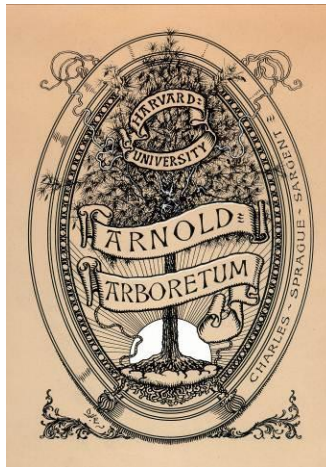


Archives I G-6 LS

Lilac Sunday, 1936- : Guide



The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

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I G-6 LS

Lilac Sunday 1936- : Guide

Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

125 Arborway, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts

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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](#).

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 [HOLLIS Images](#) by using the [Advanced Search](#) term "lilac collection" and expand to the search window below, select "repository" in the drop-down menu and search "Arnold Arboretum". 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.

Processing Information: December 2007; revised 2012 Sheila Connor, Liz Francis; revised 2015, Robin Weintraud; edited 2015, Stephanie Turnbull; edited 2023, Larissa Glasser.

Terms of access:

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Historical Note



Lilacs, Spring. Photograph by Thomas E. Marr, May 23, 1908

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).



Lilacs, Spring. Photograph by Walter R. Merryman 1926

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: *Boston Herald* (May 28) "Announces Lilac Sunday," *Boston Post* (May 29) "It's Lilac Time," *Boston Herald* (May 29), "Arboretum Lilacs Drawing Throgs."



Waltham artist Jonathon Nix created the T-shirt logo for this year's Lilac Sunday event at Harvard University.

The Daily News Tribune, Monday, May 12, 2008

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.

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:

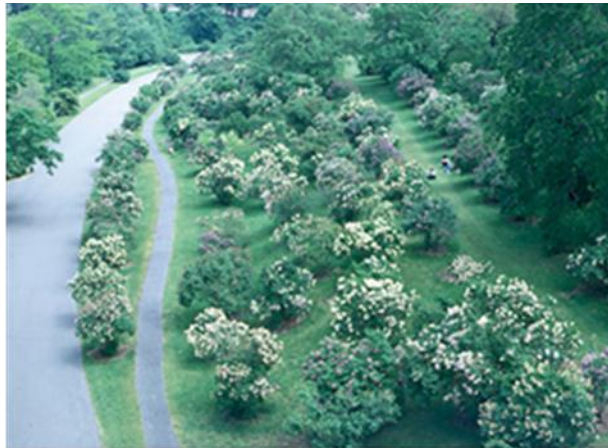
- Series I: Event**
- Series II: Photographs**
- Series III: Posters**
- Series IV: Ephemera**
- Series V: Historical Press Coverage**

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.



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

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
4. Lilac Sunday, May 30, 1920
Boston Globe articles

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

**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
14. Lilac Sunday, May 17, 1987
 - 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 21, 1995
Membership information

19. Lilac Sunday, May 19, 1996
 - A. Press release and handouts
 - B. Logistics and staffing

**Box 1, continued
Folder**

20. Lilac Sunday, May 18, 1997
 - A. Handouts
 - B. Logistics and staffing
21. Lilac Sunday, May 17, 1998
 - A. Press/press releases and correspondence
 - B. Handouts and signage
 - C. Planning/logistics
 - D. Dancers
22. Lilac Sunday, May 16, 1999
 - A. Press
 - B. Handouts and signage
 - C. Staffing
 - D. Food vendor
23. Lilac Sunday, May 14, 2000
 - A. Press release
 - B. Handouts and signage
 - C. Logistics and staffing
 - D. Dancers
24. Lilac Sunday, May 13, 2001
 - A. Press/press releases/flyer
 - B. Handouts and signage
 - C. Logistics and staffing
25. Lilac Sunday, May 12, 2002
 - A. Press release
 - B. Handouts and signage
 - C. Logistics and staffing
26. Lilac Sunday, May 11, 2003
 - A. Press release
 - B. Handouts and signage
 - C. Planning/logistics/staffing
 - D. Vendors

**Box 2
Folder**

27. 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**

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

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

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

- 31.** Lilac Sunday, May 11, 2008
 - A.** Press
 - B.** Handouts and signage
 - C.** Planning/logistics
 - D.** Staffing
 - E.** Vendors
 - F.** T-shirt
 - G.** Art exhibit
 - H.** Site plan

- 32.** Lilac Sunday, May 9, 2010
 - A.** Handouts
 - B.** Planning/logistics

- 33.** Lilac Sunday, May 8, 2011
 - A.** Press

- 34.** Lilac Sunday, May 10, 2015
 - Handout

- 35.** Lilac Sunday, May 5, 2016
 - A.** Press

- 36.** 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

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

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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

Folder

1. Lilac Sunday, NECN (New England Cable News), May 8, 2008.
1 videocassette.

SCRAPBOOK 7 (Archives IX B)

Descriptions of Lilac Sunday as reported in newspapers and television. See table below for full listing. Page references from Arnold Arboretum scrapbook number 7 (Archives IX B) and not included in this collection.

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

Box 4 (Oversize)
Contains oversized posters from Series III

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