

## **Bringing Beauty to All Seasons Part 2**

**February 1990**

### **Bringing Beauty To All Seasons**

#### **Part 2**

In the last issue we told how Bernhard Winkler came from Switzerland to Chevy Chase near the turn of the century, starting a horticulture business in a greenhouse near Rock Creek and carrying bundles of flowers to Connecticut Avenue to take a streetcar to the Washington market. His family has carried on and expanded the flower growing, specializing in the snapdragons that people enjoy in this area and many others.

IN 1929 the family – Bernhard and Hermine Winkler and their five children – moved from its home by the greenhouse to a house on Jones Mill Road. Remembering the 1930's, Fred Winkler commented that “the depression did not affect us as much as many – we had little to lose... We were used to being poor but we had a rich life, surrounded by nature and all the necessities of healthful living.”

Some friends and relatives also came from Switzerland. Including an uncle, Otto Thalman, and his wife, Frieda, who settled next door and raised three daughters” Anne, Barbara, and Jeanette. So there were cousins nearby, too. Frieda Thalman operated the Rock Creek Park Nursery School there for 25 years, beginning in 1948.

The children all went to the local schools, including Bethesda-Chevy Chase Junior- Senior High School. In those days B-CC was located on what is now the site of the new Leland Center. It was also the place many area residents remember as the site of the two successive Leland Junior High School Buildings. As the younger generations of the Winklers have also attended local schools, “there’s a real confusion in our family when we say B-CC!”

After graduating from BCC, Fred Winkler went to the University of Maryland, where he pursued his strong interest in plant genetics and propagation and earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in botany. During his college years he became increasingly interested in developing new varieties of snapdragons, keeping detailed records on all the strains and generations.

Unlike his father, who grew only existing inbred varieties, Fred, selected the best individual plants to create improved inbred lines, From these, in 1941, he introduced the first f-1 hybrid snapdragon variety, MARYLAND PINK – a cross of two unrelated pure strains, thus becoming a pioneer in the horticulture world.

Today he has 21 different hybrids available to the commercial cut flower grower. Hybrids of many plants and animals are common today, because they are more vigorous and productive than pure strains, but they were a new idea in flower growing in the 1930's.

After many years of service in World War II, Fred Winkler returned to Chevy Chase. He and his sister Barbara ran “B. Winkler Florist” for years, with his wife Sally managing the office. As the operation expanded into a significant seed business as well as a producer of cut flowers, third-generation family members, including daughter Lorrie Krautwurst and son David and his wife Kathy, became more involved.

On June 1, 1989, PanAmerican Seed Company acquired the seed part of the business, which by then had developed extensive markets in France, Italy, and Switzerland as well in this country.

Today Fred Winkler continues his development efforts in snapdragons. He propagates hybrids and keeps detailed records going back 10 generations, and some seed 10 to 15 years. He has also pioneered bi-colored snapdragons – white and pink, yellow and orange, and purple and white. Today he focuses on developing dwarf strains of snapdragons for gardens, as well as new or improved cut flower varieties for both winter and summer flowering.

There are now two greenhouses at the site near Rock Creek. The original one, dating from the first decade of this century, still stands. A second greenhouse was constructed next to it in 1950.

A hot water heating system maintains a constant 50-degree night temperature, and manually operated ventilators provide for cooling during the day when needed. Walking along the narrow aisles between the waist-high seedbeds, you see snapdragons at every stage, ranging from fragile seedlings to thriving full-blooming plants.

Their life cycle is from three to five months, and their blooming season is September through June, through there are plants at various stages growing year-round. In summer months, the soil is reworked, and the beds prepared and planted for a new crop.

The cut flowers grown here are sold to local retail florists, including, in the immediate area, Chevy Chase Florist and Small's Demmie Blackistone's of Chevy Chase. The Smalls also had a large cut flower and nursery business North Chevy Chase near Jones Mill Road for many years until the early 1970's, when the large range of greenhouses was dismantled and the land converted to residential use. The Winkler flowers are also found in florist shops throughout the area, including many in Bethesda, Silver Spring, Rockville, Wheaton, and the District of Columbia.

Several Winkler families also live in the immediate area, and four of the fourth generation is now attending nearby elementary schools. The family and others also grow fruits and vegetables in garden plots near the greenhouse.

And the botany research and the efforts to develop more new and pretty varieties of snapdragons continue – bringing joy and beauty to people in this area and many areas of the world.

(Many thanks to Fred, Sally, and Kathy Winkler for the information and photographs for this article.)

-Charlotte Wunderlich