

Mepkin Abbey Garden Volunteer Newsletter

June 2017



Easter Lilies from our recycled Lily bed.(Craig Clark)

May kept us on our toes watering once again! It seems” no rain” is getting to be a pattern and we have many new plantings that must have water in the first year! May brought fertilizing hydrangeas, roses and shrubs again. Craig even got the Cloister, Luce and the Columbarium lawns fertilized. The Azalea and Camellia feeding program was completed and we are fast at work cutting back many overgrown azaleas. We continue to de-vine and paint the ever present vines with Roundup (in hopes to eliminate them). We hope by this pruning and painting the vines, keeping up with them will not be so labor intensive in the coming years.

The Easter Lilies above are blooming now, as this is their “normal” time to bloom. Those you buy at Easter are “forced” into bloom. We save and plant all the ones Father Gueric uses in the Church for Easter (along with the Hydrangeas) and have quite a show now. It is called “recycling”.

Our Mepkin Greenhouse display of plants grown in the Greenhouse that we have located in the Arbor (with suggested donation amounts) have been a great success. Thanks to all of our Visitors who have donated to our Garden Program. We will be closing it down (running out of stock!) this next week. Financially, it was beyond our dreams. We expect to have this available again next April to raise monies for our

“wish list”. I hope each of you who took home “a piece of Mepkin” are enjoying your plants.

Garden Updates:

The Store and Parking Court:

The Store looks especially nice since the Roses and Yarrow plus Lantana and other flowers are in bloom! The paving of the Parking Court is scheduled in June.



St. Clare:

The Pomegranate Tree blooms in St. Clare Walk are always a mystery to our Visitors. They actually produce fruit, but very few people are familiar with the tree. They have been very eye-catching this year!



The Cloister:

Around on the side of the Cloister, behind the Senior Wing, is the wonderful “Brother Stephen’s Garden”. Brother Joe, with Ursula’s help, put it in again this year. What a colorful sight it is!





The Orchard:

With help from Craig ,Jimmy Livingston and perhaps an outside expert we are on the verge of having an irrigation system for the "orchard". Brother Juan has pitched in as his schedule allows and we are thankful. He has pulled us through some dry spots.

Happy to say that a couple of our figs have the beginnings of fruit the cold really set us back. Brother Joseph's fig really looks terrific. Not sure if the credit goes to protection from the barn or a secret fertilizer. Whatever it is it's working very well.

Now we have to finish the irrigation installation and learn how to operate it.

Howard

Luce Garden:

Luce Garden by the steps that come into Our Lady's Room is in rehab. We had Green Carolina to come and tackle an impossible tangle of overgrown Azaleas and a variety of vines that were indescribable. For the first time in my fifteen years here, I can now see the Briggs plan. You will remember that we pruned down Room Two last year and it looks great now—it even bloomed! Throughout the property, you will notice that Craig forged ahead with pruning and it will be magnificent in the Spring. He is the reason that young, fearless blood needs to take over from me. I never had the nerve to do what he and the Volunteers have done! His dream was rewarded, as the Abbot gave us permission to purchase the following equipment you see in the photo below. Many thanks to the Abbey, as our people have been shoveling mulch into Gator beds for years and it is back breaking!



New Tractor with End Loader (Craig Clark)

If this was not exciting enough, two Benefactors have also given us two new 4x6 Gators! They are being shipped and we hope to have them by the end of the month!

Odds and Ends:

We began exploring working with Habitat for Humanity about a month ago. They

needed work for some college groups and other skilled workmen when they are in the permitting process of building houses. We will have them from time to time to help us when they are unable to work on housing for the poor. They came and helped clean up Inspiration Point, that area to the left of the Retreat Center, went to Sext (noon service) and had lunch at the Breakroom. Thank you, Habitat, for thinking of us—we look forward to working with you again.!



Habitat for Humanity Volunteers (Craig Clark)

Again, we are lucky to have two new Volunteers. Two of our Mormon sisters were transferred and we now have Sister Gloria.



Sister Gloria (Craig Clark)

Our other new Volunteer is Cheryl Lawton, who has experience in landscaping. Welcome to both of you!



Cheryl Lawton

Before the Mormon girls left, they sang for us at lunch at the Breakroom one day. One is still with us. What a treat! We all feel very lucky to have these girls and boys help us at the Abbey.



Ursula, the Sisters and Sylvia

Our Volunteers are just spectacular. Greg Ewell, a retired Engineer, began working with us this year. His wife, Jill, has helped us for several years when they were in town. He began painting gates, crosses, signs and lo, and behold, he took on the rusted, unreadable historic sign at the road that tells about Mepkin Plantation. He researched the colors and styles and here is the result!



I apologize to Greg that I took this before he painted in the green on the Palmetto at the top. This was a great deal of handwork. Thank you Greg, for your painstaking work at Mepkin.

This is the fourth in a series of those people who have lived at Mepkin.

The Luce Era: 1936 – 1949

Editors note: We are presenting the Luce Era in several parts, as their time here was many faceted.

PART TWO, Section One:

The Luce Garden/The Camellia Garden

In 1937, Clare Boothe Luce commissioned the noted New York and Charleston landscape architect, Loutrel Briggs to design a garden near the high bluff on which she had planned to build a house for her daughter near the site of the Laurens house. In designing the garden Briggs wrote the following:

“The landscape scheme was inspired by the ageless beauty with which nature endowed this lovely location. Walks wander through the woods, into which are woven azaleas and other spring flowering shrubs. Two little lakes lie in a ravine and near them is a terraced garden which slopes toward the river, the last level designed to frame the view over the water and marshes beyond. A live oak occupied the center of the site and was retained as a focal point for the crossing of the two axes of the plan. The longer one extends up from the shore in a series of grass panels, separated by wide steps, and terminated at a low retaining wall with steps on each side....The shorter axis connects the walks along the lower lakes with high ground above the garden. In planning the more open areas, the graceful undulating contours of the land were emphasized by spacious uninterrupted stretches of lawn or limited low plantings, with camellias occasionally used for accent.”
Loutrel Briggs, Charleston Gardens.



Live Oak Room-Main Axis of Long and Short Axis



Known now as Our Lady's Room. In this photo there is a wrought iron settee where now Our Lady Statue is located.



Present Our Lady's Room with view toward Cooper River. Note the Live Oaks that are now gone.

Note that all the brick walls are painted white. Last month's article on the Luce's and their house shows that painting brick white was the style of that time. It has been suggested that we repaint these walls, but so far we have prevailed against it! Note also the extensive use of ivy as a ground cover. It is an invasive and will take over everything in its path. As a result, we have not replanted any ivy.

The Briggs Garden design began at Room 2 with the curvilinear steps. Room 1 was added by the Luce's when their family members, who were buried at Strawberry Chapel not far away, were brought here. Plans were formulated that Henry and Clare would also be buried here along with Hank Luce's late wife and her son.

As years went on and the property became Mepkin Abbey, the garden fell into disrepair. Morgan Wheelock was hired in 1987 to rejuvenate the garden as the Nancy Bryan Luce Garden, funded by the Luce Foundation, as a memorial to Hank Luce's wife, who had died of cancer.

It was at this time that the spring fed ponds were dammed and made more pond like, rather than a stream. Morgan Wheelock also added the various Palm Trees, which were not part of Briggs plan and relocated the road that came down beside the ponds.

By 2006, Luce Garden had again fallen into disrepair due to the lack of Volunteer manpower. Hurricane Hugo had destroyed the "cathedral" of Live Oaks and here is what appeared.





The debris was cleared, and a plan was devised to replace the “cathedral” of Live Oaks with 25 foot white Crepe Myrtles, which would give the same effect. Azaleas and Camellias came out of their vine coverings and more were added—all white at the request of the Brothers. After months of work, including reworking the irrigation system from the Lake and treating the Upper and Lower Ponds, which had become full of algae. The result is as shown in the photos below.

An agreement was made with the Benefactor that the Garden would be taken care of on a regular basis. At first, a person was hired and then it evolved into the present Luce volunteer crew, who have improved it yearly. Brick edgings, long underground, have been dug up and relined, Azaleas and Camellias have been pruned down to get them back in scale, the path across the ponds has been rebuilt and maintained. The brick in the garden has been repointed, along with the steps. Handrails have been added to the steps. All in all, it is quite a showplace now, and in the spirit of Loutrel Briggs design.



Luce Garden after 2008 Renovation



Our Lady's Room after 2008 Renovation

Today it looks like this:



Next month we will feature Luce Garden (Part Two,Section Two) which will be an interview I had with the late Brother Edward in 2007, who worked down here I believe with Brother Stephen.

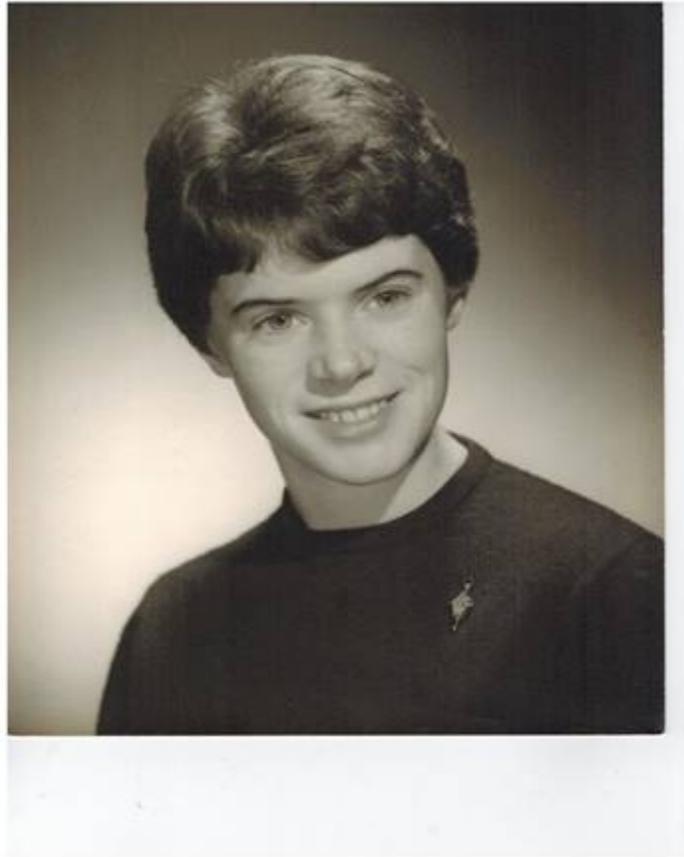
Spotlight on a Volunteer

In an effort to get to know each of you a little better, we are choosing a garden volunteer each month to answer a few questions and submit a brief bio for the monthly newsletter. This month we have chosen volunteer Gail Blanton. Gail has been volunteering at Mepkin long before there was an organized volunteer program. She does the sewing and mending for the Brothers, plays the organ when needed, and is a quiet cornerstone of the garden volunteer program. Her husband, Guy, also keeps the AC units at the monastery running in tip-top shape and has been seen helping Gail trim azaleas and pile up debris. What a team!



Here is a brief bio from Gail:

. I have TONS of hobbies! I really enjoy reading, sewing, knitting, quilting, yard work, cooking/baking. Our life in the Navy before retirement took us all over the world and it was wonderful. The down side to that was that our current house is #24 in 48 years of marriage – that’s a LOT of moves!! But on the positive side I never had to worry about cleaning out closets. I have always said that I am not a good traveler but am a good liver – enjoyed living in the different places we landed, but have never been very good at being a tourist. I graduated from college (Seattle University) with a teaching degree, but we never lived anywhere long enough for me to really get established as a teacher. Did lots of substitute work, and while in the Philippines worked for Los Angeles College Overseas teaching Marines. Also taught English for two years in Japan in a technical high school, which was an awesome job. Retired in 2007 after working 7 years for the Navy in North Charleston as a contract employee working with property records for the southeast states. We have four children and seven grandchildren (aged 1 year to 28 years old) and love visiting with them whenever we have the chance.



- 1) Who would you want with you if you were stranded on a deserted island?
 - a. *My husband, Guy, because he has so many good solutions to problems and is also my best friend.*
- 2) If you could do anything you wanted right now, what would it be?
 - a. *Just exactly what I am doing!*
- 3) If money was no object, what would you do all day?
 - a. *Same as above – just what I am doing right now.*
- 4) Where do you most want to travel, but have never been?
 - a. *We have been so many places and I've enjoyed every one of them. Wherever I go next will probably be my new favorite place! The opportunity to travel to Medjugorje with my daughter and granddaughter over Easter was an unexpected treat and fulfilled a desire I never even knew I had!*

5) What is your favorite memory?

a. *Too many to catalog, but being with our children while they were little was absolutely wonderful.*

6) What is your favorite movie?

a. *Lots of favorites, but I always watching movies like Sleepless in Seattle over again.*

7) What is the one thing that should be taught in school that isn't already?

a. *How to develop strong morals, because the kids coming up today seem to be lacking in that area.*

8) What one thing would you change if you had to do it over?

a. Nothing

9) If you could share a meal with three people from the past, who would they be?

a. *This was a hard one to decide, but I think my grandmother, our deceased daughter in law, and the child that I miscarried (would love to get to know that person!).*

10) What actor/actress would play you in your life movie?

a. HA!

10. Why do you volunteer at Mepkin?

a) *I followed my husband to Mepkin since he retired before I did and worked here two years before I started. I absolutely love my association with Mepkin and getting to know the other volunteers and the monks has been really special for me.*

My thanks to Howard for the Orchard Report, to Craig and Pam for the photos, to Craig for the Spotlight on Volunteers and to Langhorne for editing. This month I did the article on Luce Garden, Part One, Section One.

. Wishing you a safe and happy summer. Peace, dottie

