

Dr. William Nicholas “Nick” Fortescue, Sr.

Submitted by Leon Pace

Dr. William Nicholas “Nick” Fortescue, Sr. was born in Hyde County, N.C. He graduated from Duke University and then interned in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1935 he married Lottie Markham Hundley daughter of George William and Lottie Markham Hundley.

The Fortescue’s moved to Hendersonville in 1936. He set up his medical practice and began doing surgeries at the Patton Memorial Hospital, which had been built in 1913. It was Dr.’s Fortescue, Fred Trotter and E. McQueen Salley who had the foresight to see a need arising in the future, for a more modern and larger facility.

They were able to raise enough money to purchase the Old Oakley-Florida Summer Hotel on Fleming Street. This would become the site of the current Margaret Pardee Hospital which opened in 1953. Dr Fortescue was the only doctor to serve as Chief of Staff at both Patton Memorial and Margaret Pardee Hospitals.

Dr. Fortescue was named man of the year by the VFW in 1972. He was cited for his lifetime of alleviating the suffering of mankind.

Dr. and Mrs Fortescue bought their home place, consisting of about 50 acres off Kanuga Road soon after their move to Hendersonville. He soon became intrigued by the beauty of our native Azaleas and Rhododendrons. It wasn’t long until he was spending most of his spare time riding over our mountains in a Jeep seeking out unusual and special plants. He collected plant material and seeds from which he developed some very extensive plantings. He worked with and studied these plants until he became widely known as a Native Azalea expert.

Mrs. Fortescue’s Father and Mother, Mr. and Mrs. George William Hundley of Durham, North Carolina had bought an old property in 1933 off Erkwood Drive in Hendersonville. This property consisted of 258 acres and a large house. This place was first called “The Castle” and was built in 1841 by Count Joseph Marie Gabriel St. Xavier de Choiseul, pronounced “day schwa-zull”. Later it was bought by the Norton Sisters of Louisville, Kentucky who named it “Wood Norton”. Mr and Mrs. Hundley named the place “Chanteloupe” pronounced “Shon-te-loo” meaning “Wolf Song: in honor of Count De Choiseul.

After the death of the Hundley’s, Dr. and Mrs. Fortescue acquired their property. They never lived at Chantoloupe but he did maintain Azalea and Rhododendron Gardens there.

In order to have contact with and to share information with other lovers of these native plants, Dr. Fortescue joined The American Rhododendron Society “ARS”. At the time he joined there was only one Chapter east of the Mississippi River. This Chapter was The Middle Atlantic Chapter and held their meetings in Richmond Virginia. Dr. Fortescue regularly attended these meetings and occasionally presented programs about our Native Plants.

By 1957 there were twelve or fifteen people in the Asheville-Hendersonville and Rutherfordton area who were interested in the plants. They got together and formed the South Eastern Chapter of which Dr. Fortescue was a charter member. For the first few years the meetings were held in the Asheville area. The Biltmore Estate had a very large planting of Native Azaleas and Dexter Hybrid Rhododendrons. Therefore their people were key folks in the Organization. As a result most of the meetings were held in the back room of the Biltmore Dairy Bar. By the early seventy’s a lot of gardeners from the North East had retired to Henderson County and Upper South Carolina. Among these

were several Plant Scientists who had worked for the United States Department of Agriculture. These men, some of whom had been plant explorers to Japan, China and other places introduced a lot of the plants which we enjoy in our gardens today. Because of the population shift to our area the meetings were moved to the Parrish Hall of St. John in the Wilderness, South of Hendersonville on US 25 (now US 225). The meetings are still held there with membership as high as two hundred.

Dr. Fortescue continued to promote the beauty of the Natural World. During the years that Dr. Fortescue's son Nick, Jr. was in High School they maintained a lot off Church Street where Nick, Jr. sold Azalea Plants. He estimated the sale of at least 20,000 plants. These were some of the first plants that we had available here. In hopes that he could inspire the Department of Transportation to use Native Plants along the newly built Interstate I-26, Dr. Fortesque donated 9,000 Azalea and Rhododendron plants which he had propagated and grown to planting size. Dr. Fortescue's plant legacy still lives on in a lot of gardens. I have several very nice plants in my garden that originated in his garden. President Brooks, Dr. Fortescue and Dr. Ernest Yelton invited a group of Northern Enthusiasts to visit the Asheville area during the blooming season to attend a meeting of the newly formed Southeastern Chapter. Dr. Fortescue who had acquired a great knowledge of the mountains and where to find the plants, put together a week of instructive tours. These tours took the group to most all of the known Balds in Western North Carolina and the Eastern Tennessee Mountains where they were able to view the Native Azaleas and Rhododendrons in all their glory.



Mid June 1957 Photo by: Dr. Fred Nisbet

Northern Visitors and Members of the ARS Southeastern Chapter at Biltmore Estate during a week long tour to inspect the Azaleas and Rhododendron's of the North Carolina Mountains

Standing:

Clarence Barbre, Mrs. Edmond Amateis, M.G. Coplen, Warren Baldsiefen, William Nicholas 'Nick' Fortescue, Jr., Lottie Markham Hundley Fortescue (wife of Dr. William Nicholas "Nick" Fortescue, Sr.), Mrs. Jane Pardee, David G. Leach.

Kneeling:

Lanny Pride, Lottie Hundley Fortescue (daughter of William Nicholas, Sr.) , Edmond Amateis, Joseph Gable, Sylvester Owens. Dr. William Nicholas 'Nick' Fortescue, Sr.