

RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY :::::::::: WINTER 2023

Stalking the wild pachysanthum

RHS leader to speak at new meeting site, the Barnes Arboretum

A pair of firsts leads off 2023 for the Greater Philadelphia Chapter: our first presentation by a Royal Horticultural Society expert* and our first meeting at the Barnes Foundation Arboretum in Merion. The event will take place Sunday, January 8, at 1 p.m.

Rama Lopez-Rivera is chair of the International Branch of the RHS Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group, and his talk is titled “Wanderings in the Wild: Plant Hunting on the Pacific Rim.” The talk will focus his trips to Taiwan, Japan and Korea looking for rhododendrons in mountainous terrain. A particular feature will be his searches for *R. degronianum* subsp. *yakushimanum* and *R. pachysanthum*. He made remote trips to both known and lesser known locations of the species in the wild. He characterizes these treks as “often highly challenging.”

Mr. Lopez-Rivera is spending a year in these parts as a Hamilton Fellow at Longwood Gardens, a prestigious program for building leadership capacity in public horticulture.



Photo: Megan Hansen

Rhododendron pachysanthum

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Ten years ago, after significant controversy, the fabulous art collection of the Barnes Foundation was moved from its original home in Merion to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. What wasn't moved, of course, was the arboretum surrounding the gallery, and it continues in operation today under an arrangement with nearby St. Joseph's University.

* *A total history of presenters to the chapter from its founding in 1958 does not exist, so it is possible that someone from the RHS addressed the chapter before the memory of current chapter leaders.*

The collection of distinctive woodies and perennials in an aesthetically pleasing expanse was the accomplishment of Laura Barnes, wife of art collector Albert Barnes. Laura Barnes also started the acclaimed Barnes horticultural education program. One of the students in her inaugural class was the late Betts Layman, a president of our chapter in the 1990s. Chapter member Rick Ray was an instructor in the program for more than a decade and a half.

Last summer, Morris Arboretum informed the chapter of major changes in its hosting of plant societies. The chapter board found the significant new fees and restrictions to be onerous, and Bill Rein of the Barnes Arboretum has welcomed us for this meeting. Whether this will be our new “meeting home” is yet to be decided, but the board is enthusiastic about this first meeting of the year. Arrive a bit early and stroll the arboretum to appreciate the quiet beauty of a masterful garden in the off season. (Sunset will be at 4:53 p.m.)

We gather Sunday afternoon, January 8, with coffee, cookies and conversation at 1 p.m. (yes, you are encouraged to bring a nibble to share). Rama Lopez-Rivera’s program will begin around 2 p.m.

The Barnes Arboretum is at 50 Lapsley Lane, Merion, Pa. 19066. This is the “back entrance,” with a free parking lot (do not use the Latches Lane entrance). The meeting is in the Administration Building, not the former gallery. There will be signs from the parking lot directing you.

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Please note: As of January 2, the National Football League had yet to set the time of the January 8 Eagles-Giants football encounter, but even if you miss the televised game to attend the ARS meeting, be assured that the Eagles will still be in the playoffs. This being January, the possibility of ghastly weather is real. In the event of heavy snow, ice or the like that would make driving to Merion perilous, check your email late Sunday morning.

Checking in with Hope Punnett

The charms of one of our senior members and her garden

It is not a stretch to say that Hope Handler Punnett’s many decades of horticultural appreciation and accomplishment began at birth, for she was born in Flower Hospital in Manhattan. That was when Calvin Coolidge was president, and Hope will turn 96 later this month.

For the last 36 years, this member of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter has presided over, preserved and embellished a charming informal garden in the West Mount Airy section of Philadelphia, an oasis that nonchalantly reveals many wonders, from a prodigious patch of native trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*) to a vast English oak (*Quercus robor*) grown from an acorn of the tree at William Penn’s grave Buckinghamshire, England.

A childhood in Brooklyn does not too often lead to a life in sync with horticulture, but not too far from her home was the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, where a weekend program for teenagers attracted Hope, who remembers such activities as filling “penny packets” with seeds for the garden to sell. Along the way, curiosity about plant genetics arose and off she went to Smith College, the women’s school in Northampton, Mass. Smith had a plant genetics institute and experiment station, and Hope majored in botany. The campus itself was an Olmstead creation and she would hang out in the “nice” botanic garden. (She also escaped, in her nightgown, a fire that burned down her dormitory.)

Botany degree secured, Hope decamped to Yale for graduate school (it was then of course all-male in the undergrad division). She was one of only three women in the Botany and Microbiology Department. First a master's degree and then, with wrinkles, a Ph.D. She had met and married Tom Punnett, a Yale chemistry graduate, and they moved for him to go to graduate school at the University of Illinois in the southern hinterland of that state. Hope cleverly persuaded Yale to let her pursue her Ph.D. work using Illinois as her lab.

Her subject was corn genetics, an interest that started at the Connecticut Experiment Station, where the first sweet corn was developed. In southern Illinois – truly a sea of corn with a few soybeans and human beings thrown in – she “was trying to find the origin of the small extra chromosome in maize. I did a lot of things with it [corn] and to it and for it,” such as dissecting embryos. It being the 1950s, well before the ability to use plant DNA in research, “all I could do was look at the cytogenetics.” She never got the answer she was pursuing, but she did get the Yale Ph.D.

Two years in Cambridge, England, came next while Tom Punnett did post-doc studies. Britain was still enduring post-war rationing, but Hope became enamored, delighting in English horticulture – and she had the intellectual pleasure of occasionally hosting Nobel laureates for dinner. The peripatetic Punnetts went on to Rochester, N.Y. (she was teaching human genetics at the University of Rochester's night school), then to Baltimore for a six-month National Institutes of Health fellowship at Johns Hopkins University. That coincided with a period when Hopkins was *the place* for the field of human genetics, with academics from around the world coming through. That milieu helped open doors, and both of the Drs. Punnett landed positions at Temple University.

For more than three decades, Hope was on the faculty of both the Temple medical school and the biology department, based at St. Christopher's Hospital. With three young daughters (the middle girl born in England), they were steered to West Mount Airy and acquired a large house with a mostly shady garden, not that they had much time for gardening (jobs, children, sailing).

But after their daughters had fledged, they were ready for a change – Tom wanted a smaller house and Hope wanted a bigger garden. What they found, by word of mouth in 1986, is the gem she still occupies. The original part of the house was built in 1848, and for many years was occupied by Cornelius Weygandt, a University of Pennsylvania professor and author. It was Weygandt who planted the English oak acorn from William Penn's grave. Subsequent owners were Henry and Mig Evans, who developed the garden with notable plantings, including a now-vast witch hazel and a persimmon tree that annually produces a fine crop of delicious, seedless fruit.

When the widowed Mrs. Evans, a mentor to Morris Arboretum's former director, Paul Meyer, was ready to sell, she wanted a buyer who would appreciate the garden. As Tom and Hope entered the garden, Hope saw a very large potted datura and mentioned that she had done an undergraduate project on daturas. The house was theirs.

Over the years since, Hope and Tom, who died in 2008, have been worthy stewards. She characterizes it as “an old, old garden where I have probably doubled the size of plantings. Kept what was there and kept adding.” That means adding “natives as much as possible. I didn't know anything about deciduous azaleas,” but now she has a fine selection of American species, as well as elepidote and lepidote rhododendrons. Like so many of us, however, “I still don't know why rhododendrons just die,” she remarked recently.

Two factoids attest to Hope's knack and determination. She has rooted azaleas in water, and she doggedly rid the garden of lesser celandine, digging out every wretched one herself. (The

RhodoGravure can attest to the rare sight of a spring garden in this area utterly devoid of lesser celandine.)

Hope can no longer stoop to do much weeding and such, but two of her daughters and their husbands visit frequently from the Boston and Washington areas and pitch in. (Their sister lives in Israel.)

She loves the informality of her garden, as do members of garden organizations that come for tours and al fresco meetings. “And there are always surprises,” such as that swath of erythronium. For first ten years, Hope reports, the trout lilies (a.k.a. dogtooth violets) didn’t bloom, but for the last quarter century they have put on a dazzling show. A pink-tinged *Trillium grandiflorum* is naturalizing its way around the garden, as has *Primula sieboldii*. “I feel guilty about all the



Photo: Michael Martin Mills

***Erythronium americanum*, Punnett garden**

hellebores,” because they’re not native and produce excess seedlings. The knockout hellebore of the collection has yet to yield volunteers, but its all-black glossy foliage and flowers is envy-inducing. A red-flowered corydalis pops up here and there, a true spring ephemeral that goes fully dormant seemingly two hours after the flowers have finished.

Another beauty that’s chintzy in the viable-seed department is a stately *Stewartia pseudocamellia*. (Fair disclosure: The garden at RhodoGravure headquarters borders the Punnett garden, and in 2005 the head gardener was the most fortunate recipient of a rare volunteer seedling from Hope’s stewartia.)

There’s the measure of Hope Punnett – generously sharing with fellow gardeners, maintaining and enhancing an informal garden that looks deceptively as if it grew itself, and gently letting her flowers outshine her illustrious career in plant and human genetics. Remember, it all started at Flower Hospital.

An era has ended

The chapter will not exhibit at the Philadelphia Flower Show

The relationship lasted 59 years, but “irreconcilable differences,” shall we say, were just too much, and the Greater Philadelphia Chapter has opted out of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society’s storied Philadelphia Flower Show.

The partnership started back when John Kennedy was president, and continued annually, first at the old Civic Center in West Philadelphia and then at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Center City. In that string of exhibits, there were a gazebo built in Tom Lloyd’s garage, a “mountain” built of papier-mâché over a zillion milk crates, a ship’s pier, a tiered “wedding cake” of rhodos, and many other creations. The 2020 show was a bit of a miracle: it brought together thousands of people, workers and visitors, just as the coronavirus pandemic was exploding. The

show closed March 8 and then society closed down on March 13, yet the show was not a super-spreader event.

In 2021, the event moved to FDR Park in South Philadelphia, and the chapter mounted a sweet open-air exhibit, but it wasn't easy, given the disconnect of May-blooming rhododendrons and a June outdoor event, among other considerations. So the next year, with the Flower Show again at FDR, the chapter took a leave of absence, informing PHS that it was likely to resume exhibiting if the show moved back to the Convention Center.

Given vaccinations and the somewhat more manageable nature of the pandemic, the Flower Show will indeed be back at the Convention Center this coming March – which should rebuild attendance numbers that had plummeted for the June version.

But PHS significantly changed the terms of engagement for plant societies. The stipend the chapter always received to cover a large portion of its expenses has been withdrawn, and the exhibit space offered to the ARS was reduced by more than half. Displaying ferns or pots of cactus in a space barely larger than a king-size bed is, perhaps, doable. But rhododendrons? As well, the forcing operation that PHS provided (though not for free) is no longer available. Add in the dwindling number of ARS members participating in the design and execution of an exhibit, and the handwriting was on the wall.

The chapter suggested to PHS that, instead of a Honey-I-Shrank-the-Garden exhibit, a couple of ARS experts could be booked for a demonstration at the stage-and-seating area (such as: How to Successfully Plant a Potted Azalea), even repeating the demo a couple of times during show week. Nope, PHS has eliminated those demonstrations.

So there ends the 59-year run. No bang, no whimper, but at least some free time in February and early March for the dedicated crew of recent years.

Tasty, tasty

Back in the days of pleasant weather – October, actually – the chapter brunched at Jenkins Arboretum. Perhaps the most-raved-about contribution to the groaning board was the following appetizer from Maris Ogg. (It won an award for one Suzanne Goddyn in a cooking contest a couple of decades ago. Maris clipped the recipe when it was published, which is a good thing, since the Ms. Goddyn and her recipe are not to be found on the web.)

Smoked Cheese Squares

- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon butter or margarine
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- ¼ cup pitted whole dates, snipped
- ¼ cup pine nuts (or slivered almonds)
- ½ cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- ½ cup shredded smoked gouda cheese
- ½ cup shredded smoked cheddar cheese
- 1 16-ounce Italian bread shell (Boboli)

Preheat oven to 450F.

In a large skillet cook onion in butter and oil over medium heat for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in sugar, vinegar and dates. Cook and stir 5 minutes more or until onions are golden brown. Remove from heat. Stir in nuts.

In a bowl, combine cheeses; sprinkle over bread shell. Top with onion mixture. Place bread shell on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake for 8 minutes or until cheese is melted. Let stand for 5 minutes before cutting into 2-inch squares.

– *Invented by Suzanne Goddyn, Portland, Oregon*

An early national conference

Joint affair with the Azalea Society, in Atlanta

As happens every few years, the American Rhododendron Society and the Azalea Society of America are having a joint national conference this year. As it will be in Atlanta, it will be earlier in the spring than most ARS conferences, April 19-23, and registration is already available.

The deadline for hotel reservations at the convention rate is March 31. Go to <https://www.azaleas.org/convention-2023> for much information and registration forms.

One of the highlights will be the Friday dinner, with Greater Philadelphia member Susan Treadway making a presentation on her grandmother, Mary Gibson Henry, and her explorations in quest of native American azaleas. Mary Henry started traipsing through the wild almost 100 years ago, defying the male domination of such endeavors. Her home in Gladwyne is now the Henry Foundation for Botanical Research, of which Ms. Treadway is director.

In addition to multiple days of tours in the Atlanta area, there will be seminars on various topics, including “*Rhododendron smokianum*, a New North American Species” and “Why Is *R. occidentale* So Difficult to Grow in the East?” For intrepid and early arriving folks, there will be a Wednesday paddling trip to float past *R. flammeum* while in bloom.

Calendar

All listings should be considered tentative pending coronavirus developments. Members will be advised by email of changes and cancelations.

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 8, 2023, Sunday, 1 p.m. Chapter meeting, Barnes Arboretum, 50 Lapsley Lane, Merion, PA 19066. Presenter: Rama Lopez-Rivera, “Wanderings in the Wild: Plant Hunting on the Pacific Rim.” See article on Page 1.

January 29, Sunday, 2 p.m. Valley Forge chapter meeting, Jenkins Arboretum. Presenter: Tara Spears, curatorial assistant, Jenkins Arboretum, “Southern Appalachians Native Azalea Exploration”

February 19, Sunday, 1 p.m. Joint Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge meeting. Uwchlan Meeting House, Lionville, PA. Presenter: Peter Zale, Associate Director for Conservation, Plant Breeding and Collections, Longwood Gardens. "Rhododendron Rooms at Longwood."

April 15, Saturday Annual chapter banquet, Sunnybrook Golf Club, Plymouth Meeting, PA

April 19-23 National convention and joint conference with the Azalea Society of America. Atlanta. See brief article on Page 6. For more information, including hotel reservations, go to:
<https://www.azaleas.org/convention-2023>

May 14, Sunday Joint Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge Cut-Flower Competition (truss show), Jenkins Arboretum

Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society

www.gpchapterars.org

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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 typically gathers eight times a year. Sunday afternoon meetings are held September, October, and January. February through August we are mobile, with a banquet, plant sale and picnic at various sites. Several events are held in conjunction with the Valley Forge Chapter of the ARS. 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."

Chapter Board Minutes

Board of Directors Meeting,

Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society

October 11, 2022

In attendance by video conference: Karel Bernady, Linda Hartnett, Michael Martin Mills, Kim Kopple, Perc Moser, Myo Myint, Ron Rabideau and Maris Ogg.

Minutes from our last meeting were unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report. [Editor's note: Details of the accounts are not published online. Members in good standing are welcome to contact the treasurer to obtain such information.] Myo Myint reported that our chapter balances are in line with year-ago figures. Membership dues are still being received and thus far we have one new member. We have several outstanding bills for Tyler plant sale expenses to be paid. Our charitable donations were paid last month.

Future meetings and meeting locations. Due to changes at Morris, we have been researching alternative meeting locations for 2023. Michael Mills reported that Plymouth Meeting has community rooms which are available for a cost of \$90/hour and food is allowed. Michael also discussed the Arboretum of the Barnes Foundation as a potential location. Apparently the Fern society has held meetings there and said that the facilities are excellent with abundant parking. One bonus is member ability to tour the Arboretum. Michael had a conversation with Bill Rein who runs the facility and Michael believes that we can probably use the facility for free. We decided to book this space for January. Our speaker can be Rama Lopez-Rivera – who is a Hamilton fellow at Longwood and is available on our date. Michael will confirm. We could potentially use the Ambler Arboretum for PFM. Kim Kopple will investigate. We need a speaker for our banquet on April 15th. We decided to hold that event at Sunnybrook Golf Club if the date is available. Michael proposed that our speaker be Tony Aiello. The Board agreed. Michael will contact him. [*Maris Ogg checked with Sunnybrook and the space is available.*]

Valley Forge Banquet is scheduled for November 6.

Perc Moser will contact Jerry O'Dell to see if the Joint February meeting on the 19th will be held this year at the Uwchlan meeting house in Lionville. Perc will check to confirm that the meeting is scheduled and will inquire about a speaker. [*Perc checked with Jerry and the space has been booked. Speaker TBD.*]

Hybridizers Garden – Karel Bernady noted that the presentation at the Gettysburg meeting went well. Propagation for the garden is in process. Several plants still need to get cuttings. Howard Kline's 'Catherine Josephine' is not available. Also 'Speckled Honey' cuttings will not be available until next year. Karel is aiming to have all available cuttings stuck by Oct 31.

Perc reported funds raised for the garden is \$25,725, net of \$9,000 already paid to Tyler for preparation work. Posters are being sold, and \$600 has been collected to date.

Plants for members. Proceeds from our sale this year was \$1,085. We struck about 1,000 cuttings in August. We will make 100 or so grafts this year. Karel also reported that we sold about 30 one-gallon plants at Gettysburg.

Our chapter will supply 400 one-gallon plants for the Atlanta convention. Paul Beck will pick up plants in early April. Our chapter will be paid for these plants.

Flower show. Linda Hartnett said that the theme this year "Garden Electric." We have been asked to exhibit in an 8 X 10 space in the Horticult. No exhibit is required and there will be no stipend from PHS. The exhibit is to be educational. PHS will supply edging and gravel. PHS said that they can refer us to forcing sources. After much discussion, the Board hesitated to commit to a flower show exhibit. We decided to instead ask PHS if we could do a lecture about how to plant rhododendrons at the show. Linda will contact PHS.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.