

Puget Sound Bonsai Association
It's History
From Inception to Incorporation

Introduction

Haru Nagasawa answered the telephone the night of Monday, May 21, 1973 and heard Dr. Bruenner say "we did it" and with those words he announced the amalgamation of the several Seattle Bonsai groups into one organization, the Puget Sound Bonsai Association. The main groups were the Kelly Nishitani Unit #73 of the Arboretum Foundation, the Mary Maki Unit of the Arboretum Foundation, the Bonsai Bums and the Broadmoor Women's Group plus other small groups and individuals in the Seattle-Tacoma area.

It began in 1959 as Unit #73 of the Arboretum Foundation, identified as the Bonsai Culture Group. Mary Maki had just returned from a year in Japan where she had studied under Yuji Yoshimura. It was natural that she seek out Kelly Nishitani, the patriarch of Bonsai in the Seattle area, who was acquainted with others of the same interest. In the initial group, Unit #73, were Mary Richardson, Connie Raphael, Hazel Pringle and Virginia Moffet. Added were Janet Ward, Jane Blogg, Vincent Simeon and Helen Culliton to round out a workable bonsai unit, with Kelly and Mary teaching.

Kelly and Mary were an excellent balance, he of the "I learned it at my father's knee" approach and Mary of the formal training and experience. High standards were set with a serious approach to the art. The following year, 1960, as a tribute to Kelly, the group became known as the Kelly Nishitani Unit.

By 1962 it was felt that the bonsai unit was sufficiently knowledgeable to teach a beginner's class and an intermediate class. From this intermediate class evolved the Mary Maki Unit. The members of the Unit in 1973 were Jocelyn Horder, Enid Eshom, Marge Christensen, Madeleine Luther, Ruth Ricks, Lee Layman and Irene Wheatley. Later members of the Maki group were Lucile Stowell, Margot Franklin, Beverly McDonald, Evelyn Davis and Bernice Smith.

Kelly Nishitani who had the dream of an active Bonsai Association in Seattle was born in Japan and came to Seattle as a small child assuming the patriarchal assignment on the death of his father. He suffered the indignities of internment during World War II but returned with no bitterness to rebuild his nursery business. He loved to teach bonsai. He was a gentle man and a gentleman. Kelly's dream of an active bonsai association began in 1957 at the Arboretum with the nucleus of about 10 people and two goals. 1) A permanent collection of fine trees in the Arboretum, 2) A greenhouse to contain a collection.

In 1961, with high hopes, much bravado and no money the Kelly Nishitani Unit undertook an exhibit at the Seattle Art Museum with support from the Bonsai Bums.

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The Bonsai Bums were a small group of nuts who loved highballs, fine food and wines and above all trying to turn trees into Bonsai. It had no name, no dues, no officers, no official meeting dates or places. It lasted over twenty years without bylaws or minutes or treasurer's reports. It started when Bob Shields and Morris Graves went mountain climbing and Graves found and dug up a lovely dwarfed tree which he gave to Bob. Several mountain trips later with different people the Bonsai Bums were formed with Kelly Nishitani as their teacher. The original group included Bob Shields, Dr. Cyrus Rubin, Dr. Bert Bruenner, Dr. Ned Brockenbrough, Dr. Gerald Bernstein, George Schenck, Taki Nagasawa, Will Livingston, Dan Robinson and Connie Raphael. There were several other men who came and dropped out: Vincent Siemion, Paul Langpaap and Scott McClanahan to mention a few. The group met in one another's homes, usually in the basements except when they met at Tak's nursery. Connie Raphael was the person who called everyone to let them know where the meetings would be and the time.

Once each year the "Bums" had a collecting trip to some high, secret place. Mornings were devoted to the search for the ultimate tree. In the afternoons came the "Orgy". One memorable feast included Beluga caviar brought from Russia by Dr. Bruenner just for the occasion. Others were a whole filet of beef by George Schenk, lemon chicken a la Bob Shields, French red and white wines contributed by Dr. Cyrus Rubin and fabulous salads and deserts made with various wines. Getting back down the mountain was sometimes an adventure in itself. Of course there was one unifying factor--Kelly Nishitani who was the teacher. Kelly never said much, he just pruned and wired trees. He was dear and kind and inflexible when it came to good taste in Bonsai. In 1973 when Jane Blogg was trying to form a Bonsai Club in Seattle she came to the Bums for help.

As a special attraction to the 1961 show produced by the Kelly Nishitani Unit, Mr. Yoshimura was invited for demonstrations and workshops. It was a successful in creating a greater interest in bonsai and in establishing a sound financial basis upon which to further that knowledge. On alternate years thereafter exhibits were held at the Art Museum, with Kelly's and Mary's high standards of quality to guide them.

In 1969 the Kelly Nishitani unit became inactive as an Arboretum Unit. However the original purpose of furthering interest in bonsai was accomplished by the giving of financial contributions from still available funds. The Unit was also at least partially instrumental in the formation of PSBA in 1973 when the need for an all-inclusive centralized organization become obvious. The Kelly Nishitani Guild supported the Puget Sound Bonsai Association financially during its early years, giving \$2000 in 1974 in Kelly's memory, for the purpose of bringing qualified Bonsai speakers to Seattle. Helen Tuell was president of the Guild in 1974 and the presentation was made by Jane Blogg.

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The Main Seattle Public Library received a collection of representative bonsai books for viewing in the Fine Arts Department. Further funds were given to the Japanese Garden in the Arboretum and finally, it helped underwrite, with PSBA, the excellent photography of the 1981 PSBA exhibit at the Modern Art Pavilion.

Kelly Nishitani died in 1969 just prior to the last of the Unit's bonsai exhibits. Mary Maki move from the area and was, at last account, still involved in Bonsai in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Perhaps the crowning achievement of the Unit came in 1972 when the American Horticultural Society hosted a convention with International visitors at the Seattle Center. The Kelly Nishitani Unit, though at that time inactive, was invited to present a bonsai exhibit in the Modern Art Pavilion. Connie Raphael spearheaded this effort. With sensitive staging provided by the Art Museum and the wholehearted participation of other bonsai groups the exhibit was an outstanding success.

In the sixties and early seventies interest in Bonsai was growing by leaps and bounds here in the Northwest as well as all over the United States. Classes and clubs met all around the Puget Sound area. Everett had a bonsai club of which Norma Cohen and Olga Low were members. Tacoma had a group, Ruth Guy being it leader was an off shoot of classes taught by Dan Robinson Spectacular bonsai shows drawing from all the groups were held. Eventually, however, the need for a centralized organization became apparent. Most of the units were comparatively small and wished to remain that way. There was no room for growth, yet the demand for knowledge and instruction was increasing, It was felt that an amalgamation into a larger unified group would attract qualified bonsai demonstrators from around the country and to bring together local people with an aptitude for teaching, demonstrating and otherwise dispensing their accumulated knowledge.

P.S.B.A. was to be the "umbrella" organization providing information about Bonsai to members from all over the Puget Sound area and encouraging the formation of more localized study groups.

Jane Blogg was instrumental in organizing meetings to discuss the need for the umbrella organization. Meetings were held at her home and brought together the major players in the Seattle, Tacoma, Everett Bonsai community. At these meetings idea were exchanged and rough by laws drafted and the purpose and goals of the organization defined and sharpened.

And so the Puget Sound Bonsai Association was born May 21, 1973 with the Kelly Nishitani Unit, the Mary Maki Unit, Bonsai Bums and the Broadmoor Women's

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Club the principle midwives.

The Charter meeting was held at the Jefferson Park Field House with Dr. Ned Brockenbough presiding. The duties and functions obligatory to forming the organization were reviewed. The proposed bylaws were read to those present.

The only real question raised about the formation of the club was the name. The proposed bylaws used the name Puget Sound Bonsai Society. Connie Raphael objected to this name most vigorously, as only Connie could, stating that she would never belong to an organization with the initials PSBS. Society was then changed to Association which satisfied Connie and the bylaws were approved by unanimous vote and every person desirous of joining the association so signified by signing the bylaws. Sixty eight (68) people signed the document that evening. The initial dues were \$10 for a single membership and \$15 for a couple. Nominations from the floor were held for officers and Directors who would hold office throughout 1974.

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Bertram F. Bruenner 1973—1975

The first officers of the Puget Sound Bonsai were Dr. Bertram Bruenner, President, Robert Shield, Vice President, Secretary, Sarah (Mrs. Gerald) Bernstein and Ruth Guy, Treasurer. Directors were Connie Raphael, Dan Robinson, Marge Christiansen, Jim Nakahara and Virginia Tytus. It was suggested that these officers serve the remainder of 1973 and throughout 1974 and 1975. Connie Raphael and Dan Robinson were asked to hold their positions for two additional years in accordance with the by laws.

Dr. Bruenner, as the new president, welcomed all present that Monday evening May 21, 1973 to the Association and set forth the goals and purpose of the club. An educational program of interest to members in all levels of bonsai development was emphasized. There were to be four meetings each year that could included a bonsai show, sale, guest lectures, workshops, demonstrations and a publication. This club was not to take the place of smaller bonsai clubs but to act as an umbrella group and offer resources to the small groups. Connie Raphael presented the program and briefly discussed the trees on display, that were native to Washington. Dan Robinson talked about how to collect trees and care for indigenous bonsai. Members were encouraged to ask questions on anything presented by Dan or Connie.

Dr. Bertram F. Bruenner, the first president of the Puget Sound Bonsai Association, was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on May 10, 1903 to Leopold and Clara Bruenner. He practiced as a dermatologist and maintained an office in the Medical and Dental building for over 50 years. In addition, he was an associate clinical professor of dermatology at the University of Washington Medical School.

Bert's father was the organist and choir director at the Catholic Cathedral in St Paul, a job which he held for 65 years. Bert grew up on the outskirts of the city with his older brother and two sisters. It was there that he developed an interest in gardening, planting, growing seeds and caring for plants. The shapes of different leaves and trees intrigued him. He remembered attending a show in the Twin Cities when he was about 14 or 15 where there were a collection of plants. They may not have been bonsai but they were shaped and pruned in interesting ways. This fascination with plants was a lifelong hobby.

Following his mother's wishes, he embarked on a career in Medicine. Graduating from the University of Minnesota he obtained his Medical Degree there in 1929. After completing an internship at the University of Wisconsin in 1930 he moved to New York City for a year's residence at the Skin and Cancer Hospital. Then he went to the American Hospital in Paris, France to work in general medicine and

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dermatology. Upon his return from France he spent a short time in St. Louis Missouri before moving to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota for a residency in dermatology. Following this he served as a Doctor in the United States Army Medical Corps from 1933 until 1935. His good friend Dr. Samuel Light, another dermatologist who was living in Tacoma, told him about the Pacific Northwest and Bert, alone in his Ford coupe, traveled to Seattle, setting up his practice in 1935.

Bert married Madeleine Clerc in 1938 and together they raised two adopted daughters.

In Seattle he continued his interest in plants and particularly Bonsai. During the 1950's he became more involved in his pursuit of the hobby when a number of Bonsai aficionados formed a loosely knit group known as the "Bonsai Bums". Bert had a summer place at Home, in the southern part of Puget Sound, which was the delight of his life. There he maintained a large vegetable garden and also started his many Hawthorne bonsai.

Bert Bruenner was a born teacher whether in the profession of medicine or in Bonsai. Self confident, yet with no large ego, he was intensely interested in all forms of plant culture and was always looking for new plants and techniques. The bickering and jealousies that sometimes occur within organizations was beneath him. He enjoyed his trees and was not in competition with anyone. Always glad to assist and help others was exemplified by his program "the Doctor is in" before every PSBA meeting when he gave advice to members about their problem trees. Dr. Bruenner was the perfect choice for the first president of Puget Sound Bonsai Association.

Dr. Bruenner died on June 3, 1995 in Sunnyvale, California.

Dr. Bruenner open the September 24th, 1973 meeting by thanking Mrs. Mary Richardson for her work on the publication of the first Association Newsletter. The plan is to issue the newsletter prior to each meeting. It will contain local club news, openings in clubs for new members, notices of coming event and as well as carry tips for appropriate seasonal care. This was the start of what we know today as the "Quarterly".

In the beginning the first newsletters carried a logo of a cascade conifer taken from a line drawing from "The Japanese Art of Miniatures and Landscapes" by Yoshimura and Halford. Connie Raphael, at a Board meeting in February of 1975, suggested that we make up our own logo for use on letterheads and the newsletter. She recommended using Jim Nakahara's hemlock as a model. The Board decided they needed for our logo a bonsai that was a native tree and designed by one of our

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members. They followed Connie's suggestion and chose Jim's Hemlock.

The beautiful logo that is the trademark of PSBA is the silhouette of a living bonsai owned by Jim Nakahara. Jim collected this Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) in 1965. He found it in the Cascade Mountains near Hyak. It was growing in a sandy soil along with a number of other seedlings. This one was approximately 14 inches tall. It was easy to dig and Jim was able to get almost all the roots. It went directly into a bonsai container and has been there ever since. Over the last 33 year the tree has matured and changed. It is now on permanent loan to the Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection in Federal Way but is shown at major PSBA bonsai displays.

In November of 1973 the Treasurer reported 104 members and a balance on hand of \$726.11.

The president suggested that the association have a hospitality chairperson in 1974. Barbara Larson will be asked to be the Chair.

PSBA started 1974 with 96 members and had 119 paid members by August.

At the meeting on the 25 of November 1974 the group planting done by Toshio Sabarumuro was raffled. One hundred tickets, at the price of \$1.00 each, were required to be sold prior to the raffle. This being accomplished the raffle was held and Haru Nagasawa drew the winning ticket #034892 which was held by Jane Nelson. Jane remarked that her five dollar investment had paid off very handsomely.

At the meeting on February 24, 1975 Jane Blogg presented the Puget Sound Bonsai Association with a check for two thousand dollars (\$2000) in memory of Kelly Nishitani. The Kelly Nishitani Bonsai Club asked that it be used to sponsor guest lectures and educational programs. President Dr. Breunner expressed his deep appreciation for this generous gift.

Early day suppliers were Dan Robinson, pruners, Betty Caperci, Bonsai material and Taki Nagasawa, pots and shimpaku juniper plants. Teachers listed in the newsletter in 1974 were Connie Raphael, Shirley Stafford, Selena Velikanje, Dan Robinson and Adele Becker.

A show was not held in 1974 as the Board felt that not enough trees would be available for the show.

It was suggested that PSBA donate fifteen to twenty dollars (\$15/\$20) for each meeting held at the Jefferson Park Center to help with their financial problems. This

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was in addition to the regular rent. Cost for the large room was twenty dollars (\$20) and for a small room five dollars(\$5).

During Bert's term the officers and directors began the task of making PSBA a functioning organization. They realized that some of the original thinking used in the by laws needed changing to make the organization run more smoothly. Dan Robinson suggested the by law be changed to give the officers a two year term instead of the one year term called for in the original document. He reasoned that with only four meeting a year the President, as well as the other officers, would only begin to understand their job during the first year and in the second year they would be much more productive. Dr. Bruenner asked Mary Richardson to put this proposed amendment in the newsletter and asked Dan to make this motion at the meeting in November.

At the meeting on the 25th of November 1974 made the motion to change Article V to read as follows; "GOVERNING BODY: The business of the Association shall be managed by a Board of Directors, which shall consist of the officers hereinafter provided for together with five (5) additional members to be known as Directors. Officers shall be elected for a term of two (2) years. One (1) director shall be the immediate past President. The remaining four (4) Directors shall be elected for terms of four (4) years and for not more that two (2) successive terms, with one half of the directors carrying over each year. The Board of Directors shall meet on call of the President, at least three (3) times each year." This was adopted which allow the existing officer to serve until the end of 1975.

On February 24, 1975 Melba Tucker gave a work shop at the Jefferson Park Field House. Cost was \$5.00 for participants and \$2.50 for observers. Material required for this Saikei workshop were 7 to 9 trees 2 to 4 inches tall, a tray 24 x 13 or 14 inches 1/2 to 1 inch deep. In the evening she did a demonstration at the regular meeting. Prior to the demonstration she informed the member that she could sell Mr. Kawamoto's book on Saikei for \$75 to \$100 if anyone wanted to sell their copy. Since only 500 copies were printed and there is a large demand the price as drastically increased.

Also of concern to the Board during these formative years was the Association's tax status. Dr. Bruenner was working to obtain a non profit tax status with the I.R.S. and Dr. Edwin Brockenbough did the research. On April 20th, 1975 Dr. Brockenbough read Article 11 of the by laws as they were written and the proposed changes. Mr. Don Davidson moved that the by laws be suspended during the meeting so that all present could vote on the proposed amendment. His motion canceled the need for a ten (10) day notification in writing to all members for any change in the by laws. Mr. Davidson then moved that we accept the proposed changes in the by laws. Article 11 would now reads as follow; "This association shall

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be a non profit organization, devoted to educational and charitable purposes, including the study and culture of bonsai, holding of frequent meetings of the members, sponsorship of lectures and the holding of bonsai shows." Article XI was also changed to read: "Termination: In the event of dissolution and winding up of the affairs of the association , all remaining assets shall be distributed, in equal parts, to the Seattle Art Museum and the University of Washington Arboretum." The motion carried and Dr. Bruenner filed with the I.R.S. for non profit status.

At the meeting on April 28th, 1975 one of the members requested that an explanation of our goals, activities and organization be given for the benefit of new members. Dr. Bruenner enumerated them briefly as follows:

1. The aim is education through bonsai shows, workshops, lectures and demonstrations.
2. Anyone may request a copy of the by laws which define the goals and the organization specifically.
3. The Treasurer is Mrs. Ruth Guy and any member may request a financial statement of the club.
4. The Puget Sound Bonsai Association began two years ago. Officers were elected and the elections are held every two years in November. (Present officers were introduced and asked to stand)
5. Any suggestions members may have for future programs are welcome. The club is very interested in meeting beginners and has a list of several small working clubs that they may join. The September meeting this year has been planned for the beginner in bonsai.
6. There are presently 122 members.

The Seattle Art Museum Pavilion at the Seattle Center was the location of the first Bonsai show given by PSBA. The show was for three days, the 13, 14 and 15 of June 1975. Louise Reed was in charge of volunteers.

In its beginning PSBA was extremely fortunate to have many talented instructors. Many of the meetings during the first years were put on by various members talking about different aspects of Bonsai. During these early year Dr. Bruenner was actively working to provide more information on Bonsai to the beginning members. He wanted to be sure that the new members were well school in Bonsai techniques. One typical meeting program in 1975 was Connie Raphael discussing and showing bonsai plant material and selection. Jim Nakahara demonstrating potting and root pruning. Dan Robinson critiquing beginners trees. His thought was that most of the meetings programs be of interest to beginners. Taki Nagasawa, Jim Nakahara, Connie Raphael, Dan Robinson, Jane Blogg, Selena Velikanje, Louise Reed, Jane Nelson, Bob Shields, Jane Ward and of course Dr. Bruenner were some of the members utilized in 1974 and 1975. There were workshops and demonstrations featuring John Naka, Tosh Sabarumuro and Melba Tucker during Dr. Bruenner's term as president.

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The following announced the first demonstration sponsored by the Association.
“John Naka, a bonsai instructor and author of a book on Bonsai will give a demonstration in the Orcas room at the Seattle Center on September 30, 1973

sponsored by PSBA. Admission free to PSBA members.” He also returned in 1974 and 1975 to give lectures, demonstrations and workshops

Tosh Sabarumuro was also here in 1974 and 1975 giving demonstrations and workshops. Jane Nelson attended the National Bonsai Convention in Pasadena in July of 1974 and in her report to the Board she recommended that Melba Tucker come to Seattle and give a demonstration on Saikei. She also indicated that she felt Seattle Bonsai were as good as those in California. Melba was scheduled in February 1975

The Board determined that trees done in demonstrations would be raffled at meetings. A 50 cent donations will be required to obtain a chance on the tree. Trees were stored at members homes until the shock of the demonstration disappeared and the tree had recovered. After this period the Board felt they would be ready to be raffled. The Board reviewed and discussed the Tosh Sabarumuro group planting which was to be raffled. It contained 7 trees costing \$35.00 and was in an \$11.00 pot. In the opinion of the Board this was worth \$100.00 retail. They determined that at least 100 tickets at \$1.00 each would need to be sold to the members before the tree could be raffled.

At the August 19th, 1975 board meeting Ruth Guy moved that Connie Raphael, Marge Christianson and Dr. Bruenner compose the nominating committee and present a slate of potential nominees for officers for the 1976 and 1977 at the next board meeting

It was also noted that the duties of the Vice President should include being program chairperson and that the Secretary should keep a list of interested prospective members and clubs throughout the area. Dues were to be mailed to Mrs. Albert Guy, Treasurer, who lived in Tacoma.

Dr. Bruenner suggested that Neil Nietzler be made an honorary member of PSBA. Mr. Nietzler has contributed many hours in the artistic display of the past Bonsai shows. He is very interested in Bonsai. The Board members unanimously gave this an affirmative vote.

Connie Raphael also discussed having a permanent collection. She thought that this might be a goal for the club. Some clubs have tried to have one at the Arboretum but it was not interested. This idea was something for the Board to think about.

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Connie Raphael (nee Paradise) was born in New York City December 3, 1916 and grew up in Keiv Gardens Long Island where she attended public schools. She graduated from Hunters College in New York City Magna Cum Laude in 1936. Her major was biology. She obtained a Masters degree from Columbia University in 1937 Cum Laude in Marine Invert Biology. In 1940 Connie married Horace Raphael and moved to Seattle.

Connie Raphael became interested in Bonsai in the early 1940's. Her husband Horace purchase two trees for her in 1942. She realized that these were outdoor trees, a formal upright pine and a weeping cherry and kept them outside on the deck of their apartment. During the winter a prolonged freeze occurred. Connie was ill at the time and the trees were not protected and consequently froze.

The only accessible collection during this period was at Oriental Gardens on Bothel Way owned by Kelly Nishitani. Kelly being of Japanese descent was at the time in a detention camp. Connie tried to buy trees from his wife, a Caucasian who remained in Seattle, but Mrs. Nishitani would not sell any trees from his collection.

She pursued taking Bonsai lessons from Kelly Nishitani after his return to the Seattle area. She was always turned away by Kelly. His reasoning being that an American women would not have the patience or artistic skill to learn the art. This did not deter Connie and she continued her interest in the art making many calls at his nursery until he eventually accepted her as his pupil. In time he finally can to respect her scientific knowledge of botany as well as her respect for the tradition of the Art of Bonsai.

Connie became ill with cancer in 1985 and passed away October 3, 1986.

President Bruenner discussed a letter from Shirley Stafford of the Connie Raphael Bonsai Study Group. This group proposed that they become charter members of the Puget Sound Bonsai Association Study Groups. These groups would be satellites of PSBA and would encourage study and training of bonsai with continued association with PSBA. PSBA would be in the parent role, similar to the relationship the Arboretum Guilds have to the Arboretum. The board approved and reported to the membership who also approved the request. After the members approved the Board revisited this subject and felt that the affiliation of study groups is not essential but it may encourage more small groups to form which will be an asset to each member,

John Naka held a demonstration-lecture on October 12, 1975 in the Orcas Room of the North Court at the Seattle Center. It was open to all members but guests paid an admission fee of \$2.50. He also held two workshops at the Jefferson Park

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Recreational Center on Monday. Participants paid \$5.00 and Onlookers paid \$2.50.

On October 16, 1975 Ruth Guy, Treasurer, reported \$4212.09 in the treasury and 146 members

Dr. Bruenner faced the decision on holding an Bonsai Clubs International convention in Seattle in 1978. This request came from Jim Barrett of BCI. The board was divided, Dan Robinson was in favor of hosting the meeting while other members felt that PSBA was not ready to undertake such a large project. Bert asked for no action since it would affect the next group of officers. This decision was left to the next administration.

The slate of Officers and Directors recommended by the nominating committee was:

Jane B. Nelson.....President

May Belle Johnson....Vice President

Ruth Ricks.... Secretary

Ruth Guy....Treasurer

Board Members: Connie Raphael, Dan Robinson, Taki Nagasawa, Mary Richardson and Dr. Bruenner

Jane Blogg moved at the annual meeting, November 24, 1975, that this slate be accepted unanimously which was adopted.

Pat Bass suggested that Dr. Bruenner be given an standing ovation, which was done, in appreciation of his past service to PSBA.