



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

Magnolia

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Paper Mulberry Trees, Clumps, and Oval Beds: The First Phase of Landscape Restoration at Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest

Jack Gary, Director of Archaeology and Landscapes, Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest

Introduction

When John Wayles acquired a 4000-acre tract of land along the Blackwater Creek in 1763, in what is now Bedford County, Virginia he was part of a vanguard of tidewater tobacco planters that had pushed west to the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Using enslaved laborers, Wayles began the process of establishing a plantation here, several miles east of Lynchburg, on land already known as the Poplar Forest. Residing at his home plantation in Charles City County, he likely never had designs for Poplar Forest outside of generating revenue through tobacco. His son-in-law, Thomas Jefferson, may have felt the same way upon the initial receipt of the property and enslaved laborers after Wayles' death in 1773. The Poplar Forest plantation represented a much needed source of revenue for Jefferson, not only at the time of its acquisition but throughout a lifetime marked by financial distress. By the time of his death fifty-three years later, however, Poplar Forest represented much more to Jefferson than just hogsheads of tobacco and wheat. Virginia's most prominent statesman had completely transformed a sixty-one-acre section of this vernacular agrarian operation into a private retreat modeled after the villas of ancient Romans. This space was one of leisure for Jefferson, set apart from the everyday world.

Today, Poplar Forest is a museum that interprets Jefferson's life, architecture, and landscape. The Corporation for Jefferson's Poplar Forest, the non-profit organization that operates the museum, uses the disciplines of archaeology and architectural restoration

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Photo by Les Schofer.

Figure 1: View of the main house, wing, and flanking mounds looking northwest toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. This picture was taken prior to the restoration of the west double row of paper mulberry trees. Image courtesy of Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest (TJPF).

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CALENDAR

Please visit the SGHS Web site, www.southerngardenhistory.org, for a complete and more detailed calendar with the latest updates and links to individual Web sites.

January 14, 2013. Peter J. Hatch, 'A Rich Spot of Earth:' A Peek into Monticello's Vegetable Garden, Charleston Horticultural Society Lecture Series at the Charleston Museum. Peter Hatch will discuss his new book on Thomas Jefferson's Revolutionary Garden at Monticello. Visit: www.chashortsoc.org

January 25-27, 2013. 27th Annual Southern Garden Symposium, held at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia. The symposium will feature numerous esteemed horticulturist and garden designers including SGHS honorary board member Dr. William C. (Bill) Welch. Registration is open January 18. Visit: www.callawaygardens.com; or contact: education@callawaygardens.com, (706) 663-5153.

February 15, 2013. "Gardening with Heirloom Fruits and Vegetables," the Southern Garden Heritage Conference, at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in Athens. Speakers include Bill Welch, celebrated garden writer Felder Rushing, and Dr. Virginia Nazarea, Professor of Anthropology. Contact: (706) 542-1244, garden@uga.edu; or visit: botgarden.uga.edu

February 27, 2013. Ryan Gainey, *The Gathered Garden*, Atlanta, GA. The lecture will be followed by an exploration of a botanical art display, book signing, and reception in McElreath Hall, Atlanta History Center. Reservations required; (404) 814-4046; email: scatron@atlantahistorycenter.com.

March 5, 2013. "Beyond the Garden Gate: Exploring Creative Spaces," 29th Davidson Horticultural Symposium, Davidson, North Carolina. Speakers include noted authors and authorities: Professor Noel Kingsbury (University of Sheffield, England); Julie Moir Messervy; Tovah Martin; Dr. Holly L. Scoggins (professor, VA Tech); and Nan K. Chase. Visit: davidsonsymposium.org; email: davisonsymposium@gmail.com

March 20 – 23, 2013. "Resilience, Renewal and Renaissance: Keeping Cultural Landscapes Relevant," the Annual Meeting of the Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation (AHLP), in Lynchburg, Virginia. Meeting will explore regional landscapes, both urban and rural, and hear from local experts and advocates in the Virginia Piedmont, which is rich in natural beauty and American history; and includes visits to Poplar Forest, the Lynchburg Community Market, Old City Cemetery, the Anne Spencer House, and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Visit: www.ahlp.org;

April 12-13, 2013. Plantasia, garden extravaganza presented by the **Charleston Horticultural Society** and **GROW FOOD Carolina**, featuring plant sales, vendors, and speakers including Julie Jenny of Swarthmore College talking on "Botany and Beery." CHS also is promoting **Historic Charleston**

Foundation's Festival of Houses and Gardens, Charlotte Street Tour, April 13. For information on either of these events, contact CHS at (843) 579-9922 or visit: www.chashortsoc.org.

April 14-15, 2013. "More Than a Garden: Creative Ideas to Enhance Your Life," 67th Colonial Williamsburg Garden Symposium. Speakers will discuss ways to minimize lawns, introduce sensory garden features, and recommend low maintenance plants for high impact. Other topics will include growing and using vegetables and herbs, and creating flower arrangements. Call: (800) 603-0948; Visit: www.history.org

April 20-27, 2013. Historic Garden Week in Virginia. Every April, visitors are welcomed to more than 250 of Virginia's most beautiful gardens, homes and historic landmarks during "America's Largest Open House." This 8-day statewide event provides visitors a unique opportunity to see the peak of Virginia's springtime color, and visit beautiful houses with over 2,000 flower arrangements by GCV members. Visit: www.vagardenweek.org

May 3 – 5, 2013. "Someone's Been Digging in the Dirt," 31st Annual Meeting of the Southern Garden History Society, Lynchburg, Virginia. Highlights include diverse speakers and visits to Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest, the beautiful gardens at the 200 year old former plantation, Pharsalia, the restored garden of Harlem Renaissance poet Anne Spencer, and the antique roses at the Old City Cemetery. The meeting extension will tour eight private gardens and include lunch at Lynchburg Grows, an award-winning Urban Farm located in historic greenhouses. Visit: www.southerngardenhistory.org or contact Jane White: janebaberwhite@gmail.com

September 6-7, 2013. 7th Annual Heritage Harvest Festival at Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia. Celebrate the harvest and the legacy of revolutionary gardener Thomas Jefferson, America's "First foodie," who championed vegetable cuisine, plant experimentation, and sustainable agriculture. Taste a bounty of heirloom fruits and vegetables and learn about organic gardening and seed-saving during this fun, affordable, family-friendly festival — unlike any other — held on the breathtaking West Lawn of Jefferson's Monticello. Visit: www.heritageharvest-festival.com

September 26-28, 2013. "To Everything a Season," 19th Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. This biennial conference, held at Old Salem Museum & Gardens and Reynolda House Museum of American Art, and co-sponsored by SGHS, will explore historic methods and resources in cultivating, preserving, and preparing heritage foods and livestock in the American South. Visit: www.oldsalem.org or contact Sally Gant: sgant@oldsalem.org; (336) 721-7361.

Paper Mulberry Trees..... (continued from page 1)

to explore the genius behind the designs for the house and landscape. With the exterior restoration of Jefferson's retreat house completed, the museum has moved to a focused restoration of landscape elements within the ornamental grounds directly surrounding the house. Over time, this restoration will expand to include aspects of the plantation and natural landscapes that were also part of this historic property.

A combination of documentary and archaeological research is currently being used to discover the hidden aspects of the landscape and guide the physical replanting of trees and ornamental shrubs. The research process not only has discovered the exact locations of trees that are no longer present, but also has revealed new insights into Jefferson's interplay between landscape and architecture. This article discusses two projects from the first phase of landscape restoration. These projects sought to better understand, locate, and restore a double row of paper mulberry trees (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) to the west of the house, and two clumps of trees and two oval flower beds at the north corners of the house.

The Ornamental Landscape of Poplar Forest

In 1806, as Jefferson entered his second presidential term, he began instructing through letters to free and enslaved craftsmen to build an octagonal brick house near the core of the Poplar Forest plantation. [Fig. 1] By 1809, and his retirement, the main house was complete enough for Jefferson to begin making trips here as a place to get away from the social pressures of Monticello and a lifetime of public scrutiny. A task likely relished by Jefferson during his stays in retreat, was planning the landscape that surrounded the main house. Like Monticello, this landscape developed out of a combination of ideas and influences Jefferson picked up over a lifetime of studying and viewing English, French, and Italian gardens and architecture. Based on Jefferson's descriptions and modern archaeological excavations, the view we have begun to form of this landscape is one that blended architecture with landscape design, blurring the boundary between the two disciplines (Brown 1990: 127). [Fig. 2]

The ornamental grounds surrounding the house were enclosed by a circular road lined with trees, encompassing almost five acres. The northern portion of the landscape was dominated by at least thirteen tulip

poplar trees, creating a naturalistic setting reminiscent of the picturesque gardens of England. At the center was a play on Palladian architecture with the house flanked by two mounds of earth created when enslaved laborers excavated a 200 foot long sunken lawn on the south side of the house. The mounds represented the end pavilions of Palladian design, and were originally covered in willow trees on top and ringed with aspens at the base (Brown 1990: 127). Jefferson's choice of vegetation for the mounds appears to have been dictated by a desire to use the growing habits of willows and aspens to mimic the domes and columns of neoclassical architecture. Double rows of paper mulberry trees formed "arboreal wings" between the house and mounds (Wolf 2011: 152). The sunken lawn to the south was lined with flowering shrubs, which created a visual effect that framed a distant vista when viewed from the parlor of the house.

With these elements providing the primary structure, Jefferson interspersed other landscape features, including two octagonal privies cloaked in willow trees on the far side of each mound. Clumps of native trees, including poplars, locusts, Kentucky coffee trees, dogwoods, redbuds, and sweet shrub (*Calycanthus floridus*) were also planted at each corner of the house. Jefferson planted three oval beds of flowers in the north lawns as well, filling them with moss locust (*Robinia hispida*), dwarf roses, and large roses of different kinds (Betts 1944: 563). Many of these features existed at Monticello as well, such as clumps of trees and oval flower beds (Betts 1944: 333-334). Unlike

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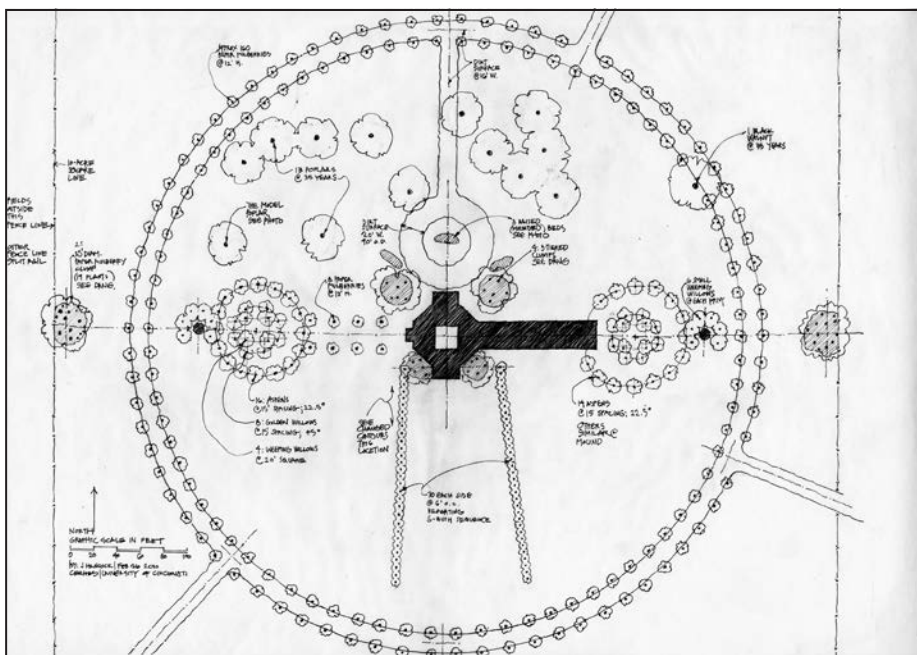


Figure 2: Landscape plan of the ornamental grounds contained within the five-acre circular road. Plan drawn by John E. Hancock, Professor of Architecture, University of Cincinnati.

Paper Mulberry Trees..... (continued from page 3)

Monticello, however, Jefferson left behind no detailed drawings of the Poplar Forest landscape to give us a clue for the exact placement, interval, or number of trees used to create some of these landscape elements.

Archaeological Research Provides the Answers

The Double Rows of Paper Mulberry Trees

In spring of 2010, Poplar Forest's Department of Archaeology and Landscapes began one of the first projects designed specifically to place ornamental vegetation back into the landscape. The preceding two decades of archaeological and scholarly research had wisely focused on gathering enough information to understand Jefferson's vision on a large scale (Heath 2007; Brown 1990; Trussell



Figure 3: The excavated remains of a planting stain found during the tree clumps and oval beds investigation. This stain is believed to mark the location of a tree. The deeper section marks the tap root.

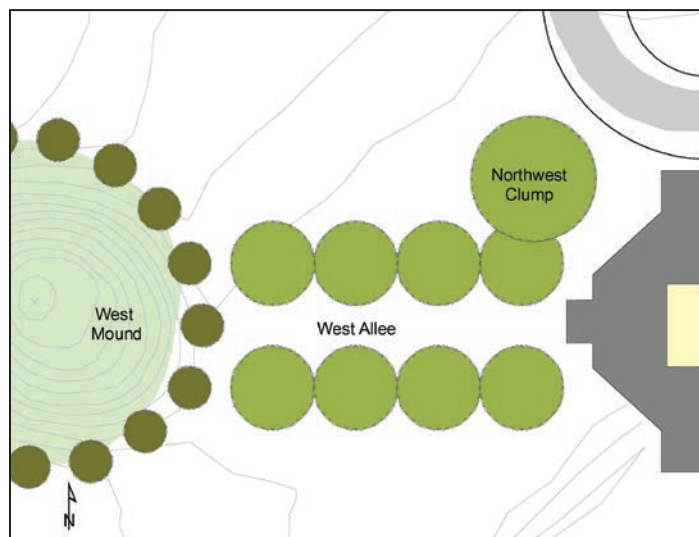


Figure 4: Plan of the west double row of paper mulberry locations and the northwest ornamental clump of trees based on excavations. The trees ringing the base of the mound are aspen trees, two of which have been located archaeologically. The other aspen tree locations are projected based on the documentary evidence that they were spaced every fifteen feet.

2000). The current projects were designed to gather the minute details of plant location, planting element size, and planting intervals left out of Jefferson's copious documentary records.

The first project addressed the double rows of paper mulberry trees Jefferson had planted in November 1812 between the house and mounds. The Poplar Forest planting memorandum for 1812 only records, "plant a double row of paper mulberries from stairways to the Mounds" and a few days later, on December 5th, Jefferson noted "planted also 2. European mulberries ... as part of the double row from the Western Mound towards the house" (Betts 1944: 494). These notes provide the extent of detail for this planting feature, and do not reveal the width of the double rows or on what interval the trees were planted. Excavations commenced in spring 2010 with the goal of finding any remains of the western double row of trees that still existed underground.

Careful excavation revealed over one hundred planting-related features, which appeared as dark organic stains in the bright red clay. Each of these stains was excavated; some of them branching off into smaller and smaller "runs," indicating that we had found the decayed remains of a tree's root system. [Fig. 3] By carefully plotting each of these root stains, we soon saw patterns emerge that marked the locations of individual trees. Measuring between the two most distinct clusters of these stains revealed two trees, spaced exactly thirty feet apart on the same orientation as the house. A quick consultation with Jefferson's planting memorandum from 1811 revealed that the aspen trees planted to ring the base of the mounds were to be spaced every fifteen feet (Betts 1944: 465).

Excavations switched focus to the base of the mound where we found two planting stains spaced approximately fifteen feet apart. One of the stains lined up with one of the previously discovered clusters exactly, while the other fell on the centerline of the house. A third one has not been found, but it seems that the thirty foot width we had discovered indicates Jefferson's desire to align the double rows of paper mulberry trees with the mound plantings, locking the two elements together to create an unbroken line from the mound to the house. [Fig. 4] An implication for the locations of all of these planting stains is that Jefferson designed the double rows wide enough to fit an actual wing between the trees, which he did on the east side of the house in 1814. Excavations conducted in the 1990s to mitigate waterproofing efforts along the north foundation of the east wing, actually uncovered the remains of the trees on that side as well, falling on the same line we discovered on the west side (Strutt 1996).

When Jefferson gave some paper mulberry trees to his Poplar Forest neighbor Charles Clay in 1815, he

Image courtesy TJPF

Image courtesy TJPF

noted that this particular species is, "...charming near a porch for densely shading it..." (Betts 1944: 547). The configuration of the double rows of trees as discovered with this project suggests that Jefferson planted them to provide shade over the flat deck of the wing on one side and in anticipation of building a wing on the west side. There is also very good evidence that the wings at Monticello were also lined with double rows of trees, some of them planted decades before any wings were ever built as part of Jefferson's redesign of Monticello in 1796 (Rieley 1996). [Fig. 5]

Armed with this new information, the west double row of paper mulberry trees were replanted in December 2011, almost 199 years to the day from their first planting. [Fig. 6] As the trees mature, which will not take long given the fast-growing nature of paper mulberries, another aspect of Jefferson's design should become visually apparent. Our excavations determined that the trees were spaced every twenty feet along the row, an interval that matches the approximate crown diameter of the paper mulberry tree. This will create the effect of a solid canopy of vegetation between the house and mound, as if the double rows are architectural features unto themselves.

The Tree Clumps and Oval Flower Beds

Using the same level of precision excavation we undertook the second project in the first phase of restoration. This project focused on uncovering the remains of the two clumps of trees Jefferson had planted at the north corners of the house in 1812. [Fig. 7]

While Jefferson left behind a list of the trees to include in the clumps (noted above), he made no mention of number of trees or the exact location and dimensions of these features. Additionally, three oval flower beds were planted near the clumps, one each at the north corners and one in the center, presumably in line with the front door of the house (Betts 1944: 563).

Excavations commenced in spring 2011, focused on the two north corner yards of the house. The configuration of planting stains located in these excavations has begun to provide a picture of a landscape element rarely seen in America in the early

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Image Courtesy of Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Inc.

Figure 5: Jane Pitford Braddick Petcolas watercolor, 1825, showing the West Front and garden of Monticello. Note mature trees along terraces enclosing them in vegetation.



Image courtesy TJPF

Figure 6: The replanted paper mulberry trees looking east from the top of the west mound. Trees planted by Grelen Nursery under direction of Will Rieley, assisted by Beate Jensen.

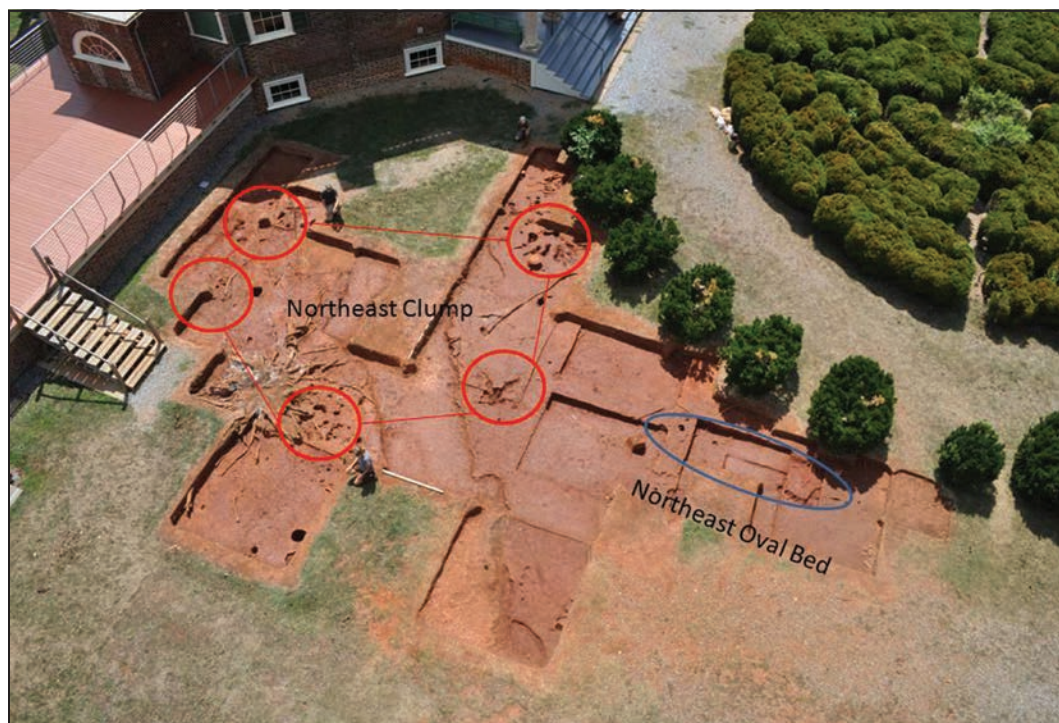


Image courtesy TJPF

Figure 7: Aerial photograph of the northeast corner of the main house showing the excavations for the tree clumps and oval beds. The red circles indicate the locations of some, but not all of the trees for the clump. The blue oval marks the location of the northeast oval flower bed, planted in 1816 with dwarf roses.

Paper Mulberry Trees..... (continued from page 5)

nineteenth century, but had been all the rage in England for several decades. Our excavations have revealed what appears to be a tight cluster of trees, perhaps thirty to thirty-five feet in diameter, containing perhaps seven to ten trees.

To confirm that the planting stains we had uncovered marked the boundaries of the clump, we conducted phytolith analysis to examine the types of grasses that once grew here. Phytoliths are microscopic fossils of a plant's cellular structure that remain in the soil after a plant dies or sheds its leaves or needles. This type of analysis is particularly useful for determining grass types. The analysis showed that the areas outside of our conjectured edge of the clump were dominated by sun-loving grasses. Inside the boundary, there was a marked difference in grass type, with shade-loving grasses dominant and almost none of the sun-loving types (Yost and Puseman 2012). We believe we have found the shade cast by the clump trees and the grass types mark the shady interior and sunny exterior of the clump.

The boundaries, as seen by the microscopic remains of grass, help us confirm that this clump was a tight grouping, similar to ones seen in prints of English gardens and described by prolific nineteenth-century English garden manual writer J.C. Loudon as "round and compact" (1835: 1117-1118). The archaeology so far confirms that the Poplar Forest clumps match the few documentary descriptions of this type of planting feature, of which Jefferson was particularly fond. He noted the pleasing effect of clumps when touring several of the English gardens in 1786 with John Adams, most particularly at Esher Place (Betts 1944: 111-112). The

Poplar Forest excavations, however, are the first to archaeologically explore what these features looked like, and when restored in 2013 will showcase a particularly unique landscape element that at one time dominated the landscapes of the English estates. [Fig. 8] Outside of Thomas Jefferson's use of clumps at Poplar Forest and Monticello and a few other documented examples, such as at William Hamilton's estate, the Woodlands in Philadelphia, it is still a subject of research to determine how widespread they became in the United States.

Excavations also uncovered two of the three oval flower beds planted around 1816. Two large stains were uncovered at the corners of the house close to the carriage turnaround, both measuring approximately seventeen to eighteen feet in length. The central oval bed mentioned in the 1816 planting memorandum has not been confirmed yet, however the location of a double chestnut rose (*Rosa roxburghii plena*) currently growing in the center of a boxwood maze at the center of the carriage turnaround in front of the house, may mark its location. Although the chestnut rose was introduced to the U.S. slightly later than Jefferson's time at Poplar Forest, it may have been used by a later owner as a replacement for the "large roses of different kinds" Jefferson had planted in the center oval bed.

If the chestnut rose does indeed mark the third oval bed, its location in conjunction with the other two archaeologically located flower beds has revealed one of the most fascinating discoveries of this project. A line connecting the three flower beds makes a perfect 135 degree angle, the internal angle of an octagon. At the time of this publication we are excavating inside the turnaround



Image courtesy TJPF

Figure 8: A digital reconstruction of what one of the Poplar Forest clumps may have looked like. Image created by the Center for the Electronic Reconstruction of Historical and Archaeological Sites, University of Cincinnati.

Annual Meeting of the Southern Garden History Society in Lynchburg, Virginia, May 3 - 5, 2013

The archaeology and landscape restoration progress at Jefferson's Poplar Forest will be the subject of a "Conversation" between Jack Gary, Poplar Forest's Director of Archaeology and Landscape, and Bill Barker, from Colonial Williamsburg, who has portrayed Thomas Jefferson professionally for over twenty years. The first evening of the annual meeting will feature a festive visit to Poplar Forest, including informal tours, cocktails, and a tented dinner reception celebrating the thirty-year anniversary of the founding of the Southern Garden History Society.

to try and confirm that the central oval bed existed where the chestnut rose stands. This will confirm one of the most explicit examples of Jefferson carrying over architectural elements into the landscape design, a concept noted particularly in the work of C. Allan Brown (1990).

One end goal of landscape restoration at Poplar Forest is to provide our visitors with an authentic experience of being “in” Thomas Jefferson’s design by replanting the vegetation as accurately as possible. By doing so, the uniqueness of Jefferson’s vision and his ability to weave together landscape and architecture literally comes to life. Only through the minutest details have we been able to discover some of the ways Jefferson designed and thought about the Poplar Forest landscape. The archaeology provides those details, allowing one of the few authentic opportunities to delve deeply into the mind of a very skilled landscape designer. What is presented here merely scratches the surface, and as new layers of data are added these interpretations may change or become refined.

Acknowledgements

The research and restoration of these projects is possible through the generous support of the Garden Club of Virginia, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation, District III of the Virginia Daughters of the American Revolution, and numerous individual donors. Specific thanks are owed to Dr. Eric Proebsting and Will Rieley, and the members of the Poplar Forest Landscape Advisory Panel for their research, labor, and support.

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Image courtesy TJPF

Figure 9: The location of the three oval flower beds connected to show the angle. The two on the sides have been confirmed archaeologically, while the middle of the boxwood hedge contains a rose bush that may mark the third oval bed planted by Jefferson in 1816 with large roses.

Book Review

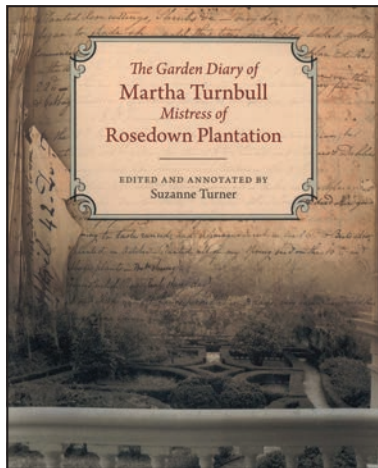
The Garden Diary of Martha Turnbull, Mistress of Rosedown Plantation, edited and annotated by Suzanne Turner, Louisiana State University Press; hardcover, 346 pages; 2012; ISBN: 978-0-8071-4411-4; list price \$39.95

The unveiling of primary garden documents has provided revelatory moments in the history of southern garden scholarship. Dynamic duos—a historical figure whose writings have been interpreted by present-day documentary historian—are the glittering stars in our knowledge and understanding of our garden heritage. Edwin Betts, a botany professor at the University of Virginia, introduced us to the multi-faceted garden world of the Sage of Monticello in the 1940s with his exhaustive editing of Thomas Jefferson's letters, horticultural memoranda, and publication of Thomas Jefferson's *Garden Book*. In the 1950s Librarian E. G. Swem, a scholar's scholar, brought forth the complex personality of Williamsburg's cranky John Custis and the enduring choreography of the trans-Atlantic plant exchange wrought by Peter Collinson in *Brothers of the Spade*. Ann Leighton's popular trilogy on the history and major figures of American gardens, the first volume being published in 1970, included the interpretation of the horticultural treasures and garden design of indefatigable plantswoman, Jean Lady Skipwith, of Prestwold Plantation in southern Virginia. Historian Barbara Wells Sarudy brought us William Faris, the Annapolis artisan and gardener extraordinaire in *Gardens and Gardening in the Chesapeake, 1700 – 1805* (1998). Great gardeners, great scholars.

Our southern garden enlightenment continues with the publication of *The Garden Diary of Martha Turnbull, Mistress of Rosedown Plantation*, edited and annotated by Suzanne Turner. The diary itself, kept between 1836 and 1894, was found in the 1990s in the attic of a Turnbull descendent. Mrs. Turnbull, described by Suzanne Turner as "Every Gardener," was remarkable, first and foremost, for her unflagging dedication to documenting the technical, horticultural aspects of her gardening pursuits: techniques like burning strawberry beds, budding camellias, blanching celery, forking asparagus, and sowing eggplant seed in hotbeds dominate her diary. The garden writings of Thomas Jefferson, John Custis, Jean Skipwith, and, to a lesser extent, William Faris, are all about plants and planting – not about inarching, fertilizer

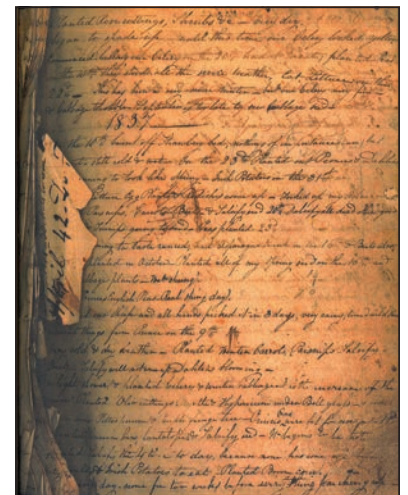
ratios, watering engines, bell jars, and guano. Although influenced by a variety of regional and period traditions, Martha Turnbull was part of the American Victorian Era, a golden age of horticulture when the emphasis was not only on new and fancy plants, but also on the elaborate techniques used to successfully grow these plants. Suzanne Turner's brilliant and loving evocation of these techniques, citing virtually every nineteenth-century literary source, illuminates this critical, and rarely discussed, aspect of our southern garden history. This book is all about the *culture*, somewhat less about the *hortus*.

Rosedown today represents the iconic Louisiana plantation with its Greek Revival Architecture, live oak avenue, and parterre gardens. Martha Hilliard Barrow (1811-1896) and Daniel Turnbull (18_-1861) were married in 1828. The 3,455 acres that became Rosedown were acquired as seven tracts between 1834 and 1841. The Turnbells began building the house, also known as Rosedown, in 1834. The couple thrived with hundreds of slaves during the flush times of king cotton. Educated in Philadelphia and an experienced European traveler, Martha's world was unusually expansive: her diary expresses a national perspective as much as a regional, Felician sensibility. Her gardens, for example, included the latest in American, and international, garden fashion – whether Paris artichokes, Downingesque summerhouses, Buist's dwarf okra from the Philadelphia author and nurseryman, rockeries, and the latest ornamental shrubs from Asia like *Cryptomeria*, cotoneaster, and Japanese quince. Although she ate turnip greens for days at a time and grew a few local vegetable varieties common among her family and neighbors ("Eliza's squash," "Aunt



source: Wikimedia Commons, author: Valantene

Martha Hilliard Barrow Turnbull (1809-1896), portrait by Thomas Sully, 1850s.



Page from the garden diary of Martha Turnbull.

Sarah's mustard"), in some ways her sophisticated tastes overshadowed a more meaningful picture of Feliciana cultural traditions in cooking and gardening.

Her diary entries suggest how remarkably familiar Martha Turnbull was with the national garden literature of the day. She did everything the experts told her to do – whether William White, A. J. Downing, Robert Buist, or Thomas Affleck. This was exceptional. Thomas Jefferson, for example, owned an extensive garden library by the earlier giants of horticulture – Philip Miller, John Abercrombie, Batty Langley, Bernard McMahon – but if he read the advice in these books – and he did to some extent – he seemed to ignore a lot of it. Jefferson's garden book was all about planting, not about digging planting pits for asparagus or fertilizing roses with ashes and onion. Martha Turnbull did everything her teachers told her to do; she did everything right.

The gardens developed by Mrs. Turnbull evolved, particularly during the antebellum period, and were expansive as well as fashionable. Activity in the five-acre vegetable garden dominated the diary, particularly during the hard times during and after the war, but the five-acre flower and pleasure gardens, apparently designed in elaborate parterre patterns with dwarf boxwood edgings, and her collection of rare camellias, propagated by a variety of skilled techniques, also reflected her horticultural genius. The pleasure gardens also included the oak avenue with turf grass panels, long hedges of cherry laurel, myrtle, and greenhouses with birds of paradise, pineapples, and orange trees. Suzanne Turner elaborates fully on the design influence of Andrew Jackson Downing, and implicitly, the transformative English horticulturist John Claudius Loudon, on Martha's rockery, summerhouses, Lombardy poplar plantings, and informal plantings of prized exotics like camellia, azalea, and black roses.

Predictably, the Civil War rocked Turnbull's world. Her husband had died in 1861. Slaves deserted Rosedown only to return as tenant gardeners and farmers. Battling

depression, and ill health, she deserted the plantation for Baltimore after Appomattox, only to return as an impoverished widow determined to make do against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Nevertheless, occasional bursts of her gardening spirit emerge when, for example, she buoyantly wrote, "I feel like gardening" upon her return home in 1864. Turnbull became a market gardener in a "truck patch," and the diary reflects a survival instinct as she desperately tracked expenses and inventoried what tools, garden features, and monies fate had left her. Ominous notes resound through the diary as Martha noted in 1871 how "I have no money ... and only \$100 in my desk," and three trips to the market in St. Francisville had yielded only a paltry \$4.40. Another earlier entry mentioned there was "not one negro in the field & only made contracts today," suggesting an uneasy labor

relationship with her former slaves. Nonetheless, Suzanne Turner described how Martha Turnbull's spiritual survival depended on a return to the downright fun of pleasure gardening: layering her rose collection and budding her camellias. Gardening

(continued on page 10)



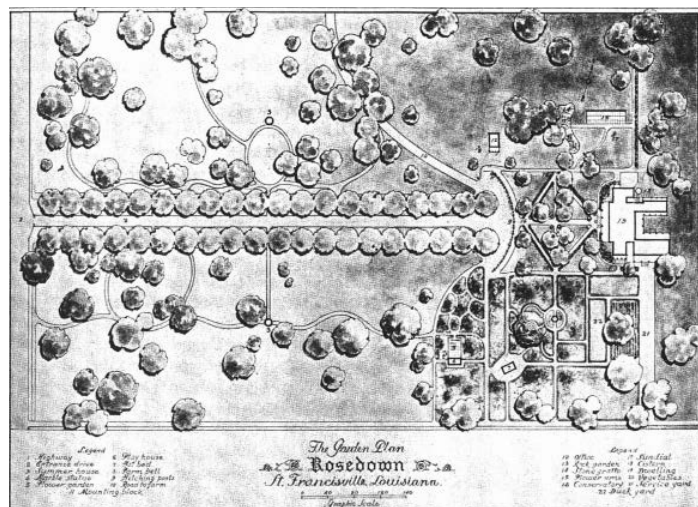
Potting shed at Rosedown Plantation.

Photo by Neil Odenwald



Clipped hedges of parterre in Flower Garden.

Photo by Neil Odenwald



"The Garden Plan of Rosedown," showing locations of significant elements. From *Great Georgian Houses of America*, 1937.



Coldframe at Rosedown Plantation.

Photo by Neil Odenwald

Book Review..... (continued from page 9)

persisted at Rosedown for the next thirty years, aided by Mrs. Turnbull's daughter and heir, her granddaughters, and a surprisingly able work force. The reader is compelled to revel in Martha's upbeat summary that "things are shipshape" in 1871, and one marvels at both Turnbull's unrelenting persistence and the life-confirming comfort she found in the gardening process.

Martha Turnbull may have been the best gardener this reader has ever encountered. A skilled propagator with a handy command of a variety of grafting techniques, she discussed the application of some unique procedure to just about every plant she cultivated. The beauty of Suzanne Turner's editing is the way she culled the garden literature of the nineteenth century to provide detailed explication of tree scrapers, which removed moss from fruit trees, the horticultural community's consensus on using salt as a fertilizer for asparagus, or the established wisdom on the value of soil amendments – from woods earth to lime to moss to cow and horse manure. The information on frames and hot beds, "mossing the lawn," sticking peas, burning asparagus, William White's transplanter, planting by the moon, cutworms on cabbages, cottonseed and woods earth fertilizer, plant combinations like onions with roses – this is all great stuff. No other American garden diary offers such fertile material on so many traditional horticultural techniques.

Martha Turnbull was also a "plant nut." She assembled an outstanding collection of fruits, flowers, vegetables, and shrubs; she played with hardiness in her culture of oranges, bird of paradise, and other tender exotic species, and cultivated successfully a range of traditional Yankee and cool season crops likely not common in Feliciana like apples, pears, and celery, as well as others that reflect a cosmopolitan (and sensual) culinary sensibility like garlic, artichokes, leeks, and eggplant. She grew large quantities of eggplant for sale at the local market, likely providing a marketable niche for an uncommon and, at the time,

peculiar crop: Martha Turnbull, "eggplant lady." Suzanne Turner's detailed use of contemporary horticultural sources to illuminate the character of these plants, as well as the involved gardening practices used by Mrs. Turnbull, has never been explicated so thoroughly before. In terms of sheer volume, diary versus editing notes, Turnbull compared to Turner, Turner's interpretation takes up more than sixty per cent of the book.

Suzanne Turner candidly states, "Clearly, the enslaved are the silent voices of this story, but this is not the story that Martha's diary primarily reveals." Turnbull was a hands-on gardener, performing many of the particularly skilled horticultural tasks herself, yet she had both able enslaved technicians grafting camellias and tying up roses, as well as access to a large supply of farm laborers who could be diverted from the cotton fields. The dynamics of this slave-plantation interaction are intriguing, and perhaps only the novelist can effectively portray how tasks were divvied up at Rosedown. When Martha wrote, "cleaned up my yard entirely by my own hands," was she raking the garden debris or were her slave "hands" doing it? Did Turnbull work alongside her laborers? Did she train them step by step to graft camellias? Was she constantly on site supervising work? What kind of manager was she? The more I discover about the past, the more I wonder about it.

Hats off to Suzanne Turner for unveiling a neglected part of our garden history: the skilled, technical aspects involved in caring for a nineteenth-century southern plantation garden. Her exhaustive investigation of contemporary horticultural works produced canny insights about the care, and passion, that Martha Turnbull invested in her Rosedown garden. A professional horticulturist for 38 years, this old dad learned a lot.

Review by Peter J. Hatch
Crozet, Virginia



Photo by Neil Odenwald

The original dove cote.



Photo by Neil Odenwald

South Garden Summer House.

Into our Fourth Decade

By Carleton B. Wood, SGHS Vice-President, LaGrange, Georgia

It's hard to believe that just last year the Southern Garden History Society turned thirty years old. When I realized that interesting fact I was surprised how young we are. I guess the combination of my own age and the fact that we are always writing, researching, and talking about historic things made me think we are much older. But here we are moving into our fourth decade, which is pretty amazing for a group of members spread throughout the Southern United States—from Texas to Maryland—and beyond. We all know how hard it is to maintain long distance relationships but it has been done for thirty years while averaging about 500 memberships, all with a love and passion for historic landscapes and gardens.

My first involvement with the society started in 1995 when I was working at Tryon Palace in New Bern, North Carolina. We were fortunate to host the 19th annual meeting in Eastern North Carolina in 2001. Since that time I've been an on-and-off participant until two years ago when I was invited to join the board. Thus far it's been lots of fun to be involved with so many amazing and talented people.

At our last two board meetings we discussed the importance of recognizing our founders who had the vision to create the society back in 1982. We also talked about acknowledging our early members and leaders who displayed a steadfast commitment to the newly formed society, particularly during the first ten years. Personally, my desire to recognize some of the early movers and shakers became even more pressing when Jim Cothran passed away this past January. It hit me that we sometimes take for granted people that forged ahead and cultivated the ground that we now tend. Thirty years is a milestone worth celebrating. This is also a great time to pause and thank those that came before us and let them know we admire and, most importantly, we appreciate what they accomplished.

Our 31st annual meeting will be held in the wonderful city of Lynchburg, Virginia, May 3-5,

2013. During the course of the meeting we plan to acknowledge some of the many people who played an instrumental role during the first decade of the society. While our recognitions will be simple they will reflect the admiration and appreciation of the entire board of directors and membership. At the same time we are making an effort to reach out to former members and friends with whom we may have lost touch. We plan to invite them to participate in the annual meeting and attend the annual dinner at Poplar Forest. Those that are not able to attend will be sent a special letter of recognition thanking them for their involvement and service to the Southern Garden History Society.

While we feel we have a solid list of the early leaders, we are open to your ideas for members or former members you think should be recognized for their contributions to the society. Please feel free to send your suggestions to Staci Catron at scatron@atlantahistorycenter.com or Carleton Wood at cwood@hillsanddales.org, or mail them to: Carleton Wood, Hills & Dales Estate, P.O. Box 790 LaGrange, GA 30241. We look forward to your input and to seeing you in Lynchburg.



Photo by Spencer Tunnel

The board of directors held a fall planning meeting graciously hosted by Staci Catron at the Atlanta History Center. A major portion of the meeting was spent developing a new strategic plan for the society. More details about this exciting planning effort will be forthcoming. Board members took time out from the meeting to tour the spectacular Swan House and Garden. Front row (L to R): Susan McLeod Epstein, Susan L. Hitchcock, Lee Bynum Schwall. 2nd Row: Gordon Chappell, Susan Haltom, Gail Griffin, Anne Legett. 3rd Row: Jane B. White, William C. Welch, Staci Catron. 4th Row: Carleton B. Wood, Mollie Ridout, J. Dean Norton, John Sykes. Not pictured: Greg Grant, Peter J. Hatch, Kenneth M. McFarland, Mary-Anne Pickens, Ben Page, and Peggy L. Cornett.



Southern Garden History Society

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Awards and Scholarships

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

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

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

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

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

Annual Membership Dues

The society's membership year is from **August 1—July 31**. The membership secretary will mail renewal notices in the summer for the 2010-2011 year. Membership categories:

Benefactor	\$500
Patron	\$250
Sustainer	\$100
Institution or Business	\$75
Joint	\$50
Individual	\$30
Student	\$15

For more membership information, contact:
Virginia Hart, Membership Coordinator
Post Office Box 15752
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27113
Phone (336) 770-6723

Email: membership@southerngardenhistory.org
Memberships can now be made electronically on our Web site!
www.southerngardenhistory.org

Deadline for submitting articles for the Winter issue of Magnolia is January 31, 2013.

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