

# President's Letter

## Charlie Andrews—Cumming, Georgia

Spring is in the air. It is time for snow and cold weather to depart. We are ready to be out in our gardens tending and talking to our plants. Yes, I talk to my azaleas. Don't you? It is the time for our enjoyable annual convention to get together with our friends. It is a time to begin field trips to see native flora in the wild and in public gardens.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote of proclaiming spring in the New England woods with the fresh Rhodora, *Rhododendron canadense*. We who have not seen them can imagine the excitement after a long and cold winter of spying the low shrubs covered with strong purple blooms on leafless branches. Emerson says:

Rhodora! If the sages ask thee why  
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,  
Tell them, dear, that, if eyes were meant for seeing,  
Then beauty is its own excuse for being

Gardening is therapeutic. While work is involved, it can be relaxing. Gardening is for fun and cleansing of the soul. Learning about plants is also educational. That is where ASA comes in. We are here to promote azaleas and provide information on these beautiful plants. Unfortunately, the trend in large nurseries and big box stores is to offer only a small selection of varieties. Growers then propagate them by the tens of thousands. Gone are the days of nurseries where one had a choice of 200 or more varieties. Our ongoing Legacy Project continues to develop information and establish collections of azalea hybridizers. The project introduces these hybridizers and their hybrids to a wider audience and encourages their propagation. Most of these are American hybridizers.

The first successful hybridization of deciduous azaleas was the Ghent Azaleas. This took place in Ghent, Belgium, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, using North American azaleas and *R. luteum* from the Black Sea area. A baker in Ghent, who was an amateur horticulturist, discovered a method of how to cross late-blooming azaleas with early-blooming ones. For 200 years, we knew him only as P. Mortier. Then in the year 2000, a book written in Dutch came out, documenting the history of Ghent Azaleas. The authors and their research team undertook their own legacy project, documenting and collecting garden specimens of named Ghent Azalea cultivars. Their book reveals who P. Mortier was. In this issue, we begin a two-part article to introduce P. Mortier to the English-speaking world and address problems with earlier information on which species were used. Our first successful hybrids deserve to be better known.

~ Charlie



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).

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### At-Large Contact

Rick Bauer

Regular membership is open to all interested parties for an annual amount of \$30; life membership for one or two persons at the same address is \$600. Members receive *The Azalean* and are eligible for participation in all activities of the Society. For information and a membership application, write to Mrs. Denise R. Lanclos, 132 Oakview Blvd., Lafayette, LA 70503. or visit [www.azaleas.org](http://www.azaleas.org).