

2014 National Convention: Doin' the Charleston

By Connie Cottingham and Mike Sikes, Athens, Georgia

During our time in Charleston, we were immersed in Southern history and Southern hospitality, and surrounded by azaleas and camellias. What a delightful experience!

Most of us arrived in Charleston on Thursday, taking afternoon tours, attending the board meeting, entering photographs and arrangements in the contests, shopping the plant sale, or catching up with old friends. We all gathered together after dinner for a reception, where we met Eliza Lucas Pinckney. The real Eliza would have celebrated her 292nd birthday this year, but actress Christy Pleasant did an admirable job of bringing her to life for us—Southern charm, historic costume, and all. We are impressed by a woman who can make her own dress, but Eliza grew the silk and cotton and, while still a teenager, perfected the agricultural and manufacturing processes for the dye. Fascinating lady! After a dancing demonstration, many ASA members joined in to learn the Charleston and the shag.

On Friday morning we boarded busses to spend the day at two plantations located along the Ashley River northwest of Charleston: Magnolia Plantation, the oldest garden open

to the public in the United States, and Middleton Place, the oldest landscaped garden in this country. Magnolia Plantation has been in the same family since it was founded in 1676. Two generations of the family now serve on the board and one member, **Drayton Hastie**, spoke to us at lunch. Magnolia Plantation was the home of Reverend John Drayton, who planted many specimens of Southern Indica azaleas and *Camellia japonica* in the 1840s and transformed the gardens into a Romantic style with winding paths, natural shrub groupings, and a woodland effect over the next several decades of his life.



Dancing demonstration.

Magnolia Plantation has impressive collections of azaleas (over 250,000!) and camellias (over 25,000!) Five camellias dating back to the 1800s are still there. John James Audubon spent many months painting in “Audubon Swamp” at this plantation.

Civil War soldiers and later an earthquake destroyed the original 1741 home at Middleton Place. Only one of the 1755 side additions still stands. The gardens, created in the Classical garden style, celebrate geometry and balance, vistas, focal points and surprises. They are very different from Magnolia Plantation, yet also contain an abundance of mature azaleas and camellias. It was a treat to experience two very historical and yet very different gardens in the same day.

Our last stop was for sweet tea at Linwood, the 1883 home of Rev. John Drayton's daughter in Summerville. Linwood is now a bed and breakfast with award-winning gardens.



Miles Beach leading a tour of Magnolia Plantation & Gardens.



Drayton Hastie speaks to the group at Magnolia Plantation & Gardens.

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During Friday evening's reception **Tom Johnson**, Director of Magnolia Plantation & Gardens told us of the history of the plantation and area, then **Ernest F. Koone III** of Lazy K Nursery in Pine Mountain, Georgia, spoke about deciduous azaleas.

On Saturday, while some headed to Charleston for a historic and harbor-boat tour, we boarded a bus headed to Cy-



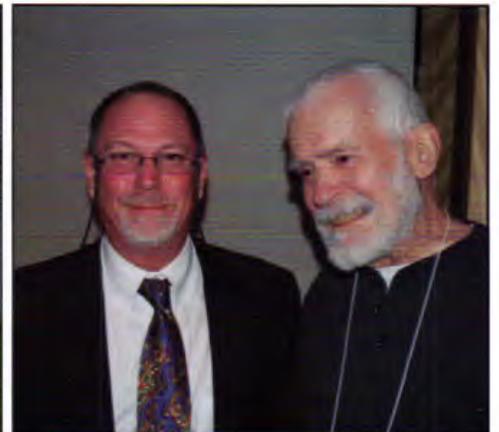
Tour of Middleton Place.

press Gardens. This picturesque garden took two-and-a-half years to reopen after Hurricane Hugo took out 60,000 trees. The backbone of this garden is azaleas, camellias, and daffodils. One highlight was a boat tour of a beautiful blackwater bald cypress/tupelo swamp that is the center of this garden, a photographer's dream, and home to many alligators. Curator **Kathy Woolsey** spoke to us about the history of Cypress Gardens (originally one of the plantations that Eliza Pinckney ran at age 16), gave us a walking tour of the gardens, and

presented a talk on pollinators. A bit of shopping at the historic Market Area of Charleston completed our day's travels.

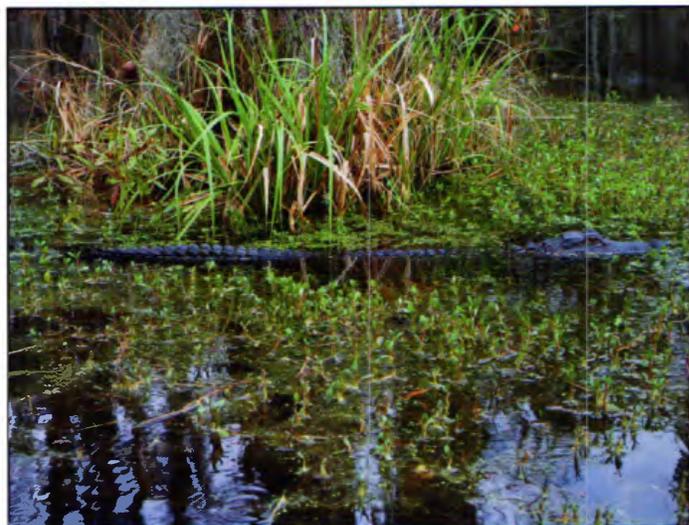
Speakers at the Annual Meeting and Banquet included **Buddy Lee**, updating us on Encore® Azaleas and Mary Roper, taking us far north to Asticou Azalea Garden in Acadia, Maine. **Barbara Stump** ended the evening with enticing plans for the 2015 National Convention in Nacogdoches, Texas on March 26-29.

Left: **Herb Frazier**, Mary Roper of Asticou Azalea Garden, and **Tom Johnson**. Center: **Barbara Stump** and **Buddy Lee** chatting at Middleton Place. Right: **J Jackson** with **Bob Stelloh**.





Kathy Woolsey leading a tour of Cypress Gardens.



Alligator in Cypress Gardens.

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Christy Pleasant as Eliza Lucas Pinckney.

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Doin' the Charleston and the Shag.

A background image of pink azalea flowers. The flowers are in full bloom, with many small, bright pink blossoms. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a garden setting. The overall tone is bright and cheerful.

SAVE THE DATE!
Find out more on the ASA conventions web page

2015 National ASA Convention
March 26-29, 2015
Texas Forest Country—Azalea Trails and Gardens
Nacogdoches, Texas

2016 National ARS/ASA Convention
April 20-24, 2016
Williamsburg, Virginia