



Great Blue Lobelia
Lobelia siphilitica
 by Chapter members
 Seig & Alice
 Kopinitz

Cathy Flanagan
 President &
 Treasurer
 757-879-1997

Emilia Godwin
 Vice President
 Programs &
 Communica-
 tions

Adrienne Frank
 Plant Sale
 Coordinator

Jennifer Myers
 Stonehouse
 Garden Steward

Marie Robertson
 Volunteer
 Coordinator

**Vacant*
 Secretary



John Clayton Chapter
 VNPS
 PO Box 1128
 Williamsburg VA 23185

Claytonia

John Clayton Chapter, Virginia Native Plant Society



May-June 2025 **40th Annual Plant Sale Success!** vnps.org/johnclayton

From the President: Cathy Flanagan: The History of John Clayton Chapter Part IV



Greetings! The winning design for the 2025 Wildflower of the year was quite creative so I thought I'd remind everyone that there are still many styles and colors to choose from. Here's the link to the [VNPS store](http://vnps.org/johnclayton). The

Mayapple is such an interesting plant, and you can read about it [online](http://vnps.org/johnclayton), or pick up a brochure at an event or potting party this summer.

In part III, we left off with a growing and meaningful collaboration developing with our local Williamsburg, Gloucester, and Northern Virginia botanists and plant enthusiasts. The Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society had, right from the start, encouraged local communities to form chapters. We were fortunate to have the wonderful resources of VIMS and William & Mary to build expertise and attract membership.

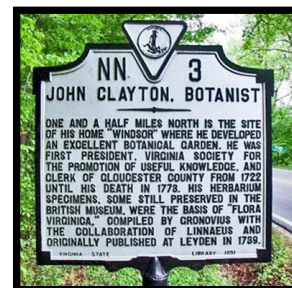
So, on June 28, 1984, we officially became a chapter of VWPS and the first Annual meeting was held on October 18th, on the VIMS campus in the then new Waterman's Hall Auditorium. Barbara Hall of Gloucester had been serving as interim president and was officially elected President along with Jim Greaves Vice President, Jackie King, Secretary, and Karen Bower, Treasurer.

The chapter was off to a great start with many projects and plans in mind, such as

displays at local events, educational programs in cooperation with local schools, and plant rescues in cooperation with developers. A joint meeting with the local Sierra Club and the Gloucester County Engineer was also planned to learn more about a proposed reservoir. Monthly Board meetings were considered essential to plan activities and tend to chapter business.

As we all know, our chapter was named in honor of John Clayton, who was the Gloucester County clerk for over 50 years, a skilled collector of Virginia native plants, and most notably the author of much of the 1739 manuscript *Flora Virginica*.

This road marker was donated in 1951 by the Virginia State Library and is a tribute to Clayton's contributions to botany. It is located just off VA-14, also known as the *John Clayton Memorial Highway* and VA-3 (Windsor Rd). Unfortunately, there isn't a place to stop and read the sign. It is, however, very near "Fort Nonsense" where there are civil war earthworks that haven't been disturbed for 150 years. A series of informational plaques of civil war era history are displayed in an attractive park setting. Since the park has been left natural, it has become a birding hot spot that hosts an incredible variety of species. <https://birdingvirginia.org/mathews/hotspots/fort-nonsense-historical-park>



Continued

From the President: The History of John Clayton Chapter IV

Note: In case you were wondering how the fort got its name, it is because all of the Union attacks came from Richmond -in the west- and the fort was built facing the wrong way. That's the story, anyway.

For a small sign, the road marker in honor of John Clayton is a good summary and contains the useful information that his herbarium specimens are preserved at the British museum. Many of these specimens are over 275 years old. You can access his collection digitally, and I find it well worth exploring. At the link below you can download photos of the specimens and enlarge them to get a closer look.

<https://data.nhm.ac.uk/dataset/clayton-herbarium>

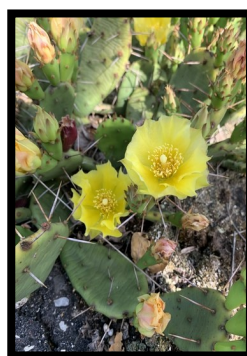
Don't expect to be able to read all of the information on the specimens -much is in Latin, and the handwriting is hard to decipher. In my opinion, the beauty of Clayton's work was his dedication and pursuit of knowledge despite the many disappointments with unanswered correspondence and the lack of a meaningful collaborative effort by J. Frederick Gronovius, who published the *Flora Virginica* without Clayton's knowledge.

Interestingly, I came across an article published in 2024, about how one of John Clayton's specimens at the British Museum was thought likely to be the oldest record in existence in eastern North America for an *Opuntia* species. (Prickly Pear cactus) The translation of Clayton's Latin description on the herbarium sheet is as follows:

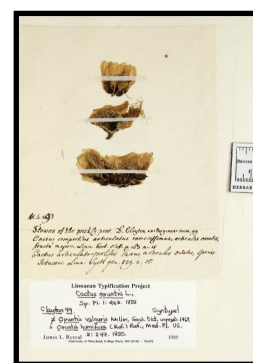
"Opuntia, with a large beautiful yellow flower, stems with pinetree like needles, purple fruit. Prickly-Pear " Clay 99.

The author feels that the specimen has significance to both the natural history of Virginia, and for *Opuntia* taxonomy in general. Due to an error overlooked at the British museum, he felt that the specimen should be repatriated to the United States where it could be comparatively studied and receive the recognition it deserves for being Virginia's first *Opuntia* record.

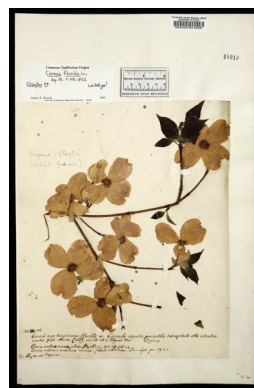
According to the Flora App, we have three species of *Opuntia* in Virginia. The Common Prickly-pear (*Opuntia cespitosa*) is found in only six counties in the western part of the state, Lee, Scott, Wythe, Rockbridge, Rappahannock, and Frederick. The Eastern Prickly-pear, (*Opuntia humifusa*) is the most commonly found species, and the Southeastern Prickly-pear (*Opuntia mescantha*) is considered the one from John Clayton's herbaria. It's primary range is in the southeastern Coastal Plain extending somewhat inland.



Opuntia mescantha



Prickly Pear flowers



Cornus florida
Flowering dogwood



Quercus nigra

While perusing the Clayton herbaria online, I found that his *Quercus nigra* specimen could be another case of a Clayton "first." On the herbarium sheet itself, you can see that the label calls it a syntype, meaning it can be considered the earliest known described specimen. There are 904 Clayton specimens in the British Museum collection and I hope they continue to be studied.

Member Profile: Marie Robertson

Interviewed by Emilia Godwin



The Plant Sale is behind us and there's no better time to thank volunteers and members for their dedication to making the sale the success we all want it to be. Many contributed; our deep gratitude goes to all of them. In this newsletter issue, we present to you Marie Robertson who is our tireless, organized and effective Volunteer Coordinator. Marie is a certified Master Naturalist and enjoys the many opportunities to conserve our natural spaces and educate others that our local chapter offers. She has lived in 5 different countries over 9 years and speaks 3 foreign languages. Marie lives in Williamsburg with her husband and daughters; aside from spending time in Nature, she enjoys cooking, baking and traveling.

Claytonia: What led you to the Native Plant Society and our chapter?

Marie Robertson: My native plant journey began in 2019 when my daughter learned about common milkweed as a host plant in her 2nd grade class. Her enthusiasm for helping monarchs and our efforts to learn more about the relationship between caterpillars and host plants led me to learn more about native plants.

When we bought our house in Williamsburg in 2020, I began removing non-native and invasive plants and replacing them with native plants. I joined the chapter in 2021 and volunteered at the May plant sale in 2022 to deepen my knowledge of native plants and to purchase plants for my yard.

Since then, I have learned so much more about native plants and their importance in our ecosystem and in the culture and traditions of our local Native American tribes. I have used Jewelweed to soothe poison ivy and have learned about historical uses of New Jersey tea, Elderberry and Wax Myrtle. I keep adding native plants to my yard, even as I have almost run out of room. With the help of the Master Naturalists and with donations from our last year's plant sale, I was able to start a native pollinator garden at Clara Byrd Baker elementary school. The garden had numerous monarch and black swallowtail caterpillars this past September, which I showed to all four 2nd grade classes as part of their curriculum about the Monarch life cycle. Of course, I focused much of the discussion on the importance of native plants in supporting our insect and animal populations.

Claytonia: Like many of our members, you are a gardener. What kind of garden space inspires you to spend time in?

M.R.: I spend most of my time in my home garden, maintaining my planted areas and enjoying the insects and birds that my yard attracts. I love the summer days when my Mountain Mint is buzzing with

insects, the butterflies are visiting my Joe Pye Weed, and my other plants host the assassin bugs and white crab spiders as they lie in wait for unsuspecting prey.

Claytonia: What's your favorite plant, if there's one that stands out in your mind?

M.R.: Butterfly weed is one of my many favorite plants. I love the bright orange blooms, its

compact habit, that it is a host plant, and that it is relatively well-behaved for a native plant

Claytonia: What kind of people inspire you?

M. R.: The children that I meet through the Nature Explorers club that I lead at Clara Byrd Baker elementary school inspire me. Their genuine interest in all aspects of nature and conservation gives me hope for the future of our environment. They are also enthusiastic about removing invasive Japanese honeysuckle.

Marie also shared with us one of her favorite quotes which reflect her personality and her values. "It is the encounters with people that make life worth living." -Guy de Maupassant, French author and playwright. She clarified, "I have lived in many places, where my fondest memories are of the people that I met and became friends with. Even now that I am settled in Williamsburg, I am grateful to have met wonderful new friends and people with interest in nature and native plants."



I got back from a three-week trip to a lush jungle in my backyard where my garden used to be. There was not much color, though. The April bloomers that were gearing up for a strong performance when I had left, had already bowed to the last 'encore' with only ripening seedheads to show for it. But not all was a sea of green. Aside from some well-behaved non-natives that I grow in pots on my deck, struggling to keep their heads above all the water that was thrown on them, I was excited to spot three of my native milkweed varieties showing their colors.

The butterfly weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, which has been a reliable performer in my garden since I started gardening here about eight years ago, shone brilliantly in the afternoon sun. Always covered in bumblebees and small bees, with butterflies making regular visits, now it looked sad and deserted. I hoped that it was temporary and the bugs would come out the next day. A week later I have not seen anyone visit yet.

The source of my giddy excitement was the common milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca*. Started from seed at least five years ago, it slowly established and spread in its area but had never bloomed. Last year, a monarch butterfly laid eggs which hatched and developed into caterpillars, but I never traced them to adults (I hope they matured and flew away before I saw them, but I'm somewhat doubtful.) This year, finally, in early May, I saw a good number of bud clusters which are continuing to open now. What a delight to see one, two, or even three bumblebees or carpenter bees enjoying the

bounty. But still no butterflies.

What can top the sight of my common milkweed blooming after all these years? Last year, I planted purple milkweed, *Asclepias purpurascens*, which never did much. What a delight it was to see upon my return a single stem crowned by a sparkling (how would I even define the color?) set of small cups already attracting bumblebees. Well, I have only seen one bumblebee at a time, but I'll take it.

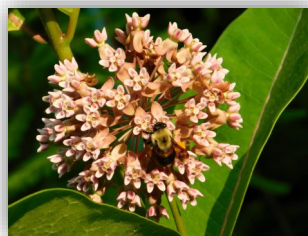
The swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*, prolific and healthy-looking, will join the concert in a week or so, based on my experience with it.

But I am wondering about butterflies. I got fewer than ten varieties visiting my garden in April and these days I only see a small spring azure *Celastrina ladon*, a silver-spotted skipper *Epargyreus clarus* and an occasional small white cabbage, *Pieris rapae*, passing by. I am grateful for the bees and beneficial wasps, but where are the big butterflies?

We invite you to send your own photos, stories, and experiences with native plants and pollinators.

Forward these vignettes to:
jccvnps1@gmail.com

They will be included in future issues of the newsletter, because we all learn from our shared experiences!



Alarming Butterfly Losses:

An article published in the New York Times on April 1st ([link](#)) included a full page of large colorful photographs including some of the most endangered butterflies. The online article is slightly different and allows you to select from a list of large cities (such as Williamsburg, Richmond, or Newport News) to see four butterflies from that area, the number of species included in the study that may be found in your part of the country, and the number of those species in population decline. The study, conducted over the last 20 years with the help of citizen scientists, has revealed an unbelievable decline in winged insects. The total numbers of butterflies have

been dramatically affected, and we have lost individual species. Monarchs have shown staggering declines. Even the Cabbage White has declined by 51%, the American Lady 58%, and the Question Mark 55%. A combination of factors are to blame: loss of habitat, climate change, and chemicals. There are things that we can do in our own yards. Grow native plants that butterflies use to grow their caterpillars, limit use of chemicals (remember caterpillars turn into butterflies), and *advocate!*

*Don't forget to click
the link!*



Data Centers:

All across Virginia, data centers are being built *at an incredible rate*. A public meeting was held in Gloucester on May 28, 2025, and it provided information on the probable building of these centers in nearby counties. In 2024, there were already 150 data centers in Virginia with 70 more under development. Loudon County has the highest number, and they are spreading fast in the more rural areas.

Local governments are interested in this type of economic development. Some of the advantages to localities may be, for example, good for the property seller, and tax revenue (sometimes) or jobs (only 20-40 employees for a center).

Disadvantages of data centers include noise pollution, use of drinking water, more electric

lines, loss of forest/habitat, traffic, and aesthetics (building look, height, fences, etc.). Water use can be staggering (2-5 million gallons per day). Considerably more energy will be required, and Dominion Energy is required to provide electricity for industry in our state.

Sources of energy will mean an increase in the use of fossil fuels, building of new power plants, electric line expansions, with the possibility of black and brown electric outages. The consumer will pay for their electrical use, costs are expected to double.

There are a few strategies that the Data Centers are working on to improve efficiency. Those include improving their cooling systems, using less water, increasing land buffers, and experimenting with noise protections. There are a couple of legislative bills that could guide development.

Join us on Zoom!

Meetings consist of a live video presentation and an interactive Q&A. Our Presenters are experts from a variety of relevant fields.

These lectures allow for a greater choice of speakers and also convenience for our members.

Also helpful is that the presentations are recorded and videos can be viewed at the link below:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/8054025>



If you have native plants that are outgrowing

their space, we may be able to help you dig them to donate to our school garden or the plant sale. email: jccvnps2@gmail.com

Our Annual Native Plant Sale is actually a year-round project that anyone can contribute to in some way. Great teamwork has made this event successful. It is how we fund our Nature Camp scholarships, school gardens, local parks, and donations to VNPS initiatives such as the digital atlas:

vaplantatlas.org

Income Expense Report 5/31/25

Income

Plant Sale Proceeds	\$14,227
Share Member Dues	\$1,058
YTD Net Income	\$15,285

Expense

Plant Sale	\$3093
Nature Camp	\$3,150
Digital Atlas	\$1,000
Community Building	\$760
Speakers	\$600
Stonehouse Garden	\$1,200
P Box rental	\$185
Checks	\$35
YTD Expenses	\$10,023

\$52,562 Nonprofit business checking
\$10,743 8 month CD 9/18/25
\$63,305 Total Assets 5/31/25

Doug Tallamy Event

September 11, 2025

Jamestown High School



We have reserved a free table for the pre-lecture opportunity to meet with the public and provide information about our chapter and what we do. The table will accommodate 2-3 people. We have 3 tickets for those who would like to represent us from 6-7pm*. The lecture and Q&A is from 7-8:30pm. A raffle follows. Reserve tickets at the link below.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/invite-nature-back-into-your-yard-a-special-evening-with-doug-tallamy-tickets-1293033892179?aff=ebdsshios>

*Can you represent us at the table?

jccvnps2@gmail.com

Note on Survey: If you went to the sale but didn't take the survey, you can email your answers to Marie. You can also email any suggestions or comments you find helpful.

mschwiet@gmail.com

Native Plant Sale Feedback Survey

1. What has been your attendance for the sale? First time? 1-2 yrs attending, 3 or more years?
2. Did you find the plants that you wanted? What did you want but did not find?
3. Did you buy 1 or more plants that were new to you?
4. How would you rate the pricing?
1) Too expensive, 2) Acceptable, 3) Appropriate, 4) Great deals.
5. How would you rate the following
(1 is poor, 5 is excellent)
Plant variety and price
Plant categories/organization
Plant holding area/efficiency
Help/knowledge of volunteers
Display area/information

This valuable survey was conducted by Marie Robertson during the sale. Marie is the volunteer coordinator for the plant sale and offers capable help with most any task. The Plant Sale thoroughly reviewed and discussed the responses to the survey which will no doubt help us at our next sale.

Adrienne Frank, Plant Sale Chair and longtime volunteer with many local organizations, had prepared for us an outline of everything that needs to be done and when. It is the start of a much needed manual for the plant sale.

We actually had a wonderful time at this meeting. Kim Owens let us meet at her house and provided lots of delicious snacks, and wonderful entertainment by her adorable tea-cup chihuahua. It doesn't feel like "work" when people are so pleasant.

Cathy Flanagan