

RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY :::::::::: SUMMER 2023

All together now!

Valley Forge and Greater Philadelphia Chapters
merge under the name Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society

The idea was around for over a decade, and on June 18, 2023, the Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society was created via the merger of the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters of the American Rhododendron Society.

Following adoption of merger terms by both boards in late spring, the June 18 Annual Meeting finalized everything with the members' adoption of new bylaws for the new ARS chapter and election of officers and directors.

How it came to pass

By the spring of 2020, each of the former chapters had appointed three members to serve on a Joint Committee to consider the future for the chapters. Indeed, the committee was not formed with a mandate to work out a merger, but to consider all options going forward. Maris Ogg, Gary Ammon and Karel Bernady represented Greater Philadelphia; Bob Smetana, Steve Wright and Perc Moser represented Valley Forge.

Despite the burgeoning covid pandemic, the committee began work (outdoor or Zoom meetings) and offered three scenarios to a joint meeting of the two chapters' boards on October 13, 2020. The scenarios were to maintain the status quo; to truly maximize joint activities by the two chapters; to merge the two chapters. Reaction was mixed, but the joint committee got the go-ahead to explore and make further recommendations regarding the second and third scenarios.



Newly elected officers (from left): Bob Smetana, treasurer; Karel F. Bernady, president; Kim Kopple, secretary; Jerry O'Dell, vice president.
(Photo: S. Henning)

And then the pandemic slowed everything down. Already, the chapters had canceled activities left and right, a situation that continued for quite some time, with the switch to some Zoom activities.

In early 2023, with vaccinations and boosters allowing the world a gradual return to pre-pandemic endeavors, the Joint Committee reconvened. By this time, the concept of merger had gone well beyond little "what about?" side conversations and was apparently gaining a level of support on the boards and among chapter members. For instance, at the 2022 Annual Meeting of the Valley Forge Chapter, Jerry O'Dell spoke after he was reelected chapter president and said that he was going to focus on getting the two chapters to agree to merge.

With the indispensable knowledge and work of Gary Ammon, a lawyer and former Greater Philadelphia board member, the Joint Committee drafted and refined the terms for a merger, as well a proposed set of bylaws, which largely amounted to a reconciling of divergences between the GP and VF bylaws. A slate of officer and director candidates was proposed, incorporating all sitting board members of the two chapters (excepting three who opted not to continue). Due diligence, such as examination of each chapter's finances, followed. Each chapter's board then approved the merger and voted to present the new bylaws for a vote at the annual meeting.

For readers with extra attention to details, the merger was entirely an act of the two chapters; the national organization takes no role in such a process. The full formal name is the Delaware Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, but the leadership has chosen to adopt the shorter Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society as its public name, so to speak. In a precise merger context, the new entity is a renaming of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, which was chosen to be the "surviving chapter" in the merger because of its tax status. The bank assets of the two chapters are being combined, and the Greater Philadelphia inventory of propagated plants, numbering in the high hundreds, is now an asset of the combined organization.

Poetically, the Annual Meeting and Picnic were at the home of Perc Moser, who had been serving as a member of both the Valley Forge and Greater Philadelphia boards. He and Sally Moser provided scrumptious grilling in a refined Bryn Mawr setting with scores of rhododendrons framing the event. Every last one of them had been deadheaded – by Sally.

Next steps

The newly elected board of the Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society held its first meeting on July 13.

President Karel Bernady had a relatively large agenda of matters to tackle, and the board managed to get through the most pressing.

One of the consistent messages from the Joint Committee leading up to the merger was the need to have a robust committee structure, and the board created five committees. They are Membership (Maris Ogg and Steve Wright, co-chairs), Programming (Jerry O'Dell, chair), Propagation and Sales (Karel Bernady, chair), Communications (Michael Martin Mills, chair), Finance (Bob Smetana, chair). The committee chairs were given a July 31 deadline to present an outline of the full scope of each committee's responsibilities.

The board also adopted a general schedule for chapter and board meetings. Board meetings will take place the third Tuesday of odd-numbered months (7:00 p.m.). Chapter gatherings will be in nine months of the year, some of which will be classic program meetings with a speaker, while others will be the banquet, picnic/annual meeting, Plants for Members and Cutting exchange. There will be no meetings in May, July or December – May is always extra busy with plant sales, truss show and personal high-level garden work; July and December, we simply take a rest from ARS activities. See the Calendar on Pages 7-8 for details on activities through 2023.

Mary Henry pursues Chapman's rhododendron

An account from the founder
of the Henry Foundation

The RhodoGravure is honored to publish excerpts of the writings of Mary Gibson Henry, the remarkable founder of the Henry Foundation for Botanical Research in Gladwyne, Pa. Part One, in the Spring 2023 issue, focused on *Rhododendron flammeum* in the wild (to read it, click [here](#)). This issue concludes the excerpts with Part Two, *R. chapmanii*.



R. chapmanii (Photo: Alan Cressler, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center)

Mary Henry (1884-1967) was a self-taught field botanist at a time when such exploits by a woman were extraordinary. She explored the deciduous azalea zone of the American Southeast many times, and amassed an amazing plant collection in Gladwyne, Pa. The excerpts are from her 1962 handwritten material for the book she intended to publish under the title *The Story of My Garden*, and preserve Mrs. Henry's voice, knowledge, disdain for commas, and love of ampersands.

By Mary Gibson Henry

© Henry Foundation for Botanical Research

In February of 1944, when guns were roaring over an unhappy world and I was a 4-star mother¹ & all wrought up with anxiety, it just seemed that nothing nice could ever happen. Something nice did happen for which I was & always will be very grateful. An invitation came for a few days botanical jaunt from Dr. & Mrs. H. Rowland Totten, near Camp Blanding [in Starke, Florida], where he was stationed as Colonel. He was head of the botany department at the Univ. of N.C.

One of my sons, Norman, was at the Naval Air Base, Sanford, Fl., prior to leaving for the Pacific and I was coming to say good-bye to him in any event. The few days at Camp Blanding were wonderful and the tramping in the open with Colonel (Dr.) Totten were just what I needed.

He told me that greatly to his surprise he had found a nice colony of *Rhodo. chapmanii* right in the very center of Camp Blanding, Clay Co., Fl. He said that probably many of the rhododendrons had been bulldozed away but that he had managed to save some of them. "Of course the next officer in charge will probably scrape them away". Probably so & it is quite likely that now [1962], 18 years later, the last one has vanished! Sadder still to relate this was the only colony of *R. chapmanii* that was ever found in eastern Florida.

Here I noted on my herbarium specimen #3419 that *R. chapmanii* was "2-4 ft. high on sandy bluff". It was too early for flowers & last autumn's seed capsules were open wide with apparently all seeds shed. One who

loves plants does not easily become discouraged. I did notice a few spider webs among the seed pods which sometimes serves to hold some closed thus maybe saving a few of the seeds. I spread my red handkerchief on the ground, broke off some seeds clusters, tied them in it, & put them in my pocket.

In an article entitled "A Station for *R. chapmanii* in Eastern Florida", pub. in Proc. Fla. Acad. Sci. Vol. 7, Nos. 2-3, 1944 (1945), Dr. Totten² states, "*R. chapmanii* has been credited in the literature to low pine woods of Western Florida. This station is distinctly East Florida and is less than 40 miles from the Atlantic Coast. The plants reported from the new station were first observed in flower on March 17, 1943".



R. chapmanii in the wild in Florida.

Another find nearby of great interest was the famous *Ixia coelestina*³ described by John Bartram. Dr. Totten had found this great prize & led me to it. "We must go early in the morning to see it for it is closed by eight o'clock". I was truly thrilled to see the beauty of this most fragile, fairylike but quite spectacular little Irid. They were there in quantity, the comparatively large flowers of clear & clean light lavender-violet are of a very telling & beautiful shade. We waited under the slim stately pine trees for a short time & then the flowers were gone. The slender stems & leaves were almost invisible & the thrill for the day was over. Other nice things were

¹ During World War II, families displayed flags in their windows with a star for each family member in the military.

² Henry R. Totten (1892-1974), botany professor for 50 years, University of North Carolina.

³ Now classified as *Calydorea coelestina*.

found among them, the rare *Glabraria geniculata*, as it was then known, but it has had its name changed & is now known as *Litsea aestivalis*.

The finest & largest plant [of *R. chapmanii*] I have is in the Rock Garden [of the Henry Foundation]. It is the one Dr. Small⁴ gave me which came from Western Florida. It is now 1962 3 ft 6 in tall with a spread of 4 ft, 8 in. It is a fine, healthy plant. Growing in full sun has made it a densely growing specimen.

There are also growing here 2 nice specimens from the seeds so precariously saved from the pods I unceremoniously dumped in my red handkerchief. It was fortunate that I was able to salvage these few & it was luck too that I succeeded in raising them.

As the years went by, & I was in Western Florida several times each season, I usually stopped in Apalachicola to see Miss Kimball⁵. She had studied botany with Dr. Chapman⁶ & he had presented her with a copy of his "Flora of the Southern States". She in turn gave this book to me. It was inscribed to her in his neat hand writing and needless to say I still cherish the book. ...

Dr. Chapman, Dr. Small & Miss Kimball have all gone to their long home but each spring when *R. chapmanii* blooms in Gladwyne they come back to me, but in memory only. ...

.....

I well remember the happy day in 1934 when Dr. Small paid me a visit, bringing with him 2 large pots, each containing a large blooming size plant of *R. chapmanii*. At that time I had never even heard of it. He said it was probably the rarest *Rhodo* in the world & he thought I should have them. When he told me where they came from, "Low pinelands, W. Fl", I feared for their safety for I was afraid they could not survive our severe Gladwyne winters. They have now come through 28 of these winters, & during one of these winters, 1936, I saw the mercury in the thermometer standing at 22° below zero! That was at 2:00 A.M. in a thermometer against a window. Where the *Rhododendrons* were growing is in a considerably colder place & where the thermometer registers 5-8 degrees lower than this!

Last winter [probably 1961-62] the temperature fell to 9 degrees below, but all of these *Rhododendrons* came through unscathed.

One of the original plants given to me by Dr. Small was planted about 10 years ago in the driest spot of the grounds of the Henry Foundation, on a dry shelf in the Rock Garden where the soil was largely composed of sand & crushed stone & where it gets the sun all day long. In the summer the rocks are too hot to hold my hand on them.

During the succeeding years Dr. Small paid me a number of visits for he said "It is easier to come to see my southern friends in Gladwyne than to go to Ga, or Fl, etc., to see them." Which of course was true.

As the years passed I became increasingly interested in *R. chapmanii* about which, at that time, so comparatively little was known. One day in 1938 when Dr. Small paid me a visit he told me where to look for it ending "Miss Winifred Kimball, amateur botanist, Apalachicola, Fla., knows where it grows." November 15, 1938, found me in Apalachicola. The town had spread over most of the area mentioned by Dr. Small, greatly changing its appearance. Cattle & fire made matters worse. I could find nothing of interest, in fact I was unable to recognize the place he described. I called on Miss Kimball. She was old & had forgotten just where Dr. Chapman had shown her "his" *Rhododendron* years ago.

Dr. A. W. Chapman's name did not then mean as much to me as it does now. How he accomplished all he did in this section of the country with its deeply indented shore line & huge swamps & bayous will ever remain a mystery to me, for there were none of the long modern bridges then & no automobiles. But even so he managed to do a lot of collecting, found many new species & wrote an excellent book.

In spite of the changes that had come about and the vagueness of Miss Kimball's directions I was able to find a few specimens of *R. chapmanii*. The tallest one I saw was a straggly one about 4 feet high. It was growing in sandy peat in full sun. The leaves of this *Rhododendron* are quite distinct in color for they are a rather light yellowish green, and at this season at least they were rolled under. This habit somewhat detracts from the

⁴ John Kunkel Small (1869-1938), author of *Flora of the Southeastern United States*, 1903.

⁵ Carrie Winifred Kimball (1870-1952). She was also the principal writer of the 1922 movie *Broken Chains*.

⁶ Alvan Wentworth Chapman (1809-1899), author of *Flora of the Southern United States*, 1860.

attractiveness of the plant and somewhat hides the fact that the leaves are obovate & usually with round or quite blunt ends. The rich red-brown young branches are rather conspicuous.

I dug 1 small plant, made a herbarium specimen & hoped to return in Spring. I could hardly wait for March to come, but time rolled around and on Mar. 30, 1939 once more I stood beside *R. chapmanii*.

On my herbarium sheet, #1483, I noted: Flowers 1¼ -1¾ in. diameter. Rose pink in color, dark pink tube. Style & stigma crimson, filaments pale pink; light brown pollen. Leaves ¾ in. to 1½ in. long; ½ in. to 1¼ in. broad. Dull green on upper surface, cinnamon brown underneath. 2-4½ ft. tall. Growing in this sand with a little peat.

That little hardboiled description gives little evidence of the real beauty of *R. chapmanii*, and the poor straggly plants that remained from what was probably at one time an abundant colony of these lovely little Rhododendrons could never again display the choice & delicate loveliness of these little fast vanishing Rhododendrons.

Results of the May Truss Show

Elepidotes dominated the display

The 2023 Cut-Flower Competition – that is, the Truss Show – had several distinguishing outcomes and features.

The weather was responsible for a couple of them: the early spring meant that evergreen azaleas across the region were mostly through blooming, and there were very few sprays entered. The same applied for lepidotes, though that happens often, since so many lepidotes are early bloomers. The result was that elepidote trusses were the great majority of entries. With no rain in the two weeks before the show, petal blight was minimal in most gardens, also contributing to the high number of fine elepidote trusses.

For the first time the show at Jenkins Arboretum was on a Saturday, the day before Mothers Day, instead of on Mothers Day itself. This was at the request of the arboretum, which was hoping to avoid the parking chaos that has beset past Mothers Day truss shows. Many participants – exhibitors, judges, show clerks – expressed pleasure at not having to shoehorn the show into their Mothers Day activities.

The weather wasn't through with us, however. Dry as May was, that Saturday was cool, utterly overcast, almost rainy, and only a very few arboretum visitors walked through after the show was open to the public. One of those few was Aaron Heckler, grandson of the late Robert Huber, a longtime ARS member in our area. Aaron now lives in his grandfather's house, surrounded by (mostly unlabeled) rhododendrons. Alas, no one had entered a truss of Bob Huber's 'Aaron Heckler'.

One lamentable matter was the low number of entrants. Only five ARS members brought entries – plus one entry from a Jenkins staff member whose interest was piqued Friday when the exhibit room was being set up.



Trusses and their judges (from left): Cathy Keim, Peter Zale, Harold Sweetman, Karel F. Bernady. Not pictured: Steve Wright, Tom Lloyd. (Photo: M. Mills)

(She won a blue ribbon for it!) There were 98 entries, not the lowest ever (there was a real precipitation washout a few years ago), but nowhere near the 250 to 300 entries that were common at shows earlier in the century.

Quite notable was the fact that all the trophies were won by one competitor, Michael Martin Mills, who took home seven. The previous record number of trophies won by one person was five. (Two trophies, the Hybridizer's Cub and Best Specimen Plant Trophy, were not awarded this year, since there were no entries in those sections.)

Here are Michael's trophy winners:

- Best Species (Karel F. Bernady Trophy): *R. viscosum* 'Delaware Blue'
- Best Foliage (Dan and Betts Layman Trophy): *R. brachycarpum*
- Best Evergreen Azalea (Lloyd Partain Trophy): 'Louise Gable'
- Best Deciduous Azalea (Steven Wright Trophy): *R. viscosum* 'Delaware Blue'
- Best Rhododendron Hybrid (Mr. & Mrs. James S. Sorber Trophy): 'Cloud Nine'
- Best in Show (John Wister Trophy): 'Cloud Nine'
- Sweepstakes for Most Points (Judi Meade Trophy)

The Steven Wright Trophy was awarded for the first time. The previous deciduous azalea trophies had been retired, and the show's co-chairs, Perc Moser and Michael Martin Mills, and the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge presidents decided to honor Steve, who is becoming the go-to person for distinctive forms of North American deciduous azaleas.

Judges for the show were Cathy Keim, Tom Lloyd, Karel Bernady, Harold Sweetman, Steve Wright and Peter Zale.

The top-notch crew supporting the co-chairs included Bud and Marilyn Gressman, Bob Smetana, Kim Kopple, Jerry and Kate O'Dell, Mimi Favre, Maris Ogg and Cynthia Rossetti.



Trophy winners at the May 13 Truss Show. All were entered by Michael Martin Mills. (Photo: Mimi Favre)

*Next event:
Cutting
Exchange
& Auction,
August 20*

On Sunday, August 20, come to Jenkins Arboretum to acquire cuttings for your own propagation – and to bid on a variety of plants, rhodo or non, many donated by members. Start time: 1:00 p.m.

To donate rhododendron or evergreen azalea cuttings: take cuttings, ideally in the morning, preferably six-inch cuttings of semi-hardened new growth. Place in a zip-style plastic bag; write the name on the bag, along with your name. Add a small sprinkle of water and refrigerate. Consider bringing in a cooler if the day is hot.

Auction donations should have info for the auctioneer to tout the plant.

In memoriam

Frank W. Brouse, 1928-2023

On July 5, one of the longest-tenured members of the local Rhododendron Society, Frank Brouse, died. He was an iconic figure, renowned well into his 90s for his hands-on nursery operation. He joined the Valley Forge Chapter in 1968 and was able to attend the Annual Meeting and Picnic of the newborn Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society in mid-June. Frank received the Bronze Medal from the Valley Forge Chapter in 1997, which cited his expertise in propagating plants for ARS members and for Jenkins Arboretum. At his Norristown nursery, started by his state forester father, he hewed to the old school of growing plants in the ground – and then hand-digging them for customers. A September memorial service is anticipated. (To read a 2020 RhodoGravure feature on Frank, click [here](#).)

Cynthia Rossetti, 1951-2023

Just two days after she served as a clerk in the May 13 truss show, Cynthia Rossetti died unexpectedly and quickly in her garden in Port Deposit, Maryland. She was 71 years old. Cynthia and her husband, Rupert, joined the Greater Philadelphia Chapter in the 1990s. She annually clerked for the truss show and they were docents when the chapter had an exhibit at the Philadelphia Flower Show at the Convention Center. A number of years ago, the chapter ventured to Port Deposit for the June picnic, where members delighted in Cynthia's family home, named Parade Rest, with its vineyard, spring-cooled root cellar, creek and intriguing plantings. With degrees in geology and paleontology, she pursued a career as a petroleum geologist based in Houston before taking early retirement and returning to Port Deposit in 1995. A celebration of her life will be held at a future date.

Bronze Medal for Gary Ammon

In April, the Greater Philadelphia Board acted to honor one of its former board members, Gary D. Ammon, with the Bronze Medal, the highest chapter-level award in the American Rhododendron Society. The medal was presented at the June picnic, along with a plaque containing this citation:

“The Bronze Medal is awarded to Gary D. Ammon for invaluable services to his chapter and other ARS endeavors.

“As a board member, he lent legal acumen to various matters requiring wise counsel. The ARS Research Foundation likewise benefited from his expertise.

“As a member of a joint Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge committee, he provided detailed memos, insights and knowledge of nonprofit law that were key to the birthing of the Delaware Valley Chapter, and he demonstrated the rare ability to herd cats, calmly, quietly, effectively. With high gratitude, the Greater Philadelphia Board of Directors unanimously voted on April 11, 2023, to bestow the chapter's highest honor.”

Calendar

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

August 20, Sunday, 1 p.m. District 8 Cutting Exchange and Plant Auction. Jenkins Arboretum. More info on Page 6.

September 10, Sunday, 1 p.m. Chapter meeting, Jenkins Arboretum. Annual Plants for Members sale.

September 19, Tuesday, 7 p.m. Board of Directors meeting, Jenkins Arboretum.

October 15, Sunday, 1 p.m. Chapter meeting. Location and program pending.

November 12, Sunday Annual Banquet, St. David's Country Club. Cocktails and conversation at 12:00 noon, luncheon at 1:00.

November 21, Tuesday, 7 p.m. Board of Directors meeting, Jenkins Arboretum.

Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society

A chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

DVChapterARS.org

Officers

President: Karel F. Bernady (2023-24), 610-827-0113; bernadk @ verizon.net
Vice President: Jerry O'Dell (2023-24), 610-608-2018; westdell @ verizon.net
Treasurer: Bob Smetana (2023-24), 610-996-0661, vfarssmetana @ yahoo.com
Secretary: Kim Kopple (2023-24), kopple.kim @ gmail.com

Directors

Terms expiring 2024: Craig Conover, Darlene Henning, Steve Henning, Maris Ogg, Steve Wright
Terms expiring 2025: Stuart Brooks, Bill Halberstadt, Linda Hartnett, Bob Horton, Perc Moser
Terms expiring 2026: Alice Horton, Michael Martin Mills, Ron Rabideau, Kathy Woehl

Committees

Finance: Bob Smetana, chair
Plant Propagation and Sales: Karel F. Bernady, chair
Membership: Maris Ogg and Steve Wright, co-chairs
Program: Jerry O'Dell, chair
Communications: Michael Martin Mills, chair

Mailing address: 14 Northwoods Road, Radnor, Pa. 19087

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 Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society is the result of the recent merger of the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters of the ARS, and serves rhododendron and azalea enthusiasts in Philadelphia, Southeastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Delaware. The group typically gathers monthly (except July and December) for program meetings, summer picnic, autumn banquet and multiple plant sales. Activities are at various locations, mostly on Sunday afternoons. Dues are \$40 per year, for combined chapter and national membership and a subscription to the Journal. Contact the president or treasurer (see above) for a form or go to DVChapterARS.org; in the Table of Contents, click on "Join."