

Red maple, *Acer rubrum*

## Arboretum Begins Planning for Woodland Garden

Last fall the Arboretum began the initial planning, design, and preparation for a new woodland garden to be located west of Polly's Play Pen. Consistent with past development at PHA we turned to our original master site planners, Michael Van Valkenburgh and Associates.

Working together with Michael and his senior associate, Jason Siebenmorgen, we began the project. Michael and Jason are both plantspeople with an essential understanding of our landscape vernacular, as well as the process by which Polly Hill developed her arboretum—with an emphasis on patience and experimentation. Thus far we have been delighted with the early design concepts.

The idea for this new garden is rooted in our original site plan (2001) and subsequent revisions. It was also an important part of our 2006 strategic plan. To date we have performed the necessary first step: site analysis. This includes identifying existing features to be preserved. We are starting within a beautiful naturalistic framework. The area is dominated by magnificent white and black oaks. These trees have been accessioned, mapped, and put on the base plan. The landscape also features handsome lichen-covered stone walls.

An obvious question is what kind of plants will be featured in the new garden? We view this garden the same way Polly Hill viewed her original property. We will

raise plants from seed, plant them out, and provide them with suitable cultural conditions so they can reach their potential. Then we will evaluate. Polly primarily planted for her summer visitors and emphasized summer-blooming plants. In contrast, the new woodland garden will feature masses of spring-blooming shrubs creating a bright cloud effect through the deciduous woodland. Spring-starved visitors will be more than pleased by this garden.

Ultimately, like the entire Arboretum, we envision the garden will have multi-season appeal just by the sheer diversity and beauty of the plants. As Polly did, we take the long view. We can see a beautiful garden. Soon, you will too. Stay tuned!

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## The Polly Hill Arboretum

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The mission of the Polly Hill Arboretum is to perpetuate the experimental tradition in horticulture established by Polly Hill by sharing knowledge of plants and scientific procedure through educational programs, research, plant conservation, and exploration. The Arboretum seeks to preserve its meadows and woodlands, to promote an understanding of its collections, and to encourage their utilization for scholarship, observation, and the enjoyment of all.

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Fifteenth anniversary celebration

## Message from the Director

Fall is a time of change at the Polly Hill Arboretum—the Visitor Center closes, the grounds are put to bed, birds migrate, leaves change color and drop. The quiet creates space to reflect on the past season. This summer's highlight was a very special event. We gathered on a beautiful August evening to celebrate a milestone: 15 years as a public garden. Gratitude was the sentiment I felt most strongly from our supporters who have followed the progress of PHA since our inception.

Our success as a public institution is rooted in our founding, from Polly's devotion to plants to Dr. David H. Smith's belief that this landscape should be preserved and accessible to all. For me personally it has been a joy to work with such a thoughtful and supportive Board of Directors that embraces this philosophy.

Where do we grow from here? Someone wise said that the only thing constant is change. At the Arboretum my job is to guide change in the direction of meeting our aspirations and better

-serving the community. You will read in this issue of *Meristems* of exciting plans for our proposed woodland garden. Simultaneously we are coming to grips with the deterioration of the building known as the Gym. We have initiated the planning to replace this centrally-located building with a modest, appropriate facility that would serve as an education center and botany lab. This new building would help us reach a year-round audience by giving us—at last!—a heated classroom. It will also enable us to process, store, and access herbarium specimens collected from the Vineyard flora and from our plant collections.

Someone else wise said that nothing good ever happens fast. As in the past we are taking time to carefully plan our next phase of growth with gratitude for the past and optimism for our future. Thank you for your support.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Timothy M. Boland".

## Board News

We are pleased to welcome two new members to the PHA Board of Directors: Gary Montrowl and Richard M. Reische.

Gary Montrowl has a long-time connection to the Arboretum through his wife, Dionis (Dinny). Her parents, Bill and Ann Fielder, were long-time friends of Polly and Julian Hill. The Montrowls retired to the Island in 2006 after working all over the world for the Central Intelligence Agency. It was only natural that Gary and Dinny would come back to the Arboretum to volunteer. Both are loyal members of the volunteer grounds crew. Gary helped rebuild the Bower with black locust from his own woodlot.

Over the years Gary became increasingly interested in our work. Now he has taken the next step by accepting a position on our Board. A wonderful advocate in the community, Gary is often talking up our plants and our programs. He calls the Arboretum a “natural treasure” and a “precious resource.” In addition to his advocacy, he brings a history of community involvement in the town of West Tisbury.

Gary adds, “It is an honor to be invited to serve as a member of PHA’s Board of Directors. I hope to draw upon my professional experiences to broaden my contribution to the Arboretum’s evolving vision and promote greater awareness of the Arboretum within the Island community.” We look forward to working

with Gary on this new level.

Richard (Dick) Reische also came to the Arboretum through his wife. Diana Reische has been a friendly, reliable, and effective Visitor Center volunteer for almost 15 years. Together with Diana, Dick has walked the grounds, attended talks, and enjoyed our annual volunteer party. In 2011 he got to know us even better when he and Diana were participants on our garden tour of the Delaware Valley,



Gary Montrowl works on the Bower project.



Dick Reische and Curator Tom Clark in Belgium

and, again in 2012, when they joined our garden tour of Belgium.

The more he learned about PHA, the more enthusiastic he became. Dick was delighted to accept an invitation to join the Board of Directors. He brings with him a strong financial background. Employed by Smith Barney for 31 years, he is currently an independent registered investment advisor. His investment experience working with institutions and non-profit organizations will be a valuable resource.

Dick notes, “Diana and I are strong supporters of Polly Hill, for the programs, for the volunteer opportunities, and for all the beautiful plant life throughout the year. The dedicated staff runs it very smoothly and effectively. It is a pleasure to be included.” It is a pleasure to welcome Dick to the PHA Board of Directors.

## Staff News

This past June, Barbara Conroy, Administrative and Financial Officer, attended the American Public Garden Association’s annual meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. The conference focused on garden evolution: how gardens need to adapt within the current economic time to ensure both their growth and their relevancy to the community.

Last summer Curator Tom Clark journeyed with interns Emily Ellingson, Olivia Meyer, and Jen Rioux to the annual Woody Plant Conference held at the Scott Arboretum in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. A high point of the summer for the interns,

they visited renowned public gardens along the way, including the New York Botanical Garden, Chanticleer, and Longwood Gardens. Past PHA interns led personalized tours at several gardens.

Tom Clark also travelled this fall to Bridgehampton, New York, to present his lecture “After the Glaciers: Great Plants for the Terminal Moraine and Outwash Plain” to the Horticultural Alliance of the Hamptons. He also spoke to the Connecticut chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, covering the rhododendron conference he attended in Edinburgh and his tour of rhododendron-

rich gardens of Scotland.

Executive Director Tim Boland was appointed a member of the Martha’s Vineyard Commission’s fertilizer working group. This group is charged with the development of Island-wide guidelines to reduce the use of nitrogen-based lawn fertilizers that degrade our water resources. In October Tim travelled to Tiverton, Rhode Island, to lecture on MV Wildtype (PHA’s native plant production program) for the Rhode Island Natural History Survey. He also presented a propagation workshop covering the collection, treatment, and storage of native seeds.



## Matthew Lobdell New Research Associate

At the spring meeting the PHA Board appointed Matthew Lobdell to the role of research associate. Matt, a native of West Tisbury, began his association with the Arboretum in 2006 with a summer internship, and later became our first collections management intern. Matt worked as horticulturist for the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy in Boston before enrolling in a master's program at the University of Delaware to further his interest in plant science. He graduated with an M.S. degree this past spring. Currently he is employed as a research assistant at the Moore Farms Botanical Garden in Lake City, South Carolina.

Matt's thesis project at the University of Delaware resulted in a horticultural monograph of the genus *Styrax* (commonly called snowbells). Though few snowbells are in cultivation, there are an estimated 130 trees and shrubs in this ornamental genus. With Matt's guidance we hope to add more species to our plant collections. Matt's fascination with magnolias led to a recent appointment by the Magnolia

Society International as cultivar registration authority, a position Executive Director Tim Boland has held for the past 10 years.

A prolific writer, Matt records his botanical motorcycle journeys on his internet blog ([www.subjectiveday.blogspot.com](http://www.subjectiveday.blogspot.com)). From his blog bio: "I first gained an appreciation for botany and horticulture when taking an internship at the Polly Hill Arboretum in my hometown of West Tisbury, Massachusetts, in the summer of 2006. Since then, I've been working towards a career in public horticulture, specifically focusing on botanic garden curation."

Tim welcomes Matt in his new role, and adds, "I am pleased to have Matt continue his association with the Polly Hill Arboretum. I consider him home-grown; a serious plantsman dedicated to the study of plants and their cultivation." We are all pleased to have Matt on our horticultural team and proud of his professional growth.

## Summer Interns

Each year we heartily thank the Feldman family for their on-going support of the PHA summer internship program. The internships provide students from all over the country with an opportunity to explore career options, gain horticultural skills, and develop confidence in their abilities. Beyond working on the grounds, interns staff the Visitor Center, lead tours, attend lectures, and visit gardens. For most, their Vineyard summer is a life-changing experience.



Left to right: Interns Emily Ellingson, Olivia Meyer, and Jen Rioux at Mt. Cuba Center

Summer intern Olivia Meyer says her PHA experience confirmed that a career in public gardens is her future! She enjoyed the outdoor physical work, taking pride in maintaining a garden for public enjoyment. She also appreciated the training she received from PHA arborists Steve Masterson and Ian Jochems, and as a result plans to become a certified arborist. After finishing her studies at Kansas State University, Olivia hopes to participate in an internship at Longwood Gardens. We look forward to watching her grow.

Jen Rioux returns to Smith College to continue her studies in environmental science and landscape studies. Jen enjoyed the education opportunities offered through our summer speaker series. She found choosing plants for our "six plant tour" displayed in the Visitor Center helped her to learn new plants and look at familiar ones in new ways. Jen (as did Olivia!) enjoyed the road trip to attend the Woody Plant Conference at the Scott Arboretum in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, where she networked with others in the public garden field and visited the gardens of the Delaware Valley. We wish Jen well in her future studies.

## Arboretum Wish List

The Arboretum collects herbarium specimens to document our plant collection and the flora of Martha's Vineyard. Despite being stored under controlled conditions these preserved plant specimens are vulnerable to insect damage. Historically herbarium sheets have been treated with pesticides to prevent destruction by insect pests; however, exposure to sub-zero temperatures also eliminates insects and is a safer alternative.

At the Arboretum we choose not to treat our herbarium sheets with toxic chemicals. The last few years we have taken our specimens off-island to the Arnold Arboretum for treatment in their freezers. If PHA owned a sub-zero freezer, eradicating insects from

our collection would be easier and more efficient. Would you consider funding the purchase of a subzero freezer?

### Thermo Fisher Scientific Lab Freezer \$5,000 (includes 3-year warranty)

This subzero freezer would protect and preserve herbarium specimens eliminating insect pests without the use of chemicals.

Should you be interested in funding a lab freezer for PHA, please contact Tim Boland at [tim@pollyhillarboretum.org](mailto:tim@pollyhillarboretum.org) or 508-693-9426. We extend our sincere thanks to those of you who have generously responded to previous requests.

## Philippe de Spoelberch Named Honorary Board Member

At the summer board meeting Philippe de Spoelberch was unanimously approved as an honorary member of the PHA Board. Introduced to the Board by director emeritus Stephen Spongberg, Philippe's tenure as a board member was influential. Through his dedicated and supportive interest, the Arboretum made many advancements. Philippe, an astute advisor, was closely involved in the Arboretum's landscape master planning and professional curatorial reviews. His pragmatic observations shaped many of our landscape developments.

Philippe also brought valuable insights to collections management. He supported efforts to advance our labeling and software programs, and has been a collaborator on our international seed expeditions. "Philippe's friendship, counsel, and support during our formative years led to professional management practices that have made all the difference," says Executive Director Tim Boland. "He has extensive knowledge about plants in their natural habitats and tremendous experience in cultivating plants from seeds. Philippe is a plantsman to the fullest extent of the word."

Philippe became acquainted with Polly



Philippe de Spoelberch admires *Magnolia* 'Daphne'.

Hill over a mutual interest in stewartia; the PHA archives contain delightful letters between them. He has watched the Arboretum grow from Polly's private garden to a public garden with an internationally recognized scientific collection, while doing the same in his home country. Philippe's development of his family property in Belgium has resulted in one of the finest collections of temperate woody plants in the world. Recently opened

to the public, Arboretum Wespelaar ([www.arboretumwespelaar.be](http://www.arboretumwespelaar.be)) contains an incredible diversity of trees, many collected by Philippe on his international travels.

Philippe has promised to remain interested and attentive to PHA's continued growth. Tim adds, "Our arboreta have grown through friendship and cooperation. We look forward to sharing ideas, seed, and research with Philippe and Arboretum Wespelaar."

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## Emily K. Ellingson at the Crossroads by Tom Clark

"This has been the perfect last internship" says curatorial intern Emily Ellingson with a nod to her diverse prior internships and future career plans. "It was all-encompassing. I built on my past experiences while continually learning." She enjoyed the varied work and broad scope of the internship whether working with staff, volunteers, or alone.

A major part of the collections management internship is the curation of our plant collection. This year we tackled three areas: the Camellia Border, the Nursery Field, and the Arboretum Field. Emily began by piecing together details to

complete the story behind a camellia planted by Polly Hill in 1974. Later she helped verify and identify many rhododendrons. All this sleuthing required her to delve into Polly's plant records and sharpen her plant ID skills. Emily says this curatorial work deepened her understanding of the curatorial process and the importance of conservation.

Emily's amazing attitude, high aptitude, and past experiences created a productive synergy at PHA. She made a lasting positive impact. Her contributions can be found in all aspects of her work: care of the greenhouse and living collection,

collecting seed for MV Wildtype, developing protocols and collecting specimens for the herbarium, and assisting with our youth education program, in addition to the arduous task of regularly watering all plantings of the past several years. I'm exhausted just thinking about it!

So what's next for Emily? When asked, she replied with certainty, "I've applied to the Longwood Graduate Program and to the masters program at the University of Minnesota in applied plant science." We wish her the best, confident in knowing that whatever road she takes, it will lead to success!



## Kids in the Arboretum: The Best Day Ever!

On a sunny June morning, a long line of second grade students winds its way from the Arboretum parking area to the Far Barn. There are smiles, giggles, and excited chatter as the students walk through Holly Park. PHA Youth Education Coordinator Betsy Dripps leads the way. As she reaches the steps, a boy next to her exclaims, “Wow! This place brings back memories!” This stops Betsy short. She laughs. She realizes this second grader has already had previous PHA visits—kindergarten and first grade. So yes, there are memories.

The PHA school education program introduces Island children to the special place that is the Polly Hill Arboretum. In 2012 over 700 students from all six Island schools participated. Betsy has crafted specific programs that adhere to the Massachusetts curriculum framework for science.

“It’s a perfect match. The Arboretum is a laboratory of discovery,” she says.

Polly Hill is quoted as saying, “Educate yourself. Learn. The learning is the fun.” The PHA school education program puts this wisdom into practice. It’s lots of fun, and the school children learn a lot.

Very popular with Island teachers, our free school programs pack the calendar both spring and fall. The most popular programs are “Flowers Change” in the spring and “Seeds Travel” in the fall. Other programs include “Tree Detectives” and “Dinosaur Plants” and there are more. All of the programs fit into the Massachusetts curriculum framework for science. Chip Story, Edgartown School second grade teacher, elaborates, “The Polly Hill program is great because it allows us to fill in the gaps of our curriculum and use it as

an outside classroom. It’s an amazing Island resource. I’ve been going there for 10 years, and I always learn something new each visit.”

The present focus of the Arboretum’s school programs is kindergarten through fourth grade. Every class receives a two-part curriculum. The first is a classroom visit where Betsy and her assistant, Jill Bouck (a certified K-6 teacher), visit the classroom. The second part, shortly after the classroom visit, is the fieldtrip to a living laboratory: the Polly Hill Arboretum.

During the classroom visit, the students are introduced to Polly Hill and how she created her arboretum by planting seeds. They learn that they, too, can be scientists—just like Polly. Betsy and Jill bring armloads of various materials into the classroom: seedpods, leaves, flowers, and scientific tools. These resources provide the opportunity for hands-on learning as each student examines botanical materials with a hand lens or magnifying glass. This activity reaches students of all learning abilities and whets their appetite for their Arboretum fieldtrip.

Once at PHA, children see the entire picture come together. Classes are divided into small groups led by dedicated volunteers, many who are retired teachers. The students are encouraged to be curious, to look around, observe what’s going on, ask questions, and make discoveries. Before they leave they make a drawing and discuss what they’ve seen and learned and enjoyed. Students experience landscape and buildings, plants and animals, sounds and smells that all combine to create an unforgettable experience.

The Polly Hill Arboretum is a perfect place for discovery-based learning. As the Arboretum looks to the future, we’ll explore opportunities for older students as well as collaborative programs with other Island educational institutions. We know that Polly Hill would be glad that Vineyard students continue to visit her arboretum, learn about nature, and create special memories. They have found something very special in their own backyard. As one Island kindergartener exclaimed this fall, “This was the best day ever!”



School group makes their way to the Far Barn.



## A Walk through Imagination

This past August storyteller Robin Tuck O'Callaghan and sculptor Bill O'Callaghan collaborated on *A Walk through Imagination*—an outdoor exhibit experience on the Arboretum grounds. Robin's story tour, "The Mysterious Forest of Dreams," led visitors on a trip through a magical landscape. Along the way Bill's whimsical sculpture illustrated the tale of the mythical voyage of the people known as the "keepers of the plants." This imaginative exhibit charmed young and old alike. Look for a new story and another exhibit next summer.



A minstrel greets visitors

## Erin Hepfner Assists Arboretum

Work on the Flora of Martha's Vineyard continued this past summer with the assistance of professionally trained horticulturist Erin Hepfner. Erin worked previously at Mytoi, Chappaquiddick's Japanese-style garden managed by the Trustees of Reservations. Documenting the flora includes discovering, identifying, and collecting plants for the creation of herbarium specimens. A quick study, Erin was trained by Executive Director Tim Boland. Since then she has made significant field collections in numerous Island habitats; many will be pressed, mounted, and labeled during the winter months.

Erin is also continuing work on a

master plant list for the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) supported by MVC funding. Plants selected for the list include native plants for sensitive Island habitats as well as Vineyard-appropriate plants requiring minimal inputs of fertilizers or pesticides. Ultimately this comprehensive list will be adopted as part of an Island-wide landscape policy. The policy will apply to all new building projects expected to be a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) based on their size, scope, and location. The plant list will also be helpful to anyone gardening or landscaping on Martha's Vineyard.



Erin Hepfner collects specimens for herbarium.

## Solar Panels

The Arboretum considers energy conservation in every area of our operations from composting to recycling to building design. In 2009 we built the Littlefield Maintenance Building with a roofline designed to accommodate solar panels when funds became available. Last spring, thanks in part to funds raised through our annual spring appeal, the South Mountain Company of West Tisbury installed these energy-saving panels. The array consists of 32 SunPower 327-watt modules. Already this investment has begun to pay off producing 30 percent of our energy requirements.

In addition, solar energy credits granted through a state-funded program will provide a rebate of \$2,860 per year for the first 8 years after installation. This rebate credit, combined with the estimated savings for electricity costs, allows the project to pay for itself within 9 years. Power generation and environmental benefits—including trees saved!—can be monitored through a real-time website link, pictured below.

### Environmental Benefits Since Installation

CO <sub>2</sub> OFFSET	TREES SAVED	OIL OFFSET
11,344.03 lbs	102.24 trees	537.93 barrels

### Money Saved Since Installation



Benefits since June 7, 2013 (as of November 18, 2013)

The panels are not visible to our visitors due to their location, however, tours are available to interested members. Please let us know if you would like to arrange a visit. Many thanks to all who donated to our spring appeal that allowed us to move ahead on this energy-saving project.

# Red Maple: Fall's Crowning Glory

by Tom Clark

Maples are a varied lot. Despite the fact that some are readily recognizable (think sugar maple and Canadian flag), there is enough diversity to stump even an avid plantsperson. As a group they range from modest shrubs to forest giants. Most, but not all, are deciduous. Most, but not all, have brilliant fall color. Most have palmately lobed leaves, but several have compound leaves, and more than a few have decidedly *un*-maplelike leaves. A few characteristics hold true for all maples: leaves paired opposite along the branches—not opposite, not a maple—and winged seeds botanically called samaras. Who as a child didn't cast maple seeds skyward and watch them twirl, helicopter-style to the ground?

Martha's Vineyard is a good place to get started on maple ID. Surprisingly its strength lies in its limited range; in fact, only one maple species is native to the Island: the red maple (*Acer rubrum*). However, you'll come across many more. A couple of European species, the Norway maple (*A. platanoides*) and the sycamore maple (*A. pseudoplatanus*), have naturalized to the point of invasiveness, wearing out their welcome. And there are dozens of beautiful maple species and cultivars that grace our gardens. My point is that the diversity is just right, not so great as to overwhelm, but diverse enough to develop your skills.

Red maple has a broad native range. In *Aristocrats of the Trees*, eminent plantsman E.H. Wilson extolled one of our most common native trees stating, "The red maple so abundant in swamp and wood, roadside and dry hilltop, is the crowning glory of a New England autumn." Indeed, red maple is the only maple to occur naturally in every county in New England and one of the



In May the ripening seeds of red maple provide a spectacular show.

most widespread trees of eastern North America with an immense range extending north to Newfoundland, west to Manitoba, and south to the Gulf States.

Swamp or scarlet maple (two other common names) is also remarkably adaptable, making it not only widespread but also common in a variety of habitats. Red maple

is most at home in deep, rich soil and in low, wet ground: along streams, bordering ponds and bogs, and in wooded swamps. In such ideal sites on the Island it can quickly grow to 50 feet tall, frequently more, often forming a canopy with beetlebung, sheltering an understory of swamp azalea, winterberry, chokeberry, summersweet, cinnamon



fern, and skunk cabbage. But it also has a wider circle of associates and can be found amidst beech and white and black oak in decidedly drier upland sites.

Our native maple is among the first woody plants to bloom each spring. In favored sites such as along the inland reaches of Tisbury Great Pond, the shoreline blushes red with masses of blossoms in tassel-like clusters. Particularly striking are flowers of rich burgundy; others, less flamboyantly, tend toward a pale yellowish orange. That same pigmentation is carried into the developing samaras. Whereas the seed of most maples takes the remainder of the growing season to develop, ripened seeds of red maple are dangling in eye-catching clusters by late May.

Island schoolchildren in the Arboretum's youth education program learn that the twirling and floating by which maple seeds deploy is an adaptation to encourage seed dispersal. The early

maturation of its seeds is undoubtedly an adaptation to its preferred habitat. Seeds that happen to land on appropriately moist ground in late May have the entire growing season to become established, and I've seen, in August, masses of two- to three-inch-tall seedlings carpeting the ground along Mill Brook.

So vibrant is their autumn regalia that an aerial view of the Vineyard in mid-October would reveal the location of virtually every red maple on the island. The courses of Fulling Mill Brook, the Tiasquam, and others would read as ribbons of scarlet, orange, and yellow; the surfaces of ponds and streams set afire by fallen leaves or by reflection. After leaf drop, fall's fire extinguished, the red twigs and plump flower buds hold a fiery promise in trust through the depths of winter; embers for rekindling. Early spring warmth in the landscape will accompany their renewal . . . and ours.



Red maple, a vibrant exclamation point in the fall landscape



Moisture-loving red maples brighten a Vineyard pond shore.



# The Unreal Beauty of Camellias

by Emily Ellingson



A single-flowered *Camellia japonica*, grown from seed by Polly Hill

I was first introduced to camellias just a year ago in northern California. Being from Minnesota, where we can't grow USDA Zone 8 or 9 plants—not to mention Zones 7, 6, or 5!—everything in that climate amazed me, but I found the camellias especially fascinating. I was drawn to their delicate blooms and the way they contrast with the glossy, almost unreal, appearance of the leathery foliage. When I arrived at the Polly Hill Arboretum in March, much to my surprise, I found camellias blooming on Martha's Vineyard.

In the United States, camellias are typically grown in what is called the Camellia Belt—a region from central Virginia, south to Florida, west through

Texas, and from California up to Washington. Where camellias are popular they are very, very popular. Upwards of an astounding 3,000 cultivars are registered with the International Camellia Society! Cultivars are named for fragrance, bloom color, and bloom type. Camellias are also increasingly selected for cold hardiness, making it possible to grow them in colder climes.

There are over 250 species in the genus *Camellia*, most are native to eastern and southern Asia and found in forested areas. Camellias are typically evergreen shrubs or trees with alternate, simple leaves. The typical wild species has a single flower, ranging from white to pink, red, and

occasionally yellow, blooming from late fall to early spring. Camellias are in the tea family (Theaceae) along with stewartia and the renowned franklinia tree.

Historically one of the most important and coveted crops in Asia, the tea camellia (*Camellia sinensis*) has been used to brew tea for over 3,000 years. It is precisely for tea that Europeans were interested in importing camellias in the early 1700s. The legendary East India Company bribed Chinese officials into exporting plants, but, due to either miscommunication or a deliberate mistake, the Chinese provided the Japanese camellia (*C. japonica*) instead. None-the-less the English embraced the new ornamental; soon Japanese camellias were all the rage, growing all over Europe in pots, glasshouses, and gardens.

Polly Hill had a particular interest in experimenting to see if camellias would grow on Martha's Vineyard. Out of the over 80 individual camellia plants that were tried at the Arboretum, 33 plants have survived. The most successful are those grown from seed. Most can be found today in the Camellia Border and Polly's Play Pen. A majority are the single, red-flowered, Japanese camellia, however PHA also has the tea oil camellia (*C. oleifera*), hardiest of camellia species; *C. saluenensis*, which has pink flowers and an elongated leaf; and several winter- and spring-blooming hybrids.



*Camellia x williamsii* 'Donation', an early spring blooming hybrid, can be found on the south side of the Camellia Border.





A camellia seed capsule, ready to drop its contents on the ground

During my first month at the Arboretum, we tackled the curation of the Camellia Border. We discovered that one of the camellias labeled *C. japonica* had a semi-double flower, unlike the single flower typical of the species. Consulting Polly's original accession card, I found a National Arboretum number attached to the plant and a note indicating it was a cross. After some research, I discovered that the plant Polly received in 1974 was 'Anacostia', a new cultivar selected for cold-hardiness in the 1970s and eventually named in 2010.

As a result of breeding programs emphasizing cold hardiness like the National Arboretum's, camellias are no longer confined to the Camellia Belt. And with the choice of hardier cultivars, camellias can be enjoyed as far north as USDA Zone 6. There are special considerations when planting camellias in colder climates. For best results plant in April or May in an acidic, well-draining soil. Choose a northern or western exposure to avoid early morning winter sun and protect plants from drying winds. New plants should be watered when dry for two to three years, but once established, camellias are fairly drought tolerant.

The western world has an on-again/off-again relationship with camellias, at times they were the height of fashion, and at other times, not so much. On a personal level, a single camellia bloom can brighten an entire winter day. Visit the Arboretum in late winter, you just might become an admirer. Peak bloom is late March through April.

## Jack Cushman

Grounds volunteer Jack Cushman began working at PHA in 2007. He had driven by the Arboretum for years, but with a bit of an attitude problem: he didn't want to pay \$5.00 (suggested donation) to "walk through a field." Then he saw a notice in the paper advertising a free program for those interested in volunteering. He came, he liked it, and immediately joined the volunteer grounds crew.

When Jack first started volunteering, he felt the Arboretum was a diamond in the rough with a lot of areas that needed work. He remembers stone walls obscured by vines. Now he says it looks great. Seeing the grounds evolve over the years has been rewarding for Jack, along with the friendships—good crew, good friends, good staff—he made along the way. He says volunteering is "a walk in the park" with a little work thrown in.

Jack enjoys physical work; pruning is one of his favorite jobs. He likes the feel of a saw or clippers in his hands, which stands to reason—for the past 35 years he has been a builder. In 1969 after leaving the U.S. Navy, he bought 50 acres in the southern tier of New York State where he and his wife,



Jack Cushman in action!

Barbara, built a log cabin. Twenty years ago they purchased a home on the Island, and nine years ago retired here, although they continue to return to New York in the winter where Jack works as a ski instructor.

Jack's message to visitors is "It's worth the \$5! Whether you come here for the first time or the hundredth time, it's worth it!" He adds that any day of the year there is something special to see: different blossoms, colors, even the light is different depending on the time of day. "There is an openness here that is vanishing in the world and on the Vineyard." He says come visit the Arboretum—don't just drive by!—and take your time.

We are pleased to have such a hard working volunteer, and with such an improved attitude! To learn more about becoming a PHA volunteer, contact Nancy Weaver at 508-693-9426.

*C. japonica* 'Anacostia' was selected for an abundance of large, semi-double blooms and increased cold tolerance.





## THE POLLY HILL ARBORETUM

### MAILING ADDRESS

PO Box 561  
West Tisbury, MA 02575

508-693-9426 Tel  
508-693-5772 Fax  
[www.pollyhillarboretum.org](http://www.pollyhillarboretum.org)

### ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

The Homestead  
809 State Road  
West Tisbury, MA 02575

### VISITOR CENTER

795 State Road  
West Tisbury, MA 02575

### ACCESSIBILITY

The Visitor Center is wheelchair accessible.

### VISITOR CENTER HOURS

Memorial Day weekend to  
Columbus Day: 9:30 am–4 pm

### ARBORETUM GROUNDS HOURS

Sunrise–sunset, year-round

### TOURS

Memorial Day weekend through  
Columbus Day: 10 am daily

### ADMISSION

\$5 suggested donation  
*Free to members and children under 12*

### FREE PARKING

### DRIVING DIRECTIONS

See [www.pollyhillarboretum.org](http://www.pollyhillarboretum.org)

**mer.i.stem:** *n. botany.* The growing point or area of rapidly dividing cells at the tip of a stem, root, or branch.



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## THEN & NOW

# State Road, North Tisbury, Massachusetts



1939



2013

The island of Martha's Vineyard has changed tremendously since 1939, yet the view across State Road towards the Arboretum's North Field looks remarkably (and thankfully) the same. Owing to a variety of conservation measures, this stretch of State Road

passes through a large area of conserved open space, all at one time owned by the Littlefield family. The west side of the road is preserved thanks to the Polly Hill Arboretum and the Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society; the east, due to the acquisition

of the Littlefield and Hickey-Greene properties by the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank Commission. One notable difference is the plantings along the Arboretum roadside. Between 1927 and 1930, Polly Hill's mother planted pitch pines (at the cost of 10 cents

per tree) to create a screen along the road. Thirty-five years later Polly added an additional planting of ornamental crabapples creating the attractive layered effect we enjoy today.