Camellias were introduced to South Carolina over 200 years ago. These small evergreen trees are unsurpassed in their adaptation to shaded situations. Our mild winters, rich acid soil and high humidity make for the right conditions for camellias to thrive in just about any garden in South Carolina. Camellias have been the symbol of grace and charm in the south and have earned the title of “the Queen of the winter blooms”. Even though there are over 200 different species of camellia, including C. sinensis which is used to make our “sweet tea”, the largest group is the Japonicas. In the 1830’s, Magnolia Gardens and Middleton Place in Charleston were the hub of camellia propagation and many new varieties of japonicas were introduced and sold throughout the state. Many of these camellias are still flourishing in gardens today. Over the years, local growers introduced and registered many new varieties of japonicas. And here in is the problem. A grower would have a lovely japonica that he named for a loved one, but he never gave any cuttings away, never shared it with anyone. The grower died or moved away, the label was lost, the land was sold, landscape designs changed, but that camellia is still growing in that same spot without a name or possibly given a different name. I have compiled a list of 376 japonicas that were propagated and registered in South Carolina from the 1800’s to 2006. This list will be available on line. Maybe you will know one of these growers in your town or know where his camellia is located and your garden club could recognize and promote their camellia.

If your group is restoring a garden and need camellia varieties from a certain era, I could provide a list of appropriate camellias. I will also be available to help identify unknown camellias in your area during the blooming season. Advice on fertilizing, watering, pruning and general camellia care is also available. Working with Jane Pearman, Chair for Historic Trees for Historic Gardens, will enable GCSC to include this important tree in the overall plan for preserving our South Carolina horticulture history.

Resources for Camellias:
American Camellia Society- www.americancamellias.org
Southeastern Camellia Society- www.southeasterncamellias.com
International Camellia Society- www.ics.org