

GREATER PHILADELPHIA RHODO GRAVURE

Newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society :::::::::: Winter 2016

Virginia is for rhodo lovers

Joint convention with azalea club to be in Williamsburg

Nobody knows what the coming spring will bring in the garden, but it is a safe bet that you can get a rich preview of May in Philadelphia by heading south to the big double convention of the American Rhododendron Society and the Azalea Society of America in Williamsburg, Va., in April.

Spring obviously starts earlier to the south, but add the maritime influence of the Atlantic, Chesapeake and several broad rivers, and the floral show should be ravishing. Indeed, the convention will coincide with Virginia's Historic Garden Week.

If the Philadelphia region has a rival for knockout historic gardens – *if* – it is the Tidewater country of Virginia. For those who can never get enough of such horticultural achievement, there will be a nonstop schedule of tours, starting Wednesday, April 20, and continuing daily through Sunday. The options include history as well as horticulture, with jaunts to Jamestown and Colonial Williamsburg available.

The gardens on tour are a feast, from the vast Norfolk Botanical Garden and Richmond's Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden to plantations dating from the 17th century and notable private gardens in the area, including a fine collection of azaleas created by Virginia hybridizers. Among them are plants of San-

Reclaiming Morris

Preview of January meeting

Philadelphia-area members of the Rhododendron Society know Morris Arboretum as a remarkable landscape of stunning mature specimens of choice trees, shrubs and perennials from around the world. It's one of the crown jewels of our region's wealth of superb public gardens, as well as our home base.

What we visitors and users can easily overlook is the fact that Morris has been transformed in the last four decades. Fact is, there was a fair bit of decrepitude 40 years ago. Fountains had become so overgrown as to be invisible, wooden structures were crumbling.

How did it become the show place it is today? Bob Gutowski, the arboretum's director of education and visitor experience, will be our January speaker, telling the story of preserving, restoring and adapting the 19th century private landscape for the 21st century. He'll have numerous images of the past and present to illustrate the journey.

Morris is on the National Register of Historic Places,

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The iconic conservatory at Richmond's Ginter Botanical Garden



dra McDonald, Joe Klimavicz and Eugene Aromi.

The lineup of speakers is impressive, with presentations by Steve Hootman of the Rhododendron Species Foundation and Rick Lewandowski, former director at the Mount Cuba Center in Delaware.

And don't miss the plant sale, featuring hard-to-find offerings of plants hybridized by Virginia noteworthies. Given that this is a joint azalea-rhododendron extravaganza, the selection of azaleas on sale will be much more generous than a typical ARS convention sale. (Our chapter has supported the sale by propagating a large number of the plants to be sold.)

It all takes place April 20-24, only 300 miles away. For full information, registration form and hotel information, go to www.arsasaconvention2016.org.



Garden of Al and Barbara Hall in Gloucester, Va., among the tour options.

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The American Rhododendron Society is a horticultural organization devoted to the genus *Rhododendron* – which includes azaleas. At the national level, the society holds annual conferences, publishes the quarterly *Journal of the ARS*, and fosters plant research and conservation. Its website, www.rhododendron.org, is a trove.

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter gathers eight times a year. Sunday afternoon meetings are held September, October, and January at Morris Arboretum. February through August we are mobile, with a banquet, plant sale and picnic at various sites. Latest meeting information may be found at www.GPChapterARS.org.

Dues are \$40 per year, for chapter and national membership and a subscription to the *Journal*. Contact the president or treasurer (see above) for a form or go to www.GPChapterARS.org; click on “Join us.”

January meeting

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and thus preservation protocol has been required. Much of the work, Gutowski says, has required extensive study of old records to learn what was designed and built before the latter-day restorations or reconstructions could proceed. In the process, there has been the unexpected discovery of how the Morris estate was integrated into the community, an unfolding story of the people who worked on the estate, where and how they lived.



Bob Gutowski

Fittingly, the Jan. 10 meeting takes place in the Morris' carriage house, transformed over the years into the Widener Visitor Center. We begin at 1:30 p.m. with coffee and conversation, the program beginning at 2 p.m. For free admission to the arboretum, simply say “rhododendron meeting” at the entry kiosk just off Northwestern Avenue.

Now in propagation



John Doppel photo

R. ‘Lemon Lollipop’, hybridized by John Doppel and recently registered, is among the Doppel plants now in propagation by the chapter. John and Holly Doppel, in making plans to move, had Karel Bernady, Steve Kristoph and others choose, cut and dig plants for propagation. John thinks this cultivar could rival ‘Capistrano’.

Who’d have thought?

If by chance you are at Germantown Friends School and want to hook up with Linda Harnett, who teaches there, don’t ask for “Linda.” You’ll get blank stares, for at GFS she is known as “Flower.” *Flower?* It all goes back decades, when Linda’s brother anagrammed their surname, Fowler.

Next time you’re in Center City Philadelphia, looking for a fine meal, you might want to check out the new restaurant Bud & Marilyn’s, at 13th and Locust Streets (short rib stroganoff with wild mushrooms, plum-ginger sorbet, and much more). Alas, asking for Bud or Marilyn Gressman will not get you special service. Fact is, they have nothing to do with the restaurant, just the same names.

Yale University went co-ed in 1969. That was 14 years after it had granted a Ph.D. to Greater Philadelphia’s Hope Punnett. Her specialty was corn genetics. (Given that corn is a hybrid whose species of origin has/have never been definitively determined, this is still a fascinating field.) Hope’s curriculum vitae is replete with academic accomplishments, and the RhodoGravure stands in awe. The RhodoGravure is equally impressed with the fact that she has been able to root evergreen azaleas in water.

Every club should have a wood carver, and we have at least two. Tom Ahern, who attended a one-room school, served as a paratrooper and hybridizes some juicy rhododendrons, is a professional creator of wooden bird sculptures. (Take a look at woodbird.com). Steve Torongo, on the other hand, takes pieces of firewood and carves faces and the like, not for profit but pleasure.

Recommended reading

One of the highly touted books of last year was *The Invention of Nature* by Andrea Wulf, the story of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) and his explorations of the New World. The New York Times included it in its list of the ten best books of 2015.

Rhododendron enthusiasts should be equally interested, if not more so, in Wulf's earlier book, *The Brother Gardeners*, in which Philadelphia's John Bartram takes a starring role. This highly researched yet imminently readable book makes the case that Bartram's shipments of plants and seeds to Peter Collinson in England were key in transforming the Mother Country into the epicenter of ornamental gardening in the Western world.

The Brother Gardeners is replete with interesting factoids. The island of Britain has only four native evergreens trees and shrubs, and thus the arrival of North American evergreens was a really big deal. One of the most coveted was *Rhododendron maximum*, our often overlooked native, along with *Kalmia latifolia*, or mountain laurel. In fact, no other species has more listings in the book's index than *R. maximum*.

Another tidbit involves the introduction, to grudging, drawn-out acceptance, of Linnaeus' binomial Latin naming system. These days, serious gardeners know their Latin and are annoyed, at most, when a name changes. (*R. nudiflorum*, for instance, is now *R. periclymenoides*. You probably grow *Lamprocapnos spectabilis* without knowing it – it used to be *Dicentra spectabilis*.) Well, be glad for change. Before Linnaeus, it wasn't that plants didn't have Latin names, but that they had enormous Latin names – sometimes a paragraph long. Linnaeus came up with the now universal sensible system.

(Wulf's Humboldt book just arrived at RhodoGravure headquarters – under a cut-and-decorated North American evergreen tree, in fact – so comments on it are not yet available.)

Both books can be purchased with a percentage of the sale benefiting the ARS by going to ARSstore.org, the special ARS portal to Amazon.com (do not go directly to Amazon).

Calendar

Important: If you do not receive this newsletter electronically, you will not receive email reminders a week before events. Please use this calendar to mark your own.

January 10, Sunday, 1:30 p.m. Greater Philadelphia Chapter meeting. Morris Arboretum, Widener Center. See article on Page 1.

January 17, Sunday, 2 p.m. Valley Forge Chapter meeting. Jenkins Arboretum. Janet Novak, "Flowers of Greece & Sardinia."

February 2, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Joint board meeting of Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters, Jenkins.

February 21, Sunday Joint Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge Chapter meeting, Uwchlan Meeting House, Lionville, Pa. Presentation by Steve Kristoph.

March 4-13 Philadelphia Flower Show.

April 12, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting. Home of Kim Kopple.

April 16, Saturday Greater Philadelphia Chapter Annual Banquet/Valley Forge chapter meeting. Whitemarsh Valley Country Club. Kirk Brown as Frederick Law Olmsted.

April 20-24 ARS-Azalea Society Convention, Williamsburg, Va. See article on Page 1.

May 6-7, Friday-Saturday Greater Philadelphia Chapter Plant Sale, Morris Arboretum.

May 7, Saturday Cut-Flower Competition (truss show), under Greater Philadelphia auspices at Morris Arboretum.

June 19, Sunday Greater Philadelphia picnic and annual meeting, Awbury Arboretum.

The Flower Show wants you

America loves its national parks, and the Rhododendron Society loves Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which is the focus of the chapter's exhibit at the Philadelphia Flower Show. The overall theme of the show is the national parks, and each exhibitor got to choose a park to invoke. With its abundant species azaleas and other rhododendrons, this park was the obvious choice for an ARS exhibit.

ARS members are needed to set up the exhibit and to serve as docents during the show, which runs March 4-13. Set-up will take place Tuesday, March 1. There's minimal heavy lifting, and it's great fun to be able to wander the floor of the convention center to see the other exhibits being installed. (Tip: the set-up badge will get you into the center through Thursday afternoon, by which point most exhibits will be close to complete.)

Docents staff the exhibit for a four-hour morning, afternoon or evening shift, and are welcome to spend the rest of the day taking in the show. Translate: it's free admission (rather than \$27 and up per person). What do the docents do? Answer questions and tout rhododendrons (as we do all the time already).

While the Greater Philadelphia Chapter takes the lead on creating the exhibit, all ARS members in the area are welcome and invited to join set-up and/or take a docent shift.

For set-up, contact Linda Hartnett (lindahartnett@gmail.com; 215-287-0731). For docent scheduling, contact Michael Mills (mmm19119@gmail.com; 215-527-7145).

We're on notice for 2019

Philadelphia will host the 2019 annual conference of the American Rhododendron Society. The ARS board approved the designation at its fall meeting on Long Island. District 8 ARS leaders – the district director, Steve Henning, and chapter presidents and boards – will soon be figuring out how to pull it off. Members will be hearing much more in coming months.

Philadelphia last hosted the national conference in 2004. With 12 North American districts in the society, it means we're slightly overdue to be host.

Weird weather

“Everybody talks about the weather but no one ever does anything about it,” goes the old saw. The just-completed month of December truly had everyone talking about it. Perhaps, just perhaps, the month also saw world leaders actually doing something about it with the signing on Dec. 12 of the Paris Pledge for Action at the world climate conference. (We’ll have a better fix on the outcome in 25 years.)

Meanwhile, here in the Northeastern United States, gardeners are rather wiggled out by the unseasonable balminess. An Episcopal priest in Chestnut Hill predicted in his Christmas Eve sermon that Easter would be colder than Christmas. With Easter relatively early this year – March 27 – he may be right.

Janet Novak of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter has been keeping tracking of what’s in bloom in Chestnut Hill, including Morris Arboretum. Her list was at 166 species as of Dec. 31. Among them are typical March bloomers *Daphne odora* and *Arabis procurrens* (rock cress). Many other bloomers are cases of plants giving off yet another flush of growth.

And then there are the rhododendrons and azaleas. At RhodoGravure headquarters, about a dozen different cultivars showed color or put out fully open flowers in November and December; for the most part, they were not early season bloomers, but a smattering of mid- and late-mid-season varieties. Some

were oh-so predictable – *R. smirnowii* as a parent often results in some fall bloom.

The sad news is what we don’t see – and won’t see. For every bud that has thrown an untimely flower of two, there are no doubt many buds on the plant that have swollen enough that a truly deep freeze will blast them. It could well be a spring of partial trusses.

Thus the RhodoGravure proposes a field trip: to Cornwall. The county is well-known as the balmiest part of England, with palms and the like living at the same latitude as northern Newfoundland Island. It’s that old Gulf Stream trick. According to Derek Fell in the December issue of the *Avant Gardener*, this southwesternmost part of Britain hasn’t had a cold winter “since the early 1960s.”

Of note, this is “causing an increase in insect pests and disease and dry spells that threaten both the camellia and rhododendron collections” at Caerhays Castle and its allied Burncoose Nursery. The Caerhays rhododendron collection is one of the largest in Europe and renowned because many plants were brought directly to the estate by George Forrest after his 1912-15 expedition to China. Among them are *R. griersonianum*, *russatum* and *martinianum*. Also on the grounds are *R. decorum*, *fargesii*, *hanceanum* and *orbiculare* grown from seed from E.H. Wilson’s earlier explorations.

No cold winters since the ’60s? We likely could learn a lot in Cornwall.