



A Rock Garden Newsletter

August 2023

Exploring Rock Gardens in Southern Wisconsin

by ACG Rock Garden Intern, Josh Nisleit.

On Saturday, June 24th, I joined a few of our Rockhead volunteers on a tour of five rock gardens in Southeastern Wisconsin. Each garden was unique in its own way, and together they formed a great opportunity to learn more about different styles of rock gardening. The combined experience and hospitality shown by the rock gardeners involved made for an unforgettable day.

The first garden of the day was located in Waterford, which was lovingly described as “the middle of nowhere.” Turning where we believed to be the right address, we made our way down a long, winding driveway deep into the forest. Towards the end of the path lay what Rockhead Jane described as a “rock garden of eden.” Here, deep in the forest, grew plants that we could only dream of growing in the rock garden at Allen Centennial. There were rhododendrons as far as the eye could see! When the owner, Tom Horner, was questioned on what his strategy was for growing these amazing plants, he simply

laughed and responded with “I dig a hole!” The forest soil was very acidic, which proved to be the perfect environment for growing the most prominent feature of this garden. Tom best described his garden as “a woodland rock garden.” Although the garden had the structure and staple plants of a typical rock garden, interspersed within the rocks were native Wisconsin woodland plants. During our time there, we learned about growing lichens, saw incredible exotic plants, and were updated on the status of plants that the Rockheads had given the owner when they last visited several years ago.

The second garden was unassuming from the road, and I had suspected that we once again had the wrong address when we arrived at the house. However, the owner, Jeff Fritz, transported us into a different world with his backyard. His garden was enclosed by an incredible conifer collection, and on the inside was a beautiful rock garden with an impressive water feature. A fantastic cacti collection was also found growing outside of the conifer ring. It was in this garden that the Rockheads met with the other passionate rock gardeners they would be spending the rest of the day with,

most of whom were old friends that they enjoyed catching up with.

The third garden, owned by Mike Kanter, was grown in a different style than the first two. Each bed was sharply outlined with rocks, which created very distinct pathways. One of the highlights of this garden was the different types of rocks used to outline the beds. I particularly enjoyed the usage of obsidian as a border. Since this garden was a bit smaller than the first two, it also felt a fair bit different from them. There were plenty of decorations spotted throughout the garden, which really gave it a “homey” feel. However, this garden proved quite perilous for myself. Mike had a large pumice rock for sale, which Rockhead Jane bought for her own home garden. While Mike went to get gloves, another rock gardener and I lifted the rock up into Jane’s vehicle. Ouch! The pumice left many cuts on our hands, and I learned that pumice is called “volcanic glass” for a good reason. Luckily, it was a Saturday, so I had time to heal before returning to Allen Centennial for work on Monday.



Part of Mike’s rock garden

The fourth and final garden was owned by Joy and Dave Collura. They have been gardening at their current location for over 30 years as they started their terrascaping project in 1992! Their garden contained an interesting mix of plants since Joy is a hosta enthusiast, but Dave enjoys growing alpine plants. Together, they

created a beautiful landscape that showcases the best of both worlds. Joy was especially proud of her mini-hostas, which she grew in rock garden troughs! After exploring the garden, Joy and Dave graciously treated everyone on the tour to a homemade lunch. During lunch, I got to talk with many of the rock gardeners. I also had the chance to talk with Dr. Ingrid Jordon-Thaden, who is the director of the Botany Garden and Greenhouse on the UW-Madison campus. I helped build the rock garden at the Botany Garden nearly two years ago, so it was nice to catch up with new developments.

At the end of the day, we all drove back to Jane’s house to get that large pumice rock out of the back of her vehicle. We successfully got it out without anybody else getting hurt, and she showed me around her home rock and crevice garden. Like all of the other rock gardens we visited, it was right outside of her home. If there was one thing that I learned over the course of the day, it was how niche rock gardening is in the world of horticulture. Going into it, I was expecting to be visiting large publicly or privately owned gardens run by countless staff members. However, time after time, I was met with just one or two motivated gardeners and the gardens they had built. Rock gardening can be difficult and is definitely a passion project, but the resulting landscapes are like no other.

Upcoming Meetings

September 16 bag lunch at noon at Lynn Groeschel’s home. Plant sale starts at 1.

October 21 Dave will show slides from the Nova Scotia convention.

A Visit to Benedict's Nursery

by Ed Glover, photos by Jane Barnett

On May 13th a group of WI-IL members made the 4 1/2 hour trek to Nappanee, IN to Benedict's Nursery. We became members of the Great Lakes Chapter for a day and joined them for their meeting and plant sale along with the opportunity to buy plants from Esther Benedict's superb collection of alpines. She is a talented propagator and the plants were maintained in wonderful condition.

It was great to catch up with old friends from the Great Lakes Chapter and we were treated to a delightful lunch. Robert and Esther Benedict were great hosts for the meeting and greeted us warmly. We enjoyed chatting with them and exploring their wonderful rock gardens, with troughs and crevice beds.



Of course the main event was shopping and we outdid ourselves as there was what seemed to be a never ending bench of interesting plants to choose from. At the April meeting of the Chapter, members had voted to authorize \$500 for the purchase of plants for the rock garden at Allen Centennial Garden. With such an array of plants before us it was no problem to spend

that \$500. Many thanks to the Chapter for making this generous donation to ACG.

When the shopping was finished and the plants were tucked away safely for the trip home, Esther graciously gave us a tour through her propagation house and holding frames where she is growing a nice collection of Arisaemas, Cypripediums, etc.

We arrived back in Wisconsin tired from the long trip but thankful for the wonderful day we had spent together.



Warren (Buck) Gabelman obituary

by Ed Glover



Buck passed away on June 11, 2022 at the age of 101. He lived a full life. After growing up on a farm in Nebraska he earned a degree in horticulture at the University of Nebraska and then served for 2 years as a Naval officer on a destroyer in the South Pacific in World War II.

After the war he obtained a PhD at Yale and then spent over 40 years as a faculty member in the Horticulture Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He trained many graduate students and developed a number of new vegetable cultivars during his research there. A full account of his research career can be seen on the Horticulture Department website – <https://horticulture.wisc.edu/2022/06/14/professor-warren-h-gabelman-legendary-vegetable-breeder-and-mentor-passed-away-at-age-101/>

Buck was a long time member of NARGS and the Wisconsin-Illinois Chapter. Along with his then wife Alberta they promoted the building of a rock garden in the new Horticulture Department demonstration garden, Allen

Centennial Garden. Then for 14 years they planted and maintained that garden. They realized the opportunity to train a Hort student in rock gardening and Buck donated the royalties from the onion, carrot & beet cultivars he had developed to fund a student intern for the rock garden.

Once these royalties ran out, Buck funded the intern from his personal funds. On the 30th Anniversary of Allen Centennial Gardens in 1989 Buck gave a large donation to the rock garden to celebrate that milestone and on his passing there was a donation to the garden's Foundation account to help fund a rock garden intern in the future. So through these generous donations, Buck's support of the rock garden will continue.

We are planning to expand the existing crevice garden and install a new trough collection in the garden this year and those funds will go toward those projects and others in the future.

If it were not for Buck's hard work and financial support, the rock garden at Allen Centennial Garden would not be the award winning garden that it is today.

In 1998 the Wisconsin-Illinois Chapter presented Buck and Alberta with the Don Havens Award for their enduring support of alpine gardening.

(My note. One of my earliest memories after joining the WI-IL chapter is a meeting where Alberta, very ill, gave each of us a cyclamen plant. An exotic plant for me at that time! They were both great assets to our chapter. Jean Halverson)

DON HAVENS AWARD OF MERIT

WI-IL CHAPTER NARGS 1998

Alberta and Warren Gabelman have been avid supporters of the gardening community in Madison for many years and active members of the WI-IL Chapter of NARGS since 1982. Their crowning achievement is the Rock Garden at the Allen Centennial Gardens on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. This garden is a valuable educational resource for gardeners and stimulates interest in rock gardening and alpine plants which is highly beneficial to our Society.

The following testimonial from Dr. Dennis Stimart, Director of the Allen Centennial Gardens, sums up their contribution to this marvelous garden.

The Rock Garden of the Allen Centennial Gardens is here today due to the efforts of Alberta and Warren (Buck) Gabelman. They introduced the concept of a rock garden in the Allen Centennial Gardens Master Plan. To assist in development of the rock garden, they organized trips to rock gardens throughout the area and arranged meetings with key members of the Wisconsin -Illinois Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society. They secured donations of materials for construction of the gardens and Alberta and Buck have selected and planted nearly every plant which exists in the rock garden today. They are responsible for the plant accession and labeling system we have implemented to educate garden visitors. The rock garden brochure for visitors to the gardens was prepared with their skillful guidance. They have volunteered hundreds of hours annually maintaining the gardens. Additionally, it is not uncommon to find them talking with general public visitors and promoting rock gardening.

To further their commitment, they established an internship to support the hire of an advanced undergraduate student to gain work experience in rock gardening.

The criteria to be a recipient of the Don Havens Award of Merit describes accurately the activities of Alberta and Buck Gabelman over the last twelve years we have worked together. First, "to kindle interest in alpine and rock gardening among the general public" and secondly "to encourage cultivation of alpine and other wild plants". Alberta and Buck are both outstanding people deserving to be recipients of the Don Havens Award of Merit.

The Wisconsin-Illinois Chapter wholeheartedly agrees with Dr. Stimart and it is with great pleasure that we present the 1998 Don Havens Award of Merit to Alberta and Warren Gabelman.



Crevice planting in rock garden area at Allen Centennial Garden

