The Florida Native Plant Society is a volunteer led and managed organization with more than 2500 members in 25 chapters throughout the state. This year, 2000, we celebrate our 20th anniversary. Chapters were asked to interview some of their special “oldtime” members and the response has been heartwarming, starting with ten wonderful stories in the Spring issue (Vol. 20, No. 1). The following, listed alphabetically by last name, are just a few more of our very special “people behind the plants.”

Photos by interviewers except where noted.

Rosemary Fleming
Charter Member of the Coccobola Chapter
Interview by JoAnne Trebatoski

Rosemary Fleming is a charter member of the Coccobola Chapter. Rosemary was born in Chicago, went to college in Southern California and the University of Illinois, and after her marriage lived in New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin. When she and her husband, Walt, retired, they moved to Fort Myers. Rosemary had worked as a naturalist at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum in Madison, Wisconsin.

Shortly after the Flemings moved to Florida, the Coccobola Chapter was formed (1981) and they became a part of the original membership of that group. Rosemary remembers that original members of the chapter included Dick Workman, Joe Tooke, Ruth Danforth, Mary Burnhardt, a native plant nursery owner named Tracy, from Cape Coral, a man from the local extension office, and several young foresters.

When I asked Rosemary what prompted her to join the Florida Native Plant Society, she told me that her mother said that from the time she was a very little girl, Rosemary was always interested in plants and birds. She remembers being captivated by the beauty of butterflyweed when her family took trips to Indiana and she saw it along the road. And she remembers playing in the open fields surrounding her childhood home – fields that were full of spiderwort, brown-eyed Susans, snotweed, and big bluestem. But her early experiences in Girl Scouting really tweaked her interest in the environment. Her troop leader knew nothing about nature but armed troop members with guidebooks to look up information about the plants and animals they encountered during hikes and camping.

Rosemary stayed involved with Girl Scouts for 70 years. She taught scout leaders and helped them feel confident in their abilities to take their troops into the countryside to learn about the environment. She also volunteered to help develop Girl Scout Camps that preserved and planted native wildflowers and forest plants, keeping the sites as natural and undisturbed as possible.

Rosemary has also always been involved in environmental groups such as the Audubon Society and Nature Conservancy. Rosemary was interested in preserving habitats and in order to preserve habitats, she had to become knowledgeable about habitats. So it was natural for her to join the Florida Native Plant Society to both increase her knowledge and to allow her to be able to protect, preserve, and create habitats in Florida. She was active in the Coccobola Chapter's many events and for five or six years, she edited the

“Florida is more ready now than it was 20 years ago to hear the message of FNPS and to act on it.”
“Coccoloba Jam,” the chapter’s newsletter.

When asked what early activities of FNPS she was especially proud of and wished to highlight, Rosemary immediately mentioned the native plant workshop for teachers that the Coccoloba Chapter presented in 1985, and the display of sample Florida habitats that the chapter did for the Lee County Fair. “We participated in the County Fair for three years and this was a highly successful way to get the word out about the Florida Native Plant Society and to increase our membership. People who came to the fair and saw the habitats were amazed at the diversity of native plants. This was a very big project for us at the time because it had to be staffed by two people for the entire ten days of the fair.”

In April, Rosemary will celebrate her 80th birthday and she is still guiding at the Six Mile Cypress Slough, is an active member of the Poinciana Garden Club, is active in her church, is a docent at the Calusa Nature Center, and is active in the Coccoloba Chapter.

Rosemary believes that FNPS has an unlimited future. “The sky’s the limit. As more people become knowledgeable about the importance of using native plants and preserving native habitats, the more impact FNPS will be able to have.” She also believes that recent publicity about Florida habitat restoration projects in a variety of magazines, newsletters, and newspapers has helped raise public awareness and should assist the society in meeting its mission and goals. In other words, Florida is more ready now than it was 20 years ago to hear the message of FNPS and to act on it.

What does Rosemary see for FNPS in the future? She’d like the society to continue giving awards that recognize individuals and groups for using native plants to landscape and also to restore habitats. Everyone needs encouragement. She’d also like to see the organization marketing itself more effectively and getting more publicity. Another important goal would be to get more landscape designers involved with native plants. Last but certainly not least, helping to get codes and legislation in place which encourage the use of native plants in landscaping and the preservation of habitats.

Words of wisdom from Rosemary: “Use people’s interest and enthusiasm for butterfly gardening to build on and to extend their interest and knowledge into native plants and habitats in general.” Rosemary is a remarkable lady and always an educator.

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**Virginia Girardin**

Longtime Member, Coccoloba Chapter

Interview by JoAnne Trebatoski

Virginia Girardin is a very special, 87 year-old, quiet, soft-spoken, gentle, gracious Southern lady who is an avid native plant gardener and expert orchid grower. She has lived in Fort Myers, Florida, for 57 years, moving from Valdosta, Georgia, where she was born. Virginia came to Florida in 1942 with her husband, Dr. Louis Girardin, who was southwest Florida's first pediatrician. He set up his practice in Fort Myers after completing his medical education.

![Virginia Girardin](image)

The Girardins chose Fort Myers to settle in because it was “such a pretty little town.”

A champion for children and a lover of nature, Virginia has a master’s degree in social work from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. She was the director for the Children’s Home Society of Florida as well as an active volunteer for all sorts of community groups, including the Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, the Orchid Society, and scout troops. She taught Sunday school for almost fifty years. She is still a member of the local foster care advisory board as well as a member of the Coccoloba Chapter.

Now you might be thinking, “Well sure, that’s easy for a doctor’s wife.” But Virginia did all these things despite the fact that her husband died very young, leaving her with all the responsibilities and expenses of a single parent with three boys to put through college.

Virginia joined the Coccoloba Chapter in 1989 and has remained very active over the years. For several years, she served as secretary for the chapter. Virginia still attends meetings and field trips and until a couple of years ago, came to exotic plant removal and native planting activities as well. Every year, Virginia donated live oak, varnish leaf, dune sunflower, and porterweed “volunteers” to the Coccoloba Chapter’s native plant sale. She dug these from her yard and nurtured them along in her orchid house. She is very proud of the beautiful, huge live oak tree which she planted as a small tree 54 years ago in the side yard of her home in historic Edison Park. It has grown to specimen size and is home to resurrection ferns, bromeliads, birds, and other wildlife. This past November, Virginia injured
her neck, restricting mobility and causing her not to be able to drive any longer. So she has moved into an apartment in an assisted living facility on the Caloosahatchee River in Fort Myers.

Virginia believes it is very important to continue the primary goal of education that is espoused by the Florida Native Plant Society. She believes that people know about the exotic plants they put into their landscapes but they don’t understand how important it is to plant native plants or how natives support animal and bird life. In fact, they still don’t know much about native plants, nor do they know how much trouble exotics can cause if they escape into Florida’s environment. She urges that in the future, the FNPS keep up all the educational activities in which it is presently involved. The need is still there.

Virginia, keep coming to the Coccoclopa Chapter events. You have much to teach us about personal commitment to what one believes in.

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**Alyene Hays**

First President of the Tarflower Chapter

Interview by Sandy Lazarus

Alyene Anderson Hays grew up in Fort Meade, Florida with her parents, a brother, and a sister in a longleaf pine forest dotted with live oaks near the Peace River. She spent a great deal of time with her grandparents who lived nearby and attributes her great love of the outdoors and wildlife to her grandfather. They would spend every Sunday afternoon walking in the woods, for as much as eight miles, or hunting rabbits in Polk County on the Peace River. She knew when and where to expect the wildflowers to come up and was permitted to freely roam the area. Alyene’s great-grandmother was a full blood Cherokee and her grandmother was 1/4 native American; so she’s sure she came by her love of nature naturally.

Alyene was not always happy at home; in fact she took to running away at the tender age of two. This was because her mother and father both worked and Alyene was under the care of a mean, stern housekeeper who shut her up in dark closets. Alyene’s father owned several IGA stores and her mother was the bookkeeper for them. They never knew why Alyene ran away so often. When the Great Depression came, her father, who had extended credit, lost the stores. Alyene and her older brother tried to help by collecting on some bills, but received mostly goods or work in exchange. She tells of going to one very wealthy house for collection and the butler declared he could not pay them anything and before he could close the door, Alyene spoke up and said; “You could give us that rug you’re standing on, my mother would love it.” Her father became postmaster at Pembroke, a phosphorus-mining town just north of Fort Meade. Her mother made silk ties.

When Alyene’s mother became ill, Alyene was her caretaker even though she desperately wanted to go to college. She made a late application to Florida State College for Women and was accepted two days before school started. A cousin came to take care of her mother, and Alyene packed and made ready for school. She had five dresses, including one made of a feed sack; an old pair of shoes, and $5.00 packed into a refurbished trunk. Off she went to Tallahassee. She bought a new pair of shoes to perk up her wardrobe for $2.98. She found a job as secretary to the sports department and soon was able to send money home.

Alyene was the best girl athlete on the basketball, baseball, and softball teams. She was selected to play on the National Hockey Team for the 1936 Olympics, the year of Jessie Owens fame. Her parents did not allow Alyene to go, a decision Alyene had to respect, but she has wondered what it would have been like.

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For Thanksgiving 1936, Alyene came home with her trunk full of pecans she had picked up on the campus grounds. The family and friends celebrated Thanksgiving as was their tradition, in the woods on the Peace River. The men hunted and filled the stew pot with squirrels and rabbits (rarely turkey) and that year they had pecan pies and cakes. After only one semester of college, Alyene returned home to resume the care of her mother.

Ten months after selling her grove to Edgar Hays, Alyene met him formally and was encouraged by both her parents to go on a date with him. They didn’t marry until 1937 because she was still caring for her mother. During their courtship, her mother was brought to Dr. Krist in Orlando and he instructed Alyene to massage her mother’s legs and with this care, Alyene got her mother walking again in only a few weeks. After she married Edgar, he proclaimed in front of their friends that it was a big mistake to buy
Alyene a house. He “should have given her a tent and a broom, because she kept their campsites much tidier than their home.”

Alyene has had a varied past as mother, wife, and worker. Though she never formally enrolled in college again, Alyene took many college courses for her own edification. She was also a beauty queen, and was constantly working with and teaching children along with raising her own three children. She walked her babies to the Livingston Street Zoo and would walk with her cousins from Orlando to Sanlando Springs. Well, she never really walked but ran because, she says, she was as busy then as she is now. She founded Girl Scout Troop 74, and drove 12 Girl Scouts around the Gulf to Mexico City. She was an American Red Cross Water Safety Instructor’s Instructor. She had a pet alligator and once caught a 23-pound sea trout. Alyene worked at City Hall and took the census when Orlando had a population of just 50,000. She is the longest continuous resident of historic Eola Heights.

In 1956, Alyene attended Blanche Covington Nature Study classes in O’Leno State Park as a 5-day vacation for those who worked with children teaching nature. It was there that she met Kathy Sample, an environmentalist and teacher who had organized the first wildflower club in Jacksonville. They met each week and each member produced three herbarium sheets per month. Alyene organized her own wildflower club of 16 people from five counties, following the same protocol of herbarium studies. Her club became a part of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs in May 1976. She was president for the first five years. The club today has a membership of 45. Jo Stone was a member of that wildflower club and introduced Alyene to Bill Partington to help organize the Florida Native Plant Society. The first state meeting was held at Rollins College in May 1980. Alyene was the first president of the Tarflower Chapter of FNPS and has since served in many capacities.

Sam Hopkins

Charter Member, Tarflower Chapter
Interview by Teri Godts

When it’s time for the “What’s Blooming” segment of the FNPS Tarflower Chapter meeting, Sam Hopkins steps up to the slide projector, plant list in hand, as he has done for years. Sam is a charter member of the Tarflower Chapter of FNPS and he is still one of our most active and knowledgeable members.

Sam was born in Greenville, Alabama, in 1917. He attended Emory University in Georgia, where he received a Bachelors and a Masters degree in chemistry. After graduation, he was employed as a chemist in Savannah, Georgia, where he researched the use of resin and turpentine. This career was interrupted by World War II, during which Sam served from 1941-1946 in the Army Corps of Engineers in the Pacific and ultimately achieved the rank of Captain.

After the war, Sam returned to the U.S. and began work as a sales representative of industrial and agricultural chemicals for the E.I. du Pont de Nemours Company in Alabama and in Florida. During this period, Sam married Sara Layton who was from Orlando, and together they would eventually have a family of three boys.
Florida Native Plant Society. Sam was very involved in the establishment of the Tarflower Chapter of FNPS. He served as the initial vice-president and later as field trip committee chair, and he gave many talks, especially concerning the identification of native plants. An early precursor of “What’s Blooming” was “What You Always Wanted to Know About Natives, but Were Afraid to Ask,” in which Sam discussed a single plant with specimens, slides and cultural notes. In addition, along with fellow FNPS members Dick Deuerling (interviewed in Spring Issue, Vol. 20, No. 1) and Dr. Eliane Norman, Sam was part of a segment called “Name That Plant,” in which members brought plants to the meeting for identification. Later in the development of FNPS meeting topics, both Sam and Dick Deuerling began a monthly series relating to the cultural and botanical history of certain native plants and plant families. Throughout the years, Sam has given lectures on many topics, including native ferns, trees of Central Florida, plant identification, and landscaping with native plants.

Sam doesn’t get out and around as much as he used to, but he still gets to the FNPS meetings. We’ll always know “What’s Blooming” in Central Florida as long as Sam Hopkins is at the slide projector.

Grace Blanchard Iverson

Charter Member, Palm Beach Chapter

Personal statement given to Cynthia Plockelman

I'm a field ecologist since birth, was brought up on field trips, have studied biology, geology, and ecology at four universities, and am still researching. Two areas of special interest for me are ecological succession (the natural change in southern Florida ecosystems over time), and ecology of a single species, for example beach peanut, Oakea hypogaea, and the Florida scrub jay, unique to the state and threatened. The Florida scrub jay occurs at the southern extension of its range in Palm Beach County. My scrub jay research spans more than ten years, using color "bracelets" that uniquely identify each bird.

For 41 years we have lived in southeastern Florida: in Miami from 1958-1973, in Boca Raton from 1973-1996, and in Hobe Sound from 1996 to the present. I'm a founding member of FNPS and especially interested in research, education, and conservation. Most of my effort has addressed two goals of the society:

1) Promoting the understanding of native Florida ecosystems and the ecology of their plant and animal species, and

2) Preserving native Florida for itself and to allow people, now and in the future, to appreciate its wonderful variety, to study its qualities, and to make discoveries of their own.

We must understand personally and explain to others that mankind can't build a native ecosystem! Through field experiences, we can promote an ever-improving understanding among people of all ages and all professions, pointing the direction for thinking in terms of both whole ecosystems and the individual species that are part of the system.

Florida is ecologically unique on the continent of North America. FNPS needs to pursue its goals vigorously, for the benefit of people as well as native species. How can we move toward these goals? I see two priority approaches: (1) inviting a sense of Florida’s unique place on the earth by establishing ecosystem preserves, and (2) planting suitably selected and arranged native plants as the major landscaping.

Especially within urban areas, there is a human need to protect native Florida in historic wilderness islands. Purchase does not end citizens’ responsibility. Watch to see that all wilderness values of your public preserves are maintained. We must focus on ecosystems in planning for human presence and for management decisions – conceive of the whole native landscape. Let’s demand and reward private and public planting of appropriate native plants arranged so they support and protect populations of native plant and animal species within native Florida preserves, as well as in parks, and other public lands.

We should invite and seek funding for future study of Florida’s native ecosystems, and their species, including the microscopic life.
We should admit that we know relatively little so far, and management is experimental.

We should insist that preserve planning be based upon sound science. We should insist on appropriate and repeatable surveys, monitoring the effects of any management, and particularly the effects of hundreds of human visitors. At the same time, we must understand that counting people who enter our preserves does not measure the uses and values thereof. The reason is that thousands of others feel relief as they drive by these “islands,” and millions more benefit from the preserves by knowing they are still there! Do you value preserves in Wyoming? Alaska?

We should prohibit landscaping with known introduced aggressive species by initiating political actions within the jurisdictions of all governmental levels. If possible, existing weed species should be removed from public property. We must continue encouraging landscaping predominantly with native plants, for their beauty, variety, and ability to support animal life, including birds, butterflies, dragonflies, lizards, and frogs.

My most significant influence has been envisioning a new lobe of urban land use planning. I conceived of and still further am establishing “wilderness islands” preserved and maintained in perpetuity as natural historic sites, used and enjoyed by residents and visitors for the features these sites protect. Living, breathing, ecological history is especially valuable in an urban environment such as is found in Broward and Palm Beach Counties. My first effort was in Broward County, then in Palm Beach County.

As a consultant to Palm Beach County, I surveyed the county for surviving “islands” of wild Florida, ranking them for potential purchase based upon quality as representative of sub-tropical southeastern Florida before urbanization. Dan Austin and I field checked each location, agreed on all evaluations, and both donated much time to make the report a reliable account. As governments continued to grant increased development, I and many others spoke to governments and interested groups on behalf of a future that included preserves of wild Florida. Continually, I have sought to have biologically sound preservation of the Natural Area Preserves in Palm Beach County, areas which resulted from the efforts of many people and numerous organizations coming together in support of this land use planning.

FNPS has brought our native plants to the attention of citizens and visitors! We have brought into being Wilderness Island Preserves in Palm Beach County, advocated planting beautiful, intriguing natives which, beyond their aesthetic qualities, attract butterflies and birds that enhance our yards, at the same time saving us time and water, and sometimes avoiding a lawn. We have pointed out the danger of plant and animal weeds that were introduced to transform the land, decorate our yards, or came with us accidentally as we moved ourselves and our cargoes around the planet. We have explained the need to control future weed introductions that could add to the millions of dollars we now spend on weed control.

By observation in the wilderness islands themselves, we can introduce people of any age to the components of wild Florida: the plants, animals, microbes, soil, sounds, life cycles of individual species, a shrub, a frog, a spider, a bird, and the seasonal change in the different ecosystems. This experience can be the source of caring, and caring is the foundation for choosing to protect.

A museum can be anywhere, but we have little wild land. The contents of museum buildings or slide programs cannot teach caring, fascinating though the exhibits, collections, and lectures may be. Caring usually develops from firsthand experience outdoors.

Imagine if the action and reactions within an ecosystem produced sound we could hear. We would hear Wild Florida humming, singing, and thundering with thousands of interactions within each plant and animal, among their lives, in the soil, air, and sunshine of an historic Wilderness Preserve, an “island of living history”!

Somehow those who are making decisions on our behalf need to step back from the moment, think of the region, and perceive these values. The future is a very long time!

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Cecil Kilmer

Longtime Member, Palm Beach Chapter

Interview by Barbara Liberman

Cecil Kilmer

This recently turned 90-year-old was born with a “green thumb” and grew up on a Kansas farm. Close to the land, Cecil developed a deep love, respect, and appreciation for all growing things. She laughingly recalls how her father teased her about growing flowers indoors in tin cans and then having to carry them outside to be watered. After business school training, Cecil, the farm girl, moved to the big city, Washington, D.C., where she had a successful career working for the federal government. But even in D.C., there was room for a windowsill garden.
In 1972, after retiring from the government, Cecil came to Palm Beach County and has lived there ever since. She settled on a small piece of land and created a virtual oasis on it. She enjoyed everything from tropical fruit trees to orchids. Everything she planted thrived. In addition to her natural gardening ability, she joined the Rare Fruit Council and two orchid groups as well as the local Audubon Society chapter, where she served on the Conservation Committee for many years. Her attendance at public meetings on environmental issues was extremely valuable, as well as her letters to politicos, where she put her ideals into practice.

In addition to her expertise and affinity for growing things, her lifelong hobbies of birding and world travel took Cecil to places where she observed hundreds of species of birds as well as indigenous plants. Ask her about botanical gardens anywhere in the world – her observations remain vividly intact.

When a few folks in Palm Beach County felt the necessity to organize a native plant association, Cecil was quickly recruited by one of the organizers. It didn’t take much urging for her to join and from that time onward, her dedication to promoting, growing, and loving Florida natives has never wavered. Her influence is felt whether in the political arena, her almost perfect attendance at meetings and field trips, sharing plants with friends, chapter members, and others; and last but not least, her wealth of botanical knowledge generously shared with everyone. If on a field trip, it is a good plan to stay as close to Cecil as possible, for the experience will enhance one’s knowledge of Florida’s flora and fauna. Her ability to raise plants from seed is surpassed only by her generosity in sharing the results with others – with individuals as well as groups such as as the newly formed butterfly association.

Over ten years ago, Cecil moved to a condo retirement community, complete with mono-landscaping and rules about planting around one’s dwelling. Before anyone knew what was happening, there was a bit of beach sunflower here, a little beautyberry there, and then neighbors were pointing out her landscaping. Soon she was known as an authority on plants and invited to serve as chairperson of the Landscape Committee. With diligence, she advised the condo manager on all the latest news learned at meetings of the Palm Beach Chapter, educated him about the evils of some of the exotics preferred by many residents, and helpfully advised with cultivation techniques.

Cecil strongly feels that the most important issue and the greatest challenge facing FNPS is “reaching people and educating them about why planting natives is important. They do not understand the damage done by many exotics.”

Peggy & Don Lantz

First issue of
The Palmetto,
February 1981.
Peggy’s brother
lettered the
masthead which
appeared on the
inaugural eight-
page issue.

Peggy & Don Lantz

Founding Members of FNPS
Inaugural Editor of The Palmetto (Peggy)
For 15 years, the Voice of FNPS
Interview by Phyllis Gray

Peggy

Peggy Lantz was born in Miami. She lived in Coconut Grove, in a little house built in the 1930s. When she was six years old, her family left Florida and moved to Massachusetts. She made a bee-line back to the Sunshine State when she was old enough to leave home and became a student at Rollins College, in Winter Park, where she earned a Bachelor of Music Education in 1955. She served as Director of Music in churches from 1961 until 1989. Today, she is still involved with her church’s music program, and occasionally serves in an interim capacity at Oakland Presbyterian Church, where she is also an Elder.

Peggy is a founding member of FNPS and served for years as a member of the Board of Directors. FNPS began as a state organization, and the chapter in Orlando was one of the earlier local chapters, along with Gainesville (Paynes Prairie), Naples, Melbourne (Conradina), Palm Beach, and Tampa Bay (Pinellas and Suncoast). Peggy’s mother, Mildred Sias, was instrumental in starting the Tarflower chapter and was the first Secretary of the Central Florida chapter (later renamed Tarflower Chapter).
Peggy has been writing since she was a young child. In school and college, and later as a housewife, she sent items out to the Saturday Evening Post and other magazines, and eventually she was published in craft, music, and horse magazines.

Peggy wrote a series of articles on edible plants for the Florida Naturalist, which attracted the interest of Bill Partington [see interview in Spring Issue, Vol. 20, No. 1]. Bill called Peggy and asked her to write a native plant article for the newsletter being put together for the Florida Native Plant Society. After Peggy wrote the requested article about cabbage palms, she took the article to Bill Partington and quizzed him about when the proposed newsletter was coming out. He commented that they did not even have an editor yet. She replied: “Would you let me be the editor?”

So, two to three months later, the first issue of The Palmetto was published in February 1981. Peggy’s brother, Fred Sias, lettered The Palmetto for the masthead, and this design was constant for the 15 years of Peggy’s editorship. Volume 1, Number 1 of The Palmetto was eight pages: two 11x17 sheets folded in half. That first issue included articles by Daniel Austin; Ken Morrison, former editor of National Audubon’s magazine and Director of Bok Tower Gardens at the time; Taylor Alexander, Professor Emeritus, University of Miami; and Peggy’s article, “The Aeonian Harp Tree: Cabbage Palm.”

When deciding how many to print of the first issue, Peggy suggested a run of 2,000. They thought that was a lot, but when the time came to prepare the second issue, the first issue was realized to be a collector’s item.

Peggy also edited The Oasis, the newsletter of the Orange Audubon Society, for a few years in the early 1980s. She then left that to become editor of The Florida Naturalist, the Florida Audubon Society’s quarterly magazine, for more than six years. Editing both The Palmetto and The Florida Naturalist at the same time was a lot of work, but proved beneficial to both magazines by enlarging the network of contacts. Peggy was sometimes able to divert an article to the more appropriate publication, or call upon artists, photographers, and even authors for one publication to submit work to the other one. Most of the time, Peggy had enough articles on hand to fill the publication, but she occasionally wrote articles if needed to fill space.

One of her favorite moments as editor involved Paul Lyrene, associate professor at Gainesville in the Fruit Crops Department who wrote an article about blueberries and sent a note with it: “Don’t make any changes without consulting me before you publish.” So Peggy suggested a few minor revisions, and awaited his phone call for approval. Not only did he approve, when he submitted an article for the following issue, his instructions gave her permission to make changes – she didn’t have to call. Other authors who trusted her, and submitted articles regularly, included a series by Eve A. Hannahs, “Butterflies;” Doris Rosebraugh, “Backyard Natives;” Lew Yarlett, “Grasses;” David Hall, “The Joy of Weeds;” and Dick Deuerling, “Edibles.”

Peggy derived great satisfaction from the covers and deciding what to select for each issue. Some illustrations were drawings she saw and liked; she then went about securing permission for publication. The first issue with color, in November 1981, featured red-ink enhanced drawings on front and back covers. The first full-color cover, Summer 1985, featured “Swamps” poster art by Linda Duever. Several cover designs were from t-shirt artwork by members.

Peggy’s favorite color cover story is about the Red Hibiscus cover, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer, 1989. The printer’s first effort “didn’t look as anticipated” because the photo was not quite sharp enough, so a redo was ordered. The second effort, a photograph by Sam Hopkins taken in Tosehatchee State Reserve, was gorgeous color, but printed upside-down! The third effort turned the photo over, and the final cover looked great. Another interesting cover resulted when a good photograph to accompany an elderberry article [Vol. 9, No. 1, Spring, 1989] was not available for the cover, and with the deadline approaching, Peggy took in a live branch and had the printer scan the blossoms and leaves!

As inaugural editor, Peggy is proud to have seen the growth of The Palmetto from a small four-page newsletter to triple the size, with the addition of color. Peggy retired from her position as editor of The Palmetto at the end of 1995. Her personal copies of The Palmetto are bound in a handsome, hand-tooled leather binding. She is a leather craftsman, as well as a musician and writer.

In addition to being editor of The Palmetto, at FNPS Conferences Peggy inaugurated the book signings, led one workshop on native plant books, gave a slide show, and presented an essay on her wild yard. She also served as Publications Chair from inception of the first conference and has been involved with editing and other tasks for all of the following books published by FNPS: Wild Things, The Return of Native Plants, by Georgia Tasker; “Bibliography,” by Hank Whittier, botany professor with UCF; Planning and Planting a Native Plant Yard, by John Beriault; Butterfly Gardening with Florida Native Plants, by Craig Huegel; Florida’s Incredible Wild Edibles, by Dick Deuerling and Peggy Yarlett; Florida Plants for Wildlife: a Selection Guide to Native Trees and Shrubs, by Craig Huegel; and Common Grasses of Florida and the Southeast, by Lewis Yarlett.

Peggy has authored two other published books. Young Naturalist Guide to Florida comprises articles written by Peggy and Wendy Hale, from the papers for young children in the Florida Naturalist during the six years Peggy was editor. After retiring as editor, the articles were combined into a book and published by Pineapple Press. The second Pineapple Press book, The Florida Water Story, was requested by the publisher and was inspired by the Florida Aquarium.

In recognition of her contributions to FNPS, Peggy received Silver Palmetto Awards in 1988 in “Appreciation for Service” and in 1995, upon her retirement, as recognition for “Outstanding Contributions.”

As Peggy related, “When I was given my first Silver Palmetto Award by FNPS, I announced that when I first started the Palmetto all I wanted to do was be an editor, but after several years of working on the magazine, I also became devoted to native plants.

Don

Don is a native Floridian who grew up in Orlando. He graduated in 1951 from the University of Florida as an Electrical Engineer, and worked for 30 years for UNIVAC as a software engineer.
From the late 1950s until 1971, he worked on satellite launches at Cape Canaveral (and some are still in space!). His work then took him and Peggy to Minnesota for eight years.

After their return to Florida, and after his retirement, Don began his term as Membership Chair for FNPS in 1988. At that time, Don inherited current lists of names of the 1100 memberships, one computer disk, and original membership applications. Don computerized all of this information and created a comprehensive database. He encouraged past members to rejoin or renew. The membership more than doubled (up to 2,600) while he served the organization as membership chair, from 1988 through 1995. His initial effort was recognized with a Silver Palmetto award presented in 1989 for membership. In 1990, Don compiled a 10-year history of FNPS, which was published in The Palmetto, and wrote again in 1995 with the 15-year history. Don “retired” again when Peggy retired as editor of The Palmetto.

One of the biggest changes Don has noticed is in the finances. During the first ten to twelve years, the organization operated on a financial shoestring and the financial impact had to be considered before every decision. Don and Peggy reminisced about a situation in the mid 1980s when the numbers were cut so short for a run of The Palmetto that when the printer spoiled too many copies, there weren’t enough copies to send to all of the members! But the story turned around about 1990. Membership was up and the conferences were doing well. Along with the growth in membership came reduced costs, increased revenue from publications, a prospering Endowment Fund, and donors.

As to the future, “FNPS is going great guns,” asserts Don. “They are doing a lot of things right.”

Together

Don and Peggy came to their present West Orange County home in Woodsmere, on the shore of Lake Lucy, 20 years ago when they moved back to Florida from Minnesota. Peggy’s grandparents lived on Lake Lucy from 1914. Her father grew up here and in 1935, her parents bought property on Lake Lucy, and this property has been in the family ever since. When her parents retired, they moved back to Lake Lucy, and when Don and Peggy escaped from Minnesota they also moved back to Lake Lucy.

Don and Peggy bought five acres in the woods, intending to build in the future, and moved into a nearby house until they were ready to build. Instead they remodeled, and have lived in their home ever since.

When they moved into their house, the land had a lawn. It is now a jungle, with sword fern, beautyberry, and cherry laurel growing amuck. “What I plant, dies; what comes up, thrives,” is Peggy’s observation.

Don and Peggy have always been members of the Tarflower Chapter, and are also members of the Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Friends of the Wekiva, and Friends of Lake Apopka. Peggy is now again editing The Oasis for Orange Audubon. Once an editor, always an editor!

Don and Peggy also have four children and five grandchildren, scattered in Atlanta, Washington D.C., Oregon, and New Jersey – certainly their greatest accomplishment together.

Dick Workman

Past President of FNPS
Author of Growing Native: Native Plants for Landscape Use in Coastal South Florida
Interview by JoAnne Trebatoski

Dick Workman

D ick Workman is considered “Mr. Native Plant Society” to folks in Lee county. He is a founding member of the Florida Native Plant Society and the author of Growing Native: Native plants for Landscape Use in Coastal South Florida. He grew up on a farm in Waynesville, Ohio, where he developed an interest in natural systems. After studying zoology at Miami University in Ohio, the Air Force led him to the Mojave Desert and an interest in plants. He began an active role in environmental protection in 1969, and organized an event for the first Earth Day in 1970 on the campus of Victor Valley College in Victorville, California.

In 1973, Dick moved to Florida to assume the job of administrative director of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation. While there, he initiated the use of prescribed fire to manage interior marshes, the active control of exotic pest plants, and started the SCCF’s Native Plant Nursery. He was active in the formation of the City of Sanibel and served as the chairman of the first vegetation committee that wrote Sanibel’s first vegetation ordinance. He is a vocal proponent of the protection of native plant communities and has advised individuals and governments on the subject throughout Florida and the West Indies. He is currently president of
"Supporting and educating regulators is important, but it is equally or more important that every member of the FNPS protect or restore a little piece of natural Florida in his or her neighborhood and help connect and attach these natural systems into corridors."

Coastplan, Inc., an environmental consulting firm located in Fort Myers, and continues to write articles for regional and local newsletters and magazines on many different aspects of native plants and native plant communities.

Dick has served for several years as the President of the Cocoloba Chapter and also has served as President of FNPS. He continues to be an active member of the Cocoloba Chapter and to serve as a Director at Large for the state organization.

Dick’s most memorable and noteworthy memory of the Florida Native Plant Society was the meeting that took place at the Sanibel-Captiva Foundation in 1979 with Bill Partington and his late wife (see interview in Spring Issue, Vol. 20, No. 1). Dick, in conversation, said to them that he thought that the time was right to formally organize the people who were interested in Florida native plants. The Sanibel-Captiva Native Nursery had already been started. Joyce Gann had started the first nursery doing research on native plants and was making information available to the public. The University of Florida was involved. Bill Partington agreed, so Dick contacted the Arizona and Utah Native Plant societies for information on their organizations, and an organizational meeting was held at Bill’s office with people who were interested in forming a Florida native plant group. Thus the Florida Native Plant Society was born. Dick describes that historic meeting as a most memorable one with diverse characters and opinions.

Another memorable happening Dick remembers was when George Allen, owner of Allen’s Nursery in Homestead, Florida, introduced Fakahatchee Grass (Tripsacum sp.) at an annual meeting of the Florida Native Plant Society. Dick says it was especially exciting to see how quickly horticulturists began propagating Fakahatchee Grass after George’s introduction.

When Dick was asked what he saw for the future of the Florida Native Plant Society, he had lots of important words – I hope that I have gotten them down on paper with integrity and accuracy. Here are Dick’s words as best I could record them:

“The Florida Native Plant Society is always going to be a small group of people who have a deep, concerted cerebral development in the area of native plants as it applies to fixing the ills of the planet. Only a small percentage of the populace can meet that criteria. However, we want to continue to encourage more people to use and appreciate native plants. Inroads will be made.”

“If the Florida Native Plant society wants to have major impact, we need first to involve and influence lawmakers and regulators at all levels of government. Secondly, the FNPS needs to help educate and establish an aware populace to support the ordinances and laws that come out of these governing bodies. And the members of the FNPS need to support conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy.”

“Supporting and educating regulators is important, but it is equally or more important that every member of the FNPS protect or restore a little piece of natural Florida in his or her neighborhood and to help connect and attach these natural systems into corridors.”

Recently Dick was doing some work in rural Highlands county and he was surprised at how rapidly the “neat little natural places” were disappearing in rural Florida.” He said: “If we depend on government and regulators to save natural Florida it won’t happen. The inefficiencies embedded in government will prevent it from happening. Natural Florida has to be saved by private individuals and groups like the Florida Native Plant Society.”

Dick Workman is indeed the embodiment of these ideas and ideals. He is recognized in Lee County and throughout Florida, and well respected as he walks the walk as well as talking the talk. May his words and his example give us all inspiration and energy, and long-range commitment to FNPS ideals. Thank you, Dick, for your leadership.

Editor’s Note: Once again, we thank all of the very special folks featured here for their concern and work on behalf of Florida’s native flora and the Florida Native Plant Society. We are indebted to these and other early members for wise guidance and much toil, providing a strong foundation on which FNPS can continue to grow. Interviewers, we are indebted to you also for capturing for us these gems of FNPS history.

Member Profiles Wanted for Future Issues of The Palmetto

1000-1500 words plus photo

Contact Cameron Donaldson, Editor, for suggested outline.
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