BEAUTYBERRY POST

THE NEWSLETTER OF MACKAY GARDENS AND LAKESIDE PRESERVE

January/February 2016

Treasure Hunter by Steve Franklin

Frankly, I never imagined myself living the life of a treasure hunter, but circumstances and our own likes and dislikes sometimes dictate our fates. Before becoming a volunteer at Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve, books, curiosity, and a desire to experience adventures similar to those I had read about led to some experiments in the form of interesting hobbies. Like Captain Horatio Hornblower I sailed the sea, though my seventeen foot Daysailor never carried me far from Florida's west coast. Canoe or kayak trips down the Wekiwa, Hillsborough, or Peace Rivers were fun, but for the most part…well…peaceful. Day hikes up and down the slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains on the Appalachian Trail were physically challenging, but seldom led to a hair-raising event. Soaring miles and miles across Florida through the updrafts

and downdrafts created by the sun as it unevenly heated the ground, circling with eagles; that kind of pure, silent flight inside a sleek sailplane was a supernatural thrill, which I enjoyed on weekends for a number of years. But treasure hunting was never something I read about and then became anxious to experience. Yet now, each day on my way to the Preserve to perform volunteer work, I search for what some might refer to as dubious treasures.

How does the saying go? "One man's trash is another man's treasure?" I guess that more or less sums up my latest passion. From the moment I turn off of Highway 17/92 onto Mackay Boulevard in the City of Lake Alfred until I reach the picnic shelter at the Mackay property I become a treasure hunter of sorts. What kinds of priceless loot does my treasure consist of? I'm sorry to say that the list includes: discarded cigarette butts, beer bottles, plastic water bottles, soft drink cans, McDonald's bags filled with empty food containers, plastic garbage bags loaded with a wide variety of ordinary garbage, candy wrappers, cardboard and Styrofoam cups, plastic straws, potato chip bags, dog poo bags, and just about anything else that can be easily tossed from the window of a car, blown out of the bed of a truck, or discarded as one walks a pet. All to the detriment of what might otherwise be recognized as an eye-pleasing landscape.

One of my favorite quotes is a statement made by an anthropologist whose name I've forgotten. He wrote, "I've discovered the missing link between the ape and civilized man, and it's us." Litter bugs tend to make me believe that this scholar was dead on with this observation. Be that as it may, the discarded "treasures" of others have become, for me, Quixotic windmill monsters, which I feel compelled to attack, armed with only my sword-like pick-up stick and a five gallon bucket. Meanwhile, I hope to someday vanquish my foes, or at least encourage him and her to behave like civilized human beings by setting a good example. But until that day arrives I'll maintain this glorious quest and call it a treasure hunt and continue to bury those dubious treasures in the trash receptacle nearest my wayward course. And naturally, I'll always welcome likeminded people to join me in this quest to preserve the beauty of the Preserve.

The cover photo features the stunning African tulip tree in full bloom in late December. Look for this West African native growing between the restrooms and the Florida-Friendly demonstration garden. *Spathodea campanulata* is one of many unusual plants given to the Mackay estate by Dr. David Fairchild over eighty years ago. Read about this important historical figure in ***An Incidental Benefactor*** in this issue.

Calendar of Events

January

- 1/7- First Thursday workshop; ***Gardening for Wildlife: Providing Food in Your Yard*** by Polk County Master Gardeners Pat Farris & Debra Howell- 10am. In an age of shrinking wild areas & increased urban development, we can help build a "wildlife corridor or way station" in our own yards. This IFAS video program gives simple, clear directions for bird feeders & nesting sites, feed & feeders for hummingbirds, & many other useful ideas. It will be followed by a discussion of our own tips, tricks, successes & failures.
- 1/10- **Interpretive Nature Walk** with Steve Franklin- 2pm. Join our seasoned environmental interpreter on a guided walk along MGLP trails. On this moderately easy walk, Steve will share information on the natural & cultural history of MGLP and occasionally throw in a little poetry!
- 1/13- ***Rare Plants of Central Florida*** with Juliet Rynear- 10am. Join Juliet for a presentation on local conservation areas & the rare Florida plant communities that these sites protect. There will be a discussion of Florida's unique natural history & many photos of local species that occur only in Florida. Juliet has worked in the field of plant conservation & habitat restoration for nearly 10 years. She has a deep love & appreciation for our natural world & is currently serving as Conservation Chair for the Florida Native Plant Society.
- January **volunteer work days**: 5, 12, 19, 26. Tuesdays- 9am - noon
- 1/16- **Saturday volunteer work day!** 9am - noon

February

- 2/4- First Thursday workshop; ***More Backyard Bees*** with Bonnie Sprague & Ray Duchesneau**-** 10am. Back by popular demand, these Lake Alfred residents & backyard beekeepers will share how they began their adventure with bees & what they learned along the way. The benefits of bees go far beyond honey production, to increased plant pollination & more.

- 2/14- **Interpretive Nature Walk** with Steve Franklin- 2pm. Once a month, Steve guides guests along MGLP trails discussing history, nature, & teaching us how to enjoy the great outdoors.
- February **volunteer work dates**: 2, 9, 16, 23; Tuesdays 9am- noon
- 2/27- **Saturday volunteer work day!** 9am- noon

March

- 3/3- ***Edible Flowers*** with Pat Cherundalo-10am. A Master Gardener & "edible landscape enthusiast", Pat returns for her third program at MGLP with this new, original look at flowers as food. Come take a fresh look at the beautiful, edible & often vitamin-rich blooms all around us.

All events are free unless otherwise noted.

Volunteers are absolutely essential to conducting successful programs and continually improving the appearance of MGLP. Volunteers work in garden areas, help restore native habitats in the preserve, develop and perform educational programs, and assist with advertising, fund raising, and volunteer recruitment. By donating a small portion of their time they are helping to improve and protect a piece of Florida's rich history and the habitats which surround it. If you'd like to become involved in any of these very worthwhile endeavors, please contact Volunteer Coordinator, Cathy Butcher, at cassiebelle@verizon.net.

Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve is located at 900 Mackay Blvd. in Lake Alfred, Florida, 33850. It is free and open 7 days a week from dawn until dusk. To inquire about renting the house or picnic shelter, or to ask about upcoming events please call Parks and Recreation at 863-291-5272. Beautyberry Post is a bi-monthly newsletter edited by Cathy Butcher with assistance from Steve Franklin. To receive the BP by email please contact Anaeli Quinones at aquinones@mylakealfred.com. Also, please feel free to forward it to interested friends.

If you would like to peruse back issues of the **Beautyberry Post** you can find them at the City of Lake Alfred's website, mylakealfred.com. Look for the newsletters under Parks and Recreation, Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve.

Please help promote awareness of MGLP by LIKING our **Facebook** page. Check out **Friends of Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve** to keep up with events, see photos, and read interesting historical information.
Photos in this issue are by Cathy Butcher unless otherwise noted.

About the author;

Steve Franklin, recently retired, spends as much time as possible practicing his current hobbies: reading, writing, playing his trombone, hiking, biking, kayaking, gardening, and a variety of volunteer work at MGLP and Brasstown Bald in Georgia.
He conducts interpretive walks at MGLP, which include information about the cultural and natural history of this area, environmental and conservation issues, and a few entertaining poems. He considers himself an amateur naturalist with an eagerness to continue learning about the natural world around us. His passion for nature is reflected in his poetry and he enthusiastically writes articles on a wide range of topics that we are thrilled to share in this newsletter!

An Incidental Benefactor by Steve Franklin

When I relate some of the history of Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve to visitors prior to each of my guided nature walks, most people are introduced to a name that is well-known in Miami but rarely mentioned in Polk County. However, Dr. David Fairchild's famed reputation as a plant explorer and an administrator with the U.S. Department of Agriculture played a very important role in helping Nancy Daley, currently the Vice-Mayor of the City of Lake Alfred, procure grant funding, which led to the purchase and on-going restoration of Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve. That's why we're going to devote a few pages in this and upcoming issues of the Beautyberry Post to relating a very condensed version of the story of this gentleman's extraordinary life.

David Grandison Fairchild was born on April 7, 1869 in East Lansing, Michigan. His father, George, moved the family to Manhattan, Kansas in 1879 when he became the President of Kansas State College. George was following a family tradition of sorts since his father, Grandison, helped found Oberlin College in 1833. In his book, *The World was my Garden: Travels of a Plant Explorer*, which I referred to often while preparing these articles, David Fairchild recalls seeing buffalo bones bleaching in the sun as the family made their way to their new home in Kansas, and reminds us that "Custer's Last Stand" had taken place just three years earlier.

Continuing the family's practice of devotion to academia, Fairchild attended the Kansas State College of Agriculture, Iowa State, and Rutgers, and later received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from Oberlin College. He speaks of his love of research work and an unquenchable desire to always learn more about the natural world when he explains how enamored he became with the wonders seen through the lens of a microscope. "It is a breath-taking world, filled with myriads of strange and fascinating objects which the naked eye could never see. Anyone who has never looked thus into the heart of a flower has not fully lived."

Fairchild attributed a "love for music and literature" to his Aunt Sue who, when they were together, read books like Dickens' *David Copperfield* aloud to him. Though his Aunt died at a very young age, he wrote, "She it was who brought into my life new ambition..." She also encouraged him to pursue additional education in Europe before settling into a permanent job, and he eventually took her advice. But first, in 1889, he accepted a position with the Department of Agriculture in Washington under the supervision of Mr. Beverly T. Galloway in "…an ugly old building…" south of Pennsylvania Ave. where the Section of Plant Pathology was housed. He was there until late 1893 when he resigned to travel to Europe for advanced studies and research in Naples, Italy.

A short way into Fairchild's book it became obvious that his travels and schooling caused him to feel a need to become acquainted with several languages. He became capable of communicating in French, German, and Italian so he could readily understand his instructors and fellow researchers in the countries where he continued his education. He wrote, "…I always enjoy stumbling along in a foreign language…In fact, an interpreter always seems to come between you and the man with whom you wish to establish friendly relations." In fact, some of the plants introduced in the U.S. were sent here as a result of courtesies practiced by Fairchild. For instance, in return for writing a letter of introduction to the Secretary of Agriculture for Mr. J.N. Tata, a wealthy Parsee in India, Mr. Tata sent Washington a collection of six mangos, three of which are grown in orchards in South Florida. "They are among the least fibrous and finest-flavored of the mangos there."

During the voyage to Europe Fairchild was introduced to a wealthy, well-traveled, somewhat eccentric American philanthropist by the name of Barbour Lathrop. Their paths would cross again later. Mr. Lathrop would help Fairchild decide to focus his energy on what would become his life's work. Lathrop would also finance a great deal of that work, having apparently decided that this would be his contribution to the betterment of his country.

After studying and doing research in Italy and Germany with several well-known scientists of that era, it's interesting to note that Fairchild's first choice of projects for himself was the study of termites and their mounds, which contain mushroom (or fungus) gardens that the termites grow to feed their young. It wasn't until 1896 while pursuing his research in Java that Fairchild again met Barbour Lathrop and became convinced that "…I would take up a study of the plants useful to man, and together with him (Lathrop), find a way to introduce their culture into America." In 1897 they began an extended tour of Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and Hawaii before eventually returning to Washington where Fairchild helped develop the Section of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Learn more about Dr. David Fairchild and his contributions to Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve and the development of agricultural practices in the United States and abroad in the next issue of the Beautyberry Post.

Dr. David Fairchild photo credit; USDA archives

Look for installment two of *An Incidental Benefactor* in the March/April edition of Beautyberry Post.

About the author;

Molly Griner, 2012 Polk County Master Gardener Volunteer of the Year, has devoted 13 years to educating Polk County residents about sustainable approaches to landscaping and gardening through Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles. She is a prolific writer with articles appearing in The Ledger newspaper and other publications. Molly also designed the foundation plantings around the Mackay house several years ago after researching what plants might have been used historically. Molly somehow finds time to also enjoy reading, crafts, painting, and gardening in her own yard!

This article will be presented in two installments.

LANDSCAPE PLANTS OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY – (and "what goes around, comes around"!)

By Molly Griner

Around the turn of the 20th century, newcomers from all parts of the United States and, indeed, around the world began to settle Florida in earnest. Settlements varied from simple homesteads of hard-working Florida Crackers to vast estates of wealthy individuals; all united by the lure of an exotic and welcoming climate.

Newly arrived gardeners and other plant lovers were delirious with seemingly unending plant choices, much as are today's gardeners who still experience the same excitement! Settlers brought with them cuttings from their homelands and planted trees, shrubs, vines, perennials, bulbs and annuals– in every color, size and shape that could be imagined. Newcomers dug up and transplanted existing Florida native varieties. Botanists and collectors were in plant "heaven," importing, propagating and developing new cultivars.

Plants introduced to early central Florida landscapes from other parts of the world had mixed results in cultivation. Some of these imported plants became incorporated into today's highly desirable ornamental garden and landscape plants, such as our colorful crape myrtle trees or winter-flowering camellia shrubs Some succumbed to intermittent freezing temperatures; others to our central Florida humid climate. Sadly, some imported plant species became successful to the point of becoming highly invasive. They proved over time to be extremely problematic in our natural areas, crowding out native plant species and disrupting our native wildlife ecology systems. Some examples of these invasive imports are Brazilian pepper (originally touted as "Florida Christmas Holly"!), melaleuca, and the queen palm. Of these three species, only the queen palm is commercially available today. These palms are now considered a Category II invasive plant to Central Florida according to the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC). Historic plantings of queen palms within the Mackay Gardens will be allowed, however, volunteer palms within the Preserve are being removed.

Florida's new residents faced the same horticultural challenges we face today, with the added problem of a lack of knowledge and experience in knowing which plants would thrive in our Central Florida climate. We now recognize key factors that make up our very unique growing conditions. Much of the soil in this area of the state has a propensity to be sandy and low in nutrients. Our climate consists of hot humid summers followed by mostly mild winters. However, the mild nature of our winter can be punctuated by uncommon but devastating hard freezes, which can destroy bloom, fruit, and even entire plants. For newly arrived settlers, these factors made early landscaping a definite learning experience!

What, then, were popular landscape plants in these early years of the 20th century? What might the Mackay estate's private gardens have included? Ironically, while lists of Mackay's extensive plant

collections exist, detailed records of the earliest landscape/foundation plants have not yet been found. In recent years, an effort to re-create foundation plantings was based on some of the memories and observations of local individuals. For example, it is believed that for the front entrance of the home a green and white theme was used; including gardenia, Indian hawthorne, ferns, white amaryllis and caladiums. At present day, the house foundation beds have been redesigned using these plants.

Records do exist that give wonderful descriptions of landscape plants that were generally popular in central Florida during the period that included the 1920's. Then, as now, there were so many plants from which to choose; the following list of some of the most popular plants is not all inclusive.

SHRUBS: A number of shrub varieties were used in early 20th century landscaping, with an emphasis on those with colorful blooms or foliage. Apparently the term for Florida as "Land of Flowers" was an inspiring theme, as many shrubs found in literature emphasized those with colorful blooms. Some popular varieties were: oleander, firebush, hydrangea, rose, Turks cap, poinsettia**,** gardenia, camellia, azalea, ixora, hibiscus, and cassia varieties. (Some cassia species are now considered invasive and not recommended.) Bauhinia species were popular. A lovely *Bauhinia galpinii*, or red orchid bush, growing along the back porch of the Mackay house was rescued from impending removal and relocated to the west side of the house in recent years. Semi-tropical and tropical shrubs used for their colorful foliage included: croton, aralia, and dracaena. Evergreen shrubs that were used in early landscapes included Indian hawthorne, arbor vitae, pittisporum, varieties of ligustrum, podocarpus and boxthorn. Old photos taken a few years after the construction of the Mackay house show a boxthorn hedge planted along a wall facing Lake Rochelle. Today that would make it close to 100 years old!

Boxthorn hedge

PERENNIALS and ANNUALS: As is true for shrubs, color was equally important in the use of perennials and annuals in early Florida landscapes! Early landscape manuals gave instructions to carve out beds within shrub areas for such colorful flowering plants, with a separate area secluded in the background for "cutting" flowers to be used for indoor arrangements. Landscapes of the early 20's might include petunia, periwinkle, blue African daisy, annual lupine, miniature sunflower, nasturtiums, sweet peas, pansies, cosmos, gaillardia and other wildflowers, snapdragon, stock, sweet alyssum and daylily. Succulents and bromeliads were also popular landscape plants.

This historic photo shows the use of lilies planted around the water garden at Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve

BULBS: Bulbs were popular in the early l900's. Dr. Henry Nehrling, working in nearby Gotha, extensively propagated cultivars of caladiums, amaryllis, crinum, and gloriosa lilies. With the proximity of the Mackay estate to Gotha, surely many of these varieties would have been included in the gardens. Gladiolus was popular, as well as the Easter lily, and native rain lily. In wet areas, along with some varieties of crinum, the Florida native blue flag iris was recommended.

VINES: Colorful and fragrant vines were prized and planted extensively. The recommended uses were for vines to climb arbors, homes or tall pines. Seemingly any surface was fair game to grow vines! Flame vine, climbing roses, queen's wreath, jasmine varieties, honeysuckle, cross vine, jessamine and coral honeysuckle were used. Chinese wisteria vine was lauded, later becoming a Class II named invasive vine in central and north Florida.

Queen's wreath vines planted many years ago still grow within planters outside the entrance to the arbor.

Look for installment two of *Landscape Plants of the 20th Century* in the upcoming March/April Beautyberry Post.

Recent Happenings

A core of dedicated volunteers continues to make a very noticeable difference in the appearance of the garden areas surrounding the Mackay house. We know some of these selfless helpers as Tom, Margrit, Lyn, Mary, Gary, Janet, Sandy, Jim, Sondra, Carl, Bev, and Karen; common names, but very uncommon people due to their commitment to making Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve a much prettier place to visit. The **Mackaysters** have been weeding and mulching new beds along the entry way, front yard, and grotto.

Trek Ten Trails Hikers!

Saturday, December 19th, **Marion Ryan**, President of the Polk County Friends of the Park Organization, led a large turnout of geocachers on one of the Trek Ten Trail hikes, which are conducted at various parks and environmental land properties within Polk County. After helping these intrepid hikers discover the location of the geo-cache box at MGLP Marian turned the group over to Master Mackayster Steve Franklin. Steve guided the group on an interpretive walk through a portion of the Preserve. The interested hikers learned about the cultural and natural history of the area, some plant and animal identification, received a report on habitat restoration projects in progress, and enjoyed Steve's thought-provoking quotes and poems.