



Potomac Valley Chapter American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Fall Newsletter: September 2007

Calendar

- * **September 16, 2007** - Regular Meeting - National Arboretum
- * **October 11-13, 2007** - ARS Eastern Regional, Mentor, OH
- * **October 27, 2007** - Fall Banquet - JR's Steakhouse
- * **January 13, 2008** - Regular Meeting - National Arboretum

Chapter Officers

President: Jon Wallenmeyer

jjjp1984@mac.com

Vice-President: Bob McWhorter

mcwho@comcast.net

Treasurer: Phyllis Rittman

prittman@erols.com

Next Meeting: September 16, 1:00-4:00 PM

**George McLellan: "Rhododendron vaseyi
and the Southern Appalachians"**

Don't miss our Fall Meeting at the National Arboretum on Sunday afternoon, September 16. George McLellan will be speaking on one of our loveliest native azalea species, *Rhododendron vaseyi*. He will also discuss the many native plants in bloom in the mountains of North Carolina in early May.

George and Don Hyatt have been working on an article about *R. vaseyi* for an upcoming issue of the Rhododendron Species Foundation Yearbook. They have digitized their best photographs over many years into a single program that George will present at our meeting. Don had his camcorder on the last trip, so expect a short music video, too.

Although *R. vaseyi* has a very small distribution in the wild, you will be amazed to see how plentiful it is, especially along a 17 mile stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway not far from Asheville, NC. Enjoy images of the trail to Pilot Mountain as George and Don admire the beauty and diversity of the delicate pink azaleas against the incredible mountain views. That time of year is gorgeous with the azaleas and flowering trees above, and carpets of early spring wildflowers below including many trillium species.

In this issue we are printing an abbreviated version of their article, as well as a color insert featuring several pictures of *R. vaseyi* and that gorgeous mountain scenery. Come to our next meeting to see the rest, and learn more about this great native azalea and other spring wildflowers in the mountains of North Carolina in early May.

Refreshment Duty: Persons whose last names begin with **A** through **H** are asked to bring some refreshment goodies for the table.

Directions: The National Arboretum is located in northeast Washington, D.C., off of Bladensburg Road at 24th and R St. The Arboretum website provides excellent directions: www.usna.usda.gov



George McLellan admiring the "red" *R. vaseyi*

Fall Banquet: Saturday, October 27

Our Fall Banquet is scheduled for Saturday evening, October 27, from 4:30 – 8:00 PM at JR's Steakhouse at Tyson's Corner, VA. Our speakers will be Sally and John Perkins, from Salem, New Hampshire. Look for separate registration materials accompanying this newsletter.

Sally and John Perkins have a lovely home on the shore of Lake Canobie, a modest size lake in southeastern New Hampshire near the Massachusetts border. Due to the tempering effects of the water and skillful horticultural practices, they manage to grow a wide array of rhododendrons that most people wouldn't consider hardy that far north. Their property is not huge, so they grow many dwarf plants especially ones with exceptional foliage. Their garden is a real treat any time of year, especially with those gorgeous white birches reflecting in the lake.

Active in the Mass Chapter ARS since 1989, John and Sally run their chapter's website and Sally is the Alternate Director for ARS District 6. Sally and John joined us on the annual trek to Roan Mountain and Gregory Bald this June and we all really enjoyed their cheerful company, botanical wisdom, and great sense of humor. We know you will, too.

Weeding - Just a Story by John Perkins

The first job I had was weeding for the Steiners. The Steiner farm was about 250 acres which they weeded by hand. Working for the Steiners was similar to working for your grand parents. The work was hard, the pay was low, the rules were strict but they were fair and always looked out for you.

The Steiners would never hire more than one new person at a time. The first job you learned was weeding and since the first day you worked they were teaching, you did not get paid. In fact, the Steiners never paid you the day you were learning a new job but you were paid a nickel more an hour for every job you knew how to do no matter what job they assigned you to do. You never asked the Steiners to learn a new job; they decided when you were ready.

You called each of the six Steiners by their first names and they called you by your first name. At the end of each day they told you how much you had earned and they paid you and told you when to report for work the next day and what you would be doing.

I learned to weed from John Steiner. He showed me how to identify the different weeds and which ones had to be pulled whenever you saw them even if it meant leaving the rows you were weeding. To this day thistles, milkweed, and morning glories stop me in my tracks whenever I see them. He taught me which you had to make sure you got all the root versus those you could kill more easily.

You see, the Steiners walked their complete 250 acres more than once a week. They would always stop to pull a primary weed no matter what else they were doing. When you worked for them you were expected to do the same. In fact you were taught that certain things always were given top priority, no matter what you were assigned to do.

The first time I drove a tractor on the open highway it was for the Steiners. I think I was thirteen. I was sixteen before I did the same for my father Bill. He told me if the Steiners think you are old enough to drive a tractor on the open highway, then you are, but when I work for him, he gets to make the rules.

After starting to work at the Steiners, whenever I walked in our fields I always pulled the thistles, milkweed, and the morning glories. On the other hand I never used the machinery on our farm until Bill told me to do so.

The Steiner farm sold to a man who farmed 2000+ acres. He farmed the Steiner fields twice a year, once to plant and once to harvest. The first time they arrived it was the most farm equipment I have every seen in one place at one time except at a country fair. So the land went from being walked twice a week to being worked twice a year, but on the other hand it was still run like a business.

John Perkins, Salem, NH - Reprinted with permission from recent comments to the Yahoo rhodo email group.

Roan Mountain and Gregory Bald 2007

For those of us who have made the trek to Roan Mountain and Gregory Bald often, this season in the Southern Appalachians was one of the most beautiful most of us can remember. Treated by good weather most of the time and excellent visibility, we managed to hit peak bloom in most of the places.

It was not easy to coordinate a large field trip this year since many of us had gone to the Magnolia Society meeting in Raleigh-Durham from June 13-17. We continued on the mountains afterwards, our cars overflowing with plants we didn't expect to buy.

On Monday, we caught up with a number of chapter members in Elizabethton, TN, for our hike along the Appalachian Trail in the Roan Mountain area. On Tuesday, we planned to hike from Carver's Gap out to Grassy Ridge. Thunderstorms were due later that afternoon, so we got an early start, saw beautiful stands of *R. calendulaceum* and *R. catawbiense*, took scads of photographs, and managed to get back to our cars by early afternoon, a few minutes before some fierce storms rolled in.

On Wednesday, a front had cleared the area, so we drove the southern stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway from Asheville to Cherokee, and had time to drive up to Wayah Bald to admire the *R. arborescens*, before heading over to Townsend, TN. The next day we would make the Gregory Bald hike and by that time, our numbers had grown to a dozen people.

Gregory Bald was truly spectacular this year, with heavy bloom and superb visibility. We will likely do the same hikes again next year, so get your hiking shoes ready if you want to join us.



Gregory Bald Azaleas: Overlooking Cades Cove

Dues are Due!

To save postage, we have included with this mailing your membership dues notice. Please don't lose it, but instead return it with your payment to our Treasurer, Phyllis Rittman. If you are paid up, feel free to donate to the ARS Endowment Fund. Thanks!

Rhododendron vaseyi and the Southern Appalachians

By Donald W. Hyatt and George Keen McLellan (See the color insert!)

Adapted from an article submitted to the *Rhododendron Species Foundation*



Rhododendron vaseyi

Rhododendron vaseyi, the pinkshell azalea, is one of our most charming native azalea species. Its delicate pastel pink flowers are exceptionally clear in color, and have a distinctive shape unlike any other native azalea. The visual effect of *R. vaseyi* blooming in the wild can be captivating, like watching myriads of dancing pink butterflies animated by the cool mountain breezes.

We are puzzled as to why the species has such limited range in the wild. Essentially, it is restricted to just two mountainous regions in western North Carolina above 4000 feet in elevation. One of those centers is in the northwest part of the state near Grandfather Mountain. The other center is in the southwest near the intersection of Rt. 215 and the Blue Ridge Parkway at Beech Gap. This is the larger of the two regions and extends into northern Georgia.

First discovered in western North Carolina by George Vasey in 1878, the lovely pinkshell azalea was determined to be a new species by Asa Gray at Harvard University. He published the name *Rhododendron vaseyi* in 1879. Two other synonyms were published later: *Azalea vaseyi*, by Alfred Rehder in 1899, and *Biltia vaseyi*, by John Kunkel Small in 1903. Since the species has many unique qualities, Small created a new genus name, *Biltia*, to honor George W. Vanderbilt and Biltmore, his vast estate near Asheville, NC. At one time, Biltmore covered 125,000 acres and extended all the way to Mount Pisgah where the species grows naturally. Today, Biltmore covers a mere 8000 acres.

We have observed significant color variation in wild populations of *R. vaseyi*. Most plants have flowers of pale pastel pink to medium rose pink, some with lighter centers, but the colors are always very clear with no undertones of blue or lavender.

Blotch configurations are quite variable. The upper three petals can carry degrees of spotting in brown, rust, crimson, or occasionally green, but some forms have almost no markings.

We often find plants in the wild with white flowers, but invariably the buds have some pale pink pigmentation so we do not consider them true album forms like *R. vaseyi* 'White Find.' We have found plants with very deep colors approaching rose-red, such as the one we used as a seed source for the Convention Banquet favors. Those are very rare.

Admittedly, we have not explored every site where *R. vaseyi* grows in the wild, but spend our time where we find the best floral displays and greatest species variation. Our favorite spot is surely in that southern region of North Carolina at Beech Gap, near milepost 423 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, an area many refer to as the "epicenter" for *R. vaseyi*.

Surprisingly, the display of *R. vaseyi* is of short duration along the 469-mile Blue Ridge Parkway. In this southern region, the species begins near milepost 408 by Mount Pisgah, and continues southwest past Beech Gap to beyond milepost 425, a distance of just 17 miles. Plants are easy to access and since the Parkway is over 5000 feet, the vistas are superb.

South of Beech Gap, as Route 215 descends to Balsam Grove, NC, there are excellent stands of *R. vaseyi* on both sides of the road for several miles. The elevation drops quickly from 5300 feet to about 4000 feet so these plants at lower elevations usually peak the week prior to those along the Parkway. Interestingly, there is very little *R. vaseyi* in the other direction on Route 215, north of the Parkway. We are not sure why, but speculate that the high ridges may create a rain shadow, blocking moisture laden air masses from the south, making the environment on the north side drier and less suitable.



Center of the Southern Region for *R. vaseyi*

Another favorite spot is Pilot Mountain, a 5000 foot peak just south of the Blue Ridge Parkway, east of Route 215 and west of Route 276. By following Forest Service roads, we can get fairly close to the Art Loeb Trail which crosses Pilot Mountain, so a round trip hike will be just a few hours. Approaching from the southeast side, the trail is very steep at first, but becomes easier as it switches back and forth through the dense stands of azaleas near the summit.

The trail is like an landscaped garden with ferns and rare wildflowers along the path including Umbrella Leaf (*Diphyllea cymosa*), Painted Trillium (*T. undulatum*) with its white flowers brushed with red, and the deeper red *Trillium erectum*. With *R. vaseyi* towering overhead framing the mountain views, this trail is an unforgettable experience.



Trillium undulatum



Pieris floribunda

In its natural environment, *R. vaseyi* is not a rare plant, since it is a dominant woody shrub colonizing open areas, exposed rocky ridges, and steep slopes under deciduous trees. The species seems to prefer moist but well-drained locations; the plants seem particularly happy in areas with thin soils on exposed rocks, especially near underground seeps and springs.

Having such a limited range in the wild, one would expect the cultural requirements of *R. vaseyi* to be extremely demanding. Unlike the lovely white flowered Mountain Fetterbush, *Pieris floribunda*, and some other high altitude plants from the same region, *R. vaseyi* is quite adaptable in the garden. It seems able to survive summer heat, winter cold, and modest drought, but does seem to dislike heavy fertilizer.

Many wonderful ericaceous plants bloom at the same time as *R. vaseyi*, including beautiful pale pink to white forms of *Rhododendron minus* var. *carolinianum*. We have spied some forms of *R. minus* with pale yellow to light apricot flowers, but they were on cliffs and we could not get close enough to get decent photographs.

Other choice wildflowers and native trees are also in full flower at this early spring season. Some slopes appear frosted with the delicate white flowers of the serviceberry (*Amelanchier sp.*), and soft yellow blossoms of *Magnolia fraseri* accent many distant mountainsides. In protected coves, large colonies of the Great White Trillium (*T. grandiflorum*) carpet some slopes, and spring ephemerals like the Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*) form groundcovers studded with hundreds of dainty yellow blossoms.

This southern stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway from Asheville (milepost 380) all the way to its terminus near the Great Smoky Mountain National Park at Cherokee (milepost 469) is one of the richest botanical regions in the United States, and one of the most scenic as well. There are large stands of other native azaleas here including *R. calendulaceum* and *arborescens*, as well as *Rhododendron catawbiense*, *R. maximum*, and *Kalmia latifolia*. However, these will not bloom until mid to late June, often extending into July. The autumn foliage in early October is equally extravagant with brilliant red vaccinium species, native azaleas, sourwoods, and multi-colored maples contrasting against the evergreens.

There is another form of *R. minus* in the region that we find most intriguing. It has small flowers of deep lavender to reddish purple, and is found at high elevations on rocky crags, especially in the nearby Great Smoky Mountain National Park at Newfound Gap. This late purple form of *R. minus* grows at the same altitude as *R. minus* v. *carolinianum*, but blooms about 6 weeks later, about the same time as *Kalmia latifolia* and *R. maximum*. We feel *R. minus* in its many forms deserves much greater study.

There are many rich rhododendron centers in the world including China and the Himalayas, but many of us will never have the opportunity to explore those remote locations. Fortunately, we are able to see wild rhododendron species here in the United States with relative ease. A simple day trip from Asheville is sufficient to catch *R. vaseyi* in peak bloom along the Blue Ridge Parkway. There are many excellent trails in the region where one can admire rhododendron species and other native plants as they have existed, relatively undisturbed, for thousands of years.

Seeing how native azaleas and rhododendrons have adapted to their environments can give a real insight into cultural needs, but experiencing species in the wild, often enhanced by spectacular natural settings, is extremely uplifting. We encourage all rhododendron enthusiasts to take similar journeys. Investigate the botanical treasures close at hand, help document genetic variations, strive to protect endangered environments, and take time to enjoy the beauty of our natural world.



Rhododendron vaseyi - Blush Pink near Mp 408 Hyatt



R. vaseyi - Devil's Courthouse Overlook Hyatt



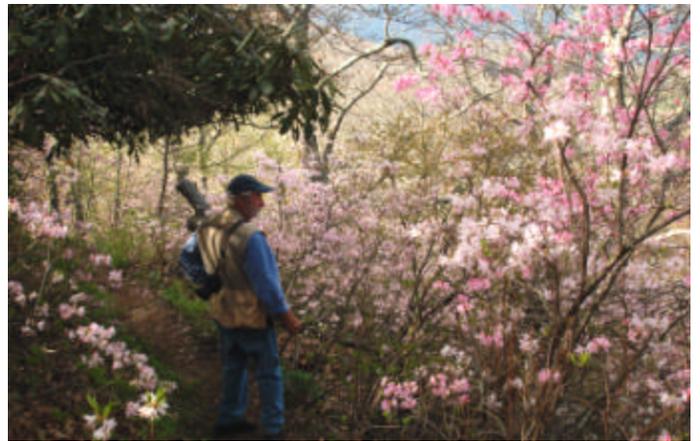
John Rock Overlook - Blue Ridge Parkway McLellan



"Red" R. vaseyi near Rt. 215 McLellan



R. vaseyi with Pilot Mountain in Distance McLellan



Pilot Mountain: George McLellan and R. vaseyi Hyatt



Kehr Garden: ('Banko' x 'Pryor Yellow') Hyatt



Kehr Garden: Tetraploid R. fortunei Hyatt

The Legacy of Augie Kehr by Don Hyatt

Dr. August E. Kehr, or “Augie” as most of knew him, was one of the founders of our Potomac Valley Chapter. He earned his Ph.D. in Plant Breeding, Pathology and Cytology in 1950 from Cornell University, and had been a Horticulture Professor at Iowa State primarily working with plant breeding and genetics of onions and potatoes. Then he moved to the DC area in 1958 where he became the Chief of Vegetables and Ornamentals at the U.S. Department of Agriculture Research and Experiment Station in Beltsville, and was Staff Scientist for the Agricultural Research Service. He became our chapter mentor.

Augie had more time for hybridizing after he retired in 1978, and moved to a lovely home that he and his wife built on 8 acres near Hendersonville, NC. Over the years, he registered 12 rhododendrons including a double, light lemon yellow he named for himself, ‘Augie Kehr’ (pictured below), and 9 different azaleas including the double deep pink, ‘Anna Kehr,’ named for his mother and a paler double pink, ‘Mary Lou Kehr,’ named for his wife. He also named 30 different magnolia cultivars!



Rhododendron ‘Augie Kehr’

Always the scientist, Augie made many unusual crosses and also experimented with chemicals like colchicine, a very poisonous substance derived from the Autumn Crocus. Frequently used in the treatment for gout, colchicine can also be used to artificially double the number of chromosomes in a plant making it a “polyploid.” Some plants are naturally tetraploids with twice the normal chromosomes, such as the blue lepidote species, *R. augustinii*, or our own eastern Flame Azalea, *R. calendulaceum*. Tetraploid plants often have larger flowers and heavier flower substance, but unfortunately, when crossed with a normal diploid, the resulting plants are triploid and sterile due to an uneven number of chromosomes.

One of Augie’s goals was to develop hardy dwarf blue rhododendrons. Using colchicine, he produced the tetraploid *R. minus* var. *carolinianum* variety he named ‘Epoch’ so he could cross that plant with *R.*

augustinii. The result was a beautiful icy bluish white, one of my favorite early rhododendrons, but Augie was not done so he never named it. Some of us are continuing his breeding lines, crossing (*Epoch-augustinii*) with itself or other species hoping to get a deeper blue that is also well adapted to our climate.

Another one of Augie’s goals was to develop a yellow evergreen azalea. He made many crosses with cream and yellow blotched evergreen azaleas, and used colchicine to double chromosome numbers on some so he could try crossing them with yellow deciduous azaleas. He didn’t reach that goal, either, but got some good plants and did register ‘Cream Ruffles.’ However, there was still more work to do.

Eventually, Augie realized that he couldn’t keep up with his 8-acre garden, so reluctantly he and Mary Lou sold their property and moved to an apartment in North Carolina for one year before moving to a permanent retirement area in Cedar Falls, Iowa, to be closer to their daughter, Janet Flick. On September 27, 2001, less than two months after the big move, Augie passed away unexpectedly in his sleep while resting in a chair. He was 87.

Although Augie had extended an invitation to me to see his garden, sadly I never got there. This year, when George McLellan and I were admiring *R. vaseyi* in the mountains, we ran into Ed Collins who invited us to see his new home in Hendersonville. At the time, we did not realize Ed had purchased the house next to Augie Kehr’s former home. When we got to Ed’s place we could see glimpses of Augie’s garden, and we were so pleased that the new owners were keeping it in such pristine condition. Ed asked his neighbor if we could tour garden and he agreed. What a treat! We saw Augie’s hybrids and rare plants he got from others, all in glorious peak bloom.

One plant that really impressed me was Augie’s tetraploid *R. fortunei*. He created it with colchicine. It has huge heavy-textured leaves and pale lavender flowers suffused with cream in large trusses. The flowers have very heavy substance, almost like leather! Augie’s tet-*fortunei* is in the trade, but it is a slow grower and even slower to flower. As a big plant it is magnificent, but I was disappointed that it was not dripping with pollen like other *fortuneis*.

In the field below Augie’s house among magnolia seedlings were the remnants from his evergreen azalea hybridizing program. I couldn’t believe my eyes... some azaleas were yellow! My favorite had deep green leaves and large flowers as yellow as *R. keiskei*. I found a tag: (‘Banko’ x ‘Pryor Yellow’). I did take pollen and crossed it onto my ‘Puck,’ a fine greenish-white Glenn Dale. In July, I got permission to take a few cuttings from several of those azaleas so we can continue the quest for yellow. Stay tuned!

Velma Haag's Garden by Don Hyatt

While on the same May excursion to North Carolina to see *R. vaseyi*, George McLellan and I also had a chance to see Velma Haag's garden in nearby Brevard, NC. Velma was already expecting a group of North Carolina botanists to visit her place that day, so we arrived a bit early before the masses. We had a nice chat with Velma who is now in her middle 90's. Although now confined to a walker after a recent fall, she still mentally sharp as ever. I laughed when Velma said she and her husband Russell never argued about spending money on rhododendrons. They were always in complete agreement!



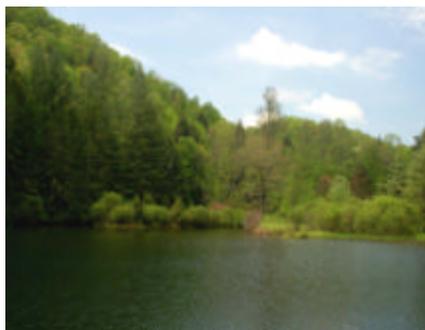
Velma Haag - May of 2007

What a gorgeous piece of property!! Velma's son, Curt, lives with her on the 176 acres and he gave us the grand tour. We hiked up to the scenic waterfall, strolled around the lake, and relished the fragrance of thousands of rhododendrons that were in full bloom that day. What amazed me was the wealth of rare wildflowers. The Haag's have a virtual wall of Oconee Bells (*Shortia galacifolia*) spilling down the bank along the driveway for perhaps 30 yards or more. I paid dearly for the two small plants in my garden that I have been trying to keep alive.

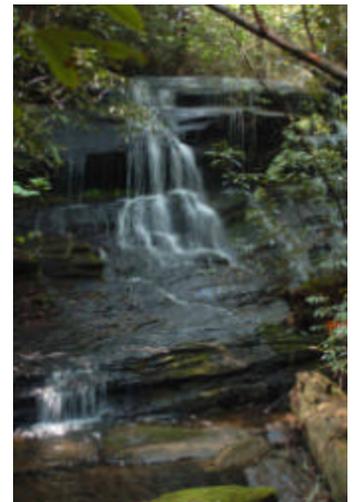
Sadly, Curt says the family does plan to sell the property after Velma passes, but they hope someone



Rhododendron 'Smoky Mountain' in the Haag Garden



Vista across the Haag's Lake



The Haag's Waterfall

who appreciates the botanical richness of the place will take it over and preserve the best of the garden. Check out their website, RhodoGardens.com. It has a many pictures but really can't do the place justice:

<http://www.rhodogardens.com/>

The Haag garden reminds me of the Dexter estate with huge rhododendrons towering overhead and yet flowering all the way to the ground. Most of the garden near the house is planted with the best of their own hybrids plus other choice plants from many other eastern hybridizers. An enormous 'Hardy Giant' was through blooming, but two of its progeny that the Haag's introduced, 'Great Smoky' and sister seedling 'Smoky Mountain', were in prime condition. Their plants are spaced far enough apart to appreciate the beauty of 10 to 15-foot tall rhododendrons in their mature state. Native kalmia with trunks like trees abound in the open woodland with scattered rhododendrons, native azaleas, and wildflowers everywhere... a horticultural paradise!

Their seedling beds down near the lake are undeniably overgrown... 10 to 12 ft. plants spaced just a few feet apart, but there are some really gorgeous things in there that deserve further testing. Many of the Haag hybrids are complex descendents of Gable plants combined with lines from Delp, Ring, Dexter, and many others. Russ kept detailed records of each row and every plant within the row so they could eventually determine the parentage if a seedling proved worthy for introduction. Maybe one day we can have a Haag Study Group like we did with Joe Gable's plants, or like what we are doing now with the Dexters through the Sandwich Club.

For the 2006 ARS Convention, we propagated many excellent hybrids from Russ and Velma Haag and they sold quickly in the plant sale. I hope you bought a few. Some varieties that we propagated are not formally registered, but perhaps they will be one day. Plants like "Casa Blanca" will likely change to 'Haag's Casa Blanca' so as to avoid problems with duplicate names. In our January 2006 newsletter, we ran an article by Velma with a color insert of the Haag hybrids.

The Sandwich Club 2007 by Don Hyatt

Every year around Memorial Day, members of the Sandwich Club, a sanctioned committee of the American Rhododendron Society, converge on Cape Cod for an annual auction of Dexter rhododendron rooted cuttings. The purpose of this committee is to propagate and evaluate the many excellent Dexter seedlings that are still growing at the Heritage Plantation, the former home of Charles Owen Dexter.

Interest in the Dexter rhododendrons really spiked after the 1980 ARS Convention on Cape Cod. That was the second convention I ever attended, and I can remember walking down that entryway with fragrant rhododendrons along the path, and so many more throughout the grounds. I remember the original plant of 'Dexter's Spice' which, unfortunately, is no longer alive. I will never forget spying a relatively small plant of a bicolor red and white rhododendron behind the windmill, a plant that would eventually be called 'Consolini's Windmill.' Today, it is hard to pick a favorite plant but it might be a ruffled peachy pink called 'Jack Cowles.'



Dexter Hybrid 'Cape White'

In the early 1980's, Norman and Jean Beaudry, as well as a number of other enthusiasts, started visiting the Heritage Plantation on a regular basis. By 1988 at the ARS Convention in Williamsburg, VA, several of those members, including Dr. Don Kellam and Dr. Richard Gustafson, with support of Dexter enthusiast Ed Collins and Jonathan Leonard, urged the Board of Directors to approve the formation a group whose mission was to select and propagate the best of the Dexter hybrids. Originally called the Dexter's Grandchildren study group, it eventually became known as the Sandwich Club. Life membership in the group is a mere \$5.00. For more details, contact our own Norman Beaudry:

beaunorm@verizon.net



Some Sandwich Club Members Posing with 'Jack Cowles'

With the assistance of Heritage Plantation's horticulturist, Jeanie Gillis, the Sandwich Club has been in operation ever since. Heritage kindly allows us to take cuttings of promising material each year, and after cuttings are rooted, we auction them off the following year to members of our group. The proceeds are used to support a horticulture intern at the Heritage Plantation.

The Sandwich Club has been responsible for identifying many excellent hybrids that are now making their way into the trade, such as 'Consolini's Windmill,' a frilled white called 'Cape White' which is surely a favorite, and the creamy pale yellow called 'Bellringer' that grows so well in our area.

Norman Beaudry has been maintaining a database of at least fifteen hundred Dexter hybrids including registered and unregistered plant names, their Heritage Plantation numbers, synonyms, and digital photographs to assist in identification. However, each year we seem to find new things in the woods, and I am convinced we have many more years of work to do at Heritage to fully evaluate those plants.

Officially the Heritage Museum and Gardens, the Dexter estate is a privately owned institution featuring a number of attractions including an antique car collection, an American History Museum filled with military memorabilia and Native American artifacts, as well as an operational antique carousel. For most of us in the ARS, the draw is the amazing display of Dexter rhododendrons. They grow along the paved roads, at the edge of green lawns, along narrow paths, and massed in woodland areas.

There is a formal Dexter Display Garden featuring named varieties, but there are literally tens of thousands of unnamed seedlings hybridized by Jack Cowles and Dexter's former gardener, Tony Consolini that are arguably better. Planted out many decades ago, they have been growing in the woods with virtually no professional care. Every spring, they bloom with great profusion in shades of white,

pink, red, yellow, cream, lavender, and purple. Many of the hybrids are extremely fragrant, too.

Admittedly, a trip to Cape Cod just to buy a few cuttings at an auction seems rather extravagant, but not if one makes it into a grand vacation. At the end of May or early June when the club meets, the bloom season in our gardens is just about through. This is a perfect time to head up to Cape Cod to enjoy their rhododendrons which are just about peak. The bloom up there in 2007 was absolutely superb!

Most of us stay at the Shady Nook Motel, a small and reasonably priced location in Sandwich close to Heritage. During the day, we visit the Dexter Estate to admire the flowers, or use the motel as a base to explore other local gardens in the region. Typically, some of us spend all day on Friday checking out the bloom at Heritage, looking for plants that will be on sale this year, or ones we might recommend for next year. After all, the estate is nearly 76 acres and with thousands of rhododendrons to see, so it takes time!

On Saturday afternoon after the auction, we usually go out to admire the rhododendrons again. Since one goal of the Sandwich Club is evaluation of existing plant material, we need to spend significant time looking for superior rhododendrons. Some plants may have been distributed previously, but we feel they need wider distribution. We also look for seedlings of exceptional merit, some of which may never have been propagated before. Of course, in the evenings we have informal discussions at the motel, and try to find a good seafood restaurant for dinner.



The "Northerly Path" in the Pilkington Garden

the spectacular garden of John and Donna Delano overlooking the bay, or the highly manicured garden of Harold and Eveline Pilkinton. The Pilkingtons saved many unnamed seedlings from Consolini's original garden plus they have their own hybrids.

In addition, I always try to make other garden stops on my way to the Cape. This year, I stopped by Hank Shannen's Rarefind Nursery in New Jersey. His display garden still had many plants in bloom, and of course I had to buy a few plants as well.

The past few years, I have added an extra day just to tour the Garden in the Woods, in Framingham, MA. Located outside of Boston, MA, this 50-acre display garden for the New England Wildflower Society is a lovely natural garden filled with rare wildflowers, many of which they offer for sale.

On the way back home one year, I spent a day in Newport, Rhode Island, touring some of the grand estates built there during the late 1890's. The largest mansion of the 11 on tour is the "Breakers," a retreat for the Vanderbilt family. The sheer opulence of the Breakers and several other estates make the Biltmore in Asheville, NC, look like a tract house. There are nearly 80 acres of gardens associated with those manors, so there is much to see. I was in awe of the spectacular trees, century old specimens that are part of Newport's heritage. Some of those giant copper beeches and weeping beeches must span a half acre!

Newport has a scenic pathway along the rocky coastline in front of those mansions called "Cliff Walk." Much of it is fairly easy navigation on paved surfaces, so be sure to include time for that.

Next year, consider joining us on Cape Cod to see the Dexter rhododendrons. It is always more fun when sharing garden experiences with good friends.



"Rhododendron Happy Hour" at the Shady Nook Motel

As we walk through the woods, Dexter guru, John Delano, places tags on plants we might consider for auction the following year. With the permission of Heritage, he goes back later that summer to take a few cuttings which he sends to various propagators.

One can easily spend the entire time admiring the wonders at Heritage Plantation but many of the local members have kindly extended invitations to see their gardens, too. Personally, I like to see how the same plants perform with extra TLC, such as in the lovely hillside garden of Barbara and Henry Writington, or

Donald W. Hyatt, Newsletter Editor
Potomac Valley Chapter ARS
Don@donaldhyatt.com