

Reuben Theodore Bullington

1908-1989

Bob was born on the family farm of Ruel and Maletia Bullington as their first child on December 9, 1908. He was formerly named Rueben Theodore Bullington. Like so many folks at that time, he attended school through 8th grade and worked on the family farm in south central Georgia.

In the late 1920's, Bob moved to New York City to seek employment. He was hired by the city's transit authority where he installed and maintained electrical switching equipment. (During his time in NYC, he was called Ted, but he switched over to the nickname Bob when he moved to North Carolina.)

During his early days in New York, he met Sally Raemer, who was working as a stenographer. In May 1930, they married. At the time, Bob was 21 and Sally was 29. Bob used to say that he "liked older women, as it ran in the family." (Bob's mother was 5 years older than his father.)

With the looming New York World's Fair of 1939, the city desperately needed a bigger police force. Bob took the opportunity to transfer into the NYC police department. During his next 20 years as a policeman, Bob rose from a "beat cop" to being the "driver" for the precinct's captain.

In this period, Bob's roots in his old farming days took over. He became self-educated in Horticulture by reading everything that he could find on plant propagation. He became a founding member of the Long Island Chrysanthemum Society. But Bob needed land to grow plants!

Bob and Sally bought a piece of property in Syosset, Long Island (at 103 Convent Road.) At that time, there were few neighbors.

Bob turned sandy soil into a friable growing medium by bringing in many truckloads of manure. He would come home from police duty in the city to "modify" this material and then rototill it into a proper soil. Bob then began experimenting with how to best grow various vegetables, flowers and shrubs. On the side, he started to sell his crops and gained a faithful base of customers. Likewise, he began to expand his interactions with other horticulturists and with the Brooklyn Botanical Garden.

Soon Bob became known as "the plant cop." He was featured in the NYC newspaper along with a cartoon of Bob in his police uniform watering a plant behind his back from a faucet. This was one of Bob's favorite possessions and he placed it prominently on the wall of their house in Hendersonville.

Although self-educated, Bob's connections in the horticultural world paid off. When he retired from the police department in 1959, he was immediately appointed as Chief Gardener for the New York State Racing Authority. For the next 10 years, Bob managed all the plantings and the grounds of the Belmont, Aqueduct and Saratoga race tracks.

About 1969, Bob and Sally decided to "retire again." Over the years, several friends from the Long Island Chrysanthemum Society had retired and moved to the Hendersonville, N.C. area. They spoke highly of Western North Carolina and recommended that the Bullingtons should also move there.

Bob and Sally bought the property on Zeb Corn Road and moved south. His first activity was constructing a greenhouse and then preparing the soil to continue his horticultural business. He moved two truckloads of nursery stock down from Syosset to start the process. But soon was grafting and cultivating a wide assortment of trees and shrubs. He was tireless in growing new varieties of plants and

shrubs to demonstrate to the community that they could be grown commercially in Western North Carolina. Bob and Sally named their home "Flora Knoll" after their home on Long Island.

Bob made contact with the local horticultural community and became a member of the "Men's Garden Club of Hendersonville." As well as working to get the N.C. Arboretum established, Bob became more active in the International Plant Propagators Society, making many influential contacts. He often joked about his international trips with the society being the only Georgia dirt farmer in the group.

One of Bob's concerns was the lack of horticultural opportunities available in Henderson County. Bob was quite vocal and outspoken on this need. With his gruff "New York Cop" speaking style, he vexed and annoyed many in the established leadership roles in the community. Unfazed, Bob was unrelenting in his dedication to horticultural excellence in Western North Carolina-so much so that he left his estate to the community to continue his vision after his death.

Bob seemed tireless and totally committed to horticulture and education. The only times that he seemed to falter were with the accidental death of his younger brother in 1981 (electrocuted while knocking down pecans out of his trees when his aluminum pole touched a power line) and of course, with the death of his wife of 54 years in 1985.

Bob died in Pardee Hospital in 1989. During his brief hospitalization, he was surrounded by the top names in horticulture in Western North Carolina.

Bill Lowe