

# Discover, Discover, Discover...

Carol Flowers—Washington, D.C.

**D**iscover, discover, and discover—it's what we all do when we become really interested in something. Every year I look forward to the ASA convention. Since the meetings take place in various parts of the country, I have gotten to know areas of the United States that I would never have visited if not for the conventions. I also get to discover more and more about azaleas.

This year my husband and I took off for Asheville, North Carolina. It was a part of the country that I had always wanted to see. Although my parents never made the move from New York, I now know why they gave serious consideration to living their retirement years there. The area offers so much that the New York City metropolitan area cannot—space, clear air, a great climate for gardening, and breath-taking mountain scenery.

Like my parents, Henry Skinner, Augie Kehr, and Chauncey Beadle—the “greats” honored at this year's convention—loved this area. Unlike my parents, Henry Skinner and Augie Kehr actually did retire in North Carolina. Working for the famous landscape architect Frederick Olmsted, Chauncey Beadle came to the area on a temporary duty assignment, lasting more than 60 years. There was obviously something in this part of the world that he discovered. The discovery caused him to stay for a lifetime.

From reading some of the life stories of Beadle, Skinner, and Kehr, it is obvious they loved their work. Beadle and some of his colleagues were named the “Azalea Hunters.” In developing the gardens at Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate, they searched the United States, collecting native azaleas to use as nursery stock plants. Eventually the Biltmore Azalea Garden had more than 1,000 varieties.

In 1951, while working at the Morris Arboretum in Pennsylvania, Henry Skinner made a 25,000-mile road trip

▼ Azaleas at the Biltmore Estate.



▲ Bill Costello enjoying Augie Kehr's magnolias.

through the eastern and southeastern United States in search of native azaleas. He sent 8,000 herbarium specimens and 500 live azalea plants back to the arboretum. Based on this story, it is easy to understand why azalea collections were expanded at the National Arboretum after Skinner became one of the arboretum's early directors.

Augie Kehr was known as a gentle, kind man. After retiring as a Staff Scientist for the USDA Agriculture Research Service, he and his wife built a retirement home in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Wanting to discover new and varied plants, he worked for the next 22 years developing more and more beautiful azaleas, rhododendrons, and magnolias. He registered nine new azaleas, 12 rhododendrons, and 31 magnolias. It was a lot of achievement and discovery for a “retired” gentleman.

Three of the convention's Thursday night speakers told wonderful stories about the “greats” of the past. Bill Alexander talked about the contributions Chauncey Beadle made in the development of the Biltmore Estate. Barbara Bullock has access to a lot of information about Henry Skinner and used it in her well researched speech. Having been introduced to Augie Kehr by a neighbor, Dr. Dan Veazey spoke about the personal life of the great plantsman. Listening to each of the speakers, you could feel the enthusiasm and excitement each of the “greats” had working in the field of horticulture.

Because of his work at the Biltmore Estate, Bill Alexander had knowledge of a lot of good stories about Chauncey D. Beadle. Starting in 1890, Beadle worked with both Vanderbilt and Olmsted. He worked to find and grow the types of plants that would eventually create the outdoor scenes seen today at the Biltmore Estate.

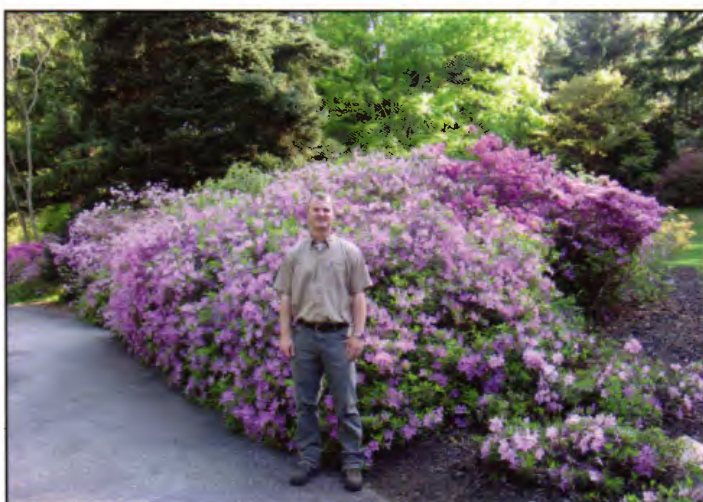
I listened intently as Bill spoke Thursday night. As a





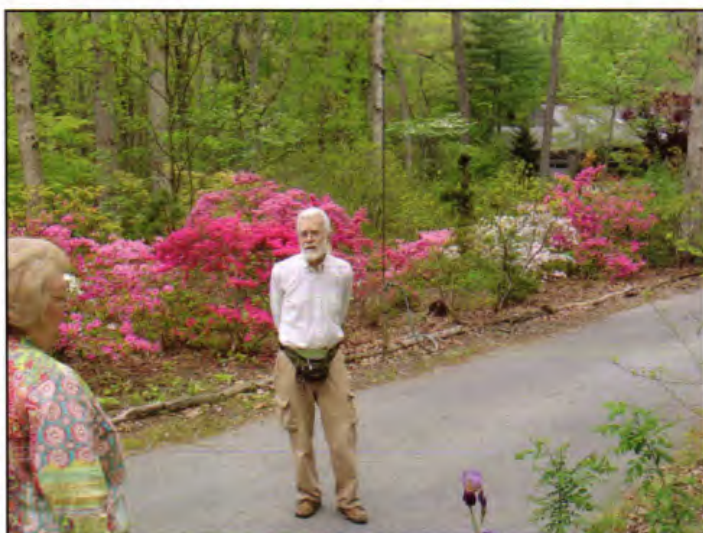
▲ Bill Alexander addresses convention attendees.

▼ Ed Collins greeting convention attendees.



▲ Biltmore Horticulturist ready to answer questions.

▼ Bob Stelloh welcomes convention attendees to their garden.



small child, and without knowing the names of Olmsted, Vanderbilt, or Beadle, I had enjoyed the landscape scenes these people worked to design and make reality. I loved walking in Central Park, the gardens of the Long Island Vanderbilt Estate museums and Planting Fields, and the old Long Island estate of William R. Coe. All of these great gardens have a similar feel, including the Biltmore Estate. All give you a sense of openness and space—the way nature itself designs landscapes.

Listening to Bill I realized that these great mature gardens don't just happen. People like Chauncey Beadle worked hard to collect plants in the wild, grow them, and plant them. My generation owes Mr. Beadle and his counterparts a lot. Because of them we have these gardens to discover and enjoy. Thanks Mr. Beadle, and thank you Bill Alexander for telling his story.

Like Bill Alexander, **Barbara Bullock** had access to a lot of stories about Henry Skinner. She has been curator of the azalea collection at the National Arboretum since 1990. She loves her job. From her speech, you could tell she had enjoyed going through much of the recorded information about

Skinner and his work. Because of her speech, we discovered a lot about the plant legacy Skinner left to our nation.

Because of his azalea collecting expeditions, Skinner came to know a lot about the plants. His knowledge and enthusiasm was passed on to other workers at the arboretum as these younger horticulturalists worked to establish the extensive azalea gardens that exist there today.

What I have always liked about people associated with the plant world is their willingness to share knowledge about plants and the plants they grow. **Dr. Dan Veazey**, our third speaker, knew Augie Kehr personally. From Dan we heard personal stories of Augie's kind-



▲ Barbara Bullock



▲ Dr. Dan Veazey



ness, and how both professionally and personally he did everything he could to expand our knowledge of the plant world. Because of Augie's hybridizing efforts, new and more beautiful forms of azaleas and magnolias came into being. Because of Augie's associations with so many others, his knowledge has been shared with younger generations. Plant research foundations exist or are in the process of being created. New and even more beautiful types of azaleas are being developed.

Our world continues to change—along with the practical knowledge

bases we develop to do things like grow plants. Plantmen also develop academic theoretical bodies of knowledge that keeps

our plants healthy and knowledge that expands the variety of plants that can grow in different types of environments. Our last Thursday speaker, **Jeff Jones**, explained what the academic world is discovering about plants through genetic plant research and the resulting updates to theoretical plant knowledge.

In the future, this knowledge may be used to produce greater varieties of healthier and better looking plants. Since a lot of scientific terminology is not part of my vocabulary, I didn't understand everything he said. But, what I did understand was that the technical discoveries the academic folks are making will make new rules for us to follow in hybridizing. New azalea hybrids will not have to be developed using hit and miss procedures. By using the knowledge of people like Jeff Jones, hybridizers will develop new azaleas more easily. Discoveries, discoveries, discoveries!

From Friday night's speakers we gained more information about the changing world of azaleas. We learned about production methods for growing native azaleas from seed; unique



Photo John Brown

▲ Jeff Jones



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ Gene Stano and Bill Costello at the Haywood Community Garden entrance.

▼ Frances and Phil Louer.



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▼ Will Ferrel and Dr. Tom Ranney enjoying the blooms.



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee





Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ The plant sale was a tremendous success.

▼ Attendees were given a seedling from 'Dixie Gold' (*R. colemanii*).



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▼ A group hikes to see the native azalea collection at The North Carolina Arboretum.



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

hybridizing methods being developed at a suburban home; and the vast number of varieties of Glenn Dale azaleas growing in a society member's small, half-acre yard.

During the past 10 years, **J Jackson** and company have become experts in growing native azaleas from seed. They are refining their production



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ J Jackson

methods. During his speech, J spoke about the special growing methods they have developed. In some cases, the plants can be distributed to the trade in two years or less.

The native azaleas I bought at the plant sale were beautiful bushy healthy plants. I like the fact that so much effort is being put into growing more and more native azaleas. Hopefully nature will be able to take care of their water requirements, and we will still have beautiful azaleas in our gardens without watering.

**Joe Klimavicz** told us about his own methods of hybridizing. He lives in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. Like so many people



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ Joe Klimavicz

in this one-industry town, his day job involves spending long hours working on government-related technology. But his evenings are filled with a different technical pursuit—azalea hybridization.

During his talk, he explained that his lab is a garage and backyard. He selects promising plants and grows row after row of cuttings in his garage. Out of these small plants come promising candidates to continue growing outside.

A lot of prep work is done before





Photo Carol Flowers

▲ Convention attendees visited Doley Bell's garden.

Joe can plant outdoors. Much of the prep involves digging up and throwing away less promising azaleas in his yard. Because the yard is limited in size—about one-third of an acre—space is at a premium. I wish I were one of Joe's neighbors. After seeing the pictures of the plants in his yard, I would love to be the recipient of some of his cast offs.

The plant knowledge Joe gains is used in university laboratories. More and more discoveries about azaleas are being made because so many people are working together and sharing what they are learning.

The final speaker on Friday night was **Dan Krabill**. He also lives in a Washington, D.C., suburb and pursues growing azaleas as a hobby. His particular interest is collecting, growing, and photographing Glenn Dale azaleas.

Ben Morrison, the first director of the U.S. National Arboretum, and his staff did much of the hybridizing work that led to the creation of these varieties. Since I also live in the D.C. area, I have enjoyed many trips to the arboretum, enjoying the masses of color these azaleas create when in bloom.

I loved seeing the photographs Dan showed. Somehow all I had ever noticed before were the masses of color these



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ Dan Krabill



Photo John Brown

▲ Dr. Joe Coleman

plants can produce, not the beauty of each individual flower. Dan gave away CDs with pictures he has taken of Glenn Dale flowers.

I will be taking cuttings from the plants in Dan's yard. Many of the varieties are not sold in nurseries. My hope is to grow the plants in my own yard and start a small azalea





▲ Jeff Jones

garden at my church. Hopefully, the beautiful plants will not die, and future generations can continue to discover their beauty.

**Dr. Joe Coleman**, our keynote speaker at the Saturday night banquet, didn't do a lot of talking. His photos pretty much said it all. Like Joe, my husband has always been in favor of growing azaleas. Every new azalea planted in the yard has resulted in less and less grass to be mowed.

Joe and his wife, Donna, have gone to lots and lots of conventions. They have collected, grown and shared thousands of azaleas and rhododendrons. The photos were beautiful. Words did not have to be used.

Because of all the convention speeches, participants learned more about azaleas. I am sure each of the speakers discovered a lot by preparing for their talks and listening to other presenters. By researching the lives of plantsmen Chauncey Beadle, Henry Skinner, and Augie Kehr, our speakers learned the stories of these "greats" and passed them on to those attending the convention.

Dan Krabill made us aware of the many beautiful Glenn Dale azaleas developed in the past. Jeff Jones explained the genetic research underway in the plant world. People like Joe Klimavicz and J Jackson are able to use this knowledge in their hybridizing and plant production programs. Joe Coleman's pictures summed it all up—azaleas are truly beautiful plants with flowers that have a very regal quality.

The 2008 ASA convention speakers contributed much to the success of the meeting. New discoveries about this genus of plants continue to be made by all of us attending the banquet. Academic researchers, historians, plant collectors, hybridizers, and nurserymen forge ahead. We continue to want to have these plants in our gardens. We continue to discover more and more about them.

*Before retiring, Carol Flowers managed a computer help desk for the U.S. Census Bureau. Her interest in azaleas came from her many childhood visits to the Planting Fields Arboretum in Oyster Bay, New York. She has been a member of the Azalea Society of America for 25 years.*

## Letters to the Editor

### Where to find azalea cultivars?

I am writing to ask for help in finding specific cultivars of azaleas. In the 1940's and 50's Miss Hogg purchased popular azaleas such as 'Sweetheart Supreme', 'Lavender Beauty', 'Hinodegiri', 'Christmas Cheer', 'Coral Bells', and 'Hexe'. These azaleas are becoming impossible to find in the Texas/Louisiana nursery industry.

I need these azaleas to maintain the historic gardens of Bayou Bend. Do you know where I can find them? Please e-mail any information to me at [bbrechter@mfah.org](mailto:bbrechter@mfah.org).

**Bart Brechter**  
Houston, Texas

### Complimenting article on soils

Have just received your summer edition and read the comprehensive article on various soils. I commend your publishing it; I compliment the author, and express my appreciation to George Klump for his work in seeing to its publication.

Never have I read a more succinct, fact-filled, and authoritative treatment on the growing mixes appropriate for azaleas and for bonsai in general.

**Bob Callaham**  
Orinda, California

### Correction to article appearing in last issue

Thanks for the extra copies of *The Azalean* with the article in it. Unfortunately, I have to add a correction which, according to my original copy, seems to have been a slip in transcribing it to the magazine.

On page 34, the right hand or inner column the first real paragraph begins "There were some peat-perlite blends. . . ." About the fourth sentence into that paragraph, the sentence as printed begins "Moreover, ester-based agents..." This sentence is nonsense, if one reads it as it is in the magazine.

An ester is essentially an organic salt. The sentence should read "Moreover, ether-based agents provide early [but low residual] wetting, but the ester-based agents provide less initial wetting [but better residual effects]."

Ether is an organic solvent, albeit a dangerous one in terms of its inflammability in its pure form. But used in other chemical combinations it has other properties.

The sentence perhaps ought to be corrected in the next issue, since the sentence makes no sense as it stands! Would you be so kind as to make that correction in the next issue?

**George Klump**  
La Crescenta, California