The Graver Arboretum

By Marjorie H. Lauer

The Graver Arboretum of Muhlenberg College, located 20 miles northeast of Allentown, Pennsylvania, contains a wide variety of interesting flora, including over 3,000 rhododendron and azalea plants, approximately 300 species of wildflowers, and numerous native ferns and deciduous trees. Readers of the Conifer Quarterly will be most interested in the Arboretum’s collection of approximately 1,000 conifers.

Dr. Lee Graver and his wife, Virginia, donated their 48-acre tract to his alma mater in 1993 for use as an educational resource. They generously provided an endowment for the maintenance of the Arboretum to guarantee that future generations of Muhlenberg students, faculty and friends can enjoy the splendor of this precious natural laboratory. My husband, Ken, was named arboretum grounds manager late in 1994, and we have lived on the property since then.

Conservationists and nature lovers with a strong creative vision, the Gravers began to develop this living museum from native woodland and family farmland in 1947. Today, under the leadership of Muhlenberg faculty and staff, the mission of the Graver Arboretum is to preserve this unique blend of wild and managed areas; to provide an outdoor laboratory for the College’s biology and environmental science departments; to offer an oasis of peaceful retreat for the casual visitor; and to enhance learning opportunities in environmental education for the college community and the public.

In the late 1940s and early ’50s, the Gravers concentrated on making different areas of their property accessible. They built gravel paths from their home site at one end of the property to the overgrown farm field fronting on a highway about a

A young conifer, dwarfed by its neighbors, represents the ongoing planning for the future at Graver Arboretum.