MEPKIN ABBEY

Mepkin Abbey Garden Newsletter

September 2026

The first day of fall this year, at least according to the calendar, is Tuesday, September 22nd. We know that fall and the cool weather it brings happens a little later here in the Lowcountry, but hopefully, the brutally hot days we've experienced the past month will be fewer in number.

Despite what could truly be described as the dog days of summer, there has been lots of activity during the past month in the gardens of the Abbey. Volunteers and staff have managed to capture in photos quite a bit of the beauty in nature that is all around us at Mepkin. Thanks so much to everyone who submitted photos for this edition.

For those of you unable to attend the annual staff and volunteers' luncheon, please know that you were truly missed. Fortunately, we have photos of the event for you and a short account of what you missed. It is always a really nice occasion. It's a great opportunity to see folks you don't get to see often enough and to make new acquaintances. And it's a really nice way to recognize and celebrate the contributions made by your fellow volunteers at Mepkin Abbey.

-- LuAnne

Keeping Up the Good Work – With a Big Shovel

Joel manned an excavator to begin repairs on a leak underground.

Fr. Stephen and Sylvia are seen here discussing tasks that needed to be completed in time for an event that would take place at this spot a few days later.

Mepkin Abbey Creates a New Site for Meditation and Prayer

The event that Fr. Stephen and his helpers were preparing for when the photo above was taken was the dedication of a new meditation and prayer garden. Located at the foot of Luce Garden within the "room" closest to the Cooper River, the new garden is now part of the beautiful and historic terraced garden created by renowned Charleston landscape architect, Loutrel Briggs, for Henry and Clare Boothe Luce after they acquired the old rice plantation in 1936.

Luce Garden has undergone several changes and a restoration since the land that it sits on was donated to the Catholic Church in 1949. The Our Lady of Mepkin statue was placed at its present site and was blessed by Fr. Anthony on April 26, 1954.[1] The Italian mosaic behind the statue was also added to the site. It was a gift to the monastery by Mrs. Luce when she was serving as Ambassador to Italy.[2] And, as the years rolled past, the upper "room" of the terraced garden became the final resting place for Henry and Clare Luce as well as their family. Now the new Rosary Garden will become not only an important *footnote* in the history of Luce Garden, but more importantly a new and extremely significant chapter in the story of Mepkin Abbey.

1. Macdonald, Robert R., *Between the Marsh and the Skies: The Mepkin Abbey Story*. (Charleston: Evening Post Books, 2023), 59.
2. Ibid., 59.

New (cont'd)

At first glance the design for the new garden appears to be very simple. But, as you begin to take it all in, the placement of each stone takes the meaning of the design to a new level. Each stone laid in the new garden represents a bead on the rosary.

New (cont'd)

The Blessing and Inauguration of Our Lady of Mepkin Rosary Garden took place on the beautiful morning of Saturday, August 15th, and was performed by His Excellency The Most Reverend Jacques Fabre-Jeune, CS, Bishop of the Diocese of Charleston. During the event participants stood on the stones and as the rosary was prayed, a rose was placed in the urns on each side of the statue of Our Lady of Mepkin.

The cross placed behind the statue is part of the rosary. Soon visitors to the site will be able to download prayers of the rosary to guide and enhance their experience of this special spot.

New (cont'd)

Volunteer, Linda Chiappone, was on hand for the blessing and shares the following photos and some of what touched her most about the event:

> *The Blessing of Our Lady of Mepkin Rosary Garden was a beautiful gathering of people, young and old, beside the Cooper River early Saturday morning. Bishop Jacques greeted us all but called up the children for a special blessing. The rosary was prayed in both Spanish and English and white roses placed before the statue of Our Lady of Mepkin. After a final blessing by Bishop Jacques, I felt a special peace and comfort looking back over the river before I walked to my car. I don't think I was alone in that feeling.*

New (cont'd)

In this photo Linda shared, Fr. Jonas (center left) speaks to guests.

And in this photo, the Bishop (in red cap) is seen in the middle of the rosary.

Mepkin's Staff and Volunteers Gather for Annual Luncheon

This year's annual gathering of Mepkin's staff and volunteers took place on Saturday, August 22nd, and coincided with the Feast of the Queenship of Mary, a ceremony that honors the Blessed Virgin. Before the meal began and service awards were given out, Fr. Jonas, the new Abbott of Mepkin, thanked the staff and the volunteers for their hard work and talked about how their service supports the Monastery's mission at home and in other spots around the world. He delighted us with a brief story about his journey to this point in time and spoke about the changes that have taken place at the Abbey in the past year. And just before he blessed our meal, he warmly issued one mandate: that we all be joyful. He reminded us that "we are Mepkin" and called for us to celebrate that every day.

Sylvia took this photo of the refectory before the staff and volunteers began arriving. Each table was adorned with a low centerpiece made of fatsia leaves topped by a flower blossom.

Luncheon (cont'd)

The luncheon is an event that volunteers look forward to each year. Attendees arrived early and the tables filled up very quickly.

Luncheon (cont'd)

The blue programs on the table listed the name of every volunteer as of the date of this event. There were 172 names listed.

<u>Luncheon (cont'd)</u>

Turnout was great. Every available seat in the refectory was occupied.

The luncheon not only brings all the volunteers together, it is an opportunity for us to dine with the Brothers and Monastic Guests.

Luncheon (cont'd)

The Abbey's new cook, Leslie, prepared a delicious meal for us. Guests dined on barbecue chicken, potatoes served in a creamy sauce, and a tasty green salad. Brownies, cookies, and other sweet treats were served along with tea and lemonade.

Luncheon (cont'd)

Quite a few of the volunteers qualified for service pins this year. The beautiful pins, which bear the Mepkin logo, come in six colors. Each color represents a specific number of accumulated hours of service.

Luncheon (cont'd)

Four volunteers earned the 1,000 Hours of Service Award.

Paul Brustowicz was one of those receiving the award. He has served as a docent and Crèche Festival volunteer for more than a decade.

Luncheon (cont'd)

Linda Chiappone, Amy Williams, and Maureen Renault also earned the 1,000 Hours of Service Award during the past year but were unable to attend the luncheon.

Luncheon (cont'd)

Garden volunteers left the luncheon with new t-shirts. Craig and Sylvia found a lovely way to present them to us. We will wear them proudly and look forward to breaking them in.

By Special Arrangement

Thanks to Ursula, once again, for providing photos of Fr. Guerric's elegant flower arrangements for the church in the month of August.

Dark green sword-like leaves paired with cone-shaped clusters of hydrangea blossoms come together on Sunday, August 2nd, in an arrangement that Ursula called a joy and a blessing.

<u>Arrangement (cont'd)</u>

More joy was provided on Sunday, August 9th, by an analogous color scheme that ranged from pink to violet. In this arrangement, Fr. Guerric brought an assortment of zinnias together seemingly held up at the base by the large, hand-like leaves of the fatsia shrub.

Arrangement (cont'd)

An arrangement of blue and white --colors honoring Mary – greeted worshipers on Sunday, August 16th, following the blessing and inauguration of Our Lady of Mepkin Rosary Garden the day before.

Mepkin's Gardens Show No Sign of the Summertime Blues

A slight breeze, a few insects buzzing 'round, and an admiring fan with a camera were all that disturbed these tall, yellow coneflowers basking in this sunny spot next to the breakroom at the farm.

Gardens (cont'd)

To fully appreciate the interesting red blossoms of this perennial, you must step off the paved path to the library down to the banks of the "rock river" where it thrives in this lightly shaded dip in the landscape.

Gardens (cont'd)

Known as Turk's cap or Turk's turban, it is part of the hibiscus and mallow family (Malvaceae). As delicate as it looks, it can tolerate dry conditions and poor soils. Hummingbirds like it, too.

Gardens (cont'd)

These photos were taken in St. Benedict's. Colleen shared this shot of the beautiful blossoms of a hibiscus shrub planted near the pierced wall.

And I spotted this single pear growing on the espaliered tree there.

Gardens (cont'd)

Mushrooms love wet weather, and some very interesting varieties have been appearing all over the grounds of the Abbey. Georgiann spotted this cluster growing at the base of a tree.

Gardens (cont'd)

She also spotted this one enjoying life in a warm, moist bed of leaves, mulch and moss. The fungi have been popping up in the grass, on trees, and almost any place where the soil is rich in organic matter.

But What's Up with Those Azaleas???

Some of the azalea bushes around the Abbey are presenting with entire branches nearly stripped of leaves. Upon close inspection you will find the reason: caterpillars have been feeding on the shrubs.

Caterpillars (cont'd)

These caterpillars will become azalea moths. They are only about two inches long, but they can rapidly strip an azalea bush of its leaves.

Online information reveals that except for leaving a defoliated shrub in their wake, they don't do any lasting damage to the bush and that they are harmless to humans and pets. But, oh, those poor azaleas!

Despite the Heat, Cool Encounters Abound at Mepkin

Perhaps the cutest photo we have this month comes from Colleen who sent along this charming photo of a dragonfly resting on Ruth's hat while she was working in Luce Garden.

Encounters (cont'd)

Here's a familiar face this time of year: a lubber grasshopper. Gloria spotted this one near the Visitors' Center. These 'hoppers grow to be rather large -- up to four inches long.

<u>Encounters (cont'd)</u>

The caterpillar of a black swallowtail is commonly called a parsley worm, but Barb found this one enjoying some bronze fennel.

Encounters (cont'd)

We have Craig to thank for noticing this pretty little ladybug resting upon a bright green leaf. The colors and the water droplets seem to call for you to pause over this photo and enjoy a very refreshing moment

Encounters (cont'd)

Georgiann came upon this creature sunning itself near Luce Garden. The small alligator seems to be sizing up the photographer, too. Perhaps that look in its eye is a warning not to get too close.

Encounters (cont'd)

Sighting deer on the grounds of Mepkin isn't a rare occurrence, but when it happens, it can fill you with wonder. When you can get as close to a young male as Sylvia did for this photo, it is a very special moment.

<u>Encounters (cont'd)</u>

Obviously curious about her, he appears to have lingered for a few moments before moving along.

Other Wonders, Other Places

We have our mighty oaks here in the Lowcountry, but in the Amazon jungle they have their Sumaumas. Thanks, Greg and Jill, for sharing this photo of the amazing tree taken during your recent travels.

<u>Other (cont'd)</u>

*Barb recently traveled to Maine where she visited the Coastal Maine Botanical Garden which features **The Guardians of the Seed** by Danish environmental artist, Thomas Dambo. Barb says the name of this troll is Soren, and he is made of recycled wood. She also noted that a local ship builder had to help stabilize his limbs.*

Reflections

This photo from Craig just seemed a perfect way to look back on the past month. Surely, we have all been tempted to take a cat nap after a morning of work during what was a very hot and humid August.

Contemplating the Month Ahead

Maintaining good eyesight is essential to helping us navigate the world we live and function in. But seeing well takes on a whole new meaning when we think about what we see in the world, exactly how we take it in, and what we prefer to focus on. One might say that from a philosophical point of view, it becomes a bit like photography. Do you prefer to look at the world through a wide-angle lens taking in as much as you can in one shot or do you go more for that macro shot moment where the tiniest subject in all its detail takes up the entire frame of view? As the photos in this month's newsletter show, Mepkin serves up so many delightful treats that no matter your preferred subject or focal length, it is always a feast for the eyes. So, again, thanks to all those that contributed photos this month and every month to our newsletter. It's a pleasure to assemble the images you capture . Each photo reveals why Mepkin is the place we want to keep coming back to.

If you are able at some point in the upcoming month, set aside a few minutes to drop by areas of the grounds of Mepkin that are not part of your assigned work area. There is almost always something new to see. Considering what a beautiful and wild place Mepkin can be, there is the potential for wonderment around every corner. Just keep those eyes open!

Here's wishing you all a good Labor Day. Maybe one without labor in it? There are folks who like working and enjoying the fruits of their labor. Maybe you know some? Around here we call them volunteers. And, speaking of such, we are always in need of more. If you know anyone, bring them out with you for a day or have them contact Sylvia at:

mepkingardenvolunteers@gmail.com