

Magnolia

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

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The Country Place Era in Houston

by Sadie Gwin Blackburn, Houston, Texas

*T*he Country Place Era in the United States lasted approximately fifty years from 1890 to 1940. It was a period in landscape architecture arising out of specific historical conditions and exhibited definitive characteristics. It was essentially a residential landscape development since its basic rationale was escape from the city. There were traces of Victorian horticultural traditions in the beginning of the period and harbingers of the post World War II gardens at the end of the period. I believe, however, that it is easier to understand the qualities of a general trend of thought or a design principle by examining specific examples in a specific place than in trying to isolate descriptive intellectual characterizations. It is my hope that by describing what



Home of John Henry Kirby, 1901-2

The remodeled house included a conservatory, the newest fashion of uniting house and garden by bringing garden plants inside the living area. The greenhouse remained from the Victorian garden but the pergola extending from house to the natatorium was a major feature of the new "Italian gardens." Photo courtesy Junior League Collection Houston Public Library Archives.

happened in domestic landscape design in Houston during that time span we will better understand our history, our ideals, and how we lived in our homes and gardens during that period.

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Calendar

June 19th-June 24th, 1993: "Of Media and Messages," the 1993 Annual Conference of the Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums will be hosted by the Minnesota Historical Society at the new Minnesota History Center in St. Paul. The conference theme will explore the application of a variety of media to the teaching of rural history, including - and beyond - living history. Sessions and hands-on workshops will help us gain expertise and skill in many fields of interest in the interpretation of agriculture and rural life. For registration materials contact Gail Ede, Historic Sites Department, MHS, 345 Kellogg Blvd. West, St. Paul, MN, 55102.

June 25th, 1993: Symposium, "New England Garden Restoration: Visions and Reality, the Transition from Private to Public Use" to be hosted by the New England Garden History Society and Blithewold Mansion in Bristol, Rhode Island. For more information, call Walter T. Punch at (617) 536-9280 or Mark Zelonis at (401) 253-2707.

Until September 12th, 1993: Exhibit, "Longue Vue and the Classical Tradition: A Legacy of Charles Platt and Ellen Shipman" at Longue Vue House and Gardens in New Orleans, Louisiana.



October 2nd-4th, 1993: Maymont Centennial Weekend. Please contact The Maymont Foundation, 1700 Hampton St., Richmond, VA 23220, for more information.

October 7th-9th, 1993: "Many Peoples, Many Cultures: The Shaping of the Southern Landscape," the Ninth Biennial Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. All Southern Garden History Society members are being mailed brochures and registration materials. For further information, contact Mrs. Jackie Beck, Registrar, Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes, Old Salem, Inc., P.O. Box F, Winston-Salem, NC 27108. Telephone (919) 721-7352, or FAX (919) 721-7335.

October 15th-16th, 1993: This year's Southern Garden Symposium will include several workshops, demonstrations, lectures and tours. Pre-registration is required. Contact The Southern Garden Symposium, P.O. Box 2075, St. Francisville, LA, 70775 for more information.

May 6th-8th, 1994: Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Southern Garden History Society in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia *

Country Place Era Continued from page 1

At the turn of the century, three major trends of thought began to influence the design of residential gardens in the United States and in Houston: the idea of the integration of house and garden into a unit for domestic living; the idea of using a particular historical style as a point of departure in architecture and landscape design; and the idea of the superior value of country living over life in the city.

Charles Platt provided the initial impetus to the idea of regarding house and garden as a single unit. His tour of Italy in 1893 resulted in a book, *Italian Gardens*, illustrated with photographs he had taken of Italian Renaissance villas and their gardens. He wrote:

The evident harmony of arrangement between the house and surrounding

landscape is what first strikes one in Italian landscape architecture - the design as a whole, including gardens, terraces, groves . . . not one of these component parts was ever considered independently, the architect of the house being also the architect of the garden. . . the architect proceeded with the idea that not only was the house to be lived in, but that one still wished to be at home while out-of-doors; so the garden was designed as another apartment. . . where one might walk about and find a place suitable to the hour of the day and feeling of the moment, and still be in that sacred portion of the globe dedicated to one's Self.¹

Platt's book and his later activity as a landscape designer and architect initiated a considerable vogue for the "Italian garden" during the early part of the twentieth century and

contributed to the idea that house and garden were equally important in domestic life. Early examples of the "Italian garden" in Houston were John Henry Kirby, 2006 Smith Street, in 1901-2 and Robert Crews Duff, 803 McGowan in 1910.

The historical influence in garden design had its inception in a controversy that arose in the latter years of the nineteenth century. Landscape designers in England and the United States reacted sharply to the contrived flower bed designs and garish colors of the Victorian garden. A strong difference of opinion existed, however, as to whether landscaping should be primarily architectural or horticultural, that is, whether it should relate primarily to the architecture of the house or to the world of Nature from which the plants came. In England, William Robinson advocated a return to the natural landscape garden of the eighteenth century, using native and hardy plants to recapture the simplicity and fidelity to Nature of that period. As it had been in that century, he felt that the landscape designer should be a horticultural artist who produced a pictorial landscape, using plants instead of paint, to create mass and line, color and texture simulating Nature. Robinson's contemporary, Reginald Blomfield, felt that the Renaissance and Baroque formal gardens provided better examples for landscape design because they complemented and reinforced the architecture.² This dichotomy existed also in America; landscape architects and architects designing gardens tended to use formal, historical design, and the landscape gardeners advocated the horticultural, natural approach.

At the end of the nineteenth century, a new awareness of Nature in America greatly influenced landscape design ideas. Although the urban population of the United States did not exceed the rural population until 1920, urban Americans were seized by a great nostalgia for rural living about 1890. By this time the American countryside had been made accessible by a network of railroads, and the wilderness, which had once been an adversary, was now perceived to be one of the nation's greatest assets. Between 1890 and 1915 government action created eleven national parks in addition to Yellowstone, which had been set aside in 1872; these were chosen for their scenic, scientific, or historical values and



were to remain public property in perpetuity.³ About the same time, many men whose great wealth stemmed from industry and commerce bought properties that exemplified these newfound values in

the beauties of Nature. They built houses and gardens in the country to escape both the pressure of business and the ugliness of unplanned urban development. Middle and lower classes joined in the general movement according to their economic capacity, but it was the country places of the wealthy that created a style of architecture and garden design that became know



Harris Masterson, 1907

A privet hedge maze was the principal garden design feature to complement the 18th-century classical architecture of the Masterson house. Such coordination of house and garden design was new in Houston at this time. Photo courtesy Junior League Collection, Houston Public Library Archives.

as "Country Place Era" design. Gardening and other outdoor activities played a large role in the leisure hours of American households during the period from about 1890 to 1940. The organization of garden clubs and country clubs were manifestations of this outlook during these years.

The earliest Country Place houses were based on European historical prototypes but were quickly superseded by country places reflecting the simpler architecture of colonial America: Medieval Tudor Colonial, Southern Colonial, New

England farmhouse. It was felt that architecture should mirror the history of the country of its origin, and gardens were to follow the design traditions of the historic period of the architecture. This formal, historical, house-and-garden design principle has been described by the general term "creative eclectic." Houses and gardens of the Country Place era were not necessarily isolated properties



was erected on shore at the foot of a long fishing and boating pier, owned by the Association and available to all families who built bay houses along the high bluff above the water's edge. Bay Ridge, however, was simply part of a movement to enjoy Nature, and preceded the idea of integrated house-and-garden design of the

formal Italian garden described by Charles Platt. The earliest attempt to create an "Italian garden" was made by John Henry Kirby and his wife who had bought a house on a whole city block at 2006 Smith Street in 1896. After remodeling in 1901, they christened their home Inglenook. Mr. Kirby often visited Boston, seeking financing for his lumber and oil companies in East Texas, so it is not surprising that



Henry Staiti, 1917

The cement curbing outlining the rose beds in the open parterre garden between the treillage tea house and the greenhouse provided geometric order for the rose display. Photo courtesy Junior League Collection, Houston Public Library Archives.

far from the city. They might be a cluster of homes in an enclave in a small community or around a country club, or even a home on a spacious lot in a planned suburb. "[Urban] Americans insisted on defining 'country' living as the highest expression of cultural society. . . ."⁴ From this perspective, garden design and gardening became more important than ever in America because gardens symbolically expressed the new ideal of Nature and outdoor living in a context of the established ideals of home and family.

This excerpt from *Houston's Forgotten Heritage* describes the origin of the ideas that produced the Country Place Era.

In Houston the first evidence of the Country Place trend was the Bay Ridge Park Association. In 1890 a group of friends formed an organization to build cottages on a strip of property on the north shore of Galveston Bay.⁵ A gazebo

the Kirbys selected John Henry Curtis, a Boston landscape gardener, to design a garden for their new home. It is somewhat remarkable that an "Italian garden" was created in Houston only a few years after Platt designed his first garden in Brookline. Curtis did not come to Houston but made the design from photographs and the property survey. His plan contained a number of features of the Italian garden, such as water parterres and fountains, a pergola, statuary and even a natural area with a lake conforming to the "Bosco" of the classic garden, but there was no perceptible integration with the architecture nor any clearly defined outdoor rooms. The garden had great charm, however, and was notable as the first garden in Houston to be designed by a professional.

The garden of Mr. & Mrs. Robert Crews Duff

reveals, I believe, the educational influence of the presence in Houston of the professionals who built Rice Institute. It is a rather original adaptation of the structural principles of the Italian garden and closely integrated with the architecture of the house. The balustrade around the house terrace was extended across the whole property, dividing front from back garden, an earlier design feature of Victorian gardens arising from practical reasons. Steps led down into the lower back garden which was divided by plantings into three outdoor rooms: the Sundial Garden, the Lawn Garden and the Psyche Parterre Garden. Statuary was carved by Oswald J. Lassig who had come to Houston as a stoneworker on the Rice Institute buildings.⁶

Meanwhile, the city of Houston was growing at an unprecedented rate. The devastation of Galveston by the hurricane of 1900 and the discovery of oil at Spindletop near Beaumont four months later ensured Houston's future as a major trading and business center. Houston's population almost doubled between 1890 and 1900, and doubled again between 1900 and 1910. The business district was expanding into the residential district encircling the downtown area.



landscaping ideals of the "country place." Houston Heights, a separate town built in 1890 northwest of Houston, was instructive regarding the value of comprehensive planning; but Houstonians were also in touch with suburban developments in other cities, most notably St. Louis. The St. Louis "private places" were relatively small, one or two streets a few blocks long, conforming to the city grid pattern but owned and maintained by the property owners; ornamental gates marked the entrances. The layout used landscaping to create a parklike setting within the area and often included a protective strip of green around the outer perimeter. Deed restrictions established high minimum standards in the Places, which were intended as enclaves for the civic mercantile elite in outlying suburban areas.

The "private places" of St. Louis were the prototypes for the earliest Country Place suburbs. Connections with St. Louis were strong through the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad business and personal associations. Westmoreland, organized in 1903, the first "planned" subdivision, was laid out by the prestigious St. Louis engineer Julius Pitzman, but Courtlandt Place in 1906 was



W. J. Crabb, 1930

The series of outdoor rooms, all in the Moorish tradition reflecting the Spanish architecture of the house designed by John Staub, including this traditional octagonal pond flanked by oil jars and, in the distance, an open lawn space with a tiled wall fountain of a Spanish madonna.

This growth was both rapid and haphazard, cutting into even the wealthiest neighborhoods. New residential areas were needed, and the character of these developments would reflect the

the classic example of a "private place" suburb in Houston, where a group of families and friends formed an ownership association to develop the small 15 acre area. Montrose, developed by J. W. Link was much larger but retained the reputation of a choice neighborhood by its esplanaded streets and building restrictions.⁷ Although suburbs were established for working class residential development with advertised public plantings, the country place integrating historical architecture and landscape were not pursued to any great degree. "Country

place" suburbs were said to be, "the exurban retreat of the urban rich."

The historical architectural style of garden design was predominately used in the new,

planned neighborhoods of the city. One fine example was the Harris Masterson house and garden at 3702 Burlington. Finished in 1907, the Masterson house was one of the earliest in Westmoreland. R. D. Steele was the architect. The garden around this Colonial Revival house was probably the result of the architect's suggestion of a design that would be historically appropriate to the architecture. In the Mastersons' garden nothing was allowed to disturb the tranquillity of the front lawn, of course, which was an obligatory part of the neighborhood area park; but the maze at the side of the house formed a decorative area that was also a joy to the Mastersons' grandchildren. The clipped hedges were evergreen native yaupon, and the repeated use of this motif in different geometric shapes for other childhood play areas was a beguiling feature in the back garden. On the opposite side of the house was an arbor with climbing roses over a walk edged with violets and a bench where one might sit and enjoy the fragrance and view of the garden. One of the Masterson grandchildren remembers pansies, geraniums, and amaryllis growing in the garden and moon vines on the trellis near the back door. The Masterson garden is an excellent example of the creative eclectic house and garden of the Country Place era. The premise that the garden should harmonize with the architecture is evident, though the architect probably left the choice of horticulture up to the owners. The Colonial Revival architecture reflected the southern heritage of the Masterson family; the maze was a garden design affiliated with the historical period of the architectural design but completely personalized in the way it was adapted to the use of the garden as a play area for the grandchildren. This kind of overt representation of the personal attributes of the family who occupied the house became a hallmark of early twentieth-century gardens.⁸

The nursery business in Houston became well established in the first years of the twentieth century. The two leading firms were the Teas Nursery and the Japanese Nursery. Edward Teas came from a family of nurserymen in Missouri who were entrusted by the U. S. Department of Agriculture with testing foreign plants for use in this country. He opened his business in Houston in 1910 and became a leading advisor and plantsman in both public and private property



landscaping. The Japanese Nursery was an outgrowth of a Japanese effort to grow satsuma oranges in the area between Houston and Galveston. When a severe freeze brought on bankruptcy, the manager, Saburo Arai, was refinanced by C. E. Schaff

of St. Louis, the president of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad who maintained a second home in Houston. The business thrived with offices both in Galveston and Houston and was a



J. Robert Neal, 1933

Designed by the Olmsted Brothers' Boston firm, this gazebo with gracefully carved columns and a dome of lacy iron filigree was a particularly appropriate accompaniment to the French inspired architecture of the house.

major source of plants for Houston, particularly Oriental ones.⁹

The only resident landscape architect known to have been active in Houston during these early years was Edward Dewson. He came to Houston in 1910 as editor of the short-lived *Southern Architectural Review* and was particularly interested in the indoor-outdoor relationship of home and garden. In 1912 he designed a plan for the lake house of E. A. Peden and in 1917 for the Westmoreland home of Henry Staiti. His restrained geometric designs indicate a thorough understanding of the principles of country place design as enumerated by Norman Newton: meticulous care for detail, proportion, and scale; space treated as a plastic material; clarity of circulation; relation between form and material to emphasize geometric form; and understatement and reserve rather than exaggeration. The Peden landscaping at Clear Lake is difficult to evaluate, though nothing seems to violate these principles.

An examination of the Staiti garden, however, reveals an adherence to every one of these principles. Indeed, it is the clarity of the engineering eye that underlies the beauty of the planting. There seem to be no echoes of historic landscape styles either in the garden or in its relation to the house; the relationship is pure design. To quote Newton once more: "the power of simple geometry. . . is independent of 'historic' styles."¹⁰

The principles evident in Edward Dewson's work reflect an influence from new developments in architectural theory. The formal geometric style of garden design had been used principally for houses built in the historical creative eclectic tradition. The use of historical styles in building and garden design was challenged, however, by midwestern progressives such as Louis H. Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, and George W. Maher. This school of thought believed that house and landscape should be based on function and celebrate the artistic characteristics of the geographical region in which it was to be built. The horizontal, spare, flowing lines of the prairie were the dominant feature of the Midwest; therefore, its architecture and landscaping should express that spirit. The historical American Colonial connotations should be left to the eastern seaboard. This independent regional attitude appealed to all areas of the United States that had been part of the westward movement. Two

Houston houses gave evidence of the influence of these progressive ideas: The Oaks, built by Edwin B. Parker, was a direct example of the ideas of Frank Lloyd Wright. The Country Place, owned by Walter B. Sharp, reflected a new movement toward using native plants to blend garden design into the surrounding landscape in the tradition of eighteenth-century English landscape gardening of which Jens Jensen was the foremost advocate in the United States.¹¹

The concern with private gardening and landscaping in the first two decades of the twentieth



century was accompanied by a new conceptual sophistication in terms of city beautification and urban planning. Civic and business leaders were firmly committed to making Houston a progressive modern city, a "Greater Houston." The Houston Business League, organized in 1898 by Rienzi Johnson, editor of *The Houston Post*, provided a contact point for the business leaders concerned about the city's future development during rapid growth. A monthly publication entitled *Progressive Houston* was issued by the city from 1909 to 1912 to inform and influence the public regarding the activities and goals of the administration.

In River Oaks the most significant horticultural trend of the time was set - the predominance of azaleas and camellias as landscape plants in Houston gardens. A descendant of John Grant says that he was the first to bring azaleas to



*Will and Miss Ima Hogg, "Bayou Bend," 1927-28
The Latin Colonial architecture of Bayou Bend was given a dramatic emphasis on the north front by the grass terraces and steps in Diana Garden, one of the ten garden rooms in the fourteen acres surrounding the residence.*

Houston after a visit to Charleston in the 1920s. In the early thirties these plants with their spectacular spring bloom began appearing in Houston gardens, particularly on Lazy Lane. It was found that Houston had the ideal climate for these plants - only the soil needed to be acidified periodically for beautiful results. The plants were cold hardy and evergreen; there were numerous cultivars which were well suited to use in parterres of formal historical garden design, or underplanted in the native pine forest. The Indicas which had naturalized in the south after

the first importation from England in the late eighteenth century were favorites. Harry Hanszen boasted a sixty year old azalea brought in from Louisiana. The River Oaks Garden Club began their spring Azalea Trail in 1935.

Camellias, too, received great attention. In Houston they bloomed during winter months and so extended the period of bloom in Houston gardens. An annual camellia show was held at the Forum by the River Oaks Garden Club which greatly increased the interest and use of this plant in gardens, particularly in River Oaks.

The landscape architect who probably designed more gardens in River Oaks than any other was C. C. (Pat) Fleming. He was born in 1909 in Beaumont, and graduated from the University of Texas with a degree in architecture. While still a student he superintended the landscaping of the campus and, immediately after graduation, formed a landscape architecture firm with Albert E. Sheppard headquartered in Austin, Texas. Fleming worked for two years with the National Park system landscaping Palmetto Park at Gonzales with an eye to preserving native plants and natural beauty; as a result of that work he was made a member of the Texas Academy of Science. In 1936, he proceeded to supervise the landscaping of the newly constructed San Jacinto Monument in Houston. There was so much business in the coastal city that the firm relocated in Houston in 1937. Long after the period under discussion, Fleming pursued an illustrious career designing mostly private gardens, but also receiving an award for his landscaping of the Prudential Building in Houston and for the Parker Memorial Garden in San Antonio. His skill in coordinating architecture and garden design, his use of appropriate materials and garden ornament, his close attention to the individuality of his clients as well as his broad knowledge of plants and horticulture, all made Pat Fleming an outstanding landscape architect of creative historical style in Houston. His work at Bayou Bend in creating the Diana Garden and later the natural woodland garden at Dogwoods made his reputation.¹²

The Country Place Era in the two decades between the World Wars had specific characteristics which reached full development in River Oaks: integrated house-and-garden design, usually of formal creative design which included European as well as American historical refer-



ences. These homes were designed by highly trained professional architects and landscape architects to reflect the individual preferences of the family. Most of these homes and gardens were opened to the

public during the Azalea Trail or on a home and garden pilgrimage. This was a time of progressive ideals, of confident belief that a city could design itself, that with the advice of talented professionals, domestic surroundings could be made beautiful and orderly neighborhoods created; and, with thought and determined civic pride, a City Beautiful might be built along the bayou +

¹ Charles Platt, *Italian Gardens* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894), 6-72.

² William Robinson, *The English Flower Garden* (New York: Amaryllis Press, 1984), 27-28, reprint (London: J. Murray, 1933); Reginald Blomfield, *The Formal Garden in England* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 19-20.

³ Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press) 521-29. See also Mark A. Hewitt, *The Architect and the American Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), 12.

⁴ Hewitt, *American Country House*, 153; quote from Peter Schmitt, *Back to Nature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969).

⁵ Bay Ridge File, JLC/HMRC/HPL.

⁶ Sadie Gwin Blackburn, "The Evolution of the Houston Landscape," *Houston's Forgotten Heritage* (Houston: Rice Univ. Press, 1991) 49-50.

⁷ Ibid, 46.

⁸ Sadie Gwin Blackburn, "The Evolution of the Landscape," *Houston's Forgotten Heritage* (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1991) 50-51.

⁹ Ibid, 52.

¹⁰ Ibid, 52-54.

¹¹ Ibid, 54-56.

¹² Interview, S. G. Blackburn with Pat Fleming, August, 1991; Biography of Pat Fleming in *Kerrville Daily Times*, June 23, 1972.

“Texas Forever”

Thus were the sentiments of German botanist and naturalist John Meusebach who explored the landscape of his newly adopted home during the mid-nineteenth century. For 120 members of the Southern Garden History Society who attended the 11th annual meeting in Brenham, Texas this past April 16th-18th, the sentiments were the same, thanks to the careful attention of conference coordinators Bill and Diane Welch and their hard-working planning committee.

From the opening remarks by Allen Commander, who described frontier flowers while dressed in full regalia as Sam

Houston, to the final reception in the Welch's garden at Cricket Court, every aspect of this well-conceived meeting worked to enrich our experience, add to our knowledge of historic plants and gardens, and alter our concept and appreciation of the Lone Star State forever.



Florence & Bill Griffin with Faith Bybee.

It is impossible to describe, nor can our photographs do justice to, the breathtaking beauty of the Texas roadsides blanketed with Indian paintbrushes (*Castilleja sp.*) Texas bluebonnets (*Lupinus texensis*) and evening primroses or



The Lewis-Wagner Farmstead at the Winedale Historical Center in Round Top, Texas.



buttercups (*Oenothera speciosa*). The pictures on this page capture but a few of the meeting's many highlights including some of the private and public gardens on the tour.

Hallmarking the meeting were the wide-range of topics and high quality of presentations by a superbly assembled roster of speakers. Lecturers



SGHS Board Members at Festival Hill April 1993.

included long-time SGHS board member Suzanne Turner who gave a stunning portrait of Thomas Affleck as “Renaissance Man of the Southern Soil,” and Nancy Volkman and Gordon Echols who addressed “Spanish Influences on Texas Landscapes.” Flo Oxley of the National Wildflower Research Center gave conference participants a deeper understanding of the origins of Texas



Ben Page, Bill Welch, and Libby Page.

wildflower lore while George Ray McEachern explored the rich history of the Texas wine-making industry.

But most significantly, by assembling the contents of the lectures and events of this conference into a published “Proceedings,” Bill Welch has set a precedent it is hoped will be continued with all future annual meetings. The three essays by Greg Grant, Jeff Abt, and Sadie Gwin Blackburn have been excerpted from this publication. Their focus on the German influence in Texas, East Texas lumber towns, and the Country Place movement in Houston represents the broad scope of “Southern Gardens Go West.” ♦

The German Influence on the Texas Landscape

by D. Greg Grant, San Antonio, Texas

The influx of German immigrants into Texas is concentrated around the mid and late nineteenth century. Many Germans felt much discontent with the political climate, the lack of a unified country, compulsory military service, and the crowded conditions in their native homeland. Many, including the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas, saw this new land as a golden opportunity to start anew blessed with complete personal freedom, bountiful resources, and limitless potential. The Society was formed in 1842 by a group of German noblemen to purchase



Roundtop. The next major area of settlement was in the hill country of west-central Texas beginning with New Braunfels in 1845 and Fredericksburg in 1846. Others that followed included Sisterdale, Boerne, and Comfort.

The Germans that came to Texas included a large number of hard-working peasants and many highly educated intellectuals. Many were skilled laborers and most well versed in social functions. They cherished knowledge, accomplishment, and cultural entertainment including singing, sports, art, and gardening.

Of course the Germans originally gardened to sustain themselves. In addition, a great number of items were harvested from the wild including grapes, plums, blackberries and anything else deemed edible. One German was quoted as saying, "We ate what we liked, and we ate what we didn't like." Like most early settlers, they primarily grew edible crops including sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, corn, cabbage, etc. It

doesn't appear that the Germans were responsible for introducing any new types of vegetables to Texas but they can be credited with the increased use of white potatoes, cabbage for kraut; wheat for "light bread," and tobacco for cigars. Although they have often been credited with being superior gardeners compared to the Anglos of the time, there is no evidence to prove such. However, they certainly gave the impression of being harder workers, often working in entire family units in the fields and rarely using slave labor. The quality of their dwellings also improved very quickly showing off their skills with wood, stone, and iron

working. This, along with a neat, regimented lifestyle also led to the

impression of their being more cultured than the Anglos and Mexicans alongside them. To this day, many German yards possess a manicured, orderly habit.

One of the most noted examples of skillful German craftsmanship and period architecture is the beautiful King William district of San Antonio. With the first house built in 1867, it became the first prominent residential section in the area. The elegant architecture and gardens of this 35 block neighborhood reflect the hard-earned wealth and refined taste of the city's new elite. It was the first designated historic district in the state.

As many of the German immigrants were college educated and even college professors; a



*George Kalteyer House in King William District, 1892.
Photo by Greg Grant.*

land and promote German settlement in Texas. The society promised land, homes, schools, churches, and more in exchange for settling the foreign land. Unfortunately, because the society was taken advantage of on most of their land purchases, they quickly depleted their finances, and eventually disbanded. Therefore, most of the thousands of German immigrants came to Texas facing extremely hard times, poor living conditions, and a number of deadly diseases.

The heaviest German settlement in Texas centered around two areas. The first was in east-central Texas, beginning with Industry in 1838. Other towns soon followed including Cat Springs, Frelsburg, Shelby, Oldenburg, New Ulm, and

number of them quickly made impacts in their respective fields. Several German naturalists rose to prominence through their exploration of the previously undescribed flora and fauna of Texas.



Ferdinand Lindheimer immigrated to America in 1833.

Among the most famous was Ferdinand Lindheimer who for fifteen years collected and classified numerous undescribed new plants around Houston, Galveston, San Felipe, New Braunfels, Fredericksburg, and San Antonio. Most of his collecting was done for Asa Gray of Harvard University and fellow German George Englemann of the Missouri Botanical Garden. Often consid-

ered "the father of Texas botany," his name has been honored in one genus of Texas wildflowers and twenty different native Texas plant species including *Gaudea lindheimeri*, now a popular garden perennial. He also helped guide Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels and the many new immigrant followers to the sight of present day New Braunfels and served as the editor of the *New Braunfels Zeitung* (a newspaper printed in German) for twenty years.

Also making a name for himself was Friederich Ernst, former head gardener and bookkeeper for the Duke of Oldenburg. Ernst, who is considered "the father of German immigration" in Texas, founded and helped settle the town of Industry in 1838, the first German town in Texas. He is perhaps most famous for his letter to a friend back in Oldenburg, Germany extolling the virtues of his newly beloved country. This letter was published in a number of newspapers throughout Germany. His contagious enthusiasm quickly spread, starting the first steady stream of immigration to Texas. In 1836 the census showed 218 Germans in Texas. By the 1840s there were thousands. Ernst was known as a skilled gardener and is credited for spreading much information on fruit and garden culture. He

is also considered "the father of the Texas cigar industry" and planned to have his own "segar" factory. By 1892 there were cigar factories in 28 towns in Texas, and by 1898 some 1,000 acres in production. Today,

Texas is the only state west of the Mississippi with a cigar factory.

Another skilled gardener was John Meusebach, second commissioner for The Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas and an accomplished student of natural sciences. He is also widely known for founding the town of Fredericksburg, forging a lasting peace treaty with the Comanche Indians of the Texas Hill country, and serving as a state senator. He later moved to Loyal Valley where his farm became a showplace with sixty varieties of roses, forty kinds of peaches, and an avenue of varying shades of crape myrtles leading to the house. His outdoor Roman bath was also quite a novelty.

Ferdinand Von Roemer, a German geologist, was sent to study the limestone areas of west-central Texas and in 1849 published *Texas*, one of the most



John O. Meusebach arrived in Galveston in 1845.

valuable early surveys of Texas flora, fauna, and geology, still considered a classic today. In his relatively short stay in the states he was known to have gone on collecting trips and shared libraries with both Lindheimer and Meusebach.

Another influential German immigrant was the highly educated Louis Ervenberg who led a movement to establish a German-English University near Industry, served as a Protestant minister, and built the first church in and helped establish the town of New Braunfels. He also established an orphanage for the many children of those who died during the long hard trek from the coast. He was a prominent supporter of improved agricultural practices and in 1850 secured a charter for a Western Texas University to teach scientific agriculture near New Braunfels. The

Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College in College Station wasn't established until 1876. Unfortunately both of his plans for institutes of higher learning failed.

Another excellent botanist, Peter Henry Oberwetter was a pioneer in the study, culture, and trade of bulbs, particularly amaryllids. He was by trade an importer of rare bulbs, and exporter of native bulbs, and a creator of other



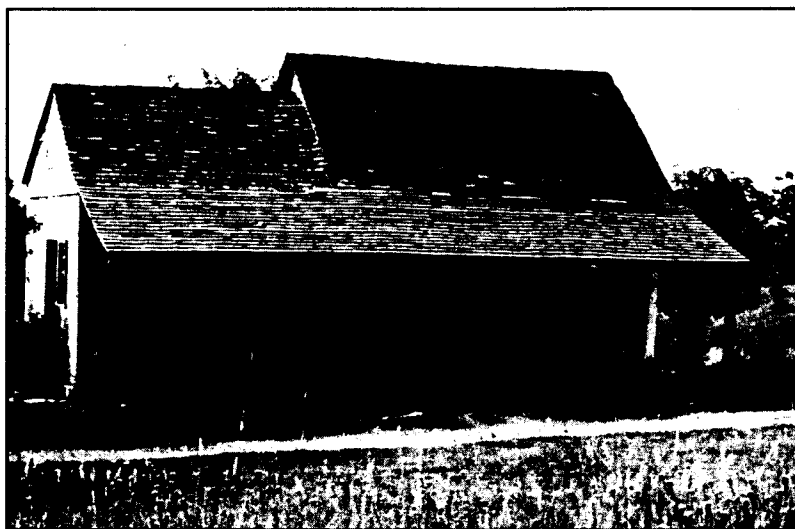
Joseph's Lily (*Hippeastrum x johnsonii*) into the United States.

Several Germans established prominent nurseries in the state including J.J. Locke's Nursery, founded in 1856 at New Braunfels, J.F. Leyendecker's Pearfield Nursery, established in 1876 at Frelsburg, and G.A. Shattenberg's Waldheim Nursery at Boerne. Locke's Nursery is still in operation today run by his 90 year old grandson Otto Locke, Jr.

In addition to the oxblood lily, several other ornamental plants can be linked to the German influence including German or bearded iris (*Iris x germanica*) and a number of early rose cultivars including 'Gruss an Aachen', 'George Arends', 'Skyrocket (Wilhelm)', 'Leverkusen', 'Dortmund', 'Kordes Perfecta', 'Trier', 'Frau Karl Druschi', 'Tausendschon', and 'Veilchenblau' to name a few.

Of course the Germans also brought a number of customs along with them including the Christmas tree. Christmas trees are now a significant horticultural commodity in Texas and the United States.

Travelling the German areas of Texas today, one can't help but notice the skillfully constructed limestone houses, the European fachwork construction techniques, the beautiful ironwork of their fences and gates, the intricate patterns of gingerbread adorning the houses, and the neat appearance of the yards and surrounding landscape, all living legacies to the concepts of German ingenuity, perseverance, and self help.



*Shumacher House.
San Antonio Botanical Center.
Photo by Greg Grant.*

new varieties of bulbs by hybridization. He is often credited with the introduction of the oxblood lily (*Rhodophiala bifida*), a fall blooming "miniature amaryllis" from Argentina, which apparently has naturalized throughout the German areas of Texas. Although in question, his offspring related that he was the first to import the St.

East Texas Lumber Town Landscapes, Circa 1900

by Jeffry Abt, Nagocdoches, Texas

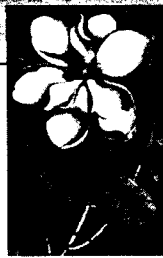
At the turn of the century, the trade magazine *American Lumberman* sent to East Texas a professional writer and photographer to document the lumber empire known as Thompson Lumber Co., marketers of the Lone Star Pine. The photographs taken for this extensive article (in fact the whole issue was devoted to the Thompsons) not only pictured the thriving business of the family, but coincidentally, captured the landscapes in and around East Texas lumber towns.

In 1844, the story begins with the migration of Benjamin Franklin Thompson from Georgia to Rusk County, Texas to the area where Kilgore



*Magnified detail of the Kilgore Homestead.
Photo by Jeffry Abt.*

now stands. He and two of his sons, John Martin and William Wirt, purchased 10,000 acres of land. The land was originally to be cleared of the timber, not for the sake of selling timber and lumber but that the land might be used for agricultural purposes. It was soon seen that money was to be made in the lumber business.



Mills were built, more lands were purchased, and the Thompsons soon were well on their way to becoming the first to make a fortune in the lumber business in Texas.

This was all history when the *American Lumberman* came to document the Thompson



Ben Williams and Jason Hawthorne on stile in Willard, Texas. circa 1900.

story. By then the business had moved south to even better timber in Trinity, Tyler, Walker, Polk, Liberty, and Jefferson counties. When the photographers moved through East Texas, they captured on film a great variety of landscapes.

In 1908, Kilgore, the Thompsons' starting place, was still something of a frontier town. The photos there reveal a town that had not progressed far, and it is surprising to find street trees planted around the square. But the photos of public buildings in Kilgore reveal a society not yet willing to spend valuable resources landscaping around schools and churches. (This could be said about all the photographs of public buildings throughout the collection.)

The home photos tell a different story. The B.F. Thompson Homestead is well planted behind the fences. Other "home" photos also reveal this sure sign of domestication. The photos of a black employee's home in Kilgore depict a variety of plants, all in a swept yard.

When the photographers moved south to Willard, Texas, they found a community totally devoted to the Thompson's lumber enterprise. The

company owned almost everything: stores, churches, schools, boarding houses, and hotels. Later in the company's history the town would be moved lock, stock, and barrel to "New Willard." Such moves were needed because the timber in the area

would eventually be cut through. People under these conditions hesitate to put down roots. As a result, the photos of these "lumber towns" often show barren landscapes. Yet, there were exceptions to this general rule. Roses were often planted, if nothing else, to brighten the place. And the home of the mill manager in Willard was the only one photographed that was planted with anything close to a formal style. Two photos of different employees reveal plantings of cannas and an elaborately made stile over a fence. It seems that both photographs were taken in front of the Willard office. And one of the most beautiful pictures taken in the series was of the "negro quarters" in Willard.

At times, the photographers from Chicago could not refrain from taking shots of homes and people unrelated to the lumber business. These photos appear in the magazine labeled "by the wayside." These scenes were too full of interest to pass by. In these "wayside" photos, we find captured some of the oldest structures in the area and the plantings around them. Log and early frame homes have mature plantings very close to the structure. The chinaberry was often found in



Homes of African-American employees of Willard. Caption for photo reads "Negro quarters."

these yards, elephant ears, cannas, climbing and shrub roses, crepe myrtles, chinese wisteria, and a variety of pot plants.

The pictures of mill operations in the town of Doucette again show a town clustered around "the mill" with a somewhat barren landscape. And it is again the "wayside" photos that are the most

interesting. The hotel in Doucette was planted in front with something close to a herbaceous border and also sported a large birdfeeder (clearly there for ornament). The picture of the lumber buyer's home near Doucette shows a typical farm of the area. A home planted around with ornamentals and shrubbery all protected by a picket fence.

It is interesting to compare the photos of homes in rural East Texas with the homes of the Thompson family members living in urban Houston. The urban homes have plantings that are pushed back to the foundation of the house.



While in rural areas, the plants are planted about the yard in such a way as to be viewed there in their own right. Also, the lawn in Houston has clearly become important; while in rural areas, it has not. In fact, if one replaced the old garden roses found in the Houston photos with azaleas, one would have a modern Houston landscape.

These contrasting photos of rural and urban homesites taken in 1908 depict planting styles of two different eras. One still contains something of the pioneer spirit while the other shows the emergence of today's modern landscapes ♦

The Trees at Somerset Place: Living Artifacts

by Terry M. Harper, Raleigh, North Carolina

How many times have you thought - if that object could speak, what story it would tell? Now, because of a research project undertaken last fall, the majestic trees at North Carolina's Somerset Place historic site are telling their story. (For more on Somerset Place and its antebellum plantation history, see *Magnolia*, V. X, No. 1, Winter 1993, p. 14.)

In November of 1992, Registered Forester A.C. Barefoot, Jr., under contract with the Historic Sites section of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, aged selected trees on the grounds around the "Big House" and on "The Lawn." Using a borer, 5mm cores were removed from each of the trees. The cores were mounted on slotted wooden slats, sanded to a high polish finish and the rings counted using a 10x hand lens. Many of the trees were hollow because of advanced decay making it necessary to combine the ring count with an estimate of the missing years to determine the year the tree was planted.

Trees representing major periods in Somerset's development were identified, and this information in combination with documentary research is providing new insights into the development of the plantation.

A cypress dating to 1676-1696 was once one of many that stood on the shore of Lake Phelps when, in 1755, a hunting party from Edenton were the first recorded Englishmen to "discover" the lake. Some thirty years later enslaved Africans finished digging a six-mile long canal between the lake and the Scuppernong river. Soon after the canal was completed in 1788, cypress trees were planted along both sides. A line of sycamores planted along the lake drive predate the

construction of the present "Big House."

Mary Riggs Collins was the most ardent gardener at Somerset Place and frequently documented her efforts in letters to friends and family. In a letter to her sister-in-law in 1852 Mary writes,

Our Lawn (as we now respectfully call the place across the canal) was planted in trees a year ago this spring . . . The northern and eastern sides of the Lawn are planted thick with forest and flowering trees so as to form a thicket or copse. There is a hollow circle of chestnut oaks not quite opposite the house et pour le reste & here are clumps of evergreen with conical & flowering trees interspersed. [Mary Riggs Collins to Louisa Collins Harrison, 15 July 1852, from Faunsdale Plantation Papers, Birmingham Public Library.]

A few of these remaining swamp chestnut oaks and a spectacular magnolia in the garden are part of Mary's garden legacy that we enjoy today.

For decades, archaeology, architectural history, and documentary research formed the core of the interdisciplinary approach to historic site interpretation. Now, oral history, horticultural research, and dendochronology have been added in an effort to link all parts of the complex cultural history of Somerset Place.

— From an article contributed to *Somerset News* by Terry M. Harper. Ms. Harper is head of the Archaeology Branch of the Historic Sites Section, North Carolina Division of Archives and History ♦

In Print

A Passion for Daylilies: The Flowers and the People by Sydney Eddison has been published by Henry Holt and Company. In this combined portrait, history, and how-to guide to this quintessential American flower - now enthusiastically cultivated in 33,000 varieties - Sydney Eddison shares her passion for daylilies and her thirty years experience growing them.

Alex Pankhurst, in **Who Does Your Garden Grow?**, traces the tales behind the names of more than 100 famous cultivars. The book has been recently issued by Earl's Eye Publishing in hardback and is available in bookstores for \$21.95 or from Capability Books, 2379 Highway 46, Deer Park, WI, 54007. Please add an additional \$2 for shipping.

Abbeville Press has recently released Laura C. Martin's **Southern Gardens: A Gracious History and a Traveler's Guide**, with photographs by David Schilling. The beautifully illustrated volume is arranged chronologically and includes concise biographies of the families who founded the gardens, as well as providing notes on the cultivation of some of the outstanding plants thriving in these gardens and up-to-date travel information. The book is sold for \$45.00.

And SGHS member Penelope Hobhouse has just published another tome. This is entitled **Penelope Hobhouse's Gardening Through the Ages: An Illustrated History of Plants and Their Influences on Garden Styles - from Ancient Egypt to the Present Day**. The publisher is Simon and Schuster and the well-illustrated book is priced at \$50.00 ♦

Members in the News

The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation recognized SGHS member **Richard Westmacott**, professor of landscape architecture in the School of Environmental Design at the University of Georgia, for his book *African-American Gardens and Yards in the Rural South*, which the Trust named Outstanding Publication for 1993. Westmacott's book is the first extensive survey of African-American gardening traditions in the rural South. Through his study in three rural areas in the South, he explores the significance and social functions of African-American "folk" gardens and the origins of their gardening practices. [Note: See

Continued on page 16 . . .



Of Interest

Where can you find cuttings of nineteenth-century coleus, or seeds for seventeenth-century pumpkins? Try a few of the mail-order nurseries listed in the brand new 1993 AHLFAM "Source List for Historic Seeds and Plants." The latest, updated and expanded edition is hot off the press. It lists 100 mail order firms that carry significant numbers of historic seeds and plants. What's more, it lists important groups, publications, and finding aids, and offers guidance for preserving and re-introducing historic plants in museum gardens and grounds. Compiled by Scott Kunst and Charlie Thomforde for the Association for Living History Farms and Agricultural Museums, the list has been published and regularly updated since 1989. For a copy, send \$1 and a long SASE to Scott Kunst, 536 Third St., Ann Arbor, MI 48103-4957. Also, Scott Kunst has issued a catalog of rare antique tulips, hyacinths, daffodils, available from the same address or call (313) 995-1486.

Allen Lacy's homeground is a new publication, a quarterly newsletter for American gardeners who enjoy reading about gardens as well as working in them. *homeground* will include a lively mix of essays on practical subjects like plant combinations, groundcovers and vines, and other topics as well as taking a more meditative and at times humorous look at what lies behind the passion for gardening. Allen Lacy has been writing gardening columns for over a decade, currently for *The New York Times* and is the author of several highly praised books. Subscriptions are \$38 per year and can be obtained by contacting *Allen Lacy's homeground*, Box 271, Linwood, NJ, 08221.

Proceedings of the Garden Conservancy conference, "The Hermitage: A Case Study of Restoration Potential," are now available from the Garden Conservancy, Box 219, Albany Post Road, Cold Spring, NY 10516. The cost of the 22-page illustrated publication is \$6 for members and \$8 for non-members (includes postage) and checks should be made to the Garden Conservancy ♦

Continued from page 15

Magnolia Spring 1992, Vol. VII, No. 4, for Richard Westmacott's article "The Gardens and Yards of African-Americans in the Rural South."]

The Greensboro News & Record's Sunday, April 25th, 1993, issue carried an article on SGHS member **Lee Calhoun's** quest to collect and preserve information on and varieties of Southern apple trees. Of the 1,300 apple varieties developed in the South, many are now extinct. Members interested in aiding Calhoun with information or by growing old Southern varieties can contact him at Route 5, Box 128, Pittsboro, NC, 27312. (919) 542-4480.

Southern Living's March 1993 issue contains "Stately Spires" by SGHS member **Linda Askey Weathers**, an article on foxgloves. The article also mentions **Phil Page**, Superintendent of Gardens at Dumbarton Oaks.

SGHS member **Dean Norton**, horticulturist at Mount Vernon, has been asked to serve on the selection committee of the Garden Conservancy.

Deadline for submission of articles for the Fall Issue of Magnolia is August 1st, 1993.



First Magnolia Essay Well Received

*I*f there's any truth to the saying, "It's all in the timing," then it was validated by the introduction of the first *Magnolia Essays*. "Residential Work of the Olmsted Firm in Georgia, 1893-1937" was rushed - hot off the presses - to the opening session of the National Association for Olmsted Parks where it was announced as new "Olmsted" research published by the Southern Garden History Society and available for sale at the conference. The NAOP met in Atlanta, Georgia, April 1st-3rd, for the centennial celebration of Druid Hills - Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.'s 1,400 acre suburban development of linear parks, planted avenues, and landscaped residential lots. This was one of Olmsted's last major achievements, and his only accomplished design work in Georgia. Lucy Lawliss, an Atlanta resident and author of the article, was present at the meeting and had the exciting experience of autographing several copies. For copies send \$10.00 to SGHS Headquarters in Winston-Salem, NC.

Florence P. Griffin, *President*

Ben G. Page, Jr., *Vice-President*

Flora Ann Bynum, *Secretary-Treasurer*

William Lanier Hunt, *Honorary President*

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