

From Arts & Architecture: Earl James Sinnamon 8 April 1919 to 10 July 1980

A popular meme declares, *The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit.* Perhaps you've sat in the shade of the trees that grow on the east and west lawns at St. John's Cathedral—trees someone else has planted. You might even have enjoyed their shade while sitting on one of the benches set



in several places on both sides of the cathedral. One bench particularly reminds us of one of those “planters-of-trees” who was a devoted member of the Cathedral. Now gone, Earl J. Sinnamon's labors as a “tireless worker for living things,” have provided the green, growing things in whose shade we sit and take our rest and respite.

On the cathedral's east side, directly across All Souls' Walk from the Celtic Cross, the low bench with the granite seat is a memorial to Earl Sinnamon, a devoted member of St. John's Cathedral and lover of trees. The “Sinnamon bench” was given by the

National Arborist Association (now the Tree Care Industry Association) in memory of Earl, who served

on their national board for a number of years in the 1970s. The small bronze memorial plaque is so discreetly placed at one corner of the concrete pad under the bench that you may never have noticed it. It reads: “Remembering Earl J. Sinnamon—His love of God and his love of trees. April 8, 1919 July 10, 1980 National Arborist Association.”



In the opening years of the 20th century, John Charles Sinnamon and Annie Margaret Sargent left the neighboring towns in County Armagh, Ireland, where they were born, and emigrated separately to the United States. They married in Manchester, Connecticut, just outside of Hartford, in October of 1917; their son, Earle James Sinnamon, was born in April 1919, just five months after the Armistice that ended WWI. Earle grew up in Manchester, graduating from Manchester High School in the class of 1937. By 1940 Earl had moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and dropped the final “e” from his first name, as the signature on his WWII draft registration card indicated.



By 1946, Earl had moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, enrolled in and graduated from the Colorado State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (which shortly thereafter became Colorado State University). After his graduation, Earl settled in Denver, where he first became supervisor of the nurseries for the



Denver City Parks, and then City Forester in 1948-1949. In 1950 Earl joined Swingle Tree Surgeons, became owner of the company in 1956, and president of Swingle, Inc. after the company was incorporated in 1964. He remained president of Swingle until his death in 1980.

In the brief on-line history of the company, now called Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care, Earl's years of leadership are described in glowing terms: “Under Earl's direction, the Company flourished as a leader in professionalism, credibility, and reliable service. Upholding the Swingle motto ‘Stay Ahead of the Pack,’ Earl purchased a computer system in 1978, long before his competitors. It was this type of foresight that brought the Company successfully into the 80's.”

In the course of his thirty-four years of work in Denver, Earl Sinnamon was known for his dedication to making Denver a beautiful natural environment in which to live. His professional engagements with Swingle and various professional arborist organizations as horticulturist, arborist, teacher, board member, and corporate president certainly kept Earl well occupied. In addition to those commitments, Earl's volunteer horticultural efforts were wide and varied, and many national and local organizations benefitted from Earl's love of trees.



*The National Association of Arborists Board of Directors, 1974
Earl Sinnamon appears in the center of the back row.*

Earl Sinnamon died on July 10th 1980, and his ashes are interred in a common crypt in the western part of All Souls' Walk. Following his death, a number of tributes to Earl and his work were published. An especially poignant remembrance of Earl's life in horticulture appeared in the Winter 1980 edition of *The Green Thumb*, the Denver Botanic Gardens newsletter. Because it is such a sincere and complete tribute, a transcript of the entire piece follows here:

Earl Sinnamon

Earl Sinnamon was one of the Botanic Gardens longtime best friends. He was, in fact, first a friend of the Gardens' predecessor, the Colorado Forestry and Horticulture Society of which he was a director and a vice-president.

Since the days of his graduation in 1946 from Colorado State University he worked to make Denver beautiful—as supervisor of nurseries for the Denver city parks, as City Forester in 1947-1948, as part of the first (1949) plant auction in Civic Center, as chairman of several subsequent plant auctions. These auctions grew into today's highly successful Annual Botanic Gardens Plant Sale. For many years Earl gave special very attention to the trees surrounding Botanic Gardens House.

After he joined Swingle Tree Surgeons in 1950 he contributed not only his own expertise to make Denver beautiful but often volunteered company time, talent, and equipment to further Denver horticulture. As owner of the company since 1956 and as president of Swingle, Inc. since its incorporation in 1964 until his death in July of this year, he invested a lifetime toward making Denver a nicer place to live. *The Denver Post* published on July 25th [1980] the letter of tribute to Earl Sinnamon published below.

A TIRELESS WORKER FOR LIVING THINGS

To The Denver Post

The city of Denver recently lost one of its most tireless workers, a man who spent hours of his own time in the last 34 years (aside from his professional life) in keeping Denver beautiful.

The Denver Post in its issue of Wednesday July 16, published a succinct obituary of Earl Sinnamon. What wasn't said was that his personal interest in, and love for, growing things virtually outweighed his professional interest. Many of us can attest to the number of times, when a horticultural disaster seemed imminent, we would hastily call Earl and he would respond, in person, as rapidly as a busy schedule would permit.

One friend said of him—"I really think Earl knew every tree in my garden"—something I'm certain could be said of every garden he ever served in Denver.

Earl devoted a great deal of his volunteer time to projects for the Park People, Botanic Gardens, and was tireless in making the grounds of St. John's Episcopal Cathedral what they are today.

His interest and knowledge were such that Denver is more beautiful for his having been here.

When we "Think Trees," we should for many years think Earl Sinnamon.

Connie Burwell White

In 1981, the year after his death, Earl Sinnamon was posthumously given the Award of Merit of the Tree Care Industry Association, “the highest honor paid by TCIA to an individual or company that represents leadership in the field of arboriculture and long-term commitment to the industry. TCIA doesn’t give an Award of Merit each year, one reason why this Award is considered our industry’s most prestigious recognition.”



The Earl J. Sinnamon Visitor Center.

To honor his work at the Botanic Gardens, and all over Denver, several years before his death the Gardens added a burr oak tree (*Quercus macrocarpa*) to what is now the Oak Grove with this tribute: “Honoring Earl Sinnamon for His Contribution to the profession of arboriculture in Colorado April 29, 1975.” More recently, in 2011, the Denver Botanic Gardens further recognized Earl J. Sinnamon’s work and contribution to the natural environment and arboriculture by naming the new Chatfield Farm Visitor Center

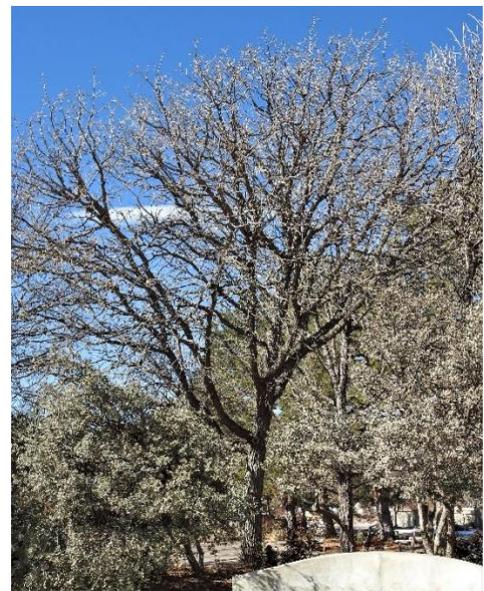
In an industry press release on October 21, 2011, Tom Tolkacz, CEO of Swingle, said of the honor, “The Denver Botanic Gardens at Chatfield has unveiled its new, much-anticipated visitor’s center, named in honor of Earl J. Sinnamon. Sinnamon was president of Swingle Lawn, Tree and Landscape Care from 1955 to 1980. The occasion marks a continuance of a decades-long partnership between two respected Colorado entities. Earl was a leader for our company and a true advocate for making people’s lives more enjoyable.... It’s fitting his name will be forever associated with one of the most beautiful outdoor spaces in the Denver area.”



The green and growing vision of Earl James Sinnamon, “lover of God and lover of trees” and “tireless worker for living things,” is perhaps best captured in the 63rd chapter of the book of the Prophet Isaiah:

...and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the LORD
for the display of his splendor.

Isaiah 63:3



Earl Sinnamon's Burr Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*)
Denver Botanic Garden's Oak Grove, 1975