

Niagara Parks School of Horticulture

By Jessica Linzel

The Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) School of Horticulture was established in 1936 to teach apprentice gardeners—in fact it was originally called the NPC's Training School for Apprentice Gardeners.

The idea for such a school was put forward as a labour solution by NPC staff in which young gardeners were educated and trained while simultaneously providing free labour to keep the ornamental flowers and shrubbery looking full and beautiful for the tourists visiting Niagara Falls and the surrounding areas.

The land encompassed approximately 200 acres just north of the Niagara Glen, purchased from the Hydro-Electric Power Commission. Today, it encompasses approximately 4,000 acres of land for students participating in a three-year program. Initially, the program had very selective enrollment, looking for physically fit, single, male students with a secondary school diploma, at least a 60-per-cent average, and two or three years of experience working in a horticultural environment. The first female student was permitted to enroll in 1973.

The school's students beautified the campus, working the hard clay soil in the summer and thinning out the forested Glen in the winter to make the grounds more accessible.

As a private, for-profit organization, the NPC was constantly looking for ways to save money while beautifying its park lands. One of its ideas was that graduates of the School of Horticulture would be required to work for the NPC for three years following graduation. There were a variety of courses offered at the school, including arboriculture, botany, entomology, floriculture, fruit culture, greenhouse environment and production, soil science, landscape design, plant identification, vegetable cultivation and more.

One of the first buildings on site was the old railway station at Queenston Heights which had been disassembled and reconstructed on campus for various purposes including a lecture hall, dormitory, and even an ice cream parlour. A new lecture hall and other buildings including an arboretum, aviary, herbarium, and multiple ornate garden areas were also added to the campus over the years. In 1959, the name changed, and it became officially known as the Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture. Its site is now known to tourists as the Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens and is also home to the Butterfly Conservatory.

References

"Niagara Parks School of Horticulture." Brock University Library Archives & Special Collections, digital exhibit. Accessed July 1, 2023.

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