

# President's Eye View

by Joseph C. McDaniel

The Society's meeting at Seattle was the kind that made you want to tell about it to anybody else who'll listen, and our president, Joe McDaniel, could not resist the temptation to set down his impressions. Therefore, we have a kind of "double coverage" of the meeting. Since the Amirak route taken by Joe and Mary Nell roughly paralleled that of Lewis & Clark expedition, he was close enough to see the breath of spring on a lot of country in between and to meet other travelers who like their scenery at close hand. Inasmuch as he didn't report seeing any Magnolias in Montana or Idaho and since he apparently didn't recruit any fellow travelers into the magnolia Society, we have discreetly drawn a curtain over these parts of his tour.

"It's madness to spare the time and expense for this," wrote C. Ferris Miller from Korea, "but I am getting balmier and balmier by the day about Magnolias and decided it was just about time I met in person with others of like aberration." Whereupon, he departed for Europe to spend two days with the Harold Hilliers in Winchester, England; then a few days with his mother in Pennsylvania; and then on to the American Magnolia Society's annual meeting in Seattle.

Karl Evert Flinck combined business with pleasure and had returned to his garden at Bjuv, Sweden, even before my three-stage, round trip Amtrak tour to Seattle delivered me and Mary Nell back at Urbana, Illinois, on April 2.

These overseas members met with other magnoliaphiles from various parts of the United States at Seattle for the biggest and in my opinion the best annual meeting of the Society so far. Those of us who hadn't seen Seattle before were impressed. It's not quite Camelot, but the weather is seldom too hot or too cold and plants from most of the temperate world (and parts of the tropics) do well there. To a horticulturist now stationed in corn and soybean country, it appeared like a garden of Eden. I'm reminded of the prayer attributed to a little girl there, who closed by saying, "Now, goodbye, God, we're moving to Tacoma."

No U.S. arboretum I know of is better stocked with species and varieties of deciduous Magnolias than the University of Washington Arboretum. It was our main attraction at Seattle, and it did not disappoint. Their plant of the week, *M. sargentiana robusta*, was in full flower. Others of the Yulania section greeted us too: *M. campbellii*, its subspecies *mollicomata*, and hybrids of the two; *M. dawsoniana*, including a broad-tepaled tree (No. 600-49) that may be a hybrid with *sargentiana robusta*; *M. denudata* (*heptapeta*), especially 'Japanese clone' (Wada's Form).

Over the years there has been an exchange of materials between the Universities of Illinois and Washington before Illinois's chancellor moved to Seattle recently to be president of the University of Washington. I sent Argentinian *Araucaria araucana* seeds to them; they sent me Magnolia × 'Wada's Memory,' M. × 'Else Frye' (a hybrid *fide* Karl Flinck) and the Mexican evergreen that J.E. Dandy said was not *M. schiedeana* (but did not give a name of its own). On this visit I gave the arboretum a scion of *M. dealbata*; I brought home, among other things, scions of *M. × proctoriana* 'Slavin's Snowy' (a cultivar with a myriad of delightfully fragrant flowers) and *Liriodendron sinensis*.

Seattle is not the best site for evergreen Magnolias; *M. grandiflora* and some others need more summer heat, and *M. delavayi* has not been established there; among *Michelia*



Gresham hybrid *M. 'Elisa'* at Gloster.

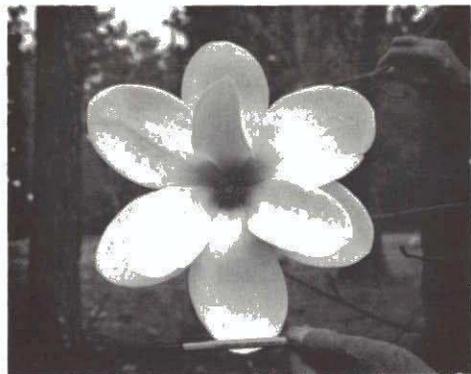
species, we saw only *M. compressa*, which is native from central Japan to the Ryu Kyu Islands. *Magnolia fraseri* and the more slender *M. pyramidata* both do well amidst the towering *Pseudotsuga menziesii* trees, as do *M. macrophylla* and *M. tripetala*. *M. acuminata* soars, but does not spread as much as at several eastern locations.

On the 27th of March, more than a quorum of Society directors assembled. It happened to be the day that Mt. St. Helens began its first eruption of this century. Richard Figlar, secretary-treasurer, could not be present but sent an encouraging report that the Society is alive, well, and growing.

The next day (March 28) the membership had an unstructured, free flowing meeting that ran all day until 5 p.m. and resumed in the evening.

The late D. Todd Gresham was present in our thoughts. Both the Tom Dodd Nurseries and the John James Audubon Foundation are selecting newer Gresham hybrids in the Gulf Coast region. Some of us will test them for hardiness in more northern zones, and we hope the best will attain cultivar status.

Other hybridizers who have made notable improvements were present. We had with us William F. Kosar, Evamaria Sperber, Lola Koerting (Ms. Sperber's successor at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden) and Phil Savage. We thank them all. Their plant creations are on their way at various speeds to the gardens of the world. Bill Kosar has just retired (for the third time) from supervising the greenhouses at Oregon State University and Evamaria is with a nursery near Seattle. Phil continues in business in the Detroit area. Some potential successors were with us.



*Gresham hybrid M. 'Tina Durio' at Gloster showing gigantic flower size.*

In Seattle Pacific Madrone trees exist beside dingy plane trees. If the Himalayan blackberry does not take over the Pacific northwest, there will still be plenty of room for *Pieris*, *Paulownia*, and hundreds of kinds of *Rhododendrons* to brighten landscapes. Two time zones to the east we cannot flower all these genera with equal success but we can still grow Magnolias.

## *Surface Unveiled, It's Kitty Litter!*

Surface—a lippy brand name that suggests surface, turf, and the Lord knows what else—is a fragmented or granulated soil conditioner product made of calcined clay. It first came to the attention of most members a few years ago in an article by Phil Savage on germinating Magnolias and growing them to full planting out size, several in a large pot, with no transplanting at different stages. Phil said Surface helped give the soil porosity, retained just the right amount of moisture, was even good for drainage, and permitted the root systems of seedlings to fill the pot rapidly.

Readers were obliged to speculate that the Surface in the germinating-growing soil mixture was a key to Phil's success in turning out plants waist high or better in two growing seasons (though that's selling Phil a bit short). It was all the more exasperating because Surface, it turned out, is not available from your ordinary weed-feed-seed store or garden shop, at least not in all parts of the country, and several members have felt frustrated ever since.

Some have turned additional shades of green reading how Harry Heineman (who had no trouble finding Surface) uses it for practically everything, probably even in his coffee. So the sleeper of the year, in the last round of Robin No. 2, was Polly Hill's one-liner. Surface, she said, is the same as kitty litter at the A&P.

A hurried visit to the neighborhood chain grocery confirmed Polly's discovery. A&P sells at least two kinds. The first, and cheapest, is brand-named Daily, probably implying that the family cat visits—or ought to visit—a box filled with it every day. The other A&P brand, whose name we quickly forgot because it costs half again as much as Daily, included a built-in deodorizer. Fortunately, Magnolias are not as rough as cats on the ambient air quality, so we plan to go Daily and let Savage and Heineman keep counting their Surface.