

Fifty Years with ASHS

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While attending the 2026 Annual Conference in Dallas, it dawned on me that this was my 50th year with ASHS. My first annual conference was in 1976 at the University of Louisiana, Baton Rouge campus. For newer members, back then we actually held conferences on university campuses. We stayed in dorms. Oral sessions were in classrooms. I was a graduate student at the time. Five of us drove from Ohio State to Louisiana. Because there were five, we drove overnight and got there early, so naturally, we had to go to New Orleans to explore.

This year during the welcome party, I was joined by Dr. Kim Williams, a former student and now colleague. Visiting with long-time friends and colleagues is one of the important aspects of the conference. Meeting new collaborators who eventually become friends is also an important aspect of the conference. There are many other former students who have had wonderful careers, and I always look forward to seeing them and learning what new things they are working on.

My first ever ASHS meeting was the winter gathering of the Northeast Region in early 1975. My senior thesis advisor, Dr. Bruno Moser, told me to attend and present my senior thesis work. A van full of graduate students and a faculty member and I drove from New Brunswick, New Jersey, to Durham, New Hampshire. While at the conference, I estimated there were about 100 to 150 people in attendance including myself and one other woman.

I can elaborate at the time we had a Women in Horticulture Working Group (the predecessor of our Interest Groups) and the President of ASHS came to speak with us. He told us he was glad we existed. It gave him a place to ask questions and help him, for example, “understand why a woman in her 30’s would want to start graduate school.” After he left the room, we looked at each other, and someone said, “And that’s why we need this group. Who would question if a man would enter graduate school in his 30’s?”

I remember a time when a senior, prominent researcher was making a presentation and used a slide of his female student holding a couple of cantaloupes. I was sitting with my department head. While many in the room chuckled, I was infuriated and was thinking, “Is this what he thinks of his female graduate students? Is this how he thinks of female faculty members?” My department head said, “Don’t say anything. I’ll deal with this.” Afterwards, several of my female colleagues and I discussed how inappropriate the slide was and that we needed to speak with the ASHS President. Just as we were discussing it, he walked by.

We spoke with him. He agreed it was inappropriate and he would deal with it. I believe it was dealt with because the people who told me they would take care of things could be trusted.

While Dr. Williams and I visited during the Dallas Welcome Reception, we joined two young women at a table. My former student introduced me to them and told them how I was the first woman hired by the Department of Horticulture at Kansas State. These two young women were so surprised. One actually said, “The first!?” Yes – exclamation and question. You could tell they couldn’t imagine that the first was still with us; that it wasn’t that long ago. That it was in my lifetime. We have many members who were the first woman hired by their department.

What I noticed more than anything at ASHS in 2026 was the diversity of those present – the number of women (I was no longer alone!), the ethnic groups, the different races. Our Society represents today’s society; represents those in horticulture.

ASHS has been an important part of my professional career and personal life. The connections have sustained me and supported me for over 50 years. I would like to think that I have helped those who came after me. I have been retired now for seven years. I’ve attended fewer conferences during these years. Yet, ASHS is welcoming to me and others. ASHS represents worldwide horticulture. ASHS represents humanity. In my humble opinion, ASHS has grown in many ways over the past 50 years. Here’s to our next 50.