S.D. Coleman—
An Azalea Pioneer

Tadeusz Dauksza—Orland Park, Illinois

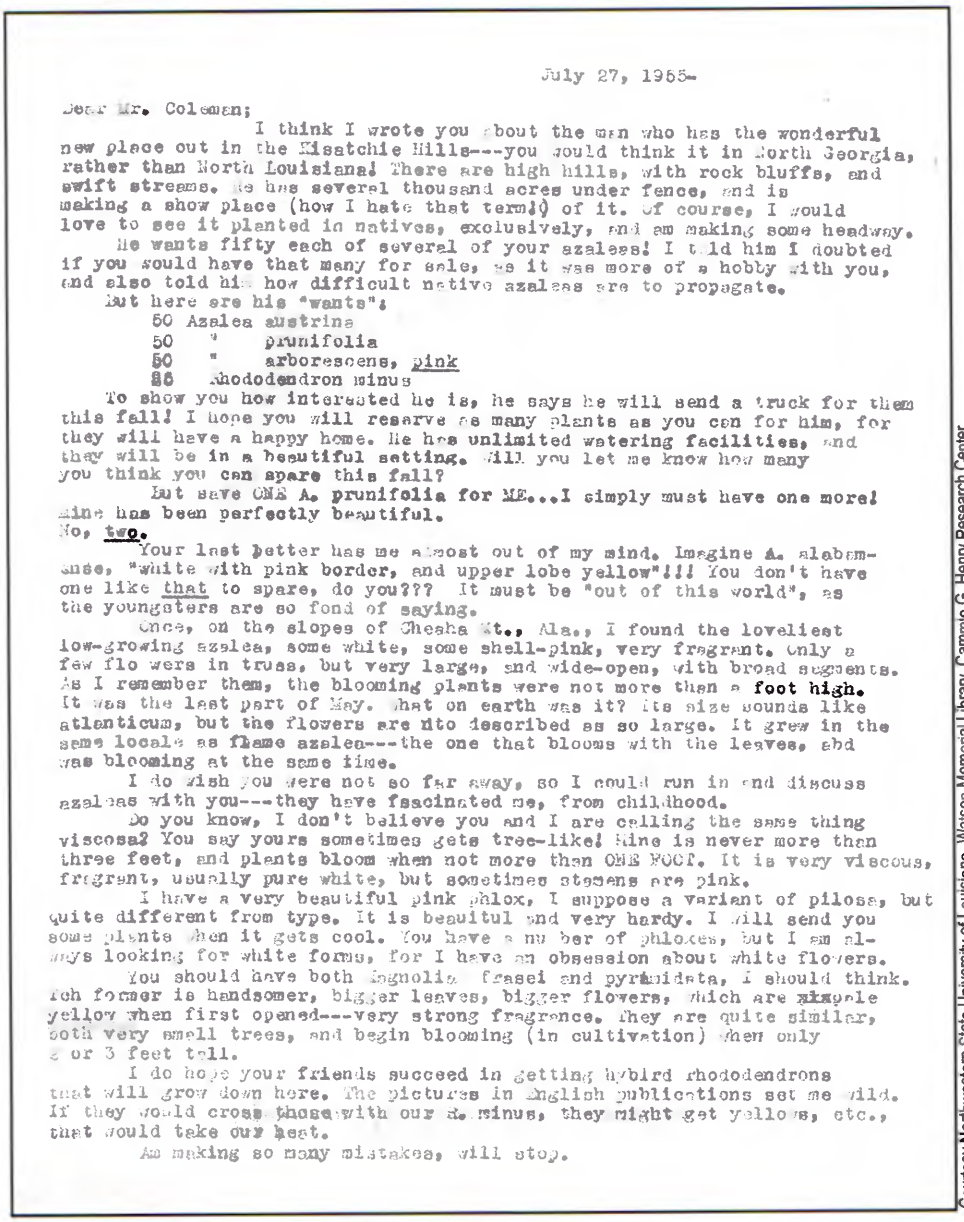
"One cannot live amidst the complexities of nature without developing a simple and practical philosophy namely, no one ever owns a plant. We are at best custodians, our job as gardeners is to please the plant by providing its simple requirement. Where ever this attitude prevails, the garden and the gardener grow in loveliness," said Walter G. Beasley. The same quote could have been said by S. D. Coleman as he believed in being a custodian of plants for future generations.

Many of us members in the Azalea Society of America look in awe at the beauty of our native azaleas. We buy them from garden centers, nurseries, and ASA annual conventions, yet we hardly ever stop and ponder where or how some of these wonderful plants came from or why certain ones have names. Thus, I will try to shed some light on S. D. Coleman, the man, not the *Rhododendron prunifolium* cultivar named after him.

Stephen Daniel Coleman, also known as Dan or S.D, was born July 17, 1888 in Ft. Gaines, Georgia, to Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Durden Coleman. He was the seventh child in a family of nine children. The azalea gods welcomed him to beautify their world on January 21, 1976 at the age of 87.

Plant hunters are remarkable men, and S. D. was a man with many talents. One hundred and twenty-one years have passed since he was born, and 33 years since he passed away. However, he left a legacy to gardeners that can never be forgotten.

It is unfortunate that S. D. did not write a book describing his journeys, for it would rival any fictional adventure in existence. We must therefore rely upon the articles he wrote for the American Rhododendron Society (ARS); his correspondence with friends like Caroline Dorman, Sigmond L. Solymosy, Dr. Henry Skinner, David Leach, and Earl Sommerville; and his dealings with arboreta that procured his azalea and camellia plants.



July 27, 1965-

Dear Mr. Coleman;

I think I wrote you about the man who has the wonderful new place out in the Kisatchie Hills---you would think it in North Georgia, rather than North Louisiana! There are high hills, with rock bluffs, and swift streams. He has several thousand acres under fence, and is making a show place (how I hate that term!) of it. Of course, I would love to see it planted in natives, exclusively, and am making some headway.

He wants fifty each of several of your azaleas! I told him I doubted if you would have that many for sale, as it was more of a hobby with you, and also told him how difficult native azaleas are to propagate.

But here are his "wants":

50 Azalea austrina
50 " prunifolia
50 " arborescens, pink
85 Rhododendron minus

To show you how interested he is, he says he will send a truck for them this fall! I hope you will reserve as many plants as you can for him, for they will have a happy home. He has unlimited watering facilities, and they will be in a beautiful setting. Will you let me know how many you think you can spare this fall?

But save ONE A. prunifolia for ME...I simply must have one more! Mine has been perfectly beautiful.

No, two.

Your last letter has me almost out of my mind. Imagine A. alabamense, "white with pink border, and upper lobe yellow"!!! You don't have one like that to spare, do you??? It must be "out of this world", as the youngsters are so fond of saying.

Once, on the slopes of Cheaha Mt., Ala., I found the loveliest low-growing azalea, some white, some shell-pink, very fragrant. Only a few flowers in truss, but very large, and wide-open, with broad segments. As I remember them, the blooming plants were not more than a foot high. It was the last part of May. What on earth was it? Its size sounds like atlanticum, but the flowers are nto described as so large. It grew in the same locale as flame azalea---the one that blooms with the leaves, and was blooming at the same time.

I do wish you were not so far away, so I could run in and discuss azaleas with you---they have fascinated me, from childhood.

Do you know, I don't believe you and I are calling the same thing viscosa? You say yours sometimes gets tree-like! Mine is never more than three feet, and plants bloom when not more than ONE FOOT. It is very viscous, fragrant, usually pure white, but sometimes stamens are pink.

I have a very beautiful pink phlox, I suppose a variant of pilosa, but quite different from type. It is beautiful and very hardy. I will send you some plants when it gets cool. You have a number of phloxes, but I am always looking for white forms, for I have an obsession about white flowers.

You should have both Magnolia fraseri and pyramidata, I should think. Tch former is handsomer, bigger leaves, bigger flowers, which are simple yellow when first opened---very strong fragrance. They are quite similar, both very small trees, and begin blooming (in cultivation) when only 2 or 3 feet tall.

I do hope your friends succeed in getting hybird rhododendrons that will grow down here. The pictures in English publications set me wild. If they would cross those with our R. minus, they might get yellows, etc., that would take our heat.

Am making so many mistakes, will stop.

Courtesy Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Watson Memorial Library, Cammie G. Henry Research Center

▲ Letter from Miss Caroline Dorman of Saline, Louisiana, to S.D. Coleman

In his early years, S. D. attended Southern College of Pharmacy in Atlanta, Georgia, receiving a degree in pharmacy in 1911. Working as a pharmacist, he purchased a drugstore in Ft. Gaines. and renamed it "Dan's on The Corner."

In 1915, he fell in love and married Winnie McKissack, also of Ft. Gaines. The couple had two children, S. D. Coleman Jr. and Doris M. Coleman.

After S. D. was diagnosed with heart ailments, doctors recommended that he sell the drugstore and take up a hobby, such as gardening. Listening to the doctor's advice, S. D. sold the pharmacy in 1929, and began gardening as a hobby. That

Photo Earl Sommerville

▲ 'Coleman's Early Yellow'

Photo courtesy of Scott Coleman

▲ S.D. Coleman walking his azalea trail.

"hobby" soon grew into a 42-acre garden with an azalea trail and a bustling nursery business. Thus was the beginning of S. D. Coleman Nurseries and Camelliamere Farms.

The nursery was started in his hometown on a few acres of land. Mainly camellias were grown and sold. Afro-American "hands" would dig, burlap bag, and load trucks with the plants. They would then drive to neighboring towns in Georgia and Alabama where the plants were sold.

One of these employees, C.A. Boldin, remained with the family for many years, and became very knowledgeable about the plants that grew at the nursery. S. D. or his son would accompany the crews when someone wanted their place landscaped ("planted") .

Camellias in the nursery were rooted in beds with sides made of tin and bricks on a hillside with paths between each bed. Local high school girls earned money at the Coleman place by forming clay balls for cuttings, which were planted in the beds. An elaborate misting and sprinkling system, constructed of galvanized pipes, was built over and around the beds. Coleman's granddaughter, Caroline, recalls: "It was wonderful for us children to run up and down those paths and get soaking wet during those hot days of summer."

Shading for nursery stock was provided by galvanized pipe frames. Barbed wire was stretched across the top to form a roof which was covered with Spanish moss.

When World War II began, S. D. Jr. enlisted in the Air Force and became a pilot. While he was stationed in England and Scotland, he observed a local breed of cattle called Aberdeen Angus No. 6. He began sending money home to his father to buy some of the cows for him to raise when he returned from the war.

Returning from World War II, S. D. Jr. married Eleanor King and proceeded to help his father raise registered Angus cows, further enhancing the Coleman farm and nursery operation. At times, the family employed more than 20 people in the operation of the business.

Help was also provided by a young man named Frank Gilreath who obtained his Bachelor of Science degree in agronomy after serving in World War II. Gilreath eventually married Coleman's daughter, Doris.

When the American Camellia Society (ACS) was formed in 1945 in Macon, Georgia, S. D. and his wife Winnie were invited to the first meeting and became charter members.

In 1948, S. D. Jr. and his wife, Eleanor, moved to the Coleman farm and raised their three children there.

In 1950, Frank and Doris, along with their two children, moved to Frank's hometown, Traveler's Rest, South Carolina. After they moved, Winnie and S. D. traveled to South Carolina often to see their grandchildren, thus offering the opportunity for S. D. and Frank to make excursions to the mountains searching for rare plants. These trips were often made with C.D. Beadle from the Biltmore Estate and Dr. W.N. Fortescue.

Winnie and Eleanor were both involved with the nursery operation, as they also loved flowers. Winnie was well known for her gifts of flowering blossoms and entertaining at home. She often invited out-of-town visitors to spend the night at their residence. Eleanor was well known for making beautiful flower arrangements which she donated to local churches and to many social events.

Many people were entertained at the nursery and the azalea trail throughout the years, and lasting friendships were made. Caroline Dorman, Henry Skinner, David Leach, Earl Sommerville, Dr. W.N. Fortescue, Ida Cason, Virginia

Photo Earl Sommerville

▲ 'July Jester'

Photo courtesy of Scott Coleman

▲ From top, S.D.Coleman and wife Winnie, Frank Gilreath and wife Doris, and Jim and Winnie Gilreath.

Callaway, C.D. Beadle, and Fred Galle were frequent visitors.

Granddaughter Caroline recalled that as a child she and her cousin Jim would hide under the bed when Miss Dorman visited because they were scared of her. "She would come to the front door and yell: It's the wild woman from Louisiana!" remembers Caroline.

In his 1950-1951 nursery catalog, S. D. wrote: "We are always glad for you to visit the nursery where we have Camellias in bloom from October till April. Azaleas start in March. The Native Azalea Trail is a sight to see, lasting well into the summer a very large collection."

In that same catalog, with only a three digit telephone number of 129, S. D. listed these four native azaleas: *Austrina*, *Alabamense*, *Canescens* and *Prunifolia* along with some sizes and prices of Kurume and Indica azaleas that could be procured from his nursery and Camelliamere Farm. Along with plants, S. D. also offered seeds from his nursery.

Though not primarily a hybridizer, Coleman was a specialist in the collection of native azaleas, particularly the southern natives. Those that he assembled are a remarkable collection of species, forms, and natural hybrids that are still available for the public to study. Several superior clones were propagated, including a clear yellow form of *R. austrinum* and a fragrant light yellow akin to *R. alabamense* called 'Coleman's Early Yellow'. 'Virginia Calloway' is another white-with-pink-border *R. alabamense* variant. In correspondence dated February 19, 1951, and July 22, 1955, to Miss Caroline Dorman of Saline, Louisiana, Coleman writes about some of the natives and their attributes.

Resources of the Coleman nurseries have assisted in many breeding projects. In 1951, Dr. Henry Skinner acquired some of the finest species from S. D. Coleman Nursery to produce numerous new F3 and F4 generations in which some were re-crossed with the Exbury and other hybrids with the first true clones of *R. occidentale*. Interestingly, 'Camp's Red' was a clone of *R. cumberlandense* (erroneously called *bakeri*) named by Skinner in honor of his friend Dr. Wendell H. Camp, who was among the first to recognize the distinctiveness of the red azalea of the Cumberland Plateau.

David Leach, well known in the rhododendron world, obtained numerous *R. prunifolium* from Coleman to utilize in creating the July series of deciduous hybrids, including 'July Jester', 'July Jewel', and 'July Jubilation'. Leach also named an azalea after his friend, 'S. D. Coleman'.

Earl Sommerville of Marietta, Georgia, an avid collector of native azaleas and hybridizer who has opened his beautiful garden during several ASA and ARS conventions, had numerous opportunities to visit, stroll, and obtain native azaleas from Coleman. Sommerville recalls that Coleman always dressed more like a preacher than a nurseryman. He also recalls that Coleman's propagation of azaleas and other shrubs was done by layering.

S. D. would take a hard-to-root azalea which was six feet tall and lay it down, covering the lower half with woodsy sawdust. (S. D. had a sawmill setup in his pineywoods.) If and when a part would take root, he would cut it free and plant it in 100-percent sawdust. The sawdust was very coarse. This method worked well in producing numerous

clones from distinct and colorful native azaleas that S. D. had collected.

Trips to the Mountains

Whenever an opportunity presented itself, Coleman, S. D. Jr., and son-in-law Frank would go on treks and azalea trails throughout the southern mountains. During those trips, the trio would collect azaleas and other shrubs in danger of being destroyed. Using these plants, they created their own "Native Azalea Trail" at the Coleman Nursery. The trail still exists today on the Coleman property.

Coleman made several mountain trips to study bloom times of native azaleas as well as color variations. He compared the blooming sequence to that of native azaleas on his own trail.

In an April 15, 1959, article for the *Quarterly Bulletin of the American Rhododendron Society*, Coleman noted that the Flame Azalea (*R. calendulaceum*) changed colors from flame to orange yellow while being moved from the mountains to his place in southwest Georgia. It also bloomed much earlier.

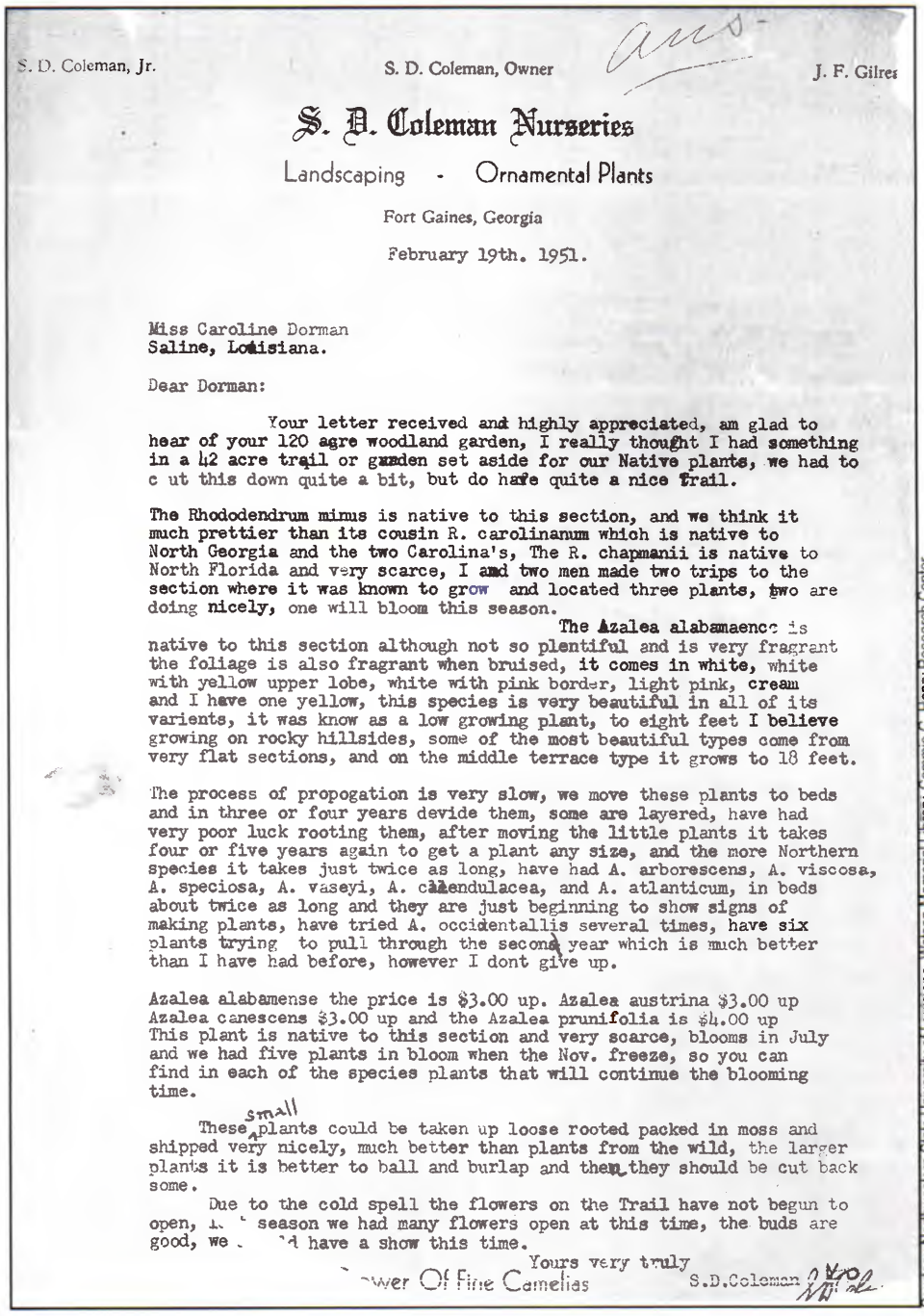
In the same article, Coleman mentions it was his 30th year in the nursery business, and stated that "a good nurseryman should be prepared to answer many questions pertaining to the business and it takes quite a bit of study as well as observations for the advancement of science to proceed." He further stated that his study and work was with living plants in the wild and with those brought to the trail to grow on as nature would have them.

In one of the findings of his trip to the mountains of South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee, Coleman wrote:

"In making many trips to these mountains, at different seasons, to study time of bloom, and variations, from the latter part of May to 17 of July, which gives quite a blooming season for the one species *Azalea calendulacea*, I find the later type after comparing both flower and foliage, to find very little difference, in other words they compare favorably. Some think the mixing has been pretty heavy. Of course in the beginning *Azalea calendulacea* could have come from hybrid origin, and am sure that *Azalea bakeri* comes in contact with this plant, but they have done pretty well holding their own as both species are beautiful, and at Soco Gap, west of Maggie, N.C., is one of the beauty spots of the mountains. I believe on Peach Tree Mountain is a continuation of this same series, of the late *A. calendulacea*. I went real late to see the foliage, of both early and late types.

"Something else of interest was finding *Azalea montana* [*A. viscosa* var. *montana*, Ed.] growing and blooming, with the type plant *Azalea viscosa*, also with *Azalea arborescens*. This possibly is where we get so many variations of *A. viscosa*. It is also strange that we do not find the Viscose series with the yellow or orange blotch on upper lobe. I did find larger flower than usual of *Azalea viscosa*.

"I did find again the little plant of the *R. carolinianum* series with the little purple flowers the color of violet, late bloomer, possibly a month later than the



S. D. Coleman, Jr. S. D. Coleman, Owner J. F. Gilres

S. D. Coleman Nurseries

Landscaping - Ornamental Plants

Fort Gaines, Georgia

February 19th. 1951.

Miss Caroline Dorman
Saline, Louisiana.

Dear Dorman:

Your letter received and highly appreciated, am glad to hear of your 120 agre woodland garden, I really thought I had something in a 42 acre trail or garden set aside for our Native plants, we had to c ut this down quite a bit, but do have quite a nice trail.

The Rhododendrum minus is native to this section, and we think it much prettier than its cousin R. carolinanum which is native to North Georgia and the two Carolina's, The R. chapmanii is native to North Florida and very scarce, I and two men made two trips to the section where it was known to grow and located three plants, two are doing nicely, one will bloom this season.

The Azalea alabamaenco is native to this section although not so plentiful and is very fragrant the foliage is also fragrant when bruised, it comes in white, white with yellow upper lobe, white with pink border, light pink, cream and I have one yellow, this species is very beautiful in all of its varients, it was know as a low growing plant, to eight feet I believe growing on rocky hillsides, some of the most beautiful types come from very flat sections, and on the middle terrace type it grows to 18 feet.

The process of propogation is very slow, we move these plants to beds and in three or four years devide them, some are layered, have had very poor luck rooting them, after moving the little plants it takes four or five years again to get a plant any size, and the more Northern species it takes just twice as long, have had A. arborescens, A. viscosa, A. speciosa, A. vaseyi, A. calendulacea, and A. atlanticum, in beds about twice as long and they are just beginning to show signs of making plants, have tried A. occidentallis several times, have six plants trying to pull through the second year which is much better than I have had before, however I dont give up.

Azalea alabamense the price is $3.00 up. Azalea austrina $3.00 up
Azalea canescens $3.00 up and the Azalea prunifolia is $4.00 up
This plant is native to this section and very scarce, blooms in July and we had five plants in bloom when the Nov. freeze, so you can find in each of the species plants that will continue the blooming time.

These small plants could be taken up loose rooted packed in moss and shipped very nicely, much better than plants from the wild, the larger plants it is better to ball and burlap and then they should be cut back some.

Due to the cold spell the flowers on the Trail have not begun to open, [illegible] season we had many flowers open at this time, the buds are good, we [illegible] have a show this time.

Yours very truly

[illegible]wer Of Fine Camelias S.D.Coleman

▲ Letter from S.D. Coleman to Miss Caroline Dorman dated February 19, 1951.

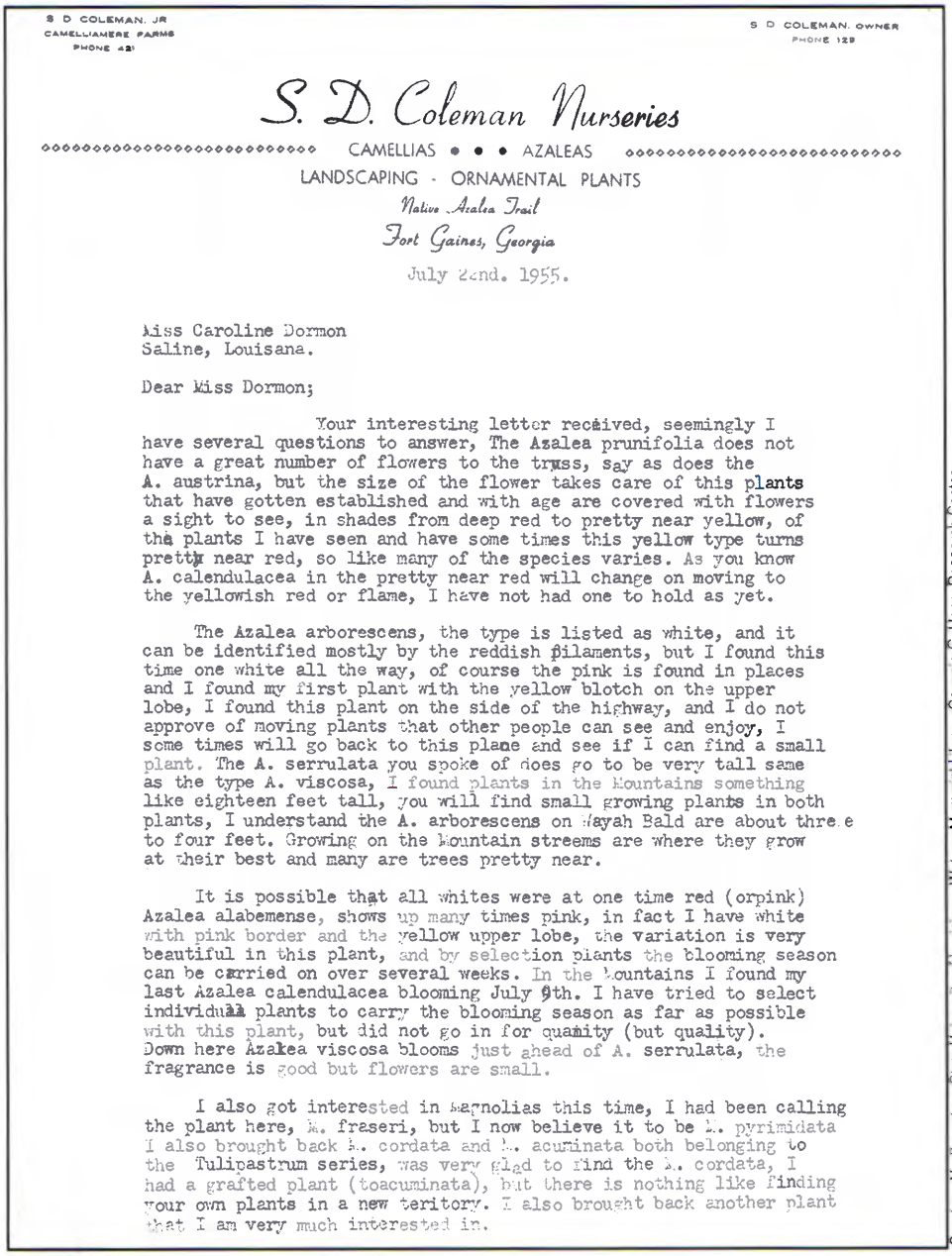
last of this series, does not have much tube, and seemingly a heavy bloomer, growing on very steep mountain side. My first small seedlings of these plants seem to bunch out and grow very slow, only had three to live. *Rhododendron carolinianum* collected at the same time, have grown off nicely.

"*Rhododendron carolinianum* is more of a mountain plant, *R. minus* is more at home along Chattahoochee River, of Georgia and Alabama. *R. chapmanii*, is the North Florida plant. Bringing them together on Coleman's Native Azalea Trail, I have some plants that bloom at the same time. Selected plants in different species will bloom at different times. The tube on *R. chapmanii* is the longer, *R. minus* next, and *R. carolinianum* the shortest, and the little plant just found has pretty near no tube.

"In planting three to five plants of each species of this group in a setting I have, as well as a number of other lovers of these plants, come to the conclusion that the *R. minus* is the show plant of the three, to date. There is a plant further north called *R. minus* which I think is one of the variations of *R. carolinianum* species. There are two types of the white *R. carolinianum* in the mountains. One is pretty near deciduous at this place.

"On the mountain southwest of Hendersonville, near the head of Green River, you find *Azalea calendulacea* with pink tubes. I am sure pink flowers could be found there, natural hybridization as I see it has taken place in the *Azalea speciosa* species more than any I have seen. Yet you find more types and colors in flowers. And they are beautiful."

Some of Coleman's trips were arranged to meet-up with other azalea explorer groups led by Dr. W. N. Fortescue of Hendersonville, North Carolina. In his writings, Coleman says the group sees more in one week than can be seen otherwise and that Fortescue knows all of the azalea beauty spots.



S. D. COLEMAN, JR
CAMELLIAMERE FARMS
PHONE 42

S. D. COLEMAN, OWNER
PHONE 129

S. D. Coleman Nurseries

CAMELLIAS • • • AZALEAS

LANDSCAPING - ORNAMENTAL PLANTS

Native Azalea Trail
Fort Gaines, Georgia

July 22nd. 1955.

Miss Caroline Dormon
Saline, Louisana.

Dear Miss Dormon;

Your interesting letter received, seemingly I have several questions to answer, The Azalea prunifolia does not have a great number of flowers to the truss, say as does the A. austrina, but the size of the flower takes care of this plants that have gotten established and with age are covered with flowers a sight to see, in shades from deep red to pretty near yellow, of the plants I have seen and have some times this yellow type turns pretty near red, so like many of the species varies. As you know A. calendulacea in the pretty near red will change on moving to the yellowish red or flame, I have not had one to hold as yet.

The Azalea arborescens, the type is listed as white, and it can be identified mostly by the reddish filaments, but I found this time one white all the way, of course the pink is found in places and I found my first plant with the yellow blotch on the upper lobe, I found this plant on the side of the highway, and I do not approve of moving plants that other people can see and enjoy, I some times will go back to this plane and see if I can find a small plant. The A. serrulata you spoke of does go to be very tall same as the type A. viscosa, I found plants in the Mountains something like eighteen feet tall, you will find small growing plants in both plants, I understand the A. arborescens on Mayah Bald are about three to four feet. Growing on the Mountain streems are where they grow at their best and many are trees pretty near.

It is possible that all whites were at one time red (orpink) Azalea alabemense, shows up many times pink, in fact I have white with pink border and the yellow upper lobe, the variation is very beautiful in this plant, and by selection plants the blooming season can be carried on over several weeks. In the Mountains I found my last Azalea calendulacea blooming July 9th. I have tried to select individual plants to carry the blooming season as far as possible with this plant, but did not go in for quanity (but quality). Down here Azalea viscosa blooms just ahead of A. serrulata, the fragrance is good but flowers are small.

I also got interested in Magnolias this time, I had been calling the plant here, M. fraseri, but I now believe it to be M. pyrimidata I also brought back M. cordata and M. acuminata both belonging to the Tulipastrum series, was very glad to find the M. cordata, I had a grafted plant (toacuminata), but there is nothing like finding your own plants in a new teritory. I also brought back another plant that I am very much interested in.

▲ Letter written by S.D. Coleman to Miss Caroline Dorman (continued at right).

More information about their travels may be found on the Web at http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/v12n1/v12n1-leach.htm.

The writer assumes that this "torch" of trips to the mountains and balds was passed on to the present group composed of **Don Hyatt, Dr. Sandra McDonald, George McLellan, Joe Schild**, and others who do it every year.

In other contributions of research, Coleman wrote the two following articles reprinted from the American Rhododendron Society *Quarterly Bulletin*, October 15, 1963 and October 15,1965. Permission to reprint granted by Glenn Jamison.

Three Southern **Azalea Species: R. Prunifolium, Austrinum, and Speciosum**

By S. D. Coleman, Fort Gaines, Ga.

My observation is that the three azaleas, *R. prunifolium*, *austrinum* and *speciosum*, attract more attention on the Trail than all other native species; however the combined effect of all the azaleas blooming at this particular time presents a spectacular show.

*Page two Miss Dormon

One of my great pleasures is looking and finding some of the novelty or puzzles of nature, I guess this will go on, even though I do not walk but very little, and I stay in more than I go out, but let me get out and my interest goes up.

I hope to go out this P. M. and see if I cant get Dan, Jr. to build me a bridge over the main stream at the Trail so I can cross I have some very important plants to plant over on the other side, and cant get it done until I can get over there.

Possibly you saw the article in The National Horticultural Magazine, April, an article by me on the Trail. The article was cut down due to space, but gives an idea.

Of course the Azalea Trail the foundation is the American species of Azaleas, we are trying some of the hybrid Rhododen drons and believe in time there are many that we can grow down south, I have friends that are breeding for just that, I hope that I can continue to be one of the clearing places, as I get a big kick out of growing something that cant be done, friends sent me what is known as Azaleadendron, a natural cross of Azalea and Rhododendron the plant is now growing, and I hope---------. I am also trying some lady slippers for the several times, each time I try a new place, I also found a lavender pink Phlox I do hope it will come back, about the prettiest wild flow I saw in the Mountains, I have on the Trail quite a collection but do not know any names.

My friend Mr. Lemmon of Marrietta, Ga. once wrote me that Dr. Wherry was comming down and wanted me to locate several Phlox to show him on arival, so I began looking it up and found I had some on the Trail, I sant several pressed specimen s, and after getting to Marrietta, and getting these specimens he turned back seemingly this was what he wanted, and no use to come after them am sure Dr. Wherry could have told me many names of others and helped me with other plants, and I like this much better than traceing down (give me a short cut.) Possibly all of this is more than you care for, and I could go on and on about plants.

Faithfully

S. D. Coleman

S D Coleman

Winnie joins me in all good wishes.

S.D.C.

Courtesy Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Watson Memorial Library, Caminie G. Henry Research Center

R. austrinum, the "Southern Azalea," varies in its blooming period from the latter part of March through the month of April. *R. speciosum,* "Attractive, good looking, beautiful," blooms after *R. austrinum* and along with *R. alabamense.* Individual plants often bloom through the entire season. *R. prunifolium*, "Plum Leaf Azalea," is the last of the series to bloom with individual plants blooming from mid June to November.

Ideas of conservation are changing rapidly. Once it was thought good conservation practice to leave our native plants undisturbed but if it had not been for a few successfully transplanted specimens many of our species would now be a thing of the past. In my section the huge Walter George dam, with its huge lake, will make a large dent in many of our species. Below us is the Jim Woodruff dam and lake and like others throughout the south it has engulfed countless woodlands and destroyed forever the native plant material of that area. The main habitat of *R. prunifolium* and *R. minus* is on the banks and tributaries of the Chattahoochee River, fortunately on what is thought of as the middle terrace.

Many years ago I realized that *R. prunifolium* was becoming scarce as the remaining small groups were widely scattered and there were few small plants. Woods burning seemed to be a bad habit and something had to be done to preserve this species, so I started collecting. In fact this was the beginning of Coleman's Native Azalea Trail. Mr. and Mrs. Cason Callaway also put in a large collection of *R. prunifolium* at their home at Blue Springs, Hamilton, Georgia. From these plants they grew many seedlings which are now used in the plantings at the Ida Cason Callaway Gardens at Pine Mountain, Georgia.

This southern section being the natural habitat of *R. prunifolium*, my thought was to get as many variations as possible, from the earliest to the latest blooming forms and from the yellow-flowered plants to those with the deep red blooms. As there were no other azaleas growing or blooming in the vicinity where these were collected there is no evidence of crossbreeding in them. I do not have a massed blooming effect in my collection but rather a continuing bloom as I prefer some color on the Trail the year around. From these original plants I have made a large distribution. *R. prunifolium* was so named from the likeness to plum leaves from plants found near Cuthbert, Georgia. This is possibly the eastern border of their habitat, extending into Alabama about the same distance.

A few years ago a friend called one morning wanting to show me something new in azaleas (wild honey suckle he called them) which were growing above Georgetown, Georgia about 25 miles from here. The plant was *R. prunifolium* growing near a spring. He insisted that I dig the plant but then I suggested that he clear out around it and let it grow as such specimens were getting scarce. Now the back waters of the dam will flood this beautiful specimen as well as many others in this area.

Plants are often lost in transplanting from the wild as the proper techniques of this delicate operation are not known. To successfully transplant from the wild, I have found that it is necessary to bring in some of the native soil along with the plant and to then cut the plant back to within inches of the ground and keep it well watered and mulched for a year. *R. prunifolium* will grow to about eighteen feet tall. It is a beautiful sight

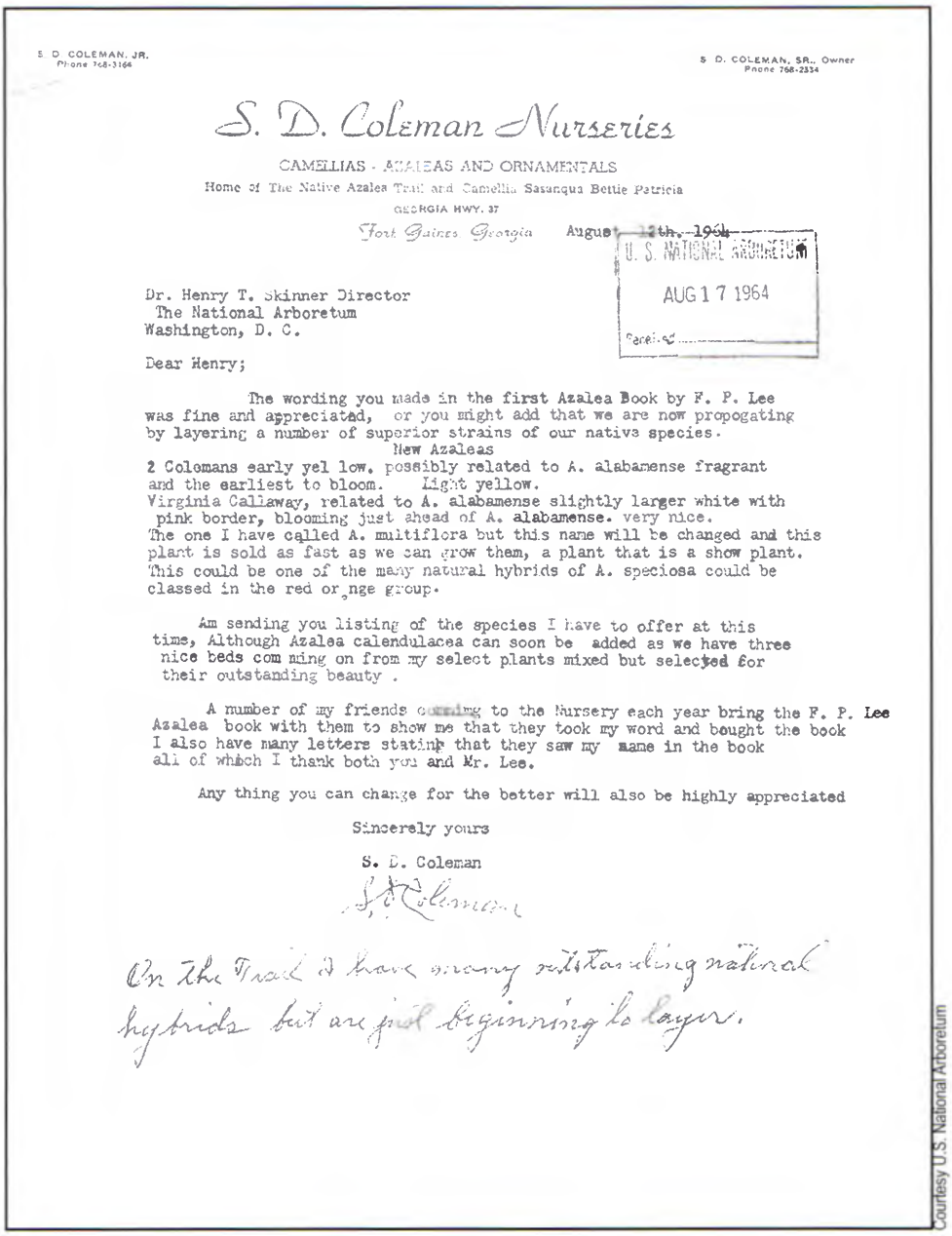
to see one of these plants in full bloom in high open woods. They grow on what I would call hilly country, on middle terrace, above the Chattahoochee valley. The three species that live in the valley are *R. alabamense*, *R. canescens* and *R. aemulans* [*R. viscosum* var. *aemulans*, Ed.]

R. prunifolium will come true from seed, there being no other species blooming near the time of the bloom of this plant; however *R. serrulatum* also blooms late further south, but I have not found them growing in the same area; the slight variation comes from inbreeding. Temperatures down to 12 degrees do not hurt these azaleas whereas many of the Far East azaleas were killed or damaged in the November freeze. Many of my first plantings on the Trail were made too close together, had more space been allowed there would now be better plants and more flowers. *R. prunifolium* begins blooming around the 15th of June and individual plants continue to November. There is no fragrance. The leaves and twigs are almost glabrous and there are no hairs on the tube. There are few flowers to the truss, but the size of the individual flowers makes up for the lack of quantity of bloom. Dr. John Wister tells me that he flowers this azalea in Pennsylvania.

R. austrinum, "Southern Azalea"

This Southern Azalea just touches the southern border of *R. prunifolium* and is the second earliest azalea to bloom. It has large pubescent buds and soft pubescent underside of the foliage, hairy twigs and stiff upright growth, much like *R. canescens* though the type of foliage is not so changeable as *R. canescens*. The yellow to orange flowers are many to the truss, sometimes making balls. Mostly they have plum colored tubes with yellow or orange lobes; once in a great while one can be found with all yellow or orange flowers, though these plants are rare. According to weather conditions these plants are in bloom from the latter part of March, first of April and last throughout the entire month.

The top border of their habitat is about Fort Gaines, Ga., due east by Albany, Ga., and extending south west



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S. D. Coleman Nurseries

CAMELLIAS - AZALEAS AND ORNAMENTALS

Home of The Native Azalea Trail and Camellia Sasanqua Bettie Patricia

GEORGIA HWY. 37

Fort Gaines Georgia August 12th, 1964

U. S. NATIONAL ARBORETUM
AUG 17 1964
Received

Dr. Henry T. Skinner Director
The National Arboretum
Washington, D. C.

Dear Henry;

The wording you made in the first Azalea Book by F. P. Lee was fine and appreciated, or you might add that we are now propogating by layering a number of superior strains of our native species.

New Azaleas

2 Colemans early yel low, possibly related to A. alabamense fragrant and the earliest to bloom. Light yellow.

Virginia Callaway, related to A. alabamense slightly larger white with pink border, blooming just ahead of A. alabamense. very nice.

The one I have called A. multiflora but this name will be changed and this plant is sold as fast as we can grow them, a plant that is a show plant. This could be one of the many natural hybrids of A. speciosa could be classed in the red or nge group.

Am sending you listing of the species I have to offer at this time, Although Azalea calendulacea can soon be added as we have three nice beds com ming on from my select plants mixed but selected for their outstanding beauty .

A number of my friends coming to the Nursery each year bring the F. P. Lee Azalea book with them to show me that they took my word and bought the book I also have many letters stating that they saw my name in the book all of which I thank both you and Mr. Lee.

Any thing you can change for the better will also be highly appreciated

Sincerely yours

S. D. Coleman

S. D. Coleman

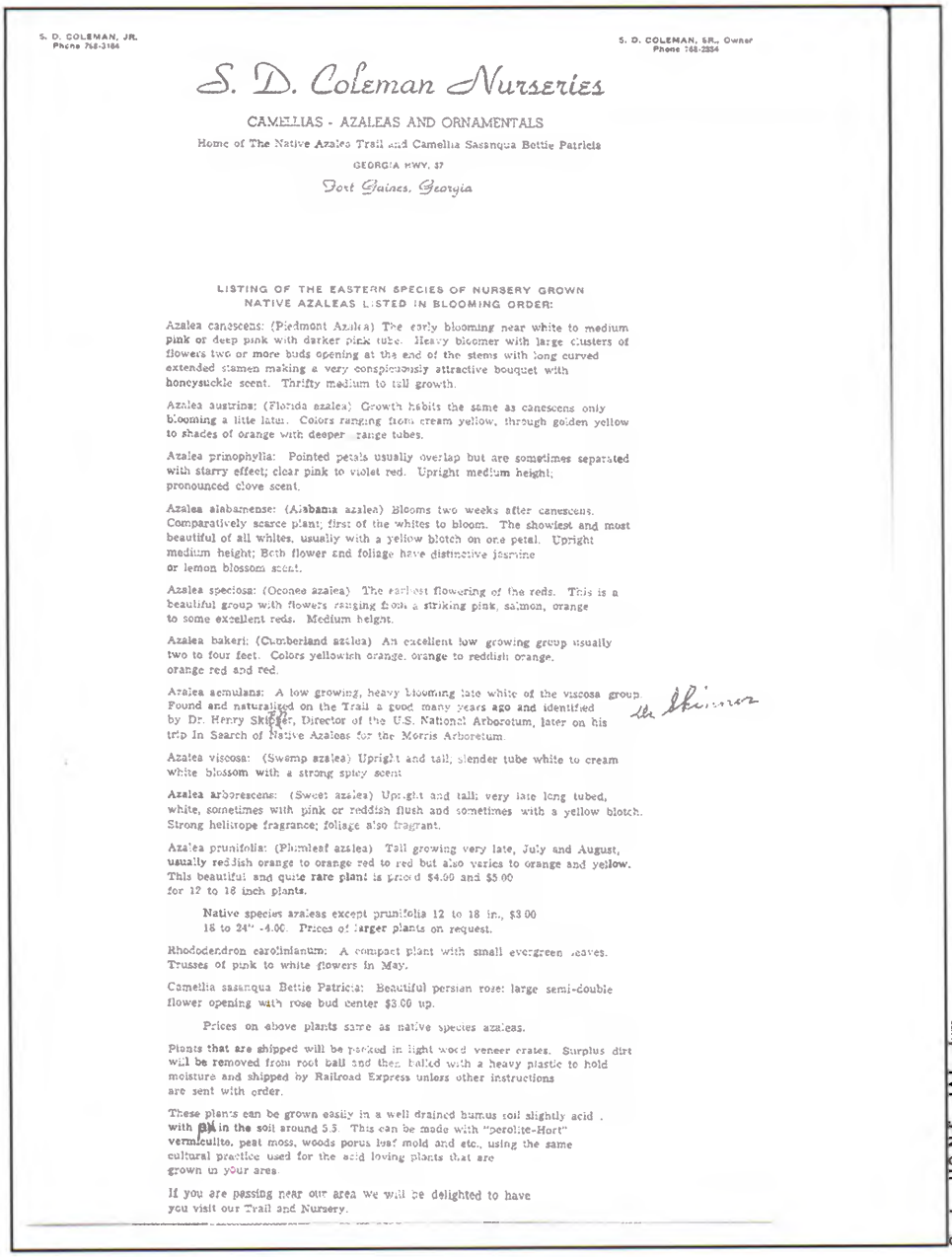
On the Trail I have many outstanding natural hybrids but are just beginning to layer.

Courtesy U.S. National Arboretum

▲ Letter written by S.D. Coleman to Dr. Henry T. Skinner (continued at right).

to Mobile, Alabama, or further. There were only two plants on the Trail when we first cleared it. Now there are many hundreds. Near Bluffton and on to Leary, Georgia are found the largest beds of these azaleas, growing in flat country on slow running streams. This is also where *R. alabamense* grows, blooming with and after *R. austrinum* looks very much like *R. canescens* in its dormant stage. The three species, *R. austrinum*, *R. canescens* and *R. alabamense* are mixing some as the three bloom together in many places.

R. austrinum is one of the sights on the Trail as many have not seen the yellow form. Some have seen the yellow *R. calendulaceum* in the mountains but *R. austrinum* has a color of its own and with many flowers to a truss. It is a much faster growing plant and those on the Trail are 15 feet high. I have possibly the first crossed hybrids of *R. austrinum* x *R. canescens* and *R. austrinum* x *R. alabamense*. I find that some of the natural hybrids do not produce seed, showing that they are not self pollinators. I have some very interesting plants of hybrid origin, collected throughout the south; some are actually smaller than the supposed parents, whereas they should have taken on hybrid vigor. *R. alabamense* has small, cone-shaped, glabrous buds, ciliate bud scales, while *R. austrinum* has rounded, large pubescent



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CAMELLIAS - AZALEAS AND ORNAMENTALS

Home of The Native Azalea Trail and Camellia Sasanqua Bettie Patricia

GEORGIA HWY. 37

Fort Gaines, Georgia

LISTING OF THE EASTERN SPECIES OF NURSERY GROWN NATIVE AZALEAS LISTED IN BLOOMING ORDER:

Azalea canescens: (Piedmont Azalea) The early blooming near white to medium pink or deep pink with darker pink tube. Heavy bloomer with large clusters of flowers two or more buds opening at the end of the stems with long curved extended stamen making a very conspicuously attractive bouquet with honeysuckle scent. Thrifty medium to tall growth.

Azalea austrina: (Florida azalea) Growth habits the same as canescens only blooming a little later. Colors ranging from cream yellow, through golden yellow to shades of orange with deeper orange tubes.

Azalea prinophyllia: Pointed petals usually overlap but are sometimes separated with starry effect; clear pink to violet red. Upright medium height; pronounced clove scent.

Azalea alabamense: (Alabama azalea) Blooms two weeks after canescens. Comparatively scarce plant; first of the whites to bloom. The showiest and most beautiful of all whites, usually with a yellow blotch on one petal. Upright medium height; Both flower and foliage have distinctive jasmine or lemon blossom scent.

Azalea speciosa: (Oconee azalea) The earliest flowering of the reds. This is a beautiful group with flowers ranging from a striking pink, salmon, orange to some excellent reds. Medium height.

Azalea bakeri: (Cumberland azalea) An excellent low growing group usually two to four feet. Colors yellowish orange, orange to reddish orange, orange red and red.

Azalea aemulans: A low growing, heavy blooming late white of the viscosa group. Found and naturalized on the Trail a good many years ago and identified by Dr. Henry Skinner, Director of the U.S. National Arboretum, later on his trip In Search of Native Azaleas for the Morris Arboretum. H. Skinner

Azalea viscosa: (Swamp azalea) Upright and tall, slender tube white to cream white blossom with a strong spicy scent.

Azalea arborescens: (Sweet azalea) Upright and tall; very late long tubed, white, sometimes with pink or reddish flush and sometimes with a yellow blotch. Strong heliotrope fragrance; foliage also fragrant.

Azalea prunifolia: (Plumleaf azalea) Tall growing very late, July and August, usually reddish orange to orange red to red but also varies to orange and yellow. This beautiful and quite rare plant is priced $4.00 and $5.00 for 12 to 18 inch plants.

Native species azaleas except prunifolia 12 to 18 in., $3.00
18 to 24" -4.00. Prices of larger plants on request.

Rhododendron carolinianum: A compact plant with small evergreen leaves. Trusses of pink to white flowers in May.

Camellia sasanqua Bettie Patricia: Beautiful persian rose: large semi-double flower opening with rose bud center $3.00 up.

Prices on above plants same as native species azaleas.

Plants that are shipped will be packed in light wood veneer crates. Surplus dirt will be removed from root ball and then balled with a heavy plastic to hold moisture and shipped by Railroad Express unless other instructions are sent with order.

These plants can be grown easily in a well drained humus soil slightly acid . with pH in the soil around 5.5. This can be made with "perolite-Hort" vermiculite, peat moss, woods porus leaf mold and etc., using the same cultural practice used for the acid loving plants that are grown in your area.

If you are passing near our area we will be delighted to have you visit our Trail and Nursery.

Courtesy U.S. National Arboretum

buds. In these mixtures one can get the fragrance of the foliage from *R. alabamense* mixture. *R. austrinum* is a fast grower and will grow in most locations that suit *R. canescens*. The type foliage and plant is typical in *R. austrinum* while *R. canescens* has many variations.

R. speciosum, "Showy—Good Looking"

The habitat of this species is a wide band across the state of Georgia, running into the state of South Carolina on the eastern lower corner, the lower portion extending below the fall line to about Leesburg, Georgia. The first plants listed were the red types, however the plant seems to mix freely with *R. canescens* and we have quite a mixture of colors, and a few yellows "rare." The plant does not take on the pubescent bud from this cross. *R. speciosum* was named by someone who really knew beauty, as there is nothing so pretty as a large bed of mixed colors, blooming at the same time. It blooms along with *R. alabamense* and the later types of *R. canescens*. *R. austrinum* could supply the yellow as the border probably runs into this species. *R. speciosum* has no fragrance, and no gland tipped hairs on the tube, unless of course it has picked up genes of some type that does have these glands. It was confused with *R. calendulaceum* for a long time, and some plants above Atlanta, Georgia, show this mixture. Plants received from this station show shorter tubes and are slightly sticky and again *R. calendulaceum* in that section blooms earlier than the ones further north.

The cow pasture plants shown in the Magazine of the Atlanta Journal some time back is one of the mixtures, *R. speciosum*, *R. canescens* and possibly some blood of *R. calendulaceum*; the white mentioned is possibly the late type of *R. arborescens* and of course *R. viscosum*, a late one, blooms in that section. *R. multiflorum* [invalid name, Ed.] and *R. fastigifolium* [*R. flammeum* x *R. canescens*, Ed.] comes in on this mixture. A most interesting species.

Three Lepidote Rhododendrons

By S. D. Coleman, Fort Gaines, Ga.

In more recent years much has been said about three of our eastern rhododendrons, namely *Rhododendron minus*, *R. carolinianum*, and *R. chapmanii*. All are of the lepidote division, "having scales on the underside of foliage," and all are classed as small-leaf type rhododendrons.

R. minus Michaux, Type location: Bank of Savannah River. Possibly named after seeing *R. catawbiense* and *R. maximum*. *R. carolinianum* Rehder, Type location: the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.

R. chapmanii A. Gray, Type location: two locations; Port Saint Joe, Florida, and a point southwest of Jacksonville, Florida.

Of the three species, the *R. minus* has the larger flower truss, sometimes up to 15 flowers to a truss. Individual flowers have longer tubes, and the flowers are evenly colored from a white blushed pink to a deep pink. *R. minus* has larger and more rounded leaves on lateral limbs. More will be said of this species. It was growing naturally on the Trail, and is therefore, a Southern plant.

R. carolinianum does not have as many flowers to the truss and individual flowers do not seem to be quite as large

as those of *R. minus*. The corolla tube is shorter. Colors range from pure white to many shades of purplish pink. The foliage seems to be more acuminate than *R. minus* and slightly smaller. The two species grow pretty much alike and the average person cannot tell them apart, unless they are in flower. Many botanists call the *R. carolinianum* in the mountains *R. minus*. It is a mountain plant.

R. chapmanii flowers somewhat remind you of those of the azalea, *R. canescens*, having long tubes of a deeper color than the lobes. The blossom is a nice pink. It is a very pretty blooming plant. The plants I have grow bushier, and the foliage is more reticulate than that of the other two species. *R. chapmanii* blooms a little earlier.

From my findings I would say the larger groups of *R. minus* are found on the Chattahoochee River, including it's tributaries in both Georgia and Alabama. The name "minus" is misleading. If you find on the hillside a bed or one plant in bloom you will see a beautiful sight. *R. carolinianum* blooms over quite a season.

Natural Hybrids

From plants collected from many stations, I would think that in North Georgia, where the two species *R. minus* and *R. carolinianum* merge, you can select plants that have been mixing over the years. In these plants the corolla tube would be longer than the regular type a little further north.

Although I have some *R. carolinianum* from the higher mountains, also, from the valleys, I find that they all do well here, and it is strange that some of these plants did not come south on some of the streams. In my travels in search of material for the Trail, I have not seen the first *R. carolinianum* in this section of Georgia or Alabama. Where so many *R. minus* grow, I do not see any advantage in crossing the two.

I don't know just how far north *R. minus* will grow, but I have heard from Pennsylvania and it grows well in the more Eastern part. *R. chapmanii*, also, will grow in the same area. This plant from Florida is the earliest to bloom. It is a very pretty blooming plant, but does not grow quite so fast as *R. minus* and seems to grow bushier. The corolla tube seems to have a deeper color than the lobes. The plants have become so scarce in the wild, that I did not see a pure white.

The *R. carolinianum* has the advantage in pure white types. For hybridizing, *R. minus* has its advantage in having more flowers to the truss and in being a plant for lower elevations. It can be used for bringing various lepidote combinations to the southland and other milder climates. *R. chapmanii* has many good features. It will grow and bloom as far north as Massachusetts, as I have just heard from a friend.

These Species Breed True

My version of a species is a plant in nature that will reproduce a likeness of itself from seed. Now with seed from *R. carolinianum* you will get *R. carolinianum*; seed from *R. minus* produce *R. minus*; and from seed of *R. chapmanii* you get R. *chapmanii*.

I have only studied the living plants transplanted from many stations on the trail. All are growing beautifully. All of the plants from the mountains continue to be *R. carolinianum*. They were collected from several stations, most of them blooming at different times. All of *R. minus* were from this section on hillsides and on tributaries of the Chattahoochee River. Some were already growing on the Trail. Seeing both plants in bloom on the Trail, one can tell the difference. *R. carolinianum* has the widest variations in color. Even *R. minus* has a pretty near white and varies to deep pink.

Useful Plants

All in this small leaf series make nice plants for the north side of the lower type buildings or other partially shaded locations. These plants can be cut to suit each individual, or can be cut for flower arrangements, being careful to cut here and there in order to give flowers each season, instead of shaping the plant all at one time. Plants in partial shade have prettier foliage, and the flowers hold up better and last longer. Fresh cut flowers last well in arrangements.

'Dora Amateis', a new hybrid of *R. carolinianum* crossed with *R. ciliatum* should be good in all sections, in the landscape as well as individual plants. All that these plants need is a well prepared bed with plenty of humus. Keep well mulched unless in a wooded area around branch heads or on hillsides of running streams as along the Trail. All we have to do is try to keep vines from taking over. We have beautiful flowers each year, unless one or two of our *R. carolinianum* bloom too late and catch the dry spell. When this happens, mulch well and it is taken care of. If in a park or around a home, these plants should be watered and mulched. Large or small oak leaves could be used and are not unsightly. If the *R. minus* blooms too heavily, it is best to take out most of the seed trusses, just as the flowers fade. This insures good blooms the next year. I believe this is true with most Rhododendrons. I have also had this happen in some species of azaleas. As I have observed all three species in nature, and about the same age plants on the Trail, in the same growing conditions, I would say *R. minus* was the larger growing plant.

We, Dan, Jr., my son-in-law Frank Gilreath, and myself, found *R. chapmanii* growing on sand dunes, containing lots of humus. Dan, Jr., made the lucky find. The plants were easily dug with the sand humus clinging to the root system, and were planted as they were on the Trail. All grow nicely in their new home.

The little plant I found in the high Smoky Mountains, possibly on the Tennessee side, and named *R. gilreathii* [invalid name, Ed.] will have to be evaluated by Dr. Henry T. Skinner. I lost my plant and gave him the type location. It is the little rhododendron which has small, saucer-like flowers of a violet color, and in time will grow to three or four feet. The plants I saw were about two to two and one-half feet.

Some Cultural Hints

With too heavy blooms and too many seed pods, there are few flowers the next season. If the plants grow too

spindly, take a sharp knife or razor blade and remove the center growth bud before the new growth begins. Too much low shade causes this. With a little sunlight the plants will nearly shape themselves and you get more blooms. Plant in a well drained, sandy, heavy humus soil, or top with a few inches of forest humus, a little peat moss, or "perlite." I have used both or all three for better results.

I am not a taxonomist, but have studied the living plants and have separated our native species of the eastern rhododendrons and azaleas. There is still much to be done, and there are yet some to be separated. Each species has many variations, and I think Linnaeus gave us the best system yet worked out, and a beautiful conversation subject. I still think Michaux, Gray, and Rehder were right in separating into three separate species, these three lepidote rhododendrons.

Torch was picked up and kept flaming

In the late 1980s and early 1990s **John T. Thornton**, **Lloyd Cotton**, and **Robert E. "Buddy" Lee** picked up the torch from Coleman. While studying and researching American native rhododendrons, the group reported:

> "We found a large population of *R. alabamense* Rehder growing along the Big Flat Creek in Monroe County. These plants seemed to be much taller growing than the type form of *R. alabamense* from Northern Alabama. Many plants were more than 15 feet tall with five inch diameter trunks. Flowering occurs after new growth. Flower or petal colors were white to pink with yellow-orange blotch. The blotches seemed to be more pronounced than in the type form. The flowers were extremely fragrant. We often could smell the flowers before we could find them. Some plants had flowers with heavy substance and may be polyploid."

'Maypink'

In the early 50s, Coleman had found and propagated a late blooming native azalea thought to be a variant of *R. alabamense*. He named it 'Maypink'. In the 1990s, **Steve Yeatts** with **Bob Stevens** began searching for colonies of the late blooming *R. alabamense* in the coastal plain of Alabama. They found a big colony near Owassa. Yeatts, along with other fellow searchers, collected samples of those plants and had their DNA analyzed by the University of Washington. 'Maypink' proved to be a tetraploid, whereas *R. alabamense* is a diploid. To honor the man who first publicized its unique qualities this rhododendron was named *R. colemanii*.

As Coleman said: "In closing, I may ask what are the rewards of such an undertaking. I suppose they vary with the individual. I doubt that fame or money would ever be the aim."

Tadeusz Dauksza *is a member Lake Michigan Chapter. His e-mail address is iltkyao@sbcglobal.net.*

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Call for Articles

The Azalean needs articles about azaleas, their care, and their use in the landscape. Articles should be submitted as Microsoft Word documents. Illustrations are highly encouraged.

Submit articles to: Pam Fitch; Editor, ***The Azalean***; P.O. Box 632537; Nacogdoches, TX 75963 or e-mail:theazalean@gmail.com.