



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society

Connecticut Chapter September/October 2012

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Sunday, 23 September 2012, 11:00am
The Waxman Conifer Collection
Corner East Rd. and Rte. 195
Just south of the UConn campus, Storrs, CT

Sidney A. Waxman, UConn professor and plant researcher, worked for more than 40 years on the selection of dwarf conifers and other choice woody plants which he propagated from cuttings, witch's brooms, and seed. These were grown and evaluated in the 10 acre nursery surrounding the Waxman home in Storrs.

The nursery had been neglected in the years after Dr. Waxman's death, but recently the UConn Extension Master Gardener Program and the UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources began working to restore the nursery and develop an arboretum and horticultural center on the property. Although still very much a work in progress, the mature forms of this unique collection will be available for our viewing.

Please note the **11am** start time. This is a rain or shine event. Wear walking shoes and dress for the weather. Bring a chair and picnic lunch for after the tour. And don't forget the UConn dairy bar for desert.

OCTOBER MEETING

Sunday, 21 October 2012 10:00 am
Lyndhurst Museum, Tarrytown, N.Y.

The annual 'tri-state' meeting has been rescheduled to October 21st to avoid conflicting with the NARGS national meeting in Pittsburgh on October 14th. Our speaker will be Nick Turland, Associate Curator in the Division of Science and Conservation at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Nick joined the staff there to work on the Flora of China Project, moving from his native England where he worked in the Botany Dept. of the
See October on page 4.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This summer, despite the vagaries of weather, my woodland and alpine plants have performed amazingly well. Two plants new to me: *Gentiana asclepiadea*, a show stopper with slender stems and multiple blue flowers; and *Cyclamen rohlfsianum*, purchased at the tri-state sale, the label stating that it needed protection as it's not hardy. I put it in my greenhouse for the winter and then placed it in the garden this summer. It is the best *Cyclamen* that I have ever had – multiple flowers, gorgeous large round leaves. My research has revealed that it is an 'aristocrat' among *Cyclamens*! I agree.



A clump of *Gentiana asclepiadea*.

A favorite flower has surprised me this year: *Lobelia cardinalis* (cardinal flower). Several plants have bloomed near my deck for years. This spring, only a few small plants appeared and I lamented the loss, until I found some growing in the lawn nearby. They were quickly moved to the garden site. Then, to my delight, I found four others around the yard. I recalled a talk by Larry Weaner at a meeting of the Connecticut Horticultural Society. His topic was *At Home with Natives*, addressing the benefits of understanding the growth of native plants. He pointed out that the cardinal flower is a short lived perennial and seeds should be scattered so
See Message on page 5.

In Memoriam: Eleanor (Ellie) Spingarn

January 6, 1928 - June 25, 2012

By Barbara van Achterberg

Ellie Brinkerhoff Spingarn was a gifted rock gardener who could make difficult plants look easy. With an artist's eye she created an exceptional garden in Georgetown, Connecticut. She was generous with friends and visitors. She was also a builder of amazing stone walls and troughs. Since Ellie was a slender woman 5 feet 3 inches tall, her beautifully laid walls, some 6 feet tall, are a testimony to her determination and strength. She is survived by her husband Joel, a noted grower of dwarf conifers.

Ellie Brinkerhoff was a member of ARGS (later NARGS) for many years, and was a member of the North Atlantic Region. In 1968 Ellie wrote a letter to members from Connecticut that the "time has come to form a local unit of the American Rock Garden Society in the State of Connecticut." Sixty people attended a meeting on April 6; Lincoln Foster was the speaker. With the help of Linc and Timmy Foster and Lee Raden, she organized the first Winter Study Weekend in January, 1969, and successive winter study weekends in Connecticut.

She was Regional Vice President of ARGS from 1976-1978. She received an Award of Merit in 1973, a Connecticut Chapter Service Award in 1986 and the Marvin E. Black Award "for a member who has helped other people to reach their potential in the plant world" in 1994.

Ellie Brinkerhoff was hired by John Oliver to create an alpine garden at his nursery in Fairfield. Many people first met Ellie there where they were introduced by her to both rock gardening and the Rock Garden Society.

It was the talk of ARGS when Ellie and Joel Spingarn became engaged. They married in 1980. We all wondered whether they would set up gardening in Long Island or Connecticut. But there was never really any question. After a year or so, Joel moved his more portable dwarf conifers to Ellie's place, where he established a conifer bank that enhanced the landscape, especially in the winter.

A friendly but quiet and hard-working gardener, Ellie commented that she had to work 3 hours a day to keep her large garden in shape. If she took a day off she worked 6 hours the next day. Her efforts showed. Even today, when Joel and Ellie have not been able to garden for 10 years, the beautiful bones of their garden remain.

She was one of the women gardeners profiled in Starr Ockenga's **Earth on Her Hands: the American Woman in Her Garden** (1998). She is photographed sitting on an old International Harvester tractor in the chapter titled "The Lure of Stone." Ellie is quoted as saying, "Any rock garden needs mulch, and stone is ideal. It has been my mulch of choice for many years."

Bobby Ward, NARGS archivist, could find only two listings of journal articles that Ellie wrote: one on growing al-pines from seeds and another on hypertufa troughs. But in personal communication, Ellie excelled. We who knew her will always remember her enthusiasm, generosity and helpfulness.

NARGS CT CHAPTER OFFICERS

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PROGRAMS: *Please talk to one of the officers if you are interested in the Programs Chair position.*

Meeting Report: July 8, 2012

By Barbara van Achterberg

The annual meeting of the Connecticut Chapter took place at Comstock Ferre in Wethersfield, a central location easily accessible off I-91. The slate of officers was nominated and accepted. Ginny Gingras will continue to serve as President; Dave DeLucia volunteered to become Vice President; Sally Katkaveck, Treasurer; Barbara van Achterberg, Secretary; and Maryanne Gryboski, Newsletter Editor. We still need a program chair, but with an extra officer, Dave, on hand, planning should be more manageable.

The speaker, Jim Locklear, has been a member of NARGS (then ARGS) since the 1980s. He lives in Nebraska, not a place with many rock gardeners. His interest developed after a trip to Colorado many years ago. Early on, he became interested in native plant culture with a special attraction to Phlox, with its almost entirely North American distribution. (Phlox siberica is native to Eurasia as well as northern Alaska.) He received two grants from NARGS to research this genus for a book, working 15 years on it. Last year, Timber Press published **Phlox: A Natural History and Gardener's Guide**.

The genus Phlox was established by Carl Linnaeus in 1737. By the 1730s, the team of John Bartram in Philadelphia and Peter Collinson of London had imported about eight different species of eastern Phlox into England. A few years later, hybrids were being developed and sold in England from the taller American species, paniculata and maculata. By 1843, nurserymen were offering the amazing Van Houtte's phlox, with red and white markings on its petals. The current 'Natasha' is very similar.

The nineteenth century saw the westward expansion. Locklear quotes two men traveling in separate covered wagons and their reactions to prairie phlox. One was "in raptures" by the masses of fragrant flowers; the other was "entranced." Even pioneers struggling to survive in the wilderness could take time to appreciate beauty. The twentieth century saw the rise of rock gardening and native plant horticulture which increased awareness of and desire for this genus. At least 60 species are known today.

Many of the western phlox are challenging - ok, difficult - to grow in the East. Dr. Jim Ault at the Chicago Botanic Garden is breeding crosses of eastern and west-

ern phlox and will soon be ready to introduce them to the trade.

Some choice phlox are:

- Phlox kelseyi, from Montana, Wyoming and Idaho, grows in alkaline soil, is a strong blue, and probably is used in Dr. Ault's very blue hybrid.
- Phlox amabilis, Yavapai phlox, is tiny, very strong pink, endemic to Arizona.
- Phlox subulata, native to shale barrens of the Allegheny Mountains and Virginia, is often taken for granted, but it is easily grown here and is beautiful in its brighter, more compact and whiter forms. 'El-lie B.' is extremely choice with very white flowers and congested stems and leaves.
- Phlox bifida, cleft phlox, is a Midwesterner, more billowing than subulata, with deeply cleft petals.
- Phlox divaricata, timber phlox, is a wonderful plant for partially shaded gardens.
- Phlox pilosa, downy phlox, is a summer bloomer for open woodlands, about 2 feet tall.
- Phlox oklahomensis, Oklahoma phlox, has a very sweet fragrance.
- Phlox pulvinata, a lovely light blue, is from the Rockies.
- Phlox speciosa, showy phlox, was discovered by Merriwether Lewis in the Pacific Northwest.
- Phlox stolonifera, Cherokee phlox, was found in the Southern Appalachians by both John Fraser and Andre Michaux. Fraser published his name first in 1802. This is one of the easiest here in Connecticut. It likes light shade and is low growing.
- Phlox drummondii is one of 3 annual phloxes, all native to Texas. One color is a true red. Found by Thomas Drummond in 1834 and sent to Scotland, by 1836 seeds were being imported to the U.S! People here didn't realize these were native American plants.
- Phlox multiflora, Yellowstone phlox, is white and grows with Aquilegia jonesii on Phlox Mountain in Wyoming. Phlox Mountain is owned by the Shoshone and another tribe.
- Phlox muscoides, Shoshone phlox, has leaves like moss; the most compressed of all phloxes, it is from an extremely harsh environment. Very choice.

After the meeting I told Jim Locklear about my large trough of Aquilegia jonesii. I asked him whether he recommended Phlox multiflora to plant among the tiny columbines. He told me that P. multiflora would be a little too aggressive in a trough and recommended Shoshone phlox instead. So now I'm hoping for seeds of Phlox muscoides.

GARDEN TIMES IN AUGUST: WEEDS

By Angela H. Fichter

There is considerable opinion afloat about weeds. How they occur. What to do to make them prosper. How to get rid of them. Not all the opinions agree with one another. But then that's what makes opinions interesting. Facts on the other hand are dry. And they have the bad reputation of changing every twenty years as scientists change their views on whether the facts are correct. So I submit this list to you about weeds for your appraisal. You can decide if the listed items are facts or opinions or better yet, absolute unalterable truths.

1. How weeds occur. Everyone knows the answer to this. They are sown by the devil. It's right in the Bible. Yes, I know, they grow from seeds. But how did they get throughout your spinach patch when the patch was roto-tilled before planting? Now you may try to get all scientific on me and say that the weed seeds were churned up from below by the tiller, and weed seeds can survive in the soil for years (whereas vegetable seeds won't germinate the following year if you even sneeze on them). But how did the seeds from down below get there? Just read your Bible (Matthew 13:39).
2. How to make weeds prosper. The best way to do this is to ignore them. Go away on vacation for a couple weeks. When you come back, you won't be able to find the veggies for the high growth of weeds all around them. And the weeds will already be going to seed! But if you refuse to go on vacation, then just overplant your flower and vegetable garden so you can't keep up with the weeds. This isn't as good as the vacation for weed growth because on some of those miserable, hot and humid evenings after work, you will go out there and whack at the weeds with a hoe. I did that. I was so proud of all the hacked up weeds I got, roots and all. But I was too tired to pick them up and put them on the dead weed pile at the edge of the yard. You guessed it. Days later when I went out to pick up the weeds, they had all rerooted. There wasn't a dead weed to be seen. This was so disheartening, that I mowed the weeds. I'll dig them up in the fall when we have that natural phenomenon called rain.
3. How to get rid of weeds. Some people spray them with weed killer. I have to admit I actually did that on a patch of weeds trying to come through the as-

phalt of our driveway. But it's not a good idea to use that anywhere near your vegetables or flowers. Killing chemicals can do more than hurt their target. In fact, pesticides have been implicated not only in cancer but also in Parkinson's disease. I figure any liquid or powder that kills a living organism like a weed or an insect is probably not good to get on your skin or in your body or near your well. Kind of like using a blow torch on the weeds. Sure it does the trick, but at what cost? So if you don't use weed killer, then what? I know of only two other methods: mulch before the weeds grow and brute labor after they grow. The mulch works really well. Where I have mulched plants, they look happy and weed free. The mulch holds in moisture and prevents the weeds from sprouting. Hoeing and turning the soil over or hand pulling of weeds is kind of like purgatory. You're not in hell, but it sure is uncomfortable.

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Natural History Museum, London, and is now Co-Director of the Flora of China Project. This 50 volume flora is now more than 2/3 complete, with all information freely available online. Since 1984, Nick has also had a deep interest in the flora of the eastern Mediterranean region and has published several books and articles on it. He is also a specialist in botanical nomenclature, and is an editor of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature – the rules for the formal scientific naming of plants.

Nick will be giving two presentations: *Plant hunting in the mountains of Crete* and *Plant hunting in southwestern Turkey*.

There are usually one or two vehicles traveling down I-95 and the Merritt Pkwy. to this event. If you'd like to join a carpool, please call Ginny or Maryanne.

Directions: from the Merritt/Hutchinson River Pkwy., take exit for the Tappan Zee Bridge/I-287. Immediately cross lanes left and follow I-287. Take the last exit before the bridge for Rte 9, Broadway. Go left on Broadway. Lyndhurst is ½ mile south on the right. Drive in past the mansion to the brick carriage house and park on the road leading down toward the river.

Book of the Month Review

Bobby Ward, Executive Secretary of NARGS national, informs us that a new feature is being offered on the NARGS WIKI website: a monthly book review.

Bobby writes that "...this month it is "**Alpines: An Essential Guide**" by Michael Mitchell. Our August 2012 review is by one of my favorite alpine enthusiasts, and it does not disappoint. What is wonderful about this review is the background on rockeries and rookeries that Panayoti Kelaidis gives us. This information is not in the book, but very informative and it is worth reading the review to get it.

Michael Mitchell has been a nurseryman for years and his family before him. This is Michael's passion and his guide is a full compendium of how to prepare a rock garden, picking the plants, and dealing with the ever abundant pests one runs across or over in the garden. Michael's choice of plants is very helpful for the beginner. The book contains an encyclopedia of wonderful pictures. Worth noting are the delospermas mentioned in the book. Again more insight from Panayoti on these must-have plants, especially Delosperma 'Graaf-Reinet' and D. dyeri. I suggest you add this book to your bedside reading!"

The review is on the NARGS website home page, www.nargs.org/; then click on "Book of the Month," on the left-hand side, about halfway down the page.

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A close-up of *Gentiana asclepiadea*, showing the interior striping of white and blue.

Message continued from page 1.

as to ensure its survival. The plant is a pioneer species found in disturbed areas and needs instability, but it produces many seeds. I equate Larry Weaner with Doug Talammy in his understanding of native plants. Larry has not written a book about natives, but he should as his talk was one of the best.

Continuing my plant stories, I have several lovely columbines with double flowers for which I had no name. Identification was done for me by Jim Almond, our NARGS Guest Speaker in May. It is *Aquilegia 'Nora Barlow'*. I have no idea how the plant came into my garden.

Our July speaker, Jim Locklear, was delighted with our meeting place at Comestock Ferre. Lincoln, Nebraska, his home, was settled much later than Wethersfield, CT, so he was fascinated by the building, its seed history and the antique implements. After the meeting, I drove him to Ballek's Garden Center (Dave DeLucia noted that Ballek's was celebrating its 350th anniversary). I wanted to show Jim the geology of the area as well as the Garden Center. We were just in time to hear Anita Ballek speaking on the need to save our precious soil in Connecticut, especially that of the Connecticut River Valley. She pointed out how much of the country was drying out and that there's a need to grow plants (not buildings) in CT, which has some of the most fertile soil in the country. Next, we visited Dave's garden and then I couldn't resist stopping at Gillette Castle to view both the structure and the sights of the Connecticut River. The next day, we drove to historic Valley Falls Farm and Park in Vernon, Sally Katkaveck's Garden in Ashford, and then to Bradley Field for Jim's 2 p.m. flight home. Before leaving, Jim presented me with his book, **Phlox: A Natural History and Gardener's Guide**, which I gratefully accepted for the Connecticut Chapter's library which also includes **The Caucasus and Its Flowers** by Vojtech Holubec & Pavel Krivka. Both books are available for loan to Chapter members.

As we begin to plan next year's programs, I request your contribution of ideas, talent, knowledge and time to help our chapter grow. Invite new members to join. Consider writing an article for the newsletter or being a speaker at a meeting. And continue to share your plants at 'show and tell' or at our sales.

~Ginny