture because there were no Canadian schools of landscape architecture at the time. We each came to be doing what we did based our own experience and background. We came together in a very strange and difficult period of history. It was during the depression in the 1930's, and it was partly the fact that we were all caught in the storm of the Depression that made it particularly enjoyable to meet once a month and talk about the subject of landscape architecture. It was a comfort and a refreshment.

We used to meet at a place on Bloor Street in Toronto called the Diet Kitchen where two nice rather old-fashioned ladies had a nice old-fashioned house on the north west corner of Bloor and Bay. It doesn't exist now of course, it is buried under a pile of high-rise office buildings. In those days you couldn't have a drink in any restaurant but these two nice ladies at the Diet Kitchen made terribly good apple pie from the apples that grew at the back of the house and sometimes we would have our lunch table out at the back of the house under the apple trees.

Now it was a difficult time and it is very difficult to convey what it felt like. Perhaps I can do this a little bit by talking about my own experience of getting into this group that I've just introduced to you. I came to Canada in 1930. I had been working in an architect's office in London and I got that strange itchy feeling that people sometimes have in their 20's that you have to go somewhere else and rather particularly you have to go somewhere else where you don't know anybody and you don't know what you are going to do or what is going to happen. You go to have the surprises of life. So I travelled with a friend, Jim Richards, who later on became a rather distinguished writer, Sir James Richards, and we arrived in Toronto where we didn't know anybody.

We got a room on Wellesley Street and our method of looking for work was through the yellow pages of the telephone book. Jim and I would start off in the morning having picked their addresses off the names in the yellow

pages, and then we would meet again in the afternoon. So the first day Jim came back he said, "Well I had rather bad luck today, I went to two or three places but I must have been there at the wrong time as they had a little notice at the door saying out to lunch". And I said, "Well that's funny I went to two or three places too where there was a notice pinned on the door saying out to lunch". And we realized things weren't going to be quite as easy as we had hoped.

This was 1930, so we set out the next day, followed the same routine and we met again in the afternoon and said that we found the same "out to lunch" notices were still there. But after a day or two of finding these notices it began to occur to us that as a matter of fact these architects with these nice addresses in the yellow pages were not coming back. There simply wasn't any architecture being done in Toronto in the 1930's.

A week or so passed and we were wondering what we would do next, as we didn't really know anything other than how to use a pencil, a t-square and a set-square. While walking the streets of downtown Toronto contemplating my fate, I came across a brass plate that read "Wilson, Bunnell and Borgstrom - Town Planners and Landscape Architects". What? Landscape Architects? And I did a sort of double take and went back to it to make sure that I had read it right.

I went and had a cup of coffee and thought, "Well my gosh, somehow I feel just like a landscape architect". I had never heard the term landscape architect, but I thought this

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is what I must be. And so I made one of those nice intuitive guesses that you make sometimes. I wonder which one of these people is the landscape architect. Wilson? Somehow I can't imagine a landscape architect with the name Wilson. Bunnell? That can't be right. Borgstrom? It must be a Swede. You know the Swedes are so wonderful. It must be Borgstrom. So I went up the elevator and asked if I could see Mr. Borgstrom and he was sitting there in his office and there was a high window behind him and on the window sill there was a monkey. It wasn't a real monkey, it was a China monkey, but it had an expression just like a monkey. It was present through my discussion with Borgstrom and an hour later I was a landscape architect. I came back the next day feeling absolutely ecstatic at such an extraordinary thing - it was almost as if Borgstrom had been waiting for me. I can't explain it, we just sort of clicked with one another; in some way, it was just as if he'd been waiting for me.

I must tell you what this firm consisted of. Wilson was the great transit engineer who laid out the streetcar system as it was at that time in Toronto and later he laid out the subway system in its first form. Bunnell was a great subdivider, and they had invited Borgstrom to their group and together they decided to start a nursery. Stanley Thompson was also in the firm and he was a golf course designer, a marvellous landscape architect. He would cut a fairway through the forest; he could see where the tee should be, and where the green should be. He had a marvellous eye for the

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landscape. Also, in a curious way, another member of the firm was Bill who ran the elevator in our building which was just across from the City Hall. I don't know how he did it, but Bill was both a member of this firm and very useful at fixing the traffic tickets - he had some curious links with City Hall.

My first job in this office was to do drawings of the Niagara Parks system and I thought I would gain a great deal of credibility if I could really make the falls themselves look like a hole in the paper - the deep trench of the falls - so I worked very hard to indicate what Niagara Falls looks like on a plan. I thought that was a rather interesting achievement. In my life I've had a long affair with Niagara Falls because thirty years later I was back there on an international board with Garrett Eckbo, a distinguished American landscape architect, and we were asked to consider whether the American falls would look better if some of the fallen rock at the bottom was removed. If you could think of a more absurd question I can't imagine what it would be. Anyway for two or three years we laboured at the aesthetic question and the American core of engineers dammed up the river that goes over the American falls and stopped the water going over so that we could look at these rocks a little more carefully and decide if they should be removed or not. And we decided you couldn't possibly decide. So nothing was done.

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By 1931, a year after I had first gone into this office, the Depression had closed in on the firm and it was all over. They separated. They had been a wonderful firm through the 1920's - done wonderfully well - and now it was gone, the Depression had closed in on Wilson, Bunnell and Borgstrom.

Borgstrom suggested to me that maybe I would like to join with him, sink or swim, and see where we could get to together. We had some work at Niagara and we had a wonderful client who had been the chairman of the Niagara Parks Board. He later became the Minister of Highways and it was lovely to have a client in that sort of position in government.

But the principal job we had, which had been won in a competition by our firm, was the northwestern entrance to the City of Hamilton. This entrance has now almost disappeared under the new freeways and so on, but in the 1930's we saw the project as an opportunity to create an important piece of landscape design. As it turned out, it was not a happy place and not a place of landscape beauty but a place of terrible human tragedy because it came to be the place where every unemployed man in Hamilton was told, "Here is a spade. You will have to go and work. There is a lot of earth-moving to be done. This is how you will get your relief money." It was like being on a chain gang in your own country. And through those early winters of the Depression I found it a pretty appalling thing to see these men getting more and more threadbare in their winter coats.

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It was a period in which you couldn't help but be a political activist and I was fortunate because among my friends were the people who drafted and wrote the Regina manifesto which was the beginning of the CCF, now the NDP. One felt rebellious, I can tell you. In Canada we didn't have works programs like the Roosevelt New Deal so it made one pretty politically stirred.

I used to go to the meetings of J. S. Woodsworth, the first leader of the CCF and there I met a wonderful, compassionate, and wise man by the name of Mr. ^{Leslie} Hancock, the father of Macklin Hancock. I also went to meetings of the more academic group, an organization called the League for Social Reconstruction. And there I noticed a very interesting looking man who was very tall, had narrow shoulders, a high neck, and a very large head which seemed to wobble rather, and a rather quizzical expression. Now you can begin to guess who this person was: this man who looked rather like a caterpillar was strangely enough Mr. Grubb. And that is how I first met Howard Dunnington-Grubb, who is now sitting beside me here with his wife Lorrie. Now let me tell you a little bit about each of the people that I have introduced to you.

Grubb, Howard Burlingham Grubb, studied architecture at the AA, the Architectural Association School of Architecture, before the First War. It was a period you can connect perhaps with Sir Edwin Lutyens and the great Georgian revival as well as the beaux arts style in Paris. It was a period of

classical and renaissance revival. That was Howard Grubb's natural style as an architect, the beaux arts classical style of architectural symmetry, the one he learned as a student.

Howard Grubb first came out to Canada with, Thomas Mawson, the great planner, and their task was to impose a classical and symmetrical plan on a little cow town in Western Canada called Calgary. After the war, Grubb married Lorrie Alfreda Dunnington, and they joined in partnership both in marriage and as landscape architects, as H.B. and L.A. Dunnington-Grubb. It was her name and his name pieced together and we don't know why they joined their names together, perhaps she didn't like being Mrs. Grubb, or perhaps he didn't feel satisfied with his own title. Anyway Dunnington-Grubb was the name they decided on.

The Dunnington-Grubb's style as landscape architects remained essentially a recollection of the great renaissance gardens of Italy, France, Hampton Court, and Versailles. That was their natural mode of expression: terraces, balustrades, vistas, finials and so on.

I enjoyed Howard Dunnington-Grubb tremendously as a person: the thing I particularly liked about him was his snorting laugh, and he was the most delicious person to have an argument with. We developed a kind of mock debate which was a lot of fun and we were even asked to perform at a luncheon in front of the chapter of architects. The idea was that I was the impertinent young man who was teasing this rather distinguished elder in the field of landscape

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architecture. I was poking fun at him for this curious style he always worked in, which seemed so extremely remote from the times in which we were living. What did it have to do with the terrible economic depression we were going through? So I was teasing him about this and saying it was simply something irrelevant to our period. But Grubb always stuck to his position.

He had a wonderful way of expressing himself and I am just going to read you a little thing that he wrote: "In the garden," he wrote "we have entered a world of fantasy and make believe where nature under the control of art provides both pleasure and rest and escape, and where the effects we think we see are mostly illusions." And that was Grubb's idea: the garden is the theatre of imagination; but I tried to come back at him. I had just been in Chicago, looking at a New Deal housing project and watching some kids scampering up and down a causeway through some jets of water. I was saying, "This is what I think is the most beautiful garden I have ever seen". It did not have any of Dunington-Grubb's finials and terraces and so on, but of course it was a theatre of imagination: the same idea for different clients.

Mrs. Grubb is sitting next to Grubb here beside me. A lovely person, I found she was rather distant, an aristocratic person, and I never came to call her anything but Mrs. Grubb. I would have liked to call her Aunt Lorrie perhaps because that was our age relationship, but she wasn't a person you could tease. Grubb was wonderful to tease

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because he snorted at you and answered back again, but somehow Mrs. Grubb you couldn't tease.

I connect Mrs. Grubb with the herbaceous border: the flowers, the beauty of the individual flower and the stalks and the shapes of the leaves. In the 19th-century, the explorers and the botanists of England were in the distant outposts of the empire and they brought back all sorts of exotic plants and seeds which the ladies of the period arranged most tastefully - crimsons, blues, purples - arranged them in herbaceous borders and in millinery. These same flowers were on William Morris wallpapers creeping and crawling up the walls of their drawing rooms and on the chintzes in their drawing rooms. This is the way I think of Lorrie Grubb: that she was a lady of flowers and I simply assume that she was a person who gave this knowledge to her husband Howard. I'm not talking about a frivolous enjoyment of flowers, Mrs. Grubb was a literary person, an aristocrat and a scholar.

Now the foundation of the Grubbs' business was Sheridan Nurseries, which they started in the 1920s to supply the materials they needed to make these theatrical gardens with exotic hedge materials, plant materials and herbaceous borders. In order to set up Sheridan Nurseries they hired the Stensson family - father and sons - to build up the nursery.

Vilhelm Stensson was one of the sons who became a kind of adopted son of Howard and Lorrie. They helped put him

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through architecture school at the University of Toronto and then he went on to study landscape architecture at Harvard and in this way he was trained to be their assistant, to be their partner. Vilhelm was a shy person and rather overwhelmed by these two terribly kind people who had given him this opportunity in life. But Vilhelm was of course very good, a first-rate professional at his work. Long after I had known Vilhelm it was a wonderful pleasure to know that he had married Janina who can tell you much more about him than I can.

Let me tell you about Borgstrom, sitting on the other side here. Borgstrom was brought up in Sweden. The arts and culture of Sweden are rural rather than urban and Carl Borgstrom had this somehow at his fingertips and in his hands. He was an artist. Whatever he did had an artistry to it and in particular a Swedish artistry to it. As a young man with his big boots and a knapsack on his back, he went travelling all over Europe and worked in the great gardens of France, Germany, Sweden and England where he learned from the masters and the head gardeners how everything in a garden is made. This was something he added to his natural abilities as an artist in the rural crafts. The war came, his journeys ended and he went to live in London where he married and had three children. After the war he came to Canada and not long after his arrival here his wife left him. When I knew Carl Borgstrom I admired his patience as he went home every night to cook dinner for his three children of school age while he

was trying to make his career as a landscape architect through the period of the Depression in a country new to him. A very marvellous, patient person.

The thing that was marvellous to me about this artist, Borgstrom, was his style. To see Borgstrom just dig the hole to plant a tree was a wonderful pleasure. Everything had a natural style to it and somehow that runs into the idea of understanding how things grow together. The great thing about Borgstrom's skill as a landscape architect was his understanding of the interrelationships of families: families of trees, families of human beings, families of animals, and families of plants. Borgstrom understood the way these elements naturally live and grow together. So Borgstrom was what we today call an ecologist and an environmentalist. We never used these words because it came so naturally to him, but I think that is really what Borgstrom was in our modern understanding of the interrelationships of plants and animals and so on.

Culham is sitting just beyond Borgstrom: and I said he looked like a Harvard professor, like a lawyer. Culham was about the same age as Grubb and Borgstrom. They were both people who had been through the First War. Culham was in the artillery. He had studied agriculture at Guelph and then went on to Harvard to do landscape architecture. He must have been a very good scholar as he always wanted to tell you things. Culham was a rather serious person and you couldn't interrupt him when he was speaking. I first came across his

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name as the person who had drawn the diagrams in the New York Regional Plan volumes which appeared in the 1920's, and which represent the greatest city planning work there is. Gordon Culham's name appears on the drawings of a neighbourhood unit. He must have been taken on by Thomas Adams to do this when he was still a student at Harvard.

After such a good introduction it is not surprising that he was taken on by Olmsted's firm, the great landscape firm that had started with the building of Central Park in New York City. Culham became a very important person in the Olmstead firm, to the extent that when they got the job for the land around The Cloisters, the great medieval museum in the north-west corner of Manhattan Island, it was Gordon Culham who was sent to Spain to find out what a Spanish garden was like. He was the person chosen to do this, and he lived there for a year or so, getting into his mind and into his fingers what a Spanish garden would be like when built around The Cloisters. And then the Depression came, as it came to every landscape firm and everybody else in the 1930s, and it was a question of whether Culham would be a partner in the Olmsted firm or whether he would move to Canada. He did move to Canada, but he took with him the files and drawings of the Olmsted jobs that were still on the agenda - Ridley College, Havergal, McMaster and the University of Western Ontario. These became Culham's property in a business sense when he moved back to Canada.

Like Borgstrom, Culham also had marital trouble which made him, I think, a very sad man. The way I think of him in the 1930s is as a very solemn person: I don't remember ever seeing him laugh and I think that Culham disappeared into his own private wilderness. After the Second War, Culham appeared again as a planner and he worked on a number of small town master plans in Ontario, returning to his interest in the Olmsted idea of land, space and community. It wasn't a change away from landscape, it was simply thinking of landscape as part of the life of a community, as Central Park is part of the life of New York City and the neighbourhood unit as it was originally conceived was a space around which life revolved.

Helen Kippax, little Helen Kippax, sitting next to all these big chaps: I don't know if it seems a slightly chauvinist idea for me to say that Helen Kippax, being small, looked at the ground a little closer. We were all way up in the sky. But Helen thought of the landscape in a rather different way and I connect her with the idea of "The Ladies' Garden". I don't mean that to be a put down at all. The garden that ladies have made has a very long and very noble history right back to the Elizabethan period of the neat little paths and hedges and flower beds of an Elizabethan garden. You connect it with the English cottage garden - a lady's garden essentially, and with the New England yard, where the herb garden and the flower garden are just outside the back door of the house. It is essentially a feminine art

or I think of it a bit that way. So I think that Helen Kippax was really a person who treasured the small scale things in landscape and was extraordinarily good at it.

Edwin Kay I've left till near the end. Edwin Kay came from England and for a time was supervisor of the Grubb's jobs. He had a connection with Howard and Lorrie Grubb, but they separated and Edwin Kay went off on his own. I believe I've been told that early in his life Edwin Kay worked in Europe on the garden of some European nobleman and that is how he learnt what you might call estate management - how to look after a garden, how to look after a landscape. I see Edwin walking along Bloor Street in Toronto, rather well-dressed. When I first introduced him, sitting here beside me, I said that he was wearing a business suit. Sometimes he would be rather smartly caught up: he had a cane with a silver knob and he would be wearing a Panama hat, rather like a count, a European count perhaps, on the boardwalk at Monte Carlo. He had that kind of style and I think this was effective in his relationships with City Hall. He had a political sense and he did a number of parks in the Toronto area. And I think that that was really Edwin Kay's skill and his business. He liked the business of the landscape.

Now Frances Steinhoff, sitting over on my left. I said I didn't know her as well as the others because she got married and went to live in Vancouver. So I'm going to ask Frances if she will represent another category of landscape architect, the kind you seldom meet in a professional

institution. I'm speaking here about the amateurs who make the most beautiful gardens of all: more beautiful perhaps than any professional landscape architect can make; the person who possesses a garden, and might even be a landscape architect in his own garden.

There is something about the personality and the intimacy of a garden which is made by the person who lives there and lives in the garden. It is unique to that person like poetry or a watercolour sketch. It is something that you can't explain why it is so personal but it is a little different from what professionals do.

In a way, I think you would have to admit that the most beautiful gardens that you have ever seen have been made by the people who live there themselves. I can think of a house in Ontario, a nice house built in the 1880's, located out in the well-known orthodox landscape of Ontario, where a person has made for himself or herself a simply incredible garden which you can't explain. It doesn't come out of any formal training, it is just a person who has a feel for the plants and the place and so on. It has a uniqueness. I'm also thinking of someone in Victoria who lives by a huge rock. There is really nothing there outside the house but the great slab of rock covered with moss, little alpine plants and small treasured things that this person has gathered there. You can't explain it. It's a very unique and personal thing. And it is a pity in a way that an institution dedicated to

landscape architecture doesn't think of these people as part of our fraternity.

Now I'm going to say something about myself before I make my concluding remarks. I was educated in England at the time the garden cities and greenbelt ideas were being explored. People were questioning the relationship between living in cities and living in the country. Was it possible to work in cities and enjoy the country too? In those days people thought of a greenbelt as something you could walk out into from a city. That was the theme out of which a very important attitude towards landscape originated in the garden cities movement. My heroes were Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin in England and later on in the United States, Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, both of whom worked on greenbelt towns and were in a sense landscape architects.

When we decided to start the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects in 1934, I argued what a wonderful thing it would be if the two professions of landscape architecture and town planning were considered as one. In the 1930's there was no town planning institute, it had simply disappeared. And there was no Canadian Society of Landscape Architects and I thought it would rather be a wonderful thing for Canada if we regarded planning towns and planning space and the interface between them as one subject. I was successful to the extent that when this organization was started it was called the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects and Town Planners. That was the title that

Borgstrom and I practised under and it was for the first few years the title of this organization. But there were other events, and other reasons and it disappeared. But I would just like to say that that was my little contribution to the discussion that went on in 1934.

Now I just want to conclude with an abstraction of thought having to do with the CSLA founders. This is probably the last time that there will be a meeting at which the people sitting here with me will be talked about by somebody who actually knew them. They were very close friends of mine, dear friends. I think that as people disappear in time, in history, into the background, of course there is a change - the details of their personalities, their reality as living people disappears - but there remains something else that is a kind of legend. You know in your own families your grandfather is a legend. You don't really know quite what granddad and granny were like, but they have certain legends attached to them and over time they have been simplified in character. They become almost like a carving on a mountain and I think this is the way you might think of these eight people I have been describing to you. It isn't important that we remember Edwin Kay walking along Bloor Street looking like a European count, and it isn't important that Grubb had a particular way of looking at you a little indignantly and quizzically. It is really the legend that these people represent that is important.

So I will conclude with these thoughts. The interesting thing about Howard Grubb is that he represents the finished work, the design that has a definition to it. It is a complete thing, it is a garden that is probably symmetrical because that expresses the idea that it doesn't occur anywhere else. It is the idea of a completely designed artifact.

Mrs. Grubb, a person of flowers, is always with landscape architects in whatever they do: the enjoyment and the celebration of the beauty of the individual flower, the plant, the shape of the tree.

Vilhelm Stensson - University of Toronto - Harvard School of Landscape Architecture - is the professional person. Now the professional has the skill to record what the idea was for a particular landscape, or garden. He or she has to be able to put the idea down on paper, and then translate the idea into the actuality on the ground, just as some person can think of a melody but doesn't have the skills of orchestrating it and putting it into a form that can be performed in the theatre and on the stage and so on. So the professional skill of Vilhelm is the monument and the legend connected with him.

Carl Borgstrom is the environmentalist, the ecologist. You can understand that I fitted very well into his philosophy - that there are natural affinities amongst growing things, affinities between what grows in plant form, the animals, the insects and so on. The interrelationships

that exist, and his natural feel for these connections, that is the legend about Borgstrom.

Gordon Culham is a legend connected with the idea of landscapes that are built for communities: a landscape designed to serve the needs of a community, much like Central Park was the centre of the life of Manhattan Island. That is a thing that landscape architects are always going to be doing in various scales and forms.

Helen Kippax: small is beautiful is an idea we all understand. It isn't just the size of a job or the size of a landscape or a garden; it is the miniature relationship between a plant, the shape of the ground, a little patio - anything in the corner of a garden that appeals to you through its contrast of texture and shape and gives delight. And that is the monument you think of in connection with Helen Kippax.

Edwin Kay, I have said, is connected in my mind with the idea of estate management, which is part of civilized life and civilized places. Is the hedge trimmed? Are the trees pruned? Is the gravel raked? Is the grass mown? Those are the things that make you love a place: that it is kept with love and delight for the beauty of the place. Estate management is I think quite a noble part of the whole objective of making beautiful places for our life.

And finally I expressed my thought about Frances Steinhoff, Mrs. Frederick Sanders. With her I associate that other rather magical thing, the place where a person has made

something out of their own personality because they possess it and live in it and make it their own.

As a way of bringing my remarks to a conclusion, I stand and applaud the founders of the CSLA for what they have left for us in these legends.

Humphrey S. M. Carver's career involved him in the fields of housing, planning, design and community action. Before he retired in 1967, he was on the staff of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. He is the author of several books, including Compassionate Landscape.

The CSLA Founding Members:

- Carl Borgstrom (Died 1951)
- Humphrey S. M. Carver
- Gordon Culham (Died 1979)
- Howard B. Dunnington-Grubb (Died 1965)
- Lorrie A. Dunnington-Grubb (Died 1945)
- Edwin Kay (Died 1959)
- Helen M. Kippax (Died 1963)
- Frances C. Steinhoff (later Mrs. Frederick Sanders)
(Died 1965)
- J. Vilhelm Stensson (Died 1972)