

# The Meeting at Harvard

by Philip J. Savage, Jr.

Rain was coming down in sheets as Joe McDaniel, Joe Hickman and I deplaned at Boston's Logan Airport, and it continued without a break during our (unplanned) tour of the greater Boston metroplex. No Proper Bostonian can imagine a human so primitive that he doesn't recognize Mass. Ave. (spoken as here written) and, therefore, vulgar signs identifying such main thoroughfares are considered unnecessary. Without a street sign to guide us, the saga of the "Three Stooges Lost in Atlantis" terminated abruptly when ex-race driver Hickman swerved to avoid hitting a massive brick building which proved to be our hotel. From then on everything was informally, unobtrusively but exactly planned for our enjoyment by the hospitable men and women of Harvard. The trick was to get there.

At the business meeting that (Friday) evening, Dick Figlar reviewed our progress since the memorable meeting at Seattle, and suggested means and options for increasing the size and scope of our Society. Members had a chance to visit with charter member and stout supporter Dick Howard and to twist his arm a bit for at least one article for *MAGNOLIA* on the Caribbean and Central American Magnolias, which he has studied extensively. Steve Spongberg's painful back problem eased enough to allow him to attend, and to contribute mightily to all three days of the meeting.

Whether by lucky chance or

hospitable design, the March/April issue of *Arnoldia* was devoted entirely to Magnolias! We were naturally delighted at this, and grateful to editor Carl Lobig, associate editor and author Dick Weaver Jr., and circulation manager Barbara Epstein, who all attended the meeting and presented each of us a copy. Members who were unable to attend should send three dollars to: *Arnoldia*, The Arnold Arboretum, The Arborway, Jamaica Plain, Mass., 02130, for a copy of this handsome March/April 1981 issue.

Dr. Peter S. Ashton, director of the



*Members attending the meeting at Harvard and Arnold Arboretum pose on some steps before a plant-hunting tour.*



*This plant of Magnolia virginiana, leaves variegated with yellow, was taken by Charles Tubesing of the University of British Columbia while attending the AMS meeting. It was grown from seed collected in Worcester County, Maryland, by R.E. Weaver and J. Nickerson of the Arnold Arboretum staff.*

Arnold, gave a welcoming address and chatted individually with all the members. He has wide experience with the trees of southeast Asia as a forester, and mentioned the thrill of seeing flower-covered specimens of the Magnoliaceae illuminating areas of rain forest as if they had been planted for the enjoyment of (nonexistent) gardeners.

Famous propagator Al Fordham attended all three days, with the enthusiastic younger men he has groomed to take his place in the varied and never-ending job of propagating the plants of the Arnold. John Alexander and Peter Del Tredici have that mysterious skill in full measure and are happy to share it with any

interested gardeners, amateur or professional.

Saturday dawned a bit brighter, and after breakfast we were whisked across campus to our meeting room. Dick Howard started the ball rolling with a summary of recent Magnolia activity at the Arnold, and then he, Steve Sponberg and Peter Ashton led groups through the old (and also new) buildings housing this world-famous herbarium. Tables in the grand library held venerable books opened to plates depicting specimens of the Magnoliaceae, mostly species discovered and described only a year or two before the fine old books were printed.

The permanent exhibit of botanical specimens reproduced with amazing detail in colored glass attracted much attention and, before moving back to our comfortable meeting room, we were also shown the preparation rooms and presses in which plants from all over the world are preserved for future generations.

In view of the painstaking preparations made for our meeting, we were disappointed at the light turnout of members. We gained back a few points through the bulldog determination of a few members who did attend to get back to Boston at all hazards. Surely no society can ask for a more enthusiastic and loyal retainer than C. Ferris Miller, an executive of the Bank of Korea in Seoul, and founder of the Chollipo Arboretum, consisting of 200 acres on the tip of the Taean Peninsula, plus an island of 12 acres. Ferris flew to the meeting from that faraway land, and gave a most absorbing talk on the Magnolias grown at Chollipo, with sidelights on *M. sieboldii*, which is native to the area. A distinct form of this species, having stamens bright yellow in color instead of the usual red, was discovered in the vicinity of the arboretum. Ferris showed slides of the flowers side by side for comparison.

All readers of our Journal are



familiar with the photographic talent of Brian Savage, who gardens in Worcester County, England, near the familiar Stratford-on-Avon. Brian crossed the Atlantic to the meeting and led us on picture tours of several of the great English gardens in which Magnolias are a prominent feature. His slides showing specimens of the western Chinese and Himalayan Magnolias were particularly mouth-watering to members who garden in colder areas.

Because the words "McDaniel" and "Magnolia" are so closely linked in our minds, I think we are inclined to take President Joe somewhat for granted. The time, talent, and hard work he has put into Magnolias through the years is beyond measure. Joe is the president of the Society, but a more realistic title would be the *sine qua non* of the A.M.S. Joe got out of a hospital bed to fly to the meeting, not because he thought it couldn't take place without him, but because he wouldn't miss it for the world.

Karl Flinck had not missed a meeting since he joined the Society, but this time a stomach ulcer (the sign of a successful executive) laid him low. Karl is up and around again and was planning to travel to this country from Switzerland in mid-October.

As mentioned previously, we were lucky to have Steve Sponberg at the meeting. He had been going through a lot of torment with an inflamed spinal disc. I understand that strong backs go with weak minds, but after checking the casualty lists at the time of this meeting, including Journal editor Harold Hopkins laid up with sciatica, I find belonging to the S.B.W.M. club easier to accept than formerly.

Cold climate gardeners are keen to obtain propagating material from species at their most northerly point of natural distribution. We have all read of the colony of *M. virginiana* discovered 175 years ago near Gloucester, Massachusetts, north of Boston, and have longed to add an authentic plant from this area to our

collections. Peter Del Tredici, assistant plant propagator at the Arnold, took us on a slide-illustrated verbal tour of that Gloucester swamp (which was donated to the public as Ravenswood Park by its former owner in 1889). Peter also showed slides, taken in February, of an "Australis" type of Sweet Bay that has been perfectly hardy, satisfactorily evergreen and fast growing to its present 30 foot height in the front yard of a residence at nearby Milton, Massachusetts.

Just prior to our meeting, our peripatetic secretary-treasurer, Dick Figlar, visited Ravenswood Park and picked up several fallen leaves from the previous summer. These are notable for their broad-oval shape, being much wider than the lanceolate leaves of Sweet Bays seen in New Jersey and southward. Dick took us, via film, on a tour of specimens of *M. grandiflora* in northern New Jersey, with particular emphasis on plants of the clone 'Edith Bogue' and open-pollinated seedlings of this handsome and unusually cold-hardy cultivar.

Charter member Harry Heineman, Jr., who gardens in nearby Scituate, Massachusetts, and is well known to the Arnold staff, gave a fine slide-illustrated talk on the Magnolias of his beautiful estate and garden.

Moving back to the hotel to wash up for the banquet, we were then transported to the restaurant known as Joyce Chen's. The authentic Chinese cuisine was identified for us by Dick and Betty Howard by passing around actual prepared herbarium specimens of the tree, shrub, vine, or herb that had produced the vegetables we were eating.

Sunday morning we were off to the Arnold Arboretum, and Joe Hickman, in bright spring sunshine, knew the streets of Boston like a cab driver. "America's Greatest Garden" appeared in splendid shape and as we walked up to the entrance of the Administration building, between two fine large trees of *M. acuminata*, all eyes turned to a giant specimen of *M. × soulangiana*

'Brozzonii' at the peak of bloom and untouched by the late spring frosts that had damaged the precocious blooming Magnolias in almost all the northern United States, Canada, and much of Great Britain and northern Europe. Its proximity to the Atlantic has protected the Arnold from severe frost damage many times in the past and it saved more than a sample for the meeting. The later bloomers of the National Arboretum's "Little Girls" were well filled with flowers.

A bright and airy room with excellent projection equipment was ready for Steve Sponberg's journal of the Arnold's 1980 plant hunting expedition to the mountainous Chinese province of Hu-Peh (Wilson country). It was most enlightening to amateurs like me to see real, honest to goodness field botanists working hard at their complicated profession on the mist-drenched mountain sides of the "Land of Flowers." Just as Wilson wrote 70 years ago, Steve found that "Magnolias are nowhere abundant in western Hu-Peh." A few slides only showed plants of this genus, one of which appeared, from the look of the flower buds, to be *M. sprengeri*, and from its location to be a genuine wild plant.

Steve was still fielding questions when we started through the propagating greenhouses, guided by Peter Del Tredici. Though burdened with a worsening cold on the edge of pneumonia, Pete was as full of bounce as a Derby winner. He obviously loves his job. Although I did not see the plants, it was interesting to hear that seedlings of *M. biondii* are growing well from the seed that Dr. Y.C. Ting of Boston College managed to obtain in Ho-Nan province in 1977. This seed was planted in spring 1978, and we should be seeing snapshots of the young plants soon. Dr. Ting took part in the meeting, and gave a short talk on the kindness and cooperation of Dr. S.K. Wu and other botanists of the Peoples Republic of China that made

possible the introduction of *M. biondii* to western hemisphere cultivation.

I have long been eager to see prints of photographs taken by Ernest Wilson in rural China, which were not reproduced in his published books. The magnificent library at the Arnold has bound collections of these in its "Wilson" section, and I would like to get lost for several weekends in that library! Chuck Tubesing, who came to the meeting from Vancouver, where he now lives, had exactly the same idea, and we joined forces to look for Magnolia photographs. Several good pictures of *M. sprengeri* were uncovered and showed straight, single-trunked young trees, about 12 to 16 inches in diameter at breast height, growing as individual specimens between cultivated fields, along roadways and besides houses in the district of Changyang Hsien. They all appeared to be cultivated as ornamentals and surely one of them must have been the seed parent of Caerhays' 'Diva.' We failed to find a picture of *M. biondii* referred to in a note attached to specimens of that species in the Gray Herbarium.

At that point an unarmed posse forcibly removed Chuck and me from the library and fed us a gourmet lunch cooked by Betty Howard and Ida Hay. Someone snapped pictures of the happy and well-fed group on the front steps as we were leaving on plant hunting tours of the grounds.

Gary Koller, supervisor of the Living Collections at Arnold, showed us more of the highlights, including *M. 'Silver Parasol'*, an exceptional example of *M. hypoleuca* now believed to be a hybrid of that species with *M. tripetala*.

Off for home on various silver birds, we had the happy and comfortable feeling of people who have been royally entertained by hospitable friends in magnificent surroundings at one of the really fine meetings of the Magnolia Society.