

BOTANICAL GARDEN

3rd Quarter 2007

The Conch Call

President's *Message*

Dear Members:

Several recent events have reminded me, once again, of how much more our St. George Village Botanical Garden is than just a simple botanical garden – it is an important historical site as well.

While we have all understood that this is true as we contemplate what the name St. George Village means, and as we have viewed the old buildings, the Blacksmith's Shop, and other evidence of previous generations and how they lived, it became particularly evident with the excitement created earlier this year by the brouhaha concerning the effort that sought to excavate and examine enslaved African burial grounds on St. Croix.

Scientists hoped the project, entitled "Voices From Beyond the Grave," would provide a link to the island's historic past. The project was a collaboration between the V.I. State Historic Preservation Office, the African-Caribbean Reparations and Resettlement Alliance, and the Danish-led Galathea3 scientific expedition. Details were published in the 2nd quarter 2007 Conch Call.

Our soon-to-be-opened museum in the Education Center showing the many years of interaction between people and plants at St. George and the planned-for restoration of the Overseer's House and other such projects will give tangible evidence of the way things were during the time that sugar was "king."

But this may be just the beginning. We understand that there is evidence of life dating as far back as the pre-Columbian period just waiting to be discovered on the property.

It looks as if we have nothing to look forward to except the satisfaction of making our little Garden into something of even greater interest.

Sincerely, James B. Kobak

THE PAST *10* YEARS AT THE GARDEN

This year St. George Village Botanical Garden marks its 35th anniversary. Plans are under way for special birthday events in February 2008.

In the 10 years since the Garden celebrated its 25th anniversary, there have been many milestones and achievements that moved SGVBG forward as an institution dedicated to the conservation, education and preservation of the botanical heritage of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

In 1997, SGVBG was awarded the first of a series of grants from the prestigious Institute of Museum and Library Services. This first project grant allowed for the hiring of a staff horticulturist to work with Ken Jones, the Botanical Curator. The Garden announced the creation of this position through the American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (now the American Public Garden Association), and it was as a result of this search process that I came to St. Croix in 1998.



In early 1998 SGVBG was accepted as a member of the Center for Plant Conservation. As one of a network of 26 public gardens, this strengthened the native plant conservation aspect of the Garden's mission statement. The following spring, the CPC held its annual meeting here at SGVBG, allowing us to show off our beautiful Garden to leaders in plant conservation efforts as well as leaders of other major public gardens.

With the beginning of the new millennium, a generous gift from Richard and Virginia Bodine (and later, Richard and Peggy Bodine) helped to move the Garden into the 21st century by allowing for the planning and construction of what was to become the Bodine Visitors' Center and Museum Store.

Although it was restored in the late 1970s, the forge of the Blacksmith's shop at St. George had fallen into disuse. In 2001, Dr. Jack Egnatinsky, already a generous volunteer, enrolled in a training program in blacksmithing in New Mexico and refurbished and fired up the forge to bring it to its current, fully functional state.

(continued on page 3)

The history of the St. George Village Botanical Garden reaches far into the mists of antiquity. By the time the first white settlers arrived on St. Croix around 1635, the lush and watered grounds of what was to become Estate St. George had been home to Amerindians for thousands of years. The ancient Indian Village was gathered on the banks of Mint Gut, where the Arawaks and later the Caribs found the soil rich, the water plentiful and the fish abundant. Lying near the western edge of the great central plain of the island, which for millions of years lay under the sea, Estate St. George comprises some of the choicest real estate on St. Croix. There the Indians grew their corn, cassava, squash, cotton and tobacco. The Europeans exploited the good earth for sugar cane; St. George village was the center of a thriving plantation under the fabled families of first Heyliger and then Oxholm that lasted well into the 20th century.

Today's residents and visitors continue to draw from the natural wealth of the land. The Garden occupies just a chip of the old plantation, 16 acres out of the several hundred acres the farm complex spread across. Yet its modest size is more than compensated for by its occupying the heart of the former sugar estate: the ruins of the workers' village, a cemetery, the rum and sugar factory, the overseer's house, the blacksmith shop and the lime kiln. Now mostly in ruins and embraced by a verdant, meticulously maintained collection of hundreds of species of local and imported flora, the old buildings and artifacts and plants make Garden a preserve of St. Croix's long-developing culture, both God-given and man-made.

The Garden is the tangible realization of a vision that dates from 1970, when the St. Croix Garden Club was on the hunt for a few acres of dirt that members could use to transplant their various collections of home-gestated flora. There was no shortage of plots offered to the club, but because of its relatively fertile soil and its inarguable historical significance, the donation by Robert Moon of nine acres of lower Estate St. George won the day. That the plot included the fairly robust Mint Gut was a further blessing. By September of 1972, a nonprofit St. George Village Botanical Garden of St. Croix, Inc. had been inaugurated and what was to become one of St. Croix's most important sites was becoming a reality. The following year, the Moon family added another 5.7 acres to their original endowment. In 1974 and again in 1976 the eminent de Chabert family of St. Croix bestowed a total of 2.5 additional acres, bringing the Garden's coverage to 16 acres.

Since the newly acquired land in 1973 had been a favorite venue of squatters, lovers, grazing cattle and a handy repository for solid waste, the monumental task of cleaning up was the first great challenge. Hundreds of volunteers pitched in to remove the debris, and in the process came up with scores of artifacts reflecting the annals of the place going all the way back to the Arawaks. Thus the Garden could add to its credentials as one of St. Croix's most important archeological fields.



The Great Hall was built in 1976. The funds for the construction of this St. Croix landmark were raised by selling bonds to Garden members who were committed to a vision of creating a community gathering place.

At the end of 1976 the Great Hall was dedicated, after three years of vigorous fund-raising and dealing with the countless obstacles and snags endemic to such a project. The royal palms that line the entrance to the Garden were planted in 1975, just as the capacious—60,000 gallons—cistern was finished that lies under the Great Hall.

The directors voted in 1977 to hire, by virtue of a grant, workers to shore up the ever-crumbling ruins throughout the Garden, a job which was and is never really finished. In the busy year of 1979 the Garden Supply Center was opened, the Wedding Bower inaugurated, a cactus garden planted (around the rum distillery) and a large vegetable plot created. Late that year two passing hurricanes swelled the gut to a flood, wiping out the Danish bridge that crossed it just west of the blacksmith shop. The bridge was reconstructed in 1979 with modern materials but with a look of the old Danish span.

The first resident horticulturist was engaged in 1984. Gordon Rutledge and his family made the restored superintendent's house their residence. Today that job falls under the eye of Horticultural Director David Hamada; he also lives in that very house.

The destruction of the storied Hurricane Hugo in 1989, which devastated most of St. Croix, wiped out dozens of original species from the grounds, and it took more than a year just to clean up the debris. But over the last nearly two decades much of the loss has been made up for. The Tropical Fruit Orchard is home to more than 30 species; the water lilies have been brought back to health, the Nursery restored and the cactus garden has been vastly expanded.

In 2006 the Bodine Visitors' Center opened for business, one of the most dramatic and welcome expansions to the constantly growing treasure that is the St. George Village Botanical Garden.

—Robert Hoffman

Upcoming Events

2007

OCTOBER

- 7 Nursery Sale with Orchid Society (11 am-4 pm)
- 10 Grow and Learn—Bees and Honey (3-5 pm)
- 26 Gardens By Moonlight (7-9 pm)
Tour the Garden by the light of the full moon, along with music, wine & hors d'oeuvres

NOVEMBER

- 10 Grow and Learn—Wreath-making (10-noon)

DECEMBER

- 7 Christmas Gala at the Garden (6:30 pm)
Elegant sit-down dinner, live music, auction of decorated Christmas Trees and other items, silent auction
- 8 Sip & Shop in the Museum Store (10 am-4 pm)
- 9 Christmas Spoken Here (11 am-5 pm)
Nursery Sale, Santa visits, choirs singing Christmas songs, vendors, workshops, "Christmas Cooks" food contests
- 12 Grow and Learn (3-5 pm)

2008

JANUARY

- 9 Grow and Learn (3-5 pm)

FEBRUARY

- 10 35th Anniversary Open House (noon-5 pm)
Birthday Party for the Garden
- 20 35th Anniversary
Full Moon Garden Party (7-9 pm)
Special Gardens By Moonlight Event
- 24 Volunteer Appreciation Party (noon)
- 24 Annual Meeting & Election (1:30 pm)
2008 Board Members

MARCH

- 12 Grow and Learn (3-5 pm)
- 29 Flower & Fine Art Festival (7-9 pm)
Artists' Reception & Sale
- 30 Flower & Fine Art Festival (10 am-4 pm)
Nursery Sale

PAST 10 YEARS *(continued from front page)*

In 2002, after 15 years of dedicated service to the Garden, Jones departed from St. Croix. He left a legacy as being the one to move SGVBG forward from a "pretty garden" to a meaningful, educational botanical collection.

Dr. Brinsley Burbidge, who had visited SGVBG in the past as a consultant, moved to St. Croix in 2003 to assume the leadership of the Garden. Burbidge guided the Board of Governors in updating the Bylaws, creating a Strategic Plan and developing a long-term plan for seeking grants and funding sources.

In 2004 SGVBG partnered with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services to initiate a three-year project to grow and replant native trees in the Sandy Point and Green Cay Wildlife Refuges.

In 2004 the Garden was awarded two IMLS grants: the Museum Assessment Program and the Conservation Assessment Program. These grants allowed for assessment by professionals who provided guidance in developing governance and conservation practices according to standards of other museums and public gardens.

Through the dedicated efforts of volunteers Margaret Hayes, Christie Bartle, and Dr. Jeff Keularts the Herbarium collection has grown to over 4,500 specimens, which catalogs 80 percent of the plants of St. Croix.

After two years of renovating and updating the Marmaduke Orchid House, this display area was re-dedicated in February 2006. It is a showplace for the orchids from the Garden's collection; Gary M. Lalor's ongoing generosity includes contributing a specimen each month.

In March 2006, the Garden held the Grand Opening of the Visitors' Center and Museum Store, thanks to the generous support of the Bodines.

James Marius, one of our most dedicated staff members, retired in 2007 after 26 years of contributing to the development of the Garden; he continues to volunteer at SGVBG.

We have much to celebrate and a great deal to look forward to!

— David M. Hamada

SAVE THE DATE!

The Annual Christmas Gala
"Christmas Around the World"

At The St. George Village
Botanical Garden

Friday, December 7, 2007
6:30pm sharp

For information & reservations call 692-2874

Sumptuous passed hors d'oeuvres
Elegant served dinner

Live auction of decorated trees
Auctioneer Roger W. Morgan

Silent auction
Music by

Patrick Baron & Judi Fricks

Limited seating – Reserve early!

Tickets \$125 before October 17th
\$150 after October 17th

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Trip to Denmark

SGVBG board member Nina York is planning on leading a 10-day tour of her homeland, Denmark, for interested Virgin Islanders next year. The trip that had been slated for May 2007 has been rescheduled for the same time next year.

The trip will be a benefit for your Botanical Garden; for more information call the office at 692-2874 or e-mail to garden2@viaccess.net.

In memoriam

SGVBG expresses deep sympathy to the family of **Donald Pratt** who passed away on June 1, 2007

The Conch Call Newsletter

A publication of the St. George Village Botanical Garden. SGVBG is a non-profit membership organization.

We welcome articles, photos, letters, and content suggestions, and reserve the right to edit.

Submit to: SGVBG, 127 Estate St. George, Frederiksted, VI 00840, email to garden2@viaccess.net or fax 340-692-6154

Visit us at www.sgvbg.org or
call 340-692-2874

Board of Governors

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Brian Eslick	Nina York

Horticultural Director: David Hamada

Administrative Director: Lesley Hoffman

Garden
Hours
OPEN DAILY 9AM-5PM

New Members

* denotes renewal member

GOLD PALM

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SILVER PALM

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Dan & Amelia Musser*

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