

## August Ernest Kehr – 1914 to 2001

Dr. August E. Kehr at the age of 87, from Mallard Point, Cedar Falls, Iowa, formerly of Hendersonville and Arden, North Carolina, died Thursday, September 27, 2001 at his home of heart failure. His remains were buried in the Evergreen cemetery in Unadilla, New York.

August Ernest Kehr was born in Frankfort, Kentucky on March 2, 1914. August was the youngest of seven children born to Carl Adolph Kehr and Anna Heller Kehr. The family moved to a farm near Unadilla, New York when August was very young.

August earned a B.S. degree in General Agriculture from Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, in 1936. The new college graduate taught Vocational Agriculture and General Science at the Unadilla High School in Unadilla, New York from 1936 to 1942. During this period he met another young teacher from Pennsylvania, Mary Louise Coon. They married on December 26, 1942.

The couple then moved to Hudson, New York where August continued teaching Vocational Agriculture and General Science at the Hudson High School from 1942 to 1947. A daughter, Janet, was born on October 14, 1945.

August returned to his studies at Cornell University in 1947. He earned a M.S. degree in Agricultural Education and Agricultural Engineering and then went on to earn a Ph.D. in Plant Breeding, Plant Pathology and Cytology in 1950. During this time August also held a Fellowship at Cornell University in Plant Breeding.

Upon receiving his PhD the family moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. August became an Associate Professor at Louisiana State University. His work at L.S.U. included breeding onions, shallots and garlic and doing cytogenetic studies on all vegetable crops.

From Baton Rouge, the family moved to Ames, Iowa where August became a Professor of Horticulture at Iowa State University as well as a Horticulturist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. At I.S.U. August was in charge of breeding, genetics, cultural investigations of onions and potatoes and investigations of spontaneous plant tumors including tissue culture studies.

In 1958, the family again moved to Silver Spring, Maryland. August went to work at the United States Department of Agriculture Research Station in Beltsville. He continued with the USDA as Leader of Potato Investigations, then Assistant Chief of Vegetables and Ornamentals, then Chief of Vegetables and Ornamentals, and finally as Staff Scientist for the Agriculture Research Service.

August retired from the USDA in March, 1978 but did not retire from his research activities. He and his wife built a beautiful home on 8 acres of woodland and meadow in Hendersonville, NC. In the years of his retirement, August named and registered 9 azaleas, 12 rhododendrons and 31 magnolias. One of his many goals was to develop a yellow magnolia and a yellow azalea. He developed several yellow Magnolias. His Sunspire is featured on the cover of the Autumn, 2001 Wayside Gardens catalog.

In August, 2000 August and Mary Louise reluctantly parted with their home in Hendersonville and moved into an apartment in Arden, NC. Since he could no longer grow his beloved Magnolias, August turned part of his time and energy to creating ceramic Magnolia as well as a host of other beautiful pieces.

In August, 2001 they moved to Cedar Falls, Iowa, to be near their daughter and her family. Mary Louise's sister Genevieve also moved to Cedar Falls from Pennsylvania.

August was an active member in both the Magnolia Society and the American Rhododendron Society. He was also a member of the Pinecrest Presbyterian Church in Hendersonville, NC.

Survivors include his wife, Mary Louise Kehr of Cedar Falls, Iowa; a daughter, Janet Flick and her husband Charles also of Cedar Falls; two grandsons, Robert Flick of Los Angeles, California and William Flick of Huxley, Iowa and a great-granddaughter, McKenzie Flick of Huxley, Iowa. He is also survived by his sister-in-law, Genevieve Coon of Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Memories of August almost always include the words intelligent, generous, kind, and gentle. He left behind a legacy of the plants he developed as well a wealth of people whose lives he touched.

*Written by a family member.*

## **Farewell**

John Brown

### Southeastern Chapter ARS

I can't sing like the Von Trapps, I'm not as pretty as Julie Andrews, but what I have to say is as full of feeling as any part of the movie.

As of August 15, we said goodbye to "Augie" and Mary Lou Kehr as they made their move to the Midwest. It was just a year ago that the *Review* noted their relocation to Fletcher.

In preparation for this article, I asked a dozen people for input. Without fail, they skipped over the usual questions of what and when I wanted it. Within a word or two each of the twelve said, "He is the kindest, most gentle person I have ever met". The twelve people I asked all fall into the kind and gentle group themselves.

This newsletter is a woefully inadequate platform to launch into a tribute to who and what makes up the life and times of the man who quietly led, advised, and was a large part of the success of the Southeastern Chapter and the American Rhododendron Society at the national level. Please accept the limitations of space and competency as we make the effort.

Augie is a much-published researcher with sterling credentials. His Doctorate in Genetics from Cornell University with minors in Plant Pathology and Cytology led him to positions on the faculties of Louisiana State University, Iowa State University. He then served at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Agricultural Research Service as scientist and administrator including two overseas programs under the Agency for International Development.

A few of his awards and positions within the American Rhododendron Society include: President of American Rhododendron Society (ARS), Gold Medal-ARS, Pioneer Award-ARS, Founding Committee of ARS Research Foundation, First Chairman of the ARS Research Committee and Organizer of the International Rhododendron meeting in 1978. In his spare time, he has been President of the Southeastern Chapter, recipient of the Bronze Medal and leader and supporter of many efforts within the chapter.

Hybridization has been a large part of Augie's life, especially in the last 20 years or so. He has named only a few of the best in the several areas that garnered his interests. In the Rhododendron group he produced 'April Pink' (fragrant, early light pink), 'Mountain Marriage' (indumented pink, very hardy), 'Southland' (floriferous dwarf, salmon elepidote), 'Carolina gold' (yellow flowered, otherwise similar to *R. carolinianum*), 'Double Gem' (deep yellow, double flowered elepidote), 'Pink Magic' (deep pink dwarf), and 'Augie Kehr' (deep yellow, double flowered elepidote). His azaleas include 'White Rosebud', 'Anna Kehr', 'Mary Lou Kehr', 'Janet Flick', 'Great Expectations', 'King Red'

and 'Terry.' Since these named cultivars represent only a very small percentage of his crosses, you would think that he would be satisfied. Not on your life. His recent work on Magnolias has produced more than a dozen beautiful crosses that are just now coming onto the market. The Southeastern Chapter was privileged to be able to get quite a number of these magnificent specimens last year and most are now growing in our gardens.

Augie's work in establishing the ARS Research Foundation was mentioned above. That was just a beginning. Last year, at our July Picnic and auction, he donated a part of his collection of books and papers to what was to become the Magnolia Foundation. Bidding was fast and furious and resulted in a donation of almost a thousand dollars to the Magnolia Society. You guessed it, he isn't through yet. Augie is working with Bob Stelloh on the formation of a Research Foundation for the Azalea Society.

--John Brown.

From "Blue Ridge Review," September 2001, the newsletter of the Southeastern Chapter in the Asheville-Hendersonville, North Carolina area. John Brown is the author and editor. It is fitting to note this was written just one month prior to Dr. Kehr's death when the Kehrs moved to Iowa to be near the family. Although there were tributes by many members of the American Rhododendron Society, the Magnolia Society and the Azalea Society of America, the above article said it best. Dr. Kehr was, indeed, a one-of-a-kind person much admired by those who were privileged to know him. In the October 2001 "Blue Ridge Review," after the death of Dr. Kehr, Editor John Brown writes,

"A fittingly peaceful and gentle end for such a gentle person. He was a pillar of the plant world, with very wide ranging interests besides azaleas. We shall all miss him."

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### **From the Azalea Society of America Treasurer, Bob Stelloh**

Dr. Kehr was a pillar of the plant world, with very wide ranging interests besides azaleas. We will all miss him. We are told he was in the process of getting airline tickets to attend a Magnolia Society meeting in Maryland, that he sat down in his recliner to take a nap, and just never woke up. A fittingly peaceful and gentle end for such a gentle person.

I had been working a little with Augie, laying the groundwork for an Azalea Society Research Foundation which was a special interest of his, just before they moved from the Hendersonville, North Carolina area to Cedar Rapids, Iowa to be near their daughter. That was about a month ago, and he gave no hint of medical problems. From Bob Stelloh, ARS Southeastern Chapter and ASA (Azalea Society of America)