



Highlights of the NEHS Board Meeting

Fort Tryon - 4-11-2015

by Donald Mackay

These are not the official minutes of our Board Meeting held at Fort Tryon just after the pruning, but worthy of discussion now in view of anticipated member reaction.

In This Issue

NEHS Board Meeting-----	pg 1
Poem-----	pg 1
Featured Plants-----	pg 2
Dwindling Sources-----	pg 3
NEHS 2015 Annual Meeting---	pg 4
Regional Reports-----	pg 4
Italian Heather-----	pg 6
Fort Tryon-----	pg 7
Lasdon Park-----	pg 7

Poem from a local paper in Danielson, CT, courtesy Judy Doyle

"In golden April weather,
 In sun and wind and rain,
 Let us fare forth and follow
 Beneath the spring's first swallow
 By budding break and heather
 To the good brown soil again!"

-Frederick Frye Rockwell,
 "Invitation", *Around the Year in the Garden*

**DON'T BE PRUNED!
 WE WOULD MISS YOU!**

Check the expiration date on the address page of this newsletter. Send your renewal to:

Treasurer Peter Matwey
 7 Heights Court
 Binghamton, NY 13905

Change of NAHS/NEHS Relationship

The basic question was whether NEHS should become a regular chapter of NAHS and pay chapter dues to NAHS in exchange for incorporating the NEHS *Heather Notes* into the NAHS *Heather New*. There is no doubt a financial incentive for us to do this as issuing our own *Heather Notes* is something of a drain in finances. However, of the roughly ten responses made to me or to Mary Matwey, eight can be interpreted as saying leaving well alone. Only two were definitely in favor of the proposition. As of now this matter is tabled to allow for further discussion at a more propitious time.

2015 Annual Meeting

Because of mainly logistical reasons, it seems there will not be enough time to organize an Annual Conference this year to meet the high standards set by previous conferences. The Board seemed to agree, albeit reluctantly, that plans for a 'southern' conference site should be postponed to 2016, but that for voting reasons and NEHS By-Laws it was important to set a date for a meeting, even for a one-day get-together. The Board has picked our next pruning meeting at The Fells in New Hampshire (set for either May 9 or May 23) to serve as our nominal Annual Meeting. Voting of officers will be carried out on-line as By-Laws permit. Secretary Matwey will attend to the issuing of ballots as needed.

Propagating Session

On a more positive note the Board has endorsed the idea (which is strongly supported by the staff at Fort Tryon) to introduce an educational note into next year's pruning at Fort Tryon. There are many visitors who watch us work and ask many questions, and not incidentally represent a possible source of new membership for NEHS.

Many visitors, and not just those who follow the piper through the heather-lined paths of Fort Tryon, seem genuinely interested in heather gardening. Next year the staff will set up a table bearing, in addition to NEHS information, small pots and potting soil and plastic bags so that visitors can make use of the cuttings we produce and try to grow their own heathers. Many will have access to window boxes, for which *Erica x darleyensis* is very well adapted. Directions will be supplied by a hand-out and by a demonstration.

Post script

By Mary Matwey

The proposed Annual Meeting set for "The Fells" in Newbury NH did not take place due to very light attendance. See Annual Meeting article, page 4, for current options.

FEATURED PLANTS



For Winter

Erica carnea 'Viveilli'

Ht. 6", Spd. 18"

Blooms Jan. thru May

Color: Heliotrope darkening to magenta

Foliage dark green with bronze Hue

Photo taken by Judy Doyle

4-27-2015

For Spring

Italian Heather

Box store Mother's Day Gifts

Photo by Donald Mackay

05-10-15

For more information about Italian heather see page 6



For Summer

Erica x watsonii 'Mary'

Purple flowers

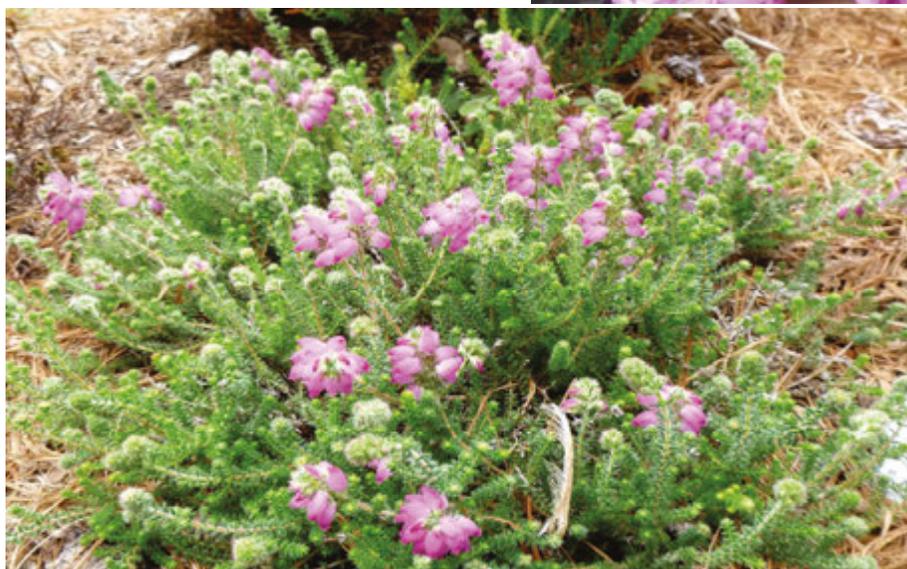
Bloom June-Nov.

Broad erect habit

Yellow tipped foliage in spring

Photo by Mary Matwey

06-22-15



The Dwindling Sources of Heather on the East Coast

By Mary Matwey

Donald Mackay asks the question “Where do we find replacements (i.e. Heather)? It used to be that our nurserymen members of the NEHS were always in a comfortable position to offer heather to the Society at discounted prices or even as a donation when we needed plants to maintain the NEHS supported heather gardens. Times have changed and the heather sources are dwindling. Heather plants are still available through mail order catalogs but not at discounted prices and amateur heather propagators within the society are rare or not bragging up their successes. All this makes for a very depressing situation if you can’t accept the fact that the gravy-train has left the station. In other words the Society does not have access to discounted or free heather plants anymore. I’ve accepted this change and when a local nursery offered beautiful, healthy, 1 gal. potted heathers at \$8 each I decided to grab them up. Too late, they were sold out in 3 weeks. Luckily I know the nursery owners and I have discussed placing an order for heathers for the 2016 spring planting season. This nursery buys plugs and has the facilities to grow them on in a controlled environment to selling size. This may not be the solution for everyone’s problem of finding heather at a reasonable price but it’s a new approach and worth the investigative effort.

Good Luck !

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NEHS Annual Meeting - 2015

This year our Annual Meeting will have to be a pro forma event, mainly because no convenient spot with lots of heather around could be found in the bucolic countryside. I also suspect previous strenuous effort in prior years have sapped the will and energy of those few among us willing to take the lead in organizing our affairs. New blood is needed here, but just a little. This is not an occasion for the Red Cross Blood Bank.

Our Bylaws, Article VI Meetings, Section A, states “**The Society will hold an Conference at which time officers and directors will be elected by the general membership and other business of the Society will be addressed.**” We can comply with the Bylaws in either of two methods where the main agenda item will be to elect a Board approved slate of officers and appointees.

(Method 1) Conduct an electronic/postal meeting

(Method 2) Arrange for an annual meeting at a location of your choice.

As of now we have narrowed our options to a one-day event at either Fort Tryon in Manhattan, or Lasdon Park in Katonah, Westchester County. In both cases we will be able to view the results of our earlier pruning and maintenance efforts, and at both places should be able to find some sheltered place for a quick business meeting, providing of course we have the attendance and proxies to hold one. Date options are August 22 or 29.

However, there is no special reason to hold a meeting on a weekend, a weekday will do.

Place and time will have to depend on those members who want a Summer Meeting and plan to attend one. Fort Tryon would be best for those coming from the south, and Lasdon Park for those from the north. Unless howls of protest are forthcoming, I am going with my personal preference for Lasdon Park on Saturday, August 22, the day after the 80th Anniversary of the Historic Sites Act. That at least might help you make up your mind. Please let the Secretary, Mary Matwey, know your plans, hopes and preferences for:

Method 1 (electronic/postal annual meeting)

or

Method 2 (physically attend an annual meeting, date and location to be determined).

Mary Matwey 607 723-1418 mmatwey@stny.rr.com

7 Heights Court
Binghamton, NY

Thank You

Donald Mackay, President

REGIONAL REPORTS

Union, ME

Approximately 80 miles to the southwest of Aurora, Leslie Galvin reports a big loss in heather that she attributes to -80° temperatures.

Aurora, ME

Patrick Glover reports: Lots of snow cover this year, heather is looking good so far.

Oxford, PA

Winter was not kind to heather here in Oxford. We did not have much snow to provide insulation from the extreme cold we experienced in February. We lost a number of heath and heather - mostly older plants (7+ years). The plants that fared the best were in the 2 to 5 year old range.

REGIONAL REPORTS continued

Binghamton, NY

Wake Up from Winter: Version 2015 at CBG

April 22, the first workday of the 2015 growing season at Cutler Botanic Garden, Binghamton, NY and time to unwrap the Heath & Heather Garden from its winter protection. After the disastrous winter of 2013-2014 when the extreme cold, wind and lack of adequate snow cover led to the decimation of the callunas and ericas, new winter protection protocols were developed. For winter 2014-2015, 3 lines of snow fencing were installed to prevent the wind from dissipating any snow cover and also from scattering leaf protection. Also, plant groups were encircled with fencing anchored by garden staples. Once the ground became cold hardened, these enclosures were filled with deep mounds of oak leaves. Lastly, an area of the garden was layer with a thick blanket of leaves anchored by camouflage netting obtained from a catalog (and online) army-navy type surplus store. The funds for this netting came from a grant from the Northeast Heather Society.

As all this protection was removed, its success as winter protection became obvious. Plants were green, the ground under the leaf protection was damp and the few ericas that had survived winter 2013-2014 were flowering. The camouflage netting did a better job of protection than the wire fencing due to the wider area of coverage. Where the fencing came too close to the plant, plant stems were subjected to the cold winds and needed more pruning to remove winter burn. This set of protocols will be used for successful winter protection.

Were there any problems with winter 2014-2015? Yes, the bunnies found a very pleasant winter home underneath a large weeping spruce in the Heath & Heather Garden. They breakfasted, lunched and dined on the low-lying branches and ventured out to snack on early flowering bulbs.

Waitsfield, VT

Mix Pine Needles and Oak Leaves for Winter Protection

Today, Tuesday, April 7, 2015, I got to inspecting my heathers in Vermont, about four months after I lost sight of them last year. The road verges, because of salt or heat taken up by the blacktop, are the first to

lose snow so that a band of green gradually expands from the road. The first bed for show, actually on the road verge, looked unhappy with no signs of new greenery. I blame the salt run-off for that.

The next bed to become exposed, composed mostly of calluna cultivars from Art Pilch's North Carolina nursery at Selma in the Great Smokie foothills, told a very different story. All heathers looked good, though protruding stems had a frost-bitten look to them. There was one exception, which was *Calluna vulgaris* 'Harry's Grace' given sleep-over privileges in that bed. No sign of frost-burn at all. No signs of blooming, either, in that the arrested buds of last November looked just the same, though perhaps a little dried out and faded of what little color they had then.

The winter-coloring heathers looked great - some bronzy red, some a fiery red. But the real surprise was, on lifting a sodden pile of mixed pine needles and oak leaves to find a bell heather I had forgotten about. I recall now planting a stray *Erica cinerea* 'Atrosanguinea' in a bare spot in that bed very late in the year, and with no hope of ever seeing alive again had buried it under 18" of pine needles mixed with a few oak leaves.

What came into sight out of the snow was a compacted mass of pine needles, maybe 3" thick. It lifted easily as a wad and there was revealed the mostly flattened bright green stems of the bell heather, some closely appressed to the soil, with no sign of damage whatever.

To someone enured to seeing the shattered stems of *Ericas* every spring, this was a most heart-warming sight, confirming that a deep-enough layer of pines needles (mixed with either oak or elm leaves) is capable of nursing frost-sensitive heathers through a brutal winter.

Only recently have I managed to keep bell heathers alive through Vermont winters, and only by denuding one or two balsam firs of all their branches to provide a mound of snow-catching interlacing sun-shading branches. It's important to catch the snow before the bitter frosts come, and to keep dehydrating winds and sunshine away from living tissue.

As the snow retreats I'll have a chance to revise these opinions, but as of now I feel very kindly to pine needles and oak leaves. The oak leaves are important I feel in giving an airier texture to the mix, and prevent the pine needles from lining up and forming a compact blanker with few air spaces in it.

At least, that's my theory for now.

Italian Heather in New Hampshire

by Donald Mackay

Only five NEHS members made it to The Fells in Lake Sunapee, NH on May 9, but armed with lithium-battery powered hedge trimmers managed to trim off the old flowers of the large area of heathers at The Fells consisting of the naturalized callunas derived from Clarence Hay's initial planting of 1931.

We got through in time for a leisurely lunch in Newburyport and then broke up to wind our own way home-wards. The Matweys were off on a circuitous route back to Binghamton (all routes are circuitous if you try to go east or west in New Hampshire) and Bunny VanValey went back south to Massachusetts.

My return, however was northward, which happened to take me to New London, the site of an extremely well stocked New Hampshire State Liquor Store. Next door to the liquor store is a large Hannaford store, but to get to the entrance one has to pass a row of blueberries, rosebushes and the usual spring flowering perennials.



What was different this year was a vivid display of pink heather clearly labeled Italian Heather. I've seen wild calluna in northern Italy near the Swiss border and encountered odd patches of *Erica carnea* near the Austrian border, but this Italian heather was unlike any heather I've ever seen. No wonder, the label described it as *Erica ventricosa*, a heather from South Africa, suitable for USDA zones 10 and 11 and as a pot plant when 70°F is available, though it can stand 30°F for brief occasions.

The plants were covered, smothered actually, by long tubular, 4-lobed corollas, with a noticeable swelling that gives them that name (*venter* is belly in Latin). I've no idea where the Italian name arises, though the label did have a sketch of Italy on the back with no indication of any growing region. There was a hint on the wrapping paper that it came from a southern nursery, but just a hint. Look out for it, under any name. It is really a very beautiful plant.

There was an email address on the label which turned out to be that of Monterey Bay Heather Nurseries, also called Coastal Nurseries. They do a multimillion dollar business and say they employ 50 to 90 people.

In spite of their Heather Nursery title they offer zero technical information. The heathers they sell are January Heather, Spring Lucky Heather, Holiday Heather, Fall Heather and Italian Heather. They describe their heathers as suitable for St. Patrick's Day, Secretaries' Day, Mother's Day, etc. This business is obviously oriented to the Holiday trade. They offer pictures without botanic description. Only the Lucky Heather looks like it could have been a calluna, but it would be a strange one to be in bloom on St. Patrick's Day.

It's certainly worth a try as an indoor plant, but I wouldn't place too much faith in the 30°F claim. Not unless it was a misprint for 30°C which is 86° F.



Shearing The Heathers at Fort Tryon

April 11 was one of those few days in this year's crazy spring when the sun was shining, winds were calm and the temps were in the 60s. A beautiful day for "Shearing of the Heathers" as the Fort Tryon staff likes to call it. The piper drew a large crowd as he circled the heather garden with the wail of his bagpipe enticing young and old to follow.

The cold weather had held back the blooming of the Ericas by a few weeks and we were greeted by pink, rose and purple of the Ericas blooming at their prime. Our yearly task is to shear the Calluna and we noted that the heavier snow cover of the winter did its job of protecting the heather which we found to be in fairly good shape. With 3 battery powered hedge trimmers we were done in no time and this gave us the opportunity to visit with the crowd who had lots of questions and comments. The children were especially curious and hopefully we gave them some pleasant memories of heather to keep with them throughout their lives.



Report of Visit to Lasdon Park

by Donald Mackay

On April 13, 2015 a small NEHS working party went to Lasdon Park to trim the heathers there. Bill Dowley's lithium battery-powered trimmer made short work of trimming the Callunas, most of which were in good shape. The heathers has been deeply covered by snow all winter, the last of the snow going after a 10" fall on Easter Sunday. However, the newly planted heathers in the new extension, though all alive, did not yet show enough growth to merit trimming. The few remaining Ericas showed their normal damage from split stems which were cut out.



The heathers in the Synoptic Garden, the Callunas, looked very good but the remaining *Erica x darleyensis* which had previously been cut back to a hollow ring needed a bit more pruning to remove split stems.

Reinforcing previous comments, the Staff said the heather garden attracted much interest from visitors, some making repeat visits.

There are now a few empty spaces in the Heather Garden mainly due to winter losses of Ericas. Where do we find replacements?

HEATHER NOTES, all rights reserved, is published quarterly by the Northeast Heather Society (NEHS), a tax-exempt organization and a chapter of the North American Heather Society (NAHS).

The purpose of the Northeast Heather Society is to foster interest in growing heathers (*Calluna, Erica, Daboecia, Cassiope, Phyllocladus* and *Andromeda*) in northeastern North America, by serving as a conduit of educational information for both the experienced and the novice gardener.

MEMBERSHIP in the Northeast Heather Society is open to anyone who pays dues to this chapter. Membership benefits include: a subscription to this quarterly newsletter, participation in chapter meetings and elections, borrowing privileges for slide/power point presentations, and, most valuable of all, contact with fellow heather gardeners who mostly live in or near your growing zone, all willing to share helpful advice and their experiences. A family membership permits more than one family member to vote and participate in all NEHS activities for an additional \$5 per year fee above the annual dues. The family membership includes all household members residing at the same address and each member has one vote. Each household will receive only one copy of Heather Notes.

Dues for an Individual: \$15 a year; \$28 for a two year membership; \$40 for a three year membership

Dues for a Family \$20 a year; \$33 for a two year membership; \$45 for a three year membership

Remit payment to: Peter Matwey, Treasurer, 7 Heights Court, Binghamton, NY 13905

For digital presentations, contact Bill Dowley, Milton, DE. Tel. (603) 903-3017; wdowley@ne.rr.com

WEB INFORMATION: North American Heather Society website: www.northamericanheathersoc.org

NORTHEAST HEATHER SOCIETY website: www.northeastheathersociety.org

ADVERTISING: Quarter page ad: \$35 per issue; \$25 per issue if advertising in two or more consecutive issues.

Contact: Pat Hoffman (856) 467-4711; njgardener15@hotmail.com

BE A CONTRIBUTOR TO HEATHER NOTES:

Do you have a suggestion, a question, a story, an anecdote, a poem, or a photo to share? Contact the Content editor:

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All material may be edited for clarity and length.

DEADLINES FOR EACH ISSUE:

March 20–June 20–September 20–December 20

