SHORTIA

NEWSLETTER OF THE
WESTERN CAROLINA BOTANICAL CLUB
SUMMER 2014

Shortia galacifolia
Oconee Bells
Field Trip Cancellations: On occasion field trips must be cancelled or changed either for weather conditions or other reasons such as road closings. Such changes are sent out by email to all members by 7 AM the day of the field trip. If you do not have email access, we will try to reach local members by telephone by 7 AM. If you are in doubt, contact a leader or co-leader whose telephone number is listed on the schedule. When a field trip is cancelled, no member will be at the contact point. Programs are cancelled when Henderson County Schools are closed (see http://www.hendersoncountypublicschoolsnc.org) but NOT necessarily canceled because of delayed opening.

New Members: Vince and Gail Murcurio, Fletcher
Shirley Tomlin, Brevard
Karl and Joan Munn, Pisgah Forest

Long-time member and hike leader at Givens Estates, Dr. John Siddall died of lung cancer on March 24th. He leaves his wife Muriel.

PROFILE OF NEW MEMBERS

Joe and Mary Standaert live in Montreat, where Mary is an elected member of the town council and is mayor pro-temp; Joe serves on several committees. Both are active with the Swannanoa Valley Museum of local history in Black Mountain, which offers many hikes during the year exploring valley history and historical locations. They authored Montreat and the soon to be published Swannanoa Valley, both books illustrated by their postcard collection.

They studied biology, ecology, and animal ecology as undergraduates, and both earned master’s degrees from Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. It was the first year the school broadened from pure forestry to environmental aspects. Mary went on to earn a PhD in biochemistry from the University of South Florida. Joe’s career was as an IT professional. Forestry was never their prime occupation, although they now own three tracts of planted pines in South Carolina, where they practice forest management with help from Mary’s brother, who was the National Tree Farmer of the Year last year.
OSAGE-ORANGE (*Maclura pomifera*)

“This native tree, deeply enmeshed in American history, is deserving of wider consideration as a hardy, drought-tolerant shade tree.” is the sub-title of an article in a recent issue of *The American Gardener* by Guy Sternberg.

The author continues, “Before settlers arrived in North America, Native Americans prized Osage-orange for its wood, ideal for making bows and arrows and a source for yellow dye. The tree was introduced to Western science in the early 1800s as the first plant specimen collected by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark’s Corps of Discovery expedition.” Later, the trees were used as hedgerows until the introduction of barbed wire fences. They served as windbreaks during the Dust Bowl years of the 1930s. The fruit of the Osage-orange may have insect-repelling qualities.

“A tree of many virtues, Osage-orange makes an impressive shade tree that thrives in a broad range of climates and soils.” summarizes the author.

(*R. Theodore (Bob) Bullington*)

On a recent winter afternoon in the auditorium at Bullington Gardens in Hendersonville, members of the Western Carolina Botanical Club were treated to the reminiscences of retired Flat Rock landscape gardener, Mickey Lively, about his friend and customer, Bob Bullington, for whom Bullington Gardens is named.

Reuben Theodore Bullington was born on December 9, 1908 in Dooley, Georgia, to a family that lived in Crisp County in the town of Cordele. He hated his first name and had no use for his brothers. Informally, he was called Bob and formally with only the initial for his first name. Bob had only an elementary school education. He left Georgia when he was sixteen years old and certain that he didn’t want to remain in Cordele and starve to death trying to farm there.

Bob’s destination, like that of so many other young folk in that era, was New York City, where he found a job with the Transit Authority working on the subways. The underground life was not what he was looking for. He took night school courses to prepare for the Civil Service exam to become a policeman and eventually passed and became a traffic cop; he later was assigned a beat.

Bob met Sally Raemer during this time, and married the older woman some time before 1935. They lived in Jackson Heights in Queens. By 1940 he was still a policeman and earned a salary of $2100 a year.
Sometime between 1940 and 1960, Bullington’s love of plants became evident, according to a story he told frequently. Next door to their home was a weed-filled vacant lot. Bob received permission from the owner to clean it up and grow plants there. He filled the lot with azaleas.

“Sally told him that he was crazy.” But he continued to water and prune his azaleas for several years. One day a man stopped to admire the plants and asked him whether they were for sale, and he quickly said “yes.” He began to dig up the plants; other people saw what he was doing and asked to purchase the azaleas also. He ended up spending the whole day digging and stuffing his pockets with the money he had made.

That evening he showed Sally, “Look what I’ve got in my pockets.” He pulled out bills, counting them to discover that he had earned in one day more cash than he had ever had at one time.

“Now who’s crazy?” he asked Sally.

After twenty years as a New York City cop, Bullington was able to retire and begin his second career as a nurseryman and landscape gardener full-time. He had a friend who owned private greenhouses on Long Island, where Bullington grew most of the plants that he sold. One of them was a yew called “Meadowbrook,” which Michael Dirr lists in his Manual of Woody Plants as developed at a greenhouse in Long Island.

Bullington’s next step was described in the September 9, 1967 issue of The New Yorker, in which the author, G.F.T. Ryall, tells of his visit to the Belmont Park racetrack on Long Island. There, “the landscape gardener, R. Theodore Bullington, is growing flowers and shrubbery to decorate the grounds and the stand come opening day.” The Belmont greenhouses were full of greenery, much of which Ryall had never seen before at close range. He reported that Bullington also did the landscaping for Saratoga and the Big A [Aqueduct] tracks. “This being chrysanthemum time, 30,000 chrysanthemums—5000 raised at Belmont Park and the rest bought from nurserymen—will be set out at the Big A in the next couple of weeks. Mr. Bullington speaks of putting out 50,000 pansies at Aqueduct every spring.”

About 1970, the Bullingtons moved to the property in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Bob may have chosen the destination because that area has more days of clear weather than any other that he considered—an important factor for a nursery. Here he grew for sale Japanese Maples, dwarf and weeping conifers and a variety of other rare and unusual plants, many of which he obtained from his Long Island friend. Bob loved all flowering plants, especially daffodils, dahlias, pansies and chrysanthemums.
Lively said, “I don’t even remember how or why I came to Bob’s garden, but I do remember being amazed by the plant material he had accumulated over the years. I remember liking the plants a lot and not liking Mr. Bullington at all. However, after several years we became friends.”

Bob didn’t have any close friends but he tolerated several people, including Fritz McCall, Fritz’s son, Brian, Ted Richardson, Harry Logan, and a doctor from Asheville. The person whom he liked most was Mrs. Webb from across the street. She never bothered him.

Bob didn’t much like women, but Sally he adored. When she rang the bell for lunch, he would immediately drop what he was doing and go inside to join her. They never had any children. She passed away three years before he did. After that, he would eat a cheese sandwich and cup of hot tea for lunch at noon every day in the garage that became the foundation for the building where Hendersonville children now learn about plants and the environment.

Education and learning were very important to Bob. Sally may have encouraged him to read and learn as much as he did. He provided scholarships for second-year horticulture students at Haywood Community College who had already proved that they deserved the help. Bob also provided the funds for a greenhouse at Blue Ridge Community College.

“Whenever I asked him a question about a plant, reported Lively, “He refused to provide any information unless I referred to the plant using both its Latin and common names.”

Bob made fun of Southern boys and said they would rather hunt rabbits than work. “They should grow only sweet taters and watermelon.” His hometown of Cordele, Georgia is called the “Watermelon capital of the world.”

Among the many people whom Bullington disliked were politicians (especially lawyers, whom he called “the legal mafia”), the local Board of Education, school children selling magazines and cookies, and customers who picked up plants from his beds to look at them and took seeds and cuttings without asking permission. The North Carolina Arboretum was on his black list because they wouldn’t put up a plaque in Sally’s honor. He never used mulch on his flowerbeds, hated having his picture taken, and insisted on grafting knives that were very sharp. He would only use a reel lawn mower, and it had to be very sharp.
An example of Bullington’s cussedness was an occasion in which fertilizer and other supplies were delivered to his greenhouse by a firm that gave a 2% refund for payment before delivery. After reading the invoice, he drove to the store and demanded payment of the sixty-seven cents he was owed. The female clerk had forgotten to list it on the invoice.

Bob Bullington died in the hospital on October 24, 1989 at the age of 80. He had not made a will but did indicate that his household goods and vehicles were to go to Sally’s sister. Eventually, Ted Richardson, the executor of his estate, arranged for the garden to belong to the Henderson County Education Foundation for $1/year.

BOOK REVIEW


Peter Crane has fortunately organized his book into chapters so that the reader can choose only the sections of interest, instead of plowing through this long book. There is information for the person who has a female ginkgo in his backyard, the city dweller who admires the male ginkgos lining her street, the elder worried about losing his memory who is considering taking *Ginkgo biloba* pills, the botanist who is interested in the history of plants and how they reproduce, the historian who has visited London’s Kew Gardens, and someone who is fascinated with Chinese, Korean and Japanese culture, religious practices and history.

Peter Raven, President Emeritus of the Missouri Botanical Garden in Saint Louis, provides a fine foreword that outlines the many-faceted uniqueness of *Ginkgo biloba*. “…ginkgo stands out by virtue of its unique features, amazing history, and long association with people.” The tree, with its distinctive fan-shaped leaves and tall trunks is found in parks, streets and recreational areas throughout the temperate world, but is extremely rare as an uncultivated native tree in the wild.

“Among the seed plants, only ginkgo and cycads have motile sperm within their pollen tubes, a fascinating example of the survival of an archaic characteristic.” “Ginkgo has survived essentially unchanged for as much as 200 million years.”
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The purpose of the Club is to study the plants of the southern Appalachian Mountains and the Southeast through field trips and indoor meetings. Membership is open to all. Individual/family memberships are $15. New members joining from the period July 1-December 31 pay $8. All memberships are renewable on January first of each year. Send dues to Alan Graham, 544 Tip Top Road, Brevard, NC 28712.