



# Magnolia

*Magnolia grandiflora*  
The Laurel Tree of Carolina  
Catesby's *Natural History*, 1743

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## "Oh How Beautiful!"

By Justin Stelter, Director of Gardens and Grounds, Carnton Plantation

### INTRODUCTION

Carnton Plantation, portions of which would be affectionately called McGavock's Grove and the Confederate Cemetery, rose to world-renown in the nineteenth century. The McGavock's prominence is directly linked to their wealth and social status, the caring refuge they provided to the wounded and dying during the Battle of Franklin, and their creation of a 'cairn' town; the largest privately held Confederate cemetery in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The following study highlights agricultural and gardening pursuits at Carnton Plantation, in Williamson County, Tennessee. Here three generations of McGavocks maximized the productivity of their landholdings, served their community, and ultimately established a lasting tribute of respect and remembrance by their creation of the Confederate Cemetery.

Around 1784 James McGavock (1728-1812) purchased a military warrant from John Shannon for 640 acres on the Harpeth River, about a mile south of Franklin. Sometime thereafter he acquired an adjoining 640 acres to the east. Additional land swaps and exchanges for Williamson County properties occurred over time. In 1814, an adjoining seventy-five acres were purchased near Nichol's mill, and for the next several decades, the McGavock's holdings encompassed 1,355 contiguous, river-enriched acres.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from knowledge of initial home construction and road layout, little is understood about the activities at the McGavock property between 1787 and 1826. Tennessee statehood was not declared until June 1, 1796 and, consequently, settlement of the area was limited until that time. Once statehood was official, however, settlement was fast-paced. Between 1800 and 1830, the population in Williamson County increased nearly tenfold, from 2,868 to 26,638.<sup>3</sup>

With this westward expansion, and emerging abun-



Photo by Liliana Katherine Stelter.

Carnton Plantation and Cemetery.

dant opportunity, two of James McGavock's sons, David (1763-1838) and Randal (1768-1843), moved in 1796 from the family's home at Ft. Chiswell, Wythe County, Virginia, into Middle Tennessee. By 1809, Williamson County tax records reveal that Randal was a caretaker, or "agent" of his father's property.

On February 11, 1811, Randal married Sarah Dougherty Rodgers (1786-1854), and by the end of the decade they had five children. Both archaeological excavations and circumstantial evidence indicate that a home was built at this time. Upon James McGavock's death in 1812, official ownership of the property transferred to Randal.<sup>4</sup>

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# CALENDAR

**February 20-May 17, 2015. “Charles Courtney Curran Seeking the Ideal,”** an exhibition at the Columbia Museum of Art (South Carolina) brings together fifty-eight Curran masterpieces capturing the joy of soaring vistas and garden landscapes on canvas. The exhibition is organized by the Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis, with the Frick Art & Historical Center and the Columbia Museum of Art. Visit: [www.columbiamuseum.org](http://www.columbiamuseum.org); phone: (803) 799-2810.

**March 21-June 21, 2015. “Van Gogh, Manet, and Matisse: The Art of the Flower,”** exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond explores the infusion of new spirit and meaning into the traditional genre of floral still-life painting in nineteenth-century France. It features approximately seventy flower paintings by more than thirty artists, including well-known painters such as Eugène Delacroix, Gustave Courbet, Henri Fantin-Latour, Édouard Manet, Vincent van Gogh, and Henri Matisse, as well as less familiar figures such as Antoine Berjon and Simon Saint-Jean. Visit: [www.vmfafa.org](http://www.vmfafa.org)

**May 15-17, 2015. “Middle Tennessee—Harmony, Hills, and History,” 33rd SGHS Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee.** The conference will include visits to the Governor’s Residence, Travelers’ Rest, Historic Carnton Plantation, Battle of Franklin sites, and private gardens. The meeting is organized by Justin Stelter (chair) and Ben and Libby Page. Meeting headquarters at the Nashville Marriott at Vanderbilt University, 2555 West End Avenue, Nashville, TN 37203. Make reservations early at [Marriottvanderbilt.com](http://Marriottvanderbilt.com); phone (615) 321-1300

**June 7, 2015. Annual Bellefield Design Lecture,** Hyde Park, NY, features Lynden Miller. Renowned public garden designer Lynden Miller discusses how the life and career of Beatrix Farrand has inspired and influenced her own work. She will explore the unique significance of public gardens and their contribution to civic life, both in Farrand’s time and our own. Visit: [www.beatrixfarrandgardenhydepark.org](http://www.beatrixfarrandgardenhydepark.org) or email: [info@beatrixfarrandgardenhydepark.org](mailto:info@beatrixfarrandgardenhydepark.org)

**June 14-19, 2015. 19th Annual Historic Landscape Institute, “Preserving Jefferson’s Gardens and Landscapes.”** This one-week course uses Monticello’s gardens and landscapes and the University of Virginia as outdoor classrooms to study historic landscape preservation. Lectures, workshops, field trips, and practical working experiences provide an introduction to the fields of landscape history, garden restoration, and historical horticulture. Visit: [www.monticello.org/hli](http://www.monticello.org/hli)

**June 22-26, 2015. American Public Gardens Association Annual Conference, “Watering our Roots to Grow our Communities,”** Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota. Botanic gardens and arboreta, historically and scientifically rooted in horticulture, are challenged to transform and stay relevant in a changing culture. Can gardens make a more meaningful impact on public life? Visit: [www.publicgardens.org](http://www.publicgardens.org); contact: [info@publicgardens.org](mailto:info@publicgardens.org); phone (610) 708-3010

**September 11-12, 2015. 9th Annual Heritage Harvest Festival at Monticello,** in Charlottesville, Virginia. This family-friendly event celebrates Thomas Jefferson, who championed vegetable cuisine, sustainable agriculture, and plant experimentation by featuring heirloom fruits and vegetables, organic gardening, seed saving, and more. Co-hosted by Southern Exposure Seed Exchange. Visit: [www.heritageharvestfestival.com](http://www.heritageharvestfestival.com)

**October 1-3, 2015. 20th “Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes” Biennial Conference,** held in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Conference is co-sponsored by Old Salem Museums & Gardens; Reynolda House Museum of American Art; and the Southern Garden History Society. For program and registration information, contact Sally Gant, [sgant@oldsalem.org](mailto:sgant@oldsalem.org) or visit: [www.oldsalem.org/landscapeconference](http://www.oldsalem.org/landscapeconference)

## Upcoming SGHS Annual Meetings

**April 21-24, 2016. 34th SGHS Annual Meeting in Charleston, South Carolina.** Meeting headquarters at the Francis Marion Hotel.

## "Oh How Beautiful!" . . . . . (continued from page 1)

In 1812, "Williamson County ordered the construction of a road through McGavock's property extending from Franklin to John Nichols' mill on the Harpeth River."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in 1815, Williamson County ordered . . . "the clearing out and keeping in repair the road from McGavock's Spring branch to the old fork road."<sup>6</sup>

By 1816, tax records show that carriages and stud horses were on the property.<sup>7</sup> Development at the McGavock property was well underway, while Randal and Sarah were also raising a family.

### THE RISE

Indicative of his prominence, Randal McGavock served as mayor of Nashville from 1824 to 1825. Moreover, around 1826, he generously expanded his home at Carnton to the mansion's current shape and size.

It is believed that at least by this period the house became more than a summer home and was sentimentally named Carnton, after his father's ancestral home place "Carntown," in County Antrim, Ireland. "Carn," in Gaelic, "cairn," is defined as "a heap of stones set up as a landmark, monument, tombstone, etc."<sup>8</sup>

In the late 1820s, an agricultural and horticultural reference provides a sense of how the plantation was perceived. The documentation, found in a letter from Felix Grundy, Randal's brother-in-law, legendary criminal lawyer, and soon-to-be U.S. Senator, is summarized in *Democracy's Lawyer* by J. Roderick Heller (great-great grandson of Carrie McGavock):

On July 28, 1829, at Carnton, Randal McGavock's home in Franklin, he wrote Tennessee's secretary of state, Daniel Graham, that for twenty years he had not enjoyed life as much as at the present: "About six days hence I turned my feet out to grass literally. I have not had sock or shoe on since."<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, the overall sentiment of this statement evokes relaxation, but Grundy was a man known for his choice selection of words. To savor putting your "feet out to grass" arouses idyllic pastoral images of a rich, lush, and abundant property. It was clearly a plentiful place where an obstruction such as shoes should not separate a human sole from the direct connection to the natural world that man has been allowed to settle. But, to put your "feet out to grass" represented more than just peaceful relaxation and a tamed land. From a practical standpoint, if "sock or shoe" was not required to walk in the grass, more than likely the grass was well-kept, certainly cleared of obstructions, and possibly mowed and manured.

Carnton's green grass was complemented by new roads, both stone and plank fences, and outbuildings. These improvements made the plantation a fine place to gather, and the McGavock's entertained many friends.



Photo by Justin Stretter.

Entrance to Carnton Plantation.

In the early twentieth century Miss Carrie Ewing (1854-1939) wrote to Mary Harding Ragland referencing a flower garden and its similarity in style to the garden at The Hermitage:

The flower garden at Carnton was like the Hermitage, or rather, the Hermitage was like Carnton—which was built first. We have heard that on a visit General and Mrs. Jackson paid to your great-great grandfather, she said: "Mr. Jackson, I want a flower garden like Sally's [Sarah Dougherty Rodgers]," and of course she got it.<sup>10</sup>

There is little doubt that the McGavocks and Jacksons had a fond relationship and that their mutual interest in gardening was a common bond. While both sites had an early "flower garden" of sorts, another garden feature shared by both was the use of native red cedar, *Juniperus virginiana*, as an ornamental.

At The Hermitage, these native cedars were planted en masse to line the main drive in a distinctive guitar shape. At Carnton, in addition to lining the carriage drive, these stately cedars were positioned in the garden to provide a symmetrical framework for the formal space and to offer respite for the ornamental plants and garden vegetables from the hot summer sun and cold winter winds.

When Randal McGavock died in September 1843 the daily management of the plantation transferred to his (youngest) son, John (1815-1893), who officially inherited the property when his mother died in 1854.<sup>11</sup>

Randal McGavock's pride in his property, demonstrated in house, garden, and agricultural improvements, and the socio-economic status that came with such trappings, carried through, if not accelerated, in the next generation. A letter from Dr. A. B. Ewing to Mr. Hugh M. Ewing, postmarked November 3, 1845, announced, "Your cousin

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## "Oh How Beautiful!" . . . . . (continued from page 3)

Jno. McGavock is bucking about as usual. By the time you return home he will have up a fine portico to his front door, yard enlarged, garden removed & serpentine walks to the house, etc., etc., etc."<sup>12</sup>

The late nineteenth-century image of Carnton's facade shows some of John's alterations including a "fine portico to his front door...and serpentine walks." The garden that was "removed" may have been Sarah's flower garden, in order to enlarge the front yard. A restoration feasibility study conducted by garden historians and landscape preservation planners Doell & Doell, in the mid-1990s suggested that:

A smaller garden, perhaps cultivated by Sarah McGavock, may have stood south of the original dwelling house (the missing east wing). Its proximity to the primary façade of the residence, coupled with the persistence of specimen trees (hollies), suggests that it may have been more ornamental in character; perhaps a door yard flower garden or parlor garden.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the archaeological work conducted in February 1994 for the Doell & Doell study, revealed that "Access to the house lot was on the south, by way of an entrance drive lined with rail fences and cedar trees, perhaps resembling extant drives at The Hermitage."<sup>14</sup>

This assessment is substantiated by the post-Civil War photo, which clearly depicts overgrown, mature red cedars along the front pathway to the house and lining that serpentine walk, which was completed c. 1847.

Whatever the intent in "removing the garden," we do know that two major events occurred over the course of the next few years that would continue to define and enhance the property. The first, a political gathering, was described in this manner: "HEN Clay and Polk ran for the Presidency in 1846 ...the most exciting election ever held in Tennessee...The convention was held on McGavock's farm, in a grove of walnut-trees."<sup>15</sup>

The second occasion, occurred on December 8, 1848, when John married nineteen-year-old Caroline (Carrie) Elizabeth Winder (1829-1905), of Louisiana. In the Carrie Ewing letter referenced earlier, the following words signal the gardening changes Carrie would lead, "When Uncle John McGavock married Caroline Winder, his cousin, she proceeded to change it [the garden] and continued to change it."<sup>16</sup>

The focus, however, was not just on home and garden improvements. By the late 1850s Carnton's milling operations were thriving, as attested in the *Western Weekly Review*:

The undersigned gives notice to the citizens of Williamson, that he has converted the Saw Mill of Barrett & McGavock into a Flouring Mill, and

is now prepared to make as good flour as can be made anywhere. The machinery and bolting cloths are new and of the best quality, and he assures the public that they can have as good flour and as much of it to the bushel of wheat as can be obtained at the best mills, and he respectfully asks wheat growers to give his mill a trial. C.C. Barrett<sup>17</sup>

That "flouring mill" was put to good use. By 1869 an article published in a paper approximately 150 miles to the west reported:

We do not think there was ever in Middle Tennessee, a finer prospect for a splendid wheat crop than the fields now show. We have been especially struck with admiration by the field of Boughton wheat on the farm of Col. Jno. McGavock, near Franklin. It is the best field of wheat that we have seen this year. It seems to be a property of this species of wheat to grow out with more vigor and tiller out more profusely than any other variety....—Dixie Farmer<sup>18</sup>

The plantation, however, was well known not only for the home, garden, and grounds, but also for its first-rate agricultural pursuits. The Williamson County Agricultural and Mechanical Society held a county fair at Carnton on October 18, 1857, at which "Such items as reapers, mowers, wagons, cultivators, cider mills, harnesses, saddles, tinware, stoves, barrels, and all manners of livestock and livestock products could be seen at McGavock's Grove."<sup>19</sup>

By 1859, Col. John McGavock was president of the annual Williamson County Fair. An 1860 newspaper article glowingly reported that McGavock took premier spot for the "best improved farm over 200 acres":

We can conceive of no higher compliment to a Planter than that which was paid to Col. John McGavock, of Williamson, by the Annual County



Earliest image of house c. 1880

Photo from Carnton archives.

Fair, lately held at Franklin. One of the handsome cups or prizes distributed by the commissioners was awarded for the best Farming Estate in the county, and of which Col. McGavock is the deserving recipient. Carnden—the premium place – ...handsomely fenced at all points with rock wall and plank... its crops are inferior to none that our State has the year produced—its fruit-orchards are abundant in their yield—its meadows are thickly carpeted with rich and valuable grasses—...and the ample groves of lotty wood which embrace so many acres of the tract, throw their shades over fields of perennial blue-grass...<sup>20</sup>

Little did they know that the 1850s would prove to be the most prosperous period for Carnton. In the US Agricultural Census, Williamson County, Tennessee: 1860, the plantation documented \$10,810 in value of slaughtered animals; \$1,000 worth of farming implements and machinery; and a total farm value of \$150,000. These peak valuations would never be realized again.

### THE FALL

On November 30, 1864, the Battle of Franklin changed Carnton forever.

In a Minute Men Attention notice dated July 25, 1861, Williamson men were requested “for the purpose of drilling at Franklin in Col. John McGavock’s Grove.” Two months later, “On September 28, (1861) at Carnton, the home of John McGavock, Company F, Eighth Tennessee Cavalry Battalion (the “Williamson County Cavalry”) was raised with Captain James W. Starnes commanding.”<sup>21</sup>

Battle of Franklin is considered “one of the worst disasters of the war for the Confederate States army.”<sup>22</sup> During this tragic battle “Carnton became a field hospital for Confederate Gen. W. Loring’s division. By the middle of the night 300 suffering men jammed the house while hundreds of others spilled across the lawn and into out-buildings.”<sup>23</sup>



Photo from Carnton archives.

McGavock Confederate Cemetery after reinterment in June 1866.

Despite the personal property damage and catastrophic loss, in the spring of 1866 Col. John McGavock extended the family cemetery by two acres to create the largest privately owned Confederate cemetery in the United States. Confederate dead totaling 1,481 soldiers were reinterred, and arranged by state, in this newly constructed cemetery.

In a letter written on May 16, 1866, John McGavock explained that the project was “done in order to have removed from fields exposed to the plow-share, the remains of all those who were buried.” The November 17, 1866, issue of *Harper’s Weekly* described the cemetery as “an improvement upon some of the National Cemeteries which we have had occasion to illustrate.”<sup>24</sup> John and Carrie McGavock maintained this cemetery for the rest of their lives.

The 1860s were devastating to the economy at Carnton. The physical property loss and negative financial effects of the battle were most apparent in the US Agricultural Census, Williamson County, Tennessee: 1870. At that time, the plantation was valued at \$75,000, half of its worth only a decade earlier. And, by the 1880s census, the value of Carnton Plantation decreased again substantially to only \$20,000.

Those census reports clearly outline the rise and fall of the agricultural pursuits at Carnton. Within fifteen years, both John and Carrie would be buried in the McGavock family cemetery, at the head of the Confederate Cemetery. In John’s will, he stated, “I also will and bequeath to my wife the exclusive possession and control of my residence yard and garden.”<sup>25</sup>

Under the guidance of leading historians of mid-nineteenth-century American gardening, the McGavock’s garden was reconstructed in the 1990s using plants available in Middle Tennessee prior to 1869. Evidence of the kitchen and ornamental garden, the one Carrie “proceeded to change,” included archaeological remnants, a native eastern red cedar, and an Osage orange tree (*Maclura*

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Photo by Annabelle Rose Stetler.

Carnton Cemetery, April 2015.

## "Oh How Beautiful!" . . . . . (continued from page 5)

*pomifera*). The following was concluded in a garden study conducted in 1994:

No photographs exist to show the arrangement of this mid-19th century garden, but despite years of neglect and change, some physical evidence remained into the 1990s indicating its extent and layout. The presence of a large Osage-orange tree in the center of the southeast quadrant suggests that vegetable growing was eventually discontinued in garden plots nearest the house. Although this thorny tree or hedge was often used as a "living" fence before the invention of barbed wire, several 19th century garden writers, including Andrew Jackson Downing, advocated using them as specimen trees because of their attractive glossy foliage and unique grapefruit-sized fruit. They could also be grown as a fine shade tree or as a luxuriant, round-headed shrub.<sup>26</sup>

Robert Hicks, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Widow of the South*, a book centered on the life of Carrie McGavock and the Battle of Franklin, tells the story of Carrie's last moments. On her deathbed it is said she proclaimed, "Oh, how beautiful!"<sup>27</sup>

We would like to believe that she was not just looking into her heavenly future, but into all the future generations to come, and was able to see how they would come from all around the world to remember and respect those lives that she lovingly cared for in life and death.

### (Endnotes)

- 1 McGavock Confederate Cemetery, <http://en.wikipedia.org>.
- 2 Williamson County Tax Records, research by Rick Warwick.
- 3 Williamson County Tennessee, <http://en.wikipedia.org>.
- 4 McKee, Larry, Ted Karpynee, Marc Wampler, "Archaeological

Investigations of the Mansion Yard and Kitchen Wing at Carnton Plantation, in Franklin, Williamson County, Tennessee." Submitted to Historic Carnton Plantation, Franklin, Tennessee. Submitted by TRC, Inc., Nashville, TN. 2003.

- 5 Phase I Archaeological Survey, Eastern Flank Battlefield Park, City of Franklin, Tennessee by Larry McKee and Ted Karpynee p. 27 April 2008
- 6 Williamson County Court Minutes Volume 2, p 238, April 3, 1815
- 7 Williamson County Trustee Tax Books, 1816, pgs. 126-127
- 8 "Cairn," <http://dictionary.reference.com>.
- 9 J. Roderick Heller, *Democracy's Lawyer: Felix Grundy of the Old Southwest* (Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 178.
- 10 Family letter (Miss Carrie Ewing to Mary Harding Ragland) transcribed by Ridley Wills II, October 9, 1989 (Carnton Archives).
- 11 Copy of Randal McGavock's Will (Carnton Archives).
- 12 Williamson County Historical Society Journal #32 2001: The Letters of Dr. A. B. Ewing (1845-1862), Rick Warwick, ed., 6
- 13 Doell & Doell Restoration Feasibility Study, 4.
- 14 Doell & Doell Restoration Feasibility Study, 6.
- 15 Miss Jane H. Thomas, *Old Days in Nashville, Tenn.* (Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1897), 65-66.
- 16 Family letter (Miss Carrie Ewing to Mary Harding Ragland) transcribed by Ridley Wills II, October 9, 1989 (Carnton Archives).
- 17 *Western Weekly Review* August 20, 1857.
- 18 *The Bolivar Bulletin*, 10 Apr 1869, Sat.
- 19 James A. Crutchfield, Robert Holladay, *Franklin: Tennessee's Handsomest Town* (Hillsboro Press, 1999) 123-124, partially referenced from *Western Weekly Review*, September 20, 1857.
- 20 *Nashville Union and American*, October 19, 1860.
- 21 Crutchfield, and Holladay, 133.
- 22 *Battle of Franklin*, <http://en.wikipedia.org>.
- 23 Rick Warwick, *Historical Markers of Williamson County Tennessee Revised: A Pictorial Guide*, (Williamson County Historical Society, 1999), 245.
- 24 Author's personal collection.
- 25 Williamson County Will Book, 509 (Carnton Archives).
- 26 "Carnton Garden," <http://www.carnton.org>.
- 27 Oral story as told to Robert Hicks by Mrs. Ewing Roberts Green.

## Members in the News



On March 18, 2015, Charles, the Prince of Wales, and Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, visited **George Washington's Mount Vernon** as part of their official visit to the Washington, D.C. area. Prince Charles, an avid gardener and proponent of sustainable living, toured the historic gardens with **Dean Norton**, director of horticulture, and visited the farm areas where heritage breeds are preserved. Their tour of the mansion, gardens, and grounds can be followed at [www.mountvernon.org](http://www.mountvernon.org)

# Roots House: Historic Workers' Cottage and Landscape Saved in Falmouth, Virginia

By Beate Ankjær-Jensen and Kenneth McFarland,  
Fredericksburg, Virginia

On November 9, 2014 staff at Gari Melchers Home and Studio at Belmont first opened the doors of a small vernacular building to the public, an event marking many years of dedicated work.<sup>1</sup> Located next to Belmont, in Falmouth Virginia, and known locally as “Fannie Roots’ House,” it is a rare example of a post-civil war worker’s cottage. While its core elements date to the 1880s, the house as it stands today with the garden and outbuildings retains many reminders of life-long resident Fannie Roots (1914-2004).

Though named for Roots, its earliest known occupants were George and Sallie Payne. George Payne was a plasterer, and examples of his work survive in the oldest sections of the house. The original building consisted of the two-room, gable roofed front section, while a shed addition on the back contained the kitchen, and an unfinished room in the attic served as sleeping space.

In 1912 the structure was purchased by Willie Roots, an African American laborer who did occasional work for the well-known painter Gari Melchers and his wife Corinne, owners of the neighboring Belmont estate.<sup>2</sup> It was under Roots family ownership, in turn, that the dwelling was enlarged to its current appearance. Roots’ daughter Fannie, who became a well-known citizen of Stafford County and a civil rights activist, was born in the house and lived there her entire life. The building did not have running water, so Roots always relied on bucket-drawn well water and an outhouse. There was electricity for lights and a telephone, but she used a wood stove for cooking and oil stove for heating.

Structural restoration began in 2008 when Belmont became the steward of the property. The condition of the house had declined steadily during the final years of Fannie Roots’ life, and the interceding four years had witnessed even greater deterioration. Heading up the project from the outset has



Young Fannie Roots under grape arbor.

been Belmont cultural resource manager (co-author of this article and longtime SGHS member), Beate Jensen, and fellow staff member David Ludecker. David Berreth, director at Belmont, also saw the importance of saving the house and grounds, but funding, as is usual at historic sites, was lacking. It thus became their task to gain support from private citizens, businesses, and volunteers.<sup>3</sup> That backing has come not only in the form of cash donations and on-site labor but also in such other valuable contributions as logs which were sawn at Belmont with a portable sawmill.

Ludecker has headed-up the extensive hands-on effort to include structural, siding, and roof restoration, as well as a complete exterior repainting.<sup>4</sup> As was common in the post-Civil War era, the house was built with materials borrowed from other structures. Wherever possible these materials have been saved. Where this could not be achieved, every effort has been made to replicate both materials and workmanship.<sup>5</sup> The finishing exterior restoration touch has been to cover the roof with a true terne metal standing seam roof. This material was chosen upon finding remnants of an original terne roof. It will be painted red to match the samples found.

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Spring 2008 pre-restoration.



Roots House from southwest, 2015.

## Roots House: Historic Workers' . . . . . (continued from page 7)

Fannie Roots' garden and the grounds surrounding her home tell an equally important story, and their restoration and interpretation will continue to be central to the Belmont mission there. The wire hoop fence demonstrates that such work has already begun. In 2008 large elements remained of such fencing that once separated the house from busy Washington Street. (See 2008 image.) In two subsequent incidents, however, it was effectively ruined by vehicles veering into it from that street. This fence form is not readily available today, but Jensen was able to locate a Texas source to find the lengths required. Now installed (see illustration), it only awaits the arrival of spring to receive a coat of white paint matching the original. Likewise, stones that kept chickens from escaping the yard will be placed back under the fence. The Jensen-Ludecker team has also restored Fannie Roots' white gate which features an arbor fashioned from rebar. Surviving atop that arbor is her Dorothy Perkins rose, which long provided a warm welcome to Roots' visitors. (Note her tiny gate bell, seen in an accompanying photo.) Also surviving about the house are privet bushes, a Rose of Sharon, a lilac, and orange daylilies.

Along with the rebar arbor, repurposing can be seen elsewhere in the Roots landscape. For example, placed squarely between the house and the street is a substantial vertical segment of leftover terra cotta piping (used to line Roots' well) which has long served as a planter. Here Fannie Roots grew tulips and summer annuals. A perennial feature was a fanciful row of artificial tulips crafted in plastic. These have faded and succumbed to years of weathering, but replacements are being sought. Bricks that were replaced during a ca. 1950s chimney repair were used to create a mouse tooth-type edging for the beds fronting the house. Her garden was also well known for her traffic-stopping phlox, another element soon to be returned in memory of the long-time presence of Fannie Roots on this busy corner.

The front area of the Roots landscape is level, but as the photos and the site plan make clear this was otherwise a decidedly inferior spot for home building. Access to well

and outhouse was not difficult, but trips back and forth to garden spaces behind and below the dwelling surely required stamina and steadiness. Fortunately, an aged white oak just southwest of the house offered welcome summer shade. An interview with a niece of Fannie Roots revealed that the shed to the north housed chickens and firewood.

Oral history relating to the house and its occupants, chiefly Fannie Roots, are ongoing, and will figure largely in determining further landscape projects. Much interior work remains to be done as well, but some sections may be left open to aid in understanding how the house developed over time. In addition, History and Historic Preservation students from the University of Mary Washington will continue to take advantage of the house and its setting for learning purposes, along with individual and group projects.<sup>6</sup>

*Editors' note: On March 15, 2015 Beate Jensen, along with David Berreth and David Ludecker, received the Historic Fredericksburg Foundation's E. Boyd Graves Preservation Award for "Exemplary efforts to restore and preserve the historic Fannie Roots House."*

### (Endnotes)

- 1 The Gari Melchers Home and Studio at Belmont has been referenced in several previous *Magnolia* articles
- 2 Gari and Corinne Melchers purchased the estate in 1916.
- 3 Work has been made possible largely with private donations and grants from the Fredericksburg Savings Charitable Foundation, the Duff McDuff Green Jr. Fund of the Community Foundation of the Rappahannock River Region, and the Marietta M. and Samuel T. Morgan, Jr. Foundation.
- 4 The distinct blue paint on the trim around the doors and windows could be an example of the African American tradition of using *haint* blue on the trim around doors and windows. A *haint* is a spirit or a ghost, and the blue paint was thought to ward off evil spirits and to keep them from entering the doors and windows.
- 5 Co-author Kenneth McFarland has been extensively involved and hand-hewed cedar logs to replace badly deteriorated ceiling joists
- 6 The Gari Melchers Home and Studio at Belmont is owned and operated by the University of Mary Washington



Roots House well & outhouse.



Sole surviving decorative tulip and the Roots gate bell.

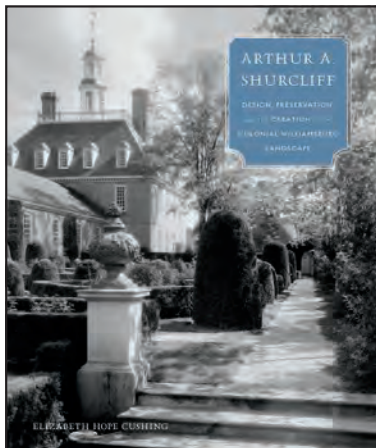
Photos by the authors.



# Book Review

**Arthur A. Shurcliff: Design, Preservation, and the Creation of the Colonial Williamsburg Landscape**, by Elizabeth Hope Cushing / University of Massachusetts Press, 2014 / Hardcover, 416 pages / ISBN-10: 1625340397; ISBN-13: 978-1625340399 / List price \$39.95

Having been engaged in the practice of landscape architecture in Boston since opening his office in 1904, Arthur A. Shurcliff had gained renown, principally in town planning and community and park design, in the years up to 1928.



Early in that year he received a commission that forever changed his professional life and, in turn, redefined his legacy. Shurcliff's work as landscape architect for the restoration of colonial Williamsburg produced landmark Colonial Revival gardens that dramatically influenced the design of private and public gardens, domestic landscapes, and the early garden restoration efforts occurring then and thereafter in Virginia. The impact was immediate and soon spread beyond the borders of Virginia, throughout the South, and beyond. With the opening of museum buildings and the newly planted gardens in 1934 and their subsequent publication in both professional and popular magazines, journals, and newspapers, "The cult of Williamsburg had commenced." The words are those of Elizabeth Hope Cushing, the author of *Arthur A. Shurcliff: Design, Preservation, and the Creation of the Colonial Williamsburg Landscape*. (Note: From his birth in 1870 until April 1930, when he legally changed the spelling of his surname, Mr. Shurcliff was known as Arthur A. Shurtleff. "Shurcliff" will be used consistently in this review).

However, as she earlier relates in this excellent study, Arthur A. Shurcliff was not among those first considered for the project by the Reverend William Archer Rutherford Goodwin, the guiding force in the effort. With the services of Perry, Shaw & Hepburn, the Boston-based architectural firm, assured, Mr. Goodwin sought the counsel of William Graves Perry (1884-1975) in the choice of a professional colleague and collaborator. He proposed consideration of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. (1870-1957), John Nolen (1869-1937), both Boston-based, and George Burdett Ford (1879-1930), a then prominent Harvard and MIT-educated city planner and author with offices in New

York City. Mr. Perry's response was quick and carried his recommendation of Arthur A. Shurcliff.

We have done work with Mr. Shurtleff, and are at present associated with him on work in the neighborhood of Boston and also in the south . . . Mr. Shurtleff is the type of man with whom it is an inspiration to work. He is clear, simple, direct, energetic and personally, very charming. His work is of the highest order and he appeals to us particularly since he has a personality which is most adaptable to collaboration with others. . . . What we wish to produce is a simple colonial atmosphere of interest, Mr. Shurtleff is eminently capable of carrying out just such a program.

The prospect was appealing indeed to Arthur Shurcliff who later wrote Mr. Goodwin saying, "I greatly hope you will decide to bring me in as I am much interested." The decision in Arthur Shurcliff's favor was quickly made, and William A. R. Goodwin wrote on 20 March 1928 notifying him of his selection to "take part in this momentous and interesting work. It is probably the most interesting thing of its kind which has been attempted." Mr. Goodwin's language, seen in retrospect, is both prescient and almost understated. Arthur Asahel Shurcliff was then fifty-seven years of age, mid-way in his fifty-eighth year, and a man who had long since gained distinction and a recognized success in the field of landscape architecture. His birth, education, personal and professional life to that point was largely Boston-centric. Much of it was spent in the precincts of Beacon Hill where he was born on 19 September 1870, at home at 9 West Cedar Street, the third of four sons and fourth of six children to Asahel Milton and Sarah Ann (Keegan) Shurtleff. The summers of his childhood and youth were enjoyed with family in country houses or other accommodations in suburban Boston, including those of 1873 and 1874 at 99 Warren Street in Brookline, which would later become the home and office of Frederick Law Olmsted and known as Fairsted. Following expectations he earned a bachelor's degree in engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in May 1894, however, he was simultaneously following his larger interests toward landscape architecture.

Mr. Shurcliff secured an interview with Frederick Law Olmsted, who advised further study, and gained the advice and friendship of Charles Eliot (1859-1897), the son of the president of Harvard and then a partner in the firm of Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot. Charles Eliot advised a focused program of courses at Harvard, the Bussey Institute

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at the Arnold Arboretum, and the Lawrence Scientific School, which Arthur Shurcliff undertook in fall 1894 and completed in 1896 with a degree from Harvard. These studies, with Charles Eliot as his mentor, were crafted to equip Shurcliff with the knowledge necessary for what was then a new profession. The underlying intention was that he would next enter the Olmsted office and gain critical on-site, in-office work experience. Doing so in October 1896, he was following in the footsteps of Warren Henry Manning (1860-1937), an earlier protégé of both Olmsted's and Eliot's, who worked in Brookline from 1888 until 1896 when he opened his own office. This promising tutelage came to an abrupt end with Charles Eliot's death from meningitis in March 1897.

As the reader has realized, Arthur Shurcliff was becoming a man of his own mind, increasingly self-confident, and responding to the appeal of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Colonial Revival, both of which enjoyed prominence in Boston. In May and August 1898 he undertook bicycling visits with his life-long friend Robert Peabody Bellows (1877-1957) to Concord and Newburyport, respectively, sketched old gardens that he believed to embody the spirit of colonial days, recorded their plantings, and interviewed their owners. These efforts came to fruition with the publication of "Some Old New England Flower Gardens" in the December 1899 issue of *New England Magazine*. On the heels of the Newburyport excursion, he set sail with his parents and younger sister Gertrude on the first of the study holidays in Europe, so encouraged by Charles Eliot, which he continued through his work in Williamsburg.

As Ms. Cushing explains "The year 1899 was a significant one for Shurcliff: in October his 'studentship' officially ceased and he became a full-time employee of the Olmsted firm. That same year the American Society of Landscape Architects was formed, with Shurcliff a founding member." The third event of 1899 was of larger importance to his adopted profession. "In 1899 as well, at the behest of President Eliot, he assisted Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. in establishing a four-year landscape architecture program at Harvard University, the first in the country." He gained appointment as an instructor in the program by 1901 and the status of a full faculty member by 1904.

This promotion coincided with a parallel decision to open his own office for the practice of landscape architecture; announcements were mailed in November 1904. The Olmsted firm was again generous and supportive, as it had been when Warren Manning left their employ, and effectively gave him clients and projects from the surfeit in their office. His practice prospered. At the end of a year, in December 1905, the press of work prompted him to resign his position at Harvard where the new landscape architecture curriculum became a graduate-level program

in 1906.

Hope Cushing summarizes Arthur A. Shurcliff's work as a town planner, highway and transportation planner, and park designer in two polished chapter-length essays. Listings of "Town Planning Projects" and "Campus Planning Projects," for schools, colleges, churches, and hospitals, appear as Appendices 2 and 3. Most of this work was for cities and towns, clients, and facilities in Massachusetts, with a small number of engagements in Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York, and Maine. Except for the work in Williamsburg, his work in the South appears to have been largely confined to projects for Massachusetts-based clients. This was the case for his company-town designs in Bemis, Tennessee, and Bemiston, Alabama, for Judson Moss Bemis and the Bemis Brothers Bag Company, and in Camden, South Carolina, where Shurcliff designed a residential village for employees of Kendall Mills. Those who attended the 2009 SGHS annual meeting in Camden will remember our visit to The Sycamores, Henry Plimpton Kendall's winter residence.

In 1910 Arthur A. Shurcliff was named chief consultant to the Boston Parks Department, which was then headed by Robert Swain Peabody (1845-1917), a partner in the architectural firm of Peabody & Stearns and long-time friend and mentor. He replaced the Olmsted firm, which had served as consultant to the system since at least 1879 when Frederick Law Olmsted produced a plan of his "Proposed Improvement of Back Bay." Shurcliff's 1926 "General Plan for Back Bay Fens," when implemented, became part of an important series of designs for parks and public spaces including Liberty Mall, the Boston Prado linking Old North and St. Stephen's churches, the Charles River Esplanade, and transportation improvements and enhancements in the Charles River Basin.

Although Arthur Shurcliff would serve as consulting landscape architect for Colonial Williamsburg until 1941, when he was succeeded by Alden Hopkins (1905-1960), Hope Cushing focuses her treatment of his work in Williamsburg on the period from 1928 to 1934. This "First Period" comprises the years in which critical work in architectural restoration and reconstruction, planning and programming, and the design and implementation of landscape and garden features were accomplished under the terms of John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s initial investment. The rebuilt Capitol and Governor's Palace were officially opened in February and April 1934, respectively. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt came to Williamsburg on 20 October, praised Duke of Gloucester Street as "the most historic avenue in America," and expressed his joy in seeing "61 colonial buildings restored, 84 colonial buildings rebuilt; (and) the magnificent gardens of colonial days reconstructed."

Between 1928 and 1934 Shurcliff committed most

of his professional time to the project, engaging his eldest son and eventual partner, Sidney Nichols Shurcliff (1906-1981), in the work, and the talents of his office staff whose names appear with others in a list of “Draftsmen Who Worked in the Shurcliff Office” as Appendix 1. Ms. Cushing chronicles the events of those years, the field research in old Virginia gardens compiled as “Southern Places,” travels to England, archival research which provided the “Frenchman’s Map,” the “Bodleian Plate,” and Claude Joseph Sauthier’s colonial maps of North Carolina towns, on-site field work and preliminary archaeological investigations, and the forays into North and South Carolina and Georgia in search of old boxwood for the new gardens. She also relates in fascinating detail the many discussions and correspondence among Shurcliff, his patrons, Messrs. Goodwin and Rockefeller, the principals in Perry, Shaw & Hepburn, and other professional colleagues, in which matters large and small and questions of authenticity were resolved, most often in Arthur Shurcliff’s favor.

Her analysis of the newly created gardens and their design is reserved largely to the series of complementing gardens and landscape features at the Governor’s Palace. These pages are illustrated with the bird’s-eye view published in *The Architectural Record* in December 1935 and a near dozen contemporary black and white photographs. Period photographs also represent the remaking of Duke of Gloucester Street and the construction of the Colonial Parkway, whose path through the restored area was carried in a tunnel favored by Shurcliff. A single photograph illustrates the lavish boxwood garden at the St. George Tucker House. The Elkanah Dean House garden, long criticized as being inappropriate given the status of its owner, is represented by a present-day view showing the elegant plan devised by Shurcliff. The gardens at the Carter-Saunders House and the John Custis Tenement, both dating to the “First Period,” and those Shurcliff designed in the late 1930s are not pictured.

The final pages of the chapter on Shurcliff’s work in Williamsburg are given over to a generally chronological presentation of responses to the creation of “Colonial Williamsburg.” These begin with unreserved praise accorded the effort and Mr. Rockefeller’s largesse. In time members of the architecture and landscape architecture profession, cultural critics, and other voiced varying appreciations and critiques of both the undertaking and the results. Beginning with those of John Bayley in the mid-1940s, they reflect an increasing accuracy in architectural scholarship, the emerging literature of American and Southern garden history, a growing insistence on documentation and site-specific research, archaeology, the uses of science in the restoration of buildings, gardens, and landscapes, and evolving social and cultural values. In the end “Colonial Williamsburg” is the idealization of a place and its past and the most visible symbol of the American Colonial Revival.

Nevertheless, it is another product of Shurcliff’s genius that holds a strong, if different, place in Ms. Cushing’s regard. On 27 April 1905, after a determined courtship that she also recounts in the pages of this book, Arthur Shurcliff married Margaret Homer Nichols (1879-1959) in King’s Chapel, Boston. Miss Nichols was a younger sister of Rose Standish Nichols (1872-1960), a landscape architect and author of *English Pleasure Gardens* (1902) and *Spanish and Portuguese Gardens* (1924). The couple would be the parents of six children born between 1906 and 1916. While Arthur and Margaret Shurcliff both had strong connections to the summer colony at Cornish, New Hampshire, where they also spent their honeymoon, they decided on coastal Massachusetts for their summer residence. Acreage was acquired on Argilla Road at Ipswich in 1907 and in 1908 a sizable one-and-a-half story frame cottage was erected. Both were skilled carpenters and committed to the tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement, and they quickly went about crafting its interior decoration and furnishings. The sustained enhancement of this family seaside retreat, belatedly named “Sheltering Walls,” is treated in a chapter entitled “The Creation of the Ipswich House” and reflected in a series of five plans, drawn between 1909 and 1941, and numerous period photographs.

*Arthur A. Shurcliff: Design, Preservation, and the Creation of the Colonial Williamsburg Landscape* is an important contribution to the history of landscape architecture in the United States. It is also a valuable addition to the literature of the Colonial Revival in Virginia. That said, our understanding of Shurcliff’s role at Williamsburg would have been enhanced by a fuller treatment of the gardens and landscape features he designed after the “First Period,” from mid-1934 to the end of his consultancy in 1941: Ms. Cushing’s insightful discussion of the Elkanah Dean House garden of 1936 raises expectations. Other projects in Virginia, notably Stratford and Wilton, on which he was engaged also merit attention. The garden plans appearing on the extraordinary group of colonial maps of ten North Carolina towns produced by Claude Joseph Sauthier (1736-1802) between 1768 and 1770 have long been recognized as an important documentary source for the Colonial Williamsburg gardens. Shurcliff acknowledged his use of the Edenton garden plans in the design of the Boxwood Garden at the Governor’s Palace and the Elkanah Deane House garden. Sauthier’s name does not appear in the index. Readers will also question the absence of a bibliography. Nevertheless, Hope Cushing’s *Arthur A. Shurcliff* becomes one of a small number of significant monographs that address the lives and work of leading American landscape architects and garden designers of the first half of the twentieth century.

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*Details, requirements, and directions for submitting applications are posted on the SGHS Web site: [www.southerngardenhistory.org](http://www.southerngardenhistory.org). For those without internet access, a copy of this document can be mailed or faxed. Contact Peggy Cornett, Magnolia editor.*

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