Piedmont Chapter



A Horticultural Prague Spring

Bobby J. Ward

The Czech playwright Karel Čapek is celebrated for introducing the word "robot" to the world vocabulary. It was coined by his artist brother, Josef, and appeared in R.U.R., a science fiction play that Čapek wrote in 1921. To gardeners, however, Čapek (pronounced CHOP-ek) is known for The Gardener's Year (1929), in which he wrote, "Let no one think that real gardening is a bucolic and meditative occupation. It is an insatiable passion, like everything else to which a man gives his heart." From that you can infer that the book is not an idyllic meditation on the joys of gardening; rather, it is a psychological comedy in which Čapek fights the "tyranny" of watering hoses, scorching sun, the "animosity and callousness" of soil, and the "dense embroidery" of plant lice. And, oh yes, there are visitors to his garden who think that a prized campanula is a radish.

My introduction to Karel Čapek was through Norman Singer of Massachusetts, a NARGS past president, who sent me a copy of the book in the early 1990s, inscribing it "One of my favorite books." Subsequently, at NARGS meetings I learned of modern Czech gardeners through Andrew Osyany of Ontario, whose Karmic Exotix list was for a number of years the North American distributor of seeds collected by several Czech plantsmen. At the time, the high alpine locales of seed listed in the catalog were truly "exotix" to me, a neophyte rock gardener: the Caucasus, the Altai, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia. Through NARGS lecture programs and study weekends I soon met Josef Halda and Vojtech Holubec, two renowned Czech plant hunters and seed collectors who are frequent speakers at rock gardening groups in North America.

In January 1997 Vojtech visited North Carolina on a NARGS speaker's tour and spoke to our Piedmont Chapter. A friend and I took him to several local areas to see native plants in the Wake County Piedmont. We kept up correspondence off and on through the years, and I relied on him for information when I became interested in modern-day plant hunters and seed collectors, including the Czechs. From that interest, Vojtech introduced me to a fellow alpine garden enthusiast, Josef Jurásek; both of them now operate alpine and rock garden seed businesses in Prague.

In May 2005, Vojtech invited me to speak about modern-day plant hunters at a meeting of the Rock Garden Club of Prague (RGCP) and to attend its annual alpine plant show. I jumped at the opportunity. My visit coincided with Prague Spring, a citywide international music festival celebrating the season, and com-

Piedmont Chapter NARGS 2008 Programs

10 a.m. Totten Center NC Botanical Garden, Chapel Hill, NC

January 19, 2008

Tony Avent Plant Delights Nursery Raleigh, N.C. "Mow No Mo' - The Wonderful World of Ornamental Grasses"

February 16, 2008

Todd Lasseigne Paul J. Ciener Botanical Garden Kernersville, N.C. "Japanese Plantsmanship and Nurseries"

March 22, 2008 (NOTE IT'S FOURTH SATURDAY)

Peter Korn Nurseryman and Extreme Gardener NARGS traveling speaker Eskilsby, Sweden "Building for Growing"

April 19, 2008

Tom Stuart Gardener Croton Falls, N.Y. "Rock Garden Ferns"

May 3, 2008 Spring Picnic and Garden Tour

Day Tour of Charlotte-area Gardens Leaving Chapel Hill 7:30 am Returning ~6:30 pm See back page for details

(Continued from page 1) A Horticultural Prague Spring memorating in its name the first, suppressed attempt of the Czechs to overthrow the former communist regime. On the trip I met three Czech NARGS members whose gardens I visited, along with Vojtech's.

Rock Garden Club of Prague

The Rock Garden Club of Prague (Klub Skalnickaru Praha, Ceska Republika) was founded in 1970. It has a membership of some 800 locals and about 60 foreign members. The club manages an annual seed exchange and publishes a quarterly bulletin, *Skalnicky* (*Rock Garden Plants*). Its members organize short weekend trips to local gardens and longer trips to the Caucasus and other alpine areas in Asia and Europe. Several of the members operate seed businesses and nurseries, often exhibiting and selling plants at three alpine plant shows that the club annually organizes, two in the spring and one in the fall. The best is the Main Spring Show, held in May and lasting for three weeks. I attended the 36th annual show, from 4 to 21 May, and saw an exhibition of at least a



Plant Sale at Rock Garden of Prague

thousand alpines. Judging by the members I met, they are passionate growers who are experienced and skilled in cultivating alpine plants.

The spring show is held on the parish grounds of a Roman Catholic church, appropriately named St. John on the Rock. The churchyard is rented by the RGCP for its plant sales and is the site of a large permanent collection of rock and alpine plantings maintained by club members. The church, a Bohemian Baroque building dating from 1730, is on a busy corner on Karlovo Namesti (Charles Square) next door to Faust House, a part of the Faculty of Medicine of the sprawling Medical Center of Charles University (founded in 1348). The sixteenth-

century alchemist and astrologer Dr. Johann Faustus lived there for a while, and legend has it that he was carried off to Hades by the Devil through a hole in the roof of Faust House. With that juxtaposition of the profane and sacred in mind, I walked very carefully under the heavy stone archway into the churchyard, where I immediately noticed the quietness; the enclosure muffled the sound of streetcars and hospital ambulances a few yards away.

At the club's sales and display area, I was met by Alena Linzmajer, who was overseeing the sales, greeting visi-



Rock Garden of St John on the Rock

tors, and assisting in vendor stock replacement. The flyer for the show listed 49 vendors this year. In the sales area you can find a wide assortment of alpine plants as well as dwarf trees and shrubs. Some of the best plants were gentians, rhododendrons, irises, daphnes, fritillaries, and numerous species of saxifrages and androsaces. There were at least a dozen forms of *Lewisia* and an equal number of *Phlox*, *Penstemon*, and *Trillium*. Alphabetically, you could view and purchase anything from *Abies koreana* 'Blauer Eskimo' to *Wulfeniana amherstiana*. If your pocketbook and U.S. customs were not such a barrier, you could completely stock a new rock garden from purchases at the show.

Alena directed me to the display garden area of Saint John on the Rock, which is about an acre (0.4 hectare). The plantings are generally arranged by geographic region (Europe, the Americas, the Mediterranean, Asia, and South Africa). RGCP members have spread plants among crevices and around small and large boulders, with the rock types varying by region. During my visit I saw several species of *Phlox*, *Cytisus decumbens*, *Rhodohypoxis*, *Lewisia*, and *Campanula*. A natural-looking pond and a small bridge have been built in one area. Rhododen-



Gentiana acaulis in bloom at St. John on the Rock garden

drons, daphnes, and small maples spread nearby under a large oak. Scattered among the rocks are *Bergenia*, *Epimedium*, *Leontopodium*, *Aquilegia*, *Clematis*, and various genera of orchids. There were also plantings of *Genista*, *Trollius*, *Tiarella*, *Dicentra*, *Alyssum*, and *Fothergilla*. In a sunny area the RGCP has planted large troughs with *Echinocactus* and other cacti.



Trough of cactus in the succulent collection, St John on the Rock

The display area of the church is open to the public only during the three plant shows, but it is maintained year round by club members. Because the churchyard is in a busy part of Prague, the RGCP recruits new members at each of its shows. Employees at the nearby medical center wander into the grounds during their lunch breaks.

Vojtech Holubec's Garden

Vojtech Holubec is an agronomist with the Czech Gene Bank, testing plantings of varieties of wheat and other cereal crops. He was one of the youngest members of the Rock Garden Club of Prague, joining at age 16. Vojtech also began corresponding with Norman Singer and NARGS at that time.

He gardens on 800 square meters (0.2 acre) in the Suchdol section of Prague, across the river from downtown. His walled garden is filled with large boulders that had to



Vojtech Holubec's Garden, Prague

be lifted by crane (the neighbors wondered what was happening). The limestone from the Czech Karst (sea sediments from the Devonian Period) is advantageously arrayed to display plants from various geographic regions: North America, Caucasus, Europe (Alps, the Balkan Peninsula, Slovakia, Pyrenees) Turkey, and Central Asia (Tien Shan, Altai, Far East, and the Himalaya).

There are mounds of scree, tufa, and flat stones standing upright, all with alpine and rock garden "jewels" tucked



Vojtech Holubec's Crevice Garden

among them, most of the plants grown from seed. Vojtech estimates he has about 4,500 plants. Behind the

Photo by Bobby Ward

Photo by Bobby Ward

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house he has a large collection of rhododendrons and azaleas, various clematis, aroids poking through the ground, asarums, and several dwarf Pinus mugo. One of the knockouts is a handsome, vigorous white form of Gentiana clusii. On the south side of the house, he has a greenhouse with a plunge sand bed crammed with plants, some rooting and others waiting to be potted or transplanted. The walkway to his house is lined with large troughs, many containing dwarf conifers and witches' brooms, a vast collection totaling 800 or more plants amassed by his son David, now 20. David, a member of the Czech Conifer Society, has traveled outside the Czech Republic looking for fine conifer specimens and brooms, which he trades with other society members or plants in the family garden. In the front of the house old, bleached-out tree stumps have been placed, enhancing the feeling of a high-altitude landscape.

On my visit to his garden, Vojtech pointed out damage from a late frost two weeks earlier. Still, many plants had begun leafing out without injury. There was a very dwarf Tilia cordata (linden tree), two forms of horse chestnut (Aesculus hippocastanum 'Cristata' and 'Laciniata'), Beesia calthifolia, and beautiful red-flowering Magnolia 'Susan' and a pink Magnolia 'Koern'. I was particularly pleased to be shown Erythronium umbilicatum, obtained in Raleigh from one of our Piedmont Chapter members during Vojtech's trip to speak to our chapter in 1997, and Trillium pusillium subsp. alabamiense, a species Vojtech obtained from a NARGS member in Delaware. Vojtech raises many plants from seeds collected by himself and other members of the club or obtained by mail. Among his favorite plants tucked about the garden are Convolvulus, Callianthemum (Ranunculaceae), Saxifraga, Daphne, and Gentiana. He finds that seeds collected in Turkey and the Caucasus grow best for him.

Charles University Botanical Garden



Charles University Botanical Garden

The current Charles University Botanical Garden was founded in 1898 (some references say 1845) and consists of 3.5 hectares (8.6 acres) There was an older university garden begun in 1775 in Prague, but it was repeatedly damaged by floods over the years and was ultimately relocated to its present site at Na Slupi Street near Charles Square. The botanical garden has the feel of a public park (admission is free) with numerous benches, quiet shady places, and several levels of winding paths, a few of which unexpectedly dead-end. Lilacs, rhododendrons, and azaleas were at their peak of spring bloom when I visited. There are several greenhouses for the protection and display of tender tropical plants, including an extensive collection of cacti, succulents, and aquatic plants, and large old cycads. The bulk of the outdoor collection focuses on trees and flora of central Europe; there is also a small limestone rock garden on a hillside. In addition, there are several mature tree species from North America and large rhododendrons from Asia situated about the garden.



Phoenix canariensis at Charles University Botanical Garden

Lining a sidewalk in large wooden barrels were five *Phoenix canariensis*, the Canary Islands date palm, recently removed from greenhouses to spend the summer out of doors. A herbarium, adjacent to the botanical garden, was founded in 1775 at the Department of Botany; it houses 2.2 million specimens (access by permission).

My main purpose in visiting the garden was to see *Ginkgo biloba* 'Praga' (also called 'Prague' and 'Pragense'), a male weeping form that is somewhat dwarf (12 feet/3.6 meters high). It did not disappoint me; Vojtech and Josef Jurásek had taken me to see it three years earlier on a trip to Prague during a cold December afternoon, when its stocky trunk and pendulous limbs, devoid of leaves, looked like



Ginkgo biloba 'Praga': Charles University Botanical Garden metal sculpture in the waning light. It maintains a sentinel position at the entrance to the Botany Department.

Alena and Zdenek Linzmajer's Garden

Alena and Zdenek Linzmajer garden on a somewhat dry, clay hillside that faces south with an open, sunny aspect. Their plot was originally rented some 50 years ago by Zdenek's father and a local gardening club. There are other gardens in this collective on adjacent neighboring plots separated by wire fences, where people grow fruits, vegetables, and cut flowers. Originally in an isolated, wooded part of Prague, the collective is now bordered by the busy D-1 highway leading to Brno and by apartments and office buildings. Still, it is a surprisingly peaceful oasis. The site gives the Linzmajers additional space away from their home to grow and test new rock garden plants, one of their passions. They have a well and a shed in which they store fruit from their fruit trees, gardening equipment, and fertilizers.



Alenda & Zdenek Linzmajer's Rock Garden

Alena and Zdenek told me the area of the garden is 580 sq meters (0.14 acre), but it seems much larger than that. It is clear they have spent many hours here setting up and maintaining a very fine rock garden. Except for the paths, there was hardly a square inch of space not covered with plants, the majority of which were in bloom. They have placed Daphne cneorum, D. cneorum 'Pygmea', and Daphne arbuscula among the rocks along with several species of Campanula and Gentiana. Here and there I saw delospermas, phloxes, Paeonia tenuifolia, Alyssum, and Helianthemum hybrids. They pointed out Aster coloradoensis, Acantholimon armenum (from Turkey), Fibigia triquetra (Brassicaceae), Leontopodium nivale, the blueflowered Polygala calcarea and the purple-and-yellow P. vayredae, the latter from the Pyrenees.

RGCP Meeting and Lecture

Vojtech had invited me to speak at a meeting of the RGCP. The club meets on Novotneho Lavce Street in the building of the Czech Technological and Scientific Society, adjacent to the historic Charles Bridge. My talk on modern-day plant hunters was translated into Czech by Antonin (Tony) Svehla, a NARGS member from McLean, Virginia, who by coincidence was visiting Prague with his wife, Jana Svehlova. (Tony and Jana attended the annual NARGS meeting our chapter hosted in May 2004.)

After my lecture, we adjourned downstairs to a restaurant with RGCP members, and Josef Jurásek, famous for his love of beer, led a toast with a round of Platan (named for a plane tree located near the brewery in the town of Protivin) and then Pilsner Urquell (from the town of Pilsen). Over dinner, I was introduced to Milan Halada, another NARGS and RGCP member. He told me about his garden and invited me to visit, even though the sun was already low in the sky.

Milan Halada's Garden

The last-minute invitation to Milan's garden was an unexpected pleasure. Racing the sun, Milan sped across town, taking Josef Jurásek, Tony Svehla, and me over the Palackého Bridge to a rural sector outside Prague called Hlubocepy. Here he guided around a special garden built inside a former quarry. The house and garden created by Milan's father are surrounded on three sides with limestone walls at least 25 feet (7.6 meters) high. The quarry appears to be an exposed uplift of limestone, as the driveway entrance to the garden is uphill for a short distance. Some of the largest rocks are lichen-encrusted and others show beautiful striations, a result of geological compression, folding, and

Milan has found interesting ways to display plants around this uniquely situated garden. Walking about, it's hard to tell

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Photo by Bobby Ward

which rock Milan put there or rearranged himself, and which ones were the result of quarrying operations before Milan's father took over the space.

He has gentians, pulsatillas, phloxes, maples, daphnes, and saxifrages. One plant demanding attention in the fading light was the striking violet-colored Iris ruthenica, a



Milan Halada's Rock Quarry Garden

species that ranges from eastern Europe to the Korean peninsula. There were numerous conifers around the garden, including cultivars of Pinus mugo and Juniperus communis.

Milan's enthusiasm for alpine plants has created a sand bed nursery or "growing-up" area, with hundreds of pots of germinating seedlings and first-year plants crammed against the north wall of the quarry. The only drawback to this delightful, early evening visit was the interruption from noisy airplanes (Milan's house is in the flight pattern of the Prague airport), reminding me that I would be returning to North Carolina the next morning.

As it was getting dark, Josef Jurásek urged me to abandon Milan and Tony, who were now looking at plants with a flashlight, and walk a quarter-mile with him to a rural roadside pub for one last round of Czech beer. Presently we were joined by Milan and Tony; the non-gardnering, local clientele became amused at these strangers talking animatedly and enthusiastically about rock garden plants in a mixture of Latin, Czech, and English.

Back Home to North Carolina

As I was being driven to Prague's Ruzyne Airport by Vojtech, I saw Vysehrad Cemetery in the distance. Karel Capek and his wife, the actress Olga Scheinpflugova, are

buried there on a hill overlooking the Vltava River (widely known by its German name, the Moldau), which flows through Prague. The cemetery contains the remains of many other people famous in Czech arts and sciences. Unlike other gravecaps in Vysehrad that are of stone or cement, the Capeks' is made of soil, with a flower vase and a watering saucer for birds.

Vojtech told me about a pink-flowering saxifrage that honors the writer: Saxifraga x megaseaeflora 'Karel Čapek'. When I returned home, I searched the Internet and found that Arrowhead Alpines in Fowlerville, Michigan lists it. The catalog says it is an early bloomer, starting in January in the alpine house.

On the long flight back to North Carolina, I read what Vojtech had written in 1992 in his book Skalyky a Jejich Stavba (Rock Gardens and Their Construction): "Tired of the pace of today's civilization, we are turning to Nature in all its forms, often without realizing it. The cultivation of alpine plants is one of these returns."

Capek expands on Vojtech's theme with a wink, I believe, by writing that "the cultivator of a rock garden is not only a gardener, but a collector as well, and that puts him among the serious maniacs."

[This article appeared in a slightly altered form in the North American Rock Garden Society's "Rock Garden Quarterly," Fall 2005, Volume 63, number 4, pages 280-286.]

Drought...Dee Hamilton

When I suggested sharing names of plants which had weathered this summer's drought the best, I had no idea the drought would continue long past September. At that time I thought, as usual in the Piedmont, we would have rain in the fall. No such thing happened.

I was surprised at how well roses, Gruss an Achen and Heritage, had done without water. The roses didn't bloom but appeared vigorous. The weedy yellow cosmos never stopped blooming. A gerbera daisy came up as a volunteer and bloomed in a sort of stunted way. How much drought gerberas will take may surprise us and is worth looking into.

Once when Marian and I talked she mentioned nandinas survived well. I began noticing the ubiquitous plants all around us that we take for granted like nandinas, forsythia, winter jasmine and crepe myrtles. I have a large, rampant knifophia that liked the drought. So far it's evergreen. The friend who gave it to me said: "You just wait..." I think meaning: ...you'll have more knifophias than you ever wanted. Unfortunately I have no idea of its Botanical name.

The Southern Gardener's Book of Lists by Lois Trigg Chaplin is a useful source of information on plants for dry areas from groundcovers to trees. If the lack of rain continues, we may all turn to xeroscaping.

What follows are lists of plants, Rock Garden Society members sent me in September?

Ruth Bierhoff

In the Rock Garden:

Asarina procumbens
Aethionema cordifolium
Aster novi-belgii 'Alert'
Buxus mycrophylla 'Compacta'
Dianthus chinensis 'Cherry Magic'
Erysimum helveticum
Euphorbia 'Helena Blush'
Oxalis regnelli 'Fanny'
Phlox stolonifera
Rosmarinus decumbens
Sedum rupestris 'Angelina'
Verbena canadensis

In the perennial garden:

Agastache rupestris
Aster novae-angliae
Crinums
Lilium formosanum
Rosmarinus officinalis
Solidago rugosa 'Fireworks'
Yucca filamentosa 'Color Guard'

John Dilley

Aster ericoides "Scheengitter"
Gypsophila cerastoides
Anacyclus pyrethrum var.
Leucojum atumnal
Erysimum "Moonlight
Arabis caucasica

Amelia Lane

Helleborus x sternii Pine Knot strain

Lynda Waldrep

Trillium grandiflorum,
Golden seal, autumn fern
Lady fern
Dixie wood fern
Marginal wood fern
Broad beech fern
Rhodeas
Black cohosh
Both types of hepaticas

Fothergilla
Inkberry
Evergreen dogwood
Hexastylis gingers & asarums
Pachysandra procumbens
Hellabores
Japanese Azaleas
Camellias

Ray Stilwell

Arisaema (many species)

Cedrus dodora

Cryptomeria japonica
'Yoshido' (gorgeous as always)

Daphne odora

Gardenia jasminoides 'Klein's Hardy' (a spectacular showing)

Ilex x altaclerensis 'Green Maid'

Ilex x altaclerensis 'Green Maid'
Ilex aquifolium 'Angustifolia'
Ilex aquifolium 'Calina'
Ilex aquifolium 'Lewis'
Ilex aquifolium 'Longspra'
Ilex aquifolium 'Marge Bennet'
Ilex cornuta 'Dazzler'
Ilex cornuta 'D'Or'
Ilex cornuta 'Willow Leaf'
Ilex cornuta x pernyi 'Dr. Kassab' (really beautiful)

Ilex crenata 'Helleri' Ilex koehneana 'Chieftain' Ilex koehneana 'Lassie' Ilex koehneana 'Kurly Koe' Ilex opaca 'Clarendon Spreading' Ilex opaca 'Jersey Princess' Ilex verticillata 'Winter Red' *Ilex verticillata x Serrata* 'Sparkleberry' Juniperus conferta 'Blue Pacific' Kalmia latifolia 'Elf' Kalmia latifolia 'Keepsake' Kalmia latifolia 'Pinwheel' Kalmia latifolia 'Sarah' Laurentia fluvitailus (superb showing) Leucanthemum superbum 'Becky' Leucanthemum superbum 'Switzerland' Taxus cuspidata (superb showing) -



Gardens on May Picnic Tour

Lindie Wilson

The Lindie Wilson garden was created by the late Elizabeth Lawrence, a garden that has been restored, expanded, and maintained by Lindie. The garden is shielded from the street by a hedge of Camellia sasanqua. You enter the garden through an arched iron gate by a path of bamboo. The garden has a geometric design reminiscent of Mediterranean gardens. A pond toward the rear serves as a focal point. There are mixed borders of woody and herbaceous plants. The rear of the garden is a small woodland.

Wing Haven Gardens & Bird Sanctuary

Elizabeth and Edwin Clarkson created Wing Haven in 1927. The gardens are enclosed by brick walls and encompass three acres. The plants emphasize cover and food for birds in both formal and informal woodland settings. The gardens contain plaques and statuary in the garden walls and pathways.

Geary Mandrapilias's Menagerie

The garden is a collection of plants and artifacts, including antique watering faucets and sprinklers, many housed in a shed. There are numerous perennials and at least fifty Japanese maples, three koi (fish) ponds, and a small connecting waterfall. Water is an important feature of the garden. Because the garden houses numerous (live) box turtles that Geary and her husband rescue and rehabilitate, step carefully.

Bob Rossier and Eldred Hudson's Mammoth Oaks Garden

The garden is an acre plus in size and contains a fountain, landscaped pool, bamboo forest, and grassy pathways among uncommon trees, shrubs, and perennials. The house is an Arts and Crafts-style bungalow built about 1953.

(Continued on page 8)

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Piedmont Chapter Meeting

January 19, 2008

Tony Avent

Plant Delights Nursery Raleigh, N.C.

"Mow No Mo' - The Wonderful World of Ornamental Grasses"

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(Continued from page 7) Charlotte Gardens on Tour

Most of the garden is under dry shade. A Victorian fireback sculpted in the head of a mythological character serves as a drainpipe for a birdbath from the fountain overflow.

UNC-Charlotte Botanical Gardens

The gardens consist of seven acres of woodland plants, primarily 3,000 rhododendrons, and three acres of semi-formal gardens. There is also a 5,000-square foot greenhouse of orchids and other tropical plants.

S Bobby Ward

May 3rd Picnic in Charlotte- Sign Up Now!

Schedule

7:30 a.m. Bus arrives (NCBG)

7:45 a.m. Leave Chapel Hill

10:15 Arrive at Lindie Wilson's garden (Ridgewood Ave.)

Then walk to Wing Haven one block away (Ridgewood Ave.)

View garden and enjoy box lunch

12:45 p.m. Leave Wing Haven

1:00 Arrive at Geary Mandrapilias's garden (Markworth Ave.)

2:00 Arrive at Bob Rossier's garden (Mammoth Oak Dr.)

3:15 Arrive at UNCC Botanical Garden (University Dr.)

4:15 Leave for return to Chapel Hill

6:30 Arrive Chapel Hill (NCBG)

\$45.00 Includes all garden entrances, lunch and bus cost

Reserve your space by mailing payment to Bob Wilder, 2317 Elmsford Way, Raleigh, NC 27608.

Details on the gardens on the tour begin on page 7 of this issue.