

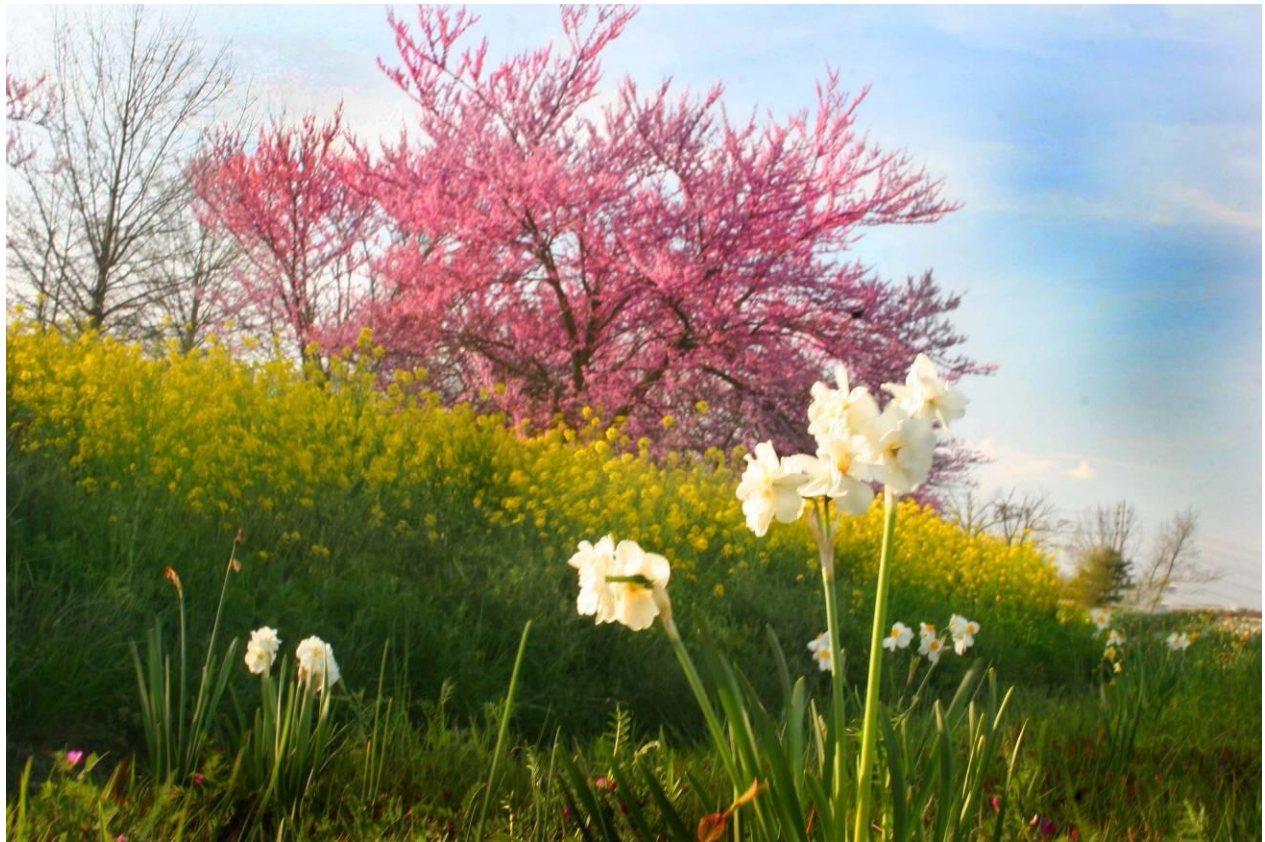
# Daffodils, Redbuds pave the way for spring

By: D. Ray Smith | Historically Speaking | The Oak Ridger | April 22, 2008

What a beautiful spring!

Redbud trees are in full bloom, and the daffodil flowers are fading now but have been gorgeous for some time. And there is no more beautiful place to see that mixture of spring beauty than Highway 162, which is to me a part of Pellissippi Parkway.

(I don't care what the crazy signs and maps say that determine Pellissippi Parkway starts at Interstate 40 and extends south. To me, it also extends north to Oak Ridge as well.)



Scenic Hardin Valley interchange on Pellissippi Parkway a showplace for redbud trees and daffodils

I can remember when it did not exist and the road from Oak Ridge to the interstate was a winding, narrow route. I can recall when the construction began and thinking, "Wow! This is going to be a great boost to Oak Ridgers traveling to Knoxville."

Later, I thought what a great addition it was when the southern section from I-40 to Alcoa was completed.

There is a story there that I want to write sometime. Do you know why that road was built? Do you recall the discussion about an airport for Oak Ridge? Think about the timing.

There is a whole series of stories that may well come from Gene Joyce's papers, now in the University of Tennessee's Howard Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy and serving as a catalyst for a group of us who are attempting to determine just how to best bring the content to the public.

Many of the historic key actions and decisions made regarding the birth of the city of Oak Ridge are

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contained in those papers, but that is another story for another time.

Regardless of the actual reason for the road or the road's "official" name, it's a glorious example of the optimum mixture of daffodil flowers and redbud trees. A drive along that road today will lift your spirits and make you glad to be alive in East Tennessee in the spring.

There are other flowers and trees there, but these two dominate -- forming the core and most special part of the beauty seen there. Almost every open space that can be planted has been covered with daffodils and complemented with several redbud trees.

For the past two years, I have said to myself at this time of the year: "There's a good story there. Someone had a vision. Someone has dedicated enormous energy to assure the beauty of spring is prominently displayed on the Pellissippi Parkway."

English poet William Wordsworth elegantly stated it this way:

"I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host of golden daffodils;

Beside the lake, beneath the trees,

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Ten thousand saw I, at a glance,

Tossing their heads in sprightly dance."

Maria Compère understands this language; she is the inspiration and dedication behind the beauty I described above.

Even when a member of the Knoxville City Council worried about what would be said regarding the lady who was undertaking an "impossible" task of planting daffodils along the Parkway, Maria Compère is the determined lady who proceeded to prove the impossible just takes a bit longer.

Ruth Pardue, the weekly "Gardens" columnist for The Oak Ridger, helped me with the research for this article. I drew heavily on her knowledge and sure appreciated her help.

She came to Oak Ridge BECAUSE of the daffodils on the Pellissippi Parkway. In her "Gardens" article of April 6, 2000, Pardue wrote: "Ten years ago, I made my first trip to Oak Ridge about this time of year. My husband waited until the spring to bring me here, for he wanted me to see the beauty of the area.

"I was very, very reluctant to come, for I knew that this was serious business in regards to making a move," Pardue went on to say. "To come to Oak Ridge through Clinton would have been the most direct route, but instead we traveled south on Interstate 75 to the Pellissippi Parkway.

"The daffodils were in bloom and the beauty of those bright flowers so impressed me that I knew this was a very special place."

Can't you just see her reaction? Remember, Ruth Pardue knows her flowers!

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"Daffodils are my specialty," she says, "and very soon I learned about the daffodil planting project. The venture was started by Maria Compère in 1984 (and) the inspiration for the project was through Maria's husband, Ed.

"Ed Compère worked at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and traveled to Oak Ridge from Knoxville daily. One day, he took Maria on a drive to see the newly constructed scenic highway. They both agreed that this was one of the most attractive highways in East Tennessee, for there are several spots where both the Cumberland and Great Smoky Mountains are visible.

"They both felt that there is a 'unique loveliness of spring in East Tennessee' and that a roadside planting would be an attractive addition, but it should not overpower the distinctive beauty of the area."

Ruth Pardue concludes her article by saying, "Maria settled upon daffodils as the perfect flower to enhance the sweeping hills along the road. She contacted the Department of Transportation, and they told her that it would take a million daffodils to do justice to the planting."

That Oak Ridger article says it so well. In 2000, Maria passed the million daffodils' mark and has continued to plant more and more of the beautiful flowers. She is now focusing on the section of the Parkway between the Tennessee River and Alcoa.

Maria told me how all this began so long ago when I called her to tell her of my desire to write this story.

I asked her why daffodils and redbuds? She replied that both the daffodils and redbuds bloom at about the same time and the mixture is complementary.

By 2000, not only had numerous daffodils been planted but also more than 1,800 flowering trees, Black-eyed Susans, Shasta daisies, Day Lilies and other perennials had been planted as well. And I am sure there are lots more by now.

However, the primary focus is on the two companions -- redbud trees and daffodil flowers. I like that. I enjoy photographing the view at the Hardin Valley interchange. That combination would be an excellent choice for Oak Ridge to use at the entrances to our city.

Next week, I will continue my examination of the history behind the daffodil flowers and the redbud trees along the Pellissippi Parkway and the living legend of Maria Compère.

I will also take a closer look at our city's entrances and especially the west entrance. We sure need to do something there!