

BEAUTYBERRY POST

THE NEWSLETTER OF MACKAY GARDENS AND LAKESIDE PRESERVE

November - December / 2014



In Touch By Steve Franklin

Sometimes the artistic talents we each naturally possess remain hidden until accidentally discovered. For many of us, singing should be confined to a shower, our painting to the outside of our homes, our sculpting to making clay candy dishes for our mothers, our musical instrument of choice should be a kazoo, and our writing should be confined to the abbreviated form known as texting. However, I've discovered that there is a way for each of us to make an artistic statement, maybe even create a priceless work of art in our own yards. Our

landscapes can become our canvases and plants and seeds can supply the colors with which our pallets are daubed.

Personally, I like to consider my little piece of real estate a work of art in progress. Through trial and error and by attending the Master Gardener Workshops at Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve I'm learning how to plant the right plant in the right place. My pallet contains all of the colors of a rainbow and then some. My endeavors are constantly in transition since they change with the seasons. My art is liquid in nature, yet it conserves precious water. It is a work displaying perpetual motion due to the whim of the winds and the appetites and desires of birds, bees, and butterflies. Being well-grounded my art creates a living space for worms, squirrels, rabbits, and other mammals. Wonderfully fresh fragrances waft from my work, gliding upon the wings of the four winds, which scatter them like flower pedals before a spring bride's dainty feet. But most important of all, my art connects me to all of Nature's wonders from "the cosmic secrecy of seed" to the natural chaos that must prevail if we as a species are to continue to thrive. I love practicing my art!

"Landscaping art classes" are conducted by the Master Gardeners of Polk County at Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve at 10:00 am on the first Thursday of each month, and they're free. I hope you'll join me there as I continue learning ways for living a sustainable lifestyle while creating priceless works of living art.

Top Photo: Historic Bridge on Mackay property across the canal between Lake Rochelle and Lake Haines. Constructed of cast concrete in 1922, this arched bridge reportedly served the historic road that connected Lake Alfred and Lake Wales.

Master Gardener Corner By Cathy Butcher

Remember reading about Captain William Bligh of Mutiny on the Bounty fame? An interesting part of that story is what was happening before those crew members decided to place the Captain and several non-mutineers on a little boat and kick them off the island of Tahiti. Bligh, being an excellent navigator, managed to get those men 3700 miles across the Pacific to the island of Timor without loss of life. The purpose of the journey leading up to the mutiny was to transport a food crop from one country and try to establish it in another, an interesting proposition in 1788. Bligh and his crew had sailed His Majesty's Armed Vessel, the Bounty, to

Tahiti to prepare breadfruit trees for this experiment. The trees required six months to grow from seed into saplings big enough to be transported. During that time the crew adapted quite well to island life and decided just to stay put when the time came to continue the journey. Believe it or not, after the mutiny and subsequent landing in Timor, Bligh later returned to Tahiti with a couple of ships and completed the transfer of breadfruit trees to Jamaica.



There are no breadfruit trees in Mackay Gardens but there is a tree growing there named for Captain Bligh, *Blighia sapida* or the akee. Bligh provided akee specimens to the Royal Botanical Garden at Kew around 1793.

The two akee trees at Mackay Gardens are on the east side of the house. Curious visitors are fascinated with the odd red and yellow fruits dangling from the limbs. The next question is always, “are they edible?” The answer is yes and no.

The edible parts are the three arils, the creamy white “cushions”, each holding a large black seed. They are only edible when the fruit is sun-ripened on the tree and opened naturally. Each aril must be cleaned of poisonous parts before being consumed. Immature or overripe fruit is extremely **poisonous!** It is very important to know when they are ripe. However scary this sounds, the people of Jamaica love akee so much that it is their national fruit. It is grown commercially and exported as a canned product. Akee is commonly cooked with salt cod, chicken, or scrambled with eggs. The plants are native to West Africa and made it to Jamaica before 1778 probably as seeds carried aboard slave ships.

The trees at Mackay Gardens are living a bit north of their comfort zone. They



would enjoy south Florida conditions better. But with our mild winters of late, these trees have been successfully bearing fruit. In a milder climate the akee would be a single-trunk tree. Some of our extremely cold winters have killed these evergreen trees to the ground resulting in new growth from the surviving roots that comes back as multiple trunks. This produces a somewhat rambling form.

The late Julia Morton, respected American botanist and author, wrote about the akee. That information can be viewed at: www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/akee.html

An interesting video with excellent photography and additional information on the Akee can be viewed at: http://www.jamaicanpost.com/jamaica_national_dish

Calendar of Events

November 2014

- 11/9- Guided Nature Hike 2PM

December 2014

- 12/4- NO First Thursday Workshop!
- 12/6- Lake Alfred Christmas Parade, begins at Mackay Blvd.
6:30PM
- 12/7- Guided Nature Hike 2PM

January 2015

- 1/8- First Thursday Workshop 10AM (date changed due to holiday)
- 1/10- Bluegrass Bash 11AM-9PM
- 1/11- Guided Nature Hike 2PM

All Wednesdays are Mackay volunteer work days! 9AM-noon

**Did you know?
Mackay is pronounced mac-EYE!**

History By Steve Franklin

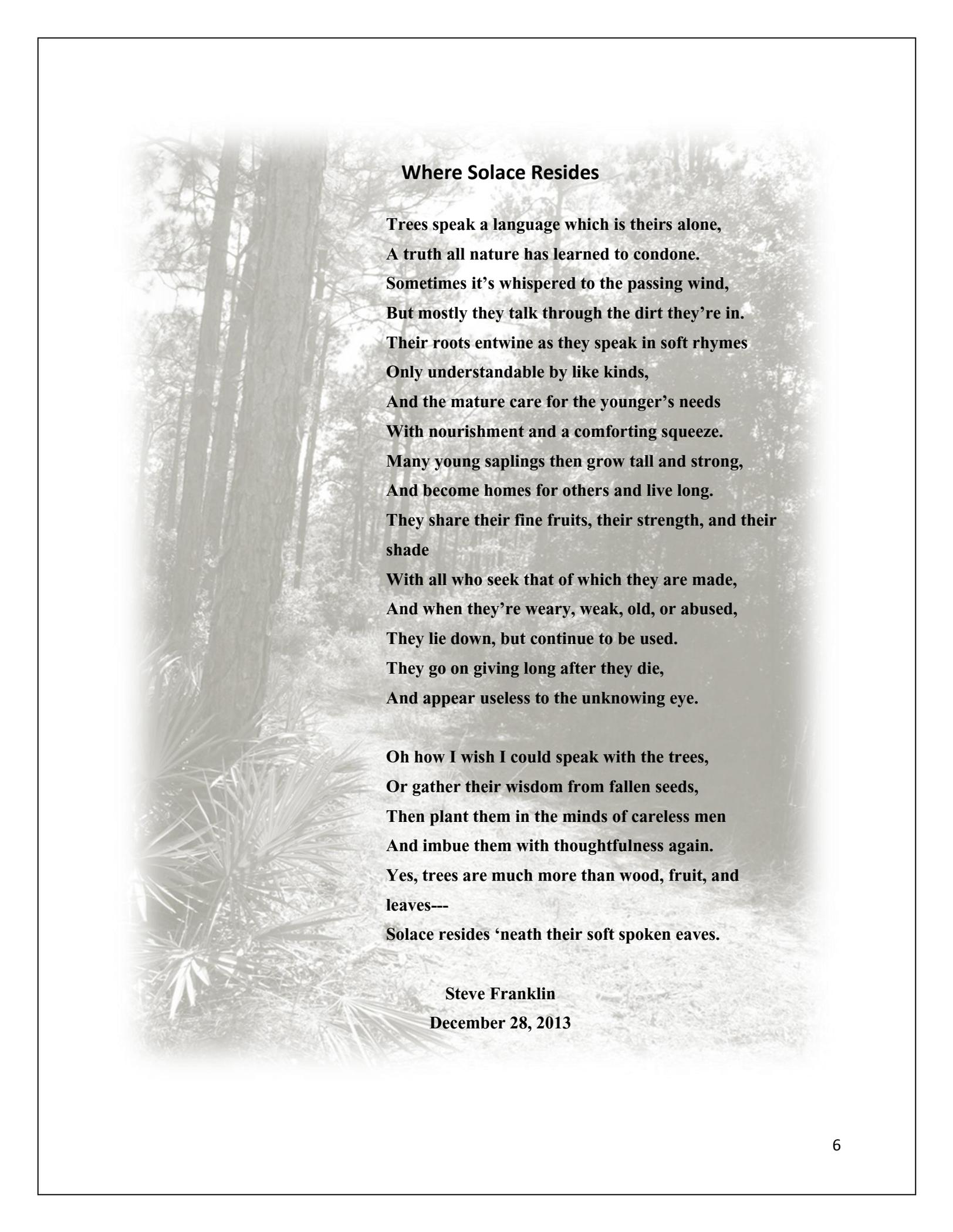
In this issue we finally arrive at the period in time when Mr. Alexander Mackay of Dundee, Scotland acquired the property on the north shore of Lake Rochelle in the City of Lake Alfred. The information presented here is taken from notes about the estate labeled "Historical Synopsis." The author of these notes is unknown so we were unable to verify their veracity. They do, however, seem to jive with most of the other notes we've been able to acquire.

Mr. Mackay purchased the property in 1915. A letter in the possession of Susanah Mackay-James Pringle details how Alexander Mackay, a Chartered Accountant in Scotland, learned about the property. "It is said that Alexander Mackay was on a train headed west to his cattle ranch in Texas when he became acquainted with a Mr. Crichlow. The Crichlows are an old Lake Alfred family who owned a saw mill out on Lake Alfred. Mr. Mackay indicated that he had an interest in land in this country. Mr. Crichlow responded that he ought to buy land in Lake Alfred. Mr. Mackay's interest was piqued and he asked for more details. Mr. Crichlow obligingly told him Lake Alfred was in Florida, that they grew oranges and grapefruit, and yes, he knew of some land for sale."

It's not certain if Mr. Mackay ever saw the property before having a house built on it. He did, however, see a picture of the house in a magazine, and sent \$15.00 to the address indicated to buy the plans. The house was constructed in 1917 by a Swedish or Norwegian boat builder named Hans Yourst. The home was christened "La Rochelle."

Mackay hired a botanist by the name of John Morley to manage the property. He moved to Lake Alfred from York, England in 1916 and managed the property until his son took over those responsibilities. In the early 1900's their citrus groves were worked with mules so a huge barn for hay and grain storage and two smaller barns were constructed. Two horses for Mackay's granddaughters were also stabled there. Many of the landscape features planted on the property came from seeds or cuttings supplied by famed U.S. Department of Agriculture plant explorer Dr. David Fairchild. This is one of the primary reasons the property has such historic value.

Alexander Mackay, his son Ferrier, Ferrier's wife Grace, and their two daughters began spending winters at La Rochelle immediately following the end of World War I. A summerhouse, accessible by paved walkway, was also built for the Mackays. Grace, formerly a well-known actress in England, enjoyed tea at four o'clock every afternoon, and would often use the summerhouse for tea parties. The home became a center for social activities in Lake Alfred, and was owned by the Mackays until 2001.



Where Solace Resides

Trees speak a language which is theirs alone,
A truth all nature has learned to condone.
Sometimes it's whispered to the passing wind,
But mostly they talk through the dirt they're in.
Their roots entwine as they speak in soft rhymes
Only understandable by like kinds,
And the mature care for the younger's needs
With nourishment and a comforting squeeze.
Many young saplings then grow tall and strong,
And become homes for others and live long.
They share their fine fruits, their strength, and their
shade
With all who seek that of which they are made,
And when they're weary, weak, old, or abused,
They lie down, but continue to be used.
They go on giving long after they die,
And appear useless to the unknowing eye.

Oh how I wish I could speak with the trees,
Or gather their wisdom from fallen seeds,
Then plant them in the minds of careless men
And imbue them with thoughtfulness again.
Yes, trees are much more than wood, fruit, and
leaves---
Solace resides 'neath their soft spoken eaves.

Steve Franklin
December 28, 2013

Recent Happenings

On November 4th Steve Franklin and Cathy Butcher welcomed the **Lakeland Sandpiper Golf and Country Club Garden Club** to Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve with a tour of the historic house and some of the



□
surrounding gardens. Steve offered these visitors a brief history of the Mackay family and their Florida home, then Cathy led them on a walk past interesting garden features and notable plants. After this delightful tour the entourage enjoyed lunch at the L.A. Café and shopping at Sigman’s Earthscape. It is wonderful to see Lake Alfred’s “crown jewel” attracting outside interests. How exciting it is to share this bit of old Florida charm with the world and also invite them into our community to experience good dining and interesting shopping. At a recent Master Gardener workshop, it was stated that ecotourism in Florida has now surpassed hunting and fishing in terms of economic value to the state. Hopefully, our local businesses will take note of this and join in to help encourage visitors to the Gardens and Preserve and our city.



Meet Lake Alfred’s new Parks and Recreation Director, **Richard Weed**. Richard’s roots run deep in Lake Alfred. He spent his entire life growing up here and completed his education at nearby Polk State College graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in Public Administration. Before accepting the Lake Alfred position, Richard worked in Auburndale for 8 years in Parks and Recreation and Utilities, achieving Crew Leader status of the Water Department. Richard is an avid outdoorsman, enjoying both hunting and fishing. He deeply appreciates nature. While preparing for his upcoming

nuptials, he manages to find time for other passions, such as college football and grilling! Richard is “excited to be working for his home town and taking a role in shaping its future.” He wants to “see Lake Alfred thrive and become an active community with a lot to offer.” Management of MGLP is only a portion of Richard’s responsibilities as Parks and Recreation Director. We support and look forward to your growth and success in your new job!

On October 20th, the Lake Alfred City Commission gave a green light for moving forward with restoration of the Mackay Preserve as detailed in the **FWC Habitat Restoration Plan**. This invaluable assistance provided by FWC, at no charge, will allow the City to take important steps for reestablishing native habitats within the Preserve that have been altered over the last 10 years due to the encroachment of invasive native and exotic plant species. It is critical to act now to protect our unique habitats such as the Cutthroat Seep and species of concern such as the threatened Gopher Tortoise. Expect to see clearing of undergrowth, cutting of some trees, and prescribed burns in the Preserve over the next five years.

Coinciding with the habitat restoration is the implementation of a \$50,000 **FWC invasive plant removal grant** awarded to Mackay Preserve to help eradicate exotic plant species that are damaging the native habitat through rampant, uncontrolled growth. This assistance is critical to achieving a position of control over these pests plants. Plants targeted for removal are: Caesar’s weed, rosary pea, Guinea grass, camphor tree, golden bamboo, cat’s claw, Surinam cherry, Natal grass, queen palm, Para grass, lantana, Natal grass, and Brazillian pepper. Spraying of these undesirable plants within the Preserve will likely begin in early 2015.



Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve is located at 900 Mackay Blvd. Lake Alfred, Florida, 33850. It is open dawn till dusk 7 days a week and is free! Contact Parks and Recreation at (863)291-5272 for more information on scheduled activities or how to rent the house for weddings or other events. Or email any questions to Anaeli Quinones at aquinones@mylakealfred.com. Photos this issue courtesy of Anaeli Quinones and Cathy Butcher.