

2011 Evansville Convention Wrap Up— Azaleas and Other Interests Challenging Weather—Still a Great Convention

Carol Flowers—Washington, D.C.

We have taken airplanes to most ASA conventions we have attended, but this year we decided to drive to Indiana. By driving, we had the opportunity to visit family in Dayton, Ohio. As the time for the drive came closer we began to take some serious looks at the Evansville, Indiana, weather reports. The reports were not good. As late April closed in, we worried more and more about our two-day drive from Washington, D.C. to Evansville. The rain was not stopping, and Evansville was reporting record floods. Our drive began not knowing what challenges lay ahead.

Before the convention, Evansville was an area of the country neither of us had ever seen. I was looking forward to touring the gardens and places described by the article in *The Azalean*. As we got closer to Evansville, sights of flooded homes and farm lands led us to wonder what effect this damaging weather would have on the upcoming convention. Would nature be kind to our hosts from Hoosier country? Area roads were flooded and in some cases probably washing away. Would convention goers actually be able to see the planned area gardens and natural landscapes?

In retrospect, there was no need to worry. Our hosts were up to the challenges. They knew lots of alternate roads to use and nature cooperated. We didn't have much sunshine during the convention, but we didn't have torrential rains either. The garden tour write-ups lived up to expectations and the convention speakers provided lots of new information on azaleas and gardening ideas.

This article has not been an easy one to write. In trying to figure out what to say, I have made trips to the local Chinese carry out for lunch, the drug store for a morning paper, and the grocery store for ice cream. All of this was really done to try and figure out what to write about. The article written to describe the convention and entice all of you to come was well done. It accurately talked about planned convention events. I kept asking myself what new and different information I could provide. A day passed. I finally had some ideas for this article.

While on the tours, and after hearing the great speakers, I came up with lots of new ideas for my own D.C. gardens. As usual, I doubt that I will implement many of them. During every Azalea Society convention, I see great gardens, am introduced to new varieties of azaleas, and hear speakers talk about wonderful garden related topics. What added richness to the events of this convention were the interests of our Hoosier hosts other than those directly related to azaleas. Information about our hosts' other interests began when I looked to see what surprise goodies were in my convention



Photo Barbara Slump

▲ Sculpture at the Red Skelton Museum.

▼ Exbury deciduous azalea at Wits End Garden.



Photo Barbara Slump

packet. Foodstuff is always popular with me, so I was pleasantly surprised when I discovered a jar of what looked like homemade salsa. The cleverly designed label on the jar had a Web site address. I figured it described something about the jar's contents. In the rush of events, I forgot about the jar and didn't see it again until I returned home. Sightseeing tours, speeches, the plant sale; and Azalea Society board of directors' meetings quickly took center stage.

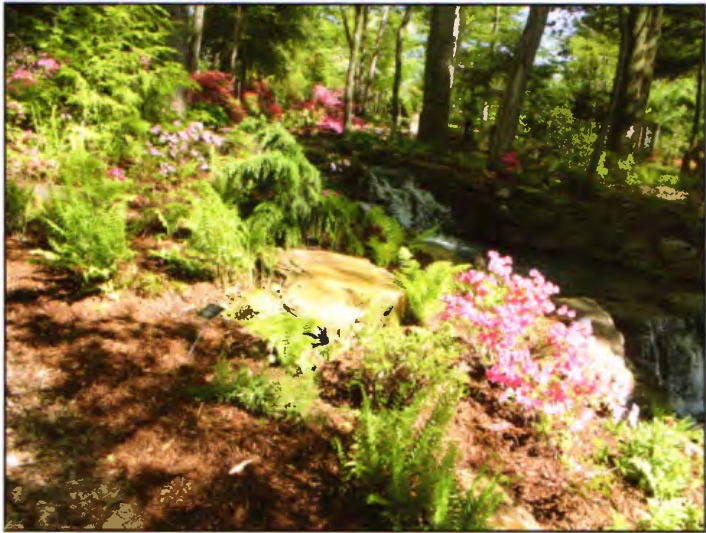


Photo Barbara Slump

▲ Hillside at Azalea Path Arboretum and Botanical Garden



Photo Barbara Slump

▲ Don Dillinger's Garden

Friday Garden Tours

Early Friday morning we boarded buses for the one hour trip to the neighboring town of Vincennes. Once arriving in the small city, local tour guides told us something about the town's history. Yes, Red Skelton grew up in this city. Taft, our country's 27th president, had also been a resident of this town. The town started as a fort around the time of the War of 1812 and over the years had been home to various Indian tribes, Canadians, French, British and eventually of course Americans.

We were lucky to have the opportunity to see the work of the area's well-known landscape designer Dallas Foster. He had helped the Emert family with the design and development of their garden "Wits End." Students from Vincennes University enjoy this garden when they study horticulture. I am sure much of what they learn has to do with the comprehensive collections of plants growing in this garden's series of six rooms. Of course, plants at "Wits End" include lots of azaleas.

The bus tour concluded with the 50 acres of azaleas and woodland plants found at the Azalea Path Arboretum and Botanical Garden. Wow, what a beautiful spot!

Saturday Garden Tours

Saturday tours concentrated on the local Evansville area. It started with Evansville's pride and joy, the Mesker Zoo's Botanic Gardens and the new Amazonian Exhibit. People from both the world of horticulture and the world of zoo animals worked to provide huge greenhouses with plants and animals found around South America's Amazon River.

With any visit to a zoo, the kid comes out in us. As parents and grandparents we now go back to zoos with children and grandchildren. We continue to be delighted by the new and fascinating animal creatures and plant varieties that exist. Amazon plants and animals were new to me. Hopefully for the sake of future generations we will learn to protect and nurture the flora and fauna found in this part of the world.

▼ Convention attendees entering Mesker Zoo



Photo Barbara Slump

We saw more Evansville city gardens, each with a different theme and different kinds of plants; each reflecting the interests of the owners. Lunch was a special event. Not many garden groups have members like **Debbie** and **John Bizal**. Besides azaleas, their interests include collecting and restoring old cars, World War II planes, and associated memorabilia. The barbeque lunch was great, but people like my husband weren't as interested in lunch. When the tour bus pulled up to the hangar, their eyes lit up. The opportunity to see and photograph these collections proved to be one of the highlights of the day. Who expected the opportunity to see restored World War II planes at a plant convention!

Because of the flooded roads I am not sure what Evansville city gardens I did or did not see. What I do remember enjoying were walks through beautiful housing areas. Thanks all of you who were willing to open up your gardens and show your private special places.

Convention Speakers

Thursday Night Speakers

Gene Bush, owner of Munchkin Nurseries, spoke about



▲ Howler Monkey Exhibit at Mesker Zoo

▼ Margie Jenkins admiring one of the Bizal's restored cars.



▲ Restored cars at Debbie and John Bizal's home.

▼ The Bizal's also restore vintage World War II aircraft.



the perennial shade and woodland plants he grows, collects and sells at his nursery. The tiny "munchkin" plants he displayed were not something you would find at Lowe's or Home Depot. I have little experience with wild woodland plants. My immediate thoughts were—what beautiful creations of nature. With a little bit of luck I will find the time and energy next year to plant a few of these "munchkin" treasures. I might even learn the names of some of them.

Tom Johnson was instrumental last year in helping to form our new ASA chapter in Charleston. In memory of the Rev. Drayton, who owned the historic rice plantation "Magnolia Plantation" during our nation's Civil War period and restored its gardens as a romantic style garden, the chapter was named the "Rev. John Drayton" chapter.

With much enthusiasm, Tom discussed his plans to use his knowledge of azaleas and camellias to find pre-1900 varieties so that Magnolia Plantation can be restored to the romantic style garden of its past. Tom's enthusiasm was catching. Holding meetings once a month, the new azalea chapter is off to a great start and is scheduled to host an ASA convention in the near future. If any of you ASA members

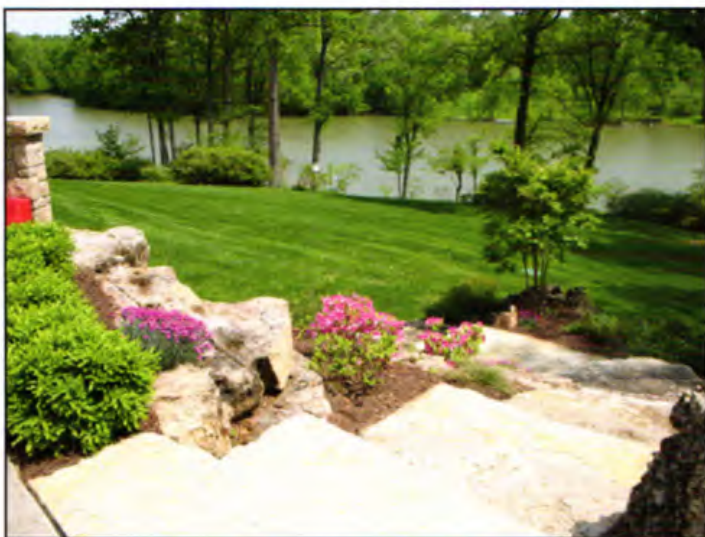
know the locations of the old camellias and azaleas please let Tom know.

Since I am by nature an early riser, listening to talks at night is generally difficult for me. Both Gene and Tom kept me interested and awake. Thanks for being willing to give these talks and for keeping them interesting.

Friday Night Speakers

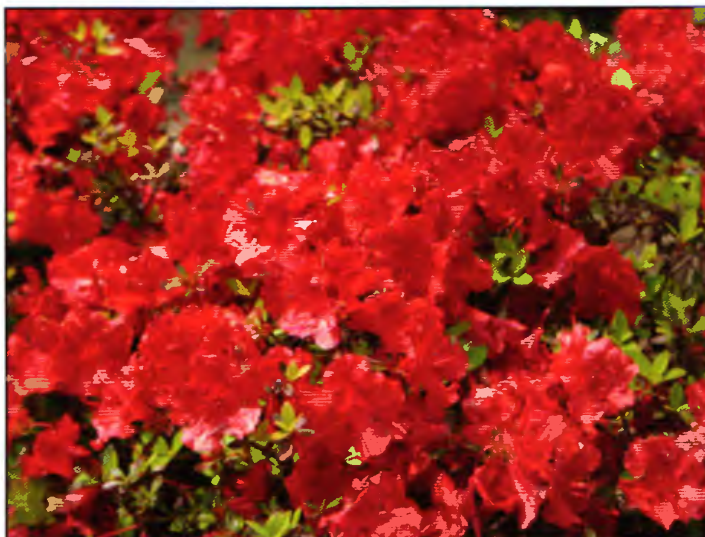
Our speakers, Jack Brown and Paul Bouseman, both provided talks the evening after our tour of the Vincennes area. Having lived in Evansville for a long time, Jack was able to tell us much about Evansville's past. He and Paul Bouseman had in common the fact that they both had worked on the Amazon exhibit at the Mesker Zoo.

A lot of study is going into the horticultural habitats that make up the homes of zoo animals. Study in this field allows zoo keepers to provide more comfortable animal habitats. In his talk about the zoo, Paul Bouseman provided us with a lot of information gained and put into practice to keep zoo animals healthier and happier. I even learned about a new plant-related field called zoo horticulture. Next time I am



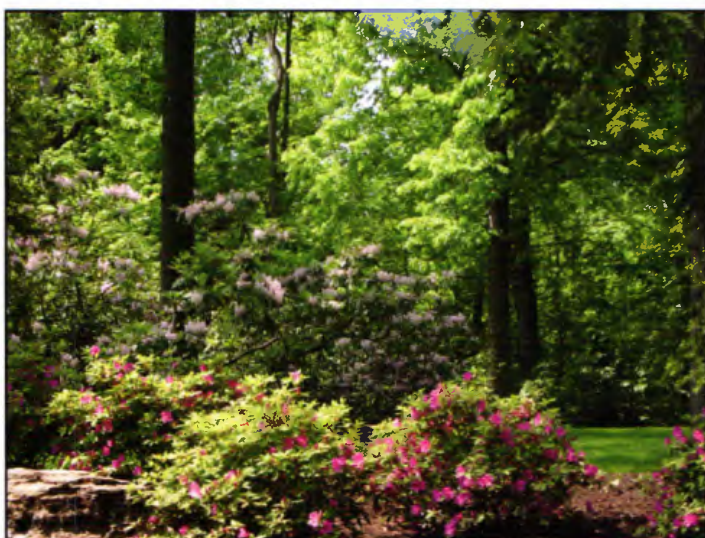
▲ Limestone steps at Fuquay garden.

▼ Fuquay garden.



▲ New planting of azaleas at Fuquay garden.

▼ Double pale pink azalea at Fred Sievers garden.



at the zoo in Washington, D.C., I will make more of a point of looking at the plants and trees grown there. Maybe they even have some azaleas I have never seen before.

Saturday Night Speakers

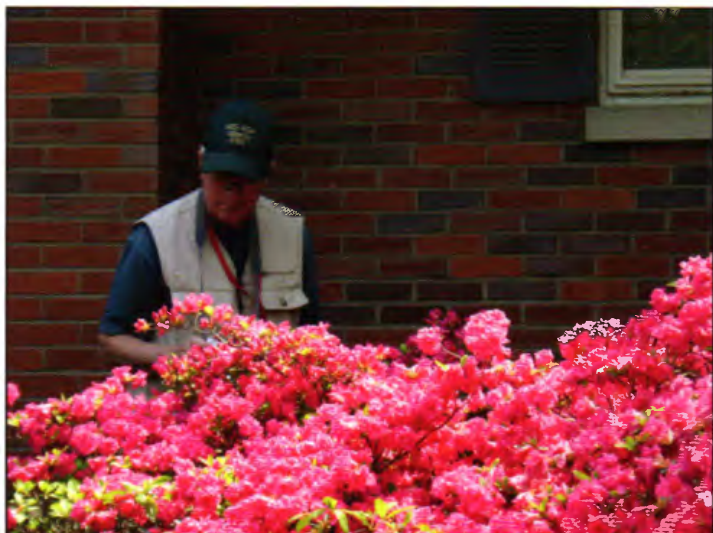
By the time the Saturday night banquet took place, we had been able to catch up with old friends and meet new friends. We had seen the varieties of azaleas that grow in the southern Indiana area and become familiar with many other types of plants. We were now aware of the fact that there are huge numbers of varieties of both Japanese maples and Hosta. We had been introduced to the wild flowers, ground covers, and unusual shrubs and trees which enrich the designs of our azalea gardens. We now knew more about azaleas and companion plants. Many of us were thinking about introducing these plants to our own gardens. Obviously whether or not these plants could be grown in our own gardens depended on the climate and soil conditions of our home towns. There was another problem with using plant: availability. Saturday night keynote speaker, Dr.

Andrew Whipple, addressed this issue.

Dr. Andrew Whipple became very aware of the problem of plant availability when he tried to find and grow exceptionally beautiful azaleas he had seen while attending the 2002 ASA/ARS convention in Atlanta, Georgia. Because of his biology background, he knew he had to learn the methodology related to tissue culture. During his keynote speech he shared techniques and methodology involved in plant propagation via tissue culture. It was these techniques he used to produce plants for the azalea garden at the Indiana University where he teaches.

I doubt that many of us who listened will actually practice this methodology. What we do know now is that this propagation method is being used more and more. Propagation via tissue culture will make rare plants more available. Our gardens will be all the more beautiful because of the many plants being grown using this method of plant propagation.

The annual meeting for society members was held after the banquet. Our newest chapter, The Rev. John Drayton



▲ Joe Coleman admiring the azaleas in Fred Siever's garden.

▼ Larry Miller's garden



▲ Larry Miller's garden

▼ Evansville Historic District



chapter, recently formed in Charleston, South Carolina, was recognized. It is a chapter that is already full of very active and enthusiastic Azalea Society members. We look forward to the annual convention they will be hosting in the not too distant future.

Summing Up the 2011 Convention

Sunday, my husband and I headed home. Once again we had met old friends and made new friends. We had learned more about the azalea and the plant world. Before the convention we had never thought much about Japanese maples and hosta plants. Now we knew there were hundreds of varieties of them. We learned that rare plants, including native azalea plants can be produced using tissue culture techniques. Because of our convention hosts, we knew more about the restoration of old cars and World War II airplanes – and after arriving home we again found that jar of homemade salsa.

On its label was a Web site: 2020clearview.com. I brought up the website and learned that one of our convention hosts

was not only an eye doctor and gardener but also the “Salsa King” of Vincennes, Indiana. Dr. Emert, if you ever want to give up being an eye doctor you can always get into food preparation. The Web site had lots of salsa recipes and is now bookmarked on my computer. Excess tomatoes and peppers from my home garden worked great in some of the recipes I tried. So now maybe I can be a salsa queen at the farmer’s market in downtown LaPlata, Maryland.

You never know what you might learn at Azalea Society conventions. What you do know is that you will always enjoy them and have a good time.

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