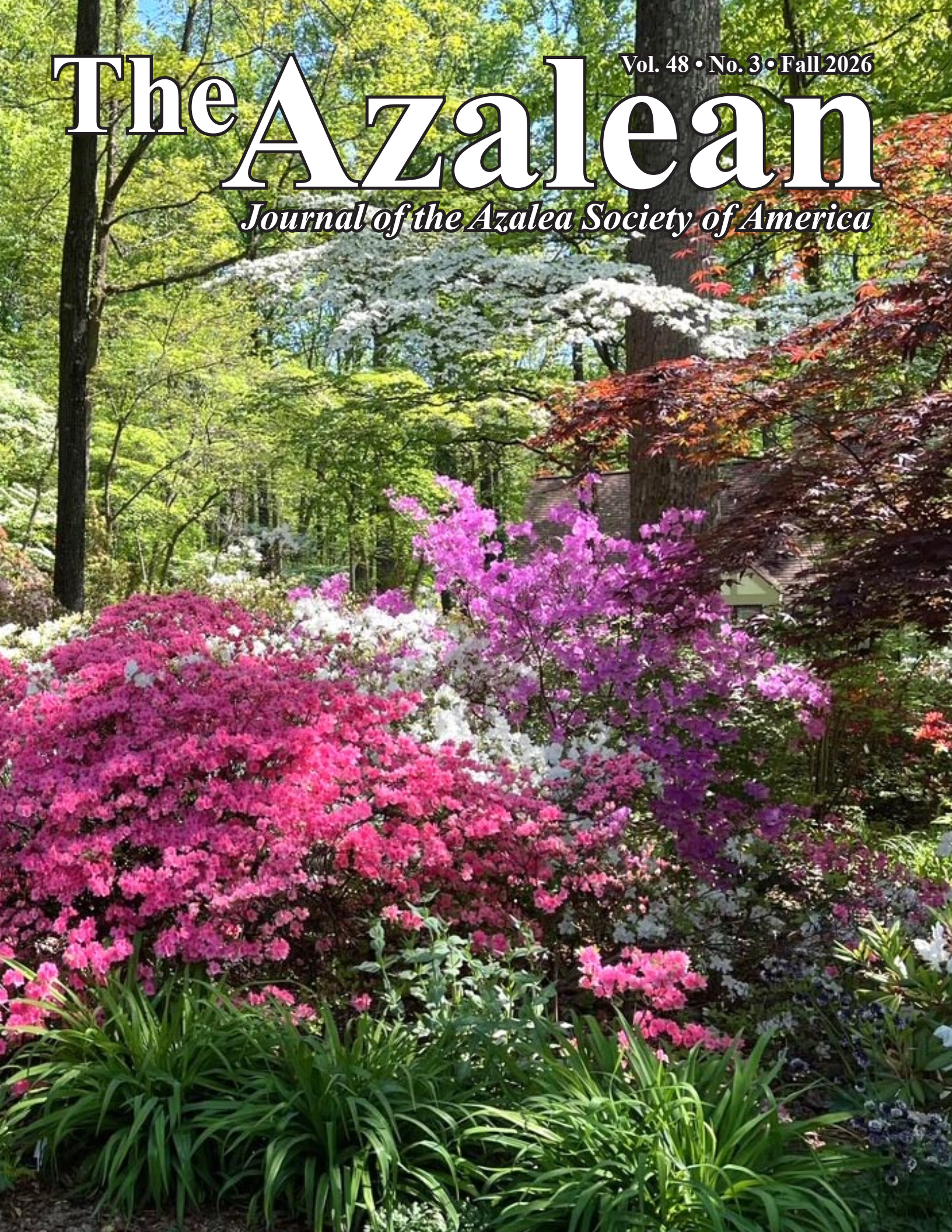


# The Azalean

Vol. 48 • No. 3 • Fall 2026

*Journal of the Azalea Society of America*





# President's Letter

**Aaron Cook—Hendersonville, North Carolina**

As the transition from summer to fall begins, we enjoy the last fading blooms of *Rhododendron maximum* and *R. prunifolium*. Thanks to Buddy Lee and others, we still have the fall-blooming evergreen azaleas to look forward to. This time of year, the garden settles into the deep green of late summer, and the first hints of fall begin to show. I noticed that some *Arisaema* seeds are beginning to turn red, and as the days grow shorter, I enjoy watching the fireflies light up our evenings. Soon, we will have our first heavy frost, and the whole nature of the garden will change.

This summer has been a season of extremes: hot days often culminate in violent storms and heavy rainfall, causing flooding in many areas of the state. Extreme weather now seems to be the norm, and North Carolina is one of the many states impacted.

One of the best reminders that the Azalea Society is a volunteer organization happens each year at our Convention. This year in Athens, GA, we again saw what could be accomplished by a small group of passionate and dedicated members. To everyone involved, thank you. Your efforts were deeply appreciated and helped create a unique experience for everyone who attended.

Now, our Vaseyi Chapter members are working hard at planning the 2027 Convention here in Hendersonville, NC. We look forward to seeing our Azalea Society family next April for another gathering of old friends and new.

As we look forward to our 50th anniversary next year, it is also worth looking back at the people and moments that have shaped our Society's story. I hope you enjoy the fourth installment of our history in this edition of *The Azalean*. For me, looking back over the years from 2009 to 2018 was bittersweet. It brought back many fond memories, but it also reminded me how much I miss some of my dearest azalea friends, particularly Bob Stelloh and Margie Jenkins. Bob played a pivotal role in the Asheville 2012 Convention, and I thoroughly enjoyed catching up with Margie at the 2018 convention in Arkansas. These memories are part of what makes our gatherings so meaningful. Please make every effort to attend our National Convention. You will be warmly welcomed by everyone.

~ Aaron

**Save the Dates!**  
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**Asheville, NC**

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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- Winter 2026 issue is due October 15, 2026
- Spring 2027 issue is due January 15, 2027
- Summer 2027 issue is due April 15, 2027
- Fall 2027 issue is due July 15, 2027

Remember, you too can write for *The Azalean*!

To submit your articles and  
photos for publication, contact:  
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## On the Cover

Vista in front yard of the McWhorter’s  
garden in Gambrills, MD, with the evergreen  
azalea ‘Tradition’ in the left forefront. Photos by Don Hyatt.



# Chauncey Beadle and the Biltmore Estate Azalea Garden

*By Stacey Weir—Asheville, North Carolina*



View of Biltmore House in Asheville, NC. Photo courtesy of Biltmore.

Biltmore has a rich history of sustainable land planning and landscape architecture, which aligns with its mission to preserve the property as a profitable working estate.

In the late 1800s, George W. Vanderbilt chose Asheville, NC, to build his dream home: a French-style chateau designed by Richard Morris Hunt, a world-renowned architect whose projects included the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty and the facade of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Vanderbilt also hired Frederick Law Olmsted, now regarded as the father of American landscape architecture, to design Biltmore's home grounds. Olmsted's work included Central Park in New York and the Emerald Necklace park system in Boston. Together, Hunt and Olmsted would create a masterpiece for George Vanderbilt.

As construction began on the foundation of Biltmore House, work was already underway to develop Olmsted's plans for the gardens and grounds surrounding Vanderbilt's magnificent new home.

In 1890, Olmsted hired Chauncey D. Beadle, a young botanist and horticulturist from Cornell University, to head up the nursery operation and assist in the planting of the grounds. After the grounds were completed, Vanderbilt asked Beadle to stay on as the estate superintendent. Beadle stated, "I came for a month and stayed for a lifetime."

Beadle contributed to Biltmore's horticulture legacy in many ways. In addition to being the estate superintendent, he began the Biltmore Herbarium with support from George Vanderbilt. The vast herbarium was filled with species from the southern Appalachian region. It was a prized collection of 100,000 preserved specimens. Unfortunately, most of that data was lost during the area's historic flood of 1916. Later, the remainder of the herbarium (about 25 %) was donated by Edith

Vanderbilt to the Smithsonian Institute where it is still used by researchers today.

Beadle also had a special love for azaleas, and by 1930, he led a group known as the "Azalea Hunters," which included botanists Frank M. Crayton and William A. Knight. They often traveled with Sylvester Owens, Beadle's personal assistant, and chauffeur of 28+ years, who was an azalea expert in his own right, and who was instrumental in the collection of azaleas. They traveled to areas rich in native azaleas to collect specimens, searching high and low, especially in the Southeast, but in other parts of the country as well. In one epic adventure, the Azalea Hunters traveled 1,800 miles in four days to eastern Texas to investigate azaleas. They spent years collecting native azalea species. Beadle eventually had more than 3,000 specimens he called his "children."

In 1940, Edith Vanderbilt bestowed the 15-acre garden formerly known as The Glenn, designed in 1901 by the Olmsted brothers but never completed, for the establishment of the Biltmore Azalea Garden. As Beadle neared retirement after 50 years as Biltmore's Landscape Superintendent, he donated his azalea collection to the Azalea Garden and was finally able to complete this beautiful space as a rhododendron habitat.

Coupled with a stellar tree collection of deciduous and evergreen, the azaleas mingle with other rhododendrons, shrubs, and perennials in the Azalea Garden to create a magical meandering adventure along a mountain stream that stretches all the way to Biltmore's Bass Pond.



Chauncey Beadle in the Azalea Garden, ca. 1948. Photo courtesy of Biltmore.



Spring blooms in Biltmore's historic gardens. Photo courtesy of Biltmore.

Today, you will find specimens such as one of the first distributed *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* rediscovered in China in the 1940s and planted at Biltmore around 1950; a NC champion katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*); a stunning blue atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*), planted in the 1930s, and one of the largest stinking cedars (*Torreya taxifolia*) planted from seed in the early 1900s. Azalea species blooming spring or summer include *Rhododendron canescens*, *R. atlanticum*, *R. linearifolium*, *R. calendulaceum*, *R. periclymenoides*, *R. viscosum*, *R. arborescens*, *R. alabamense*, *R. austrinum*, *R. prunifolium*, *R. cumberlandense*, *R. flammeum*, *R. vaseyi*, *R. prinophyllum*, *R. serrulatum*, and many Asiatic species.

Biltmore is known for its diverse azalea collection and for other ornamental gardens such as the Conservatory filled with tropical plants, the Spring Garden that features spring-blooming plants, the Shrub Garden, the four-acre Walled Garden filled with annual displays, perennials, and roses, and the Italian Garden that is home to pools full of aquatic plants.

All of these gardens were part of Olmsted's original design and are still managed in keeping with his in-

tent. Thanks to George Vanderbilt's instincts about Mr. Beadle, who kept Olmsted's design intent on track for future generations, this group of historic gardens surrounding Biltmore House offers exciting year-round ways to explore the estate's plants and landscape architecture.

During the ASA 2027 Annual Convention next April, our tour will begin with a bus ride along the Approach Road. We will try to imagine the area as it looked immediately after James Galls' crew finished grading the road and redirecting Ram Branch. At that time, it was a blank slate waiting to be planted in Olmsted's naturalistic style incorporating both native and subtropical plants to achieve his desired effect. As we travel along the Approach Road, Biltmore staff will point out unique features of the landscape design and plantings. Everyone will then be dropped off at the entrance to the Shrub Garden to ramble. From here, you will take a self-guided tour through the Shrub Garden, Spring Garden, Walled Garden, and Conservatory before arriving at the Azalea Garden. The rest of our time will be spent in the Azalea Garden admiring the extensive collection of azaleas and other unique plants. The estate tour will be completed with a leisurely bus ride along the French Broad River. Bus captains will provide a brief history of the estate's agriculture and horticulture legacy. For those who would like to spend more time on the estate to visit the Chateau and Winery, tickets will be made available through an online link on the website.

### About the Author

Stacey Weir has been with the Biltmore Company for 20 years. She has served many roles in the Horticulture Department and is currently the Historic Gardens Manager. Her love of horticulture began with her parents who taught her organic gardening and house plants. Stacey received a Bachelor of Science in Horticulture from The Pennsylvania State University in 2002 before starting her mountain life in Western North Carolina.



Aerial view of Biltmore's historic gardens. Photo courtesy of Biltmore.

# Cultivating in the Cliffs: The Horticultural Triumph of Azaleas at Cedar Lakes Woods and Garden

*By Jennifer Warriner—Williston, Florida*



**Fig. 1:** An established evergreen *Rhododendron* 'Formosum' specimen displaying healthy growth along the limestone rock face. This educational display demonstrates the successful long-term acclimation of Southern Indian Hybrids to managed, artificial microclimates where specific soil-acidification protocols protect the root system from excessive calcium carbonate leaching.

## Introduction: From Industrial Ruin to Botanical Sanctuary

The story of Cedar Lakes Woods and Garden is fundamentally one of ecological resurrection. The dramatic topography that defines the site today originated as a 20th-century lime rock quarry, mined to provide the foundational materials for nearby US 27. When abandoned, the property devolved into a severely polluted swamp.

Born in 1942, Dr. Raymond T. Webber balanced a distinguished career in dentistry and military service before creating the gardens. After earning his M.S. degree and endodontic certification in 1974, he practiced dentistry until 2014, while also teaching at the University of Florida, contributing to textbooks, and lecturing globally for 14 years. His dedication extended to the military as well, serving eight years in the Army before being called up for Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990 and 1991.

It was during this time, in 1991, that he discovered and purchased the polluted, swampy quarry for private use. Though he initially just wanted to clean it up for a personal fishing pond, the painstaking excavation of mining remnants sparked a grander vision. Over the next three decades, Dr. Webber transformed this industrial scar into a breathtaking, multi-level botanical paradise where a vibrant collection of azaleas now

serves as the structural centerpiece that he still enjoys today.

## The Quarry Factor: Microclimates and Geological Challenges

Cultivating azaleas inside a retired lime rock quarry presents a distinct suite of environmental parameters that contrast sharply with typical North Florida flatwoods landscapes.

## The Alkaline Dilemma

Perhaps the most significant hurdle to rhododendron cultivation at Cedar Lakes is the surrounding geology. While azaleas thrive in acidic, well-draining soils (ideally a pH between 4.5 and 6.0), our plants are completely surrounded by porous lime rock. To compound this challenge, the local clay soil introduces drainage and elevation management hurdles. Because lime rock constantly leaches calcium carbonate into the groundwater and soil profile, the gardens naturally experience high pH levels. To counteract this and keep the collection thriving, the horticultural team routinely monitors pH levels and implements targeted soil management practices to maintain the acidity necessary for nutrient uptake.

## Moisture and Air Dynamics

The structural depth of the quarry, bounded by towering rock walls and a heavy, protective tree canopy, alters the local microclimate. While the dramatic cliff sides create excellent sun and shade dynamics—allowing the azaleas to perform beautifully under a varied, filtered light regime without suffering from light-deficiency stress—the physical depression traps air. In the intense humidity of Florida, this enclosed topography creates unique pockets of stagnant moisture. Consequently, our primary horticultural battle is not drought or light management, but rather an elevated susceptibility to fungal disease and unique pest pressures born from this high-humidity environment.

## The Collection: Botanical Diversity and Naming

The living collection at Cedar Lakes represents an intentional mix of evergreen hybrids, historic cultivars, and native species that have adapted beautifully to the rugged cliffside terrain.

The initial backbone of the collection was selected by Dr. Raymond Webber, who personally collected

specimens during his extensive travels in Japan. In the ensuing decades, local enthusiasts and friends of the garden have donated numerous varieties, further enriching the garden's genetic diversity. Today, the collection features a robust lineup of cultivars:

- **Southern Indian Hybrids & Traditional Cultivars:** The foundational plantings lean heavily on reliable, vigorous performers. 'Formosum' (including its red, pink, and lavender variations) stands as our most populous and resilient cultivar (see figure 1). Other prominent classic varieties include 'George Lindley Taber' (syn. 'George Taber'), 'Mrs. G.G. Gerbing', 'Southern Charm', and the elegant 'Duc de Rohan'.
- **Encore® Azaleas:** To ensure extended color across seasons, the gardens utilize multi-season bloomers such as 'Conleb' (Autumn Embers®), 'Conlep' (Autumn Twist®), 'Conlen' (Autumn Bravo®), and 'Conlec' (Autumn Royalty®).
- **Specialty Hybrids & Satsuki Types:** Unique textures are provided by popular hybrids like 'Dogwood', 'Candy Stripe', 'Red Ruffles', and 'White Ruffles'. A showstopper that consistently captures the attention of visiting enthusiasts is the spectacular Satsuki Hybrid 'Miyono-sakae'.
- **Native Species:** Embracing regional ecology, the gardens display native deciduous varieties, most notably the striking, fragrant Florida azalea (*Rhododendron austrinum*).

### Cultivation Philosophy and Maintenance Protocols

Managing an extensive rhododendron collection across a rugged, multi-tiered landscape requires a structured maintenance regimen that respects the natural growth habits of the plants.

### Irrigation and Nutrition

Our watering protocol shifts dynamically with Florida's distinct seasonal moisture patterns. During the drier autumn and winter months, irrigation is deployed once every four days. In the intense heat of the spring and summer growing seasons, the frequency is in-



Fig. 2: Garden overlook at Cedar Lakes Woods and Garden.

creased to once every three days, with a strict maximum duration of 60 to 90 minutes per zone to mitigate the risk of root rot in the quarry's clay pockets (see figure 2).

To sustain vigor and support the heavy bloom cycles, the collection is fertilized twice a year. The team utilizes a balanced, slow-release Triple 14 (14-14-14) formulation to deliver a steady supply of macronutrients without causing localized salt spikes in the high-pH substrate.

### Pruning and Aesthetics

In keeping with the wild, breathtaking aesthetic established by Dr. Webber, the pruning philosophy at Cedar Lakes rejects formalized hedging or artificial shaping. Instead, the team relies strictly on selective, light hand-pruning. Cuts are executed immediately following the conclusion of the primary spring bloom season. This strategy maintains natural, cascading forms that blend seamlessly into the rugged cliff faces without accidentally removing the following year's dormant flower buds.

### Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Given the enclosed, humid nature of the quarry, disease pressures present a far greater challenge than



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insect pests. However, localized outbreaks of stem borers (*Oberea myops*) do occur. To protect the surrounding ecosystem and water features, the garden relies heavily on organic and mechanical Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices. Infestations are managed safely using organic neem oil treatments alongside a targeted, manual application of a custom rubbing alcohol and pure castile soap solution.

### **The Reward: Bloom Succession**

Through careful cultivar selection and nutrition, Cedar Lakes achieves a dual-peak bloom succession that maximizes visual impact. From a horticultural standpoint, the gardens experience two distinct peak windows. During the Spring Peak period of February to March, blooming plants include: *R. austrinum*, *R. 'Formosum'*, Indian Hybrids, and Satsuki Hybrids. During the Autumn Peak of September to October, the Encore® Hybrids and multi-season bloomers are flowering.

### **Notes and References**

1. U.S. Code Sixty-Ninth: This intentional overlap ensures that whether visitors are navigating the deep quarry floor in the crisp spring air or the early autumn warmth, they are greeted by a display of rhododendron resilience.

2. For rhododendron enthusiasts: Cedar Lakes Woods and Garden is actively seeking partnerships with knowledgeable collectors and taxonomists to assist our team with the meticulous, ongoing process of accessioning and mapping our extensive cultivar collection. Contact <https://cedarlakeswoodsandgarden.com/>.

### **Conclusion**

Cedar Lakes Woods and Garden stands as a living testament to what can be achieved when thoughtful horticulture meets adaptive management. By embracing the architectural drama of a ruined industrial site while systematically conquering its geological challenges, we have created a sanctuary where azaleas do not merely survive—they define the landscape.

### **About the Author**

Jennifer Warriner is the Marketing and Communications Coordinator for Cedar Lakes Woods and Gardens, based out of Williston, Florida. While not a professional horticultural writer by trade, she collaborated closely with the expert garden staff to distill their hands-on expertise and insights into this article.

### **Back Cover Photo**

Azaleas at the Cedar Lakes Woods and Garden in Williston, FL, include *Rhododendron simsii* 'Red Ruffle' along with *Rhododendron* × 'George Lindley Taber' in the background.

# Today, My Favorite Garrett and Harris Hybrids are ‘Mrs. Emma Jones’ and ‘Vittatum’ Respectively

*By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland*

This is the sixth in a series of “favorite” articles. My approach, this time, is a little different in that it is a “twofer”<sup>1</sup>; that is, I’m reporting two “favorites” in one article. It works well because both cultivars, from different hybrid groups, are aspects of the same story.

The story actually begins in 1981 when Dewey Garrett published an article entitled “The Harris Hybrids” in the January 1981 issue of *The Azalean*, *The Newsletter of the Azalea Society of America*.<sup>2</sup> The Harris Hybrids were totally unknown to me, and I didn’t know anything about Dewey Garrett... except that his article stated that he lived in Anderson, South Carolina, which is about 19 miles from Erskine College in Due West, South Carolina, where I received my degree in Biology in 1969. Lawrenceville, Georgia, where James Harris lived, was only 115 miles from Due West, right down I-85. In the early 1980s, most everyone in the Washington Metropolitan Area was focusing on Glenn Dales, Linwood Hardy, Back Acres, and Robin Hill Hybrids, largely due to the promotion and influence of people like Frank White (Azalea Acres Farm in Lanham, Maryland) and George Harding (Copper Beech Nursery in Germantown, Maryland and the retired Chief of the Horticulture Division of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior). I liked what I read in Dewey Garrett’s article, and I decided to focus on the Harris Hybrids. All those “bordered-cultivars,” and ‘Pink Cascade’, ‘Georgia Giant’, and ‘Joan Garrett’ (named for Dewey’s wife) sounded really interesting.

## The Moons Must Have Been Aligned

In July (1981), out of the blue, I received an invitation to participate in an Erskine College Alumni soccer game in Due West on September 5th.<sup>3</sup> This was too good an opportunity to pass up. I wrote letters to the Garretts and James Harris indicating that I was attending the activity at Erskine, just up the road, and I wanted to visit them on September 7th, if it was convenient. Happily, in both cases, it was convenient. I had a nice visit with the Garretts and a wonderful specimen of ‘Mrs. Emma Jones’ (*Rhododendron kaempferi* x ‘Vittatum’), one of Dewey’s introductions from his Garrett Rainbow Hybrids, was among the plants they shared with me. It can best be described as a nicer/larger flowered ‘Vittatum’. If you fancy ‘Vittatum’ for its variability, you will love ‘Mrs.



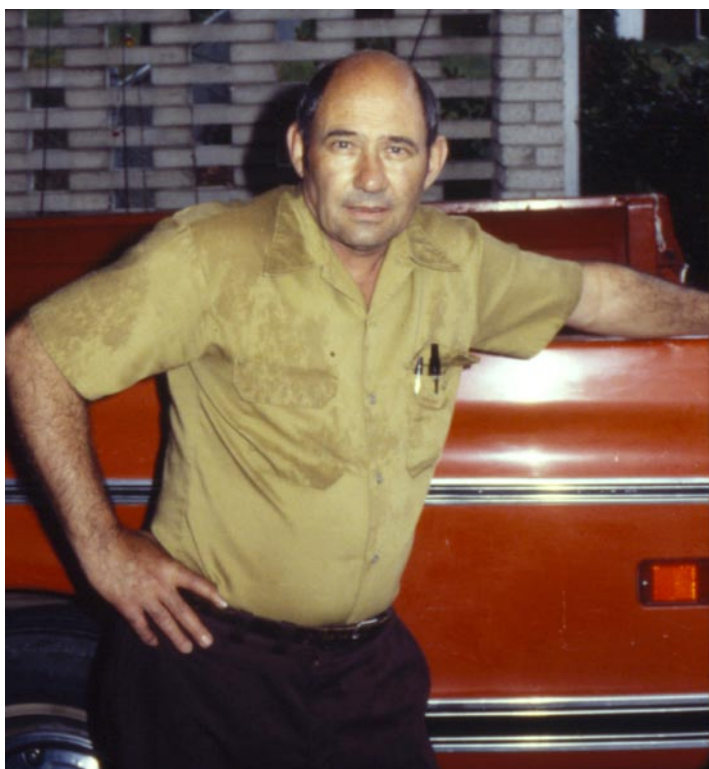
**Fig. 1 ‘Mrs. Emma Jones’, a large flowering evergreen azalea belonging to the Garrett Rainbow Hybrid group, developed by Dewey Garrett in Anderson, South Carolina. Fans of ‘Vittatum’ will appreciate ‘Mrs. Emma Jones’ for its variable flowers and mid-April bloom. Photo by William C. Miller III.**

Emma Jones’. Between Galle and the IRRC, it can be described as a 2.5-3 inch single flower, a delicately washed white, with purplish pink flakes, streaks, and I would add sectors. The dots in the blotch area are a bold purplish red, and self colored purplish pink flowers are common. My plant is upright, has never failed to bloom, and is all of 13 feet tall, I guesstimate. Like ‘Vittatum’ and many other azaleas, you probably need to be careful about propagation. You should either identify the wood, while blooming, from which you will take cuttings; or you should plan to grow propagations on to sufficient size to rogue out any sports. If any of your new propagations bloom with all purplish pink self flowers, they aren’t ‘Mrs. Emma Jones’ any more; and you cannot distribute them as that cultivar.

## The Curious Case of Harris 170-A

Lawrenceville, Georgia was another couple of hours down I-85 from the Garrett’s place in Anderson. Mr. Harris was waiting for me when I pulled into his driveway. I backed my Pinto station wagon into his driveway, popped the back hatch, and announced that I wanted to “fill her up” with his azaleas. He was happy to accommodate me. Going home, my pinto must have looked like a mobile jungle. My modest Harris Hybrid collection, consisting of plants directly from the developer, was born.

One of the plants was tagged 170-A. It wasn’t a cultivar name, and it wasn’t mentioned anywhere in my



**Fig. 2** James Otis Harris, as he posed when I asked permission to take a photograph, at his home in Lawrenceville, Georgia, September 7, 1981. Photo by William C. Miller III.

meager Harris (physical) file. At the time, I reasoned it was probably a work-in-progress... perhaps still under evaluation. It was a major mistake, in retrospect: I didn't think to ask for more details. Some years later, I heard from Bill McDavit, a (recently deceased) friend in North Carolina, that Harris had named it 'Vivation'. "Vivation," by the way, is a gentle, breathing technique created by Jim Leonard in 1979 that is designed to quickly and permanently resolve trauma, stress, and negative emotions. For some reason, 170-A, now 'Vivation', didn't seem to follow the normal course of events which typically includes some kind of public introduction (e.g., an item in *The Azalean*) even though it was clearly a product of Harris' early



**Fig. 3** A very attractive, large flowering (5-6 inch), evergreen azalea developed by James Harris in Lawrenceville, Georgia and named for Dewey Garrett's wife, Joan. Photo by William C. Miller III.

work. It was, however, briefly mentioned by Harris in his definitive article in the September 1989 issue of *The Azalean* entitled "The James Harris Azaleas: A 25-Year Status Report."<sup>4</sup> 170-A, at that time unnamed, didn't appear in the detailed table of cultivars which included formulas, but warranted only a brief comment towards the end of the article. It wasn't mentioned at all in the 2002 *Azalean* article by Roger Duvall entitled "James Harris Hybrids."<sup>5</sup>

### **The Three Phases**

The Duvall article was interesting. It characterized Harris' breeding program as having three phases. The goal in the first phase, roughly 1970-1985, was to produce plants with large flowers, cascading plant habits, and improved heat tolerance (e.g., 'Pink Cascade', 'Fascination', 'Gloria Still', 'Joan Garrett', and 'Georgia Giant').<sup>6</sup> The second phase, from 1985 on, involved Harris' desire to develop plants with red flowers (e.g., 'Coronado Red', 'Midnight Flare', and 'J. Valentine'). A third phase, mentioned by Duvall, involved breeding with Encore® 'Conleb' aka Autumn Embers®, PP#10581. The goal was to produce red flowering plants that would be suitable for indoor applications through the winter months and holidays... perhaps including Valentine's Day. Duvall reported that Harris had a candidate with bright red blooms which he (Harris) intended to name 'Harris Holiday'.<sup>7</sup> Where 'Harris' Holiday' is today is unclear. A broad Internet search revealed mention of the cultivar, but I couldn't find any indication of commercial availability.

### **"My Favorite" Harris Hybrid, at least for the present, is 'Vivation'**

I have had many years to enjoy the Harris Hybrids, so it was difficult to narrow the selection down to one favorite. There is 'Pink Cascade' which is truly remarkable, and I had never seen anyone tie an azalea branch into a knot. Then, there is the fact that good reds are hard to come by in most hybrid groups. It's the rare red that is "fast"... doesn't tend to fade, bleach, or sunburn as the flower ages. Finally, there are the cultivars like 'Vivation' and 'Gloria Still' which are "soft," whitish, and subtly very light pink. This last group is best admired up close where the beautiful features can be easily appreciated. From afar, like across the yard, the subtle color characteristics are muted and the "garden effect" is little more than a plain "off-white."

'Vivation' (parentage unknown or unreported) is a 2.5-3 inch, single, white flower with the hint of a very light purplish pink wash. The hue intensifies deeper in



Fig. 4 A 2.5-3 inch, single, whitish evergreen azalea with a very light purplish pink wash and subtle highlights in the throat. Identified initially as 170-A, it was eventually named 'Vivation'. While it is a product of Harris' Phase 1 work, it somehow didn't get the same attention and promotion that his other early azaleas got. It's probably not in many gardens. Photo by William C. Miller III.

the throat. There are five wavy and overlapping petals, and a foliaceous calyx is present. There are often nine light pink stamen with whitish anthers, although the stamen count is variable due to the presence of petaloidy. The dots in the blotch area are light yellowish green. No one, not even family, knows the whereabouts of James Harris' breeding notes.

The unadvertised icing on this cake: in 2013, 'Vivation' sported and produced a flower with an intense purplish pink colored border (see Fig. 5). It was one branch, and I haven't seen the sport since. I have no idea what conditions caused the sport or why it didn't appear before or hasn't reappeared since. Chalk it up as another of the azalea world's little mysteries.

## Notes and References

1. The term "twofer" is a contraction of "two for one." Its earliest known use dates back to the 1870s, was an early marketing strategy, and involved the customer getting two items for the price of one. Here, I'm reporting two azalea favorites in one article.
2. Garrett, Dewey. 1981. "The Harris Hybrids." *The Azalean, The Newsletter of the Azalea Society of America*, 3(1): 1-4. In the beginning, *The Azalean* was a modest newsletter... a humble beginning for the journal that we enjoy today.
3. During my senior year at Erskine College, my roommate talked me into going out for the soccer team. A soccer player himself, he remarked that he thought I should at least have some fun during my senior year. I took his advice, I won a starting position at left defender, and it was a grand experience.
4. Harris, James. 1989. "The James Harris Azaleas: A



Fig. 5 In 2013, a single branch on 'Vivation' produced flowers with an irregular pinkish purple border. The sport was a one time event. Photo by William C. Miller III.

25-Year Status Report." *The Azalean*, 11(3): 50-51.

5. Duvall, Roger. 2002. "James Harris Hybrids." *The Azalean*, 24(1): 6-7.

6. Galle, Fred. 1985. *Azaleas*. Portland, OR: Timber Press, Revised and Enlarged Edition, 271-272.

7. Duvall, Roger. 2001. "James Harris and His Hybrid Azaleas." *JARS*, 55(3): 162-164.

## 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*.

P

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# Azalea Research Committee Report

*By Hale Booth—Signal Mountain, Tennessee*

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The Azalea Research Fund is a wholly owned component of the Azalea Society of America. It is operated by the Azalea Research Fund Committee which accepts grant proposals year-round, evaluates the proposals and approves various proposals for funding. Maximum grants are \$5,000. The Azalea Research Fund (ARF) is self-sufficient, and its goal has been to incur no expenses other than grants awarded. The total value of the Azalea Research Fund (ARF) was \$114,074 at the end of 2023, \$111,655 at the end of 2024 and \$117,584 at the end of 2025. The ARF Chair coordinates awards closely with the ASA Treasurer.

In March 2026, ASA through our Azalea Research Fund awarded a grant of \$4,219 to the University of Connecticut. This grant is to assist Dr. Charles Krasnow with his research on “*Phytophthora* Root Rot of Azalea: Developing Sustainable Management Strategies to Improve Production.”

Previously, we reported on two grant applicants that are currently funded by ASA. The first award was for \$5,000 to University of Florida researcher Carolyn Bento Willis. Her research project is Diversity and distribution of *Exobasidium* fungi on *Rhododendron* species of North America. The second grant was for \$5,000 and awarded to Samantha Pryor also with the University of Florida. Some of you may have met Samantha at our Annual Meeting in Auburn Alabama. Samantha’s research topic is: Exploring the predictive power of pollination syndromes and the floral traits used to attract effective pollinators in *Rhododendron* species.

Each of these grantees agree as a condition of the award to write an article about their research project and its conclusions for *The Azalean*. Our grants are small with a maximum award of \$5,000, however they are very attractive to graduate level researchers as our funds can cover the hard costs of research projects while the graduate is contributing extensive amounts of professional time to the project at no additional cost to ASA Research funds.

One of the continuing problems we run into is the overhead rate many universities charge against grants. This rate is calculated to cover a portion of the university fixed costs that may typically be used by any grantee. These established overhead rates can range as high as 25 to 50 percent. While that rate can be absorbed by large grants it can be a “deal killer” to small grants like what ASA provides.

As a result, before disbursing a grant award to a university-based researcher, we request they consult with their faculty advisor to determine the overhead rate that would be applied by the university in these modest awards. If the overhead rate is going to significantly impact the funding of our research award, we offer the option to the researcher of making the award directly to them. This eliminates the overhead issue but creates a potential income tax issue for

the grantee. We have had a few past grantees choose this route as students typically do not reach a personal income threshold necessary to pay taxes.

There was death of a research grant recipient. Dr. Vanessa Koelling of Auburn University Montgomery campus was a 2019 grant recipient from ASA for her research into “What is a species? Investigating the morphological, physiological, and genetic differences between closely related Southern Azalea species.” Very shortly after funding, Vanessa along with the world was shut down in response to COVID-19. Once University life returned to more normal conditions, she encountered serious health issues which would plague her the rest of her short life. At her request we granted what would become the first of several health-related extension requests for extensions of her time for research completion. In late November of 2024 we granted a final one-year extension request. Before her work was completed, she died in surgery on September 18, 2025. I suspect what remained of her research died with her. However, Patrick Thompson was listed as a collaborator in her research project, and I will see Patrick at Auburn and will discuss if we should just write this off or if he has other options or suggestions.

One of the few requirements that ARF places on grant recipients is that they submit an article to *The Azalean* editor at the conclusion of their research. This ensures that our members can learn about research that ASA’s research program is funding with member funds. Presently there is not an organizational link between the Azalea Research Fund and *The Azalean*’s editor. There have been a few occasions where an article pops up in our journal, and we basically learn that the project is complete, with or without any credit to ASA for financial support the editor presently has no organizational link to know that a research project is underway and that they should be on the watch for a future article regarding the project. I think in the future our ARF chair as a normal step in the grant award process should submit a short one or two paragraph article to *The Azalean* announcing the funding of each grant award. This would queue up the editor to expect some research article in the coming months or year. This is just one strategy and board members may have better suggestions for operational linkages, which ARF is certainly open to.

With the editor being aware of the research awards, they can also ensure that the author gives proper credit to ASA for investing in the research. It is likely that this publication of an early career article by some of our grantees is their first experience of having their work published.

## About the Author

Hale Booth is the Azalea Research Fund Committee Chair. The rest of the committee members are Aaron Cook, J Jackson, John Migas, and Dr. Andy Whipple.

# The Not-So-Delicate Azalea Lacebug

By Carol Allen—Germantown, Maryland



I love azaleas! The photo-op, feast-your-eyes displays in the Washington, DC-area are numerous, and azaleas are pretty easy-care, aren't they? Maybe!

The biggest sin-against-azalea is improper siting and that is all because of the azalea lacebug. The azalea lacebug (*Stephanitis pyrioides*) is a sucking insect that can gather in huge numbers on the underside of the leaves. From the upper surface, the damage is very similar to spider mite stippling. Fortunately, the azalea lacebug is much larger and more easily seen.

This insect overwinters in the egg stage. The eggs had been inserted into the midribs and large veins of the underside of the leaves the previous fall, and the nymphs emerge concurrent with the new leaves in the spring. The nymphs go through five instars as black, spiny juveniles and can grow into adults in as quick as 30 days. The adults are about 1/10" long with back-swept, translucent, and netted wings. Since the body is a cream color, a hand lens may be needed to get a good look at them. However, they are easy to spot, because both nymphs and adults are usually present in fairly high numbers if conditions are right. Even more incriminating are the numerous "tar spots" of black fecal material.

As the hordes of lacebugs feed on the leaves, the loss of chlorophyll renders the surface stippled and silvery. The damage is aesthetically unappealing, can cause early leaf drop, and generally weakens the plant.

There are three generations per year in the Mid-Atlantic region; May, July, and September. The best control is siting azaleas in the shade, where natural enemies (jumping spiders, lady beetles, lacewing, and others) will keep the population suppressed. If chemical control is needed, a spray program can be initiated in

early to mid-May or as soon as the nymphs are spotted. Horticultural or neem oil are preferred products, although others are also effective (read the label of the product for application directions and insects they control). Regardless of the chemical used, thoroughly coat the underside of the leaves. A good effort to control the early generation will limit later populations. Caution: Do not spray while the shrub is in bloom, so you are not killing our beneficial pollinators.

Azaleas are not the only plant that suffers from this family of pests. The azalea lacebug and the andromeda (*S. takeyai*) lacebug are non-native pests, whereas the rhododendron (*S. rhododendri*) and hawthorn lacebug (*Corythucha cydoniae*) are native species. In general, each species is specific for its host, but the hawthorn lacebug plagues many members of the rose family, including buttonbush, cotoneaster, flowering quince, pyracantha, and shadbush to name a few.

Keep an eye out this spring for these widespread pests and either move the plants to the shade (if possible) or initiate control measures early. Adequate moisture during times of drought and an appropriate organic mulch will help boost the plants' natural immunity.

## 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.

This article previously appeared in *Washington Gardener Magazine's* "InsectIndex" column.



Azalea lacebug photos are courtesy of Keisotyo and Forest & Kim Starr [CC BY 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons, [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org).

# Chapter News



## Welcome New Members!

### Alabamense:

- Charles Faulkner, Hueytown, AL

### At-Large Members:

- Steve Ransbotham, Atlanta, GA

### Northern Virginia:

- Patrick Bohlen & Lynn Hana, King George, VA
- Mr. Alexander R. Yu, Fairfax, VA

### Vaseyi:

- Susan Repko, Brevard, NC



## 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](mailto:treasurer@azaleas.org) if you are interested in the position of Advertising Manager for *The Azalean*.



Rick Edwards presents his method for propagating deciduous azaleas to the Northern Virginia Chapter. Photo by Rick Bauer.

### Northern Virginia Chapter

#### *Rick Bauer, Corresponding Secretary*

The chapter held our annual cutting exchange on July 12 at Kirkwood Presbyterian Church in Springfield, Virginia. We were fortunate to have Rick Edwards from the Arkansas Chapter come from Missouri to give us a presentation on propagating evergreen azaleas. We had a great turnout at the meeting and on Zoom. We also posted the presentation on YouTube® for viewing by those who couldn't attend. For those attendees interested, a workshop was held after the meeting at the home of Dave and Leslie Nanney.

In addition to the cutting exchange, we also had our ever popular plant exchange. Our members enjoy being able to share their excess plants with other members and obtain additional plants for their collections.

We also signed the contracts for the 2028 ASA Convention hotel. We'll be at the Crowne Plaza in Herndon, VA. This is the hotel where we held the convention in 2009. It will be newly renovated when we hold the convention. Mark April 21–23, 2028, on your calendars.

Our next Chapter meeting will be held on October 18.



Barry Sperling, Lynn Hana, Dave Nanney and Rick Edwards stick cuttings. Photo by Laurel Hill.

# In Memoriam: Robert “Bob” McWhorter

*By Diane Reinke—Wheaton, Maryland*

The ASA lost a valued member with the passing on May 3, 2026, of longtime member Bob McWhorter. His life was marked by leadership, service, and love for his family. Born in Washington, DC, Bob lived the last 38 years of his life in Gambrills, Maryland. Bob earned a degree in law enforcement at the University of Maryland. While studying at the university, Bob met his lovely wife, Rosa Musameci. They were married in 1968.

Bob served his country as a member of the National Guard and served as a trooper for the Maryland State Police. While with the police, he was also member of the SWAT Team. After retiring from the state police, Bob worked for the Department of Corrections until his retirement in 2005.

Bob was an avid gardener. He held the offices of vice president and president in both the ASA Ben Morrison Chapter and the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. He and Rosa designed and maintained a beautiful two-acre garden at their Gambrills home, showcasing hundreds of azaleas and rhododendrons, along with many beautiful companion plants.

Some of the azaleas that have graced the McWhorter garden are ‘August to Frost’, ‘Ambrosia’, ‘Kaempferi Yellow’, ‘Carrie Amanda’, and ‘Admiral Semmes’. Rhododendrons include ‘Taurus’, ‘Dexter’s Honeydew’, ‘Blazing Grace’, ‘Rhein’s Luna’, ‘Bob Furnan’s Big Yellow’, ‘Rosa Marie’ (one of Bob’s hybrids that Carolyn Beck is registering and that is named after Bob’s wife Rosa), and ‘Jennifer Marie’ (Don Hyatt’s cross that Bob grew from seed and that was nominated for the Tyler Test Garden in Pennsylvania and named after their daughter, it has not yet been registered). Companion plants include camellias (‘Black Tie’, ‘Yume’, and ‘April Remembered’) and kalmias (‘Sarah’, ‘Tinkerbelle’, and ‘Yankee Doodle’).

See the Spring 2026 issue of *The Azalean* on page 8 for a new azalea, ‘McWhorter’s Fancy’, that was named for Bob McWhorter.

Bob and Rosa welcomed many visitors to the garden over the years and treated them to tasty snacks and drinks on their shaded porch.

Bob enjoyed the outdoors, participating in sports and camping, among other activities. He also served as



Bob and Rosa standing in their driveway. Photo by Don Hyatt.

vice-president and president of his local homeowners association.

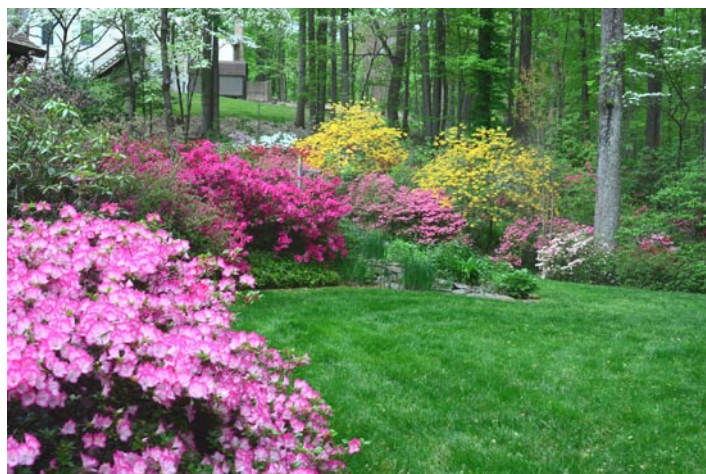
A man of deep faith, Bob was a parishioner of Our Lady of the Fields Catholic Church, where he served as a Minister of Care and a Eucharistic Minister. His funeral was held at this church, and an honor guard from the State Police was present.

Besides his devoted wife Rosa, Bob leaves to cherish his memory his son, Robert Jr. and wife Manieka; son-in-law Bryan Thomas; and four grandchildren. Bob was predeceased by his beloved daughter, Jennifer Marie Thomas.

Bob is greatly missed by his family and many gardening friends and is not forgotten.

## About the Author

Diane Reinke is the Secretary of the Ben Morrison Chapter.



Vista across the McWhorter's back yard with Schroeder's ‘Carrie Amanda’ at left forefront. Photo by Don Hyatt.

# Remembering the Past: Our Fourth Decade (2009-2018)

## The Azalea Society of America

*By Aaron Cook—Hendersonville, North Carolina*

In this fourth edition of our history, we look back at the Conventions held from 2009 through 2018. I have shortened and changed the tense on many of the original articles. To give full credit to the original authors, I have included their byline with each section.

### 31st ASA National Convention—2009

(Credit: Carol Flowers)

The 2009 Azalea Society of America convention in Northern Virginia highlighted the region's rich azalea culture through presentations, garden tours, plant sales, and discussions about cultivation, hybridizing, and conservation. The event opened with talks from our members emphasizing how gardens develop over time and how successful azalea growing depends on understanding soil, drainage, climate, and the constant changes that affect living landscapes.

The major theme of the convention was the importance of adapting to garden conditions. Tony Dove's presentation traced the evolution of his Maryland garden and reinforced the value of improving heavy clay soil with organic matter such as composted leaves, peat moss, and grass clippings. Rick Bauer's presentation on Bob and Betty Stewart's garden showed another example of problem-solving in horticulture. Their sloped suburban site offered excellent drainage for azaleas, but also created erosion challenges. Terracing and container growing were used, and when metal barrels overheated the soil, wooden insulation was added to protect the plants. Rick's presentation also highlighted Bob Stewart's many contributions as an azalea hybridizer.

Garden tours allowed participants to see a wide range of approaches to azalea gardening. The Krabill garden demonstrated a collection of more than 1,100 azalea varieties arranged into a cohesive landscape. Don Hyatt's garden showed how loss and renewal can reshape a mature garden; after older trees and shrubs were damaged or removed, wildflowers and companion plants helped create a fresh design with more available sunlight. Joe and Brenda Klimavicz's garden illustrated the science and family involvement behind hybridizing, with many neighboring yards also displaying plants likely connected to Joe's breeding work. Phil and Fran Louer's five-acre Haymarket garden emphasized large-scale collecting, combining thousands of azaleas, rhododendrons, wildflowers, ferns, native plants, and other companions.

The convention also included presentations on native azalea and rhododendron habitats. Bob Stelloh and John Brown shared photographs from East Coast mountain regions where azaleas grow naturally, while George McClellan broadened the view with images from across the United States and Canada. These talks underscored the grandeur of natural plant communities and the growing importance of protecting native habitats so azaleas and rhododendrons can continue to thrive in the wild.

Additional Sunday tours, despite steady rain, featured the Stewart garden (see figure 1), the Dave and Leslie Nanney garden, and Carolyn and Paul Beck's woodland garden. The Stewart hillside, known from published photographs, was especially striking in bloom. The Nanney and Beck gardens offered examples of



**Fig. 1** Convention attendees explore Bob Stewart's amazing azalea hillside, a marvel of engineering and construction, at his beautiful home on Oriole Avenue in Springfield, Virginia. Photo by Buddy Lee.

wooded settings, where mature tree canopies sheltered azalea collections below. Companion planting was also important in these gardens, with wildflowers becoming more prominent in the Nanney garden and dwarf conifers expanding in the Beck garden.

The convention's plant sale gave attendees access to unusual azaleas and companion plants not commonly available in local nurseries, including Bob Stewart Hybrids, Holly Springs Hybrids, and native azaleas. Evening talks by Rosalie Nachman and Don Hyatt balanced entertainment, plant knowledge, and photography, offering both practical information and visual inspiration. Overall, the convention celebrated azaleas as garden plants, collector specimens, hybridizing subjects, and native treasures. It also reinforced several enduring lessons: gardens continually evolve, good soil preparation is essential, gardeners must adapt to site challenges, companion plants enrich azalea displays, and preserving native habitats is vital to the future of these plants.

### 32nd ASA National Convention—2010

(Credit: Carol Flowers)

The 2010 Azalea Society of America convention in New Orleans highlighted Louisiana's horticultural heritage, distinctive hospitality, and the region's ongoing contributions to azalea culture. Hosted by the Louisiana Chapter, the gathering introduced attendees to the local tradition of "lagniappe," the practice of offering something extra. Throughout the convention, participants encountered that spirit through garden tours, plant-focused education, regional food, and generous hospitality.

The first full tour day took attendees north of New Orleans to visit several important nursery and research sites. At Transcend Nursery, Buddy Lee discussed Encore® Azaleas, a popular reblooming group that has become widely available in many areas, including the Washington, DC, region. Attendees toured the nursery, learned about Lee's breeding work, and received one of his newest Encore introductions (see figure 2). The group then visited Bracy Nursery, once a 160-acre family dairy farm and now a large container-plant operation. The nursery's extensive

rows of plants demonstrated the scale and variety of Louisiana nursery production, while guests also experienced regional cuisine prepared on-site.

The tour continued to Margie Jenkins' nursery, where cold winter conditions had limited azalea bloom, but allowed camellias and native Louisiana plants to stand out. Jenkins shared her knowledge of regional plants and offered attendees plants of her azalea selection, 'Freddy'. The day concluded at the Louisiana State University AgCenter's Hammond Research Station. Founded in 1922 to support strawberry and truck-crop farmers, the station has expanded its mission to serve the green industry through landscape horticulture research and extension. A major feature of the station is the Margie Y. Jenkins Azalea Garden, established in 1996 to recognize Jenkins' contributions to horticulture. The garden's extensive azalea collection gave attendees a chance to see varieties previously described in *The Azalean*. Dinner at the station included presentations on Louisiana's role in azalea improvement, the state's resilience after Hurricane Katrina, and the Society distinguished service awards were presented to Maarten van der Giessen and John Thornton.

The second tour day focused on major New Orleans cultural and garden institutions. The New Orleans Botanical Garden, located in the city's 1,300-acre City Park, traces its origins to the 1930s, when federal relief programs helped implement a master plan for the park and establish the garden's predecessor, the Rose Garden. After a decline in the 1980s, the garden was revitalized through support from organizations, donors, and volunteers. Hurricane Katrina caused extensive damage in 2005, but the garden reopened within six months and began rebuilding its plant collections. Today it includes the Zemurray Azalea and Camellia Garden, where camellias, azaleas, magnolias, and sculptures by Enrique Alferez create a distinctive setting. The garden also serves an educational role through tours, classes, shows, concerts, and community events.

The tour also included the Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Created through the Besthoff Foundation, the five-acre garden opened in 2003, after a major fundraising effort, and was designed to make modern sculpture accessible in a public landscape. Mature live oaks, azaleas, pines, and magnolias provide the setting for dozens of sculptures, while volunteers help maintain the grounds. Like the botanical garden, it supports educational programs and public access.

Another featured destination was Longue Vue House and Gardens, a 12-acre estate built between 1939 and 1942 for Edgar and Edith Stern. Designed with significant input from landscape architect Ellen Shipman and later developed by architects William and Geoffrey Platt, the estate consists of 12 garden rooms that evolved over several decades. Among its educational features is the Lucy C. Roussel Discovery Garden, created in 1998 to teach visitors about plants that provide food, clothing, and shelter through sensory, hands-on experiences. Longue Vue also offers classes, lectures, and resources related to gardening, the environment, and decorative arts.

Overall, the convention combined plant scholarship, garden exploration, regional history, and Louisiana hospitality. Its tours emphasized the state's nursery industry, public garden institutions, azalea collections, educational programs, and recovery from Hurricane Katrina. The event demonstrated how annual ASA conventions broaden participants' knowledge of azaleas,

horticulture, and different regions of North America while also creating opportunities for fellowship and shared learning.

### 33rd ASA National Convention—2011

(Credit: Carol Flowers)

The 2011 Azalea Society of America national convention, "Hoo-sier Hospitality 2011," was held April 28–May 1 in Evansville, Indiana, despite difficult weather conditions throughout the region. Heavy spring rains and flooding had affected roads, homes, and farmland before the event, creating uncertainty about whether planned garden tours and outdoor activities could proceed. Local hosts from the Lake Michigan and Tri-State chapters adjusted quickly, using alternate routes and careful planning to keep the convention schedule moving with minimal disruption.

The convention opened with ASA Board meetings, a plant sale, and an introductory program. The first major tour took participants to Vincennes, IN, a historic city north of Evansville associated with Red Skelton and President William Henry Harrison. Local guides introduced the city's history before attendees visited notable gardens, including "Wits End," a garden designed with the assistance of landscape designer Dallas Foster for the Emert family. The garden featured a series of planted rooms and a diverse collection of azaleas and companion plants used for horticultural study by Vincennes University students.

The Friday tour also included the Azalea Path Arboretum and Botanical Garden, a large southern Indiana collection of azaleas and woodland plants. The site showcased the region's ability to support a wide range of azalea varieties and provided one of the convention's strongest examples of large-scale azalea cultivation. That evening, speakers Jack Brown and Paul Bouseman expanded the program beyond garden tours. Brown discussed Evansville's local history, while Bouseman described the development of the Amazon exhibit at Mesker Zoo and explained the growing importance of zoo horticulture in creating healthier, more natural habitats for animals.

Saturday's program focused on Evansville-area gardens and related attractions. Attendees visited Mesker Zoo's Botanic Gardens and its Amazonian exhibit, where horticulture and animal care were combined in greenhouse environments modeled on the Amazon River region. Additional private gardens in Evansville highlighted different design approaches, plant collections, and owner interests. A lunch stop hosted by Debbie and John Bizal added an unexpected dimension to the event: in addition to azaleas, the hosts shared collections of restored antique cars, World War II aircraft, and related memorabilia, making the visit memorable for both garden and history enthusiasts.

The speaker program continued with Gene Bush of Munchkin Nurseries, who discussed perennial shade plants, woodland species, and unusual small-scale plants suitable for azalea gardens.

Tom Johnson also addressed the convention, describing efforts connected to the Rev. John Drayton Chapter in Charleston, South Carolina, and plans to identify historic pre-1900 azalea and camellia varieties for the restoration of Magnolia Plantation's romantic-style gardens. His remarks emphasized both chapter growth and the importance of preserving older plant cultivars.

At the Saturday night banquet, keynote speaker Dr. Andrew Whipple addressed the challenge of plant availability. Drawing on his biology background and his experience after the 2002 ASA/ARS convention in Atlanta, he explained how tissue culture can be used to propagate rare or difficult-to-find azaleas. His



**Fig. 2** ASA members line up to receive an Encore® Azalea during the tour of Buddy Lee's Transcend Nursery in Independence, Louisiana, as part of the 2010 Convention. Photo by Pam Fitch.

presentation showed how laboratory-based propagation methods can help preserve desirable cultivars and make rare plants more accessible to gardeners, universities, and public collections.

The annual meeting recognized the newly formed Rev. John Drayton Chapter and noted its active membership and future role in hosting an ASA convention. By the close of the Evansville gathering, participants had toured historic sites, private gardens, botanical collections, and specialty displays while learning more about azaleas, Japanese maples, hostas, woodland plants, zoo horticulture, and tissue-culture propagation. Despite flooding and logistical challenges, the convention was completed successfully through the flexibility of local organizers and the cooperation of attendees. The event demonstrated that Azalea Society conventions can combine plant education, regional history, garden design, and personal hospitality into a broad learning experience for members and guests.

### 34th ASA National Convention—2012

(Credit: Preston & Bonnie Cooley)

The 2012 ASA/ARS joint convention opened in Asheville, North Carolina, with headquarters at the Crowne Plaza Resort. The event brought together members of the Azalea Society of America and the American Rhododendron Society for a weekend centered on native azaleas, rhododendrons, regional gardens, and Society business. Activities began Friday, May 4, with board meetings for ASA and ARS leaders, while other attendees took part in tours and sightseeing. A pre-convention tour of the Biltmore Estate offered access to the Vanderbilt home and several notable garden areas, including the Shrub Garden, Spring Garden, Walled Garden, and Azalea Garden, all located within the estate's extensive grounds.

Friday evening featured a welcome reception with hearty appetizers, bluegrass music, and time for attendees to socialize before the opening presentation. Don Hyatt presented: "Chasing the Bloom: Native Azaleas on the Blue Ridge Parkway," using images and commentary to highlight the botanical diversity of the Southern Appalachian Mountains and the seasonal display of native azaleas along the parkway.

Saturday's garden tour began early, with six buses departing after breakfast for a day of field observations and garden visits. The first portion of the route followed the Blue Ridge Parkway, where attendees viewed wildflowers, azaleas, and rhododendrons

in natural settings. Although the weather was cold and damp, blooming native azaleas provided a strong connection to the previous evening's presentation. The tour then continued to the Charles Dexter Owen Garden in Biltmore Forest, near the Biltmore Estate. Developed in the early 20th century by the current owner's parents, the estate is known for its important collection of Dexter rhododendrons, one of only three major collections of its kind. Visitors viewed plantings along the approach to the house, a dramatic display of Dexter rhododendrons cascading over a long brick wall, an orchid greenhouse, a perennial garden, a lower shade garden with rhododendrons, lilacs, and dogwoods, and a recently installed native garden. The final Saturday stop was the North Carolina Arboretum in the Pisgah National Forest. The 435-acre site includes cultivated gardens, forested trails, and plant collections designed to reflect Southern Appalachian heritage. Attendees visited the Quilt Garden, the Bonsai Garden, and the eight-acre National Native Azalea Collection, which contains 16 of the 17 azalea species native to the United States. Saturday evening included a flower show judging workshop, a hybridizers roundtable, the Rhododendron Society banquet, a business meeting, awards, and a presentation by Christina Woodward and Nick Yarmoshuk on *Brueckner elepidote* rhododendron hybrids and their formal evaluation.

Sunday focused on private gardens in Hendersonville, including the Grist, Collins, Stewart, and Stelloh gardens. The Grist gardens featured Japanese, Charleston, and Victorian Rose garden areas, with azaleas and rhododendrons throughout the property. The Collins garden, located on seven acres with two streams, displayed dwarf rhododendrons, conifers, azaleas, Cowles hybrid rhododendrons, deciduous azaleas, and newer plantings. The neighboring Stewart garden, developed over more than two decades by Dr. August Kehr, included extensive magnolia, rhododendron, and azalea collections, many connected to Kehr's hybridization work. The Stelloh garden offered an informal woodland setting with azaleas, rhododendrons, Japanese maples, dwarf conifers, and wildflowers. The convention concluded Sunday evening with the Azalea Society banquet and meeting. Reports were presented, Society business was conducted, and awards were distributed. The final program, delivered by Dr. Thomas Ranney with graduate students Kimberly Shearer and Jason Latier, examined hybridization and polyploidy in plant evolution. The Vaseyi Chapter's planning and coordination helped make the joint convention a successful gathering focused on horticultural education, garden exploration, and Society fellowship.

### 35th ASA National Convention—2013

(Credit: Jim Thornton & Mike Sikes)

The 2013 Azalea Society convention was held in Athens, Georgia, from April 18 through April 21, with guests staying at the Holiday Inn on East Broad Street in downtown Athens. Athens is the "Classic City of the South," a place where historic architecture, contemporary art, lively nightlife, distinctive shops, and a progressive food scene blend with the energy of a college town. The convention opened Thursday with registration, an ASA Board meeting, a plant sale, and a welcoming program. Dr. Wilf Nicholls, director of the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, served as the opening speaker. He had been born in London, earned his doctorate in botany from the University of British Columbia, worked with several botanical gardens, and came to Athens in 2010 after years of plant-collecting work in places

such as Morocco, Spain, Alaska, Labrador, the Yukon, and other regions.

On Friday, attendees boarded buses for a tour of local Athens gardens. Their first stop was the home garden of Vince and Barbara Dooley. Vince Dooley had been widely known for his years as University of Georgia football coach and athletic director, but after retirement he turned his coaching instincts toward gardening. The Dooleys' five-acre property had been transformed into a garden featured by *Southern Living* magazine, with trails, Japanese maples, hydrangeas, exotic shade plants, azaleas, garden rooms, benches, urns, sculptures, and water features (see figure 3).

The group then visited the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, a preserve of more than 300 acres that had been set aside by the University of Georgia (UGA) in 1968 for plant study and public enjoyment. The garden included natural habitats of the Georgia Piedmont, specialty gardens, display beds, and collections with year-round interest. Highlights included the Heritage Garden, with heirloom plants and historic crops; the International Garden, which explored relationships between people and plants; the Shade Garden, with azaleas, camellias, magnolias, dogwoods, and other shade-tolerant plants; the Native Flora Garden; and the Flower Garden, which featured roses, dahlias, iris, butterfly plants, fragrance plants, annuals, perennials, daylilies, daffodils, and peonies. The tour also included the garden of Cindy Karp and John Morrison, a five-acre property with sculptures, a pond, waterfall, pool area, tulips, and massed azaleas, followed by Tom and Ram Giberson's garden, a two-and-a-half-acre oasis with waterfalls, koi ponds, a spirit house, Japanese maples, and extensive plant groupings. On Friday evening, speakers Maarten van der Giessen, Dennis Royal, and Jeff Beasley shared memories of notable Azalea Society plantmen, including Eugene Aromi, James Harris, and George Beasley.

Saturday's tour began with a trip to Commerce, Georgia, to visit Homeplace Garden Nursery, which had been owned and operated by the Willis Harden family for more than 35 years. The nursery specialized in shade-loving plants, including Japanese maples, rhododendrons, kalmias, pieris, conifers, and azaleas. Attendees were given time to walk woodland trails through a botanical garden-like setting and enjoy Georgia barbecue before traveling to Lavonia, to visit Transplant Nursery. The Beasley family nursery, associated with George and Mary Beasley and later operated by Jeff and Lisa Beasley, offered native and evergreen azaleas, camellias, Japanese maples, shade trees, and shrubs. The group hoped to see the native azalea garden in bloom. On the return to Athens, participants stopped at the Founders Garden, created as a living memorial to the 12 founders of the Ladies Garden Club of Athens, the first garden club in America, organized in 1891. Its two-and-a-half acres included a formal boxwood garden, courtyards, a terrace, a perennial garden, and an arboretum.

The convention tours concluded at the Trial Gardens of the University of Georgia, which had been started in 1982 by Dr. Allan Armitage, Dr. Michael Dirr, and university students. The gardens had been developed for research, teaching, and plant introduction, and they received plants and seeds from breeding companies, nurseries, growers, and gardeners around the world. Visitors could review detailed information about plants under trial, including annuals, tropicals, vines, container plantings, and perennial beds.

The weekend concluded Saturday evening with the annual

banquet and business meeting. Dr. Michael A. Dirr was the keynote speaker. He worked his way through school at a nursery and garden center, earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Ohio State University, received a doctorate in plant physiology from the University of Massachusetts, and began teaching in 1972 at the University of Illinois. He later became a Mercer Fellow at Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, directed the University of Georgia Botanical Garden, returned to teach at UGA, and became a professor in 1984. As a principal of Georgia Plant, Inc., he helped introduce new cultivars to the plant trade. He had also published more than 300 scientific papers and articles, and his *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* had become a major reference for horticulture and landscape architecture students. Overall, the convention offered a weekend of gardens, nursery visits, horticultural history, fellowship, and expert speakers, all framed by the charm and plant culture of "Classic Athens."

### 36th ASA National Convention—2014

(Credit unknown, possibly Tom Johnson)

Historic Charleston, South Carolina, was the site of the 2014 Azalea Society of America national convention. The theme for the convention was, "Doin' The Charleston — Azalea Style." The Charleston Marriott Riverview Hotel, which overlooked Brittlebank Park, the Ashley River, and Joe Riley Baseball Stadium, served as the venue. The site gave attendees convenient access to downtown Charleston and the surrounding Lowcountry. The event invited participants to experience the city's live oaks, Spanish moss, historic homes, plantations, gardens, and abundant azaleas, while enjoying the charm that had helped make Charleston a top travel destination. Guests were encouraged to arrive early and take advantage of optional tours, including Historic Charleston Foundation's Tours of Homes & Gardens on Thursday, March 27. Organizers had also considered arranging an Island Sip & See tour to the Angel Oak on Johns Island, the Charleston Tea Plantation, Irvin-House Vineyards, and Firefly Distillery on Wadmalaw Island if enough people showed interest. Convention setup was scheduled to begin on Wednesday, March 26, followed by registration later that afternoon and evening. Registration included plant sale check-in, flower and photo competition entries, a welcome bag, the opening reception, and breakfasts on Friday and Saturday. On Thursday morning, registration and plant sales



**Fig. 3 (From left to right) Mike Sikes, John Harrison, Vince Dooley (holding plant), and Jim Thornton during the 2013 ASA Convention visit to the Dooley garden in Athens, Georgia, which was described as a "horticultural menagerie" and a serious collection of Japanese maples, redbuds, azaleas, and camellias. Photo credit unknown.**



**Fig. 4** ASA 2014 Convention attendees toured Middleton Place. The property was granted in 1675 and established in the 1730s as a rice plantation on the southwest bank of the Ashley River, about 14 miles northwest of Charleston, South Carolina. Recognized as the oldest landscape garden in the United States, special features include marvelous camellia, azalea, and magnolia gardens, the butterfly lake, the azalea hillside overlooking the rice mill pond (pictured here), and the Middleton oak which is estimated to be 1,000 years old. Photo by William C. Miller III.

opened, and that evening attendees gathered for a welcoming reception with light hors d'oeuvres and drink tickets. Michael Trouche, a native Charlestonian and tour guide, introduced attendees to Charleston through "A Primer on Charleston," and organizers also included a presentation on Gullah history. The evening introduced Lowcountry traditions as guests learned the Shag, South Carolina's state dance, and the Charleston, while the silent auction opened.

Friday, March 28, focused on plantation tours. Plant sales and competitions opened in the morning, entries were accepted until early afternoon, and judging followed. Attendees were divided into two groups, both visiting Magnolia Plantation & Gardens, known as the oldest Romantic garden in the country, and Middleton Place Plantation, noted for its formal gardens and butterfly garden (see figure 4). Local docents from the azalea chapter, the Garden Club of Charleston, and Tri-County Master Gardeners guided visitors and answered questions. Lunch was served at Magnolia, and buses returned guests to the hotel by late afternoon. That evening, Tom Johnson of Magnolia Plantation discussed the history of growing azaleas outdoors rather than in conservatories, while Ernest Koone of Lazy K Nursery addressed the changing azalea nursery industry.

Saturday, March 29, offered two tour choices. One group traveled to Cypress Gardens in Moncks Corner to explore swamp trails, gardens, bald cypress and tupelo trees, antique roses, and historic rice-field dikes. During lunch, Dwight Williams explained the role of butterflies in azalea fertilization and propagation. The other group toured Charleston's historic district, including the Battery, Heyward-Washington House, Mrs. Whaley's Garden, St. Michael's Church, Rainbow Row, and other landmarks, before taking a private Spiritline Cruises harbor tour with lunch. Both tours returned guests to the hotel by late afternoon.

The convention concluded Saturday evening with the Awards Banquet and Meeting, a Southern-style buffet, and the end of the silent auction. Speakers included Mary Roper of Asticou Azalea Garden, who described the garden's historic azalea collection, and Robert "Buddy" Lee, inventor of the Encore® Azalea and a

leader in plant innovation. Sunday was left open for attendees to explore Charleston or visit recommended sites on their way home.

### 37th ASA National Convention—2015

(Credit: Connie Cottingham, Mike Sikes, and Barbara Stump) In March, ASA Members converged in the Zone 8b Texas Forest Country for the 2015 National Azalea Society Convention. On Thursday night, they boarded the buses for a reception, plant sale, and talks at the new Ina Brundrett Conservation Education Center in the Pinewoods Native Plant Center. They took buses to most events, and chatting with folks while waiting on and riding the buses turned out to be one of the best ways to meet new people. At Pinewoods, David Creech, Director of the Stephen F. Austin State University's SFA Gardens, introduced attendees to the area and the SFA Gardens, which are seven distinct gardens. It was good to get the history and overview before walking through these gardens. Bart Bretcher then spoke about Bayou Bend Gardens, created by Ima Hogg in the 1920s and now home to over 20,000 azaleas and a decorative arts collection second only to Winterthur in the U.S.

The next day, they visited the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden and Mast Arboretum. The famous 'Koromo-shikibu' azaleas that graced the Fall 2014 cover of this journal were in full bloom and much photographed. Mother Nature did not follow our schedule and decided not to arrange for the gardens over 7,000 azaleas to be in full bloom while they were visiting, but there were some azaleas in bloom, and the deciduous magnolias were in full glory. It was a treat to hear about the gardens during a tour led by Barbara Stump, since she was so instrumental in the development of this garden. Barbara must have made a mad dash to get home after the tour, to meet the group at her historic home and beautiful gardens for lunch before touring the garden of Mary Beth and Jim Haygood. Many of the attendees took the time on our own to discover the restaurants in Nacogdoches; a few of them became regulars at The Liberty Bell downtown. On Friday evening, Ronnie Palmer of Azalea Hill Gardens & Nursery in Arkansas explained Huang Azaleas. Instead of a name, Huang Azaleas use a numbering system in which every digit has a meaning. He also discussed the azaleas of Earl Somerville of Georgia, and Satsuki azaleas. Buddy Lee spoke about deciduous azaleas and new Encore® azaleas, then gifted an Encore® Autumn Fire® to everyone attending. Buddy Lee and David Creech conducted the plant auction, which included some lively bidding.

Saturday was a day of touring mainly private gardens, starting with the Furniss garden, a well-landscaped home surrounded by rolling pastures. The Gayla Mize Garden, a forest garden showcasing many understory trees as well as deciduous azaleas, is one of the newest additions to the SFA Gardens. The attendees wandered the extensive trails there before heading to the Pinewoods Center for lunch and the plant sale. Afternoon tours included the Elliott and the Durr Gardens. Meeting Gloria Durr and experiencing her garden, built on 3-1/2 lots and around a city drainage ditch by the owners themselves over several decades, was a highlight of the trip. (What an amazing lady and garden!) On Saturday night, the awards ceremony was held at historic Mast Hall in downtown Nacogdoches. Barbara Stump acknowledged the many people and organizations that helped to create this year's inspiring meeting, including the Nacogdoches Convention and Visitors Bureau and area garden clubs. SFA's newest assistant professor of



**Fig. 5 (From left to right) Ken Gohring, Charlie Andrews, Audrey Stelloh, and Jim Trumbly at the Junko and Joe Liesfeld's garden during the ASA 2016 Convention in Richmond, Virginia, which reflected classic Japanese design concepts. Photo by William C. Miller III.**

horticulture Dr. Jared Barnes took the attendees on a virtual PowerPoint tour of botany trips through the Southeast, including the largest population of *Rhododendron vaseyi* at Southern Highlands Reserve, and among wild miniature horses roaming Grayson Highlands, both in North Carolina.

### 38th ASA National Convention—2016

(Credit: Barbara Stump and Sherrie Randall)

The April 20–24, 2016, joint convention of the Azalea Society of America and the American Rhododendron Society offered a unique celebration of horticultural, plant lore, and fellowship. Held in Williamsburg, Virginia, the gathering drew 152 ASA members and 326 total attendees for five days devoted to azaleas and rhododendrons. Organized by the Northern Virginia ASA Chapter in partnership with the Mid-Atlantic, Mason-Dixon, and Potomac Valley ARS chapters, the event reflected the sustained effort of co-chairs Rick Bauer and Don Hyatt, numerous committee members, and a wide network of volunteers.

Among the convention's most visible attractions was an ambitious plant sale that opened on April 20 and remained a focal point throughout the program. More than 4,000 plants were offered, representing a remarkable range of azalea and rhododendron material. Legacy evergreen azalea hybrids included Glenn Dale, Harris, Holly Springs, McDonald, Robin Hill, Satsuki, and Stewart selections, while deciduous offerings featured Aromi and Dodd hybrids as well as notable species. Rhododendrons, tree peonies, and other specialty plants broadened the selection. Coordinated by Carolyn Beck, Ray Smith, and many volunteers, the sale benefited from donations, propagation efforts, and nursery participation. Strong attendee interest led to the sale of more than half the inventory before the convention concluded and limited public access after the closing session helped extend both outreach and revenue.

Rick Bauer and Don Hyatt welcomed participants and introduced social gatherings, share sessions, and special events, including the Flower Show and Photography Show. Presentations ranged from a historical appearance by John Bartram (Kirk Brown in period costume, see figure 6) to Steve Hootman's discussion of species rhododendrons and plant collecting through the Rhododendron Species Foundation and Botanical Garden. Rick Lewandowski offered insights from his leadership at Mt.

Cuba Center and Shangri La Botanic Garden, while Mike Stewart addressed the legacies of hybridizers and the practical challenges of collecting, evaluating, and preserving plant material.

Formal society business underscored the convention's role as more than a horticultural showcase. During the ASA banquet and annual meeting, President J Jackson recognized outgoing directors Rick Bauer, Larry Miller, and Dave Nanney and announced the incoming directors Jo Ann Smith, Chris Wetmore, and Larry Miller, who agreed to serve another term. Treasurer Paul Beck presented the 2015 financial report and discussed steps to strengthen the organization's finances. The meeting also highlighted member retention, recruitment, advertiser support for *The Azalean*, Exceptional Service Awards, the Best *Azalean* Article Award, and a spirited plant auction.

The garden tours supplied the convention with its most immersive experiences. Attendees traveled by bus to private home gardens, historic settings, and public botanical collections. In Gloucester, the Williams, Hall, and Brant gardens revealed distinct interpretations of cultivated beauty, combining azaleas with specimen trees, dogwoods, hellebores, tree peonies, mosses, groundcovers, sculpture, seating areas, and whimsical design elements. The Liesfeld and Pinkham gardens offered further contrast: one drew influence from Japanese landscape traditions, with stones, metal objects, pruned azaleas, bonsai, water features, and a tea house, while the other emphasized thoughtful plant selection, deer protection, companion planting, and varied woody forms (see figure 5).

Visits to public gardens expanded the convention's perspective from private passion to institutional stewardship. Norfolk Botanical Garden displayed extensive azalea collections, including Sandra McDonald Hybrids, Glenn Dale Hybrids, European and American deciduous azaleas, accessible trails, tram tours, visitor amenities, and a large Chinese art installation. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond offered the scale and polish of a major public garden, with a conservatory, visitor center, orchid displays, gift shop, specialized garden areas, and access to the Cosby Garden, whose azalea collections were planned to become the Lewis Ginter Nature Reserve.

The Williamsburg convention was a successful collaboration between two closely allied plant societies and served as a vivid expression of specialized horticultural culture. It highlighted the



**Fig. 6 Modern plant lovers (from left to right), Carolyn Beck, Carol Flowers, Rick Bauer, Don Hyatt, Kirk Brown (in character), and Rosa McWhorter watch as Don helps 18th century John Bartram, Official Botanist to King George III, get his PowerPoint presentation loaded during the ASA 2016 Convention. Photo by William C. Miller III.**



**Fig. 7 (From left to right) You-ying Whipple, Dr. Andy Whipple, Dave Nanney, Paul Beck, and John Perkins touring the Hammond Research Station in Hammond, Louisiana, during the ASA 2017 Convention. Photo by William C. Miller III.**

central themes of legacy, education, volunteer commitment, and of the significant azalea and rhododendron hybrids. Through lectures, awards, plant sales, organizational meetings, and carefully curated tours, the convention served not only as an annual gathering but also as a demonstration of the knowledge, generosity, and enthusiasm that sustains ASA and ARS across generations.

### 39th ASA National Convention–2017

(Credit: Barbara Stump and Allen Owings)

The Louisiana Chapter and LSU AgCenter played host to a lively and educational Azalea Society of America convention in and around Hammond, Louisiana. The Convention combined plant-focused learning with generous Southern hospitality. Led by LSU AgCenter director and Louisiana Chapter president Allen Owings, the Society welcomed ninety participants for three nights and two full days of events. Receptions, catered meals, local cuisine, and opportunities to reconnect with azalea friends helped set a warm tone. Sponsors included Plant Development Services, Inc. and Bracy's Nursery, and the Thursday plant sale featured unique azaleas from Ronnie Palmer of Azalea Hill Gardens and Nursery, along with companion plants and gift starts of new Encore® and Southern Living® plant introductions. The Hammond LSU AgCenter, one of 18 centers across the state, provided an impressive setting with nearly 150 acres devoted to landscape horticulture research and display gardens, including the Margie Y. Jenkins Azalea Garden beds, though an unusually warm winter meant many azaleas had already bloomed (see figure 7).

The first excursion took attendees to historic St. Francisville and Imahara's Botanical Garden, a 55-acre landscape developed by Walter Imahara since 2003. Guided in part by his daughter, landscape architect Wanda Chase, visitors saw the garden's sculpted plantings, topiary-like "poodling," nine ponds named for Imahara's children, and a massive hillside once bright with thousands of azaleas. The visit also highlighted Imahara's Japanese-American family history, including World War II internment, and his carved haiku reflecting resilience and gratitude. The group then toured Rosedown Plantation, now a Louisiana State Parks site, where they viewed live oak allees, towering Southern Indian 'Pride of Mobile' azaleas, formal rose and perennial parterres, and a reconstructed in-ground hot house once used for tropical plants and social gatherings.

Friday evening's program emphasized practical and scientific aspects of azalea culture. Dr. Rodrigo Valverde discussed virus identification in azaleas, including research supported in part by the ASA Research Fund. Dr. Mark Windham of the University of Tennessee presented on growing disease-free azaleas, humorously reminding attendees to inspect nursery plants closely, especially for healthy white roots. Dr. Neil Odenwald encouraged gardeners to look carefully at their landscapes and apply sound design principles when planting and maintaining gardens.

On Saturday, April 1, the group visited three nurseries near Covington, Louisiana. At Buddy Lee's 60-acre arboretum and evaluation nursery, attendees walked through immaculate trial rows beneath pines, seeing heat-tolerant rhododendrons, deciduous azalea trials, and new seedlings being assessed. At Transcend Nursery, Buddy and Dixie Lee welcomed visitors with more plant evaluations, gumbo, Cajun music, Mardi Gras beads, and a festive second line dance. The tour continued to Bracy's Nursery, operated by Regina and Randy Bracy, where attendees learned how the 150-acre container nursery grows more than 750 kinds of plants and ships dozens of semi-trucks weekly to independent garden centers across the Southeast. The Bracys also hosted a luncheon at their home, where ASA Distinguished Service Awards were presented to several Louisiana Chapter members and local supporters.

The final nursery stop was Jenkins Farm & Nursery, where Margie Jenkins shared favorite evergreen and deciduous azaleas and allowed attendees to explore the grounds. There, visitors finally saw blooming azaleas, especially dependable late-blooming Robin Hill Hybrids. The convention concluded Saturday night at Hammond's Mezzanine Event Hall with the annual meeting and banquet. Officers were announced, awards were presented, Hale Booth reviewed Azalea Research Fund work, and David Banks and Paul Beck demonstrated the upgraded Azalea Society website. Overall, the convention blended horticultural education, nursery insight, regional culture, and fellowship, giving attendees a deeper appreciation for azaleas and for the people who grow, study, and celebrate them.

### 40th ASA National Convention–2018

(Credit: Barbara Stump)

Early spring weather greeted the 81 attendees of the annual ASA convention in Little Rock, Arkansas, held April 5–7 at the Holiday Inn Airport. Despite cold rain, sleet, and snow, participants from 15 states and Ontario enjoyed a well-organized gathering coordinated by Gerald Klingaman of the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks, Janet Carson of the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, and volunteers from the Arkansas Master Gardeners and ASA. The convenient hotel setting housed meetings and opened the convention with a reception in the plant sale room, where respected azalea growers, hybridizers, and propagators offered an unusually rich selection of plants.

The plant sale was a major attraction. Ronnie and Donna Palmer, Larry Coleman, Carolyn Beck, the Bauers, Buddy Lee, and others supplied rare and desirable azaleas, including Encore®, Southern Living®, Glenn Dale, Holly Springs, Satsuki, and hybrids by Joe Klimavicz and Bob Stewart. Paul Beck's portable point-of-sale system, supported by an online list of 296 varieties, enabled buyers to plan ahead and check out efficiently. Attendees still had to move quickly to secure the rarest plants.



**Fig. 8 (From left to right) Stan Brown, Senora Simpson, Bob Stassen, Tom Milner, and Janet Carson visiting the Old Mill in North Little Rock, Arkansas, during the ASA 2018 Convention. A Pulaski County Parks & Recreation project, it was built in 1933 next to a branch of the Arkansas River. It was designed to look as if it dated to the 1830s when such mills were used to grind grain. Photo by William C. Miller III.**

The garden tours were the heart of the convention and offered a vivid introduction to Arkansas topography, from the Arkansas River valley to the Ouachita Mountains and the Ozark Mountain Plateau. The group first visited Ronnie and Donna Palmer's Azalea Hill Gardens and Nursery near Pine Bluff, begun in 1969, where extensive collections of evergreen and deciduous azaleas were on display even in the rain. Notable plants included Stan Brown's 'Angie', named for his daughter, the deciduous Exbury hybrid 'Cannon's Double', and 'Lilacina', identified as a fragrant evergreen azalea. The tour continued to Garvan Woodland Gardens near Hot Springs, now part of the Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design at the University of Arkansas. There, attendees explored the Japanese-style Garden of the Pine Wind, bridges, pools, Lake Hamilton views, manicured azaleas, viburnum trees, and major garden structures including the Garvan Pavilion, Anthony Chapel, carillon tower, Bride's House, and Groom's House. The garden's scale, accessibility, and volunteer support made it one of the convention's most memorable stops.

On April 7, the group visited the woodland garden of Arkansas Master Gardeners Ann and Tony Woods near Searcy. Their intimate private garden combined specimen annuals, perennials, flowering shrubs, Japanese maples, roses, stonework, and care-

fully chosen plants such as *Edgeworthia* 'Akebono', hellebores, bloodroot, *Baptisia*, *Epimedium*, Magnolia 'Coral Lake', and Ann's favorite azalea, 'Mt. Saint Helens'. The warm equipment barn, with a fire and seating, was especially welcome in the cold weather. The day continued to Batesville, where lunch was held at the county community center before touring Larry Coleman's remarkable hillside garden. Behind a suburban home lay a steep, Japanese-inspired landscape with expertly pruned Kurume Azaleas, spring-colored Japanese maples, koi ponds, a tea house, a 100-foot retaining wall, and sweeping views. Coleman had built many of the garden's features himself over 25 years, creating an atmosphere that suggested a hillside garden in Japan. The final tour stop was the Old Mill in the Lakewood neighborhood, a 1933 structure designed to resemble an 1830s gristmill, with rustic concrete work by Dionicio Rodriguez and gardens maintained by Pulaski County Master Gardeners and volunteers (see figure 8).

Evening programs added historical and horticultural depth. Stan Brown of Clarksville presented an overview of Arkansas plant breeding, tracing selections from the 1880s through modern introductions. He discussed enduring plants such as the 'Arkansas Black' apple and the native herbaceous perennial *Amonia hubrichtii* commonly called Arkansas blue star, along with the University of Arkansas's extensive work in blackberries, fruit crops, crape myrtles, and ornamental plant evaluation. Brown also highlighted azalea development in the state, especially the work of John Carden of Fort Smith and the continuing efforts of Carden-Harris Hybrids in Branch, Arkansas. Brown described his own efforts to breed cold-hardy azaleas for northwestern Arkansas, culminating in 'Angie', which he presented to Miss Margie Jenkins. Ronnie Palmer agreed to propagate it for future convention plant sales. Overall, the Little Rock convention combined efficient organization, outstanding plant sales, exceptional gardens, regional landscape education, and a wonderful fellowship of azalea enthusiasts.

**Part 5 of this series will be in the Winter 2026 *Azalean* and will cover the fifth decade of the Azalea Society of America. This series covers the decades leading up to the 50th anniversary of the Society in 2027.**

#### About the Author

Aaron Cook is the current president of the Azalea Society of America.

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