

Mepkin Abbey Garden Volunteer Newsletter

February 2017



Sky at dawn at the Mepkin Breakroom

February is the month of love — a month to exchange Valentine cards and to be reminded of God's unending love for us. On the mornings I am at Mepkin I arrive around 6:45am and plenty of people think I am crazy. We all have seen the spectacular photos of the Oak Allee, Luce Gardens, etc. Seeing this beauty is often a gift God sends to those of us who are on the grounds as the world is waking up. January and February are months in the garden where we continue to see the cycle of rest in the plant materials. It is a good message for us that, we too must rest and be silent and take in all this beauty.

Garden Updates;

The Store and Parking Court:

We continue to work on the Store Parking Court. We found the debris work too strenuous for our people, and called in the magic of Green Carolina. Here are the results.



After having received and accepted the planting plan for the area, we will plant and then get the paving done to finish our efforts in this area.

St. Clare:

As we continue to clean out and prune back in St. Clare, amazingly, there is always a surprise. As I was riding through a week or so ago, I looked down to find a Lenten Rose in bloom! St. Clare had a most generous present from a friend in Tennessee of about 20 new Lenten Roses which we planted two months ago. We are most grateful for the gift and look forward to them being in bloom by next year.



Lenten Rose



Magnolia that blooms in St. Clare in January

The Cloister:

George continues to outdo our flower beds with his beautiful raised vegetable beds full of many varieties of lettuce.



Raised lettuce beds

The Orchard:

We've seen no eradication too good to be true as we continue to work on weed removal. The pre-emergent herbicide should slow them down we hope.

The blueberries are looking very good and the buds are swelling. We have scattered wood ashes around most of our plants to act as zen organic fertilizer would.

Norm and I mowed around the bluebird houses since we plan to burn next week. There have been lots of birds around and we don't want to take a chance of damaging any nests or young birds,.

We mowed around the persimmon trees and were amazed at the fire ants hidden in the high weeds. To make our pruning chores less painful we spread Amdro (fire ant bait) to slow them down a bit.

Spring is coming I think!

Howard

Luce Garden:

The faithful crew continues weekly in Luce Garden. Joe has raised and relined the bricks which look spectacular.



Raised brick edging in Luce Garden

Secular Cemetery:

The Secular Cemetery is located near the Farm, and Visitors do not usually see the area. For years it was unkept. Now it is part of our regular routine areas and the Luce Crew have been working for several months cleaning up the woodlands behind it as they go back and forth to the burn pile. I was amazed when they called me over to see it and to ask about delineating the area (between the Cemetery and the woods) to give it a more pleasing look. The families of these friends of Mepkin do visit, and I know they appreciate the work that has been done here.



Secular Cemetery

Odds and Ends:

Recently I was reading about an effort to increase the number of long-needle pines in South Carolina. I realized that, once again, Mepkin was ahead of the curve. This stand was planted several years ago and is doing nicely, as you can see. It is part of our program to help the natural habitat for birds and other animals.



Long leaf Pine Stand

Volunteers:

We are happy to announce we have two new Mormon Volunteers, Sister Margaret and Sister Faith. Lucky for us, we retained the two Elders we already had.



Sister Margaret and Sister Faith

Another Volunteer surprise was that after finishing exams, Craig's daughter and her friend joined us one day to help cut down all the dead ferns in St. Clare. Thank you, ladies, for the help.



Alexis and Cameron

Those Who Lived at Mepkin::

Craig has been working on information about the people who have lived at Mepkin. Each month, we will be featuring one of the major residents of this beautiful place, as we are often asked by Visitors and Retreatants questions about who lived here, where did the name Mepkin come from, and how do the Laurens Cemetery and the Luce Garden relate. This month, we are featuring the first people we believe were here.

The First Inhabitants of Mepkin

We have no definitive written records of Native Americans living on the Mepkin property, however, the occurrence of artifacts and the knowledge of their preference for elevated, productive bottomland is strong evidence of their presence here. The earliest records of Mepkin that we found, dated 1681, state that the land was named

Makkean by the Cusabo Indians, a coastal tribe that inhabited land from Charleston to the Savannah River and inland. Although only a guess, it's quite possible that Mepkin derived its name from this early pronunciation.



(Arrowheads found at Mepkin)

The Cusabo tribes that inhabited the coastal areas and inland waterways of South Carolina were a peaceful group. Their belief system was similar to other southeastern tribes in that they valued order and saw chaos as harmful or evil. They believed that the spirit and body were so closely linked that one could not be healed without healing the other.

The Cusabo homes were circular in design, made of bent poles and covered with bark from either cypress or white cedar trees. Moss or clay was added for further insulation. Their villages, usually surrounded by a protective wall or palisade, consisted of several homes and a council house for tribal meetings. A plaza was often cleared outside the council house where dances and games took place. Besides hunting and fishing, the Cusabo Indians farmed corn, beans, squash, and melons. They also maintained orchards of peaches and plums.



Early European explorers observed that the Native Americans were able to inhabit and use the land with little apparent negative impact to the area. They perfected the use of fire to manage plant communities, and learned to use hundreds of plant species to meet basic needs including food, shelter, tools, and medicine. Ecosystem function and health had never been higher, and burning practices effectively increased biodiversity. We are still honoring that legacy today at Mepkin by prescribed burning.

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 Elaine Dennis. Elaine has the best smile and is always available for a big hug! She is a wonderful addition to the volunteer program and attacks every project and task with that big smile of hers.



Here is a brief bio from Elaine:

I was born in Moncks Corner in 1954 as the fifth of six children. My father was an alcoholic and times were difficult. I was fortunate enough to have an old Welsh pony that provided an excellent escape for me. I excelled in school and was awarded a scholarship to Presbyterian College in Clinton, S.C. and spent the summer before my senior year there.

My father died when I was sixteen and my little brother, Keith, was killed in a snow storm when 26 inches of snow fell in Moncks Corner in 1973. He was 16 at the time and I was 18. We were very close. I was accepted to the University of South Carolina soon after and was happy to leave Moncks Corner. I worked my way through school with two jobs while attending undergraduate (English) and graduate (Speech Pathology) school. I was a part time secretary for the state Office of Energy Management and also worked as a cocktail waitress.

I graduated in 1977 and a year later was accepted in the US Public Health Service (USPHS), providing speech therapy to all ages in a variety of settings in Beaufort, SC.

I received my Commission in the USPHS in 1980. My first assignment as a "fed" came in 1988 when I was asked to recruit specialty physicians with scholarship payback to rural SC. I recruited 70 specialty physicians during the next four years and was then transferred to the DHHS Atlanta Regional Office to advise the state of Georgia on specialty physician recruitment in rural GA and to oversee 50+ community and migrant health centers in GA and SC.

Three years later I was transferred to D.C. to direct the Health Care for the Homeless Program.

I spent the next thirteen years in D.C. I had several jobs, including special assistant to the AIDS Czar, directing a program to provide bleach and condoms to substance abusers throughout the country in an effort to address the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic, and developing Medicare guidelines for common disorders like pain management, depression and cataracts. The last six years in D.C. were spent writing, implementing, and directing a program to provide and evaluate

mental health services for people affected by and living with HIV/AIDS throughout the country. I also wrote a follow-up program to evaluate the cost of providing these services. I transferred back to Atlanta to be closer to home as my mother was battling lung cancer. I worked as the mental health consultant at the DHHS Regional Office for a couple of years, but I found it boring. I retired a Captain after 26 years in the USPHS. During my career, I travelled extensively in the US, as well as visiting Egypt, Greece, and Japan.



I moved home in 2004 to take care of my mother. I still loved horses so I bought a few. In 2007, my Tennessee Walker spooked at Boy Scouts riding bicycles on a dirt road and reared, causing me to fall and break my hip. After one pinning and two hip replacements, I was told not to ride anymore, but I didn't listen. I built a 12 acre horse farm in 2009. A beautiful, peaceful place for mother and me. I ended up fracturing my pelvis in two places after falling again when a turkey flew out of tall grass. I haven't ridden since 2010 and I really miss it.

I lost my older brother, Will, to alcohol, substance abuse, and cancer in 2009. My oldest brother, Jimmy, also died from cancer in 2015. I am grateful to still have a brother, Al, and sister, Jan, living.

In 2012, I got breast cancer and my mother died at the age of 91. This was not a good time for me. I was quite depressed about losing my best friend and being deathly ill from chemo. As I began to recover, my counselor at the time suggested that I volunteer at Mepkin. I always loved Mepkin, but didn't know there were volunteers. I was delighted to discover that Ursula was the contact, as I knew her from the flower shop when I was in high school. Volunteering at Mepkin has been a saving grace for me. I love Mepkin, the Brothers, and all of the volunteers!

Another Godsend has been the young couple, Karista and Wyatt, who moved into a cabin on my property a year ago. They brought their three horses to my barn. In addition to being a wonderful source of socializing for me, they do the majority of feeding and mucking of the stalls for all of the horses. This has been a huge help to me.

I thank God every day for these blessings in my life.

- 1) Who would you want with you if you were stranded on a deserted island?
 - a) MacGyver.

- 2) If you could do anything you wanted right now, what would it be?
 - a) Ride my horses.
- 3) If money was no object, what would you do all day?
 - a) Take care of animals (dogs, horses, and birds), spoil my nieces and nephews even more, and spend more time at Mepkin.
- 4) Where do you most want to travel, but have never been?
 - a) Florence, Italy.
- 5) What is your favorite memory?
 - a) Making Captain in the US Public Health Service.
- 6) What is your favorite movie?
 - a) Dr. Zhivago.
- 7) What is the one thing that should be taught in school that isn't already?
 - a) Bring back cursive writing.
- 8) What one thing would you change if you had to do it over?
 - a) I would have children.
- 9) If you could share a meal with three people from the past, who would they be?
 - a) My Mother, Father, and little brother Keith.
- 10) What actor/actress would play you in your life movie?
 - a) Katherine Hepburn
- 11) Why do you volunteer at Mepkin?
 - a) It brings me joy!

Many thanks to Howard for the Orchard Report, Craig for the “First Inhabitants of Mepkin” and the Spotlight on Volunteers features, and to Langhorne for editing.

I would love some feedback from our readers about how they like or do not like the new features in the Newsletter. Please email me at roddydh@gmail.com. Happy Valentine’s Day! dottie