

# 1994 Azalea Society National Convention: An Insider's View

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*Richmond, Virginia*

Usually a national convention is one of those things you go to for enjoyment with little appreciation of behind-the-scenes activities and the preliminary effort required. All of this changes when your chapter hosts the national convention. From the initial meetings, it was obvious that, although there were several people with specific experience and talent, the organizing of a convention was, for the most part, new territory. One example of the uncertainty of estimates was the tour of the Virginia House and Agecroft. This initially was scheduled as a caravan trip, with modest numbers of attendees. As registrations came in, the numbers indicated a requirement for a bus. Then, additional vehicles were required. At least, the packed station wagons caused rapid bonding. Complete strangers became friends very quickly.

Early fears of having a party and no one coming were replaced with very good registrations. As people started arriving, acquaintances were renewed, and old friends were recognized in the crowd. Registration went very smoothly as the scheduled activities commenced. The trip Friday to the Virginia House and Agecroft went well, in spite of individual interpretations of the directions. After lunch at Dogwood Dell, we returned to the hotel and viewed slides presented by David Sauer.

Friday night, rain kept us in the hotel for dinner, which taxed the dining area staff to accommodate our group. After dinner, an auction was conducted, after which we were treated to three mini presentations by George McLellan, Rosalie Nachman and Nancy Swell. [Articles appear in this issue, ed.]

We were very fortunate to have the Thiemes, Nachmans and Swells open their gardens with something for everyone. Saturday, while visitors were touring the gardens, the flower show was being judged. The hotel staff had suggested staging it around the indoor pool. This provided a beautiful setting for the flower show.

The garden of Gus and Margaret Thieme is really artwork using water and stone, using plants to complete the effect. This represents many years of planning and effort. The result is a very fascinating garden, definitely not one to be copied easily.

The garden of Leon and Nancy Swell appears at first glance to be a small area loaded with azaleas. Continuing into the garden you find that it evolves into a large area with each crook and turn planted with more unusual plants.

The home of Larry and Rosalie Nachman is surrounded by a dense selection of choice plants which make the garden one which is beautiful any day of the year.

All of the gardens were beautiful. This did not just happen. It was the result of a lot of concentrated effort to make them attractive for the tour. In addition to these gardens, we visited the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, which is continually being upgraded. It has a well designed perennial garden with several other areas being added. I hope the azalea and rhododendron area will be a part of plans in the near future.



*Top: Bob Stelloh described the progress of the George Harding Garden.*

*Bottom Left: Richmond Chapter Bob Clary addressed the attendees.*

*Bottom Right: Frank Robinson addressed the Society.*

*Photographs by Robert Hobbs*

The banquet Saturday night included so many segments that it was not certain if they would all fit. Following the business meeting, conducted by President Malcolm Clark, and a status report on the Harding Garden by Bob Stelloh, Frank Robinson, the Director at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens was the speaker, and he provided us with thought provoking views of a visit to Japan. [Article appears in this issue, ed.] We had plants for sale to members, after which the convention was concluded at a fairly reasonable hour.

One last event was a Sunday brunch for out-of-town guests at the Nachman home. Even rain did not dampen spirits, and the festivities were concluded with everyone heading for home having enjoyed a good weekend, visiting with old friends, making new ones, and enjoying their favorite flowers. Who could ask for anything more?

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