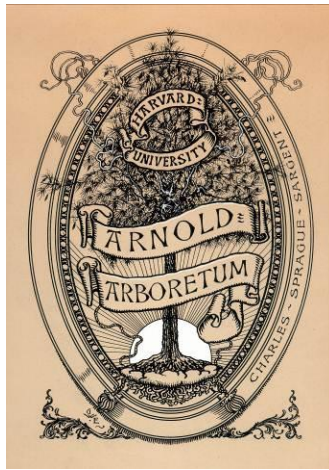


Archives IV C 1.1

**Early Plant Accessions, 1872–1899: Guide**



**The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University**

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## **IV C 1.1**

### **Early Plant Accessions, 1872–1899: Guide**

**Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University  
125 Arborway, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts**

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#### **Descriptive Summary**

**Repository:** Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

**Call No.:** IV C-1.1

**Location:** Archives.

**Title:** Early Plant Accessions, 1872–1899.

**Date(s):** 1872–1899

**Creator:** Jackson Thornton Dawson (1841-1916), Martin Daley, Louis Victor Schmitt, William Judd (1913-1946)

**Quantity:** 1 linear foot

**Language of material:** English

**Abstract:** The Arnold Arboretum's plant records system is the oldest continuously maintained system of its kind in North America. From the time of its founding, the Arboretum has had a record system that includes a standardized accession number assigned to every plant on the grounds for use in tracking its name and origin. Today accession records are maintained on BG-BASE™ a database linked to a mapping program that shows the location of each plant on a series of maps.

**Note:** Access to Finding Aid record in [HOLLIS](#).

**Preferred Citation:** Early Plant Accessions. Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University.

#### **Processing Information**

Processed in 2008, finding aid template applied by Kayleigh Hinckley, March 2011, revised 2012 by Sheila Connor, revised 2023 by Larissa Glasser.

#### **Acquisition Information**

**Provenance:** These records were created between 1873 and 1899 principally by Jackson Thornton Dawson during his Arboretum career as plant propagator from 1873 – 1916.

#### **Terms of Access**

Researchers seeking to examine archival materials are strongly encouraged to make an appointment. The Director, or an office of origin, may place restrictions on the use of some or all of its records. The extent and length of the restriction will be determined by the Director, office of origin, and the Archivist. Some of the books are quite brittle and must be handled with extreme care.

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## Historical Note



The Arnold Arboretum's plant records system is the oldest continuously maintained system of its kind in North America. From the time of its founding, the Arboretum has had a record system that includes a standardized accession number assigned to every plant on the grounds for use in tracking its name and origin. The initial system of recording plant accessions began in 1874 and was created by [Jackson Thornton Dawson](#) (1841-1916), the Arboretum's first plant propagator. The records for these incoming plants included an assigned base number, Latin binomial, provenance, date and form received such as seed, graft, or plant.

As the record keeping evolved Dawson recorded information in a series of books arranged either by alphabetical, numerical, or phylogenetic order or some combination of the three. For the most part the plant records arranged in phylogenetic order follow the taxonomic classification system for flowering plants devised by George Bentham (1880-1884) and Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911) *Genera plantarum ad exemplaria imprimis in herbariis kewensibus servata definite*. This early taxonomic system, which did not take into account Darwin's theories of evolution, was used as the guide to the placement and arrangement of plants in the Arboretum's living collections.

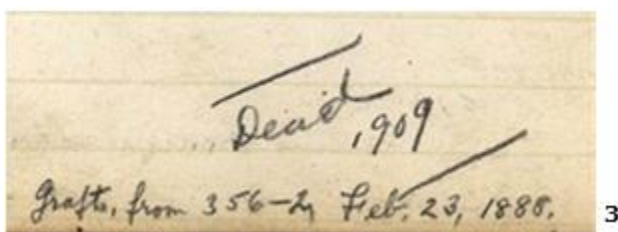


One of the books in the collection may have been an inventory of plants already present in the collections and could have been intended to accompany the maps that documented the location of trees planted in the systematic arrangement. The first very rudimentary map titled *Plan of the Arnold Arboretum Showing Progress of the Work, October 31, 1887, C. S. Director* that documented tree placement was made by landscape architect Henry Sargent Codman (1863-1893), a partner in Frederick Law Olmsted's firm, and a nephew of Charles Sprague Sargent (1841-1927), the Arboretum's first director.

The numbering system Dawson used, in which each new taxon added to the collection was assigned a base number from which the numbers assigned to subsequent accessions of the same taxon were derived, suggests that these were inventory numbers rather than accession numbers as used in our current system. There is evidence that a parallel system of recording all material received was begun at this time.

The initial system proved cumbersome and unworkable and as the collection grew, so did the quantity of accessions representing the same taxon, and the use of the same base number for genetically unrelated accessions invited error and misinterpretation. It became clear that the system required a change, and sometime after the death of Dawson, when William Judd assumed the post of plant propagator a new system was initiated that required that a large proportion of the collection be renumbered. The new system consisted of a sequential number with an appended year code to each accession received and the first incoming accession of a taxon retained its number, but later accessions of the same taxon were assigned new numbers. Vegetative re-propagations of material already in the collection continued to follow the suffix system, each bearing a number derived from either the original or the new base number assigned to the accession from which it had been propagated.

Although many entries are in Jackson Thornton Dawson's hand others may have been made by either his assistant Martin Daley, Louis Victor Schmitt, Arboretum Superintendent who began in 1905, or Dawson's eventual successor, William Judd (1913-1946). Annotations



to original entries often appear to have made in the field and usually consist of brief, hastily made remarks. The books in this collection captured accession information for the new system and document the early attempts at record management that eventually led to a solution.

Some of these early accession books were also used, in part, to track expenses, labor and plant distributions. For example, the Arboretum's Expense Journal, 1883-1895 includes a summary of the number and types of trees and shrubs planted during 1884-1885, and 1886; Expense Journal 1895-1896 contains plant distribution records; Expense Journal 1922-1930 contains a record of seeds and plants received at the greenhouses during 1918; For these holdings see Archives Business Office, Income and Expense Records, IC-1. An

additional Early Plant Records Accession Book can be found in the Papers of William H. Judd, IV A-1 WJ.

Today accession records are maintained on BG-BASE™ a database linked to a mapping program that shows the location of each plant on a series of maps. The Arnold Arboretum's living collections database, [BG-BASE™](#), is online and can be searched by entering one or more words from the scientific or common name.

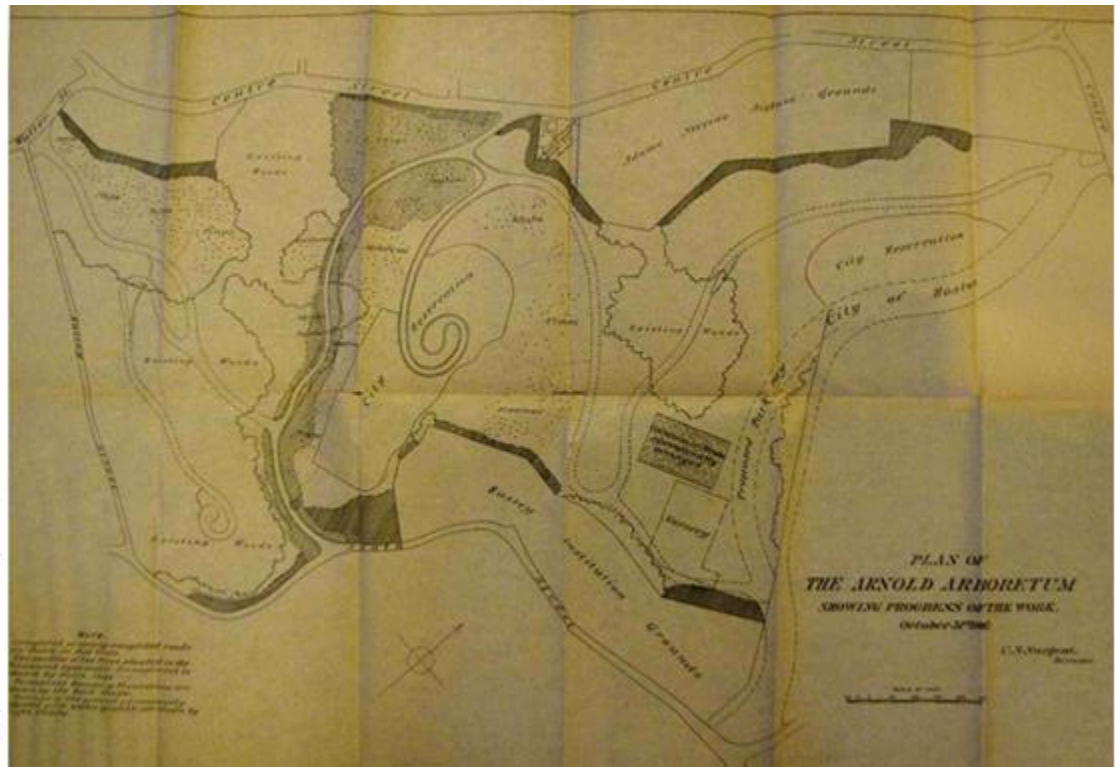
Information about this collection was excerpted from "[Chronicling the Living Collections: the Arboretum's Plant Records](#)" by Jennifer Quigley, *Arnoldia* 49 (1): 1989.

Fig. 1. Jackson Thornton Dawson, age 30. Photographer unknown.

Fig. 2. Original Arboretum Nursery site at 1090 Centre Street. Photo taken 1900 or earlier. Photographer unknown.

Fig. 3. Annotation from Early Plant Records Accession Book F.

Fig. 4. "Plan of the Arnold Arboretum Showing Progress of the Work, October 31, 1887" (below)



**Note reads:**

Completed or nearly completed roads are shown in full lines.

The position of the Trees planted in the Permanent Systematic Arrangement is shown by stars thus +++

Permanent Boundary Plantations are shown by the Dark Shade

Portions of the grounds permanently Planted with undergrowth are shown by Light Shade

**Scope and Content**

This collection contains the earliest versions of the Arnold Arboretum's plant record system that includes a standardized accession number assigned to every plant on the grounds for use in tracking its name and origin. The accession numbers and dates of each volume overlap; highest accession numbers vary between 3,274 and 3,663. The period covered usually begins with 1872 and ends between 1874 and 1899; however annotations to the original entries in some books extend well into the early 1900s.

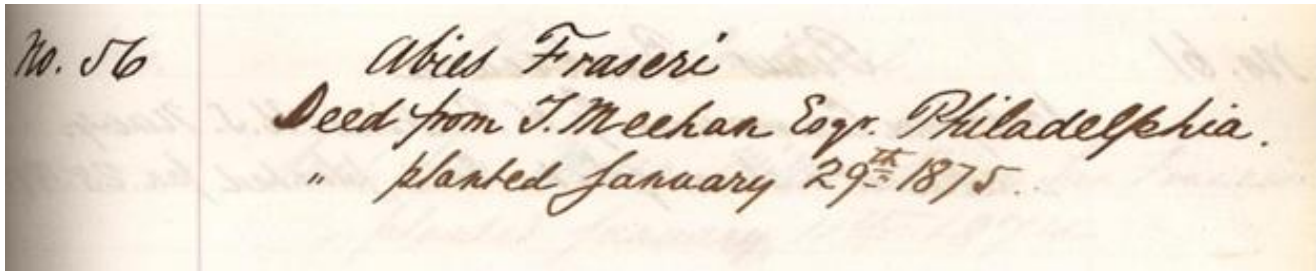
### Arrangement

The collection is arranged in 1 series and consists of 6 bound volumes organized by earliest dated record within the date range of each book. The description of each volume begins with an example of a typical entry found within.

### Container List

#### Series I:

**Plant Accession Book A, [dates range from 1872 - 1874]**



Numerical listing of seeds received and date planted.

Inscribed on first page: Seedlings/Arnold Arboretum (copy)

Records do not include base numbers for each plant. Most records only include planting date. May have served as an inventory control for Arboretum's first nursery.

Handwritten notation on 2d page:

Index

Conifers \_\_\_ Page I

Deciduous \_\_\_ " LXXI Nos. 1-399.

" \_\_\_ " XXXVII Nos. 400-448

First numerical sequence: No. 1 on page I to no. 448 on page XLVI

Second numerical sequence: No. 1 on page LXXI to no. 399 on last unnumbered page.

There is no evidence of XXXVII Nos. 400-448.

Dates range from 1872 to 1874.

Many pages are blank. Black ink and pencil. Handwriting varies. Un-tabbed

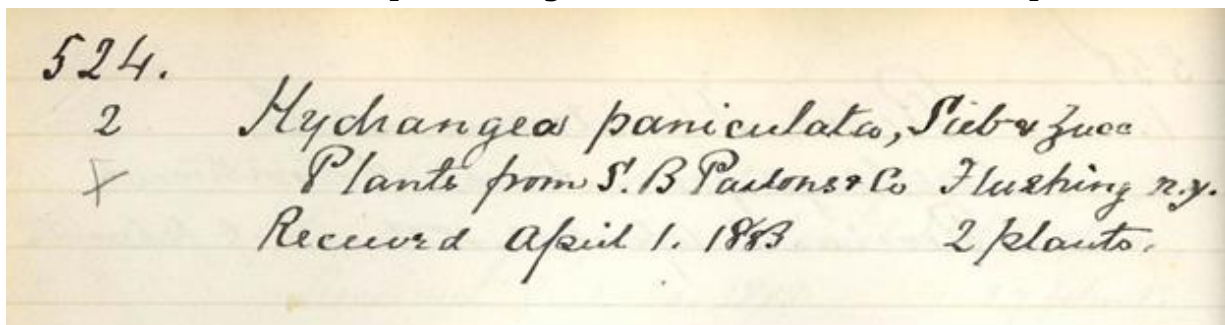
Hand lettered in Roman numerals I - LXXI, remaining pages unnumbered.

162 numbered and unnumbered pages, handwritten numbers end at LXXI.

20cm x 26.5cm x 2.3cm

Boxed and repaired (new spine) 10.08.2008

### Plant Accession Book B [dates range 1872 - 1899 and 1877 - 1889]



A listing in 2 volumes of plant accessions arranged in the Bentham and Hooker taxonomic sequence.

No inscription on flyleaf or title page.

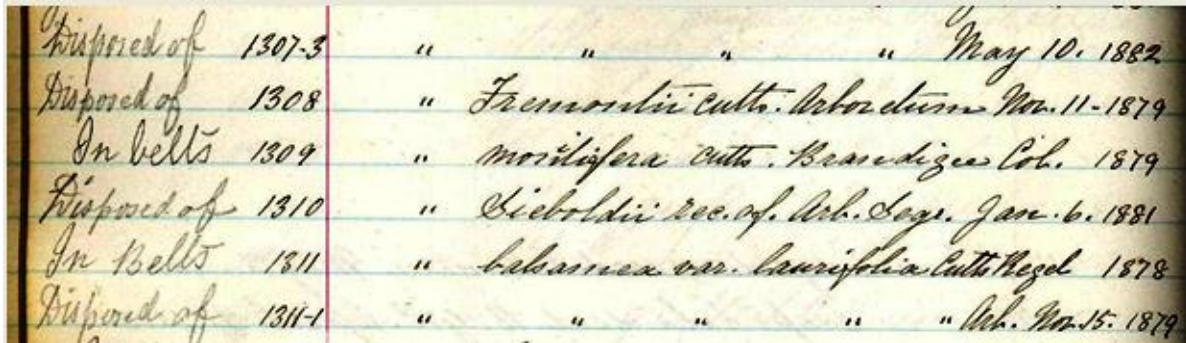
Entries include base number, Latin binomial, and date received.

Source information often includes provenance, and form received such as seed, graft, and plant. 2 volumes in 1 box.

v.1 Dates range from 1872-1899  
Highest Base Number: 630  
Many pages are blank.  
Black ink and pencil. Corrections are in pencil.  
330 Unnumbered Pages  
20.8cm x 26.3cm x 3.8cm

v.2 Dates range from 1877-1889.  
Highest Base Number: 3,513.  
Many Pages are blank.  
Black and red ink and pencil. Corrections are mostly in red.  
314 Unnumbered pages  
20.8cm x 26.3cm x 3.8cm.

#### Plant Accession Book C [dates range 1873 – 1885]



A listing of plants by Latin binomial with associated base numbers arranged alphabetically by the first letter, but are not in alphabetical order within each letter.

Inscribed on flyleaf: Arnold Arboretum 1884-1885

Dates range from 1873 to 1885.

Highest base number: 3,247.

Entries include a base number, Latin binomial, and date received.

Source information often includes provenance, and form received such as seed, graft, or plant.

Corrections to either botanical names or associated name numbers are usually done in red. The records are heavily annotated in pencil with notes such as "dead," "planted out," "planted in the woods", "disposed of." Annotations occasionally include the notation "in catalogue" suggesting that there was also a card index of plant accessions. Many pages are blank.

Black and red ink and pencil.

Handwriting consistent for original entries, annotations usually differ.

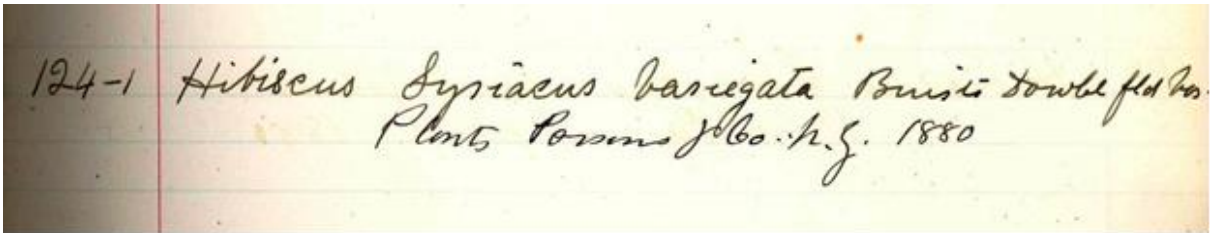
Tabs A-Z.

256 unnumbered pages.

17.2cm x 30cm x 5cm

Boxed and repaired (new spine) 10.07.2008

**Plant Accession Book D [dates range 1874 – 1889]**



A listing of plant accessions organized by the Bentham and Hooker taxonomic sequence.

Inscribed on first page: Jackson T. Dawson, Arnold Arboretum, South Street, Jamaica Plain, Mass. 1874.

Dates range from 1874 to 1889.

Highest plant base number: 3,663

Entries include base number, Latin binomial, and date received.

Source information often includes provenance, and form received such as seed, graft, or plant.

Listing arranged with sufficient space between entries to allow insertions.

Other notations include disposition of plant material such as "dug up, 1892" and "dug up and destroyed"

Many corrections to base numbers. Many pages blank. Black ink and pencil.

Handwriting consistent on original entries; corrections occasionally in different hand.

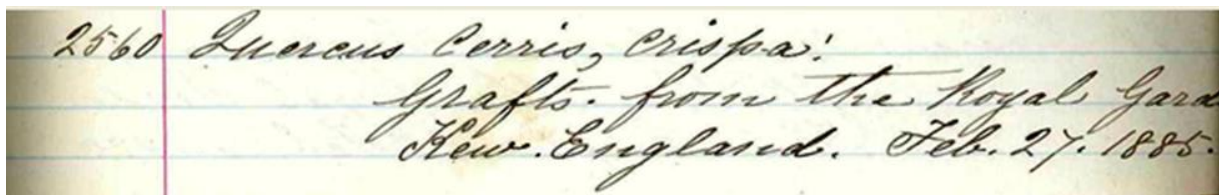
Tabs 1 – 37 [p.37 handwritten]

719 numbered pages.

22cm x 33cm x 5.3cm

Boxed and repaired (new spine) 08.28.2008

**Plant Accession Book E [dates range 1881 – 1888]**



An alphabetical listing of plants by Latin binomial with associated base numbers.

Plant names are not in alphabetical order within each letter.

Inscribed on flyleaf: 1886

Dates range from 1881 to 1888.

Highest base number: 3,324

Entries include a base number, Latin binomial, and date received.

Source information often includes provenance, and form received such as seed, graft, or plant.

Limited number of corrections (in red ink) to either botanical names or associated base numbers.

Very limited number of pencil annotations as to disposition of plants. Many pages are blank. Black and red ink and pencil. Handwriting consistent.

Tabs A-Z.

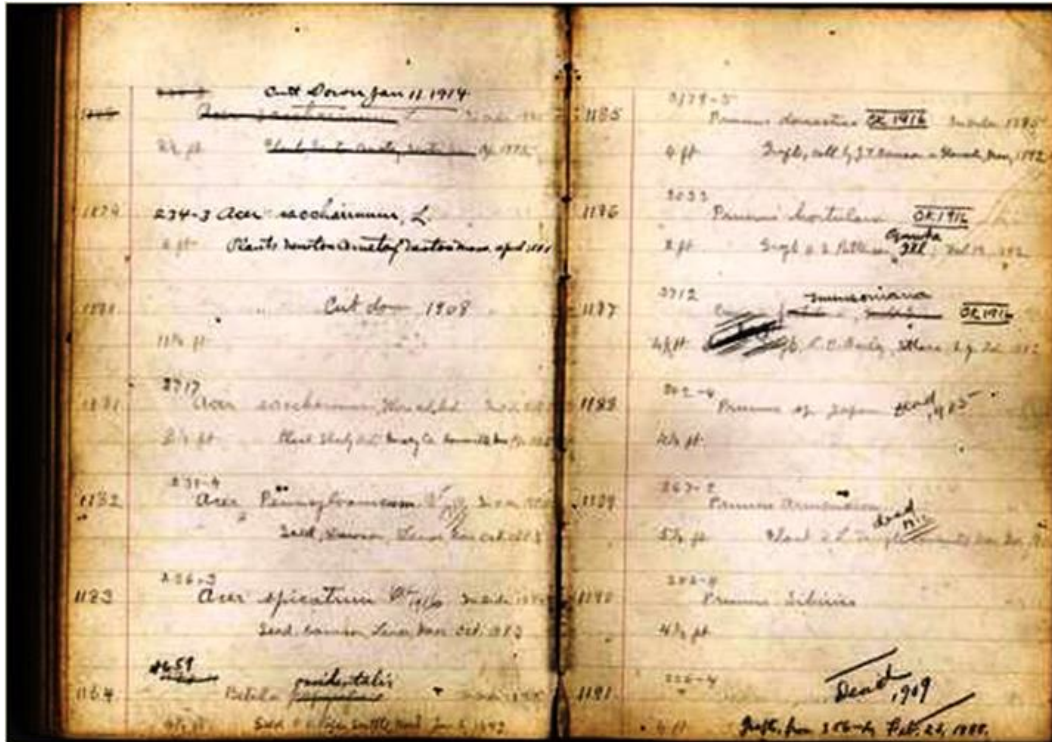
360 numbered pages.

20.2cm x 26.4cm x 3.5cm

Boxed and repaired (new spine) 10.07.2008



**Plant Accession Book F [numerical list]**



Numerical list (No. 1 to No. 1,640) of plant accessions also includes the unique accession number assigned to each plant.  
 No information on flyleaf.  
 No title page, various notes on endpapers.  
 Entries include base number (1-1,640), accession number, Latin binomial, provenance, year planted, and location where planted appearing as: In Order 1886. ("In order" refers to its location on the grounds in a "group" of similar taxon). Often the height of the plant is noted.  
 Listing is arranged with sufficient space between entries to allow insertion of comments of which there are many and include accession number and name changes. Other notations, which are often dated, include condition of plant such as "dead", OK, gone."  
 Handwriting varies greatly, with all annotation later than 1916 by Judd's or possibly Louis Victor Schmitt ( -1944) Arboretum Superintendent from 1905-1944. Initial entry usually in black ink with additions in pencil; subsequent entries and annotations in pencil.  
 400 unnumbered pages.  
 18cm x 13.5cm x 3.5cm.  
 In very poor condition, boxed 2011.

**Note: See Archives IC 1.1 Expense Journal, 1883-1895**

Included on pages 288-292 in the 1883-1895 expense journal kept by Jackson Thornton Dawson is a summary of the number and types of trees and shrubs planted during 1884-1885 and the number of plants planted out in the Arboretum in 1886

(57,556, Taken from Nursery 10,079, Total 67,635) Also included on page 292 is a listing of "Foreign Plants" all *Quercus* species with associated numbers. Planting areas are described as "belts" which are measured by length and width and the expense journal lists costs associated preparing these areas which include:

- Brookside South Street Entrance
- Centre Street Belt
- Goldsmith [Brook] Belt
- Hillside South Street Entrance
- In the Arboretum
- Kent and Skinner Belt
- Nervine Asylum Belt
- Payson Field
- Plantation Area Spring
- South Street Belt