# Potomac Valley Chapter



# American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Fall Newsletter: September 2020

# Potomac Valley Chapter Calendar

- **September 25-27** ARS Eastern Regional, Gettysburg, PA (*canceled*)
- October 4, 2020 PVC Chapter Picnic (canceled)
- November 9, 2020 PVC Fall Banquet (canceled)
- June 3-6, 2021 ARS Convention, Nova Scotia, Canada (?)

#### Chapter Officers

President: Ginny Mohr rngmohr@msn.com Secretary: Diane Reinke Isabelle49@aol.com Treasurer: Phyllis Rittman prittman@erols.com

# **Chapter News – Virus Disruptions**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt our ARS meetings as well as almost everything else. The Fall Eastern Regional planned by the Mason-Dixon Chapter was supposed to be in Gettysburg this month. That will not happen. We had to cancel our chapter picnic and banquet, too.

At this point, we have not heard about the 2021 ARS Convention planned for Nova Scotia next spring. Below is a picture I took of the lighthouse at Peggy's Cove when the ARS held a Fall Regional in Halifax in 2013. It is such a beautiful area but I fear we will still be struggling with this virus and that meeting may be in jeopardy, too.



#### **Dues are Due**

September is the start of our annual membership renewal campaign. Please support the ARS and send in your dues. Even if we can't meet face to face right now, we hope you enjoy the ARS Journal and our chapter newsletters. We appreciate the many Associate Members from other chapters, too.

We will be sending out 2021 dues renewal notices by regular mail soon which will include a return envelope for your convenience. Due to disruptions in regular mail service caused by recent changes at the Post Office, mail has slowed down. We anticipate additional problems caused by mailin balloting as well. Members must renew by December 1 to avoid Journal disruption, so try to renew early. Please mail your check payable to **Potomac Valley Chapter ARS** to:

# Phyllis Rittman, Chapter Treasurer 10840 Fairchester Dr., Fairfax, VA 22030

### **Membership categories:**

Individual/Family	. \$40.00
Student (proof of age required)	10.00
Commercial/Corporate	90.00
Sustaining	75.00
Sponsoring	. 150.00
Life, single	1,000.00
Life, family	1,500.00
Associate Membership*	10.00

#### **Online Dues Renewals**

The ARS now accepts online renewals for those who prefer to pay by credit card or personal Pay Pal account. To avoid dealing with the mail, check out the ARS Office and click on Membership Services:

# https://www.arsoffice.org/

You will need your "membership number" to complete the renewal process which is on your Journal mailing label.

### **Rhododendron of the Year Nominees**

Every fall, we are expected to come up with nominees for our Rhododendrons of the Year in the Middle Atlantic Region. We need to select four plants: a large leaf Elepidote Rhododendron, a small leaf Lepidote Rhododenron, an Evergreen Azalea, and a Deciduous Azalea. If you have some favorite plants, send the names to me, Don Hyatt, and I will try to form a concensus. We don't want to repeat past winners so review the prior ROY winners from our region listed on the next page.

# **London Town Update**

We learned that the tornado that hit Edgewater, MD, on September 3 caused considerable damage at London Town Gardens. The core gardens seem to be intact but many old trees were uprooted. It will take some time to clean up the damage.

#### **Other Local Activities**

Fall Sale at White's Nursery

22531 Wildcat Road, Germantown, MD 20876

Mike and Deb White are having a fall plant sale at their nursery to reduce inventory

Dates: September 12, 19 and 26

Time: 9 am. to 5 pm

Check out their website for directions. Note that Davis Mill Road is closed following storm damage.

## www.whites-nursery.com

For more information contact: Mike White (301) 788-3293 or Deb White (301) 471-5958

# Northern Virginia Chapter ASA Sale Kirkwood Presbyterian Church, 8336 Carrleigh Pkwy, Springfield, VA 22152

Our friends in the Northern Virginia Chapter ASA are holding their annual plant sale again this fall at the Kirkwood Presbyterian Church. Check out their website for details: www.nv-asa.org

Date: September 26 Time: 1 to 5 pm

## Nature's Best Hope Lecture - by Doug Tallamy

Margaret Vogel has extended an invitation to join a Zoom talk by Dr. Doug Tallamy, a noted entymologist and wildlife author. He will tell us how we can help reverse declining biodiversity in our own gardens. The talk is co-sponsored by the Potomac Garden Club and the Montgomery County Public Libraries. See attachment for details on how to connect to the session.

Date: September 14 Time: 10 to 11 am

#### Sad News

**Betty Bernady**, beloved wife of Associate Member Karel Bernady, passed away on Sunday, August 31. Karel was the rhododendron expert. He propogated plants and traveled with us to the mountains, but we always enjoyed seeing Betty at occasional meetings. She was very witty and will be greatly missed by all.



Karel and Betty in the Pilkington Garden

Hyatt

Cam Williams whose whimsical garden we visited in Gloucester, VA during the 2016 ARS/ASA Convention passed away on August 8. You may remember her "Secret Garden," a ruin she had built in the woods. She also built an elaborate Dog Spa for her beloved Golden Retrievers.



Cam's Whimsical Secret Garden

Hvatt

# Buy through the ARS Store!

When you purchase things online, remember to go to **ARSStore.org** before linking to affiliated stores like Walmart, Target, or Amazon Smile. Our society can earn up to a 5% commission when you do. The ARS has already received \$3700 from such sales!

# **Chapter Seed Exchange**

Since we will not be able to collect seeds in the wild this year, if you have some seed pods on interesting plants, send them to Don Hyatt.

# Middle Atlantic Region – 2021 Rhododendron of the Year Awards

We need your input for the 2021 Rhododendron of the Year Awards. Below are last year's Winners:









'Bea MacDonald'

R. keiskei

'Wagner's White Spider

R. periclymenoides

## These are all the past ROY Winners by Year for the Middle Atlantic Region:

Year	Elepidote	Lepidote	Evergreen Azalea	Deciduous Azalea
2020	'Bea MacDonald'	R. keiskei	'Wagner's White Spider'	R. periclymenoides
2019	'Ken Janek'	'Rhein's Luna'	'Treasure'	R. cumberlandense
2018	'A. Bedford'	'24 Karat'	'Dreamsicle'	R. arborescens
2017	'Gilbert Myers'	'Blaney's Blue'	'Ben Morrison'	R. canescens
2016	R. hyperythrum	R. minus var. minus	'Inch'	R. atlanticum
2015	'John C. White'	'Southland'	'Ashley Ruth'	'My Mary'
2014	'Nestucca'	'Kehr's White Ruffles'	'Caitlin Marie'	R. calendulaceum
2013	'Taurus'	'Cornell Pink'	'Rose Greeley'	R. schlippenbachii
2012	'Janet Blair'	'Windbeam'	'Sandra's Green Ice'	'Sunny-side-up'
2011	'Brown Eyes'	'Molly Fordham'	'Tina's Whorled'	R. prunifolium
2010	'Scintillation'	'Mary Fleming'	'Carrie Amanda'	'Klondyke'
2009	'Wheatley'	'Landmark'	'Koromo-shikibu'	'Old Gold'
2008	'Mist Maiden'	'Weston's Aglo'	'Dream'	'White Lightning'
2007	'Caroline'	'Olga Mezitt'	'Fairfax'	(none)
2006	'Bellringer'	'PJM Elite'	'Elsie Lee'	'Homebush'
2005	'Calsap'	'Dora Amateis'	'Nancy of Robinhill'	'Gibraltar'
2004	'Gigi'	'April Pink'	'Girard's Fuchsia'	'Crimson Tide'

#### Criteria for selecting a Rhododendron of the Year for the Middle Atlantic Region:

- 1. We need to select plants that grow in as wide a range as possible. We are not trying to publicize new varieties that are recently released but we want plants that are considered "good doers" or appear on the Proven Performer lists developed by the local chapters in our region.
- 2. The cultivar should be a superior form. It should have attractive flowers, good foliage, and a plant habit that makes it a desirable landscape specimen when not in bloom. The plant should not be prone to insect damage or disease problems.
- 3. One of the biggest difficulties we have had in choosing ROY nominees is that the plants must be **officially registered** with the American Rhododendron Society. Many wonderful plants we grow are not registered so they are not eligible for the ROY awards. Rhododendron species can be used as ROY winners without being registered provided the typical form performs well throughout the region.
- 4. The variety should be available for purchase either through commercial sources or chapter plant sales. Ideally, we should be looking several years ahead to give growers time to build up stock for sale.

To develop a list of potential nominees, please send names of your favorite rhododendrons and azaleas to: **Don Hyatt: donaldhyatt@verizon.net** *or* **don@donaldhyatt.com** 

# Reflections on Charles Owen Dexter by Don Hyatt



Charles Owen Dexter (1862 – 1943) Photo: "Hybrids and Hybridizers"

At the 2019 ARS Convention in Philadelphia, our organization presented the Pioneer Achievement Award to Charles Owen Dexter. This award was established in 1981, and is given for pioneering and original achievement in the advancement of rhododendrons. Those contributions must have withstood the test of time to assure their lasting value so most of the recipients have been honored posthumously. The first recipient was the late Joe Gable. We honored his work at the 1982 ARS Convention in Washington, D.C.

In the nearly four decades since then, there have only been 14 recipients of that award. Charles Dexter passed away before the ARS was founded but he was a deserving candidate. The rhododendrons he developed on Cape Cod are some of the finest plants we can grow in the Eastern United States.

Our chapter used to take annual field trips to the Cape to see the Dexter rhododendrons and admire hybrids developed from them. I thought I could use this issue of our newsletter to focus on the history and accomplishment of Charles Dexter and discuss some of those beautiful rhododendron hybrids.



Dexter Hybrid 'Scintillation'

Born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1862, Charles Dexter developed a prosperous textile company in nearby New Bedford, Massachusetts. He was a proud New Englander, and a descendent of two of the original members of the Mayflower, John Alden and Richard Warren. Those relatives had arrived on Cape Cod on November 9, 1620, and helped established the Plymouth colony that celebrated the first Thanksgiving the following year.

Dexter enjoyed visiting Cape Cod. In 1921 at the age of 59, he had been given a rather alarming warning that he had a bad heart and was not expected to live very long. Desiring to retire and get back to nature, he purchased a 100-acre abandoned farm on Shawme Lake near the town of Sandwich on Cape Cod. This would be his final refuge.

Horticulture can have a therapeutic value, and that may be why Charles Dexter's health improved and he defied that ominous diagnosis. He did not suffer an early demise but lived an additional 22 years, passing away in his garden on 1943 at the age of 81. For most of that time he was intensely focused on one activity, hybridizing rhododendrons!



The Dexter Estate – Schawme Farm

We are not sure when Dexter first became interested in rhododendrons. Paul Frost, a landscape architect he hired to transform his property into the estate at Shawme Farm, was fond of rhododendrons. However, the only hybrids generally available at that time were the Ironclads. As Dexter's interest grew, he tried rhododendrons from other sources including a new nursery near Barnstable owned R.J. Farquhar and plants he imported from places like the Veitch Nursery in Exeter, England.



Ironclad 'Roseum Elegans'



Plant from Veitch that Dexter called 'Skyglow'

Encouraged by E. H. Wilson and Charles Sargent at the Arnold Arboretum, Dexter embarked on an avid hybridizing program that lasted two decades. Although his records have been lost, we know he incorporated many genetic lines into his breeding program. Unlike modern hybridizers who may have specific goals, such as producing a hardy red or yellow, Dexter just wanted to improve the quality of the plants available for colder gardens at that time. Without a doubt, he was extremely successful in that regard.



Dexter raised nearly 10,000 seedlings each year

Rhododendron hybridizing seemed to become Dexter's primary focus for the remainder of his life. He was making as many as 5,000 crosses a year and raising over 10,000 rhododendron seedlings every season during much of that time. To develop hardy rhododendrons, Dexter instinctively relied on one of nature's immutable laws, natural selection, or "survival of the fittest." The scale of his efforts and the rigor of his selection is what made his achievement so significant.

Charles Dexter was proud that he could often bloom his seedlings in just four to five years. He had seedling beds scattered all over the property. He was ruthless in culling out inferior plants that did not seem hardy. Any leaf burn, even after their very first winter, and that plant was history!

When the remaining seedlings bloomed, he discarded any plants that he deemed inferior or did not meet his strict standards. Dexter did try to propagate and distribute some plants he considered superior. Without that, many would have been lost.



Winter Burn: Destroy it



Good Foliage: See it bloom

Like many of us who face the reality of too many seedlings when hybridizing, he also had an abundance of plants and often sent flats or even truckloads of unbloomed seedlings to others up and down the East Coast including to relatives as far away as Asheville, NC. Some nurseries did speak disparagingly about Dexter's work at the time noting that some of the seedlings they got were just average plants and nothing special. Any hybridizer knows that most of seedlings from a typical cross will be mediocre at best. However, there could be some truly outstanding plants among those seedlings, too.

Surely, Dexter's work was one of the most intensive hybridizing programs ever attempted. He raised an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 seedlings in those 22 years. The realization that from those seedlings came a modest collection of about 79 named cultivars is significant. It represents about the top 0.05% percent of the seedlings he raised. His plants were not only beautiful but also hardy enough to succeed where rhododendrons had often not grown before. Some of the Dexters like 'Wyandanch Pink' are hardy to temperatures as low as -25° F.





'Wyandanch Pink' - Hardy to -25° F

Charles Dexter may have died two years before the ARS was founded, but one of its first activities was to form a Dexter Study Committee. Dr. Clement Bowers of Cornell University and the New York Botanical Garden collected together some other experts in the Northeast to form this group. The original committee members included Henry Skinner at the Morris Arboretum, Paul Vossberg at the Westbury Rose Co., John Wister at Swarthmore and the Tyler Arboretum, and Donald Wyman at Harvard's Arnold Arboretum. They were later joined by Edmund Amateis, David Leach, and others. These people knew and valued the work of Charles Dexter, and decided they needed to document, evaluate, and preserve his plants.



The edge of Schawme Lake where Dexter died.

The committee did face a daunting task and their work lasted nine years. They traveled to gardens that grew Dexter rhododendrons, evaluated them, and then tried to propagate and preserve the best if that was agreeable with the owners. One of their first selections was the incomparable 'Scintillation' which has proven to be an incredibly valuable commercial variety known round the world.

They also had to deal with confusion where the same plant may have been growing in a different garden under a different name. 'Janet Blair' was the same plant as 'John Wister'. There are at least two versions of 'Scintillation' that are slightly different.

They tried to locate sources of plants that were no longer on the Dexter estate since they discovered that only 18 of the 79 named cultivars known at the time were on the property. Without their efforts, it is not clear how many of the Dexter Rhododendrons we would have available today. We can thank these leaders for recognizing Dexter's accomplishments and doing their best to preserve his legacy.



**Unnamed Dexter Seedlings in the Woods** 

Shawme Farm changed hands at least four times after Dexter passed away. Over the years, many of the original plants died or were dug up and sold to others. In 1969, the property was purchased by the Lilly family who planned to create a museum of early Americana on the site. They called it the Heritage Plantation which is how we know it today.

In 1972, the Heritage Plantation approved a Dexter display area where a large number of the original hybrid rhododendrons were returned to the property where they could remain on display.



**Dexter Display Garden** 



The Windmill

My first trip to Heritage was part of the 1980 Convention hosted by the Massachusetts Chapter. I was in awe! I remember huge plants in full bloom everywhere including the original "Dexter's Spice' near a charming windmill. It was extremely fragrant. Off to the side was a seedling later to be named 'Consolini's Windmill'. It had striking bicolor flowers. Tony Consolini was Dexter's head gardener. Heman Howard and Jack Cowles were horticulturists who took over after him. At one point, Jack Cowles was told to clear out his seedling beds. Some were planted in a lovely bed beside the main walk. He moved others into the woods.



'Dexter's Spice'



'Consolini's Windmill'

When I returned in 1990 during the next Cape Cod convention, I saw that 'Dexter's Spice' had died but those seedlings along the walk were now head high and gorgeous. When I returned in 2003, I was surprised to see those seedlings had been cut back to the ground and there was a sign stating:

"What happened to all the Rhododendrons? The plants in this garden have been cut back dramatically because they have become overgrown, unsightly and they were blocking the view. Rather than removing them, the museum





Main Walk in 1980

**Explanation Sign in 2003** 

decided to rejuvenate them by pruning. This is accomplished by cutting them back with a chainsaw. This encourages the extensive root network to send up new growth from the bottom. In 3 to 5 years there will be a beautiful hillside of low rhododendrons here."

Unfortunately, many rhododendrons will not regenerate from the base when pruned so severely. Sadly, that was the fate of the plants along that walk. They all died! Eventually they removed the sign and put in a few plants of 'Scintillation' instead.

There really were some spectacular plants in that area. Fortunately, some of the best like the luscious warm pink 'Shaker Sunrise' had already been propagated so they were not lost forever.



'Shaker Sunrise'

The reason those cultivars were saved was due in part to the private efforts of people like Jonathan Leonard, Bea MacDonald, and Ed Collins. There was a secondary study group authorized by the ARS in 1988 called the Sandwich Club. They wanted to evaluate Dexter hybrids including plants developed by Tony Consolini, Dexter's gardener, and the new hybrids from Jack Cowles and Heman Howard who

were at the Heritage Plantation in subsequent years. Don Kellam and Dick Gustafson as well as Marshall Stilwell led that committee. Norm and Jean Beaudry were charter members, too. I joined several years later as did many of our chapter members. As the original leaders passed on, the Beaudrys with John and Donna Delano of Duxbury, MA, took the lead. Norm built a database coordinating names and numbers used by others for the same plants.

For 22 years, the Sandwich club would meet on Cape Cod in the spring and identify outstanding seedlings growing on the 76-acre estate. They took cuttings, rooted them, and sold them at auction the next year. The funds were used to support an intern. They named and registered the best cultivars.



The Sandwich Club - 2008

The Cowles hybrids became the major focus of that group. There was a spectacular plant named 'Jack Cowles' in the garden that seemed impossible to root. Many other hybrids in the garden or growing in the woods were more cooperative.

The Sandwich Club also studied hybrids in the garden of Eveline and Harold Pilkington. They had purchased Tony Consolini's garden after he passed away in 1971, and started moving hundreds of his hybrids to their own garden to preserve them.



The Pilkington Garden on Cape Cod

Consolini's lot was small so many of his plants were tall and spindly when the Pilkingtons took over. I remember seeing their place during that first Cape Cod Convention. Although the blossoms of the Consolini hybrids were lovely, most of the plants were not much to look at. I think I saw the only plant Tony ever named, a deep red he called 'Pride of Cape Cod'. Its ball-shaped trusses are spectacular but it was very straggly and continues to be so.

With pruning, Eveline transformed them into lovely landscape specimens. They could not move Tony's original 'Bellringer' which was already too large, but it is very robust and roots easily. Eveline had many large specimens of it in her garden.



One of several huge 'Bellringer' plants at the Pilkington's

They did register some of the Consolini hybrids like the bright pink 'Big Dome', and a bicolor called 'Taj Mahal'. The "cream on the northerly path" became 'Pilkington's Pride'. Other varieties are still being distributed by number like Consolini 303, Eveline's favorite, a tall plant with ruffled orange flowers that fade to pink. She continued to make crosses and created lovely hybrids of her own, too.



Pilkington Hybrid 'Strawberry Parfait'



The Cowles Garden at Heritage Plantation

Our trip to the Cape was a multi-day event where we visited gardens of some Mass Chapter members who lived in the area like John and Donna Delano, Dick and Kathy White, and the Writingtons. We usually convened at the garden of Gene and Barbara Gingras who kindly hosted a picnic for us. Most of us went to the Pilkingtons, Bob and Audrey Furman's to see 'Bob Furman's Big Yellow', and twice I went to Martha's Vineyard to see the Polly Hill Arboretum and Peter Norris's garden.

Of course, the auction at Heritage Plantation was the main event. When I arrived, I admired the yellow at the gate we called 'Yellow Gate', and went directly to the Cowles Garden to see 'Jack Cowles'. Then I wandered about the main garden. I would check behind the windmill to see if 'Consolini's Windmill' was in bloom. I might have time to stroll the paved Rhodo Walk to see 'Spectacular' and other Cowles hybrids before going to the Dexter Dell.

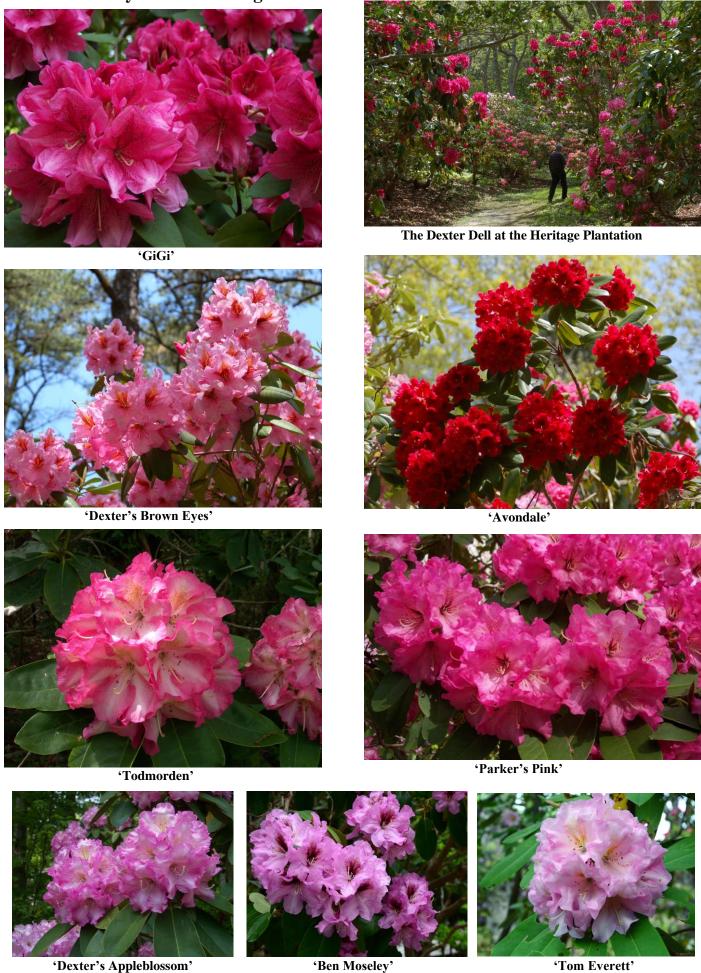


The Paved Rhodo Walk at Heritage Plantation

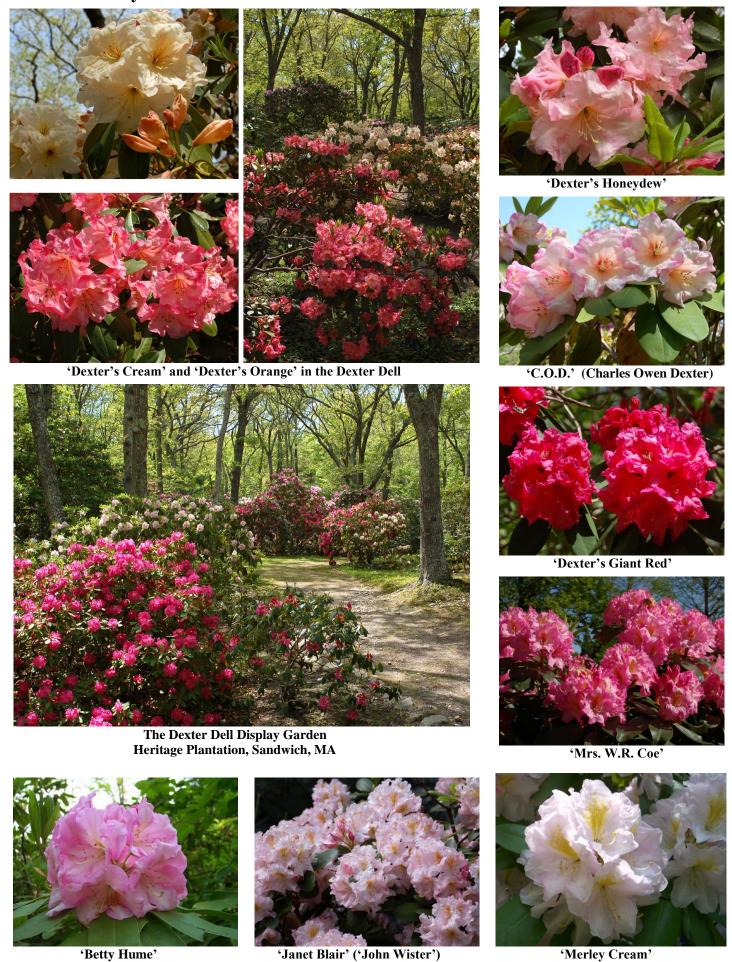
We then held the auction and later John Delano would lead an excursion to check out plants that were in bloom in the woods so we could select things to root for the next year. There were so many places to visit like First Hill, Second Hill, and the Campfire Trail where many favorites grew. Great memories!

The rest of this newsletter has images of many of these rhododendrons. I hope you enjoy the diversity!

# Some Dexter Hybrids at Heritage



# **More Dexter Hybrids**



# Some Consolini and Pilkington Hybrids



'Bellringer'



'Consolini's Windmill'



'Taj Mahal'



Consolini 303 (Eveline's Favorite)



'Pride of Cape Cod'



'Pilkington's Pride'



'Big Dome'



'Eveline Pilkington'

# **Some Cowles Hybrids** 'Golden Ager' 'Cape White' 'Jack Cowles' - Plant and Flower 'Campfire Peach' 'Don Kellam'



# **More Cowles Hybrids**

'Deep Throat'



'Spectacular'

'Morning After'



# Potomac Valley Chapter of the

# American Rhododendron Society

The Potomac Valley Chapter ARS is one of three American Rhododendron Society chapters located in District 9 which represents the Middle Atlantic region of the United States. Some of our chapter activities have included:

- Regular Meetings with Speakers
- Annual Chapter Banquet
- Garden Tours
- Field Trips to Nurseries or to Wild Stands of Native Azaleas and Rhododendrons
- Local and National Seed Exchanges
- Plants for Members Program
- Flower Show
- Informative Chapter Newsletters
- Annual Photography Contest
- Access to Chapter Library Books

Our regular chapter meetings are usually held four times a year at the Potomac Community Center in Potomac, MD, on Sunday afternoons. However, we do hold occasional meetings at other locations in nearby Maryland, Virginia, or Washington, DC.

We encourage you to check out our chapter website which includes nearly 20 years of previous newsletters that contain interesting articles, more color pictures, and examples of past activities:

#### www.arspvc.org

As a member of our local chapter you will also become a member at the national level of the American Rhododendron Society. This entitles you to a year's subscription of their outstanding quarterly **Journal** filled with information and many color pictures. You will also be invited to attend national conventions or regional conferences.

The cost of ARS membership is \$40 per year and includes membership in a chapter of your choice, such as our Potomac Valley Chapter. If you are already a member of another ARS Chapter, you may join the Potomac Valley Chapter as an Associate Member for only \$10 per year but you will need to identify your home chapter.

For more information about the American Rhododendron Society, check out their website:

www.rhododendron.org

# Membership Application / Renewal American Rhododendron Society

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City/State	
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Memberships are on a calendar year basis ar include the local chapter membership:	nd
Individual/Family\$4	0.00
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Sustaining	
Sponsoring. 1	50.00
Life, single	
T:0 0 :1	00.00
Life, family	00.00
Life, family	00.00
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Associate Membership*	00.00 00.00 10.00

# POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER ARS prittman@erols.com

To join our chapter, contact our treasurer:

You may also send this form with US Funds payable to the national organization:

# AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY P.O. Box 214 Great River, NY 11739

To pay online by credit card, follow the link to "Membership" on the ARS website:

www.rhododendron.org

#### **More ARS National Contact Points:**

Phone (631) 533-0375, Fax (866) 883-8019 Email: member@arsoffice.org

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