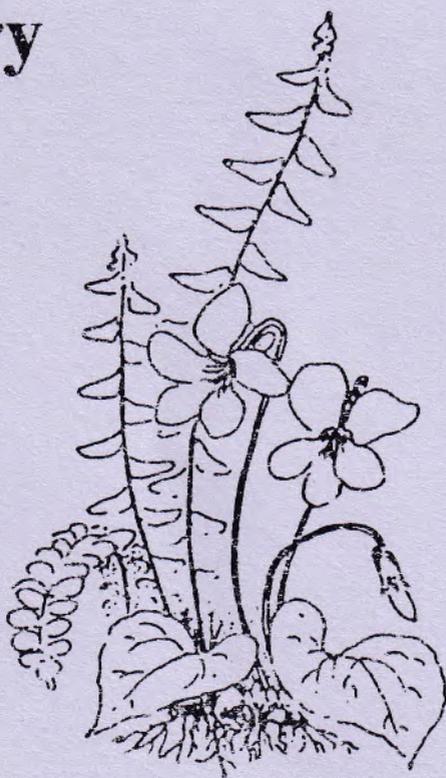


Potowmack Chapter
Virginia Native Plant Society

1982 - 2002

A
History



PAST PRESIDENTS

Mary Painter	1982 - 1984
Mary Pockman	1984 - 1986
Ed Ballard	1986 - 1988
Karen Sorenson	1988 - 1989
Beth Holloway	1989 - 1990
Anne Haynes	1990 - 1993
Nancy Luria	1993 - 1995
Mark Etheridge	1995 - 1996
Alonso Abugattas	1996 - 1997
Norma Vermillion	1997 - 1998
Marianne Mooney	1998 -

1982-2002

POTOWMACK CHAPTER CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

In the early 1980's, a concerned young woman named Mary Painter, upset that the nursery where she worked was selling wild-gathered plants, contacted Fairfax County officials about the problem. They asked if she would conduct a series of meetings at county nature centers. According to the late Ed Ballard writing in *Potowmack News* 10 years later, "she stimulated a core group of volunteers to organize the Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society (VWPS)*. Mary became the first president of the new organization." Fairfax County honored Mary with a 1982 Volunteer Activist Award for single-handedly starting VWPS.

In June 1982, VWPS published its first newsletter, edited by Norma Vermillion and called

*In September 1988 at the state annual meeting, members voted to change the name of the Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society to the Virginia Native Plant Society so as to reflect the need to support and preserve all native floras.

simply "Newsletter." In July the new Society became a corporation. Setting a trend that would continue on and off for the next 20 years, the group began a program of plant rescues. Also during those early months, an agreement of cooperation with Green Spring Gardens Park was forged, including plans for propagation beds. The first plant sale was held at the Society's Annual Meeting on Saturday, October 16. As of August 1982, the new group already had 161 members.

In July, Mary Painter met with representatives of another new organization, the Prince William Wildflower Society, to discuss merging the two groups and forming chapters. Potowmack (originally called Alpha Chapter) was the first chapter formed and Prince William followed not long after. Potowmack Chapter's name, according to Ed Ballard, "was chosen as a variant spelling of George Washington's Patowmack Canal at Great Falls to relate its territory to the upper tidewater river." On November 22, 1982, the first board meeting of the newly chartered Potowmack Chapter of the Virginia Wildflower Preservation Society (VWPS) was held at a Presbyterian Church in Annandale. Our chapter, with approximately 459 members, is now the largest in an organization of 11 chapters statewide.

The overall aims of the new organization and its chapters were, and have remained, to "further appreciation and conservation of Virginia's native plants and habitats." How to achieve these ends? From early days a number of chapter activities and structures were initiated that have continued over time. These have included plant propagation, sales, and donations; creation of the native plant trail and support of an intern at Green Spring; guided walks and slide lectures; garden tours; surveys and rescues; cooperation with other environmental advocacy groups; invasive recognition and removal; site registries; and a newsletter.

Plant Propagation, Sales, and Donations. An organization needs money to support its activities, and the work of the Propagation and Sales Committee has done admirably as a source of chapter funding. The first plant sale sponsored by the new chapter was held in the spring of 1983. Plans for the sale were announced in the very first issue of Potowmack News, Vol 1, # 1. Mary Pockman, who was propagation chairman at the time, asked for donations from members as the new beds being created at Green Spring would not be ready in time. They sold 500 plants of 70 species and cleared

\$603. In 1986, 750 plants were for sale on the Mother's Day plant sale at Green Spring and by 1993, 10 years after the chapter was founded, more than 1,100 plants were sold at the spring sale and hundreds more in the fall, as propagation chairman Gerry Pratt proudly announced in her newsletter summary. These substantial numbers have continued up to the present. Many plants have also been donated to gardens at schools, libraries, parks, nursing homes, and churches. Propagation bed workers have also been given many plants, with the tacit understanding that as they grew and spread, extras might be returned to the chapter as plant sale material.

Besides funding for the chapter, the propagation beds have served as a native gardening apprenticeship for numerous members who took advantage of the opportunity to help at the beds over the years. The several chairmen who have organized the work there have given tremendous amounts of their time, talents, and personal expertise to the task and to the chapter. Starting from a tiny piece of the landscape of Green Spring, plants raised at the propagation beds have spread throughout the Northern Virginia community, returning to our increasingly urban landscapes

something that had been destroyed and helping to restore an ecology that supports native species of all kinds.

The Native Plant Trail at Green Spring Gardens Park. In 1987 a site was chosen to be the location of the long-planned Native Plant Trail at Green Spring. Park Manager Don Humphrey laid out section 1 of the trail. Brenda Skarphol, a charter member and the park horticulturalist, was program coordinator for the chapter. Park Authority workers did the grading and surfacing and Don drew up a list of plants to fill the environmental conditions along the trail. Plants were acquired from rescues and from the propagation beds. The new trail was one of three gardens visited during our 1990 spring Garden Tour. The flyer sent to members that year said that the trail "is a good example of chapter activities in action."

In 1991 an even more ambitious plan was envisioned when the chapter voted to hire plant expert Cole Burrell, a former curator at the National Arboretum, to design a master plan for the 2-acre site. The plan included plant combinations by habitat, possible backyard landscapes, and more. Volunteer

workdays were scheduled twice a week throughout the summer. By 1992 the trail had 225 species, and arrangements were made for a brochure, signs, a bench, and irrigation faucets. The chapter won a Fairfax County Park Service award that year in recognition of its contribution to Green Spring. In 1994-5 there were 400 species of plants, and walls made of western Maryland stone purchased by the chapter were constructed. For many years we have paid the salary of a horticultural intern who has helped with special trail projects and maintenance. Today the trail is an easily accessed way to show people the beauty of plants in their natural environments.

Guided Walks and Slide Programs. From the beginning and through the years, the chapter has had the benefit of trained botanists and other professionals who have contributed their considerable expertise to help members learn about native plants in wild places. Familiar names such as Marion Blois Lobstein, Cris Fleming, Stan Shetler, and many others have conducted spring and summer tours and/or slide programs to show off Northern Virginia's rich heritage of natural wildflower communities. Favorite expeditions have

been to see natives growing in the parks along the shores of the Potomac River--Riverbend, Turkey Run, Scott's Run, Great Falls--and yearly, in the spring, to see the masses of trilliums blooming at the Thompson Wildlife Management Area in Linden, Virginia.

Local Garden Tours. One of the treats our chapter has offered is the opportunity to visit members' yards to see how they have used native plants to create a garden--some worked on for years, some newly created, all works in progress. Visitors see just how well native plants can work in a home landscape and get new ideas for plant combinations and placement for their own yards. The first tour was held in 1986. Tickets were \$8 and space on two 20-passenger minibuses was quickly sold out. A *Washington Post* reporter was there and published a story on the McLean and Great Falls gardens featured. Tours have continued intermittently since. Our current garden tour chairman, Billie Trump, remembers some of the highlights of past tours: "Don Humphrey's expanse of blue Jacob's ladder and yellow wood poppy, Tiana Camfiord's endless vista of *Phlox stolonifera*, Laurel Scull's foamflower and ferns that went on and on, Laura Beaty's hillside of *Senecio* and

the lovely woods at Gerry and Dust Pratt's and Trish Hendershot's homes, Don Hyatt's trillium and lady slippers, and Paul Kovenock's fantastic hillside."

Identification and Removal of Invasive Aliens.

The damage invasive alien plants can cause has been a problem recognized by the chapter since the beginning. Early on, attention was paid to the removal of common landscape plants such as English ivy, which often escaped from people's yards and invaded public parks. "Pull parties" were arranged at sites like Theodore Roosevelt Island where after a bout of ivy removal, volunteers were later cheered to find that trout lily and Dutchmen's breeches had reappeared. However, roughly 10 years ago the issue of invasives really came to the fore and became a dominant concern of the chapter as well as the Society and many other local, state, and national groups. There seems to be an explosion of invasives--way beyond ivy--and more and more effort has been spent informing members and the public about which plants to avoid buying and growing and which ones need to be removed altogether. In a recent newsletter, one-third of the articles were concerned with the issue of invasives. The chapter uses



Trillium grandiflorum
Great white trillium
Illustration by
Barbara Stewart

an educational slide show on invasives to teach other groups about invasive plants. Pull parties have increased in frequency and broadened to include multiple species--mile-a-minute plant, porcelain berry, kudzu, wisteria, multiflora rose, stilt grass, and on and on. Chapter members have become very active in supporting community efforts to rid public areas of invasives, such as at Four Mile Run in Arlington.

Surveys and Rescues. When the ownership of land is changing or land is about to be developed, there is a sometimes a need to survey its native flora and/or "rescue" its native plants. One of the first surveys was undertaken in 1984 by Al Studholme and his Botany

is a sometimes a need to survey its native flora and/or “rescue” its native plants. One of the first surveys was undertaken in 1984 by Al Studholme and his Botany Committee at a property overlooking the Potomac River that had been bequeathed to the Audubon Society. In 1986 members surveyed a 100-acre tract along Leesburg Pike and later rescued the plants. Much more recently, Kathleen Kust and a crew of volunteers worked for several years to survey the Lorton prison site as decisions were being made about its future. In 1999, Margaret Chatham updated a plant survey of the Nature Conservancy’s Fraser Preserve, and wrote about it in our newsletter.

When plants need to be rescued from development sites, our members have also been there to help. These plants are donated, never sold. At the very first chapter board meeting in 1982, the Rescue Committee chairman reported on a rescue of eight lady’s slippers from Lady Slipper Lane, and the Landscape Committee reported that a site at Green Spring had been prepared for their receipt. In 1984, *Potowmack News* listed a summer-long schedule of rescue work at the Fair Lakes tract. In ’86, Fair Lakes was still on the agenda; members led by rescue chair Arie Bouter replanted them

at Woodlawn Plantation with other public sites lined up to receive plants as well. By 1987 the board voted to make Green Spring the sole repository for rescued wildflowers because wide siting of plants was not working out well. In 1996 we were asked to remove pink lady-slippers from Andrews Air Force Base. Recently Barbara Farron and members of several other environmental groups have been actively rescuing plants at an about-to-be developed tract at Reston.

Cooperation With Other Organizations. There are lots of opportunities to promote native plants beyond our chapter activities and our members have taken advantage of them. Many if not most members belong to more than one environmental group. We have supported and publicized their events as they have ours. We have shared speakers and answered their calls for volunteers. A small sample, culled from old newsletters, shows a few of the specifics: In 1986 we joined 13 other environmental organizations to help Save Huntley Meadows from a proposed highway. In 1990 we worked with VDOT and the McLean Citizen’s Association to promote wildflower plantings along Northern Virginia roadways. In 1993 we helped expand

a butterfly garden at Potomac Overlook Regional Park. In 1998 we cooperated with Great Falls Park in a "Do Not Pick the Wildflowers" poster contest, with the winners displayed at the park that summer. We had a joint field trip with the Maryland Native Plant Society in 1999. We have taken our educational display board to the Wildlife Art and Photography Shows as well as to educational events on the National Mall and at local parks. We gave money to Fairfax ReLeaf for tree planting and to the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust for land conservation. The chapter regularly gives slide shows to garden clubs and other organizations. We have promoted nurseries that offer native plants and landscape designers that use natives. We publicize the courses given by Marion Lobstein and Cris Fleming for the Smithsonian, Audubon, and NOVA Community College and the wildflower walks sponsored by local nature centers. This list could go on and on....

The Site Registry Program. VNPS has a statewide program, begun in 1990, of voluntary "registration" of sites with regional or statewide significance because of their special rare native plants. While not a legal designation, the registry draws

attention to these sites and helps to ensure their survival. Of the 14 official sites statewide, Potowmack Chapter sponsored two. In 1994, Huntley Meadows, Riverbend Park, and Scott's Run Nature Preserve together became our first sites; Mary Pockman and Jane Collins undertook to make the necessary applications. Runnymede Park in the town of Herndon became a Registry Site in 1999, thanks to the efforts of Rod Simmons and others who worked on that project.

Potowmack News. From Volume 1 in '82 to Volume 20 in '02, the *Potowmack News* has existed to tell members what's going on. Besides listing chapter activities, it has served an educational function, offering articles on botany, how to grow natives, how to create habitat in your yard, the latest topics in conservation, descriptions of parks and other wild areas, and reviews of books. It posts opportunities to volunteer, courses to take and events sponsored by other groups. A few of our members who are artists--notably Barbara Stewart, who designed the chapter logo of wood violet and ebony spleenwort--have contributed original wildflower drawings to grace its pages and help in wildflower recognition. In its early years the newsletter was a cut

and paste job. More recently it has been produced on a computer, and with the advent of scanners, it has become relatively easy to add our own photographs. Potowmack News became available to a wider audience when the state Society began posting chapter newsletters on its website a few years ago.

Imagining the Future. What can we expect to be the nature of the Potowmack Chapter in 2022, another 20 years from now? Our mission of education and conservation will still be the focal point of our organization. Land conservation will become more important than rescues as undeveloped land disappears. We will become more involved in stewardship and promotion of the native plants in our local parks and other public spaces. We will continue to support organizations such as the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust and others like it whose aim is to save habitat.

The issues surrounding invasive plants will not go away, and it will no doubt be necessary for the chapter to remain active in educating the public about them, removing them, and doing all that we can to stem the tide of loss and homogenization of species. It will

be a tough fight. The decimation or worse of important native species due to out-of-balance insects and pathogens will likely be an increasing problem as global travel and trade bring more challenges to our native ecologies. We may become more knowledgeable about the interdependence of natural systems and aim for even more cooperation with other advocacy groups. We will have to be more involved in political action in the future, either officially as a chapter, or as individuals. A good guess is that the current trend towards use of the computer for easy access to information and for communication will continue and expand. When the chapter started in '82 there was no Internet and no e-mail. Now anyone can call up a plant name and instantly get information on how to grow it, where to buy it, whether it is invasive, or anything else. In 1995, when Sylvia Orli first proposed it, we had no chapter listserv. Now a quarter of our members are signed up and are able to easily get and send timely information on chapter activities and opportunities for rescues, invasive removals, bills coming before the state legislature, announcements from other environmental groups, etc. It will be interesting to see how this wonderful communication tool will be used in the future. For

example, it is reasonable to imagine that the newsletter will someday be transmitted by e-mail, thus saving the considerable mailing costs.

None of our achievements would have been possible without the many many people involved in the chapter over the years. Anne Crocker, who kept meticulous membership records for 15 years; Liz Smith, who among many other things organized our chapter's hosting of the state convention a few years ago; the secretaries who took the board minutes; the treasurers who kept our money safe; the presidents and vice presidents who ran the meetings; the propagation beds workers; the committee chairs--all have given very generously of their time and talents to make this organization work. Besides all the worthwhile things that have gotten done, for many of us there has been a great deal of fun involved. And there is the rewarding joy of working with something awesome and beautiful--nature--and sharing that joy with others of like mind. We can be very proud of our accomplishments over the past 20 years. We look forward to a future full of useful work and joy in plenty.

Sally Sieracki

VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY REGISTRY SITES

Within the bounds of The Potowmack Chapter

SITE	PREMIER SPECIES	LOCATION
Huntley Meadows Park 1994	Wetland species Spotted Joe Pyeweed Blue flag	Telegraph Road Alexandria ADC Map 29 K1
Riverbend Park 1994	Spring ephemerals White trout lilies Valerian	Jeffery Road Great Falls ADC Map 3 H5
Runnymede Park 1999	Wetland species Meadow species	Herndon Parkway Herndon ADC Map 1 K13
Scott's Run Park 1994	Spring ephemerals	Georgetown Pike McLean ADC Map 8 E3