

## UT Arboretum – Historical Dramas and more

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 6, 2009)

As we continue our examination of the history of the University of Tennessee Arboretum, a 250 acre island of solace and solitude in the midst of our city, I hope you are beginning to appreciate this jewel we have in our midst. This column will conclude the historical perspective and one last article will bring out the current activities and future plans as well as provide the promised "Indian Trail Tree" discussion by Richard Evans.

The UT Arboretum has over seven miles of walking trails are suitable for short walks of merely ½ mile of level trail to 2 ½ miles of excellent combinations of ascents and level spots for an invigorating short hike. Hiking is but one of the many activities the public can enjoy in this special place we call our own.

The UT Arboretum is a bird watching sanctuary and a scientific study area for over 2,500 native and exotic plant specimens representing over 800 species, varieties and cultivars. Richard Evans, the UT Forest Resources Research and Education Center director and personal champion of the UT Arboretum, spends his time dedicated to the preservation of nature's beauty and the full use of our natural resources for the education of our children, the enjoyment and education of our adults and the creation of future natural areas where generations to come can also enjoy the beauty, education and joy of observing and preserving nature.

A large part of the mystic of the UT Arboretum is the society of volunteers who promote the special aspects of their arboretum and consider ways to provide for the varied programs and experiences available to us all. Over the years, from 1965 to today, these dedicated volunteers have assured that the long term interest of this special place is foremost in the minds of the society and kept the public aware of the needs of the arboretum.

Under the leadership of the recent UT Arboretum Society President, Norm Dobbs, efforts of the society have focused on bringing unique programs of appeal to wide audiences to introduce audiences to the broader aspects of the arboretum. These programs were varied in subject and served to attract many new members and supporters. Among the many successful events were the evening "Owl Prowl", co-sponsored by the Clinch River Raptor Center; the evening outdoor history dramas and reenactments, fall wildflower walks; workshops on care of garden tools, growing herbs, building hypertufa pots and others.

Let me focus on the area of this effort in which I was personally involved, the history dramas and reenactments. I have been pleased to be asked to write *Historically Speaking* columns on these programs and have been able to assist in arranging for the program presenters.

Mike Dahl, who portrayed an Overmountain Man who fought in the King's Mountain victory of October 7, 1780 that literally changed the course of history and told of the "King's Mountain Messenger, Joseph Greer, who was awarded land in my home town for his heroic month-long 600-mile trek to Philadelphia to notify the Continental congress of the victory. This battle is known to have turned the tide of victory and led to the winning of the Revolutionary War. What a great piece of history to have recreated in our city at our arboretum of solace and solitude.

Next Lynn Fox brought us the story and re-enactment of famous John Sevier, the person who nearly formed the state of Franklin and who governed it for four years as well as becoming Tennessee's first governor and serving in that capacity for 12 years. He was also the commander of the Washington County contingent of the Overmountain Men who won the victory at King's Mountain.

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Then there was the Martin's Station story brought to us through the connections of Tracy and Loretta Rollins. Another stirring story of early pioneer settlement and the fight it took to stay alive in the wilderness of 1776. Dragging Canoe had just spoken in the latest treaty with the white settlers and the Cherokee stating the settlers had won what would be a "dark and bloody ground" and Joseph Martin felt he had selected Martin's Station as a target.

These re-enactments have been top quality as those who have been able to see them know. I am not sure what the subject might be of the next drama. We have the Fort Southwest Point folks in Kingston who would be a good choice. I have seen their program presented for a small audience at the Freels Bend Cabin...another treasure in our midst!

Presidents of the arboretum society have been, Alex Nowicki – 1965; Charles Mahoney – 1966; Edward Clebsch – 1967; Harold Byck – 1968-69; Bill Rainey – 1970-71; Mike Countess – 1972; Leone Gengozian – 1973-75; Ed Phares – 1976-77; George Eckerd – 1978-81; Larry Landau – 1982-83; Lois Good/Ed Nicholson – 1984; Harold Elmore – 1985-88; Ted Rogers – 1989-1992; Willard Witte – 1993; Nancy Hardin – 1994-95; Eileen Neiler – 1996; Charles Samuels – 1997-1999; Bill Hayden – 2000-01; Thomas Schmitt – 2002-03; Dennis Superczynski – 2004-05; Norman Dobbs - 2006-08; and Tom Row – 2009-present.

Each of these individuals has dedicated their time and energy to the betterment of the UT Arboretum. It is through the continuing supportive efforts

Through a partnership between the UT Arboretum Society and the UT Arboretum a pavilion type program shelter was constructed and a parking lot for over 100 cars was built in the interior of the arboretum acreage. This has allowed a substantial increase in the programming capabilities of the Arboretum. Throughout the year this shelter is the site of numerous programs and public events, including the annual spring and fall plant sales, lectures, professional development seminars and training programs.

Dedicated as the Dr. Jack and Evelyn Sharp Program Shelter in 2000, this shelter honors Dr. Sharp, a UT faculty member, world renowned botanist, Arboretum Society Board Member and early promoter of the concept of having an Arboretum at this site. This shelter has become a popular site for weddings and is a most picturesque location with the natural surroundings as a backdrop.

Of course, the annual spring and fall plant sales are worthy of more than mere mention in association with the shelter where they are now located. These sales have provided quality plants for many homes in Oak Ridge and surrounding communities. They are a treasure in and of themselves. If you have not visited the Arboretum during one of the sales, you have missed the opportunity to purchase some most unusual and high quality plants at very reasonable prices.

In 2005, the UT forest Resources and Arboretum hosted the "All about Dogwoods Field Day" which brought together researchers, garden professionals, nursery specialists and dogwood enthusiasts to learn about the culture, care and maintenance of dogwoods. This event demonstrates the unique character of the Arboretum whereby the single location can provide scientific study, education and enjoyment of one of nature's most beautiful trees, the Dogwood. Of course, there are other species that are just as interesting and for which a program might well be provided in the future.

In 2007, the "Cemetery Ridge Trail" was dedicated and hiked for the first time. Nearly 100 people participated, many of whom were Boy Scouts, parents and children. This trail has many unique natural

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and human history features. It is a trail I often hike and enjoy because of its quiet remoteness and solitude as well as its varied specimens of very large trees and many mushrooms.

Another example of the unique nature of the Arboretum happened just this year (2009) when the "Tennessee Healthy Hardwoods Field Day" was held there. This event was sponsored by the Tennessee Division of Forestry and the Tennessee Forestry Association. At this event, forest scientists, professional foresters, land owners and conservationists came together to increase their knowledge of proper stewardship of our hardwood resources.

The UT Arboretum history is full of excellent examples of good forestry management and public involvement. Next week Richard Evans' Trail Tree will conclude our series on the UT Arboretum and we will briefly mention the fund raising effort currently being undertaken by the UT Arboretum Society.



Lynn Fox portrays Davy Crockett as he tells the stories of "walking in the footsteps of Tennessee history"

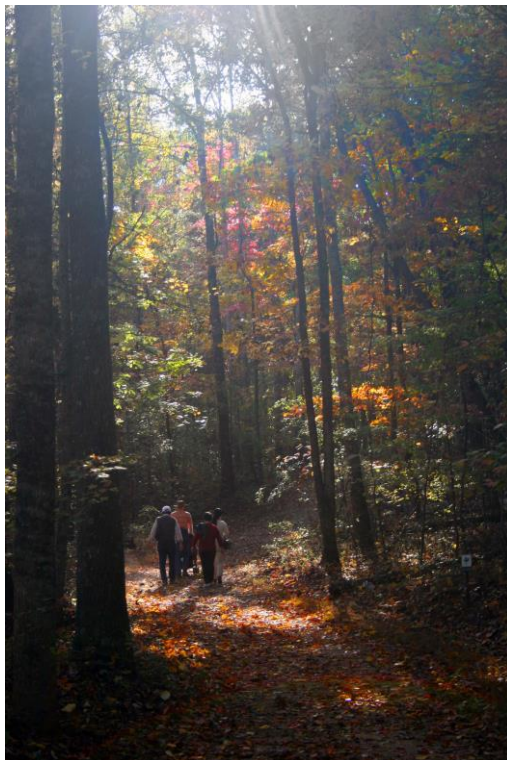


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Mike Dahl tells the story of the Overmountain men who won the battle of King's Mountain, the key battle turning the tide of the Revolutionary War!



A family enjoys the beauty of the Cemetery Ridge Trail in fall