

## Mepkin Abbey Garden Volunteer Newsletter

August 2017



Gold Pin (1000 hours worked) Award Winners

L to r : Abbot Stan, the four current Mormon Volunteers, Roy Wilson, Karen Roberts and Nelson Weaver. Missing are Guy Blanton and Wanda Orman.

As always, the highlight of July is the Annual Volunteer Picnic that the Brothers give for the many Volunteers and their thousands of hours each year.

A few facts:

July1, 2016-June 30,2017:

1-Total of 15,343 hours this year. A total for all the time records have been kept=120,460 hours.

2- 29 new Volunteers

3- 63 Volunteers reached a new level of award

The Picnic was delicious and a great time was had by all.



Picnic Buffet

Tables:







The first recognition was given Rainy Drew, who has faithfully served Mepkin in the business office for 20 years!



Here Rainy receives a beautiful sweet grass basket for the wall in her home. She also received a gift certificate to Belks. Thank you, Rainy, for all you do for all of us. Always with a smile and very quickly filling any request.

The Mormon Elders and Sisters who faithfully serve several hundred hours each year were awarded a plaque and gold shirts for all the many Volunteers they have rotated in and out over the last several years. The Abbot realized that individually they would never earn 1000 hours, but together they have reached more than 1000 hours.



The Mormon Elders and Sisters receiving the special 1000 hour award plaque from the Abbot.

Another exciting announcement was made by the Abbot, naming Craig Clark as Director of Grounds and Gardens. Almost two years ago, Craig and I agreed to a five year term to work into the job to replace me, but he has come along so fast and really takes on all the labor end of the program. I have agreed to continue the Newsletter and other record keeping we do and will now be known as "Special Projects" person. I have been doing both and it is time for me to cut down on some of the work I can no longer do.



Dottie Roddy and Craig Clark



Craig's family: Jackson, Alexis and Laura



## Garden Updates:

### The Store:

The beds at the Store have filled in nicely with all the rain. We are busy trying to keep it under control now!



Front of the Store

### St. Clare:

The Elephant Ears are making their appearance now as well as the Papyrus.





Elephant Ears in Bloom



Papyrus



Bench with Leopard Plants and Fern

The Cloister:

The Russian Sage has taken over the Daylilies this year. They should be wonderful when their purple blossoms come and the yellow butterflies fly in and out of them.





Russian Sage



10 Man cottage bed

The Orchard:

Things have been slow in the "orchard" for everything except the weeds. Norm and I have been dependably loosening the soil with forks and pulling out a wide variety of



weeds. The weeds seem to have more lives than a cat and promptly reappear nearby. We lost some of our brambles to herbicides and a transplant project will begin soon to relocate plants under the arbor. Luckily we have had some blackberries pop up in random locations .

Our irrigation project is still in progress. Thankfully we have had a good bit of rain so there doesn't appear to be a rush.

There have been some figs but they ripen at dime to nickel size. The best by far are still Br. Joseph's tree adjacent to the umbrella barn. The birds discovered that ripe figs are tasty and get most of them before we can. I wonder about the idea that we can plant enough trees for everyone. I think the late cold spell took a toll on most of our fruit. Perhaps next year.

Howard



Native Hibiscus at Orchard Fence

Columbarium:

Last month I had several requests to photograph a close up of the mosaic butterfly I

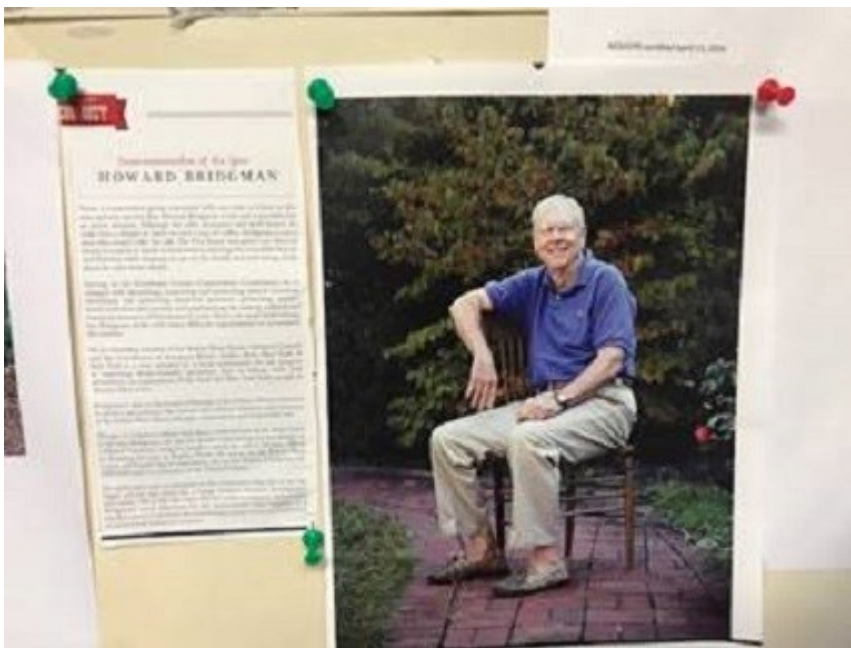
had pictured. Here it is:



Mosaic Butterfly by Angel Allen

Odds and Ends:

Another exciting announcement. One of our longtime and faithful volunteers, Howard Bridgman, was named Environmentalist of the Year! Howard also writes the Orchard Report each newsletter. Congratulations, Howard, for an honor well deserved!



Howard Bridgman

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.*



Clare and her daughter, Ann Brokaw, at Mepkin

Clare also hired famed Charleston garden architect Loutrell Briggs to design a “camellia garden” that would eventually join a home she planned to build for her daughter, Ann Brokaw. She also had a Magnolia Allee planted as an entrance road to the house, and it remains today. Unfortunately, the home was never built as Ann was killed in an automobile accident in 1944. As a result of this tragedy, Clare joined the Roman Catholic Church, being taught by the famous Bishop Fulton Sheen. Consequently she became an ardent essayist and lecturer in celebration of her faith, and was ultimately honored by being named a Dame of Malta.

Clare Luce wrote to Abbot Dunne the following:

“In the afternoon we went to the plantation and it was so lovely, with the late blooms. I felt serene there for the first time in so many years, certainly for the first time since my lovely child died. She used to run, laughingly, through those gardens. Her brown hair flew in the wind when she galloped on her horse under the Live Oaks. Her legs in brown boots were trim, and she was slim and gay, and very, very innocent for a girl in this sort of world. I felt her happiness all day. How very strange that joy can come of so much sorrow as I have known, that one can feel so rich when one gives away the thing one loves the best---as I loved Mepkin”

In 1949, Henry and Clare gifted the Mepkin land to the Roman Catholic Church to be used by the Trappist Order’s Gethsemane Abbey. The gift to Gethsemane was said



because Clare admired and studied the works of Thomas Merton (Brother Luis), a famous Trappist at Gethsemane. Twenty-nine monks of the Order of Cisterians of the Strict Observance (Trappists) came from Gethsemane, Kentucky to found the Abbey that exists today.

In a letter from Father Christian Aiden Carr to Clare Boothe Luce dated 4/26/86, he writes "Droves of casual visitors thru Mepkin in recent weeks. The place, the religious community here – a strong force for goodness and joy and openness to the wonders of God's love..."sermons in stones, tongues in trees, books in the running brooks...and good in everything""

This gift was the subject of an Editorial in a local paper:



And so we close the Luce Era and next month will feature the Mepkin Abbey Era.

## 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 George Neil. George works tirelessly on the raised beds in the Cloister; supplying the monastery with herbs and vegetables both common and unique. He is also very thoughtful in sharing many of his home-grown fruits, vegetables, and

plantings with the volunteer group. He has installed over 20 bluebird houses across the property that he built and maintains himself. The bio below only begins to scratch the surface of George's amazing life.



You wouldn't want me as your math teacher, but I do have a gift for languages and gardening. I was born in Philadelphia in 1937, graduated from Penn with honors in English, and top grades in French. My father, a brilliant attorney, wished me to go to law school, but his death in 1957 ended that idea. The U.S. Army became my life, interrupted only briefly by three enjoyable years as a journalist.

The Army enabled me to marry, raise a family, advance my education, and travel the world - which my wife (Freya) and I enjoyed. I became fluent in German, tutored in French, and in time picked up bits of other languages. We lived in Europe for seven years, and I served twice in Vietnam, with Infantry and Aviation Support units. Few Americans would have had experiences like mine in Vietnam.

After Vietnam, I served as liaison officer for HQ, U.S. European Command {USEUCOM} to a NATO HQ in The

Netherlands, {HQ, Allied Forces, Central Europe}. There, I assisted officers of 6 allied nations in planning for the defense of Central Europe. {I also inspected U.S. Prepositioned Equipment Depots, U.S. Missile Sites, and commercial seaports in Germany, Belgium, and Holland. Where I noticed problems that would impede our ability to defeat Warsaw Pact forces, I informed HQ, USEUCOM.}

Meanwhile, Freya taught at an international school in Brunssum, NL. Our younger, teenage daughter interned during summers as a reporter for the international newspaper, edited by a British colonel. Katherine also played French horn in a local Dutch orchestra.

Returning to the U.S., I wrote emergency mobilization plans for all Army Reserve and National Guard units below the Mason-Dixon Line. During key officer transitions, I was the "de facto" garrison commander at Ft. Stewart, GA, supporting General Norman Schwarzkopf, the 24th Infantry Division commander. I retired from the Army in 1985.

For the next 10+ years, I applied my administrative skills at Drayton Hall, overseeing daily operations and taking the lead in environmental protection. After heart surgery in 1996, I left full-time work at Drayton, became a paid consultant, and enrolled in Clemson's Master Gardener training program, supplemented by horticulture classes at Trident Tech. As a certified Master Gardener, I provided more than 3,500 hours of community service, including classes in vegetable & fruit growing, composting, and plant propagation. I'm now considered a Master Gardener Emeritus. I've volunteered at Mepkin for about 10 years.

Apart from gardening and travel, my interests are reading, outdoor life, woodworking, genealogy, archaeology & anthropology, botany and foraging for edible plants & mushrooms. I love animals, **dogs** especially. Small boats, rowing and sailing were important in my younger years, as were fishing, hiking, canoeing, and camping. In college and the Army, I was an expert marksman, learned to rappel from helicopters and cliffs, and taught unarmed defense.

Freya and I have been married for 57 years. We're very proud of our two successful daughters and three grandsons.

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

**(For a short -term stay): My brother Bill or Howard Bridgman, both seasoned, enthusiastic outdoorsmen. (For a much longer stay, and only if she'd agree): Magda Wellens-Nuyts, an old friend and experienced hiker, mountain-climber and lover of the outdoors. Widow of Lt. Kol. Jos Wellens, Belgian Army logistician, my peer and friend for many years.)**

2. If you could do anything you wanted right now, what would it be?

**I'd be hiking with Freya, my dear wife, and our two little daughters, in the ancient, dark "Vaihinger Wald", a well-managed beech/oak/spruce forest near Stuttgart, Germany.**

3. If money was no object, what would you do all day? **I would fish for salmon in the Miramichi River (New Brunswick, Canada) with my brother Bill and Elmer, a local guide.**

4. Where do you most want to travel, but have never been? **(With my family) to Ha Long Bay, North Vietnam; (with daughter Katherine) to Ireland and the Channel Isle of Guernsey; (with my Brother Bill) to "Haida Gwai" in the Queen Charlotte Islands, off the coast of British Columbia.**



5. What is your favorite memory? **The drive with my wife and young children in Norway, along the gravel road from Bergen to Rjukan, through the spectacular Hardanger Fjord Plateau.**
6. What is your favorite movie? **"Dunkirk", most recently. As a child, "Tales of Uncle Remus".**
7. What is the one thing that should be taught in school that isn't already? **Respectful Courtesy, and Openness to Other Cultures. "The Golden Rule" is a universal guidepost to decency, fairness, and understanding.**
8. What one thing would you change if you had to do it over? **I would have tried harder to convince myself, my wife and our daughters that our then-pending "total family separation" would work, then accepted my assignment by the Pentagon as commander of the port at Iskenderun, Turkey.**
9. If you could share a meal with three people from the past, who would they be? **(Assuming we could all speak as friends and equals), my good brother, Bill, and our well-meaning parents, George Mahon Neil and Anna Frances (Robinson) Neil.**
10. What actor/actress would play you in your life movie? **I can't imagine who would do that. It would have to be someone who understood our (unnecessarily nuclear) family, and how inter-family relationships, discords, and expectations influenced my outlook on life.**
11. Why do you volunteer at Mepkin? **I love the natural (and well-tended) beauty of Mepkin, the friendly companionship of the volunteers, the openness and grateful acceptance of Mepkin's monastic brothers, and the opportunity to commune with nature and all its creatures in a peaceful setting. Years ago, I valued the opportunity to increase my knowledge of horticulture and gardening at Mepkin ... that motivated me to come often from Summerville. A day at Mepkin is almost always spiritually uplifting for me**

I apologize for this issue being later than usual. I have been in and out of town for several weeks. My thanks to Craig for taking over his duties, to Howard for the Orchard Report and to Langhorne for editing. The last Luce article (as all the Luce articles) have been a joint venture between Craig and myself. My thanks also for your continuing comments and support of this Newsletter and the Garden Program.

"God spoke: Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the

cattle, and, yes, Earth itself.” Genesis 1:26

Peace, one and all, dottie