

# Dedicated to Tranquility

*Commemorative Bench Program creates new platform for philanthropy*

Jon Hetman, Associate Director of External Relations and Communications

As famed American naturalist and pioneering conservationist John Muir wrote, “In every walk with nature one receives more than he seeks.” Visiting the Arnold Arboretum and communing with its trees can refresh the mind, recharge the spirit, and inspire both curiosity and reflection. Often one of the most wonderful and rewarding things to do here is to pause for a spell and allow the beauty of nature to delight the senses. Since last fall, Arboretum visitors walking along Meadow Road may have noticed two new, natural-finish wood benches providing an attractive and inviting place to rest beneath the trees and enjoy nature’s (and Olmsted’s) handiwork. These installations represent the first donations in the Arboretum’s new commemorative bench program, which aims to improve this most basic of visitor amenities through philanthropy.

Traditional slat benches—painted dark green and typically set on concrete supports—have dotted the Arboretum landscape for decades, originally installed by the Boston Parks Department as part of the City of Boston’s responsibilities in making the Arboretum accessible to the public. Devising a new, donor-driven approach to funding benches in our landscape only became possible last year through a mutually agreed adjustment to our 1000-year lease agreement. Through this change, the Arboretum assumes full control over the placement, installation, and maintenance of some 70 benches, most on main Arboretum roads and secondary paths. The arrangement gives our horticulture managers full control over how benches impact collections and landscape maintenance, affect or leverage view sheds, and contribute to a positive visitor experience. As a donor opportunity, it also provides an important new income stream for the Arboretum, which operates exclusively by public support.

Arboretum horticulture staff, with particular inspiration and effort contributed by Gardener Nima Samimi, devised the striking, naturalistic character and design of the new benches. A defining aspect of Nima’s original concept is the use of unpainted wood from



Arboretum trees for the bench backs and seats. Felled by disease, old age, or extreme weather, the trees are cut, cured, and milled into thick planks. With rough edges retained for a more natural appearance, the wood is sealed and protected from the elements by layers of clear varnish. Appropriate to an arboretum, this finish reveals the underlying anatomy and biology of the tree and lends an appearance corresponding to the Arboretum’s environment. Since all Arboretum plants remain vital as scientific specimens even after their demise, the use of their wood for benches creates another chapter in their compounding history as an Arboretum plant. To underscore this connection, the Arboretum affixes an accession tag from the original tree to each bench, along with a dedication plaque for donor commemoration.

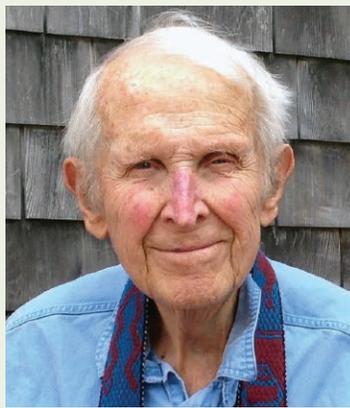
Funding a commemorative bench at the Arnold Arboretum offers members of our community a thoughtful and distinctive way to recognize a special person or occasion. Available for placement in numerous locations throughout our 281 acres, the benches provide respite to visitors and command remarkable views of the landscape year-round. Over time, we aspire to replace all existing slat-style benches in our landscape with this new design, all procured through donor support and crafted from trees that served science as a part of our collections.

Importantly, the donations received through the Commemorative Bench Program contribute directly to the care and expansion of our renowned living collections—giving our old trees new agency in helping grow the Arboretum of tomorrow. 

For additional information about donating a commemorative bench at the Arnold Arboretum, please visit the Arboretum website or contact Jon Hetman, Associate Director of External Relations and Communications, at [jon\\_hetman@harvard.edu](mailto:jon_hetman@harvard.edu) or 617.384.5763.

## Remembering Henry Hixon Meyer, Jr. (1921-2017)

On June 26, 2017, the Arnold Arboretum lost a longtime friend, advocate, and benefactor with the passing of Henry Hixon Meyer Jr. at his home in Rhode Island at age 96. A member of the Harvard University Class of 1944, graduate of Harvard Business School, and a Second Lieutenant in the Allied Army in World War II, Henry worked for nearly five decades in Boston's financial community. He and his wife, Edith "Nod" Knight Meyer, first got involved at the Arboretum in the 1970s as members and through Nod's participation as an Arboretum Associate, Dana Greenhouses volunteer, and plant information expert. After Henry retired in the 1990s, they moved away from Boston but remained active with the Arboretum—Nod as a member of the Arnold Arboretum Visiting Committee for Harvard and Henry as a member of the Director's Advisory Committee. In 1995, Henry and Nod made a transformational gift to establish an endowment in support of elementary school programs at the Arboretum—the Nature Study Fund for City Children.



Since that time, tens of thousands of students from Boston Public Schools have participated in guided spring and fall explorations of plants and ecology in our landscape. Henry remained deeply involved with the programs for the rest of his life, consulting regularly with Arboretum directors and educators and—as a prodigious correspondent—writing letters to decision-makers and philanthropists to raise awareness and support for our work in children's education. In recent years, he

helped raise funds to renovate the Dana Greenhouses as a memorial to Nod, and provided significant annual funding to establish special training and outreach opportunities in our landscape for public school teachers. A larger-than-life figure committed to improving outcomes in disadvantaged communities, Henry Meyer created an indelible legacy in sharing the beauty and wonders of the natural world with the schoolchildren of Boston and beyond.

To make a contribution to the Nature Study Fund for City Children, please contact Janetta Stringfellow at 617.384.5043 or [janetta\\_stringfellow@harvard.edu](mailto:janetta_stringfellow@harvard.edu).