

# A Note from Your Editor

Barbara Stump — Nacogdoches, Texas

As of this issue THE AZALEAN will carry a seasonal indication on the masthead. We will maintain the volume and number designations so that the journal will have consistency for archiving and professional research purposes. Thus, this issue is Volume 22, Number 3, Fall 2000. The decision to shift to this designation was taken after deliberation with President Bode and, I believe, will cause no major delays in producing the journal.

After careful thought and reviewing what I had in hand, the convention presentations will actually be featured in both the fall and winter issues. This fall issue focuses on the historic context of both the convention venue and the historical journey of azaleas to America so ably told by Don Voss. Next issue will feature hybridizing by Fred Minch, the "Tray Mountain Azalea Connection" by Jeff Beasley, Maarten van der Giessen's article on

evaluation criteria, Hank Bruno's on Callaway Gardens, and mine on the new Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. But there will still be room in the winter issue for member articles, and in all the issues to follow.

Future issues will maintain a schedule that is closer to the beginning of the season rather than the end of it as much as feasible given the submissions for publication. They will meet all required dates for publication of upcoming annual meeting registration information and election slates and ballots.

I am very happy to say that the chapters have been very forthcoming to my requests for news. I hope you will all think about President Bode's call for articles. It really is *your* journal and the voice of the Society.

Just to show you how easy it is to help out, I invite you to send in de-

tails about any Azalea Trails that you know of in your towns, chapters, and regions. I plan this for the Winter issue so we can all plan trips to visit such sites. Because we have members all across the nation, there should be quite a schedule of options, allowing you to "follow the spring" and the azaleas across the country. Then, of course, the Society would like to know if you've found a particularly good event and we will publish that in the Spring or Summer issue. A great example of this is the article on the annual Landon Azalea Festival, which we featured in the Azalea Gardens section of the March issue this year. It really is just that easy.

For the record, deadlines for submissions are as follows:

Winter issue:	October 15
Spring issue:	January 15
Summer issue:	April 15
Fall issue:	July 15

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## 2000 Convention Report

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*[Compiled from my notes and those published by Frank Bryan and Frances Louer in the Oconee Chapter Newsletter and the "Azalea Clipper" of the Northern Virginia chapter, respectively, Ed.]*

Whatever we can say about the Annual Meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, will pale by comparison with what it really was. Attendance was great, with 131 members coming from all parts of the U.S.

For those of you who could not journey to Charleston, one of the most valuable aspects of actually going to the meeting, besides the chance to see old friends and getting live plants of rare and unique provenance, was the quality of the slide presentations. The presenters all had many slides of one-of-kind azaleas not well known or not widely distributed. This was particularly the case with Fred Minch's hy-

brids, the new native hybrids the Beasleys are beginning to select and breed, and Maarten van der Giessen's "look back" at some old favorites that deserve to be offered again by garden centers. Don Voss's article in this issue is a goldmine of carefully distilled research on azalea origins and routes of distribution, reading much like a tale out of Marco Polo. However, what we cannot show you, because of space limitations, are the maps of each country of origin and the slides of the half-dozen evergreen azaleas that he considers of special significance in ornamental horticulture that reached the West from 1800-1850. Perhaps in the

future we can import these into the Society's website as a photographic convention synopsis. The wealth of expertise among our membership is most impressive.

This leads me to remind you about the learning side of these conventions. For many of us these are fun ways to get together and discuss our favorite angle on azaleas, whether it be hybridizing, collecting and growing, or simply visiting them in great gardens. But it appears they are also great learning opportunities, with enough substance to entice horticulture students of the future into growing azaleas, even be-

coming members of the Society. Could we consider giving a few complimentary registrations for local youth at the chapter level, perhaps?

As usual, the meeting was a rich combination of evening presentations and daytime tours and the occasional plant sale. Following are just some observations, with a few illustrations, to try to give you the flavor of this unique experience.

### Evening Speakers

**Wednesday evening, March 22**, we met for three presentations. **Kathy Woolsey** of Cypress Gardens introduced us to the myriad pleasures of Charleston, South Carolina. Many of the area plantation gardens were developed and persist because their owners were wealthy and had come from Barbados. This heritage accounts for the strong Caribbean influence in the city. It lies in USDA Zone 9, with long summers, humidity in the 90% range frequently, and winters so brief you miss them if you sleep late. She mentioned that with this sort of weather many native Charlestonians don't even plant gardens in the summer, it's so hard to work in them in the heat. The city is a lively one, but history is a main ingredient. Charleston was André Michaux's main base of operations during his 10-year botanizing. Belgian-Indian hybrids were introduced there in the late 1800s and early 1900s, while Kurumes were planted in the 1920s and 1930s. The Southern Indicas such as *R.* 'Formosa', *R.* 'Judge Solomon', *R.* 'President Claeys' do quite well, but the Kurumes die out in a few years. Other popular local azaleas are *R.* 'Red Ruffles', *R.* 'Christmas Cheer', *R.* 'Mother's Day', *R.* 'Fashion', *R.* 'Happy Days', and the Gumpos. Kathy ended her chat by telling us about wonderful local restaurants we should try.

**Don Voss** gave a thorough history lesson, which is covered in his article later in this issue. **Hank Bruno's** over-

view of the development of Callaway Gardens was accompanied by impressive views of the gardens in various seasons. The effect was rather like visiting the gardens ourselves, but with a very knowledgeable gardener at our side.

### Tours, Day 1

**Thursday, March 23** began bright and early with our trip to **Magnolia Plantation**, owned by one family, the Draytons, for over 300 years. Begun in 1676, this makes it the oldest major public garden in America. Located right on the Ashley River, this plantation was our first real introduction to why this area is called the "low country." While it is listed on the National Historic Register, the site is fully self-sufficient, receiving no governmental aid. Though we were not able to tour inside the historic home that day, there was something for everyone to enjoy, from a gift shop to a petting zoo with deer you could feed by hand and peacocks, including an all-white one. The 125-acre former rice field is now a waterfowl refuge, Audubon Swamp Garden, and is home to egrets, anhinga, and some alligators. You could view these close up and safely from a series of boardwalks, dikes, and bridges. The owners are pet lovers, and if you visit again you can bring your pet along on a leash if you'd like. The mature garden was such a sight from every angle, including a view from the large raised balcony that allowed us to see down onto mature camellias, azaleas, and wisteria and down several long allées. No wonder the family retained ownership of this garden even through some very tough years. The present owners are developing the gardens for color displays in all seasons (according to the very professional orientation video).

Next we traveled to stunning **Middleton Place**, another National Historic Landmark. The scale of this garden is hard to describe, but a few facts may help: The butterfly terraces that are the signature of the gardens

took 100 slaves 10 years to dig by hand. The plantation was settled in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and came to Henry Middleton in 1741 by marriage. Four generations of Middletons were very active politically. Dating from the 1920s and 1930s, the Azalea Hillside Garden contains 35,000 azaleas, primarily of red Southern Indian varieties, with some deciduous representations. *R.* 'President Claeys' predominates. Added to these sheer numbers, imagine how it looks reflected in a lake dammed for the purpose at the base of the hillside. The typical 19<sup>th</sup> century formal garden had two reflecting pools, one formal and one informal, and exquisite collections of azaleas and camellias. In keeping with the age of the garden, grand old trees dominated, from the Middleton Oak, to magnolias, cypresses, mountain laurels, crepe myrtles, and giant live oaks. Middleton Place is justly proud of having achieved a 250 year-anniversary and celebrates it in souvenirs in their gift shop. Colonial activities and barnyard demonstrations round out the experience, complete with sheep grazing on the lawn. For the history-minded, you could tour the house and review all the history for a very reasonable price. The day was chilly, blustery, and gray, so it was a wonderful treat to have a lovely luncheon in their events pavilion. Definitely worth a return trip if you're in the area.

The final event on the way back to the hotel was a bus tour of **downtown Charleston**. The tour guide pointed out colonial churches, markets, and historical sights. The church steeples along the skyline have given the city the nickname, "The Holy City." Single houses were unique among the homes, being only one room wide and several rooms deep with two porches called piazzas. These were built to catch cool breezes during the long hot summers. We saw many architectural styles: colonial, antebellum, Victorian, and Art Deco. We stopped briefly to see Battery Park where artists were painting local mansions. Word is that some of these Victorians sell for \$1 to \$5 million now.

## Evening Speakers

**Jeff Beasley** of Transplant Nursery in Lavonia, Georgia, described some of his wild azalea finds at Tray Mountain, north of Helen, Georgia. Some of these will provide material for new hybrids. As second-generation nursery people, they have been working on crosses and selections of rhododendron, azaleas, and deciduous azaleas in their family for 20 years now. Their new series of "Maid in the Shade" cultivars has been released, and was listed in the September 1999 issue of **THE AZALEAN** (p.51). Their most notable azalea is *R. 'My Mary'* named for Jeff's mother who attended the conference.

**Fred Minch's** presentation on hybridizing involved the very able assistance of wife Jean in making his talk a fun family affair. Every enthusiast can relate to the "fun" of having their dining room table taken up with azalea seeds in various stages of drying and sorting. What an image that was!

**Maarten van der Giessen's** talk on commercial criteria for azalea evaluation dealt mainly with the need to get other hybrids beyond *R. 'Hino de Giri'*, *R. 'Hino Crimson'*, *R. 'Fashion'* and the like into the market and out to the public via local nurseries. He suggested hybrids such as those of Pete Vines and other newer introductions. One of Maarten's objectives is to get Satsuki-type flowers into early-blooming plants. Many in the audience agreed. There are few Satsuki in the U.S. trade at the moment. Another objective is to select for heat-tolerance for Zones 7-10, not cold hardiness in Zones 3-6. Successes in new introductions include the "Encore Series" bred by Buddy Lee and given top-class marketing by PDSI. A Glenn Dale, *R. 'Refrain'* does well. Some others he mentioned are *R. 'Sunglow'*, *R. 'Koromo Shikibu'*, *R. 'Orange Slipper'* (a sport of *R. 'Red Slipper'*), *R. 'Janet Rhea'* and other Linwoods, *R. 'Vibrant'*, *R. 'Marian Lee'*, *R. 'Zephyr'*, *R. 'Astronaut'*, *R. 'Red Ribbon'* (an Aromi hybrid), *R. 'Ambrosia'*, and *R.*

*'Saint Moritz'*. Bottom line, a lot of excellent hybridizing has been done, but marketing needs to be done to get these new introductions to the consumer.

## Tours, Day 2

**Friday, March 23** tours began with a most unusual garden, the result of a very political family's gift. Located at Monck's Corner, South Carolina, 3200 acres of land used to belong to Clare Booth Luce and her husband who used it as a weekend retreat. They donated the land to The Charleston diocese, which sold some and established **Mepkin Abbey** on the rest. Twenty-seven monks live a cloistered life in this beautiful setting overlooking a former rice field. Our guide was Brother Daniel, their business manager, and is the only member who leaves the property. The order is self-sufficient, raising 30,000 laying hens, whose eggs support the Abbey and whose manure the brothers compost and sell. The Abbey has a beautiful new chapel, a new senior's wing, and is adding a big new library. They occasionally accept visitors who wish to stay for meditation and reflection. One impressive area on a bluff overlooks the flooded rice field, a reflection pool, a hillside of azaleas and camellias, and towering live oaks. Future plans are to develop a botanic garden on the property. More about that venture as it develops.

The buses then took us to **Carolina Nurseries**, a huge commercial nursery and the largest in South Carolina. While the entire nursery is 700 acres, we toured parts of 280 acres of container-stock. They have 35 acres under shade and 541,000 square feet of saran-covered Quonset hut houses. They employ 40 salaried employees and 325 hourly ones. The production from this state-of-the art nursery is amazing: 11 million pieces of nursery stock, ranging from seedlings to 15-gallon container trees. They grow a full range of *Ilex*, junipers, and

broadleaved and herbaceous perennials destined for both Northern and Southern markets. Their shipping dock looks as big as a football field, and can load 24 semi-trailer loads at a time. They shipped 1,500 trailer loads of plants out in 1999 alone.

This nursery was a generous sponsor of our convention in 2000, including, but not limited to, the catered barbecue lunch with all the fixings they served us in their spotless new potting shed. It felt just like a family reunion, and we got to talk to many of the staff at Carolina. They also are the first nursery company to grow Aromi hybrids in any great numbers. Partners in the operation, Jay Guy and Linda Erdman, both brought plants to the plant auction Friday night.

We saw Kathy Woolsey again at 175-acre **Cypress Gardens**, once the site of a rice plantation and now a huge black-water swamp. Begun by Benjamin R. Kittredge in the late 1920s, it now has 100 acres of garden, a butterfly house, conference facilities, gift shop, an aquarium, and picnic shelters. There are miles of walking paths and trails and many old favorite cultivars perched right along the edge of the cypress swamp. Special garden areas include the Wedding Garden, Camellia Garden, Garden of Memories, and Woodland Gardens. Kathy led a few tours and made everyone welcome to take cuttings. She explained that Hurricane Hugo hit the area hard, and that Cypress Gardens lost many trees, which has caused problems with camellias that need a little shade. The staff is still replanting trees and azaleas. One azalea is named for the garden, *R. 'Duchess of Cypress'*, rather like a pale *R. 'George Lindley Taber'* with occasional streaks of lavender and lavender spots; she has spectacular fall bloom. Some members enjoyed the chance to go canoeing among the bald cypress knees.

The final tour of the day was a professionally guided tour of **Summerville**, so named because it used to be the preferred location of

summer homes for Charlestonians who wanted to get away from the humid banks of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers. Begun in 1830, it grew into a Victorian village made popular by physicians of the time who recommended it for its "beneficial pine air." Our timing for our visit was perfect, because the entire town of very historic cottages and mansions seemed swathed in Southern Indicas of fuchsia and purple.

The evening banquet was a gala affair, finished off by one last talk, by **Barbara Stump**, describing a new garden's development project. All this fun and the slide show made the annual meeting a bit late. However, the entire crowd was more than happy to

give Bob and Bee Hobbs a standing ovation for their tireless support of the Society and their 10 years of work as editors of **THE AZALEAN**. They were really surprised to receive the commemorative case clock, presented by Jim Thornton. (See minutes in the Society News section later in this issue.)

All in all, the two days were a real whirlwind of azalea sights and history. Rather like an illustrated tour of Don Voss's talk: The area around Charleston was where some of the first azaleas came to America, and we got to see that those very gardens are still being well cared for today. And we can testify that today's growers are doing their best to continue that tradition.

Thanks again to all the folks who made this convention a wonderful event! Thanks to Mr. Drayton F. Hastie of Magnolia Plantation for his generosity and support; to Cypress Gardens and Kathy Woolsey for their support; to Jay Guy and Linda Erdman of Carolina Nursery for arranging the tour and wonderful lunch; and thanks to the speakers. A special thanks to the organizers from Louisiana and Alabama: Bill Bode, Buddy and Dixie Lee, June and Jerry Ladner, Billy Lucas, Maarten van der Giessen, James Campbell, and Vince Ciolino.

## How Azaleas Came to Our Gardens: A Snapshot

Donald H. Voss — Vienna, Virginia

Those who read **THE AZALEAN** can rest easy—this will not be one of my excursions into the rules of plant nomenclature. But because deciduous and evergreen azaleas came to our gardens by quite different paths, we must first distinguish between them. In addition, the terms "species," "hybrid," and "cultivar" require brief comment.

### Distinguishing Deciduous and Evergreen Azaleas

When the plants are in bloom, differences between deciduous and evergreen azaleas are apparent in flower form, color, and bud morphology. In the deciduous azaleas, the corolla tube is usually prominent and expands more or less abruptly into the limb. Corolla hues may be white, yellow, orange, yellowish pink, red, pink, purple, purplish pink—often in combination. Because of the presence of carotene pigmentation, these yellows and oranges tend to be high in chroma (i.e., saturation or "purity" of color). Examples are *R.* 'Windsor Buttercup' and *R.* 'Orangeade'. An important fea-

ture of the deciduous azaleas is that the terminal bud produces only flowers.

In the evergreen azaleas, the corolla usually flares from the receptacle into more or less widely spreading lobes—a form often called "funnel-shaped." The hue range is narrower than that in the deciduous azaleas, because carotenoid pigmentation is not present. The slight coloration from yellowish pigmentation present in many white azaleas is usually so low in chroma as to be visually indiscernible. Yellowish pinks (coral or salmon if you prefer), reds, pinks, purples, and purplish pinks are common in the evergreen azaleas. In the evergreen azaleas, a terminal bud produces both flowers and new vegetative growth.

With respect to foliage, both the evergreen and deciduous azaleas leaf out in the spring and drop leaves in the fall or early winter. In the evergreen azaleas, however, a second flush of growth produces the so-called summer leaves, as well as terminal buds that will produce flowers and vegetative growth in the following spring.

The summer leaves persist through the winter and usually drop when new growth develops in the spring.

As a result of their respective cycles of leaf growth and leaf drop, the deciduous azaleas are bare of foliage in winter, while evergreen azaleas have some leaves. Though leafless, the deciduous azaleas' branches and fat buds often add a grace note to the winter landscape—one especially attractive when highlighted with snow. The evergreen azaleas carry their relatively small green (or, in some cases, rich dark red or purplish red) summer leaves through the winter but do not appear as dense as in summer when clothed with the larger spring leaves.

### "Species," "Cultivars," and "Hybrids"

Botanists continue to argue about what constitutes a species. "Species" are usually, but not always, defined with respect to plants growing in the wild. The species is the basic unit in plant classification and is designated by a Latin epithet. We need only note