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Women and plants

Diane Rene

There has always been a close relationship between women and plants, explained York Humanities Prof. Ann B. Shteir during her lecture, "Women and Plants-A Fruitful Topic," at the Atkinson Fellows Lounge on Wednesday, Oct. 31.

This relationship began as far back as the Garden of Eden, when Eve, searching for knowledge, found it in a luscious fruit, the apple. This search for wisdom through botany consequently brought about mankind's expulsion from Paradise. In later centuries, women who knew how to use herbs for medicinal purposes were labelled as heretics, since it was felt that medical knowledge should be limited to men only.

There are several correlations between women and plants. The first such relationship deals with fertility, the "celebration of a woman's body." In the 17th century, women sowed the fields, reaped the crops, and played an important role in agriculture. As well, women and the land are one in cycles, a phenomena which links them even more closely.

In the 19th century, Canadian periodicals stated that women should study botany to derive a code of moral behaviour from it. In an 1848 issue of the Burlington Ladies' Journal, one writer stated, "Who could not look at violets and imitate their retiring modesty?" However, another said that such studies should not take away women's "gaiety."

As well, there were other reasons for engaging women in the study of botany. "In those days," explained Prof. Shteir, "there was a tax on women for

being idle, lazy, silly or frivolous." It was believed that plant studies "improved women's education, for their minds and for hard-core fundamental knowledge."

Later on, society had to find a way to organize the wealth of the world's plants. In the 18th century, Karl Linaeus, a Swedish scientist, said to categorize them sexually, by the positions of their pistils and stamens. He even described plants with such described plant activities with words such as "marriage, brides, grooms, and nuptial beds." One Englishman rebuked Linaeus' method, saying that the scientist's description of a pansy was "too smutty for British ears."

Thus, in conclusion, the long-standing connection between women and plants continues to be a fruitful topic. "The study of botany is a sociological and cultural mirror," concluded Prof. Shteir.

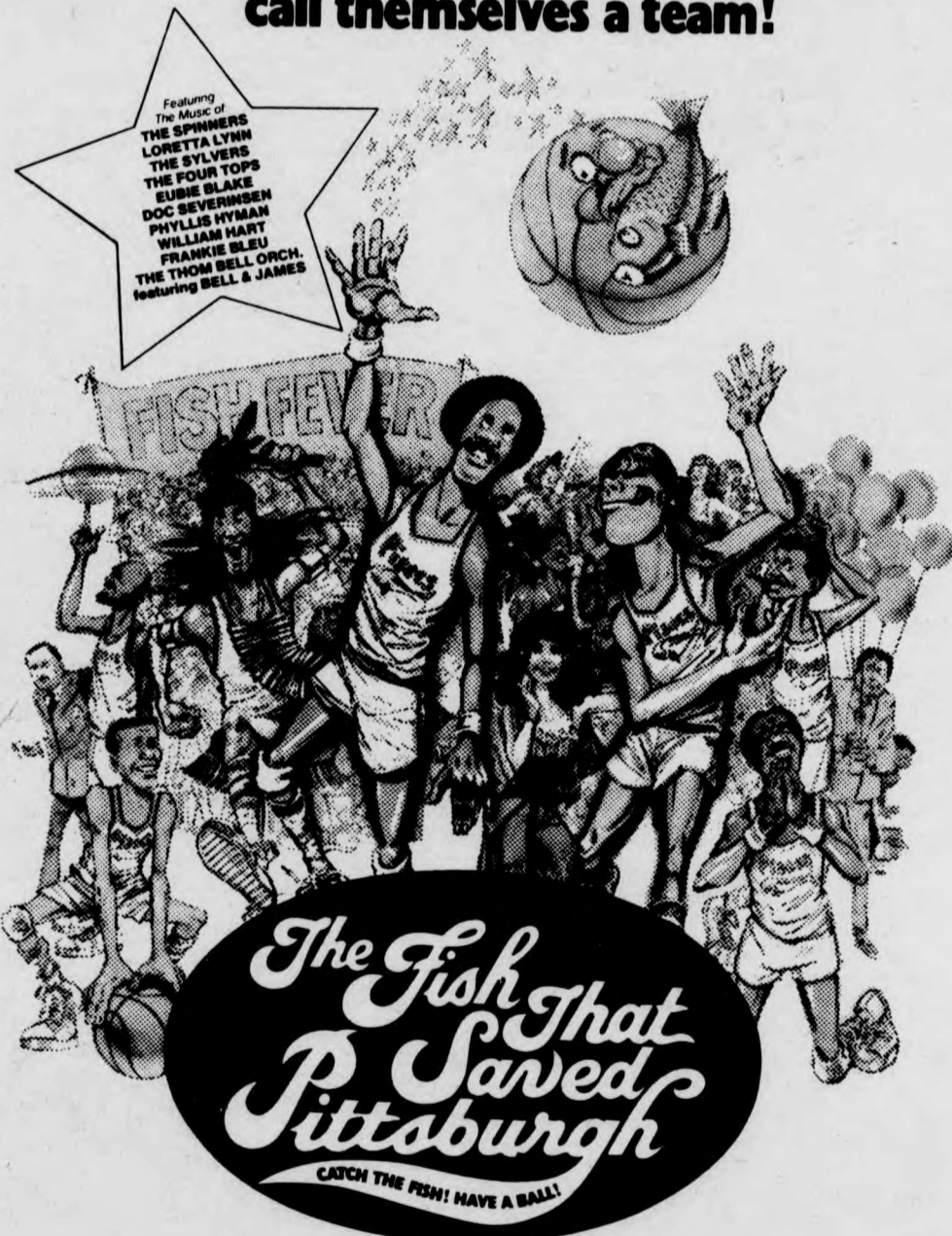
Mac

from page 1

Contacted at his home late Tuesday, University President Ian Macdonald denied any previous knowledge of Kaplan's November 1 letter, or the ACC motion. When read excerpts from the statements, Macdonald refused to be apologetic about the administration's monetary policies.

"They're entitled to their opinion, but I can't agree," declared Macdonald. On the topic of the recently discovered surplus, Macdonald argued, "We could have ended up with a \$1.4 million deficit. It seems that this is a preferable situation to be in."

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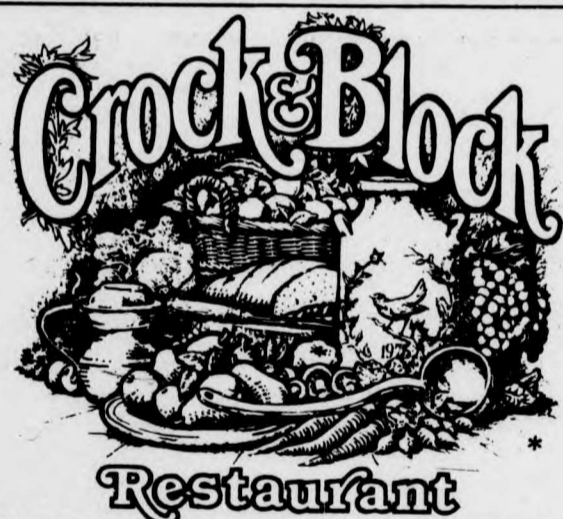
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