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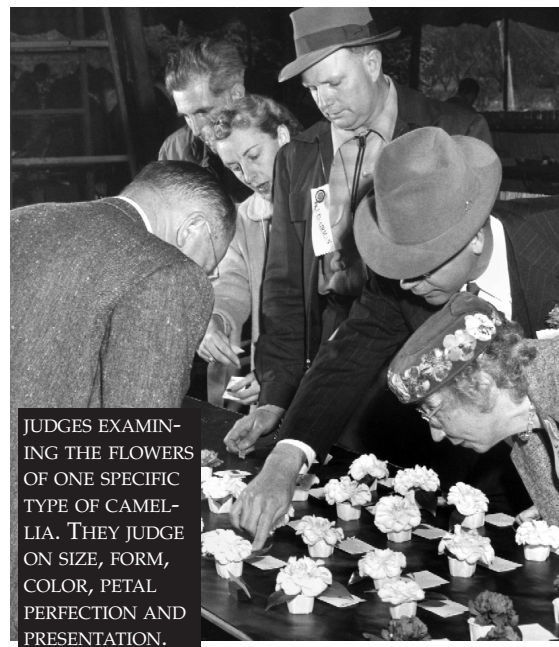


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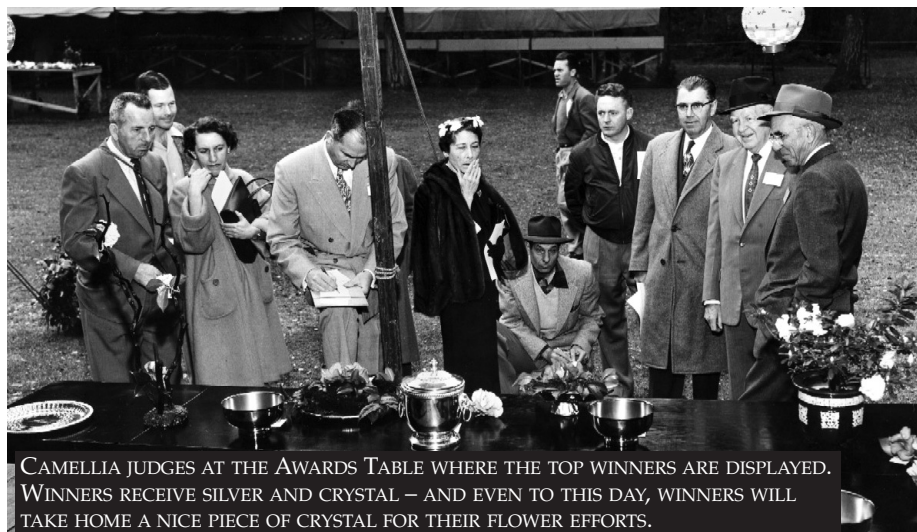
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CAROL PAULOWSKY, 1956
CAMELLIA QUEEN, PRESENTING
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DESCANSO GARDENS

Celebrating the Camellia

BY BRENDA REES

Camellias have been an integral part of Descanso Gardens since founder E. Manchester Boddy first planted the showy flowers in 1935. Boddy's nursery provided camellia plants to the public and his plantation supplied blooms to the cut-flower industry which helped make camellias the blossoms of choice for corsages worn by fashionable ladies of the era.

Even after Boddy sold the property to the County of Los Angeles in 1953, camellias were still a high priority for the La Cañada botanical

garden.

In fact, in the 1950s and 60s, Descanso celebrated its extensive camellia collection with elaborate pageantry, society shows, a "Queen of Camellialand" contest and crowded walks through the famed winter-blooming flower forests.

"When Descanso was first owned by the County of Los Angeles in the early 1950s, the focus was really on the floral festivals working with the local garden communities on festivals that highlighted camellias and roses," says Robin Sease, Manager of

Visitor Education and Service for Descanso. Later, the Descanso Garden Guild would continue to support these festivals and expand the programming.

"It was such a big deal in those days. Our Main Lawn was filled with displays and people looking at the blooms in the forest," she says. "What strikes me as I look through these old photos of the festivals is how well attended they were and how dressed up people came to them. Men in suits. Women in their Sunday best with gloves, hats and handbags. This was truly an outing."

Hoping to recreate some of that early buzz and a slice of the Gardens' past, Descanso is holding a celebration of its signature flower, "The Golden Age of the Camellias" from February 20 to the 27.

The week-long festival features camellia forest tours, workshops and walks along with an evening party on Feb. 20, hosted by humorist and author Charles Phoenix. Phoenix will incorporate images of Descanso's camellia-crazy past into his wonderfully hilarious presentation, "Charles Phoenix's Retro Slide Show of Southern California."

If any former Camellia Queens happen to be in the audience that night, Phoenix will also interview them to find out just what it was like to be Descanso royalty.

One past Camellia Queen from 1961, Carol Dickerson, plans to attend Phoenix's Feb. 20 show and says she is always happy to talk about her past reign. "I was only 18 years old when I had the title," says Dickerson, who now resides in Banning. "It was so awesome, you have no idea. I felt so pampered and it was wonderful."

With record attendance that year, the auburn haired beauty – wearing a flowing gown topped with an elaborate camellia-styled headdress – joined Descanso officials in planting a camellia named after her in the Gardens. For years, the medium white 'Carol Dickerson' japonica camellia lived at the Gardens.

Sadly, time has taken that camellia, but Dickerson still remembers the dress she and her mother bought

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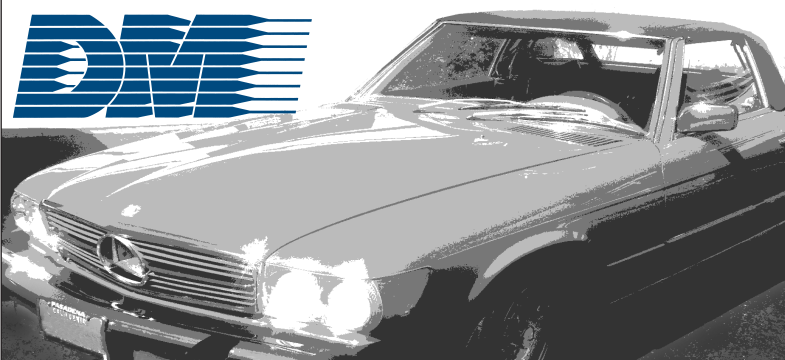


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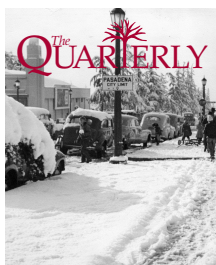


SHARON BRYANT, 1957 QUEEN

for the occasion, the flowers in the hair and all the media attention and photographers.

Since that time, Dickerson hadn't visited the Gardens until earlier this year, and she was flooded with memories as she toured her former reign. "The lushness of landscape is what I recall," she says. "The large forests, the beautiful shade trees and how gorgeous it felt just be in the Gardens. It was magic."

Other events planned for the Golden Age of the Camellia Festival include: Faery tours of the Camellia Forests for children on Feb. 20, a tea tasting workshop on Feb. 21, and a



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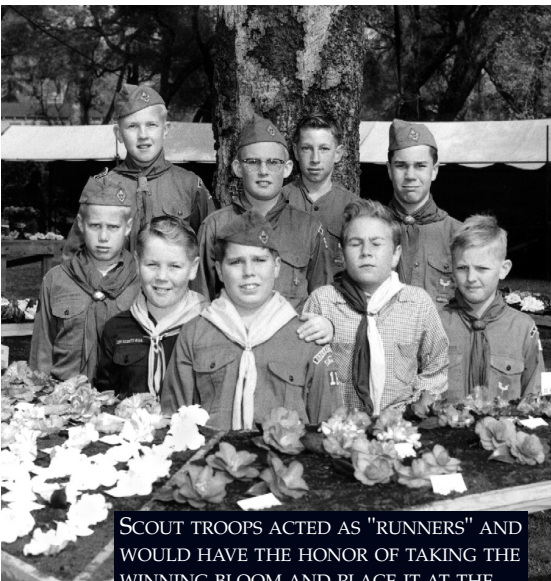
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walking tour of the Camellia Forest on Feb. 27. In addition, the Southern California Camellia Council will host their annual show on Feb. 27 and 28.

Former Camellia Queens are encouraged to contact Brenda Rees at (818) 949-7984 or PR@descansogardens.org.

Descanso Gardens is located at 1418 Descanso Dr., La Cañada. General admission: \$8 adults, \$6 for students/seniors and \$3 children 5-12. Children 4 and younger are free. Descanso is opened from 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. every day except Christmas. Membership supports Descanso. For more information, call (818) 949-4200 or visit www.descansogardens.org.



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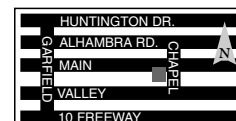
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