

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter June 2006

Next Meeting

Saturday, June 3, at 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall
BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge
MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183

Chapter Business: Show & Tell, Ask The
Expert, and any other relevant or irrelevant
activities, as long as they are interesting.

AM & PM— Richard May, Proprietor of Evermay Nursery in Old Town, ME

Evermay Nursery is a small Maine based
family run nursery. They grow unusual
plants not generally available. These include
Primula species, wildflowers, woodland,
rock garden and alpine plants. Because their
customers are spread over the Eastern and
Central United States, they are
predominantly a mail order nursery. The
majority of their customers order from their
website (www.evermaynursery.com) which
features over 200 pictures of the plants they
grow. They also mail out a catalog for those
who don't have web access.

The program will focus on plants that many
gardeners find difficult like *Meconopsis*,
Lewisia, *Androsace*, *Hepatica*, *Edraianthus*,
and *Gentiana*, plus specific plants like
Dicentra peregrina.

Lunch — BYO. We welcome dessert
contributions. This will be followed by
our plant & seedling sale plus a sale of
plants brought by Richard May. Bring as
many as you can, and, as always,
donors get first pick.



Chairman's Message – 5/15/06

By Peter F. George

May 15, and it's 43 degrees and raining. It's
been raining for days, and although there is
nothing I can do about it, it is making each
day interminable and depressing. I have
dozens of plants that are waiting to bloom,
but with the rain they are simply in stasis,
showing bud color, but not opening those
buds. The bees that normally would be
swarming around my fruit trees, which are
in full bloom, are waiting it out, with only
the occasional masochistic bumblebee
daring to face the cold wind and rain. I know
that at some point the weather will turn
warm and sunny, and hopefully the plants
will wait a few more days before giving up
on blooming this year.

Before the rains began, I did my best to
locate plants that looked dead but had
actually survived the winter. I found a
surprising number, with a few literally
hanging on by one tiny spot of green. It
appears that the older the plant, the more
likely it was to either die or suffer major
damage. My large and decade old
Helianthemum is gone, and so are my
Penstemon newberryi, *Penstemon ovatus*
(which will survive in my garden via the
dozens of seedlings it left behind), and all of
my South American species, several of

which I've had for 4 or more years. I guess this winter was the season of change for my gardens, and since there will be quite a large turnover of plants, I will also make some design changes as well.

The last Chapter meeting was quite successful, and I'm very optimistic about the rest of our year. Membership is again rising, and the programs are uniformly excellent and interesting, and I hope to see many of you at the next meeting. Richard May is a wonderful grower, and his location in Maine gives us a real chance to grow Primulas that will survive and flourish in our peculiar climate. He always brings a new 'look' to each program, so even if you have seen his previous talks, this one should be brand new.

I want to personally thank those members of our Chapter who continue to provide us with services that aren't easily noticed by most of our members. Norma Abel should be renamed 'Able' for the work she does in communicating with our new members, writing thank you notes to our speakers and a myriad of other small but important tasks that need to get done each month in order for our Chapter to function properly. I still need an official 'Greeter' and a 'Refreshment Chair,' so if you have any interest at all, please let me know. My email address is: petergeorge@verizon.net, and I look forward to hearing from each of you about issues that YOU feel need to be addressed.

Good gardening, and let us all hope for a warm, sunny and long spring growing season.

BNARGS: THE EARLY DAYS

By Anne Spiegel

It was going to be a study group. Norman Singer had approached me at the Winter Study Weekend put on by the Delaware Chapter in Wilmington. It was the first study weekend for me, a very new NARGS (back then it was still ARGs) member. It sounded like a great idea – some people seriously interested in rock garden and alpine plants would meet up in the Berkshires and have discussions on relevant

topics. Norman sent out a notice and I think his list was based partly on zip codes.

Norman, Caroline Pope, Geoffrey Charlesworth and Elodie Osborne



organized the first meeting. We met at the center house of the Berkshire Botanical Garden in March 1986, and we really filled the room. We represented quite a large area – from Vermont to the mid-Hudson valley and all points in between. There was so much participation, enthusiasm and energy that after a couple of meetings Norman suggested that we form a Chapter. We were first listed as a Chapter in the summer 1986 ARGs Bulletin (now called the Quarterly) and Joe Eck from Vermont was the first President.

Our meetings had almost immediately developed into an informal structure that is basically still followed today. We would

start out with new business (kept very short), then a morning talk followed by bring-your-own lunch and whatever goodies someone had baked for the meeting. (At one meeting someone brought a "dirt cake" she had baked in a clay flowerpot with a shiny new trowel to use to serve the cake. It was decorated on the top with candy "worms".) After lunch, we would have another talk, usually shorter, and then a plant sale or auction depending on the season. We had our first "annual lunch meeting" at the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge and 75 people came. Even back then we were obviously a group that liked to eat.

Those first few years most of the talks were from our own membership: Howard Pfeiffer, Geoffrey Charlesworth, Joe Eck, Dick Redfield and Linc Foster, to name just a few. We had such a wealth of experience and talent among our members and they were all so willing to share their knowledge and answer the questions of those just starting rock gardening. Personally, I always thought of Dick Redfield as a walking encyclopedia of plant knowledge. You would research to the best of your ability, and then when you hit a stonewall, you would ask Dick and he never failed to come up with an answer. And my favorite meetings were those when I sat next to Timmy Foster who brought an artist's eye to everything she did. Her comments were always wonderful. In those early years, Norman arranged the programs and gave us a wonderful mix yet never lost the focus on rock gardens and rock garden plants. He always participated in all the meetings with such humor and friendliness – I think he was really the first unofficial

"greeter". Later, that became an official position but no one ever filled the role with such bon-ho-mie and panache.

We visited each other's gardens. Elodie Osborne invited us to her garden, which featured an enormous outcropping that had been planted years before by Linc and Timmy Foster. We visited Ted Childs' marvelous hillside garden in Norfolk - Connecticut's so-called "refrigerator". Norman and Geoffrey opened their gardens several times, such a feast of wonderful plants, half of which you didn't know. I've never forgotten that first visit, when

Geoffrey, (who up to then had never said more than hello), asked me: "Do you want to grow everything or do you want to make it look good like Norman?" I had to admit to being blessed with a site that made everything look good but that yes, I did want to grow everything. Part of the fun of those visits was looking at the seedling pots, which were legion.



Our plant sales were marvelous. Often fueled by Norman's and Geoffrey's overflow (at that time they grew thousands of seeds); we also had plants from Dick Redfield, who introduced us to *Cyclamen fatrense*, a truly hardy cyclamen, and Norman Priest, who was a dab hand at dividing *Adonis amurensis* and shared his bounty with us. Millie Latawicz brought divisions of the double-flowered bloodroot that at the time few had access to or were growing. Elliot Jessen always had rhododendrons and Linc Foster frequently contributed Saxes, which he had hybridized. You always went home with something wonderful to grow and learn

to know. At some point, Norman and Geoffrey must have gotten bored with constantly schlepping plants to the sales and started having a giant seedling sale at their home, with several other chapters being invited. From the receipts came a large donation to our meeting host, the Berkshire Botanical Garden. I'm sure many of us still have plants bought at these sales.

Norman and Geoffrey contributed so much. Geoffrey gave talks and wrote for the newsletter constantly. He was probably the main reason we had so many out-of-town members, who joined for the Newsletter. He brought plants for the "show and tell" and served as one of our presidents. Norman, also one of our presidents, was the great organizer and kept everything moving along at a good clip. He always had a plant to show about which none of us knew anything. He once said he would always order from the seed exchange either something that couldn't be pronounced or about which he could find no information. Not a bad idea – keeps you from getting into a rut. Few people could speak to Norman for any length of time without becoming infected by his enthusiasm for plants and people. At our tenth anniversary meeting, Norman delighted all with a huge surprise cake in celebration – a wonderful idea, and one which satisfied his sweet tooth – or was it Geoffrey's? I can never remember.

Obituary

A. Frederick McGourty, 69, of Litchfield Road, Norfolk died Thursday, April 27, 2006 at his home. For many years he was the editor of publication at Brooklyn Botanic Gardens. In the mid 1970's he moved to Norfolk and ran the Hillside Gardens with his wife in Norfolk. A celebration of his life will be held on June 3, at 2 p.m. at Hillside Garden, Norfolk.

BULB FANCIERS SHARE THE WEALTH

By Jane McGary

Frequently seen among the small classified ads in the Alpine Garden Society's bulletin are offers to sell surplus bulbs from the collections of gardeners who specialize in geophytes, or plants that spend part of their annual cycle as underground storage organs. When my own bulb frames began bursting at the seams, I decided to follow suit. At first I exchanged bulbs or just gave them to friends, but after the word spread and strangers began asking for my list, I went commercial in a small way.



I lift and repot my collection of about 1200 species, half one year and half the next. Whatever doesn't fit back into the frames goes into the list. I'm not a Dutch farmer with a temperature- and humidity-controlled warehouse; I keep the sale bulbs on a well-wrapped table in my dining room, which is cool and dimly lit. Any dinner parties during August have to occur on the patio! The list goes out only by e-mail to save on postage, and most people order the same way. (The ones who've contributed to the *Rock Garden Quarterly* get a bonus.) After a month, whatever remains goes into the garden or is donated to a local botanic garden for sale as potted plants the next spring. I also send some to the excellent "running" bulb exchange of the Pacific Bulb Society (www.pacificbulbsociety.org). In the past few years, the difficulties imposed by US import restrictions motivated me to

send all my seeds to NARGS; the bulb collection usually produces 65 or more species for that purpose, and they're very easy to collect -- though I hate cleaning *Allium* and *Triteleia* capsules.

I don't think I make any profit doing this, considering the investment in seeds (wild-collected if I can get them), supplies, and time, but it does get me a tax break as a "farm." The best thing about it is knowing that I've spread my collection around North America, and if I lose something (rodents are a constant problem), it's likely to have survived somewhere else. It's helpful and sometimes surprising to learn how different plants survive, or not, in different regions. If you'd like to receive the list, just ask before the end of July (janemcgary@earthlink.net).

Favorite Plants

It's hard to designate any one plant as being one's favorite. But I do have a great love for diminutive things. In the



bright sunlight of the rock garden *Androsace* are a hit for me.

They're beautiful simple yellow-eyed flowers that develop a rosette of foliage along the flowering stalk. These eventually lie down and take root, spreading

the plant like a miniature strawberry plant. In the woodland garden or a shady spot, *Dicentra cucullaria* (Dutchman's Breeches), *Anemone*, *Anemonella*, and *Hepatica* are very attractive. Their simple beauty stands out along with their glowing

colors. But in recent years I have accumulated quite a number of *Corydalis solida*.

When I drove the race truck for my pigeon club back from Cleveland and Youngstown, Ohio in the spring I would leave the NYS Thruway at Syracuse and go north to Oswego, NY. Ellen Hornig of Seneca Hill Perennials (315-342-5915) is located there. Her collection of plants is unique and I highly recommend that every plants person take the opportunity to go there. These nurseries have a life cycle- it's based on the energy level of the owners. When they no longer are able to justify the considerable effort needed to run such a business they just fade out. For example, there was a lady in Fulton, NY who had a massive collection of Iris. She had accumulated much of the old material from the time when people started growing the bearded Iris in America. Her children had no interest in this business; therefore I think the business folded. When breeders over-emphasize the bloom size the scapes don't hold the flower and need to be staked. That is why such new material had to be discarded and people went back and brought the program forward with a more sensible approach. Ellen Hornig sells some of this Iris lady's plant material. A lot of things in life are "two steps forward, one step back".

If there is a plant for which I have a great fondness it is *Corydalis solida* 'Blushing Girl.' It has many flowers and an interesting pink color with two shades.

By Dean Evans

Chapter Dues

Having reviewed the list of those members who have paid their 2006 Chapter dues, it appears that quite a few of us have

overlooked this modest but important contribution to the ongoing health of our organization. If your name is written in red ink, it means you owe for the current year. Please send a check to Jeff Hurtig as soon as possible. (*See back page for address.*)

LEAVING HOME

'Why did you come to Kimball Farms?' During my first couple of months here I was asked this question numberless times. I never knew what the question really meant. Was it just the equivalent of a polite 'How are you?' requiring a standardized response? Did they want my whole life history right away or just the latest installment? Was it a psychological question? A financial question? A health question? A family question? Well now the truth can be told. I left home because the kitchen faucet was dripping. I think it was in 1995 that I noticed a slight drip - not enough to worry about. The man who delivered oil was also the only plumber in town and he easily dismissed the drip. A few years later he actually unscrewed everything and replaced some kind of metallic worm that corrected the drip for a short while. Then it started up again and he suggested that I should buy a new faucet at Carr's in Great Barrington, which he would install. After several months I did this but meanwhile Angelo (not his real name) retired and his sons were running the business, which had been divided, into oil delivery and the other stuff. The son Benny (not his real name), now doing everything except deliver oil, and his son Sal (not his real name) who, as a teenager, had been there for some of the furnace servicing was now Benny's full time helper. So the faucet, instead of going to Angelo, went through



Benny to Sal, who was designated plumber. But Benny had health and marital problems and Richard (not his real name) took over both sides of the business, Sal got married, took another job, found a house near mine but forgot completely about my new faucet and the ancient drip.

I was growing close to 2000 packets of seed during those years so needed large quantities of water. My technique was to set the seed pots overnight in two inches of water in a kitty-litter tray. In the morning I would take them out of the greenhouse, well soaked, in trays where they would sit on picnic tables until spring. Germination usually began in late March. I also drank about a quart of apple cider every week to get my pills down. Cider came in plastic bottles.

So whenever the sink was free of dishes I placed the empty plastic bottles under the dripping faucet overnight to catch the drip. This was quite erratic and depended a lot on exactly how the arm of the faucet was oriented. Sometimes there was no water at all by morning and sometimes the bottle was overflowing. I felt absolutely no guilt because every drop was utilized. When the power went off, which was several times a year, the collected water flushed toilets. Eventually I had about fifty bottles and the greenhouse began to look disreputable and overcrowded. Ultimately I was nagged by friends and the plumber about the drip and how easy it would be for me to do it myself. None of them offered to do it. I was fully aware that I didn't know how to do it myself and that any screw Angelo or Benny had tightened would be impossible for me to move. Also there was the possibility of major flooding if I started the operation and failed. So as soon as an apartment became free at Kimball Farms I left home.

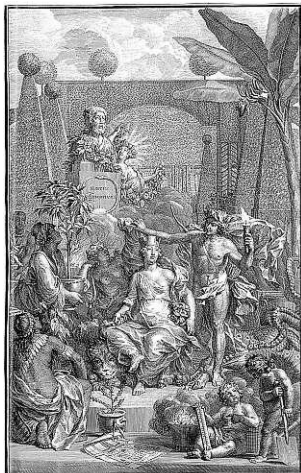
Geoffrey Charlesworth

“IS THIS THE PERSON TO WHOM I AM SPEAKING?”*

By Cliff Desch

*“Ernestine, the telephone operator played by Lily Tomlin on Saturday Night Live in the mid-1970s”

As avid rock gardeners we bandy about the scientific names of plants we grow or would like to grow or have tried and failed to grow. This latter category is usually the largest. Often neophytes find the use of these names a daunting exercise. The scientific name of every known kind of living and extinct organism is based on a binomial system of nomenclature. This two-part name consists of first the genus (plural: genera) name (first letter capitalized) followed by the species (plural: species) epithet (all in lower case letters). Both names are underlined or written in italics. For example, one of my favorite sounding names is *Turbinocarpus klinkerianus*, an endangered cactus from Mexico. To date, about 2,000,000 species have been named which includes 225,000 flowering plants. It is estimated that 1,000,000 to 100,000,000 extant species, mostly insects, are yet to be described. Quite an estimated range! Even taking the low end of this range, one is confident to say that taxonomists, those who describe new species, will not run out of study materials in the foreseeable future. The now universal use of this binomial system is credited to the Swedish biologist and medical doctor Carl Linnaeus (1707-1782). Although he did not



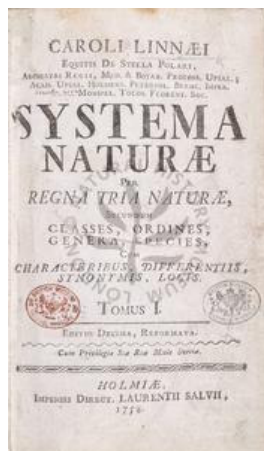
invent this system, he is responsible for its promotion and acceptance throughout the scientific community. The oldest valid plant names are in Linnaeus' *Species Plantarum* (1753) while the 10th edition of his *Systema Naturae* (1758) is considered the temporal start of valid zoological names.

Linnaeus studied medicine in Sweden and in the Netherlands. He practiced medicine in Sweden, specializing in treatment of syphilis, from 1738 until 1741 when he accepted a professorship in medicine at the University of Uppsala. In this era, botany was an integral part of medical studies and he was able to incorporate his real love, plants, as well as sending his students out to collect plants in distant lands, including Pehr Kalm (1729-1803) in eastern North America, Daniel Solander (1733-1782) in Australia (on Captain Cook's first circumnavigation of the globe) and Carl Thunberg (1743-1828) in South Africa and in Japan. Thunberg arrived back in Sweden in 1779, only to learn of his mentor's death the previous year.

Linnaeus became quite influential in scientific circles during his life and apparently did allow fame to go to his head. Bill Bryson, in his book 'A Short History of Nearly Everything' (2003), comments of Linnaeus that "rarely has a man been more comfortable with his own greatness." Linnaeus suggested that the title "Prince of Botanists" be inscribed on his gravestone. During his career he named or recorded 13,000 species including man, most domestic plants and animals, and quite a number of 'alpine' plants (e.g. *Aquilegia Canadensis*, *Dianthus alpinus*, *Diapensia lapponica*, *Epimedium alpinum*, *Gentiana acaulis*, *Kalmia latifolia*, *Rhododendron ferrugineum*). Linnaeus also set up a hierarchical system of classification based on shared physical attributes of the organisms. In his system, for example, animals were divided into 6 groups: worms

(including mollusks and crustaceans), insects, fishes, reptiles, birds and mammals. Plant groups were distinguished by their reproductive structures and how they carried out sex. Although it took some time for his system to ‘get around,’ the British scientific community accepted it enthusiastically from the start. The Linnaean Society was founded in and is based in London, not in Sweden.

The Linnaean System, however, was not uniformly applied throughout the world scientific community. To keep things in order, various scientific organizations have codified rules for naming species and classifying organisms. Plants and fungi fall under the rules of the International Code Of Botanical Nomenclature (first edition 1867); animals under the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (first edition



1902). The botanical code does not prohibit the use of a genus name even though it may already apply (or will apply) to an animal group, and vice versa. Thus, it is important to establish if the person to whom you are speaking is a botanist or a zoologist before exchanging scientific binomials. The same genus may instill very different images depending on the scientist’s background. For example, an ornithologist knows *Glaucidium* as a genus of pygmy owls from southeastern Asia and species of *Arenaria* are turnstones. An entomologist would recognize *Iris* as a genus of Mediterranean grasshoppers and *Dryas* as nymphalid butterflies. A marine biologist knows *Phyllodoce* and *Nerine* as genera of polychaet worms (annelids), and *Artemisia* and *Leucothoe* as genera of malacostracan crustaceans (lobsters, crabs, prawns, etc.) Really off the wall is

Polypodium, a genus of parasitic jellyfish relatives that invaded the ovaries and eggs of sturgeon in the Volga River basin, and in the Black and Caspian Seas. Does your caviar have a funny taste?

Editors Notes:

- Sharon Morris Kincheloe, of Staunton, VA, has provided our botanical illustrations this month. Sharon's work includes botanical drawings and etchings. She also draws insects occasionally. The limited edition prints are done from their original colored-pencil drawings and printed on 100% acid free museum quality paper. The etchings are hand engraved in drypoint, inked, and hand-pulled through the etching press. The etchings are then hand-painted with watercolor. Her website is: <http://www.botanicaldrawings.com/index.html>
- Joyce Fingerhut reports that the \$100 late fee for the International Interim Rock Garden Plant Conference this July based at Snowbird, Utah will be waived this year. There are still \$300 stipends available to any NARGS member who has never attended a national meeting. Please contact me for information.
- Mass Audubon Native Plant Sale, Friday, June 2 through Sunday, June 4, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day, Pleasant Valley Sanctuary, Lenox. Native wildflowers, ferns, trees, and shrubs. Mass Audubon members get 10% discount, new memberships available at 50% off the regular price. Call 413-637-0320 for more information.

May 6, 2006 Meeting Notes

By Tom Clark

Chairman Peter George called the meeting to order with about 35 people in attendance. It was especially good to see several new faces in the audience. They were Harold Peachey of West Sand Lake, NY; Rita Furlong of Becket, MA; Geri and Doug Walter, also of Becket. All of them expressed a sincere interest in the group and seemed to be quite impressed with the level of knowledge and enthusiasm that our group as a whole possessed.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Joe Strauch relayed the sad news of the passing of Fred McGourty on April 27. Fred was described as being a kind, friendly and sharing individual, and certainly a bigger-than-life figure in the world of horticulture. A memorial service will be held at his home and garden, Hillside Gardens, in Norfolk, CT on June 3.

Pam Johnson, who maintains the BNARGS web site, reminded the group that she maintains a list of related events (plant sales, plant society meetings, garden tours, etc.) at our web site and encouraged members to send such announcements to her for promotion through our web site.

SHOW & TELL

John Spain shared several items with us, the first of which was a first-hand look at how he deals with a shipment of cacti. He actually had with him just such a package that he had received recently but had not opened. Cactus received from a mail order source typically arrive as cuttings or bare-root plants that John sets in sand to root before planting in the garden. He handles them easily with a pair of kitchen tongs. John also had a bag of a product called

Dyna-Gro that is a pumice like material, available in various grades, that could be very useful as a rooting medium, a component of a free-draining potting mix and other similar applications. According to the bag *Dyna-Gro* is, “a natural, non-toxic and environmentally safe growing medium” and is derived from “sedimentary rock composed of fossilized remains of diatoms”. For more information visit www.dyna-gro.com.

There is no escaping the fact that we live and garden in a forested region of the country here in the northeast, and I imagine nearly all of us have a small patch of woods, or at the very least a couple trees that cast a shade that is welcomed by us humans as well as a few choice plants. Fellow member Don Dembowski of Pelham, NY treated us to a wonderful talk entitled “Spring Woodland Gems”. Don highlighted a wide range of the many plants he cultivates in his garden and provided far more than basic characteristics. He spoke of the likes and dislikes of the plants based on his experiences, and covered in some detail propagation techniques that he has used successfully. Although our chapter plant



sale was rather small for May, Don filled several tables with the fruits of his propagation labor and offered for sale many of the plants he spoke of: double *Trillium grandiflorum*, a

stunning form of *Polygonatum cyrtonema* with reddish purple leaves, a couple different forms of *Anemonella*, and other choice plants. Thank you, Don, for sharing both your knowledge and your plants.

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Peter F. George
Vice-Chairperson – Dean Evans
Secretary – Norma Abel
Treasurer – Jeffrey Hurtig
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson – Dean Evans
Greeter – **Open**
Independent Director – Elizabeth Zander
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George
Proofreader-Rita Evans
Meeting Recorder – Tom Clark
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel
Program Chairperson – Robin Magowan
Refreshments Chairperson - **Open**
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

Published 10 times per year (Feb. through Nov.) by the Berkshire Chapter NARGS

Membership is open to all members of
NARGS

Dues \$10.00 single, \$12.50 Family
Payable to the Treasurer
Jeffrey Hurtig
33 Jeremy Drive
East Lyme, CT 06333

Deadline for Next Newsletter is June 15,
2006

Please contact editor before reprinting
articles

Peter F. George, Editor
Berkshire Chapter NARGS
PO Box 833
Petersham, MA 01366