

Regional meeting in Maryland

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The TMS membership committee chairman, Perry Narten, instructed me, the other member of the committee, to do something to encourage local or regional groups within the Magnolia Society. Other plant societies have such groups and have found that they usefully support and supplement the goals of the national or international society. Rather than theorize about this—though I do find theories lovable—I decided to invite members to a regional meeting, to plunge ahead, to try and see what the reaction would be.

Forty people attended a first meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Magnolia Group on April 29, 1995 at my farm garden near Thurmont, Maryland. My big worry was weather, and fortunately, it was a perfect spring day. People arrived starting at 10:00 AM and were registered and introduced and name-tagged and coffeed and enjoined to wander about the garden. Preparations had been hectic, and jobs neglected for years had been accomplished to make the place minimally presentable.

The day before I had counted 46 magnolias in bloom, though some (most, in fact) very sparsely (one flower about to open or one drooping was sufficient to be counted by the proud owner), with my 'Elizabeth,' *M. x soulangiana* 'Verbanica' and several of the Kosar hybrids at their peak. But there is always much of interest in any garden at this season, and everyone seemed to enjoy guided or unguided tours about my plantings. Cherry trees were perhaps the highlight. As ever when greeting visitors, one is inclined to dwell on the greater glories of the past week or to forecast the wonders yet to come.

The area selected was the states abutting Maryland—Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, D.C., Delaware and New Jersey. All Magnolia Society members in this area were sent a two page statement of why and what and how, an invitation to the specific meeting, a reservation form requiring a \$5 per person fee to cover expenses (which proved adequate) and a map. Seventy members received invitations, and twenty-three members attended. We—I consulted with several other members in preparing this



Surveying purchases and contemplating bids at the auction.

material—thought we might get 15 to 20 attending, so the actual attendance was very satisfactory. Perhaps three-fourths—at a rough but educated guess—had never attended a Magnolia Society function, so one important goal, expanding our usefulness to members, was achieved.

A one day meeting, held at a member's garden, within a limited geographical area that would permit most members to travel to and fro in one day, with an unpretentious lunch that would not overly burden the host or be expensive, a program that could be provided by members attending and a plant exchange or auction was the idea. The invitation provided information, but travel, motel and dining arrangements were left to individual members. We wanted the meeting to be brief, simple to stage and inexpensive—for the benefit of host and visitors. We wanted everyone to think that they could act as future hosts of a meeting.

The membership directory helps, but simply knowing that there are other members in the area does not seem to lead to visits and exchanges and mutual assistance without the push that a personal meeting provides. I know that I have benefited a great deal, gardenwise and otherwise, from visits to and from other members of the society that I have met at national

meetings. But I, and I suspect you, hesitate to initiate visits to those we have not met. Socializing, simply meeting other magnolia nuts, is an important objective.

The program was prepared and presented by Perry Narten—a selection of eighty slides from the Society's library intended to survey the species and selected hybrids suitable to the region. Comments and questions were encouraged, and we had some interesting comments to supplement Perry's introduction to each slide.

The event was staged in a portion of our 1890 era horse barn, hastily cleaned up to be accessible and furnished with an assemblage of chairs, benches and stools. Roberta Hagen organized lunch: salads, munchies, breads, cold meats, brownies, coffee and tea, etc. Tasty, and within budget.

Plants were donated in both good quality and quantity (David Lay, Ray Carter, Barry Yinger, Perry Narten and others). They were divided into three categories—to be purchased for \$1 (my thought being that a minimal cost would make people select with a degree of thought and thereafter plant more carefully than freebies), to be raffled (giving everyone a shot at selecting something good as a reward for coming and an incentive to attend in the future), and to be auctioned. The auction (Barry Yinger and Dick Figlar presiding with Roberta recording) produced more cash than anyone expected. A 'Vulcan' for \$70 and several of the yellows for good prices were the big sales. We netted \$482. The cash has been transmitted to Treasurer Tarpley to be held on behalf of the regional group, any interest earned to be the Society's gain.

Three new members were signed up, tee shirts, books, etc. were sold for the Society's benefit. Proceeds were transmitted to the treasurer.

There will be a 1996 spring meeting and thereafter we may consider whether we should attempt a fall meeting. We hope to announce meetings in the Magnolia Magazine and specifically state that any Magnolia Society member residing outside the region who is interested would be more than welcome to attend. Hopefully, at future meetings we can do more to encourage non-member prospects to attend.

The larger goal is to promote local or regional groups within the Magnolia Society. Our first meeting here demonstrates that there is interest in such groups. What we need are people willing to take the initial steps to test the possibilities elsewhere. I can supply copies of the materials I used, answer any questions and

make more extensive suggestions to anyone interested. But this is only one approach, perhaps not the best or most suitable elsewhere, and group organizers will have to select their own path.

The initial steps should, I think, involve several members discussing the idea. Doing so here lent more credibility to the idea than would have been the case if I had acted alone. Deciding on the area—how big or how small—is one important point that requires local knowledge and some insight into the potential attendees.

There are presently no formal guidelines established by the Board of Directors governing local or regional groups within the Magnolia Society, although Perry Narten and I are assembling guidelines used by other plant societies with a view to presenting some idea to a future board meeting. Obviously, since the general objective is to support and supplement the international organization, nothing should be done to conflict with or detract from the functions of the Magnolia Society.

We had eighteen from Maryland, eleven from Pennsylvania, four from New Jersey, four from Virginia, one from the District of Columbia, and two from New York. The attendees were Norman and Jean Beaudry, Alstair Bolton, Monroe and Janie Busch, Ray and Faye Carter, John Curanzy, Jon and Betty Duyava, Richard and Anita Figlar, Gordon and Roberta Hagen, Harold and Linda Hopkins, Dennis Jones, Ted and Sharon and Tanner Kiefer, David and Mary Lay, Perry Narten, Summer and Frances Parker, James and Claire Porterfield, James and Ellen and Margaret and Ann Reinig, Randy Rice, William Robinson, John Roundtree, John Shaffer, Judy Springer, Bob and Denise Stelloh, Tom Stone, and Barry Yinger. In addition, five paid the registration fee but were unable to attend.

This meeting demonstrated that members are interested and will respond. Our next task is to sustain that interest. Your task, fellow member, is to explore the possibilities in your area. ❀

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