



Rebirth of the ATO Spring

For the most practical of reasons—the availability of water and the freedom from water-borne disease—the founders placed the University here on the edge of the Cumberland Plateau and named its springs for Bishops Polk and Otey.

The first child born into the nascent Sewanee community, Rainsford Fairbanks, was baptized in Otey Spring in 1861. Her father, George, who later built Rebel's Rest, wrote to Bishop Stephen Elliott, "We have a young daughter born on the Mountain entitled I suppose, to be considered to be the first University nativity here. She has been baptized by Bp. Otey in the limpid waters of 'Otey's Spring' so familiar to you and yours."

The site was ideal, but the times were not. The Civil War put the establishment of the University on hold. During that conflict, Union and Confederate soldiers camped at different times below the springs in what is now Abbo's Alley. There are records of the young men writing home, extolling the virtues of the water.

When the University did scramble to its feet after the war, iron pipes were installed to carry water from Otey Spring to a cistern from which it was pumped to a tank in Breslin Tower. A fence was erected around the spring entrance to guard against any intrusion that might degrade the water quality. A bathing tank and laundry that used water from the two springs were built in the ravine below.

Many in the University community dug wells on their own leases and pumped water to rooftop tanks, but for years Sewanee's black population continued to fill their water jugs at Otey Spring. Even after a municipal water system was established, townspeople used this spring's water for making ice cubes. Ice made from piped water was rusty red, but that made from the

The fence is gone. The spring is no longer used, nor is it protected. Pieces of demolished furniture are strewn throughout the woods, glass litters the area, and invasive exotic shrubs have overtaken the boulders.

What has happened? When did people stop revering the spring and its waters and turn to abusing this source of cleanliness and health, this site of historical importance

to the Mountain? Alcohol alone wasn't the cause. Alcohol consumption by students was officially prohibited well into the 20th century, but whiskey was always available, thanks to local bootleggers. And ATOs have withdrawn to the privacy of the spring to enjoy alcoholic refreshment for decades.

So what was it? Prof. Waring McCrady, a Sewanee ATO alumnus, suggests that it was the attitude changes of the 1960s, when the dress code, the tradition of wearing gowns, and other



waters of Otey Spring—now known as the ATO Spring—was clear and rust-free.

Ely Green recounts in *Too Black, Too White* that around the beginning of the 20th century, "The tourists were coming in ... Often the guests would pay me ten cents a gallon for water from the ATO Spring. This water was supposed to be ninety percent pure, equal to Vermont water."

Fast forward to 2015. The ATO fraternity has been hanging its hat in the former library above the spring for 145 years.

"stodgy" holdovers from the past took a big hit. Or is the debasement that the spring has endured simply a tiny example of what the earth in general is taking from us humans? Either way, the spring, no longer required for its life-sustaining value or recognized for its sacred or historical nature, had become littered with trash and choked with exotic plants.

Enter one Sam Seawell, an ATO fraternity man majoring in environmental

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Herbarium Gears Up for Summer Research

“Summertime, and the livin’ is ...” busy! Most of the college students are away, but ask those who are here, and if they’re not taking summer school classes they probably have a summer internship.

Lucky for us, we have our Post-Baccalaureate Fellow Callie Oldfield, C’15, here through June. Assisting her in research are interns Katie Kull and Kimberly Williams, both rising seniors. The three women are working with Herbarium Director Jon Evans on a collaborative project involving Sewanee cell biologist Dr. Elise Kikis and Middle Tennessee State University plant geneticist Dr. Ashley Morris, herself a Sewanee alumna, C’97.

The group is doing a population genetics study of hill cane, *Arundinaria appalachiana*, a species of bamboo that is common in the upland forests of the Domain. River cane, *A. gigantea*, which prefers streamside habitats and lower elevations, is the other species that we have here.

Hill cane has been recognized as a species for only ten years, and very little is known about it. It’s a much smaller plant than river cane, usually about 18 inches to three feet tall. It

grows in discrete patches across the plateau, many of the plants connected by underground rhizomes. Is each patch a clone? If so, do multiple patches represent the same clone? Those are some of the questions that these biologists are pooling their resources to answer.

We are happy to have Ashley Block, C’13, working on her Ph.D. in Integrative Conservation and Anthropology at the University of Georgia, back for the summer. Block will be working with the Herbarium and Tennessee’s Division of Natural Heritage to study the possibility of the state’s initiating a Plant Conservation Alliance, similar to the one in Georgia.

Also, Block will be working with Dr. Evans this summer to follow up on research that she did for her undergraduate honors thesis—a study in anthropological ecology at the King Farm on the Domain. How has the history of land use at the farm—years of raising hogs and other livestock and planting row crops—affected the succession of forest plants that took over once the farm was abandoned? Block and Evans will analyze six years of data from permanent sample

plots that were established on the 30-acre farm so as to understand the role of agricultural legacies in directing ecological change in southern Appalachian forest communities.

—Mary Priestley



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Summer Calendar of Events

Walls of Jericho, Sunday, June 19

Nate Parrish, graduate student at Austin Peay State University, is doing a flora of the Walls of Jericho as his master's thesis. He is looking forward to leading hardy hikers to see this beautiful spot and be introduced to some of its botanical diversity. Meet at 9:30 a.m. at the Alabama trail head on Highway 16 on Keith Springs Mountain. Dress for hiking, and bring lunch and plenty of water. This is a strenuous eight-mile hike with a 1,000-foot elevation climb at the end. For more information, get in touch with Mary Priestley.

Watercolor Workshop, Saturday, July 16

Join watercolorist Jack Baggenstoss for a day of plein air painting. Meet at the Sewanee Herbarium at 9 a.m., after which participants will disperse across the campus to paint in locales of their choosing. There are many options, both on the central campus and farther afield, including quiet retreats, busy gathering spots, and beautiful overlooks, each with its own botanical flavor. Bring your own materials. Participants will regroup in the early afternoon to share their work and experiences. The workshop is free, but please reserve a spot by phoning the Herbarium, 931.598.3346.

Abbo's Alley Walks

Sundays, June 26, July 10, and July 17

The Herbarium is offering walks through Sewanee's Abbott Cotten Martin Ravine Garden as a prelude to the Sewanee Summer Music Festival concerts. Meet at 1 p.m. at the gazebo in the Alley just off South Carolina Avenue for this easy one-hour stroll through the garden. Wear walking shoes.

Nature Journaling

A group meets for nature journaling Thursday mornings 9–11. Come try it out—stick with it if you like. Bring an unlined journal (or a few sheets of unlined paper) and a pen or pencil. No experience needed. In nice weather, the group gathers at Lake Cheston; otherwise, they meet in the Herbarium, Spencer Hall Room 171. For more information, get in touch with Mary Priestley.

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.

THE SEWANEE PLANT PRESS

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Drawings, by Mary Priestley, are spiderwort, the ATO Spring, hill cane, and May-apple.

HERBARIUM BLOG

sewaneeherbarium.wordpress.com

For more information on these events or to reserve a spot in the watercolor workshop, call the Herbarium at 931.598.3346. Directions are available at the Herbarium website, sewanee.edu/offices/herbarium.

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sustainability. Seawell has convinced his brothers that stewardship of the spring is an important aspect of the fraternity's life.

The guys are bringing the spring out of that dismal period. Over the past several months, they have dragged out the trash, released the massive oaks and yellow-poplars from miles of English ivy vines, removed invasive bush honeysuckle, and constructed benches in what is becoming a beautiful retreat. The stream is no longer littered with beer cans and bottles. Ferns and wildflowers, including clumps of May-apple, trillium, baneberry, and woodland oxalis, are taking back the forest floor.

There is still work to be done, but Seawell and crew are up to the task. And this transformation represents, I believe, a sea change in the mindset of the fraternity.

A college fraternity is, outwardly at least, all about brotherhood. Like other students, the ATOs are cultivating friendships and

mutual respect that, in many cases, will last their whole lives. In years to come, they will return to the Mountain to rekindle these relationships.

They are also developing a healthy, life-affirming relationship with their fraternity's home here on the Mountain, which is reflected in their respect for and care of the spring and its environs—the little wildflowers that carpet the forest floor, the magnificent trees that reach from the earth into the heavens and backwards and forward in time, the massive and softly rounded sandstone boulders and outcrops, and the waters of the spring itself. For these guys, a return to the Mountain will always include touching base with this special place. Homecoming will have unique meaning for those who brought about the rebirth of this beautiful and historic site.

Seawell believes that long-term this stewardship effort depends, in part, on the fraternity's sharing the space with the larger community. He and his fraternity

brothers are opening up the spring and its environs to visitors, and they encourage you to come. How to access the spring? From Abbo's Alley, venture up the hill either behind Johnson Residence Hall or beside the Rebel's Rest site. By early this summer, there will be bridges across the streams for easy traverse. Drop by—bring a book or a picnic, and enjoy the fruits of these young men's labors.

—Mary Priestley

