

## Visit the Virginia State Arboretum

By Susan Camp

Jim and I like to take our vacations in the spring before school is out or after school starts in September when traffic is lighter and crowds are smaller. We had planned to drive to Greensburg, Pennsylvania to visit our granddaughter, then meander through parts of eastern Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, ending in Brevard, NC to visit family before coming home. Hurricane Helene ended that trip. I am thankful to say that Brevard suffered little damage, but other communities will be rebuilding for years to come. Please help those affected by that monster storm in any way you can.

After leaving Greensburg, we decided to head north and drive along Lake Erie into Canada and visit Niagara Falls, then travel east along Lake Erie and Lake Ontario through the region called the Niagara Frontier, and return home through the Adirondacks. We stayed off the interstates as much as possible and traveled through towns and villages, state parks and forests, enjoying the changing colors of the season. Along the lakes, we viewed hundreds, possibly thousands of acres of Concord grapes and apples being harvested.

One of the highlights of our trip occurred on the first day before we left Virginia. As we drove toward Winchester on Route 50, I noticed a sign for the State Arboretum of Virginia, also called the Orland E. White Arboretum after the first director, but perhaps best known as Blandy Experimental Farm.

In 1926, Graham F. Blandy left 712 acres of his historic family property, Tuleyries, to the University of Virginia to be developed as an experimental farm where students would learn modern farming methods. Director Orland White oversaw the planting of non-native trees, including Arizona cypresses and the often-photographed grove of 300 ginkgo trees that put on a spectacular show of golden yellow leaves every fall.

Radiation experiments were conducted in the 1950s on corn plants in an attempt to improve production. Personally, I hope they weren't successful. Blandy Experimental Farm was closed to the public until the early 1980s, and during this period, the university's financial interest in the farm waned. In 1986, the Virginia General Assembly named the farm the State Arboretum of Virginia. It is open to the public year-round, and it is a treasure.

The central 172 acres of the farm contain a learning center, numerous walking trails, several lakes, two small pavilions, native plant meadows, a classroom, living quarters, a research village, and groves of thousands of trees.

Besides the ginkgo grove, an American chestnut test plot is located in a remote section of the farm; I don't know if that area is open to the public. You can wander through towering Cedars of Lebanon and view more than 160 species of American Boxwood. In fact, the American Boxwood Society Memorial Garden is located at Blandy.

The greenhouse and research lab are not open to the public, but visitors can wander through the massive herb garden located in front of the greenhouse.

UVA students can participate in the Undergraduate Program in Population, Community, and Ecosystem Ecology while living in a historic building that dates back to the early 1800s. Some current research studies, according to the arboretum website [blandy.virginia.edu](http://blandy.virginia.edu), focus on invasive species, environmental stressors on vertebrate behavior, and invasive bee populations. College life is so much more interesting today.

Several busloads of kindergarten and elementary school children and their teachers enjoyed the trails and the sunshine while we were there. Jim and I walked for about two hours, and there was still much more to see. We particularly enjoyed the native plant trail, even though most of the flowers had already gone to seed. We recognized many of the natives and discovered some new ones with the help of brochures provided by the Virginia Native Plant Society. We want to return next summer while the flowers are blooming so we can take some good photographs.

And the trip up north? It was fantastic. We just never have enough time to see everything.