

LOOSELY LOGICAL, FACTUALLY FRACTURED,  
POSSIBLY PLAUSIBLE,  
TOTALLY IRRELEVANT RANDOM FACTOIDS,  
TRIVIAL TIDBITS, JOGGED MEMORIES,  
REMEMBERED REMINISCENCES AND RAW RECOLLECTIONS  
ABOUT THE “VERY EARLIEST HISTORY OF EPPC”

**DISCLAIMER:** All the names I use are the genuine article; nobody was innocent, especially Don Schmitz and Dan Thayer. I have taken a pointer from James Frey, the author of “A Million Little Pieces” so please expect a modicum of hyperbole, an erg of exaggeration and perhaps, due to lapse of time, even an occasional but wildly entertaining (at least to me) imagined memory.

By Robert F. Doren

Since Amy Ferriter is fond of calling me this, I guess I must be the defacto “old fart” of EPPC, proverbially not literally, and you’d be polite not to argue with that statement. Because some other people must believe the same thing, like Karen Brown, who has asked me to write this totally inane article—she did not ask for the inane part, I thought of that myself—on the history of EPPC, all because I opened my big email-mouth and mentioned some odd, old factoid (actually it was about Julia Morton) and she thought it was interesting, which it really wasn’t. Karen, get a life! And she has been ragging on me to put down all my old-fart memories for posterity. Karen’s probably sorry she asked me by now. So, for all of you who give a hoot about what (proverbial) old-farts have to say, let’s begin—otherwise pass go now, and move quickly on to the next article—this is the recommended default option.

**RANDOM FACTOID No. 1.** Julia Morton was (she died in 1996) an economic botanist at the University of Miami and was president of the Society for Economic Botany. She was very interested and concerned about invasive species, especially melaleuca, as she felt it was a

serious allergen. When Julia attended her first EPPC meeting, she came with a \$1,000.00 check in hand. At that time we had a total of \$250.00 in the bank—after begging people for \$10.00 annual membership dues—and thought one thousand dollars was tantamount to winning the lottery. Well, when Julia handed Bill Theobald (he was our first treasurer) that check we all nearly wet our pants and we quickly created a lifetime membership category and she was our first lifetime member. We figured we weren’t going to get anymore money out of her so why not?

**RANDOM FACTOID No. 2.** At the first melaleuca conference in 1981 in Naples, Florida, Julia Morton presented a paper about the allergenic properties of melaleuca but she unfortunately had no research to back up her claim. The next speaker was an allergist (a medical doctor) who had done extensive research on allergens in Florida (including melaleuca). His research, which was quite extensive and convincing, had concluded that melaleuca was not an allergen. Julia took rather public issue and apparently personal umbrage at this and virtually called the guy a quack. The “discussion” soon escalated into a rather heated exchange,

we all went running, expected Julia to be sued or end up with a broken jaw, but luckily the then very young Ted Center came to the rescue to introduce the next speaker and ushered them both hastily out of the limelight. Ted’s been my hero ever since.

Once upon a time there was one EPPC. It was born in the Dan Beard Center Conference Room in Everglades National Park in the summer of 1982. HOLD ON YOU SAY, EPPC WAS FORMED IN 1984 or 1988! Shows how much you know!

**TRIVIAL TIDBIT No. 1.** EPPC was first incorporated in 1988. It took us 6 years of meetings and bylaws changes to get our act together. We also didn’t have any (and I mean any—let me tell you, we were trailer trash) money back then to incorporate. In March of 1988, George Gann (at that time he was known as George Gann-Matson) gave us the \$55.00 fee we needed to incorporate EPPC. Bill Theobald (our treasurer, but I’m not sure why we needed a treasurer when we had no treasure) was designated the registered agent to serve our incorporation papers and the officers signed the papers of incorporation on March 24,

1988. They were Joyce Kleen, Mark Maffei, Ron Myers, Bill Theobold and Robert Doren. Our “incorporation” meeting was held at Ted Center’s offices (the old ones not the nice new ones he’s in now.)

**RAW RECOLLECTION No. 1.** Ted Center actually had hair back then, really!

The labor to birth this EPPC lasted two days. The first 10 hours of labor we spent arguing (and I mean arguing; Ann-Marie LaRosa, George Molnar and Mark Maffei would have come to blows if they hadn’t all been sissies) about what the hell to call this thing we were about to give birth to. The Florida Department of Natural Resources (today it’s called the Florida Department of Environmental Protection) didn’t like the word “exotic;” the Florida Division of Forestry wanted to use the word “council” but the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission (today’s Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission) liked the word “association” better; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hated the word “alien” because it could be confused with people who came here illegally; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were at a complete loss for words; the Loxahatchee folks wanted the word “non-indigenous” in the name (I think they were just being hoity-toity); Dade County folks didn’t like the idea of using the word “council” and preferred the term “committee” and never mentioned the word “association,” and the Biscayne folks liked the word “association” but not “committee,” and on, and on, and on it went, for ten horrid hours.

**RANDOM FACTOID No. 3.** Bill Theobold worked for the Florida Division of Forestry on the Coconut hybridization project, REALLY! Betcha didn’t even know there was such a thing; of course there isn’t anymore, Hurricane Andrew blew all the coconuts to New Orleans. If you did know about this project, you’re an old fart too! His project was intended to re-coconutify Dade County (today it is called Miami-Dade County) that had been de-coconutified by a terrible disease called lethal yellowing. Estimates of over 1.5 million coconut trees (and many

other palm species) had been killed (in the late 70s and early 80s — before most of you were born) just in Dade County...and it was Bill’s job to replenish the resplendency of Miami’s resident coconuts. So, as the head of a group that was bringing exotic coconuts to Miami from all over the world and hybridizing them and then planting them all over the county, it was only natural that we make him THE first EPPC treasurer.

About the only word we could all agree upon for the first 6 hours was “plant.” So we decided that every person in the room would write down on individual 3X5 index cards words for the name of the baby. By each word they would write OK (if they liked the word), NO (if they didn’t like the word), and OVERMYDEADBODY (or something to that effect). Here are the words we were left with after that exercise, from my actual notes of the actual meeting, really!



So, there you have it, baby’s first words. Baby put some of these first words together to form sentences that baby wanted to be called. The ones I remember (I think), ’cause they weren’t in the notes either.

- ✓ Pest Plant Society (I REALLY HATED THIS ONE – BECAUSE OF THE AFRICAN VIOLET THING)
- ✓ Non-indigenous Pest Plant Association
- ✓ Non-indigenous Pest Plant Society (we’re not African violets)
- ✓ Nuisance Plant Association
- ✓ Exotic Plant Committee
- ✓ Exotic Plant Council (we were getting close here)
- ✓ Exotic Pest Plant Council

We actually voted on these names but you already know the outcome. So ended day one of baby’s birth and we all left exhausted wondering what the next day was going to bring.

Day two. I had written a first draft of by-laws (that I thought we would get well into on the first day) so we didn’t have to start from scratch. I would have done that with the names, had I only known. Anyway, the bylaws we passed are really not too different from the ones you guys have today; mostly they have been refined as things have changed and that’s good. But there is one important story about the second day of reckoning you all might find interesting. There was an even bigger fight the next day about who could and should be allowed to be members of EPPC.

There were two camps. Camp One included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission, the Florida Division of Forestry, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Camp Two included everyone else.

The battle lines were drawn, and were fought around whether EPPC membership and organization should be modeled on an existing Florida group called the Florida Fire Council or not. This group only allowed employees of government agencies to be members and there were no dues. When you look at the early by-laws, you can see this issue in the various versions of the membership categories.

Camp One people (we’ll call them the Red Staters) (Mark Maffei, Joyce Kleen, and Bill Theobold carried this banner) only wanted EPPC to allow members if they were employees of government agencies. Camp Two people (we’ll call them

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Blue Staters) (Ann Marie, George Molnar and I were the banner carriers for Camp Two) wanted EPPC membership to be open to everyone.

The next interminable series of hours were spent wrangling over the single by-laws article called membership. Back and forth we went...“No, the Red Staters would argue, if you let the public be members, the agencies will not be able to direct the organization; who knows, someone from the herbicide industry might end up on the board.”

*RAW RECOLLECTION NO. 2. Bill Kline, a big cheese with Dow, used to ply*

*all us board members with dinners and drinks (lots of drinks) on his Dow business account and he became the first EPPC herbicide representative on the EPPC board. We strung him along as long as that business account lasted but eventually had to give in. And nothing BAD happened (well, nothing too bad, that is)!*

The Blue Staters would rebut, “Everyone should be allowed to become members to keep the organization fresh, and be able to be active. Only as a non-profit corporation can EPPC be independent.” And then the Red Staters would say, “No, we (meaning

agency employees) would never be allowed to be members of an organization that was independent and did not represent the agency viewpoints.” And again the Blue Staters would pipe in, “That’s exactly why EPPC needs to be non-profit and independent so agencies won’t be able to control what EPPC can do and say.”

Well, you get the point. This sort of exchange went on for several really exasperating, quite infuriating, and occasionally nauseating hours. It seemed for awhile that the Red Staters were winning the debate but little did they know that some of us Blue Staters had been kibitzing on the side while they were pontificating about how wonderful it was when agencies ruled the world (kinda like today). During a brief lull from sheer exhaustion, George Molnar and I stood up and proclaimed that we should bring this to a vote of the people—we used high sounding moralistic platitudes and played their emotions like a harpsichord—and if the majority of people present wanted to do such a foolish thing as limit EPPC membership to agency employees only, we would not interfere, but that the National Park Service and Dade County would not participate in the organization. You have to know that for several years NPS and Dade County were instrumental in bringing everyone together to organize exotic issues in south Florida, and this led to the very EPPC formation meeting we were arguing in and thus gave us an unfair advantage, which we took full advantage of. So, with great fanfare and brilliant accolades, kudos and celebration, and a landslide victory, the Blue Staters won the day and EPPC became (eventually) a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation in the State of Florida. YEA!

I’m not sure how much longer Karen is going to let me ramble on with this article, which I am supposed to limit to 2000 words, but I have never been parsimonious with words. How many of you, I wonder, have moved on to the next article by this point? None of you? You mean it’s really that good? I think it’s just your morbid curiosity to see what crazy Bob is going to say next.

*TRIVIAL TIDBIT No. 2. Speaking of articles, the first EPPC Newsletter—later*

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to become the sensational journal you're now reading—was sent out in January 1991, Vol. 1, No.1. It talked about the planned Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) report on exotics which was still a year away; that USDA seemed closer to listing melaleuca since the public meetings had been held; that the 1990 Farm Bill allowed federal agencies to organize to control “undesirable” (I'm surprised that wasn't one of the words we came up with at our 1982 meeting) species; there was widespread concern because the Florida DNR Bureau of Aquatic Plant Management (today they're called the Bureau of Invasive Plant Management—because of EPPC by the way) was going to be abolished (apparently they were being a bit too pesky to all the people who wanted to grow and plant all those pesky plants). This original Newsletter also contained the first EPPC “Most Invasive Exotic Pest Plant List” with 23 plants on it. Lou Whiteaker was our first editor; he shortly left for a job in Oregon. Lou sent a letter from EPPC to Dan Ward asking him to head up our committee to further develop the “List of Most Invasive Species.” Mark McMahon (he also passed into the great exotic yonder in 1994) “volunteered” to be our next Chair. We didn't have elections then; we couldn't get people to vote, much less serve, except with a bit of arm twisting—and a tad of head bashing. And lastly, Ted Center reported on the sixth year's progress of talks for designing and building the Davie Quarantine Facility—it was finally completed in 2005. Now that's fast work!

**JOGGED MEMORY No. 1.** The first name proposed for the updated version of the EPPC newsletter/magazine you hold in your hands was XENOPHYTA. Ted Center and I thought it up and we thought we were being very clever — everyone else thought we were nuts. Well, we are but that's beside the point. Amy Ferriter, I think, finally came up with the current title but only after making a huge hissy-fuss about “you can't call it Xenophyta because nobody will know what you're talking about.” Of course, she was right, but she still didn't have to make such a big hissy-fuss about it, jeez Louise!

Well, the EPPC baby had been born and was entering early childhood. EPPC had had several parents by this time and some of them had had enough, and found new places to go and live. George Molnar (a prior Chair and later board member) went off to Californ-eye-A to a high-falootin' consulting job, and Lou Whiteaker shuttled on out to Oregon for a guberment job. These folks hatched some new EPPCs out west. George went on to found the CalEPPC in 1992, along with John Randall

and Carla Bossard, both of whom presented papers at EPPC's first Exotic Plant Conference in 1989. Lou started the Pacific Northwest EPPC or PNEPPC.

**JOGGED MEMORY No. 2.** George Molnar wanted EPPC assistance in setting up CalEPPC. We had almost \$2,000.00 in the bank by then and decided to give CalEPPC \$600.00 to help them get established. The board asked me to

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go, since I could use gubernment dollars, and I flew to California with a \$600.00 check in my hands and spent a week helping them birth their baby EPPC. It was at this point we decided to add the word "Florida" to EPPC since we were no longer alone in the world. Not much fuss was made about changing the name this time. (Note: if the board tells them it was a loan the interest by now might be substantial!)

It seemed you couldn't keep a good thing down and Brian Bowen went and started the fourth chapter, Tennessee EPPC, that engulfed a whole slough of seven other EPPCs to become Southeast EPPC (SE-EPPC), and then Connecticut was begat, and Michigan and New England and New York and Wisconsin and Alaska and Mid-Atlantic. Wow!!! We were getting to be quite a big family and I was just as dazzled and impressed by what had been wrought as anybody could be. And today the Florida EPPC has over \$50,000.00 in the bank, they fund grants and symposia

and travel and calendars and such, and I am so pleased to see that what that impoverished, overwrought, contumelious little bunch did in 1982 turned out so well.

Who'd a thunk it back in the early and mid 80s when we had to beg and cajole people to be on the board, take pity gifts of \$55.00 to get incorporated, sneakily print our own letterhead and photocopy our newsletters and use government paper and stamps to send them, that this was going to happen?

**RANDOM FACTOID No. 3.** *The first EPPC (FLEPPC) newsletter came out in 1991, then CalEPPC's arrived in summer of 1993, PNWEPPC followed suit in the Spring of 1994, followed by TNEPPC's in the Fall of 1994 (I have copies for the EPPC historical museum—when it opens).*

Now I have seven pages for this article that Karen asked me to write and probably far more pages than she wanted and I am sure it's far more absurd and immature

than even she expected. Of course there's lot's more stuff that has happened and the EPPC history is much richer than I can tell in this short tattle-tale of mine. But I leave those other things, like the time Ted Center cried, or when Amy Ferriter smacked Don Schmitz and made him screech like a girl, or when Mike Bodle fell off his chair and acted like a girly-man, and that time Don Schmitz made a complete fool of himself (well I guess that's not so unusual), and the huge cat-fights between CalEPPC and FLEPPC over NAEPPC and Faith Campbell, and Tony Pernas' first exotic plant experience in BICY with Devi Sharp, and George Molnar's hurricane tie, and when Ted Center nearly got us all killed in Australia, and when that crazy man Greg Jubinsky kept dangling his hand in the water to attract estuarine crocodiles, or when Francois Laroche scolded his Haitian soccer buddies for peeing while playing soccer, and when Jackie Smith was rumored to have started that Harley, and the time Doria Gordon—well we won't go there, or the time Carla Bossard's flashlight died, and that time JB Miller went skinny dipping, and the melaleuca aerial survey when Anne Marie LaRosa threw up on everyone in the plane, and that time Ron Hofsetter fell out of the melaleuca tree and sprained his ankle and had to be carried for miles, and that really ridiculous looking hat that Dan Austin would never take off, and the many, many, many more tales of EPPC history to other articles and probably to other people to tell. And as Bob Hope used to say, "Thanks for the memories." It was actually kinda fun going down memory lane, Karen. Let's do it again in another 20 odd years.

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