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Remembering...My Thirty Years with *Castanea*



Audrey D. Mellichamp

Whatever will I do? For thirty years, I have been juggling 3 issues of *Castanea* at the same time. Our lives—mine and *Castanea*'s—had become 'one.' We 'mutually benefited' each other. *Castanea* published 4 issues each year; maintained its niche and improved its presence and quality. I was able to work at home and raise my daughter, managed the household, and go on impromptu field trips with Larry. The flexibility of this part time position and being my own boss allowed both of us to excel. Through the years, *Castanea* and I have gotten older but better, weathering a lot of changes.

Do you believe it, I am only *Castanea*'s third editor. Dr. Earl Core was the first, working for 36 years to establish this journal. Dr. Jessie Clovis continued it for ten more years. I became involved in 1980 when Dr. Jim Matthews felt that new procedures were needed to allow *Castanea* to have a better presence in the scientific world. We have done that. Now Allen Press will take our journal and promote it into the digital era.

Long before my first issue was printed in June 1982, I was learning the process and editing incoming manuscripts for that issue. Each manuscript was now peer reviewed by at least 2 reviewers and 1 assigned editor. My role was to synchronize all this and field questions from the authors and printer. For the most part this was smooth going but conflicts did happen. My calm presence 'cooled' these situations and mediated a solution.

So what are the significant changes for *Castanea* during these 30 years? Early on we put the *Castanea* logo on top of the front cover with the contents below. That changed later to a full chestnut logo on the front with the contents on the back cover. Most recently we have had cover art featuring an interesting plant from our region. Our geographic area has changed too. We extend the whole of the Appalachians, not just southern, from East coast to the Mississippi River. The change in our organization's name reflects that change as well, going from Southern Appalachian Botanical Club to what we really were—the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society.

Under Core and Clovis, both from West Virginia, our journal was published by McClain Printing Company in West Virginia. A few years after I arrived, I petitioned to change to Allen Press out of Lawrence, Kansas. Since they were specializing in scientific publishing, I felt that *Castanea* would benefit from their expertise. Allen Press was able to accommodate the subsequent changes that we needed, even printing color plates for our authors.

The size of the journal started small with the type running across the page. The journal's size became larger [this is *Castanea*, not me! I am the same size as when I started *Castanea*, just rearranged a bit.]. The size was now 7 × 10" with the print across the page. This increased the words per page about 10–15% and when we went to double columns on a page (a relatively recent change), the words per page increased another 10–15%. Occurring at the same time, the number of pages per issue grew, from 60 pages to 80 pages to 100+ page issues now.

Our quality is top notch. Peer review and the editorial involvement have given us that polish. We are attracting better papers and leading papers that want our regional exposure. Our symposia and Occasional Papers in Eastern Botany enhance our focus and promote the scientific awareness of *Castanea*. *Castanea* fits this niche but we do have national and international distribution in readership and author submissions. Field research, systematic and ecological, is one of our key focuses but we have physiological and natural history components and now more laboratory research.

What have been my changes? For one, I can now talk on the phone to anyone. Being shy and inexperienced at the start, with practice and years of experience, I am forthright, upfront, and quick on the phone but yet maintaining a calm, graceful, and cheerful, informative manner.

I have toned down my perfectionism—a lot. One can only do so much, go over it so many times, and then you need to let it go. I have learned this and have become quicker but still accurate.

Next comes the COMPUTER. In the 'old days', we did everything by hand/hardcopy. When I had to learn the computer, I did not know how to turn it on. I only knew how to type on my manual and electric typewriters. Saving the document, emails, attachments, copy and paste. All horrors. However, I did have a very patient and good teacher. When Larry (Mellichamp) realized that I just wanted to turn that thing on, he slowed down and I learned. For years I handled electronic submissions before the journal turned to AllenTrack.

Being *Castanea's* memory for these 30 years has been a joy and a hardship. Every 2–3 years I was telling a new president or editor or reviewer about our procedures and methods. Furthermore, I was always reminding someone about deadlines for manuscripts or articles for the president's message and write ups for the Bartholomew and Windler awards, while under my own deadlines. Here I learned to be more flexible and tolerant. In the end, it will get done. The joy has been keeping *Castanea* thriving and meeting authors and editors at meetings and on the phone.

So, whatever will I do? Feeling good about leaving *Castanea* stronger, better, and prepared to enter the next phase of its history, I will follow my other passions of traveling the world [Watch out Meg Lowman. Larry and I are thinking of doing the Amazon canopy tour in 2013.] and teaching historic open hearth cookery.

In 2012, my daughter Suzanne and I will cruise to Alaska's Glacier Bay to observe the glaciers and the whales. Then we go to Italy for the month of October. Suzanne, a young professional potter, will take a ceramic course at La Meridiana. Before that, we will tour the Italian lake area, Verona, and Venice.

Some of you know that I represent a 1795 backcountry housewife and cook on the hearth at President James K. Polk State Historic Site in Pineville, North Carolina. I am also the current "Queen" or chair of the Mecklenburg Historical Association Docents. We are the ones that dress historically and tell the story of the sites. We keep history alive. I have just learned that Queen Charlotte (Charlotte, North Carolina being named for her) was considered the Queen of Botany. She helped the young Kew Gardens get established. So, as I step from the realm of *Castanea's* botany, I move into the docent historical realm by being their 'Botany Queen.'

I do wish *Castanea* continued success and botanical presence.

—Audrey Mellichamp, Managing Editor, *Castanea*.



Audrey teaching children historic cooking at the Polk birthplace, Pineville, North Carolina.



On top of the world! Audrey hiking the ridge track, Queenstown, New Zealand, 2009.