



Ramseur Legacy at Sewanee

Early on in my career I recognized that there is a special bond among botanists. George Ramseur and I shared that bond. I am grateful to have had George as a colleague and a friend over my 30 years in Sewanee, and I am thankful for the many ways his legacy has helped me in my career here. Here are just a couple ways George’s legacy has been important to me:

In the 1950s and '60s, during a time when the University was being pressured by its forestry program to maximize timber profits from the Domain, George Ramseur was a lone voice coming from the Biology Department arguing for the protection of its unique stands of old-growth forest. It was his advocacy that ultimately led to the University setting aside Shakerag Hollow and Thumping Dick Cove despite strong opposition during those years. George was ahead of his time in recognizing that the scientific and educational value of these natural areas far outweighed the short-term monetary gain the University would have achieved by logging them. In his Founders Day address to the University in 2002, eminent Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson called Shakerag Hollow “irreplaceable” and “a cathedral of nature, more valuable for the history it preserves, of millions of years, than any building.” Much of my research and teaching on the Domain (including several of my publications with students) over the last 30 years has been centered around the ecology of these old-growth forest sites. I am greatly indebted to George for his vision in pushing for their protection.

In 1976, George was hired by the Tennessee Valley Authority to study forest biomass as part of an ecosystem study of two forested watersheds on the Cumberland Plateau: one at Franklin State Forest, eight miles south of Sewanee, and

one at Fall Creek Falls to the north. The key aspect of this study was the establishment of long-term forest dynamics plots that were unique for their time in the Southeastern United States. In my first year at Sewanee, George found the original data sheets for these plots and graciously passed them along to me. In 1995,



Professor George S. Ramseur, 1926–2024

George worked with me and my students to re-census these plots, and we have continued to do so every 10 years since. George’s valuable scientific legacy has been maintained now by four generations of Sewanee research and has served as the basis for my recent USDA-funded research with Sarah Neumann, C’99, at Tennessee State University. Results from this long-term project have informed our understanding of the importance of upland forests to the maintenance of biological diversity on the plateau and the critical role they now play in combating climate change by sequestering and storing large amounts of carbon.

At the University of North Carolina, George was the first Ph.D. student of Al Radford, who was the author of the *Manual of the Vascular Flora of the Carolinas*. George brought with him to Sewanee a huge set of duplicate specimens from Radford’s Carolina flora project, and this became the start of an herbarium collection at Sewanee that I eventually inherited. Over his career at Sewanee, George and his students regularly collected plants from the Domain as part of his Plant Taxonomy course. These specimens served as the initial foundation of the *Flora of the Domain* project that the Sewanee Herbarium engaged in starting in the 1990s. George met regularly with Mary, Yolande, and me in the early days of this project, giving us insight into where we should look for plants. George was a co-author with us when we finally published the *Flora* in 2016. He recognized early in his career at Sewanee that the Domain was a botanical treasure, but even he was surprised when we ultimately discovered more than 1,130 species of plants living here!



E.O. Wilson signs the herbarium guest book.

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Tribute from a Fellow Botanist



Ross Clark, the first of George's students to complete a graduate program, did his master's thesis on the flora of the Fiery Gizzard Gorge system. He is emeritus professor and former chair of biology at Eastern Kentucky University. He also is a charter member of Ancient Mystical Order of Tree Worshipers (AMOTW), an actual but little-known congregation on the Mountain. Clark wrote this foreword to *What if Trees Could Walk*, a Sewanee Tree Book, written by Mary Priestley in 2016 and dedicated to George Ramseur.

How can one put the deepest feelings of gratitude and friendship into words? This delightful book was conceived as a tribute to George's 90th birthday. What it really is for me

personally is reaffirmation of my memory of more than 55 years of George's influence on his family, his community, and his students. In that time (has it really been that long?), my relationship with George and his family has evolved from neophyte student to quiet, trusting friendship and deep affection.

Deep knowledge of landscapes results from encountering the same natural features over and over, viewed each new time within the perspective of perspectives previously gained. To gain the insights that constitute deep knowledge, one needs to see the same rocks, the same slopes, trees and other phenomena which occur seasonally in different circumstances, every year for decades of one's lifetime. When one observes the same place for a long time with a seasoned naturalist's eye, one becomes aware of how and why populations fluctuate, the pace of biogeochemical cycles under different conditions, how the bark in trees changes with age, how insults to nature attempt to heal, and a myriad of other inflections which most people would never notice. When one has deep knowledge of a place, the mind speaks silently to itself each time one enters it. And the place and its inhabitants certainly speak back. There are only old friends here. They are George's friends. And they are yours.

George Ramseur Sr., consummate Appalachian botanist, is a person who has had deep knowledge of many special places for a long time. His greatest gift to students has always been the quiet, persistent transmission of the way nature, and plants in particular, speak to those who will take time to listen. One of his personal approaches has been to revisit special places over and over and over.

It is so very fitting that this book's focus is the metaphor of trees. Deep knowledge is only acquired gradually. That is how trees grow. It is the way George's influence has grown and will continue to grow. Several philosophers over many centuries have pointed out that when we pass from the scene, the measure of us lives on in the way we have influenced others. Knowledge and insights continue in our students and children through their influences and insights, and so on, imperceptibly.

The best thing about George as a teacher is that he is also a comfortable and trusted companion to his students. Few teachers anywhere are ever that exceptional. George, may the Mountain always remember you, and the trees always speak of you. And you too, Ruth.

—Ross Clark, C'63

Photo: Dr. Harry Yeatman with the author.

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hanging on our enclosed back porch.

This same botany class was able to take a week-long trip with Dr. Ramseur to the Okefenokee Swamp and Cumberland Island. Talk about different ecosystems than the Cumberland Plateau! We took canoes from the SSOC (then Sewanee Ski and Outing Club) and canoed the swamp—with its large alligator and snake populations and aquatic plant life. There was a HUGE alligator that Dr. Ramseur and his canoe partner spooked—with a resulting huge splash, then diving under their canoe! Think "Jaws"!

With the help of fellow student Beth Candler, our class was able to stay at the

Candler compound on Cumberland Island. What a treat! My wife and I have been back to Cumberland several times, even staying at the Carnegie family-owned Greyfield Inn. While we were at the Inn (same where JFK Jr. stayed on his honeymoon), I purchased a gold ring fashioned by GoGo Ferguson (a Carnegie descendant). She uses animal bones found on the island to sculpt jewelry. This ring, in particular, brought back memories of Dr. Yeatman. In biology, one of his favorite snippets: only two mammals have penis BONES—raccoons and walruses. Martha still has, and wears, that gold raccoon penis bone ring! That story is always a great conversation starter in new social settings!

I have stayed in touch with Drs. Yeatman and Ramseur over the decades—particularly at

Christmas. Even this Christmas, we received a (dictated) note from Dr. Ramseur.

Martha and I still contribute to the upkeep of the Herbarium and the Forestry Cabin. I was thrilled to know Sewanee received the greenhouse collection from Vanderbilt University. While visiting this past weekend, I drove out to the Forestry Cabin, to the end of the Breakfield Road, where Emily and I hunted for specimens, and by Dr. Ramseur's old home near Proctor's Hall.

I will miss Dr. Ramseur greatly. He had a profound influence on my love of the outdoors, especially botany.

—Stephen Smith, C'76

Drawings by Mary Priestley

Biology Major, continued from page 5

His recollection reached back 40+ years as he spoke of seeing a young man dancing with delight around a newly spotted orchid. The young man was me, and this could have been one of two times, once in the field work during a systematics lab here, and once on the side of the road in northern Florida during our class's spring break trip that same year. But George continued about how every now and then a

student would come along, and something would give him away—and George would recognize that this student would be a botanist. And at that point, with me dancing around with excitement at seeing this orchid, he knew that about me.

Between these two brief remembrances of George, and the gifts of them to me, I doubt seriously that I will ever receive any higher accolades from Sewanee. Since my undergraduate years here, I have

grown substantially in my knowledge and understanding of the plant kingdom, and as I share this through formal and informal teaching, I still strive to learn and discover more. I believe that he knew this and hope that he was proud of his student, and friend. Good-bye George, Dr. Ramseur. Thank you.

—Jonathan Ertelt, C'78
Webb Greenhouse manager

Drawings by Mary Priestley

In Memoriam: George S. Ramseur Sr.

This tribute first appeared in the weekly Sewanee Mountain Messenger's Nature Notes column, of which Yolande Gottfried is the author/coordinator.

My relationship with George Ramseur was a valued part of my experience in Sewanee and, in large part, what enabled me to pursue my interest in botany here. We were delighted to learn that we had a connection with Dr. Albert Radford at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. George was Dr. Radford's first Ph.D. student, and I was privileged to have Dr. Radford as my master's thesis advisor. It was a special thrill to have Dr. Radford attend George's retirement events.

George allowed me to sit in on some of his classes and even to go on his fabled Smokies field trip with one class. He also proposed me as a wildflower walk leader for the Smokies Wildflower Pilgrimage and introduced me to leading botanists there, which has been an

honor and a wonderful experience for many years.

A real highlight of my time with him was working on the trail guide to Shakerag Hollow. After his retirement, George was looking for a project to work on, and so was I. We walked Shakerag frequently through several seasons, making distance measurements along the trail and detailed notes of trees, forest types, and what was flowering when, then working on plant identifications back in the herbarium. I learned so much from him as he challenged me to name winter trees by the bark and to read the land, for example. We tried together to figure out how to use Filemaker Pro on an ancient Apple computer to begin to create the plant database for the herbarium, which necessitated many hikes from his cubby hole in the basement of Woods Labs up to the then computer center in the far end of the building.

When the expansion of the Sewanee Herbarium began with Dr. Ramseur as director *emeritus*, I was again privileged to be part of



the team with him, Director Dr. Jon Evans, and Mary Priestley. The herbarium is now named for him and contains many plant specimens collected by his students of 35 years. His friendship, generosity, and distinctive teaching style are greatly missed.

—Yolande Gottfried
Sewanee Herbarium associate

Pictured: Mary Priestley, George Ramseur, Jon Evans, and the author.

A Former Student Remembers



George Ramseur was first a professor, then a guide in the woods, then a mentor, but most importantly a friend of over 45 years.

George was somewhat of an enigma when I was a student. I had an avid interest in wildflowers and ecology and was always asking questions. He rarely answered me

directly but usually had a way to get me to find the answer on my own. Sometime frustrating, but usually rewarding! He was also a good listener and put together a summer school four-week botany/ecology field course per my request. We went from one end of North Carolina to another, camping along the way. Such a great experience for the five of us!

George and Ruth came to our wedding. He followed along my path in grad school as I studied plant pathology. I then began to research apple diseases. He asked me to come back to speak to biology students in a seminar about my career resulting from a biology major. I was honored—George had a way to make you feel good about what you were doing.

We developed a long friendship over family, gardening, and the natural world. In the 1990s, he went with a group of our Sewanee friends for a long Memorial Day weekend in the Smokies. We camped in the Smokemont Campground where he impressed us all by scaring off a bear. George showed us his favorite spots to observe nature's phenomena: glow worms, landslides, and plant communities. We both hiked and bushwhacked our way through the woods during which most of us could not keep up with George, yet we were all about

30 years younger. You could tell the Great Smoky Mountains were his second home!

As the years moved on, I tried to visit with George and Ruth in Sewanee at least once a year. They were always such gracious hosts, serving us meals and giving us a place to stay a few times. George always could remember people and events so well from our past. He could recount his students' accomplishments and lives after Sewanee. He obviously kept up with many of his students and was a gift to many.

George often took hikes on the Domain with me, and sometimes friends, and he would still get excited at something in the woods! One time he wanted to explore an area and we were on a rock outcrop when the unmistakable rattlesnake rattle was heard. He playfully found which rock it was under. I learned something every time I came by to visit, even the November before he died!

I will miss our visits and phone calls with George and that twinkle in his eye! But I will always treasure our long meaningful relationship.

—Elizabeth McClatchey Brown, C'78

Pictured: George Ramseur emerges from a visit to check on the hart's-tongue fern.

From a Colleague



When we arrived in Sewanee in the fall of 1980, I was eager to continue my grad school tradition of long field trips and quickly found a kindred spirit in George Ramseur. We shared a number of students, including Laura Scott, C'82, Andy Kegley, C'81, and Hossein Ordobadian C'84. There were no vans; we traveled in cars, some owned by the college and some by students. We took George's botany and plant ecology classes to the Smokies. I remember the open closet near his office, strewn with surplus camping

equipment, his rope ladder for descending into sinkholes for his elusive Hart's Tongue Fern. I remember crawling steeply uphill on hands and knees under rhododendron towards the crest of Annakeesta Ridge near Newfound Gap and conversations that were easygoing and wide-ranging.

On a parallel track, my wife, Cindy, found a mentor in Ruth Ramseur. After working in the elementary school library and substitute teaching, Cindy had her first real chance for Sewanee Elementary School teaching when Ruth went to India with George, leaving Cindy to happily cover her class. In later years Ruth, the principal, mentored Cindy, the classroom teacher.

One night at Elkmont in the Smokies, I well remember walking away with students from the soft lights of the old houses into the pitch-black forest. This spring, a former student, Stevenson Moffatt, reminded me of George's directions about standing in silence in the company of a huge tree in the dark. Later, in the mid-'80s, George and I began to visit the Smokies by ourselves to study heath balds and beech gaps that were George's passions. Once, in deep fog, we dropped through the woods from the Appalachian Trail just east of Newfound

Gap, encountering a perfectly bare, slick, branch of Annakeesta Ridge. A cloudburst-triggered landslide had torn every stitch of soil and vegetation from the bedrock and sent it surging across the highway. (Long after George's retirement I was visiting the slick with Structural Geology students to check out the slowly-revegetating bedrock). Another time we camped at Smokemont and awoke to find so much snow that we retreated to the herbarium in the basement of the visitor's center. We laughed a lot when we returned to camp to find that the wet snow had collapsed our tent.

Several summers ago we decided to reoccupy some of our old spaces and check out the effects of the 2016 "Chimneys" forest fires that had decimated Gatlinburg. George was well past 90, and we were both excited about the trip. His



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More Memories from the 1970s



Having been an Eagle Scout who wanted to become a pediatrician, Sewanee, with its Domain and known pre-medical program, seemed to be an obvious choice for my college career. My great aunt, who grew flowers over acres of land, and a professional Scout mentor who knew flowers, trees, birds, and hiking, also encouraged me to attend Sewanee.

I immediately joined the cross-country team which used the Domain for just that—cross country. It was the perfect place to hike and run over its then 10,000 acres. The University also strongly encouraged faculty/student interactions.

I met Dr. George Ramseur after volunteering to help maintain and weed Abbo's Alley. He was in jeans and quite unassuming as we

hiked the ravine. Here was this cocky freshman, who thought he knew so much, being instructed one-on-one by a walking botanical encyclopedia. Talk about being humbled—but in a gentle, academic way.

I thrived at the University and loved the Domain. I became scoutmaster of the Sewanee Boy Scout Troop, under the watchful eye of McCord Yates, carpenter for the University Shop. I ultimately had several dozen boys (and girls in the Explorer Scouts) of University professors in the troop (post). We hiked, camped, backpacked, and canoed all over the Cumberland Plateau. Dr. Ramseur's daughter, Kathryn, and Dr. Harry Yeatman's son, Clay, were in the Explorer Post. Dr. Martin Knoll, Sewanee geology professor, was also in the troop.

As a biology major, I was then able to take classes under Dr. Yeatman and Dr. Ramseur, both of whom intimately knew the Domain. I was also chosen for the University Domain Land Use Committee as the student representative. This was chaired by Forestry Professor Dr. Charles Cheston. Mrs. Jean Yeatman, wife of Harry, was also on that committee.

My favorite non-medical class at the University was botany, taught by Dr. Ramseur.

My partner was Emily Butler (Schultz), also C'76. We were assigned the plant family Scrophulariaceae (figwort). She and I were very serious about this project—collecting, identifying, mapping, drying/pressing, labelling, and mounting specimens from all over the Domain, Cumberland Plateau, and Middle Tennessee.

We collected well over 100 specimens. With the help of Dr. Clay Ross (computer science) and Wayne Adams, C'77, we were able to computerize these specimens, using (now ancient) IBM data card/tape methods. I am not sure whatever happened to that computer tape with our collection listings.

Dr. Ramseur kept the specimens he liked/wanted. At least six of these specimens are in the Herbarium permanent collection.

I kept many of the specimens for decades. I framed four (pachysandra, trout lily, trillium, and dutchmen's breeches) of these for my then-girlfriend, now wife, Martha. They are still



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“The Best Biology Major We Never Had”



I sat down this morning to begin writing another article about one of the groups of tropical plants that I have gotten to know so well, and it occurred to me in that instant just how many ways Dr. George Ramseur has impacted and forged much of my adult life. Not that he worked with me on the wide variety of tropical plant families with which I am now most familiar—that started the year before I first came to Sewanee. But once on the Mountain, I continued with my interest in exploring and acquiring houseplants. And my sophomore year, Botany was a natural choice for a course selection. It didn't end up being my favorite course—Spring Flora or Plant Systematics would claim the prize a year later. Both were taught by George, though as a student of course I didn't refer to him in such a familiar way. That didn't start until the year before my wife and I moved to Sewanee, when I came up to see the first flowering of the *Amorphophallus titanum*, the corpse flower, from the large part of the collection from Vanderbilt University

which I had helped move up here when they decided to close their greenhouses.

This is supposed to be brief, not a gift for which I am well known. But of all the honestly delightful memories I have of George, there are two that stand out most strongly. The first is a second-hand memory, though when I mentioned it to him, he did seem to think that it indeed sounded like him. It was the year after I had graduated with my degree in philosophy, and my name came up somehow in a conversation with a fellow graduate while chatting with George at our first reunion weekend. As it was passed along to me, Dr. Ramseur's response to hearing my name was to comment that, “He was the best biology major we never had.” There are many things that I've heard and forgotten in the 45 years since I first heard that, but it has stuck with me as my career working with and teaching about plants has grown and developed.

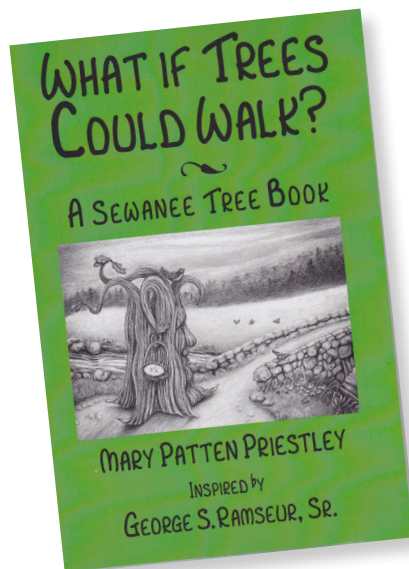
The second memory is much more recent, within the past six months. I had been out to visit George with Mary Priestley a month or two earlier, knowing that his time with us was likely drawing to a close. I saw him after a Sunday service at the Parish of St. Mark and St. Paul, close to a table in the fellowship hall with some friends around. I pulled up a chair, greeting

him as I sat down. He looked at me and asked whether I was up in Sewanee for good at this point, which let me know that more than likely he didn't remember much if any of our visit just a month or so back. But as conversation continued, he absolutely floored me.

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All Things Bright and Beautiful



Where do I begin? In George Ramseur's introductory botany class, of course! Peter McCrohan C'73, who is now a well-known horticulturist in his native New Jersey, was my lab partner. George remembered him 50 years later when Peter was here for Homecoming 2023.

George and I once talked about his philosophy of teaching. “What I didn't want was for students to think I was the most mediocre teacher they'd had! I realize my general botany course wasn't really organized. But I knew it wouldn't work if I organized the material and had the students sit and take notes. I wanted to avoid the trap of memorization. ... Teaching a course is like telling a story. There's enough material in a 101 [general botany] course to do 10 stories. So you choose one tenth of each to tell. ... And if you don't enjoy telling a story, then nobody's going to enjoy listening to it.

“I have not been an experimentalist, but rather a descriptive researcher. That's how we learn: we look at things, we discover things, and we interpret them. My interest in science and research is discovery. One year Gene McGee [of the Sewanee Silviculture Laboratory], Charlie Baird and Henry Smith [Sewanee Forestry Department], and I decided we'd do a project in Dick Cove. We never got started on it. Gene finally published something. They thought it was an even-aged stand and would collapse; I thought it was multi-aged. We discovered red oaks on the decline and sugar maples increasing. This was not in keeping with either theory. Now I think it's obviously

a change in climate. Up until that time the changes were so slight I wasn't incorporating them in my interpretations.

“And I've always considered myself to be a teacher, rather than a researcher. The list of publications and papers I've made is short. My primary interest was to have 100 good students.”

George taught through questions—he

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The Ramseur Method of Leading a Nature Walk

Butcher, baker, candlestick maker, botanist, ecologist, conservationist—George Ramseur’s former students have gone our many separate ways. But we all experienced his unique style of leading a field trip or nature walk—or teaching a class! This song, sung to the tune of “Surrey with the Fringe on Top,” was written in 2008, when George received the Harry Yeatman Environmental Educator Award from the Friends of South Cumberland State Park. —Mary Priestley

When he takes you out to see the trees,
Honey, here’s the way it’s gonna be:
You won’t have a chance to let your brain go idle,
While he’s quizzing you like Socrates!

“How’d this forest come to be?
What’s the land use history?
Why this certain group of trees?
Did you stop ... to think?”

“How’d we know that trilliums grew here?
What’s the chance a turkey flew here?
When’s the last time deer came through?”
The questions never STOP!

He sees connections ‘tween the sun and rain,
The animals, plants, and seasons.
He gets us to looking past the scenery
To the “hows” and the “whys” and the reasons!

Thank you, George, for your special brand of teachin’,
You got us to lookin’ without a lot of preachin’!
Ain’t no finer thing – we’re beseechin’ that you never STOP
With that Ramseur Method of Leading a Nature Walk!
... that special Ramseur Method of Leading a Nature Walk!



Photo: George Ramseur, hike leader to Piney Point.

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daughters, Suzanne and Kathryn, well aware of George’s (and perhaps my) tendency to stray from the prescribed script, gave strict orders not to wander far from the road. We took off for Gatlinburg, had a quiet dinner in an out-of-the way restaurant, and settled into our hotel—definitely the best accommodations we’d ever shared in the Smokies. The next day we stopped at the classic overlook above the Sugarlands where many of you have seen the colors of contrasting species on the side of Mount LeConte. The forest had been savaged by fires, but some of the old patterns were

still there. At Newfound Gap we decided to sample the rhododendrons (close to the road, of course) that were another of George’s passions. He was animated and eager to show me the variant he had discovered years earlier. Before I knew it, we were well out of sight of the road on the Appalachian Trail, and George was in hot pursuit of more beautiful rhododendron blossoms. I realized he was truly carried away, despite his frailty, and maneuvered to get ahead of him, slowly nudging him north again towards the Gap. Later that evening, driving the back hills roads of Gatlinburg with their bare, isolated chimneys, we felt the glow of a fulfilling day.

This past April, Andy Kegley, C’81, Tom Macfie, C’80, and I were camping at the Moore Pavilion in Lost Cove. We set out in clear sunshine for Buggytop, the entire morning punctuated by stories about George: stories of his teaching, of his deep roots in Carolina, of his family. We noted that similar conversations could be taking place among other students and friends on other trails. What a gift to celebrate the life of our friend with a walk in the woods.

—Bran Potter
Sewanee Professor of Geology

Photo: George Ramseur and his homemade rope ladder in a North Alabama sinkhole.

Legacy, continued from page 1

The same year that we published the Domain flora, the University celebrated George’s 90 birthday by establishing the Ramseur endowment for a post-baccalaureate fellowship program with the Sewanee Herbarium. JT Michel, C’24, will be the first beneficiary of this endowment

this coming academic year. We hope to build this fund to help launch future Sewanee students as they explore careers in botany.

These are just some of the many ways that George’s legacy directly benefited my program at Sewanee over the years. However, George was more than just an important colleague. He was also a dear

friend, fellow garden enthusiast, and a kind and gentle soul. I will miss him.

—Jon Evans
Sewanee Professor of Biology
Director, Sewanee Herbarium

Portrait of George Ramseur by Kathryn Ramseur.

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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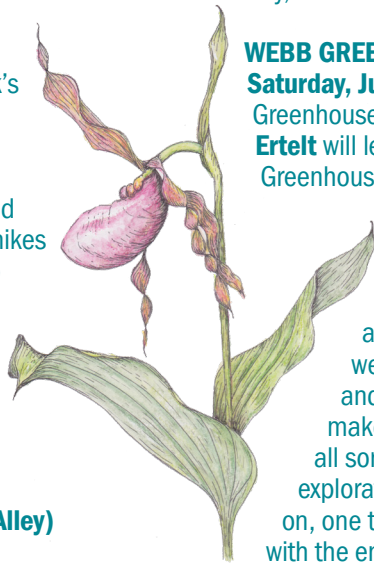


Summer Calendar of Events— Tributes to Dr George Ramseur

PINEY POINT

Saturday, July 13, 10 a.m.
Yolande Gottfried, Mary Priestley

Piney Point is a striking promontory that boasts a sweeping view out over Shakerag Hollow and Roark's Cove. The community of plants that grows on the sandstone outcrops along the way is a special one, and George Ramseur often led hikes here. This moderate one- to two-hour walk begins at the tennis courts at St. Andrew's-Sewanee School (beyond the football field).



created the water system that feeds the koi pond. Meet at the Texas Avenue entrance. There is parking on the right side of Fowler. Easy, one mile.

WEBB GREENHOUSE

Saturday, July 27, 10 a.m.
Greenhouse manager **Jonathan Ertelt** will lead a tour of the Webb Greenhouse. According to Ertelt,

“There is always a wide variety of plants in active growth and flower from different ecosystems around the world, so that we can talk about pollinators and adaptations that plants make in order to survive in all sorts of conditions, an exploratory journey which I am still on, one that was started years ago with the encouragement of George Ramseur.” The greenhouse is located on the south side of Woods Labs science building on campus.

**ABBOTT COTTEN MARTIN
RAVINE GARDEN (Abbo's Alley)**
Saturday, July 20, 10 a.m.

Join head gardener **Louis Rice** for a stroll through the Alley. George Ramseur was for years the Abbo's Alley botanist, “keeping an eye on the general welfare of the plants, pruning, removing and cultivating them when necessary,” as quoted from a June, 1976, article in *Tempo* magazine. Putting his physics background to use, George also

THE SEWANEE PLANT PRESS

The Sewanee Herbarium
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Department of Biology
The University of the South
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Fiery Gizzard: Voices from the Wilderness
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asked lots of them and invited more from the students. “If you can get somebody to ask a question, they’ll listen to the answer. I asked questions to try to get them to think. If you don’t ask questions, you don’t know if they’re thinking or not. In teaching, I tried to put things out as a proposition: ‘Is this true or not?’ It helps them to question authority.

“Students don’t know how to handle a question for which they can’t get the answer.

In ecology class, I’d ask something like, ‘An animal has evolved in the grassland. It can migrate east into the forest or west into the desert. Which way will it go?’”

In his essay elsewhere in this newsletter, Jonathan Ertelt remembers George Ramseur’s ability to recognize future botanists among his students. I’m not so sure that George had me pegged as such, but after that class I personally knew that I would be a “plant person” for life, as I dubbed myself.

I began volunteering in the herbarium when Jon Evans was hired as Sewanee’s botanist, shortly after George’s retirement in 1993. Jon needed help with mounting and organizing the many pressed and dried plants that George and his students had collected over 35 years,

and I was happy, with Yolande Gottfried, to jump right into the task.

Under Jon’s direction, the Sewanee Herbarium blossomed, with George, Yolande, and me on board. Yolande and I began working on the plant collection, and we all started leading wildflower walks and organizing other events. We formed a Friends of the Herbarium group, and I began editing this newsletter. George invited us to help lead wildflower walks in the Smokies as part of the Spring Wildflower Pilgrimage. And, when he decided to retire from serving on Tennessee’s Rare Plant Advisory Committee, he asked me to take his place on it. What wonderful opportunities to learn and share more about the diverse flora of our state!

In 2001, concerned about the loss of some of the large old trees on campus, George initiated the Search for the Big Trees. Sponsored by the herbarium and Tree City USA, we challenged community members to nominate the largest tree of its species, based on trunk diameter. George’s daughter Kathryn designed a logo for the search, and with the help of sharp-eyed community members, the data came in. George teamed up with alumna Sandy Baird to measure the nominated trees. In all, they documented 55 champion trees,

but more importantly their effort got community members really looking at and appreciating these woody giants.

George and I worked from time to time on a “Botany 101” sort of publication, which I finally penned in 2016 under the title *What if Trees Could Walk? a Sewanee Tree Book*. Again, daughter Kathryn created artwork: a beautiful portrait of her dad and a whimsical drawing of a tree moseying down a path. The book is dedicated to George. See elsewhere in this newsletter the foreword that Ross Clark wrote for it.

I am among many who are lucky to count George as mentor and friend. He loved Creation and was always, always interested in and astonished by its intricacy and diversity. George’s funeral, held last April on Earth Day weekend, was a loving and joyful affair. We sang that beloved hymn, “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” whose biblical source is from Genesis: “and God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Very good indeed!

—Mary Priestley, C’72

*Drawings and poster design by Kathryn Ramseur.
Book cover design by Latham Davis.*