

Connecticut-Westchester Mycological Association

Spores Illustrated

WINTER
2010



www.comafungi.org

www.fungiphotos.net

President: Dianna Smith
Diannasmith@optonline.net
Membership: Beverly Leffers (718)636-6348
Morrsonian@juno.com
Treasurer: Donald Shernoff (914)761-0332
Donshernoff@yahoo.com
Editor: Rena Wertzer (914)472-3575
Renawertzer@hotmail.com
Webmaster: Ursula Hoffmann (212) 288-5460
Ursula.hoffmann@lehman.cuny.edu

A GOOD NEW YEAR TO ALL COMA MEMBERS AND FRIENDS



The State of COMA 2010

By Dianna Smith

2010 was a very good year for COMA in spite of a dry, difficult collecting season. Our membership, our most valuable resource, has increased and we welcome the many new-comers with their enthusiasm and diverse mycological interests.

Our programs, arranged for us by past president, David Rose, started with a program by COMA member and founder of the Mid-Hudson Mycological Association, Bill Bakaitis, who presented an in-depth program on the genus *Leccinum*. Gary Lincoff gave a wonderful talk on the genus *Psilocybe* and its cultural and more recent scientific uses. Interestingly, some of our most astute members were subsequently able to find all kinds of bluing *psilocybes* growing right in their lawns. Though not on the schedule, I stood in for Dave and gave an illustrated talk on edible mushrooms and their toxic look-a-likes. Fortunately for us, he rescheduled his illuminating talk on the confusing vicissitudes of mycological nomenclature.

We did not have our annual foray in Connecticut this year, but we sponsored, along with the NYMS, the LIMC and the MHMA, the Northeast Mycological Federation foray at Soyuzivka in Kerhonkson, NY. I was very proud to have such a supportive and creative team of COMA members helping to make this event successful. Some of our members who chipped in to help wherever needed included Ursula Hoffmann (NEMF president), past COMA president Sandy Sheine and husband Jerry, Sue Rose, Kathy Americo, Joe and Kathy Brandt, JJ Murphy, Rena Wertzler, Zaac Chavez, Linda Yanonne, and the Lincoffs, to mention just a few. At this foray honoring Sam Ristich, Dave Rose received an award for his contributions to the field of mycology. Dave, who is an archivist for the March of Dimes, is currently amassing and organizing Sam's enormous collection of correspondence, papers and photographs. COMA has also played a significant part in financially supporting this extensive project. Not only did the club donate \$500, but thanks largely to Kathy Americo who organized a silent auction, we collected at NEMF over \$1300 in additional donations.

COMA, like all non-profit organizations, relies on its members to volunteer to make it run smoothly and efficiently. On behalf of all of COMA's members, I want to thank the following for their exceptional service over the past few years: JJ Murphy for organizing the annual walk schedule; creative thinkers and co-vice presidents Kathy and Joe Brandt; and Peggy DeGasperis, COMA's board of trustees's secretary. Fortunately for us, both JJ and the Brandts will continue to work for us on the board. Replacing these three in their former positions are Zaac Chavez, our new walks chairman, Kathy Americo, our new vice-president, and Amy Wong, our new board secretary. I hope more of our members will assist the club by sharing ideas for improving participation, by volunteering to lead walks, and by helping to make our annual foray a continued success and contributing to *Spores Illustrated*.

The summer publication of Gary Lincoff new book, *The Complete Mushroom Hunter*, was thrilling for all of us to read. I am fortunate to have been one of the mushroom photographers in the book. COMA's board of trustees generously decided to buy several cartons of the publication and sell them to members at cost. Rena Wertzler, Don Shernoff, and I must have sold over a hundred copies out of the trunks of our cars. Members who attended the guided walk with Gary this summer, as part of COMA's Mushroom University, were even able to get their copies signed. A few copies are still available in case you missed out.

Mushroom University

Every winter for the past several years, members of COMA who wanted to gain a deeper understanding of fungi have met six times over the winter to spend four to five hours each session with Gary Lincoff, who comes in from the city to conduct a workshop for us. Every year we study a different genus. We previously have had workshops on, for example, the boletes, russulas, and lactarius. This year we are focusing on the study of polypores and crust fungi. Our workshop takes place at my home in Croton on Hudson from 9:30 to about 1:30 on Saturdays. We charge just \$100 for the course. Barring the need to change a date due to snow conditions, we are scheduled to meet on the following dates: February 19, March 5 and 19, April 2, 9, and 16, and once in the summer.

If you think you might be interested in joining us, let me know ASAP. To secure a place, *make your check out to COMA and mail it to Dianna Smith, 30 Fox Run Rd, Croton on Hudson, NY 10520*. Each year, the number of people who attend has grown from around 10 to 20 or so. Last year we had a waiting list and were unable to accommodate those who signed up late.

diannasmith@optonline.net

Mushroom Revolution

by John C. Michelotti

Now, I'm not talking about the mushrooms rising up and taking over the world, but I'm not saying I wouldn't appreciate that either. What I'm writing about is how my interest in mushrooms budded last winter and how it has grown in the past year.

The revolution, with me, started in the kitchen. Cooking away at curries with my vegetarian friend, I found a desire to make more and more mushroom dishes. As someone who likes to know where my food comes from, I joined COMA and a new world opened up to me. My first meeting was a talk by the mushroom guru, Gary Lincoff, about someone he met up with all over the world named Silly Simon. I learned that some particular mushrooms are used in studies by Johns Hopkins to help terminal cancer patients psychologically and emotionally. Other mushrooms under study by the University of Arizona lesson symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) in a substantial amount of patients. That sprouted an interest and a question: What other uses are there for these tasty, funny fungi?

I branched off and did some research which led me to reading Paul Stamets' book, *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Save the World*. The diverse healing properties within mushrooms, not just for people, but for the soil and plants, are astounding. I was amazed to find that the mycelium of mycorrhizal mushrooms form symbiotic--mutually beneficial--relationships with the roots of trees and plants. By using sugars in exchange, the mycelium helps the plant roots gain more phosphorus, nitrogen, and water. Also, one mushroom can link with multiple trees and regulate nutrition between them if one tree is lacking sunlight or nutrients. Based on this fact alone, people have set up businesses such as Mycorrhizal Applications Inc., mycorrhizae.com, of Grants Pass, Oregon, which sell spores to farms across the United States. Through a no-till method that helps the mycelium take root, farms can improve yield, disease resistance, and soil quality for years to come. This is a big boost for small farms that are trying to sustain their land and our local food supply using chemical-free methods.

Meeting exceptional people on the COMA walks inspired me to become more involved and attend the Sam Ristich NEMF Foray in Kerhonkson, NY, where I met Sue Van Hook, Justin Frisino, and Daniel Flagg of EcoVative, ecovativedesign.com. They told me how their founders, Eben Bayer and Gavin McIntyre, created an alternative to Styrofoam or expanded polystyrene using mycelium and local agricultural waste, such as cotton burrs and buck wheat husks. They explained how 'EcoCradle' takes eight times less energy to create than polystyrene and releases ten times less CO2 emissions in the process. It has all the beneficial properties of polystyrene, such as being non allergenic and being a great insulator that floats. It is also flame retardant, and it is 100% biodegradable. They were kind enough to invite me to their facility in Troy, NY, where I got to see how they 'grow' EcoCradle, which they are forming to use for packaging materials. This product can replace the toxic white stuff that produces 25 million kilograms of CO2 emissions and, along with plastics and other synthetic materials, takes 10% of our earth's petroleum to create. From packaging to surfboards, from home insulation to boating docks, this mushroom is starting its own major movement.

As my knowledge has grown in the past year, so has my interest. The nutritional inspiration I gain from my fellow mushroomers has readied my roots to search further into the possibilities of fungi. What does the future hold for mushrooms? World Domination? One can only hope.



For Immediate Release

Contact: Linda Hammond 607-687-4698

NEWS RELEASE

**Paul Smith's
College,
Paul Smith's, NY**

August 11-14, 2011

Paul Smith's College to Host NEMF 2011 Mushroom Conference

Paul Smith's College is hosting the 35th Sam Ristich NEMF Foray from Thursday, August 11 through Sunday, August 14, 2011, at Paul Smith's, NY. NEMF (North East Mycological Federation) is a group interested in expanding knowledge of mushrooms to any and all who are interested. There will be forays into the nearby woods and all are welcome to attend.

More information will be forthcoming on the NEMF website, <http://nemf.org>, Click on MENU and then Click on the 2011 link. Registration will begin in January.

Paul Smith's College is located at the intersection of Routes 86 & 30, Paul Smith's, NY.

<http://nemf.org/>

2011 COMA FORAY

SEPTEMBER 1 TO 4

Save the Date

The Tinder Polypore

(reprinted from the November/December issue of *Mushroomers*, the newsletter of the Oregon Mycological Society)

“Come on fungi, light my fire” — with a nod to “The Doors”

Feel that chill in the air? While we turn up our thermostats or light a fire in our woodstoves or fireplaces, some of our ancestors used a polypore, *Fomes fomentarius*, as tinder to light the fires that warmed them.

The Latin word *fomes* means "tinder" or "touchwood" and the Latin word *fomentarius* means "material to feed a fire"—both the genus and species names emphasize the use of the fungus for fires. Also known as touchwood, punk, hoof fungus, amadou, or Amadouvier, references to the tinder polypore turn up throughout history.

► About 3,300 BCE*, Schnalstal Glacier, Ötztal Alps, near Hauslabjoch on the border between Austria and Italy.

A Neolithic man (later known as “Oetzi”) dies, possibly the victim of a skirmish or accident. Among Oetzi’s possessions were two species of polypore mushrooms with leather strings through them. One of these, the birch fungus (*Piptoporus betulinus*), is known to have antibacterial properties, and was likely used for medicinal purposes. The other was a black felt-like substance deduced to be interwoven hyphae from the fruiting bodies of the tinder polypore (*Fomes fomentarius*). The fungus must have been very important for him to carry it in a special pouch for such a long distance. His fire starting kit also included flint and pyrite for creating sparks.



Fomes fomentarius photo from http://botit.botany.wisc.edu/toms_fungi/dec2001.html

► In the year 115 CE*, during the reign of Emperor Trajan, Rome.

A female slave is lighting a fire. “But how exactly do Romans light a fire? We look closer to look over her shoulder and discover that she’s using a piece of steel. It’s shaped like a small horseshoe and she holds it in her hand as though she were holding a jug handle. She strikes it against a piece of quartz that she holds in her hand. Some sparks fly up and one of them lands on

a thin slice of a mushroom that serves as tinder (it's from the genus *Fomes*, the wood-like mushrooms that grow on tree trunks). The girl blows on it lightly and holes start to form on the surface of the mushroom from the incandescence. At this point she touches it to some straw, to "infect" it with the heat of the mushroom. She blows some more. First a puff of smoke billows up from the straw and then, suddenly, a flashing flame. The deed is done." (Alberto Angela, *A Day in the Life of Ancient Rome*, Europa, 2009)

The *Hiker's Notebook* offers additional insight into how the tinder polypore was prepared and used. (http://www.sierrapotomac.org/W_Needham/TinderPolypore_090129R.htm)

"The historical and ancient method of 'German tinder' preparation was to remove the hard outer rind of the fungus and cut the softer, fibrous interior flesh into strips that were placed in a pot filled with enough urine for submersion. Saltpeter (potassium nitrate) can be substituted as a chemical alternative to urine in more modern applications. The urine-fungus concoction was then boiled for several days with the periodic addition of urine. At the completion of the process, the fungus was removed, drained and dried; the resultant admixture had combustive properties that made it exceptionally well suited for use as touchwood to start a fire."

"The common name Amadou is a calque** from *Amadou*, the French name for the fungus which means to coax or cajole. It may be presumed that this etymological association arose from the use of the Amadou to coax a fire along when first started. The slow-burning properties of the tinder fungus also provided a critical means of fire transport from one camp location to another."

"Elio Schaechter relates in the book '*In the Company of Mushrooms*' that the Athabaskan people of Alaska called the fungus "growth from a tree" and used it to transport a fire from one location to another as did the Cree Indians of Northern Quebec. The common name punk attests to the use of the tinder fungus as a means of maintaining a lighted ember."

According to Paul Stamets in 'Mycomedicinals,' punk became popular in the Middle Ages with the spread of the flintlock rifle which used the spark from a flint to ignite the fungal punk which provided adequate amplification to ignite the gunpowder and discharge the weapon. In the halcyon days of yore when firecrackers were legal and relatively plentiful, punk was a very effective ignition implement."

* BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) have replaced the designations BC and AD

**A 'calque' is an expression introduced into one language by translating it from another language.

You can read more about the iceman's fungi in this paper: Peintner, U, R. Poder, and T. Pümpel, 1998. The Iceman's Fungi. *Mycological Research* 102: 1153-1162. Learn more about the tinder polypore at Tom Volk's Fungi, http://botit.botany.wisc.edu/toms_fungi/dec2001.html Additional source: South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology, Bolzano, Italy, <http://www.oetzi.com/>

2011 NAMA
Dr. Dick Homola Memorial Foray
Thursday, August 4 – Sunday, August 7
Hosted by The Western PA Mushroom Club

An excellent foray is planned for you.

- We are going to be using 4 new air conditioned buildings on campus.
- The area is a great place to hunt mushrooms and favored by Walt Sturgeon, John Plischke, Emily Johnston, and others.
- There will be 20 walks to choose from.
- There will be 25 exceptional mycologists and presenters to help you learn mushrooms.

Join us for a long weekend of Fungi, Fun, and Friends!

As the foray is set up, it is limited to 225 people. It is going to sell out early, so don't hesitate, get your registration form signed and send it along with a check today. You must be a member of NAMA to attend. You can find a membership application on the NAMA website.

Registration is Open

The Mycologists and Presenters will be:

Dr. Alan Bessette
Arleen Bessette
Douglas Bassett
Ernst Both
Becky Plischke
Tina Ellor
Dr. Patrick Leacock
Renée LeBeuf
Gary Lincoff
Dr. Frank Lotrich
Dr. Alan Bessette
Dr. Rosalind Lowen
Dale Luthringer
Rebecca Miller

Donna Mitchell
Dr. Shannon Nix
Ron Spinosa
Becky Plischke
Kim Plischke
John Plischke
Ursula Pohl
Bill Roody
Noah Siegel
Walt Sturgeon
Mark Speak
Rod Tulloss
Jim Tunney

The NAMA website has photos and biographies of all the mycologists and presenters. It also has a registration form.

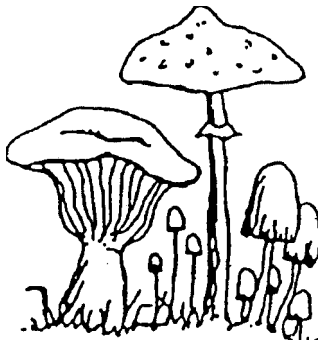
2011 COMA FORAY

SEPTEMBER 1 TO 4

Save the Date

Many thanks to all our members who made contributions to *Spores Illustrated* throughout 2010. Please continue. It has been wonderful having so many participants. *Rena Wertzler, editor*

Deadline for Spring Issue: March 15th, 2011



COMA
8 Coralyn Road
Scarsdale, NY 10583