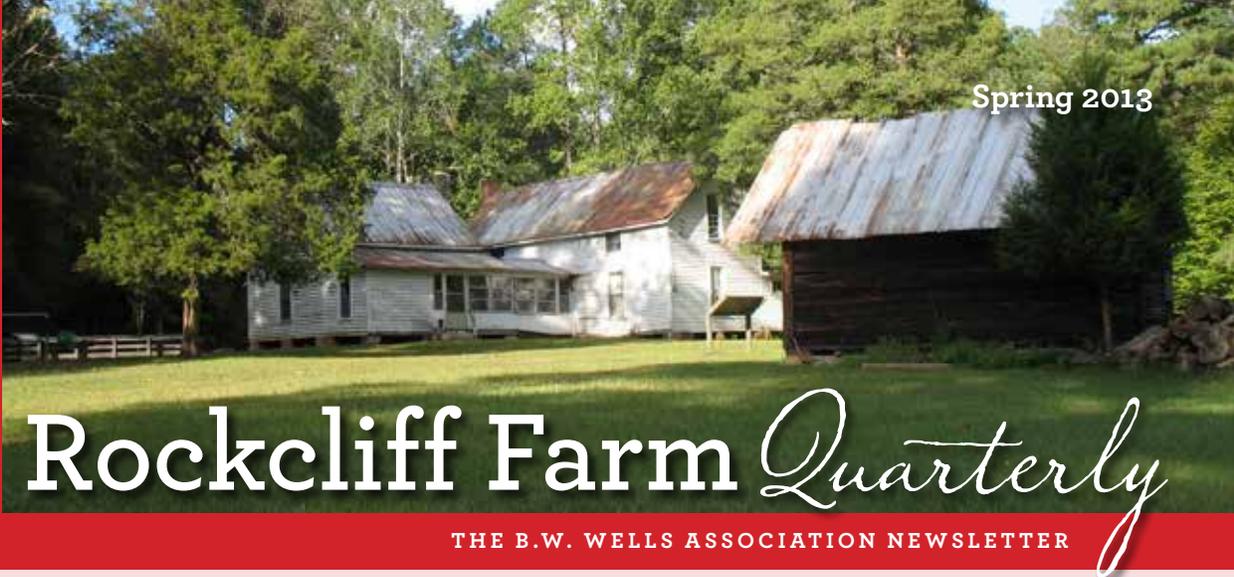


“Man living
in harmony
with nature.”

– B.W. Wells



Rockcliff Farm Quarterly

THE B.W. WELLS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

The Association has understandably been quiet over the winter. We are looking forward to the Spring season when we will hold Heritage Day on the first Saturday in April, that is April 6th. This is a week later than our customary date, and we hope that will mean better weather for the event. In preparation for the event, we will be active clearing the trails of winter debris one week earlier on Saturday March 30th. We have a commitment from a Boy Scout troop to participate and we would appreciate a few adults coming out to supervise the boys.

Last year, Association members made repairs to the Wells house. Jeff Adolphsen supervised repairs to a side of the house where rain water had penetrated the siding rotting out a stud. He replaced the stud, about six pieces of siding, and repaired the window frame. Erich Meyers undertook the work of stabilizing the breezeway that connects the kitchen block to the bedroom block. He firmed up the structure so it no longer sways, placed a new underlay, and re-attached the original wood flooring. On a couple of warm days, before the onset of winter, Herb Amyx and Hugh Nourse painted the new wood siding with primer and exterior coat.

A group of members, including Bob McCamy, Joel Wolf, Craig Cooper, John Pelosi and Hugh Nourse along with Robin Hendricks, met to consider how to repair the smokehouse. They proposed jacking up the structure, and rebuilding the stone pilings. A draft proposal was forwarded to the State Historic Properties office for comments. The officer recommended against the proposal. He suggested that the first step should be to clear a strip of grass from around the



Breezeway with new siding and original floorboards. Exterior wall with new siding and repaired window frame.

Photos by Hugh Nourse



UPCOMING EVENTS

10TH ANNUAL HERITAGE DAY!

See trout lilies, Hepatica and other spring ephemerals. Games, guided tours, hikes, activities for kids, plant raffles and more.
(See web site for flyer and schedule)

APRIL 6, 2013
SATURDAY, 9 AM – 5 PM
Location: Rockcliff Farm



Photo by Hugh Nourse

Erythronium umbilicatum, the most common species of trout lily Wake County, has purple anthers in contrast to *E. americanum* which has yellow anthers. This is the first trout lily of the year at Rockcliff Farm.

structure to ascertain whether in fact it had slipped off the pilings. Before jacking up the building, it is important to replace rotted planks in the front and back walls. The back of the smokehouse particularly needs much replacement, and two wide planks across the front should be replaced. Robin Hendricks has graciously offered us the opportunity of browsing through her collection of planks from old wooden buildings to select replacements. Jeff Adolphsen has indicated that a state archeologist should be present during the clearing around the edges in case any artifacts are exposed.

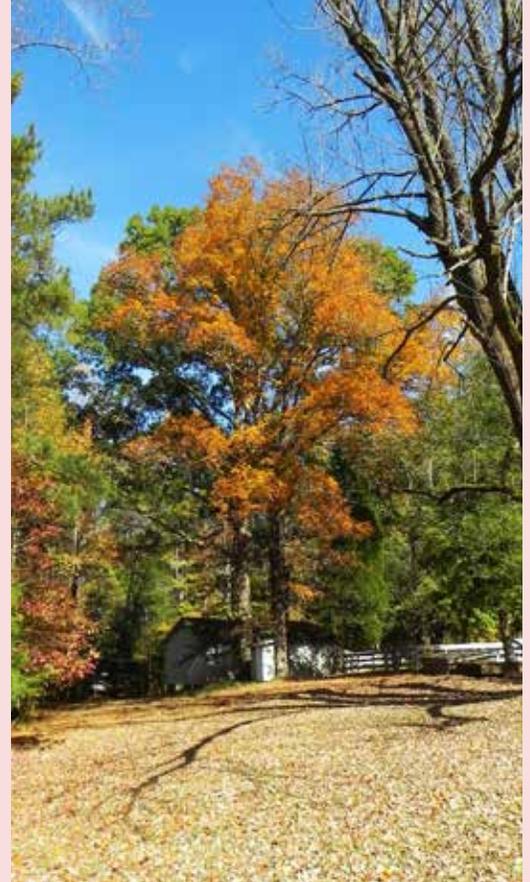
Projects on our to-do list include:

1. Stabilizing the smokehouse and painting or sealing the roof
2. Removing flaking paint from the Wells house and repainting the walls
3. Sealing the roofs of the Wells and Ray houses plus the studio.
4. The State Historic Properties office has recommended that repairing the Ray barn should be a priority, but it is in such bad condition that it is not a task to be undertaken lightly by volunteers. It could be a difficult and expensive restoration, requiring specialist rebuilders, and could cost more than our bank balance.

Looking forward to seeing you on a bright and sunny Heritage Day, where the activities will be tours of the old houses and the studio, plus ecology walks and activities for the children that will include painting with pine needles, how to build a baseball, and how to build a kite.

Finally, a word of thanks to Erich Meyers, John Pelosi and Jeff Adolphsen for their work on the Board in past years. John and Jeff joined the Board in 2003 when the dormant Association was being revived.

—Hugh Nourse



The hickory tree in front of the studio with a lovely display of fall color in October.

Photo by Hugh Nourse

WHITE BANEERRY AT B.W. WELLS RECREATION AREA



White baneberry (*Actaea pachypoda*) is one of the rarest plants found in the B.W. Wells State Recreation Area. It appears to be present in only one deep, heavily wooded valley. This valley runs parallel to an old roadbed that ends eventually at an osprey nesting platform. The presence of white baneberry in this valley is an indication of the high quality of the woodlands and the likelihood that the original plant species are still there. Found in this same valley are unusual color forms of painted buckeye, paw paw trees, three-lobed violets, southern maidenhair ferns, and many species of wildflowers. It is possible that this area was never farmed due to the steepness of the surrounding valley walls.

White baneberry with its saw-toothed leaves and “eye-like” fruit (top) and in bloom (bottom).

Photos by Herb Amyx

White baneberry is often called doll’s eyes due to the large, strange-looking white berries that are produced by the plant after blooming. The berries resemble the eyes of old-fashioned China dolls, white with a large black spot in the middle. The name “baneberry” comes from the toxicity of the berries and the foliage—handling them can cause acute irritation and blisters. Birds, however, can eat the berries with no ill effects and serve to disseminate the seeds.

The white baneberry at B.W. Wells is listed in Watch Category 6—regionally rare in the Piedmont. After we recorded its exact location by GPS coordinates, State Parks placed it in its database of rare and important plants at Falls Lake.

—Herb Amyx

CRANEFLY ORCHIDS (*Tipularia discolor*)

On January 8th, Dan Petretich asked me whether the crane-fly orchids were showing in my garden yet. That was a surprise to me as I hadn't even considered the possibility. Dan triumphantly informed me that his crane-fly orchids had sent up their leaves already. Later that day, when I checked my crane-fly patch, nothing was showing. A week later on a walk through my neighbor's wooded area, I observed carefully where two colonies had been last year and yes, leaves were showing. Again I checked the patch in my woods and at last that colony had leaves on display.

Crane-fly orchids are named for the supposed resemblance of their blossoms to the long-legged crane-fly. Each blossom is as ethereal as the insect itself. The botanical name, *Tipularia discolor*, reflects the fact that the leaves are of two colors, green above and purple on the under side. Oddly most plants have smooth leaves while a few have crinkled leaves. Each corm produces just one leaf and that senesces when the forest canopy shades the colony.



On Heritage Day at B.W. Wells Park, we rely on *Tipularia* to provide interest to visitors along the wildflower walk. Is it my imagination, or are the numbers of plants diminishing along there? A few years ago I counted forty blooming plants there, but nowhere near that number last year. Could it be that the five successive drought years have taken their toll? Or do these orchids simply take a break staying below ground to build strength in their tubers before attempting another bloom cycle?

Tipularia is a spring ephemeral, meaning that the leaves appear in late winter and spring, to gather sunlight shining through the leafless trees, but when the trees send out their leaves and shade the undergrowth, the *Tipularia* appear to go dormant and lose their leaves. But underground there is still activity, for astonishingly during the first week of August, the plants send up naked bloom stalks. The petals appear quite muted in color, making them difficult for hikers to spot. One has to wonder how the pollinators find the blooms.



For the photographer, the crane-fly blossoms are a challenge as they grow in deep shade, necessitating the use of lighting. Trying to gauge the amount of flash is a guessing game. Too bright a flash makes the blossoms appear white—the petals are surprisingly reflective. With luck and just the right amount of flash, the photo can reveal the pretty colors that are hidden on the petals.

The high reflectivity of the petals and the near-white color suggest that pollination is by nocturnal visitors. Scientific literature lists one insect as the pollinator for *Tipularia*, the noctuid moth named *Pseudaletia unipuncta*. Ironically that is the moth of the armyworm, infamous for ravaging grain crops. The moth succeeds in finding the orchid blossom at night, supposedly attracted by the nectar stored in the long spur (tube) that sticks out behind the blossom. To my mind, this suggests that researchers have overlooked the fact that many white, night-blooming flowers signal to pollinators with fragrance. When August comes around again, I will have to wander out to my *Tipularia* patch at night and sniff at the blossoms. Reportedly the *Tipularia* will readily set seed when pollinated but pollination is infrequent. Can you visualize my activity this August as I kneel beside the *Tipularia* with a small paintbrush in hand attempting to spread pollen from one tiny blossom to another?

—Hugh Nourse

Photos by Hugh Nourse; unopened bloom photo by Herb Amyx

OSPREYS AT ROCKCLIFF FARM

Early March marks the return of ospreys to the Falls Lake area, which is a major inland nesting site for this species. Ospreys, who year after year continue to return to the same nest, are a common sight at Rockcliff Farm due to the proximity of nesting sites and good fishing in the lake and inlets nearby. The closest nest is just below Rockcliff Farm, at the edge of the lake along the Zeagle's Rock Trail, about halfway between Zeagle's Rock and Soapstone Point. This nest is high in a large pine tree that slightly overhangs the shore. The best place to see the nest is from the small sandy beach just below the trail. A second nest, a nesting platform, is located at the end of an old road that begins where the paved road turns left to go to the boat launch area. The road is on the right, runs beside the large grassy mound and is closed by a chain. It is about a half mile walk to the nesting platform. There is a third nest close by at Shinleaf. With potentially three pairs of ospreys in the skies overhead, it is no wonder that they are seen and heard so often.

The osprey is often called sea hawk or fish eagle and is the namesake of the NFL football Seattle Seahawks. For such a large and powerful bird, the call is a rather weak chirp. Go to this link to hear the typical osprey call: <http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Osprey/sounds>. The osprey has its own family, separate from other raptors, and is one of the very few examples of a single species with a worldwide distribution that includes all the continents except Antarctica.

It is extremely unlikely that Dr. Wells, who died in 1978, ever heard or saw an osprey near his home. The first year osprey nests were reported in the Piedmont was 1984. Populations then expanded rapidly with the building of the major reservoirs.

—Herb Amyx



Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)



Flying osprey photo by Herb Amyx

MAKING CONNECTIONS

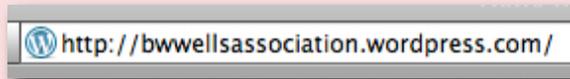
Be sure to check us out at the new website and blog. “**L**ike” us and you will get the latest news, events and updates from the association as well as shared pictures of B.W. and Maude Wells from our archives.

We’d love to hear from you, so please pass along any stories and/or pictures you may have of Rockcliff Farm and B.W. Wells.

See a new video of B.W. Wells on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/DnDWu90Py5A>
(Put in a capital “O”—not a zero.)



See our blog at:





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MISSION STATEMENT

The B.W. Wells Association will strive to educate the public about B.W. Wells, North Carolina's first plant ecologist, and promote his conservation ethics. The Association will achieve its mission primarily by assisting the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to preserve, restore and interpret the unique cultural and natural resources at Rockcliff Farm, the site of Wells' retirement.