

## Upper James River Native Plant Chapter McCormick Farm Fieldtrip

Text and photos by Phyllis Fevrier. Pland list by Phyllis, Peggy Dyson-Cobb and Katherine Smith

A dozen members of the UJRN chapter gathered in the spirit of the VNPS Annual Meeting field trip initiative on September 18<sup>th</sup> 2021. We rediscovered a local gem for botanist, birders, and historians alike. Our chapter's main interest was to identify as many native plants in the riparian buffer along the Marl Creek Trail located around Mill Pond at McCormick Farm. The large welcoming sign at the trail



head gave us great insight to the history. The Mill Pond was built to provide a steady source of water to run the grist mill used in the 1700's. The famous McCormick reaper innovated grain farming. The more recent change from grain farming to pasture is one of many changes in land management. Soil erosion from farming and road construction led to increased sedimentation in the pond, which now includes a large area of wetlands. The extensive surrounding farm fields are now managed for long-term environmental health and agricultural production. Set aside for water quality protection and wildlife corridors are the sensitive riparian areas, filled with native plants.

On the easy walk thru this surrounding vegetative buffer of Marl Creek, we discovered some signage for large native trees like hickories, oaks, walnut, bass wood and elm. We discovered understories plants like witch hazel, fringe tree, hawthorn, blackhaw, elderberry and persimmon. We found many bog and shade loving native plants, like white turtlehead, blue lobelia, jewel weed, false nettle, and the tallest pilewort ever imagined. Our plant sleuthing rewarded us with a large list of diverse native plants, cultivating many conversations. We shared secrets of useful Plant ID apps on smart phones, discussed medicinal uses of some plants, spotted invasive species, and noted the eradication efforts by the present day stewards. Superintendent, Dr. Gabe Pent introduced a wildflower meadow with a no-till drill in spring of 2020, using a variety of seed from Ernst. This wetland meadow at the end of the trail loop was a cheerful spot of bright yellow and blue, with blue mist flower, black-eyed Susie, partridge pea in full bloom. A tribute at the site of a fallen American chestnut and American elm connect us historically to today's effort to reintroduce the American chestnut. The changing landscape from pond to wetlands and beyond makes this site an interesting botanical field trip within an amazing historical context. (See our plant list below).

McCormick Farm, a mile from I-81 in Raphine, and open to the public, is a two acre Landmark Historic Site. It is well-described in the self-guided tour signage at the museum and especially at the entrance to Marl Creek Trail. In 1954 the McCormick family donated their 620 acre farm to Va Tech for research and agricultural education.





The site is being used today by the Shenandoah Valley Agricultural Research and Extension Center to inform the public about better farming practices. Virginia is served by many regional ARECs. This is the ONLY site to host a riparian buffer dedicated to native plants. ARECs provides agricultural producers and Extension educators in Virginia and the mid-Atlantic region with applied, research-based information on the soil, animal, and plant components of forage-based livestock systems.

Striving to preserve the historic "McCormick Farm" as the site of the invention of the McCormick grain reaper that started the mechanical revolution in agriculture, two acres were set aside as the McCormick Memorial Plot. Here an historic log cabin museum housing many McCormick Grain Reaper models, the grist mill, smoke house, blacksmith and slave quarters. This unique place is a treat for visitors throughout the seasons.



UJRNP Chapter Field Trip to McCormick Farm September 18th 2021

People List : Jan Smith, Peggy Dyson-Cobb, Katherine Smith, Phyllis Fevrier, Peggy Agnor, Karen Lyons, Bob Biersack, Gary and Mary Helfenberger, Becky McKenzie, Carolyn Helmetsie, Janet Brister

Plant list :

Trees

Pignut Hickory *Carya glabra*

Shagbark Hickory *Carya ovata*

White Oak *Quercus alba*

Swamp White Oak *Quercus bicolor*

Red Oak *Quercus rubra*

Black Walnut *Juglans nigra*

Black Cherry *Prunus serotina*

Red Cedar *Juniperus virginiana*

American Elm *Ulmus americana* (deceased)

American Chestnut *Castanea dentata* (deceased)

Basswood *Tilia americana*

Green Ash *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* (under treatment for emerald ash borer)

Elderberry *Sambucus canadensis*

White fringe Tree *Chionanthus virginiana*



American Hawthorn *Crataegus phaenopyrum* (with black knot fungus)

Witch Hazel *Hamamelis virginiana*

American Persimmon *Diospyros virginiana*

Black Tupelo *Nyssa sylvatica*

Tree of Heaven *Ailanthus altissima* (Invasive under treatment for eradication)

Eastern Hop Hornbeam *Ostrya virginiana*

American Hornbeam *Carpinus caroliniana* (muscle wood)

Chestnut Oak *Quercus prinus*

Scarlet oak *Quercus coccinea*

Hackberry *Celtis occidentalis*

Mulberry *Morus rubra*

Yellow Poplar *Liriodendron tulipifera*

Sassafras *Sassafras albidum*

Eastern Redbud *Cercus canadensis*

Black Locust *Robinia pseudoacacia*

Box Elder *Acer negundo*

Sugar Maple *Acer saccharum*

Spicebush *Lindera benzoin*

American Black Raspberry *Rubus occidentalis*

Blackhaw *Viburnum prunifolium*

Mapleleaf Viburnum *Viburnum acerifolium*

Others:

Posion Ivy *Toxicodendron radicans*

Virginia Creeper *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

Wild Grape spp. *Vitus* spp

Trumpet Creeper *Campsis radicans*

Greenbriar, Catbriar *Smilax rotundifolia*

Crownbeard *Verbesina occidentalis*  
Wingstem *Verbesina alternifolia*  
Canada Goldenrod *Solidago canadensis*  
Spotted Wintergreen *Chemaphila maculata*  
Hog Peanut *Amphicarpa bracteata*  
Autumn Olive *Eleagnus umbellata* (Invasive under treatment for eradication)  
Japanese Honeysuckle *Lonicera japonica* (Invasive under treatment for eradication )  
Avens *Geum* sp  
Pussytoes *Antennaria plantaginifolia*  
Bladder Champion *Silene vulgaris* (non native)  
Blue Mistflower *Conoclinium coelestinum*  
Black-eyed Susie *Rudbeckia hirta*  
White Turtlehead *Chelone glabra*  
Pilewort *Erechtites hieracifolia*  
Jewel Weed *Impatiens capensis*  
Horseweed *Erigeron canadensis*  
Wild/Prickly Lettuce *Lactuca serriola*  
Thoroughwort/Snakeroot *Eupatorium* sp  
Calico Aster *Symphotrichum lateriflorum*  
Partridge Pea *Chamaecrista fasciculata*  
Eastern Gamagrass *Tripsacum dactyloides*  
False Nettle *Boehmeria cylindrical*  
Great Blue Lobelia *Lobelia siphilitica*