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CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

MORE THAN A TREE

CLUB ACTIVITY REPORT

"BOTANICALLY SPEAKING"

GREENS THAT GROW IN THE SPRING... TRA LA!

PIPPA'S SONG

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MORE THAN A TREE

by Barbara Hallowell

March is upon us--March, when impatience and weariness with winter are epidemic. Sounds and signs and the feel of spring are becoming more frequent, but we complain that the full burst of this glorious season just can't come soon enough.

Now, before the leaves emerge, is the time to admire a tree, not a tree festooned with blossoms or delicate with new leaves, but a bare tree, stark with lingering winter. Now is the time to get acquainted with the basic tree, enjoying the contours of its twiggy outline, the arching and angling of its branches, the beauty of its budded twigs against the sky. Maybe it harbors a sprig of mistletoe or a squirrel's leafy nest or a broken branch with last summer's leaves still clinging and rattly in a breeze.

Looking at a tree is more than considering its bark and buds, its lenticels and leaf scars. It is getting the feel of the tree, the spirit of its species. Indeed, one can even play around with the idea of giving its species a "personality."

To some people a tree is just a tree, something with trunk, branches, leaves, and unseen roots. To them trees are not worth considering except, perhaps, in terms of board-feet or cord wood. But to others, each species, each tree, is special. Each has its own identity. Who could consider as similar the oak and the dogwood, the beech and the sourwood?

Dogwoods seem comfortable and friendly, aiming to please in all seasons. The shapely tracery of their winter twigs will soon transform into a snowy mantle of blossoms. Then summer's handsome foliage will become a spectacle in red in autumn. When the artistic twigs emerge again, we will have nearly five months to enjoy them. Dogwoods in the tree world are like chickadees in the bird world--small, well-behaved, and busily spreading charm. Everyone loves them.

But the oak is strength. One needs only to look up into the spread of a white oak to sense its tremendous power. The old cliché, "the mighty oak," didn't just happen; might is synonymous with oak. And if a tree could be wise, what better candidate for wisdom than the oak! It is a tree of the climax forest, long-lived, dependable, solid.

The oak keeps company with the beech, but there their similarity ends. Smooth, gray bark, often patched with lichen, and tidy limp arrangement separate the beech from its rough and powerful neighbors. Sleek, tawny buds, delightfully streamlined, will soon spread apart and release leaves of the coolest, greenest green--beech green is refreshment. Neat and shiny, these leaves and the regular, classic tree form characterize the beech as refined, organized, composed.

The happy-go-lucky sourwood, irregular and a bit haphazard, grows scattered along edges and roadsides. Though its awkward silhouette rarely merits admiration, its winter twigs sport a rich red and are lumped with ridiculous little buds. In full leaf, plumed with white summer blossoms or flamboyant with scarlet autumn foliage, the irrepressible sourwood, that disorganized youth which is filled with beauty, holds a special niche in the tree lover's heart.

And swamp maple is the tree messenger of spring. A few brief spells of warmth burst its buds, tipping each with a miniature crimson announcement that spring is on its way. Winter-gray mountainsides warm with tints, then patches, of red. Swamp maple is color, excitement, anticipation.

Man's nature characteristically lead him to ignore special things that exist close to home. It is "outsiders" to the mountains who often seem most impressed by that unique conifer, the Frazer fir, which grows natively only in high haunts of the Southern Appalachians. Seen from a craggy viewpoint, surrounded by vast wilderness and seemingly endless mountain tops, its deep green spire creates a sense of dark mystery. It is a tree of rugged, untamed lands, yet locally is one of our most tamed trees, cultivated extensively as a Christmas tree.

Stand beneath a Frazer fir and look into its shaggy branches. Stand beneath an arch of oak branches, or dogwood, beech, sourwood, or maple. What a world of difference among them! What do they mean to you?

A tree is more than "just a tree."



"You'd better make a decision—the continents are starting to drift!"

Punch/London

-----CLUB ACTIVITY REPORT BY HISTORIAN JOHN KUHN-----

President Bruce Leech called upon Peggy Camenzind, Nan Morrow, and John Kuhn to meet with him in early February of 1979 to draw up a schedule of field trips for the year. At a subsequent meeting, Barbara Hallowell, George Oldham, and John Kuhn (with suggestions from the Tullars and Harvey Krouse, met to further consider the educational and social meetings which were well attended in 1979.

Some of these innovations for last year were a lecture in September by Miles Peele on the Evolution of a Flower. This was given on a rainy day at Holmes State Forest Park--a very bright spot in the day!

In October, August Kehr lectured on the Propagation of Woody Plants. The Hallowells hosted this meeting.

November seemed such a good time for Tom Hallowell to present excellent slides on Attracting Birds to Your Yard. A good turnout came to the First Federal Savings and Loan Association's Community Room, which so many organizations may avail themselves of free of charge. (Have you ever told them "thanks?")

Our loyal member, Helen Turner, who resides in Carolina Village, prepared and presented a splendid program there with many specimens on Identifying Western North Carolina Pines. This was our mid-November meeting. Ruby Harbison drove over from Morganton on November 30 to show slides and tell us about Bluff Mountain: Its Flora, Features and Future. Ruby's contributions to our Club are greatly appreciated, too.

Another first for us was held December 10 when each member photographer was invited to show a number of The Best from All of Us.

Harvey Krouse brought a different, intriguing program to us (which is part of a course he teaches at Blue Ridge Tech: Continent Formation and Movement by Means of Plate Tectonics. A good subject for a cold January 11.

And on January 18, our historian, John Kuhn, went over some of the basics that every photographer should know. By means of slides, he presented advanced ideas for one's pursuit of the hobby of photography.

Following are field trips taken in addition to the foregoing:

April 2, Green River; April 9, Boggs Rock, near Liberty, S.C.;

April 23, Bee Tree Lake (these were new areas).

On May 4 we traveled to Crabtree Meadow on the Parkway; May 21 (cold & wet!) we visited the north slope of Mt. Pisgah; and on June 15 a large group drove to Craggy Gardens to see the rhododendrons.

There was an overnight trip, June 21 & 22, to Wayah Bald and Burnington Gap. Pea soup fog greeted us on the Bald, but the next day rewarded us with sunshine and lovely flowers.

Always a special event--the Camenzinds gracious invitation to all Club members to their interesting home near Brevard. August 3 was a very warm day so those who didn't hike the mountain enjoyed the swimming pool! Then, this "Botanical and Supper Club" reveled in a covered dish supper.

Here are some surprising figures: we have driven an estimated 2000 miles to

get to 44 events and locations to look for flowers, and they were plentiful--10,006. We passed 18,764 trees, walked 65 miles uphill and 35 downhill, and 2 miles on the level. We saw approximately 400 species of flowers, wasted many rolls of film, and enjoyed every minute.

Thanks are extended to our leaders of these events: Peggy Camenzind, Sam Childs, Ruby Harbison, Tom and Barbara Hallowell, August Kehr, Harvey Krouse, John Kuhn, Bruce Leech, Julian and Marge Little, Lew Mains, Jim Morrow, Nan Morrow, Teeny Oldham, Miles Peele, John Robinson, Dick Tish, Gordon Tooley, Ben Tullar, Helen Turner, and Karl and Ann Weidle.

Anyone disagreeing with the facts and figures of this report may feel absolutely free to retrace all the distances, count all the flowers and trees, interrogate all the people, and bring a written report with his facts and figures (for the round file).

BOTANICALLY SPEAKING

No tiny seed nor noxious weed
Escapes our close attention
From allium to zizia
Or dandelion to gentian.
We poke and pry and scrutinize
And peer in mossy crannies
And when a slope's too slippery
We slide down on our fannies
We photograph and carry books
For solemn consultation
On species new as we pursue
Our botany education.

Helen Tullar

GREENS THAT GROW IN THE SPRING... TRA LA!
By Jessie S. Grigg
Submitted by Sylvia Wilson
(Condensed from March '78 issue of "The State")

In the Southern Appalachians there occurs an overlapping of northern and southern flora and it is here, especially in North Carolina's Smokies, that the wild greens grow best.

My grandmother left her footprints in the wet spring lawn and adjoining meadow as she trekked to the slippery banks of the creek where she ran her hand into icy water to collect a handful of the dark green leaves of watercress. Arriving back at her kitchen she washed and chilled the delicate branches making them ready to please both old and young

Grandmother also spotted the first greens that appeared on the lawn or along farm fences. There were many zig-zagging fences in the mountains and early

settlers called the greens that grew in the protected areas along the fences "corner-of-the-fence greens." Well known were purslane, polk, sorrel, plantain, dandelion, and land cress (often called creeses). In some areas, especially remote mountain coves, the first edible green--the ramp--pushed its leaves through the matted leaves and patches of snow.

Don't Call Them Weeds!

Wild greens are staging a prestigious comeback and challenge the skill of the gourmet cook. Their variety and quality often challenge that of the supermarket. They have survived pesticides, pollution and other destructive forces. They appear in endless variety and are free for the picking. They haven't been force-grown, refrigerated, sprayed with insecticides, or in any way devitalized. You will find green, leafy counterparts for collards, kale, spinach, lettuce, turnip greens, and such, and your pocketbook will be less flat.

In February and March the subject of the ramps creeps into many dietary conversations. We once had a neighbor whose children kept our lawn free from ramps, which grew profusely in places where we preferred grass. This neighbor heard us speak disparagingly of ramp's potent odor. She admitted that ramps make onions and garlic smell like spring flowers but added that the taste is one of a kind which has no rival.

As you make an imaginative return to the greens enjoyed by early North Carolina pioneers, you will find that many are at their best when cooked in the traditional manner. Others, however, are better adapted to raw salad making. Appealing blends of both color and taste can easily be achieved. Today's cook will be tempted to produce many a gourmet delight--milkweed pods with hollandaise sauce, or pickled cattail spikes and Jerusalem artichokes. Water cress will not only be used as a salad but as a garnish, frequently taking the place of the traditional parsley.

Greens come early and last long. After the early appearance of ramps, water-cress, docks and sorrels, come the mustards, purslane and lamb's quarter to be followed by Indian celery, dandelions, land cress, nettles, plantain, salsify, wild hyacinth, spearmint, burdock and wild onions.

Greens may be imaginatively prepared. At cocktail time try rampkins (pickled ramp bulbs substituted for pickled onions), ramp wine, or Pickapeppa ramp canapes--made by mixing Pickapeppa sauce with cream cheese and finely chopped ramps. The mixture is served on open-faced rye sandwiches.

The imaginative cook will use substitutes for cultivated greens in her favorite menus.

PIPPA'S SONG, by Robert Browning

The year's at the spring
And the day's at the morn;

Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled

The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;

God's in his heaven--
All's right with the world.