



## The 100th Issue of the *Plant Press* and a Look Back at the Sewanee Herbarium Story

Now, we have arrived at the 100th issue of the *Plant Press*! When we started this proud little newsletter in 1997, who would have guessed that this cleverly titled quarterly would become one of the oldest continuously published herbarium newsletters in the country and the only such newsletter in Tennessee? The *Plant Press* has been a source of Herbarium news, student research reports, and activities calendars for almost 30 years. We send it out to more than 300 Friends of the Sewanee Herbarium whose generous financial donations support Herbarium programs every year.

Looking back through the issues is like a trip down memory lane, and it is a wonderful archive of all that the Herbarium has accomplished over the years. The first issue shows a picture of the newly assembled Herbarium staff. When I arrived at Sewanee in the fall of 1994, as the newly hired botanist in the Department of Biology, George Ramseur had been retired for a few years. His herbarium space in the basement of Woods Lab had been taken over by the Woods Lab shop and was in bad shape. After reclaiming and renovating the space, I invited fellow botanists Yolande Gottfried and Mary Priestley to volunteer as curators, and we created a space for George Ramseur to hang his hat as an emeritus. The Sewanee Herbarium was launched and very soon after so was *The Plant Press*, with Mary Priestley serving as its dedicated editor.

One of the first projects we embarked upon was a floristic inventory of the entire Domain. This ambitious project would build from George's student collections, with the ultimate goal of producing a published flora for Sewanee's 13,000 acres. We began collecting plants from all parts of the Domain, exploring remote places likely never before visited by faculty and students.

The Sewanee Flora project, as it came to be called, required that a representative of each new species had to be collected and made into an herbarium specimen that would serve as a voucher for its presence on the Domain. This involved correctly identifying, pressing, mounting the plants onto special paper, and creating a label. The information on the label was entered into an herbarium online database that I had created, allowing it to be searchable. The early 1990s was the beginning of the internet, and we had one of the first online herbarium databases in the country. We later received National Science Foundation funding to create digital images of all our specimens as part of a larger collaboration involving all the herbaria in the state to create a statewide online archive for the Flora of Tennessee.

My students and I also established a series of long-term vegetation monitoring plots across the Domain that provided habitat information for each plant species and allowed the Herbarium to monitor changes in plant composition over time. These plots represented the diversity of plant habitats across the Domain and allowed us to create the first inventory of Sewanee's plant communities.

The Domain Flora project was finally completed in 2015 and published in 2016 in the journal *Castanea*. The Flora publication documented the presence of 1,118 taxa of vascular plants on the Domain. To put this in perspective, that number represented 39 percent of the total vascular plant taxa for the entire state of Tennessee! The flora contained six new state records, 74 new Franklin County records, and two potential new species! Eighteen taxa found on the Domain were listed as protected either at the state or federal level. The publication established Sewanee as the most botanically diverse campus in the nation (a distinction previously held by Berea College in Kentucky), and we were awarded the Windler Prize from the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society for the best systematics paper of that year!

One of the important functions of the *Plant Press* has been to post a calendar of all our upcoming Herbarium events. Every year, the Herbarium leads numerous activities for the community including Domain hikes, art shows, nature journaling exercises, and exotic species removal work sessions. We teach programs about plants for the Tennessee Naturalist Program and other adult education opportunities, and we have hosted symposia and workshops in association with local parks. I received grant funding in 2000 from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Undergraduate Biological Sciences Education Program to work with local schools to promote ecological awareness about our local flora. The Herbarium staff, working with Sewanee students, built nature trails at three local elementary schools and helped children at another put together their own publication, *Felix Grundy's Grand Tour*, authored by Jill Carpenter and illustrated by the children. We helped establish a nature center at Grundy County High School and trained teachers to be able to use these facilities as an outdoor classroom. I'll never forget we were at Grundy County High School conducting an outreach event the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, when the Twin Towers were hit.

In 2005, the Herbarium established Sewanee's first Post-Baccalaureate Fellows program. This program has been funded over the years by my



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## The Domain Flora—a Curator's Perspective

If only the Herbarium had kept track of all the hours and all the people involved in what culminated in the publishing of *Flora of the Domain*! Mostly in the depths of Woods Labs, in a windowless room, an unending succession of Herbarium volunteer staff and student interns/scholars/fellows, over a period of almost 25 years, processed specimens and entered collection data in a database.

Starting with the nucleus of the collection from Dr. George Ramseur's students, mostly still in newspaper, specimens were sorted, mounted, entered in a database, and labeled. At first the aim was wide—the flora of the four-county area of Franklin, Marion, Grundy, and Coffee. As time went on the focus narrowed to the Domain itself. The database that we used kept changing:

first FileMaker Pro and then Access, requiring so many hours of transferring data, for which Alfire Sidiq, C'09, deserves special mention. Then, the authority for the official nomenclature of the plant specimen names also kept changing: first Kartesz, next the U.S.D.A. Plant Database, and finally that used in the *Guide to the Vascular Plants of Tennessee*.

And then there were the marathon sessions with Dwayne Estes to verify the identification of the voucher specimens for the Flora. So many notations on so many labels and revisions in the database! All along, the Herbarium was using a sort of auxiliary database of "plants to collect," gathered from lists of flora in nearby similar areas, which also underwent constant revision. This was a sort of reverse way to

approach a flora: instead of going out to see and collect what was there, the effort was to go out and find what the collection might be missing.

When it looked like the collection was basically complete, the University acquired 3,000 acres in Lost Cove and Champion Cove—good news (more new species to collect) and bad news (more time until the flora would be complete). Finally, the Autumn 2016 issue of *The Sewanee Plant Press* announced "Domain Flora Published!"

— Yolande Gottfried  
Herbarium Associate

# Stirling's Hollow: Possibilities for Native Plants

Anyone familiar with Stirling's Coffee House on Sewanee's central campus has almost definitely enjoyed sitting outside near the small wooded area between Stirling's, the Bishop's Common, and the Women's Center. Whether it's the birds that visit the feeders and burning bush thickets, the cherry trees that paint the ground pink, or the wineberries to be had in the summer, it's a beautiful place to do homework, share a coffee with a friend, or relax between classes. But wait a minute—burning bush, cherry trees, wineberries? None of those are native plants! While the cherries and wineberries are lovely and deserve to stay, (the burning bush can burn, for all I care) wouldn't it be nice to add a few more local species to the mix of understory plants?

That's what Sara McIntyre and I thought during one of our bi-weekly Sustain Sewanee meetings early this spring. Sara works with Sewanee as the sustainability coordinator for the Office of Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability (OESS). The small patch behind the bird feeders

in the Stirling's backyard was cleared of exotics like honeysuckle and Oriental bittersweet and mulched in 2020 by Facilities Management; we noticed that happily neither seems to be growing back! We thought back to the fantastic project that Ashley Fox, C'19, completed near the Alumni House, planting a rain garden of swamp milkweed, nutsedge, and other natives in a naturally wet area, and we thought "Why not do the same here?" So we started asking around.

Julia Stubblebine runs the coffee house and was thrilled to hear about the idea. She agreed that it would be great to replant some of the jewelweed that used to grow in the cleared patch, as well as adding a few extra species like cardinal flower. I organized a meeting between Mary Priestley, Amy Turner, and Sara from OESS, and William Shealy from Facilities Management. It became clear that the native garden by the feeders would just be a small first step in a much larger project! Mary brought her plant expertise, Amy and Sara brought their let's-make-it-happen strategy and support, and

William brought sage advice about making the project work long-term.

The plan for this spring is still to plant the small area near the feeders with wetland-tolerant native plants and shrubs, but with the goal of kick-starting a longer-term and larger restoration project for the whole wooded area. The ultimate goal will be to carry out the perfect invasive removal and native planting project, replacing bittersweet and burning bush with species like wild raisin and deciduous holly. This will do wonders for the aesthetic appearance of the area, hopefully provide better habitat for native animals, and ideally serve as a demonstration for future University projects and invasive removal in the greater Sewanee area.

The garden-planting workday where we'll be putting in alders, jewelweed, cardinal flower, and cinnamon ferns is scheduled for the end of April. Please reach out to [pritchaj0@sewanee.edu](mailto:pritchaj0@sewanee.edu) if you're interested in participating!

— Angus Pritchard C'22



## Looking Ahead: New Herbarium Outreach Plans



Not surprisingly, the Herbarium program of outreach activities has been on hiatus. Wildflower walks, workshops, and events were put on hold or much reduced for two long years. Lately, we've stepped back to take a fresh look at our programs and organize them around a few themes. We think we've come up with an interesting variety of offerings, in line with both the University calendar and the progression of seasons. All events will be publicized through the *Sewanee Mountain Messenger* and through social media, as well as this newsletter.

Springtime is the place to start. At that time of the year, the forest floor is sunny

for a brief few weeks. Spring wildflowers, including the ephemerals, are up and beckoning to the earliest pollinators, as well as eager, winter-worn humans. So every April, the Herbarium will continue to offer wildflower walks, with an emphasis on Shakerag Hollow. This year, Mary Priestley and Jon Evans both gave guided walks through Shakerag on Easter weekend, Priestley on Saturday morning and Evans Sunday afternoon.

The second "explosion" of blooms of the year happens in late summer. The display will have moved from the forest floor to sunny areas: roadsides, meadows, and reservoir edges. We will have walks then, as well, possibly around Lake Cheston, along the Mountain Goat Trail, or at South Cumberland State Park's Foster Falls.

In the fall, our thoughts turn to art as a means of connecting with nature. We'll be preparing for the Herbarium's annual *All Things Bright and Beautiful* exhibit at Stirling's Coffee House, which usually goes up at the beginning of spring semester. For these fall workshops, we plan to offer topics that even the "armchair naturalist" might enjoy: botanical art, scientific illustration, possibly photography, or nature journaling. Participants can then opt to display their works in the Stirling's show.

Wintertime weather is unpredictable, and we thought it wise to offer more indoor workshops, this time concentrating on plant identification or ecology. For each, the focus might be on flowering plants, trees, or "lower plants," such as ferns and mosses. We might take a close look at one of our habitats, such as the upland forest, sandstone outcrops, ephemeral ponds, or cove hardwoods. There's a chance that we'll get out the microscopes, crack open the reference books, and bone up on some botanical terminology.

Altogether, the Herbarium is looking forward to having quite an array of outreach events. Besides the walks and workshops described here, our corps of Block Fellows have begun presenting Plant Fridays, during which they give tours of the Herbarium and of the Webb Greenhouse, offer advice on plant care, and occasionally sell greenhouse-propagated plants. We hope that you will find among these offerings something that appeals to you and that you will join us as we explore together the remarkable diversity of this place.

— Mary Priestley

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research grants, a targeted grant from the Oak Spring Garden Foundation, and a special endowment established in honor of George Ramseur. This incredibly successful program has allowed recent graduates to complete and submit for publication botanical research that they started as undergraduates. Here are examples of fellows we have supported: Leighton Reid, C'06, published work with me from vegetation plots established in Dick Cove on the Domain. Leighton is currently a professor of restoration ecology at Virginia Tech. Nathan Bourne, C'11, worked on the Flora of the Domain and co-wrote with me the portion of the *2013 University Sustainability Master Plan* that pertained to Domain management. Nathan is currently a curate at St. John's Episcopal Church in New Hampshire. Callie Oldfield, C'15,

co-authored five publications with me as a post-bacc in 2015–16 (including the Domain Flora). After receiving her Ph.D. in plant ecology at the University of Georgia, she now serves as the director of research at the Phinizy Water Center for Water Sciences in Georgia.

In 2017, we created an Undergraduate Fellows Program thanks to a generous endowment established for the Herbarium by Bill and Teri Block in memory of their daughter Ashley Block, C'13. Block Fellows are Sewanee students who manifest a passion for plants and serve as undergraduate ambassadors for the mission of the Herbarium. So far, we have had eight amazing Block Fellows who have brought new energy and purpose to the Herbarium. Fellows meet weekly during the semester in our Spencer Hall space that became our new home

when we moved out of Woods Lab. The Fellows Program is a peer-mentored system. Fellows organize student events and Herbarium activities and help recruit new fellows each year.

One of the chief duties of the fellows is to manage our newly acquired living plant collection in the Webb Greenhouse. Right before COVID-19 struck, the Biology Department received more than 200 species of plants from a decommissioned collection at Vanderbilt, facilitated by its longterm curator and Sewanee alum, Jonathan Ertelt, C'78. The fellows organize and carry out the management of this collection, including daily watering, fertilizing, and pest management. They hold weekly open house sessions for students to tour the

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# From the Editor

## Thank You!

In the summer of 1997, four years into Prof. Jon Evans's Sewanee career, we established the Friends of the Herbarium, and its quarterly newsletter, *The Plant Press*, was born. (Several years later, when we were gently informed that the National Herbarium's newsletter goes by that name, we changed our formal name to *The Sewanee Plant Press*.)

The Alumni Office, under Yogi Anderson, C'72, funded the printing and mailing. My father put together the first few issues, and University Print Services reproduced it, initially on a printing press overseen by Jean Ricketts and manned by David Green and the late Tim "Rambo" Carpenter. Cathy Sherrill printed many issues, first on the press and then on a digital press. Today, Erin Fizer runs the digital press, and finishing is a team effort with Tracy McBee and Vikki Hill at the helm. Soon Print Services took over the designing as well, and for almost every issue Tammy Elliott has served as our skilled "compositor." Before retiring in 2019, Marketing and Communications' Pamela Byerly proofread each issue, and now Buck Butler reviews each. Britney Green in University Relations handles our mailing list, and Andrea Johnston oversees donations from Friends of the Herbarium. Sandy Smart, who followed Betty Sue Rollins in charge of the mail center, gets it out to you.

Yolande Gottfried, Jon Evans, and I have done most of the writing; Gottfried has handled the calendar of events; and I the illustrations. Early on, George Ramseur penned a series of articles outlining the history of botany at Sewanee, highlighting the careers of several of his former students. Along the way, talented students have contributed writing and illustrations. And now we have 100 issues. You can "thumb through" every one of them in the *Plant*

Press archive on the Herbarium's webpage. Many thanks to everyone who has helped with this long-lived project.

## The Iconic Persimmon Tree

When Jon Evans visited Sewanee to interview for the faculty position that he now holds, George Ramseur took him on a walk through Shakerag Hollow. Some amazing



trees tower over that trail. The two paused in front of a dark, blocky-barked one, 15 to 20 inches in diameter, and Ramseur quizzed the younger man, "What kind of tree is that?" Quickly and confidently, Evans responded, "Persimmon—and what a tree!" Ramseur was so impressed with Evans's knowledge and enthusiasm that he has told the story many times over the years. I've recalled it every time I hiked past the tree.

This spring, when I ventured into the Hollow to check out the spring flora, I was dismayed to see that "their" persimmon tree had fallen. I dashed off a sympathetic note to Evans, who responded that he had collected a chunk of its bark as a souvenir. I plan to follow suit, taking a sample of that distinctly rectangular bark for our friend and mentor, founder of the Herbarium George Ramseur.

## Hikes with the Grounds Crew Continue

Several years ago, shortly after William Shealy began as the University's

superintendent of landscape planning and operations, he and I began a twice-yearly custom of hiking with the grounds crew. We have been all over the Domain, including Bridal Veil Falls, Solomon's Temple, Lost Cove, Lake Dimmick, Piney Point, and of course Shakerag Hollow. Shealy was recently appointed Sewanee's director of economic initiatives, a role in which he will help plan and manage Sewanee Village Ventures projects. Happily, this does not mean the end of my treks with his former crew. Longtime crew member Wayne Caldwell has taken on the job of coordinating the outings. Our semi-annual adventures will continue!

## Nature Journaling Group Going Strong

The Herbarium-sponsored nature journaling group now numbers about 15. A college student is planning to start a

"spin off" for students. The nature journalers' work forms the backbone of the Herbarium's annual *All Things Bright and Beautiful* exhibit in Stirling's. We meet Thursdays 9–11 a.m. to draw and talk about our observations of nature. If you'd like to come by, please let me know. We'd love to have you.

## Earth Day 2022

A year ago, the Herbarium partnered with the Green House and the University Farm to create student-decorated flags to celebrate Earth Day. We hung them on a clothesline with which we festooned the front porch of Stirling's Coffee House. This year, the flags are back, at Stirling's, sewn together to form large banners. Be sure to check them out if you are on campus between now and Commencement.

— Mary Priestley

# Friends of the Sewanee Herbarium

The Friends of the Sewanee Herbarium support the work of the Herbarium: education, research, and conservation. A \$10 annual contribution would be very much appreciated. The date of your most recent contribution is printed on your address label.

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greenhouse, and they propagate plants for students to take back to their dorms.

In the summer, the fellows have funding to work on botanical research projects with me and to assist the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation and the Tennessee Plant Conservation Alliance (TPCA) with plant conservation projects in our region. The Herbarium was a founding member of the TPCA, and its network of state and federal agencies, botanical gardens, and academic institutions has been a great resource for our students to gain skills in conservation and to find jobs.

One of the joys I have had over the years has been my continued research collaboration with former students. Sarah McCarthy Neuman, C'99, and I recently resampled plots established at the Arnold Air Force Base through a grant from the U.S. Geological Survey and published a 19-year study examining the effects of climate change on forested wetlands. Sarah has just accepted a new faculty position at Tennessee State University in Nashville. Ashley Morris, C'97, and I have worked on a number of projects together including basswood persistence on the Georgia barrier islands and spatial genetic structure of hillcane on the plateau. Ashley is a professor in the Biology Department at Furman University, and she and I will be co-funding a post-baccalaureate fellow this summer to work on a long-term study of sassafras genetics on the Domain.

We have accomplished a lot over the last 28 years! I have had many of my colleagues

at other institutions wonder how we have been able to maintain such a vibrant program when so many herbaria around the country have been closing. They are astounded to learn that the Sewanee Herbarium has never received an operating budget from the University, nor are any of the staff positions official University lines. When I was hired as an ecologist back in 1994, I was not asked to create this program. It just seemed right to want to celebrate, promote, and protect the amazing botanically rich landscape around Sewanee. None of this would have been possible without the dedicated support of so many people over the years.

First, special thanks to my wonderful colleagues Mary, Yolande, and George whose tremendous volunteer dedication helped the Herbarium become what it is today. The *Plant Press* has been a labor of love for Mary Priestley, whose management, editing, and illustrations have made this newsletter happen 100 times in a row! I cannot thank her enough! Next, thanks to all my students over the years who helped in so many ways and whose work we have featured in the 100 issues. In the years that I directed both the Landscape Analysis Lab and the Herbarium, we had help from a number of additional folks including Nick Hollingshead, Ann Bradley, and Alfie Sidik, C'09. Finally, a very special thanks to you, the Friends of the Herbarium, whose gifts and contributions over the years truly kept our program afloat and allowed it to blossom into what it is today. Here's to botany alive and well at Sewanee and to the next 100 issues of the *Plant Press*!

— Jon Evans

## THE SEWANEE PLANT PRESS

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

### WEBSITE

[sewanee.edu/offices/herbarium](http://sewanee.edu/offices/herbarium)

### EDITOR

Mary Priestley  
[mpriestley0150@gmail.com](mailto:mpriestley0150@gmail.com)

### CONTRIBUTORS

Jon Evans  
[jon.evans@sewanee.edu](mailto:jon.evans@sewanee.edu)

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

Angus Pritchard  
[anguspritchard@gmail.com](mailto:anguspritchard@gmail.com)

### COMPOSITOR

Tammy Elliott

*Illustrations by Mary Priestley.*

## HERBARIUM PUBLICATIONS

*Fiery Gizzard: Voices from the Wilderness*

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*Trail Guide to Shakerag Hollow*

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