



Magnolia

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

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Gardening with Mrs. Balfour: An Antebellum Vicksburg Gardener

By John Sykes, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

In May 1853 Emma Balfour wrote her sister-in-law: "I wish you could see my garden now. It is really beautiful. The roses are as fine as they can well be & I have such a variety of other flowers that the whole garden as one looks at it from the gallery above or from the street looks like a mass of flowers. It is so complimented that I begin to feel very proud."¹ Throughout the 1850s, Emma Harrison Balfour pursued her passion for gardening at her new home in Vicksburg, Mississippi. For her garden Emma Balfour conducted an extensive search for plants from friends, local nurseries and those available down river from New Orleans.

Born in Charles City County, Virginia in 1818, Emmaline Harrison (as she was christened) found herself a resident of Mississippi soon after her marriage in 1834 to Edward R. Warren.² The young couple (like so many other Virginians) was lured to the great Southwest by reports of financial rewards associated with the famed "flush times" of the cotton boom. Some twenty years earlier, the Reverend Newit Vick, a Methodist minister from Virginia (after a decade or so living in North Carolina), loaded his large extended family in a flatboat and headed down the Mississippi River. After entering Mississippi territory, Vick chose to settle his

clan on the Walnut Hills near the confluence of the Yazoo and the Mississippi Rivers.³ The commanding location was the site of an early Spanish fort.

Some two hundred feet above the high water mark of the river, the rolling hills presented an incredible vista across miles of flat delta land sweeping West and North. A 19th-century visitor commented on the unusual geography:

"There [is] only one way to account for the hills of Vicksburg — after the Lord of Creation had made all the big mountains and ranges of hills, He had left on His hands a large lot of scraps; these were all dumped at Vicksburg . . ."

⁴ The entrepreneurial Parson Vick envisioned a town on the hills and managed to sell a lot before dying of yellow fever in 1819. Despite Vick's descendants squabbling for decades over his property, Vicksburg developed rapidly after being chartered in 1825.⁵

A traveler on the Mississippi in 1836 observed the fever of the times:

Vicksburg is a busy place. The people here are run mad with speculation. They do business. . . in a kind of phrenzy[sic]. Money is scarce, but credit is plenty and he who has no money can do as much business as he who has. There is an enormous value set upon everything here. Every [thing] is sold as if they were precious relics — so extravagant is their cost. . . Butter [sells] at 75 c[en]ts. Eggs at \$1.50 a dozen and



Emma (Harrison) Warren Balfour, ca. 1848
1818-1887

photo courtesy Archives, Birmingham Public Library

Continued on page 3...

**Inside
this
Issue**

Page 2

Page 10

Page 13

Calendar

Setting for the Texas White House

Book Reviews



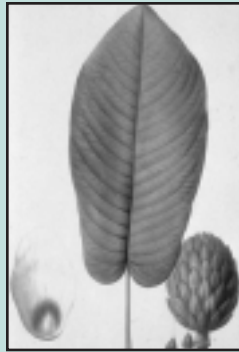
CALENDAR

March 2nd-July 14th, 2002.

"Pierre-Joseph Redouté: A Man Passionate About Flowers," an exhibition at the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, NC. Sponsors include the Davidson Horticultural Symposium. For information, call (704) 337-2000 or visit their Web site at: www.mintmuseum.org.

August 15th, 2002. "By the Book: The Influence of Printed Material on the Design of Early American Gardens." Historic Garden Symposium at Gunston Hall Plantation will explore what Americans extracted from British and Continental books on gardening and how the sources were adjusted to New World gardens. For information call: (703) 550-9920; visit the Web site at www.GunstonHall.org; e-mail: Historic@GunstonHall.org; or write to: 10709 Gunston Road, Mason Neck, VA 22079.

August 16th-17th, 2002. "North American Plants – Their Cultural History," the 3rd biennial Historic Plants Symposium, hosted by the Thomas Jefferson Center for



Magnolia macrophylla

Historic Plants at Monticello. Speakers include: Dr. Arthur Tucker, Denise Adams, Douglas T. Seidel, Mark Laird, Peter Hatch, Peggy Cornett, and Cole Burrell. For information, contact Peggy Cornett at (434) 984-9816; pcornett@monticello.org

October 25th-26th, 2002. "Oktober Gartenfest" at Winedale near Round Top, Texas. The University of Texas Center hosts this annual fall gardening program for American History Winedale Division in cooperation with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service of the Texas A & M University System. Other participants include the Herb Society of America, Pioneer Unit, the International Festival-Institute at Round Top, and the Pioneer Arts Foundation. For more information, contact SGHS members Bill Welch, (979) 690-9551; e-mail: wc-welch@tamu.edu; or Mary Anne Pickens, (979) 732-5058; e-mail: gravel@wcnet.net.

April 11th-13th, 2003. 21st annual meeting of the Southern Garden History Society in Atlanta, Georgia. The tentative theme is "Atlanta's Landscape Legacy." For information, contact Jim Cothran, (404) 577-4000; e-mail: j.cothran@robertco.com.

Remembering Zack Bynum and Bill Griffin

Two stalwart members of the Southern Garden History Society have left us. Zachary T. Bynum, Jr., (Zack) died suddenly in his home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on April 17th. William W. Griffin (Bill) died May 10th in his home in Atlanta, Georgia, after a lengthy illness.

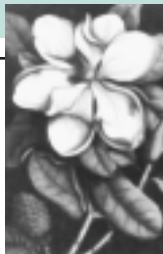
Both men were charter members and served the society long and well by being strong supporters of their wives' efforts. Florence Griffin was an original board member and the first secretary-treasurer. Bill was a constant support when she chaired the first annual meeting, held in Atlanta in April 1983. When Florence was society president in 1992-94, Bill rewrote the bylaws. Bill was always at Florence's side as they often graciously entertained society members in their home. By profession, Bill was a real-estate lawyer; by avocation, he was a strong preservationist and conservationist. Gail Griffin, Bill's daughter-in-law, now serves as an SGHS board member.

When Flora Ann Bynum, also an original board member, became society secretary-treasurer in 1984, Zack became unofficial treasurer. Flora Ann kept the checkbook and wrote the checks but Zack, by profession a tax accountant, did the annual and semi-annual financial statements for the board and prepared the annual income tax returns. In 1984 he prepared the papers with the Internal Revenue Service to secure tax-exempt status for the society. Whenever the SGHS board met in Winston-Salem, Zack was an enthusiastic host and provider of transportation, picking people up at the airport or at their hotels and getting them wherever they needed to go.

Both men were gentlemen in the true Southern tradition. Bill and Zack became good friends through society meetings. As both were enthusiastic, knowledgeable birders, they were often found bird watching while their wives toured gardens. Perhaps today they are discussing the birds of heaven.

Gardening with Mrs. Balfour

continued from page 1



cabbage at 50 c[en]ts a head.

There will be a tremendous failure here some day, and that not far hence. And Vicksburg, I am told is the State [of Mississippi] in Miniature. It will be a fine field for Lawyers in two or three years.⁶

Two significant 19th-century inventions helped spur Vicksburg's rapid growth: the cotton gin and the steam engine. Eli Whitney's revolutionary device single-handedly changed the antebellum agriculture of the South. The rich fertile lands of the Yazoo river delta above Vicksburg and the delta lands across the river in Louisiana quickly became a leading antebellum producer of the "golden fleece" of cotton. Vicksburg's location made it the chief commercial port for the region's cotton crops. The steam engine suddenly gave river boats the power to travel up-river on the Mississippi which diverted traffic from old overland routes like the Natchez Trace. Vicksburg commercial interests grew rapidly. Steam also powered rail locomotives that were just beginning to appear in the southern landscape. Vicksburg's boom was not always appreciated by others. Emma Harrison knew the attitude of Natchez people well: "We think that we are not properly appreciated by them, from what they remember of this place as it *was*, and we are determined they shall have a high appreciation of it as it *is* [now]. And then for the Natchez people it is mortifying & so hard to believe (in the face of statistics) that Vicksburg is a place of much more importance than theirs, but so it is and the fact makes them the more jealous of us."⁷

The "Vicksburgians" took the lead in promoting rail road construction and the town was linked to the east by the Southern Railroad and to the west by the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Texas Railroad. By the late 1850s *DeBow's Review* gave a glowing account of Vicksburg's promising future:

Its position must make it a point of the highest importance in railway travel and freightage, to and fro, between the Southern Atlantic cities, Texas and California. San Diego on the Pacific, El Paso in the western part of New Mexico, Marshall in Texas, Shreveport in Louisiana, Vicksburg in Mississippi, Montgomery in Alabama, and Savannah in Georgia are all nearly on the same parallel between the thirty-second and thirty-third degrees of north latitude, thus presenting the most direct and economical line of railway, that can possibly be built between the Atlantic and Pacific seaports. This route would reduce the railroad time between New York and San Diego to six days, at twenty miles an hour! Just think!⁸

Despite the region's growth and Vicksburg's boom, the move to Mississippi did not always guarantee immediate success (or happiness) for its immigrants. Emma's first child, a two-year-old daughter, died suddenly and soon after her husband, Edward Warren age 39, succumbed to yellow fever and the young widow was left without family in Mississippi.⁹ Placing her Vicksburg property in the hands of a family friend, William T. Balfour, a young doctor from Virginia, Emma and her maid, a slave named Margaret Ann moved to Alabama. A year earlier in 1843 her brother, Dr. Thomas A. Harrison relocated to Marengo County with his wife, Louisa Collins of Edenton, North Carolina. Dr. Harrison established a cotton plantation in the canebrake region called "Faunsdale." While living at her brother's home, Emma and her sister-in-law, Louisa developed a close and life-long friendship. The friendship gave Emma a sister she never had, and Emma became devoted to her niece Louise, the Harrison's only child. Emma and her sister-in-law Louisa

shared similar interests, both were extremely devout to the Episcopal Church, and both shared a passion for gardening. Louisa Collins Harrison was beginning to lay out an extensive improvement plan for gardens around her own home.

After a suitable period of mourning, twenty-nine-year-old Emma Harrison Warren began to attract the notice of a number of suitors. Although she never considered herself "handsome," Emma's pleasant and genial personality made her enjoyable company. Her formal education was short-lived when she married at age 16, but a life-long love of reading kept her mind active and inquisitive. A great reader of popular novels, Emma loved *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*, but thought *Wuthering Heights* entirely "unsuitable" for genteel readers.¹⁰ Her own religious convictions were very pronounced. A strict observer of Lent, Emma would have never thought of attending a party or social gathering during the penitential church season and was horrified when the local Roman Catholic priest allowed an orchestral concert of secular music to be held *inside the chancel* of his church.¹¹ Emma was often annoyed by local prejudice towards Episcopalians: "One lady . . . [said] that she could not see the least difference between us and the Romanists for we all fasted and she believed if Bishop Otey was to put up a cross, we would all fall down & worship it."¹²

During a return visit to Vicksburg in March 1847, Emma conferred with Dr. Balfour about her property, and found the Doctor was more concerned about Emma herself. Although initially taken aback by Balfour's proposal and rejecting the good Doctor's offer, Emma later relented.¹³ William T. Balfour, in his brief time in Vicksburg, had become a well-known and popular physician. Besides being from a fine Norfolk, Virginia family, Balfour was a fellow medical school classmate of Emma's brother at the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁴ Emma married Dr. Balfour at Faunsdale on December 1, 1847 and she returned to Vicksburg.¹⁵ During her second period of life in Vicksburg, Emma Balfour began an extensive correspondence with her "dear Sister" Louisa at Faunsdale and their chief topic of conversation in their letters was *gardening*.

The Balfours settled themselves in a local hotel and began to search for a comfortable home. Even in her hotel room, Emma couldn't do without flowers, telling Louisa in February 1848:

I have two azaleas sitting in my window in bloom and their brightness has done a great deal to reconcile me to my close confinement. One is red and the other white. The red is the *Ignescens*, it is so like the *Watsonia* that I selected it as such and I can see not a shade of difference between them unless the *Watsonia* has larger flowers . . . The white one is filled with half blown buds and is beautiful. My little violets too seem trying to do their best in a little cigar box. I get sometimes as many as six or seven in a morning, always two or three. My camellias — although they look well, the buds are not burst. I am getting impatient with them and think I shall try a change of soil as well as a change of climate for them. The only account for their state of indifference is — that they are too aristocratic plants to thrive well in a hotel, and though I [still] think they might pay me the compliment to make an exception in favor of my room. I am determined to take them out of this atmosphere as soon as possible.¹⁶

Continued on page 4...

Gardening with Mrs. Balfour

continued from page 3



Emma did not have long to wait to move, her husband William quickly made an offer on a very desirable brick house on the corner of Crawford and Cherry Streets. Despite Dr. Balfour considering the house “one of the largest and best finished houses in the State,” his wife had more than just gardening plans in her head. He observed: “Tonight as we were sitting around the lamp, I saw Emma very busily drawing something on a piece of paper. I looked over & asked what she was doing. She very naively remarked that she was adding two more rooms & a green house to our home — [then] it would be perfect.”¹⁷ Because of difficulties in securing a clear title to the property, Emma’s remodeling plans were postponed for several years. However, her garden could not wait and she began in earnest after the couple moved to the house in March 1848.¹⁸

The house occupied a one-acre lot several feet above the level of the street and enclosed by a brick retaining wall on the North and West and in the rear of the lot — the South side, a picket fence.¹⁹ The builder positioned the house close to the northern edge of the lot on Crawford Street, which allowed a large rear south-facing garden area. In the side yard was a kitchen building with living quarters for the cook, a two-room servant’s quarters, and at the rear of the lot, a stable and carriage house.²⁰ The house and lot had not been occupied for several years and there was much work that needed to be done. Writing Louisa, Emma reported: “. . . the whole front [of the house] was nearly covered with ivy, but it could not be painted without pulling it down as it ran on windows, portico, and up to the roof and the carpenters and indeed everyone told us it ought to come down as it was injuring the house, so reluctantly as you may imagine I saw it pulled down . . .”²¹

When Emma had the chance to examine the garden closely, she was shocked to discover that “bitter coco” grass had infiltrated the back garden. Almost ready to give up entirely, Emma wrote that “. . . we have learned [since] that it is on one half the lots in town and the ravine back of town . . . is filled with it. Persons as they brought it out of their gardens have thrown it there and it has been washed from there, till it has spread very much.”²² Fortunately, the front yard was still free of coco. A good stand of Bermuda grass had stopped its advance. Her husband William suggested having the entire back lot graded deeply to eradicate the pesky weed. It is not known if Emma followed her husband’s advice. Coco, or nut grass, was a growing problem in antebellum Louisiana and Mississippi. Natchez nurseryman Thomas Affleck in a November 1843 letter to *The Cultivator* referred to two varieties of nut grass: the sweet and bitter coco. Although difficult, Affleck wrote that the sweet coco could be eradicated with persistent effort. However he considered sweet coco “a mere trifle to its cousin the *Bitter Coco*. . .” and knew of “no means of destroying or checking it.” Affleck reported that the bitter coco was “ruining some of the finest lands on the Mississippi and spreading rapidly through the interior.”²³ Another *Cultivator* reader, Mr. Tillotson from New River, Louisiana recommended digging it up and burning it, but offered an additional, rather impractical solution: “Bagasse, so called, after the juice is expressed from the sugar cane, placed, say two feet thick [on the coco grass], we believe will destroy it . . .”²⁴

Coco grass proved to be a continual menace for Emma. In February 1851 Emma wrote: “William commenced cementing the walks . . . which is the only way to get rid of the cocoa in

them. In the beds I can manage it very well. They cement them in New Orleans and they look exactly like rock.”²⁵ So petrified of the weed, Emma often kept plants from friends for a long time in pots in an effort to quarantine them.²⁶ Her crop of bulbs (which she intended dividing with Louisa) were so split by coco roots to make them not worth shipping.²⁷ Emma often reminded Louisa how lucky she was to be free of coco grass in the Alabama canebrake. But, Louisa fought her own battles at Faunsdale with



The Balfour house - July 1863

source: Library of Congress

wire grass.”²⁸

Although severely neglected, the old garden managed to have a few pleasant surprises for Emma. There were a number of fruit trees on the lot: peaches, apples, quinces, figs, and what Emma considered “quite a treasure — very fine pears.”²⁹ There were five or six “very large flowering Pomegranate from fifteen to twenty feet high, two osage orange trees,” one of which was “quite a large tree.”³⁰ In the front yard Emma was pleasantly surprised: “I find much to my joy that I have here a very large white Banksia [rose]. How I happened to overlook it is a mystery for it is in a very conspicuous place — just before one of the dining room windows, but it had been very much trimmed to be out of the way of the painters.”³¹ There were other roses that appeared that first spring: “all sorts of common roses, Cherokee, Duchess of Dino, Cluster, Perpetual Pink and white, [and] one or two sweet roses.”³² Her initial plans for the lot included a hedge of cape jessamines (*Gardenia jasminoides*) on three sides and on one side (by Cherry Street) *Lauria mundi* [Editor’s note: identity unknown] trees planted along the cape jessamine hedge every twenty or thirty feet. *Lauria mundi* grew rapidly and she found them especially beautiful.³³ The rear of the lot sloped down toward the back street and Emma considered that a hedge of pyracantha afforded “better protection” along the fence line.³⁴

Neighbors and friends quickly came to Emma’s aid for plants for her garden. Mrs. Mason, another Virginia transplant to Vicksburg, sent over several “very fine carnation plants” raised from seeds sent from Washington, D.C.³⁵ Mrs. Matilda Railey of Natchez gave Emma a beautiful bouquet of flowers from her home Oakland. Emma carefully nursed a jessamine cutting from the bouquet for her garden.³⁶ In March 1850 Emma was thrilled with a gift of “a dozen young Lauria Mundi trees from two to

continued on page 5...

Gardening with Mrs. Balfour continued from page 4



three feet high” which she planted along the division fence between the garden and the stable lot.³⁷ Emma’s next door neighbor Mrs. Willis gave her cape jessamine bushes, caper seeds, and seed from her Catalpa tree to send to Louisa. Emma and Mrs. Willis became great friends through their mutual love of gardening: “In walking around . . . [her] garden, we noticed a very singular honeysuckle which she did not remember . . . [having] put there & on examination, we found it a scion. . . from the common coral honeysuckle [*Lonicera sempervirens*]. It is a genuine orange color and really beautiful. [Mrs. Willis] . . . has tied a cord to it so that we may know it in the fall to get cuttings from.”³⁸

Frequent boxes from Louisa at Faunsdale contained numerous things for Emma’s garden. In January 1849 Emma wrote Louisa: “My flowers arrived safely for which thanks. The *Russelia* looks as if it might be something very pretty . . . The white violets I look upon a quite a treasure. . . . I think I have now the genuine double white violet. Many years ago I gave this violet to a poor woman here who had a great love of flowers without the means to gratify it and now I get it again through

friends and neighbors. There also were numerous professional gardeners in Vicksburg. Emma’s neighbors the Colemans employed a full-time Irishman to manage their garden. Twenty gardeners, 3 horti-culturists, and 3 florists worked in the city in 1850. Reflecting the rather cosmopolitan make-up of Vicksburg’s population, these garden professionals were born in Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Maine and from as far away as Germany, Switzerland, England, Scotland, and Ireland. Like every smart gardener, Emma quickly developed good working relationships with the leading nurserymen in town. John Lambert, an Englishman, ran an extensive nursery in the suburbs of Vicksburg.⁴² Concentrating originally on roses and fruit trees, Lambert later expanded to all sorts of flowers.⁴³ In 1853 he joined with a partner to import and cultivate evergreens and “all kinds of shrubs that will grow out.” Lambert gave up the cultivation of greenhouse plants and roses altogether, telling Emma they just didn’t pay for the effort required. At Lambert’s Emma was enchanted with the new varieties of evergreens that she had never seen before: “One new one is the ‘weeping arborvitae’ — the most curious and beautiful thing. Another is the ‘cryptomaria Japonica.’ [*Cryptomeria japonica*] This also is pendulous and seems to belong to the yew or fir species. It has flowers and berries and is one of the very prettiest things I ever saw. I have reserved places for both and enjoyed them.”⁴⁴ But several months later, Emma reported Lambert’s death to Louisa: “William attended him and before he died he told him that all of the choice and rare evergreens which he had brought on for the purpose of raising from, he would like me to take if I wished them, that he would rather I should have them than anyone else.” After being requested by Lambert’s widow to make her choice, Emma wrote of her selections: “. . . the broad leaved, or weeping pine. It is as straight and stately as an eastern palm. Then there is the Deodor cedar pendulous, . . . the funereal cypress, the Balsam fir, the Norway Spruce, the Irish Yew (much prettier than the English), the bearing Olive and many other things and these are all of good size and in addition to these, seventeen of the finest varieties of azaleas.”⁴⁵

Emma enjoyed nothing more than an early evening’s ramble through Hatch’s Nursery and greenhouse. Following the death of her husband, Mary C. Hatch (with the aid of her son and a professional gardener from Ireland) continued the family flower nursery business.⁴⁶ The Hatches published an annual catalog, which Emma used as a reference guide and a wish list for her purchases for herself and Louisa. At Hatch’s Nursery, Emma could choose from a wide variety of azaleas: “crimson, white, variegated, purple” and an large assortment of roses. Emma purchased “a very fine Parie Joseph & Resirs, each two dollars” because they were quite large specimens. Emma found the Rhododendrons “exquisitely beautiful.” In the greenhouse, Emma noticed two striking “new plants:” *Abutilon striatum* (*A. pictum*) and the *Aritasea crenulatura* [Editor’s note: identity unknown]. Writing Louisa of her discoveries: “this you will see in the Catalogue. It has a flower like the Hoya and beautiful clusters of red berries like cherries. I got some of the berries & . . . [the gardener] told me how to manage them. The other plant he told me where to get in New Orleans . . . They are both greenhouse plants & I doubt whether it is not a waste of time & money to get them, but nevertheless it is irresistible.”⁴⁷



Emma’s garden, ca. July 1863 (Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson and staff)
source: Kean Archive

her.”³⁹ When Louisa mentioned an upcoming trip to eastern North Carolina, Emma begged her to bring back some cowslips for her.⁴⁰ The exchange of botanical gifts was never one-sided, with Emma frequently sending cuttings and seeds especially for Louisa’s garden at Faunsdale. Sticking cuttings in potatoes for added moisture, Emma let no opportunity go by and sent plants by any Vicksburg friend going to Alabama. When collecting seeds of her poppies, geraniums, and her prized scarlet sage, Emma despatched generous quantities to Faunsdale. Louisa often was able to share Emma’s offerings with her own sister-in-law, Mary (Riggs) Collins of Somerset Place in Washington County, North Carolina. [see “An Unlikely Plantation Mistress: Mary Riggs Collins and the Gardens at Somerset Place,” J. Sykes, *Magnolia*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, Summer 2001.] In January 1853, Mary Collins wrote Louisa after being thrilled with Emma’s scarlet sage seed: “Please present my kindest thanks to Mrs. Balfour . . .”⁴¹

Emma’s love of gardening was shared by many of her

continued on page 6...

Gardening with Mrs. Balfour continued from page 5



Occasional trips to New Orleans in the 1850s meant the same things to Emma as they do today: fine food, a chance to observe (and purchase) the latest fashions, and excitement of the Crescent City's French opera house and special concerts. Although exciting, trips to New Orleans left Emma feeling afterwards "positively stupid" lacking any energy even for gardening.⁴⁸ However lingering the effects of a New Orleans trip might be, Emma, while in the city, always took good opportunities to purchase more plants for her garden. In March 1850 she wrote Louisa: "I got some beautiful flowers in New Orleans. Amongst other things some acacias — the acacia bestialia, Houstonia, and Farnesiana. If they prove to be what I bought them for, I must try and root one of each for you."⁴⁹ Knowing just how to please his gardening wife, William Balfour during one visit, chanced upon an auction. Emma was thrilled telling Louisa of William's purchase of "three boxes of bulbs from the gardens of (some hard Dutch name) near Haarlem in Holland. Hyacinths, tulips, crocuses, Narcissi, &c., and such bulbs I never saw before."⁵⁰

The bulbs proved to be a good purchase and a month later, Emma was raving:

... oh my hyacinths, my hyacinths!! They are worth a trip across country here [just] to look at them. Only the single ones are blooming yet; but I think they are the prettiest — such bells as they have! I counted the petals on some of them and found eight and these broad — now this is the single hyacinth which the Dutch esteem above the double and no wonder.

Every day since I have been at home, some persons have come in just to see them tempted — by the glimpse they can get through the palings.⁵¹

The tulips were equally fine and Emma found her "... 'bon sholl' tulips ... seem to do better here than the ordinary kind. They have very short stems, and all are double — some as double as the old 'butter-and-eggs' in the old gardens at home."⁵²

In 1858 there were fourteen different "seedsman and florists" working in the Crescent City.⁵³ Emma quickly learned, however, that she could find much better prices if she took the train from downtown to the fashionable suburb Carrollton. Emma raved: "The flowers at Carrollton are cheap to excess, compared with those in town."⁵⁴ Among her most prized Carrollton purchases were "two [double crimson] oleanders more than ten feet high and large accordingly for one dollar each."⁵⁵ While shopping for flowers, Emma made a point of visiting Boligny pottery (also in Carrollton) to get ornamental vases made for her garden.⁵⁶

After five years of improvements to her garden, Emma wrote Louisa in February 1853 about her more productive plants: "While collecting flowers I have not neglected fruits and in the course of two years, with good luck, I shall have every variety of fruit that is worth cultivating. That is as far as my space goes, and as I cannot have every variety of its kind, I have selected the finest of each."⁵⁷ Emma saved seed from her favorites and gathered cuttings to cultivate. After much trial and error, she garnered good crops of strawberries and raspberries. There also were "peaches of the choicest varieties," nectarines, figs, apricots and plums. She also looked forward to her first crop of scuppernong grapes among the six different "fine" varieties she had on the lot.⁵⁸

By the 1850s, the cultivation of fruit was almost a mania in Vicksburg. Other than Thomas Affleck's Natchez orchard, the largest antebellum commercial orchards in Mississippi were in the Vicksburg area. John Lambert's orchards, Colonel John Hebron's La Grange Nursery outside of town, and Dr. M. W. Philips of nearby Hinds County produced large quantities of fruit for export.⁵⁹ New Orleans restaurants were quick to tell customers that their fine fruit was from Vicksburg and Vicksburg fruit found its way to Louisville, Kentucky and other up-river towns.⁶⁰ None of the commercial orchards were overnight successes, but were the result of a long process of acclimatizing northern varieties on native southern stocks. A gentleman planter Dr. Philips, originally from Columbia, South Carolina, learned a great deal from his father's experiences there and the work of two early prominent South Carolina horticulturists, N. Herbmont and J. S. Guignard.⁶¹ Dr. Philips frequently championed the development of southern horticulture as editor of the *Southwestern Farmer* and in contributions to national agricultural publications.⁶² Sharing Dr. Philips's enthusiasm, Emma observed to Louisa in August 1853:

I have made up my mind that it is perfect nonsense for a sensible person ever to give up a thing because he is told by others that 'every person has tried it, it is perfectly useless, it will not succeed.' When I first came here, the universal cry was that pears would not do here, nor apples. Well, I only wish you could see a waiter of pears now on my table! And these are not remarkable, though each one would weigh more than half a pound and is as yellow, juicy and luscious, as possible! And one apple lying there the New York pippin is five inches in diameter! I am satisfied now that all fruits will do well here, if you consider the situation to suit it best. There are pears now at all of the gardens here from the 'Petit Muscat' ripening in May to the latest winter pears and every variety of apple, and this year, one gardener succeeded well with the cherry.⁶³

Emma frequently consulted popular gardening works for information and advice. She owned several books by the famed Philadelphia nurseryman Robert Buist. In 1848 Emma purchased Buist's *The Family Kitchen Gardener* "to see his mode of treating fruit trees." She thought the book extremely useful and found Buist's recommendations for raspberry cultivation "very simple" and the best if you wanted to succeed with a good crop.⁶⁴ Incredibly fond of roses, Emma frequently consulted Buist's *The Rose Manual* for information on important roses to add to her garden. When a New Orleans friend offered her the 'Souvenir de Malmaison' and 'Le Moire,' Emma immediately consulted Buist's descriptions. One evening while at Hatch's nursery, she became entranced by the *Myrtus Tomenrosa*, telling Louisa: "Buist speaks of it as the prettiest of all the myrtles" although the "flowers are really beautiful and very abundant ... the foliage I do not think as pretty as some of the others."⁶⁵ Occasionally Buist failed Emma in identifying botanical gifts from friends. Dr. Culbertson, a planter from the Louisiana side of the river, sent Emma "the Madame L'affay Rose & some shrub called the 'gay deceiver' (he did not know the botanical name) and the 'Polonus Imperialis'" (*Paulonia tomentosa*, princess tree), which she added, "I can't find it in Buist" and hoped Louisa might find it in some of her own garden books at Faunsdale.⁶⁶

continued on page 7...

Gardening with Mrs. Balfour continued from page 6



For Christmas 1856 William Balfour surprised his wife with a gift of Loudon's *Encyclopaedia of Plants*. John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843), the Scottish Landscape gardener, produced a large quantity of published reference works, of which his eight volume *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum; or The Trees and Shrubs of Britain* (1838) was perhaps his greatest work as an editor and compiler.⁶⁷ In 1829 Loudon published *An Encyclopaedia of Plants*, which described itself in its lengthy subtitle as "comprising the description, specific character, culture, history . . . respecting all the plants indigenous, cultivated in, or introduced to Britain . . ." After Loudon's death, his wife Jane Webb Loudon continued to edit subsequent numerous editions of her husband's work. Mrs. Loudon was herself a prolific writer whose gardening works specifically aimed to encourage "lady gardeners." Andrew Jackson Downing edited in 1843 the first American edition of Jane Loudon's *Gardening for Ladies* and *Companion to the Flower Garden*.⁶⁸ Emma was thrilled with William's present of Loudon's *Encyclopaedia*. A book she long wanted and, as she told Louisa, one "which can rarely be procured in this country. Gardener's generally have it. It has twelve thousand illustrations of plants and when I see a flower that I do not know I have only to consult Loudon and there it is." During a trip to the Mississippi sea shore, Emma returned from Pass Christian with water lilies. Using Loudon, she identified her water lilies as "the real nympleu or nyad of the streams." She had great hopes for them, telling Louisa: "I put them in my fish pond with many doubts whether they would grow in standing water on a cemented bottom, but they are doing beautifully so far — and are above the water already, and looking quite at home. If they will only bloom, I shall prize them above everything in my garden."⁶⁹

Besides identification troubles in her garden, Emma Balfour frequently found her gardening efforts interrupted by domestic duties, house guests and thwarted by nature. There was a full compliment of slaves on the lot for domestic work. Her coachman Dick did double-duty as butler and gardener.⁷⁰ Following Emma's example, her maid (and chief housekeeper) Margaret Ann became engaged. Having encouraged the match, Emma gave the bride a "very pretty Swiss muslin dress" for the wedding and told Louisa: "There is to be a wreath of white flowers on her head & a white satin sash. This I believe completes her costume unless she has a white fan."⁷¹ The regular visits of the Episcopal Bishop of Mississippi to Vicksburg always meant that Bishop Green and his wife could be found as guests of the Balfours. There also were more permanent additions to the Balfour household. Miserably pregnant in May 1848 and under orders of bed rest, Emma found it very difficult to "sit so resignedly and see every [thing in the garden] around me in such

a state of *uncultivation* and were it not that I see it all very differently in the far distance, I should be in despair."⁷² In September the Balfours celebrated the birth of the couple's first child, a healthy daughter named Louise Harrison (after their favorite sister-in-law Louisa). Little Louise Balfour was followed by four additions: brother Willie in 1851, and sisters: Alice in 1853, little Emma in 1855, and Annie in 1860.⁷³

Emma often found her garden was enjoyed by the animal residents of the lot. The southern end of the garden was the stable lot — home to the carriage horses, a cow and a calf, and chickens. Emma frequently used "stable mixture" in combination with vegetable manure for her garden.⁷⁴

Despite the barriers of a fence and a pyracantha hedge, Emma soon learned that the animals seldom respected her fence line. When Louisa's mimosa bloomed at Faunsdale, Emma mourned her own: "Mine is gone I am afraid for supposing it would never come up, I paid no attention to it & I think it likely some chicken has swallowed it. If not it is still in the bed & may surprise me some of these days, as yours did."⁷⁵ In October 1848 Emma promised Louisa her one Spanish lily: "Don't you think me very generous to send you the only one I have? For I have no place to put it & it has met with so many accidents that I am afraid I shall lose it & I would rather one of us should have it. Once the horse tread on it, once the calf bit it down, and then the cow walked on it and the chickens scratched it up, & in short, it seems to be a doomed flower, for my pink lily beside it has never been injured." Emma's sole consolation about occasionally sharing her flower garden with the chickens was that they were soon destined for the gumbo pot.⁷⁶

The weather also conspired against her garden. During the long drought of 1850, Emma bemoaned: "My poor flowers! I have watered & watered till everybody on the place *blesse*s the flowers. I suppose . . . I shall lose many things. Not only the dry weather, but the dust which is awful, stops the pores & is worse I believe than the drought."⁷⁷ The drought was repeated the next year and Emma wrote Louisa: "I have given up going in the garden almost entirely, it distresses me to see a state of things which I cannot remedy, even by watering. Water seems to do very little good, the pores are so choked up by dust and the leaves so dry that they scarcely seem to drink in any of the moisture."⁷⁸ When Emma wrote again in October 1850 rain was still scarce: "I am making all preparations to go to work in the garden again as soon as we have a good rain & for the first time in my life, I believe I am impatient for winter weather to commence to set the ground and kill the grass. Nearly all my violets on the south side are killed by the dry summer, while those on the north look well, at least the double white ones do, and I am inclined to think that they stand the summer better than others."⁷⁹



Emmaline (Harrison) Warren Balfour
1818-1887
copied 8 Oct. 1993 from the original miniature
(ca. 1858-9) owned by the descendants of Dr. Thos. A. Harrison.
source: Private Collection

continued on page 8...

Gardening with Mrs. Balfour continued from page 7



But by the summer of 1853, Emma could rejoice that “the greatest comfort I have is my bath room.”⁸⁰ Having successfully secured the title to their property, the Balfours began several major renovations. Because they had already built a greenhouse at the end of her garden lot, Emma abandoned her earlier idea of an attached conservatory. The two-story rear gallery (overlooking the garden) was extended the length of the house, a back rear stair added for the servants, and the wonder of wonders: a bath room. “I do so enjoy this luxury! We have water more than we can use.” An outside connection with a hundred feet of hose gave the Balfours “great security against fire,” but Emma decided she needed “a little engine for watering flowers, for to water from this hose of ours wastes too much water and moreover, waters the walks as well as the flowers . . .” (She had seen a similar water engine being used at Hatch’s Nursery.)⁸¹ As thrilled as Emma was with the new improvements, they were not entirely revolutionary among the wealthy in Mississippi and there were much more elaborate uses of water in gardening. When she visited old Vicksburg friends in Jackson, Emma was amazed at the elaborately well-landscaped grounds. The Yergers’s not only had running water and several bathrooms in their new house, but also a separate cistern produced a “pretty little” *jet d’eau* in their artificial lake.⁸²

Emma left good descriptions of her plants, but no detailed plan of her garden survives, possibly because most of her plans remained in her head. She wrote Louisa: “How I wish for you sometimes to help me! You know what it is to plan and alter and plan again, until you can not tell whether it is pretty or not.”⁸³ A surviving picture of her garden shows lush plantings, and a shade arbor, which seems to be enjoyed by occupying Federal troops. During the infamous siege of Vicksburg, Emma kept an almost daily diary of the horrors. On May 25, 1863 during a lull in Federal bombing, Emma wrote:

In the midst of all this carnage and commotion, it is touching to see how every work of God, save man, gives praise to Him. The birds are singing as merrily as if all were well, rearing their little ones, teaching them to fly and fulfilling their part in nature’s program as quietly and happily as if this fearful work of man slaying his brother man was not in progress. . . . The flowers are in perfection, the air heavy with the perfume of cape jessamine and honeysuckle, and the garden gay and bright with all the summer flowers. The fruit is coming to perfection, the apricots more abundant & more beautiful than I ever saw them. Nature is all fair and lovely — ‘all save the spirit of man seems divine.’⁸⁴

Unwilling for his family to stay in occupied Vicksburg, Dr. Balfour escorted Emma and the children through enemy lines to Alabama. Since Louisa’s house at Faunsdale was already crowded with her own family from occupied Eastern North Carolina, the Balfours rented a house near Demopolis for the duration of the Civil War.⁸⁵ The dedicated Dr. Balfour could not leave his patients and returned to Vicksburg after settling Emma and the children in their temporary home. Although she could rely on Louisa’s help (and rare, brief visits from Dr. Balfour), Emma found herself responsible for everything imaginable to run a household: feeding and clothing her children and servants were her principal concerns.

After the Civil War, the family was reunited in Vicksburg. Although there are no post-war letters surviving from Emma, undoubtedly there was more work for her in the garden. She evidently still claimed some gardening successes, winning in

1869 the first place prize at the Warren County Fair for her “Blackberry wine.”⁸⁶ Despite the death of Emma’s brother Tom and Louisa’s subsequent remarriage, the two remained extremely close. When her beloved niece Louise died in North Carolina in 1872, Emma was the first to arrive at Faunsdale to help Louisa prepare for the funeral.⁸⁷ Louisa received invitations to the Balfour girls’ weddings and, in later years, Emma enthusiastically shared photographs of her little grandchildren. The death of her husband William in December 1877 received much notice by Vicksburg residents, and Emma was not alone in her grief. Having spent a lifetime of dedicated public service, Dr. Balfour’s death was described by a newspaper editor as having “created a void that can never be filled,” and among the crowd that thronged the church and gravesite were “every member of society . . . rich, poor, white, black.”⁸⁸

Hoping to improve her own health by a change in climate, Emma spent the winter of 1887 in the North Carolina mountains. She died in Asheville on February 25th of pneumonia at age 68.⁸⁹ Her remains were returned to Vicksburg and buried in the family plot at City Cemetery by the side of Dr. Balfour. Emma’s tombstone of a marble cross appropriately has carved roses and ivy clinging to it. In her will Emma carefully divided her favorite possessions: family portraits, silver, and furniture among her children. She also left a special bequest to her former slave, Margaret Ann.⁹⁰

The Balfour heirs divided the large garden lot into three smaller lots, and by 1890 had disposed of the entire property.⁹¹ The outbuildings slowly disappeared and even Emma’s greenhouse fell victim to neglect and was removed. The Balfour house on its much smaller lot had a number of subsequent uses: the B’nai Brith Literary Club, a convent for the Sisters of Mercy, and eventually divided into four apartments.⁹² In 1982 the house was meticulously restored to the period of the Balfour occupancy and is now a bed and breakfast inn, available for tours and special events. The garden property was never returned to the house lot and very little remains of the garden that Emma Balfour lavished so much attention upon during the 1850s. Her surviving letters, however, give a wonderful view of a dedicated and knowledgeable Mississippi gardener in antebellum Vicksburg.

*Tombstone of Emma Balfour
City Cemetery, Vicksburg, MS
photo by John Sykes, Baton Rouge,
Louisiana*



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continued on page 9...

End Notes

continued from page 8



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27. EHWB to LMCH, June 6, 1850, FPP.
28. EHWB to LMCH, January 13, 1847, FPP.
29. EHWB to LMCH, April 3, 1848, FPP.
30. EHWB to LMCH, April 16, 1848, FPP.
31. EHWB to LMCH, March 19, 1848, FPP.
32. EHWB to LMCH, April 16, 1848, FPP.
33. EHWB to LMCH, January 13, 1847, FPP.
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Setting for the Texas White House

By William C. Welch, College Station, Texas



In early August 2001, I received a call from Washington, DC with a request to meet with President and Mrs. George W. Bush at Prairie Chapel Ranch, their new home in Central Texas near the rural community of Crawford, to assist them in identifying the native plants on their property. Months earlier I had met with Texas State Representative Dianne White Delisi, who also is a Bell County Master Gardener, to discuss the ranch and the Bushes' interest in exploring its potential for gardening and possible restoration of parts of its 1,600 acres into native prairie grasses for conservation and wildlife habitat purposes. A co-worker, Dr. Doug Welsh, Texas Master Gardener Coordinator, was asked to join me so we began planning our trip.

We departed our offices at Texas A&M University for Crawford, bringing along a dozen or so specimens of native Texas perennials, shrubs, and trees we thought might be an appropriate addition to the property. The land in the area is basically prairie with occasional rocky creeks and stands of live oak, cedar elms, mesquite, and other native species. Most of the land is devoted to improved pasture grasses and cattle production.

Prairie Chapel Ranch is part of the six and three-quarter-million-acre Grand Prairie soil region of Texas and is similar to the nearby area known as the Blackland Prairie. The grasslands of both are generally composed of dark colored, clay-based, alkaline soils of varying depths over limestone. Little bluestem grass, along with big bluestem, Indian grass, switchgrass, and sideoats grama (the State Grass of Texas) were dominant vegetation on the prairies before these areas were settled and overgrazing and fire suppression changed the balance of plant species. Seasonal wildflowers were common, including bluebonnet, Indian paintbrush, verbena, coreopsis, and sunflowers. Brush species in the grasslands were uncommon, and trees and larger shrubs were usually located along creeks, rivers, and bottomlands. The higher points of the ranch have forested uplands and rocky areas interspersed with ravines and outcroppings of limestone, marl, and shale.

Creeksides and bottomlands often have rich alluvial soils capable of supporting pecan, black walnut, bur oak, American elm, and sycamore trees. The nature of vegetation growing in the Blackland bottomlands is no longer completely native, but now has naturalized alien species such as chinaberry, mesquite, and tallow trees. Early McLennan County land surveys made before 1840 mention only occasional, scattered, large mesquite trees.

The woods on the escarpments where the rocky ravines stretch down to the creeks and river areas

still have 15-30' high growths of eastern red cedar, Ashe juniper with Mexican buckeye, Texas buckeye, prickly ash, green ash, and persimmon. Because of fire suppression, even the rough areas of the Grand Prairie region, which were usually only grazed, have changed in nature. Instead of the typical trees from the local creeks and bottomlands taking over, vegetation usually associated with the Edwards Plateau such as Texas ash, live oak, Ashe Juniper, and Texas red bud has moved in. Prairie Chapel Ranch is in an area of Central Texas that has interesting differences in geology and vegetation.

We arrived at 11:00 a.m., August 24th and were warmly greeted by Mrs. Bush. She, Dr. Condoleeza Rice and a couple visiting from New York had been jogging earlier in the morning and Mrs. Bush had emerged casually dressed and ready to talk about gardening and to show us their new home. Dianne Delisi joined us and we toured the home and plantings immediately around it. All the rooms of the house had beautiful views of the surrounding landscape and the house had been carefully sited to retain some large live oaks, cedar elms, and a handsome specimen of toothache tree (*Zanthoxylum americanum*).

The drive area is bordered by beautifully built native cut stone walls with planting beds about six feet wide that were filled mostly with warm season annuals and perennials such as globe amaranth or bachelor's buttons (*Gomphrena globosa*), zinnias, and *Salvia* x 'Indigo Spires.' Large freeform beds of native perennials and grasses add color and texture to the landscape. Buffalo Grass was chosen for all the lawn areas because of its low water needs and fine texture. Laura Bush refers to the large, paved area behind the main house as the "dance floor." She further explained that beneath that terrace is a large water storage facility. The house has no gutters, but the wide roof overhangs direct water to gravel beds located several feet from the house and collect rainfall from the metal roof and channel it to the 42,000-gallon tank.

As Laura Bush completed our tour of the house and garden, we met Dr. Condoleeza Rice and President Bush, who had just arrived from a press conference in Crawford. He was equally as gracious and friendly as the First Lady, and invited us all to an informal buffet. We began to gain insight into the President's interest and commitment to learning more about the native habitat of the ranch and how it could be enhanced and restored. The President then asked that I join him in the front seat of his natural gas powered Ford pickup along with Mrs. Bush. Dianne Delisi and Doug rode in back.

Our tour with the President lasted nearly two hours and covered much of the ranch. He is particularly interested in the ravines leading down to Rainey Creek and ultimately to the beginnings of the Middle Bosque River. The land adjacent to these ravines is heavily wooded with a variety of

continued on page 11...

Texas White House...

continued from page 10



native plants and shrubs. On one of these stops the President removed a round growth from the leaf of a live oak and asked what it was. Doug and I explained that it was growth formed by a gall-forming insect. I reached in my pocket, took out my small Swiss army knife, and cut the gall in half, exposing the larvae of the gall. I explained that the insect



Bill Welch with Mrs. Laura Bush and President George W. Bush.

caused the tree to produce the protective growth around the insect egg. The President seemed fascinated and commented, "I wonder if we could use that in stem cell research." (When I mentioned this incident to my wife, Diane, she gasped and said, "You pulled out your knife in the presence of the President!")

The creek bottom is fairly extensive and has a large population of native pecans. Several times the President stopped the truck, got out and asked the names of plants in the area. He already knew quite a few but asked me to quiz him about others after I had identified them at earlier stops. By the time we had completed our tour he was proficient in identifying nearly all of the woody plants we encountered. He is particularly proud of one of the ravines where he has personally cleared and built an elevated wooden walkway making a beautiful cliff and dry creek area accessible. At this point we met former secret service agent Robert Blossman, the Bushes' ranch manager. The President and Robert have "matching" chainsaws they use in clearing away some of the native cedar that has become invasive in parts of the property. An East Coast friend who is very protective of native plants asked me about the wisdom of removing these cedars (*Juniperus virginiana* & *J. ashei*). The problem has emerged mainly in the past 150 years since much of the Texas prairie was tilled for farmland and naturally occurring fires are no longer common. As the over-farmed land was converted back into pastures the cedar quickly invaded and monopolized the precious natural rainfall resulting in huge

thickets of cedar. As these stands are thinned or removed, native prairie grasses can re-establish and provide an environment that better supports quail, wild turkey, and other native birds and animals. Educational programs through Texas Cooperative Extension and other organizations are focusing on assistance to farmers and ranchers like the Bushes who are interested in restoring our Texas prairies.

Upon return to the main house we continued our discussion about the native plants of the ranch. His two dogs, Spotty and Barney, joined the President. After cold drinks and a visit in their comfortable living room the President excused himself to return phone calls and Mrs. Bush, Dianne Delisi, Doug Welsh, and I continued our "garden talk." Laura Bush had recently invited her Austin Garden Club members to the ranch. She had rooted cuttings of hydrangeas from the White House and given each member a plant. She offered these to us as well, stating that although she loved hydrangeas she was aware that they required more water than was practical at their ranch. We talked about the various plants we had brought and were again made aware that Laura Bush is a serious gardener and is strongly committed to landscape water conservation and an ecological approach to landscape development.

On the drive home Doug and I decided that we would offer to create an illustrated notebook of native plants of the ranch, which we titled "Selected Plants At Prairie Chapel Ranch." The President indicated while we were there that he wanted to share information about the plants of the ranch with visitors. At a press release from the ranch during the visit of President Putin after our initial visit, the President commented that later in the day he was going to be working in the grove of Bois d'Arc trees (*Maclura pomifera*) and then explained to the reporters exactly what Bois d'Arc trees are.

Work on the notebook required several more visits to the ranch and we developed a good working relationship with Robert Blossman, ranch manager. One of those visits was on September 11th, when it was necessary for us to suddenly evacuate the property. Like the rest of the world we were shocked and saddened by the day's events. Robert called later that day to make sure we had made it home safely and to schedule another visit as soon as possible. Just before leaving on September 11th, we discovered a small population of *Lobelia cardinalis*, Cardinal Flower, in full bloom on the banks of Rainey Creek. I suggested that Robert harvest seed when it matured in a few weeks. We asked Bonnie Murphy, owner of Bonnie's Greenhouse in nearby Waco, Texas, to start the seed and she was able to do so. Mrs. Bush was pleased to know about the existence of these beautiful native perennials and to have more to plant and share with her friends.

We look forward to visiting the ranch this spring when the wildflowers should be in full glory. Robert reports that

continued on page 12...

Texas White House...

continued from page 11

this year's bluebonnet crop appears to have great potential. Perhaps we will be fortunate enough to have another visit with the President and First Lady. The President wrote us each thank you notes from Air Force One as he returned to Washington, DC the last of August. They also sent signed photographs taken during our visit. As a gardener I often dream about my gardens and projects and now the Bushes' Prairie Chapel Ranch is a part of my dreams.

Plants Found Growing at the Prairie Chapel Ranch

Buffalograss – *Buchloe dactyloides*
 Woollybucket Bumelia – *Bumelia*
languinosa
 American Beautyberry – *Callicarpa*
americana
 Love-in-a-Puff – *Cardiospermum*
halicabrum
 Pecan – *Carya illinoensis*
 Common Hackberry and relatives –
Celtis occidentalis
 Button-bush – *Cephalanthus occidentalis*
 Texas Red Bud – *Cercis canadensis* var.
texensis
 Inland Sea Oats – *Chasmanthium*
latifolium
 Carolina Snailseed Vine – *Cocculus*
carolinus
 Rough-leaved Dogwood – *Cornus*
drummondii
 Green Hawthorn and relatives –
Crataegus viridis
 White Ash, Green, Texas and relatives –
Fraxinus americana, *F.*
pennsylvanica var. *lanceolata*, *F.*
texensis
 Maximilian Sunflower – *Helianthus maximiliani*
 Lindheimer's Globeberry – *Ibervillea lindheimeri*
 Possumhaw Holly – *Ilex decidua*
 Texas Black Walnut – *Juglans microcarpa*
 Cedar/Juniper – *Juniperus ashei*, *J. virginiana*
 Cardinal Flower – *Lobelia cardinalis*
 Bois d'Arc, Osage Orange – *Maclura pomifera*
 Chinaberry – *Melia azedarach*
 Wild Four O'Clock – *Mirabilis multiflora*
 Red Mulberry and relatives – *Morus alba*, *M. nigra*, *M. texana*,
M. rubra
 Cactus, Prickly Pear – *Opuntia lindheimeri*
 Common Switchgrass – *Panicum capillare*
 Virginia Creeper – *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*
 Sycamore – *Plantanus occidentalis*
 Eastern Cottonwood – *Populus deltoides*
 Mesquites – *Prosopis glandulosa*, *P. juliflora*
 Mexican Plum – *Prunus mexicana*
 Escarpment Live Oak, Bur Oak, Live Oak – *Quercus fusiformis*,
Q. macrocarpa, *Q. virginiana*
 Other Oaks: Lacey, Red, Chinkapin – *Quercus* species
 Carolina Buckthorn – *Rhamnus caroliniana*
 Prairie Flame-leaf Sumac – *Rhus copallina*
 Western Soapberry – *Sapindus drummondii*



Goldenrod – *Solidago canadensis*
 Poison-ivy – *Toxicodendron radicans*
 Cedar Elm and relatives – *Ulmus crassifolia*
 Mexican Buckeye – *Ungnadia speciosa*
 Verbena, Rose Vervain – *Verbena bipinnatifida*
 Frostweed – *Verbesina virginica*
 Pale-leaf Yucca and relatives – *Yucca pallida*
 Toothache Tree, Prickly Ash – *Zanthoxylum americanum*

Books for the Shelves of a Southern Gardener

A number of books of interest to members of the Southern Garden History Society were issued at the end of 2001, timed for the Christmas market, and several remain at the front of bookseller's stalls. The most imposing, in appearance and ambition, is Elizabeth Barlow Rogers' *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History*, which encompasses garden and landscape design from antiquity to the present. *Between North and South: The Letters of Emily Wharton Sinkler, 1842-1865*, makes available a series of engaging letters written by the Philadelphia-born mistress of South Carolina's Belvidere Plantation to her kinsmen that convey the domestic, social, and political life of the antebellum period. The writings of the pioneer Florida botanist and gardener Henry Nehrling, which first appeared as columns in a Florida newspaper in the 1920s and were reprinted in the 1940s as *My Garden in Florida*, have been edited, reorganized, and abridged by Robert W. Read and reissued as *Nehrling's Early Florida Gardens* and *Nehrling's Plants, People, and Places in Early Florida*.



Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History reflects Elizabeth Barlow Rogers' study of city planning through the course of a quarter century, a long involvement with New York's Central Park, and a point of view by which she has emerged as a champion of park and garden revitalization. Appointed as administrator of Central Park in 1979, she held this critical position until 1995, serving as the founding president of the Central Park Conservancy, and effectively overseeing the renewal of America's first great public park. In consequence, this survey of mankind's landscapes emerges as a mirror of her effort to appreciate Central Park and its design by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux within the larger contexts of landscape design and the uses of public space throughout the known history of human place making.

She casts a wider net, opening her analysis with the crafting of space for ritual and sacred purpose, at Stonehenge, in Greece, Egypt, and at other sites in the ancient world. So doing, she recognizes the archaeological remains of Watson Brake, near Monroe, Louisiana, and dating to ca. 3000 BC, as containing "The earliest evidence in the Americas of a large-scale, well-planned,

continued on page 13...

Books...

continued from page 12



collaboratively constructed landscape space” While following a generally chronological format, she organizes and presents her views within the larger framework of an architectural and cultural history, articulating the political purposes, social ambitions, and civic intent underlying landscape design and its built fabric. Gardens and public spaces of the Classical, Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods are addressed before she returns to the South some 4,700 years later, and to James Oglethorpe’s plan for his Savannah colony, laid out on a plateau above the Savannah River and engraved in 1734. She turns next to the gardens of the American colonies, including those of Virginia and South Carolina, quickly moving from Middleton Place to Mount Vernon, to L’Enfant and his 1791 plan for Washington, D.C.

Not surprisingly she devotes a long series of paragraphs to her discussion of Thomas Jefferson and the landscapes he created at Monticello, Poplar Forest, and at the University of Virginia, reproducing Allan Brown’s plan of the grounds of Poplar Forest. Her reverent appreciation for Mr. Jefferson is second only to that for Frederick Law Olmsted – and Calvert Vaux – and their achievement at Central Park, and in the park systems Olmsted, his sons, and their associates designed for other American cities. Ironically, for Olmsted, his work on the grounds of the United States Capitol and the World’s Columbian Exposition anticipated the rise of Beaux-Arts planning that his sensitive nature railed against in the closing years of his professional practice. At Biltmore Estate, Olmsted’s Approach Road is indeed his finest and most successful design feature. His larger achievement there, however, was the crafting of a vast, seamless estate landscape of gardens, grounds, fields, pastures, and woodlands – and a system of pleasure, service, and farm roads – from a patchwork of small holdings, some ill-used and of widely varying character, which George Vanderbilt’s agents assembled in the 1880s and 1890s. At the turn of the twentieth century she revisits Washington and the McMillan Plan for the capital, and later addresses the work of Beatrix Jones Farrand at Dumbarton Oaks. A final nod to the South appears in the penultimate chapter where the historicist impulses at Colonial Williamsburg and Celebration, Florida receive equal notice, the celebrated plan for Seaside, Florida, by Duany and Plater-Zyberk is published, and the memorials to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Vietnam Veterans garner her appreciations.



The late Emily Whaley will have already introduced many readers of *Between North and South, The Letters of Emily Wharton Sinkler, 1842-1865* to the Sinkler family of South Carolina and their garden at Belvidere. Belvidere, one of several Sinkler family plantations on the Santee River in Upper St. Johns Parish, was a favored residence from 1848, when Charles Sinkler (1818-1894) and his young wife Emily removed there from their Eutaw Plantation, until 1941 when the impoundment of the Santee River covered its gardens and grounds under Lake Marion. Memories of that garden, where her parents were married in 1910, remained clear and warm to Mrs.

Whaley; the garden-making efforts of her Sinkler forebears, with arbors of Cherokee roses and iris walks, were important in their own right and for the influence they forever cast over the satisfaction she found in the garden designed for her by Loutrel Briggs.

Remembrances of “this long line of country gardeners” were affectionately recalled in *Mrs. Whaley and Her Charleston Garden*. Emily Whaley was the



great-granddaughter and namesake of Emily Wharton Sinkler, 8 October 1823-10 February 1875, “the light and joy” of Belvidere Plantation. (Author’s collection)

Wharton Sinkler, the granddaughter of her second son Charles St. George Sinkler (1853-1934), who lived at Belvidere until his death. Her daughter, Anne Sinkler Whaley LeClerc, skillfully edited the letters of *Between North and South*.

Emily Wharton (1823-1875), the daughter of Thomas Isaac Wharton of Philadelphia, came to South Carolina in 1842 as the nineteen-year-old bride of Charles Sinkler. The couple first established a home on the family’s Eutaw Plantation, but in 1848 they relocated to nearby Belvidere, which remained their primary residence and chief location of her garden efforts. The published letters, all but one written between November 1842 and April 3rd, 1855, were addressed to her parents, her brothers Frank and Henry, and her sister Mary. They are filled with accounts of domestic life, the plantation scene, affairs of Charleston society, travels and the events, large and small, that occupy one’s days. Gardening was a great pleasure for Emily Wharton Sinkler, as it had been to her maternal grandmother and gardening mentor, Mary Coré Griffith, and it enjoys a certain presence, if not prominence, in her letters. Black and white photographs illustrate Belvidere and its gardens tended by Mrs. Sinkler and her descendants. In a letter of March 27th, 1848 to Mary she advises:

“This is the time to see the South. I am sitting now with the door open and a crab apple tree directly in front is laden with blossoms diffusing the most delightful fragrance through the whole air. The only spring thing we have is asparagus as yet but our green peas tho’ not in blossom are a foot high.”

At the end of the 1848 garden season, she was laying plans for the next year and wrote to Mary on November 30th:

“I enclosed 12 1/2 cents in this letter and wish you would buy me a paper of the best mignonette seed and also a paper of Hearts-ease seed of the large dark purple sort. There is a variety in which the petals are large and dark and there is only a small spot of bright yellow in the

Books...

continued from page 13



middle. I would like that variety and if that is not to be had get the next best the man has.”

Whether “the man” was David Landreth, Robert Buist, or Henry A. Dreer, all of whom had seed houses in Philadelphia, is not known.

These modest purchases of single packets of seeds were clearly secondary to her gatherings of cuttings, roots, bulbs, and plants from the gardens of friends and acquaintances that she planted at Belvidere and recounts in later letters. One such foray was made in April 1850 “to Stateburg to the Andersons where I got a wheelbarrow full of flowers. They have a beautiful Garden and Greenhouse and I had ‘great pickings’.”

A month later she wrote to her brother Henry from Woodford, another Sinkler residence:



Bull, the butler at Belvidere Plantation, circa 1914. (From “Memories of a South Carolina Plantation during the War” ([1912]).

“I found my garden in a most flourishing condition. Franks’s seeds being well up and quantities of pinks, Heart’s Ease and various other plants in full bloom. I wish I could transport to you all some of our super abundant strawberries. This morning I sent for my green house plants which have been boarding all winter in a neighbouring green house. They have increased wonderfully.... Bull [her butler] who has a very pretty turn for flowers is now hard at work putting my geraniums of which I have 40 into fresh boxes of earth. We are here quite busy now....”

A final quotation, from a letter written to her brother Henry on February 23rd, 1852 from Belvidere, conveys the tenor of antebellum plantation gardening and an early instance of “garden restoration.”

“It seems strange to hear of snows in the letters I receive. We have had here for more than a fortnight the most delightful spring like weather, weather in which one feels comfortable both out of doors and in. I am taking advantage of it to improve the place. The ground has been so hard frozen all winter that until now any attempts at gardening have been useless but now I am going at it in earnest. I wish I had you here to consult with. Charles has given me a carpenter to work under my direction for a month, and a person to garden so my hands are full. The old garden is to be restored. It is now nearly forty years since it was tended but it contains many shrubs yet. I have arranged a small garden on each side of the front steps which is to be enclosed with an iron fence, and is to contain the choicest specimens. I have already some very fine roses which have taken so well that they will bloom this spring – The Glory of France, Groille, Harrisonian de Brunnus, Cloth of Gold, and Souvenir de Malmaison. This last is the most splendid Rose you ever saw – as large as a coffee cup, and so firm and rich. I am foraging all through the country for roots and cuttings.

There is a long break in her surviving correspondence, from April 3rd, 1855 to April 4th, 1865 when she wrote the last of her extant letters to brother Henry, and none from the last decade of her life. Emily Wharton Sinkler died in a carriage accident on the way home from church on February 10th, 1875, and her body was buried in The Rocks churchyard now isolated on an island in Lake Marion. The published account of her funeral, written by her sister-in-law Katherine Wharton, does not mention what, if any, boughs of flowering shrubs or evergreens were gathered from the Belvidere gardens for her grave.



Few residents of Florida today, or its gardeners even, recognize the name of Henry Nehrling, a pioneer plant breeder and botanist, however, his work with tropical and sub-tropical plants, begun in 1879, probably contributed more to the appearance of the rapidly developing early-twentieth century Florida landscape and the cultivation of its plant and nursery stock than any other figure in the state’s early botanical history. His life and career followed a fascinating course. Ken McFarland introduced Dr. Nehrling to members of the society in a cover article in the Winter-Spring 1999 issue of *Magnolia*. Now the University Press of Florida has issued a revised, abridged edition of his posthumous two-volume work, *My Garden in Florida*, in two paperback volumes: *Nehrling’s Early Florida Gardens* and *Nehrling’s Plants, People, and Places in Early Florida*.

continued on page 15...

Books...

continued from page 14



Dr. Nehrling's home at Gotha, Palm Cottage Gardens, presently the home of Florida Native Plant Society member Mrs. Barbara Bochiardy.

In retrospect Dr. Nehrling's life, up to the certain sadness of his last years, was one we might envy; he early recognized his life's interests and followed rewarding paths to their satisfaction. Of German ancestry and a native of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, he was educated at home, in a Lutheran parochial school, and in the seminary of the State Normal School at Addison, Illinois. In 1873 he embarked on a sixteen-year teaching career in Illinois, Missouri, and Texas. In a life punctuated by opportunity and challenge, two events proved critical. First, in 1879 in a Houston garden, he saw the *Amaryllis* in full bloom; and over the next thirty years, up to the publication of *Die Amaryllis* in German in 1909, he promoted and bred the *Amaryllis*, producing numerous hybrids. (Meanwhile, a two-volume edition of his *Our Native Birds of Song and Beauty*, first published in German in 1891, appeared in 1893 and 1896.) The second event occurred in 1893 when, returned to Wisconsin and the custodian of the Public Museum of Milwaukee, he visited the World's Columbian Exposition, seeking to obtain materials at the closing of the fair for display in his museum. There, in the exposition conservatory, he saw for the first time the colorful Brazilian caladium and was captivated by it, met Adolf Leitze the botanist who had cultivated dozens of the varieties on display, and purchased hundreds of Leitze's plants, which he carried back to his greenhouse in Milwaukee. Thereafter, Dr. Nehrling was forever associated with the cultivation and hybridization of the caladium.

In 1884 Dr. Nehrling had purchased a small tract of land

at Gotha, Florida, near Orlando, which he is said to have first visited two years later. E. L. Lord, Nehrling's first biographer, wrote in 1925 that "from 1884 onward his mind was fixed on Florida as his future permanent home." The events of his life led to that destiny, but it was not until two decades later, in 1904, that he would settle permanently in Florida, at Gotha. There, while working with the United States Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industries, he cultivated Palm Cottage Gardens, the first of two important gardens he created in his adopted state. A severe freeze on February 3rd, 1917 devastated his garden and destroyed tens of thousands of plants in cultivation for commercial sale. His resolve to move his garden South was put into effect and he relocated to land at Naples where he created his Tropical Gardens

and Arboretum. It, too, was subjected to freezes, in 1926-1928, and a devastating hurricane in May 1926. In 1922, coincident with the development of the Naples gardens, Dr. Nehrling began submitting articles for publication in the *American Eagle*, a small newspaper in Estero, Florida, edited by Allen H. Andrews. Their publication continued until his death at Gotha on November 21st, 1929.



Dr. Nehrling with his *Pandanus* in Naples, Florida, 1927.

Dr. Nehrling's writings had a broad appeal and their value was readily appreciated. In 1933, four years after his death and two years after a public memorial at which Dr. Harold Hume eulogized his contributions to the botany of Florida, Alfred and Elizabeth Kay's selection from the *American Eagle* articles was

published as *The Plant World of Florida*. Allen H. Andrews gathered a larger selection of articles and other writings and published them as *My Garden in Florida*, volumes one and two, in 1944 and 1946. The text of those volumes, abridged and edited by Robert W. Read, again make available the writings of a man who, as David Fairchild described as like no other, "quite so fully combined their passion for observation with their skill in propagation and cultivation of a variety of species, keeping them under their constant attention so that they were able to accumulate through many years' observation clear pictures of their characteristics." This patient genius defines his essays and writings on plants, gardening, and the Florida landscape, and it explains the attraction for readers today, seventy and eighty years after their first appearance in the pages of the *American Eagle*.

By Davyd Foard Hood, Book Review Editor
Isinglass, Vale, North Carolina ♣

Publications Available Through SGHS



The New Louisiana Gardener- *Nouveau Jardinier de la Louisiane*, 1838 publication by Jacques-Felix Lelièvre and translated into English by Sally Kittredge Reeves. Published by LSU press in cooperation with SGHS. Hardcover. 186 pages with color photographs and halftones. Specially priced for SGHS members at \$25 (plus \$3.50 postage). *NC orders add 6.5% sales tax.*

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