

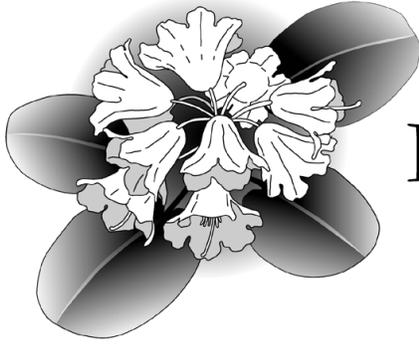
# AtlanticRhodo

[www.AtlanticRhodo.org](http://www.AtlanticRhodo.org)

Volume 45: Number 2

May 2021





# Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society

## Our Mission

ARHS supports and promotes the development and exchange of expertise and material relating to the creation and maintenance of year-round garden landscapes featuring rhododendrons and other plants.

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Photos in articles are by the authors, unless otherwise identified.

## Membership

### Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society.

The current membership period is September 1, 2020 to August 31, 2021. The membership fee is \$20.00 if paid between September 1, 2020 and November 30, 2020, and \$30.00 after Nov. 30, 2020. A membership form is included with this issue. For benefits and to download a membership form see ARHS website [www.atlanticrhodo.org](http://www.atlanticrhodo.org)

**American Rhododendron Society:** ARHS is a chapter in District 12 of the American Rhododendron Society.

Combined ARHS and ARS membership cost is \$74.00 Canadian. A membership form is included in this issue. For benefits and to download a membership form see [www.atlanticrhodo.org](http://www.atlanticrhodo.org)

Cheques, made payable to Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society, should be sent to **Rebecca Lancaster, 22 Walton Dr. Halifax, NS B3N 1E4**

*AtlanticRhodo* is the Newsletter of the Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society. We welcome your comments, suggestions, articles, photos and other material for publication. Send all material to the editor.

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Cover Photo: Rhododendron 'Walter Ostrom' [Photo Freeman Patterson.]



## Calendar of Events

The Nova Scotia Museum auditorium is not open this fall/winter season due to Covid 19 restrictions. We plan to hold meetings and deliver our programs via the Zoom platform until we are again able to meet in person.

- March 2 Zoom meeting. **2017 Expedition to North Vietnam** Steve Hootman, Executive Director and Curator of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, will present an illustrated talk about a two-week plant hunting trip to North Vietnam. Several plants new to science were identified.
- April 6 **A New Garden in Pereau** by Jamie Ellison, teacher, photographer, hybridizer, long-time member of our club, will present photographs and planting ideas from his new garden in Pereau. Not to be missed!
- May 4 A preview presentation by Zoom of what will be available for sale at the ARS 2021 convention plant sale. Join us and you'll get the inside track on choice rhodos, azaleas and companion plants on offer from Insigne Gardens, Rhodo-land Gardens, the Holden Forests and Gardens Research Station, and perhaps other growers. The members' plant sale, normally held in May, will be part of the ARS 2021 convention plant sale, coming this June (see below for more info).
- June 3-6 **The American Rhododendron Society 2021 Spring Convention**  
Please see the announcement in this issue for more information.  
Also see <https://ars2021.org> for information and online registration.

**Thank you for avoiding the use of perfumes and scented products when you come to ARHS events.**

### Membership Dues:

**Are your dues paid up to date?** Our records show that some members are not. If you are a local ARHS member please consider renewing as a dual member of both the ARHS and ARS (American Rhododendron Society). This gives access to the ARS Journal, a full colour magazine published quarterly, as well as access to the ARS seed exchange, ARS conventions, and other benefits. Please see page 2 for information on payment methods. And our website: <http://atlanticrhodo.org/about-us/membership-info/>. A membership form is included in this Newsletter.

### Welcome

**A very warm welcome to our new members who have joined ARHS since February.**

**Joe Brusio**

**Richard Dionne**

**Louise MacGillivray**

**Sean Rafferty**

**Hopkinton MA**

**Sutton, QC**

**Dartmouth, NS**

**Shirley, BC**

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## A Word from the Guest Editor

### Sheila Stevenson

While John Brett is making an excellent comeback from a serious stroke, Sterling Levy and I have put together this May 2021 *Atlantic Rhodo*.

My fb post that *R. dauricum* “Ruth Wainright” buds were showing colour one week ahead of the two previous years prompted the fond memoir from John Weagle that you will enjoy.

As we head into peak bloom time, we can get lots of practice in applying what Freeman Patterson is telling us, in his engaging and forthright way, to think about and do as we make our photos. Thank you, Freeman, for your great instruction. And for creating hope by sharing your deterrent experience with those who have no plants to photograph because of ‘deer!’

In 2020-21, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia mounted a retrospective exhibition of ceramic work by celebrated potter, Walter Ostrom: “Good Earth, the pots and passion of Walter Ostrom.” The essay “Not without a plant”, about Ostrom the plantsman, and his storied garden in Indian Harbour, was written for the legacy catalogue of the same name and reprinted here with the blessing of AGNS. More thanks to Freeman, for permission to use the Indian Harbour garden photos he made for the 1989 book, *In a Canadian Garden*, by Nicole Eaton and Hilary Weston -- which also work beautifully to illustrate the anonymous 1984 RSCAR newsletter article, “A Coastal Garden”, that specifies what Walter was growing in those rugged conditions.

On the eve of “Rhodos Down East”, as we revisit “Fifty Years of Hybridizing Rhododendrons and Azaleas in Nova Scotia”, you may find that Dr Craig speaks to the present and future, as well as to the past. We can offer this content, written by Dr Craig for the 2003 *Journal of the American Rhododendron Society* 20 years after retiring from the Kentville Research Station, thanks to Sterling and his ‘recovery’ work. Perhaps in a future issue we can have some comment and discussion in response to the fodder he provides in his piece. True to form, he did not pass up the chance to promote deciduous azaleas!

Meanwhile, send your well wishes to John at the N.S. Rehab Centre, 1341 Summer Street, Halifax, B3H 4K4, Room 723, or email [jbrett@eastlink.ca](mailto:jbrett@eastlink.ca)

And a happy bloom season to all!

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## **REGISTER NOW (if you haven’t already) for the American Rhododendron Society 2021 VIRTUAL CONVENTION: “RHODOS DOWN EAST: EXPLORING THE NORTH ATLANTIC REGION”**

**June 3-6, 2021. Thursday through Sunday**

Conference co-chairs, Jim Sharp and Rebecca Lancaster, were keen to see the ARS 2021 conference happen here in Nova Scotia and took on the work in 2019 for ARHS to be the host chapter. Amidst pandemic uncertainty with how to deliver this conference (so many plans have been shelved or altered) we now know that the wonderful presentations, garden tours, and discussion sessions will be virtual, so anyone with internet access can participate. We hope each of you will check out the details at <https://ars2021.org/> and follow the link to the EventBrite registration.

The Plant Sale will be more localized: plants from three growers will be available for pre-ordering and pick-up at their respective nurseries. These include Japanese maples and other trees from Dave Veinotte, Mahone Bay; woodland plants and rhodos from Ken Shannik’s Insigne Plants, Halifax; and an extensive collection of rhodos from the Holden Arboretum, as well as cuttings of plants from Nova Scotia gardens -- all grown by Jack Looye at his nursery on North Mountain, Kings County. The plant lists are available on the Convention website. ☘



## AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY 2021

### VIRTUAL CONVENTION

### ***RHODOS DOWN EAST: EXPLORING THE NORTH ATLANTIC REGION***

June 3-6, 2021

Virtual Convention from Nova Scotia

Hello District 12!

Both Regions have experienced marvelous Spring weather this year, with the exception of several spots that couldn't avoid frost kill. What a trying but giving hobby is this rhododendron pursuit!

And so it is with Conventions - here one year, gone the next. 2020 will forever be a missing year, which makes us doubly appreciate Atlantic Region stepping forward to host 2021. In-person or virtual, we'll take it! By the time the Convention opens most of us will be pretty well practiced with ZOOM technology, some of you with great finesse. So it won't be a shock to engage with the presentations from our sitting rooms with a snack or a beer in hand, or touring show gardens while we put up our feet.

**As I write, Convention Co-chair Jim Sharpe has just announced that Nova Scotia has "had a great increase in cases in the last week resulting in cancellation of all social gatherings, a lock down and travel restrictions. This has forced us to cancel the in person Convention, but the virtual Convention will proceed." Jim assures us that virtual registrations have done well and are expected to double in the coming weeks.**

Yes, we have prepared for this eventuality. Nonetheless, it is very disappointing, especially for local registrants who were well positioned to attend in person. We are doubly grateful to the Convention organizers for their ongoing efforts not merely to keep the Convention alive but making it the fabulous virtual event it promises to be. A milestone for ARS!

Check out the Convention site for the programs and events, sit back and enjoy: <https://ars2021.org>

As you may know, the ARS ~ Next Gen Program has initiated several projects that reach out to a younger cohort to engage them in activities of the ARS such as the Photo Competition, "Rhododendron Through Your Lens." Students, including High School entries, compete for cash prizes sponsored by Blue Sky Nursery, while all other non-student entries are recognized in a variety of ways. All photographs will be considered for inclusion in the NG Photo Library to use in the Program's future projects.

In the next three weeks the NG Program is hoping you will participate in two ways:

- Be a mentor:- get the message out, give a hand to Students of botany, photography...or High School. Help them connect their iPhones with a rhodo.
- contribute YOUR current, or previous years' photographs to the competition; consider all the fab photos you've posted on FaceBook or Twitter - they will have permanent purpose in the NG Library!

[https://www.rhododendron.org/next\\_gen\\_photocontest.htm](https://www.rhododendron.org/next_gen_photocontest.htm)

Next~Gen Program thanks you in advance!

When lockdowns cease, travel resumes, and virtual Convention attendees will have enjoyed abundant exposure to the delights of your beautiful region, you might just have an influx of visitors, anxious to experience in person!

So looking forward to *Rhodos Down East* and wishing you the very best for a hugely successful event,

**Christina Woodward, District Director, ARS District 12**

# How to Make Better Photographs of Your RHODODENDRONS

Freeman Patterson

Your rhododendrons have “lured” you to make photographs of them and they are hoping you will observe how they have done it.

Note that I say “make” photographs, not “take” them. There is a huge difference. When you take a picture you just point your camera or phone at the plant or blossom that attracted you, press the shutter release, and move on. If I were the plant or blossom, I’d feel really hurt. When you “make” a picture, you don’t just look, you observe. You treat the plant or blossom or garden bed with respect. You endeavour to make a picture that will truly convey the beauty of the subject matter to everybody who sees the image and give yourself a lovely memory.

Here are some illustrated guidelines, suggestions, and tips to help you.

**TOOLS:** You can make wonderful photographs with your phone and any camera, no matter how inexpensive. The creativity is in you, not in the tools. Without you, they’re nothing!

If you have a camera with interchangeable lenses, you have enormous capacity to make compelling images, but you can do wonders with a phone or basic camera, especially if you pay attention to its wide-angle capacity. A wide-angle lens is not only a way to include more in your composition from a close-up position, but it is the best tool you have for showing perspective, when you use it properly. (See the next two pictures.)



Notice that in both the horizontal and vertical compositions, I stood at a normal height, but tilted my camera down sharply. This accomplishes two things: 1/ it eliminates the sky, which is irrelevant in most pictures of rhodos and azaleas, and 2/ it includes foreground material that is not only important, but also appears large compared to plants at the top of the composition, thus creating a strong sense of perspective (distance on a flat surface.)

These days most lenses (including those on phones) have close-up capacity, so it’s easy to go from a wide-angle composition to a close-up. However, keep in mind that both of these extremes, plus in-between positions (focal lengths) are all useful. All too often photographers make only close-ups and provide no sense of the overall plant, bed, or garden. Showing close-up after close-up of trusses becomes boring, whereas providing context adds visual variety.

A polarizing filter or polarizer is extremely helpful when making pictures of rhodos, as it can remove or reduce the shiny reflections on leaves, especially when you are photographing in sunlight. It screws on the front of your lens and you rotate it as you look through your viewfinder to observe when it is most effective. Here are two comparison photos I made in a field of wild blueberries in autumn. In the second, I used a polarizer to eliminate the harsh highlights on the leaves and make the rich colours fully visible. When I'm photographing rhododendrons, I always have a polarizer on my lens, no matter what the lighting. (Readily available through Amazon.)



**LIGHTING:** Let me be frank! The worst time to photograph your rhododendrons is on a hot, sunny afternoon, especially if it's windy. The best and easiest time to photograph your garden, individual plants, and flowers is on an overcast day or in misty or slightly rainy conditions. Most of the photographs accompanying this article illustrate the point. Notice the absence of annoying "washed-out" highlights and solid black shadows.





When you are photographing an individual truss in bright sunlight, you can get rid of the harsh lighting by shading the bloom with your body or cap, and the background too if possible.

However, early and late in the day you can use sunlight very effectively, if you pay attention to its direction. Light coming from either side or from behind the plant or flowers can provide dramatic outlining of blossoms, for example. On clear days in June I begin photographing around 5:30 a.m. and rarely continue beyond 8:00 o'clock.





## COMPOSITION:

Although I could provide an all-day seminar on the elements of visual design (such as line, shape, perspective, and texture) and principles for arranging them in the picture space (such as balance, rhythm, proportion, and dominance), I'd like to make three key points.

- 1/ There are no rules of composition, only guidelines. Observe your subject matter carefully and use your best judgement.
- 2/ Learn how to abstract. This is critical! All it means is "strip the label off your subject matter" (say, a large rhodo truss or a garden path with flower beds on both sides) and see it as a shape (e.g., a circle, oval, or triangle) or as a line. Then you can make a sensible decision about how large or small you want it and where to place it. The following two compositions couldn't be simpler. Both contain an oblique line (of flowers) that divides the picture space into two dark, balancing triangles (shapes) of supporting space.
- 3/ When you are abstracting or seeing the design behind the labels, it's as easy to make excellent compositions of large areas as it is of close-ups. The size of the area is irrelevant.





The next two photographs illustrate the importance of shape and where shapes are placed. The first image contains two circular shapes (R. Eruption trusses) – a major motif and a minor motif. Notice that I've placed the larger shape in the upper right and the smaller in the lower left. Our eye (and mind) is naturally attracted to the larger shape, but the smaller one competes for attention and we move obliquely across the picture space to it, before being drawn back to the major motif.

This oblique movement across the space adds a subtle sense of life and growth that would be lacking if I had centred the two shapes top and bottom, creating an invisible vertical movement between them. Oblique movement always creates a sense of dynamic, thrust, or growth, whereas vertical and horizontal placement of lines (and movement between shapes) produces a feeling of stability, often of rest. Take care to create the feeling you want.



This next example contains one major shape, which has the potential for being very boring. However, I observed that in the light overcast the truss of R. 'Virginia Delp' was slightly brighter on the left side than on the right, so I swung my lens fractionally to the left to give more space on that side. This resulting imbalance creates a feeling of informality, whereas a central placement of the truss (large shape) would seem more formal and stiff.

However, large dark evergreens in the background were very distracting, so I turned them into supportive negative space by focusing exactly on the bloom and using a very shallow depth of field (i.e. f/3.5, f/4 approximately) to throw the background out of focus. (If you don't know the importance of depth of field and how to create a little or a lot, depending on what you want, ask a knowledgeable photographer to explain it for you or, very likely, you can find good instruction on line.)



Tone is even more important than colour (hue) in most colour compositions. Tone is simply the lightness or darkness of things – white and black being the two extremes with a long continuum of greys in between.

You would have found spots of white sky or very light leaves in the background of the above picture very annoying. So, I made tiny adjustments to my camera position to eliminate them. And, as I've already mentioned, the slight difference in tone between the left and right sides of the truss helped me decide where to locate the truss in my composition.

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To sum up, remember that both gardening and photography are mediums of visual expression. The pursuit of each can produce incredible personal rewards and satisfaction.

So, make your photographs as thoughtfully as you create your garden. When you are looking through your viewfinder, position the lines and shapes in the picture space carefully, eliminate annoying “hot spots” and big black holes, if you can, and make sure to check for distracting branches (lines) etc. that are poking in around the edges.

Not only does this care reduce or eliminate time you may have to spend making corrections later on your computer, but it shows you respect and care about the subject matter that “called” to you strongly enough for you to make a picture of it.



## Freeman Patterson reports early successes with deer-detering devices ...

April 9, 2021, Freeman wrote: I was watching the April 6 presentation by Jamie Ellison, when the matter of deer in gardens came up late in the meeting. So I'm writing about two deer-repelling devices that have been recently effective, in two different situations, to deter deer from eating plants and otherwise damaging gardens. Best, FREEMAN

On Shamber's Bluff, where I live in New Brunswick, there is a roaming deer herd that varies in number between 7 and 16 individuals. There are huge open fields nearby, plus the woodland of the nature reserve. The deer are not as habituated to people as in more settled areas. However, they can be a problem for me in the winter months, when the fields are usually covered with snow. They love the flower buds of rhododendrons and azaleas. Because I have no close neighbours, I have generally been successful at deterring them in winter by playing three different radios, in widely-separated locations, from late afternoon to dawn, when my two dogs are indoors. However, not always, and power failures are also possible.

For me, the effective solution has been PREDATOR EYE, made by the Canadian company Aspectek. The device is tiny, inexpensive, solar-powered, and has an effective range of 453 metres or 500 yards. I cover my entire 3½ acres of rhodos with six (total cost about \$120 or two for \$36, via Amazon) There are two models at the same price. One has one eye and a very long battery life – the sun always powers it up. The other has two eyes and a shorter battery life (a potential problem after two weeks of cloud), but both are fully effective for me. Mine have been in use for three months. No deer!

Jean and Rob Northrup of nearby Hampton (who supply me with all my horse manure compost) have some potentially nice flower gardens near their house that have been decimated in recent years by deer. The deer are so habituated that they eat from under the bird feeders, strip all the shrubs, including roses, and sleep near the house. One can usually

see one or more deer around at any time of day. I was positive that 'Predator Eye' would not repel deer so totally habituated to humans. So, I suggested the other Aspectek deer repelling-device, YARD SENTINEL. It is motion activated, both sonic and supersonic, can be set to continuous operation or to specifically chosen hours. Volume, range, etc. are adjustable. It operates by being plugged into an electrical outlet or with four C batteries, automatically switching to them when there's a power outage.

For highly habituated deer this device is "goodbye Charlie!" Being birders, the Northrups set the device for night-time operation. The first night, Jean watched a line of deer approaching through the snow and, at about 40 feet, the lead deer triggered the alarm – a sonic burst of five seconds-- and they all fled instantly. The following night at three a.m., Rob was up and happened to be looking out the bedroom window when four deer approached very, very tentatively. At the critical point, the alarm went off. Rob remarked that jet planes don't take off as fast. More than two months have passed since a deer has appeared – night or day! After a decade of living in a deer yard, the Northrups are looking forward to gardening again. All their relatives have since installed the YARD SENTINEL as well.

1/ Both devices are tiny: Predator Eye is 7.5 cm by 7.8 cm. and Yard Sentinel slightly larger. They hang easily on a tree, post, etc.

2/ Dogs seem not to be affected negatively by Yard Sentinel sound; the Northrups have five dogs and none regards the sonic or supersonic sound as coming from a predator.

3/ Pay no attention to the reviews on Amazon, some of which are critical. I hesitated myself before concluding that in all likelihood the products do what they are designed to do, but some people are careless in how or where they hang these little lightweight devices and then blame the devices, rather than their own lack of care. ☞



Sheila Stevenson stands at the gate of the newly constructed fence that surrounds her Fergusons Cove gardens Monday. She says the local deer population has gotten out of control and needed the fences to protect her property and plants from the hungry animals. TIM KROCHAK PHOTO. For story see <https://www.saltwire.com/halifax/news/local/plentiful-deer-a-public-health-and-safety-threat>.

# Not without a plant

Sheila Stevenson

Garden Photos by Freeman Patterson



Pots de Fleurs

Walter Ostrom

The Art Gallery  
Mount Saint Vincent University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

May 14 - June 6, 1976

His April 1976 exhibition, “Pots de Fleur”, presented Walter Ostrom not only as a potter but as a gardener and plant enthusiast. Inside a lath house, built by Walter’s father, and installed in the Art Gallery at Mount Saint Vincent University, colourful camelias and azaleas in fine earthenware and terra sigillata flower pots offered visitors a spirit-lifting experience. The message then: the pot is not complete without a plant.

When Walter came to NSCAD and began a career in clay, he acquired a property on the rugged Atlantic coast in Indian Harbour, the village next to Peggy’s Cove. It would be the ground for his horticultural projects. While ‘ground’ to an artist is something like gesso applied to canvas, or slip on raw clay, ‘ground’ to a gardener starts with the soil on the earth’s surface - generally a mix of clay, sand, and organic matter.

Soil composition is variable: geology, weather, location, cultural history can all have a hand in the mix-making.

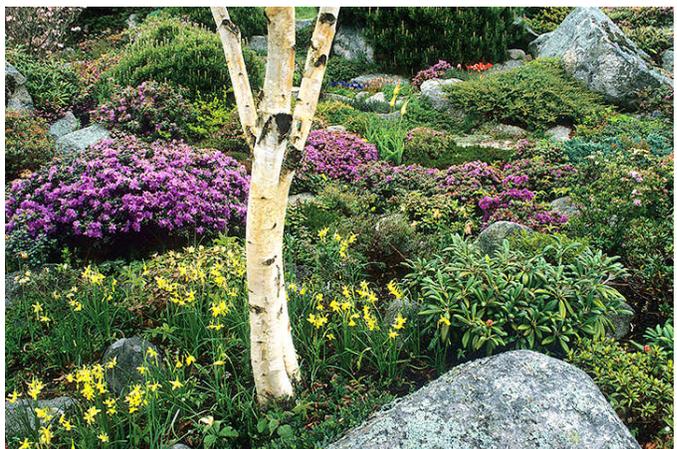
The soil at Indian Harbour is acidic, the native plants – mostly in the Ericaceae family -- are acid-tolerant, and a bog runs across the property. The climactic conditions include fog, rain, sun, wind from every direction, snow, ice, and seemingly-endless freeze-thaw cycles. The local practice to burn the ground every spring meant there was no plant higher than your knee on the site when Walter moved there.

Walter had been gardening in southern Ohio and was plant-attuned before coming to Nova Scotia. As he tells it, “When I got here I was seeing sheets of *Cornus canadensis*, and junipers by the mile rather than by the bush. I loved the landscape”. “Indian Harbour was”, he says “an exotic floral playhouse. So much new. What was growing there was unfamiliar.”

Out one day with the Halifax Field Naturalists’, he remembers meeting up with “killer stuff”, like *Kalmia polifolia*, *K. angustifolia*, and *Rhodora* -- the native rhododendron species, *R. canadense*. “Soooo exotic”, he says. “I had no idea. Who KNEW there was a rhodie here?”

As Walter came to know the native species and their genera, and to understand the nature of his floral playground, the questions were, “WHAT IF I bring relatives of the natives to Indian Harbour? WHICH ONES have the best chance of being successful?”

He had learned something from his attempt to plant a wind break with 300 Japanese black pines. A coastal tree native to Japan and South Korea, adapted to wind and salt, *Pinus thunbergii* should have done well in Indian Harbour. Except it was not adapted to ice and snow, and only 30 survivors made it.



However, the rhododendron that had captured Walter's attention, *R. canadense*, has a thousand-plus relatives around the planet, ranging from tiny shrubs to towering trees. Many thrive in conditions similar to the zone 6b coastal environment at Indian Harbour. While bloom colour and truss form can be desirable, what's most enchanting about these plants is the foliage. Many are evergreen, and variations in leaf size, shape, texture, and colour make them very attractive to the northern gardener who wants to enliven the deciduous winter landscape. Which is what Walter wanted to do, and consequently achieved with inspiring success in Indian Harbour.

When he asked the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) for information, they told him, "You have a rhododendron expert in Nova Scotia. His name is Richard Steele." Referred to as 'Captain Rhododendron' by CBC radio host, Peter Gzowski, retired navy officer Captain Richard Steele was one of an international network of amateur and professional plant breeders and growers, an active contributor to the rhododendron breeding program (1957-82) at the Agriculture Canada Kentville Research Station.

Walter remembers what he calls "the walking-around drill at Halls Rd", in those early days when Captain Steele was living near Halifax amongst the rhododendrons he had planted on his and his neighbours' properties. As Walter recalls, "He would tell me stories about where he got the plant, the Latin name for each of the species plants, and those of the species parents for the hybrid plants – it was plant genealogy. Then he'd quiz me. I was terrified."

The Captain, as Walter calls him, was a founding member in 1972 of the Ontario-based Rhododendron Society of Canada (RSC). The purpose: to share knowledge and plants, and to promote public interest in the genus through shows, sales, and seed exchanges. In 1976, the Rhododendron Society of Canada Atlantic Region (RSCAR) was formed by a number of local enthusiasts. RSCAR meetings were an opportunity to revel in plant images and immerse in plant talk and botanical Latin.

With Steele as his mentor, Walter began his search for great garden plants -- seeking out seeds, pollen, cuttings, and fellow plant enthusiasts; propagating, cultivating, sharing, doing all a horticulturist can; planting native and non-native

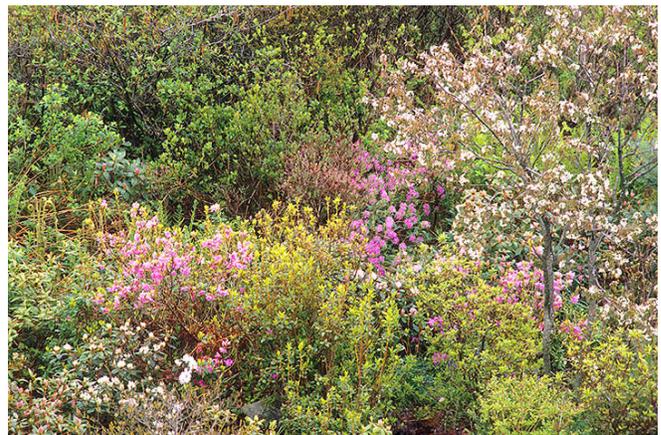
plants -- species and those with mixed parentage; all the while observing, assessing, selecting; and creating the garden that attracted writers, photographers, and fellow gardeners.

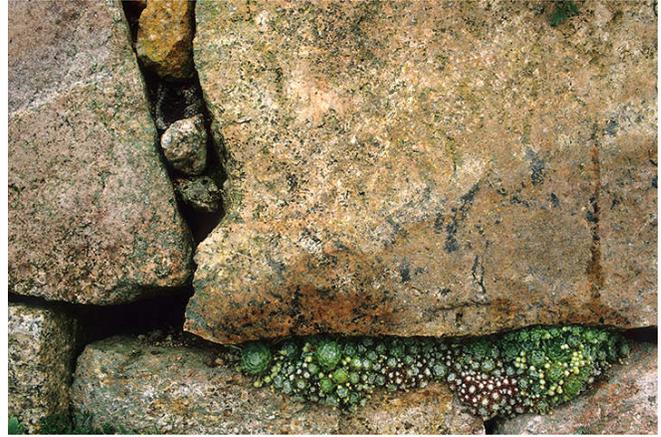
Wherever Walter went on ceramics business, he made sure to have a plant day. While on a teaching gig at Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, Walter took 600 cuttings from 50+ rhododendron species plants quarantined at UBC en route to the USA from the UK, and brought them back for Captain Steele to root and grow on. Dwarf lepidotes in the lot, among them *R. scintillans* and *R. orthocladum*, turned out to be very happy in the Indian Harbour environment.

Walter's approach in his ceramic practice, of drawing on elements from a range of sources and mixing things up, has been described as "hybridizing" by ceramic artist and teacher, John Gill. In the plant world, the term describes the process of interbreeding between individuals of different species, or between genetically-divergent individuals from the same species. The goal is to produce a plant with the desirable characteristics of the parents (e.g. the beguiling round leaf of a tender (not hardy) parent with the hardiness of the other parent, as in the Kentville hybrid, *R. "Minas Grand Pre"*.) While Walter has done some plant hybridizing -- the yellow-flowered *R. "Indian Harbour"* is his first to be registered with the Royal Horticultural Society – his interest has been in species and their variants. For him, it's "the purity, the essence of a plant -- before it is sent to the hairdresser for colour and a perm".

As plantsman or potter, Walter says, "It's a way of thinking. Let's put this together to see what happens. But it's not an uninformed approach. You have to work from some knowledge." He attributes this propensity to ask, "What if?", to his interest in both science and history and what has endured from what others before him have done. Prior to being a potter, he was a chemist. Studying properties, mixing things up, observing what happens is what chemists do. No surprise that he would wonder such things as "What if I change the figure ground on this pot?" or "What if I cross species x with this one?"

When asked "What is gardening for you?", Walter is quick to say, "It's the growing. It's making soil - WONDERFUL





soil, planting seeds, knowing they are growing in the best ground I can produce; the growing on -- ALL of it.”

As he reflects further, he adds, “I was teaching at the most intense, demanding art school/asylum in North America. On the hour-long drive home. I’d switch my brain to Garden Fantasy Land, planning in detail about soil and compost - how deep, how much, in which garden bed ... scheming about making good ground and planting would put me to sleep at night.”

The move to Lunenburg from Indian Harbour in 2007 meant leaving that ground and garden to others. But the plant attraction for Walter has not abated, with new gardens underway in Lunenburg and Merida, Mexico. It seems he has always had his hands in the earth, more often than not with real or imagined plants somewhere in the mix.

The message now is that the potter is not complete without the plants.

A personal note: While on a ramble through the in-situ Rhododendron Garden in the Thrumshingla pass in Bhutan in 2010, Stephen Archibald and I met two Swedes. When we introduced ourselves as being from Nova Scotia, their response was to ask: “Do you know John Weagle? Do you know Walter Ostrom?” Not that we thought to say so at that surreal moment, but we should have said that Walter was the reason we were on that trip to look at Himalayan species rhododendrons in their natural settings. Twenty years earlier, at Walter’s urging, we had joined RSCAR. Subsequently we are among the gardeners who have benefited whenever Walter said, “That’s a dynamite plant. You HAVE to have that plant.” ☺

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>*Good Earth: the pots and passion of Walter Ostrom*. Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and Goose Lane Editions. 2021. 176 pages.

<sup>2</sup>A plant’s proper name, used to accurately and universally identify species, is unique, in Latin, and in two parts. Each binomial contains a genus name (or generic name) and a species name (also called specific name or specific epithet). The genus name is always capitalized and is written first; the specific epithet follows the genus name, is never capitalized, but is italicized. i.e. *Cornus canadensis*. (common name: spreading dogwood). A cultivar name for a hybrid plant is in quotation marks. The genus name may be abbreviated to its first letter once the full name has been used, i.e. *C. canadensis*

<sup>3</sup>in conversations with Walter Ostrom, 5 September and 25 September, 2019.

<sup>4</sup>ibid

<sup>5</sup>ibid

<sup>6</sup>ibid

<sup>7</sup>ibid

<sup>8</sup>Lepidote rhododendrons have scales on the underside of the leaf which protect the leaf pores. Elepidotes, on the other hand, have no scales covering the stomata.

<sup>9</sup>in conversations with Walter Ostrom, 5 September and 25 September, 2019.

<sup>10</sup>ibid

<sup>11</sup>ibid

<sup>12</sup>ibid

<sup>13</sup>Life-long Haligonian, plantsman, founding RSCAR member, and Walter’s contemporary. See

<https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/v55n2/v55n2-weagle.htm>

## Some Ceramic Work by Walter Ostrom, featured in the exhibition *Good Earth the pots and passion of Walter Ostrom.*

Art Gallery of Nova Scotia October 2020 to March 2021 with a catalogue/book of the same name, 2021. AGNS and Goose Lane Editions

Photo credit: John Brett



Dessert Plates in the shape of a petal, a Song dynasty (960- 1279) specialty. Earthenware, press moulded, maiolica.



Flower Bricks. Earthenware, wheel-thrown, altered and constructed, maiolica with resist.



Tiles with assorted glazes.



Flower Bricks. Earthenware, wheel-thrown, altered and constructed, maiolica with resist.



Dessert plate with Rhododendron pistils and stamens, loosely rendered.



Vase in the shape of a basket.

## Coastal Gardening

*Editor's Note:*

The anonymous piece, *Coastal Gardening*, was written for American readers (viz. Fahrenheit) by someone fluent in the language. We learn very specifically (pun intended) what Walter Ostrom was growing in his Indian Harbour garden in 1985. I came across it only days ago, in an early RSCAR Newsletter, and wished I had known about it when I was writing the piece elsewhere in this issue about Walter's plant and garden passions for the AGNS catalogue, *Good Earth*. Thanks to Sterling Levy for typing it.

Close to Peggy's Cove on Nova Scotia's South coast, there is an area of about 25 sq. miles, which vaguely resembles the moon. Here the glaciers scraped the earth bare, leaving sheets of exposed granite and scattered huge boulders. Being virtually treeless, it bears the full brunt of the Atlantic's salty winds. Fog abounds and any snow is blown away. Yet, nearby at Indian Harbour, Walter Ostrom has one of the nicest ericaceous gardens anywhere in the Northeast.

Temperatures are seldom over 72° F in the summer and rarely under 5° F in the winter (0°F being the lowest. Plants are situated on lee slopes or in depressions out of the full force of the wind and planted in rock crevices as soil is virtually non-existent.

Of the lepidotes, *R. yakusimanum* grows to perfection - beautiful tight mounds. Walter has grown *yakusimanum* from many seed sources and has some dwarf/slow growing forms. One, 'Bumblebee', from Japan, the slowest of all. 'Catalgla', *R. catawbiense compactum* and various *R. brachycarpum* also do well with some wind protection. From ARS seed, there are a few interesting species in the lath house: *R. rex ssp. Fictolacteam*, *R. campanulatum* (Tower Court), *R. galactinum*, *R. caloxanthum* (Grieg) and *R. clementinae* (Cox). Perhaps these are hardy survivors from many seedlings since weeded out by cold.

Of the azaleas, *R. canadense* is native and abounds; *R. vaseyi* does well even in the wind, while in the obtusums (or evergreen azaleas), those low growers with *R. nakaharai* genes have been quite successful. *R. kiusianum* grows beautifully in twiggy sheets almost enjoying the wind as much as the yaks. 'Mt Fuji' is an excellent form. *R. camtschaticum* grows just as well and causes a traffic jam in the spring when this broad two inch mat bursts into bloom.

When we consider the lepidotes, the possibilities explode as a note from W. Ostrom indicates....

Growing rhododendrons from seed and cuttings add an extra bit of excitement to each spring. Some plants that bloomed this spring (83) from cuttings collected on the West Coast during the summer of 1979 include: *R. intricatum*, *R. keleticum* (Cox), *R. radicans* (Cox), *R. radicans* (Dr. Rock), *R. radicans* (Hayden), *R. orthocladum* (Knightshaeps), *R. drummonium* (James), *R. lepidotum elaeagnoides*, *R. lysolepsis*, *R. rupicola* (Wisley), *R. kiusianum* 'Mt Fuji', 'Russatini', 'Bob's Blue', 'Ptarmigan', 'Cream Crest', and 'Princess Anne'. ☿

**R. 'Indian Harbour'** Walter Ostrom's hybrid (*R. brachycarpum* x *R. aureum*) x *R. campylocarpum ssp. caloxanthum*,  
Registered by Jamie Ellison

April 8, 2021 from Carol Dancer, Victoria BC: " Weather here remains chilly but is suppose to warm up next week. R.' Indian Harbour' is in full bloom, covered in flowers. So glad I convinced Walter to name it, and Jamie to do all the registering."



[Photo Carol Dancer]



May 14, 2021 from Jamie Ellison, blooming at Pereau.

## The first blooms of *R dauricum* 'Ruth Wainright' trigger memories ...

John Weagle - Context by Sheila Stevenson

On April 7, Sheila Stevenson posted a photo on the ARHS Facebook page of *Rhododendron dauricum* 'Ruth Wainright' showing colour, with the note, "one week earlier than in 2020 and 2019". John Weagle commented, "Two weeks earlier than the original at Ruth's. Hers faces south but with filtered light through pines and a hemlock. She and I planted it in the mid '70s and have never seen it touched by frost. The plant was grown by Walter Ostrom from seed collected wild in Hokkaido. I named it for her in the late '80s."

Then John posted this photo:



Ruth Wainwright (left) with Aileen Meagher. Both painters, avid gardeners, and former society members. How I miss them!

Subsequently he wrote this:

Both were RSCAR members. Aileen Meagher lived on Seymour Street (2 blocks away from me). She was a beloved art teacher at St. Mary's Boys' School on Grafton St., Olympic medalist at the 1936 Berlin games, and a world traveller. She was a very colourful woman - always wore linen in wild tropical Gaugin colours, often with her own hand-painted floral patterns. She had a gravelly voice due to her frequent tobacco habit and loved a good Scotch. She'd drop everything with the mention of a garden tour -- especially one to Walter & Elaine Ostrom's in Indian Harbour -- or an outing to the wilds or a garden centre. There were daily walks in Point Pleasant Park and memorable car rides with her at the wheel, her largish hound frantically jumping from front seat to rear, Aileen oblivious while puffing away.

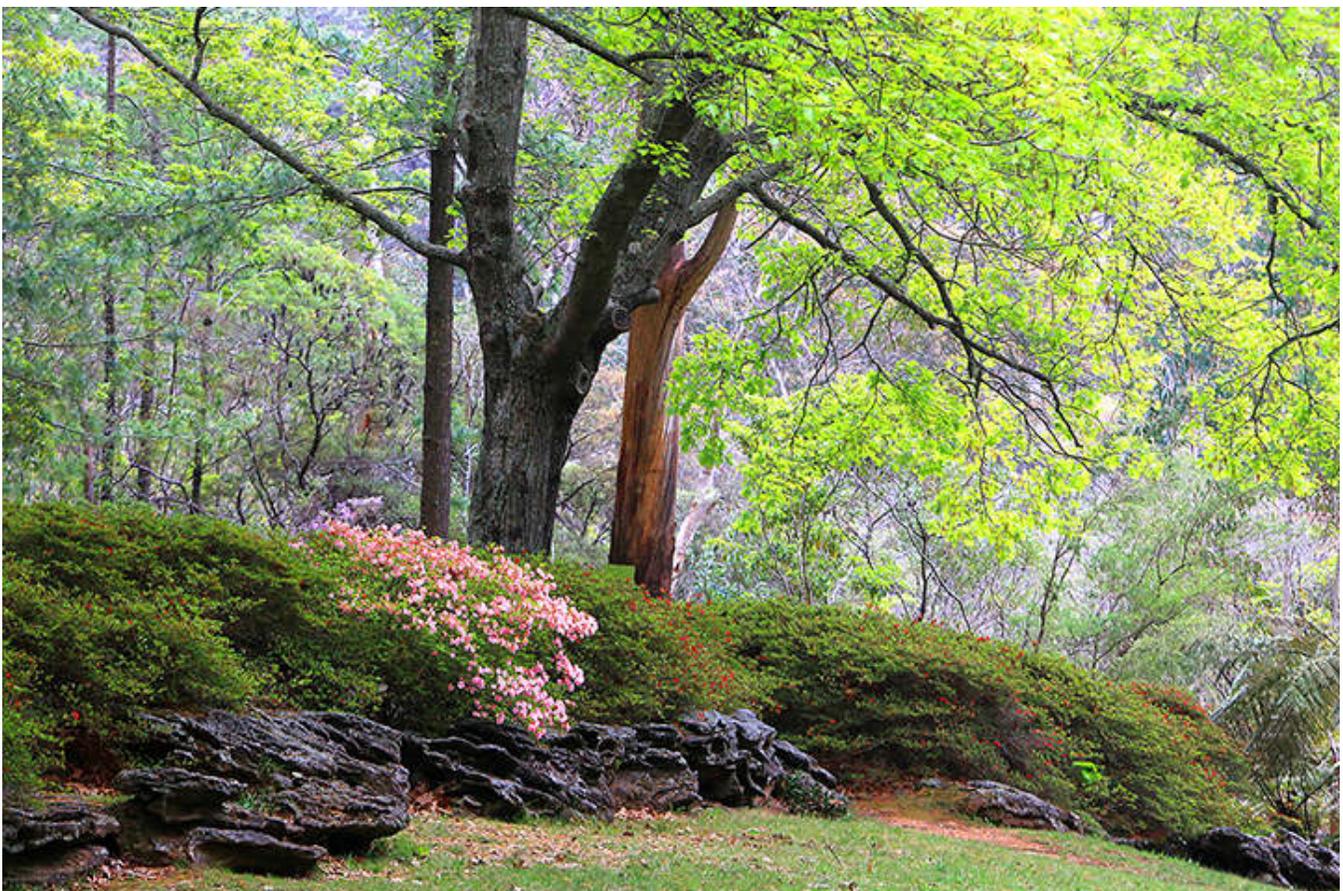
Her sidewalk bay window was the talk of the town as she had a different exquisite flower arrangement in it every few days -- she had an unending arsenal of forced bulbs, branches, potted rhodos, autumnal branches, etc. that seemed to come from nowhere, enough to round out the year. Everyone (students and the general public alike) stopped to admire. Friends would ask, "Have you been past Aileen's (or that brown house with the orange door) today?" Her specialty was a cottage garden with exotics tossed in for good measure. She threw memorable dinner parties and her own birthday parties. Her Christmas tree was always special, as was the nativity scene under the bay window. She left her house and garden to Dal. Dal destroyed the garden and made a parking lot a few years later - a lesson to be learned there. The house remains but the magic that was Aileen is gone.

Ruth Wainright, her very close friend, was more the aged Garbo type. A concert harpist, she played with the local CBC Orchestra. She and I spoke on the phone every night -- deeply into serious horticultural matters, her art and music, frequented gardens (especially the Ostrom's with Aileen), garden centres far and wide. Steele's Bayport Plant Farm was a regular stop. Her postman was Art Beach, likely Nova Scotia's first true rock gardener but that's another story.

Ruth was an inspiration for me; her Halifax garden boggled my mind, as she grew things that were thought rare at the time and far too tender for Halifax - Pieris, evergreen cherry laurel, rare rhodos like 'Blue Tit', 'Goldsworth Yellow', 'Blue Peter', Magnolia *sieboldii*, Thujopsis *dolabrata*, Primula spp. galore, Paxistima, Daphnes, Kalmias, Lilium spp. and countless fern spp.

Many rare plants came from times in the '40s & '50s when she and Aileen studied painting on Long Island and Provincetown with the artist Hans Hoffman, friend of Braque and Picasso. Hoffman came to stay with Ruth one time, and helped her with her garden. He went to an upstairs window overlooking the garden and told her to lay out a hose to define the beds she had in mind. He was floored by her sense of design when she did this. Aside from slight changes to allow a lawn mower to flow smoothly along the broad curves, she had followed his dictum to "Never have incurving or out-curving beds oppose one another." The bones of the garden and her presence there are still strong 80 years later; Ken Shannik is her daughter's gardener.

Both were energetic women who gave so much artistically and horticulturally to this province. Both made paintings and drawings of early 1900s streetscapes, fishing villages, farms, and life in this province and beyond. When they both died in the mid-1980s I was dumbfounded at their ages. It was hard to keep up with these two. ☐



An azalea planting about to burst into bloom. October 2018, New South Wales, Australia. [Photo Freeman Patterson]

# FIFTY YEARS OF TESTING AND BREEDING RHODODENDRONS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Donald L. Craig

## Centreville, Nova Scotia, Canada

A permanent printed record of the history of the Kentville Research Station's rhododendron breeding programme does not exist. As I am the only one that has the information, I hope that this article will document its beginning in 1952 and step by step development up to my retirement in 1983. Over time our project revealed much new information about the diversity of the genus *Rhododendron* - its forms, habits, adaptability, and great spectrum of colour. The endorsement of our work by the public and media was a source of inspiration. I hope that this report will be useful to the home gardener and anyone contemplating a similar programme, be it large or small. John Weagle's very generous contribution to the organization and presentation of this article is acknowledged with sincere thanks. - - - Don L. Craig

Nova Scotia is a 544 km. long, 80 km. wide peninsula between the 43rd and 47th degree north latitudes. It is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean and barely joined to New Brunswick and the rest of North America by a narrow isthmus. Kentville is located in the agriculturally rich Annapolis Valley, which is approximately 100 km. long and 16 km. wide. The south and north mountains running west to east protect the Valley, creating a pocket where tree fruits, berry crops, and ornamentals thrive. The Bay of Fundy, 16 km. to the north, modifies the climate. Halifax, the provincial capital, is 107 km. east of Kentville on the Atlantic coast and has quite a different climate.

The Valley is in Plant Hardiness Zone 5b; the extreme western end of Nova Scotia and much of the coast Zone 6a; southern coastal area 6b (with a few parts perhaps even 7a or better), and the interior 5a. Weather data for Kentville for a 10-year period shows a minimum low of -23°C (-9°F), which occurred once in December, -24°C (-11°F) once in January, -27°C (-17°F) once in February and -20°C (-4°F) once in March. Winter temperatures can fluctuate from a low of -18°C (0°F) to above freezing in a 24-hour period. The climate is strictly maritime - snow, rain, wind, frost, and moderate temperatures which can shift rapidly in winter. The Valley is considerably hotter and drier than coastal areas but can boast good deep soil.

## The Beginning

In the beginning there were no plans to do anything more than make the vista more presentable when approaching the Kentville Research Station building complex. The approach to this view was over a pond and its large weeping willow. The banking behind the pond faces north, forming a semi-amphitheater some 30 meters high and 120 meters long. The banking was a mess of brambles and weed trees which when removed brought order out of chaos. The only gem was an old but small planting of "iron-clad" rhododendrons (probably planted around 1920). They had grown well so the obvious thing was to plant more. Thus the search for plant material and knowledge had begun. We were starting from scratch.

## Securing Plants

The first attempt to secure plants occurred in November 1952 when I took 200 cuttings from the Station's "iron-clads", and to my surprise most of them rooted. In due time a listing of rhododendron species seed, available from the Sweden's Gothenburg Botanical Garden, came to my attention. At this point, it dawned on me that this could serve as a starting point for a collection of species and cultivars. In April 1953 we received seed of species from B. Lindquist at Gothenburg who had just returned from Northern Japan, this thanks to our connection with Dr. I. Granhall at the Balsgard Fruit Institute in Fjllkestad, Sweden.

Presumably a few were collected in Northern Japan: *R. concinnum*, *fargesii* [now *R. oreodoxa* var. *fargesii*], *fauriei* [*R. brachycarpum* ssp. *fauriei*], *fauriei* var. *rufescens* (now *R. brachycarpum* ssp. *brachycarpum*), *ferrugineum*, *flavum* [now *R. aureum*], *hippophaeoides*, *hirsutum*, *insigne*, *intermedium*, *longesquamatum*, *luteum*, *ponticum*, *schlippenbachii*, *searsiae*, *smirnowii*, *tschonokii*, *vaseyi*, and *viscosum* (as well as a *R. catawbiense* hybrid, *Gladiolus primulinus*, *G. palustris* and *Chrysanthemum cinerifolium*). And so we proceeded to produce plants. In terms of winter survival and plant quality *R. fauriei* and *R. schlippenbachii* were by far the best performers. Summer heat was a limiting factor for some, while winter cold probably got the others.

From then on we made many contacts for plants and information. The search extended to four nurseries on the U.S. West Coast, including Greer Gardens in Eugene, Oregon, and Van Veen's and Bovee's Nurseries in Portland, Oregon. On the East Coast we procured plants from Shamarello & Sons, Euclid, Ohio, Warren Baldisieffen in New Jersey, Tingle Nursery in Maryland, and David Leach in Pennsylvania. In England the Knaphill Nursery in Surrey, and the Goldsworth Nursery in Woking supplied material. In Sweden the Gothenburg Botanical Garden and in Canada, the Woodland Nursery, Mississauga, Ontario, and later, Bayport Plant Farm in Nova Scotia topped off the collection. The core of the Research Station's plantings came from these sources and, with the exception of most of the species from Sweden, the survival rate and plant performance of most plants from these sources was very satisfactory. By 1955, 42 beds had been prepared and planted, by 1957, 545 rhododendrons and azaleas were in permanent positions, and by 1975, 50 beds contained 1,000 rhododendrons and azaleas.

## My Position

My position at the Research Station was that of a research scientist heading up the "Crop Section," which included ornamentals. My specific task was to develop a research programme for berry crops. Two years of graduate studies at the University of New Hampshire provided an opportunity to specialize in plant breeding. I am still involved in plant breeding as a hobby.

## Why a Programme

Once involved with the initial Kentville rhododendron plantings, I had an opportunity over time to visit many of the worldfamous rhododendron gardens. My journeys took me from Seleger's Moor in Adliswil, Switzerland, to the Dunedin Botanical Garden in New Zealand. Points in between included Kew, Exbury, Great Windsor Park, Savill, Wisley, and Stourhead -- all in England. A transfer to the Scottish Horticultural Research Institute in Dundee in 1963, for a year's doctorate work, enabled me to roam at will from the Cox garden at Glencarse to Inverewe in the northwest with Brodick Castle, Crathes, and Sherriffs in between. Of course the Edinburgh Botanical Garden was revisited several times. The Bodnant Garden in Wales was wonderful. In the United States my visits included numerous East Coast, West Coast, and Virginia gardens. In Canada, Vineland, Ontario and British Columbia beckoned me several times. I pursued the Kentville programme because I wanted others to see and learn about these wonderful plants that I was privileged to see in so many of the world's best gardens. Each garden visited was an invitation for me to come back to Kentville and attempt to improve the plantings. Sufficient money and labour were in the end critical factors that could not be overcome.

## George Swain

The rhododendron programme initiated in 1952 was nicely underway when the late George Swain joined the Station's staff in 1957. It was his gift of plant knowledge and landscaping that was mainly responsible for the numerous plantings, which became the Station's showpieces. The collaborative breeding of Swain and Craig produced 14 cultivars. Swain resigned in 1967, the year of the Station's first Rhododendron Sunday. The rhododendron project reverted to my care and the tradition of having a Rhododendron Sunday has continued. A conservative estimate of the number of people that viewed the plantings from 1967 to 1983 was in excess of 100,000. The success of the Station in determining the adaptability and suitability of many rhododendron cultivars and species was a factor in the decision made in 1972 to form the Rhododendron Society of Canada. By 1977 the Atlantic Chapter was formed by founding members Barbara Hall, Aileen Meagher, Walter Ostrom, Dick Steele, George Swain, John Weagle and myself and now numbers well over 200 members.



George Swain with 1958 Kentville crosses.  
Photo by Dick Steele in 1966

Rhododendron Sunday created a surge in rhododendron plantings about the province. If success can be measured in awards, there can be no doubt about the achievements of the Station which prior to my retirement in 1983 accumulated 16 major and 200 first, second, and third class ribbons at national and regional flower shows. The popularity of rhododendrons in the province still climbs to this day and the wide range of cultivars available in the province is astounding.

## Dick Steele

For many years Dick Steele, acknowledged as Canada's foremost rhododendron and azalea authority, has very generously given of his talents and knowledge of rhododendrons through the regional and national societies and through public speaking, radio, TV, and the media. His firm belief in so doing is that the world can be a more beautiful world for humanity if more people can be encouraged to become involved in the culture of ornamental plants. To this end, the Kentville Research Station, my own garden, and those of many others have been the beneficiary of his philosophy and generosity.

During the 1953 to 1983 period the Kentville plantings progressed from a small to a large collection of display beds containing some 1,000 rhododendrons and azaleas. In addition to assisting in this part of the programme, he encouraged and assisted the breeding programme with planting material, pollen, knowledge, and advice. Capt. Steele's contributions helped in making the Kentville plantings a major attraction for the public. The display of many cultivars and species became the largest in Eastern Canada affording the public an opportunity to see at first hand the diversity of plant form, flower, and foliage quality and color.



Dick Steele, Don Craig, Robert Seleger.  
Photo courtesy of Don Craig

### Radcliffe Pike

Another notable contributor to the Kentville programme was the late Radcliffe Pike of Lubec, Maine, whom I met in 1951 at the University of New Hampshire graduate school. His knowledge of plants was amazing and his enthusiasm knew no bounds. I am certain that much of my enthusiasm for rhododendrons came via Rad. I recall memorable trips with Rad to the Arnold Arboretum at Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts, and to the Reefer Point Garden in Bar Harbor. It was at Reefer Point that I was to view the hardiest and best *R. fortunei* specimen that he knew. Rad crossed this *fortunei* with a superior selection of *R. smirnowii*. Pike's records of the New Hampshire rhododendron and azalea breeding programme state that this *smirnowii* came via "Reefer Point Gardens, Bar Harbour, Maine. Second generation in Maine from plants from Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh Scotland. The *fortunei* from seed from Edinburgh Botanic Gardens." At a later date Rad sent a number of the seedlings of his *fortunei* x *smirnowii* cross to Kentville where they developed into very large and beautiful showpieces.

### Leslie Hancock

The late Leslie Hancock of Mississauga, Ontario, the very well-known nurseryman and plant breeder, was also a wonderful supporter of the Kentville programme. Like Pike, he was a book of plant knowledge and acknowledged as one of Canada's foremost rhododendron authorities. Through his tireless efforts, the Rhododendron Society of Canada came into being in 1972. It was indeed an honour to have been asked to serve as a founding director of the Canadian Society and to serve as President (1984-85). Leslie sent many plants to Kentville including seedlings from *R. fortunei* crossed with *R. smirnowii*. They were planted with the Pike plants, where they have performed wonderfully well.

### Cultivar Testing and Breeding

I firmly believe that cultivar evaluation is absolutely necessary as an adjunct to breeding for improvement. In the Research Station strawberry breeding programme (1952-83) many cultivars were evaluated. We made many crosses utilizing cultivars from Germany, England, New York State, State of California, and Canada for their desirable genetic traits, as well as the wide genetic base they provided. Thousands of seedlings were fruited from which eight outstanding selections were chosen for naming and release. Their acceptance has been phenomenal.

Using the same approach for rhododendrons we had, by 1975, evaluated 81 species and 170 rhododendron and azalea cultivars. "Evaluation" means a yearly rating of winter hardiness, bloom date, colour, plant and flower quality. We used the hardiness rating system developed by the American Rhododendron Society System where H1 is hardy to  $-32^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-26^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), H2 to  $-26^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-15^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), H3 to  $-21^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-6^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

By 1983, 234 parental combinations had been made, 15,500 seedlings produced and flowered, 94 selections made, and 14 of the 94 named and registered. The breeding philosophy was the same as that used for the strawberry, mainly that a relatively small number (approx. 100) of seedlings will reveal the value of a specific cross. Parents vary greatly in how well they combine with one another. It is called "specific combining ability." If they combine well, the cross can be repeated on a larger scale; many selections have been made from 100 to 200 seedlings or less. Superior parental appearance does not guarantee superior combining ability. Parents must be tested first.

Over the years many of the Kentville seedlings were grown in the Station's fields where they were exposed to all of the weather stresses such as wind, cold, no shade, and no irrigation. Some were also grown in ground beds, others in ground beds under a lath shade canopy. With the exception of the very early crosses, which were made in a glasshouse, crosses were made on plants growing outdoors.

### First Crosses Made 1958

That Swain and I should become involved in a rhododendron-breeding programme was inevitable. George had success in breeding commercial snapdragons in Ontario and I was fresh from graduate school where the University of New Hampshire Department of Horticulture was strongly focused on plant breeding. I was also very much involved with Kentville's strawberry and red raspberry breeding programme. Swain made the first crosses in 1958. Parents involved were 'Doctor H.C. Dresselhuys', *R. smirnowii* and *R. catawbiense* 'Catalglia'. Inter-crossing the three in a glasshouse with their reciprocals produced 537 seedlings. These seedlings were grown in an open station field fully exposed to the elements. They grew well, flowered, and were all pink, as one would expect. They were also very winter hardy. Fifteen were selected and one was named 'Gabriel' ('Doctor H.C. Dresselhuys' by *R. smirnowii*). Several were sent to the Fredericton, N.B. Research Station (Zone 5A) where they performed very well in that very cold climate.

After this first year of crossing we set out our breeding objectives which were to produce rhododendrons sufficiently hardy for the colder regions of Atlantic Canada, compact enough to be useful for landscaping modern homes, a good range of flower colors, and early, mid, and late season flowering. Tolerance to mildew infection was a criterion for azaleas. Many of the azalea cultivars now available are mildew susceptible while others are not. We crossed tolerant cultivars and had good results in terms of producing tolerant seedlings. "Generous in saving, quick to discard" is a breeding mantra which should be recited daily by the aspiring breeder.

### **My Favorite Kentville Cultivar**

You might ask me to name my favorite Kentville-bred rhododendron. Without question it is 'Minas Peace'. 'Minas Peace' was entered as a numbered seedling in the Canadian Society 1976 Montreal flower show. The plant is semi-compact, leaves dark green, leaf underside covered with thick grey-orange indumentum, flower buds rosy red opening to white suffused pink with light rose stripes on the back of the corolla, flower quality superb, compact trusses born above the foliage. If there were no flowers it would still be worth growing because of its form and foliar quality. 'Minas Peace' is more comfortable in Zone 6 than 5B. It was judged "Best" in the Montreal show.

The first cultivars released received their names from Longfellow's poem "Evangeline." The poem tells the story of the 1755 expulsion of the French Acadians from the Grand Pré area some 16 km. east of Kentville. The 3000 Acadians were herded onto British sailing ships; 900 homesteads in Grand Pré alone burnt to the ground. They sailed out of the tidal Minas Basin, which is part of the Bay of Fundy and only a short distance from Grand Pré. They were dispersed along the way from New England to the West Indies. The most fortunate were put off at Louisiana where they were welcomed by their own race. There were only a few names in the poem so to keep the historical connection the prefix 'Minas' was used. Minas was a community not far from Grand Pré.

### **Rhododendron luteum**

*Rhododendron luteum* is a highly desirable deciduous azalea species. Its yellow tubular/funnel-shaped, long-lasting flowers have an exquisite sweet fragrance which permeates the whole garden. Hailing from the Caucasus, Turkey, and several rather nearby areas it is no surprise that the experience of RSCAR members is that many *luteums* are not terribly winter hardy including most wild collected seed and the Rhododendron Species Foundation's named cultivar 'Golden Comet'. Our good fortune was that Nova Scotia hardy *luteums* came from the Lindquist seed received in 1953. Twenty-five seedlings were produced. A few were planted along the top of the north facing banking in the pond area. Being over-shadowed they nonetheless flowered regularly but not well. Three more were planted in a small bed fully exposed on the crest of the hill leading to the picnic grounds; these flowered well but one was outstanding in flowering, growth, vigour, plant quality, and both bud and stem hardiness. And so this "outstanding *luteum* " was a very valuable addition to Nova Scotia gardens. A few years ago seed of these good *luteums* were sent to the RSCAR Seed Exchange and hopefully they have grown and flowered as well as those in my own garden. I cannot comment on the fate of all twenty-five original seedlings: the time lapse of 50 years is the culprit.

### **A 'Fundy' - 'Bellefontaine' Cultivar Comparison**

The KRS cultivars 'Fundy' and 'Bellefontaine' were derived from the same cross and so it is not surprising that they are similar in general appearance. Their plant forms are equally pleasing. Twenty-five to thirty year old plants of both cultivars have reached a height of nearly meters at KRS and elsewhere. The mature height and form of these cultivars are ideal for spacious landscapes but not for home foundation plantings. Properly presented they are of exceptional beauty. Members who have lost labels can easily confuse the two. Here are a few distinguishing characteristics.

- 'Bellefontaine' is in full bloom 5 to 7 days earlier than 'Fundy'.
- New growth stems of 'Bellefontaine' have a rose colour epidermal colouring
- New growth stems of 'Fundy' are always green.
- The flower colour of 'Bellefontaine' is lighter pink than that of 'Fundy'.
- The stigmas of 'Bellefontaine' are dark red, those of 'Fundy' are yellow.
- Both have a yellow brown blotch, but much smaller on 'Bellefontaine'.

In 1983, the Kentville rhododendron programmes -- like similar programmes in Canada, e.g., Vineland, Ontario, the rose breeding programme at the Central Farm Ottawa -- came to a halt because of economic constraints, a shortage of money and labour, and because of the need to prioritize the region's most pressing horticultural needs. Breeding was terminated and the display beds relegated to very minimal maintenance.

## Looking Back, Positive and Negative Comments

### Positive

It was demonstrated that with very minimal cost to establish and maintain, the Kentville rhododendrons became an excellent public relations asset. Widely known in Canada and the US by lectures, visitations, press and TV, it brought pleasure and knowledge to thousands of people. Rhododendron Sunday held first in 1967. It is a very positive annual event, providing the public the opportunity to view the great varieties in plant form and quality, season of flowering, flower color, etc. It helped stimulate interest in rhododendrons so that today plant purchases in Nova Scotia are at an all-time high. The great value of deciduous azaleas such as the Knaphills was demonstrated. When compared with rhododendrons the obvious thing is their superior ability to survive in challenging winter climates. The pleasure of having world experts such as Edmund de Rothschild and Robert Seleger visit the Station to view the plantings and take part in discussions was a great pleasure.

### Negative

How unfortunate it is that, as of 1983, the Kentville programme ceased to function in a meaningful way.

Rhododendron Sunday is no longer the major attraction it was. The very large number of new and improved rhododendrons are not on display for the public. A much-needed re-organization and re-vitalization of the Kentville display beds is still in limbo.



Dr. Don Craig and Edmund de Rothschild.

*Photo courtesy of Don Craig*

### Do We Need A Breeding Programme?

Had I known in 1952 what I knew in 1975 following 23 years of extensive testing of cultivars and species I would not have become involved in a breeding programme. In 1952 I did not know with certainty the names of the cultivars in the Station's lone planting. By 1975 there were 174 cultivars and 81 species that had been or were still being tested. Many of these proved to be good performers (Agriculture Canada Pub. 1303 ["rhododendrons in the atlantic provinces"] revised 1981). Breeding with commercial aspirations is anything but easy especially for the breeder with limited resources. The Kentville programme was very small. The naming of 14 selections pales in comparison with that of the late Weldon Delp who has registered 301 cultivars and the late David Leach 85. Both, like Kentville, were breeding for winter hardiness. Leach's facilities for breeding in terms of land, laboratories, manpower and money were more than adequate; Kentville is very limited in comparison (Leach, ARS Jour. Vol. 41, No. 4, 1987).

The sheer number of introductions by Delp and Leach is mind-boggling. How does one adequately test so many? In my mind the numbers are in excess beyond reason. Adequate testing for regional adaptability was a real constraint for breeders, especially small breeders such as the late Joseph Brueckner of Mississauga, Ont. et. al. Reporting in his article "The Quest" (ARS Jour. V 36, No. 1) Leach states: "There followed next a group of hybrids of which too many were named perhaps because they represented a success after so many failures."

Now that the market is inundated with an endless number of new cultivars, I too realize that we were in too big a rush to apply names to at least a few of our introductions. Surely from among the many cultivars from Delp, Leach, and others there are new rhododendrons to more than satisfy most gardeners.

For the moment the important thing is to have the public realize the wide range of rhododendrons available for Zones 5 and 6. There are so many plant forms to choose. Bloom dates can vary from May until mid July. The range of flower and foliage colours has increased dramatically. There is now a degree of winter hardiness in some species and cultivars to make it possible to have success even under very severe winter conditions.

### More Breeding and Testing at Sunny Brook Farm

Having retired from the Research Station in 1983 I returned to the Station from time to time until 1987 in order to evaluate seedlings, especially 1,200 azaleas I produced from seed sent to the Station from Exbury in England. The seed origin was "seed from the very best Exbury plants mainly the deep red and yellows." Only 16 were selected due to the high incidence of foliar mildew. None were named.

## Breeding

In 1987 my daughter (Sue Gunn) and I initiated rhododendron plantings at her 232-year-old home 9 km. north of Kentville. One acre of the 13-acre homestead is devoted to the plantings in 28 beds containing 52 azalea cultivars and 88 rhododendron cultivars plus many companion plants such as *Kalmia*, *Pieris*, *Calluna*, and dwarf evergreens. We have also practiced my "hobby" by growing 2,816 seedlings from 73 parental combinations. Currently (2001) we are evaluating 113 selections from these crosses; 'Mist Maiden' and 'Besse Howells' were common contributors in many instances because of their winter hardiness, plant form and quality. The same can be said of 'Calsap', 'Janet Blair' and 'Scintillation'; indeed our first step was to cross 'Janet Blair' with 'Calsap' and 'Scintillation' with 'Calsap'. We grew 90 seedlings of each cross, selected the four best from each and then inter-crossed them. By back-crossing with 'Calsap', its hardiness was added, and the quality of 'Janet Blair' and 'Scintillation' were apparent in the progeny. One resembling 'Mrs Furnivall' was a highlight of spring 2002. Shammarello's 'Besse Howells' has attributes worthy of consideration - hardiness, compactness, and semi dwarfness. From 18 "yak" x 'Besse Howells' seedlings we have four selections.

Similarly 13 of 95 seedlings of a cross of 'Minas Rose Dawn' x 'Besse Howells' are on trial including my best red to date, SEL75-31 -- a 1971 cross of ('Red Head' x "yak") x ('Catalgla' x a selection of Elizabeth Group)-- has a nice compact truss, the colour of 'Nova Zembla', but measures only 0.9m high x 1.4m wide in 28 years.

Several years ago John Weagle was impressed with selection S.94-04, from our cross of S.80-07 [(*Bellefontaine*' x *R. degronianum*) x 'Goldsworth's Yellow'] x BPT#80-5 (*R. aureum* x 'Prelude'). The seed parent is an old KRS hybrid, very compact and a pale yellow; the pollen parent is Captain Steele's best early yellow. The hybrid is a compact mound sporting dark yellow flowers and is now on trial. As well a sibling which I feel is superior is being tested. The joy is in having them in our own garden.

## Testing

During my years at the Research Station one of my main interests was the evaluation of any rhododendron or azalea cultivar or species that by definition should be suitable for Zone 5A or 5B. I have now obtained a range of new material, which was not tested at Kentville, plus old standards for comparison purposes. The so-called "news" are cultivars such as Leach's 'Golden Gala', 'Normandy', 'Swansdown' and 'Cyprus'; the Mezitt hybrids 'Henry's Red', Jane Abbott Group\*, 'Olga Mezitt' and 'Weston's Aglo'; Beasley's 'Top of the Mountain\*', 'Cherokee'\* and 'Currahee\*'; others such as 'Leann'\* and Bosley 1016\*. Many of the "new" cultivars were obtained at the American Rhododendron Society plant sales at the Annual meetings at Eugene, Oregon, Williamsburg, Virginia and Cape Cod, Mass. Our garden has much greater exposure to sun and wind than the Kentville planting, thus, another opportunity to rate winter damage to flower buds. This we did for five consecutive years (1993-97) using scores of 4 for full flowering; 3 good flowering; 2 for scattered flowering and 1 for all buds killed.

Thirteen cultivars had perfect scores of 4, 24 were 3 or better which is satisfactory; the remainder had variable scores per year from 4 to 1 suggesting that in some years they would be less than satisfactory. None of the azaleas scored less than 3; most were 4 or slightly less.

Winter temperatures for Dec., Jan., Feb., and Mar. for the 5 years were no lower than -24.9C (-13F) suggesting that all of the cultivars would fall within the hardiness rating of H2 yet there was significant bud damage to some cultivars in 1995 and 1996. It is worth noting that none of the deciduous azaleas were seriously damaged. The rhododendron cultivar 'Scintillation' is acclaimed by many to be the premier elepidote in the New England States. Its hardiness rating is H2. Its performance at my summer cottage Sunnybrook, at the Research Station and elsewhere suggested it is over rated, an indication that rating hardiness involves complex plant and climatic functions.

Near Chester Basin, NS, my 'Scintillation' growing within 50 meters of the Atlantic Ocean performs very well when compared to another in my home garden in the Annapolis Valley. Hardiness ratings assigned to many other rhododendrons cannot be assumed to be totally accurate. Pellet and Holt of Vermont (Vermont News Release: 1-2, Dept. of Plant and Soil Science, Burlington) state that "the selection of hardy rhododendrons should not be based solely on mid-winter cold hardiness because the rate of hardiness development is an important consideration. The hardiest evergreen rhododendron may be injured when minimum temperatures are below 15C (5F) in November and early December".

Rhododendron cultivar evaluations at Sunnybrook have been very productive. We are now aware of the value of numerous new cultivars in our garden as well as a number that are not fully satisfactory. Among my favourites are 'Henry's Red', 'Golden Gala', 'Swansdown', 'Normandy', 'Melusine La Fee', Bosely 1016, 'Olga Mezitt', 'Weston's Aglo', 'Leann\*', 'Francesca', and of course my own introductions. The data on date of full bloom is useful and the minimum winter temperature information helps us to understand that low temperatures in midwinter are not the only factors causing damage to rhododendron tissues.

We take great pride in our garden, especially in view of having done it all by ourselves. We are the gardeners. For 50 years the beauty of rhododendrons and azaleas has surrounded me. I simply can never get enough.

## Some Kentville Rhododendron Cultivars



'Acadia'  
Photo by John Weagle

### Cultivar 'Cornwallis' (Syn. 'Acadia') (R\*)

Parentage - *R. fortunei*, open-pollinated  
Breeder - seed via Schumacker, Sandwich, Massachusetts  
Introduced - 1973, Registered - 1977, D.L. Craig  
Habit - large upright  
Colour - dawn pink (H.C.C. 523/2)  
Exposure - light shade  
Hardiness - zone 5b  
Bloom time - mid-season  
Large deep pink flowers borne in compact trusses well above the foliage are pleasantly scented. The throat is flecked oxblood (H.C.C. 00823/3).

### Cultivar 'Fundy' (Syn. 'Evangeline') (R\*)

Parentage - *R. fortunei* x *R. smirnowii*  
Breeder - Hancock, Mississauga, Ontario.  
Introduced - 1973, Registered - 1977, D.L. Craig  
Habit - very large, upright  
Colour - neyron rose (H.C.C.623/3)margins, paler center  
Exposure - light shade  
Hardiness - zone 5b  
Bloom time - mid-season  
A very large rhododendron and at 40 years old, the plant is over 14 feet high. Large rose opal buds; flowers borne in large trusses above the foliage are pleasantly scented. An outstanding rhododendron that comes into its own in 8-10 years. Can exhibit yellowish foliage in excessive sun even on the Scotian coast.

### Cultivar 'Gabriel' (R\*)

Parentage 'Doctor H.C. Dresselhuys' x *R. smirnowii*  
Breeder - George Swain  
Introduced - 1973, Registered - 1977, D.L. Craig  
Habit - tall  
Colour - rhodamine pink (H.C.C. 027/2)  
Exposure - light shade  
Hardiness - zone 5a  
Bloom time - mid-season  
The hardiest Research Station introduction, performing well as far north as Fredericton, New Brunswick.

### Cultivar 'Minas Grand Pré' (Syn. 'Grand Pr') (R\*)

Parentage - *R. catawbiense* compact form x *R. williamsianum*  
Breeder - George Swain  
Introduced - 1973, Registered - 1996, D.L. Craig  
Habit - semi-dwarf, compact  
Colour - pale purplish pink (RHS 62D)  
Exposure - light shade  
Hardiness - zone 5b  
Bloom time - mid-season  
An outstanding semi-dwarf plant with small attractive roundish leaves which flush a copper colour similar to that of its pollen parent. Loose attractive clusters of attractive bell-shaped pink flowers. A must for every garden in hardiness zone 5b or milder. It seems very happy in the garden of Peter Cox in Glencarse, Scotland.



'Minas Grand Pré'  
Photo by Sterling Levy

### Cultivar 'Bellefontaine' (R\*)

Parentage - *R. fortunei* x *R. smirnowii*  
Breeder - R. Pike, Lubec, Maine  
Introduced - 1975, Registered - 1977, D.L. Craig  
Habit - very large upright  
Colour - rose opal (H.C.C.022) in bud, opening neyron rose (H.C.C. 623/3 in throat, to 623/1 margins)  
Exposure - light shade  
Hardiness - zone 5b  
Bloom time - mid-season  
Judged by many as the Research Station's outstanding introduction. A seedling from the same cross that produced 'Fundy'. Very tall (14+ feet) in 40 years. Pleasantly scented neyron rose flowers are borne in large trusses above the foliage. Very good plant form but only comes into its own after 8 to 10 years.



'Bellefontaine'  
Photo by John Weagle

**Cultivar 'Minas Peace' (R\*)**

Parentage - [( *R. catawbiense* 'Catalga' x *R. degronianum* )  
x *R. yakushmanum* (now *R.*

*degronianum* ssp. *yakushmanum* )]

Breeder - D.L. Craig

Introduced - 1982, Registered - 1998, D.L. Craig

Habit - medium tall

Colour - white suffused pink

Exposure - light shade

Hardiness - zone 5b

Bloom time - mid-season

This is one of my favourite rhododendrons. The excellent foliage has a thick covering of attractive grey-orange indumentum on the leaf undersides. This habit is semi-compact. The flower buds, strong purplish pink (RHS 55B), open to pale purplish pink (RHS 56A), striped a strong purplish pink (RHS 55B) on the reverse of each petal. Flower trusses compact and above the foliage. A plant for all year round.



'Minas Peace'  
Photo by Don Craig

**Cultivar 'Minas Maid' (R\*)**

Parentage 'Nova Zembla' x *R. yakushmanum* (now *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushmanum* )

Breeder - George Swain

Introduced - 1979, Registered - 1979, D.L. Craig

Habit - medium tall, compact

Colour - moderate purplish pink (RHS 62B)

Exposure - light shade

Hardiness - zone 5b

Bloom time - early mid-season

This most reliable rhododendron possesses a very good level of winter hardiness. Compact growth habit. Basic colour is purplish pink. The ball-shaped truss is held above the foliage. Foliage quality is very good. Very floriferous.



'Minas Maid'  
Photo by John Weagle

**Cultivar 'Minas Snow' (R\*)**

Parentage 'Cunningham's White' x *R. yakushmanum* (now *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushmanum* )

Breeder - George Swain

Introduced - 1981, Registered - 1998, D.L. Craig

Habit - medium tall

Colour - white

Exposure - full light

Hardiness - zone 5b (plant), 6a (flower buds)

Bloom time - mid-season

Compact growth habit and dark green foliage. Underside lightly covered with a tan coloured indumentum. Flower quality is outstanding. Flower and bud pure white. Flower trusses held well above the foliage. 'Minas Snow' is highly regarded as an excellent white on the West Coast and eastern seaboard of the USA. Inexplicably it sometimes exhibits bud damage in early December on the Scotian coast.



'Minas Snow'  
Photo by Don Craig

**Cultivar 'Minas Rose Dawn' (R\*)**

Parentage - ('Nova Zembla' x *R. yakushimanum* [now *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum* ]) x (*R. catawbiense* var. *album* 'Glass' x 'Elizabeth')

Breeder - D.L. Craig

Introduced - Ag. Research Station, 1982, Registered - 1997, A.R. Brooks

Habit - medium height, wider than tall.

Colour - red-purple

Exposure - light shade

Hardiness - zone 5a

Bloom time - mid-season

Flower trusses compact and above the foliage. Buds strong purplish red (RHS 67A), very attractive, open funnel shape. The petal edges are wavy and vivid purplish red (RHS 67B); main body moderate to pale purplish pink (RHS 65A-D); extensive moderate red (RHS 180 A-B) spotting on inside of dorsal petal. Very floriferous.

**Cultivar 'George Swain' (R\*)**

Parentage 'Goldsworth Yellow' x (*R. catawbiense* 'Catalgla' x Theresa Group)

Breeder - D.L. Craig

Introduced - 1988, Registered - 1998, D.L. Craig

Habit - medium tall, compact

Colour - pale yellow (RHS 158B)

Exposure - light shade

Hardiness - zone 5b

Bloom time - early

Early flowering, pale yellow (RHS 158B), of value because of its earliness and good semi-compact habit. Globular dome-shaped truss held well above the foliage.

**Cultivar 'Mary Craig' \*\***

Parentage 'Goldsworth Yellow' x *R. degronianum*

Breeder - George Swain

Introduced - 1981

Habit - semi-dwarf, compact

Colour - pink, buds dark pink

Exposure - light shade

Hardiness - zone 5b

Bloom time - early

A good semi-dwarf compact plant. Flower buds dark pink opening light pink. Flower trusses held above the foliage.

**Cultivar 'Sue Gunn' (R\*)**

Parentage - ('Nova Zembla' x *R. yakushimanum* [now *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum*]) x (*R. catawbiense* 'Catalgla' x 'Elizabeth')

Breeder - D.L. Craig

Introduced - 1992, Registered - 1992, D.L. Craig

Habit - medium tall, compact

Colour - vivid purplish red (RHS 57B) with black spotting on dorsal lobe

Exposure - light-medium shade

Hardiness - zone 5a

Bloom time - mid-season

Spectacular in terms of its bright showy colour which is purplish red. Wavy flower margins. Black spotting on the dorsal lobe. Very floriferous with a dense growth habit; it puts on a good show even from a distance.



'Sue Gunn'  
Photo by Don Craig

**Cultivar 'Minas Princess' (R\*)**

Parentage - open-pollinated Ghent azalea hybrid

Selected by D.L. Craig from seed via Schumacher, Sandwich, Massachusetts

Introduced - 1982, Registered - 1998, D.L. Craig

Habit - upright, tall

Colour - light purplish pink (RHS 55C)

Exposure - full sun to light shade

Hardiness - zone 5a

Bloom time - mid-season

This is an excellent azalea. The flowers are very attractive, the scent very pleasant.



'Minas Princess'  
Photo by Sterling Levy

**Cultivar 'Minas Flame' (R\*)**

Parentage 'Gibraltar' x 'Balzac'

Breeder - George Swain

Selected by - D.L. Craig

Introduced - 1982, Registered - 1998, D.L. Craig

Habit - upright, tall

Colour - vivid reddish orange (RHS 33A)

Exposure - full sun - light shade

Hardiness - zone 5b

Bloom time - mid-season

This hybrid has the appearance of most Knap Hill azalea cultivars and is a strong growing plant. It has a good level of mildew resistance. Its orange-red flowers are attractive.

\* Royal Horticultural Society Certificate of International Registration.

\*\* Name is not registered.

N.B. Many of these hybrids may require more sun on the Scotia coast where fog is prevalent.

N.B. In 1980 I selected and named a seedling azalea 'Minas Gold' because it was mildew resistant at the time and for a period afterwards. It later, however, proved that this resistance was not present and so I discarded it. Perhaps 'Minas Gold' was an escape or another strain of mildew caught up with it. 'Goldflake', for example, is a vastly superior cultivar.

N.B. Various Kentville hybrids can be purchased at Bayport Plant Farm, Bayport, Lunenburg, NS. 'Minas Grand Pr' (aka 'Grand Pr') is available in small sizes at Blomidon Nurseries, Greenwich, NS; Lakeland Plant World, Dartmouth, NS, Gerryls Nursery, Centreville, NS and Murray's Garden Centre, Portugal Cove, NF. ☞

*Dr. Craig is a member of the RSC Atlantic Chapter.*

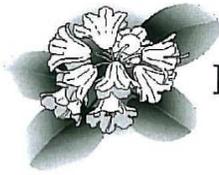
*Editors Note: This article appeared in the Journal of The American Rhododendron Society in 2003 and in AtlantocRhodo 2003-2004.*



Kentville Research Station - 1978. [Photo Don Craig]



Gunn Garden - 1985. [Photo Don Craig]



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**Photo Album - Some plants resulting from the work of our pioneer rhododendron breeders**



PH 76-M, 'Richard Basser'. [Photo Dick Steele]



93- Q. [Photo Dick Steele]



R. 'Dave's Delight'. [Photo Dick Steele]



'Ma Chère'. [Photo Joseph Brueckner.]



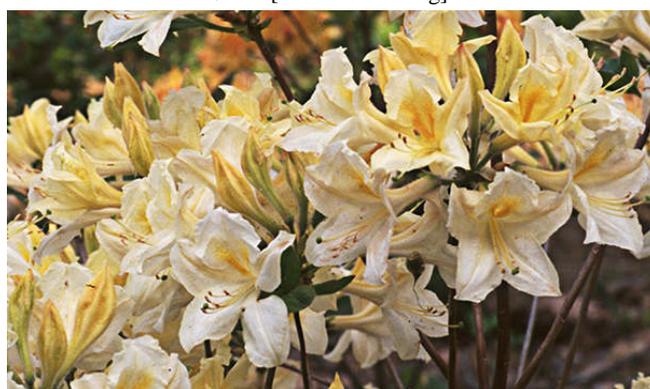
'Bluenose'. [Photo Joseph Brueckner]



94-4. [Photo Don Craig]



*R bakeri* x *R. arborescens*. [Photo Don Craig]



92-52. [Photo Don Craig]