

History of the Southeastern Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

After studying all available resources, I have concluded that Dr. Ernest Yelton was the moving force that caused this chapter to be formed.

Dr. Yelton said that he was growing Azaleas and Camellias in 1954. In the fall of that year he wanted to buy some more Azaleas. He drove to Travelers Rest to visit a nursery owned and operated by Rudolph Anderson. While there he saw a small plant covered with red flowers. It was a grafted hybrid Rhododendron. It had been imported from a nursery in England. The price was five dollars. He declined to make the purchase but couldn't get the beauty of the red flowers out of his mind.

With the arrival of spring, Mrs. Yelton decided to visit the Nursery to buy more azaleas. Dr. Yelton told her that if the nursery should happen to have some of the pretty red Rhodies to buy one of them. She was able to get one and proudly brought it home for him. He selected a spot for the Rhodie and dug a hole in red clay and carefully planted it. The plant bloomed that spring. It clung to life for two more years before dying, but never bloomed again.

In the meantime Dr. Yelton decided that if he was going to be interested in Rhododendrons and achieve any degree of success in growing them he would need a lot of information. He decided to join the ARS in the spring of 1955. The nearest chapter was the Middle Atlantic in Richmond VA with Dr. Tom Wheeldon as president. He wrote to Dr. Wheeldon asking him about their meetings and programs. Dr. Wheeldon invited him to attend their annual meeting. Dr. Yelton decided that the distance was too great to travel to learn about Rhododendrons. He started visiting nurseries in the area to see what information could be gained. In the meantime he started checking the ARS Bulletin for people joining who had no chapter affiliation. Once in awhile a name would show up in this general area. One was a man named Josiah Brooks who lived between Enka and Asheville and was very enthusiastic about Rhododendrons. Dr. Yelton wrote a letter to him telling of the problem he was having getting information about Rhodies. Mr. Brooks responded immediately that he was having the same problem. He suggested that the two of them should get together a group of people. Both of them screened all their friends without finding anyone who was interested in becoming a member. They decided to start a new Chapter of the ARS in this area. In the meantime they came in contact with Buck Thorne who lived in Asheville and was President of the Asheville Chapter of the Men's Garden Club of America. Mr. Thorne and his wife were very active gardeners and were very happy to meet someone who was interested in growing Rhododendrons. Meeting Mr. Thorne was a blessing in that he was able to get about half of the men in the Garden Club to sign up for the new Rhododendron Society Chapter.

The group held their organizational meeting on March 13, 1957 at the George Vanderbilt Hotel. At this meeting fifteen people signed up, but they decided to keep the membership open for two weeks before sending in the Charter. By doing this they had twenty nine members when they filed their Charter.

The following officers were elected.

Joe Brooks President; Dr. Ernest Yelton, Vice Pres; Buck Thorne, Secretary/Treasurer. When they first approached Dr. Wheeldon with the idea of forming a chapter in Asheville, he told them that there was no need for another chapter in his district. At this time his district reached from New York to Florida and from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic Ocean. But he was very gracious and came down from Richmond two or three times and talked to them about organization and chapter work.

They held plant auctions at their meetings. The members would all bring a plant to be auctioned. The money that was raised was used to bring in knowledgeable speakers.

Dr. William Nicholas Fortescue who was also a Charter member lived in Hendersonville at the Chantaloupe (shon-te-loo) Estate off Erkwod Drive. He was a native azalea expert spending a lot of time driving over the mountains in a jeep looking for unusual and special plants. He collected plant material and seeds from which he developed some very extensive plantings. He had gardens both at Chantaloupe and on a fifty acre track of land off Kanuga Road.

Mr A.J. Overton wasn't a charter member but joined sometime during 1957/1958. He ran a wholesale food business in Hendersonville. His home was on Kanuga Road within the city limits of Hendersonville. He had a nice garden which he had started sometime during the early to mid thirties. The garden came almost to the street and was very visible. It was a sight to behold in the spring. People would drive from miles around to see this beautiful display of color. These two gardens are the only gardens that I am aware of in the Hendersonville area at this time.

Dr. Fortescue was a great promoter of Azaleas. He rooted a lot of them and also bought some from Mr. Anderson's Nursery to sell to the public. They sold about 20,000 plants per year for three years. While Nick Fortescue Jr. was going to high school. Dr. Fortescue had gotten acquainted with Mr. Crayton who worked for Mr. Beadle at the Biltmore Estate. One day while discussing unusual plants, Mr. Crayton told him about a red form of the Rhododendron Maximum which he had discovered while working on the Blue Ridge Parkway during the 1930's. About 1955 they went to see the plant which was indeed red. They discussed this red flowered Max with members of the ARS. This led to a group of the most knowledgeable and well known plant experts from the Northeast traveling here to see it in 1957. Among this group was Dr. Henry Skinner of the National Arboretum. It had been discovered earlier that there were three smaller plants near by also flowering red. Dr. Skinner had secured a permit to remove a plant. Dr. Skinner took the plant to the National Arboretum to be studied and propagated from. Before long the word got out about the mild winters here and the fact that so many different species of Rhododendron and Azaleas naturally occur here also the many beautiful natural hybrids which are found on the nearby Balds. This was very attractive to our Northern friends. Soon some of them started relocating to this area, bringing their vast knowledge of hybridizing, propagating and growing Rhodies and Azaleas. Many of them moved truckloads of their life's work with them. As a result we now have access to several extensive gardens of very rare plants. Many of our members who are native of this area have also developed extensive and beautiful gardens utilizing cuttings from these plants.

The influence of these plant greats has made the Southeastern Chapter what it is today. We have several long time members who were fortunate to have been students of these men and women. They are still today handing down this information and advice thus we still have a link to the wealth of knowledge and information.

We still have in our chapter active hybridizers and members with awesome gardens who are willing to share them with others. We have several members who are in the nursery business offering some of the rarest and sought after plants imaginable.

The history that we are making today is just as important as is the history of the past.

Submitted by Leon Pace Chapter Historian

Southeastern Chapter American Rhododendron Society

Charter Members

March 13, 1957

Asheville Garden Club, Inc	William N. Fortescue, M.D.*
J.R. "Joe" Brooks *	George W. Gignilliat *
Mrs. Derwood Brown	L.M. Griffith, M.D. *
Joseph L. Carson *	Mrs. George W. Hardaher
W.F.P. Coxe	Gary Harthcock
Mrs. John B. Dennis	W. R. Hoots
Charles A. Dewey, Jr. *	Traynham Houston
L.E. Jarrett	R.L. Montague
L.L. Klostermeyer, M.D.	Fred J. Nisbet, Ph. D.
Mimosas Garden Club	Rex D. Pearce
Alfred E. Kremer	James S. Raper, M.D.
W.F. Lewis	Lewis S. Rathbun, M.D.
Allen T. Lockwood, D.D.S.	H.E. Rogers
Willard H. Lindberg	W.H. Thorne *
Ernest H. Yelton, M.D. *	

* Members of other chapters of ARS also

In this year 2014 Ernest Yelton is the only living charter member.

Chapter meetings were held in the Biltmore Forest Town Hall until about 1982. At that time the meetings were moved to St. John's Parrish Hall in Flat Rock. This move was made due to a shift in membership more to the Hendersonville-Brevard-and piedmont of North and South Carolina.

Southeastern Chapter of the ARS National Meeting and Convention

May 7-9 1967 held at the Grove Park Inn Asheville, NC

The Southeastern Chapter President was W.H. Thorne

Vice President was A.L. Kremer

Speakers

Dr. Carl Phetteplace VP of ARS of Oregon

Rex Pearce of Pearce Seed Company came from NJ to Hendersonville,

Fred Galle of GA

Dr. David Leach of Tryon, NC

Dr. Dponald Wyman of Massachusetts

Frank P. Kinght of England

Dr. Mark Cathy of Maryland

Dr. Robert Ticknor of Oregon

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**BONNIE BLUE RIDGE**

May 4-8 1994 Theme "Bonnie Blue Ridge" held at the Radisson Hotel Asheville NC

Marge Jackson did a painting of Blue Ridge Rhododendron that was used on Note Cards to correspond with the convention's theme Bonnie Blue Ridge.

**Speakers**

James R. Baker native of Illinois

George Briggs of Asheville

Malcolm Clark

Dr. John Creech

Clara Allen Curtis of NC

Larry Mellichamp of Charlotte, MC

Rich Owings of Asheville, NC

Dr. J.C. Raulston

Edward Schell

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APPALACHIAN SPRING

May 3-7, 2012

Joint Southeastern Rhododendron Chapter and Vaseyi ASA Chapter Convention.

Theme "Appalachian Spring" held at the Crowne Plaza Asheville, NC

Speakers:

Don Hyatt - keynote speaker

Christine Woodward

Nick Yarmoshuk

Dr. Tom Ranney

Grad students Kimberly Shearer and Jason Lattier

Noted Hybridizer Members

(All names may not have registered plants)

Dr. Henry Skinner

Dr. August "Augie" Kehr

Russ and Velma Haag

John L. Creech

Bob Head

Donald Johnson

Ernest Yelton, MD

James R. Todd, Jr.

Ray Head

Russ Guilkey

Stan Southerland

Wayne Hutchins

Richard Becker

Lonnie Player

Southeastern Chapter Presidents

Name	Years served
*J.R. (Joe) Brooks (First President)	1957-_____
*Fred J Nisbet, Ph.D (charter member)	_____
*L.L. Klostermyer, MD (charter member)	_____
*Everitt Mitchell	_____
William R. Garren	1965-1966
*W.H. (Buck) Thorne (charter member)	_____
*R. Glen Maxwell	_____
*Sam B. Tate	1969-1971
Ted G. Richardson	1971-1973
*J.D. Johnston	1973-1974
*Dan Foster	1974-1975
Ann Richardson	1975-1977
*C. Russell Haag	1977-1979
H. Furman Cantrell, Ph.D	1979-1981
* Wallace Marley	1981-1983
* Nollie Robinson, Jr	1983-1985
Russell Gilkey, Ph.D.	1985-1987
*David Dean	Jul 1987-Apr 1990
**Augie Kehr, Vice President	May 1990-May 1991
*Robert E. "Bob" Bowman, Jr.	Jun 1991-Jun 1995
*Ed Collins	Jul 1995-Jan 1996
Bill Klippel	Feb 1996-Sep1996
*Ed Collins	Sep 1996-Jun 1999
Patricia Phillips	Jul 1999-Jun 2001
Ray Head	Jul 2001-Jun 2003
John Brown	Jul 2003-Dec. 2004
*Billy Joyner	Jan 2005-Jun 2005
Bill Klippel	Jul 2005-Jun 2007
Don Johnson	Jul 2007-Jun 2009
Doley Bell	Jul 2009-Jun 2011
Jackson McCarter	Jul 2011-Jun 2013
Ray Head	Jul 2013 to present (2014)

* **deceased that we know about**

NOTE: **Augie Kehr was VP and stood in for President David Dean during his illness

Southeastern Chapter Awards First Bronze Medal



The Southeastern Chapter recently presented the Bronze Medal to Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Johnston of Asheville, North Carolina for many years of outstanding service to the chapter and to the Na-

tional Organization. Pictured at the presentation ceremony are left to right Mrs. Marian Johnston, Mr. J. D. Johnston, and Mrs. Ann Richardson, past president of the Southeastern Chapter.

Southeastern Chapter Members - National Awards

Pioneer Achievement

1994 – Dr. August E. Kehr “Augie”

Gold Medal

1967 – Joe Brooks

1977 - Dr. August Kehr

Silver Medal

1976 - Dr. Ernest Yelton

1981 - Dr. Russell and Velma Hagg

1984 – Dr. H. Furman Cantrell

1994 – Ed Collins

Southeastern Chapter Awards

Bronze Medal

1978 – Mr. and Mrs. J.D. Johnson

1981 – Cliff Mashburn

1984 – Cy and Mary Repetto

1990 – Robert and Evelyn Bowman

1990 – James Ray Head

1990 – Dr. Harold Crutcher

1993 – Paul and Ruth Ann Drechsel

1995 – Jim and Evelyn Wood

1999 – April Sanborn

1999 – Ken Majer

2001 – Bob and Denise Stelloh

2002 – Patricia Phillips

2004 – Glenn O’Sheal

2007 – Jim and Tami Wagner

2008 – Bill Klippel

2010 – Vivian Abney

2012 - no award presented

2014 – Jackson McCarter

1979 – Ted and Ann Richardson

1984 – M. O. Braswell

1990 – Dr. Russell and Gloria Gilkey

1990 – David and Naoma Dean

1990 – Fritz McCall

1993 – Dr. and Mrs. John Mixner

1995 – Russ and Velma Hagg

1998 – Dr. August E. Kehr

1999 – Audrey Dwyer

2000 – Ed Collins

2002 – John Brown

2003 – Leon and Jean Pace

2006 - Don and Rose Johnson

2007 – Wayne Hutchins

2009 – Doley and Melody Bell

2011– No Banquet held

2013- no award presented

The Chapter President's Award

1999 – Ray and Karen Rhoads
2003 – Bob Stelloh
2004 – James Ray Head
2004 – Audrey Dwyer
2008 – Ray Head
 Leon and Jean Pace
 April Sanborn
2009 – Glenn O'Sheal

Chapter Lifetime Achievement Award

2005 – Dr. Russell Gilkey

Appreciation Awards

2008 - Tami Wagner
 Marilyn Haynes