

# The Sewanee PLANT PRESS



Volume XIV, No. 3

Newsletter of the Friends of the Herbarium

Summer 2010

## Sewanee's GreenHouse

**O**n Alabama Avenue a block south of Spencer Hall and next door to McCrady Dormitory stands a white frame house with green shutters, formerly known as the Armentrout House. Before that it was called the Mitchell House, and before that it was the Kirkland House.

Bishop Mitchell, University Chancellor in the 1950s, was married to Vivien, a tiny wisp of a lady. Known for her ability to make flowers grow anywhere, Vivien Mitchell would probably be thrilled to see her home in its current incarnation as Sewanee's "GreenHouse," the residence of one of the college's most active communities, a group of student leaders dedicated to simple living, organic food production, and local community enrichment.

The house serves as the meeting place for several student organizations, both environmental and otherwise. Also,

its residents open it up for community-wide folk music jams and "Arm&Trout" open mike nights. They host events for multi-cultural and merit weekends and put on a spring Garden Party.

The backyard garden, where Mrs. Mitchell had her flower beds, is now cared for by GreenHouse members. Chelsea Askew, Sewanee's organic garden intern, is tending it this summer. The raised beds and surrounding shrubs put in by previous owners are being maintained, and a few more beds have been added this past year, as well as blueberries, strawberries, beautyberries, a wildflower patch, and several trees. Privet and English ivy are being eradicated and replaced by native upland forest plants.

The Armentrout Garden has caught the imagination of many of the students. Offering 500 square feet of outdoor growing space, it contains more than 50 square feet

of insulated, student-built cold frames that enable residents to grow crops throughout the Advent and Easter semesters. A wildlife garden attracts a diversity of avian and butterfly visitors, and the house's four rabbits are the highlight of "Project Wonder," the GreenHouse's after-school program for local elementary students.

"Hen Hall" houses 12 laying hens, and a 100-square foot mobile chicken tractor affords "the ladies" safe access to the GreenHouse lawn. In the basement worm farm, 50,000 resident annelids churn McClurg Dining Hall's waste into rich compost.

The herbal garden, established by former student Kate Cummings, contains common herbs and flowers like sage, rosemary, oregano, lemon grass, lavender, basil, mint, as well as lesser known comfrey, beebalm, nasturtiums, yarrow, and echinacea. Kate, a 2010 graduate of the college majoring in

International and Global Studies with a concentration in Environmental Affairs, was a member of the GreenHouse community while she was here in school. For her independent study project this year, she put together a guide to the herbal garden, titled *The Plant Homesteading Guidebook: Food, Medicine, Soaps, and Natural Dyes*.

The guidebook includes the names, families, scientific names, and uses of most of the plants in the garden, along with information about fermentation, soap making, and recipes. There is also a section on the biology and historical uses of herbs. Kate's advisor for the project was Dr. Deborah McGrath, and she



(cont'd p. 4)

**The Sewanee Herbarium: Education — Research — Conservation**

# Nature Journaling

*Most of what I have learned about nature and its processes has come from the experiences I have had using my journals.*

—Clare Walker Leslie

Keep a nature journal. It is a wonderful way to connect to the natural world simply by recording, as accurately as I can, what I see and often jotting down some personal reflection. First introduced to the idea in a workshop led by writer and naturalist Jill Carpenter, I have enjoyed the pursuit off and on for close to ten years.

That first notebook, which Jill gave me, is now complete and among several journals in a little row on my bookshelf. One of them is from geologist Bran Potter's *Walking the Land* course, which at the time was open only to first-year college students and the odd auditor. We read, wrote, and sketched. Once a week we met to tramp somewhere on this mountain, on and off trail, and share our journal entries. Each of us was instructed to choose a place to visit during the week for reading, writing, and reflection. My spot was Bridal Veil Falls here on the Sewanee Domain.

Readings for the course included those of John Muir, Wendell Berry, and Henry David Thoreau, as well as authors I had never heard of, Stephen Graham, Sheila Burnford, and Katherine Moore among them. Not surprisingly, there were a few geological works in the reading list, including Luthur's *Our Restless Earth* and *The Map that Changed the World* by Simon Winchester.

My *Walking the Land* journal is a combination of natural history observations and background, sketches, maps, newspaper clippings, and reflections – even reflections on reflections. It's unlike the rest of them, which are heavy on sketches, light on rumination.

This past spring, one of the participants at a herbarium-sponsored botanical drawing workshop asked me how to start a nature journal. Now I know what to tell him:

1. Start with a small, inexpensive unlined notebook and a pen or pencil. Small notebooks fill up quickly and give a feeling of accomplishment in less time than large ones do. I do my drawings in pencil, go over them

in pen, and erase the pencil lines. But you might want to launch right in with that pen.

2. Give yourself 10 minutes to draw something in nature – maybe a weed from your yard or a spider in the doorway. (If you're quick, you can go for a bird on the feeder.) If you want to work it into a finished drawing, great. But a simple sketch is fine, too. Jot down your thoughts if you feel like it.

3. Recognize this fact: your first entry in a new journal will fall short of your expectations, so you may as well get that done and out of the way. After that first not-so-good drawing or overly written description, the pressure is off and you can settle into enjoying your journal.

What do you draw or write about? Where do you do it? What will make it a nature journal? All of that is up to you. Clare Leslie suggests taking a walk and collecting something small that catches your eye: a flower, a twig, or a snail shell. Then spend some time drawing it when you get back home.

Here are some ideas:

- Sketch a potted plant or a flower in a vase
- Record the bird species on your feeder or the frog species in your pond
- Keep up with what's blooming week-to-week in the woods near your home
- Check out the life under a log or stone
- Make note of the weather patterns
- Write about your garden — garden journals count here
- If a bobcat passes through your yard, get that down!

People have different interests. My friend Jill once spent an hour watching a cicada emerging from its old exoskeleton, making quick sketches of the various stages. I like to draw something botanical related to the season: a spring trillium, summer aster, autumn goldenrod, or a winter twig.

I wish I could say that I set aside time each day for my nature journal. I don't.

But I do keep it handy, and the time that I spend journaling is definitely quality time. It has helped me sharpen my skills of observation, drawing, and writing. And when I am journaling I am really living in the moment for a short while. The best thing about it, though, is that it has helped me to develop a feeling of intimacy with South Cumberland Plateau, where I live and work and play.

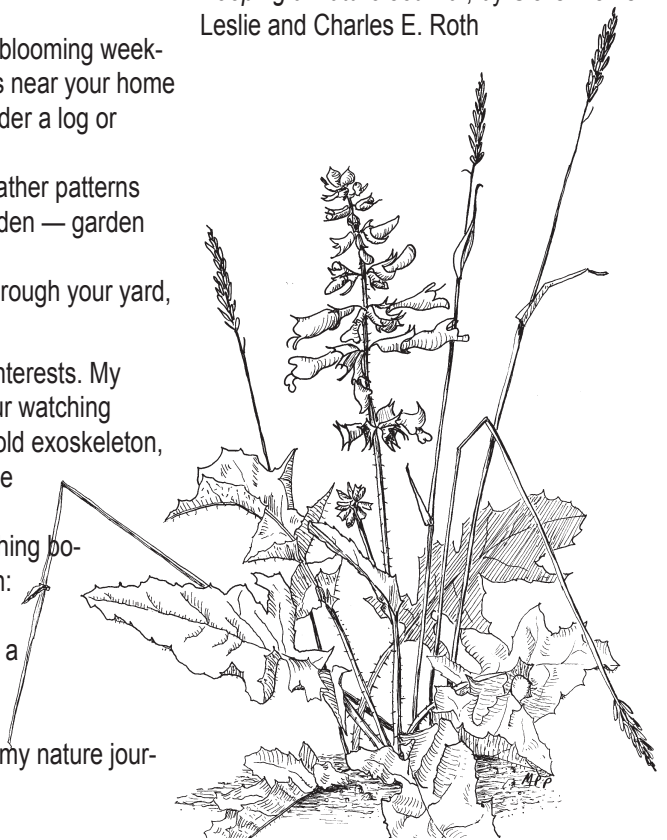
If you have had the urge to nature journal, I encourage you to start this summer. It's easy to get outside at this time of year to garden, hike, or travel. And many of us have more time for ourselves now than during the school year. For the months of June and July, I plan to journal on Thursday mornings in Abbo's Alley. Meet me at 9 AM in the gazebo if you'd like to try your hand at it. Or do it on your own – either way it will be fun. Happy journaling!

—Mary P. Priestley

For some reading on the subject:

*The Creative License: Giving Yourself Permission to be the Artist You Truly Are*, by Danny Gregory

*Keeping a Nature Journal*, by Clare Walker Leslie and Charles E. Roth



# Summer Calendar of Events

## Trees of the Sewanee Campus — Tues., June 22, 4 p.m., George Ramseur

Join botany professor *emeritus* Dr. Ramseur in a walk among the trees of the Sewanee campus, which he has lived with and taught about for many years. Meet in front of All Saints' Chapel for this easy one-hour walk. For background reading, see *Comparative Descriptions of the Native Trees of the Sewanee Area*, by Stephen Puckette with Mary P. Priestley, Karen Kuers, and Thomas O. Hay, 1996, The University of the South Press, available at the University Bookstore.

## Nature Writing — TBA, probably the week of June 28, Sam Pickering

A graduate of Sewanee, Prof. Pickering did graduate work at Cambridge and Princeton before embarking on a remarkable academic and literary career. He is offering a workshop in creative nonfiction for the 2010 Sewanee School of Letters, June 13-July 23. Watch the Sewanee Messenger, e-mail, and other media for date and time information.

## Nature Journaling Opportunity — 9 a.m. Thursdays in June and July, Mary Priestley

Experienced in but not an "authority" on nature journaling, Mary has been practicing it for close to ten years. There will be the opportunity for conversation about nature journaling and books on the subject for perusal, but this is not a workshop. Rather, it is an invitation to set aside any or all Thursday mornings in June and July for nature journaling. Meet at the gazebo in Abbo's Alley. Bring a notebook (preferably small and unlined), a pen or pencil, and something to sit on if you wish.



## Lake Cheston Stroll — Tues., July 6, 4 p.m. Jean and Harry Yeatman

Stroll around Lake Cheston with these eminent Sewanee naturalists and see what can be found — wetland and aquatic plants, meadow plants, trees and shrubs, maybe even some bird-watching. Meet at the Lake Cheston pavilion for this easy one-hour walk. Bring hats and insect repellent if desired, though the insects usually are not a problem.

*All times are CDT.*

Wear appropriate shoes on all of these walks. Risks involved in hiking include physical exertion, rough terrain, forces of nature, and other hazards not present in everyday life. Picking flowers and digging plants are prohibited in all of the above-mentioned natural areas.

For more information on these events contact Mary Priestley at [marypriestley@bellsouth.net](mailto:marypriestley@bellsouth.net). Directions are available on the Herbarium website, <http://lal.sewanee.edu/herbarium>, under the calendar of events.

## THE SEWANEE PLANT PRESS

The Sewanee Herbarium  
Dr. Jon Evans, Director  
Biology Department  
Sewanee: The University of the South  
735 University Avenue  
Sewanee, TN 37383

### WEB SITE

<http://lal.sewanee.edu/herbarium>

### EDITOR

Mary Priestley  
[marypriestley@bellsouth.net](mailto:marypriestley@bellsouth.net)

### CALENDAR

Yolande Gottfried  
[ygottfri@sewanee.edu](mailto:ygottfri@sewanee.edu)

### COMPOSITOR

Sondra Bridges

*Drawings, by Mary Priestley, are of  
the Greenhouse and lyre-leaved sage.*

## Membership Application/Renewal

The Friends of the Sewanee Herbarium support the work of the Herbarium: education, research, and conservation. A \$10.00 annual contribution would be very much appreciated. The date of your most recent contribution is printed on your address label.

Name and Address (if different from that on the mailing label on the back):

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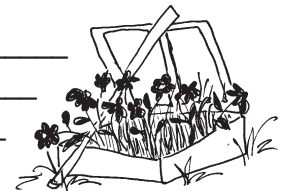
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Amount Enclosed:  \$10.00  Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable to **The University of the South**. Gifts are fully tax deductible.  
Send to: **Sewanee Herbarium**, c/o Mary Priestley, 735 University Avenue, Sewanee, TN 37383

Others who might like to receive *The Sewanee Plant Press*: \_\_\_\_\_



## Caldwell Rim Trail Nears Completion

**C**aldwell Rim Trail, named in memory of Hugh Caldwell, the philosophy professor who founded the Sewanee Ski and Outing Club, will be the first trail in the Lost Cove trail system. This 2-mile loop atop the plateau will feature scenic overlooks, bluff lines, and a level of difficulty similar to those of the Piney Point and Beckwith's Point trails. The Sewanee Outing Program plans to complete it early this summer. For more information, contact SOP Director John Benson, [jbenson@sewanee.edu](mailto:jbenson@sewanee.edu).

## From the Director

**T**his summer, interns Katie Qualls and Nathan Bourne are hard at work, both in the field and in the herbarium, collecting and identifying plants and processing the specimens. In addition, they are establishing sample plots to get an overview of plant habitats on the Domain.

They'll take a two-week break from that floristics work to help with the Sewanee Environmental Institute's Pre-College Field Studies Experience for high school students. They, along with Mary Beth Epps, will serve as counselors for the twenty-nine rising high school juniors and seniors from across the country who will be living on campus and working with Environmental Studies faculty June 27 through July 10. For more information, see [sei.sewanee.edu/programs/precollege/](http://sei.sewanee.edu/programs/precollege/).

—Jon Evans

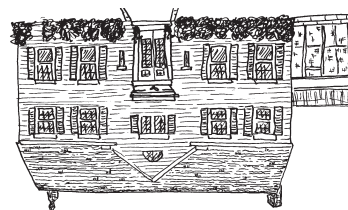
**Sewanee's GreenHouse**, cont'd from p. 1 used the herbarium resources for some of her research.

If you are around Sewanee this summer, drop by and see the gardens and check on the hens and rabbits. For the month of June, the house will be home to the Sewanee Environmental Institute's School of Archaeology. Kate's guidebook is available on the herbarium webpage at [lal.sewanee.edu/herbarium](http://lal.sewanee.edu/herbarium).

—Mary P. Priestley



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Sewanee, TN 37383-1000  
735 University Avenue  
Herbarium, Biology Department

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