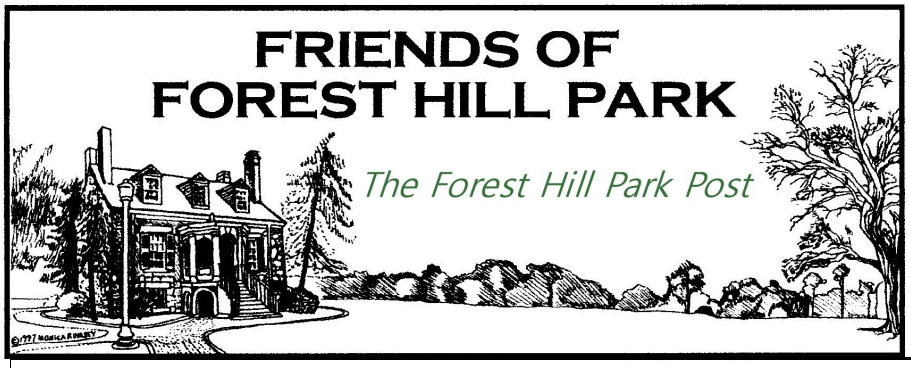

January 2018

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Vice President	Terry Fitzgerald
Treasurer	Lee Shewmake
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www.friendsofforesthillpark.org

The Oaks of Forest Hill Park

Ernest Wilson

There are six oaks found in Forest Hill Park which came up on their own without being planted. They are White, Chestnut, Northern Red, Southern Red, Willow and Post.

One oak that is not native but has been planted is the Sawtooth Oak, *Querqus altissima*, a native of China. It is planted along the stone steps leading from the picnic shelter parking area to the road going down to the lake. The leaves have saw -teeth edges resembling Chestnut leaves, but have acorns with cups covered with projections, unlike any of the native oaks in the park. It has naturalized in several places in Virginia. It has been planted as a wildlife food in spite of the extreme bitterness of its acorns. Most animals will not eat them.


Sawtooth Oak Leaves

The Friends of Forest Hill Park have planted Bur Oak *(Querqus macrocarpa)* near the old azalea garden. We will see how well this mid-western oak does in Central Virginia.


Bur Oak Leaves

The White Oak, *Querqus alba,* is found all over the park. It is beautiful especially when it is old and growing in a field. It can live 400 years. Like other white oaks the lobes of its leaves are rounded rather than bristle- tipped. Like other white oaks its bark is light gray and its acorns are borne every year. The acorns have less tannin in them than red oak acorns, but they still must be processed to remove tannins before eating. It supports more species of animal than any other plant in our flora. Its wood is hard and makes good furniture and floorings.


White Oak Leaves

Chestnut Oak, *Querqus montana,* is another oak growing in the park. It has saw-edges on its leaves like those of a Chestnut tree. It can grow in drier or rocky areas that are not optimal for White Oak. It has larger acorns than White Oak. The ground under the tree is often covered with them. Like other oaks it germinates in September soon after falling from the mother tree. It produces roots which grow into the ground. Shoots

Friends of Forest Hill Park recently planted a Chestnut Oak seedling in the park.

don't appear until spring after they are exposed to cold.

Another member of the white oak group Post Oak, *Querqus stellata,* has been found by both Pat Wood and Bill Shanabruch in the park. It used to be present but the large tree died some time ago. Seedlings are now present. This tree specializes in living in acid poor soil areas such as found on the east side of park. Its hard wood is often made into posts by farmers.

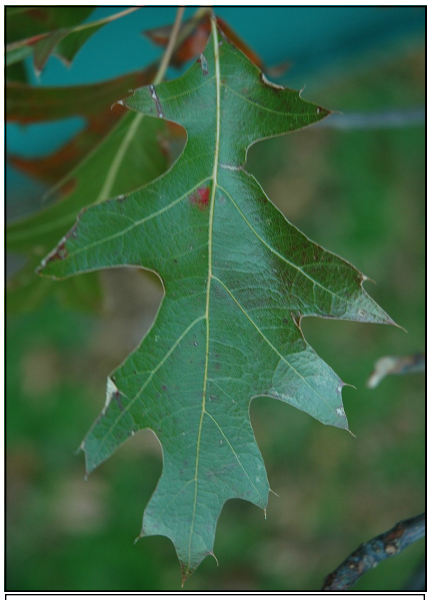
The Northern Red Oak, *Querqus rubra,* is a large oak with dark bark. Its leaves are large and symmetrical. As with all red oaks they are bristle tipped. Its wood is the most useful of all oaks and makes a good shade tree, but it forms tap roots which make it difficult to transplant. This is the reason you will not find it at most nurseries.

Leaves of the Post Oak, a type of white oak.

Pin Oak (*Querqus palustris)*, a tree native to Virginia but not to Forest Hill Park, is carried by most nurseries. Its leaves are smaller than Northern Red Oak but it is much easier to transplant. There are three large and gorgeous ones on the lawn near the Stone House.

The Southern Red Oak, *Querqus falcata,* has leaves narrower than the Northern Red Oak or has leaves whose lower lobes are larger than upper ones. It usually occupies areas that are drier and less fertile than the ones where *Q. rubra* grows.

The Willow Oak, *Querqus phellos,* has narrow leaves and grows large very quickly. It grows in bottom lands and areas with moist soils but will grow in drier areas. It is often planted. It has the smallest acorns of all the oaks in the park- so small that a good wind can spread them.



A Pin Oak Leaf.

Identification of oaks can be challenging. All the members of the Red Oak group can hybridize with each other. Likewise all the white oaks can potentially cross with each other. Hybrids would show intermediate characteristics somewhat different from its parents but similar, so that the hybrid could be confused with one or more of its parents. Usually, we can assign a tree to one species but there is often doubt.

One interesting fact I learned recently is that red oaks are native only to North America while white oaks are found on most northern continents.

The oaks in the park are large and old. They are interspaced with old pine on the east side of park. Generally pine grows up before oak does. It grows quicker than oaks. The oaks generally come up under pines. It is unusual to have old oak and old pine together. Perhaps part of an oak forest was cut down and the pine grew up in the open space.

The oak forest is giving way to Beech (*Fagus grandifolia)*. Young Beech is growing up under the oaks. This usually takes 200 years or more to happen.

There are some beautiful wild flowers that are parasitic on the roots of Oak trees. There are two species of False Foxglove or Oak Leech (*Aureolaria)* growing in the park. They have gorgeous large yellow tubular flowers. Look for them particularly along the edge of the walk on the east side of the lake in the summer and fall. Each plant is attached to the roots of a neighboring oak tree, stealing water and minerals and even amino acids and sugars from its host. They cannot be grown in a garden without their host tree.

Downy False Foxgloves live as parasites on the roots of oak trees.

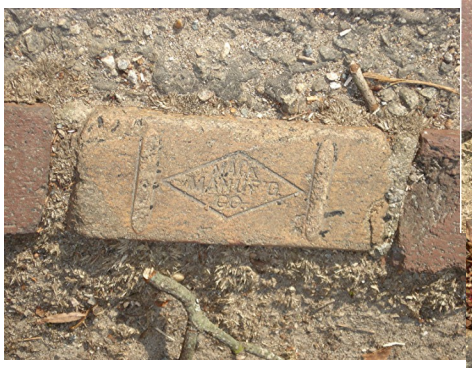
Willow Oak Leaves

The leaves on the right are those of the Northern Red Oak. Friends of Forest Hill Park recently planted a Northern Red Oak seedling in the park.

Southern White Oak leaves

Not From Around Here . . . . .

Some of these bricks are interspersed with the standard red clay bricks along the service road between the Stone House and the maintenance shop in Forest Hill Park. A little research revealed that they were fired near Charleston, WVA more than 100 years ago and made from a pristine grade of clay and shale. Their journey east over the mountains to Richmond almost certainly would make a good story.



Repairs at the Stone House in Time for Christmas

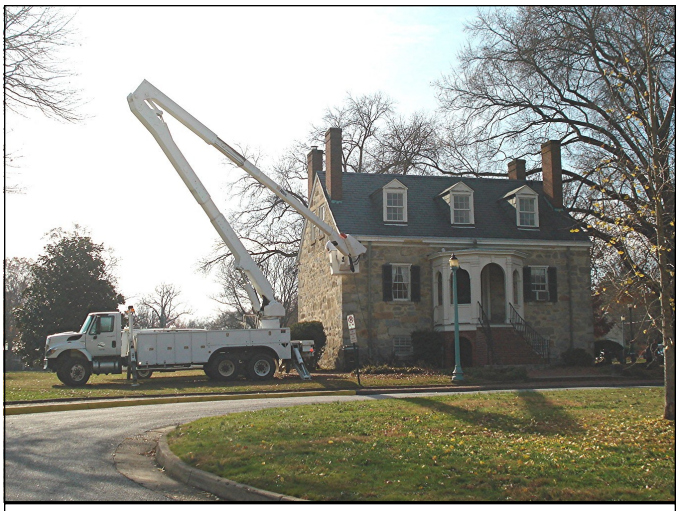
Dredging Begins at Lake

Maintenance is ongoing in two areas of Forest Hill Park.

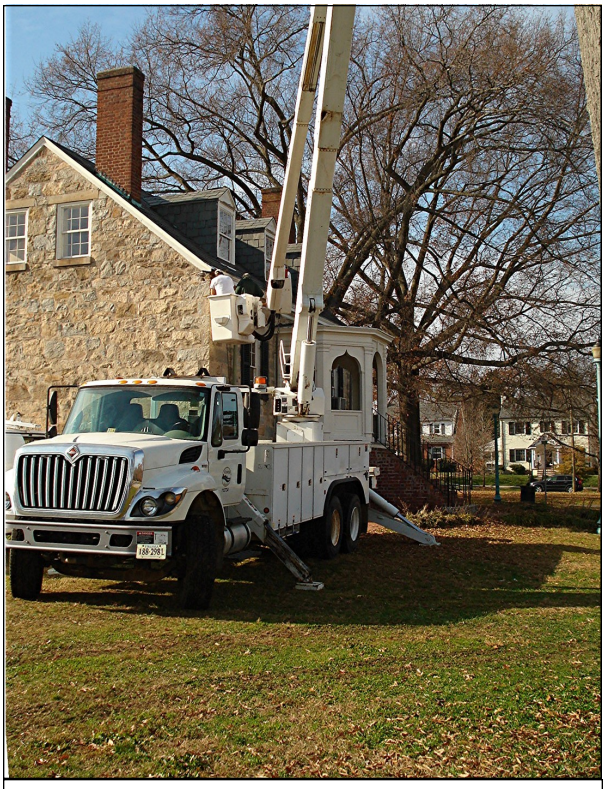
The Stone House was closed during November for repairs, but the work continued into December.

Dredging equipment arrived on site at Forest Hill Lake on December 18th to begin a multi-week dredging job. Access to the lake and trails and roads near it has been limited since the heavy equipment arrived.

What nice Christmas gifts for everyone who enjoys visiting Forest Hill Park.

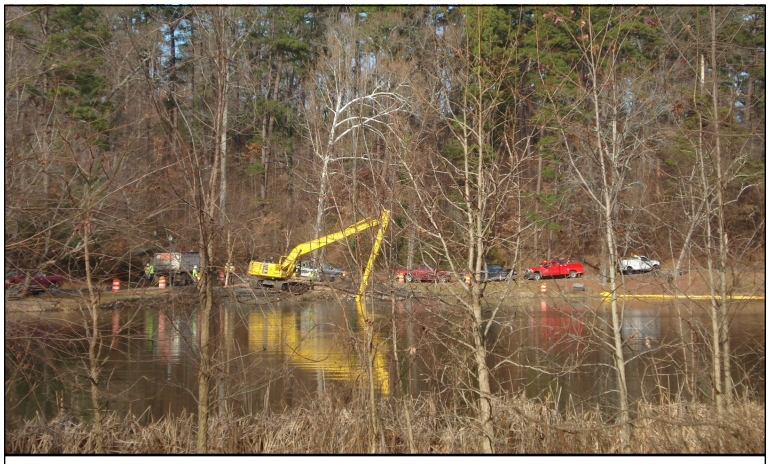


The plug in the soffit is visible to the left of the porch in this image. Squirrels had been entering the house through the opening for a few years. Plaster and drywall repair took place inside the Stone House.



Some of the wood trim had to be replaced and painted.

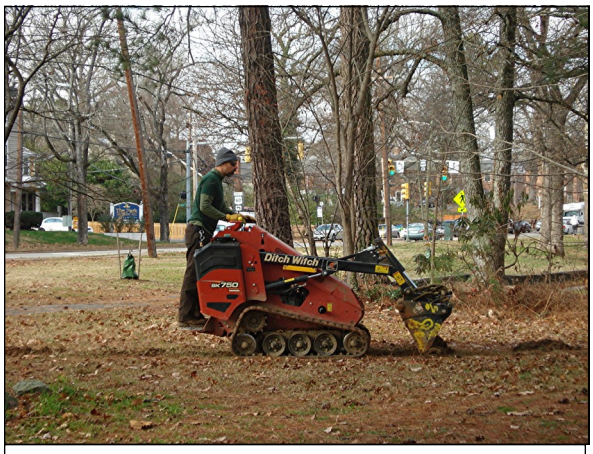
Major exterior repairs were completed in time for the first snow and the Christmas season.



Dredging the lake begins. The sludge from the fore bays is loaded onto the truck on the left for disposal.

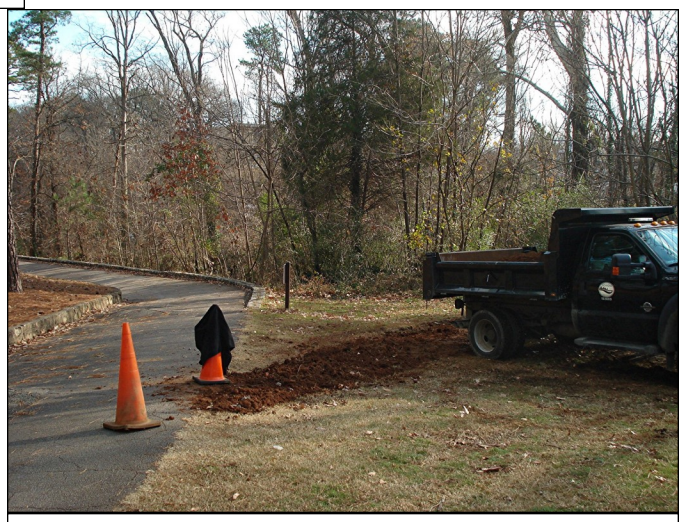
Park Champions

Mary and Marc removed invasive vines and a few weed trees. Note the beautiful red leaves on the crabapple tree to the left.



Parks and Recreation decided to reroute a trail near the stone pyramid to reduce or eliminate erosion. Michael is scratching the surface of the new route.

Michael and a Puller Bear weed wrench versus several old privet trees. Michael and the wrench prevailed.



A depression at the service road was packed with clay to preserve the integrity of the asphalt.

Michael, Bill and Andrew planted native flora in the path of the former trail.

After the pine tags were spread and the newly planted natives were watered, Carol and Michael talked about ways to avoid soil erosion in the park.