



Magnolia

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

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The Professional Gardener's Trade in the Eighteenth Century

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Eighteenth-century Williamsburg, as capital of the Virginia colony, became a focal point for politics, the courts, trade and material consumption due to its many merchants and as the site of weekly, open-air markets. The city was also populated with some fine town homes and gardens, and also became the locus of an active trade in garden seeds and plants between several local, gentry gardeners and their "curious" gentlemen friends of scientific learning in England.

A lesser-known facet of Williamsburg's gardening and horticultural history, however, concerns the influences of, and the spread of horticultural knowledge by professional, English- and Scottish-trained gardeners. [NOTE: The word "professional" in this article's context is specifically used to draw a distinction between someone who was formally trained as a full-time gardener, as opposed to a talented amateur, for whom gardening was a

part-time avocation.]

An examination of the professional gardener's trade and how they were trained in their craft reveals much about why such men eventually came

to these shores. Also revealed is how their presence in Williamsburg led to the establishment (late in the eighteenth century) of a commercial landscape plant nursery here.

As tradesmen, English- and Scottish-trained gardeners were never present in large numbers in Virginia, though their influence was certainly profound in other ways. While horticultural books were available and were widely purchased by local gardeners, it was through personal contacts and friendly advice to neighbors and

acquaintances, that professional gardeners helped to spread sophisticated horticultural knowledge and expertise to an ever-widening circle of interested amateurs.

Mostly gentry-class gardeners in Virginia were

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eager to learn how garden successfully in a vastly different climate from that of England, where all of the gardening books then in print had originated. Because of these climatic differences, Virginia gardeners were ultimately forced to experiment to greater or lesser degrees. The degree of experimentation largely depended upon the extent to which someone had access to other local sources

of reliable information. For this reason, then, such people particularly valued the advice of any trained gardener who might live or work nearby, in helping them to

make their modest gardening efforts achieve greater success.

Similar to practices still in use today, aspiring, professional English gardeners in the eighteenth century learned their trade by serving a lengthy apprenticeship under the teaching and direction of a "head" gardener. Adhering to a tradition that went back to the middle ages, gardeners, though many

were from a respectable middle class background, were always regarded as servants in the households they served, and were always men.¹ As a craft or group, they often had very little identity as individuals. Sometimes unskilled adolescent boys and working-class women might be hired seasonally

to collect grass clippings after turf was scythed, or to pick caterpillars or other pests by hand from the flowers and vegetables.² But everything else on a large English estate, other than the most menial of tasks, was done by the resident staff of apprentices and journeymen gardeners. To accomplish these chores, a small army of gardeners were typically employed on most estates.

Just as there was then an established structure or hierarchy among all members of society (and even within the ranks of the gentry) in all large English households so, too, was there a hierarchy that existed among the servants. The chief servants of a large manor house ranked above all others, and were duly accorded the dignity and title of "Mr." by the lesser servants under them. These chief servants included the butler, the clerk of the kitchen, the head cook, the head groom, and perhaps the head gardener, depending upon the size of the estate and the degree of responsibility he had. These men usually took their meals together at a private table; apart from the remainder of the staff. All of the other servants typically ate together in the servant's hall. These included footmen, under butler(s), porters, coachmen, grooms, gardeners, stable-boys, odd men and household maids. All of the kitchen staff (excepting those mentioned above), including kitchen and scullery maids, ate in the

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GENTLEMEN and others, may be supply'd with good Garden Pease, Beans, and several other Sorts of Garden Seeds: Also, with great Choise of Flower Roots; likewise Trees of several Sorts and Sizes, fit to plant, as Ornaments in Gentlemen's Gardens, at very reasonable Rates, by Thomas Creasc, Gardener to the Cottage, in Williamsburg.

Virginia Gazette, January 13, 1738.

CALENDAR

November 4th, 1997. Felder Rushing, co-author of *Passalong Plants*, will present "Minerale de Minnesota" at the New Orleans Old Garden Rose Society. P.O. Box 51416, New Orleans, LA 70151-1416.

March 27th-29th, 1998. The Life and Work of Ellen Biddle Shipman, a symposium presented by the Sarah P. Duke Gardens of Duke University in Durham, NC. (see article below) Speakers to include Judith Tankard, Mac Griswold, John Franklin Miller, and John T. Fitzpatrick. For more information, contact Taimi Anderson, education coordinator at Duke Gardens, (919) 969-7796.

April 24th-26th, 1998. The Dallas Area Historical Rose Society will host the 1998 Annual Conference of the Heritage Rose Foundation. Speakers will include

Dr. Katherine Zuzek, Scott Kunst of Old House Gardens, and Stephen Scanniello of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. In addition to lectures and panel discussions, the schedule includes tours of public and private gardens, and a banquet in a unique and dramatic setting. An all-day, pre-conference bus tour to the Antique Rose Emporium is scheduled for Thursday. For more information, contact The Heritage Rose Foundation, 1512 Gorman Street, Raleigh, NC 27606-2919; phone (919)834-2591; e-mail: rosefoun@aol.com.

May 29th-31st, 1998. 16th Annual Meeting of the Southern Garden History Society will be held in Asheville, NC, with the Biltmore Estate as host and chaired by William Alexander, landscape curator of Biltmore.

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kitchen.³ This kind of rigid class system, while typical in England, would probably not have been seen in the colonies to this extent, except within the respective households of the royal governors of each colony and among the paid household staff of the royal colleges.

Though the available documentation concerning eighteenth-century English gardeners' lifestyles is not extensive, enough data exists to relate what must have been fairly typical cycles of daily life on most estates. The gardeners, young and old, all boarded together, usually in the lean-to sheds on the north side of the walled kitchen garden, often sleeping two or three in a bed. If they worked for a large estate, then their meals were provided for them as described above.⁴ Usually the head gardener was given separate, private quarters in a specially-equipped outbuilding or garden pavilion for himself and his family, if he had one.⁵

The gardeners' work day typically started at six in the morning or even earlier, and ended around six or eight o'clock at night. On a well-run estate, after having their supper the gardeners then had to study gardening, botany and various other sciences until their bedtime.⁶ Work tasks were dictated by weather and the season. Major construction work had to be accomplished within the usually short weather "window" between the moderately dry summer and the wet late fall months. If left until too late in the fall, the soil became too heavy and waterlogged. In those days, to create new planting beds in formerly turfed areas required the labor of scores of gardeners.⁷

Each apprentice or journeyman gardener on the estate was expected to adhere to a set of rules established by the head gardener, or perhaps by the owner himself. They would be fined or their pay would be docked if they left their tools and implements dirty, if they smoked while on the job or were absent from work without permission. Fines could also be levied for other infractions, such as if they did not have a pruning knife on their person or if they failed to wear the

gardener's trademark apron. They could be given stiff fines especially if they did not know the basic knowledge expected for their rank or position, such as the proper Latin names for common garden plants, or the names for each particular tool of their trade and their respective use(s) or purpose(s).⁸

A gardener's apprenticeship period could vary, but generally lasted about three years. The new "journeyman gardener" could either remain in the employ of the estate

where he apprenticed, or he could leave and become a "jobbing" or contract gardener on his own. If he chose the latter course, he usually had to purchase a full set of his own tools, which then cost the huge sum of £7 or 8. Regardless of the career path he chose, he could reasonably expect to receive a wage of about three or four shillings a day. If he had no other sources of income, this modest salary was just enough to support a very humble lifestyle for himself, a wife and one child. Because of the growth of its suburbs and the many large nursery gardens, which employed a large labor force, London offered the best job opportunities for journeymen gardeners. While jobs were available, the overly-plentiful supply of gardeners kept daily wages low. Thus, the standard of living of most jobbing gardeners in urban areas tended to be mediocre to very poor.⁹

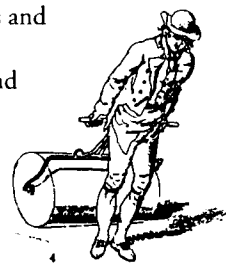
While most great English estates underwent revisions after about 1725-30, due to changes in gardening tastes to a more natural style, the gardens of large town houses in English cities remained geometrically-configured until the

very end of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ This was probably due to the need for organization within the very limited space available for urban gardens. Large town house gardens were typically laid out and planted by local jobbing gardeners and nurserymen to meet the needs and desires of their upper middle-class owners.¹¹

To assist those needy fellow tradesmen and their families, gardeners who worked near or within the cities often joined gardeners' societies and lodges. One group of gardeners in London formed the Society of Gardeners in the late 1720s, and well over twenty influential gardeners and nurserymen were among its members. These



Frontispiece Thomas Mawe and John Abercrombie, "Every Man His Own Gardener," 12th ed., London, 1788.



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organizations fulfilled both a benevolent and professional purpose and were organized very much like Masonic fraternity lodges, with elected officers and membership dues required. These gardener's lodges exerted much influence over their members and even the communities around them until at least the 1820s.¹²

Scottish gardeners appear to have been the most sought-after gardeners in Georgian England. The Scots seemed to have been particularly desirable because of their ambition, their willingness to work hard, and their reliable and frugal natures. Their gardening education was notably well above average and typically included studies in geology, chemistry, meteorology, physics, and botany. Many young, aspiring, Scots gardeners broadened their learning to other areas, such as dancing, fencing, chess and backgammon, and skill with a musical instrument; to become more well-rounded and advance further in life. With such an ambitious work ethic, it is little wonder, then, that professionally-trained Scots gardeners were so much in demand throughout Britain and also within her American colonies.¹³

Journeyman gardeners with talent and ambition aspired to eventually reach the position of a head gardener. The most common career path to this goal was usually to work hard and secure a favorable reputation as a journeyman; to acquire good references from all previous employers; and to secure a head gardener's post with a minor gentleman with a small- to moderate- sized estate. Head gardener posts on large estates could seldom be attained without a proven track record on a smaller estate in a similar position. Thus, advancement to this level often took many years.

For those who did not have the talents, education, or organizational abilities to be promoted to the post of head gardener even on a smaller estate, a life of poverty and destitution in old age were always possibilities. Some of the larger nurserymen in northern English and Scottish towns paid very low wages to their employees and, thus, forcibly

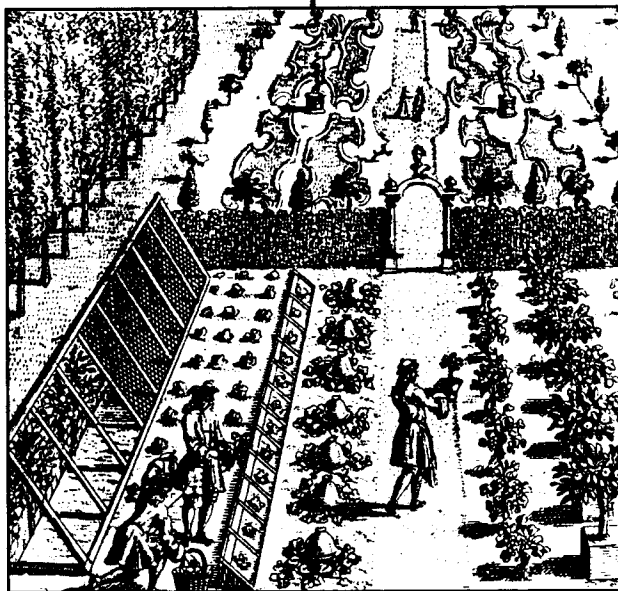
kept their workforce in squalid living conditions that were often no better than slavery. The supply of journeymen gardeners in urban areas such as these typically exceeded the demand. Finding a good job was difficult, and competition for the available gardener's jobs in these localities was apparently quite fierce.¹⁴

In the colonies, however, quite the opposite condition existed. Gardeners trained to English/Scottish standards were relatively scarce in the colonies and, thus, many young journeymen gardeners chose to emigrate to these shores where, with less competition they could better their lot and increase their employment chances. Undoubtedly, not a few of these expatriates were also probably just one step or two ahead of the law and/or debtor's prison.

Those few who were lucky and talented enough to secure a post of head gardener led a much better life than their charges. While their greater daily responsibilities demanded much from them, they often had a few additional perquisites, which made life more comfortable. A well-kept and elegant garden had long been regarded in England as a visible symbol of the owner's taste and sophistication. Therefore, one of the eighteenth-century English gentry pastimes was to visit and experience each other's gardens with a critical eye. Naturally, the owner of an estate wanted to make the best impression possible at all times. He also wanted to ensure that

his gardeners treated his guests hospitably, and that they receive direct and courteous answers to their questions about the plants and the garden's daily management.

It was usually the head gardener's duty to escort all important visitors around the house and grounds.¹⁵ This task, while often time-consuming, had decided advantages. Wealthy guests often tipped handsomely for such personal tours, and these contacts could often result in an outside design commission for the particularly knowledgeable and deferential head gardener. Lancelot "Capability" Brown, the most famous of all eighteenth-century English landscape gardeners-turned-architects, got his start doing design works on a part-time basis through earlier social contacts he had made while giving tours as head gardener for Lord Cobham, at "Stowe," in Buckinghamshire. Brown's reputation quickly spread, and his services increasingly became more in demand. After Lord Cobham's death in 1751, Brown finally left Stowe



Wall screens, cloches, bell-jars and potted fruits shown in a charming early 18th century garden. The Practical Gardener, Stephan Switzer, 1724.

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Colonial American Garden Exceptionalism

by Barbara Wells Sarudy, Monkton, Maryland

Early American garden history did not parallel English garden history of the period.¹ Colonial Americans did not rush to adopt the "natural" pleasure garden craze that was changing the English countryside at the time. Why?

By the eighteenth century in Britain, aristocratic families had farmed grand estates of one-thousand acres or more for centuries. There, famous landscape designers travelled from one great estate to the next, redesigning the face of a land already tightly sectioned off into hedged parcels. English gentry were escaping to their country estates and to the smaller second homes and gardens on the Thames near Richmond to avoid the corrupting forces of court politics and urban commerce.

In early America we find a wholly different phenomenon. While the names Chesapeake gentry chose for their estates may have reflected the ideal of innocent rural retirement — Solitude, The Retreat, The Hermitage — they knew these plantations were serious business. These colonials were not just tending their pleasure gardens, they were actively managing the day-to-day struggles of carving out a comfortable life from the still untamed American countryside.² Visitors were well aware of the differences.³ "In America," a French traveller noted in the 1790s, "a very pretty country house corresponds only to a place moderately kept up on the outskirts of a large French city, and even then one will find in [America] neither the good taste . . . nor the comforts which make living in it a pleasure."⁴

Among early Americans, there was no great social gulf between the landed aristocrats and the mass of local gentry and shopkeepers. American gardens did not symbolize political disagreements between the Whigs and the Tories. British Americans generally shared a conservatism that undergirded the emerging new representative democracy. The new American government took inspiration from the Roman republic and drew much of its symbolism from classical sources.

Unlike England, America had an abundance of natural resources.

Pleasure parks served as timber

nurseries for the concerned English gentry when trees became scarce in the British countryside. The colonial landscape still offered lush virgin woods.⁵ Early American landowners did not need forest keepers, they needed forest clearers.⁶

The English gentry also designed and stocked their

pleasure parks as protected private nesting retreats for wild fowl and game animals. Foresters patrolled the "natural" gardens of eighteenth-century England. Wild animals and birds were plentiful in the American countryside, where people were free to hunt for game unencumbered by the English laws

that allowed only the privileged to hunt and sometimes punished poachers with hanging.⁷ English landowners were deadly serious about protecting game in their parks from both human and animal predators. English fox hunting was more than sport; it was war against the impudent fox who dared to feast on the gentry's game. In the Chesapeake, the hunt was a social cold weather recreation where gentlemen often "let a fox loose. . . which afforded an agreeable ride after the hounds."⁸

In eighteenth-century America, wild game was abundant but having enough to eat was an issue.⁹ Most colonial families struggled to raise enough off the land to feed themselves and their workers, plus some extra to sell to others and make a profit. Only after the first quarter of the century did a relatively stable, native-born population begin to flourish in the Chesapeake. While laboring simply to survive, some of these British Americans made earnest attempts at pleasure gardening. Their triumphs are revealing exactly because of these cultural and economic pressures and priorities. We can trace the historical precedents for many of their garden designs, but the motives behind American gardens of this period often reflect a new idealism, shared equality, and a spirit of rebellion not common in mother England.

I use the term "Chesapeake" loosely here. From Pennsylvania to Virginia, country landowners often built their houses on a rise of ground, preferably on the bank of a river or a bay, and then sliced the hills supporting their dwellings into level garden areas connected by sometimes steep turf ramps. Though it is true that gardeners up and down the Atlantic included terraces in their garden designs, this penchant for terraces, slopes, and falls truly characterized mid-Atlantic taste. Those fortunate enough to build on the grounds falling toward the great Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries seemed particularly enamored with this style, which allowed the owner to manipulate both access and views to and from his house. The preference owed as much to control as to art.

Many garden historians scour English garden history searching for models for eighteenth-century colonial gardens. They pour over garden treatises and geometry texts hoping to stumble on some magical mathematical formula that American garden builders followed. They rehash the easily-accessible, well-documented, overly-analyzed but



"English landowners were deadly serious about protecting the game in their pleasure parks from both human and animal predators." Woodcut, Bowles & Carver, 1780-1795, London, England.



"Early American landowners did not need forest keepers, they needed forest clearers." Woodcut, Thomas Bewick 1753-1828, Northumberland, England.

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unique garden efforts of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to explain American gardening in general. They read descriptions of contemporary American gardens by English travellers who borrow terminology from grand English villas and grounds to describe what they see.¹⁰ They hear art historians warning them to discount depictions of early American gardens and landscapes as copies of European prints. And there is a little bit of truth in all of it.

Thomas Jefferson, who had toured gardens in Europe and Britain during the 1780s, wrote to William Hamilton in 1806 that his garden at the Woodlands in Philadelphia was "the only rival which I have known in America to what may be seen in England."¹¹ The difference was in the details, of

course, just as one Englishman said when he compared Britain's Richmond on the Thames to the American Richmond on the James River in 1796, "The general

landscapes from the two Richmond-hills are so

similar in their great features, that at first sight the likeness is most striking. The detail of course must be extremely different . . . The want of finish and neatness in the American landscape would first strike his eye."¹²

Eighteenth-century American gardens were not copies of English natural landscape gardens, they were uniquely republican in style and in what they symbolized to their creators. They were an ordered, practical balance between the ornamental and the useful. +



Woodcut, Bowles & Carver, 1780-1795, London, England.

- 1 The most enlightening recent book on gardening in eighteenth-century England is *Polite Landscapes* by Tom Williamson, published in 1995 by The Johns Hopkins University Press in Baltimore, Maryland.
- 2 One of the best explanations of rural retirement may be found in an excellent discussion of this concept in the British American colonies in C. Allan Brown's article "Eighteenth-Century Virginia Plantation Gardens: Translating an Ancient Idyll," which appears in *Regional Garden Design in the United States*, edited by Therese O'Malley and Marc Treib and published by Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington, DC, 1992.
- 3 When some contemporary European visitors heap lavish praise on the American "villas" dotting Virginia's rivers, Allan Brown explains that perhaps such "comments may exemplify their capacity to see beyond the actual to the significant." *Ibid.*, 139.
- 4 Moreau de Saint-Mery, M.L.E. *Moreau de St. Mery's American Journey 1793-1798*. Edited and translated by Kenneth Roberts and Anna Roberts (Garden City, New Jersey: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1947) 121.
- 5 When British troops were brought across the Atlantic to fight during the Revolution, they were sometimes trained in Canada to become familiar with military maneuvers in the "wooded country of America, with which they were totally unacquainted." *A Journal by Thos. Hughes*, introduced by E. A. Benians, (Cambridge: University Press, 1947) 6. The dense, dark woods frightened some English visitors. One wrote that "the idea of being benighted in the wilds of America was not a pleasing circumstance to a European female." *Journal of a Lady of Quality*, edited by Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean Andrews, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 146. Robert Hunter wrote of woods in Virginia where "the trees were so thick that we could scarcely see the way at all." *Quebec to Carolina in 1785-1786: Being the Travel Diary and Observations of Robert Hunter, Jr.*, a Young Merchant of London, edited by Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling, (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1943), 239.
- 6 William Eddis, *Letters from America*, edited by Aubrey C. Land, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 66.
- 7 In England, hunting had long been a mark of social status. Legislation ensured that not just deer, but also other forms of game such as hares, partridges, and pheasants were reserved for the use and enjoyment of the rich. The Game Act of 1671 directed that game could only be taken by people possessing freehold property worth at least 100 pounds per year;

by those holding leaseholds of ninety-nine years or longer or copyholds worth at least 150 pounds per year; or by those who were the sons or heirs apparent of esquires or others "of higher degree." Not only did this act restrict the right to hunt to less than one per cent of the population, it also restricted it specifically to the established landed rich. In 1707 the penalty was increased to a blanket fine of five pounds or three months in prison. In 1723 the Black Act, "for the more effectual punishment of wicked and evil disposed persons going armed, in disguise" ensured that merely appearing in the vicinity of a game reserve, armed and with face blackened, was a hanging offense. In 1773, a new Night Poaching Act raised the fine up to fifty pounds depending on the number of prior convictions and allowed imprisonment of up to twelve months plus public whipping. Williamson, *Polite Landscapes*, 136.

- 8 For American fox hunting see *Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer of Philadelphia*, edited by Jacob Cox Parsons, (Philadelphia: William Fell & Co., 1893) 9-10, 13, 23.
- 9 On October 19, 1769 newly arrived royal appointee took his first trip to Maryland's Eastern Shore and noted, "It abounds . . . with game." William Eddis, *Letters from America*, edited by Aubrey C. Land, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), 15. In the eighteenth century, the Chesapeake woods were alive with grouse, woodcock, squirrels, rabbits, wild turkey, and deer. Panthers, cougars, bobcats, wolves, and bears lived in the hills to the west of the bay. For more information about Maryland hunting see Meshach Browning's *Forty-Four Years of the Life of Hunter*, published by J. B. Lippincott in Philadelphia, 1860. For shooting pigeons see *Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer*, 10. For shooting and eating venison see *Ibid.*, 25.
- 10 Some eighteenth-century Americans did not put much stock in travel accounts written by Europeans. One wrote on September 11, 1795, "To-day I finished reading de Warville's 'Travels.' I can readily understand why he makes so many errors, for his stay was too short to give an accurate account of matters and things." *Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer*, 219.
- 11 Jefferson, Thomas, *Jefferson's Garden Book* edited by Edwin M. Betts (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society 1944), 322-323. July 1806.
- 12 Edward C. Carter II, John C. Van Horne, and C. E. Brownell, eds., *Latrobe's View of America, 1795-1820: Selections from the Watercolors and Sketches* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press 1985), 72. "And in point of situations, there is no comparison, Richmond is allowed by all foreigners to be the most beautiful spot in England." *Quebec to Carolina: Diary of Robert Hunter Jr.*, 301

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to go into business for himself full-time as a designer. He was among a very select few head gardeners who successfully managed to make a lucrative new career for himself giving design advice to wealthy patrons.¹⁶

A head gardener's typical duties were quite diverse. His major responsibility was to secure a continuous supply of fresh vegetables for the kitchens and flowers for the house. The head gardener also saw that the gardens and greenhouses were always kept neat and clean, and he had to introduce as many new and exotic plants as possible. He supervised the storage of roots, fruits and seeds; manage the sale of any excess produce; and directed all new construction work on the estate. In addition, he also had the daily duty of supervising and educating his apprentices; serving as a tour guide for visitors; and sometimes acting as a night-watchman to foil potential poachers!

With all these responsibilities, many head gardeners felt that they were very underpaid. Those who worked on a medium-sized estate earned about £40 a year, with about eleven shillings a week returned to the owner for their board. Aside from visitors' tips, there were few other income opportunities available. Yet it was not unusual for a head gardener to handle the wages of his gardening staff and construction contracts, which could total as much as £3,000 or more a year. No matter how much they improved themselves or the staff, it was rare for employers to increase their wages. A head gardener usually had to leave one job and go to another if he hoped to increase his earnings.¹⁷ New job positions were secured via contracts on a yearly basis, and, as stated before, good references were absolutely essential. Even for the most talented and conscientious gardener, one employer with a bad disposition or who bore him a grudge over a small transgression could easily ruin his career.¹⁸ The



reputations about particular head gardeners and the quality of their work did, indeed, get around!

If employed by a great peer with a large estate, a head gardener was truly at the pinnacle of his profession. Many such men felt themselves fortunate to have advanced that far, and most were content to do their demanding jobs for the rest of their careers from this lofty plateau. As stated previously, only a select few aspired (and even fewer managed) to ascend even higher. Aside from giving design

advice, the only other career alternatives were to go into business by opening a seed shop or plant nursery, or to write gardening books for sale to a gentry clientele, which was ever-hungry for practical design and cultural gardening advice.¹⁹

The would-be gardener-turned-designer often faced stiff competition from men with other various backgrounds. Painters, architects, builders, doctors, pharmacists, and minor gentlemen all decided, at one time or other, to try garden design as another way to make money.²⁰ The professionally-trained gardener did have a clear advantage due to his horticultural knowledge, but he still had to have a sense of prevailing tastes in garden design as well as an eye for design. Finally, because he would still be seen somewhat as a servant in his client's eyes, he would have to constantly display tact and diplomacy, personal wit and

charm, social refinements, and personality so necessary in daily dealings with one's social betters in order to succeed. These demands were formidable enough to deter many humble gardeners from attempting design work for the gentry. A few gardeners, such as Thomas Spence of Byfleet in London, managed to do quite well by limiting his design efforts to smaller, urban gardens for upper middle-class clients.²¹ Commercial plant nurseries were located near any large city in England, but only the largest and most aggressive operations provided their owners with a sufficient income to



The Gardener, An aquatint from the series "Cries" by Thomas Rowlandson, publ. 1799. (Museum of London)

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support a modest lifestyle. For most of the eighteenth century, however, the horticulture trade was centered in London; providing a wide variety of offerings. In 1730, there were about thirty important seedmen living and working in London. By 1760, that number had grown to at least thirty nurserymen and ten seedsmen located there, and as many again were scattered throughout the rest of England.²²

Advertisements.
GEORGE RENNEY,
GARDENER,
From ENGLAND,
INTENDING to settle in this place,
will undertake, by the year, to keep in order a few
GARDENS, at a reasonable price. Should he not meet
with encouragement in this way, he would be willing to
engage with any Gentleman in the country.
WILLIAMSBURG, Sept. 28, 1769.

Virginia Gazette (Purdie & Dixon)
Supplement to September 28, 1769

Virginia by naturalist Mark Catesby, in the first quarter of the eighteenth century.²⁴ Two of the most famous and successful nursery operations in England, however, were Loddiges Nursery, founded by Conrad Loddiges, the German gardener of Sir John Sylvester, and Brompton Park Nursery, founded in 1681 by four noted master gardeners, Roger Looker, Moses Cook, John Field and George London. Loddiges, located in Hackney, was also noted for its introduction and availability of plants from the American colonies.²⁵



Botany Woodcut published by Bowles & Carver, London, c.1770-1790.

Brompton Park was propelled to greatness in the 1690s under the operation of London and his new younger partner, Henry Wise, after London's original partners had died or had sold out to him to retire. The popularity of London and Wise was due to the combination of their design skills and their ability to anticipate the latest gardening fashions desired by their clients. These talents, coupled with maintaining a large enough inventory in their nursery to meet virtually all demands for plants called for in their expansive design schemes, assured their business success.²⁶ Their work also had a profound influence on early gardens in the colonies, such as at the College of William and Mary.

Compared to the total number who practiced the trade, not many professional gardeners ventured to write gardening books. Those few who did write usually managed to become quite wealthy from it, and to achieve a degree of immortality for their efforts, besides. Gardening

books were constantly being published in England during this period. Between 1730 and 1750, twenty four major gardening books were published, and sixty-six tomes appeared between 1765 and 1785. The most notable among the authors of this productive period in garden literature was Scots gardener, Philip Miller.

Born in 1692, Miller was at first a florist, then gardener to the Company of Apothecaries, where he became extremely knowledgeable about plants. His book, *The Gardener's Dictionary*, went through sixteen editions, with the last one appearing long after his death in 1771.²⁷ A more obscure, but no less important book, entitled *City Gardener*, was published by Thomas Fairchild in 1722. Fairchild's work is unique in that he was the sole Georgian garden writer who wrote specifically about the topic of town gardens, and he was the only one who wrote for an amateur audience. His competitors wrote exclusively for professional readers, and so their books usually were little more than a calendar of monthly or seasonal tasks.²⁸ Both Miller's and Fairchild's books, as well as several others, were known by and purchased for the personal library shelves of several notable gentlemen in eighteenth-century Virginia.

After reviewing the typical lifestyles of eighteenth-century English and Scots gardeners and the conditions by which they had to make a living, it is little wonder that so many of them ultimately chose to abandon the certain continued servitude and low wages in their homelands to take their chances by emigrating to the American colonies. Though some of those who emigrated may have remained in some form of servitude once here in Virginia, nonetheless their chances to improve their lot financially, with less competition, were greatly enhanced.

Several professional gardeners in eighteenth-century Virginia worked as head gardeners at either the Governor's Palace or the College of William and Mary, or both.²⁹ Some gaps exist in the records that have survived, but the Palace head gardeners' names we do have, and the period they worked there are as follows: Thomas Crease (1720 to about 1725-6); Christopher Ayscough (1758 to 1768); James Simpson (1768 to 1769); James Wilson (1769 to about 1771); and John Farquharson (1771 to 1781). Those gardeners who worked for the College and the period they worked there were: James Road (1694 to ?); Thomas Crease (1726 to 1756); James Nicholson (1756 to 1773); and James Wilson (1773 to 1780).³⁰ We also know that Crease (in 1738), Ayscough (in 1759), and Wilson (in 1774) placed advertisements in the *Virginia Gazette* newspaper offering to sell garden seeds directly to the public, in order to augment

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their regular incomes.³¹

Several other gardener-tradesmen were in Williamsburg at various times during the eighteenth century, and a few placed advertisements in the Virginia Gazette newspaper to offer their services for hire. One was George Renney, who, after arriving from England during the late summer of 1769, was looking to settle down here and find work, ".....by the year, to keep in order a few GARDENS, at a reasonable price."³² Other surviving documentation reveals that several English and Scottish gardeners were living in Virginia during the eighteenth century, including a William Henderson in Westmoreland County (in 1742); Nicholas Hingston in Alexandria (in 1798); David Mathesons in Stafford County (in 1775); Alexander Petrie in Richmond (in 1783-88), and later (1796) in Norfolk; and James Stewart (in 1775).³³ There were undoubtedly many others whose names and places of residence are now lost to us.

One final, late eighteenth-century Williamsburg gardener deserves mention here. He was seedsman and nurseryman, Peter Bellett. Although nothing is known of his birthplace or professional training, Bellett obviously emigrated from France sometime in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. By the mid 1780s, he and a Dutchman named Kroonem were partners in a Philadelphia seed store, advertising themselves as "florists, seedsmen, botanists and gardeners." Kroonem minded the store while Bellett frequently made periodic trips to Baltimore, Alexandria, Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk to sell seeds directly to customers there.³⁴

Landscape nurseries, such as Prince's Nursery in New York, were also beginning to appear in several of the former colonies by the end of the century. In 1794, Bellett sold his seed store interest to his partner and moved his family south to Williamsburg. He eventually purchased a total of twenty acres of property on the west side of Capitol Landing Road, located directly behind the Coke-Garrett house, and there opened a landscape nursery [NOTE: Sadly, the site of Bellett's Nursery has today been all but totally destroyed by the later

construction of Lafayette Street and the railroad tracks. Both features run directly through the middle of what was the former nursery site].³⁵

Obviously, Bellett must have re-located to Williamsburg to seize an opportunity to meet what must have been a growing regional demand for plants. From the steady growth of his operation over a ten year period, we also know that he helped to create further demand because, significantly, Bellett was quite an entrepreneur for his day. He firmly believed in constant, aggressive marketing to promote his wares. He periodically placed sales advertisements in all of the newspapers within the region. Moreover, he even prepared printed catalogs annually and distributed them to store owners in Petersburg, Richmond, and Norfolk to act as sales agents for him, no doubt on a commission basis. Williamsburg residents Joseph Prentis and Joseph Hornsby purchased seeds, plants, and fruit trees directly from Bellett, as no doubt many other regional residents did, as well.³⁶

By 1804, Peter Bellett's Williamsburg plant nursery reached the height of its success, with an astounding inventory of 100,000 fruit trees being grown by Bellett and his staff of eight slave gardeners. Late that year, however, for reasons which are today not entirely clear, Bellett

placed his entire nursery, garden tools, livestock, and all of his slaves up for sale, announcing his intention to move to New York state. He apparently never made it. While successful in selling a part of his holdings, two years later Bellett was still trying to divest himself of the remaining property. He must have been ill, because by December of 1807 he was dead, and his surviving family of a wife, at least one son, and five daughters remained in Williamsburg, where they apparently each lived out the rest of their lives.³⁷

Bellett is just one example of that group of foreign-born, professionally-trained gardeners who, through hard work, determination, and aggressive marketing of themselves and their wares, were able to eventually realize what we have today come to call "the American dream." Coincidentally, by doing so they also helped to spread horticultural knowledge and the awareness of gardening as a fine art, a somewhat novel concept to most Virginians who, at that time, tended to regard a garden primarily as a place for growing cabbages and lettuce for the table. In their own humble ways and via simple,



Colonial Williamsburg's Terry Yemm & Wesley Greene

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everyday tasks, professional gardeners helped their clients to see the aesthetic as well as practical potentials of gardening. Through their efforts, and of those men with the wherewithal to indulge in ornamental horticultural experimentation, a "garden" in this country eventually came to be regarded as a place of repose and reflection, a place where art and artifice could be displayed, and as a source of visual delight. Finally, their efforts helped to create a market for ornamental plants to support the rise of commercial landscape plant nurseries in this country.

This is the story that long-time Colonial Williamsburg employees and costumed gardeners, Wesley Greene and Terry Yemm, are today endeavoring to tell visitors who stop by our "Colonial Nursery." This interpretive and plant sales site first opened in the Spring of 1996 on lots located directly across Duke of Gloucester Street from Bruton Parish Church. Through the efforts of many dedicated staff members from several departments as well as volunteers, this project has been both a great interpretive and financial success for the Foundation so far.

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9. Ibid, p. 150; and John Harvey, *Early Nurserymen*, Phillimore & Co., Ltd., London and Chichester: 1974, pp. 1-7.
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26. Fleming, Laurence and Gore, Alan, *The English Garden*, Spring Books, London: 1988, pp. 59-60; and Harvey, *Early Nurserymen*, pp. 51-56.
27. Stuart, *Georgian Gardens*, pp. 153-4, 157.
28. Cruickshank, *Life in GC*, pp. 199, 201; Harvey, *Early Nurserymen*, pp. 49, 77, 150.
29. See unpublished manuscript by the author, entitled, "Plantsmen and Tradesmen of the Soil: Biographical Sketches of Notable 18th Century Williamsburg Amateur and Professional Gardeners." Williamsburg, VA: 1991, pp. 27-32, 40. (hereafter cited as "Brinkley, M. Kent. 'Plantsmen and Tradesmen.'")
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31. *Virginia Gazette* issues: 13 Jan. 1738 (p. 4, col. 1); Nov. 1759 (p. 3, col. 2); 03 Mar. 1774 (p. 3, col. 2).
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33. Names, localities, dates, and other information concerning nationality/origins derived from MESDA CRAFTSMEN List (published by the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, in Winston-Salem, NC), dated 25 March 1991.
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37. Information on Bellett's family members was found in the College of William and Mary Archives, The Southall Family Papers, Folder # 192, w/ index card reference on file in the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Bruton Heights School Education Center, CWF.

Members in the News

Joanne Seale Lawson, regional director of the Garden Conservancy's *Open Days Directory* and SGHS member, will direct a survey of Historic Texas Landscapes, as funded through Bayou Bend Gardens. The report will identify a wide range of Texas landscapes, from private estates to heritage ranches to public parks and institutional sites. Survey results will be incorporated in Wave Hill's comprehensive database, The Catalog of Landscape Records in the United States.

SGHS secretary/treasurer Flora Ann Bynum is featured in *Country Home – Country Gardens*' fall 1997 issue. The article, "Colonial Flora," which includes numerous full-page photographs, profiles Flora Ann's mid-Victorian garden in Old Salem.

The October issue of *Southern Accents*, features "Living Legacy," an article by Susan Dowell, with original watercolors by Meg Kratz. The story's focus on heirloom bulbs profiles Old House Garden's Scott Kunst and highlights the recent Historic Plants Symposium at Monticello with quotes by Peter Hatch and Peggy Newcomb.



In Print

The Gardens of Louisiana: Places of Work and Wonder, by Suzanne Turner, photographs by A. J. Meek. Louisiana State University Press, 1997. \$49.95

Heirloom Vegetable Gardening, by William Woys Weaver, Forward by Peter J. Hatch. Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1997. ISBN 0-8050-4025-0. \$45.00

American Gardener's Calendar, Bernard McMahon. New facsimile reprint of 1806 edition with Forward by Peter J. Hatch. Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., Charlottesville, VA, 1997. ISBN 0-929332-00-8. \$45.00

[copies available through the Center for Historic Plants, (804) 984-9817; www.monticello.org/shop]



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The daily and seasonal tasks of eighteenth-century gardeners were not so vastly different from those still confronting gardeners today. But many other similarities exist, as well. Even the mentoring system of educating gardeners today under the guidance of a more experienced senior has not changed so radically from practices used over two centuries ago. However, the major difference between the lives of eighteenth- and late twentieth-century gardeners lies in the fact that colonial gardeners lived largely in an uncertain, though perhaps benevolent form of paid servitude and, of course, today's gardeners do not. Another major difference is that modern technological advances have eliminated much of the back-breaking manual labor required of eighteenth-century gardeners. Science and technology has reduced not only the need for maintaining large labor forces, but has also enabled today's professional gardeners to accomplish more work within a shorter period of time, and with far less physical effort.

With all these thoughts in mind, perhaps we are now better able to more fully appreciate the contributions that the

professional gardeners of the eighteenth century made to the expanding world of gardening in America. While seeking a better life in the New World, these men helped to pass on Old World gardening knowledge and, perhaps most importantly, to impart a new appreciation of the expanding world of horticulture in all its many forms and fashions. Their contributions, however insignificant they may at first seem today, were ultimately but one facet of the much broader process of taking possession and making use of the land, which was, in turn, a significant part of the story of our becoming Americans. ♦

Annual Membership Dues

Benefactor	\$250	Joint/husband-wife	\$30
Patron	\$150	Individual	\$20
Sustainer	\$75	Student	\$5
Institution/Business	\$30		
Life membership	\$1,000 (one time)		

The membership year runs from May 1st to April 30th. Members joining after January 1st will be credited for the coming year beginning May 1st. Write to membership secretary at: Southern Garden History Society, Old Salem, Inc., Drawer F, Salem Station, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27108. phone (910) 721-7328.

A Symposium to Celebrate the Life and Work of Ellen Biddle Shipman



This three day symposium, March 27th–29th, 1998, focuses on Ellen Biddle Shipman, noted landscape architect, whose prolific design career extended from 1910 to 1945. Among her work dealing mostly with private gardens was one public garden commission, the design for the elegant Terraces of the Sarah P. Duke Gardens, which were featured in the edition of *Magnolia*. The Terraces, dedicated in 1939, are one of the few Ellen Shipman designed gardens still intact and show her great skill in laying out the structural framework and architectural details of this outstanding garden.

The publication of Judith Tankard's book, *The Gardens of Ellen Biddle Shipman*, has stimulated renewed interest in the life and work of this remarkable and talented woman landscape architect. An exhibition, "The Gardens of Ellen Biddle Shipman," organized by the Library of American Landscape History, is travelling to various museums and will be mounted at the Duke University Art Museum from the end of March until the end of May. This exhibition presents thirty projects of Shipman's garden designs through photographs,

drawings and plans, and will be augmented with drawings and photographs specific to the Terraces at Duke Gardens. The opening of the exhibition at

DUMA with a gala reception will be the inaugural event of the three day symposium.

The series of symposium lectures will focus not only on the life and work of Ellen Shipman, but also explore the setting of the country place era and the role of women landscape architects during that time. The present-day challenges of garden and landscape preservation and a case history of an Ellen Shipman garden restoration also will be examined. In addition to Judith Tankard, speakers will include Mac Griswold, author of *The Golden Age of American Gardens*, John Franklin Miller, director of Stan Ilywet in Akron, Ohio, during the restoration of the Shipman garden; and John T. Fitzpatrick, former project manager of the Garden Conservancy. All are SGHS members, with the exception of John Miller.

Symposium participants will have an opportunity to tour the Sarah P. Duke Gardens and a garden tour will take participants to Winston–Salem to view Reynolda Gardens of Wake Forest University, and the formal garden at the President's House at the University, designed by Ellen Shipman during the 1920s for De Witt and Ralph Hanes. ♣

Dr. William C. Welch, *President*
Peter J. Hatch, *Vice-President*
Flora Ann Bynum, *Secretary-Treasurer*
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