

A Chapter in the Life of Causey's Mill

By Mary Wright



Piney Point was where my lifelong love affair with water began. Although this is not a story about me or my life, I wanted to share with you the foundation on which I base how Causey's Mill became important to me; beside the fact that my mother was a member of the Hilton Village Women's Club and we passed by the mill several times a week.

As a youngster growing up in York County on the Poquoson River was heaven. I have no memory of hot, muggy July days as I spent entire summers in the river, literally. I remember the first time I slipped out of my green and white life ring float and swam; we were at the York River Yacht Haven. I was free! That day opened the door to endless water possibilities. I was no longer a bobber, but one amongst the fish.

I went through all the swimming classes the local American Red Cross office had to offer in record time. By the time I was 11 I was an accomplished swimmer having taken classes at every neighborhood pool, creek, military facility, and beach in York County. Summers to come would be spent sailing up and down the Chesapeake Bay...weeks on end: Mobjack Bay, Horn Harbor, Fishing Bay and Gwynn's Island, Reedville, Tangier Island, Oxford, the Solomon's, and St. Michaels. So, it was only natural that after becoming a Newport News Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener to continue advance training in the Water Steward program (VCE NNMG WS – say that three times fast!).

Once Anita Smith, fellow Master Gardener, and I completed the Water Steward training we recruited Janice Ward, who had been through the Water Steward program several years earlier, and began scouring Newport News for a site which needed the attention of Water Stewards. Since we live in the Chesapeake Bay Water Shed we were interested in installing a buffer zone. Simply put, a buffer zone is a protected area alongside a waterway and/or wetland. They provide a valuable habitat for wildlife and most importantly buffer zones protect water resources by filtering and assimilating contaminants from surface runoff water. We visited Dr. Laurie Fox, Horticulture Associate, at Hampton Roads Agriculture Research and Extension Center (AREC) in Virginia Beach and Yolima Carr, Curator of Gardens & Grounds, at the Hermitage Museum and Gardens in Norfolk to discuss buffer zone projects they had completed at their facilities. Both happily shared their trials and tribulations with us and, of course, their expertise.

We returned to Newport News feeling confident; armed with CD's, plant lists, pictures, vendor lists, reference guides, and a myriad of other items to aid in our endeavor to put together a plan to "sell" our project. The trouble was we hadn't found a "buyer". Then right when we thought we had a prospective "buyer" our plans fell through. Call it dumb luck, fate, or a coincidence but Doug Kennedy, Superintendent of Landscape Service and Maintenance with the City of Newport News Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism happened to be with us that day. The meeting had been in Abernathy Park on Lake Maury at Causey's Mill. Doug spoke up and said, "We are looking to do a project right here at the mill." We were in awe – ecstatic even!

So, it was back to the drawing board. This time we were lucky in that more Water Stewards would be working on the project. A handful of Newport News Master Gardeners were about to graduate from the Water Steward class of 2012 and they needed a project. Eagerly, Ray Robinson, Jimmie Espich, Katherine Duncan, and Vanessa Connell were onboard with the idea of a buffers zone at Causey's Mill. As fate would have it, Anita Smith was giving a presentation at the Newport News Women's Club. Anita began by telling the group who the Master Gardeners were, about their work in the community, their involvement with children and seniors, and of their future projects. Who knew that right there in the audience was Susan Abernathy McCreary, daughter of the late Estelle and George Abernathy.

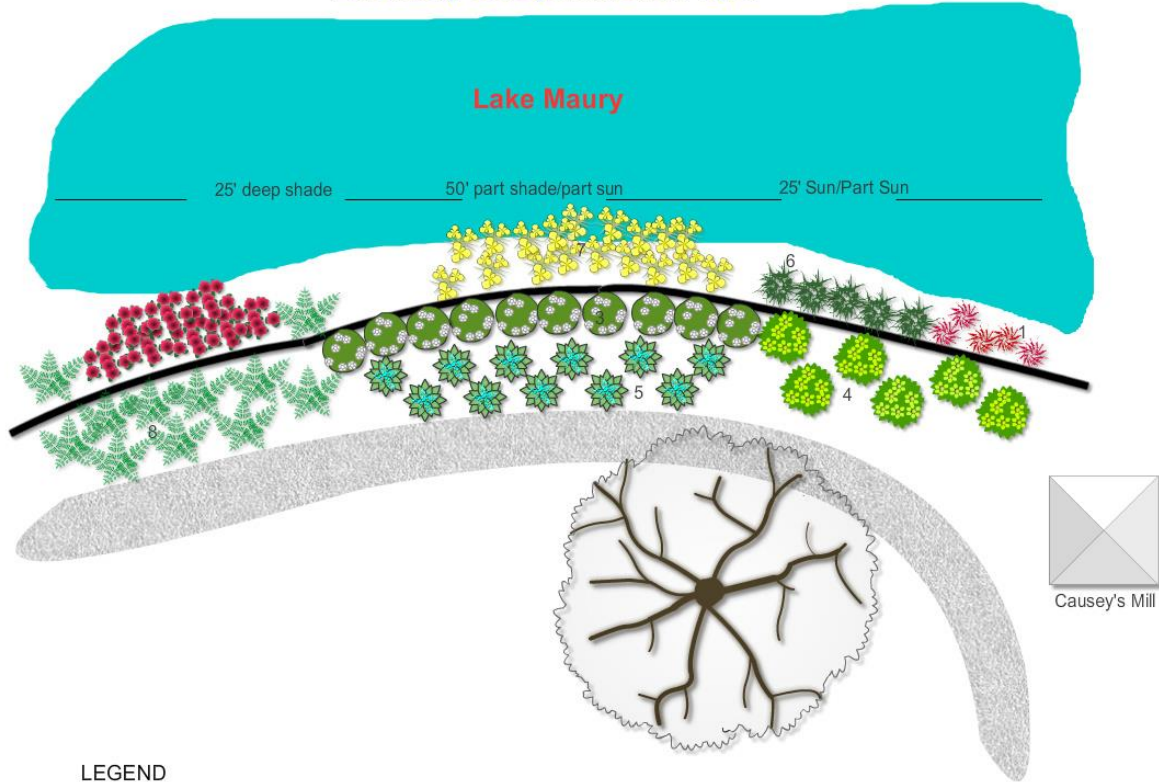
Some forty years earlier, Estelle, had been a founding member of the Huntington and Warwick Garden clubs. Estelle's passion was herbs and she grew them at her home in Newport News. She also organized the 1950's herb display at the Chamberlin Hotel for the World Trade Conference. Well, to make a long story short, Susan was happy to learn the Newport News Master Gardener Water Stewards were going to propose a plan for her parents "name sake garden". Currently the plan proposed by the VCE NNMG WS's has been accepted by the city and the necessary paperwork is now in the hands of Virginia Tech. Life is good in our fair town.

There is still much work to be done and when the time comes to get our hands dirty we would be honored to have you volunteering beside us. For more information please call me, Mary Wright, at Virginia Cooperative Extension at 757-591-4838. Oh, and by-the-way, my water career didn't end with those swimming lessons so long ago. I went on to become a Water Safety Instructor and a PADI scuba diver.



Site of the proposed buffer zone.

Lake Maury-Causey's Mill Buffer Project



LEGEND

1. Red Switch Grass, full sun, 3'-6'. 6 PLANTS.
2. Cardinal flower (*Lobelia x speciosa* 'red variety'), sun-part-shade, tall, likes "wet feet", plant on bank's edge. 23 PLANTS.
3. Fothergilla gardenii (June Platt): shade or full sun, white spring flowers, shrub, moist soil, 3' high. 10 PLANTS.
4. Baptista ('Carolina moonlight'): shrub, dry to medium wet soil, late spring flowers (yellow), 48". 5 SHRUBS.
5. Beauty Berry: part shade-full sun, blue summer flowers with purple berries in fall, shrub, 4' high, moist to dry soil. 11 PLANTS.
6. Common Rush (*Juncus effusus*): 4', plant at water's edge, part sun-full sun. 5 PLANTS.
7. Iris pseudacorus (yellow water iris): 3', clumping, plant at bank or water's edge. 300 PLANTS.
8. Autumn fern: Grows to 1 1/2 to 2 ft. tall and 18 in. wide. Full shade. Needs wet or constantly moist soil. 15 PLANTS.