Descriptive Summary:

Repository: Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, Jamaica Plain, MA
Call Number: I G-6 LS
Location: Archives
Title: Lilac Sunday, 1936-
Date(s): 1936-
Creator: Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University
Quantity: 2.5 linear feet, 4 boxes
Accruals: Further accruals expected
Language of material: English
Abstract: Collection contains photographs, 35mm negatives, 35mm slides, correspondence, memos, press releases, pamphlets, flyers, newspaper clippings, posters and notes on the Arnold Arboretum’s annual “Lilac Sunday” celebration.
Note: Access to Finding Aid record in Hollis Classic or Hollis.
Preferred Citation: Lilac Sunday, 1936-. Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University.
Additional Material: Additional images of can be found in the Arboretum’s in-house Digital Access Management System, ImagePortal by searching for “Lilac Sunday.” Please note that Image Portal can only be accessed onsite. Ninety-two historic images of the Lilac Collection can be retrieved from VIA by using the search term “lilac collection” and limiting the repository in the drop down menu to Arnold Arboretum Horticulture Library (Jamaica Plain). See also Featured Collections, Lilac Collection.

Acquisition Information

Provenance: This majority of the collection was transferred from the Arnold Arboretum’s departmental holdings to the Arboretum’s Archives in 1984 when the Archives was established. Further accruals expected.


Terms of access:
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### Historical Note

On May 25, 1908, when the *Boston Daily Globe* published the headline “LILAC SUNDAY AT ARNOLD ARBORETUM” the first record of what would become an annual celebration, as well as its signature name, was created.

The *Globe* probably received one of the monthly “clipping sheets” that spring which Charles Sprague Sargent, the Arboretum’s first director, sent to select local and national newspapers. These “clipping sheets” consisted of four or five short pieces about the Arboretum plants that would be in bloom in the upcoming weeks. Many newspapers were aware that most people worked six days a week, chose the optimum day for a visit and created “Lilac Sunday.” The term “Lilac Sunday” would first appear in an Arboretum publication in 1925 in E. H. Wilson’s *America’s Greatest Garden*.

In the May 1911 issue of the Arboretum’s *Bulletin of Popular Information*, its first year of publication, Sargent would only provide an estimate of the best time to visit when he wrote that “the lilacs should be at their best by the end of the week.” But with *The Christian Science Monitor* reporting that the “LILACS HAVE BURST INTO BLOOM AT THE ARNOLD ARBORETUM” (May 25, 1912) and the *Globe* continuing its coverage with “GREAT DISPLAY OF LILACS: Thousands of Persons Visit Arnold Arboretum and See Great Masses of Flowers” (May 25, 1914), Sargent, ever mindful of the power of the press, became ever more specific with his annual *Bulletin* predictions. In 1919, he forecast that “.....the collection will probably be at its best about May 24th.” The following year, he saw “... every reason to believe that many of the plants will be in full bloom by Saturday, the 29th.” While they may have been at their peak on Saturday, the *Globe* ran coverage of the event under the heading “LILAC SUNDAY AT THE ARNOLD ARBORETUM” (May 31, 1920).

Without ever actually using the term “Lilac Sunday”, Sargent made his last lilac projection in 1926: “When this Bulletin [May 19] reaches its...”
readers the earliest Lilacs will probably be in bloom and there is every promise that
Lilacs this year will be unusually full of flowers.”  That year the press had a field day:

Since the 1980s the date for “Lilac Sunday” is set almost a year in advance, and peak
bloom time is occurring earlier in the spring. At the beginning of the 20th century “Lilac
Sunday” was apt to fall at the end of May, then for many years the third Sunday in May
was the norm, but in 2002 the celebration was moved to the second Sunday in May.
The 100th anniversary of “Lilac Sunday” occurred in 2008.

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**Scope and Content**
This collection contains photographs, 35mm negatives, 35mm slides,
correspondence, memos, press releases, pamphlets, flyers, newspaper clippings, and
notes on the Arnold Arboretum’s annual “Lilac Sunday” celebration that are largely
organized by year. Some years have no records.

Additional content is available in digital form at the library. Listed by year, this
includes:
1896-1923: Boston Globe articles (.pdf files)
1988: list of photos (MS Word)
2004: map, schedule, flyer, signage, dancers information; list of retail lilac sources
(.pdf files)
2005: signage, schedule, handout, dancers information (.pdf files)
2010: poster (high-resolution image)

**Arrangement**
This collection is arranged in 5 series:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Event</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>Historical Press Coverage</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Series I is arranged with each folder number corresponding to a year, such that
some years have one folder (e.g. 1900: Folder 1, Lilac Sunday, May 20, 1900), and
some years have more than one folder (e.g. 1983: Folder 11A, Press release/flyers;
Folder 11B, Logistics and staffing; Folder 11C, Art exhibits).

Series IV, Historical Press Coverage, contains materials located in Arnold Arboretum
Scrapbook 7. For more information on scrapbooks, please contact the library.
**Boxes 1-2**

**Series I: Event.** Chronicles the activities of particular years. Records include press releases; handouts, signage, and flyers; planning, logistics, and staffing notes, lists, and timelines; vendor orders and invoices; t-shirt designs; and other materials.

**Box 1**

**Folder**

1. Lilac Sunday, May 20, 1900  
   Boston Globe articles

2. Lilac Sunday, May 24, 1908  
   Boston Globe articles

3. Lilac Sunday, May 25, 1919  
   Boston Globe articles

   Boston Globe articles

5. Lilac Sunday, May 15, 1921  
   Boston Globe articles

Visitors enjoying the lilacs *(on left)* and parking on Centre Street *(on right)* during Lilac Sunday, 1936, both photographs by Donald Wyman

Lilacs, Spring, May, 1972. Photographer unknown
Box 1, continued
Folder

6.  Lilac Sunday, May 14, 1922
    Boston Globe articles

7.  Lilac Sunday, June 2, 1924
    Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor articles

8.  Lilac Sunday, 1978
    Press release

9.  Lilac Sunday, 1980
    Proposal to Mrs. Barry Bingham for “Lilac Week” from Peter Ashton

10. Lilac Sunday, May 16, 1982
    Press release and poster

11. Lilac Sunday, May 22, 1983
    A. Press release/flyers
    B. Logistics and staffing
    C. Art exhibits

12. Lilac Sunday, May 20, 1984
    A. Press release/handouts
    B. Logistics and staffing
    C. Dancers

13. Lilac Sunday, May 18, 1986
    A. Press/press release/flyers
    B. Logistics and staffing

    A. Press
    B. Handouts

15. Lilac Sunday, May 22, 1988
    A. Press/flyers
    B. Lilac Legacy Champagne Benefit

16. Lilac Sunday, May 20, 1989
    Lilac Collection Benefit

17. Lilac Sunday, May 20, 1990
    Press and lilac society handout

18. Lilac Sunday, May 19, 1996
    A. Press release and handouts
    B. Logistics and staffing
Box 1, continued
Folder

19. Lilac Sunday, May 18, 1997
   A. Handouts
   B. Logistics and staffing

   A. Press/press releases and correspondence
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Planning/logistics
   D. Dancers

21. Lilac Sunday, May 16, 1999
   A. Press
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Staffing
   D. Food vendor

22. Lilac Sunday, May 14, 2000
   A. Press release
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Logistics and staffing
   D. Dancers

23. Lilac Sunday, May 13, 2001
   A. Press/press releases/flyer
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Logistics and staffing

24. Lilac Sunday, May 12, 2002
   A. Press release
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Logistics and staffing

   A. Press release
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Planning/logistics/staffing
   D. Vendors

Box 2
Folder

26. Lilac Sunday, May 16, 2004
   A. Press
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Planning/logistics
   D. Staffing
   E. Vendors
   F. T-shirt
Box 2, continued
Folder

27. Lilac Sunday, May 15, 2005
   A. Press/press release
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Planning and logistics
   D. Staffing

28. Lilac Sunday, May 14, 2006
   A. Handouts and signage
   B. Planning and logistics
   C. Staffing
   D. Vendors
   E. T-shirt

29. Lilac Sunday, May 13, 2007
   A. Handouts and signage
   B. Family activity handouts
   C. Planning and logistics
   D. Staffing
   E. Vendors
   F. T-shirt

   A. Press
   B. Handouts and signage
   C. Planning/logistics
   D. Staffing
   E. Vendors
   F. T-shirt
   G. Art exhibit
   H. Site plan

31. Lilac Sunday, May 9, 2010
   A. Handouts
   B. Planning/logistics

32. Lilac Sunday, May 8, 2011
   A. Press

33. Lilac Sunday, May 10, 2015
   Handout

34. Lilac Sunday, Undated Material
**Box 3**

**Series II: Photographs.** Most images depict visitors walking through the lilacs, on the grounds, or in front of the Hunnewell Building.

![Lilac Sunday, May 13, 2007. Photograph by Jay Connor](image)

**Folder**

1. 1936
2. 1962
3. 1973/74
4. 1987-89
5. Miscellaneous 1980s
6. 1997, slides, Phyllis Anderson
7. 2001, slides, Peter Del Tredici
8. 2007
9. Undated

**Series III: Posters.** Includes photographs of Lilac Sunday promotional posters and related material. For more information about the posters, see the Art and Artifact database inventory (on-site only).

![A selection of Lilac Sunday posters](image)
**Box 3, continued Folder**

1. 1982. Also includes correspondence, requests for posters, and information about “Silent Auction Lilacs and Art” to benefit the restoration of the lilac collection.
2. 1983
3. 1984
4. 1986
5. 1988

Note: For my posters, see Box 4 (Oversize).

**Series IV: Ephemera**

**Folder**

1. Lilac Legacy button, undated

**Series V: Historical Press Coverage.** Descriptions of Lilac Sunday as reported in newspapers. See table below for full listing. Page references from Arnold Arboretum scrapbook number 7 and not included in this collection.

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**Local Lines.**

At the Arnold arboretum in Jamaica Plain there is now in bloom the largest display of lilacs ever seen in this country; it contains from 125 to 160 varieties of syringa vulgaris. This collection has been obtained from all parts of the world, and includes every known species in cultivation. This popular flower can be seen at its best during the following week or 10 days. The public is cordially invited.

Boston Daily Globe, May 25, 1895
## Scrapbook 7 - Lilac Sunday Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>May 30, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Lilacs bloom in America's tree garden&quot;</td>
<td>Detroit Journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>June 1, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Arboretum lilacs beginning to bloom&quot;</td>
<td>Christian Science</td>
<td>Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 1, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Arboretum trees make great show&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Record</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>June 10, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Lilac Sunday at Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Herald</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 8, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Wonderful lilac show at Arnold Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>June 8, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Arboretum ready for &quot;Lilac Sunday&quot;&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Transcript</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 9, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Arboretum lilacs now open&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Record</td>
<td>Photograph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>June 11, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Hundreds visit lilacs in bloom&quot;</td>
<td>Christian Science</td>
<td>Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June 13, 1917</td>
<td>&quot;Lilacs and azaleas now rivals at Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>May 1921</td>
<td>&quot;Lilac time at Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Transcript</td>
<td>Specifically mentions &quot;Lilac Sunday.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>May 6, 1921</td>
<td>&quot;Lilac Sunday at Arnold Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td>Article and photograph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May 1921</td>
<td>&quot;Next Sunday will be lilac day at Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>May 1921</td>
<td>&quot;Rare lilacs at the Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Record</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>May 21, 1923</td>
<td>&quot;Throngs visit Arnold Arboretum for annual observance of Lilac Sunday&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118</td>
<td>June 2, 1924</td>
<td>&quot;The lilacs are in bloom&quot;</td>
<td>Christian Science</td>
<td>Monitor Article by E.H. Wilson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119</td>
<td>June 1, 1924</td>
<td>&quot;Lilacs in magnificent profusion make Arnold Arboretum glow&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Post</td>
<td>Specifically mentions &quot;Lilac Sunday.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>June 2, 1924</td>
<td>&quot;Several thousand visitors view lilacs in bloom at Arnold Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td>Specifically mentions &quot;Lilac Sunday.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>May 18, 1925</td>
<td>&quot;Glory of lilacs at Arboretum. Record crowd visits botanical garden to see finest collection in world, now in full bloom&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td>George Merrill led a tour at 3pm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>May 16, 1924</td>
<td>&quot;In lilac time&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td>May 16, 1925</td>
<td>&quot;Lilac Sunday at Arboretum - Azaleas also in bloom there&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May 16, 1925</td>
<td>&quot;Tomorrow is lilac day at Arboretum&quot;</td>
<td>Boston Globe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 4 (Oversize)
Contains oversized posters from Series III

6. 2000
7. 2010
8. 2011
9. 2012