

Magnolia Bulletin of the

Magnolia grandiflora The Laurel Tree of Carolina Catesby's Natural History, 1743 Bulletin of the Southern Garden History Society

Vol. XI I

No. 1

Fall 1995

Old Salem Conference Examines Women and Southern Gardens

"Set out with my own hand 608 splendid blossoming bulbs..."

(1864 Quote from Catherine Devereux Edmondston)

By Kenneth M. McFarland

T o paraphrase opening remarks by garden historian Valencia Libby of Temple University, the multifaceted role of women



"Gardening." Washburn and Co.'s Amateur Cultivator's Guide to the Flower and Kitchen Garden, Boston, 1869.

in shaping the southern landscape (and landscapes elsewhere as well) has frequently been unsung, to say the least, and the subject of blatant prejudice in more cases than a few. Speakers at the 1995 "Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes" conference attempted to redress these and other interpretive shortcomings as they scrutinized "The Influence of Women on the Southern Landscape." Well over one hundred participants gathered at Old

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Calendar

March 23rd, 1996. "Telling Her Story: Expanding the Past of Georgia's Women Through Historic Places." Sponsored by the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Agnes Scott College, the Georgia Humanities Council, and AT&T University. For more information, contact: Beth Gibson, Historic Preservation Division, 500 The Healey Building, 57 Forsyth St., NW, Atlanta, GA 30303; (404) 651–5288, fax (404) 651–8739.

April 14th–17th, 1996. "A Celebration of American Gardening," The Fiftieth Williamsburg Garden Symposium, examines the evolution of gardening in the last fifty years and looks at what is in store for the next. Speakers include: Mac Griswold, Allan Armitage, Mary Painter, Jane Taylor, and SGHS board member Dean Norton. Contact: Garden Symposium Registrar, P. O. Box 1776, Williamsburg, VA 23187–1776; (804) 220–7255, fax (804) 221–8921.

April 19th–21st, 1996. The tenth–annual meeting of the Heritage Rose Foundation will be held at Goodwood Plantation in Tallahassee, Florida. Meeting includes lectures and tours of private gardens that feature old roses. Contact: Weej Broderson at (904) 656–1163 or, for a registration packet, send a SASE to Charles A. Walker, Jr., 1512 Gorman St., Raleigh, NC 27606. Registration deadline is March 22nd.

May 9th–10th, 1996. Gillette Symposium, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, 1800 Lakeside Ave., Richmond, VA 23228–4700; (804) 262–9887, fax (804) 262–9934.

May 10th–12th, 1996. Fourteenth–annual meeting of the Southern Garden History Society in Easton, Maryland, co–sponsored by the Talbot County Historical Association. The meeting focuses on the Lloyd family houses and gardens and speakers will include Barbara Sarudy, Orlando Ridout V., Peter Kurtze, Dean Norton, and Michael Trostel. Registration materials will be sent in January. This promises to be a very special meeting. Contact conference coordinator Ed Shull at P. O. Box 21262, attn: SGHS Meeting, Catonsville, MD 21228; (410) 744–2681.

May 17th–18th, 1996. "The Landscape of Theme Parks and Their Antecedents," Dumbarton Oaks Studies in Landscape Architecture Symposium. More information on this symposium will be available in late February. Call: (202) 339–6460.

May 18th–19th, 1996. Greenscape '96. Mississippi's premier flower and garden show, focusing on regional gardening traditions, held in Jackson. Speakers will include SGHS member Felder Rushing, Holly Shimizu of the U.S. Botanic Garden, and Peggy Newcomb. Contact Rebecca Wiggs, at (601) 948–6470.

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Old Salem Conference...

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Salem and Salem College in early October for the

tenth edition of what remains the premier conference of its kind. They not only watched and listened but also vigorously offered "feedback" as speakers raised matters of interest and concern.

Early in her comments, Ms. Libby underscored the "facelessness" of so many women's achievements in the area of gardens and landscapes. Regarding the efforts of individual women, anthropologist Gail Wagner of the University of South Carolina could do little to

remedy this problem as she discussed the gardening lives of Native American women in prehistoric eastern North America. Yet if we ask questions about groups of people, as Ms. Wagner demonstrated, archaeology (with some help from a terribly skewed historical record) can tell us a great deal about the day-to-day activities of those who for thousands of years preceeding, as well as after, the arrival of Europeans and Africans were deriving most of their subsistence from tilling the soil. For example, a fairly cursory look shows that the famous trio of maize, squash, and beans are relative late comers to the gardening lives of Native American women, appearing only a little

over a millennium ago.

Kay Moss of Gastonia, North Carolina's Schiele Museum discussed another class of individuals who remain largely faceless: the subsistence farm women of the southern frontier. Drawing from the limited records which document the lives of these women, Ms. Moss focused not on particular persons but instead on the wide array of plants they utilized for food, decoration, and especially medicine in order to help counteract the harsh conditions of a frontier existence. They could read the fields and forests "like a book," Ms. Moss demonstrated, turning to nature's apothecary in lieu of the stores and doctors available to town dwellers.

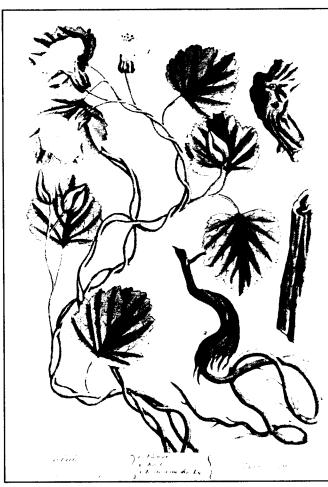
Grossly ignored too have been the lives of African American women – during slavery, throughout the Jim Crow era, and right into modern times. Thanks to scholars such as Richard Wesmacott of the University of Georgia, however, new light is now being cast on this rich subject area. Influenced by

Mr. Westmacott's work on African American rural gardens and yards, landscape architecture professor Sue Anne Ware of North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro shared her findings about African American women with rural roots who have moved into suburban settings. Thus, while countless generations of African American women will forever remain anonymous to those who would study their gardening activities, at least some of their descendants are no longer faceless thanks to Ms. Ware's research. Indeed, several of these gardeners attended her Old Salem presentation, offering a unique dimension to this presentation.



Pulitzer Prize-winning author Eudora Welty records the southern landscape from her Jackson, MS homesite. Photo courtesy of Terry James.

While anonymity unfortunately characterizes the lives of so many southern women and their landscape surroundings, at least some women gardeners of the South can be studied in detail. Usually people of means, these women have left sufficient documentation - at times an actual physical landscape, but in other cases simply an impressive written record - that their gardening lives are open for close scrutiny. A panel presentation about four such women, all plantation mistresses, illustrated this point. Starting furthest back in time, garden educator Laura Viancour of Colonial Williamsburg discussed the late eighteenth-and early nineteenth-century life and landscape activities of Lady Jean Skipwith at Prestwould Plantation in Virginia. Thanks to the existence of



Examples of 18th-century botanical engravings by Elizabeth Blackwell.

many of Lady Skipwith's notes and related letters, and to the survival of Prestwould itself (located near Clarksville, Virginia) scholars have been given a rare opportunity

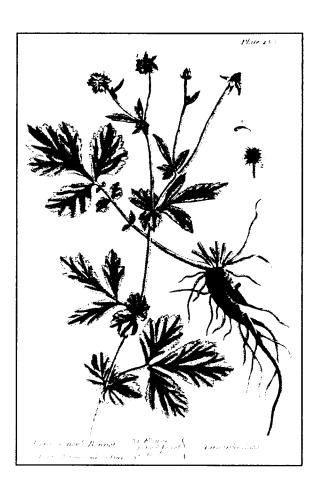


Clara Schoffner, Greensboro, NC.

to study the work of this exceptional person. In 1805 her daughter described to St. George Tucker "A spacious, fine garden, to the cultivation of which she (Lady Skipwith) is totally devoted - if you are fond of gardening of flowers & shrubs, as well as fine vegetables, you would delight to see her garden..." Today the outlines of that garden can still be examined. If one wishes to go further, the detailed notes kept by Lady Skipwith are available for study too, reflecting in their use of Latin plant names and understanding of horticultural nuances the good education she received as a young girl in Great Britain. Though more evident now in her papers than at Prestwould itself, Lady Skipwith's activities extended far beyond the immediate house and grounds, moreover, encompassing many additional plantation acres, including a deer park and an island in the nearby Roanoke River.

Thus, more than an individual who tended a few small plots of ground, she was truly a *landscape* gardener.

A woman of equally impressive attainments was Martha Turnbull, of Rosedown



Plantation near St. Francisville, Louisiana. Her gardening life, which stretched for over half a century, was surveyed at Old Salem by Texas garden historian and writer Greg Grant. Mr. Grant observed with regret that while Rosedown remains a highly visited site, far fewer people have access to Mrs. Turnbull's garden diary. Ranging through fifty-seven years, the diary illuminates her gardening activities during times of prosperity as well as during the increasingly lean years following 1865. Above all, it reveals a woman of great tenacity and near-religious devotion to her garden and grounds, a tenacity and devotion shown in the near total absence of

references extraneous to gardening, including such cataclysmic events as the Civil War.

Remarkable devotion also characterized the life of Ann Pamela Cunningham of Rosemont Plantation in South Carolina, a life discussed by historical landscape consultant Christie Snipes of Columbia, South Carolina. (For more on the subject, see Magnolia, Vol. IX, No. 2, Spring 1993.) An array of primary and secondary source materials compellingly document the gardening interests of both Ann Pamela as well as her mother Louisa Cunningham. And, although the Rosemont site has changed greatly since the loss of the mansion house to fire in 1930, many intriguing vestiges of the Cunninghams' plantation landscape survive as well. Yet, not withstanding this rich body of resources, unarguably Ann Pamela's most enduring legacy results from her unswerving devotion to saving Mount Vernon, a property which today stands in the vanguard of landscape preservation efforts in the United States.



Catherine Devereux Edmondston. Photo courtesy of: N.C. Division of Archives and History

While Ms. Viancour, Mr. Grant, and Ms. Snipes could offer photographic proof to supplement their discussion of plantation mistresses, little survives along the Roanoke River in Halifax County, North Carolina to document visually the energetic gardening efforts of Catherine Devereux Edmondston. However, this is more than offset by Mrs. Edmondston's diary which was begun in 1860 and then spanned the war years. Reminiscent of Martha Turnbull's writing, the diary records both a love of gardening as well as the day-to-day gardening battles, victories, and losses of a plantation mistress. Unlike Mrs. Turnbull, however, Catherine Edmondston made frequent references to the war, these references reflecting her deep and abiding support of the Southern cause. Also unlike the case of Mrs. Turnbull, the Edmondston diary is available to all, having been published by the North Carolina Division of Archives and History as "Journal of a Secesh Lady": The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston. Historic Stagville Administrator Jo Ann Williford interwove poignant quotes from Mrs. Edmonston's writing as she described a period of political, familial,

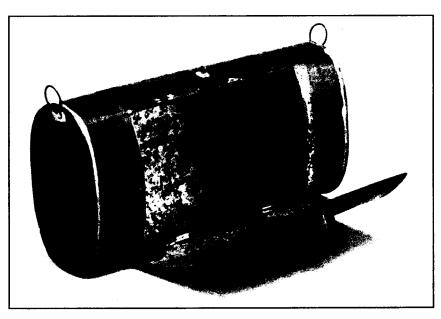
military, and gardening tumult in the life of this plantation mistress. On the eve of the Civil War she revels in her floral achievements at a party for her husband's military unit, the Scotland Neck Mounted Riflemen, noting "Mrs. Smith & I dressed the Pyramid of Flowers which were really beautiful! My Dahlias made a most magnificent show & won universal admiration..." By 1864, however, the war's impact was evident as she boasts of her successes in growing and drying tea leaves, a commodity then bringing

exorbitant prices in southern markets.

"How I wish we had plants enough to supply us;" she observed, "we would laugh at Yankee Blockaders..." In the end of

course, the "Yankee Blockaders" had the last laugh, and though Catherine Edmondston continued her diary entries until early January 1866, the remaining nine years of her life are, sadly, much less documented.

The writings of such upper class southern women, both about gardening and myriad other issues, do much to help us understand their lives and support some of our understandings about their material comfort while at the same time shattering other stereotypes about "plantation ladies." While such individuals did not usually write for publication, but instead for their own enjoyment and record-keeping, other women gardeners of the South have made writing a much more central element of their lives. None is perhaps more famed and highly regarded than Mississippi's Eudora Welty, an artist whose work was beautifully described by Jackson garden writer and designer Susan Haltom. During an evening presentation, Ms. Haltom drew from a



Lady Jean Skipwith's plant collecting box. Photo courtesy of Prestwould Foundation.

host of Miss Welty's writings to illustrate the Pulitzer Prize-winning author's intense passion for the southern landscape. As the audience discovered highlights of her life they also heard evocative references by Miss Welty to such plants as the mimosa "with its smell in the rain like a cool melon cut, its puffs of pale flowers settled in its sensitive leaves;" or characters such as Ellie Morgan, "a large woman with a face as pink and crowded as an old-

illustrations for *A Curious Herbal* appeared when botanical painting was considered a socially-appropriate activity for women but writing was not. Her talk then touched on

the efforts of various influential women and their writings, including Jane Webb Loudon and her *Gardening for Ladies* and *Ladies Companion to the Flower Garden*; "Elizabeth," Countess von Arnim author of the delightful *Elizabeth and her German Garden*; the now legendary Gertrude

Jekyll; and the much-beloved Elizabeth Lawrence, whose *A Southern Garden* is cherished by gardeners from Maryland to Texas – and many outside the South as well.

Like Elizabeth Blackwell, many women have chosen to devote their artistic energies chiefly to the visual, rather than verbal, illustration of gardens and plants. New York art historian and author May Brawley Hill examined the

work of some of these individuals during the period from the end of the Civil War into the early twentieth century. While some women turned to traditional techniques such as drawing and painting, others embraced the new opportunities presented by photography to capture landscapes and gardens. Perhaps no one discussed by Ms. Hill is better known in the South than Frances Benjamin Johnston, whose landscape and architectural camera work still sets the standard in states such as North Carolina. The early endeavors of such women not only helped to establish career paths for their successors, but they also helped to preserve in film and on canvas a rapidly evolving, and in many cases disappearing, southern landscape.

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Excerpt from Lady Jean Skipwith's journal listing "Bulbous roots to be got when in my power." Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

fashioned rose." Fortunately, these and many more such references survive in perpetuity in the extensive body of work by Eudora Welty. Fortunately, so too does the Jackson house and garden of the still-active writer: the property has been given by her to the State of Mississippi, with work on the garden being coordinated by Ms. Haltom.

While Susan Haltom scrutinized the efforts of one writer-gardener, New Hampshire landscape historian Susan Schnare reviewed the work of a succession of women whose work on gardens and plants have been published over a period covering three centuries. She began with Elizabeth Blackwell, whose eighteenth-century

Landscape and architectural historian Davyd Foard Hood illuminated the slightly later activities of another group of women important to southern garden history and landscape preservation in his examination of the garden club movement. Following the lead of women in Athens, Georgia who organized their club in 1891, groups in state after state across the South formed garden clubs, reflecting in many cases a new wealth melded with a desire to preserve old gardens. Although they often struggled successfully to save sites their husbands were in the process of destroying, these women and their clubs made arguably their greatest accomplishments in the domain of publication. Following the example set by such works as Historic Gardens of Virginia and Gardens of Colony and State, garden groups published study after study illustrating old landscape settings in various southern states. As Mr. Hood demonstrated, such works (though not always measuring up to the standards of modern scholarship) remain important both to our knowledge of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century southern gardens, as well as to an understanding of early twentieth-century ideas about landscape history and garden restoration.

Just as the attainments of garden club members are receiving new attention and appreciation, so too is the work of women landscape architects. Indeed, Valencia Libby singled these professionals out in her opening remarks as both the subject of contemporary prejudice and as a group whose training has been little-scrutinized by students of landscape or educational history. Winston-Salem landscape

designer Sherold Hollingsworth, ASLA, who reviewed the work of several such women, sought to redress some of these shortcomings in professional appreciation

and scholarship. Conference participants thus gained a renewed awareness of the impressive achievements of such landscape architects as Ellen Biddle Shipman, whose surviving work in both North Carolina and other areas of the South still demonstrates the level of her professional mastery.



Garden House at Prestwould. Photo courtesy of Prestwould Foundation.

Professional mastery was also evident during the workshop phase of the conference, with nature and garden photographer Virginia Weiler of Winston-Salem offering tips on how to capture plants and gardens on film; Monticello's Peggy Newcomb discussing late nineteenth-century plants; and conference speaker Susan Schnare reviewing the "do's and don'ts" of restoring gardens and landscapes. In addition, Old Salem's Carol Hall mounted an exhibit on those most

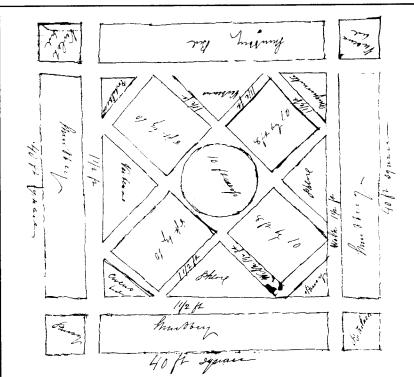
necessary of garden "tools": hats and bonnets. The practical aspect of these workshops and the exhibit was in turn

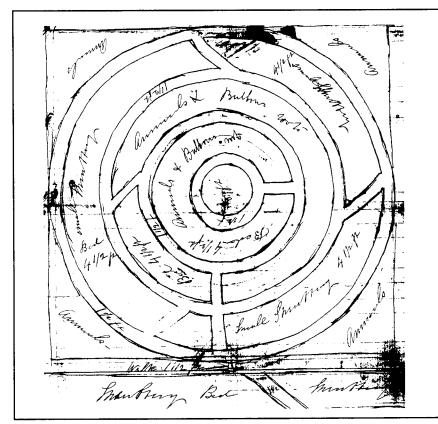


balanced out by the philosophical and interpretive elements of the Friday evening panel discussion on "Southern Women,

Southern Landscapes" moderated by Valencia Libby. Issues relating to African American garden and landscape practices; the spiritual component of gardening; and the very definition of a "restored" garden, were but some of the questions examined by a group of panelists remarkable by any standard for their knowledge of garden history and their love of the southern landscape.

Camilla Wilcox, an Old Salem conference committee member and the curator of education at Winston-Salem's Reynolda Gardens, helped to conclude the three day program on Saturday, encapsulating in her remarks and symbolizing in her own life and work a central message of this event: one must know women's history to truly know southern garden history. Highlighting the efforts of her peers in many fields, Ms. Wilcox offered her audience a passionately-felt reminder of why they had come to this conference in the first place. Having set themes to guide the conference, Valencia Libby appropriately offered final comments, summarizing a program at which all participants surely gained a renewed appreciation of "The Influence of Women on the Southern Landscape" +





Lady Jean Skipwith's sketches of her garden. Courtesy of Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Box 21, Folder 32, Skipwith Family Papers.

Book Review

Gardens of Historic Charleston by James R. Cothran.

Hardcover. 177 pp. \$40.00 ISBN: 1- 57003-004-9

In Carolina Gardens, 1937, E. T. H. Shaffer described Charleston as "a city set in a garden." In the years prior to his writing, and in the half century following, there has not been a more apt nor succinct description of a place that is inarguably one of the most important and distinguished urban landscapes in both the South and the larger United States. In few other places is there such a rich melding of geography, architecture, plants, and the handsomely crafted products of an advanced material culture. For travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for those who came to take up winter residence in Charleston in the opening years of the twentiethcentury, and for us, today, it remains a place of heady delight and satisfaction. Charleston is a beautiful city that is at once both public and private, where property lines are marked by brick, stucco, or tabby walls and then erased by views through handsomely-wrought fences and gates. It is a place where neighboring gardens can be seen from the upper stories of houses and brought into one's visual domain, and where the tendrils of creeping fig, roses, jasmine, and honeysuckle and the long, shading limbs of live oaks and magnolias ease across legal boundaries to articulate and grace the larger place — "a city set in a garden."

Members of the Southern Garden History Society, and especially those who attended its tenth–annual meeting in Charleston in 1992, know Charleston. They will find much in *Gardens of Historic Charleston* that is familiar. While many carried Louisa Pringle Cameron's *The Private Gardens of Charleston* away from that gathering, James R. Cothran's book is a more perfect souvenir. Through image and text Cothran represents many individual gardens opened for

the 1992 tour while casting his purview, and ours, across the larger tableau of private space and public landscape.

Cothran, born in South Carolina and educated at Clemson University, the

University of Georgia, and the Georgia Institute of Technology, has an Atlanta-based practice in landscape architecture and urban planning. His education, his interest in the gardens of Charleston, which he traces to a visit in the late 1940s, and his years of professional practice and expertise are reflected in the organization of Gardens of Historic Charleston. Its one-hundred and seventy-five plus pages, with rich color photographs, are divided into seven chapters of varying length. The opening chapters provide a brief overview of Charleston's horticultural heritage and garden traditions. Short mentions of Henry Middleton, Dr. Alexander Garden, Andre

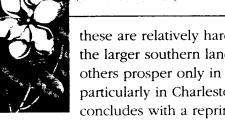


A Garden in Charleston, from Picturesque America, 1874.

Michaux, Eliza Lucas Pinckney, John Champneys, Henry Laurens, Thomas Lamboll, and Martha Logan (author of *The Gardener's Kalendar*), among others, and their gardens point up the pressing need for a scholarly examination of gardening and horticulture in Charleston and on its adjoining plantations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time, recognition is owed to the gardens, the gardeners, and landscape designers of nineteenth–century

Charleston, an era recalled by the names of Philippe Noissette, the Reverend John Grimke Drayton, and Joel Poinsett and the introduction of the Azalea indica, which, in numbers alone, has come to dominate the southern garden. Gardening in the twentieth-century is introduced by a chapter on Loutrel W. Briggs (1893–1977) who, beginning with his work for Mrs. Washington Roebling in 1929, essentially defined the "Charleston garden" and preserved it in print in his Charleston Gardens (1951), the distinguished predecessor of this book, also from the University of South Carolina Press.

Cothran then goes on to discuss and illustrate the small town garden, the superior achievement of Charleston gardeners. There is much to be said for being confined, as a gardener, to a very limited space. After noting the features of the Charleston garden – its architectural components, materials, and its furnishings - Cothran moves to the final and longest chapter, "Plants of Charleston Gardens." This compendium lists seventy-one plants that have an important history of use in the city through the past and to the present. Many of



these are relatively hardy and common to the larger southern landscape, however, others prosper only in the lower South, and particularly in Charleston. This chapter concludes with a reprinting of Emma B.

Richardson's list of historic plants grown in Charleston that was first published in 1941 in "The Charleston Museum Leaflet No. 15."

Davyd Foard Hood, book review editor

In Print

Tennessee's Historic Landscapes: A Traveler's Guide, by Carroll Van West. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press. Illustrated. Hardcover. \$50.00. The author, who is also senior editor of the Tennessee Historical Quarterly and professor of historic preservation at Middle Tennessee State University, takes the reader on a delightful and informative tour of the state's urban, rural, and "interstate landscape." The book, while emphasizing sightseeing by themes and landscapes, includes a comprehensive index of towns, counties, and places — offering the traveler ready access to information about any historic site in the state +

Calendar

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May 25th, 1996. Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plant's Fourth Annual Open House at Tufton Farm. Lectures at the Monticello Visitors Center are followed with workshops and tours at the nursery. For more information, write CHP, P. O. Box 316, Charlottesville, VA 22902; (804) 984-9822.

March 21st-23rd, 1997. Fifteenth-annual meeting of the Southern Garden History Society, to be held in Tallahassee, Florida. Mark your calendars and look for more on this meeting in upcoming issues. Contact conference coordinator Weej Broderson at (904) 656-1163.

Garden Tour in Normandy — June 24th-30th, 1996

A study tour sponsored by the American Friends of Blerancourt will visit the private gardens of Normandy and Ile de France.

Participants will visit the estate gardens at Groussay park, La Mormaire, the manoir de la Bruyere, Le Haras de Reux, and the chateaux d'Ermenonville, de Galleville, de Bailleuil, Garielle, and de Canon among others. The tour also offers a luncheon at Monet's garden in Giverny on the day the museum is closed and a viewing of the Louvre's Sculpture Garden before the public opening. The museum at Blerancourt, which opened in 1989, exhibits a collection of paintings and drawings that pools the shared experience of France and the Americas. Blerancourt's gardens are evolving into a unique botanical link between the two as well. The grounds of this seventeenth-century French chateau were designed by Madison Cox and Mark Rudkin to reflect a North American landscape, using our native flora, and which includes an arboretum of North American trees. For more information about this tour of Normandy, contact the American Friends of Blerancourt, Inc., 530 Fifth Ave., Suite 430, New York, NY 10036; (212) 391-0818, fax (212)840-7246 •

A Call for Nominees to the Board of Directors

F our members of the Southern Garden History Society's board of directors will rotate off the board in May 1996, in accordance with a rotation system established in the society's bylaws adopted in April 1993. Four new board members will be elected at the society's annual meeting in May, which will be held at the eastern shore of Maryland.

According to the bylaws, "Any member of the Southern Garden History Society may present a nomination for Director or Directors to the nominating Committee, provided the nomination is presented in writing at least one month prior to the annual meeting of members at which Directors are elected."

Deadline for submission of articles for the Winter Issue of Magnolia is February 15.

Mrs. William W. Griffin is chair of the nominating committee for this term. Any nominations should be sent to her by April 9, 1996 at: 1330 West Garmon Road, NW,

Atlanta, Georgia 30327. Mrs. Griffin requests that the qualifications for the proposed board nominee be sent along with the name.

The bylaws further state: "From the nominations for Directors made by the members and from other nominations made by members of the Nominating Committee, the Nominating Committee shall select a slate to be approved by the existing Board of Directors and voted on at the annual meeting of members."

Other members of the nominating committee are Dr. William C. Welch and Mrs. Zachary T. Bynum, Jr. 4

Ben G. Page, Jr., President
Dr. William C. Welch, Vice-President
Flora Ann Bynum, Secretary-Treasurer
William Lanier Hunt, Honorary President

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