



Dick West

Photograph obtained from Maryann West



*Jim Shanks, Andy Adams, Jr., Dick West, and Bill Miller
Photograph by Barbara Bullock*



*Dick West verifying
Glenn Dale Azaleas
Photograph by
Barbara Bullock*

Reflections on the Real Richard Thurston West *August 15, 1941 to October 1, 1996*

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Some years ago, as a logical consequence of my interest in azaleas, I conducted extensive research into the life of Ben Morrison. I quickly discovered that the picture that one developed of him depended on with whom one talked. The tale of the elephant and the blind men comes to mind. You will remember that each blind man described the elephant based on some anatomical feature. The blind man who examined the ear stated that the elephant was like a fan, while the blind man who found himself at one of the legs believed that the elephant resembled a tree trunk. People who worked for Ben Morrison painted a picture different from that by people who worked with him. People who knew him professionally described him differently than those who knew him post-retirement in Pass Christian, Mississippi. While this is not so surprising since many people do change over time, it is a bit disconcerting for the historian who has to satisfy himself that everyone is really talking about the same person.

In marked contrast, I have discovered that there was only one Dick West. He passed away unexpectedly on October 1, 1996 and I attended his memorial service, which was held on October 6, 1996. During one part of the service, those present were given an opportunity to express their feelings. The extemporaneous comments from people representing every period and conceivable aspect of Dick's life from childhood playmate, to neighbor, to former colleague, to current colleague were as similar as they were heartfelt and sincere. They all described someone who had touched their lives in a very substantial way, someone who opened his heart to others and was there for them in their time of need, and someone who would be missed.

Barbara Bullock, from the National Arboretum, took part in the service and described Dick's many contributions to the U.S. National

Arboretum, to the Azalea Society of America, and to the azalea community as a whole. Another participant in the service was Peter Clepper who was a friend of Dick's from the National Library of Medicine. He spoke of Dick's many professional achievements. Because Peter and Dick had worked closely for all of Dick's Federal career, I asked Peter to supply a few comments about Dick's professional life and his other avocational interests:

"Readers of **THE AZALEAN** will be saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Richard West. His many contributions have won frequent praise. Dick was fifty-five and leaves behind a wife, two grown children, and numerous friends from every walk of life. His career as a program official and information scientist at the National Library of Medicine began twenty-five years ago, shortly after he received an advanced degree in library science from the University of Maryland. His interest in horticulture followed soon after, during the years he and his wife were improving a new house in Columbia, Maryland into a lovely home with a delightful garden.

"His entire Federal career was spent at the National Library of Medicine, as a program official in its extramural programs. His responsibilities included the full range of assistance grant functions: program development, scientific review administration, and planning and evaluation. His publications appeared in several leading medical information science journals. He was often invited to lecture on medical information issues at the University of Maryland School of Library and Information Services.

"Dick's remarkable intellectual curiosity was not easily satisfied. When something interested him, he made an effort to learn a lot about it. His professional knowledge covered everything from the printing trade to computer technology.

"He understood the function of knowledge in the broadest context of

health care, and he conducted program initiatives that won, and deserved, great praise. For the past ten years he had worked closely with leaders in American academic medical centers. These efforts were intended to assist the effective management of medical information of all kinds as an essential, national health care resource. He was recently honored by this medical community for his thoughtful and constructive efforts. Experienced colleagues everywhere sought his advice; younger workers always found a supportive mentor.

"He was a good and informed gardener, for whom azaleas in particular were endlessly fascinating. Frank White taught him how to propagate. From there he went on to classification, color identities, and, his passion in recent years, the identity, collection, and distribution of Morrison's Glenn Dale hybrids.

"Besides these activities, the knowledge he acquired of Victorian silver and American antiques reached the expert level. His painstaking genealogical researches into his family origins included a successful search for ancestors in Great Britain and France. In all these things, he was completely modest, always eager to learn and willing to share."

Peter's words above, like his remarks at the memorial service, are thoughtful and describe accurately the friend that I had learned to respect and admire. There was very little mystery about Dick West except perhaps how he managed to maintain his pace of activities, any number of which were full time job equivalents. Peter has also since informed me that Dick was to have received an award from the Director of the National Institutes of Health for his outstanding services. Similarly, it was reported to me that Dick was to be the 1996 recipient of the Brookside Gardens Chapter's F. P. Lee Commendation.

A Collaboration and Friendship

I have been trying to reconstruct when my collaboration with Dick West began. It is curious how some events stick in your mind, but I remember the first time I ever saw him. I attended a Propagation Seminar given by Frank White at his Azalea Acres on Princess Garden Parkway in Lanham, Maryland in the Fall of 1979 or 1980. Dick was the quiet guy puffing on the pipe, and I do not think we spoke.

I looked back at the ASA membership rosters to see when Dick's name first appeared and determined that he joined the ASA either late in 1981 after the roster was created or early in 1982 before the new roster was published. Dick turned up again at several of the Glenn Dale Preservation Project Workdays at the Glenn Dale Station during the early to mid 1980's. Again, in his quiet way, he chopped and hacked with the rest of us, and he was just another of the multitude. When I realized where the Glenn Dale Preservation Project was going, or rather where it was not going, I concluded that it was very important to examine the files at the Glenn Dale station for whatever information that they might reveal about Morrison, the Station, and the azalea work that was performed there. In retrospect, the decision to focus on historic documentation was a very important, as events would later prove.

In 1989, I met Andy Adams, as a fellow traveler, when I had the opportunity to go on a special trip to Japan. I knew about the Ten Oaks Nursery and its participation in Morrison's distribution program for the Glenn Dale hybrid azaleas from my research. I recognized the historic significance and possibilities at Ten Oaks and had visited Andy several times, but my hands were full with work, family matters, Brookside Gardens chapter activities, and trying to keep the Glenn Dale project afloat. Dick was ahead of me there. Since Andy does not routinely volunteer much information (not a criticism), I

did not know how long Dick had been studying the Ten Oaks Nursery in Clarksville, which is just down the road from his home in Columbia, Maryland. Dick's first article was published in **THE AZALEAN** in the last quarter of 1989, and I am cited in the "Notes and Comments." So it must have been between my Spring trip to Japan and Dick's first article in late 1989 that we became acquainted.

Much to my surprise, I discovered that Dick shared my interest in the history of azaleas. I was happy to share with him every scrap of information that I had discovered at Glenn Dale, the National Arboretum, River Farm, Pass Christian, Beltsville, and Takoma Park as his enthusiasm was infectious. Dick's capacity for dealing with large amounts of data and information was astounding. His ability to grasp the significance and make sense out of something that had eluded me earned him my respect. He was the proof that two heads are better than one. I could bounce an idea off him and expect a timely and reasoned response. While we did not talk daily, we talked frequently. Somewhere in the following months, our acquaintanceship turned to a serious collaboration which resulted in the many articles that were published in **THE AZALEAN**, and two books—*The Bell Book* that was published in 1994, and a revision of Morrison's *Monograph 20* that was completed in manuscript form a week before his death.

Sense of Humor

Dick was also a little ahead of me in the "parent/child space and time continuum"; that is, he had already experienced and successfully managed events that I was just now going through, e.g., a teenager getting his driver's license or selecting a school. He enjoyed sharing his experiences, and he always began with the suggestion that I should "take notes." Dick's easy manner was disarming, and at some point our collaboration evolved into a close friendship.

He had a delightful sense of humor and at times was a bit of a tease. As committed as anyone to

discovering the facts, he nevertheless delighted in teasing me about my penchant for obscure detail which he took great pleasure in characterizing as "esoterica."

Our phone conversations usually took place in the morning. His voice had a certain character to it, and the office staff easily recognized him when he called. Due to the earliness of the hour, he usually got the same secretary when he called. On several occasions, when he called and I was not there, he told her that he was the "FBI" or "CIA" calling for me. Suffice it to say, I did a double-take when I read the phone message slip the first time. When he would call and I was not there, he would launch into a monologue when I got around to returning his call. "We," meaning all of the other Federal employees in the world, "are here... hard at work for God and country, while you are off somewhere goofing off." It did not matter whether I was a few minutes late due to traffic or just unavailable to take his call.

Fortunately, he could take it as well as dish it out. Living in Columbia, Dick frequently experienced his own traffic problems due to weather or accidents which made his commute to work understandably trying. It was now my turn, and I reminded him that that was the price he had to pay for choosing to live in a "planned community." Columbia, Maryland, when it was conceived many years ago, was supposed to be the wave of the future in that it would avoid many of the common urban problems by "superior planning."

Our respective computers also served as an opportunity for a little good-natured ribbing. There has always been a bit of a competition between people who like the IBM compatible platform and those who prefer the MacIntosh platform with its graphic user interface. My computer orientation is IBM-compatible and Dick liked the Mac. Apple's primary selling point was that it was supposed to be so much easier to learn. I never missed an opportunity to remind him that I could never take seriously a company (Apple) whose primary thesis seemed to be that people were too stupid to

learn Microsoft's Disk Operating System (DOS).

Quiet Leadership by Example

Dick West was a little bit "old-fashioned" by current standards. For example, he had a "creed" (a word that you do not hear much any more) that he lived by. It was truly personal in the strictest sense of the word and was not something that came up in any of our conversations. In fact, I was unaware of it until it was mentioned in his memorial service, and yet, I immediately recognized it as his operational philosophy. According to Maryann, his wife and an English teacher, it was his distillation of a famous poem that he adapted into a way of life:

"I shall pass this way but once;
Therefore, any good that I can do,
Let me do it now,
For I shall not pass this way again."

He was extremely dependable and true to his word, as Bob Hobbs, the editor of **THE AZALEAN**, was to discover and appreciate. On several occasions, out of frustration and desperation, Bob called around trying to locate suitable material to publish in **THE AZALEAN**. From time to time, Bob has had commitments from people who, without any explanation, failed to deliver. Dick believed in **THE AZALEAN**. A number of the sixteen articles authored or coauthored by Dick were begun after the article receipt deadline and specifically in response to Bob's situation. Dick was a marvelous "wordsmith" who made writing look easy. And, if he said the manuscript was in the mail, you could depend on it.

Dick was content to operate in the "background." He shunned the spotlight and, except when "obliged," preferred to be behind all cameras. He was incredibly modest, though he never failed to recognize the efforts of others. His quiet confidence, enthusiasm, and energy were highly motivating to his associates, and his involvement with a project was a near guarantee of success. The Ten Oaks Glenn Dale Project is just such an example. Dick was the main driving force behind the project which was

designed to reestablish the Glenn Dale hybrids in parks and arboreta around the country. The project had recently taken on international implications when we discovered that gardens in England had received shipments of Glenn Dales azaleas in 1947 and 1960 and thus might serve as sources of original Glenn Dale plant material just like the Ten Oaks Nursery.

Memories

It was the family's request that, in lieu of flowers, memorial contributions be made to the Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) in memory of Richard T. West for the support of the azalea program at the U. S. National Arboretum. [The address of FONA is: 3501 New York Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002, ed.] Dick spoke often of his recollection of visiting the Arboretum as a youngster with his father shortly after it first opened to the public in 1949. Together, they especially enjoyed the azaleas at

a time when the azaleas were still relatively new to the local gardening public.

We all had the good fortune of knowing the real Dick West, if only through his writings. For those of us who worked closely with Dick in one endeavor or another, we are better for the experience. I will miss his intellectual stimulation, his friendship, and the challenge of keeping up with the pace that he set. He was a good example of a good example. A perpetually positive influence, his legacy will last as long as we have our memories.

William C. Miller III, co-Chairman of the Azalea Society of America's Membership Committee and Chair of the Public Information Committee, is a recipient of the Society's Distinguished Service Award. He is a former Vice President of the Society and a long-time ASA member. He is a frequent contributor to THE AZALEAN. He is a co-sponsor of the Ten Oaks Glenn Dale Project. □

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

For President: James O. Thornton, Conyers, Georgia. Jim is best known as a founding member and first President of the Oconee Chapter. Retired from AT&T after 31 years, he and wife Patsy now preside over an ample and rather mature garden of mostly azaleas (he also does orchids). From ASA point of view, it is his great skill as an organizer, mover and shaker, that recommends him to you.

For Vice President: William F. Bode, Covington, Louisiana. Bill retired as a hospital division manager for a pharmaceutical company. He is a past president of the Baton Rouge Men's Garden Club and a past president of the Louisiana Chapter of the Azalea Society of America. He has been interested in azaleas for 30 years.

For Director: Gen. Bryghte D. Godbold USMC (Ret.) Dallas Texas. Bryghte holds a Ph.D. degree from NYU and is Director Emeritus of the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Gardens and the U.S. National Arboretum. He was Director of "Goals for Dallas" in 1963, a blueprint for development which lead growth strategies for the city of Dallas into the 1990's.

For Director: Donald W. Hyatt, McLean, Virginia. Don has a Bachelor's degree in Biochemistry with a double major in Horticulture and a Masters degree in Computer Science. He has taught mathematics or computer science in the Fairfax County, Virginia public schools for 28 years Don has been president of the Northern Virginia Chapter of the Azalea Society of America, and served on the Board of governor's in the Society's formative years. He has been hybridizing azaleas and rhododendron for over 30 years.

For Director: Col. Murray Sheffield USAF (Ret.), Wetumpka, Alabama., Murray made a career in the Air Force and served from 1941 until 1945 and 1948 until 1971. He has been gardening with azaleas for many years. He and his wife Inez, have a four-acre garden with 4,000 azaleas in the ground (250 varieties). He has had good success working with thousands of cuttings, liners, and mature plants, both purchased and started from scratch.

TO ALL ASA MEMBERS

With the change in the dues schedule that was approved by the Board of Directors for 1997, the Membership committee wishes to take this opportunity to remind "all hands" that all old membership applications should be disposed of or modified to reflect the increase in dues. Since a number of chapters have taken the initiative to create their own versions of the ASA membership brochure, it is imperative that the chapters ensure that the information contained in their brochures is current and complete. Applications with insufficient funds are returned which is awkward, expensive, and preventable.

Finally, dues notices for 1997 were mailed in October. There is no advantage in waiting. If you have not already responded, please take a moment to do so now. If you have misplaced the pre-addressed envelope that we provided, send your check in the amount corresponding to one of the membership categories to:

Membership Committee
Azalea Society of America
P.O. Box 34536
West Bethesda, MD 20827-0536

The new dues structure for 1997 is:

Annual	\$ 25
Contributing	\$ 50
Sustaining	\$100
Endowment	\$200
Life	\$500

As always, your generosity and cooperation are appreciated.

William C. Miller III
for the Membership Committee