

Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter March 2010

Next Meeting

Saturday, April 3 at 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall
BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge
MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183

AM & PM

John Lonsdale

**AM: *Cyclamen* - Cultivation &
Propagation**



**PM: *Androsace*, *Dionysia* and *Primula* –
Cultivation & Propagation**

Lunch ---BYO

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch will be followed by Show and Tell, a plant sale and an auction.

John Lonsdale moved to Pennsylvania from England in 1996 and began to create Edgewood Gardens, now a home to thousands of hardy woodland, prairie and bulbous plants. His spectacular website can be perused at: www.edgewoodgardens.net

Editor's Notes:

Each year, towards the end of February, I start counting the days until my garden starts to revive from its winter slumber. I know where the first signs of life are likely to occur, and I haunt these disparate corners of the garden watching for some indication of life. The deciduous plants are the ones that worry me the most, because there really is no way to know if they survived the winter until they decide to tell me. So when the first snowdrops broke through, around March 5th, I was delighted. They slowly expanded until about 25 or so had bloomed by the 12th, creating a lovely white corner on the east end of the driveway. The crocuses started coming in about the same time, and as of this writing, March 24th, there are over a hundred blooming, a mix of *Crocus tommasinianus* and some Home Depot hybrids, bringing out the few solitary bees that are active in 50-degree temperatures. Near the snowdrops, along a stone path into the upper portion of the east garden, I have about three dozen miniature daffodils, purchased 15 years ago from Nancy Wilson. They come back every year and have increased quite nicely from the 6 I originally planted out.

In the western section, about 40 yards from the house, a lone *Draba polytricha* is in bloom, a foot or so from a beautiful two-foot-wide *Aethionema oppositifolia* in full bloom – a sight to behold at this early date. Last year I got about 10 blooms, while this year I have over two hundred. There is no

accounting for this, other than the difference in the snow cover! The only other plants in bloom are a dozen or so *Thlaspi rotundifolium*, which seeded around last year, and my *Adonis amurensis* sited next to my barn, facing south and at the top of a small slope. One bloom, but it is beautiful!



Thlaspi rotundifolium

As the days get longer and the sun higher, all of us will have increasing difficulty separating ourselves from the garden to address other areas of our lives. If the April meeting day is warm and sunny, I imagine we'll lose a few members to the draw of their gardens, and many of us who show up in West Stockbridge will be more than a little conflicted about our decision to forgo the garden for the garden meeting. But it will be a good one, and we will have an opportunity to bring home some plants as well, as John Lonsdale is bringing along some of his treasures



for us to buy. He will discuss the cultivation and propagation of *Cyclamen* in the morning, and the cultivation and propagation of *Androsace*, *Dionysia* and *Primula* in the afternoon session.

I expect a small plant sale and, as always, a few auction items. This past weekend, at the

Winter Study Weekend, Harvey Wrightman let me steal away a spectacular piece of tufa, well planted and filled with nooks and crannies for a few dozen small gems to be added. The best and fairest way to handle this special item is a drawing, and I'm planning on selling 35 tickets at \$10 each. Harvey gets \$275, still WAY below the real retail price, and the Chapter keeps the rest.

See you all on April 3rd.

Stonecrop Sale

Harvey Wrightman



STONECROP GARDENS

81 Stonecrop Lane - Cold Spring New York 10516



Karen Perkins operates Garden Visions, the nursery that propagates and sells Darrell Probst's collections of *Epimedium* species and the hybrids he has created. His lecture on searching in China was most enthralling; and, having many of the plants available on the Karen's sales table added more to the obvious interest of the audience. To our great delight, Karen has agreed to attend and setup a sales table for the Stonecrop Sale on April 24. She will have wide selection of offerings, all beautifully and orderly set out with color photos. If your interest goes beyond the rock garden, then this selection of *Epimediums* will entice you with the wide variation there is in leaf form and color. The flowers too have their delicate appeal, colors ranging from white, through yellow, orange, and shades of purple. From the EWSW I brought home some smaller species including a form of *E. platypetalum* that barely exceeds 5cm in height. – I can see it as a mat in a trough for a shadier setting – perhaps with *Haberlea* and

Ramonda. Like the other vendors at this sale, the grower is the seller and the stock is garden-evaluated.

Don Dembowski - Shade plants: Don was also at the EWSW, and he will return to the Stonecrop Sale with a good selection of mostly shade plants. Again, he will bring double-flowering *Trillium grandiflorum*, which will sell quickly in the initial frenzy. Also, he will have a selection of shade tolerant plants – *Arisaema spp.*, several varieties of *Anemonella*, *Tricyrtis spp.* *Primula seiboldii* selections and some interesting forms of *Primula kisoana*. Also: *Magnolia x 'Arrowhead Sue'* (pink flowers and reblooms in summer), *Stewartia malacodendron*, *Heleborus thibetanus*, *Paeonia obovata 'alba'*, Gold-laced Primrose, *Primula x 'cherry pinwheel'*, *Iris lacustris*, *I. gracilipes* and *I. verna*; *Tricyrtis nana* and *T. 'lightening strike'* (wild variegation) and *Podophyllum pleianthum*.



Iris lacustris

Cyclamen: A Stonecrop member, Bill Perron, will be selling 10 different species of yearling *Cyclamen spp.* including several subspecies and varieties, the majority of which are hardy in our local (zone 6) area. There will also be 2 and 3 year old flowering *C. hederifolium*, *C. coum*, *C. cilicium*, *C. purpurascens* (all hardy) and *C. persicum*. *C. coum* and *C. hederifolium* will be available singly as well as in 6-packs and

flats for those who want to plant a large grouping of plants in a shady area. Bill will also be offering a variety of yearling *Arisaema spp.* and *Helleborus x hybridus* from Pine Knot strains.

An exciting addition is a small evergreen flowering shrub, *Hebe pinguifolia 'sutherlandii'* from New Zealand that has



Hebe pinguifolia 'sutherlandii'

thrived in his local garden in several spots for years. Great for a rock garden or border, 10 of these will be offered for the first time this year.

Evermay Nursery: Richard May specializes in primulacaea, both species and hybrids- all hardy for northern New England gardens. Last year I remember seeing some beautiful pots of *Dodecatheon dentatum*, a diminutive white flowering shooting star. This year *Dicentra peregrina* is listed on the website. There is also a wide offering of rock garden plants and woodland perennials. The web address is: www.evermaynursery.com

Stonecrop Gardens: It seems that the plant benches at Stonecrop always have something new. Last year I came back with some *Primula marginata* selections to add to our stock. In the garden walls there are huge mats of *Gypsophila aretiodes f. caucasica*

that Frank Cabot brought from England some 30 years ago. Absolutely hardy to winter and summer, it clings to the earth like moss on a rock. On the benches you can buy a pot of the same wonderful plant. That's the great thing about Stonecrop – the nursery and the garden are right there and you can view plants in a garden setting. See www.stonecrop.org for more details.

Wrightman Alpines Nursery: The most exciting thing for me is the plant material we are raising from seed collections of several experienced Czech collectors. The wealth of new material could be a catalogue of its own – and so much of it is proving to be very growable. Most intriguing are the gentians, especially the fabled autumn blooming species. Older collections always seem to be more delicate and not tolerant of limestone soils; so, it was with some trepidation that I



Gentiana .lawrencei- photo by Josef Halda

bought those first few packets. Results have been gratifying, with even those sought after large trumpet types, *Gentiana spp. farreri*, *Gentiana .lawrencei*, *Gentiana sino-ornata*, *G. veitchiorum*, *G. georgei*. All are showing good growth with no fussiness. Go to www.pavelkaalpines.cz and click on “China 2008” for photos of the various species. Take a good look at the shots that show the conditions they are growing in – often in pastures with short grasses and forbs. We will have a selection of the new species at

the stonecrop sale. Our web address is: www.wrightmanalpines.com

At this sale, the growers are the vendors, and the plants are garden-tested by them. You get honest assessments and personalized



Gentiana georgei- photo by Josef Halda

advice. Mark April 24 on your calendar and plan a day around this terrific event. There will be a food and beverage vendor onsite too. It all starts at 10:00AM.

First Timer's Comments: 2010 NARGS Eastern Winter Study Weekend

A few keywords describe my first Winter Study Weekend.

Rocks - Gordon Hayward tailored his talk to the rock gardening audience suggesting we consider the contributions of the rocks themselves adding permanence, structure, texture, a sense of place and a contrasting foil to the plants. When we walk the perimeters of our gardens, Gordon Hayward asks "What is the way **into** our gardens?" Ponder that!



Little pots - Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer's enthusiasm for iris compelled me to purchase 3 little pots of MDB's (miniature dwarf bearded iris). That combination of learning, enthusiasm and opportunity to buy from vendors is a great part of the weekend. The vendors lined the far wall of the solarium and were open for sales until 10:30 PM each night. Indulge in plants!

Spiral bound booklet - The Rock Gardens of the Future program booklet is a combination of schedule souvenir and information pamphlet. Lauren Springer Ogden and Scott Ogden's slide show list is a thoughtful, detailed description of the points of their talk. With the notes I scrawled in the margins during each presentation, this booklet will be a good resource.



Travel and discovery beyond my reach - Beautiful pictures of China, stories of the harrowing aspects of

travel and lovely pictures of plants were the substance of Darrell Probst's talk on *Epimediums*. Geography and exploration are aspects of rock gardening that fuel the interest of rock gardeners, well served by this program.

Travel and discovery within my reach - Jeff Good spoke about the Fells in Newbury, NH including the history of the house, gardens and family. Many pictures showed the progress on the extensive rock garden. Plan to visit this summer! The Fells will be part of the NARGS National Meeting next year.

Take a break - When gardening, I need to remember to take a break, drink some water and sit for a moment. The same was true for me at the Winter Study Weekend so I

skipped enough sessions to relax and re-energize.



People - I came home richer for the people I met. One person, after hearing a talk, said, "I have been doing something right!" which is so true and such a good reinforcement for our endeavors. Another person suggested a good book for me to buy with "you can grow the plants from this region".

The future - The title of the weekend was "Rock Gardens of the Future". The last program I attended was Mike Slater's talk on "Reliable Rock Garden Plants". It was the perfect final touch with a sequence of many beautiful pictures of plants and optimism about growing these gems which "have been in the garden a long time but are not gone". From the Winter Study Weekend, I have a longer wish-list of plants and inspiration to continue rock gardening.



Anne Hill

Photograph Key:

- P. 2 photo – *Cyclamen hederifolium* – J. Lonsdale
- P. 5 photo - *E. x 'Baoxing Mist'* – Darrel Probst
- P. 7 photo - *Anemonella macrophylla 'Shoafs Double'* – Peter Joppe
- P. 8 photo - *Cypripedium 'Gisela' (macranthos x parviflorum)* – Peter Joppe

Thaw



Our ice approaches spring, its silk
of watery skin is perfectly
clear- Taste and the tang
of tin spreads out in the mouth

Musky aging snow scented air
sand of subterranean creeks, wind
chiming runnel carrying away
all sounds and remains of bad choices
winterlight reflections
of fat crackling in the fire, in its ice
cold liquid.

Do you smell it, its' work?
Quenching that
aftertaste of ozone
ions importantly this melting ice holds
chaliceing
balancing
news of old storms
ultimately
getting through
sluicing to the cavities of my lucid heart

Lori Chips 2/24/06

The Wall Garden

Her act of holding
a delicate solar system
at one time
in her mind

Movement

each tiny

intricate
object so
important with its exact weight and space
balancing
a crosshatch, an argument, plans
for dinner, or a new method
to prune a tree.

She files her favorite alpine plants
into her wall garden in a similar way.

Growth
Proportion
Space
Weight
Pretty

flowers the wall
will hold them all

A curved system.

Campanula muralis
Bell of the wall
Arabis, Aubrieta Alyssum
or the Brassicas with flowers
in the shape of a cross.

Some quiet urgent place
in her memory speaks of crosses
hushed, resonant, winking
with jewels.

Her heart makes sweet
sense of these and the stone
façade makes
sense of the rest.

Thrive but remember
just never trail

one beauty
directly
over another.

A simple cross a jewel a stone
a rime of lichen urchins
the wall
her mind then always
innately

awash

in this perfectly reasonable fragrance.

Lori Chips 1/22/09

2010 BNARGS Programs

April 3

AM and PM: **John Lonsdale Edgewood Gardens** See page 1 for details. John will have hardy and non-hardy cyclamen for sale

May 1

AM & PM **Cliff Booker**, (NARGS Tour Speaker from the UK), *Cream of Alpines*

June 5

Garden visit to gardens of **Robin Magowan & Juliet Yli-Mattila**, with a talk on the new construction aided by Josef Halda and Zdenek Zvolanek

July 3

Peter George, former Chair and current newsletter editor, *Evolution of My Garden*

August 14

Bill Brown, *Spring bulbs of Turkey*

September 4

AM: **Barrie Porteous**, *Unusual and Underused Perennials*
PM – **The Big Plant Sale**

October 9

AM: **Andy Brand** of Broken Arrow Nursery, *Shrubs for the Rock Garden*
PM: **Eric Breed** (from Dutch Rock Garden Society) *Going Wild for Bulbs*

November 6

Annual Lunch

Sydney Eddison, author of Gardening for a Lifetime: How to Garden Wiser As You Grow Older

March 6th BNARGS Meeting

AM: **Peter Joppe** of Hillside Nursery (<http://www.hillsidenursery.biz/>) presented on Woodland Plants. Please consider visiting their web site as it includes price and availability of the some of plants

(especially the orchids!) featured in his presentation. Hillside nursery began over 20 years ago and today is propagating 100s of taxa from seed. They offer both wholesale and retail with the latter via mail order, no regular retail hours. They notably specialize in *Cypripedium* orchids. Peter's images alphabetically covered over 50 woodland plant taxa, nearly all considered growable in our area. The catalog of plants he showed included: an Aconitum (from the Russian Altai with large leaves and white flowers), *Aconitum uncinatum*, *Actaea rubra*, locally familiar but this photo taken at high elevation in a Utah desert, *Anemone nemorosa* (a double white and single blue), *Anemonella thalictroides* (now considered *Thalictrum*), 'Betty Blake' (light green double flowered named for the beloved Betty of southern Michigan) 'Schoaf's Double' and 'Cameo', the August blooming *Anemonella macrophylla* (seed MUST be



sown fresh), and *Aralia racemosa* (a giant compared with most herbaceous woodland plants). Moving on to 6 species of *Arisaema*, Peter noted that *A. sikkokianum* has lived in the same location for 15 years, good drainage may be the key here. One plant not for sale is a dwarf *Cimicifuga japonica* from Korea (via Darrell Probst) reaching only 8" with black stems, many floral stems and resistant to black leaf spot. He noted the variation in *Caulophyllum thalictroides* as it emerges and in flower color (brown flowered versus yellow/green in *C. t.* var. *giganteum* (also found as *C. giganteum*). A new offering for Hillside is *Cornus canadensis*, aka bunchberry or running dogwood, which Peter noted grow well for them with bark mulch; the roots remain between the bark and soil. He also mentioned the southern

U.S. *Diphylleia cymosa* and its East Asian counterparts which exist for the genera *Disporum* and *Jeffersonia* as well. They also grow gentians (at least 3), *Gillenia* (aka *Portertanthus*), *Glaucidium* (whose soil must be < 5.2 pH to avoid black crown rot), *Linnaea borealis* (which does well with no competition at the edge of raised beds), *Mertensia virginica*, *Mitella diphylla* (whose intricate, crystalline flowers have experienced difficulty in marketing), 4 species of *Paeonia*, *Podophyllum hexandrum*, *Polygonatum humile*, *Sedum nevii*, *Streptopus rosea*, *Stylophorum diphyllum*, *Sinilesis aconitifolium*, *Trautvettaria caroliniensis* and double trillium (*T. grandiflorum*) being grown for New York Botanical Garden, and now retailing for below \$50.00. They are also growing *T. pusillum* and *T. sulcatum* (from seed is the fastest of all trillium) and lastly *Uvularia grandiflora* and *U. perfoliata*.

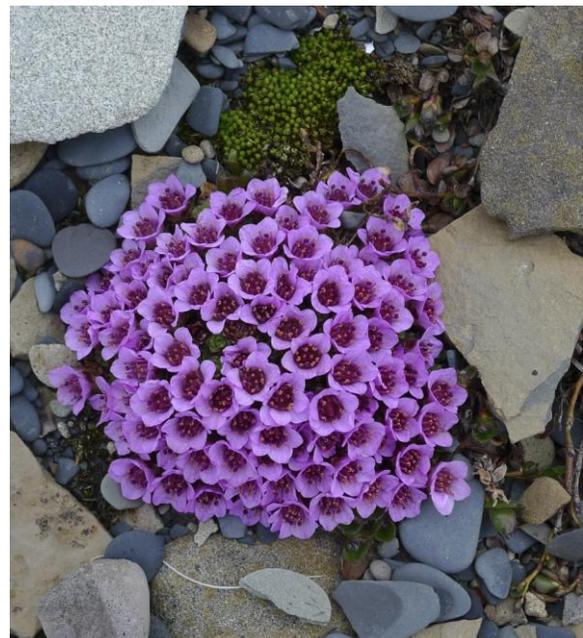


The work they are doing with *Cypripedium* is phenomenal. We know that orchid seed is the size of dust and Peter estimates they start a season with 1 million seed, sow about 40,000 (via a “smoke and mirrors” protocol), resulting in 5,000 seedlings which hopefully result in 4,000 plants. One image of shelves containing 550 glass (salsa) jars, each containing 12 – 14 transplants exemplified how intense this work must be. It takes 2 people up to 5 days to obtain sale transplants (which themselves need 3 years). He showed numerous crosses (6 new this year, listed on their web site) not to mention numerous forms of *C. parviflorum* and *C. pubescens*. Cultural information based on natural habitat included wetland *Cypripedium* species (bog and fen) tend to keep their roots closer to the surface (eg. *C. reginae* which he considers more difficult in cultivation, will not tolerate close

cultivation) while woodland types have deeper yet spreading roots (eg. *C. pubescens* has horizontal roots spreading at 45°). The imagined record keeping alone for the hybridization work happening at Hillside makes me rather stick a pin in my eye. Thank you Peter for the detailed and consequently better understanding of retail prices for seed grown terrestrial orchids.

PM: Robin Magowan & Juliet Yli-Mattila in Denmark, Norway and Svalbard: Botanic Gardens and Alpine Plants

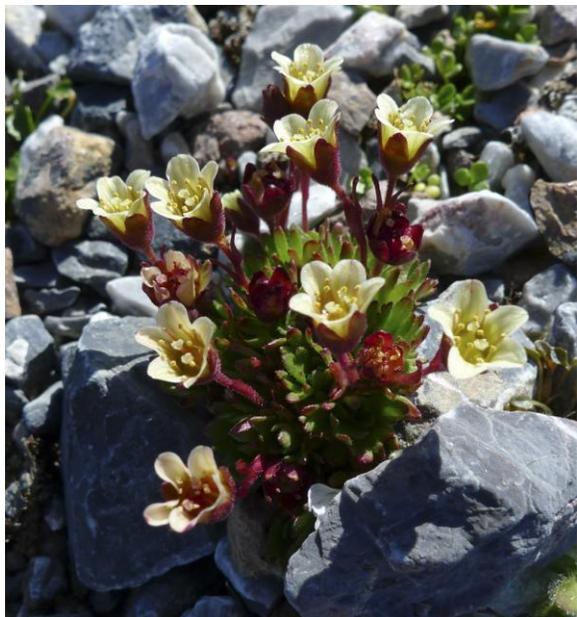
Luckily Robin and Juliet provided a much appreciated slide list of their story which included incredible landscapes views, how they traveled, animals they saw and the alpiners growing in *situ*, as well as in botanic



Saxifrage oppositifolia (Svalbard) – photo by Juliet Yli-Mattila

gardens. Although seasoned NARGS members may not be able to grow all of the same species they saw in Copenhagen (not much snow but plenty of winter wet and cooler summers), the views and artistic compositions of flowering alpiners were

inspiring and post card memorable! Here they visited the Garden in Royal Palace Park designed by Piet Oudolf and shared many views of the University Botanic Garden where plants from around the world grew with and without labels. The views of the coastal archipelago of Bergen, Norway well illustrated how protected the mainland is (by so many islands) and we were told all



‘Ivory’ Sax (Svalbard) – photo by Juliet Yli-Mattila

harbors are ice free in winter, thanks to the Gulf Stream. Here they traveled north in a National Geographic Explorer (“home”) for two weeks. In Jostedal National Park they saw the receding Briksdal glacier. We saw many familiar plants as they neared the Arctic Circle, Lofoten Islands: Vaerøya and Å (pronounced “ahh”): *Epilobium angustifolium*, *Valeriana officinalis*, *Pinguicula vulgaris*, *Potentilla anserina*, *Corydalis lutea*, etc. The Tromsø University Arctic-Alpine Botanic Garden is the northernmost botanic garden in the world (and the northernmost university), situated above the Arctic Circle. Its geographical equivalent in the U.S. would be approximately the same latitude as the

northernmost point in Alaska: Point Barrow. Most impressive were the blue *Meconopsis* as well as red (*M. punicea*) and yellow (*M. integrifolia*) at the entrance. The shore of Bjørnøya (Bear Island) held slowly degrading whale bones, some vertebrae contributing artistically and perhaps nutritionally to the plants photographed there.

This superb presentation proves that education by travel provides remarkable lessons and I feel lucky to have shared in this experience. I’m in awe of many of our members and appreciate the sharing at every meeting, not only for how plants might better grow in cultivation but for the pure love of this broad topic.

Editor’s note: The next issue will have Robin’s very own reprise of his talk, accompanied by a more comprehensive selection of Juliet’s beautiful photographs

Ruth Sheppard – A Tribute

By Elliot Jessen

To many of us who knew Ruth, her name brings to mind a no-nonsense rock garden enthusiast. Quick with a plant name when encountering a ‘plant name dispute,’ and always willing to provide advice to help a flagging patient recover.



Ruth and Herb really got into rock gardening following their move to Winchester Center, CT in 1989. After restoring the house on their property, they began to create a garden any of us would envy!



The Sheppards filled their new garden with plants retrieved from famous on the East and West coasts including Alaska. They both explored the Big Horns, the Medicine Bow, and any other hill and mountain that got in their way.



Herb built a small greenhouse for Ruth which allowed her to start propagating and



selling many of the rock garden gems she grew. Over time, her reputation as a superb propagator spread throughout the rock gardening world, and requests for advice in this arena came from members all over the planet.

Ruth's interests were not confined to the rock garden. She created niches for native New England woodlanders, azaleas, rhododendrons and confers.

One of her last creations was a dwarf conifer garden on the hillside behind the house. Ruth passed on October 19th, 2009 at the age of 78. She will be missed.

Elliot Jessen – photos by Becky Lynn Spain - 1994

NARGS 2010

Romancing the Rockies

The Marriage of Plant and Stone

July 11-14, 2010

Denver & Salida, Colorado

Exploration and field study of the "edaphic factor": how does limestone or granite substrate influence the flora and biodiversity? For full information, go to <http://rmcnargs.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=59>

Philosopher Queen

The Chemurgic Garden



Wracked by disuse, vandals
long gone when she was charged
among a very few others to
rip it up. No herb
that morning no emetic
no narcotic or dye to remain.
Stinging nettle she has for
an answer, as thanks wringing
cursing her at the root
of her left thumb.
Did she dare enter
the building to find water or
would that even help, so she
will just rub the spot
a little and by lunch it will be forgotten and
it is.

The underground Horses
of her Park, the dark dark
stables, animals
used to moving rock-
They stamp
in her memory still.
Aconitum. Nicotiana. Dictamnus
Delphinium. Ah. Poisons, though the last
will lend you beauty before you die.

In their day the Horses

had heroic names, the old gardeners
had rules
She remembers and a Mystery
of Calendars to fuel their Work.
Growers are always counting backwards
else
would seed erupt, fruit tree blossom
scion strike or
cutting root?

Here
the Moon's tussle instructs
the very instant
on the head of a pin now Magic works
on the Queen she
recalls being young, Her hands in the dirt
getting dirty. It is all
too clean now. The smell
of hot dry earth
newly rained on reaches her.
Where are the poisons, Her
working Horses
now? She stands in the same sun
as before, blue
blooded fists
full of onions
and Thyme.

Lori Chips

Some Important Websites to Visit

<http://www.berkshirebotanical.org/events/index.html>

<http://nargs.org/smf/>

<http://www.srgc.org.uk/smf/>

<http://webhome.idirect.com/~jehan/Information/orgsseedx.htm>

<http://www.bnargs.org/>

Positions of Responsibility

Chairperson – Cliff Desch
Vice-Chairperson – Robin Magowan
Secretary – Carol Hanby
Treasurer – Pamela Johnson
Archivist – James Fichter
Audio Visual Chairperson - Joe Berman
Greeter – Open
Independent Director – Peter F. George
Newsletter Editor – Peter F. George
Meeting Recorder – Elaine Chittenden
Plant Sale Chairperson – Bob Siegel
Program Chairperson – Elisabeth Zander
Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

Published 10 times per year (Feb. through Nov.) by the Berkshire Chapter NARGS

Membership is open to all members of NARGS
Dues \$10.00 single, \$12.50 Family
Payable to the Treasurer
Pamela Johnson
PO Box 203, 140 Main Road
Monterey, MA 01245

Deadline for Next Newsletter is April 20, 2008

Please contact editor before reprinting
articles

Peter F. George, Editor
Berkshire Chapter NARGS
PO Box 833
Petersham, MA 01366