

The first meeting

March 9, 1968. If it was a typical Saturday in Knoxville, where I was in graduate school at the University of Tennessee, I was somewhere in the mountains hiking. Having gone to undergraduate school in Memphis, I was determined not to like Knoxville and found it a good place to get away from. Memphis and Knoxville are in the same state, but are worlds apart. In retrospect I am sure my disenchantment would have been even worse if I had known that the Magnolia Society—then the American Magnolia Society—was holding its first convention that morning in Memphis.

To my knowledge, other than occasional anecdotes of Phil Savage, the only report of that meeting was that of Dr. John M. Fogg, Jr., then president, that appeared in the *Newsletter of the American Magnolia Society* Vol. V No. 1, pages 1-2. I was therefore surprised and delighted to uncover in a box of registration material from the Fogg/Barnes era that Peter Del Tredici forwarded to me a "tentative program" for the first meeting and the text of Joe McDaniel's address on *Magnolia virginiana*. The latter is published, as far as known, for the first time beginning on page 3 of this issue.

I was well acquainted with the Memphis Botanic Garden, the site of the meeting, and had visited the magnolias there on several occasions. While gardening fever had not reached the magnoliophile level at this point—Phelan Bright, a college friend, and I had purchased two "canned" *M. x loebneri* 'Merrill' plants from a local nursery in 1965 or 1966—I was falling under their spell and had planted all the local nurseries provided at my parent's house. This amounted to about six varieties, mostly unnamed. All continue to thrive on Mother's clay hill.

The collection of magnolias at the Memphis Botanic Garden was young but still capable of a good show. Approximately 500 magnolias were planted out in the mid-50s of which probably 100-150 survive. The records of what and from where are sadly lost. A design blueprint called for everything available—regardless of hardiness and heat considerations. Only the strong survived. Now the collection is approaching 40 years of age. Comprised mostly of *soulangiana*, *loebneri* and *stellata* for the spring display, it also numbers most of the American natives with a good selection of *M. grandiflora* forms. Whether these were named cultivars of the day is open to speculation. A very fine *M. sprengeri* var. *diva* clone, now somewhat overgrown by oaks and black cherries of the native garden, is the pride of the collection. When spring allows, it is worth my ninety mile drive to see in bloom.

In recent years the collection has been expanded with new cultivars—native and exotic. Future plans call for even more additions as staff and finances allow. Part of this expansion will become home to six new cultivars given the garden by TMS president John Allen Smith on behalf of the Magnolia Society for providing the facilities for the Fall 1993 meeting of the Board of Trustees. Indeed, in somewhat reduced numbers but not without a magnolia in bloom, the Magnolia Society did return to the scene just over 25 years later. If you should happen to be in Memphis some bright March day, go by the garden. You won't be disappointed. ♣

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