

A Celebration of the Life of Bob Stelloh (1934-2014)

by John Brown

Robert “Bob” Theodore Stelloh, of Hendersonville, North Carolina died at home July 15, 2014. He died peacefully in his sleep after a long illness, 4 days short of his 80th birthday. Bob was an ardent member of the Azalea Society of America, serving first as a national director from 1986-1988; he became treasurer in 1995 and served until 2007. He designed, set up, and managed the ASA website around 2001/2002 along with the Yahoo Group, Azaleas (2003). Perhaps, his collection of thousands of pictures of azalea plants, azalea places, and azalea people will be the part of his legacy that is best remembered. These are available on the Azalea website under Pictures.

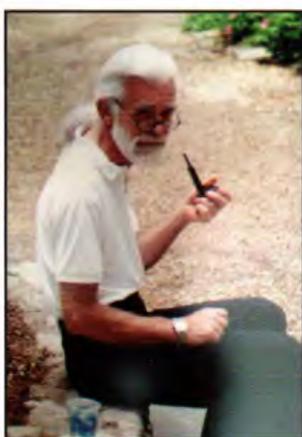
While attending the ASA National Convention in Charleston in 2000, Bob and a small group proposed the formation of the Vaseyi Chapter and agreed to host the next convention in 2001. Bob served as treasurer of the Vaseyi Chapter until shortly before his death. He was directly involved in hosting three national ASA Conventions, traveling thousands of miles collecting plants, handling finances, and organizing tours and registrations. Before moving to Hendersonville, Bob and his late wife of 38 years, Denise Stelloh, were active in the Brookside Gardens Chapter and were a big part of the group that established and maintained the George Harding Garden.

Bob won many awards as a member of ASA, including the the ASA Exceptional Service Award, and The Azalean Article Award in 1993, SE-ARS Bronze Medal in 2001 and President’s Award in 2003, and the 2006 Vaseyi Chapter Augie Kehr Award.

When Bob retired, he moved to Hendersonville, North Carolina where he pursued his passion for gardening, especially his love of azaleas and rhododendrons. The Stelloh Garden is his legacy, a work of art featuring over 1,000 different azalea cultivars. He mapped his garden beds and tracked precise plant locations and detailed plant descriptions using a computer program he developed and named “Garden Information Manager.” GIM was purchased and is used by several arboretums and botanic gardens including the Lewis Ginter Garden in Richmond, Virginia. The Stelloh garden has been featured on numerous national and local garden tours, during which visitors couldn’t help but appreciate Bob’s genuine, friendly spirit, his keen interest in sharing garden knowledge and experiences, and his overall love of life.

Bob had an abiding interest in sharing the knowledge of azaleas and other garden plants with others. Unfailingly, he

would appear at chapter meetings with plants for door prizes, each with its own story. His knowledge and attention to detail made him a infinite source of information. **Chris Wetmore** said “I will never forget how nice he was when I was a new member. I joined right before the Asheville convention. At the very next Vaseyi meeting surplus plants were sold. I was still learning and didn’t know anyone at the meeting. He was so kind and helpful answering questions and helping me pick out plants. He must have spent 30 minutes helping me. He was so tickled at how interested I was in all the different azaleas. He had a wonderful spirit that I hope we can all carry on.”



Jean Pace remembers “we have a great respect for Bob and always enjoyed talking to him. He helped me a lot with computer problems and helped me start a web page for my high school classmates. One time he actually used an idea I had for a spreadsheet for a truss show, saying ‘that was so simple why didn’t I think of it?’ Then he realized how it sounded – apologized profusely – then we both had a good laugh. I told him I could never be mad or upset with him but I would use it for blackmail one day.”

April Sanborn, Vaseyi Chapter Past President and longtime azaleophile, recalled one of many stories about Bob. “Many years ago a bunch of us made regular trips to Copper Bald. As many of you know, the first part of that hike is a bit steep. I have asthma and sometimes when I start out on a hike like this too fast I start to have wheezing and difficulty breathing. Well, that happened on this occasion and I couldn’t keep up. Everyone disappeared up the trail. Everyone, except Bob. He saw what was happening and came back down the trail and stayed with me and then walked at my pace till I could breathe easier and continue. It was a small act of kindness, but very typical of him. I have never forgotten this.”

My favorite story involves the Hooper Bald Restoration Project. In 2010, a small group gathered on the Bald to remove unwanted vegetation and allow the *R. calendulaceum* and *cumberlandense* to grow. **Jim Brant** brought an attractive young lady to me and asked that I help her get started. I gathered Bob and took them to an area deep in the brush and pointed out an azalea that needed releasing. Audrey immediately spotted two more and started working. The rest of the story is, as they say, history. Bob and Audrey were married within the year and had four wonderful years together.

These are only a few glimpses into the person who was a friend to many, and a mainstay of the Azalea Society. He will be sorely missed.