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The Azalean

Journal of the Azalea Society of America





President's Letter

Aaron Cook—Hendersonville, North Carolina

I can say with complete honesty that I don't remember how or when I met most of my Azalea Society family. However, that is not true of Tom Johnson. We met while waiting to board the bus at the 2010 Louisiana Convention. We started a dialogue that lasted almost 15 years. I learned in that first conversation that he was an Eagle Scout, that he had worked on the Jimmy Carter Library Gardens in Atlanta, and that he planned to start a new Chapter of the Society in Charleston, SC. A few years later he hired one of my students to work at Magnolia. I remember vividly the 20th of November 2024 when I learned of his tragic passing. This left our Society without a President or Vice-President to serve the next term. I was at a loss for how to respond; but felt compelled to do something. So that evening, I emailed Charlie Andrews, Rick Bauer, and Paul Beck offering to help in any way possible.

I was prepared to serve as a Board member or even as Vice-President; but was completely unprepared to receive a call from Rick Bauer asking me if I would serve another term as President. While my first instinct was to look for a gracious way to back out, I could hear the voices of Jane Newman and Margie Jenkins in my head. Don't forget your promises! In 2009 during lunch at Green Springs Farm, I promised Jane I would do everything I could to keep the Society going. I made a similar promise to Margie in 2018 in Larry Coleman's garden at the Arkansas Convention. So here we are. I will be much more cautious about any future promises. I won't mince words. The task that lies ahead is daunting. Membership has fallen below 500 members for the first time in my memory, and it is getting more expensive to produce our Journal and to attend our annual Convention every year.

So, why am I filled with optimism. Several reasons spring to mind. We now have a new Membership Committee chair in Charlie Andrews. We still do a great job putting on Society conventions. The latest convention in Malvern, PA, is a fine example. As usual, I got to see all my friends and tour great gardens. I also saw and interacted firsthand with the next generation of Azalea Society leaders who are already making important contributions to the Society.

Each carefully planned activity and garden inspired in me a new optimism for the Society's future. As Lisa and I walked through the gardens, the attendees and helpful staff displayed an astounding accumulated knowledge of azaleas and horticulture. They shared this knowledge freely with each other, and you couldn't help but be caught up in their passion for plants. It was a delight to follow along the garden paths and listen to our members discuss species identification, hybridization, and new plant material.

Yes, we have a lot of work ahead of us. So, let's get to it.

~ *Aaron*

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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In This Issue

VOLUME 47 NUMBER 2 SUMMER 2025

Features

- 36 Azalea Miner Bee: Good Things Come in Small Packages
By Carol Allen—Germantown, Maryland
- 37 Member Profile: Don Hyatt
- 44 Mississippi's *Rhododendron austrinum*
By Ron Miller—Pensacola, Florida
- 49 In Memoriam: William Manning McDavit
By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland
- 52 Today, My Favorite First State Hybrid is 'Nels Pete'
By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

Society News

- 34 President's Letter
- 42 Chapter News
- 43 New Members
- 46 Distinguished Service Award Winners
- 47 Exceptional Service Award Winner
- 47 Call for Society Officers
- 48 April is Azalea Month
- 50 ASA 2025 Convention Wrap-up
- 54 When Does My Membership Expire
- 54 Advertising Manager Sought
- 55 Best Article Announcement
- 55 Financial Statement

Advertising Index

- 45 White's Nursery
- 45 The Azalea Works
- 55 Azalea Hill Gardens & Nursery
- 56 Visit Mobile

Deadlines for *The Azalean*:

- Fall 2025 issue is due July 15, 2025
- Winter 2025 issue is due October 15, 2025
- Spring 2026 issue is due January 15, 2026
- Summer 2026 issue is due April 15, 2026

On the Cover

Rhododendron (Ghent Azalea Group) 'Quentin Metsys' photo by Kathy Jentz at the Jenkins Arboretum.



Remember, you too can write for *The Azalean*! To submit your articles and photos for publication, contact: theazalean@gmail.com.

Azalea Miner Bee: Good Things Come in Small Packages

By Carol Allen—Germantown, Maryland



Fig. 1 Azalea miner bee on azalea flower. Photo by Beatriz Moisset, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

The idea that many plants depend on a specific pollinator has probably reached the status of common knowledge. This concept has urged gardeners and even commercial garden businesses to include more native plants than non-native wherever possible. Plants with local-ecotype provenance are actively sought in many gardening circles. The purpose is to support as much of the local insect population as possible.

Azaleas, members of the genus *Rhododendron*, have been studied for their pollination associates. Based on observation, swallowtail butterflies and bumblebees have been seen as successful pollinators.

The methods of pollination are many, and with swallowtail butterflies on azaleas, there emerges an even more unique method: pollination by wing flapping. It seems that as the butterflies scramble over a truss of flowers, they pick up pollen on the edges of their wings and with further flapping, deposit it on the protruding stigma. Both azalea pollen and swallowtail wing scales have been found on the stigmatic surface of azaleas.

Bumblebees are well known for their “buzz” or sonication type of pollination. Certain plant groups, Ericaceae being one, have anthers that hold their pollen in tubes with a small pore at one end (poricidal anthers). This keeps the pollen from being knocked off, but requires a certain type of pollinator to release the pollen from the tubes. Blueberries and azaleas have poricidal anthers.

The buzzing activity of bumblebees shakes the pollen out of the tubes and onto their bodies, as well as the nearby stigmas.

Where does that leave the azalea miner bee (*Andrena cornelli*)? They work over each anther thoroughly. They collect large amounts of pollen in the long, widely spaced hairs on the tibia (middle segment) of the female bee’s hind leg.

Transfer of pollen from the scopal hairs to the azalea stigma is not generally observed, leaving some researchers to assume that the azalea miner bee is an inefficient pollinator. (See Figure 2.)

Azalea miner bees are medium-small bees with sparse hairs on the abdomen. (See Figure 1.) The body color is dark-brown to black. They are found in mixed woodlands, orchards, suburban, and urban settings.

Azalea miner bees have been observed on native azaleas and rhododendrons in the wild, as well as hybrid azaleas in gardens. This is one more good reason to retain those large, traditional azaleas in the landscape.

Like most miner bees, the females are solitary and

nest in bare, well-drained soil. The pollen is used to feed the young bees. Azalea miner bees are not aggressive and seldom sting. If your property is blessed with an area of nesting miner bees, allow them their two to four weeks of late spring activity.

Azalea miner bees are not abundant. The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) lists 113 records with 28 occurrences supported with images. *Andrena cornelli* has been observed from Connecticut south to North Carolina. The Maryland Biodiversity Project holds 12 recorded sightings from nine counties throughout the state.

About the Author

Carol Allen describes herself as a committable plant-a-holic. She has more than 25 years’ experience in the horticulture industry, with a special interest in plant pests and diseases; is a Licensed Pesticide Applicator in the state of Maryland; and is an ISA-Certified Arborist.



Fig. 2 Left: stamens, consisting of filaments and anthers. Most flowers release pollen by splitting the anthers along a line of weakness (top right); some only do it through a small hole or pore (bottom right). © Wikipedia Creative Commons.

Member Profile: Don Hyatt

Tell us about yourself and your background.

I have had a lifelong interest in plants. I started my first garden when I was three years old at the family home my parents built in McLean, VA, in 1950. Over the years, I developed a shady garden featuring rhododendrons, azaleas, and wildflowers. For the first 60+ years, my $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre property was ideal, a moist sloping tract with rich organic soils. The typography faced northeast and had high dappled shade provided primarily by century-old oak trees that were 80 to 100 ft tall. Aided by unique microclimates available on the property, I was able to raise many plants that were difficult for others to grow. My garden was featured during the 2009 ASA Convention garden tour in Northern Virginia.

Due to unfortunate circumstances in recent years, I am now having to start over. The initial problem was the arrival of deer that found my organic garden especially tempting. More recently, I have been besieged by weather extremes that have killed most of my mature plants. Living on the same piece of property for 75 years, I can attest that the climate has definitely changed in the past decade. I have seen some of the hottest temperatures on record as well as some of the coldest. I have had periods with excessive rains and flooding, with an incredible eight feet of rain that fell in the summer of 2018. That year, my soil became super saturated, even on sloping terrains. It was the equivalent of river bottom muck that smothered the root systems of many rhododendrons and azaleas that were 40 to 50 years old. That was followed by several extreme droughts where my soils hardened like cement and cracked open. What is frustrating is that so many 100-year and 500-year weather records seem to be falling on a regular basis. This climate is not normal.

Warm temperatures often continue late into the fall now, but that can be followed by sudden deep freezes that have damaged hardy plants that had not yet gone dormant. A similar problem is happening in the spring when warm winter days will wake plants early from their dormant state, but then they get hit by a severe, late freeze. That can kill the blossoms for the current year, burn off the new growth, and it can often kill the plant. The freezing weather causes the rising sap to form ice crystal splitting the bark and separating it from the wood underneath. That girdles the plant which causes it to die in the summer.

A final blow the past few years has been the loss of my shade canopy. I have lost a total of 12 of my tallest oaks that were 100 years old. Some were lost to storm damage, but others to disease. My sheltered microcli-



Don Hyatt at the Jenkins Arboretum. Photo by Kathy Jentz.

mates are no more and I feel like I am trying to garden in the deserts of Kuwait.

Now that I have discussed the evolving history of my garden, I will shift to my personal history. I always considered myself a science nerd and assumed I would end up in a career related to horticulture. As a child, my favorite time was in the garden. I was always moving plants to improve the color scheme in the landscape. I also adopted the woods behind my house where I tended my wildflower colonies. In first grade, I actually made corsages for every girl in my class and I suspect that gesture helped me win class president. I sketched my flowers and painted watercolor portraits of them. I was hybridizing azaleas and rhododendrons when I was in my teens. I selected orchids for my high school science projects, since they were growing during the school year.

I earned a BS degree in Horticulture with a double major in Biochemistry from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in 1969. I had won a state science scholarship so my curriculum advisor allowed me significant freedom to add additional courses of interest each semester. I ended up with an extra 90 quarter hours above graduation requirements. In addition to the prescribed curriculum for my double major, I took advanced classes in mathematics and chemistry, food science technology, a class in FORTRAN, several classes in Shakespeare due to a superb visiting professor, classes in Russian and art illustration. I sang tenor in the Varsity Glee Club.

I had actually started a PhD program in biochemistry at Tech thinking that I would go into plant genetics but had an epiphany during the first summer term. Realizing I might end up in a career where I would spend most of my time in a laboratory, I felt it would be too confining. I had so many other interests. At that same time, Fairfax County Public Schools announced that they had a shortage of math teachers and were recruiting. Since I was certified to teach multiple subjects at

the secondary school level, I decided to accept an offer to teach math for one year while I assessed my priorities.

As often happens in life, your chosen career doesn't materialize and instead, some other career chooses you. That is what happened to me. I knew that teaching would not be a lucrative career but money was never a high priority for me. However, I found teaching very rewarding on a personal level. When I asked myself about the importance of teaching compared to other careers I might pursue, I had to rank it right at the top. Educators were highly regarded in many ancient cultures. I made my decision and spent the next 33 years teaching mathematics and computer science in Fairfax County, VA. In reflection, I think the personal satisfaction one feels in those two careers is really quite similar. A gardener plants some seeds, provides a nurturing environment, and creates a population of wonderful new plants. A teacher takes young minds, also provides a nurturing environment, and hopefully produces a group of competent young adults who will be assets to society.

For the first 16 years of my teaching career, I worked with all levels in middle school including non-readers and belligerents, as well as academically gifted. During that time, computer technology was being introduced in education. I had found that very interesting while an undergraduate, so I decided to pursue a MS Degree in computer science at night school offered by my alma mater, Virginia Tech. I had just completed my degree in 1985, when the Governor of Virginia announced a new magnet school, the Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (TJHSST), designed for students with special talents in math, science, and technology. There was a call for a teacher with a Master's degree in computer science and at least 5 years of teaching experience to be the Director of a Computer Systems Lab. I decided to apply and was offered that position. For the next 17 years, I developed advanced computer classes for gifted students based on my Master's program. That position was very demanding of my time, so it became my primary focus from the time the school opened in 1985 until I retired in 2002.

One life-changing experience for me and my students at TJHSST happened early in my tenure there during the summer of 1988. There was a national contest called SuperQuest sponsored by ETA Systems, a division of Control Data, where they were going to give away a million-dollar supercomputer to some high school in the U.S. I decided we should go after that prize. I formed a team with four of my students, and entered the competition. There were 2,500 entrants that they narrowed down to four finalist schools, so we were invited to spend the entire summer in Min-

nesota learning about the technology as we competed for that powerful machine. It was an awesome summer where each student had to develop a research project that would challenge their supercomputer. I was so proud of them and we did win. One of the judges, who was a Nobel Laureate, said he would accept the research project of one of my students, as is, as a Master's thesis. That computer was installed in our lab when we returned home. All seniors at Jefferson were required to do an independent research project, so it became a valuable tool for interdisciplinary computer applications, computer simulations, and graphics visualization.

From that point on, the students I taught at Jefferson were very successful in a wide range of competitions such as the Intel Science Talent Search, the International Science Fair, and an Internet competition called ThinkQuest where they won over \$250,000 in scholarships for themselves and prizes for the school. It has been so gratifying to follow the success of my former students as they pursued careers in college and industry.

After retiring in 2002, I shifted my focus back to my original interests in horticulture. It had taken a back seat because of the demands of teaching, but I was able to maintain a small business on the side, Stonehouse Creek Nursery. Started in 1978, I propagated rare rhododendron and azalea cultivars that I sold locally during the summer. A nursery can be rather confining, so eventually I closed that down, too. That allowed more time for travel and a chance to explore a wide range of interests including gardening, photography, botanical illustration, writing, and the study of native plants in the wild.

Since 1990, one of my main priorities has been documenting the beauty and diversity of our native azalea and rhododendron species. Rather than working on my own garden, I have preferred to use my time trying to preserve rare native azalea and rhododendron populations in the wild. I also look for ways to support public gardens since they will have permanence whereas private gardens are usually lost after the property is sold.

I did miss the daily lectures and interaction with my "audience" when I retired. Since then, I have become very active on the horticulture lecture circuit. I have given many presentations at national and international horticulture conferences on both coasts and overseas. I have been a frequent speaker at local garden clubs well as chapter meetings of the American Rhododendron Society and the Azalea Society of America. I received a number of awards including the ARS Silver Medal in 2002 and the ARS Gold Medal in 2012. I received the Distinguished Service Award from the ASA in 2009. I have served on the national Boards of both organizations.

Who are your influences/heroes?

I have had many people influence me over the years. Starting so young, my parents had much to do with nurturing my initial interests in horticulture. Before moving to McLean, VA, my parents had a small townhouse in Arlington, VA, where they raised roses, peonies, iris, and a few other perennials in the backyard. They brought those plants to our new house and gave me a place for my own garden. We used to go on wildflower hikes in the woods to bring plants back for the garden. We dug up dogwood seedlings as well as hemlock seedlings to plant around the property.

Both of my parents grew up on the same street in Washington DC, Franklin St. NE. It is located just on the other side of New York Avenue across from the U.S. National Arboretum. Whenever we visited family for Easter, birthdays, Mother's Day, or other holidays, they usually took me to the Arboretum to see the azaleas and other floral highlights. That was very indoctrinating. I can remember the Azalea Valley with the Knap Hill azaleas and Exbury hybrids given to the U.S. by The Netherlands after World War II. There were also the Glenn Dales. My grandmothers were always giving me flowers from their gardens for me to plant at home. The grandmother on my mother's side said I was like a miniature Luther Burbank. I must admit that I did discover the 12-volume set of *Luther Burbank, His Life and Works* in the library which was some of my favorite reading material. As I recall, I gave a book report on that somewhere along the way. My mother and grandfather on her side were both commercial artists so they also encouraged my interest in botanical illustration. I was always painting my flowers as a child, but I remember the excitement when in elementary school they gave me a copy of the *MacMillan Wildflower Book* for my birthday. They directed me to the work of many other botanical artists that I admired, especially Anne Ophelia Dowden. Other influences include Dr. John Creech. When he worked at the USDA, prior to becoming the Director of the National Arboretum, he set up displays at the Arboretum during azalea season. One year, he showed the variation possible from a single azalea cross. I forget the cross, but one of the plants he showed was eventually named 'Mrs. LBJ', which has white, hose-in-hose flowers and 'Brookside Delight', which is a pale lavender. I became more excited about the possibilities of hybridizing azaleas and rhododendrons and began making all kinds crosses.

I was always looking for new azaleas to plant in the garden. Frank White in Maryland and Ben Birch in Virginia sold cuttings rooted from the Glenn Dale azaleas at the National Arboretum. As a child, I saved my allowance to buy azaleas from them.

I was already enamored by the Knap Hill and Ex-

bury Azaleas from ads I saw in the Wayside Gardens catalog, but they were too expensive. Our ARS chapter had an auction of deciduous azaleas when one of our members passed away. That is when I got my first stock plants of those clones, probably in the early 1970s. I was raising lots of seedlings by then and one of my hybrids with huge yellow trusses I decided to name, 'Yellow Cloud'. It won Best Deciduous Azalea in the Show at the 1982 ARS Convention we hosted in Washington, DC, and a picture of the truss appeared on the cover of the *ARS Journal*. Suddenly, my plant was in great demand and I thought that it might be my big break into the nursery business. I sent one of my three plants off to Briggs Nursery and signed a contract to have it propagated under tissue culture. Murphy's Law was working overtime in 1988 since that was the year I got my 3,000 liners back from Briggs to pot up and grow on. That was the same summer I was supposed to take the team of students to Minnesota to compete for the supercomputer. Big life decision... grow my yellow azaleas to start a nursery or try to win that million-dollar supercomputer. I opted for the latter. I set up automatic watering systems, headed for Minnesota, and hoped for the best. I didn't lose too many plants that summer, but teaching responsibilities increased when we won the computer so I tried to unload my tissue culture plants wherever I could. I eventually broke even on the investment, but it was clear at that time I was not going to be a nurseryman.

Another person who was influential in a way was Fred Galle. He was an icon and I met him at a number of ARS meetings. He knew I was focusing on those large-flowered Knap Hill type deciduous azaleas so we often discussed them. He thought those "Dolly Parton" azaleas were a bit gaudy and asked, "Have you ever seen the native azaleas in the wild? They really are charming." I admitted that I had not been able to travel to see many plants in the wild, but in 1995, I finally had a chance to get up to Gregory Bald. He was right and I am a convert, now, too. There were other ARS leaders who gave me advice including Augie Kehr and George Ring. They were wonderful mentors.

What other plants do you like to grow and collect?

In addition to rhododendrons and azaleas, I really like all kinds of plants. My first love and still high on my list for favorite plants are wildflowers, and especially our native orchids. I have already mentioned the 80-acre tract of pristine woodland behind my house that became my extended garden playground. It was a lovely piece of property and botanically rich. On the ridge there were still ghostly white trunks of chestnut trees that died of the blight, holly trees, hemlocks, dogwoods, native azaleas, mosses, ferns, arbutus, and at least four native orchid species.

My main focus was on some pink lady's slippers growing in a pine grove in that woods. I learned to pollinate them when I was quite young, maybe 6 or 7 years old. In the fall, I would shake the dust like seeds around the pine woods when the pods ripened. By the time I went to college, I had a carpet of orchids back there with many hundreds of blooms. The soil conditions and micorrhiza were never right in my own garden to support pink lady's slippers so I could never successfully transplant any to my yard. No matter how careful I was, the transplants would decline over time and be gone in a few years. While I was in college, that tract of land with the pink lady's slippers was sold to a real estate developer who leveled the terrain to build houses on ¼-acre lots. He took the whole top of the hill and put it in the valley to have more lots to sell. The trees were gone, my wildflowers were gone, and my carpet of orchids was gone.

About the same time that I started pollinating my lady's slippers, we took several family vacations to Florida. That is when I became interested in tropical orchids. I joined the National Capital Orchid Society when I was probably 10 years old. Orchids were expensive but they had auctions where some plants were very cheap... only \$0.25 or so. I remember bidding on Cattleyas named "Lebalon #5" and "Lebalon #19" thinking I'd start a collection of the whole Lebalon series. That is when some kind lady leaned over and said, "Lebalon is 'No Label' spelled backwards." After that realization, I started buying community pots and growing them on. I gradually took over my mother's dining room table with my orchid collection since it had the best light. Then I moved to the basement under artificial lights when she decided to reclaim her space. After I started teaching, my father and I built a greenhouse off of the garage for my expanding orchid collection. By that time, I was also into camellias and azaleas that I would force into bloom in the winter months. Unfortunately, I lost my orchid collection one year due to a freeze while I was at school. That was when I shifted to propagating azaleas and rhododendrons and officially opened my nursery business.

I did get some yellow lady's slippers when I was in high school and they are probably still my most cherished plants in the garden. I was never able to get them to reseed elsewhere in my yard, but the clumps did boast on the order of 110 blossoms each year. I had to move them in mid-summer one year when I had a large tree taken down. That did set them back but they are recovering.

I have been adding lots of deer-resistant plants to my garden in recent years including daffodils, double hellebores, and tree peonies. I used to have a large daylily and hosta collection at one time, but that was pre-Bambi.

What got you started on collecting native azaleas?

We had the native *R. periclymenoides* in the woods behind my house so those were around from my earliest memories. I did dig some of those to plant in my first garden. I remember being awestruck seeing my first *R. calendulaceum* on a family vacation down the Blue Ridge Parkway when I was in elementary school. I really became earnest in collecting native azaleas following the 1990 ASA Convention our Northern Virginia Chapter hosted at Tysons Corner. I gave a talk at the banquet titled, "Azaleas: A Look Toward the Future" where I referenced many points already discussed.

I had been a member of the Middle Atlantic Chapter ARS Species Study Group where we met regularly to review a slide library provided by the ARS to teach people about the genus. The slides on our native azaleas were terrible, so our group planned a project to update the photos and text for that portion. I invited the group which included Ken and Sandra McDonald, George McLellan, Bill Bedwell, David and Debbie Sauer, and Walter and Sybil Przypek to my house on the Sunday after the 1990 ASA Convention where we started planning trips to document our native azaleas. Because I couldn't take off from school when most of the early things were in bloom, I was not able to join others to see species like *austrinum*, *canescens*, or *atlanticum*. I did join the group in 1995 when we planned a week-long extravaganza, going to Roan Mountain, Wayah Bald, Hooper Bald, and Gregory Bald. George McLellan eventually presented a program using the best photos from our group at an ARS Eastern Regional conference in Williamsburg, VA, in the fall of 1999. From that point on, I was totally hooked and we arranged trips every year, as soon as school was out.

Fred Galle was right. Once you see the natives in the wild, all other forms seem trivial. After nearly 20 years, Charlie Andrews has now taken over planning for the mountain hikes from us. I am happy that tradition is still continuing.

What is your favorite azalea that you grow?

My favorite azalea has to be *R. calendulaceum*, not necessarily as it grows in my yard but the way it grows in the wild. The Appalachian Trail on Roan Mountain from Round Bald, to Engine Gap, and beyond to Jane Bald to Grassy Ridge Point is beyond compare! People who have hiked the entire 2,000+ miles of the Appalachian Trail say that is prettiest stretch of the entire trail. What is amazing is that those assessments were made when the azaleas and rhododendrons were not in bloom. Seeing those plants flowering in that gorgeous mountain setting is truly a spiritual experience!

As for an evergreen azalea, my favorite is probably 'Wagner's White Spider'. I salvaged that plant from a spray one of our members entered in the Potomac Valley Chapter ARS Flower Show one year. It won best new hybrid and I asked Dave Wagner if I could propagate it and distribute the plant according to the name he chose. It is wonderful in the landscape since it's delicate and airy blossoms work like baby's breath in a flower arrangement.

For a large-flowered deciduous azalea comparable to the Knap Hill and Exbury forms, I am very fond of 'Sweet Christy' due to the very ruffled blossoms of soft lemon yellow. It was a selection by one of our early ASA members, Dr. Roy Magruder.

In the native azalea category, I think 'My Mary' is one of my most favorite garden plants because of its plant habit, delicate blossoms, and very strong fragrance. I thought it was hardy as a rock but it did suffer this winter in a number of locations. I like growing plants that remind me of people I know. George Beasley, who named that plant for his wife, Mary, were both good friends. I still laugh when I remember how he introduced that azalea. George rambled on about the great characteristics including flower color, mildew-free foliage, and fragrance. He concluded with the remark that the plant was "wider than tall" and then said it reminded him of his wife so he named it 'My Mary'. Wider than tall? Mary didn't appreciate that last comparison.

What advice would you give to beginners?

I would recommend that a beginning azalea collector join the ASA and get involved with some of the group's activities. We have many knowledgeable members in our organization and a new person will learn much more from the personal advice during hands on activities than from a book or asking advice from a clerk at a garden center. Most commercial nurseries carry plants being pushed by wholesalers, whereas the local experts know about the latest introductions that haven't even gotten to market place. Talk to the experts. They will give the best advice.

I also recommend that beginners should try to attend national conferences and conventions. It is inspiring to see private and public gardens since they will give us ideas for our own home landscapes. The planners will have arranged a series of entertaining speakers who will educate and inspire us, too. Finally, we can always count on a convention to offer a killer plant sale that will provide rare and exciting new cultivars to add to our collections. Most of those plants will not

be available at the local garden centers.

Over the years, I have found that the friendships I make at these meetings and the memories I bring back are far more valuable than the plants I grow.

Anything else you want to add?

I have already rambled enough in answering these questions. There is an incident I would like to share that was during my trip to Exbury Gardens. I had joined a tour George McLellan arranged for his landscape clients and we were supposed to arrive by 12:30 PM and get a private tour by one of the head gardeners. The travel agent who handled the tour spent too much time at the pub where we had lunch. Then he thought he'd take a "short cut" but got lost. We missed the tour and then learned that the gardens would be closing early because they were preparing for the Founders' Dinner that night. We would have maybe 30 minutes to see all 250 acres. George McLellan, Bill Bedwell, and I were not in the regular tour bus but in a car carrying excess baggage, so once we were in the garden we decided to see as much of it as possible before the officials at Exbury ran us out. I had wanted to see Exbury since grade school. I wasn't about to miss it.



Don Hyatt with R. 'Caroline' in his former garden.

It had been a rainy morning and the skies cleared just as we arrived. We went through the gate and ran through the garden snapping pictures as fast as we could. We got through the main rhododendron area, the maples, and then found the Exbury Azalea display. Eventually, we worked our way back to the far corner of the estate where there was a large pond with the famous Black Swans and yes, more Exbury Azaleas.

I was standing there snapping pictures when I felt someone tap me on the shoulder. I was sure it was the Exbury police and they were going to escort me out. Instead, it was a petite elderly woman who said in a strong Southern accent, "I know you, I've been to your garden!" That woman was one of the most cherished icons in the ASA, Margie Jenkins. I said, "I know you, I've been to your garden, too!"

Margie explained that the weather was so cold and rainy earlier in the day, they didn't get to see much. Once the sun came out, though, her group decided to get lost in the garden until they were run out, too.

We parted ways and left the garden around 6:00 PM as the distinguished guests were just arriving. Edmund de Rothschild was there at the entry greeting his guests and we did wave as we drove off to our next destination. It was a fantastic afternoon, and finally a childhood dream fulfilled!

Chapter News

Alabamense Chapter

John Torbert, Past President

The Alabamense Chapter held an Azalea 101 Workshop in Mobile, AL, with approx 40 participants on March 15.

On March 29, the Chapter led a tour about evergreen azaleas at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, GA, and on April 5, we led a tour on native deciduous azaleas.

To promote the ASA and sign up a few members, the Alabamense Chapter participated as an exhibitor at the Master Gardeners Annual State Convention in Prattville, AL, on April 3 and 4. We sold a few plants in the process. We plan to repeat the Azalea 101 Workshop and Exhibition table at next year's Master Gardener event in Huntsville, AL.



Members of the Ben Morrison Chapter visiting the azalea collection at Brookside Gardens in Wheaton, MD. Photo by Kathy Jentz.

Ben Morrison Chapter

Budne Reinke, President

We had an enjoyable and informative tour of the azaleas at Brookside Gardens in Wheaton, MD, on April 30. We focused on the Glenn Dale hybrid azaleas, which were planted there many years ago by the former Director of Horticulture Emile Deckert. Chapter members were joined by Bill Miller of The Azalea Works in Bethesda, MD, and his wife Janet. During the tour and at the luncheon afterwards, Bill, who is quite knowledgeable about the Glenn Dales, pointed out interesting facts about these azaleas and the contributions made by Mr. Deckert.

The tour of a private garden on May 16 to Three Fox Pond in Potomac, MD, was cancelled due to inclement weather. Plans are on to reschedule the tour in late May/early June and then to return again next spring when their azaleas are at their height.



Northern Virginia Chapter plant sale at Meadowlark (l-r) Craig Hudson, Ralph Habegger, Paul Beck, Carol Bruch, Bill Miller, and Lars Larson in the foreground is Barb Kirkwood. Photo by Carolyn Beck.

Northern Virginia Chapter

Rick Bauer, Corresponding Secretary

The Northern Virginia Chapter held our first meeting of the year on March 23. It was a joint meeting with the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and we had a great turnout of attendees (to include a Zoom attendee from Cairns, Australia).

Our presentation was by Don Hyatt showing photos of "Art and Accents in the Garden with a



Ralph Habegger spreads mulch at the Klimavicz Legacy Garden at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna, VA. Photo by Carolyn Beck.



Don Hyatt presenting "Garden Art and Accents with a Bit of Whimsy" to the Northern Virginia Chapter. Photo by Kathy Jentz.

Bit of Whimsy." Images of many art forms that enhance the garden included selections from many of the gardens he has visited. Depicted were animals and birds made from various materials, sculpture, carvings, ceramics, Japanese lanterns, planters (including sinks and toilets), trellises, arbors, furnishings, rocks, wind spinners, water features and much more.

On April 3, we held a workday at the Klimavicz Legacy Garden at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna, VA. We cleared out planting space for additional Klimavicz hybrids, fertilized with Holly-Tone®, and did some pruning, weeding, and spreading of leaf mulch.

We held our first plant sale of the year at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens on April 27. We had great weather and a good turnout of customers. Sales were brisk.

Vaseyi Chapter **Aaron Cook, President**

On April 15, a group of Vaseyi members traveled to East Fork Nursery in Sevierville, TN. We had a great visit with the owner, our friend Vivian Abney, enjoyed the many plants in bloom and brought a few home with us.

On April 22, the Chapter had a meal and garden tour at the home of Lisa and Aaron Cook.

The Vaseyi Chapter was well-represented at the ASA National Convention in Malvern, PA, with 19 members attending.

We are looking forward to more trips and opportunities for fellowship this summer.



The Vaseyi Chapter on an April garden tour. Photo by Lisa Cook.



Welcome New Members!

New At Large members include:

- Margo Bruno, Huntington Station, NY
- Ronald Farquhar, Brunswick, GA
- Eric Main, Decatur, GA
- William West, Urbandale, IA
- Mike Wood, Portland, OR

The Alabamense Chapter welcomes:

- Pairzetty Bauer, Gulf Shores, AL
- Toby Gray, Huntsville, AL
- Deborah Marriott, Magnolia Springs, AL
- Kelly McLain, Mobile, AL

The Arkansas Chapter welcomes:

- DeeDee Moline, Greenbrier, AR

The Ben Morrison Chapter welcomes:

- Monty & Robin Cross, Midland, VA

The Central Carolinas Chapter welcomes:

- Nancy Mabes, Fayetteville, NC

The Northern Virginia Chapter welcomes:

- Lachelle & Philip Castellana, Leesburg, VA
- Melissa Worthington, Burke, VA

The Rev John Drayton Chapter welcomes:

- Mike Brewer, Charleston, SC
- Leeann Shearouse, Lake City, FL

The Texas Chapter welcomes:

- Hoe H. Chuah, Cypress, TX
- Lee & Melissa Olger, Nacogdoches, TX

The Texas Forest Country Chapter welcomes:

- Deanna Young, Brookeland, TX

Mississippi's *Rhododendron austrinum*

By Ron Miller—Pensacola, Florida

A few days ago, Ralf Bauer and I were at last able to boat on the *R. austrinum*-bearing streams at the western-most edge of the range of the species in Mississippi. The plants there are anomalous in lacking the most popular signature trait of *austrinum*—glandular hairs on the new growth. This divergence is so surprising that the revision of the deciduous azaleas in 1993 referred to them as yellow *R. canescens*. *Austrinum* has twice the genomic material as *canescens*. Technically, it is a tetraploid, *canescens* a diploid. These western *austrinum* have, like *canescens*, glandular hairs on the outside of their corolla tubes. The yellows on the Escatawpa River often have a very few scattered and wimpy glandular hairs near the leaf petioles; those on Black Creek are almost entirely eglandular. Readers may have heard of the best known *austrinum* in the nursery trade, Tom Dodd's 'Escatawpa', which has glandular hairs, though, not many of them. Our most often grown *austrinum* is atypical.

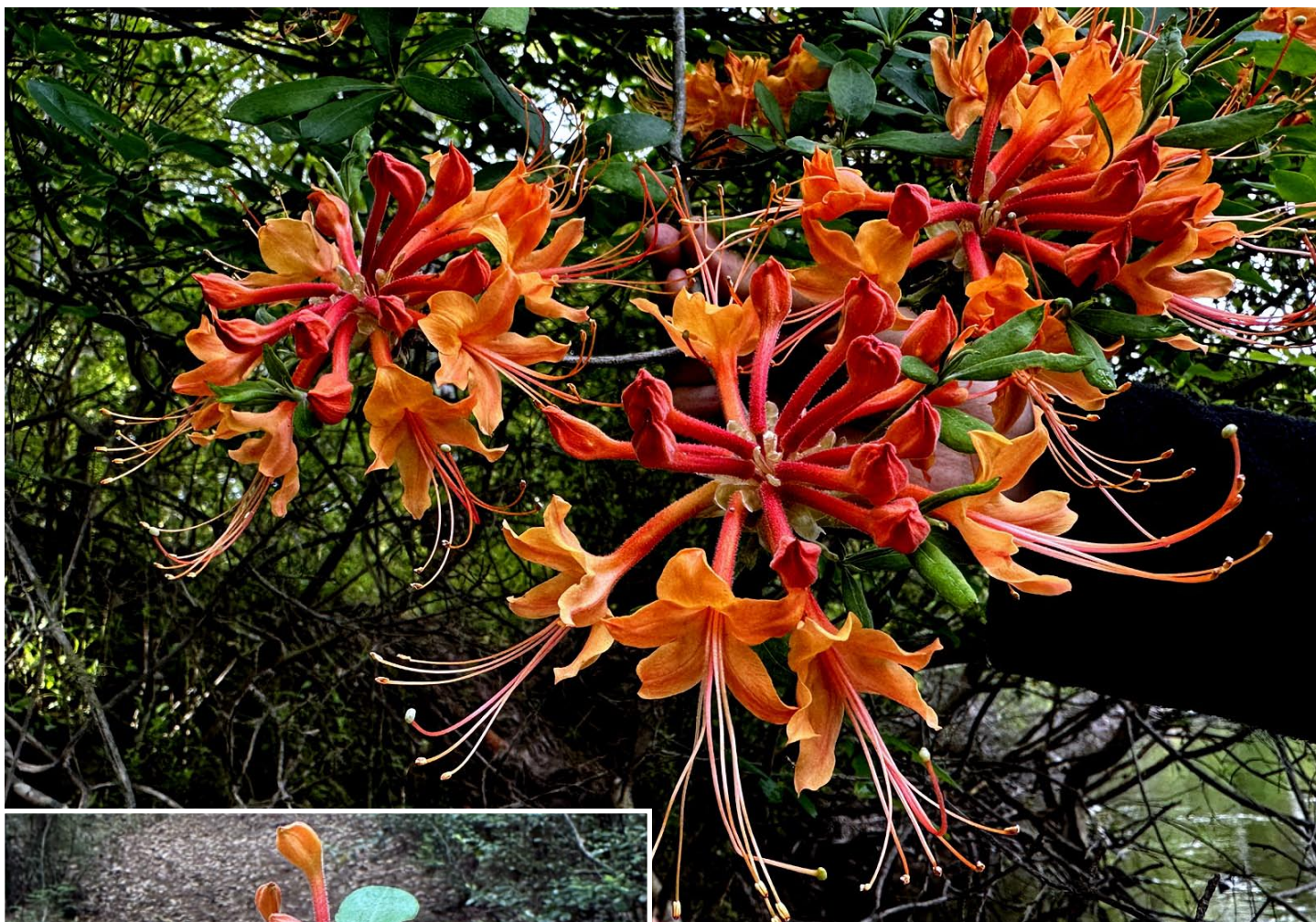
Over there, one can tell *canescens* bushes from *austrinum* bushes when not in flower by a microscopic study of their fine hairs and (in practice) by the fact that the *austrinum* are surrounded by truly amazing webs of runners, which *canescens* plants lack. Nonetheless, if *canescens* and *austrinum* are not the same species—and they are not—they are close, apparently “kissin’ cousins.” John and Sally Perkins have been finding more hybrids between the two species down here than ever seemed possible.

Ralf and I found the pigments of the yellows most interesting. They are very different from the pigments of the *austrinum* on the east side of the Alabama River. See the associated photos with this article. You will notice the pink overtones in many of the flowers, yet as far as we can tell, there are no *austrinum* that could be called pink in the way that many *austrinum* to the east can be. This difference probably tells us something about the evolution of the species. *Austrinum* over this way in Florida are also very tolerant of moist settings. These Mississippi marvels demand high, dry ground. Some of the *austrinum* on Black Creek also have rather surprisingly tomentose leaves.

As I like to insist, things get interesting when you recognize that what we for convenience call a single species is often characterized by a significant and usually adaptive geographical distribution of distinct forms.



Stereotyping azalea species is as mindless and reductive as stereotyping categories of human beings. An azalea species name is not a dictionary entry reflecting scientific concept like a chemical element or a prime number, though much of our literature, even academic, treats it as though it was. Too much botanizing takes place in the air conditioning.



Acknowledgments

A previous version of this article appeared in the May 2024 issue of *Azalea Blooms*, the newsletter of the Azalea Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

About the Author

Ron Miller (rhodokiller@gmail.com) is a retired professor of English Renaissance literature, a frustrated grower of cool-climate azaleas and rhododendrons in Zone 9, a superannuated plant hunter, and the species author of *Rhododendron colemanii*.

Photo Credits

All photos accompanying this article were taken by the author in early April 2024 and are of *R. austrinum*.

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So you want to learn more about the lovely
Glenn Dale Hybrid Azaleas?

The Azalea Works in Bethesda, Maryland,
has two books by Bill Miller and the late Dick West
which detail the fascinating story about B.Y. Morrison,
the 454 Glenn Dale cultivars, and the unpublished PI
and Bell Numbers by which they were managed. For
details, see the website at:

www.theazaleaworks.com

While you're at it, visit the extensive collection of
azalea, companion plant, and animal .jpg images.

2025 Distinguished Service Award Winners: Barbara Kirkwood and Michael Martin Mills

By Rick Bauer—Yorktown, Virginia, Robert Lee—Independence, Louisiana, and Charlie Andrews—Cumming, Georgia



Barbara Kirkwood receives the ASA Distinguished Service Award from Rick Bauer at the 2025 ASA annual convention.

Barbara Kirkwood has been a valuable asset to the Society at both the chapter and national level. She served first as the vice president and then stepped forward to take the leadership role of president of the Northern Virginia Chapter, serving in this role for five terms. She introduced new ideas and energy to the largest chapter in the Society. She brought these same attributes to the Azalea Society's Board of Directors. She has been a strong supporter of the ASA's Legacy Project, particularly in her coordination with Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in the development and maintenance of the Klimavicz Legacy Garden. Her persistence in coordinating and following up with successive leadership personnel at Meadowlark is a key factor in the success the chapter has experienced in developing the garden.

The Society greatly appreciates her contributions to the society and your efforts to promote azaleas. Because of this service to ASA, she has been designated as a distinguished member of the Azalea Society of America.



Michael Martin Mills receives the ASA Distinguished Service Award from Rick Bauer at the 2025 ASA annual convention.

Michael Martin Mills has done a commendable job as the North American Registrar for the Genus *Rhododendron* since 2012. In this position, his attention to detail has been quite evident to those who have submitted forms for the azaleas they wish to have registered with the Royal Horticultural Society. He readily answered questions related to the registration

continued on next page

2025 Exceptional Service Award Winner: Charles R. Andrews III

By Rick Bauer—Yorktown, Virginia, Robert Lee—Independence, Louisiana, and Aaron Cook—Hendersonville, North Carolina



Charlie Andrews receives the ASA Exceptional Service Award from Aaron Cook at the 2025 ASA annual convention.

In recognition of his many years of dedicated leadership and contributions to the Azalea Society of America.

In his years as an Azalea Society member, he has served in many important capacities. He has contributed over 25 articles for publication in *The Azalean* and served on the editorial advisory board. He has served as a key organizer of society conventions and field trips.

He helped develop new Azalea Society logos and a style guide for articles in *The Azalean*. He has served as the Society's vice president and president.

More than that, he has been an enthusiastic and entertaining sharer of your vast knowledge of azaleas and a kind and generous friend to everyone you come in contact with.

The Society greatly appreciates his leadership and thanks him for his service and dedication. You are an exceptional asset to the Azalea Society of America.

Distinguished Service Awards continued

process, providing a thorough reply. He meticulously reviewed all registration request forms and corresponded with the submitter when clarification was needed, asking thoughtful questions, and making helpful suggestions. After plants were registered, he forwarded the appropriate documents to the registrant.

On multiple occasions, he has submitted articles to *The Azalean* that cover the information, including photos, of newly registered azaleas. He has also written other articles for *The Azalean*.

The Society also thanks him for opening his garden on numerous occasions for the enjoyment of many plant enthusiasts and for your contributions to the Azalea Society of America.

Society Officers Sought for 2026-2028

For our next election cycle, we will be electing society officers to serve during the term 2026-2028. The positions up for election are Society Treasurer and Secretary. Additionally, we will be electing three Directors to serve during the same period. Those interested in volunteering for one of these positions, or who would like more information, should contact the Chairman of the Nominating Committee, Charlie Andrews at candrews@mindspring.com. Volunteers should submit a copy of their resume and a headshot no later than September 30, 2025. These will be published in the Winter issue of *The Azalean*.



April is Azalea Month

By Kathy Jentz—The Azalean, Editor

The Azalea Society of America (ASA) has declared April is Azalea Month to celebrate the beauty of these flowering shrubs. It is now an official holiday and will be published in the next edition of **Chase's Calendar of Events**.

Azaleas are long cherished in America as symbols of spring and renewal. They are extremely popular landscape plants due to their brightly colored blooms, long-lasting flowers and their ease of cultivation.

Azaleas belong to the genus *Rhododendron*. The different varieties of azaleas are classified as being species or hybrids. Species grow true from seed (unless they are crossed with other species or hybrids). Hybrids are crosses between other species or hybrids, and may be faithfully reproduced only from cuttings and by tissue culture, which are clones of the mother plant. Azaleas have been hybridized for hundreds of years, and almost 10,000 different varieties have been named, although far fewer are in the trade. Azaleas provide a wide variety of plant habits, sizes, colors and bloom times to meet almost every landscaping need or personal taste.

All native North American azaleas are deciduous (drop their leaves in the fall), with flower colors ranging from white to purple, pink, red, orange, and yellow. Evergreen azaleas—native primarily to Japan, China, Korea, and Taiwan—have flower colors including white and various shades of purple, pink, red and reddish orange, but not yellow. Color patterns include single colors and bicolors as well as sectors, stripes and flecks, sometimes on the same plant.

Most azalea varieties bloom in the spring, with some blooming as late as August. Blooms typically last for one or two weeks. In warm climates such as the deep south, some azalea varieties bloom again in the fall.

Azaleas are relatively pest-free, forgiving, and easy-to-grow plants.

Ways to celebrate Azalea Month:

1. Enjoy the beauty of azaleas.
2. Visit a public garden or park with an azalea collection.
3. Attend a local azalea festival or start/host one!
4. Plant an azalea shrub in your garden.
5. Learn about the many azalea native plants and cultivars in the azaleas database at <https://azaleas.org/>
6. Gift an azalea plant to brighten someone's day.
7. Cut a bouquet of azalea blooms for a pretty indoor bouquet.
8. Share #AprilisAzaleaMonth posts on your social media.

Spread the word about our Society's April is Azalea Month campaign by sharing the link to our webpage: <https://azaleas.org/april-is-azalea-month/>.

In Memoriam: William Manning McDavit

By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

Note: This text and image were extracted from an obituary published on Legacy.com by Brunswick Funeral Service-Shallotte on May 11, 2025.

William Manning McDavit, 93, of Sunset Beach, North Carolina, died May 6, 2025, at McLeod Seacoast Hospital, Little River, South Carolina. Born December 16, 1931, in Franklin, New Jersey, Mr. McDavit moved to Sunset Beach in 1988, after retiring with 32 years of federal civil service. Mr. McDavit is survived by his wife, Mary Wood McDavit, a former librarian aide. Surviving are three children, Laura Barbano and her husband, Gary, Mary (Carolyn) McDavit and her husband, Guilherme Kurtz, and William (Mike) McDavit and his wife, Kim; three grandchildren, Kimberly, Luisa, and Grady; and one sister, Zelene Hutchison. A memorial service was held at the Brunswick Funeral Service Chapel in Shallotte, North Carolina. On the same day, a Celebration of Life was held at the VFW in Calabash, North Carolina. Memorial donations may be made to the American Cancer Society (<https://donate.cancer.org>) or Wounded Warriors (<https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org>).

As a young man, Bill served in the US Navy and saw combat action on the USS Toledo (CA-133), a Baltimore-class heavy cruiser, during the Korean War. He was honorably discharged on May 14, 1953, as a Fire-control Technician Third Class. He loved playing semi-professional sports during his active-duty years in the Navy (baseball, football, bowling), until his ailing back limited his competitive playing to golf.

Bill met his cherished future bride, Mary Grace Wood, on a blind date while on assignment at the Anacostia Naval Station, Washington, DC. Married on December 16, 1952, the happy couple enjoyed a long life together for over 72 years. Bill was a US Navy civilian electronics communications specialist in Washington, DC, for most of his professional life. In 1955, Bill started working for the Navy on the high-tech goniometer antenna array, the Navy Space Program at the US Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) in Washington, DC. The military used this innovative technology to triangulate radio signals for navigation, intelligence gathering, and search and rescue. He was a member of an elite team responsible for developing and fielding the very first spy satellite during the Eisenhower Administration. Friendly, informal, and likable, all who met and knew Bill (Mac or Fuzzy) or waited on him at a restaurant were instant friends. He tried his best to accept all people; if you knew Bill, he was your friend. Such generosity of heart also extended to long-distance support for a young Japanese foster child, Haruo Masahiro Teriu, in the 1960s. Because of his frequent government travels to Japan, Bill was able to visit his foster child on numerous occasions before the boy was reunited with his biological family.

While raising his three children with his wife in Oxon Hill, Maryland, he coached HS football and wrestling and was an active fundraiser for both high school teams. His children fondly remember the Christmas Eve family tradition of dining out at a different nationality or ethnic cuisine restaurant in DC each year. Equally memorable and almost

eclipsing holiday celebrations was his generosity in sharing unique gifts for the kids after returning home from one of his frequent trips abroad in the 1960s and 70s. Every overseas “TDY” and Bill’s treasured gifts were like another Christmas morning for his family after each return. Bill loved cool jazz and was a lifelong collector of jazz recordings. His early interest in jazz stems from his high school days of sneaking out to the Bop City jazz club in New York, NY. In his later years, Bill collected and traded coins.

He also amassed an exotic mask collection and other souvenirs from his extensive travels to various countries around the world while working for the NRL during the Cold War. His official travels took him to the Aleutian Islands (Alaska), Japan, the Philippines, Iran, Scotland, Germany, Italy, France, and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

Bill cherished his retirement years with his beloved wife and remained highly active in pursuing his hobbies and in playing leadership roles in civic society and local veteran organizations. He was an avid golfer (scored a hole-in-one at Rivers Edge in 2014!); a dedicated and spirited gardener; a methodical freshwater fisherman; and served as president of his local homeowner’s association. He also helped lead the Calabash Veterans Golf Association. An active member of the Calabash American Legion and VFW for a long time, William flipped hotcakes for many breakfast fundraising occasions. He never passed up an opportunity to raise funds for a charitable cause on the Links, or in the Legion or VFW pub!

He loved gardening in retirement, creating an oasis of azalea blossoms at his Sunset Beach home with his wife, Mary, and naming their property, “Azalea Sunset.” He cultivated, designated, and labeled more than 1,000 flower varieties on their homestead, in which at least one plant was in bloom at any time of the year. At its peak, Azalea Sunset was home to 900 azaleas, 162 camellias, and 30 rhododendrons. In a local newspaper column in 1993, Bill said, “You can lose more azaleas from kindness than from neglect.” Bill served as Vice President of the Azalea Society of America four times and also found time to cultivate azaleas at VFW Post 7288 in Calabash.



2025 Annual Convention Summary

By Kathy Jentz—*The Azalean*, Editor

Jenkins Arboretum & Gardens hosted the society's 2025 Convention from May 7–9, 2025, in Malvern, Pennsylvania. It was unusual not to have a local chapter plan and run the event, but Jenkins staffers Steve Wright and Tara Spears did a tremendous job with organizing the event and keeping everything on schedule.

The timing of the event this year was perfect for viewing the azalea peak bloom as well as the many native flowers of Pennsylvania. Several members came early or stayed on extra days to visit nearby gardens, not on the convention itinerary, such as Longwood Gardens, Stoneleigh, and Bartram's Garden.

The first day was local garden touring on your own and the ASA Board of Directors meeting. A list of the many public gardens in the region as well as several local private gardens that were open for ASA members was provided to registrants. I was pleased to be able to visit Octoraro Farm & Gardens and to chat with Harold and Christine Sweetman.

In the lobby at check-in time were free azaleas, seedlings, and seeds for all registrants to select from. Also greeting us was John and Ann Bartram (as portrayed by Kirk and Sara Brown).

That evening was the welcome reception with a dessert bar and announcements. Andrew Bunting, Vice President of Horticulture at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society addressed the gathering and answered questions about the many local public gardens.

On Thursday, we ate breakfast as a group at the hotel and we had picture-perfect weather as we visited WynEden (a private garden) and Chanticleer. One bus visited WynEden in the morning and the other was at Chanticleer; the other bus did the opposite. We all met up at Jenkins for lunch and we toured the Holly Springs Legacy Garden. Pete Vines, the hybridizer of the Holly Springs azaleas, was in attendance along with Jake Summers, who designed the garden as his special project during his time as an apprentice there. There was also a lively plant sale there—with plants conveniently loaded up for us and delivered back to the hotel for pick up. (Is it just me or is

a hotel room window lined with plants one of the happiest of sights known to mankind?)

Thursday evening was a buffet dinner at the hotel featuring two speakers. Author Nicole Juday spoke about some of the historic gardens in her book, *Private Gardens of Philadelphia*. Then, Dr. John Lonsdale, owner of Edgewood Gardens in Exton, PA, spoke about "Azalea Companion Plants." He also offered plants for sale after the presentation.

On Friday, it rained as we visited Winterthur. Luckily, the house tour and museum were available for those avoiding getting too wet. We went on to Mt. Cuba and the skies cleared for us as we arrived. The native plants looked fresh and lush.

The ASA business meeting, dinner, and awards presentations was held back at the hotel with keynote speaker Karel Bernady, who spoke about "Native Azalea Hotspots of the Northeast." We also had our annual meeting with the announcement of new officers and presentation of awards.

Be sure to save the date for our ASA 2026 Convention in Athens, GA, in APRIL 12–15, 2026.



Your editor braving a rainy morning of garden tours. Photo by Kirk Brown.



You-Ying Whipple lends a hand and gives perspective to the beautiful peony. Photo by William C. Miller III.



Chanticleer with executive director Bill Thomas at far right and his Welsh corgi, Monty. Photo by Kirk Brown.



Pathways lined with azaleas at the Jenkins Arboretum. Photo by William C. Miller III.



WynEden, a private garden in Chadds Ford, PA. Photo by Denise Lanclos.



Native lady slipper orchids were highlights in several of the gardens we toured. Photo by William C. Miller III.



Native azaleas at Winterthur. Photo by Kathy Jentz.

Group photo at Winterthur. Photo by Robert Ramik.



Today, My Favorite First State Hybrid is ‘Nels Pete’

By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

Note: This is the fifth in a series of “favorite” articles. ‘Ambrosia’ and ‘Opal’ were identified as my favorite Glenn Dale and Linwood Hardy Hybrids respectively; cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) was identified as my favorite perennial companion plant; and ‘Shinnyo-no-tsuki’ was presented as my favorite Satsuki Hybrid.

In April 1983, Gorden Severe¹, forwarded an informational item to Dr. Charlie Evans, then the editor of *The Azalean*, regarding a new hybrid group of azaleas known as the First State Hybrids. This group was developed by Nels Nelson of Millsboro, Delaware, who was interested in cascading azaleas and groundcover azaleas with double flowers. The announcement included descriptions of two cultivars, ‘Nassau’, and ‘Nanticoke’, sister seedlings derived from ‘Cora Brandt’ x ‘White Gumpo’. After obtaining Mr. Nelson’s permission, the information was published in the ASA “News and Views” section of the December 1984 issue of *The Azalean*.

Nels Nelson

Actually, Nels was Nels Peter Nelson, Jr. and not to be confused with the actor, Nels P. Nelson who is best remembered for his role as a “Munchkin” in “The Wizard of Oz.” Find a Grave®, a resource website which sometimes contains useful biographical material, listed his father as Nels Peter “Pete” Nelson who was born in Denmark in 1874. Nels was born in Bristow, Nebraska on May 7, 1922, to Pete and Mollie Nelson. Pete, Nels’ father, was a farmer. How Nels got to Millsboro, Delaware is unknown. Unfortunately, several letters to members of Nels’ family went unanswered.

I don’t remember precisely when I met Nels Nelson, but I attended some of the Delaware chapter meetings where he was a member, and I recall the many occasions he volunteered to serve as auctioneer at various national meetings around the country. He was, after all, a retired professional auctioneer. He was a founding member of the Delmarva chapter and served as a member of ASA Board of Governors from 1990-1991.

My wife, Janet, and I visited his home in Millsboro, Delaware, on May 11, 1986, on the occasion of the Delaware chapter meeting where Polly Hill was the featured speaker.



Fig. 1. Nels Nelson and Janet Miller viewing his Millsboro, Delaware garden which overlooked the Indian River. Photo by William C. Miller III.

Fig 2. ‘Nassau’, the double flower, sister seedling to ‘Nanticoke’, introduced by Nels Nelson of Millsboro, Delaware in the early 1980s. Photo by William C. Miller III.



We were amazed at his garden. It was beautiful, and it overlooked the Indian River. There wasn’t a blade of grass out of place. There were mature azaleas everywhere, and it must have required an army to maintain it.

The Free State Hybrids

When I first looked into it, it was not entirely clear how many Free State Hybrids there were. The ASA database list which I believe is the definitive reference now, since it is a product of a thorough review of multiple sources, includes seven cultivars: ‘Fairmount’, ‘Henlopen’, ‘Millie’, ‘Mount Joy’, ‘Nanticoke’, ‘Nassau’, and ‘Nels Pete’. The sources of information include *Azaleas* by F. C. Galle, the *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* (the IRRC) published by the Royal Horticultural Society, Bill Steele’s nursery plant lists, the 1940 United States Federal Census, The US National Archives, the Find a Grave® website, and a “mysterious” document from my files that I appropriately call “Page 70.”² I don’t remember how I came by Page 70, but when it fell into my hands... I was smart enough at the time to throw it in a physical file for future reference.

In reviewing the list of Free State Hybrids, there were a couple of problems that had to be resolved. For example, the early listing in the ASA database had both ‘Fairmount’ and ‘Fairmont’. Obviously, one was wrong and since Nelson demonstrated a tendency to name his hybrids after places in Delaware, that gave ‘Fairmount’, an unincorporated community 9.8 miles from Millsboro, the nod.

Secondly, ‘Mount Joy’ appeared in the ASA database with a reference to the late Bill Steele, a nurseryman in Pennsylvania who listed it in his plant list as ‘Mt Joy’ (synonym cultivar name assumed) and attributed it to Nelson. But, it didn’t appear on Page 70. Again, Mount Joy is a city in Delaware three miles from Millsboro, so there was rationale for accepting ‘Mount Joy’ as a First State Hybrid. However, this ‘Mount Joy’, clearly an azalea judging from its attributed formula, should not be confused with the ‘Mount Joy’ that appears in the IRRC as an elepidote rhododendron hybridized by C. Herbert.

Finally, ‘Mollie’ appeared on Page 70 and Bill Steele’s 1997 plant list. The second point to note is that the formula for ‘Mollie’ is given as ‘Violetta’ x ‘Hiawatha’ which is a



Fig. 3. 'Fairmount', a highly variable single flower, white with red stripes and sectors, and named after a nearby Delaware town. Photo by William C. Miller III.

reversal of the formula that produced 'Nels Pete'. That's when it dawned on me that 'Pete' and 'Mollie' were named not for cities in Delaware... but for his parents.

'Nassau' and 'Fairmount'

A small specimen of 'Nassau' was my first introduction to the First State Hybrids. It had a double flower and gave every indication of being a low and slow grower. The plant was so small that it had very few flowers. Unfortunately, a bulldozer got it when I sold the Ewing Drive property. A subsequent owner, with zero interest in azaleas, replaced the house that I grew up in with a small "McMansion"... the footprint of which left precious little room for landscape.

After my positive experience with the 'Nels Pete' (my second Free State Azalea) that I got at one of the Delaware chapter meetings, I acquired my third Free State Azalea, a very nice plant of 'Fairmount' from Ronnie Palmer.³ The 'Fairmount' flower is single, white with reddish stripes, sectors, etc, and blooms late May to early June in Bethesda, depending on the year. Sometimes the blotch is reddish dots and sometimes there is a little greenish yellow in the blotch region. A small foliaceous calyx is present. My plant never made it out of the pot, and it died after several years as a consequence of my being away for several weeks one Summer.

'Pete' and 'Nels Pete'

With all the foregoing as background, 'Nels Pete' is my favorite First State Hybrid. In Bill Steele's 1996 plant list and on Page 70, the cultivar is listed simply as 'Pete'. On the tag of the plant that I acquired at one of the Fall Delmarva Chapter mini-meetings however, it was 'Nels Pete' so I suggest we are dealing with synonyms. I prefer 'Nels Pete' over 'Pete' since it is more distinctive, a bit more decipherable on a fading tag or a crinkled aluminum tag, and that was how my specimen was tagged.

'Nels Pete' is single, 2-2.5-inch, purplish-red flower (I don't see it as pink) with typically five petals and five stamen. The amount of off-white color in the petals varies from year to year and is probably attributable to environmental factors. The filaments are off-white (variably whitish

with a just a hint of purplish-red) and the anthers are dark. The stigma is a yellowish-green and the style is almost white and is readily distinguishable from the filaments. A foliaceous calyx is present. At maturity (10 years) in my garden, the plant was nearly six feet tall and showed a tendency to put out lateral branches. It's still about six feet tall today. Happily, 'Nels Pete' has never failed to bloom for me.

Notes and References:

1. The late Gordon Severe was a nurseryman, an ASA member in Millsboro, Delaware, and the president of the ASA's Delmarva chapter that was chartered in 1986. One of the Delmarva chapter's contributions was the concept of the Fall Mini-Convention that was held in early October, when many members who were in the nursery business were less pressed by business matters and could attend. They were no-frill meetings, but the speakers were always interesting (e.g., Polly Hill and Dr. Arthur Frazer) and it was another opportunity for attendees to acquire more plants.
2. The Galle book, the IRRC, and Bill Steele's plant list need no real introduction. The 1940 Census and the US National Archives are standard Federal information resources. The Find a Grave® website sometimes provides biographical information and in this instance, in the absence of a well-written obituary, it helped distinguish Nels Nelson from all of the other many Nels Nelsons and revealed the provenance of some of the First State cultivar names.
3. Ronnie Palmer of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, is a longtime member of the ASA, and was chiefly responsible for the establishment of the Arkansas chapter which was chartered in 2018. He has been the chapter president for many years.

Cultivar	Formula	Description	Galle	IRRC	Page70
'Fairmount'	'Pink Gumpo' x 'Chikyu-no-haru'	A low growing plant, very similar to its Gumpo parent, but with single white flowers strikingly marked with red in many variations. Excellent foliage and growth habit. Late midseason.	No	No	Yes
'Henlopen'	'Pink Gumpo' x 'Chikyu-no-haru'	Of same parentage as 'Fairmount' and also low growing. 2-inch single flowers are a beautiful and unusual pink, hard to describe but possibly tan-pink, with many variations. Late midseason.	No	No	Yes
'Mollie'	'Violetta' x 'Hiawatha'	A medium-sized mounding plant with 2 1/2-3" single white flowers with a green throat. The flowers have traces of yellow-cream on the petals, which will vary with different exposures and weather conditions. Midseason. Excellent dark evergreen foliage. Appreciates excellent drainage.	No	No	Yes
'Mount Joy'	unknown		No	No	No
'Nanticoke'	'Cora Brandt' x 'White Gumpo'	Compact plant habit, very much like the Gumpo. Flowers are 1 1/2" double, white with light purple flakes and specks and some shadings of pink. Late. Dark green foliage.	Yes	Yes	Yes
'Nassau'	'Cora Brandt' x 'White Gumpo'	Similar to 'Nanticoke' but double white flowers have pink and violet markings in many variations.	Yes	Yes	Yes
'Nels Pete'	'Hiawatha' x 'Violetta'	A semi-upright plant with 2" single pink and white flowers. Midseason.	No	No	Yes as 'Pete'

Table 1: The description and formulas in Table 1 came from Page 70, the single page from an unknown source that discussed the First State Hybrids. The columns, left to right, are cultivar names, formula, a description, and whether the names appeared in Galle, the IRRC, or Page 70.



Fig. 4. 'Pete' or preferably 'Nels Pete' is an evergreen azalea named for Nels' father. While the amount of white in the flower is somewhat variable from year to year, probably attributable to environmental factors, the plant has never failed to bloom. Photo by William C. Miller III.

With his wife, Donna, Azalea Hill Garden & Nursery was established in the early 1970s with the goal of producing quality plants and providing information about plant selection and planting. He is an active participant in the ASA's Legacy Project and is the lead for the Glenn Dale, Huang, Linwood Hardy, and Sommerville Azaleas.

About the Author:

William C. Miller III is a recipient of the Brookside Gardens Chapter's Frederic P. Lee Commendation (1988) and is twice the recipient of the ASA's Distinguished Service Award (1995 and 2002). He was chairman of the ASA's Glenn Dale Preservation Project, and co-chairman of Dick West's Ten Oaks Glenn Dale Project. He is past president of the Brookside Gardens Chapter, a former vice president of the ASA, a past member of the ASA Board of Directors, past co-chairman of the ASA's Membership Committee, past chairman of the ASA's Public Information Committee, the longest serving member of the ASA's Editorial Advisory Board, and a frequent contributor to *The Azalean*.

Advertising Manager Sought for *The Azalean*

The ASA membership dues do not cover all the costs for editing, layout, preparation, printing, and mailing of *The Azalean*. The costs have been made up by generous donations by a few members and a few advertisements by our members with nurseries or gardens. We need to seek out advertisements from other sources to remove our dependence on donations. The reimbursement for the ad manager is 10% of revenue for new ads, and 5% of the cost for repeat ads. (The most recent Advertising Manager had waived her reimbursements.) Please contact Paul Beck at treasurer@azaleas.org if you are interested in the position of Advertising Manager for *The Azalean*.

When Does My Membership Expire?

By Paul A. Beck, Treasurer

That is the most often asked question, especially around the end of the year. There are several ways for you to determine the answer to this question without having to call or email the Treasurer or Membership Administrator (membership@azaleas.org). If your membership expires at the end of the year, you will be emailed a reminder in December, or sent a paper reminder if you have no email address on file with the ASA.

The address label on the mailing envelope containing each copy of *The Azalean* has "Expiration: XX" printed above and to the right of your name. The date your membership expires follows, or one of three key words: Life, Subscr, or Gratis. If it says Subscr, that means you have signed up for an automatically renewing yearly subscription. If you would like to sign up for a subscription, please see the Join Us, Renew or Donate page on the ASA website.

Another way to determine your membership expiration is to view your membership record on the ASA website (you must be logged in to the website to view membership data). Once you are logged in, open the membership page from the About the Society/Members menu item. Your chapter membership will be displayed. At the end of the line containing your name are two dates, (1) when you first joined the Society, and (2) your membership expiration year, or one of the three key words mentioned in the previous paragraph. In January and February each year, the expiration date is shown in red if you have not renewed for the current year.

In addition, your own personal record has two links at the end of the line, View and Edit. View is used to display the details of your record, including a history of dues payments, associate chapter membership payments, and any donations you may have made to the Society. The Edit link will allow you to change any information in your record except for chapter affiliation and expiration date. If you wish to change your chapter affiliation, contact the membership administrator.

As a final note, if you move, please remember to notify the membership administrator, or better yet change your record yourself. If you fail to update your address when you move, your copies of *The Azalean* will probably be returned to the Treasurer or possibly disposed of.

ASA Financial Statement - December 31, 2024

By Paul A. Beck, Treasurer

INCOME STATEMENT

Year 2024

RECEIPTS

Contributions, Donations & Gifts	\$6,288
Dues (Life & Regular)	\$10,665
Seed Exchange	\$770
<i>The Azalean</i>	\$2,928
Interest & Dividends	\$5,677
Total Receipts	\$26,328

EXPENSES

Grants	\$9,995
Professional Fees (Editor)	\$7,200
Printing, postage, convention*	\$10,317
Membership	\$2,360
Dropbox & website	\$708
Credit card fees	\$442
Awards	\$100
Total Expenses	\$31,122

Net Loss **\$4,794**

BALANCE SHEET

December 31, 2024

ASSETS

Checking	\$18,059
Savings	\$12,132
PayPal	\$4,838
CDs	\$88,763
Mutual Funds (Schwab)	\$172,654
ARF Stock Investment (Schwab)	\$31,946
Schwab cash	\$10,986
Total Assets	\$339,378

LIABILITIES & RESERVES

Uncashed checks	\$0
Operating Fund	\$168,504
Credit Card	\$119
Endowment Fund	\$59,100
Research Fund	\$111,655
Total Liabilities	\$339,378

*Does not include printing expense of \$2,974 for the Winter 2024 issue of *The Azalean*, which was paid in January 2025. If this expense was included, the loss for 2024 would have been \$7,768.

Best Article Announced

Congratulations to the Best Article in *The Azalean* in 2024! The members voted for "A Dedication of the Earl Sommerville Legacy Garden at the Wright Environmental Education Center" by Ken Gohring.



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