



# Magnolia

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

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## The "Awful Ailanthus" A Love-to-Hate Story

Kenneth M. McFarland, Fredericksburg, Virginia

In late December 1852, soon after the start of his first Southern "journey," Frederick Law Olmsted visited a tobacco plantation south of Petersburg, Virginia. Here he met the owner, "Mr. W," and had the opportunity to observe various aspects of life among the plantation's enslaved residents...

the chief purpose of his travels below the Mason-Dixon. Being Olmsted, however, he snatched an opportunity to remark on the landscape. Here, and germane to this essay, he noted that while making improvements to his house Mr. W also had removed some "old oaks" as they interfered "with the symmetry of the grounds." In their stead Mr. W "had planted ailanthus trees in parallel rows."<sup>1</sup>



Frederick Law Olmsted 1857.

wikimedia.org.



"Along the River." Likely illustration of ailanthus in a Chinese garden. Image credit: commons.wikimedia.org

One early introduction, however, seems now to have passed almost totally into the "bemoaned" category. This is *Ailanthus altissima*, ironically named tree-of-heaven later to gain the less celestial handle of "stink tree" along with other pejorative monikers. Yet every dog has its day, and so

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Olmsted offered no comment or appraisal of ailanthus here, but he was later to favor use of the tree in certain situations, including installation in Central Park. While it might be a stretch therefore to say the Connecticut Yankee was on the "love" side of the ailanthus equation, his feelings were more like those of early ailanthus aficionados than of people who became its biting critics.

Of course, the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries witnessed tremendous excitement engendered by new plant introductions and shared by plant hunters, nursery operators, and gardeners alike. (*Magnolia* readers have heard the story repeatedly.) Their endeavors brought dramatic change to the appearance of the European and American landscape in ways than can be celebrated as well as bemoaned, sometimes both depending upon the tastes of the landscaper/gardener. (*Lagerstroemia indica*, the ubiquitous crape myrtle offers a fine example.)

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# CALENDAR

**February 10-May 28, 2017.** “Matilda Browne: Idylls of Farm and Garden,” an exhibition at the Frances Griswold Museum Home of American Impressionism, Old Lyme, CT. She was a founder of the Greenwich Society of Artists and exhibited in all of their annuals from the first, in 1912, through 1931. Visit: <https://florencegriswoldmuseum.org/exhibitions/>

**March 12-July 16, 2017.** “East of the Mississippi, Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Photography,” an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, in Washington, DC. The first exhibition to focus exclusively on photographs made in the eastern half of the United States during the 19th century, *East of the Mississippi* showcases some 175 works—from daguerreotypes and stereographs to albumen prints and cyanotypes—as well as several photographers whose efforts have often gone unheralded. Celebrating natural wonders such as Niagara Falls and the White Mountains, as well as capturing a cultural landscape fundamentally altered by industrialization, the Civil War, and tourism, these photographs not only helped shape America’s national identity but also played a role in the emergence of environmentalism. Visit: [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov)

**April 7-July 16, 2017.** “Thomas Jefferson: The Private Man, from the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society,” an exhibition at the New York Historical Society Museum and Library. A gifted writer and political philosopher, Jefferson was also an accomplished gardener, farmer, and architect. *Thomas Jefferson: The Private Man* provides a glimpse of his life outside the public sphere through the iconic documents he created. Among the thirty-six documents and artifacts from the MHS collection on display are Jefferson’s Garden Book, his last letter to John Adams, manuscript leafs from his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, early drawings of Monticello, and a copy of the Declaration of Independence in Jefferson’s hand. Visit: [nyhistory.org/exhibitions](http://nyhistory.org/exhibitions)

**April 9-July 9, 2017.** “Frédéric Bazille and the Birth of Impressionism,” National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. This exhibition is the first major presentation of Bazille’s work in America in a quarter-century and brings together some 74 paintings from private and public collections in the United States, Europe, and Japan. Paintings by Bazille (1841-1870) are exhibited alongside key works by the predecessors who inspired him—including Théodore Rousseau and Gustave Courbet—and by the contemporaries, such as Manet and Monet, with whom

he was closely associated. Visit: [www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/exhibitions/2017](http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/exhibitions/2017)

**May 12-September 24, 2017.** “Artists, Scientist, Explorer: Mark Catesby in the Carolinas,” at the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston, SC. Featuring the British Royal Collection, this exhibition explores the life and work of Mark Catesby, who spent four years documenting the natural habitats of the Carolinas, Florida, and the Bahamas. Visit: [www.gibbesmuseum.org](http://www.gibbesmuseum.org)

**May 26-28, 2017. Southern Garden History Society Annual Meeting, “Roots of Bluegrass,” Lexington, Kentucky.** Meeting includes visits to Ashland, the Henry Clay Estate; Botherum House and Gardens; historic Old Frankfort Pike; and a Central Kentucky horse farm. Visit: [www.southerngardenhistory.org](http://www.southerngardenhistory.org)

**September 8-9, 2017. Heritage Harvest Festival at Monticello.** Celebrate the revolutionary legacy of Thomas Jefferson with workshops, lectures, tomato tastings and more. Featured speakers include vegetable historians William Woys Weaver, Michael Twitty, Ira Wallace, Brie Arthur, and Tim Johnson. Visit: [www.heritageharvest-festival.com](http://www.heritageharvest-festival.com)

**September 21-23, 2017. 21st Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens & Landscapes,** “Gardening in the Golden Age: Southern Gardens & Landscapes of the Early 20th Century and the Challenges to their Preservation,” held in Winston-Salem, NC. The Flora Ann Bynum Keynote Lecture, sponsored by the Southern Garden History Society, will be given by Sam Watters on the garden photography of Frances Benjamin Johnston. [See book review in *Magnolia*, winter 2013, Vol. XXVI, No. 1] Other speakers include Virginia Grace Tuttle, Staci Catron, and Mary Ann Eddy. Winston-Salem in the 1920s was the largest and wealthiest city in North Carolina, and a tour of its gardens and landscapes will be featured. More details to appear in upcoming issues of *Magnolia* and on our website: [www.southerngardenhistory.org](http://www.southerngardenhistory.org)

**October 21-22, 2017.** The 29th Annual Southern Garden Symposium and Workshops, in St. Francisville, LA. Featured speakers include Mississippi author Margaret Gratz, Monticello’s Peggy Cornett, and the entertaining floral design duo Tom and Nancy McIntyre. Registration opens in April. Visit: [www.southerngardensymposium.org](http://www.southerngardensymposium.org)



## The "Awful Ailanthus"..... (continued from page 1)

did ailanthus, the epitome of what we today call a "weed tree."

Anyone with more than a passing awareness of ailanthus knows that it traveled to the West from a Chinese homeland where it was revered for its medicinal uses, as well as being the host tree for the ailanthus silk moth. Tree-of-heaven first appeared in Europe and Great Britain in the early-to-mid-eighteenth century. It was the period of the chinoiserie, a time when fashionable ladies and gentlemen were passionately embracing things Chinese. An ever increasing number of merchant ships importing goods from Asia helped both to foster the fashion and to make sure buyers could continue to indulge their Chinese fantasies. From clothing to every facet of the decorative arts, the chinoiserie had an impact that lingers to this day.

The gardening world, too, felt the impact of the fashion for *le goût chinois*. Evidence in the form of garden architecture survives in such dramatic examples as Sir William Chambers' pagoda at Kew. But while pagodas did not pop up in every corner of Europe and America, live examples of Chinese landscape and garden elements were also appearing, remaining with us in ever growing numbers. One example, of course, is the above mentioned crape myrtle, joined

by such enduringly popular Asian imports as camellia and azalea. How could the American South be the South without them? And to offer shade and verticality to those chinoiserie-flavored gardens came *Ailanthus altissima*, the tree-of-heaven.

Credit for introducing ailanthus to the West goes to the widely travelled Jesuit priest Pierre d'Incarville (1706-1757), who began a mission in China in 1740. He soon gained access to Chinese gardens and began sending a variety of seeds to his native France, a practice d'Incarville continued until his death. Included among those seeds finding their way to Bernard de Jussieu (1699-1777) at *Le Jardin de Plantes* were those of tree-of-heaven. Jussieu, in turn, forwarded seeds to English contacts, including Philip Miller and Peter Collinson.<sup>2</sup> From England ailanthus traveled to America, in 1774 passing first into the hands of Philadelphia gardener William Hamilton.<sup>3</sup>

An account of Hamilton, one of Thomas Jefferson's best gardening friends, and his home "The Woodlands" is offered in co-editor Peggy Cornett's "Inspiration from the Woodlands: Jefferson's Enduring Ties to Philadelphia's Botanical Riches," published in *Twinleaf*.<sup>4</sup> Cornett reminds us that Hamilton can also be credited with

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The tree-of-heaven was first illustrated by the French botanist René Louiche Desfontaines in 1788.



Mature ailanthus, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Photo by K. McFarland.



Base of massive ailanthus in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Circumference estimated to be twenty feet at chest height.

Photo by K. McFarland

## The "Awful Ailanthus"..... (continued from page 3)

introducing ginkgo, Lombardy poplar, and Norway maple. The Lombardy poplar quickly gained popularity, but ailanthus required more time to be broadly disseminated. While the former was grown by Jefferson, moreover, and appears in a well-known c. 1825 painting of Monticello, our third president apparently never planted ailanthus.

Nurseryman William Robert Prince suggested that ailanthus's burgeoning popularity in the early nineteenth century might relate to a simple name change. His grandfather, William Prince, had reportedly sent tree of heaven to Bartram's Garden under the name "Tanners' Sumach." The younger Prince suggested that the simple trick of changing the name to "Chinese Ailanthus" brought about a near miraculous rebranding miracle, leading prices to rise 300% and making it difficult to produce enough stock to meet growing demand.<sup>5</sup>

Other than a name that Prince said cast "a potent charm" on the tree, ailanthus did have qualities that had appeal beyond a mere alluring name. Perhaps above all it made for a handsome mature tree that got that way *quickly*: in twenty-five years tree-of-heaven can reach fifty feet. Its disease and pollution resistance were also a plus. It is thus easy to see how such a tree might not only win the hearts of some gardeners but also catch on with urban planners and developers. The Prince Nursery was located in Flushing, while an example of a ready market for their ailanthus supplies was to be found in nearby "busting at the seams" New York City.

In great numbers young tree-of-heaven plants thus travelled across the East River and into Manhattan appearing as street trees or adorning the lots of recently built homes as the city made its relentless march north. City authorities also used ailanthus for street planting in Brooklyn and Boston, while in the South Baltimore planners also embraced the quick growing tree.<sup>6</sup> While tree-of-heaven thus had its obvious supporters (not least of which was the Prince Nursery), there were others who soon began to bring out the negative side of the "love-hate" story.

Famed New York garden authority A. J. Downing (1815-1852) helped lead the way for the "anti crowd."



A.J. Downing.

Moreover, he did not "beat around the bush," so to speak, in 1852 observations in his widely read magazine, *The Horticulturist*:

We look upon it as an usurper, which has come over to this land of liberty, under the garb of utility to make foul the air, with its pestilent breath, and devour the soil with its intermeddling roots ...<sup>7</sup>

Later in the decade *The New York Times* published several items echoing Downing's points. A letter of June 30, 1859 headed "The Poisonous Ailanthus" referenced Downing's condemnation, which had joined that of "other horticulturists and landscape gardeners (who) unanimously condemn ... the ailanthus, a rank overgrown weed at best...." This had opened with reference to studies by a French medical professor stating that ailanthus bark "contains a volatile oil, which is so deleterious in its effects" as to cause "vertigo and vomiting" among those "in contact with the vapors." The letter writer also cited evidence that the tree could have a "sickening effect on delicate persons, particularly children, often forcing them to gag."<sup>8</sup>

A reply from "SUFFERER" appeared in the *Times* for July 4, 1859, further demonstrating the feelings of anti-ailanthus faction. While "SUFFERER" makes no note of gagging, no quarter is shown tree-of-heaven.

### The Awful Ailanthus To the Editor of the New York Times:

In your paper of to-day, you declare war against the Ailanthus. Thousands and tens of thousands of New-York citizens will thank you for it. Do keep it up till the internal, stinking, poisonous thing is extirpated, root and branch. New-York is wicked. It has sins innumerable to answer or atone for, but if there are such things as earthly penalties for such sins New-York is paying them slowly and surely by the odorous vileness of the foul Ailanthus. But what makes it worse, it falleth on the just and unjust. I don't know as that can be literally true of this burgh. Some think the former class extinct. If not, a few more years of the Ailanthus will do the job for both classes. How does that "overgrown weed" come to be planted from year to year, still in the very face of its vileness and unhealthiness. Mainly, doubtless, as many of our "improvements" (?) are made—by "builders," anxious to have a fast shade to aid in selling the "model houses" with which up town blocks are fast being filled—houses whose infirmities will scarcely allow them to tarry with us for one generation. And how

<https://en.wikipedia.org>





"The Ailanthus Avenue at Berry Hill." *Historic Gardens of Virginia* (1923).

about the Central Park? Is that to be adorned by the deadly Ailanthus? Better send for the Upas at once, and between the two we should have a delicious time....<sup>9</sup>

One can only imagine the olfactory impact on all those antebellum New Yorkers compelled to have open windows on sultry summer nights.

Plant lists and other period documents make it appear that some Southerners may have heeded Downing's advice. Ailanthus is not commonly encountered in the material thus far studied by the author. Still we know that, as noted, it was used in Baltimore, and of course we have the 1852 Olmsted reference cited at the start of this article. As well, "Mr. W" was not the only Southside Virginian to embrace it for lining a plantation drive. One of the finest antebellum homes of that region is Halifax County's Berry Hill, a remarkable dwelling that epitomizes every popular notion of the Greek Revival style. In *Historic Gardens of Virginia* (1923) Elizabeth Bruce Crane provided an essay discussing the garden and landscape of her forebears at Berry Hill, observing that: "Leading to the grounds was an Ailanthus avenue one-half mile long. This Ailanthus or Tree of Heaven as it was then called, was an imported tree, not indigenous to the United States, and was considered very rare."<sup>10</sup> Along with a garden plan, her essay also includes a photograph of the plantation "avenue."

Another Southern reference to ailanthus shows up in the Henry Watson Greensboro, Alabama landscape plan of 1857, joining there a group of both native and non-native trees.<sup>11</sup> While a large variety of Asian imports show up in other Southern nursery offerings and private garden lists, however, tree-of-heaven is scarce, as stated earlier. Interestingly, ailanthus does appear on the Beatrix Farrand plant list for Washington, D. C.'s Dumbarton Oaks.<sup>12</sup> Director of Gardens and Grounds, Gail Griffin, is uncertain whether Farrand actually planted ailanthus

or simply noted its presence on the site.<sup>13</sup> Griffin does add that Farrand put in other plants widely accepted as invasive today.

Despite its ornamental use at Berry Hill and other Virginia plantations, by the close of the nineteenth century ailanthus was gaining a reputation more in keeping with A. J. Downing's outlook than with the William Prince "potent charm" perspective. The out-of-control weed tree we know today seems equally as familiar to famed Richmond novelist Ellen Glasgow (1873-1945), who appears to have seen it as a symbol for decline. In *The Voice of the People* she paints a word picture of a farmstead in Tidewater Virginia, noting "The yard was unkempt and ugly, run wild with straggling ailanthus shoots and littered with chips from the wood-pile."<sup>14</sup> In *The Battle-Ground*, Glasgow travels back in fictional time to the Civil War, but ailanthus continues to get no respect. Here one of Glasgow's rustic characters offers his visitors dinner *if* they will chop wood. Concurrently he is "taking a wad of tobacco from his mouth and aiming it deliberately at one of the ailanthus shoots."<sup>15</sup> So much for arboreal celestialty!

Today *Ailanthus altissima* serves chiefly as a target for "thou-shalt-not" and "how-to-rid-yourself-of" landscape articles. Yet they can be handsome trees, reaching eighty feet if allowed to mature, and their stubborn determination to propagate and thrive deserves at least a modicum of admiration. Most readers will know that this characteristic was celebrated in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943). Here instead of being a target for tobacco juice, ailanthus is celebrated for survival traits that serve as metaphor for similar characteristics in a family. Might Ellen Glasgow in her waning months have read Smith's book and had an ailanthus epiphany? Probably not.

#### (Endnotes)

- 1 Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on Their Economy* (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 89-90.
- 2 Shiu Ying Hu, *Ailanthus*, 33, <http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/1979-39-2-ailanthus.pdf>.
- 3 During the mid-nineteenth century immigrants from China introduced ailanthus to California independently from earlier east coast arrival of the tree.
- 4 Peggy Cornett, *Twinleaf Journal & Catalog*, no. 17, 2005.
- 5 Cornett, 12.
- 6 Hu, 35.
- 7 Quoted in Edward O'Reilly, "From "Splendid" to "Usurper": The fickle story of the Ailanthus tree," New-York Historical Society Museum & Library, "From the Stacks," December 31, 2014.
- 8 Anon., "The Poisonous Ailanthus," *New York Times*, 30 June 1859. Reference courtesy Peggy Cornett, Monticello.
- 9 SUFFERER, "The Awful Ailanthus," *New York Times*, 4 July 1859. Reference courtesy Staci Catron, Cherokee Garden Li-

(continued on page 6)

## The "Awful Ailanthus"..... (continued from page 5)

- brary. Upas (*Antiaris toxicaria*) is an Asian tree perhaps most widely known for the use of its sap in producing poisons.
- 10 Elizabeth Dabney Tunis Sale, Editor (Compiled by the James River Garden Club) *Historic Gardens of Virginia*, Richmond, VA 1923.
- 11 <http://southerngardenhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SouthernPlantLists.pdf>, 204
- 12 <http://southerngardenhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/SouthernPlantLists.pdf>, Dumbarton Oaks, 1921-1947, 242

- 13 Email communication Gail Griffin to Kenneth McFarland
- 14 Ellen Glasgow, *The Voice of the People*, New York: A. L. Burt Company, Publishers, 1903, 33. KMM italics. Available online at: [https://books.google.com/books?id=2ZZnJz96r08C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=2ZZnJz96r08C&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).
- 15 Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1903, 489. Available online at: [https://books.google.com/books?id=9jtxcjOnq2kC&pg=PA488&source=gbs\\_toc\\_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=9jtxcjOnq2kC&pg=PA488&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false).

## Of Interest: Two Garden Memoranda in the Sale of the Alexander Hamilton Papers at Sotheby's

Staci Catron, Atlanta, Georgia

Due to the success of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Ron Chernow's landmark biography in 2004 and the hottest ticket on Broadway being Lin-Manuel Miranda's phenomenon *Hamilton*, Alexander Hamilton is no longer an ignored and misunderstood Founding Father. A recent Sotheby's auction of seventy-seven lots of the Hamilton-Bowdoin family archive of Alexander Hamilton papers brought \$2,545,750, exceeding its \$2,100,000 presale estimate.<sup>1</sup>

The sale included outstanding examples of his political writings, love letters to his future wife Elizabeth (Eliza) Schuyler, and Hamilton's appointment as aide-de-camp to General George Washington dated March 1, 1777. It also held two autograph memoranda of Hamilton's plans for the gardens for Hamilton Grange, his beloved estate in New York, completed in 1802, just two years prior to his death.

The larger of the two memoranda, which includes a diagram, focuses on flower gardens:

"2. The Gardener, after marking these out and making a beginning by way of example, will apply himself to the planting of Raspberries in the orchard. He will go to Mr. [John] Delafield for a supply of the English sort and if not sufficient will add from our own and some to be got from our neighbors." [Delafield was a New York merchant and banker; he had a country home on Long Island, from which, perhaps, Hamilton's English raspberries were to be gotten.]

"3. If it can be done in time I should be glad if space could be prepared in the center of the flower garden for planting a few tulips, lilies, hyacinths, and [—]. The space should be a circle of which the diameter is Eighteen feet: and there should be nine (9) of

each sort of flowers; but the gardener will do well to consult as to the season. They may be arranged thus:" [Here Hamilton has drawn a diagram indicating how he would like the flowers arranged; twelve areas of planting around the circumference of the circle, beginning at 12 o'clock with lilies, and proceeding with tulips, undetermined, hyacinths, undetermined, lilies, tulips, lilies, hyacinths, undetermined, hyacinths, and tulips.]

[The manuscript continues with a marginal note ("Wild roses around the outside of the flower garden with laurel at foot.") and picks up where some text of point 4 has been lost at the head of the page: "the road. The walks and roads must all rise in the center.]

"5. If practicable in time I should be glad some laurel should be planted along the edge of the shrubbery and round the clump of trees near the house; also sweet briars and\* [—] A few dogwood trees not large, scattered along the margin of the grove would be very pleasant, but the fruit trees there must be first removed and advanced in front.

"These labours, however, must not interfere with the hot bed."<sup>2</sup>

The second memorandum discusses practical undertakings in the garden:

"1. Transplant fruit trees from the other side of the stable.

"2. Fences repaired. (Worn away) repaired behind stable. The cross fence at the foot of the hill? Potatoes Bradhursts? Ground may be removed and used for this purpose. Cows no longer to be permitted to range.

"3. The sod and earth which were removed in making



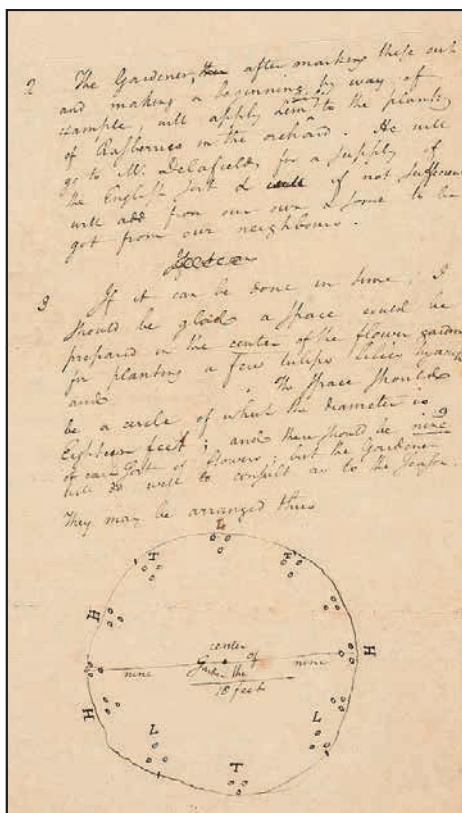
the walks *where it is good* may be thrown upon the grounds in front of the House, and a few waggon [sic] loads of the compost.

"4. A Ditch to be dug along the fruit garden and grove about four feet wide, and the earth taken and thrown upon the sand hill in the rear."<sup>3</sup>

A description of the two memoranda highlighted above that sold at the Sotheby's auction in January of this year and excerpts from several letters regarding Hamilton's garden are also included in the Garden Club of America's seminal work, *Gardens of Colony and State*. The centerpiece of Hamilton's estate, Hamilton Grange, was a two-story Federal house in upper Manhattan designed by architect John McComb, Jr. Near the southeastern corner of the house, Hamilton "set out a circle of thirteen gum trees, naming each after one of the original thirteen states."<sup>4</sup> Apparently, the trees were set too closely together to reach their full size and began dying off, the last one being cut down in 1908.<sup>5</sup> The passages from the letters show Hamilton's keen interest in gardening and farming, which was fostered by his relationships with other gardeners, such as Dr. David Hosack, the founder of the Elgin Botanic Garden in New York, and fellow ardent Federalist, Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina.



View of The Grange in its original location in upper Manhattan.



Following Alexander Hamilton's tragic death in a duel with Aaron Burr on July 11, 1804, his widow struggled to keep the estate and eventually had to sell it. The Federal house from the Hamilton Grange estate, also known as The Grange, has been moved twice. Since 2006, it has been part of a National Park Service site in St. Nicholas Park in Manhattan, and was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 1960 and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1966. The Hamilton Heights section of Harlem derived its name from Hamilton's original estate.

Garden Club of America. *Gardens of Colony and State: Gardens and Gardeners of the American Colonies and of the Republic Before 1840*. New York: Published for the Garden Club of America by C. Scribner's Sons, 1931.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Lita Solis-Cohen, "Alexander Hamilton Papers Sold," *Maine Antique Digest*, April 2017, <https://www.maineantiquedigest.com/stories/alexander-hamilton-papers-sold/6243>
- 2 Lot 1062, Two Autograph Memoranda, One with a Diagram, Planning the Gardens at the Grange, *Alexander Hamilton: An Important Family Archive of Letters and Manuscripts*, Sotheby's New York, January 18, 2017, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/alexander-hamilton-important-family-archive-letters-manuscripts-n09612/lot.1062.html#>
- 3 Lockwood, Alice G. B., ed., *Gardens of Colony and State: Gardens and Gardeners of the American Colonies and of the Republic before 1840*. V.1. (New York: Published for the Garden Club of America by C. Scribner's and Sons, 1931), 263.
- 4 Lockwood, Alice G. B., ed., *Gardens of Colony and State: Gardens and Gardeners of the American Colonies and of the Republic before 1840*. V.1. (New York: Published for the Garden Club of America by C. Scribner's and Sons, 1931), 262. Garden Club of America. *Gardens of Colony and State: Gardens and Gardeners of the American Colonies and of the Republic Before 1840*. New York: Published for the Garden Club of America by C. Scribner's Sons, 1931.
- 5 Lockwood, Alice G. B., ed., *Gardens of Colony and State: Gardens and Gardeners of the American Colonies and of the Republic before 1840*. V.1. (New York: Published for the Garden Club of America by C. Scribner's and Sons, 1931), 262.

## In Print

**Redouté to Warhol: Bunny Mellon's Botanical Art** exhibition catalog | softcover, 80 pages | 2016, \$20

This exhibition, which was on display from October 2016 into February 2017 in the LuEsther T. Mertz Library's Art Gallery, was presented in partnership with

the Oak Spring Garden Foundation. The show features masterworks of the botanical art collection belonging to the late Rachel Lambert "Bunny" Mellon, which she assembled in the library she founded on the property of her estate in Upperville, Virginia. Over the course

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## In Print.....(continued from page 7)

of decades, Mrs. Mellon collected more than 10,000 volumes on botanical subjects, simultaneously pursuing her horticultural interests in the greenhouses and cutting garden complete with intricately pollarded fruit trees and manicured topiaries.

Curated by Dr. Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi, Susan Fraser, and Tony Willis, the exhibition comprises some sixty important works of art ranging from rare watercolors by renowned botanical artists such as Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues and Pierre-Joseph Redouté to twentieth-century paintings by Pablo Picasso and Andy Warhol. This exhibition catalog provides a new perspective from which to appreciate Bunny Mellon's extensive collection and appreciation of botanical art. Visit: [www.nybgshop.org](http://www.nybgshop.org)



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *Pot of Flowers*, 1958.

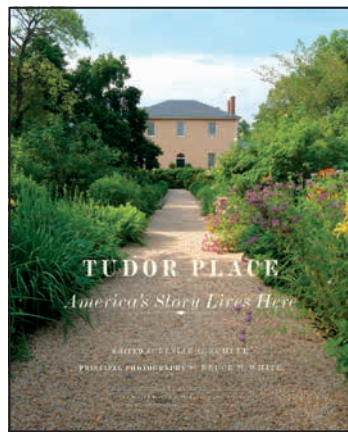


Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708-70), *Magnolia grandiflora*, ca. 1737.

## Book Review

***Tudor Place: America's Story Lives Here***, by Leslie L. Buhler, editor, and Bruce M. White, photographer. White House Historical Association, publisher. Hardcover, 320 pages | ISBN-10: 1931917566; ISBN- 978-1931917568 | 2016, list price: \$49

Tudor Place, the Georgetown residence of the Custis-Peter family through six generations, enjoys importance on every level in American history, a status above time and place. This distinction was acknowledged by its designation as a National Historic Landmark, in the company of the White House, the United States Capitol, and St. John's Episcopal Church on Lafayette Square, on the establishment of the program in 1960. The publication of *Tudor Place: America's Story Lives Here* in 2016 by the White House Historical Association celebrates its bicentennial.



The significance of Tudor Place and its owners, however, antedates the completion of the mansion in 1816 and its occupation by Thomas Peter (1769-1834), his wife Martha Parke Custis Peter (1777-1854), and their family. Martha Peter, the namesake of her paternal grandmother, was a much-favored grandchild of both Martha Dandridge Custis Washington (1731-1802) and George Washington (1732-1799). Their affection and the legacies of family and fortune were critical to the lives lived at Tudor Place.

Thomas Peter brought his own distinguished patrimony and wealth to the couple's marriage in 1795, and he served as an executor of Martha Washington's estate at her death in 1802. The bequests Martha Peter received were supplemented by the couple's purchases at the private family sale that preceded the public dispersal of her grandmother's possessions and the remaining property of the president from Mount Vernon.

Thomas Peter acquired the property that became Tudor Place from Francis Lowndes on 5 June 1805. Its 8.5 acres, bordered on the south and north by today's Q and R Streets and on the east and west by 31st and 32nd streets, included the brick wings and hyphens of a five-part country house envisioned by Mr. Lowndes, together with brick and frame outbuildings. The family occupied the west wing as their residence and bided their time on the building of the principal, center block. In the event they rejected the transitional Georgian-Federal mode that prevailed in 1805 and is reflected in the appearance of nearby, contemporary houses known today as Dumbarton Oaks and Dumbarton House. Thomas and Martha Peter elected instead to create a classical villa on the elevated site overlooking the Potomac River and engaged a family friend, Dr. William Thornton, as their architect. Dr. Thornton (1759-1828), who had won the competition for the Capitol in Washington, served on the board that oversaw the establishment of Washington as the nation's capital and as head of the U. S. Patent Office (1802-1828), and provided John Tayloe of Mount Airy with the plan on which his new townhouse was built. Dr. Thornton served his friends well: he provided them the design of a handsome stucco-covered house whose entirely new center block featured a dramatic temple-portico flanked by tall windows in arch-



headed recesses echoing the dome atop the portico. It was a work of genius.

Essentially completed and occupied by Thomas and Martha Peter in 1816, Tudor Place would remain the home of their descendants until 1983 and the death of their great-great-grandson, Armistead Peter III. The estate's original 8.5 acres were reduced by the sale of the northernmost portion, along the south side of R Street, in the antebellum period and a second sale of a lot fronting east on 31<sup>st</sup> Street in 1866, which was acquired by Armistead Peter III in 1961 and brought back into the family enclave. Tudor Place's residual grounds of 5.5 acres, being the center and southern part of the 1805 purchase, retain their historical borders along 31st, Q, and 32nd streets on the east, south, and west, respectively. Today, Tudor Place survives as one of the very few great properties in the United States that was the home of a single family, an elite category that includes Middleton Place, and Shirley and Mt. Airy, seats of the Carter and Tayloe families in Virginia.

The story of family and place is conveyed in a series of four principal essays and a concluding pair of appendix-like catalogues of "The Washington Collection" at Tudor Place and "Highlights of the Tudor Place Archives." Leslie L. Buhler, who served as executive director at Tudor Place from 2000 to 2015 provides a genealogical overview of Thomas and Martha Peter and their descendants in "The Custis-Peter Family of Georgetown." These remarkable people included Britannia Wellington Peter Kennon (1815-1911) who was born at Tudor Place and returned to it as widow in 1844. A photograph made in May 1906 conveys the erect carriage of an aristocrat and the formidable character that enabled her to protect and preserve Tudor Place, from her mother's death in 1854 until her own in 1911. One of her critical decisions was to hire John Luckett in 1862 to tend the gardens and grounds of Tudor Place. A former slave, he remained the estate gardener until his death in 1906, and he appears in these pages in a full-page photograph made on 15 May 1899.

Britannia Kennon outlived both her daughter (and only child) Martha (1843-1886) and her husband Armistead Peter (1840-1902). The stewardship of Tudor Place passed to her grandson, Armistead Peter Jr. (1870-1960), who installed electricity, central heating, and modern plumbing, including six bathrooms. He and his son, Armistead Peter III, also renewed the gardens of Tudor Place and in 1929 recreated a flower-knot garden in one of the quadrants of Martha Peter's lost garden aligned along the old drive leading south from R Street. Its design was adapted from a parterre at Avenel, created by Jane Peter Beverley and said to have been based on the original Tudor Place flower-knots. The plan of Avenel's gardens, drawn by James Bradshaw Beverley, was published in *Historic Gardens of Virginia* in 1923.

Armistead Peter III continued the high level of stewardship exercised by his father. He and his wife, Caroline Ogden-Jones Peter (1894-1965), established the Carostead Foundation (today's Tudor Place Foundation) to assure

the preservation of Tudor Place. In 1969 he privately published *Tudor Place: Designed by Dr. William Thornton and Built Between 1805 and 1816 for Thomas and Martha Peter*, the principal published source on the estate's history.

William C. Allen brought his long expertise as the architectural historian in the office of the Architect of the Capitol (1982-2010) and his authority as author of *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics* (2001) to his contribution, "An Architectural History of Tudor Place." His knowledge of Dr. William Thornton and building practices in Washington in the opening years of the nineteenth century provide an invaluable context for appreciating the splendid achievement Tudor Place represents. Patricia Marie O'Donnell likewise drew on the experience of her profession and the cultural landscape studies on Tudor Place she and her firm prepared in 2002, 2012, and 2013 for "The Landscape of Tudor Place." Leslie L. Buhler and Erin Kuykendall, curator of collections at the estate from 2011 to 2015, have provided an engaging account of the extraordinary collection of artworks, household furnishings, and personal property acquired through the generations by the Peter family and used daily while "Living at Tudor Place."

The spirit of Martha Custis Peter and that of her daughter, Britannia Peter Kennon, is present throughout these essays and the pages of *Tudor Place*. Two black and white photographs, selected from the many in the Tudor Place archives and published herein, convey their role as links between the past, present, and future of Tudor Place. The first is a daguerreotype of Martha Peter and her granddaughter Martha Custis Kennon (1843-1886). Mrs. Peter is holding the miniature of George Washington painted by Walter Robertson that President Washington gave to her upon her marriage in 1795. In the second photograph, made in October 1910, some three months before her death at Tudor Place on 27 January 1911, on the eve of her 96th birthday, Britannia Kennon is seated in a wicker wheelchair and being wheeled through her garden by her great-grandson, Armistead Peter III, then a lad of fourteen. One senses his acceptance of responsibility, seen here, and realized in a life-long commitment to the preservation of Tudor Place.

Davyd Foard Hood  
Isinglass  
Vale, North Carolina

*Reviewer's Note: Bill Allen and I were classmates in the graduate architectural history program at the University of Virginia in the early 1970s and participated in a seminar on early American architecture conducted by Frederick D. Nichols. Professor Nichols, a contributor to Armistead Peter III's 1969 monograph on Tudor Place, gained Mr. Peter's approval to bring the near-dozen students in the seminar to see this handsome example of American neoclassicism. Mr. Peter graciously received our party and accompanied us through the rooms of Tudor Place and onto its grounds.*

# The Little Bulbs: Early Daffodils in the Elizabeth Lawrence Garden

Andrea Sprott, Charlotte, North Carolina

There is reason to celebrate. In my world, anything new that has to do with Elizabeth Lawrence and her Charlotte, North Carolina, garden is *always* reason to celebrate. In the six-plus years I have been garden curator at the Elizabeth Lawrence House & Garden, many a celebration has been had. One of those occurred before Christmas 2016, when one budded stem from a group of unidentified *Narcissus* emerged in a shady part of the garden. That doesn't sound like much over which to rejoice, until you consider that it was two years in the making.

In the spring of 2014, while preparing ground for the installation of some caladiums, I discovered a group of three thinly-foliaged but fat unidentified *Narcissus* bulbs at the end of my spade in a shady part of the garden. This discovery thrilled me considerably because, 1) my spade also "discovered" the aluminum stake to which Elizabeth Lawrence affixed plant identification tags (no tag attached, unfortunately); 2) further hand-digging uncovered a small piece of slate that may well have been an additional marker of sorts; and, 3) because all of this information combined told me fairly definitively these bulbs were original to Lawrence's garden. I immediately transplanted them close to their original spot, but in a bit more sun, in hopes they could eventually make enough energy to bloom one day.

Nearly two years later, in the third week of December 2016, while making my new bloom documentation/new plant assessment rounds in the garden, I noticed a bud emerging from the midst of 8-10" long glaucous foliage of one of the three mystery daffodils. Ever-curious and more than eager to update the "*Narcissus* unknown" database entry, I watched that one stem like a hawk. In the meantime, I scoured Lawrence's meticulously documented plant records. Unfortunately, she rarely noted exact locations of her plantings. Also, she grew over 450 different *Narcissus* in her Charlotte garden. My best bet, therefore, was to wait for a blossom to burst forth. I wouldn't know its true identity any other way.

Throughout the remainder of December and early January I watched that stem get taller and taller, but appeared no closer to opening. The weather forecast for the end of the first week in January was horrible - single digit lows and alleged snow. I waited until the very last minute of the very last day before the arctic blast moved in, before I cut that one stem and brought it inside. In a tiny glass vase on Elizabeth's studio windowsill, I left that tightly budded



Elizabeth Lawrence Paperwhite narcissus.

Photo by A. Sprott.

treasure, hoping against hope it was far enough along to open. It wasn't easy to leave it there Friday evening, knowing that if the forecast was right, I wouldn't be back to see it until sometime the following week. I could have taken it home with me, but that just didn't seem right. It needed to be there on the windowsill in her studio.

I cut one other early *Narcissus* flower that same afternoon, and placed it in the vase with the mystery daffodil. It was the very first bloom of *Narcissus* x 'Nylon', one I brought back to the garden a couple years ago - one Elizabeth wrote about in *The Little Bulbs*:

*"I have had as many as four of the milk-white flowers from a single bulb. Their thin, fluted bowls are filled with a strange heady perfume like that of the Chinese sacred lily."* (TLB, 79)

Although the temperatures that weekend were bitter cold (a low of 11°F) the snow did not quite make as big a show as they originally thought. I was back to work on Tuesday; I could not get there fast enough! What greeted me in Elizabeth's studio set my heart aflutter. Three of the mystery daffodil's six buds had opened - obviously a *Tazetta* daffodil (paperwhite) with purest crystalline white overlapping petals. 'Nylon', all buttery and delicate, had also opened beautifully. I brought the little vase into my office and starting snapping pictures. It was then I noticed the deliciously sweet fragrance; the sweetest, purest winter-sweet-like aroma I have ever smelled in a daffodil. And then I *knew* it was original to Elizabeth Lawrence's garden. Now comes the really fun part: searching those 460+ daffodil index cards for the proper identification of this incredible gem. Stay tuned. And now it's your turn to enter the tenterhooks waiting area for my next installment: sorting out plant identities using Elizabeth Lawrence's research!



## In Remembrance

The Southern Garden History Society has lost two long-time and very active members this year.

**James Weaver (Jim) Corley, Jr.**, died March 26, 2017, at his home in Marietta, Georgia. Over the years Jim and his wife Florrie attended many annual meetings of the Southern Garden History Society and his love of gardens, horticulture, and garden history was much admired. He was a Georgia Master Gardener



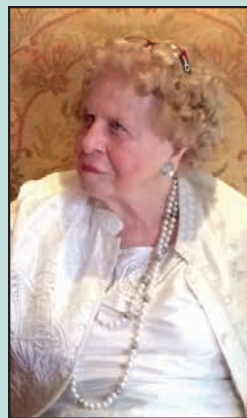
Jim Corley, Jr.

Extension volunteer for over twenty years. At the Atlanta Botanical Garden he conducted tours and volunteered at the Plant Hotline, a call-in service. He was the Atlanta Botanical Garden Volunteer of the Year in 1999 and received the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007. Jim and Florrie Corley were founding members of the Board of Trustees of Cobb Landmarks and Historical Society when it was organized in 1974 and served as co-chairs in 1985, 1986, and 1988. Jim served as coordinator of the group that oversaw the moving and restoration of the Root House. The Corley Award is given yearly in honor of the couple.

**Margaret Ann Craig Robinson** died quietly at home on April 4, 2017. The daughter of Edwin Wilson Craig and Elizabeth Wade Craig, she was born Sept. 14, 1924 in Nashville, Tennessee, where she lived her entire life. "Mrs. Robinson," as we all affectionately knew her, became involved with the Southern Garden History Society through her daughter Libby and son-in-law, Ben Page, past president of SGHS and co-

hosts of the 2015 annual meeting in Nashville. Mrs. Robinson, who also attended many SGHS annual meetings, hosted a festive reception and dinner for the 2015 meeting at her beautiful home and garden.

Her life was filled with extraordinary accomplishments and events, as her lengthy obituary in *The Tennessean* attests. Her paternal grandfather, Cornelius Abernathy Craig, was a founder of National Life and Accident Insurance Company, and her family was closely involved in the business for three generations. Under her father's leadership the company founded WSM Radio and Television and the Grand Ole Opry. She was active in the American Red Cross during World War II, serving as chairman of the Nashville-Davidson County Chapter of the Motor Corps. Mrs. Robinson was on the Board of Directors for Grassmere Nature Center, which then evolved into the present-day Nashville Zoo at Grassmere. She was on the Cheekwood Botanical Gardens Planning Committee, which developed a master plan for expansion of the gardens and development of an education center. Mrs. Robinson was honored with numerous awards in recognition of her many years



Margaret Ann Robinson

of public service, including the 1997 "Mic Award" from WPLN-Nashville Public Radio; YWCA's 2001 "Women of Achievement" award; the Tennessee Library Association's 2001 Trustee Award; the 2001 "Lifetime Achievement Award" from Nfocus magazine, and FiftyForward's 2010 "Crowning Achievement Award." Her keen wit and lively presence will be missed by all who knew her.

## Members in the News

An article by Fredericksburg member **Beate Ankjaer-Jensen** appeared in the Mar/Apr 2017 *Piedmont Virginian*. Her essay, "Gari Melchers' Belmont," examines the landscape and gardening lives of Gari and Corinne Melchers at their Falmouth, Virginia home. Photos of restoration work include several by famed photographer Frances Benjamin Johnston c. 1927 and 1930 paired with the same scenes today.

<http://piedmontvirginian.com/piedmont-gardens/>

**Staci Catron** has an essay on the Jephtha H. Wade Estate (Mill Pond Plantation) in Thomasville, Georgia included in a recently published volume entitled *Warren H. Manning: Landscape Architect and Environmental Planner* edited by Robin Karson, Jane Roy Brown and Sarah Allaback and published by the Library of American Landscape History in association with the University of Georgia Press.



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## Awards and Scholarships

The **Flora Ann Bynum Award** is the highest award bestowed by the Southern Garden History Society. It is not awarded annually, but only occasionally to recipients who have rendered outstanding service to the society. Nominations may be made at any time by any member. The award will usually be presented at the annual meeting.

The title **Honorary Director** (Board of Directors) may be bestowed on individuals who have rendered exceptional service and made significant contributions to the society. Nominations for Honorary Director are made to the President by current Board members and are approved by the Board of Directors.

The **Certificate of Merit** is presented to a member or non-member, whose work has advanced the mission and goals of the society. Awarding of certificates will be approved by the Board of Directors and will usually be announced at the annual meeting.

Society **Scholarships** assist students in attending the society's annual meeting and are awarded to bona fide students enrolled in college and university majors relevant to the mission and goals of the society. The scholarship provides a waiver of registration fees plus \$500 to assist with travel and lodging.

*Details, requirements, and directions for submitting applications are posted on the SGHS website: [www.southerngardenhistory.org](http://www.southerngardenhistory.org). For those without internet access, a copy of this document can be mailed. Contact Virginia Hart, SGHS Administrator.*

## Annual Membership Dues

The society's membership year is from **August 1—July 31**.  
 Membership categories:

<b>Benefactor</b>	<b>\$500</b>
<b>Patron</b>	<b>\$250</b>
<b>Sustainer</b>	<b>\$125</b>
<b>Institution or Business</b>	<b>\$100</b>
<b>Joint</b>	<b>\$60</b>
<b>Individual</b>	<b>\$40</b>
<b>Student</b>	<b>\$15</b>

For more membership information, contact:  
 Virginia Hart, SGHS Administrator  
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 Phone (336) 770-6723

Email: [membership@southerngardenhistory.org](mailto:membership@southerngardenhistory.org)  
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*Deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of Magnolia is July 15, 2017.*

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