

Memorial to be dedicated to 'Padre of the Roses'

BROOKS — This month marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Father George Schoener, who pioneered a famous rose hybrid style in the churchyard here, north of Salem.

The Northwest Rose Historians, the Brooks Historical Society, researcher Mike Dalton of Portland and Chemeketa Community College have teamed up to create a monument dedicated to the man who became known as "Padre of the Roses."

The marker will be on the campus of Chemeketa's regional training center, the site where Assumption Church stood from 1875 to 1915. Dedication is set for 11 a.m. Friday, March 21.

Emigrating from Germany in 1890, Father Schoener was ordained a priest in Pittsburgh and was later assigned to a nearby parish in Rochester, Pa., where he designed and built a church.

Increasingly poor health brought him to Oregon. The priest was impressed by the profusion of wild roses he saw growing in Marion County and astonished by the rose-lined streets of Portland. A youthful interest in plants was rekindled; son of an orchardist, he had studied botany at universities in Germany and Switzerland.

Father Schoener tended Assumption, and his roses, from 1911 to '15, developing a novel style of open-air cross-pollination of roses and other plants. Through Mendelian principles of plant inheritance, he strove to bring out desirable characteristics, including disease resistance, larger flowers, prolonged bloom time and unique form and color.

"This priest had no elaborate equipment, no one to assist him, little money," Bishop Francis Leipzig wrote in the *Catholic Sentinel* in 1977. "He was isolated from libraries and centers where information might have been secured. His equipment consisted of his own capable hands, an intellect sharpened by study and observation and an honest love for his work."



Connie Hilker, Hartwood Roses photo

The Nutkana Rose, bred by Fr. George Schoener.

In 1914, the priest had the pleasure of seeing one of his new roses formally christened by Portland's Rose Festival queen. That year he exhibited 60 of his hybridized plants at the festival. By this time he had written for many botanical magazines. In 1915, he exhibited his roses at the Panama-Pacific Exhibition in San Francisco, which gave him additional fame.

Some of his finest creations carried genetics of the native Oregon Nutkana and the French 1890 hybrid tea rose, Madame Caroline Testout, also known in Oregon as the "Portland Rose."

On the night of Oct. 9, 1915, the Brooks church was destroyed by fire. An explosion started by a gas stove in a neighbor's house consumed the church, rectory and extensive gardens. Everything was lost, save a few seedlings and salvaged items, including the Eucharist.

The parish here then ceased to exist. Father Schoener started over with his gardens at McKenna Park in North Portland, but moved to Santa Barbara, Calif., within two years, at the invitation of botanical societ-

ies there. There he became world-renowned for his work establishing his "Padre's Botanical Gardens."

Father Schoener died in 1941 at age 77, having retired to Santa Clara University. At the time of death, he had 5,000 rose bushes including a giant rose 8 inches in diameter and rose trees towering 25 feet high.

He was striving to produce a pure blue rose, a dream of rose fanciers. He is buried at Calvary Cemetery in Santa Barbara.



Santa Clara University George Schoener Collection

Father George Schoener with his famed roses, 1915.