

BEAUTYBERRY POST

THE NEWSLETTER OF MACKAY GARDENS AND LAKESIDE PRESERVE

July/August 2016



In Touch by Steve Franklin

Getting in the mood to write about the importance of the natural environment to our everyday lives isn't difficult as I look out the rain-streaked front window of my temporary home near the top of the highest mountain in Georgia. Straight ahead the large, oblong, dark-green leaves of rhododendron shrubs mix with the smaller but darker leaves of mountain laurel shrubs to create a living curtain, which nearly renders our home invisible to the prying eyes of tourists riding the shuttle van up to the Visitor's Center at the summit of the mountain. Though it's the middle of May, we're still experiencing springtime at this altitude. White oak and red oak tree leaves are emerging from their buds in colors that match their names. The light green, wide-spread, more mature leaves of yellow poplar and maple trees lighten the scene overhead, contrasting pleasantly with the thin gray clouds which stream by. Scarlet-colored, berry-like

buds cling to some of the mountain laurel shrubs indicating that beautiful clusters of white teacup-like blossoms laced in pink will soon be appearing. Here and there the purplish-pink blossoms of Catawba rhododendrons have begun to show their faces, and everywhere pink, blue, yellow, and white wildflowers quietly sing the praises of plentiful rain and warming sun. And throughout the trees an assortment of migrating warblers, like a chorus of sprites, contribute their songs to a forest that seems to be near bursting with life. It all feels as refreshing and redemptive as clear, cold water gushing from a mountain's rock face.

But this is not what prompted me to sit down and begin writing. Actually, I was reliving the day in April when almost 90 first graders and their teachers and chaperones came walking down the sidewalk from their Lake Alfred school toward the entrance to Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve. For those of us who have been volunteering quite a bit of time there for the past several years the sight of those excited young people approaching the object of our love and attention was the materialized hope of a dream we'd long shared. The reality turned out to be as pleasant and heartwarming as the dream.

Prior to their arrival the children had studied the story of Char the gopher tortoise, which was written by volunteer coordinator/master naturalist, Cathy Butcher, with just such a field trip in mind. They were genuinely concerned for Char's well-being and anxious to visit his home. They had learned about the challenges that Char and his family had encountered in the face of development and with the invasion of exotic plants into their native habitat. They were thrilled to walk the trails of that environment, to learn more about it, and to share with us some of the knowledge they'd already acquired. We were thrilled to see them take a sincere interest in our environment, and we were left hopeful by their visit. Because, to be honest, often times it seems like a generation or two has completely lost touch with all of the natural wonders that must thrive if our lives are to remain sustainable. These young people helped renew our trust in mankind to, before it's too late, adopt the changes in behavior, which are necessary to our continued survival as a species, and we love them for that.



Top picture-Historic Mackay House

After raising a family in Lake Alfred and retiring from a demanding career, **Margaret Wheaton** turned to ink and watercolor sketching as a hobby in 2008. She wishes to be part of the Urban Sketchers, a worldwide network of artists whose goals are capturing events in their lives and places they travel using any kind of media. Their drawings reveal a moment in time from their direct observations. Margaret says, "I like to do it because my sketches take me back to the place with all my senses – sound, smell, weather, feelings."

Calendar of Events

July

- 7/7- First Thursday Presentation: **Biopesticides: Good Bugs & Natural Pesticides** with Joe Wolf, Florida Master Gardener-10am. Come & learn how to control unwanted garden pests through the use of their own natural enemies.
- July **Volunteer work dates:** 5, 12, 19, 26, Tuesdays 8am-11am*
- 7/9- **Saturday** volunteer work day! 8-11am. **
- 7/30-**Astronomy night** with Cleve Carter-7-10pm. This ever popular event teaches the basics of astronomy. An observation session on the back lawn will follow the presentation, weather permitting. Some telescopes will be provided but feel free to bring your own.

August

- 8/4-First Thursday Presentation: **Common Weeds of Central Florida Yards** with Debra Howell &Pat Farris-10am. This will include a slideshow & discussion of common weeds we encounter in our landscapes. Bring a weed to I.D.
- August **Volunteer work dates:** 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Tuesdays 8am-11am
- 8/20-**Saturday** volunteer day! 8am-11am

September

- 9/1-First Thursday Presentation: **Habitat Restoration and Conservation Landscaping** with Juliet Rynear-10am. Chair of the Conservation Committee for the Florida Native Plant Society. Juliet returns to Mackay to review native habitat restoration work in Central Florida and will explain the importance of preserving remaining intact habitats which support an amazing diversity of plant species. Juliet will share the important role that home gardeners and landscaping professionals play in this effort.

*Note time change. Tuesday work days are for maintaining the grounds nearest the house and the Florida-Friendly Demonstration Garden. This involves the removal of fallen limbs and palm fronds and keeping these areas weeded. Lyn Rumrill or Tom Zimmers will advise volunteers on areas to work or report to the Parks and Recreation Office in the house. Please bring a drink.

** Saturday work days will focus on invasive plant removal. This important and fun work will involve hand removal of troublesome plants or their seeds within the Preserve. Bring shovels and small hand pruners if possible. A limited amount of tools are available at the shed. Trash bags and 5-gal.buckets will be provided. Report to Juliet Rynear for assignments at the kiosk. Please bring a drink. A cooler with ice will be provided. The use of repellent and sunscreen are recommended.

All events are **free** unless otherwise noted.

Have you considered volunteering at MGLP? 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 your time you 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.

This is the final installment of the following article, The Incidental Benefactor. The first three installments can be found in the January/February, March/April, and May/June 2016 issues of the Beautyberry Post.



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 (final) by Steve Franklin

I believe it's true of many highly successful people that they are loners at heart and that their chosen profession also serves as their favorite occupation. Dr. David Fairchild said, "Although I belonged to the Chevy Chase Golf Club and passed it every day, I could never find recreation in playing there. The club and links were always full of people, and I could not get away from the sound of voices and those problems and prejudices which form so large a part of casual human conversation." So his holidays and Sundays were spent in the garden, in his study with his microscope and microscopic camera, or working with a homemade, long-focus lens to take pictures of plants and insects. Thirty-eight of his insect close-ups made the National Geographic Magazine in May of 1913.

In 1916 while botanist John Morley was beginning to develop the Mackay family's estate in The City of Lake Alfred, the Fairchilds were visiting Miami. They had decided that they wanted to live there someday. Mrs. James Nugent learned of this and invited them to look at her property on Biscayne Bay. After Marion saw the 8-acre location she said, "David, I want this place. I will ask Mother to give it to us." They called it "The Kampong" after similar family compounds in Java, Indonesia where he'd spent much of his time collecting plants. It may have been during that visit to Miami that Fairchild commented to Louis C. Tiffany that, "Northern

people who settled in South Florida insisted on spending time and money growing roses...” even though they might have to plant them each year. He couldn’t understand why they would do this when something like a Bombax Cotton tree from South China, like the ones we have at Mackay Gardens, could be grown year round and would display beautiful red flowers in season.

In 1923 the Fairchilds were invited to dinner aboard Mr. Allison Armour’s houseboat, which was anchored near Coconut Grove. Mr. Armour proposed that they make a long trip exploring for plants. So, in 1924 Fairchild retired from the Department of Agriculture to join his second benefactor as they set sail on the “Utowana,” a cargo vessel refurbished as a botanical laboratory and plant collecting vehicle. “Thus, from 1924 to 1933, the Utowana nosed into Mediterranean and African ports, explored the fjords of Norway and the coasts of the Canary Isles, Mexico, South America, and thirty of the West Indian Islands.”

According to Wikipedia, Dr. David Fairchild collected and introduced more than 20,000 exotic plants and varieties of established crops into the United States. They included species such as: soybeans, pistachios, mangos, nectarines, dates, bamboos, and flowering cherries. He



also brought in new varieties of wheat, cotton, and rice. In 1918 he wrote to Frank Meyer, one of his most successful plant explorers, who was working in China to let him know “...that we were putting in three hundred acres of soybeans.” I’m sure that they’d both be pleased to know that since then soybeans have become one of the most widely distributed plants in the U.S.A.

Had it not been for the fact that Dr. David Fairchild’s office sent to botanist John Morley some of the exotic plants still growing on the property at Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve, there is some doubt whether or not Nancy Daley and the people of The City of Lake Alfred would have been able to acquire the grant money that allowed this fabulous place to become public property. Today, thanks to the incredible number of achievements that Dr. Fairchild made during his extraordinary life and the efforts made by city residents, workers, and volunteers to restore and preserve Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve, we can all enjoy the beauty and serenity that exists at a place which Dr. David Fairchild might well have been happy to call home.

Dr. David Fairchild photo credit; USDA Archives

HISTORY OF THE CONCRETE BRIDGE by Connie White

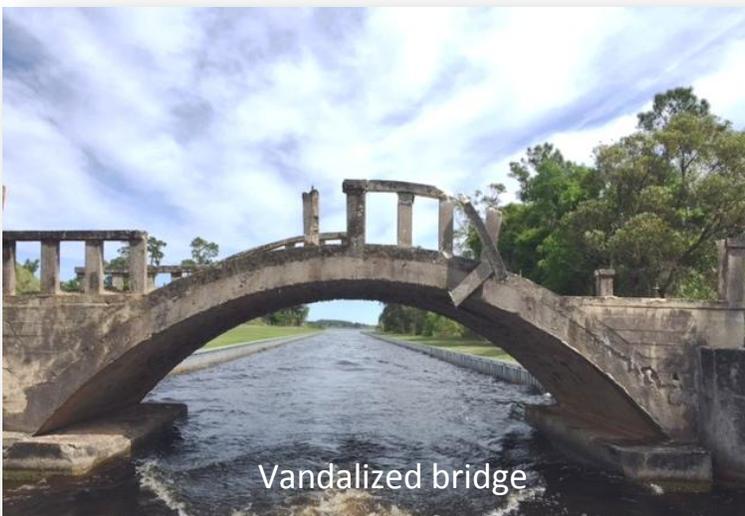


How much do you know about the little concrete bridge that crosses the canal between Lake Rochelle and Lake Haines? Did you even know there was a bridge? A lot of people don't know that it exists, except for those who travel the canal between the two lakes by boat. If you take a walk eastward on the asphalt trail just outside of the entrance gates to Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve, you will find the bridge. You cannot cross it, but you can see it. It is a beautiful, old concrete bridge, and this is its story.

Alexander Mackay, the Scottish master of the Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve property, was invested in, and served on the Board of Directors for several businesses in the United States. Because of his business affairs, Mr. Mackay traveled extensively in the U.S. Around 1915, during his travels, he became acquainted with Mr. J. M. Critchlow, a resident of Lake Alfred. Mr. Critchlow had business interests in the citrus industry, and suggested to Mr. Mackay a piece of property in Lake Alfred that would be a suitable citrus investment. In August of 1915, Alexander Mackay purchased lots 2 and 3 of Section 4, Township 28, Range 26, located in Lake Alfred, which is approximately 128 acres of land. The purchase price was \$21,000. This land is situated on Lake Rochelle, and is a portion of what is now Mackay Gardens and Lakeside Preserve. Mr. Mackay continued to purchase more land in the Lake Alfred area, including land adjacent to the original 128 acres. Mr. Mackay hired John Morley, a botanist from York, England to oversee his Lake Alfred property. While Mr. Mackay continued to make his home in Scotland, he and Mr. Morley communicated by writing letters, and in some instances sending telegrams, to discuss matters concerning the property. Mr. Mackay and his family visited the Lake Alfred property and home every year, usually during the fall.

The citrus industry in Polk County was booming during the early 1900s. Alexander Mackay, being an eager businessman, was very interested in being a part of the citrus industry. Most of the land purchases that he made were based on their potential for profit, but one section of land in particular, lots 1 and 5 of Section 4, which lies between Lake Rochelle and Lake Haines, proved to be unsuitable for agriculture. In Mr. Morley's words this area was "practically worthless swamp land". The decision was made to have a canal dug on this property connecting the two lakes. In a letter from Alexander Mackay to John Morley dated October 1925, Mr. Mackay says, "I am glad that you have made a fair contract for the canal between Rochelle and Haines, and I hope to see it completed by the time I get down. You should also make arrangements for a bridge across the canal in the swamp and for the sand being applied in raising the road crossing to the other side." Then in a letter dated May of 1926 from John Morley to Ferrier Mackay, the son of Alexander, "The concrete bridge over the canal is practically finished and we have been road building with the Miami Scraper about a week now...".

We can only speculate as to why Mr. Mackay wanted this canal dug, and details regarding permission to dig the canal are not known. According to the website for the Lake Region Lakes Management District (www.lakesmgmtdist.com), the canals which make up the Winter Haven Chain of Lakes were begun in 1915 by a group known as the Twenty Lakes Boat Course Club. This group came to be known as the Lake Region Lakes Management District. These canals were originally proposed as a way to haul freight between the lakes. But no information has been found to suggest that this canal was ever used for that purpose. We do know that a boat house was erected on the Mackay property in 1917 and several boats were purchased during the next few years, so perhaps the canal was dug simply for easy access from one lake to the other. The concrete bridge which was built over the canal connected to a road through the swamp on the east side. The Miami Scraper that was referred to in the 1926 letter was a piece of equipment pulled by a tractor and used to grade and level the land. This would have been used to create the road on both sides of the bridge.



Vandalized bridge

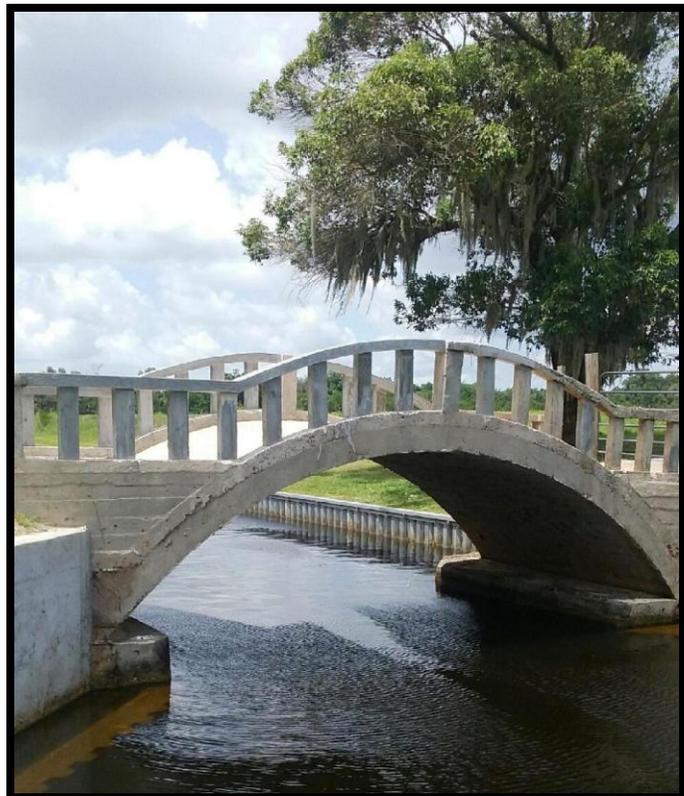
The canal as we see it now is much different from the way it looked originally. At one time the trees along the banks overhung the canal, creating a beautiful canopy. As boat traffic passed through the canal it caused shoreline erosion, and eventually the seawalls were put in. The

concrete bridge is still there, but it too has seen some changes. Over time it has seen some decay due to age. In recent years a gate has been installed to prevent use of the bridge. Unfortunately, the bridge has recently suffered some abuse. The damage is currently being repaired, but we must all make the effort to inform others that this bridge and canal are a part of our Lake Alfred history, and must be preserved.

Native Floridian Connie White is an avid researcher of history. She is President of the Lake Alfred Historical Society and Curator for the Lake Alfred Historical Museum. Connie also volunteers at the Historical and Genealogical Library and Polk County History Center. She and husband, Chris, recently returned from the State Library and Archives of Florida with over 2700 scanned documents from the Mackay Family Papers. From these items she hopes to establish facts about the Mackay family's affiliation with Lake Alfred.

Photo credits: historic bridge photo courtesy of the Lake Alfred Historical Society; damaged and restored bridge photos courtesy of Nancy Daley.

Lake Alfred City Manager, Ryan Leavengood took action to stop the ongoing vandalism to the historic bridge and return it to its original condition. Restoration was completed in June 2016. The area will now be under 24 hour video surveillance.



The Field Trip

They moved down the sidewalk in pairs,
Their ranks undulating between
Teachers who hindered their progress
As the sea's bed alters a wave
Before it crashes to the shore.
And the sounds of joyous voices
Engulfed us as we stood watching.
And then they were all among us,
And we were awash in the thrill
That most children experience
When returned to Mother Nature.
For them it was a homecoming,
Though they were unaware of that.
Just enough years had drifted by
For them to become excited,
Yet not recall exactly why.
And so they came to see and touch
And hike the trails and learn as much
About the woods and its creatures
As one fine morning would allow.
We tried to help them re-connect
In hopes they'd someday form the net,
Which made life here sustainable
While that goal's still attainable.

Steve Franklin

April 25, 2016