Transcript for "Presenting William Bartram"

An Audio Program from *This Goodly Land: Alabama's Literary Landscape*

Dr. John C. Hall speaks about naturalist, artist, and author William Bartram. This presentation was made on March 27, 2008, as part of the Draughon Seminars in State and Local History, a series of lectures funded by the Kelly W. Mosley Endowment and presented by the Auburn University Libraries and by the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts at Auburn University. The audio has been separated into three parts for the convenience of the listener. This transcript has been edited for readability.

Part I

Dr. Dwayne Cox: Good afternoon and welcome to the library. I'm Dwayne Cox, head of Special Collections & Archives, and I thank you all for being here.

Our speaker this afternoon is Dr. John Hall. John has a long resume here, and I won't read it all, but John is a naturalist, he's a museum professional, he's currently the curator of the Museum of the Black Belt at the University of West Alabama, which is located in Livingston, and he's here today, as you know, to discuss William Bartram.

But his trip and his appearance is funded by the W. Kelly Mosley Foundation which was created in honor of Ralph Brown Draughon, Sr., and the Kelly Mosley Foundation Funds are administered by the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities, known sometimes as Pebble Hill, and they're one of the co-sponsors today along with the University Libraries.

Dr. Hall.

[Applause]

Dr. John C. Hall: I'm delighted to be here today. I've got three degrees from the University of Alabama, and this is the only place that'll pay me to talk about Bartram. It kind of feels like I've discovered a new sin.

You're going to find that I'm very excited about this whole thing, and really the subtitle of this talk is "Who Is William Bartram and Why Should We Care?" And so I'm going to range hither

and yon but someone reminded me to be sure and tell my joke, which is my best Auburn joke, but it's a good Auburn joke, "in a good way," as they say.

During the Depression, one of the "alphabet agencies" hired the professor from Auburn to go out and give the talk in agriculture around the state, went to every county, every little town, gave the same talk over and over and over. They provided him with a car and a driver, and they went on and on and on and on, and, after a couple of weeks, the driver says "You know, boss, I think I can give that talk myself." The professor says, "Well, I'm getting pretty tired of it; let's change hats." So they swapped hats, the professor drove into town, and the driver gets out, stands up in front of the crowd and gives the talk, perfectly, just perfectly. He's doing real well in the question and answer until finally some wise guy in the back stands up and asks some horrible question involving phases of the moon and planting by signs and pounds of fertilizer and things like that and "What do you think about that?" "That's the dumbest question I ever heard. That question is so dumb even my chauffeur can answer it."

So I have my chauffeur here, this is my wife Rosa, who's almost ready to give the talk. If she went along to a few more of these, she could do it.

There're really two Bartrams to talk about. There is the one who is famous up North, which is John Bartram, this man's father, and then there's the one who visited the South and wrote the book about Alabama and the Southeast, which is who we know to be famous. So this is going to range amongst them.

[image displayed: William Bartram, portrait]

Here's the old man, who you'll notice was painted by Charles Wilson Peale in 1808. I counted on my fingers, and I realized the old man is about my age in that picture. He is the author of the *Travels* and *An Account about Indians*. He is the son of John Bartram who is the famous man in Philadelphia. He's an artist of note, and he's the senior American naturalist of his day. One of the little things I'd like to point out about him today is how he fits into the society of the Founding Fathers. He's very much a part of that group, and so it would be interesting to kind of watch how he fits into that.

[image displayed: "John Bartram," modern drawing of an Eighteenth Century naturalist]

This is the father; we really don't have a portrait of John. He's the first American-born professional botanist, maybe the first professional botanist in America. He has an international reputation, he is in direct contact with Linnaeus, who is the father of botany. He originates a commercial nursery which he calls a botanical garden, and this nursery supports the family for several generations; it's a going concern. In 1765, he is appointed the King's Botanist by the king of America. (I always enjoy asking children if they know America had a king, and we certainly did.) He is being supported by a Quaker British businessman named Peter Collinson, and he sends Collinson these boxes of seeds, and plants, and cuttings and things. Collinson, who is in the midst of this big enthusiasm for English gardening, hands these things out to people. In fact, probably John Bartram is responsible for more of the introduced weeds in Europe than

anybody else. And he is the co-founder of the American Philosophical Society in 1742, which is the first American scientific society, so he's quite a guy.

[image displayed: Benjamin Franklin, portrait]

This is the family friend, and one of the things to point out is that this is another Peale portrait. You'll see these all through the show today. This man was a habitual painter of famous Americans in his day, and so to see the Bartram portrait amongst them is to indicate where he ranks in all of this. He [Franklin] also has an international reputation of a scientist. If he had not gone into politics, he would be famous still as a scientist. He is the co-founder with John Bartram of the American Philosophical Society, and he has offered a printing job to the son William. William is the second son, he's one of a pair of twins, and there's an older son who's going to inherit the family business. So the father is very anxious to find something for Billy to do. One of the things that he does not accept is a job as an apprentice with Franklin, and he fails at about everything else he tries, and so we'll see what happens to poor Billy.

[image displayed: Bartram House, exterior, engraving]

This is the Bartram House, from an engraving published about the time of William Bartram's death (I'm sorry to be blocking the way here, I'm quite opaque). So there it is, about 1820 or so, and there it is today.

[image displayed: Bartram House, exterior, modern photograph]

The house is still in good repair; it is a city park in Philadelphia located about three or four miles out from town on the other side of the Schuylkill River. It is a project of a large Friends group, and it's very active. They've redone the house, the place looks beautiful. That looks like a raggedy old garden here, but, in fact, that is probably what it looked like in Bartram's day.

Some of the famous Americans like Madison and Jefferson and George Washington himself come out to see the famous garden and are disimpressed. It lacks order. Of course the Bartrams are planting by habitat, and they're planting wet plants here and dry plants here and sunny plants here and all. They're still doing this, and so it's really quite a nice affair.

The Bartrams are part of a large Quaker community in and around Philadelphia, and this Quaker community really is quite connected still to England and to Holland and so, again and again, we're going to see this connection of businessmen and whatnot.

[image displayed: Window of Bartram House, exterior, showing stone underneath with carved motto, modern photograph]

What looks at first like a cutesy little religious motto under the window, which is carved by the way by John himself, "It is God alone, Almighty Lord, the Holy One by me adored. John Bartram, 1770." Well, that just looks, "Oh, isn't that sweet," but in fact he's a Free-Thinker, and he is at odds with his Meeting, his church, over the question of the Trinity. He denies it, he says there is only One. Now, if you read it, of course, again, "It is God alone," you realize that this is

a religious screed, he is stating his belief. At one point they formally dis-church him, and he says, “That’s okay,” and he comes to church everyday anyway, he keeps on coming.

[image displayed: Bartram House, interior, showing desk, chair, and work materials, modern photograph]

Here is Bartram’s desk, reconstructed as it might have been sometime in the early 1820s around the time of Bartram’s death. The furniture is gone from the house, but they have replenished it with period antiques, it’s very lovely. The lady who was running the tour would not go on until I came out of the room. I was going to sit at the desk for a while. That’s a shame, I really wanted to sit there for a little while, but there is his desk in the house.

[image displayed: Price list for garden items]

This is a going commercial concern. Here is the garden catalog published by the father, John Bartram, 1758; there are a number of these known. He is prepared to supply you with seeds and cuttings and bulbs and whatnot for several hundred species of plants, many of which are from the South or from further west. In fact, if you’ll look right there, that is John Bartram’s signature on that particular piece. This is very much of a business venture as far as John is concerned.

[image displayed: Peter Collinson, engraving]

This is John’s sponsor in England, a man named Peter Collinson, who is a Quaker businessman. There is a connection between him and Franklin, who, you’ll recall, is in England for some time before the Revolutionary War. This man is a famous supporter of science and botanists, and there is a genus of plants in fact named Collinsonia by someone who knew which side of the bread his butter was on. So this is Peter Collinson. They never met. There is a lengthy correspondence between them, Bartram Sr. sending him these boxes of seeds and whatnot. This guy really is quite important to the foundation of early botany as a science.

[image displayed: Bird, color illustration]

Here’s the problem: Billy doesn’t want to be the printer’s devil to Benjamin Franklin. Billy wants to be a botanist and an artist and, as early as fourteen or fifteen, Billy’s art is already circulating in Europe. This is one of a number of little pictures here, showing a bird or something sitting on some sort of a little stump, which has been unkindly referred to as the “stump and magpie period.”

But the thing of it is, all of the things you will see in the Bartram drawings are real plants and animals. That’s an identifiable plant, it’s probably either peppergrass or trumpet creeper. This is an identifiable species of moth. This is another grassy plant over here. Again and again in these little drawings you’re going to see identifiable natural history specimens. Bartram has some kind of a phobia about having empty spots in his drawings, and you’re going to see that he’s always putting something off in a corner to fill up an empty spot. So this is typical Bartram; he gets more elegant, but he can’t help himself for filling in the empty spots.

[image displayed: Mud turtle, drawing]

Also early on, he is commissioned to draw a series of turtles for someone in England, and he draws a lovely series of turtles, which are very much acceptable illustrations of recognizable species. Here's a mud turtle with this identifiable little hinge in it.

[image displayed: Blandings turtle, drawing]

There's a Blandings turtle. Now that's a Northeast species, we don't have that one in the South, but look at the pretty shine he's been able to render on the belly of the turtle there.

[image displayed: Snapping turtle, drawing]

While that's kind of cartoonish, any of you who have had the enjoyment of dealing with a free-range snapping turtle knows, man, they will get back up on their hind legs, and they'll get down, and they'll leap and lunge and snap at you, and it goes pop at you, and so that's not a happy snapping turtle right there.

So the kid's got talent, but can he make a living at it?

[image displayed: Timber Rattlesnake, watercolor]

Here's a young Bartram work, a timber rattlesnake, lacking a little bit in artistic merit, but certainly an accurate little watercolor painting of a timber rattlesnake.

[image displayed: Map showing the southeastern coast of the United States during the late Colonial period]

The English win the French and Indian War, Seven Years' War in Europe. The French give up their claim to the Southeast, which is typified by the presence of Fort Toulouse right over here. So, through Collinson's influence, John is appointed King's Botanist to go down and explore the Southwest. This is the Southwest in this era; it doesn't become the Southeast until much later.

That is the best map I have from National Geographic and, since it was free …. So they come out of Philadelphia, they come down to Charleston, they explore the coast up and down, the South Carolina, Georgia, North Florida coast, spend a good deal of time down around St. Augustine and the St. John's river area down here. Little Billy says "This is it, man. This is the place, this is what I want to do." This is in 1765, they write a big report and send it off to Collinson, and then they go home.

[image displayed: Franklin Tree branch, color illustration]

One of the things they discover in the South is the Franklin Tree. Now this is the famous instance of the camellia-like shrub they find growing at Fort Barrington, Georgia. They find it in one place. There's a small grove of mature, big shrubs. By 1810, it's gone; no one ever sees it again. People have looked for it in the woods ever since, and it's not there. And so, between this trip in

which it is not blooming and the next trip in which it is, they get some seeds. He and his father, on two different trips, collect seeds from this thing, and the seeds go back to Philadelphia. This becomes extinct in the wild, and the assumption at this point, there's still some work on it, but there's an assumption at this point, is that all living specimens of this are descended from the seeds that the Bartrams rescued. That may or may not be true, but that's the story.

It is an extraordinarily hard plant to grow. It will not grow in any place which has ever grown cotton (which in this day and age means most of the South), because there's a fungus associated with cotton agriculture which kills it. And it's very rare to see one of these things grown large enough to be flowering and fruiting. I've tried it twice now, and neither one of them has lived but about a year, so I'm going to try it again. This is Franklin's Camellia, Franklinia altamaha. The Altamaha is the upper end of the Savannah River, so it's Franklin's Camellia of the Altamaha.

Billy fails at storekeeping. He fails at being a planter. His father gives him a bunch of money and sets him up with some land to become an indigo farmer. He's more interested in natural history than he is in disciplining his slaves. He can't get anything done, he goes broke, and in fact he's pretty much of a failure. Now we like to call him Billy and think of him as a young kid there, but he's in his mid thirties when all this is going on.

[image displayed: John Fothergill, engraving]

So he scurries around and finds himself a sponsor in England who is an associate of Collinson's, and this man is John Fothergill, who is the "Dr. Phil" of London of his day. He is the society doctor, and he also has a big botanical garden and supports botanists. Fothergill commissions him to go to the Southeast, collect exotic plants (common plants that we know were considered to be exotic) and send them to him, and kind of micromanages him or tries to micromanage him. He keeps saying, "Billy, get more plants, more plants, more plants," and Billy says "Yeah, right. Look at the Indians! Look at this, look at that!" So there's a little tension between them as to whether he's doing exactly what he should be doing.

Billy writes several reports to him which exist and one which doesn't (we wish it did), which go back to England. The problem here is that all of the drawings and the manuscripts and the specimens that he collects go to Britain. Then, after the unpleasantness beginning shortly, they never come back. Fothergill is handing them out hither and yon as marks of favor and influence, and, to this day, there has never been a retrospective of the Bartram art. There has never been a big collection of it in a book. The specimens are scattered hither and yon around the country. There is still work to do, the problem being that the stuff is over there and the people that are interested are over here, but, as we know, there are people who are working on this, and so we remain hopeful.

[image displayed: Natural history drawing, color illustration]

Here's a drawing for Mr. Fothergill. Rosa gets upset with me when I call this a cartoon. I don't mean that it's supposed to be funny.

But again, all of the little elements in here are real. This is an identifiable species of land snail, these are calcite crystals here, this is an American lotus pod with seeds lying here and there, probably a humming bird, a male dragonfly (not just a generic dragonfly because of the little black spots on his wings), and then, of course, the snake eating the frog over here. The frog seems to be a little distressed, and, if you look right down here, there's the tail of the snake sticking out, and right back through there just faintly to be seen is the snake's body. This is typical Bartram. All of these are identifiable species. He doesn't distinguish among them. He says, "Boy, that's interesting, too!"

Rosa and I have been laughing lately at one of the catalogs at Christmas [in which there] was a t-shirt that says something to the effect of "We should all buckle down and be serious about what we do and not be distracted by other things … Oh look, there's a chicken!" It's an ADD t-shirt, that's what it is. So Bartram is, I think, maybe a little bit distracted by things.

Part II

[image displayed: Map showing routes of Bartram's journeys, 1773-1776]

With his grant from Fothergill, he commences. He comes back to Charleston, he mostly lives in Savannah. If you read the book, you think he is on this big, long, three-year journey throughout the Southeast. He is living in Savannah and going on excursions, usually with letters of introduction to important people hither and yon. He goes and he spends weeks or months collecting, then he comes back to Savannah, boxes it up, writes it up, and ships it off to Mr. Fothergill. That's the way things are going. The book is very deliberately created to convey the sense of this journey without the complications of coming and going. It's not that he's being duplicitous, it's just that it's easier to write a travelogue like that.

He is, in the spring of 1775, trying to go over the Appalachian Mountains to see the Cherokees in central Tennessee, when the unpleasant news arrives of the beginning of the war in Boston. The British agents have been stirring up the frontier; it's not safe to go over and see the Over-the-Hill Cherokees. So he regroups very quickly, finds there is a bunch of traders who are going to Mobile. He joins them, and off he goes to Alabama. He and his father before him want to see the Mississippi, so the whole point of this is to go to Mobile and then go along the coast and up to Pointe Coupée to see the Mississippi River, which he eventually accomplishes.

Fortunately for us, though, he enters Alabama along the Chattahoochee River in early July of 1775 and spends the rest of the summer and part of the winter either in Alabama or traveling across it. He goes to Mobile. He takes a little side trip to Pensacola, where he is afraid that he is going to be arrested. Even though the family appears to have been Revolutionary in sympathy, he is carrying all these letters to important people who are, of course, Loyalists. He doesn't know who would arrest him; it may be one or the other, you know. I mean, this whole war at this point is Shiite [vs.] Sunni all over again. People are killing each other, burning each other out, shipping each other off, stealing from each other; it's a terrible scene.

Unfortunately he is recognized by the Governor at Pensacola, and the Governor, instead of arresting him, offers him a job. “Won’t you stay here and do a survey of West Florida and be our naturalist?” “No, thanks, I’m going back to Mobile.” So that’s what he does. He goes over and gets a look at the river in the vicinity of Baton Rouge, meets Dunbar who’s the famous Mississippi natural historian, comes back to Mobile, sends off a load. This is what I would really love to see, some of the specimens and the notes he sent to England from Mobile about September of 1775.

Then he comes back up the old road to Mobile (which is Federal Road to be) and spends the winter living in a little Indian town. If you go to Montgomery, if you go north like you’re going to Wetumpka, at some point you will cross the Tallapoosa River. The Indian town where he is staying is immediately upstream on the left bank. So he is living there. He goes down to Fort Toulouse, he sees and describes Fort Toulouse. He describes Alabama, he describes the Black Belt. He describes eighty miles of unbroken hardwood forests in the midst of what we know to be the Pine Belt now. He describes an area ten miles across that is solid dogwood trees. What, an old growth forest of dogwood trees? There’re all kinds of wonderful things that he sees here, and we are very thankful for him.

Then, about the first of January, he goes back to Savannah. He gets his affairs in order. By then the war is on, he loses touch with England. Then, in 1776, he goes back home, not along the coast where the war is. But he goes back inland and goes home to Philadelphia and arrives there in time for his father’s death the next year and lives the rest of his life on the botanical garden (which now belongs to his brother) as the resident naturalist and reinvented philosopher.

[image displayed: Bartram on the river in a dugout canoe, modern painting]

He’s still inspiring to modern workers. This is a modern artist named Jackson Walker, and this wonderful painting of Billy and his dugout canoe along the St. John’s River in Florida, his favorite area. I have not seen the original of this, but they tell me, if you look back in the bushes, you can see Indians peeking out, which I think is a grand idea. So, there is Billy and the St. John’s.

[image displayed: Map showing Bartram’s route across Alabama]

Here is a close up of where he was in Alabama. He enters down below Phenix City/ Columbus, crosses the river at a big Indian town called Uchee. He goes along the northern edge of the Black Belt, crosses the Black Belt down the old Federal Path. He spends most of his time up here around Stockton at the home of a former British commander there, a man named Farmer, Major Farmer. Farmer loans him a canoe and somebody to row, and he explores upstream into the delta up here and makes a number of his most important discoveries. Beautiful things that he sees, he describes very nicely for us. Then eventually he finds a boat that’s going west and he goes to see the Mississippi, comes back up the Path and then spends the winter in here, and then back home to Savannah.

[image displayed: Uchee (Creek town), overhead view, poster]

A lovely big painting of Uchee; it's a poster created by the U.S. Army (which explains the great big eagle in the front). But this is a pretty good drawing actually, the artist has done his homework. This is the Chattahoochee River, this is the west bank in Alabama. Big winter house, big counsel house, with a conical roof, semi-subterranean, and then bunches of individual dwellings around. Here're people shooting with blow guns. Here's the chunky yard which is one of the big games of the early historic period. The chunky yard often had a big post sunk right in the middle of it, and there's the big post, and this post is very important symbolically for the town. When you went to war, this is what you painted red and stuck your hatchet in and things like this, so he's got that right. This is a very big picture and, by the time you shoot it down like this, what you can't see very well is, over here are a bunch of mounted horsemen, and that is undoubtedly Bartram and his party of travelers about to cross the river.

[image displayed: Wooded path, modern photograph]

Here's the path to Mobile. The Indians had been here 15,000 years by this time, and they had all the routes here and there worked out. The trick of getting from over in the Creek area around the upper Tallapoosa and Coosa is that you don't want to have to cross all these big rivers as you head for Mobile. So what you do is you come down the divide along the edge of the Alabama, and this old track, which was a footpath and later a horse path and finally a wagon road, becomes the Federal Road. So this is the path to Mobile.

There are still places where you can see the old ruts of the wagon road, and I'm glad to report that here recently, the Highway Department has announced that they are going to publish a map of the Federal Road which was surveyed, a map that shows which parts of it there's still roadbed on, and in fact a good deal of it, probably forty to fifty percent of it, still has modern improved roads on it. Then, of course, a good deal of it crosses private property, and I'm not quite sure how they are going to deal with that because you can't get on that property, but a good deal of the stuff on private property still looks like this. Photographed by Mark Dauber who is a local photographer (maybe some of you know him, he's most excellent).

[image displayed: Oak leaf hydrangea, branch, modern photograph, and leaf and flower cluster, drawing]

One of the favors he does do for us is that he, just over the line in Georgia, just before he comes into Alabama, describes very carefully the oak leaf hydrangea, which is, of course, everybody in the South's favorite plant. You may be interested to realize that this is your new state wildflower. Now it's not the state flower, which is the camellia. Why is the camellia the state flower? Because the Legislature asked the Women's Federated Garden Clubs to offer a candidate, and they did. Why did they pick that? Nobody knows, but it's sure pretty. But, unfortunately, it doesn't live in the Western Hemisphere. Anyway, this is a much better candidate for the state flower but it's never going to be the state flower, it's always going to be the state wildflower.

[image displayed: Hydrangea leaf, mounted botanical specimen]

This is a drawing, an engraving made from a drawing by Bartram, and there is a leaf collected by Bartram in Alabama or Georgia, the summer of 1775. I would love to know if, in fact, that might

not be one of the leaves that went back from Mobile that summer. By the way, this leaf was here. Remember, we had a Bartram Conference, in this room in fact, a couple of years ago, and this was one of the ones that somebody had managed to get here to show us. But that's about as close as you're going to come to meeting William Bartram right now.

[image displayed: Cowcumber or bigleaf magnolia, leaf and blossom, modern photographs]

Here is another one of his descriptions. Now he names some two hundred plants in the book, but for reasons technical, he winds up being able to credit only about twenty of them, because of botanical complications which we won't go into here. But this is one of the ones he described. This is the bigleaf magnolia, the one with the great big green leaves, blossoms about this big around. He calls it Magnolia auriculata because of the little ears back here at the base of the leaf, but this is better called an Alabama cowcumber (not to be confused with cucumber magnolia which is a different plant). So this is cowcumber, and I'll read you his description of this in just a moment.

[image displayed: Pyramid magnolia, leaf and blossom, modern photographs]

Pyramid magnolia, another one of his discoveries. This one interestingly is discovered down around Boatyard Lake in Baldwin County. Boatyard Lake is where Fort Mims is. That's the place where the Creek War kicks off thirty years later. This has got this peculiar little kite-shaped or diamond-shaped leaf. It's also got ears, but it's much smaller and blossoms are about this big. This is here; if you look for it hard in the woods, you can find it, but it's not one of the more prominent of the deciduous magnolias.

Now this is him describing Magnolia auriculata: "How gaily fluttered the radiated wings of the Magnolia auriculata, each branch supporting an expanded umbrella, superbly crested with a silver plume, fragrant blossom, or crimson studded strobile and fruits!" Ah, that's much better than the modern way, isn't it? He goes on and on about several trees. I'm going to read you something else longer in a minute, so I won't read this one, but he goes on and on about the "stateliness of the trunk" of the cypress, "cumbrous top toward the skies," "wide shade," "dark intervening cloud," and so forth. This is somebody who really likes it.

[image displayed: Bartram painting outdoors at Tukabatchee, modern painting]

This is an Alabama artist, Carol Meredith-Barksdale, and this is supposed to be Tukabatchee. We don't have any indication that Bartram actually ever did any landscapes, but, again, she did her homework. This is the Tallapoosa flowing in this direction. If you are driving toward Tallassee, from Shorter, you cross the river and shortly you will see some kind of industrial plant out in the field and what looks like part of Auburn's experiment station or something back behind it. Behind that, by the river, is this. That's where this is, and again she's got the big winter house down right. She has got the little clusters of private homes surrounded by little fences, which is a feature that Bartram alone notes, amongst all of the people who talk about the Creeks, the little fences around the little clusters of two or three houses.

There's the chunky yard, there's the pole, and here is the square ground. The square ground was very formatted, who could sit where, what clan, and so forth, and this is the outdoor venue for everybody making decisions and whatnot. So he's still inspiring folks. Bartram alone notes that the houses (which were poles with woven branches and canes between them and then plastered smoothly with mud) at the bigger towns were painted and had mythological animals painted on them. Nobody else talks about this, and Bartram is full of these insights. I would love to see one of these houses that was in full dress before things started to go bad for the Creek nation.

[audience question: "Lower Creek or Upper Creek for Tukabatchee?"]

Tukabatchee is, I guess, Upper Creek. We and the British and everybody else tried to put western organizational models onto the Creeks, and it doesn't quite fit, and this is kind of, maybe, sometimes, sort of, the Creek capital or where big meetings were held. This is the town for instance where Tecumseh comes down and gives the frightening speech suggesting that we kill all of the white guys. Not a bad idea.

[image displayed: Giant evening primrose, color illustration]

One of the things he discovers in Baldwin County is the giant evening primrose, which he's very careful about describing, does it all just perfectly. It's a big, tall, yellow primrose, sometimes with blossoms as big as four or five inches, and, even discounting a certain amount of hyperbole from the learned master, it's still down there and it's still pretty, although it's not quite that big.

[image displayed: Giant evening primrose, modern photograph]

There's a photograph of it. It is quite widespread. This is one of the flowers that goes back to England and Holland and escapes, and it spreads rapidly and is a roadside weed. Well, around 1903 or '04, when DeVries and Schömachen [sp.?], the other guy, are working on reinventing the laws of heredity, and DeVries starts working on mutation, it is this plant, it turns out, that DeVries is using as a model for his mutation studies. Unfortunately it mutates very rapidly and interbreeds, and it's really very difficult, but new evidence suggests that it is in fact the Bartram primrose that is so important to the foundation of genetics.

[image displayed: Cypress swamp, modern photograph]

Now, this is obviously a big, flooded swamp back over here. Bartram goes up the river at Stockton, up through the delta; bears left and goes up Baton Bigbee a short distance. Now this is the senior Southern botanist of his era, nobody else knows the Southeast better, he's been down there about three or four years by this time, he knows it, he has seen it all. Here's what he says about Alabama. "Opposite this bluff, on the other side of the river, is a district of swamp or low land, the richest I ever saw, or perhaps anywhere to be seen; as for the trees I shall forbear to describe them, because it would appear incredible, let it suffice to mention" that the cypress, ash, sycamore, yellow poplar, sweetgum, and others, "are by far the tallest, straightest and every way the most enormous that I have ever seen or heard of." That's Alabama, and, if we can leave that delta alone long enough, maybe we will see those big trees again. We don't have anything to be ashamed of. He was impressed with Alabama, and he had seen the rest of the South.

[image displayed: Shoals (Cahaba) lily, modern photograph]

He is the discoverer of the Cahaba lily, which many of you realize is actually the Shoals lily and occurs in many of the rivers as they come down off of the fall line into the coastal plain, all the way around the Southeast up into the Carolinas. Our local variety is the Cahaba lily, and we're rightfully proud of this gorgeous river plant.

Part III

[image displayed: Original edition of *Travels*, spine and cover]

Here's the book.

[speaker holds up Dover paperbound edition]

This is the most commonly found edition of the book by Dover. Do not buy this book, I'll explain in a minute. But this is about the same size as the original, maybe slightly thicker. At the time this was printed in 1791, it was the largest book ever printed in America. So this was no minor feat that he managed to pull off, and part of the problem for having to wait so long (see, the war is over about '83, and it's still eight years here until the book is published; part of this delay is due to the sheer size of the project), unfortunately, during this delay, there are four other major botanical works about America printed, and he gets scooped in naming many of his plants.

These are extraordinarily rare now, because it was not popular, it didn't sell, and in fact that's the only American edition until 1928. One edition; but, by the next year, there is an edition published in Britain and over the years there've been something like fifty foreign editions. Of course, Bartram doesn't get a penny out of any of these. Although it does appear that he got a chance to partially edit the one that was published in London, and I'll show you something from them in a minute. It turns out that the book is avidly read by Britain and the Europeans who see it as a romantic novel of man in the wilderness, surrounded by tall trees and dangerous panthers and Indians lurking with bows and arrows and things like that.

The romantic side of the Indians increases in direct proportion to how far away from them you are. New England by the late 1700s or 1800s has this romanticized notion of Indians, as soon as the Indians stop scalping them, and so it's a bloody business. In Europe, though, they've always thought that the Indians are very cool, and so this was an important book for them. It's never been out of print in 216 years, which is a pretty good record.

[image displayed: Original edition of *Travels*, frontispiece and title page]

Here is the flyleaf to the book. This is Bartram's friend Mico Chlucco, and that's probably the only portrait that we know that Bartram drew. This is an engraving made by a Philadelphia engraver of the portrait.

The book actually is entitled *Travels through North & South Carolina, Georgia, East & West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulgees, or Creek Confederacy, and…* it goes on and on, which is why everyone calls it *Bartram's Travels*. There are actually two documents in this book. The first is this travelogue, which is primarily natural history and an account of his trip. The second part is an account relating to the Indians, which is his answers at length to a series of questions posed to him by a professor at the emerging University of Pennsylvania. It is in that part that he really expands on his observations of the Indians, and it turns out to be an extraordinarily valuable piece of anthropology. In fact, Kathryn Braund here published recently on this, and everybody is delighted with the things that Bartram saw.

[image displayed: Original edition of *Travels*, title pages for both sections]

Here is the frontispiece to the *Travels* and then here is the lead page to the Account, which is the second part of the book.

[image displayed: Mico Chlucco, portrait sketch and engraving from original edition of *Travels*]

Okay, this is just for fun now. This is Bartram's original sketch and (this guy is either pretty skinny or he's not very pretty or whatever), there is Mico Chlucco, which means Chief Chlucco. Here is the engraving as it appears in the Philadelphia-produced book, maybe a little bit of improvement.

[image displayed: Mico Chlucco, engraving from British and French editions of *Travels*]

This is 1791, and then here is the next spring edition printed in London right here. Now, this is before photographic reproduction, and so, if you've got a drawing, you have to re-engrave it or get the block. Since the block was in America, you had to re-engrave it. So they gave it to a much more talented engraver in London, but unfortunately Chief Chlucco turns out looking like King George. Here is "King George," he's looking really pretty good there.

Here at the meeting a couple of years ago, someone had a French edition of the book, which is even later. Here's the French edition, and what someone has done is, they've taken a piece of tissue paper, they've traced the British edition. Then they've laid the piece of tissue paper down on the new plate and engraved through the tissue paper onto the new plate, which, of course, when you print it, means that the image is reversed. But now he's looking like Rousseau, he's looking even better at this point, an even more skilled engraver right there. So there's the gradual improvement of Chief Chlucco going through the editions. If they had kept doing it this way, he'd look pretty handsome, Robert Redford-ish, now probably.

Bartram's favorite place is north-central Florida, and he writes about it glowingly, and one of his favorite things are the big blue springs that come up out of the ground and go flowing away here. So he says "Just under my feet was the enchanting and amazing crystal fountain which incessantly threw up, from dark, rocky caverns below, tons of water every minute, forming a basin and a creek of four or five feet depth of water, and near twenty yards over, which meanders six miles through green meadows, … a continual and amazing ebullition."

Now we know that Coleridge is reading Bartram because he's copied part of it into his workbook. And so, after this passes through the opium-soaked brain of Mr. Coleridge, it comes out, "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan A stately pleasure-dome decree: Where Alph, the sacred river, ran Through caverns measureless to man Down to a sunless sea," and it goes on and talks about six miles over (which is a Bartram phrase), and so forth and so on. And you read *Kubla Khan*, you read Bartram's description, you say "Oh, my word, there's no doubt about where this guy is getting his mood." The poets, the Romantic poets, are reading minutely.

And then, here's *Ruth*. *Ruth* is fun. Go to the Internet, Google "Wordsworth Ruth Text" and this will come up. Read the whole poem, it's 250 lines long, it's fun. The upshot of which is a wild Georgia boy comes home from the New World, he seduces innocent Ruth and pretends to marry her, then runs off and abandons her, and she goes mad and runs into the woods and dies a tragic death. This is the Romantic period now, this is exactly what you expect to happen, but what is fun is to read Bartram and then read *Ruth*, and all of the sudden you start recognizing where all this imagery is coming from.

"Brought [them]from the Cherokees," "military casque" (a helmet), girls, "a happy rout," "with dance and shout," "their pleasant Indian Town," "To gather strawberries all day long, returning with a choral song when day-light is gone down," straight out of Bartram with his encounter with the Cherokee maidens that they're watching from the bushes. Oh, it's wonderful. Here is the "Magnolia spread high … overhead! The Cypress and her spire," scarlet flowers' gleam "cover a hundred leagues and seem To set the hills on fire." This is straight out of his description of the azaleas in the Appalachians, absolutely straight from it.

"But ill he liv'd, much evil saw," and he receives the "wild men's vices" and gives "them back his own," and "his genius and moral frame" is impaired, and he becomes "the slave of low desires," and so forth. In other words, living on the rough frontier is damaging to the soul of the righteous man. To which my point is that, if this is what the British think about the Americans, maybe we were better off without them. But it's fun to see the different take that Wordsworth gives on this thing. He views this wild free life with the Indians with horror, really. This is degrading, it's not what a gentleman does. An interesting take on things. It's fun to read this.

[image displayed: Thomas Jefferson, portrait]

Here's Thomas Jefferson. He's not a close friend of the Bartrams, but Jefferson and Madison and Washington and all are buying a good deal of their plant material from the Bartrams, and there is a correspondence between them. All of them at one time or the other come out (you'll recall the Continental Congress and everything was in Philadelphia), and all these people come out and visit the garden. Again, here's another one of these Peale paintings with Bartram right in amongst the Founding Fathers.

[image displayed: Tea party at Bartram House, Revolutionary period, 1920s painting]

This is one that the curator at Bartram's Garden, a man named Joel Fry, who (I'll show you his picture in a minute) sent me. We discussed whether or not we were actually going to show this,

and we decided that we would. This is supposed to be the Bartrams. This is William, who is dressed, of course, as the French philosopher Rousseau, and then this is George Washington dressed as he might have looked about 1760 or so, in his militia uniform with dark hair and as a young man. (They're the same age, almost exactly.) Here's everybody dressed at the height of French fashion, being served by a lady of color.

This is everybody's vision of what gentlemen's society must have been like in Revolutionary times. This was printed and run as part of a calendar by a Philadelphia newspaper about 1920. While it's got all kinds of problems, including plants that didn't exist in North America at the time and a Persian cat (which Joel said he will personally eat if anybody can prove that it was there in America by this point), it shows the esteem with which people held the Bartrams. These are important folks, these are the folks who are adding to their gardens and making societal life worthwhile. So it's a powerful image, even though it's very wrong in detail.

[image displayed: Black vulture, color illustration]

Bartram is really an important bird man; he can identify more than 215 species of birds without binoculars. This is a pre-binocular day. Here is a black vulture, one of Bartram's little sketches. Bartram never makes the big book of birds that might have made him famous, but he's a marvelous artist, and he is the teacher of Alexander Wilson. Wilson is the one who does paint the portfolio of birds and therefore claims to be the father of American ornithology. Someone has pointed out that if Wilson is the father of American ornithology, then Bartram is the godfather.

[image displayed: Florida sandhill crane, color illustration]

This is another Bartram drawing of the Florida sandhill crane, which is the eastern sub-species, which was described by Mr. Bartram. You know this is a Bartram painting because of the recognizable species of flowers and plants in the margins of the painting or the drawing.

[image displayed: Alexander Wilson, portrait]

Here is Alexander Wilson himself; a Scottish schoolteacher who is very interested in birds. Bartram teaches him about birds and also teaches him and critiques his painting, so he improves the man's painting. He creates a portfolio called "American Ornithology." So that's kind of a pun right there. He is a big influence on Audubon, who might have come up with the idea himself, but there's enough of a contact between this man Wilson and Audubon who is slightly younger, that it's likely that Audubon gets this idea of painting the portfolio (and then selling it by subscription to support the printing of it) from Wilson. There is a meeting between these two in Cincinnati and the only bona fide we have of it is from Audubon himself who claims that, when Wilson saw his painting, Wilson gathered up his stuff and left without a word. Maybe; but it's a good story, what the heck.

[image displayed: Woodpeckers, four species, color illustration]

Here's Wilson's woodpecker plate. I would point out at this time that all the early drawings of birds are done from dead specimens, including that rather obviously dead sapsucker over there

with its tail and mouth open. This doesn't resolve itself until after the Civil War, when photography becomes available, because a bird just won't pose for you no matter what you do.

[image displayed: Swallows, several species, color illustration, and screech owl, with other species, color illustration]

Another Wilson plate, including swallows which are quite good, and a bunch of just sort of odds and ends birds, including a little screech owl which looks kind of strange but then again little screech owls look kind of strange. Wilson did quite a good piece of work, but he dies young, leaving the stage open for Audubon.

[image displayed: Green heron, color illustration]

There is a little watercolor sketch by Bartram, and the bird is noted mostly for the lifelike pose. This is the work of a man who is so familiar with the birds, he's a naturalist first, an artist second, and he's so familiar with the birds, he is able to sketch them in a lifelike pose.

[image displayed: Golden bream, color illustration]

Bartram is a big fisherman. He is probably the first American-European to catch a fish in Alabama on an artificial bait. The Indians teach him how to make flies with a hook and some feathers, and you dangle it on a pole by the stump, and (slurp, slurp) they get 'em. So he calls it fishing with a bob, not a bobber, but a bob. So this thing is a bob.

[image displayed: Alligators, drawing]

That's an early Bartram work, and it's alligators. Bartram describes alligators, and he makes some wild and extravagant claims. Now I've been sniffing around behind Bartram for about a dozen years, and, as recently as the mid '90s, when I started wondering what was going on here, there was an urban legend floating around that you couldn't trust Bartram because his observations of the alligators were so bizarre that you couldn't trust anything else he said. And, in fact, when we attended a meeting down in Florida, there were several papers specifically addressing this problem.

One of the things he claims is that alligators blow smoke out of their nose, and another thing he claims is that when they grunt, the water surface dances, and he claims also that they cooperate, lying side by side eating fish that are running up and down the rivers. Well, that's obviously nonsense, and so, even in Bartram's own life, he shuts up and refuses to discuss alligators. He will not talk about alligators with anybody. "Old man's crazy."

[image displayed: Alligators feeding, modern photograph]

Unfortunately, he is right, and there is a photograph of alligators cooperatively feeding. The creek is flowing this way, and here're the alligators lined up cheek to jowl with their mouths open, scarfing up the fish that are running up and down the little creek and here're the guys ready for second setting. All right, there're alligators cooperatively feeding.

[image displayed: Alligator, modern photograph]

And there's an alligator grunting in the water and the water dancing, because it turns out that what is happening is that this isn't a vocalization, it's them vibrating their ribcage. That (grunt, grunt) noise is the alligator doing this and, in fact, the water does dance and, when they slam their mouth shut, the spray issues out of their noses and mouths, and I guess that could be mistaken for smoke or something. So it turns out the old man's right, which makes everybody feel a lot better about believing what he says because, in almost every case, he may not be interpreting what he is seeing right but his observations are correct.

[image displayed: Coachwhip snake, color illustration]

Here is one of his nicer watercolor sketches. Those of you who have ever seen a coachwhip snake realize that it's tan or pale for most of its length, and the only pigmented part is the few inches at the front, which looks like the sweat soaked handle of a braided bullwhip. Which is why they are called a whip snake, and this is the one that chases you down and wraps around your ankles and lashes you to death with its tail. (OK, if you believe that one, I've got a bridge I want to sell you, too, but it does look like a whip.)

[image displayed: Rattlesnake head, drawing]

Here is the head of a rattlesnake. There're a couple of good rattlesnake stories in Bartram, and there is a hysterically funny story where he is working over here at Tukabatchee, and somebody comes to him saying "Puc-puggy, Puc-puggy" (his Indian name is Puc-puggy , which means Flower Hunter). "Puc-puggy, Puc-puggy, there's a rattlesnake in the camp. We're forbidden to kill rattlesnakes. You've got to come kill the rattlesnake." He goes down, and, "I don't want to get involved in this." "Oh, yes!" So he goes down and he kills the rattlesnake, cuts off its head and goes back to where he's working. In a few minutes, here's a deputation of people who have come to scratch him so that he bleeds, to bleed out some of the aggressive nature in him. There's this big argument over whether or not they're going to scratch him, and they finally forgive him. It's a wonderful story. I am tempted to wonder if, in fact, this might not be the rattlesnake.

[image displayed: Marsh pink and imperial moth, color illustration]

Somewhere in the early '70s, somebody gives him a painting lesson, we're not quite sure who it is. He's working with a mapmaker named Brahm [sp.?] in Georgia, and somebody gives him a painting lesson because his stuff gets lots better real quick. This is one of his later paintings with the lovely marsh pink here, but he can't help himself, he's got to include something else there, a lovely big imperial moth, even though he's talking about the painting. He is toying with the idea of doing a "Botany of America" with a lot of pictures of plants and things, which never actually comes off, but a lot of these paintings and drawings you see were prepared for this "Botany of America."

[image displayed: Lettered olive mollusk, drawing]

There's a lettered olive, a lovely pen-and-ink work for the little shell that lives on the Gulf Coast right now.

[image displayed: Passion flower, drawing]

A passion flower, but we all know it's really called a maypop. There's a maypop. A typical exacting later drawing by Billy.

[image displayed: Pitcher plant, drawing]

And then there's a pitcher plant, and this is one of the ones drawn for the Botany, you see he has already lettered some of the details here. So here's the purple pitcher plant that still lives in Alabama, but look here, he can't help himself, there's another species stuck in a corner. "Oh, I've got this big open spot here. Let me put…" "Ooh, look, a chicken!"

[image displayed: Bartram Symposium scholars standing around an easel displaying a botanical illustration, modern photograph]

Here's a bunch of Bartram scholars standing right there, including Kathryn [Braund] (who obviously doesn't like me and who ducked out … eye appointment, at least that's what she says). This is Tom Hallock. This man and this lady (who is from University of Pennsylvania and whose name I am blocking on at the moment) have discovered the original manuscript from which the 1791 edition was set. There are corrections in the manuscript in two different hands, only one of which is Bartram's. So we are waiting for them to publish for us to frantically look to see which of our passages has been added, probably by Mr. Johnson, the publisher, in order to sell the book. We're really looking forward to this.

There's a very active Bartram scholarship out there. Anybody who writes on science, travel, geography, and philosophy is bound to have people studying him, and they're still working on him even as we speak. The tall gentleman in the back is Joel Fry, the curator up at Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia, who is not nearly as frightening as he appears there, who's a marvelous guy, very knowledgeable botanist.

[image displayed: Books, *Travels: Naturalist's Edition*, *Travels: American Library Edition*, Waselkov and Braund's work on Indians]

Now it's time for your reading assignment. This is a university; you don't get out of this. The book I want you to read is [*The Travels of*]*William Bartram: Naturalist's Edition* by Francis Harper. The original book is written for an Eighteenth Century scholar who is familiar with Latin. It has certain conventions in it that make it very difficult to read, not the least of which is the names for plants that he uses are no longer valid, and you can't even look them up. "What is he talking about?" "We don't know." This is why it's very frustrating to read the original unless you're an expert.

What I want you to do is get this book (for about $10 off at Amazon), *Naturalist's Edition* by Francis Harper, because it's got the original text, then it's got a page-by-page commentary over

where he is, what the date is, what he's seeing, what he's really talking about when he talks about something. And then it's got a large glossary so you can look up every word in the text and find out what it is when he's using eight different terms for the same plant. So this is the one I want everyone to buy and read first.

If you have read that, then I will allow you to read the Kathryn Braund and Greg Waselkov (of Mobile) book on William Bartram and the Southeastern Indians. A lovely big book and they have been through Harper here. They have pulled out all of the Indian connections, and they go through them one by one (Harper publishes about 1950), they put fifty years of modern anthropological scholarship on them, bring all of them up to date. And you realize what an observer Bartram really was. He sees things and talks about things that nobody else talks about. So, by all means, if you're interested in Indians, this is your second book.

If you have done your homework, I will allow you to read the *American Library Edition*. The *American Library Edition* is a very unhappy job. It has got tissue-thin paper, narrow margins, itty-bitty type. It's not pleasant to read, but it has other things in it by Bartram, including the two original reports to Fothergill (or two of the three, one's missing). Two of the original three original reports to his sponsor in England, which is different than the text in *Travels*, and there's a few other minor things by him in there. But, by all means, I want you to read Harper's *Naturalist's Edition* first.

[image displayed: Book, *The Flower Hunter*]

He remains an inspiration to other people. A very recent children's book about the Bartrams. It's about him and his father, about little Billy who is helping in the garden and who goes on the trip with his father and who sees the Indians and everything. Charming, very excellent, really even for big folks. It tells a lot of very good things, and this is a brand new book, which I most highly recommend. It would be a mighty nice Christmas or birthday present for a young'n. There is the new book.

This is the Bartram philosophy as he expresses in his Introduction:

"This world, as a glorious apartment of the boundless palace of the sovereign Creator, is furnished with an infinite variety of animated scenes, inexpressibly beautiful and pleasing, equally free to the inspection and enjoyment of all of His creatures."

Which is a grand way to end up the thing.

[Applause…]