

ASA/ARS Joint Convention 2012

Preston & Bonnie Cooley - Dallas, Texas

The 2012 ASA/ARS joint convention was our first convention as the editors of *The Azalean*. We lived in Charleston, South Carolina at the time so we chose to drive to Asheville. We love the mountains of North Carolina and were excited to see them in the Spring. The convention headquarters was the Crowne Plaza Resort, which was very well appointed and conveniently located. The free shuttle service to downtown Asheville was especially nice!

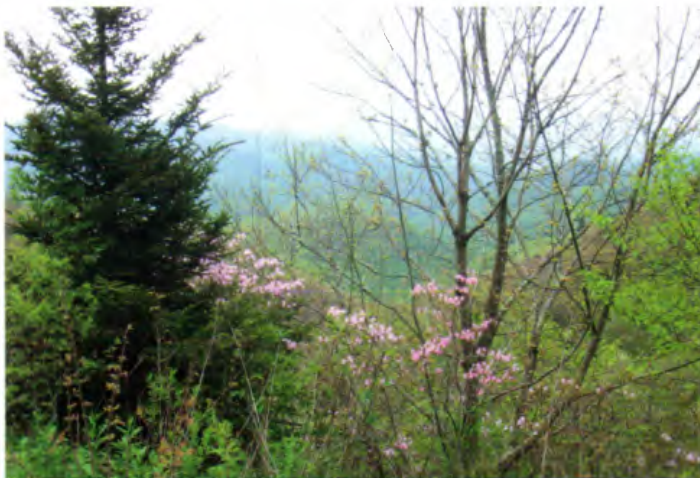
The convention opened on Friday, May 4. For the board members of the ASA and ARS this meant meetings; for everyone else it was tours and sightseeing. For those that signed up, there was a pre-convention tour of the beautiful Biltmore Estate house and gardens. The house, which is the largest single-family home in America, stands within 8,000 acres of gardens and forest. Society members had the opportunity to tour the Shrub Garden, Spring Garden, Walled Garden, Azalea Garden, and the Vanderbilt home. Society members arrived back in the afternoon and had some time to relax before heading off to the evening event.

Friday evening was the welcome reception and presentation. The reception started around 4 with hearty appetizers and a bluegrass band. It was a time for people to filter in and socialize as they waited for the evening's presentation to begin. The presentation, given by Don Hyatt, was entitled *Chasing the Bloom*

and it was very informative. He took us on a journey through the botanical diversity of the Southern Appalachian Mountains using wonderful images and humor. It is always refreshing to see a presenter who is passionate about their subject!

Saturday started early for those going on the tour of gardens. Breakfast began at 6:30 and the buses, all six of them, were loaded and away by 8:30! Our journey started up the Blue Ridge Parkway to view wildflowers, azaleas, and rhododendrons in the wild. Our trip on the parkway was especially informative because we ended up on Don Hyatt's bus, and got to "chase the bloom" in real time! We saw so much of what Don had talked about the night before. Don't pass up a chance to have him as your guide; it is a rare treat. The weather was cold and damp, but the many native azaleas in bloom made it worthwhile.

Our next stop was the Charles Dexter Owen Garden in Biltmore Forest, near the Biltmore Estate. This beautiful estate was created by the current owner's father and mother in the early 20th century. The centerpiece of the garden is a collection of Dexter rhododendrons which the current owner's father had shipped by box cars from Cape Cod. This is one of only three major collections of Dexter rhododendrons in the world today! There were various species of rhododendron and azaleas planted on either side of the approach/driveway to the house.



▲ Native Azaleas on Blue Ridge Parkway



▲ Cascading Dexter Rhododendrons at the Charles Dexter Owen Garden



Photo Bonnie Cooley

▲ The Charles Dexter Owen Garden

▼ Bonsai Garden at the North Carolina Arboretum

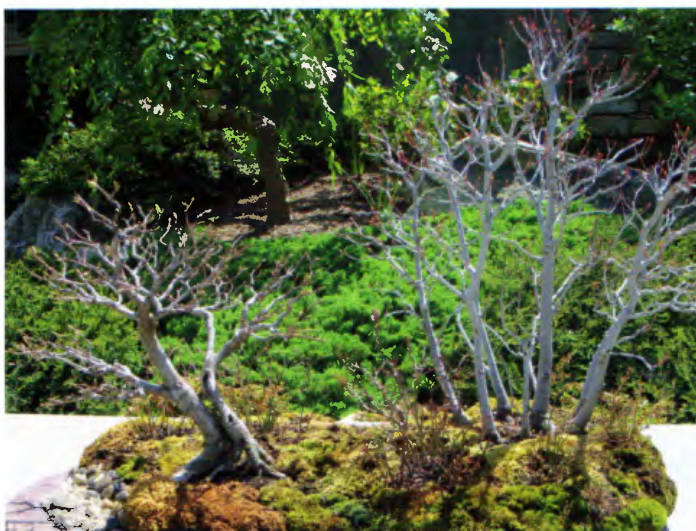


Photo Bonnie Cooley



Photo Bonnie Cooley

▲ 'Amagasa' at the North Carolina Arboretum

Upon reaching the top of the driveway we were met by a breath-taking display of Dexters cascading over a 50 foot long brick wall! As we continued our walk we passed the greenhouse that houses the owner's orchid collection, strolled through the perennial garden and continued on to the lower shade garden. The shade garden had a variety of species of rhododendrons along with lilacs and dogwoods. There is also an extensive native garden on the property, which was just installed over the last year.

Our final stop was the North Carolina Arboretum located in the Pisgah National Forest. This 435 acre arboretum includes of 65 acres of cultivated gardens and 10 miles of forested hiking/biking trails. The gardens were designed to reflect the heritage of the Southern Appalachians and the role plants played in the life of the people. The weather cleared and became almost warm, so walking was very pleasant.

We saw the Quilt Garden, designed to reflect traditional quilt patterns, and the Bonsai Garden, which has one of the best collections of bonsai in the Southeast. The arboretum is also home to the eight acre National Native Azalea Collection, which holds 16 of the 17 azalea species native to the United States. While most of these natives were past bloom, there were a handful of *Rhododendron flammeum* to brighten the path. The arboretum is definitely on the list of places to return to again and again.

We returned to the hotel around 5 pm after a full day of taking in just some of the beauty of Western North Carolina. After a flower show judging workshop and hybridizers roundtable discussion, Saturday wrapped up with the Rhododendron Society banquet, meeting and award ceremony. This was followed by a presentation by Christina Woodward and Nick Yarmoshuk on the Brueckner elepidot rhododendron hybrids and a program for their formal evaluation.

Sunday was another day full of beautiful gardens in Hendersonville: the Grist gardens, the Collins garden, the Stewart garden, and the Stelloh garden, all graciously opened for convention goers to enjoy.

In the Grist gardens we saw the Japanese Garden, complete with waterfalls and a pagoda. There was also a Charleston Garden and a Victorian Rose Garden. Varieties of azaleas and rhododendrons are planted throughout the property.

The Collins garden is located on seven acres with two streams. The previous owner had an interest in dwarf plants, which you could see in the number of dwarf rhododendrons, conifers and azaleas, among other things. Two additional acres have been opened to display Cowles hybrid rhododendrons, deciduous azaleas and transplants from the dense plantings of the existing garden.

The Stewart garden, located next to the Collins garden, was originally developed by Dr. August Kehr over two plus decades. The property encompasses ten acres. Due to Dr. Kehr's hybridization work, the garden may contain the largest collection of magnolias in the country. The garden is also home to a vast collection of rhododendron and azalea hybrids, many of them developed by Dr. Kehr.

The Stelloh garden is an informal woodland garden full of azaleas, rhododendrons, Japanese maples, dwarf conifers, and wildflowers. The garden is mostly shade but it did have a few sunny spots. Everywhere we turned there was something different, something unexpected. For those who missed it, you missed a treat.

Sunday evening wrapped up with the Azalea Society banquet and meeting. Reports were presented, Society business was discussed, and at the end, awards were given. Afterwards was an enlightening presentation by Dr. Thomas Ranney entitled "Trekking through Swarms of Azaleas and Double Helices". Dr. Ranney and two of his graduate students, Kimberly Shearer and Jason Lattier, presented their two projects that study the role of hybridization and polyploidy in plant evolution.

Thank you to the Vaseyi Chapter for all of your hard work and diligence. This joint convention was a huge success and enjoyed by all who attended.

▼ Buddy Lee and John Migas at the plant sale



Photo submitted by Buddy Lee



Photo Bonnie Cooley

▲ The Charles Dexter Owen Perennial Garden



Photo Buddy Lee

▲ Dr. Thomas Ranney

▼ Garden at White Gate Inn and Cottage

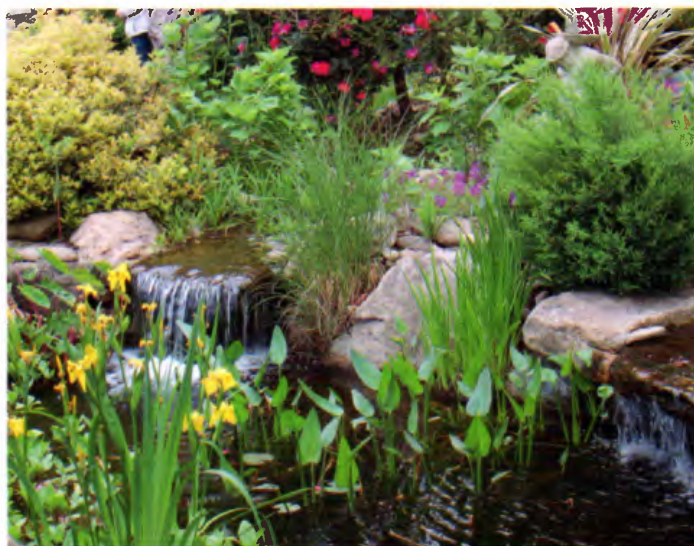


Photo Joanne Neckel