

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183, Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4  
Vol. 14 No. 4 December, 1998



President Harry Wright 338 8345  
Secretary Marleen Crucq 339 7845  
Treasurer Ernie Exner 338 6845  
Ways&Means Dave Crucq 339 7845  
Librarian Kirsten Emmott 339 7159  
Social Hilda Fawcett 337 8318  
Membership Pauline & Richard  
Bonney 339 7594  
Editor Mary Palmer 923 6629

## 1 Dec

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Marleen and Dave Crucq, 2301 Seabank Rd. Continue on Waveland after you pass Coleman Rd., drive east on Seabank to the corner of June Rd.

## 8 Dec.

We have an interesting evening to look forward to, including some of Bill Rozel's cleverly wicked games, delicious food provided by the executive, and sharing of gifts. Each person should bring a gardening-type gift, value around \$10. Several members will provide slides of gardens, flowers, wild-life or - who knows?

## 10 Nov.

We were glad to see so many members at this meeting, for we had a wonderful bonus - not one speaker, but 3. Mike Trask and Joe Morin,

members of the Vancouver Island Paleontological Society, brought slides and specimens of some of the oldest plants in the world - Cycads, judged to be over 100 million years old. They gave an interesting talk on the work recently done by amateurs, finding and putting together bones of ancient beasts found in a local river. By the way, this society sells some interesting plants including cycads. Ask Kirsten Emmott for a copy of the list.

Then Aleyne Cook entertained us with a talk - and 50-year old slides, of his time working at Sunningdale Nursery in the early '50s. About 1900, when the owners of this nursery decided to specialize in rhodos, they were instrumental in sending many of the famous plant-hunters to China. Many "new" rhodos came to England and thence to America at this time. Later, China was closed to plant-hunting for many years. Recently, of course, a new stream of rhodo-hunters, including Warren Berg and Peter Cox, have made many trips over there, and are constantly bringing new and different species and hybrids to

the market.

Aleyne also talked of setting up the Sino-Himalayan garden at Van Dusen Gardens in Vancouver, with species rhodos from the Greig Nursery in Royston.

Altogether, a very interesting, entertaining and educational evening, thanks to the three speakers.

## BOOK REVIEW

One of the newest books in our library is a copy of Manual of Grasses, Timber Press, 1994. The Royal Horticultural Society has, in the past ten years, published several encyclopedias of garden plants, gardening, plants and flowers, and a very comprehensive Dictionary of Gardening, which is a little out of our price range at 550 pounds for a 4-volume set. Luckily they have decided to print parts of this dictionary in separate volumes, of which the Manual of Grasses is one.

This book covers information on the families of grasses and grass-like plants, including bamboos, sedges, and rushes. The introduction has more

information in it than many books, and the fine line-drawings give a much better idea of the form and shape of many of these plants than photographs would give.

There is also an extensive glossary, an index of popular names (valuable when you try to track down one of these plants at a nursery) and bibliography. Anyone keenly interested in grasses should buy their own copy of this book.

### MEMBER NOTES

Conference 2000 update.  
Some time ago I mentioned there would a Rhodo Conference on the Island in 1999. Wrong - it will be in Sept. 2000, at one of the big hotels near Duncan. The Cowichan Valley Rhodo Society will be looking for help. Those of us who attended the conference in Victoria some years ago will remember the impressive BBQ our club put on for about 500 guests and the fun we had that day. Conference 2000 is something to look forward to!

**SAD NEWS** from the Mount Arrowsmith Society!

"We are very saddened to learn that one of our most valuable members, Someone Else, has left. Someone's leaving creates a vacancy that will be difficult to fill as Someone did far more than a normal person's share of the work.

Else was with us for many years. Whenever there was a job to do or committee to chair, one name was on everyone's list - "Let Someone Else do it". And Someone always volunteered.

Someone was among the most generous contributors of time and effort. No wonder everyone assumed Someone Else would do it!

Now Else is gone! What are we going to do? Who is going to do the things that Someone Else did?"

And that brings me to a request that Harry Wright has made:

"All I want for Christmas is a .... Vice President". Come on, people, it's time to say-- NOT "Let Someone Else do it", but "Let me do it!"

### PRECIPITATION

Don't forget that though we have had some heavy rains this past few weeks, the ground is still dry 6" down, particularly in beds that are overhung by roofs or thickly-leaved trees such as cedars.

### THE LOST GARDEN OF HOLBERG

Leslie Drew has written an article for the Cowichan Valley newsletter, Nov. 98, about Bernt Ronning's garden, the "Lost Garden of Holberg".

" This isolated treasure garden of exotic trees and shrubs, rhodos among them, lies in

deep forest midway between Holberg and what little remains of the ill-fated Danish settlement at Cape Scott.

Locally, it is called the Bernt Ronning garden for its creator, the young Norwegian who settled there in 1914. Ronning was a man to match the wilderness of northern Vancouver Island. He had the energy and the practical skills, the determination and a vision for his homestead, one centered on plants and growing them from seed. Single-handedly over the years he made an arboretum.

Equally remarkable is the story of how two modern-day pioneers from the United States, Ron and Julia Moe, have been reclaiming the garden from West Coast jungle. A couple drawn to remote spots and undaunted by the task of garden restoration on a grand scale, they emerge as just the kind of people Ronning would have liked - plant lovers and hard workers who are fully respectful of what he created".

If you ever plan to drive up past Port Hardy, toward the top end of the Island, be sure to stop in to see the garden as it is now.

A personal note: In 1949 my husband and I moved to Winter Harbour, a little closer to the

wild West Coast than Holberg. Transportation was by small boat - no roads - and though I heard of Mr. Ronning's wonderful garden I had no way of getting to it. I heard the story of how he sent to the Royal Horticultural Society for seeds of many interesting shrubs, and grew them on. One shrub seemed to be just perfect for the climate and situation, shiny evergreen leaves, edible berries, not too tall etc. Well - have you ever seen the way Salal grows on the West Coast? Impenetrable thickets 10-12 feet in height - that's the plant he sent all the way to England for! How I wish I had had the chance to meet him!

## OBITUARIES

Three very famous rhodo people have died this past year, and the world will be a smaller place without them. **Fred Galle**, who wrote the definitive book on Azaleas (in our library), **David Leach**, whose "Rhododendrons of the World" is still one of the most comprehensive books on the subject, even though written over 30 years ago, and **Edmund de Rothschild**, a member of the famous English family who live and work in one of the great rhodo gardens of the world at Exbury.

**WHAT'S NEW?** Snippets from here and there. "The Garden" - Journal of the RHS - often has information for or by North American correspondents. For instance - Who would like to join a new Society - the Mediterranean Garden Society, who plan to promote first-hand information on water-saving techniques and plants? A few more dry summers here and we are going to need as much information as we can get. The address is:

The Mediterranean Garden Society,  
P.O. Box 14, Peania 19002,  
GREECE.

How about someone in our club joining, then sharing newsletters and information with other members?

Briggs Nursery (Wash. state) has an interesting "new" self clinging deciduous climber named Schizophragma hydraneoides "Moonlight", with silvery-grey leaves.

The University of Manitoba has produced a new potentilla "Pink Beauty", with strongly coloured pink flowers.

Did you know?

Leaves of Davidia involucrata and Cercidiphyllum japonicum both smell of burnt toffee as they colour and fall in the autumn?

Seattle Rhodoland News reports in the Oct. issue that work has been proceeding at Meerkerk Gardens on a new rock garden. Volunteers have built up the soil, added rocks, transplanted mature dwarf rhodos, dwarf conifers, spireas, heathers and various groundcovers. A new prostrate perennial which bloomed all summer, is a verbena "Homestead Purple", introduced from the UBC Botanic garden. It was selected as winner of the American Perennial of the Year. This plant loves to grow, is resistant to mildew, drought tolerant, and is not fussy about soil. Sounds like a winner!

**Continuation of an article by Bill Bedwell**, writing in the Mid-Atlantic rhodo News & Notes, on drought.

"After a mostly dormant garden in August, conditions are ripe to cause a lot of fall flowering if we do get a significant amount of rain in Sept. or Oct. The plants come out of a drought induced dormancy and react as if it is spring and time to bloom and/or start growing. That, in combination with early frosts can do a lot more damage than a plunge to -5F in the dead of winter, I believe.

Similar freeze damage occurs in an unusually early spring,

such as March 1998 when the plunge to the upper teens, following many weeks of unusually warm temperatures with nights well above freezing, actually killed a few normally hardy rhodos. I had extensive bark split on 'Yaku Angel' that has not yet killed it, but I have noticed that death from bark split may come many years later.

For example, a big 9 ft. plant of "Disca" keeled over this spring, revealing that winter damage from the mid-1980s set up gradual decay to the point that the living part of the base of the trunk was too thin to support the big top. I remember that damage when it first occurred and looked at it occasionally over the years when the plant appeared to be thriving, wondering if the freeze wound was getting deeper. It took more than 10 years, but it eventually destroyed the plant.

A suggestion: it can be helpful to layer some lower branches of rhodos when they are relatively young and let the layers be backups if the main trunk goes. This can give backup protection from freezes, borer damage and storm damage."

### PROVEN PERFORMERS

The most reliable rhodos in this area, as suggested by twelve members of our club, living in many micro-climates in the area:

Snow Lady, Loderi, King George, Hallelujah, Mrs. E.C. Stirling, Point Defiance, Taurus

Others not as often listed included Cosmopolitan, Crimson Pippin, Etta Burrows, Gomer Waterer, Hotei, Jean Marie de Montague, Ken Janek, Lackamas Spice, Lady Bird, Lord Roberts, Mrs. T.. Lowinsky, Nepal, Peeping Tom, Pink Pearl, Red Wood, Red Walloper, auriculatum, Susan, Scintillation, Virginia Richards, Vulcan, Yaku Sunrise and Yellow Pages. Harry Wright says "Thanks for participating" to all.

### HARDY GERANIUMS

This group of plants contains some of the most satisfactory ground-cover companions for our rhodos and it was a real pleasure to find an excellent article on the subject by Phoebe Noble, of Victoria, in the April 1998 issue (No. 60) of Fine Gardening. There are wonderful photos of geraniums, much useful information, and even a picture of Mrs. Noble, complete with rain hat and wheelbarrow. It must rain sometimes in Victoria! If you don't own this magazine, borrow it from the library, for it contains another

useful article on how to start seeds the easy way.



*I heard the bells on  
Christmas Day,  
Their old familiar carols  
play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat,  
Of peace on earth,  
Good-will to men.  
(Longfellow)*

*Merry Christmas  
and  
Happy New Year  
to all our Rhodo Friends  
  
Ray & Mary  
Palmer*