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The Azalean

Journal of the Azalea Society of America

President's Letter

Aaron Cook — Valdese, North Carolina

Photo: Pam Frith

▲ Past President John Brown handed the reins to then incoming ASA President Aaron Cook in May 2009 at the national convention in Virginia.

Fellow members, this is my last President's Letter. How well I remember that Saturday in early May in Virginia when I accepted the reins of leadership from **John Brown**. As most of you know, the President's term of office runs from convention to convention in two-year cycles. The new ASA President and Vice President will assume their duties at the annual meeting in Evansville, Indiana.

My two-year stint as President has flown by. As a Society we have had our successes and failures. We have been uplifted by conventions in Virginia and New Orleans. We have galvanized azalea lovers everywhere and successfully worked to save the Glenn Dale azaleas on Mt. Hamilton. *(See related article on page 11.)* My hat is off to all involved, but especially to **Steve Henning** and **Don Hyatt**.

There were high points to be sure, but low points as well. We suffered the loss of some of our most loyal members during the past two years. Personally, I was particularly hard hit by the sudden loss of our dear friend and Texas Chapter President **Michael Stump**. *(See related article on page 16.)*

Have we accomplished everything we set out to do? No. I leave much work to be completed by **John Migas**, **J. Jackson**, **Dan Krabill**, and **Carol Flowers**. I have absolutely no reservations about the qualifications and dedication of this group of officers.

Overall, my tenure has been a very gratifying experience. I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank the board of directors, my fellow officers, the chapter presidents, and the many members who have provided me with warm friendship and support. I could not have accomplished anything without you. I hope that what we have accomplished together has had and will continue to have a positive effect on our Society.

My Kindest Regards to Everyone,
Aaron Cook

Azalea Society of America

The Azalea Society of America, organized December 9, 1977 and incorporated in the District of Columbia, is an educational and scientific non-profit association devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of azaleas which are in the subgenera *Tsutsusi* and *Pentanthera* of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Heath family *(Ericaceae)*.

Regular membership is open to all interested parties for an annual amount of $25; life-membership for one or two persons at the same address is $500. Members receive ***The Azalean*** and are eligible for participation in all activities of the Society including those of the chapter with which the member affiliates. For information and a membership application, write to Carol Flowers, Secretary, 700 New Hampshire NW, Apt. 1011, Washington, DC 20037 or visit **www.azaleas.org.**

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Journal of the Azalea Society of America

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Pure pink tetraploid growing on the banks of the Escambia River in Florida. Please see related article on page 4.

Photo Ron Miller

Is *Rhododendron austrinum* Always Yellow?

A Case Study in Blindness

Ron Miller—Pensacola, Florida

Some time ago, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an op-ed arguing that accuracy in medical diagnosis actually diminishes in situations where personal records are available online. Once a person has been labeled as suffering from (say) chronic headaches, subsequent physicians tend to pigeonhole their observations according to the inherited diagnosis. Though time and money are no doubt saved, what if the current problem is actually something more serious?

As I read the article, I reflected upon almost 40 years of springtime azalea touring—first by canoe and later by jon boat — on two local rivers near my home in Pensacola, Florida. One river, the murky, semi-alluvial Escambia, has a delta and upstream chock full of mixed pink and yellow deciduous azaleas—all very, very spectacular. The other river, the Yellow, is a sandier, almost tea-colored stream that displays only pink azaleas for the lowest 30 miles or more. Above that, mixed pinks and yellows take over, while on the upper reaches of the Yellow River in Alabama, yellows predominate. I naturally assumed that the pinks were *Rhododendron canescens* and the yellows were *R. austrinum* because my hero Henry Skinner encountered the bicolor middle of the Yellow River in bloom and called the pinks *R. canescens* and the yellows *R. austrinum*, providing an influential diagnosis of their interaction:

> The flower [of *R. austrinum*] may be wholly a clear, golden yellow or, more often, the petals may be yellow and tubes a variable strawberry red, giving one the impression that this red tube belongs more properly with *R. canescens* and has perhaps been acquired by *R. austrinum* after flowering at the same time along the same streamsides and producing a proportion of those unmistakably anemic buff-colored hybrids for many years past. As the banks of the Yellow River grow luxuriant *R. canescens* so elsewhere they are appropriately covered with masses of the yellow "Florida" Azalea . . . (Skinner, 1955).

▲ Figure 1—Close-up comparison of seed capsules and pedicels from eglandular genuine *R. canescens* and from the glandular Yellow River pink

So, inheriting Skinner's labels, I raved to family and friends about the mixing between the two species along the natural levees of the Escambia River, never observing that some of the yellow plants are, oddly enough for a reputedly non-rhizomatous upland species, spreading vigorously in spots where their root crowns are covered by brackish water during spring tides and strong south winds. Indeed, hurricanes put many feet of salt water over the lower parts of the colony. Even odder is that all the "canescens" in the swarm turn out to be as rhizomatous as the yellows and in addition are highly glandular on the lower edges of their flower bud scales and on the multicellular hairs on their vegetative parts. As for the lower Yellow River, I never bothered once to look closely at "just old canescens" while boating upstream to enjoy the yellows. For some reason, *R. austrinum* did not seem to like the sugary sand ridges and peat hummocks where the pinks prevailed. Recently, I have concluded that the yellows cannot compete in the highly acid, sterile, sometimes droughty conditions near the river's mouth. A handy ecosystem distinction in my region separates white-sand from brown-sand communities. Yellow azaleas prefer darker sand with clay in it; the Yellow

Photo Ron Miller

▲ Figure 2 — Escambia River Tetraploid

▼ Figure 3 — Escambia River Tetraploid

Photo Ron Miller

River pinks thrive on white.

Thus, blinded by an authoritative, inherited diagnosis, I failed to observe that those Yellow River *R. canescens*:

(1) often sport very uncharacteristic yellow petal blotches;
(2) are radically rhizomatous;
(3) have stiff leaves that are rough and rather grayish;
(4) send down a deep, water-seeking root system rather than the shallow splay of *R. canescens*; and
(5) bear flower bud scales edged with wavy glands and vegetative parts so copiously forested with stalked glands that the tips of winter stems seem covered in gray velvet.

For decades, my only observation was that the Escambia River pink-and-yellow swarm often starts blooming at the end of January but usually peaks a week or so into April, conveniently after the Yellow River pinks.

Then, a few years ago, Clarence Towe called my attention to the taxonomic utility of stalked and flower-bud-scale glands. Dusting off an old microscope, I stared at the glands on the local yellow azaleas in my yard. No such glands, however, could be found on my lone *R. canescens* cultivar. Months later, on a lazy float trip on the tidewater section of the Yellow River, I snatched a few budded branch tips for microscope practice. Under magnification, the pinks looked like the yellows in my yard. Glands everywhere, on the flower bud scales as well as on the vegetative parts.

Figure 1 provides close-up comparison of seed capsules and pedicels from eglandular genuine *R. canescens* and from the glandular Yellow River pink. If glands on multicellular hairs are present elsewhere than on the corolla tubes of an azalea, they can be found on the pedicels and on the sepal areas of the capsules. Azaleas on both my local rivers also bear glands on new growth shoots, on leaf petioles and bases, and on the underside veins of the leaves.

The next year, I read the seminal article which finally put azalea ploidy determination on firm ground by using flow cytometry (Jones et al., 2007). *R. austrinum* is a tetraploid! Skinner was therefore just flat-out wrong about that hybrid swarm on the Yellow River, as was I about the Escambia River. Diploids (*R. canescens*) almost always produce infertile triploid F_1s with tetraploids (*R. austrinum*). Everything out on the Escambia, however, was covered year in, year out with fat clusters of highly glandular seed capsules, from tagged pink plants to oranges and to yellows. Then I remembered that John Thornton had mentioned years before that he had crossed *R. canescens* and *R. austrinum* and that the hybrids were sterile and puny. Another friend, Tom Milner, had the same disappointment. The Escambia plants, on the other

hand, were fecund brutes, occasionally 15 and sometimes 20 feet tall.

Quickly I motored forth onto the Escambia delta with a jeweler's loupe in hand, seeking eglandular *R. canescens*. No luck. Though there are widely scattered colonies in my area, eglandular pinks seem to have been displaced entirely along the main river banks by more aggressive glandular azaleas. Then it hit me: there had to be another, this time pink, tetraploid in the region for *R. austrinum* to be canoodling with. Where is it? I already knew. Within 20 miles, on the Yellow River. Hauling my jon boat out again, I plucked a series of leaf samples from azaleas along a 10 or so mile run up and down the tidewater Yellow. Off in Ziplocs to Dr. Tom Ranney at North Carolina State. In a few days, Ranney, prompt and generous as always, emailed that they were tetraploids. Earlier, he had tested samples from totally pink, quite glandular plants that had been flagged and photographed on the other river, the Escambia River. They were tetraploids, too.


Photo Ron Miller

▲ Figure 4—Lower Yellow River Tetraploid Pink

When is a hybrid not a hybrid?

In a tidier world, this would be the end of the story. Two reproductively compatible species occupy adjacent niches. They cross. Since the vast majority of hybrids are less competitive than their parents, the F_1s will not develop on their own but die off, to be replaced by additional crosses from the parent species. If a hybrid happens to be truly competitive and can gain reproductive isolation, it might "speciate out" by finding a separate niche for which it, and not the parents, is maximally suited. Or it might even replace, though the chances are infinitesimally small, one of the parent species. Evolutionarily, hybrids and mutations seem identical in this regard: many are called but very, very few are chosen (Arnold, 1997).

Consider those wonderful hybrids on Gregory Bald. They are apparently byproducts (a) of the presence of three compatible diploid species on the bald itself or on nearby mountains and (b) of a transitory clearing now kept open by yearly governmental intervention. Such bailouts will inevitably fail, because the only way to halt the replacement of the hybrids in the vegetational sequence would be to burn the bald to re-create a mineral soil mountaintop where, briefly, nesting sites would be effectively unlimited and hybrid uncompetitiveness would not matter.

The Escambia River swarm, aided by nothing more than the intervention of our occasional tree-thinning hurricanes, violates this pattern. The azaleas seem to be a vigorous part of a climax association of riparian trees, palmettos, vines, and almost impenetrable evergreen brush. There is no evidence whatsoever that either unmixed *R. austrinum* or unmixed Yellow River pink can be found anywhere within or near the swarm, in spite of the hunch that first sent me scurrying out onto the Yellow River seeking a pink tetraploid. No doubt the swarm, for all its intergradation, tends to be bimodal in color, with the vast majority of plants falling about half and half into the basically-pink and the basically-yellow categories. Circumstantial evidence from proximate color distribution and from bloom time suggests that the pinks are as likely to produce yellow as pink seedlings, and vice versa.

In hybrid swarms known to me, one parent will inevitably bloom a tad earlier than the other, so the balance of the mix changes over the blooming season. One parent will occupy a site drier or rockier or shadier or chemically different from the other. Thus in northern Alabama where *R. canescens* and *R. alabamense* hybridize, later *R. alabamense* occupies the dry sandstone ridge tops; earlier *R. canescens*, the damp valley floors; and the intermediate hybrids, the slopes in between. However, no one boating on the Escambia River and coming around a bend can guess whether the next cluster will be mostly pink or mostly yellow, no matter whether the bank ahead is a dry sand ridge or a wet peaty swale. If one ventures out in late January or early February, the isolated earliest patches are about half pinks and half yellows. In the first weeks of May, when the very latest plants bloom, the same color balance obtains. Certain quite limited neighborhoods have very early plants and others have very late plants; no area holds exclusively yellow or pink plants.

The situation differs markedly with the swarm on the middle Yellow River. In the transitional areas, the color balance shifts as the season advances. At first, the river banks are almost pure pink, then shade into mixtures, then become pri-

▲ Figure 5— Lower Yellow River Tetraploid Pink

marily yellow. Scattered yellows prefer the drier sandy-clay bluffs. Dense pink swaths cover white sand slopes near water and peaty flats away from the river. Thus the very conventional swarm itself consists of both apparent hybrids and apparent parental types in their customary habitats and growth forms. If Skinner had arrived at his Yellow River bridge two weeks later, he would never have seen those massed "canescens" on the river slopes.

The Escambia population behaves as though the plants are not hybrids at all but are well on their way to speciating out toward a bicolor, rhizomatous, glandular, saltwater-immersion-tolerant, self-sustaining adaptation to the levee-and-bank ecosystem. More challenging is the pink tetraploid of the Yellow River. Is it a form of *R. austrinum*? Can *R. austrinum* sometimes be pink? Should this pink azalea be interpreted instead as a subspecies or even a separate species? This puzzle I bequeath to any taxonomist or evolutionary botanist willing to take it up. The numbered list on page 5 lays out ways in which the Yellow River azaleas are distinctive other than in corolla color. Most suggestive of the status of the pinks is their ability to sustain an apparently conventional hybrid system, and not to merge, with *R. austrinum* along the middle river. Habitat requirements seem to have driven what Darwin would call a "wedge" on the Yellow River between the closely related white-sand pinks and the darker-sand standard yellows.

Figures 2-6 and the cover photo show characteristic plants from both rivers. Note the two lower Yellow River plants without a trace of yellow (Figures 4 and 5) and the Escambia River pure pink (cover photo) that must be genetically indistinguishable from the preceding yellow (Figure 2) and from the following half-and-half (Figure 3).

Learning to See

Most of us assume that nowadays plant hunters can locate new taxa only in the wilds of Amazonia or New Guinea; yet these tetraploids have been hiding, like the purloined letter in Poe's short story, in plain sight, passing for recognized plants because we amateurs defer too much to authority and spend too little time observing plants as a whole, roots and runners and glands and growth form and habitat and warts and all. Conversely, professionals are wed to that pre-industrial data-storage device, the herbarium sheet, wherein definitive behavioral hints as well as fragile stalked glands get lost. Think how long it took to recognize *R. colemanii* in plain sight, not just in the woods but in our gardens, when there were probably nearly as many *R. colemanii* as *R. alabamense* sheets in herbariums. A sheet of *R. eastmanii* existed long before an alert birder chanced upon plants blooming in a well-visited South Carolina park. Such blindness is not accidental but structural. Basing azalea studies on herbarium sheets is like basing animal studies on roadkill.

Plant hunting epitomizes what engineers call a "feedback loop": you look in order to learn, at last, what to look for. It helps, admittedly, to have high-tech ploidy determination available to adjust your vision. After my eyesight was trained by the plants along my two rivers, I boated up the Escambia River to see that the yellows became dominant, with true, eglandular, diploid *R. canescens* finally appearing above the Alabama line; yet the yellows were accompanied by scattered glandular pinks all the way north into the Red Hills region where *R. colemanii* thrives. Thus the range of uniform yellows is split right down the middle by a mixed-color tetraploid population. Just how many more not-all-yellow tetraploid swarms remain to the east or to the west, no one knows. Many *R. austrinum* variants in the trade, such as 'Millie Mac' and 'Riefler's White' and 'Apricot Austrinum', resemble material found along my local rivers. White tetraploids, for instance, along with extra petals, seem symptomatic of hybrid dissonance on the stretch of the Yellow River where pinks from below first collide with the yellows from above. Picotees resembling 'Millie Mac' and 'Calamity Junction' are scattered along both streams.

So far, I have found another extensive pink and yellow patch in a sandy area in southern Covington County, Alabama, just east of the Yellow River drainage, and very rare pinks scattered among the yellows on the lower Choctawhatchee River in the middle Florida Panhandle. Nothing yet to the far east or west. Throughout, especially in Alabama, extensive populations abound where glandular *R. austrinum* and eg-

landular *R. canescens* intertwine with absolutely no hint of hybridizing. However, any group of "canescens" anywhere with yellow throats, with no red or yellow diploids about, merits a closer look with a magnifier and a search on hands and knees for rhizomes.

The westernmost colonies of *R. austrinum* in the Pascagoula watershed of Mississippi add a final surprise while underscoring that variations tend to be river-system specific. These verified tetraploids are, except in rare instances, totally eglandular save for their corolla tubes, yet their colors are rich, opaque "austrinum" yellows and oranges, not the paler, almost transparent yellows of *R. colemanii*. As one gets closer to the Pascagoula, *R. austrinum* becomes progressively less glandular. The popular cultivar 'Escatawpa,' found on the border of Alabama and Mississippi, is significantly less glandular than more easterly plants; and occasional yellows along the Escatawpa River itself are as eglandular as any yellow further west. No patch of yellow azaleas anywhere, on the other hand, seems to be as consistently, profusely glandular as those aggressively rhizomatous pinks along the lower Yellow River.

In sum, *R. austrinum* and its allies offer a rich, hitherto unnoticed puzzle that is not at all reflected in academic descriptions or in botanical keys. The evidence suggests that *R. austrinum* is not so much an inbreeding, genetically coherent species as an inhomogeneous stew derived from disparate populations of pink and yellow, rhizomatous and non-rhizomatous, glandular and eglandular tetraploids isolated within steep, protected coastal river valleys during the last glacial maximum, ~12,000 years ago, when the sea level was more than 350 feet lower than at present. The closer to the Gulf today, the more distinct the populations. Glands and rhizomes and pink coloration radiate outward from the lower Yellow River region, glandlessness from the Pascagoula, diminished rhizomes from the lower Choctawhatchee and from the Apalachicola. Yellow epicenters must have been scattered all along the now-submerged continental shelf. The present northern tier of the *R. austrinum* range in Alabama and Georgia seems to be most homogenized, i.e., closest to published norms.


Photo Ron Miller

▲ Figure 6—Middle Yellow River Hybrid Tetraploid

As for the other American tetraploids, who knows? Perhaps locally varicolored *R. colemanii* and oddly variable *R. atlanticum* (remember the tetraploid Choptanks?) are also migrants-in-progress from epicenters on the shelf. The present range of *R. atlanticum*, except for its southernmost fringe below Savannah, was occupied until recently by spruce, fir, and jack pine (Graham, 1999). Research suggests that evolution can take place at bewildering speed in the wake of ecological catastrophes (Weiner, 1994), and what, this side on an asteroid collision, could be more catastrophic than the explosive post-Wisconsin warm-up in a region where boreal vegetation patterns have prevailed for ~90% of the last few million years? (Graham, 1999). Consider the non-coastal tetraploid, *R. calendulaceum*. In spite of the cliché, the southern Appalachians can scarcely have been its cradle. That cradle must be rocking, temporarily empty, much further down this way. At most, the mountains are the flame azalea's brief summer retreat. Who knows what *R. calendulaceum* might have looked like, or whether it existed at all, before the ~18 (yes, 15-20!) slowly-cool-down/explosively-warm-up cycles of the Pleistocene? We do know that polyploids, with their geometrically enhanced genetic potential, can be far more opportunistic than diploids in adapting to radically altered conditions (Van de Peer et al., 2009). That is why many of our noxious invasive weeds are polyploids; and indeed, by colonizing huge areas abandoned by subarctic and tundra vegetation, *R. calendulaceum*, by far our most numerous azalea, might itself be seen as a highly variable, invasive polyploid weed. Recall the adaptive bag of tricks shown by the weedy Escambia River tetraploid, with its three-month-plus bloom time, its tolerance for immersion and for salt, its rhizomes, its heightened fertility, its color variety and odor.

Unfortunately, it took me almost 40 years to look at those plants though my own rather than through Skinner's eyes. The horticultural world would be richer, and the chat groups would have more grist for their mills, if we azalea fanciers would occasionally forgo our pilgrimages to the same all-too-familiar spots

and practice de-familiarizing our visions by looking nearer at home for quirks and inconsistencies, examining more than the flowers, seeking details that Skinner or Frisbee or others missed on account of the very scope of their pioneering surveys. Easterners in particular need to avoid Skinner's great pitfall: an azalea that doesn't "key out" should not be chalked up as a hybrid unless the imagined parents are front-and-center visible for minute examination. This is not, mind you, a "splitter's" call to multiply taxa but quite the opposite, a hard-won recognition that the facile urge to pin labels and impose categories on polymorphous living things can blind us to nature's complexity. Stephen J. Gould's "punctuated equilibrium" can be an invaluable way to think about speciation (Gould, 2002), so long as you keep open to the possibility that sometimes, as with *R. austrinum*, you may find yourself looking very closely at a punctuation mark.

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Magnolia Gardens Introduces French Student Exchange Program

Jim Thornton—Conyers,Georgia

Most of us remember Magnolia Plantation and Gardens we visited during the 2000 ASA national convention. The gardens are internationally known for its collection of old European camellias and azaleas planted in a romantic-style setting.

The gardens were opened to the public in 1870 by the Drayton family. They still own and operate the gardens today and are still in pursuit of those original varieties which have gone by the wayside over the years. Today, though, they are being assisted by the Great Gardens of America Preservation Alliance (GGAPA), which was formed by Magnolia Gardens and headed up by Miles Beach, director of the Magnolia Gardens camellia collection. But then, that's another story (see ***The Azalean***, Vol. 31, No. 2, Summer 2008).

Last summer, Magnolia Gardens took another step into the international arena when Diane de Roquette from the French Heritage office in Paris visited the gardens with a tour group and ran into Director of Gardens Tom Johnson. Naturally the two started talking shop with the subject being how the European romantic gardens evolved and came to the United States.

One thing led to another and after returning to Paris, Diane contacted Tom about a student exchange internship program with French horticultural students. Naturally, Tom was interested and soon after, Greg Jaye of the French Heritage Society in New York visited Magnolia Gardens to review the intern study program developed by Tom. However, Tom's work doesn't stop here, because he intends to develop a true exchange program that includes Americans going to France to study. Soon after Greg's visit, two young men from France showed up at Magnolia Gardens' door ready to learn and share.

Both are students at the prestigious Versailles National School of Landscape Horticulture in Paris, which, by the way, is a second degree program to qualify. Jean-Christople Pigeon and Thibault Jeandel had been chosen to be the first students from Versailles to come to the United States on the internship program. Their duties included helping with the goals and objectives of the GGAPA and sharing their knowledge of the romantic gardens of France and other European countries. When they return to France, they will be assisting the Alliance in looking for azalea and camellia varieties that have been lost here in America.

Jean, a graphic designer, is studying the design of parks and gardens and is working on a special project of Versailles that incorporates a vegetable garden. His tour in the United States has been invaluable in adding knowledge to his data base of the diverse range of vegetables we grow in the South, knowledge he will carry back to France and put to use there.

Photo Ron Miller

▲ Christophe Pigeon (left) and Thibault Jeandel.

On the other hand, Tibault is a musician. He is using his background to work with landscape designers to develop ways to incorporate natural sounds into garden design. For instance, take a park in a busy downtown area with heavy traffic, buses, trucks, and horns, but devoid of birds singing, rustling leaves, or a bubbling brook. It wouldn't be much of a serene setting. But what if those sounds were engineered and amplified into the design. Would that make a difference?

Both exchange students were enthralled with our Spanish moss-draped trees. They had seen the movie *Gone with the Wind* but explained "until you live in this environment, you just can't imagine the added effect it would have had on one seeing the movie." Something we take for granted?

Jean and Tibault were taken on a tour of several southern states—from South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, to Louisiana and back. I asked each what impressed him the most, but first had to listen to the diet Tom and Miles had subjected them to as they made their way on this trip. Might as well tell you, barbecue came up as "A No. 1" on their list. Think about this: these two guys back in Paris, firing up a grill, throwing on several racks of ribs, and icing down a keg of beer. What will the French think of us now?

Anyway, back to their tour. They visited public and private gardens as well as commercial nurseries, including Callaway, Bellingrath, and the botanical gardens at Louisiana State University. Although they missed the "big spring show" of azaleas, they came away with this thought: "It's not so much formal but random planting that resembles organization and planning that catches the eye and makes one feel at ease and comfortable. Something we need in our stressful world."

To this I say: "Amen!"

Jim Thornton *is a cofounder and the first president of the Oconee Chapter. He has served as a director, vice president, and president of the Azalea Society of America.*

U.S. National Arboretum Decision on De-accession of Selected Collections

Harold Belcher—Cheverly, Maryland

Last November, the U.S. National Arboretum (USNA) announced a decision on de-accession of its Glenn Dale Hillside of its azalea collection on Mt. Hamilton and its National Boxwood collection and its Perennial collection on the Bladensburg Road side of the arboretum. This decision was based on the loss of a long-standing financial support for the USNA Asian Valley Collection from a private donor. Losing this financial support will require the USNA Gardens Unit in 2012 to cut two gardener positions, which were funded by that private donor for its Asian Valley collection. As a result of the loss of funding, and the necessity of cutting two gardener positions, the USNA believes that it has insufficient personnel to maintain all of its gardens and collections and must now evaluate the best use of the Garden Unit's financial and personnel resources.

The arboretum has begun this process so that it can be completed before the loss of the two privately funded positions in the Asian Valley collection in 2012. The Gardens Unit staff, under the direction of Scott Aker, analyzed the USNA collections for de-accessioning by considering the scientific value (germplasm) of each collection; its educational and interpretive value; its aesthetic value and appeal to visitors; and, the current level of stakeholder involvement/support for the collection. The collections selected for de-accessioning will be removed. Important germplasm within those collections will be preserved by taking cuttings, or in some cases, transplanting elsewhere on the USNA grounds. The Gardens Unit staff will document identified plants in the selected collections for propagation and, when practicable, shipment to other gardens, nurseries, and collections. The remaining plants will be removed, destroyed and low-maintenance native trees or meadow plants will be planted to restore the de-accessioned areas.

While the Arboretum had long-term plans to remove nearly all of the undocumented azaleas (those plants that cannot be positively identified) on the Glenn Dale Hillside (about 20 to 25 percent, or about 2,000 mature plants, of the total azalea collection) so that they may be replaced with known Glenn Dale azalea introductions massed in large groups for visual impact. Unfortunately, the azaleas to be de-accessioned are the oldest and most majestic plants. The decision to de-accession the collection will expedite those plans. They will now shift to a fast-track removal of azaleas of unknown pedigree so the area is less of a maintenance burden. Most removals are expected to take place in the summer of 2011. The USNA rationale for de-accessioning this part of the Glenn Dale Azalea Collection is that it is for the most part undocumented plant material for which they cannot justify the expense of long-term maintenance. This plan is to cut down the undocumented azaleas on the Glenn Dale Hillside and apply herbicide so that they cannot return. The plants that are removed will be replaced by new, identified rooted cuttings from their propagation program. However, replacing 60-year-old azaleas with rooted cuttings will leave a barren eyesore, highly subject to erosion, and will also provide favorable growing space for new invasive species in one of the most visible and frequently visited locations in the arboretum.

The plants in National Boxwood collection and its associated Perennial collection will be completely and accurately inventoried. Selected plants on the inventory will be used for cuttings, propagation of plants, and distribution of the resulting plants, or to form the basis for new plantings elsewhere in the Arboretum. Removal of plants would not take place until autumn or winter of 2011-2012. The National Boxwood Collection forms a beautiful green barrier from the heavy traffic on Bladensburg Road and contributes greatly to the tranquil ambiance of the Arboretum. The plan would entail the removal of every plant in this collection, leaving unobstructed views of the highway and allowing the sounds of the highway to intrude. Removing this collection and planting low maintenance trees, which will take years to mature, will do little to maintain the Arboretum's ambiance and attract visitors.

The Perennial Collection represents plants that most gardeners are familiar with and have in their gardens. It provides visitors with a stunning display from the tree peonies in early spring, daffodils and herbaceous peonies, and day lilies somewhat later. The collection provides visitors with obvious and subtle differences in flowers, fragrances, and colors. It should not be removed and replaced by a meadow.

The interim USNA Director responsible for this decision, in a letter to the President, National Capital Area Garden Clubs Inc., dated November 15, 2010, stated that "permanent sustained funding to support the minimum number of staff needed to develop and maintain their collections, but especially the boxwood and perennial collections and the azalea hillside, is the only viable way they can be saved. Should such funding become available, the replacement of undocumented azaleas on the Glenn Dale Hillside with Glenn Dale cultivars could be accomplished gradually, in a way that maintains the spring show while newly planted azaleas become established, and the de-accession of the National Boxwood Collection and Perennial Collections will not be necessary" and, "In the short-term, the Arboretum will continue to examine other possible funding mechanisms." In that letter the Interim USNA Director also stated that "some might argue for the simple abandonment of garden spaces when staff positions are lost, this is not a responsible ap-

proach. Abandonment is environmentally harmful because of the potential for invasive species to become entrenched. It is nearly impossible to recover such collections after just a few years of abandonment without considerable expense." It should be noted that the USNA Azalea Collection was abandoned in the past and after years of neglect has been brought to its current state of restored beauty and health by the devoted efforts of the curator and a staff of volunteers over the past 20 years. During that time, the curator and her staff of volunteers have been able to positively identify numerous previously undocumented azaleas on the Glenn Dale Hillside. These efforts, if allowed to continue, will provide documentation for many more of the undocumented plants in the collection and preserve these beautiful plants.

It is difficult to understand how the future loss of those private funds for Asian Valley maintenance can justify such a drastic decision. Several questions come to mind concerning the USNA decision.

If the availability of funding is the only issue, why take such drastic, irrevocable action which once done cannot be reversed should funding become available?

How does the loss of funding for two positions in the Asian Valley Collection, which by the terms of that funding required those positions be used only to supplement the regular work and not to supplant government funds, or the two other full time Federal gardeners who regularly maintain that garden, justify the de-accessioning of three completely unrelated collections? With regard to the azalea collection, it is currently maintained by one full time position (the curator) and a volunteer staff.

Were the stakeholders, such as the Azalea Society of America, American Daffodil Society, American Hemerocallis Society, American Peony Society, American Rhododendron Society, American Boxwood Society, Friends of the National Arboretum (FONA) and National Capitol Area Garden Clubs Inc., who have a long-established relationship with and an interest in the Arboretum and its collections, contacted to obtain their input prior to this decision being made?

It should be noted that these stakeholders have provided significant financial and volunteer support to the USNA over many years. In the past, the Arboretum's Advisory Board consisting of its stakeholders, would be consulted prior to taking action that would substantially alter its collections. The Arboretum needs to restore its Advisory Board so that future decisions will have input from its stakeholders.

If the criteria for evaluating potential collections for de-accessing were: "its aesthetic value; appeal to visitors; and, the current level of stakeholder involvement/support for the collection", why were the Glenn Dale Hillside azaleas on Mt. Hamilton selected? The Azalea Collection, especially the Glenn Dale Hillside azaleas on Mt. Hamilton which are one of the prime floral attractions in our Nation's Capital, serves as the premier draw for the general public to visit the Arboretum in the spring, attracting thousands of visitors each year. The lovely mature azaleas, many of which are over 60 years old, occupy perhaps three to six acres of the 446-acre arboretum. Those azaleas are not overgrown or in decline and there is no space issue. The arboretum's Glenn Dale azaleas are among the oldest and most spectacular specimens in the country. The Glenn Dale Hillside azaleas have considerable historical value as well and are of particular importance to the U.S. National Arboretum. They were developed by its first director, Benjamin Y. Morrison, and represent the top 454 selections of the 75,000 seedlings he raised during the development of Glenn Dale azaleas. Morrison's colossal breeding project has had no equal. It produced the first large-flowered azaleas created for the climatic conditions of the Mid-Atlantic region, particularly the Washington Metropolitan area. They have proven hardy in the Mid-Atlantic region and many of them are found in Mid-Atlantic gardens. It was the magic of the spring azalea displays on the Glenn Dale Hillside of Mt. Hamilton that first prompted the Arboretum to open its doors to the public in 1954. They are indeed a national treasure that should be preserved.

Those of us who would like to see the decision to de-accession the Glenn Dale Hillside of the Azalea Collection on Mt. Hamilton, the National Boxwood Collection and the Perennial Collection at the Arboretum reversed, or at least reconsidered, are encouraged to express their concerns by contacting:

Dr. Colien Hefferan
Director, U.S. National Arboretum
3501 New York Avenue NE
Washington, DC 20002
E-mail: Colein.Hefferan@ars.usda.gov

Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
Jamie L. Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C., 20250
Email: agsec@usda.gov

Editor's Note: In February, the U.S. National Arboretum suspended actions to remove the Glenn Dale azaleas. This is attributed in part to a $1 million donation to Friends of the National Arboretum to establish an endowment to preserve the azalea, boxwood, and perennial collections at the arboretum. FONA will launch a fund raising campaign this spring to raise an additional $1 million for the endowment. Watch for more information in future issues of **The Azalean**.

Harold Belcher *began his appreciation of azaleas while working at Dr. Wilbur Engleman's azalea nursery in Lanham, Maryland, during his high school years (1961 -1964). He graduated from the University of Maryland with a business degree in 1970. Harold worked for the Navy Department and the Department of Justice and retired from Federal government service in January 2009. He is a past four-term president of the Ben Morrison Chapter of the ASA and former ASA board member. Harold has been a resident of Cheverly, Maryland, all his life and has enjoyed visiting the U.S. National Arboretum since 1960.*

Society News

Call for Photos of Azaleas in Nacogdoches

Barbara Stump

Stephen F. Austin State University now has a press, the SFASU Press, and one of its forthcoming books is *Azaleas of Nacogdoches*, to be edited by **Barbara Stump**, with an introduction by **Dr. David Creech**.

If you have images that you took when you came to the Nacogdoches ASA Convention in 2007 that you'd like to share for this publication, we'd love to have them. They must be taken somewhere in Nacogdoches County and must be high-resolution. We are particularly looking for landscape images of azaleas along the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail routes.

For more information, or to send digital images, please e-mail Barbara Stump at bstump@sfasu.edu. Or better yet, bring your images to the Evansville Convention in April!

National Membership Meeting Planned

The ASA will host its annual national membership meeting at 7 p.m., Saturday, April 30, 2011, at the Clarion Inn and Conference Center, 4101 US Highway 41 North, Evansville, Indiana.

Newly elected ASA officers will be installed during the meeting. (See page 83 of the Winter 2010 issue of ***The Azalean*** for the Nomination Committee report.) A ballot was included in the Winter 2010 issue of ***The Azalean*** and must be received by April 15, 2011.

Board of Directors Meetings Set

The ASA Board of Directors will meet from 2 to 4 p.m., Thursday, April 28, 2011, at the Clarion Inn and Conference Center, 4101 US Highway 41 North, Evansville, Indiana.

A second Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for 8 a.m., Sunday, May 1, providing an opportunity for newly elected officers to discuss new business.

Foundation Benefits from Matching Gifts

J.O. Thornton

Again, we want to keep you apprised and aware of the activities of the Azalea Research Foundation, including keeping you informed on ways to make a donation and become a part of this new ASA endeavor.

All of the last few issues of ***The Azalean*** included some kind of message about how you can contribute to the research fund, and well here's another method. But, wait—before I get ahead of myself, let me, for the sake of new members, reiterate the foundation's purpose.

It all started when the ASA was just some hare-brained idea of some azaleaphiles who thought the "Royalty of the Garden" should be among the much cherished plants of the horticultural world and become a "society" of its own! Thus, in 1977, the Azalea Society of America was incorporated as a non-profit organization, devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of the azalea. In part our objectives include the contribution to scientific advancement in this area of horticulture. But it wasn't until 2009 that the Azalea Research Foundation was officially created as a standing committee of the ASA.

You too can support the vision by making a contribution to the research fund. And here's another way to do it while making your money multiply! Many companies offer "Matching Gift" programs for both active and retired employees. Simply stated, it is a program that companies make available to employees who support viable non-profit organizations such as ours.

Options vary from company to company. Some companies will double your donation amount, and others even triple it! It's something to look into when you decide to contribute to this "lofty" cause.

For more information, go online and search for "matching gifts" and you will see lists of companies that have such programs. Or call your company's Human Resource department or payroll office and inquire about your employer's matching gift program. Once you determine they will participate, they will provide you with a form to complete. Fill out your portion of the form and send it to us—we'll do rest!

What better way to support the Azalea Research Foundation and to have a successful program that is a valuable asset to the ASA?

Last Notice for 2011 Dues

Dan Krabill

It is past time for renewal of your ASA membership for 2011. If you have not renewed, please send $25 ($40 for overseas members) to Dan Krabill, ASA Treasurer, 6009 Copely Lane, McLean VA 22101.

Voss Awarded ARS Gold Medal

Long-time ASA member Don Voss was recently honored by the American Rhododendron Society with the prestigious Gold Medal, the highest award bestowed by the society.

The award recognizes Don's many contributions to the society and to our understanding of the genus *Rhododendron*, which have earned him international recognition. The award was announced at the ARS annual meeting in Long Island, New York, last May. He received the medal in June at a meeting of the Potomac Valley Chapter of ARS. Don joins an impressive list of ARS Gold Medalists, including former U.S. National Arboretum director Henry Skinner, who received the award in 1965.

A retired CIA branch chief, Don became interested in azaleas soon after serving in the army during World War II. His father-in-law, renowned azalea breeder Robert Gartrell,

had hybridized a group of evergreen azaleas known as Robin Hill azaleas. Before Gartrell's death, the Botannical Register had requested him to register the remainder of his Robin Hill selections (about half). Don evaluated the remaining plants, prepared registrations, and helped to introduce them into the nursery trade. He then organized Gartrell's records and papers, which are now housed in the archives at the University of Virginia.

Don has an impressive list of accomplishments. He has long been active with the ASA and ARS. For the ARS, Don served as a member of the Board of Directors and as President of the Potomac Valley Chapter, and he still serves on the Research Committee, reviewing grant proposals and ensuring that work funded by the society meets high standards for scientific accuracy. He has served for many years on the editorial review board for the ASA.

Contributions by Don Voss to the American Rhododendron Society (ARS), Azalea Society of America (ASA), and other azalea work that contributed toward his receipt of the Gold Medal include:

- Serving as a speaker at ARS meetings and as a judge at flower shows. In addition to the editorial board for the ASA, he served on the ARS Editorial Committee. He reviewed manuscripts for the publications of these societies, helping authors to correct errors and ambiguities in their manuscripts. Don served an important role in ensuring the accuracy and clarity of these publications. In addition, Don has published approximately 50 articles in horticultural journals.

- Becoming an internationally recognized authority on methods for describing flower color, a very important factor in describing plant cultivars accurately. While working to straighten out problems in the U.S. National Arboretum's Glenn Dale azaleas, Don had difficulties relating color descriptions made using the Ridgway Color Standards (used by Benjamin Morrison and other early horticulturists and now long out of print) to modern standards, especially the Royal Horticultural Society color chart. In the course of this study, Don worked with former National Arboretum geneticist Rob Griesbach and learned some molecular biology so he could understand how flower colors are produced and how they are inherited. Don's publications on the accurate description of flower color are now used by horticulturists throughout the world.

- Working with scientists and horticulturists with European organizations such as the Royal Horticultural Society and the Scottish Rhododendron Society in the U.K.—where he is highly respected—on cultivated plant nomenclature. Don's work has led to revisions to the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants, and he was invited to serve on the editorial commission that produces the Code, a position he was unable to accept.

Don is also active with the U.S. National Arboretum, volunteering more than 6,500 hours since 1988. The list of his accomplishments during this period is impressive. It includes extensive research, writing, and editing projects, as well as a stint as herbarium manager.

Contributions by Don Voss during his work as a National Arboretum volunteer that contributed towards his receipt of the American Rhododendron Society's Gold Medal include:

- Playing a key role in the final editing and publication of National Arboretum Contribution Number 7, *A catalog of cultivated woody plants of the southeastern United States*, for which he worked closely with former arboretum scientist Fred Meyer and is credited as co-author.

- Checking all specimens of *Rhododendron* in the National Arboretum herbarium—several thousand specimens, including both wild and cultivated *Rhododendron* from all parts of the world—making sure that the identifications were correct and the names used were up-to-date.

- Thoroughly reviewing the botanical type and horticultural standard collections in the National Arboretum herbarium, which involved a re-evaluation of around 4,000 specimens and the checking of thousands of publications, including some very obscure literature. Don wrote a new database to allow this information to be captured initially, and he is now working to transfer this data to the main BG-Base database. In the course of this work, Don formally designated several hundred horticultural standards according to the new requirements set down in the latest version of the International Code for the Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants. Also included in this project was a re-evaluation of all current and historical specimens of Glenn Dale azaleas.

- Essentially running the National Arboretum herbarium for more than a year in the 1990s after the retirement of Peter Mazzeo and the death of Ted Dudley left the arboretum temporarily without a taxonomist. During this period, Don oversaw the operations of the herbarium, ensured that essential operations continued to be carried out, and took over supervision of other volunteers.

Call for Articles

Pam Fitch

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.

Chapter News

Brookside Gardens

William C. Miller III

The speaker at the Brookside Garden chapter's annual meeting on December 5 was Carole Bergmann, a forest ecologist and field botanist for the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Best known for her war against exotic, invasive, and pest plants, her presentation was entitled *Wild Flowers of the Maryland Piedmont*.

The current chapter officers agreed to continue for 2011 and were approved by acclamation. The treasurer's report was made and accepted and a copy of the two volume IRRC was shown at the "show and tell" session. The F. P. Lee Commendation for 2010 was awarded to **Yoriko** and **Ming Chin**.

Barbara Bullock, the curator of azaleas and rhododendron at the U.S. National Arboretum was the speaker at the February 6 chapter meeting. Her presentation was entitled *Designing with Azaleas: Tips on Pruning and Placement in the Landscape*.

While we didn't experience the massive snow fall of last winter, we still had a couple of scares, a lot of plant damage, and some pretty significant regional power outages. As a result, generators and power back-up systems are popping up like crocuses.

The speaker for the Sunday, April 3 chapter meeting will be Brookside's own **Phil Normandy**, and the title of his presentation will be *The History of the Azaleas at Brookside Gardens*.

▼ At the Brookside Gardens Chapter's 2010 annual meeting on Sunday, December 5th, the Frederic P. Lee Commendation was awarded to Ming (left) and Yoriko Chin of Rockville, Maryland for their many contributions to the chapter.

Photo William Miller III

Texas

Barbara Stump

The Texas Chapter has grown, thanks to concerted public relations efforts of **Pam Fitch** and **Mike Stump**, and holding fun meetings like the June cutting picnic. In November, we decided to take a hint from the way the Ozark Chapter of the ARS works—meeting in different places to encourage learning while meeting for the Society. So, 18 Texas Chapter members took a fall trip to Shreveport, Louisiana.

The trip allowed us to visit member **Bud Willis's** nursery, Willis Farm, to see his stock of selected ornamental native and heirloom shrubs, and shade and fruit trees. His plant list includes five varieties of deciduous azaleas including 'Admiral Semmes' and 'Stonewall Jackson' and 13 varieties of evergreen azaleas—Southern Indian, Kurumes, Aromi, Glenn Dale, Beltsville, and Harris hybrids. Of course, the fact that we could purchase plants there helped attract members to the trip.

After a fine lunch arranged by **Jeanette Hotard**, we went into Shreveport to see the gardens around the R.W. Norton Art Gallery. The Gallery has 40 landscaped acres that include 15,000 azaleas and a variety of other flowers including native iris, ginger, cannas, and black-eyed-Susans. The trails allowed us to view many lovely trees and shrubs including sweetspire, dwarf abelia, loropetalum, 'Crimson Queen' and 'Bloodgood' maples, dogwoods and redbuds. **Dr. David Creech** and his wife **Janet** joined us there to answer questions about this garden.

The site is essentially a large ravine, so the trails wound down ridges to a beautiful pond at the bottom (see photo). Another special treat was the special art exhibition: "Ansel Adams: The Masterworks." This collection of 47 stunning black-and-white landscape photographs by Adams (1902-1984) represented about two-thirds of a selection he himself made late in his life to serve as a succinct representation of his life's work.

While this was Mike's final effort to organize the Texas Chapter into a growing chapter, we will continue the theme with other cutting picnics and trips. There are many people in East Texas who love azaleas, and we aim to find them and get them into our Society!

As a service project, the chapter purchased a number of deciduous azaleas from Doremus Nursery in Warren, Texas, for planting in a new garden at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches. Thanks to a wonderful gift of Charles R. Mize to Stephen F. Austin State University, this new eight-acre garden is now officially named (by the

Photo Jeff Abt

▲ Texas Chapter members, all but two new in 2010, and Tom Milner grin for the camera. The azalea gardens weren't in bloom, but now we know we need to come back in the spring.

SFA Board of Regents January 25, 2011) as the Gayla Mize Garden. This honors Ray's late wife, a former ASA member, who was very active in community affairs in Nacogdoches, who was a leader in the effort to start the Nacogdoches Azalea Trail 10 years ago, and who helped connect SFA Gardens with the donor whose endowment supports ongoing development of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden. We are now searching for the "best of the best" deciduous azaleas and ornamental flowering trees for this new garden. Members of the Texas Chapter are helping with mapping and plant labeling and hope to plant the next batch of azaleas next fall.

Azalea City Program Accepting Applications

One of the principal goals of the ASA is to promote the appreciation of azaleas in public and private landscapes. To help achieve that goal, a program was established in early 2004 to find, recognize and certify those municipalities that promote and display azaleas as Azalea Cities.

We invite you to explore the requirements to be recognized and certified as an official Azalea City. In general, successful applicants for Azalea City status will have shown a dedication to highlighting azaleas through proclamations for an Azalea Week, festivals, tours, and the prominent display of azaleas in public gardens and landscapes. The certification period is for five years, contingent upon a continuing azalea emphasis in your municipality. There is no application fee.

For more information on the Azalea City program, including a list of current Azalea Cities, please visit the ASA Web site at www.azaleas.org.

In Memory

Michael Miller Stump

A memorial service of witness to the resurrection for Michael M. Stump, 71, was held Wednesday, December 1, at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Nacogdoches, Texas, with Rev. Steve Newton officiating.

Mike Stump passed away on Sunday, November 28, 2010 in Nacogdoches. He was born September 29, 1939 in Ashland, Kentucky to Harold and Sallie Stump.

He was a graduate of Spencer High School and Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. He earned his MBA from the University of Florida and had a long executive management career in a variety of businesses, including financial software systems, engineering, and contract operations for municipal water and wastewater treatment systems. Since making his permanent home in Nacogdoches in 1999 he had been an active citizen supporting community initiatives. His restoration of two historic homes in Nacogdoches led to involvement in Friends of Historic Nacogdoches, Inc. He also served as president of the Texas Chapter ASA and as an elder in his church home, Westminster Presbyterian Church. His primary interest was people, and he was a dedicated mentor to his children, co-workers, and friends. He will be remembered for his capacity for friendship, sincere encouragement to all, and his intelligent wit, ready humor, and smile as big as Texas.

Mike is survived by his wife, Barbara; sister Dianne Kelley of Hiram, Ohio; daughters Mamie Elizabeth Flechas of Williston, Florida, and Sara Goldberg of Orlando, Florida; and son Michael Vincent Stump of Pearland, Texas. He was his family's joy and treasure.

The family requests memorial gifts be made to the Azalea Research Foundation, c/o James O. Thornton, 884 June Drive, Conyers, GA 30094 or to the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, P.O. Box 13000 SFA Station, Nacogdoches, TX 75962.

▼ Mike Stump posed with "Flat Stanley" during a tour of Margie Jenkins' nursery at the 2010 ASA National Convention in New Orleans.

Photo Barbara Stump

A Winter to Forget: "Snowmageddon 2.0"—Part II

Don Hyatt—McLean, Virginia

Editor's Note: The following article is the second installment of a two-part story.

The following diary is really a collection of excerpts from e-mail messages sent to friends and family over several months during the winter of 2009-10. Some editing has been done to improve clarity, and to correct spelling and grammar errors. Metric equivalents have been added also.

Tuesday: February 9, 2010

I did get a better view of the garden in the back yard from the deck today. It is a total disaster. Almost all of the azaleas and rhododendrons have been flattened. My big pale yellow Exbury azalea 'Marina' that was featured on the cover of last winter's ***The Azalean*** has only one branch visible above the snow. The rest of the bush is prostrate. The snow is too deep for me to get anywhere near them. I had some large 'Glacier' azaleas off the deck, and I can already see damage there. The broken ends of large branches are poking out above the snow.

It is 4 p.m. now and the temperature has risen to 33 degrees (0.5° C). This is the first time it has been above freezing since the snow started falling last weekend. There were a few flurries awhile ago but they stopped and the sky is brighter. The news reports warn that this is just a temporary lull since a coastal storm is forming to the south and will be here later this evening. We are supposed to have ferocious winds with this storm—20 to 40 mph (32 to 64 km) with higher gusts.

I did finish shoveling the deck. I must admit that I tried to throw the last few shovels on the very top of my largest pile to get it above the deck. I made it! That pile is well over eight feet (2.4 m) tall and looks exactly like the Matterhorn. There weren't many places I could put the snow from the deck because I have so many good plants down there. My best Gregory Bald azalea selections are below the deck and I have that huge pink Glenn Dale 'Dream' at the corner. That monster measures eight feet (2.4 m) tall by 25 feet (7.6 m) wide and I can't put snow on it, either. I finally decided I could sacrifice a three feet (0.9m) tall 'My Mary.' She is a tough girl, but I have others in the garden. Of course, she may not thaw out until June.

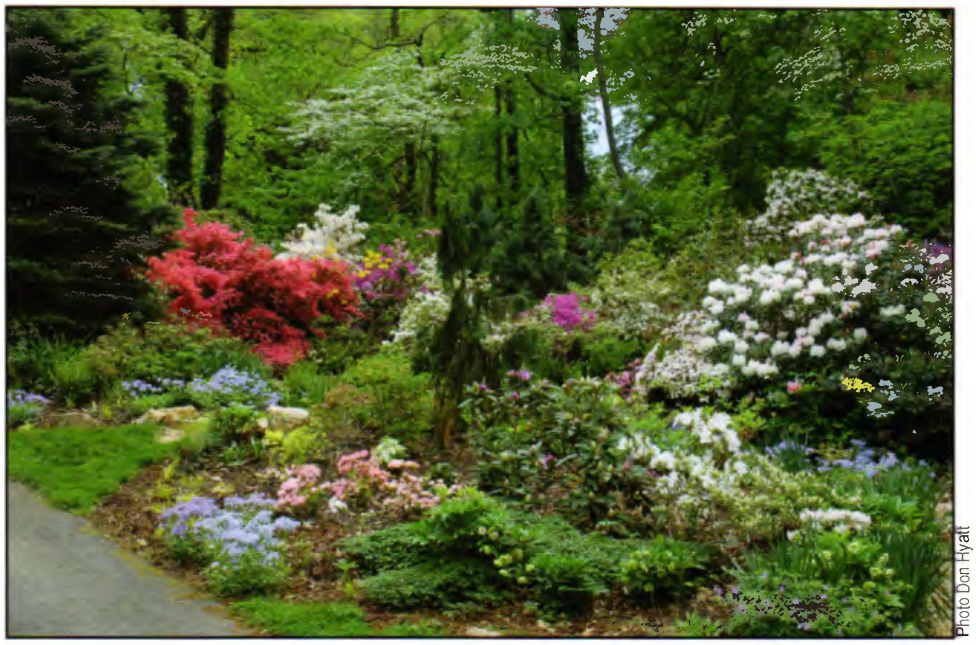

Photo Don Hyatt

▲ Don Hyatt's yard in bloom prior to "Snowmageddon 2.0"

▼ The same area on February 23, 2010.

Photo Don Hyatt


Photo Don Hyatt

▲ Hyatt's greenhouse surrounded by snow in February 2010.


Photo Don Hyatt

▲ Snow piled in Hyatt's back yard. Finding places to put the snow was problematic.

Wednesday: February 10, 2010

Snow, snow, snow! It is 9:30 a.m. and they have upgraded our expected storm totals again. We are under a blizzard warning now with 10 to 15 inches (25 to 38 cm) of snow expected by nightfall, possibly more. The winds are fierce! I already have about six inches (15 cm) of new snow, but it will be very hard to measure totals this time due to extreme drifting. We did have a period of sleet overnight after about the first three inches (7 cm) of snow. That packed things down and will at least limit the drifting to the top layer.

It is 2 p.m. now, and we are having white-out conditions all across the region. I guess we should call this "Snowmageddon 2.0." I can barely make out the house across the street but I can see a poor holly tree in my yard that is sideways from those strong winds. I can't believe I still have power. The temperatures here have been continuing to fall. It started out at 30 degrees (-1° C) and is now down to 17 degrees (-8° C). We have had gusts to nearly 50 mph (80 km). It is just brutal out there!

I am getting a lot of ice buildup on the greenhouse now because the outside temperature is so low that ice has formed on the glass inside the greenhouse. The snow doesn't melt as it falls. The furnace is running constantly and I bet it is still only 55 degrees (12° C) in there. There is snow buildup on the storm windows in the house, too. Some have large ice crystals on the glass, and others are completely frosted over. I can't see out.

It is 6 p.m. and the snow does seem to be letting up. I have noticed some amazing and artistic snow drifts outside. There is a large four feet (1.2 m) drift at the edge of the garage that completely engulfs an old 'Hino Crimson'. The patio between the house and the deck has filled up with snow; it must be at least five feet (1.5 m) deep. As best as I can tell, I think I got 14 inches (35 cm) with this storm so that makes at least 54 inches (137 cm) of snow in only 10 days, and more than 80 inches (203 cm) for the season.

Friday: February 12, 2010

It has taken me two days but I finally cleared the lower driveway to the street edge again. Then the plow came by, so that means I have an extra three feet (0.9 m) of ice to break through to gain access to the street. I'll do that tomorrow since I am not going anywhere. There is only a single lane down the center of the road, but I did get mail and a newspaper today. The temperatures got above freezing for a while, so maybe things will get back to normal soon. Fat chance!

Sunday: February 14, 2010

Shoveling snow is a never-ending task, but the biggest problem continues to be where to put it. I will have to consider that the next time I design a garden. Finding places to put snow is a problem for everyone. The parking lot at RFK Stadium in D.C. has become a dumping ground for snow. Piles are more than 30 feet (9 m) high. It didn't get above freezing here yesterday, so not much melting is going on.

The snow texture is rather firm right now, more like Styrofoam. Instead of shoveling, I cut off sections about the size of a cinder block and try to toss those somewhere. Once a pile is over my head, I start looking for another spot. That's not easy to do. I have had to sacrifice some rare plants but maybe I can root cuttings after this stuff melts.

Monday: February 15, 2010

It is President's Day, and apparently some monster snow plow or road grader came through the neighborhood last night to plow our street. We now have two lanes, so cars have room to pass and it is much safer. I guess they expect us to go out and hit the sales today. Naturally, it closed off my driveway so I have been out much of the morning trying to dig though that. I haven't even finished shoveling the steep side.

The grader was obviously having problems finding places to put snow and apparently dumped much of it on top of what used to be my azalea planting at the street edge. I guess the operator didn't realize that the white expanse wasn't a snow drift. It was my beautiful wall of azaleas including 'Rose Greely,' 'Dayspring', 'Corsage', and scattered rhododendrons. I wonder what will be left when that stuff melts.

The temperatures were very cold overnight but they have

Photo Don Hyatt

▲ A forty-year-old *R. makinoi* hidden beneath two feet of snow.

Photo Don Hyatt

▲ After carefully brushing away the snow, the *R. makinoi* "popped" back into place with minimal damage.

risen up above freezing now. The weathermen say we should get a mix of snow and rain in today's storm—probably no more than one to three inches (3 to 7 cm) in my area. The long range forecast is for maybe "something" on the weekend. Give me a break!

It is 8 p.m., and we did get some fairly heavy snow for a while this afternoon. We only got 1/2 inch (1.2 cm) of new snow, but a "dry spot" has developed over us and they think the snow is almost over. Hallelujah!

Tuesday: February 16, 2010

I am getting a closer look at some of the plants in the garden, and I am beginning to see so much breakage. The problem is that the damage isn't over yet. As the snow melts from below, the top layer settles and more branches are going to break. There is not much I can do about it. I will have to do a lot of heavy pruning this spring. In a few years, things might look decent again, maybe even better in some cases since many of those big plants were really getting out of bounds. I have watched Barbara Bullock's wonderful renovation of the old Glenn Dales at the U.S. National Arboretum over the years. The trick is to prune early in the season before the plants break dormancy (Mother Nature did that), and never take out more that 1/3 of the big branches at any one time. I will try to restore my garden in the same way.

Thursday: February 18, 2010

I spent most of my time after breakfast digging my way to the street edge on the steep side of my circular driveway. I'm done! It is such a feeling of accomplishment. Now I can start working my way around to other parts of the garden.

Sunday: February 21, 2010

I have been digging paths all over the garden today. I quit shoveling late this afternoon, and I am done for the day. Everything hurts, not just my broken body parts, but every single fiber of my being. I was able to dig some trenches through the snow for drainage should we get the heavy rains forecast for tomorrow. I have been most concerned about my special plants.

I finally worked my way over to the edge of the greenhouse because I didn't see any signs of my 40-year-old *R. makinoi*. That narrow leaved rhododendron is one of my favorite specimens in the entire garden. I raised it from seed. The plant used to be four feet (1.2 m) tall but all I could see was a two feet (0.6 m) pile of snow next to some benches. I decided my *R. makinoi* must be flat on the ground with all that snow on top of it. I approached the task like an archaeology dig, carefully removing snow around the plant, a handful at a time. I exposed each branch starting at the main trunk and working to the tip. When I finally got the plant clear, it popped right back into place and seems to be fine. It only has a couple of small broken branches.

In general, the rhododendrons in the garden have come through okay. I lost some branches, but I wondered if the way their leaves curl up when they are cold and straighten out in warmer weather has helped them shed the snow. The huge 'Caroline' that dominates my backyard wasn't even fazed by this mess. It is tough as nails! Their branches do seem flexible.

The more I see the azaleas, though, the more I realize they have taken a very serious hit. My purple azaleas in the front yard beside my well house have been completely crushed, especially in the center. Those were well over six feet (1.8 m) tall but as the melting continues, I can see that many of the trunks in the center of that planting seem to be twisted, splintered, or broken off. The side branches were able to rest on the lawn as the snow piled up so the view from the house should be okay. I have a hybrid white pine I don't know where to plant, so I may put it in the center of that planting. A vertical accent might be nice while the azaleas are filling back in.

Monday: February 22, 2010

It has been above freezing for several days and I noticed that one branch of my witch hazel 'Arnold Promise' that is above the snow has actually opened overnight. Those yellow flowers are a real treat to see. It gives me hope that spring will eventually come. Soon the snow will be just a memory and my azaleas will be in bloom. I expect spring to be late


Photo Don Hyatt

▲ As the snow melted, significant plant damage was revealed.


Photo Don Hyatt

▲ Broken limbs of an azalea as snow melts away.

▼ Pruned azaleas making a come back in August 2010.

this year. No matter what the flowers look like, they will be appreciated more than ever after Snowmageddon.

I am certainly looking forward to New Orleans and the ASA Convention. It has been cold along the south, so spring might be late for them. I don't care if there isn't a single azalea in bloom as long as they don't have any snow.

Postmortem:

In late March, I pruned out the most severely broken branches in the azaleas, but tried not to remove more than 1/3 of the branches on any individual plant. By mid-summer, strong new shoots had regenerated from below those cuts. I will need to do additional shaping over a period of several years to restore some plantings, but after the initial shaping most plants look fine.

After such a long and cold winter, the spring was not late but very early. The weather shifted from below normal to way above and most flowers bloomed two weeks ahead of schedule.

The saga of the 'My Mary' under the giant snow pile was interesting. The first twig was visible by March 8, and by March 18, the pile was only 3 ft (0.9 m) tall and a few more branches were showing. After several days with temperatures near 80 degrees (27° C) followed by some heavy rains, the snow pile was only 4 ft (1.2 m) wide and 10 inches (25 cm) high on March 20. By March 25, every bit of snow was gone, but four days later a late freeze caught most of the very early spring bloom, but it was not cold enough to ruin the mid-season garden which was lovely. The plant of 'My Mary' was more like a ground cover after the snows melted and it did lose a major branch. It bloomed two weeks later than the others in the garden.

It seems like we moved from Snowmageddon straight into Dante's Inferno. June and July were the hottest on record with many days well above 100 degrees (38° C). After many weeks of severe drought, rains returned in late July. By August, most plants looked very healthy and were setting buds for next season. The garden seems to be healing, and so am I.


Photo Don Hyatt

Don Hyatt *has been an avid hybridizer of azaleas and rhododendrons for more than 30 years, with a particular interest in deciduous azaleas. He taught mathematics and computer science for more than 35 years. His exceptional web pages at http://www.tjhsst.edu/~dhyatt/gardencenter.html demonstrate his ability to combine his work and avocation. Don is a former district director of the ARS, and a past director of the ASA and past president of the Potomac Valley ARS chapter.*