
Report of the Membership/Public Information Committee for 1998

William C. Miller III

For the period May 1, 1997 to March 31, 1998 (an 11-month period and a one-time adjustment to better fit the National Meeting and THE AZALEAN cycle), I submit the following report. Fifty-two items of correspondence excluding electronic mail (e-mail) were received from twenty-three states (and the District of Columbia) and four non-North American countries (Poland, England, Australia, and Sweden). The most mail came from North Carolina with nine followed by Virginia with five. May and October of 1997 were the busiest months with eleven and nine items of correspondence respectively.

Last year I reported on the existence of the Internet web page that the Louisiana Chapter had established. Beaten to the punch, my plans for a personal web page finally came to pass in May, and I created a home page for "The Azalea Works," my personal academic and commercial endeavor (the Universal Resource Locator or URL is www.theazaleaworks.com). Following the example provided by the LA Chapter, I thought to include information about the ASA and a membership application. As of April 1, 1998, six people have joined the ASA, as a consequence of discovering my web page. It is probable that they would not be members today otherwise. With the advent of my web page came e-mail capability. E-mail messages from as far away as Australia have been received. If nothing else, the experience demonstrates the importance of the ASA moving forward and establishing its own official web presence without delay. Also, I predict that e-mail will begin to play a bigger role in the administrative operation of the ASA.

I would like to thank the nurseries who sent me catalogs and plant lists. On occasions, I am asked where a particular cultivar can be obtained. It is helpful to me to have your catalogs and plant lists on hand. I would also extend a special thanks to the folks who promoted the ASA in their catalogs. Every little bit helps. Please make sure that you report the dues as \$25 and the address as:

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

For those who are comfortable with the World Wide Web and would like to obtain ASA membership information electronically (at any hour of the day), the URL is www.theazaleaworks.com/asa.htm. An application form can be printed from www.theazaleaworks.com/appl.htm.

A supply of membership brochures was mailed to the local chapters on February 21, 1998. Brochures are being supplied from the National level to help support the chapters in their respective local, public outreach programs. As I have stated previously, membership is a local function and a local responsibility.

On the subject of the ASA brochure, a phone message was left on my home answering machine in mid-January. A gentleman had picked up a copy of the ASA brochure while visiting Brookside Gardens and was contacting me since my name was the closest in the enclosed table. He was interested in developing a brochure for a water garden club and was impressed with the design and content of the ASA brochure. He wanted to know if I could tell him who designed the ASA brochure, and he wanted to know who printed it. I was

more than pleased to tell him that I had designed it using WordPerfect 5.1 and that Tom Phillips at Hour Printer, Inc., in Silver Spring had done the printing. Someone once said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

While "surfing the Net," I discovered a number of references to the ASA. As I suspected, they were seriously outdated. I contacted the appropriate individuals and provided them with current information. For those who have an interest in locating new web sites about gardening, some URLs are:

The Atlanta Garden Connection:
www.atlgarden.com

GardenNet:
TRINE.COM/GardenNet/GardenAssn

A Guide to Plant Societies:
www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/NebFacts/nf94-184.htm

In an ongoing effort, another brochure mass mailing exercise was launched this year to exert a positive effect on ASA membership. Over one thousand brochures were mailed in two batches, 601 in early March and another 414 in early April. Many thanks to Bobbi McCeney, Mary Rutley, and Dottie Murphree of the Brookside Gardens chapter for addressing all those brochures. Special thanks also go to Bee and Bob Hobbs for pre-processing and mailing both batches.

An experiment was conducted with the dues renewal notices for the current (1998) membership year. Rather than having renewals returned to the official ASA address as has been routinely done in the past, all of the renewals for this year were sent directly to the Treasurer. The experiment has not yet been evaluated, but from my perspective there were no major problems, and in fact, my burden was lessened. One minor problem involved members who utilize subscription services (usually institutional members). The subscription services (e.g.,

Faxon, EBSCO) did not get the word and renewals were sent to the official box rather than directly to the Treasurer. The redirection of the dues renewal notices also meant that it was now the Treasurer's responsibility to closely coordinate with the updating of the database, the production of mailing labels by the database manager, and any late (post March 1) renewals so that no members fell between the cracks. Invariably, there are always renewals, address changes or modifications, or new members that surface after the mailing labels are generated but before **THE AZALEAN** is mailed. These have to be coordinated with Bee and Bob Hobbs.

It is worth taking a moment to remind all hands that all *new* membership applications should be directed to the official ASA address at the West Bethesda post office. There were a number of instances recently where the regular procedure was not followed. This complicated matters and caused delays in new members receiving the "new member welcome packet" which contained time-sensitive information.

On the subject of the "new member welcome packet," we desperately need someone to write a four to six page "introduction to azaleas" that could become part of the new member welcome packet. It should be designed to get the new member, who perhaps knows little or nothing, up to a basic level of understanding. The final product would have to be reviewed and approved by the BOD, and it should be general enough to be applicable to any part of the country. If anyone would like to tackle such a project, they should contact me at:

Bill Miller
7613 Quintana Court
Bethesda, MD 20817
(301) 365-0692 after 7 p.m.
bill@theazaleaworks.com

At the National Meeting in Atlanta, the Board of Directors (BOD) approved a policy change regarding the receipt of new applications with insufficient dues. With all of the membership

brochures that have been distributed over the last twenty years, occasionally an old one surfaces. As one might expect, the frequency of such occurrences increases significantly with every dues increase (e.g., the most recent dues increase from \$20 to \$25 in 1997). The old policy was to return the application and the insufficient check with a personal note that explained matters. This was a bit of a hassle for me, but it had the advantage of giving the applicant complete control with no lingering administrative complications. Either they re-submitted their application with the proper dues, or they didn't. Historically, most people responded in short order with the necessary amount and everything was fine. Believing that it was "bad business practice" to return money, the BOD directed the Membership Committee to accept all insufficient checks and to process the memberships normally. A "special notice" form letter was to be included in the new member welcome packet that explained that an additional sum was required to bring the dues up to the proper amount. The new process meant that I no longer had to write a personal letter, an improvement from my perspective, but it did nothing to repeal the law of unintended consequences. For example, what does the ASA do if the new member is not responsive to the notice that an additional sum is required? There is nothing in the bylaws that says that the BOD can write it off (as some have recommended), and presumably it becomes the Treasurer's responsibility to pursue such debts. What happens when renewal time comes around and the debt

remains unpaid? If the member in question belongs to a chapter, one solution would be to require the local chapter to cover the debt...but that would not work for an at-large member. I believe the change in policy has proven to be a good idea since it has reduced the number of letters that I have had to write. Still, the BOD needs to give this matter some additional thought to resolve the bylaws issues.

A final word on dues...dues notices are mailed in October or November for the coming year. At the end of January or the beginning of February, a second dues notice is mailed to those members who have not responded. My thanks to those members who respond promptly to the first dues notice every year. All members should make every effort to respond to the first notice. It only makes sense.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Bill McIntosh with whom I have shared the membership committee responsibility since 1994. Due to personal circumstances, Dr. McIntosh has had to give up his management of the ASA database, a major contribution to the infrastructure and day-to-day operation of the society. It has been a pleasure working with him. His attention to detail, his dependability, and his professional approach to this critically important function have made my job easier while insuring that his successor will have a tough act to follow. □



New Members



AT-LARGE MEMBERS

Bob & Sharon Alfaro
303 THORNBERRY CT
MT AIRY MD 21771
410-549-0391

Merton A Bell
536 MAIN ST
COTUIT MA 02635-3121
508-428-1515

Charles Brocklehurst
1923 FAIRVIEW ROAD
FOUNTAIN INN
SC 29644-9137
864-862-3016

Peter J Cery
840 PLEASANT GROVE ROAD
YORK HAVEN PA 1737-9012
717-266-4730

Eugene Courtney
35 CAMBRIDGE ROAD
WOBURN MA 01801-3422

Marianne & Bruce Feller
88 OLD FIELD ROAD
OLD FIELD NY 11733-1646
212-578-2659

Gordon & Linda Greenman
5337 LANSLOWNE LANE
MERCER ISLAND WA 98040-4648
206-232-8176

Carol Hiller
22 RENI ROAD
MANHASSET NY 11030

Gary Hwang
P. O. BOX 425
ZEBULON NC 27597-0425
919-269-4101

Tom & Yvonne Lowe
114 NORTHSIDE DRIVE
CEDARTOWN GA 30125-2226
770-748-5004

Geoffrey L Mehl
RD 1 BOX 80
HENRYVILLE PA 18332-9721