

# NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



January 2009  
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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy New Year! By now you have probably heard the results of our auction last month. The success was due to the efforts of a few volunteers: Al McCrae did a fantastic job of obtaining donations and his hard work certainly was one of the major factors in the outcome; Ken & Madeleine Webb of Victoria donated rhododendrons to the club and many of them were available for the auction; June Bouchard and John Deniseger assisted in organizing and coordinating, Sandra Dorman did her usual wonderful setting up of the table decorations and drinks. Many members donated items which certainly added to the variety and value of the goods on display. We owe a big thank you to the businesses that donated; you will find them listed in this Newsletter. Whenever possible, acknowledge the support that these businesses have given to our organization and when shopping at their stores, please thank them. If I have omitted anyone – please let me know so I can acknowledge your help. Thank you, we appreciate you!

Glenda, Chris and John have been arranging the program for this coming year and I know you will find this year will be entertaining and informative as usual. Again, I ask that you invite friends and acquaintances to attend our events.

I look forward to seeing you in January,

Paul

PS – I forgot the most important people at the auction – those who bid. Thanks. Without you, the auction couldn't have been the success it was.

## EXECUTIVE

President	Paul Lawry	390-2370
Vice President	John Deniseger	390-3605
Secretary	June Bouchard	390-3605
Treasurer	Chris Southwick	758-0993
Directors	Glenda Barr	390-2822
	Linda Lawry	390-2370
	Sandra Dorman	390-0136
	Barb Coy	758-8497
	Rosina Schmidt	751-3386

## COMMITTEES

Advertising	Michael Miller	758-2879
Library	Ann Beamish	758-2574
	Helene Sullivan	758-7023
Newsletter	Kathryn Grant	245-7879
Membership	Debbie Gaboury & Barb Coy	
Program	Glenda Barr	390-2822
Raffle	Ann Davey & Val Harvey	
Social	Sandra Dorman	390-0136
Dollar Table	Reinhold Gorgosilich	758-6533

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## NEXT MEETING

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

BEBAN PARK SOCIAL CENTRE

7:30 pm

MARGARET HORSFIELD

“VOICES FROM THE SOUND”

# NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

## TWIGS AND STEMS



### GOODIES FOR JANUARY MEETING

Chris Southwick  
Terry Mack  
Glenda Barr

### Our January Speaker

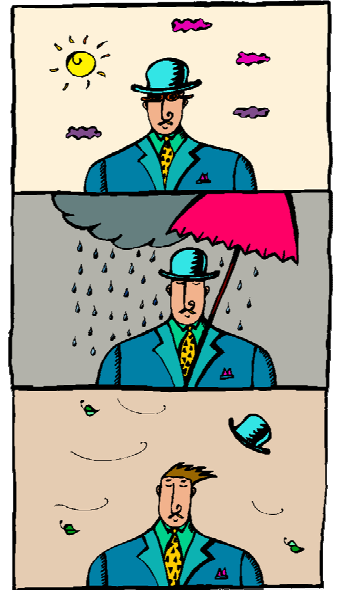
In 1989, Nanaimo author Margaret Horsfield heard about an incredible garden on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Exploring Cougar Annie's garden aroused her curiosity, making her want to learn more about the story and the area's history. In 1999, she published the award winning book, *Cougar Annie's Garden*. Cougar Annie lead Margaret to continue exploring the lives and stories of those who had lived in the Clayoquot Sound area, leading to her latest book, *Voices from the Sound: Chronicles of Clayoquot Sound and Tofino 1899-1929*. Margaret will join us in January to talk about the stories and people in both books and more.



Unloading freight from the *Princess Maquinna* at Ahousat, 1919

### Dr. Richard Hebda to Speak

The Nanaimo Horticultural Society is pleased to have Dr. Richard Hebda come to speak on climate change and gardeners. This presentation will take place on Wednesday, January 14 at 7:30 p.m. at the Nanaimo Ecumenical Centre, 6234 Spartan Road. The evening will commence with a brief business meeting followed by a one hour presentation with questions and refreshments to follow. Guest fee is \$ 5.00. NHS members are free.



Dr. Richard Hebda is the Curator of Botany and Earth History at the Royal British Columbia Museum. He is also an Adjunct Associate Professor in Biology and the Schools of Earth and Ocean Sciences and Environmental Studies at the University of Victoria. Dr. Hebda received his B.Sc. Biology in 1973 from McMaster University and his Ph.D. in Botany from the University of British Columbia in 1977. He is the author of 80+ scientific papers on environmental history of the last 15,000 years, 200+ popular articles mainly on bulbs and Native Plants, and three books. He has also (co)edited three books and participated in numerous TV, radio and newspaper interviews. He acts as advisor to many public organizations.

In the event of snow this evening will be cancelled.

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**THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING BUSINESSES WHO  
DONATED TO OUR CHRISTMAS AUCTION:**

**CANADIAN TIRE**

**SHAR-KARE FEEDS &  
PET SUPPLIES**

**THE BACKYARD WILD  
BIRD & NATURE  
STORE**

**VANCOUVER ISLAND  
UNIVERSITY**

**SHARECOST RENTALS & SALES**

**DIANA'S GARDEN CENTRE**

**GREEN THUMB NURSERIES**

**TURLEY'S FLORIST & POTTING SHED**

**DIG THIS**

**KEN MACKAY CONCRETE FORMING**

**BUCKERFIELD'S**

**THE WINE WORKS**

**ART KNAPP PLANTLAND**

**ALEX'S THERAPEUTIC GARDEN CENTRE**

**CARPE DIEM**

**THE QUILTED DUCK**

**PLEASE THANK THEM FOR THEIR SUPPORT  
NEXT TIME YOU SHOP!**



## **Vancouver Island Hybridizers – What's in the Works Now?**

By Alan Campbell, Cowichan Chapter

'The good old days', we all remember those, even if our individual recollections differ. I hold fond memories of childhood days of the mid 1950's growing up in the village of Cobble Hill and it's central agricultural feed store. Farmers from their surrounding farms would meet there, talk of all that was of concern and purchase that which was needed. 'The Creamery' was a fantastic place for us youngsters, dimly lighted alleyways made from towering stacks of burlaped sacks of grains, the smell of alfalfa hay and molasses. Yet even from the depths of these battlements of burlap we would hear the arrival of 'old Bob Caven' and his team of Clydesdales pulling his buckboard wagon up to the loading ramp for his weekly supplies. A scene of perhaps 100 years earlier eroded away by the Mercury and Fargo pickup trucks parked around him. The horse and wagon had served Mr. Caven well his whole life, no need for those new fangled foul smelling machines.

I applaud Mr. Caven's ability to be content with his ways and means and not feel the 'need' to embrace all that is new but to disregard the ability to improve is another thing all together. Charles Duell was a man who foresaw the end of advancement. In the year 1899, during his tenure as the Commissioner of the United States Patent Office, Mr. Duell stated: "Everything that can be invented has been invented." Thankfully those with inquiring minds chose not to heed him. It is those men and women with an inborn sense of curiosity or inquisitiveness which allows the addition to or improvement of that which has come before.

Joe Harvey Ph. D. of the American Rhododendron Society's Victoria Chapter is one such man. Born in the County of Yorkshire, England, and schooled in Durham, Dr. Harvey focused his scholastic endeavours towards biology. An interest in hybridizing became part of Joe's work while pursuing his doctorate. Rhododendrons were not his subject of choice at that time. The hybridization of violets became the substance of his thesis. (Joe has kept rather mum on that point amongst rhododendron circles so perhaps we'll just keep that to ourselves).

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The lure of the western horizon pulled Joe to Halifax in 1963 where he accepted a position in the Biology Department of Dalhousie University. During his time on the East coast Dr. Harvey became acquainted with the local rhododendron scene. Nova Scotia has its own 'rhodoholics' and men such as John Weagle and Capt. Dick Steele would fully engulf Dr. Harvey in the addiction. Twenty six years later, in 1989, would find Joe attending the American Rhododendron Societies' Spring Convention hosted by the Victoria Chapter. This 4 or 5 day sojourn to the West Coast would cause an epiphany within Joe resulting in him and his wife Linda selling their eastern home and retiring to Sooke in 1990.

Producing rhododendron hybrids with improved habit and foliage is Dr. Harvey's focus. Choosing species specifically with indumented foliage and hand pollinating the desired crosses has produced exceptional plants. John Weagle has registered one such plant named 'The Porcupine' (*R. degrobianum* x *R. makinoi*) (2002), a very compact plant whose new growth emerges standing straight up reminiscent of its namesake in an irritated state. Numerous crossings using *R. degrobianum*, *R. makinoi*, *R. pachysanthum*, *R. pseudochrysanthum*, along with choice plants from the Taliensia subsection I am sure will produce more plants being registered having Joe Harvey as hybridizer.

With his doctorate in biology and his membership in the Linnean Society of London, Joe is the first to admit that he is a scientist not a gardener. Gardener or not the scientist's inquisitiveness has cultivated a prodigious amount of rhododendron seed. Seed lots obtained by local propagators as well as those offered through the ARS Seed Exchange will ensure that Joe Harvey rhodo hybrids will be growing not only in Vancouver Island gardens but also in the gardens of Eastern North America, France, Denmark and Finland.

Harry Wright is another 'East Coaster' who has greatly enhanced the rhododendron scene here on Vancouver Island. Harry and his wife Gwen's thirty-five plus years of living in the Comox Valley at their Haida Gold Gardens has garnered them the respect and friendship of countless people in the American Rhododendron Society.

His parents love of the soil notwithstanding, Harry looked for a little more adventure than what he was finding digging potatoes out of the New Brunswick soil. Harry's search for 'the new' eventually had him join

the Royal Canadian Air Force in the early 1950's. A twenty year military career included a 2 year tour of duty with N.A.T.O. in Europe along with a 1 year tour with the U.N. in West New Guinea. These extended duties provided Harry with the opportunities to visit the many magnificent gardens of those regions. A lengthy posting to C.F.B. Trenton in Ontario followed but couldn't keep Harry's enquiring mind busy enough. His mother's love of landscape surfaced in Harry and pulled him into a correspondence course in landscaping and to take an off hour part time job at a nursery. Eventually Harry started his own landscape maintenance business and the desire to learn more had Harry begin a three year course on General Horticulture from the University of Guelph which he finished just in time to take a new posting at C.F.B. Comox. This was to be the last posting for the Wright's, Harry took his release from the military in 1972.

The years that followed were busy ones, establishing a landscape maintenance business, purchasing the land which would hold their home and gardens and eventually taking on the position of Parks Foreman for the city of Courtenay. Harry quickly became aware that West Coast gardening revolved around rhododendrons. The yellow rhodos took top spot on Harry's list with Bob Rhodes' 'Haida Gold' coming in first. Asking for and receiving permission to use the name 'Haida Gold' Harry left his position as Parks Foreman to devote full time to Haida Gold Gardens.

Harry started to dabble in hybridizing during the late 1980's. His focus was to try and extend the bloom period especially in the yellows. Work began on the 'Courtenay Royals'. The first named plant, 'Courtenay King', was actually a plant purchased in the early 1970's as *R. auriculatum* but it showed itself to be a hybrid once it bloomed. A crossing of 'Haida Gold' x 'Golden Star' produced sister seedlings named 'Courtenay Queen' and 'Courtenay Princess' both good yellows with the 'Princess' blooming in April and the 'Queen' more fragrant and blooming a month later. 'Courtenay Lady' ('Ladybird' x 'Enchanted Evening') was next followed by 'Courtenay Duke' ('Madame Guillemot' x 'Gomer Waterer'). These, the 'Courtenay Five', were registered in 2001. Harry was asked to name a plant for the Queen Mother and permission was given to use the name 'Queen Empress'. Bill Dale had given Harry seed of a crossing of {(*R. fortunei* x *R. decorum*) x *R. diaprepes* 'Gargantua'}, the progeny of which Harry grew on, evaluated, and chose the best to honour the Queen

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Mother. 'Queen Empress' was registered in 2004. A third selection from the 'Haida Gold' x 'Golden Star' seedlings was chosen and named for Iona Campagnola who was the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia from 2001 to 2007. 'Iona Cee', registered in 2006, is similar to its sister seedlings but blooms a month later, in mid June. My list also shows a 'Courtenay Gold' ('Haida Gold' x 'Crest') not registered as yet.

Harry Wright's desire to learn more led him to join the Vancouver Chapter of the ARS. Finding his needs not being met due to his inability to attend the meetings in Vancouver Harry saw no recourse but to start a rhodo club in the Comox Valley. The North Island Rhododendron Society received its charter from the ARS in 1984. Harry has sat as President of the NIRS on numerous times as well as other executive positions. In 2003 Harry was approached to sit as the Alternate District Director (to relieve an ailing Ken Gibson) which he accepted and followed that position with 3 years as District Director. During this time Harry somewhere found the time to compile a listing of the many species and hybrid rhododendrons growing in the gardens of District One. My fourth edition of this compilation shows 125 gardens contributing and 4180 different rhododendrons listed.

Perhaps not as large in stature as some, Harry Wright is definitely larger than most in accomplishments. Harry is a very approachable man, generous with his knowledge and his plant material and we have always found an open door at Haida Gold Gardens.

John Hawkins and Lloyd Gilmore of the Victoria Rhododendron Society are relatively new to hybridizing, both having converted from the purview of propagator to that of hybridizer in the last 5 to 10 years. Both have approached hybridizing independently though their goals show similarities. I recall John saying once, "If I'm going to grow rhodos from seed then it might as well be seed that I have produced." The seed John produces reflects his three main hybridizing goals. Firstly to bring more colour into late winter blooming plants. Here he is using the late January (in Victoria) blooming *R. ririei* as the seed parent hoping to introduce more colour into the usual white and pale pinks. John also likes the yellows and has been trying to create plants with better habits (more compact) with yellow flowers. His main seed parent here is 'Marie Starks'. Finally into this mix John hopes to introduce fragrance.

His overall objective is to produce a compact, bushy, fragrant plant that will suit smaller gardens.

Lloyd Gilmore's goal, "...is to create a 'hose in hose' flower with indumentum and scent in a slower growing plant for smaller house lots." Sounds easy if you say it fast enough! A Jack Lofthouse plant, 'Jeda', is Lloyd's key plant. To introduce indumentum Lloyd uses *R. pachysanthum*, *R. bureavii*, *R. flinckii*, *R. mallotum*, and *R. roxianum*. For increased pigmentation 'Marie Starks' introduces a good yellow, for spotting 'Paprika Spiced' is used and for a red introduction *R. neriiflorum* 'Rosevallon' and *R. sanguineum ssp. haemaleum* have been used. Into this mix goes 'Dexter's Spice' for fragrance. Lloyd has not as yet registered a plant though 2 have been named, 'Sooke Clouds' ('Jeda' x *R. pachysanthum*) and 'Parksville Sunset' ('Paprika Spiced' x 'Jeda').

Throughout the writing of this instalment the thought floated across the bottom of the page that this would end the series on 'Vancouver Island Hybridizers' then realized that the thought mirrored the thinking of Charles Duell. In no way have all rhodo hybrids that can be hybridized been hybridized. Someone will always come to see a characteristic which needs improvement no matter how subjective that may be. Perhaps this will be the last vignette on the subject to be pulled from my pen but for those budding hybridizers I'll finally close here with a quote from Lloyd Gilmore. "Set your goals, plan your crosses, using plants that are dominate for your desired traits, do some armchair hybridizing, dream, use the internet, read, ask questions and observe, but above all have passion."

*Reprinted from the CVRS newsletter, December 2008*



*Paprika Spiced*