

Garden gave a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the gardens from its beginning during the Depression with the work of the WPA up through current happenings with the extensive azalea collections.

BEST IN SHOW 2011 note from Glenn Kauffman

I obtained the *R. keiskei* seed from the Potomac Valley Seed Exchange in 1979. I probably sowed the seed in late '79 or early '80. My records say 55 seedlings were set out in June of 1981. I'm sure this plant is the only survivor from that lot. I was growing many seed lots during that time. I don't have any information about the seed lot, as I haven't been able to locate the actual seed list. It has probably been in its current location, under the edge of a deck, for about 20 years. The plant is about 5' tall and nearly 8' in spread.



R. keiskei Photo by G. Kauffman

After two summers of extended dry periods, the plant is showing some stress as you may note in the picture. I really should take cuttings as the habit is very nice. The entry in the flower show was almost an afterthought as this plant and a Mary Fleming were the only rhodos or azaleas in bloom last week. I certainly didn't expect a Best in Show, but it was a very pleasant surprise.

I'm giving a 10-15 minute talk to the Master Gardener's class (which I'm taking) this evening. I'll try to introduce them to the native azaleas as much as I can, and to the work MAC is doing!

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Beck, Carolyn & Paul, 2963 Fort Lee St. Oak Hill,
VA 20171

Joseph Miller, 23730 Kingston Village Rd,
California, MD 20619



MAC group touring the Hermitage Museum grounds. Photo by W. Przypek.

THE LEGACY OF THE MID ATLANTIC MEN: *Dr. Thomas Wheeldon* by William F. Bedwell

Recently, Ken McDonald made some email comments that got me to writing this article about my memories of Dr. Thomas F. Weeldon, M.D. Ken wrote that our Middle Atlantic Chapter, which we now call MAC, began on "March 24, 1952. My Dad and Dr. Wheeldon joined ARS in late 1949 and were probably beginning to organize a chapter after that, but New York became the first actual chapter in 1951, so that was more likely the basis of starting a Middle Atlantic Chapter." Ken says prior to these first two chapters, ARS was an organization headquartered in Portland, OR.

It was in the summer-fall of 1969, that I mailed my check to Oregon to join the American Rhododendron Society; then I first visited the Wheeldon place, called Gladsgay Gardens, to buy some rhododendrons in early spring of 1970. I did not know that Dr. Wheeldon was a member, but I suspected he was. Later I found out that he organized the Middle Atlantic Chapter as the second chapter in the East, intending to cover the entire Middle Atlantic portion of the country. In response to an ad in the Richmond Times-Dispatch concerning rhododendrons for sale, I dialed the phone number, got Dr. Wheeldon's medical office, and the phone was answered by Mavis Haywood, who for many years did much of the secretary-treasurer-membership work for MAC and has remained a longtime MAC member though she now lives in Florida. When I said I must have the wrong number, Mavis Haywood quickly asked questions to find out that I was calling about rhododendrons. Immediately she connected me with Dr. Wheeldon and he chatted

a while and invited me to come to his house after work. I thought it was bizarre to be able to talk to a medical doctor that easily.

It turned out that Dr. Wheeldon's beautiful and huge garden bordered along the city bus route I used for four years when I was a student at the University of Richmond, but trees and hedges and walls screened it from view so I never knew it was there. The property is located a short walking distance from the university campus. When I was in college in the latter half of the 1950s, my aunt sent me a clipping from the *Washington Post* about that garden, saying it had the largest private collection of azaleas in the country at that time, but I did not try to find it and would have been too timid to try to visit such a secluded property in such a n i m p o s i n g neighborhood. Later I read an article by J.

Harold Clarke in the January 1954 *ARS Quarterly Bulletin* stating, "On the grounds of his beautiful home he [Wheeldon] has assembled over 1500 species and varieties of azaleas, probably the finest private collection in the United States, if not in the world." It went on to say he was adding rhododendrons with success.

I don't know who owns the property now but over the years since Mrs. Wheeldon sold it, one or two houses have been built in parts of the former garden, though glimpses from the street appear to show that nearby plants were spared. A few days ago, in mid-March 2011, I drove past that property on Three Chopt Road in Richmond and a giant camellia with a huge rounded top full of red flowers had grown up and over the screening and was on full display cascading down to the street. Some rhododendrons had grown up and over the hedge too but mid-March is too early for their flowers. I think Dr. Wheeldon had the Gable rhododendron, 'David', growing in that area near the driveway entrance. Just like years ago, you can barely see the house and property from the street except for those tall shrubs.

When I arrived late that afternoon, in the spring of 1970, I think, Dr. Wheeldon was outside near the parking area pruning a hedge of a narrow form of



Dr. Thomas Wheeldon.
Photo in collection of Ken McDonald.

Japanese Plum Yew (*Cephalotaxus harringtonia* 'Fastigiata'). Among his first words were, "I am not sure they should let a surgeon do pruning." I mentioned that I had recently joined ARS and he said he thought my name sounded familiar but I had given my Dinwiddie address when I joined ARS because that is where my garden is located. For that reason he did not associate me with Richmond since I told him I lived in Richmond when we spoke on the phone. Actually the place I was living in Richmond at that time was two blocks from his medical office and that was our chapter's official address, but I did not know that when I joined after learning the ARS address from an article by David Leach in a garden magazine. Dr. Wheeldon said he used to come to Dinwiddie years before to treat a man severely crippled with arthritis but there were not a lot of things that could be done in those days. By coincidence, the widow of that man lived two houses from my family home in Dinwiddie. There are many small world coincidences in all of this.

Dr. Wheeldon explained that he recently closed his nursery operation out in one of the counties and consolidated things at the house where he had been working for a year trying to restore functionality for one of his daughters who was in a severe accident. At his home nursery, Dr. Wheeldon would not sell less than three of a variety because that was a minimum wholesale quantity. Perhaps his home was not zoned for retail. He said that he preferred to buy twenty of a variety and try it in various locations instead of thinking he could not grow it because one of them died.

During a later visit, he took me to his greenhouses. I have read that he was a superb and innovative propagator of rhododendrons in the days before rooting hormones and tissue culture, and I know he was producing excellent plants. Rhododendrons were very expensive in those days, compared to today, because the success rate with propagation was poor, as I understand it. Dr. Wheeldon stressed extreme care in preventing diseases and he told me I must remove any chocolate and cigarettes from my pockets before entering his greenhouses because they carried viruses. The first year's growth on the cuttings had been pruned back to force branching, and he suggested pinching out the new growth buds again. He said he was growing good root systems instead of forcing large tops. Made sense to me. And his plants thrived for me.

During that first visit, Dr. Wheeldon showed me a large plant of *R. austrinum* that still had burlap around the roots. He said he and his helpers had to fight off snakes to get it, which he admitted was nutty. Later it was planted in a prominent spot in that large expanse of lawn from the front of the house and during our last chapter tour of the garden Harry Wise got some pollen from that plant. Harry said it was the finest specimen of *R. austrinum* that he had seen. That expanse of lawn led back to a gazebo at the far end of the property that came to a point. He took me back to the gazebo to show me how nutty he was (his words) because he had recently bought a large plant of one of the very large leaf rhododendrons from a nursery in Oregon and paid all that shipping cost. I could easily relate to that kind of nuttiness. Stories



Dr. Thomas Wheeldon in his garden. Photo by Kenneth McDonald (Sr)

like that made me feel I had chosen the right plant society! He introduced me to Mrs. Wheeldon whose name was Gladys, hence the garden name Gladsgay Gardens. They invited me to come back and tour as often as I wanted.

By then, the collection had grown to more than 2000 varieties of azaleas and rhododendrons with tens of thousands of plants. Many, many rare varieties then and even rarer today, if they exist at all. Most all of the Glenn Dale azaleas, the Beltsville Dwarfs and Wilson's Fifty, Chisholm-Merritt, Yerkes Pryor, and Gables, with Satsuki and Hirado azaleas, plus deciduous hybrids and species, and many others. And they had labels! A year or two later I began skipping lunch for weekly tours during flowering season to see the progression of flowers all the way

from early season to late season. The garden brought the books to life. I went back to the gazebo to check on that very large leaf rhododendron. It was not there. No surprise to me. I wonder how long it lasted.

It was most enjoyable talking with Dr. Wheeldon, or mostly listening to him because I wanted to learn, during this and subsequent visits to his garden. After he discovered I was a good listener and made comments showing my interest, he talked about many interesting scientific subjects as well as ARS. In that first visit, Dr. Wheeldon told me he had argued with ARS about the need to have some of their annual meetings in the east. Initially, the Middle Atlantic Chapter did cover the entire Middle Atlantic area south of New York, but soon other chapters were organized. In the meantime our chapter attracted such illustrious members as Joseph Gable, David Goheen Leach, Dr. Henry T. Skinner, Dr. Frederick O. Coe, George Ring, Fred Galle, and Frederick P. Lee, who wrote *The Azalea Book* with the expanded edition published in 1965, the year I began my azalea and rhododendron garden. That book was the basis for Fred Galle's major book, *Azaleas*, published in the 1980s. Galle communicated with Mrs. Wheeldon about the Bell Station azalea hybrids in gathering information for his book.

Another famous member of MAC was Henry Francis du Pont of Winterthur who hosted a garden party and other events at his famous mansion for the first ARS Annual Meeting in the east, held in 1962 as a cooperative effort of the Middle Atlantic and Philadelphia Chapters. Dr. Wheeldon pushed for that break with the ARS tradition of having all conventions in the Pacific Northwest; then he served as General Chairman of that very successful 18th Annual Meeting of ARS, held at Winterthur and Longwood Gardens, just eight years before I met him. People I met at the 1976 convention were still talking about that party in such a grand setting.

In another project, Dr. Wheeldon told me he did some work with the Dexter Committee whose members traveled to various estates and gardens that years earlier, probably after Dexter's death, had acquired young, un-named Dexter rhododendrons. The committee evaluated those Dexters, and selected the best for naming and propagation for distribution. This included the Dexter rhododendrons at Winterthur, which Dr. Wheeldon propagated to add to the collection on display at the Dexter estate, now



MAC members touring grounds of Hermitage Museum. Photo W. Przypek



Sharon Horn setting up Flower Show. Photo W. Przypek



Azalea display at Norfolk Botanical Garden. Photo S.McDonald



MAC members in tram at NBG. Photo W. Przypek



Shirley & Jay Gillenwater working on P4M. Photo W. Przypek



Hiking in NBG. Photo W. Przypek



Marcus Jones. Photo S.McDonald



Tony Avent. Photo W. Przypek



Outgoing President Celia Dollarhide & incoming President Lloyd Willis. Photo W. Przypek

called Heritage Museums and Gardens, located in the Town of Sandwich on Cape Cod. He registered one of them as ‘Ashes of Roses’, a confusing name because the color is not rose but a blend of yellows and cream. I bought one of the numbered Winterthur Dexters that became one of my favorites and I donated cuttings to MAC’s Plants for Members program. I saw the Dexter rhododendrons at Winterthur in the 1980s and they had developed into large beautiful specimens, but when I saw that area in the fall of 2009, most of them were dead, possibly from improper pruning since the remaining plants are much smaller.

Dr. Wheeldon also told me he was on the ARS rhododendron ratings committee and he had just returned from a meeting out west. As a new member, this really impressed me. He said he was arguing with them that the ratings were too much centered on how well rhododendrons performed in the Pacific Northwest with too little regard for the rest of the country. I think those ratings eventually died out because that controversy lingered for years to come and was never resolved to everyone’s satisfaction. I suspect the ratings were replaced by the Rhododendron of the Year designations for each of the more localized Districts, but in our own District 9 we cannot agree on how well they grow either. Our Chapter especially has a wide range of climates, soils, etc. so the argument goes on. And Dr. Wheeldon’s Middle Atlantic Chapter goes on.

Mrs. Wheeldon donated to the ARS archives in Alderman Library at the University of Virginia all of Dr. Wheeldon’s azalea and rhododendron records, papers, notes, and correspondence with the greats such as Joseph Gable, who wrote many letters to Dr. Wheeldon. I had an opportunity to read some letters, including one from Gable that accompanied his complete list of azalea cultivars that he introduced with comments about each. I think a copy of that list was used by the Gable study group led by members of the Potomac Valley Chapter. Gable’s cover letter said he was never going to type up that list again. Other letters were from Leach, Henry Francis du Pont, Henry Yates, and Edmond Amateis. Amateis was a rhododendron hybridizer of varieties still popular today, such as Dora Amateis, Professor Amateis and Dorothy Amateis, but he also was a noted sculptor. When I visited Mrs. Wheeldon in later years she showed me a bust done by Amateis of one of the Wheeldon daughters. When health

problems (arthritis?) forced Amateis to give up his work and move to a warmer climate, Dr. Wheeldon acquired a number of his yet unnamed rhododendrons and planted them in prominent spots in Gladsgay gardens, where I admired them in later years. There is correspondence with nurseries such as the Hobbie Nursery in Germany, Coleman Nursery in Georgia, on and on. And there are lists of plants that he acquired and notes on cultivation. There is a letter to Guy Nearing asking how to grow ‘Ramapo’ since all twenty of Wheeldon’s plants died. Many of us have had that problem with ‘Ramapo’.

Dr. Wheeldon died in 1976 at the age of 84 and was buried in Richmond’s very famous and beautiful Hollywood Cemetery. Sandra and Ken McDonald were among the MAC members who attended his funeral. I saw the Wheeldon monument a few years ago and was impressed that it has rhododendron trusses carved into the granite. Many other famous people are buried there, including Lewis Ginter for whom Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden was named, and Ginter’s niece, Grace Arents, who bequeathed her property and money to establish that Botanical Garden. Mrs. Wheeldon supported and worked on the efforts to make Grace Arents’ wishes become a reality despite opposition from other interests. The main complication was that the bequest was made to the city of Richmond, but the property is in Henrico County and the City already had a garden at Maymont. Since I lived in the city, she called me to write a letter to my Richmond City Council representative and to join her and others at a meeting of the Council to support of establishment of that garden. It was my first experience with that sort of thing and through a lot of work over a period of years we prevailed.

Dr. Wheeldon was honored with the ARS Gold Medal in 1973. Both Gladys J. Wheeldon, in 1980, and Mavis Haywood, in 2004, were honored with the ARS Bronze Medal from the Middle Atlantic Chapter. During the many of the years that Dr. Wheeldon was President, then Secretary-Treasurer of MAC, his secretary Mavis Haywood did much of the work as well as helping with chapter activities, projects, and meetings. In addition to her work on many of the chapter activities, flower shows, and meetings over the years, Mrs. Wheeldon made generous donations to our chapter projects and to chapter garden projects and supplemented some of the cost of our chapter’s 50th Anniversary Meeting in

Luray, Virginia, in 2002. She died January 16, 2007, and Ken and Sandra McDonald and I attended her funeral.

FROM THE MIDDLE OF MAC – by Jane McKay



The dogwoods are starting to fade though they put on a magnificent show as they do every year. I have between 30 and 35 dogwoods on my little over one acre property but the odd thing is that outside of my next door neighbor who has two barely over the property line, no one in the area has even one dogwood.

The weather here has been dry although we did get two tenths of an inch this past week. A lot of good that did especially since the temperature was 91 degrees F. the last time I looked at the thermometer.

I grew up in the outskirts of New York City on Long Island next door to my cousins. My cousin and I used to play on the property between the two houses. The only thing that marred our play area was a big bunch of ugly sticks that grew in the middle. Granted that in the summer leaves came out on the sticks followed by big blue balls called hydrangeas. I swore that if I ever had a garden of my own I would never have a hydrangea on it. I kept that promise up all those years until this year. I just purchased two small hydrangeas and may even buy one more. So much for promises.

The garden seems especially lovely this year, every day more azaleas and rhododendrons open. I do miss all the native Peggy and Charles McComb on Friday night.
w i l d Photo by W. Przypek.

flowers. The voles took care of those. I think the reason things look so good is that we did not have a late frost this year. I will stop rambling on now as a

I know Sandra has a good amount of articles besides my babbling.

DEATHS Although **Bob Furman** was not a MAC member, may of you knew him in connection with the Sandwich Club and tours of his garden in Massachusetts. Norman Beaudry sent the following announcement on April 21st:

As many of you already have heard, the rhododendron world lost one of its finest hybridizers last week when our friend Bob Furman suffered injuries from a freak garden accident that took his life last Sunday. He had been working with his gardener and very much looking forward to having everything



Bob Furman in his garden. Photo from Jon Wallenmeyer

ready for May garden visits. I have spoken with Bob's wife, Audrey, this week and she said Bob would have wanted all his ARS friends and Sandwich Club members to come to an informal garden tour and celebration of his life, so we have tentatively set the time to do that for Wednesday, May 25th at 10 AM.

Bob and Rosa McWhorter's daughter **Jennifer Marie McWhorter Thomas** lost her battle with melanoma cancer on April 25th. She and her husband Bryan had three children. Our deepest sympathy to the family.

Memberships and renewals should be sent to Jane McKay, Membership Chairman, 3 Cobb's Ct., Palmyra, VA 22963.

Annual membership dues are \$40 per year.

Miscellaneous inquiries may be sent to the editor (address below) for forwarding to proper individual.

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