Tradition Continues (and Grows) with New President

SCOTT MOELLER, Naturalist and Director

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But they also helped remind us of the importance of planting and preserving trees. Protected from the wind by the young Presidential Oaks of past Gustavus presidents, dozens of Gusties, guests, college leaders, and past presidents gathered for the dedication of another Presidential Oak tree to new President Rebecca M. Bergman.

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LINNAEUS ARBORETUM on the campus of Gustavus Adolphus College provides an enriching environment to educate the mind, revive the spirit, and delight in Minnesota’s natural history and the College’s Swedish heritage. The Arboretum is named for Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778), a Swedish botanist who is best known for his work; describing the natural communities and their plant names to a simpler binomial nomenclature system. The Arboretum’s logo incorporates Linnaeus’s favorite plant, Linnaea borealis L., or the twinflower, found in Sweden as well as northern Minnesota. Minnesota is home to three major vegetation communities: the conifer forest in the north, the prairie in the south and west, and the deciduous forest in between. These natural communities are represented in the eastern portion of the Arboretum. The area surrounding the Melva Lind Interpretive Center includes formal gardens and trees from around the globe that are hardy in Minnesota. The first trees were planted in 1973 on what was once the campus sanctuary.

North Elementary students learning about the plants of the Arboretum. | Photo by Aria Taddeo

Director’s Notes: Pardon the Interruption
SCOTT MOELLER, Naturalist and Director

Springtime Arboretum visitors may notice some heavy machinery making some “messes” throughout the Arboretum. That’s because work will begin this spring on a number of important habitat-related projects. Exotic Siberian elm trees will be removed from the perimeter of the prairie; invasive buckthorn will be eliminated from the deciduous woods; non-native shrubs will be removed from an area across from the cabin; as well as many other projects. All trees and shrubs are valuable—and it is sometimes difficult to see them cut down—but these projects are essential to maintain the health and integrity of the native plants of the Arboretum. As the Arboretum grows and matures, it is our obligation to help the native plant communities grow to approximate the true native vegetation of our area. This work can be messy and leave unsightly “scars” on the land for a short time, but the long-term good will outweigh the short-term disturbance in the end. Please pardon our “messes” as we go about the work, but do make frequent visits to watch the progress. And check out some of the articles in this issue for more details about some of these projects.

Invasive plant species in the Arb’s Mason Deciduous Woods. | Google map by Genevieve Brand

Work Begins on Deciduous Woods Habitat Project
SCOTT MOELLER, Naturalist and Director

Work on an important deciduous woodland habitat project is progressing rapidly, but much work still remains. An invasive species inventory study conducted last fall in the Mason Deciduous Woods helped pinpoint the locations of various invasive species “hotspots” throughout the woods. The survey detailed the locations of about a dozen undesirable woodland plant species including buckthorn, Siberian elm, Siberian pea shrub, amur maple, black locust, and others. Buckthorn, identified as a top priority, was removed from 90 percent of the deciduous woods last fall with the help of Gustavus student workers. Remaining stands of well-established buckthorn (as well as Siberian elms) along the west edge of the woods will be removed in the 2015 growing season.

Visitors to the Arboretum will also notice the removal of non-native pea shrubs and bristly locust across from the cabin. These exotic species are starting to spread uncontrollably into the woods. They will be removed and replaced with native trees and shrubs.

The ultimate goal with this work is to protect the integrity of the native trees and shrubs to pave the way for the eventual introduction of native understory plants and continue to develop our best approximation of a truly native deciduous woodland.

Director's Notes: Pardon the Interruption

TIGERLION ARTS’ PRODUCTION OF NATURE
A WALKING PLAY ON THE GROUNDS OF LINNAEUS ARBORETUM

TigerLion Arts presents Nature, the mythic telling of Emerson and Thoreau’s mutual love affair with the natural world. Grounded in the story of their friendship, this virtuosic production offers a perspective on their lives that is strikingly relevant, richly complex, and yet utterly simple.

Nature is performed outdoors as a “walking play.” A professional ensemble of actors takes the audience on a journey through the natural environment as scenes unfold around them. Bagpipes, ancient flutes, drums, and rich choral arrangements are intricately woven into the script.

Nature is an extraordinary, family-friendly experience that co-mingles story, spirit, and nature, as a means to reconnect its audience with the natural world. This original work is collaboratively created with writer/actor Tyson Forbes, a direct descendant of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Four performances to be scheduled from September 25–27, 2015 (Homecoming weekend). Times and ticket information are to be determined. Watch for more information coming soon.
Oak Wilt Fungus Identified in Arb Trees

Scott Moeller, Naturalist and Director

We don’t know where it came from or how we got it, but we do know how to contain it and eliminate it. I’m talking about the oak wilt fungus that was identified in a pair of oak trees in the Arboretum’s Presidential Oak Grove last winter.

Oak wilt is a fungal organism that attacks oak trees, spreading mostly underground from tree-to-tree root connections. The bad news is that, if an oak tree gets infected, it is essentially a death sentence. The good news is that the disease can be contained and eliminated if proper measures are taken.

The two affected trees were noticed last fall when their leaves unexpectedly turned brown. Repeated attempts to confirm the disease through the University of Minnesota’s Plant Pathology Lab initially failed to identify the disease as oak wilt. Additional high-level DNA testing, however, confirmed last winter that the trees were infected by the oak wilt fungus. Inspections of the trees showed no obvious physical damage, so it is presumed that drought stress contributed to the trees becoming infected.

Consultation with top Minnesota DNR forestry staff and experienced private foresters led to the adoption of a plan to remove the infected trees and prevent the spread of the disease to neighboring trees. The most visible part of this plan will be the “trenching.” Since the infected trees have been removed, the only way the disease can spread is through underground root connections. Long, five-foot-deep trenches will be dug this spring to sever root connections and prevent the spread of the disease. The trenches will be backfilled immediately and will not pose any hazard to visitors.

Residents in the community need not be concerned about the fungus spreading to their trees, but may want to monitor any oaks on their property in the event that they have been infected by the same unknown source that infected the Arboretum oaks.

To avoid risking infection of your oaks, pruning or cutting should only be done when trees are dormant, between late fall and early spring. To learn more about the symptoms of oak wilt, go to http://dnr.state.mn.us/treecare/forest_health/oakwilt/index.html.

Historic Marschner Vegetation Map Donated to Interpretive Center

Scott Moeller, Naturalist and Director

Visitors to the Arboretum Interpretive Center may have noticed a new item on display: Thanks to a donation from Arboretum co-founder and longtime friend Harriet Mason, a full-size map of Minnesota’s pre-settlement vegetation now graces the west wall of the building.

Printed in 1974, this version of the map is a University of Minnesota redrawing of Francis Marschner’s original 1930 map. Marschner made his original map while working for the US Department of Agriculture by compiling historic survey records from the U.S. General Land Office Survey notes.

The map represents our best visual approximation of the pre-European settlement vegetation communities that existed in Minnesota and has come to be known to ecologists, botanists, and historians simply as the “Marschner Map.” These same biologists and historians have argued about the accuracy and resolution of the map, but there is general agreement that it is our best “snapshot” of what Minnesota vegetation probably looked like in the mid-1800s.

As a snapshot, the information we can glean is limited. It can only tell us what the landscape may have looked like at the time of the early surveys of this land. It cannot tell us, for example, how the native people of the area may have altered trees (and nature) as teachers, and the importance of listening to them. Arboretum director and naturalist Scott Moeller pointed out the parallels between planting a tree and selecting a new college president—with each, it is an investment in the future for those who will come after us.

One plants an oak tree for themselves. Almost on cue, a small group of school children biked past the ceremony, as if to emphasize who will be the beneficiaries of the trees we plant and the college that President Bergman helps us shape.

President Bergman spoke of the importance of community in achieving future goals as she accepted the honor of the nearby red oak tree dedicated to mark her inauguration as Gustavus’s 17th president. Each of Gustavus’s 17 presidents is represented by his or her own oak tree in what has come to be known as the Presidents’ Oak Grove of the Arboretum.

This area and tradition were established by former president Axel and Loreli Steuer, who were also on hand for Bergman’s ceremony. With the Steuers, the tradition of dedicating an oak tree for each president and a lilac for the first ladies was begun.

Of course, with our first female president, we have a great opportunity for a new tradition. Last fall’s ceremony included the dedication of a new bench overlooking the oaks and lilacs, known as the “First Gentleman’s Bench.” The new bench was dedicated in honor of Dr. Thomas Bergman, and will bear his name as well as other Gustavus First Gentlemen who come after him.
RESERVATION AND PRE-
PAYMENT REQUIRED AT
HOURS BEFORE THE EVENT.
Meal served at 11:30 a.m. Talk
begins at noon and is over
by 1:00 p.m. Cost is $8 for
Arboretum Members, $9 for
non-members.
Credit Card payment: Go to
gustavustickets.com or call
933-7796.
Check payment: Mail to Shirley
Mellema, Linnaeus Arboretum,
800 West College Ave, St.
Peter MN 56082.
Questions? Email arboretum@
gustavus.edu or call 933-6181.

Scott MOELLER, Naturalist and Director

The Linnaeus Arboretum is proud to be a recipient of additional funding from the Schmidt Family Foundation to support the Coneflower Prairie. Last winter a grant was submitted and funded by the Foundation to protect, preserve, and enhance the Coneflower Prairie in a variety of ways. Many readers may remember that it was the tremendous generosity of donors and the matching grant of the Schmidt Family Foundation that made it possible for the tremendously successful reconstruction of the Coneflower Prairie in 2008.

This young prairie is doing exceptionally well but is threatened by invasive and non-native plant species that could jeopardize its health if not dealt with. These new funds provided by the Schmidt Family Foundation will allow us to reduce and control invasive smooth brome throughout the prairie, remove non-native trees around the perimeter of the prairie that act as an undesirable seed source, conduct timely controlled burns for the health of the prairie, and establish a foot-traffic entrance corridor and signage on the northwest corner of the Arboretum to give campus users more direct access to the prairie.

Work will begin on the various portions of this project beginning this spring and continuing to next winter. Thanks to the generosity and dedication of the Schmidt Family Foundation, the Coneflower Prairie will be a lasting gift for its residents and visitors for many years to come.

Arb Receives More Funding for Coneflower Prairie from Schmidt Family Foundation

Scott MOELLER, Naturalist and Director

Halloween Hike Becoming Fall Family Tradition

SCOTT MOELLER, Naturalist and Director

After taking a year off in 2013, the Arboretum Jack-O-Lantern Hike was brought back by popular demand last October 24. Nearly 50 families from St. Peter and surrounding communities joined us for a beautiful evening of pumpkin carving and Halloween fun, ending with a night hike. Families were encouraged to come dressed in costume, and there was no shortage of unique Halloween costumes in the crowd. After carving jack-o-lanterns and placing them along the trail, kids and adults enjoyed popcorn and cider and were treated to some twilight Halloween stories as read by the Bookmark’s Molly Yunkers. As darkness fell, participants were led down the trail to view everyone’s candlelit pumpkins and get some candy in the Borgeson Cabin. On the hike back from the cabin, the “Headless Horseman” was spotted galloping back and forth along a distant trail. Special thanks to Julie and Steve O’Malley, Claire Nuessmeier, members of Gustavus Zeta Chi Phi sorority, and others for their assistance and expertise.

Annual Family Weekend FallFest Biggest Ever

SCOTT MOELLER, Naturalist and Director

The annual Arboretum FallFest celebration reached new heights last October 11. The perfect weather and abundance of activities drew a record crowd of over 800 to the Arboretum grounds. Now in its seventh year, the FallFest event strives to have something for everyone. This is especially important since the event is held on Gustavus Family Weekend. Indeed, many of the participants were parents, grandparents, and siblings of Gustie students. This year, Gusties and their families played a variety of games, viewed craft exhibitors in the Interpretive Center, decorated pumpkins, enjoyed food from the concession stand, watched the dog demonstration, went on hayrides, and many more activities. Once again, a very popular activity was the Arboretum Treasure Hunt, a fun activity that gets participants out exploring all of the different areas of the Arboretum. Special thanks to Annette Frederick, Jonie and Neal Anderson, Gustavus Alpha Sigma Tau sorority, and many others for their assistance and expertise.

The historical Marschner vegetation map donated to Interpretive Center continued from page 3 of the landscape prior to European settlement.

But, the information it can provide us is still richly conveyed with deep and vivid colors. Grasslands are depicted with shades of yellow, brushland with browns, hardwood forests with greens, pine forests with shades of blue and purple, and bogs with gray.

Only a quick glance is needed to remind us how quickly we turned over the vast prairies of the south and west, and filled the “Big Woods” of east-central Minnesota.