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# Summary Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repository</th>
<th>Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>Ashton, Peter S., Director, (Peter Shaw Ashton), (1934- )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Peter Shaw Ashton papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1950-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td>5.0 Linear feet (4 cartons, 5 boxes, 2 oversize folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>The Peter Shaw Ashton papers document Ashton's work as Director of the Arnold Arboretum, 1978-1987. The collection consists primarily of administrative records including agendas and reports, budgets, and documentation of special projects.</td>
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</tbody>
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**Preferred Citation note**

Peter Shaw Ashton papers, 1950-, Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University
Peter Shaw Ashton (1934–) served as Director of the Arnold Arboretum from 1978-1987. Born in England, he was educated at Cambridge University, receiving a B.A., M.A. in 1956, and in 1962 a Ph.D. in botany.

Ashton became fascinated with tropical rain forests and worked as a forest botanist in Brunei and Sarawak on the island of Borneo. Considered a world authority on the Dipterocarpaceae, a family most well-known for its large, rain forest trees found mostly in east Malaysia where they are the dominant species in the lowland forests. These trees provide a major portion of hardwoods entering international markets. Concerned about deforestation that could ultimately threaten the livelihood and survival of millions of people, Ashton’s research sought an understanding how biological diversity is maintained in nature and how it can be used for human benefit in a sustainable manner.

Dr. Ashton served as lecturer and senior lecturer in botany at Aberdeen University in Scotland from 1966-1978. During this period he spent significant time in leading field research in Southeast Asia.

Dr. Ashton took on the dual roles of Arnold Professor of Dendrology and director of the Arnold Arboretum in 1978. Under his leadership, the Arboretum revised its accession policy to favor species of wild origin over nursery or garden origin plants. Documentation of plant identification, health and hardiness was upgraded through computerization of records. As a safe harbor for rare or endangered species, the Arboretum collaborated with other botanical gardens to collect species from a specific geographical area. This work was coordinated by the Center for Plant Conservation (CPC). The Center, actively supported by Dr. Ashton began its mission while located at the Arboretum.

Specific highlights of Ashton’s tenure include a new formal collections policy in 1980 that was later published in Arnoldia, the 1983-1988 verification project that employed genera experts to identify and update the Arboretum’s entire living collections, and from 1986-1989 various grants that supported the computerized mapping project of the entire living collections 14,000+ specimens. Also during his tenure, the institution’s public programs were expanded for adults, teachers and school children. Park rangers were deployed to address security concerns and visitations were estimated to have increased five-fold compared to the 1970s.

In 1980 a grant supported the beginnings of writing Arboretum guidebooks, and grounds crew education abroad was initiated at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and the University of Reading in United Kingdom. The Horticultural Trainee Program continued with participants earning four college credits. In 1983 proposals to participate in a Flora of North America project were underway at Harvard University Herbaria. In 1984 the Children’s Field Study program was developed to work with Boston area schools and teachers, which was funded by NSF for the Museum Institutes for Teaching Science. In 1985 an IMS grant supported the conversion and preservation of Ernest Henry Wilson’s archives of glass plate negatives to prints and film. Beginning in 1984 the Eleanor Cabot Bradley Garden of Rosaceaceous Plants, the first major change to the Arboretum’s landscape since its inception, was designed. The garden was officially opened to the public in 1987.
As a scientific researcher, Dr. Ashton was actively engaged in field research and envisioned the Arboretum playing a major role in research into techniques to save endangered plant species. Ashton’s dedication to expand the Arboretum’s role in scientific research was demonstrated by his commitment to build a wet lab facility.

He was the only Arboretum director to employ an executive director to run the administrative activities of the Arboretum. He resigned in his directorship 1987 when his efforts to construct laboratory facilities in Jamaica Plain were rejected. He continued as professor of dendrology in the Harvard botany department.

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**Scope and Contents note**

This collection consists of administrative records and budgets, records of Mercer fellowships, grant proposals, special projects, staff meeting agendas and minutes, executive and sub-committee proposals and reports, and visiting committee and overseers reports.

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**Administrative Information**

**Publication Information**

Archives of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

**Terms of Access**

This collection is open for research. 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 and will be enforced equally for all researchers.

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Provenance

This collection was transferred from the Arnold Arboretum’s departmental holdings to the Arboretum’s Archives in 1987 when Peter Ashton resigned. Additional materials were donated in 2011 by Dr. Ashton’s wife Mary Ashton.

Processing Information note

This collection is partially processed.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Arnold Arboretum. Library.

Subject(s)

- Finance
- Herbarium
- Laboratories
- Living Collections department
- Research grants

Other Finding Aids note

Partially complete folder inventory available. Contact Archivist.