

Master Gardeners Helping Another Historic Site (published 6/15/2024)
By Kate O'Lenic, Master Gardener

Old Deery Inn and Museum in Blountville is a wonderful place under the care of the Sullivan County Department of Archives and Tourism. And the master gardeners were happy to help spruce up the gardens there on April 27 this year. We pulled weeds and tidied up the brick walkways.

This year was my first visit to Old Deery Inn, and I fell in love. The property is situated on Highway 126, just off SR-394. It is a gem that many people may miss as they drive by. The original building was a log cabin built between 1780 and 1790. The Inn survived fires set during the Battle of Blountville during the Civil War. You can read about the history of this beautiful inn at http://www.historicsullivan.com/tourism_deeryinn.html.

If you've never been there, you have to go! The Inn is being lovingly restored by the Sullivan County Historic Preservation Association but is still open for tours. The grounds are chock full of fascinating buildings and the museum is wonderful. You will be regaled with stories about the Inn and its history by knowledgeable guides.

A point of interest is the Smithsonian Gates on east side of the Inn. These wrought-iron gates were at the Smithsonian Institute from 1879 until 1910. Also fascinating are the guests who stayed at the Inn, including Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, Andrew Johnson, Louis Phillipe Orleans, the King of France, and the Marquis de LaFayette. The inside doors have been autographed by three Tennessee governors, including Frank Clement, Buford Ellington, and Lamar Alexander, and the front door by President Jimmy Carter. Incredible!

We master gardeners help at other historic sites as well including Exchange Place Living History Farm, Rocky Mount Living History Museum, Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park, and Tipton-Haynes Historic Site. We enjoy helping at all the official projects where we volunteer.

Our efforts at other historic sites include a lot of other things besides the necessary weed removal. Exchange Place Living History Farm benefits from our help with a demonstration vegetable garden containing heirloom and hybrid varieties grown in raised beds. We built the raised bed gardens and trellises for vines. We also maintain a pollinator garden and we have a small garden area that focuses on native plants. Master Gardeners also do tree identification, adopt new areas for development, and do research on heirloom plants and garden design.

At Rocky Mount we planned and installed specialty gardens, historically representative of the date the buildings were constructed. There is an herb garden, a kitchen garden, and a dye garden, full of plants that were used to make dyes for clothing back in the day. We also created two native plant gardens at the large stone sign seen from the road and at the gated entrance. Master Gardeners are developing the Sonja Fox McKamey Memorial Garden. It will have a special infinity garden, and many other raised beds. When we work at Rocky Mount when it is open for tours, we dress in costume representative of the time. We help in putting on festivals there as well.

At Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park, Master Gardeners installed plants for a monarch butterfly garden which they also maintain. It has been registered as an official Monarch Way Station. We also plant and maintain kitchen and herb gardens.

At Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site, Master Gardeners maintain several gardens including wildflower/butterfly/pollinator gardens, a small kitchen garden, and what is called the slave garden. Variety and visual appeal for visitors and pollinators are key in the plantings in the pollinator garden. It is a designated Certified Monarch Waystation. Native plants and those that attract and/or serve as hosts for Monarchs and other caterpillars make up the garden.

Master Gardeners also teach children how to plant a vegetable garden and coach them through the growing season so they can reap the benefits of their own vegetable patches. We also help adults learn to garden and provide information and assistance in building raised bed gardens and even bird houses.

Tennessee has so many historic treasures that we are proud to support with our gardening knowledge. Take a little road trip and visit some of your state treasures, including Old Deery Inn. Enjoy!

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.