



Magnolia

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

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An Unlikely Plantation Mistress: Mary Riggs Collins and the Gardens at Somerset Place

by John Sykes, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

During the 1850s visitors to Somerset Place plantation in Washington County, North Carolina passed through miles of desolate swamp lands before arriving at the borders of large cultivated fields, edged with cypress trees, along the shoreline of Lake Phelps, the second largest fresh water lake in the state. Antebellum visitors were often startled with the marked contrast of the highly cultivated plantation environment amid its “wilder,” more natural surroundings. The image of clean, whitewashed buildings under a lush grove of trees gave the appearance of a small village, for in a sense, the plantation was a thriving community unto itself. Nature had been conquered, civilization and order imposed upon “the savage wildness of the natural locality.”¹

Architectural historian John Michael Vlach described the process: “To mark their dominance over nature and other men, planters acquired acreage, set out boundaries of their holdings, had their fields cleared, selected building sites, and supervised the construction of dwellings and other structures.” The plantation’s design was “an expression of the owner’s tastes, values and attitudes.”² Equally impressive to visitors were the flower and vegetable gardens that bordered the main house. There was no doubt to Somerset Place visitors that the gardens were the visible expressions of the personal tastes, values and attitudes of the plantation’s mistress, Mary Riggs

Collins (1808-1872). In April 1856 her neighbor remarked that “Mrs. Collins[’s] garden is bringing out all its treasures...”³

Although gardening fell well within the “feminine sphere” in the prescribed role of a plantation mistress in the ante-bellum South, Mary Riggs Collins was hardly a typical plantation mistress. Nothing in her early life

prepared her to be mistress of one of North Carolina’s largest plantations. A northerner by birth and education, for almost four decades, she lived exclusively at Somerset Place. Unlike other southern women in her class or “station in life,” Mary Riggs Collins lacked the suitable training for her position on the plantation. She had no role models in her childhood. Plantation mistresses frequently looked to the examples of mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and female cousins in fulfilling the demands that were expected by antebellum southern society.⁴

Born in Newark, New Jersey in March 1808, Mary Riggs was a member of a wealthy and socially distinguished family.⁵ Because of her

family connections and wealth, Mary Riggs was automatically assured a comfortable place in polite northern society. When very young, Mary and her seven sisters were day students in local private schools and later completed their education in nearby boarding schools. Mary Riggs was a quiet, thoughtful child, who loved to read and easily excelled at her schoolwork. Although Mary developed a sophisticated appreciation of fine music, she



Photo courtesy of N.C. Department of Cultural Resources

Mary Riggs Collins at age 51.

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Upcoming Conferences

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CALENDAR

September 22nd, 2001. "75 Years of Williamsburg Gardens," **Garden History Seminar.** Speakers include Colonial Williamsburg staff members. For registration information, telephone (757) 220-7174; fax (757) 565-8630; e-mail: tdailey@cwf.org. [See article below.]

September 27th-29th, 2001. "CULTIVATING HISTORY: Exploring Horticultural Practices of the Southern Gardener," 13th Biennial Conference on **Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes** at Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The theme will explore historic horticultural practices in the South. For more information, contact Keyes Williamson, conference chair, Old Salem, Inc., Box F - Salem Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27108, telephone (336) 721-7377, e-mail: facilities@OldSalem.org or visit their web site at: www.oldsalem.org/planandplano.html [See article below.]

October 14th-18th, 2001. 9th **International Heritage Rose Conference in Charleston**, South Carolina. This conference will focus international attention and educate the public on the historic contributions of Charleston as the source of the Noisette Rose, the first class of rose to be developed in America. Speakers will include both regional and international rose experts such as: John Meffert, Greg Lowery, Gwen Fagan (South Africa), Marie Butler, Ruth Knopf, Malcolm Manners, Greg Grant, David Ruston (Australia), Odile Maquelier (France), Trevor Nottle, Phillip Robinson, Marijke Peterrich (Bermuda), and Rosamund Wallinger (England). Post conference tours will include opportunities to visit Brookgreen Gardens, Medway Plantation, Mepkin Abbey Gardens, Magnolia and Drayton Hall Plantations, Wadmalaw Island, and the Charleston Tea Plantation. Hosted by Ruth Knopf; honorary chairs: Mrs. Joseph H. (Patti) McGee and Mrs. Alexander Sanders. For general questions about the conference, e-mail: roseconf@webtv.net or contact Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, P. O. Box 975, Charleston, SC 29402. Telephone (803) 853-8000. For registration and payment questions only, e-mail: coned@cofc.edu or telephone (843) 953-5822. [See article below.]

October 19th-20th, 2001. "Exploring Southern Gardens," the annual St. Francisville **Southern Garden Symposium.** Speakers include: Linda Auld, Lake Douglas, David Floyd, Edward C. Martin, Jr., Max and Marie Mizell, Judith B. Tankard, and Jim Wilson. For registration information, telephone (225) 635-6330, or write: The Southern Garden Symposium, P. O. Box 2075, St. Francisville, LA 70775.

October 20th, 2001. "Cultivating the Written Word," **Garden Writers Symposium**, designed for professional horticulturists, avid gardeners and aspiring writers. The program includes celebrated authors: C. Colston Burrell, Rick Darke, Adrian Higgins, and Virginia Small. For more information or reservations, telephone (703) 642-8095 or write: Green Spring Gardens Park, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria, VA 22312.

October 20th, 2001. "Vanishing Borders - Gardens: Common Ground for International Understanding," a one-day symposium sponsored by the Peckerwood Garden Foundation in collaboration with the Garden Conservancy. The symposium will be held at Prairie View Texas A&M University. For more information, contact Deborah H. Friedman by telephone: (845) 424-3789, or e-mail: dhf@bestweb.net

October 26th-27th, 2001. "Texas Gardening ... Adventures in Success," 8th Annual Winedale Oktoberfest. Includes tours of the Round Top area, and presentations by Dr. Sam Cotner, Sally Kittredge Reeves, Barney Lipscomb, Scott Ogden, and Greg Grant. For registration information, contact Gloria Jaster at the University of Texas Winedale Center (979) 278-3530 or fax (979) 278-3531. [See article below.]

April 18th-21st, 2002. "Return to the River: A Gala 20th Anniversary," the 20th Annual Meeting of the Southern Garden History Society in Natchez, Mississippi. Dr. Elizabeth Boggess, meeting chair, is planning a special anniversary event.

Legendary English Gardener Rosemary Verey Dies

Renowned English gardener, garden designer, and author Rosemary Verey died of pneumonia May 31st at the age of 82 in Chelsea Memorial Hospital in London. She had been a member of Southern Garden History Society for many years and often responded to the editor with a friendly postcard after receiving her quarterly issue of *Magnolia*. Ever the gracious host to gardeners from all over the world, Rosemary Verey (or Mrs. V. as she was known to those close to her) had for decades welcomed the novice and professional alike to her very personal garden at Barnsley House, a 17th-century rectory in the Cotswolds of England. I first met her in 1978 during a garden tour sponsored by Reynolda Gardens in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Upon arrival, she and her husband spent time showing the tour group their amazing library with floor to ceiling bookshelves brimming with books. She engaged us with a discussion about rare, first edition botanical references until the noon hour, when she dismissed

us to her quarry garden saying, with her typical dry wit, "I know how you Americans don't like to miss your lunch."

Twenty years later, I returned for a repeat visit and strolled

with her once again through the magnificent vegetable garden, perennial borders of Acanthus, lilies, and black dahlias, and famous Laburnum arch. Following the walk, we were invited into "The Close," a small cottage adjacent to Barnsley House where she had resided in later years. There, in her cozy living room, we discussed interesting plants over a bottle of wine, enjoying photos of her with Prince Charles and an autographed picture of Elton John, two of her clients. Her son Charles, who has overseen the garden over the last two years, will continue to

maintain the four-acre property, which will remain open to the public. *New York Times* garden editor Anne Raver wrote a lengthy tribute to Mrs. Verey in the June 7th obituaries section, which can be accessed through the Internet at www.nytimes.com — plc



Photo by P. Cornett

Rosemary Verey and son, Charles

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never was proud of her own musical talents and must have been pleased when her sisters' accomplishments eclipsed her own and allowed her to retreat to her favorite books.⁶

Scuppernon River.⁹ The canal provided needed drainage for the cleared fields, a natural fall line gave sufficient water power for saw and grist mills, and a direct transportation route to export cypress lumber—the company's first product. Slaves purchased locally and imported directly from the African coast provided the needed labor for the Lake Company's ambitious schemes. Profits were initially slow and Collins's partners were unable to continue funding the work at the Lake. The Collins family eventually secured title to the entire property, comprising almost 180,000 acres of land.¹⁰

Josiah and Mary Riggs Collins began their married life at the "Lake" in a small dwelling called "the Colony" while they made plans for the construction of a proper home.¹¹ The young couple named the plantation "Somerset Place" as a romantic allusion to the English shire where the first Josiah Collins was born.¹² They also renamed Lake Phelps, restoring the original Algonquian name of "Scuppernon."¹³

The plantation produced two major cash crops, wheat and corn. Harvested and milled on site, the crops were loaded on flats to be transported down the canal to waiting schooners in the Scuppernon River. Mary Riggs Collins helped her husband by copying needed documents and inventories, and keeping the



Photo courtesy of N.C. Department of Cultural Resources

Somerset Plantation

The comfortable urbanity of her existence changed rather drastically in 1828 when she met Josiah Collins (1808-1863) of Edenton, North Carolina.⁷ Young Joes, the third in the line of distinguished Josiah Collinses, was the oldest son of a large, wealthy eastern North Carolina family. They became engaged in March 1829 and were married in Newark six months later on August 9th. After an extended post-wedding trip to northern resorts, the couple visited the leading stores in New York making significant purchases of household items for their North Carolina home.

Josiah and Mary Riggs Collins were not to live in Edenton where the Collins family had lived for two generations, but traveled across the Albemarle Sound to the "Lake" plantation in Washington County. For almost five decades, lands along Lake Phelps were the primary focus of the financial interests of the Collins family. The first Josiah Collins (grandfather of Mary's husband) was an English emigrant who became a very successful Edenton merchant and ship owner. In the 1780s he formed a partnership with two other Edenton investors called the "Lake Company" to develop the rich, swampy lands around Lake Phelps for cultivation.⁸

Surveys of the lake property revealed that the lake level was eighteen feet higher than the water level in the nearest navigable river. Development plans for the Lake Company included the construction of a six-mile-long canal from the lake to the



Photo courtesy of J.N. Quinn

View of Somerset Place from the lake.

account ledgers.¹⁴

daily

Gardening was not the chief concern of Mary Riggs Collins after moving to Somerset Place. First the couple needed a proper home. Engaging a local builder, the Collinses constructed a large two and a half storied house with double piazzas. The house faced the canal (the approach for visitors) and was close to the lakeshore in order to take natural advantage of lake breezes. This house proved to be inadequate for the large number of family and friends who spent winters "on the lake" with the Collinses. Almost every winter, Mary had several of her sisters visiting to escape the severity of the northern climate.¹⁵ A rear wing with a large dining room and master bedroom above (again, with double piazzas) was added within a few years of the main house's completion. Frequent guests helped to

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alleviate the remoteness and isolation of the plantation for Josiah and Mary Riggs Collins.

Architectural historian Catherine Bishir describes the “big house” at Somerset Place as a simple, but substantial Greek Revival structure built in the local style.¹⁶ However unassuming the exterior of her new house, Mary Riggs Collins made great efforts in creating a stylish interior. Wallpaper ordered from New York covered all the principal rooms and the main hall. The entire first floor was covered with woolen carpeting. The woodwork, trim and



Photo courtesy of J.N. Quinn

Somerset Place kitchen with garden in foreground.

doors, were painted to resemble light oak and the baseboards were marbled to match the black marble mantelpieces in the main rooms.¹⁷ Considered to have impeccable (and fashionable taste), Mary Riggs Collins decorated her house with mahogany furniture in the empire style, marble statuary, lithographs and paintings, and a large collection of family portraits.¹⁸

During the first twelve years of her marriage, she gave birth to six healthy sons. A devoted, loving mother, her continual pregnancies forced her to rely on the paid assistance of a northern-born governess and a free black nursemaid to care for her children.¹⁹ A large room on the third floor of the house (located just above her own bedroom) was reserved for the children’s playroom. Always firm, but indulgent to her children’s wishes, Mrs. Collins allowed the children’s pets free reign over the house. The Collins boys had a veritable menagerie including dogs, cats, birds, a very talented raccoon, and the most exotic of all—a pair of Indian monkeys.²⁰

Once old enough to begin serious study, the sons took up residence in the old “Colony” house with their tutor and the resident plantation priest. Following southern custom, it allowed the plantation tutor a quieter setting removed from household activities in which to maintain a disciplined study environment.²¹ The Collinses also were guardians for two English orphans, John and Frederick FitzGerald, who received the same educational advantages as their own children.²² In 1845 the Collinses employed a German music teacher who also instructed the entire family in French. In order to encourage their children’s successful language study, Mary and Josiah made French “the household language.”²³ When her

oldest son, Josiah Collins IV left for Harvard College in 1849, a neighbor worried about Mary’s reaction: “Mrs. Collins says it was quite a trial to part with him, never having been separated from him more than a few weeks. Mr. Collins use to say that he reckoned when Joe went to college . . . [his mother] would go with him. She however did not go.”²⁴

Her children were both the source of Mary Collins’s greatest happiness and her deepest personal grief. On a particularly mild February afternoon in 1843, two of her sons were boating in the canal with two slave playmates when their boat capsized. The accident was discovered too late and four seemingly lifeless bodies were retrieved. A neighbor reported some of the details:

Edward and Hugh Collins were carried to their father’s house and placed in separate rooms, that they both might derive the utmost benefit from the fire. They were rubbed incessantly . . . and other applications were used. As soon as the accident occurred, Dr. Hardison was sent for. He came in an incredibly short time, about an hour from the period at which the messenger left the Lake. He used warm applications, leaving no effort untried to restore life, but all in vain—the summons had come—the king of terrors had done his work.

. . . After an hour or two had elapsed . . . Mrs. Collins being in the same room [with Hugh], asked the Dr. if there was any hope.

“None madam,” was the reply.

Then followed a sublime scene. She kissed her [dead] child with a mother’s fondness. With firmness bordering on heroism, the silent tear trickling down her cheek, she addressed [her child] . . .

“Farewell, my dear son; you are promising buds (hesitating a moment) destined to bloom in heaven, which has been my aim—my chief aim.”

Then taking her remaining children that were in the room to the lifeless body, said, “Come, look at your dear brother—there are but five of us now.” She then took leave of the gentlemen in the room, and thanked them for their kindness.²⁵

As the two brothers had died together, the bodies of Edward (age 10) and Hugh (age 8) were placed in a single coffin, but not before Mary clipped locks of their hair to be preserved in a small gold locket. A third son, William Kent Collins died instantly in October 1857 after being thrown from his horse into a tree along the canal road.²⁶ Another son George came near to drowning in the lake when a sudden storm caused his sailboat to capsize. After a sleepless night for the entire family, George and his slave companions reappeared the next morning.²⁷

After the birth of her last child, Arthur, in 1842, Mary suddenly found time to devote to gardening. Having spent most of her life in urban environments, gardening was a new pastime that she embraced with great enthusiasm. Making it “her amusement from year to year,” Mary was never impatient to be finished and continued to make yearly improvements.²⁸ The Collinses regularly subscribed to leading periodicals including a few that gave useful information on agriculture and gardening: *DeBow’s Review*, *Southern*

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*Planter, American Farmer, Farmer's Register, and Farm and Garden.*²⁹ In the library at Somerset Place, Mary could consult the first Josiah Collins's own copy of Alexander LeBlond's *The Theory and Practice of Gardening* (1727). Although quite antiquated, the book featured plans and specifications for formal gardens with directions on how to plant and maintain gardens.³⁰ In 1851 Mary purchased Francois Andre Michaux's six-volume work, *The North American Sylva* for which she paid the princely sum of \$24.00.³¹

Mary regularly ordered seeds and plants from local suppliers in Edenton and Norfolk. Because plantation produce was shipped to New York, Baltimore and Charleston, she also could use her husband's factors in those port cities to secure purchases for her garden.³² Mary purchased some items from her neighbors, paying farmers William Overton and Joseph Phillips for walnut trees in 1843.³³ Mary's sisters in New Jersey, Jane and Julia were frequently requested to purchase items for the family and occasionally items for Mary's gardening efforts, including in 1848 an order for "flower jars."³⁴

The earliest surviving plan of the "Lake plantation" was done in 1821 and shows a small formal garden near the site of the present one. The garden area was substantially enlarged to four acres by the removal of several slave cabins.³⁵ The entire area was enclosed with a wooden picket fence and was divided into sections by walks and drainage ditches. A formal parterre, just adjacent to the house, gave way to a substantial kitchen garden and a large orchard of apples, peaches, plums and quinces. A significant portion of the flower garden was reserved for a variety of roses. In 1851 Mary was especially pleased when her "Chromatella Rose" bore splendid flowers that season.³⁶ Mary made several purchases from the Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania nursery of Robert Buist (1805-1880), America's leading nurseryman and "seedsman."³⁷ In 1844 Buist published his *Rose Manual* and although his had not bloomed yet, gave a description of Mary's Chromotella as "large, double yellow, of as bright a shade as our old yellow rose; colour as yet unique in the group of Noisettes." The English advertise it under the name of 'Cloth of Gold Noisette,' with very large flowers and fine bold stiff petals, withstanding the effects of the sun, retaining its colour, a perfect yellow. . .³⁸

In the vegetable gardens there were a variety of items produced for plantation consumption. Deathly afraid of "tempting" cholera in 1849, Mary had her thriving watermelon vines destroyed.³⁹

Although no list of Mary's library at Somerset Place has survived and she never mentioned her garden inspirations, there is no doubt that she was highly influenced by the work of Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852), America's premier landscape gardener and designer of the 1850s.⁴⁰ Each summer the Collins family traveled north to escape the seasonal illnesses of eastern North Carolina. They visited family relations who lived in the Hudson River Valley. Mary's nephew James Kent married Washington Irving's niece, so the family had entree to Irving's home, Sunnyside; and a Collins cousin married into the Livingston family of Montgomery Place, which featured a much celebrated garden designed by Downing himself.⁴¹ Downing in his influential *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1841) lavished praise on the efforts of transplanted North Carolinian Robert Donaldson who established the estate Blithewood.⁴² Mary Riggs Collins could have visited the Donaldsons because Josiah Collins III's Aunt Mary

McKinlay was one of the first to honor Mrs. Donaldson (the former Susan Gaston of New Bern) with "One Grand Ball" after her marriage.⁴³

Downing's *Treatise* offered Mary many ideas, which appeared in her landscaping efforts at Somerset Place. A small parterre garden located just adjacent to the main house followed the lines of Downing's "architectural Flower-garden" with "... a direct connexion[sic] with the house, at least on one side . . ." with "regular lines and forms employed in its beds and walks." Downing described it further: "The Flowers are generally planted in beds in the forms of circles, octagons, squares, etc. the centre of the garden being occupied by an elegant vase. . ."⁴⁴ Instead of a sculptured vase, Downing offered his readers "a very pretty and fanciful substitute" by using "baskets of rustic work."⁴⁵ Mary made her own "rural basket of lattices and twisted grape vines and painted [it] green," and placed it in the circle near the house.

Just as Mary was beginning her "amusements" in gardening at Somerset Place, her sister-in-law Louisa Collins Harrison began her own efforts in Alabama at Faunsdale, her Marengo County plantation. The two corresponded frequently about their plans and shared seeds and cuttings. Louisa was a frequent purchaser from nurseries in Vicksburg, Mobile and New Orleans, and sent many of her favorite species to Mary to try at Somerset Place.⁴⁶ In April 1844 a large shipment arrived from Louisa which were considered to be "really beautiful and show much taste in the purchaser."⁴⁷ Mary reminded Louisa in 1852: "When you have any nice flower seeds or slips of cactus, this sister of yours would be very glad to get them by mail."⁴⁸

Nineteenth-century transportation being what it was, many of Louisa's shipments arrived at Somerset Place too late to save. In 1847

Mary thanked her "... for the slips and seeds you were kind enough to send me. The former were

quite wilted & never repaid my care by even an effort to live. The seeds have done well. I had however all the varieties but the periwinkle & Irish Furze [Gorse, *Ulex europaeus*], the latter has not honored me by growing."⁴⁹ A letter shows that Louisa often specifically requested varieties from Mary. She wrote to Louisa: "I have before me dear Lou a box of seeds saved last winter from the Egyptian garland flower as you requested but think they can hardly be worth sending now & will try 'nothing preventing' to get you some more the coming season."⁵⁰ In 1853 Mary thanked Louisa for scarlet sage seed adding that "I once had it & prized it very highly



Louisa McKinlay Collins Harrison of Faunsdale (1817-1896) and her daughter, Louisa (Louise) Collins Harrison (1844-1982)

from the Archives, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, AL

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but it died out as too many pretty things seem to do in this world.”⁵¹ At Faunsdale Louisa cultivated several varieties of *Salvia* including *S. splendens major* (scarlet) and *S. patens* (light blue).⁵² On a visit to North Carolina in 1851 Louisa brought her sister-in-law an especially generous offering from her Alabama garden. Mary thanked Louisa profusely: “Among the plants you brought, though all are valuable, I think I prize the coral tree [*Erythrina*] & the *Russelia* [Coral Plant, *R. equisetiformis*, formerly *R. juncea*] rather the most—the former is splendid, it has now four limbs covered with its gorgeous velvet flowers. The latter grows some three or four feet high & has a shower of blossoms nearly all the year round.”⁵³ Louisa’s gift of *Russelia* root died, but Mary could report later that: “. . . the most insignificant among the slips is growing nicely.”⁵⁴ Louisa shared her knowledge frequently with a grateful Mary: “I have just discovered the fact you mention with regard to the Roella, viz. the necessity of a large quantity of water in the blooming season. Mine are now large plants and just coming into flower.”⁵⁵ It continued to give Mary trouble and she confessed to Louisa that “The plant I find the most difficult to manage is the Roella. Slips grow very freely but the leaves become shabby & when cut off the plant takes a long time to recover itself.”⁵⁶

The most exotic of Mary’s horticultural gifts from Louisa was a night blooming cereus [*Hylocereus undatus*].⁵⁷ Most thought it “. . . the most magnificent thing in the shape of a flower . . .” that they had ever seen.⁵⁸ In 1851 after being carefully cultivated by Mary for five years, the cereus was thriving. Mary could report to Louisa: “It is now a large plant & has borne more & more flowers each year. This summer it had in all twenty-two but this is the point-on Joe’s birthday—the very evening of the day on which he attained his majority twelve splendid flowers came out at once & quite unexpectedly too.”⁵⁹

In 1849 her ward, Fred FitzGerald, returned from an extended trip to India, bringing presents for everyone at Somerset Place. (There were two monkeys for the Collins boys.) Mary’s gift was a large collection of unlabeled seeds from the Botanical Gardens of the East India Company in Calcutta.⁶⁰ Mary shared her gift with Louisa, but was not pleased with her own results and wrote Louisa: “I hope your India seeds produced something worth having—mine have disappointed me much. There are some pretty flowers among them, but on the whole they must have been cultivated in the Botanical Garden rather for the purposes of science than beauty. I have however some fine looking plants that have not bloomed at all. These I mean to keep in pots to see whether they mean to do anything or not.”⁶¹

Since it was much easier to ship seeds, Mary needed a place to cultivate them. In 1849 she wrote Louisa: “My green house is under way, that is the foundation is laid, the frame up & a brick wall run up at the back as a protection against the cold side—the sashes too are prepared & I am told it will be ready before long—but the carpenters are just now abstracted for some more important work [on the plantation] & I shall not be surprised if I have to house my plants in a spare room.”⁶² Five years later Mary was still waiting for a finished green house: “All my flowers look very sweetly in their new green house though the latter is not entirely complete. You have lived long enough I presume upon a plantation to have discovered that the strictly ornamental *must* yield to *everything else*.”⁶³ Mary promptly purchased a stout lock for her finished green house to guard her

prized floral possessions.⁶⁴ In October 1853 she wrote to Louisa: “I must thank you before I forget it for the salvia seed. I prize it highly, that [salvia seed] you sent me last winter has been very ornamental in my garden & is even now in full bloom. I raised the plants in my greenhouse & then set them in the garden where they have been admired of all observers.”⁶⁵

Mary’s enthusiasm for gardening inspired her husband’s sisters to make their similar efforts at their homes in Edenton. Alethea Collins, the youngest of Josiah Collins III’s sisters began to update the old gardens at the Collins Homestead. The old parterre (set out by Louisa in 1842) still looked beautiful with “crimson perpetuals,” tea-roses, oleanders and verbenas.⁶⁶ Alethea removed several of the wooden cross fences dividing the garden for a more natural look.⁶⁷ Among her other flowers, Alethea had “a profusion of Roses and Chinese honeysuckle.”⁶⁸ She also allowed her box bushes to grow unchecked to form arches over the garden walks.⁶⁹

Henrietta Collins Page began a far more ambitious scheme soon after the completion of her large new home on King Street. The stylish house, “Dorsey’s Hill,” took its name from its location on a slight promontory overlooking the Albemarle Sound. Henrie Page immediately began planting trees to shade the house from the glare cast by the water. Her garden was to be in the latest fashion and Louisa and Mary Collins offered her lots of advice. Henrie received flower seeds and various plants including mock orange, woodbine, and several varieties of periwinkle, including one variety that she described as having leaves the “color of ochre.”⁷⁰ The “Dorsey’s Hill” garden (now Pembroke Hall) soon faced competition on King Street when Henrie’s neighbors, the Warrens, finished their new house: “Their house is a very fine, large one; but many persons think it looks gloomy & heavy. It strikes me, however, as imposing. [Dr. Warren] has imported an English or Irish gardener this Spring to lay off his grounds & I have no doubt they will have a pretty place. Every improvement he makes adds to the beauty of our view.”⁷¹

In the 1850s, Mary Riggs Collins also gained a new neighbor who shared her passion for gardening. Jane Caroline North, an attractive South Carolinian and former belle of Charleston society, married her distant North Carolina cousin, Charles Lockhart Pettigrew in 1853. The couple spent their honeymoon on a grand tour through Europe taking in many of the famous public gardens. Carey Pettigrew returned to her husband’s plantation, Bonarva, and restored good relations with her nearest neighbors, the Collines at Somerset Place. Inspired to improve her own gardens, Carey outlined her plans (which were remarkably similar to Mary’s garden at Somerset Place):

In the dense thicket of the old garden I have done nothing beyond cutting (not trimming) away the roses which had all grown so madly as to require stringent measures. From the sweet roses . . . I have set out many cuttings. The present side of the operation is beyond the Osage Orange. The kitchen garden is thrown entirely beyond the line of Fig trees. I had this space thrown into large beds, broad walks dividing. These beds Charles has laid off in the handsomest style into large double squares & ovals. You remember at Tuileries the spots of flowers how arranged? (Don’t laugh) They are somewhat after that fashion. Mrs. Collins has sent me some [of her] famous Roses. . .⁷²

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In addition to sharing roses, Mary Collins gave Carey “. . . cuttings and plants of her choicest things.”⁷³ In 1854 Mary sent over to Bonarva: “two cactus, a red & a pink, a scarlet sage, a wax plant, two kinds of Big[n]onia, a fine scarlet geranium, an Indian flax & what looks like a Ropinac.”⁷⁴ After having great success with cultivating “forget-me-nots” in her garden, Mary sent her extra seeds to Carey.⁷⁵ In December 1856 Mary left “a lovely bouquet of Heliotrope, geraniums & myrtle” and Carey sent back “a large bunch of violets nicely arranged. . .”⁷⁶

The two avid gardeners conducted a regular “interchange of housekeeping assistance” with Carey sending over “nine splendid bunches of celery,” and a peck of fresh cranberries from her own cranberry bog with Mary Collins responding with “some of the finest quinces” Carey Pettigrew had ever seen.⁷⁷ After expressing some interest in having ivy cuttings from Somerset Place, Carey was shocked when Mary Collins herself appeared at Bonarva with two large boxes, which she planted herself.⁷⁸

Carey Pettigrew’s family in South Carolina visited Bonarva often and enjoyed the hospitality offered by the Collinses at Somerset Place. Carey’s sisters often sent messages to Mary Collins and Carey frequently shared their letters with her neighbor. When Carey’s sister Minnie saw a lovely garden while traveling, she immediately thought of Mrs. Collins’s garden.⁷⁹ In 1859 Carey’s mother sent a glowing account of her recent trip to see “Mr. Drayton’s highly improved garden” near Charleston: “The azaleas were in full beauty & I never saw so splendid a show as they made—every variety of red from pale flesh colours to deep scarlet besides white that looked like snow banks & varieties of purple & variegated. The camellias were over. They had been equally grand.”⁸⁰ Carey later reported back to her family: “How lovely the azaleas must have been, as yet Mrs. Collins has none.”⁸¹

Mary’s garden produced flowers in abundance and those not shared with friends and neighbors were displayed throughout the house. Mary owned “six flower stands” to showcase arrangements and more delicate plants.⁸² When she hosted a large dinner party for her Pettigrew neighbors in April 1854, Mary served “a beautiful set supper . . . with a pyramid of greenhouse flowers in the center of the table.”⁸³ Every Easter, flowers from her garden decorated the altars of the plantation chapel and of nearby St. David’s Church.⁸⁴ At Christmastime, Mary Collins decorated the house and plantation chapel with greenery. In the chapel, swags of evergreen were hung in the “gothic style” over the windows.⁸⁵

In addition to her gardens, Mary Riggs Collins changed the plantation landscape at Somerset Place. An *allée* of elm trees were planted along the “street” of plantation service buildings and a line of sycamores was planted along the orderly row of slave cabins that bordered the lakeshore.⁸⁶ Mary improved the old poultry yard by planting it with weeping willows.⁸⁷ Her most ambitious landscaping project was developing the “lawn.” Located in front of the main house, the lawn occupied eleven acres on the opposite side of the canal from the garden area and offered beautiful views of the lake. During the spring of 1852, Mary laid out a pleasure park probably directly inspired by Downing’s directions on “How to make a country place.”⁸⁸ To do so, she spent \$65.00 in evergreens alone. Mary described her plans in a letter to Louisa: “the northern & eastern sides of the Lawn are planted thick with forest & flowering

trees so as to form a thicket or copse. There is a hollow circle of chestnut oaks not quite opposite the house . . . and here and there are clumps of evergreen with conical and flowering trees interspersed.” Visitors could follow several winding paths on the lawn and pause at several locations to rest upon two “iron sofas” and four “rustic chairs.”⁸⁹ If in a melancholy mood, visitors could visit the plantation graveyard located in the far northeastern corner of the lawn.⁹⁰ To connect the lawn with the more formal garden area, Mary wanted “a circular bridge with seats built over the canal opposite the house.” Since the raised bed of the canal road offered a natural barrier to her garden, Mary removed the canal side fence to offer an unobstructed view of the lawn.⁹¹ Somerset sheep were allowed to graze on the lawn and slave children often played there amusing themselves in the search for dandelions.⁹² Mary also contemplated a maze or “labyrinth” based on a plan supplied by her sister-in-law Louisa, but never seemed to have implemented this garden feature.⁹³

Mary’s gardening efforts came to an abrupt end in July 1860. After enduring headaches for several days, she suffered a massive stroke. Mary was temporarily blinded and paralyzed on one side. Several Doctors predicted the worse.⁹⁴ After a long convalescence, Mary was permitted to take a daily drive in the carriage around the plantation and her neighbor Charles Pettigrew reported a chance meeting to his wife Carey:

I looked into her eyes and they had no expression as if she saw me. She said, “I scarcely see you Mr. Pettigrew.” I said I was truly sorry to hear that she had been so sick and hoped a change would soon take place for the better; she said something languidly; as soon as possible I said “Good Morning” and the carriage moved off in a walk. She is not able to go any faster. Oh! My dearest darling wife, I feel most painfully to see the wreck of our most admirable friend.⁹⁵

In September Josiah Collins took his wife to Edenton to convalesce with his sisters at the Collins Homestead, to be closer to the attentions of the family doctor.⁹⁶ Nine months later in April 1861, Carey reported Mary’s condition to her sister: “Mrs. Collins is really better. The Dr. says she looks much older, but spoke like herself & her memory seemed unimpaired. Her sight is sadly affected. She cannot read a line. They speak of her coming home next week & Mr. Collins says he must take her away in June, but in the disturbed state of the country [it] is uncertain where to go.”⁹⁷

Mary Riggs Collins did recover, but her illness was only a foreshadowing of a long series of tragic events for her. In February 1862 the Collins family fled Somerset Place to escape the arrival of Federal Forces in occupied eastern North Carolina. Her three surviving sons, Josiah, George, and Arthur all joined the Confederate Army. In June 1863 her husband died suddenly in Hillsborough, leaving Mary to struggle to hold the family properties together.

In April 1865 her son George made the first visit back to Somerset Place. He found the main house a wreck: furniture left behind had been looted, the fine library gone and every inch of wool carpeting had disappeared. All of the fences were missing, probably used for firewood by the freed slaves still on the plantation. George immediately began repairs, telling his wife:

We have had the old garden fence set up in its place again & the grass taken off the brick walk & around the house so as to take

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Mary Riggs Collins...

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We have the grounds ornamented with a rail fence just at the bridge to keep the sheep on the Lawn & another from the wood house gate to the Lake to keep the cattle . . . out of the garden. Mother will be horrified I know but I can not help it now, it is the best we can afford.⁹⁸

Mary Collins returned to Somerset Place, but she settled herself into the “Colony House” (where she first lived after her marriage) and gave the main house to her son Josiah’s large family. A year after being unsuccessful in efforts to become solvent, Mary Riggs Collins deeded the entire plantation to her nephew, William Blount Shepard, in order to satisfy a debt owed Shepard by her husband. Shepard allowed his Aunt and his cousin Arthur to remain at Somerset Place. After a brief illness, Mary died there in April 1872 at age 64.

Somerset Place remained in the Collins family until 1889 and then a series of subsequent owners gradually reduced the plantation acreage. A later resident remembered the remains of Mary’s garden in the 1890s:

Two or three large clumps of red japonica grew near the house and a beautiful large wistaria vine grew up the south end of the porch . . . down the brick walk to the once beautiful old English garden. Many old-fashioned rose bushes, japonicas, box bushes, snow drops, jonquils, “butter and eggs,” a beautiful magnolia tree and a few flowering shrubs were left to tell the beauty of bygone days. In a corner of the garden the very much delapidated conservatory stood.⁹⁹

In 1941 the main house and the surviving outbuildings became part of Pettigrew State Park. A decade later the State Parks service began a “complete and authentic restoration of the buildings and grounds.” The work began under the direction of W. S. Tarlton, a specialist in American History.¹⁰⁰ Tarlton drew a detailed map of surviving garden features and plant specimens, including copious notes from the recollections of local residents.¹⁰¹ Although not a trained archaeologist, Tarlton excavated the property extensively and documented his work with meticulous notes. During excavations near the main house, Tarlton made the “unexpected” discovery of surviving brick walks, fence postholes and a formal garden plan with gravel walks, all preserved under a layer of soil a foot and a half deep.¹⁰²

Armed with his notes and sketches, Tarlton traveled to Williamsburg, Virginia for advice on an appropriate garden restoration.¹⁰³ Alden Hopkins (1905-1960), the resident landscape architect at Colonial Williamsburg, spent several weeks studying

Tarlton’s map and notes. Hopkins drafted a restoration plan based on the surviving features and specimens.¹⁰⁴ However, it fails today to meet the tougher standards of historic garden restoration.¹⁰⁵ Neither Tarlton nor Hopkins had the benefit of the numerous garden references contained in several large collections of family papers then still owned by Collins descendants.¹⁰⁶ Although extremely faithful to Mary Collins’s form, Hopkins chose plants in an effort to please himself and twentieth-century Colonial Revival tastes.

The lack of adequate funds prevented Tarlton from fully implementing Hopkin’s restoration plan. The old fence lines were rebuilt along the garden enclosure and the brick walks were restored with salvaged nineteenth-century brick.¹⁰⁷ Within the formal garden area, Tarlton made the unfortunate decision to stabilize the surviving gravel walks with concrete.¹⁰⁸ Although Tarlton urged his supervisors to complete the restoration of the “Lawn” area, this was never done.¹⁰⁹

Visitors today to Somerset Place can still see many surviving features in the landscape reflecting various periods of the plantation’s history. Immense rows of cypress planted in the 1780s by the Lake Company still line some fields and canal banks. Sycamores planted by Mary Collins survive along the shoreline near the site of the slave cabins. The elm tree *allée* no longer lines the plantation street, which is also missing its row of service buildings. In the garden enclosure, a magnolia tree planted in the mid-1840s stands alone at the site of Mary’s flowerbeds. Across the canal on the lawn, Mary’s ring of chestnut oaks is one of the few features to have survived from her planting effort in April 1852.¹¹⁰

As all gardens reflect the inspiration of their creators, surviving records and manuscripts help to recreate for us (if only mentally) the vision that Mary Riggs Collins, a most unlikely plantation mistress, created in the landscape at Somerset Place.

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End Notes...

¹ Edmund Ruffin, *Farmer’s Register, A monthly publication, devoted to the improvements of the practice and support of the interests of Agriculture* (Petersburg, Virginia), November 30, 1839, 731.

² John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 1.

³ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to [Mary Charlotte] Minnie North, April 29, 1856, Pettigrew Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.

⁴ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 25-26, 39, 48.

⁵ John Sykes, *A Collins Family Compendium* (Creswell, NC: Somerset Place Foundation, 1991), 27.

⁶ Henrietta Elizabeth Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, August 7, 1846, Faunsdale Plantation Papers, Archives, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

⁷ There are two different traditions regarding Mary’s first association with Josiah Collins. Supposedly Mary was a student at the same boarding school in New York City that

educated Josiah’s older sisters, Ann Daves and Mary Matilda Collins. In 1828 Mary’s older sister Helen became engaged to William Kent, a childhood friend of the Riggs children and son of the famed “Chancellor” James Kent of New York. During Helen’s engagement, Mary undoubtedly saw Kent’s best friend Josiah Collins who later served as a groomsman when William Kent married Helen Riggs. L. Vernon Briggs, *Genealogies of the Different Families bearing the name of Kent in the United States, together with their possible English Ancestry, A.D. 1295-1898* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill Press, 1898), 197-198.

⁸ Hugh Williamson, *The History of North Carolina* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1812; Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1973), II, 182-183; Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, I, 404.

⁹ George P. Collins, “Discovery of Lake Scuppernon,” *Publications of the Southern Historical Association* (Washington: Southern Historical Association, 1902), VI, 23.

¹⁰ John Sykes, *The Lake Chapel at Somerset Place* (Raleigh: N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, 1999), 5-7.

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- ¹¹ E. Alethea (Collins) Warren, "Sketch of the Life of Josiah Collins," n.d., Josiah Collins Papers, Archives; W. S. Tarlton, *Somerset Place and Its Restoration* (Raleigh: Division of Parks, 1954), 20-21.
- ¹² Ann Blount (Shepard) Pettigrew to Mary Williams (Shepard) Bryan, September 30, 1829, Bryan Family Papers, State Archives.
- ¹³ Collins, "Discovery of Lake Scuppernong," 23.
- ¹⁴ [Mary Riggs Collins], Plantation Record from January 1850 to July 1853, Account Books, Josiah Collins Papers.
- ¹⁵ Ann Blount (Shepard) Pettigrew to William Shepard Pettigrew, March 1, 1830, Pettigrew Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection; E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, January 2, 1845; Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, January 20, 1853, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ¹⁶ Catherine W. Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 203.
- ¹⁷ James R. McPherson and Stephen E. Massengill, *A Report on the Collins Paper Research* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1977), 3-6; Tarlton, *Somerset Place and Its Restoration*, 128-129.
- ¹⁸ Ann D. Collins, Henrietta E. Collins and Louisa M. Collins to Josiah Collins, August 13, 1843, Book N, p. 179, Chowan County Deeds, Chowan County Courthouse, Edenton, N.C.; Alethea Collins, "Somerset Place," [n.d.], Accession files, Historic Sites Section, N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh; E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, December 27, 1850, Faunsdale Plantation Papers; McPherson and Massengill, *Collins Papers Research*, 3-6.
- ¹⁹ The Collinses employed Elizabeth Anna (Elder) Gregg (1813-1881) of Brooklyn, New York and then Sarah Howser (ca. 1797-1838) of Orange County, New York. Charlotte Cabarrus (1800-1860), a free black from Edenton was employed as a nursemaid first and then became the chief housekeeper in charge of the household staff of slaves. Account Books, 1839-1853, Josiah Collins Papers, Archives; St. David's Parish Register (transcript), Farm Security Administration Papers, Archives; Grant H. Collar, Jr., *Newberry Family and In-Laws* (Little Rock, AR: privately printed by the author, 1988), 239-240.
- ²⁰ George P. Collins to Graham Daves, July 20, 1849, Anne Cameron Collins Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.
- ²¹ Sykes, *The Lake Chapel*, 53-57.
- ²² Powell, *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, II, 203-204.
- ²³ Mary Blount Pettigrew to James Johnston Pettigrew, May 15, 1845, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ²⁴ Charles Lockhart Pettigrew to James Johnston Pettigrew, August 30, 1849, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ²⁵ Narrative of William Shepard Pettigrew, [February 1843], Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ²⁶ Malichi J. White to William Shepard Pettigrew, October 10, 1857; William Shepard Pettigrew to Hardy Hardison, October 15, 1857, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ²⁷ Mary Blount Pettigrew to William Shepard Pettigrew, June 6, 1861, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ²⁸ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 15, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ²⁹ Daybook of Josiah Collins, January 1842-January 1846, January 4, 1842, July 9, 1842; Daybook of Josiah Collins, January 1848-July 1856, May 14, 1853, Josiah Collins Papers, State Archives.
- ³⁰ In 1967 the volume was presented to the State of North Carolina by a Collins descendant and subsequently cataloged for the Somerset Place Restoration. However, the present location of this rare early garden work is unknown. Cadwallader Jones Collins, Jr. to John F. Bivins, Jr., October 13, 1967, Accession files, Historic Sites Section, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh.
- ³¹ Daybook of Josiah Collins, January 1848-July 1856, September 18, 1851, Account Books, Josiah Collins Papers, State Archives.
- ³² Mary Riggs Collins purchased seeds from Edenton merchants, T. J. Bland and John M. Jones and from Henry Buff, a German chemist who lived in Ports-mouth, Virginia. Daybook of Josiah Collins, January 1842-January 1846, February 24, 1843, April 7, 1843; Daybook of Josiah Collins, January 1848-July 1856, Josiah Collins Papers, State Archives; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Norfolk County, Virginia, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (microfilm, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge.)
- ³³ In 1850 William Overton was an illiterate fifty-two-year-old farmer that lived in the Cool Spring District, just adjacent to Somerset Place plantation. Daybook of Josiah Collins, January 1842-January 1846, May 10, 1843, Josiah Collins Papers, State Archives; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Washington County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (microfilm, Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge.)
- ³⁴ Daybook of Josiah Collins, January 1848-July 1856, January 31, 1848, Josiah Collins Papers, State Archives.
- ³⁵ James Moffatt, "Plan of Josiah Collins's Farm at Lake Phelps, August 16, 1821," "Garden and House Plot," n.d., Map Collection, Josiah Collins Papers, State Archives.
- ³⁶ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 10, 1851, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ³⁷ Joachim Wolschke-Bulman and Jack Becker, *American Garden Literature in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection 1785-1900* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998), 63-64; Daybook of Josiah Collins, July 1856-February 1867, March 24, May 7, 1860, Josiah Collins Papers, State Archives.
- ³⁸ Robert Buist, *The Rose Manual; containing Accurate Descriptions of all the finest varieties of Roses, Properly classed in their respective families, their character and mode of culture, with directions, for their propagation, and the destruction of insects. With engravings.* (Philadelphia: for the author, Carey and Hart, 1844), 91-92.
- ³⁹ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, September 28, 1849, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁴⁰ Judith K. Major, *To Live in the New World: A. J. Downing and American Landscape Gardening* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1997), 2-9.
- ⁴¹ Jacquetta M. Haley, *Pleasure Grounds: Andrew Jackson Downing and Montgomery Place* (Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Press, 1988), 13-15.
- ⁴² Jean Bradley Anderson, *Carolinian on the Hudson: The Life of Robert Donaldson* (Raleigh: The Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina, Inc., 1996)..
- ⁴³ James West Bryan to John Herritage Bryan, December 18, 1828, Bryan Family Papers, Duke University; Frederick S. Blount to [unnamed], January 2, 1829, John H. Bryan Papers, State Archives.
- ⁴⁴ Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (New York: A. O. Moore and Co., 1859), 371.
- ⁴⁵ Downing, *Theory and Practice*, 370.
- ⁴⁶ Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison purchased from Charles Allen and Royal & Jeter's "Hill City Nursery" in Vicksburg, Mississippi and from Joseph Develin "Nurseryman and Florist" in Mobile, Alabama. Bills and Receipts, 1845-1860, Faunsdale Plantation Records, Private Collection.
- ⁴⁷ E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, April 25, 1844, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁴⁸ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 15, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁴⁹ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, September 17, 1847, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵⁰ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, September 17, 1847, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵¹ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, January 20, 1853, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵² Receipt of Charles Allen, January 27, 1860, Faunsdale Plantation Records.
- ⁵³ In 1851 Robert Buist's *American Flower-Garden Directory* designated coral trees as members of the genus *Erythrinas* "containing about thirty species of leguminose, scarlet-flowering plants." Robert Buist, *American Flower-Garden Directory* (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1851), 159; Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 15, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵⁴ Robert Buist wrote concerning the *Russelia juncea*: "a slender plant of an upright habit, producing, when well grown, a profusion of scarlet tubular flowers, about one inch long..." Buist, *American-Flower Garden Directory* (Philadelphia: E. L. Carey & A. Hart, 1839), 25. Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 12, 1849, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵⁵ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, January 20, 1853, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵⁶ Robert Buist described the *Roëllas* as "pretty leafy shrubs, with blue terminal funnel-shaped flowers, lip-spreading; *R. ciliatâ*, *R. spicâta*, and *R. pedunculâta* are the finest of the genus." Whereas Mary was troubled with properly watering her *Roëllas*, Buist cautioned his readers that "the pots must be well drained, and care taken that they are not over-watered." Buist, *American Flower-Garden Directory*, (1851), 250. Another possible candidate for Mary Collins' *Roëlla* is *Ruellia*, which is also described by Buist: "There are a few species, very pretty flowering plants of easy culture. *R. formosa*, flowers long, of a fine scarlet color; plant half shrubby. *R. fulgida* has bright scarlet flowers on axillary long-stalked fascicles. *R. persicifolia*, will unequal leaves and light blue flowers, is now called *R. anisophylla*. Buist, *American Flower-Garden Directory*, (1851), 171; Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 15, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵⁷ Louisa purchased the plant from "Feasts." In 1850 a Jacob Feist operated a dry goods store on 29th Avenue in New York City. See *The New York City Directory, for 1850* (New York: John Doggett, Jr., 1850), 172; Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, September 13, 1851, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵⁸ Henrietta Elizabeth Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, August 7, 1846, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁵⁹ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, September 13, 1851, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶⁰ Josiah Collins, Jr. to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, June 9, 1849; Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, June 14, 1849; E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, June 18, 1849; Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 12, 1849, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶¹ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, September 28, 1849, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶² Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, September 28, 1849, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶³ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, January 20, 1853, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶⁴ Daybook of Josiah Collins, January 1848-July 1856, March 6, 1853, Josiah Collins Papers, State Archives.
- ⁶⁵ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, October 13, 1853, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶⁶ Henrietta Elizabeth Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, May 14, 1844, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶⁷ E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, April [1853], Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶⁸ Ann Collins Blount to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, May 19, 1846, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁶⁹ E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, April 5, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁷⁰ Henrietta Elizabeth (Collins) Page to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, August 8, 1849, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁷¹ The Warren House garden lot was sold after Dr. Warren's death and is now the site of the Beverly Hall gardens. Tom Butchko, *Edenton: An Architectural Portrait* (Edenton: Edenton Women's Club, 1992), 210-212; Henrietta Elizabeth (Collins) Page to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, May 8, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁷² Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to [Mary Charlotte] Minnie North, February 22, 1855, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁷³ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to Jane Gibert (Petigru) North, March 1, 1855, Pettigrew Family Papers.

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- ⁷⁴ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to [her sister], November 9, 1854, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁷⁵ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to Jane Gibert (Petigru) North, April 22, 1854, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁷⁶ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to [Mary Charlotte] Minnie North, December 4, 1856, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁷⁷ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to [Mary Charlotte] Minnie North, November 22, 1856, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁷⁸ Mary Riggs Collins probably shared English ivy with her neighbor, because Caroline later requested her sister to “inquire if the *Irish Ivy* can be obtained at any of the nursery gardens in Charleston.” Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to Louisa Gibert North, December 6, 1857, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁷⁹ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to [Mary Charlotte] Minnie North, April 29, 1856, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁸⁰ Jane Gibert (Petigru) North to Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew, March 25-26, 1859, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁸¹ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to Jane Gibert (Petigru) North, April 3, 1859, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁸² Estate of Josiah Collins, 1863, Chowan County Estates Records, State Archives.
- ⁸³ E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, April 3, 1854, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁸⁴ E. Alethea (Collins) Warren to Sarah Rebecca (Jones) Collins, April 21, 1879, Anne Cameron Collins Papers.
- ⁸⁵ E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, January 6-7, 1845, Faunsdale Plantation Records; E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, January 7, 1846, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁸⁶ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 10, 1851, Faunsdale Plantation Papers; W. S. Tarlton, “Notes to Accompany Plan [of Somerset Place], ca. 1952, Research files, Historic Sites Section, N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh.
- ⁸⁷ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 15, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁸⁸ Downing, *Theory and Practice*, 437-441; E. Alethea Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, April 5, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁸⁹ Estate Inventory of Josiah Collins, 1866, Collins Papers, Archives.
- ⁹⁰ Tarlton, *Somerset Place and its Restoration*, 66.
- ⁹¹ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, July 15, 1852, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁹² Uriah Bennett interview, May 1937, Scuppernong Farms Project, Farm Security Administration Papers, State Archives.
- ⁹³ Mary (Riggs) Collins to Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison, September 17, 1847, Faunsdale Plantation Papers.
- ⁹⁴ George Patterson to Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew, July 24, 1860, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁹⁵ Charles Lockhart Pettigrew to Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew, August 23, 1860, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁹⁶ Hardy Hardison to William Shepard Pettigrew, September 18, 1860, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁹⁷ Jane Caroline (North) Pettigrew to [Mary Charlotte] Minnie North, April 13, 1861, Pettigrew Family Papers.
- ⁹⁸ George P. Collins to Anne Ruffin (Cameron) Collins, June 19, 1865, Anne Cameron Collins Papers, Southern Historical Collection.
- ⁹⁹ Tarlton, *Somerset Place and Its Restoration*, 130.
- ¹⁰⁰ Tarlton, *Somerset Place and Its Restoration*, iii.
- ¹⁰¹ W. S. Tarlton, Plan of Somerset Place (with annotations), ca. 1951, Research Files, Historic Sites Section, Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Raleigh.
- ¹⁰² Tarlton, *Somerset Place and Its Restoration*, 56.
- ¹⁰³ Thomas W. Morse to William S. Tarlton, February 3, 1954, Research Files, Historic Sites.
- ¹⁰⁴ Alden Hopkins, Somerset Place Garden Restoration Plan, Research Files, Historic Sites.
- ¹⁰⁵ Charles A. Birnbaum and Robin Karson, eds., *Pioneers of American Landscape Design* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 170-175.
- ¹⁰⁶ Letters, account books, and papers from Somerset Place were donated to the North Carolina State Archives in 1961 and designated the “Josiah Collins Papers.” In 1981 descendants of Louisa McKinlay (Collins) Harrison donated a large collection of family papers (including Mary Riggs Collins’s letters about gardening) to the Birmingham Public Library.
- ¹⁰⁷ Tarlton used salvaged bricks (and other materials) from the Pettigrew plantation, Bonarva for restoration work at Somerset Place. Built in 1861 to replace a house destroyed by fire the year before, Bonarva was considered in 1953 as beyond repair and demolished by the Parks Service. Tarlton, *Somerset Place and Its Restoration*, 60.
- ¹⁰⁸ Tarlton, *Somerset Place and Its Restoration*, 60.
- ¹⁰⁹ Tarlton, *Somerset Place and Its Restoration*, 65-66.
- ¹¹⁰ Terry M. Harper, “Somerset Trees: Living Artifacts,” *Somerset News*, March 1993.

International Heritage Rose Conference

By Ruth Knopf, Charleston, South Carolina

Roses have long been an important part of our lives as Southern gardeners and records show that they have been in Southern gardens from the beginning of our country’s settlement.

On October 14th-17th, 2001 the Ninth International Heritage Rose Conference will be held for the first time on the East coast of the United States in Charleston, SC. This conference offers a unique opportunity to focus on Noisette roses, a single group of old roses which is entirely American in its derivation and which originated in Charleston at the end of the eighteenth century.

There will be a series of presentations, which begin with a tight focus on Charleston’s place in rose history and the introduction of ‘Champneys Pink Cluster’ and ‘Blush Noisette’. The story of John Champneys and Philippe Noisette, their places in the Charleston of their time, and Charleston’s role as a portal for the introduction of plants to America and from America to Europe, provide a rich background. What these early hybrids were and how they

found an important place in gardens, both in the South where the old Noisettes took a strong foothold, and in Europe where they became the basis for a wonderful new class of roses, take us to the heart of this symposium. The way in which the Noisettes fit in with three other old rose groups – the Chinas, the Teas and the Musk roses – provides an opportunity to explore a large segment of old roses that are often overlooked in rose literature today.

The story of the rediscovery of the old Noisettes in South Carolina echoes stories of old rose findings around the world. The joy of seeing in these found roses connections with the past, with generations of ordinary gardeners, can be told by present day gardeners from around the world with equal eloquence.

For a listing of speakers and information contacts, see the Calendar on page two. For additional information please contact: Mimi Cathcart at: acath92299@aol.com, (843) 722-8262; or Ruth Knopf at: steeprose@aol.com, (843) 883-9216.

Cultivating History: Old Salem's Renowned Biennial Conference

by Flora Ann Bynum



"Cultivating History, Exploring the Horticultural Practices of the Southern Gardener," will be the theme of the Thirteenth Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes, to be held in Old Salem, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, September 27th -29th. The conference focuses on historical horticultural practices in the South, including African-American landscapes, gardening by the moon, 18th-century garden pests, garden design, and historic garden tools.

Davyd Foard Hood, architectural and landscape historian of Vale, North Carolina, will open the conference with an overview of historic Southern gardens in letters, journals, and travel accounts. John Forti, horticulturist at Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, Massachusetts, will discuss "Cultivating History in the Historic Garden."

Three afternoon workshops on "Exploring Historic Practices" will be followed with an evening panel on historic tools. Participating in the workshops and panel will be Stephen Mankowski, journeyman blacksmith and Terry Yemm, journeyman gardener, both of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia and Kate Meatyard of St. Mary's College, Maryland.

Rudy Favretti, preservation landscape architect of Storrs, Connecticut, and long considered the dean of landscape preservation in America, will open the second day of the conference with a discussion on early garden layout, "Sprung from the Earth: the Layout of the Common Garden." The rest of the day will be devoted to a panel, "In Search of the African American Landscape." Douglas W. Sanford, assistant professor and director of the Center for Historic Preservation at Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, Virginia, will present "The Archaeology of Slave Quarter Architecture and Landscape." "Jardin Loin, Gombo Gaté: African-American Foodways and the Kitchen Garden" will be discussed by Jessica B. Harris, professor, Queens College, Brooklyn, New York, author of several cookbooks on the foodways of the American Diaspora, and a founding member of the Southern Foodways Alliance.

The panel will continue with "'Little Spots allow'd them': Slave Gardens in the 18th Century" by Patricia Gibbs, historian with Colonial Williamsburg, and "Gumbo, The Three Sisters, and Food Production in 19th-Century Slave Gardens" by Lena Ashmore Sorensen of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

The afternoon will conclude with a visit to St. Philips Moravian Church and Graveyard in Old Salem, now under

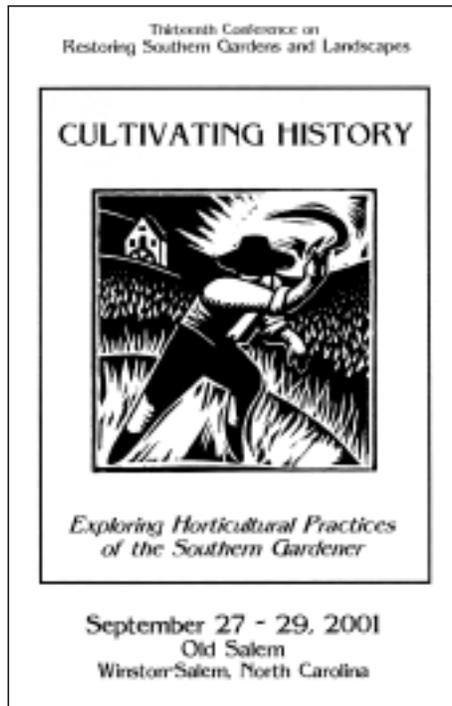
restoration, and the oldest standing African-American church in North Carolina.

The third morning of the conference will be opened by Sally K. Reeves, archivist of the New Orleans Notarial Archives, New Orleans, speaking on "Rediscovering Gardening by the Moon." Mrs. Reeves translated and did the introduction to the recently published *New Louisiana Gardener*, sponsored by SGHS. Peter Hatch, director of gardens and grounds for Monticello, Charlottesville, Virginia, will give the final presentation on "Ecological Imperialism: Southern Garden Pests, 1700-1830." Keyes Williamson, director of horticulture for Old Salem and conference chair, will conclude with a conference summary.

The Southern Garden History Society is one of the conference sponsors, along with Old Salem, Inc., the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in Old Salem, and Historic Stagville in Durham, North Carolina.

SGHS members have been mailed a brochure with registration information for the conference, and a number of registrations have already been received.

Kay Bergey serves as conference registrar. For additional information, call Ms. Bergey at (336) 721-7378. ♣



NEGHS Call for Papers

Proposals for articles are now being accepted for Volume 10 (2002) of the Journal of the New England Garden History Society. Subjects are not restricted to New England and topics relating to landscapes, gardens, preservation, and other themes associated with Modernism and Modern Gardens are especially welcome this year. Proposals should be one page (no more than 250 words) and include suggested illustrations and a brief biography of the author. Proposals are due October 1st, 2001, and should be sent to the Editor, NEGHS, Massachusetts Horticultural Society, 900 Washington Street, Wellesley, Massachusetts 02482, or as a Word Attachment to: Judith@tankard.net. For a list of recent articles and ordering information for back issues of the Journal, visit their web site at: www.masshort.org/neghs.htm ♣

GARDEN HISTORY SEMINAR

75 Years of Colonial Williamsburg's Gardens



September 22nd, 2001, Colonial Williamsburg will hold its annual Garden History Seminar in Williamsburg, Virginia. The theme this year is "75 years of Colonial Williamsburg's gardens." Since their debut in 1926, the gardens have become one of the most enduring and recognizable American landscapes. The historic area and its numerous individual gardens set with a restrained baroque town plan have come to personify a major element in American garden design.

Presentations scheduled: "The Case for Gardens in Williamsburg," by **Kent Brinkley**, landscape architect, Colonial Williamsburg; "The Emergence of Garden Archaeology at Colonial Williamsburg in Principle and in Practice," by **Marley Brown**, Archaeologist, Colonial Williamsburg; "Reconsidering the Garden Legacy of Alden Hopkins," by **Mary Hughes**, landscape architect, University of Virginia; "The Evolution of the Governor's Palace Garden," by **Wesley Greene**, garden historian, Colonial Williamsburg; "Garden Interpretation at Colonial Williamsburg," by **Laura Viancour**, horticulturist, Colonial Williamsburg; and "The Influence of Williamsburg on American Gardens," by **Gordon Chappell**, landscape architect, Colonial Williamsburg.

For additional registration information contact the program registrar by telephone (757) 220-7174, fax (757) 565-8630, or by e-mail at tdaily@cwf.org. ♣

"Texas Gardening ... Adventures In Success" 2001 Oktober Gartenfest

The eighth Winedale Gardening Symposium follows highly successful programs each year since 1994. This year's topic, "Texas Gardening ... Adventures In Success," will cover many of the defining characteristics of both old and new garden interpretations suitable for Texas conditions. This symposium will examine a range of garden techniques, from planting by the moon, to the creation of settings featuring fragrance, dry garden occupants, or mixed beds of both vegetables and ornamentals. Barney Lipscomb of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas will detail the history and lore of poisonous plants.

Dr. William C. Welch, Extension Landscape Horticulturist at Texas A&M University and past president of SGHS, will begin with introductory information defining the judicious use of old, new and native plant material in the modern "garden-escape." Sally Kittredge Reeves, archivist of the New Orleans Notarial Archives and translator of Jacques-Felix LeLièvre's 1838 publication *Nouveau Jardinier de la Louisiane*, will speak on "Gardening by the Moon," a concept followed even today by many people. Barney Lipscomb of the Botanical Research Institute of Texas will then detail "Poisonous Plants," making famous poisonous plants of history come alive again through case histories and details.

Saturday participants are invited to a very special plant sale ably coordinated by SGHS members Jayme and Harley Ponder. This year's offerings are more exciting than ever. A slide presentation by Dr. William C. Welch will feature many of the plants under discussion. Aubrey King, third-generation East Texas nurseryman, D. Greg Grant, gardening authority located in Cherokee County, and Heidi Sheesley/Bill Rohde of Treeseach Farms in Houston have all contributed to the outstanding selection of desirable plants at the sale. Proceeds go toward landscape development of the Winedale Historical Center.

Scott Ogden will speak on "Plants for the Dry Years." Scott lives and gardens in Austin, Texas in the dry, calcareous region where the Hill Country begins.

The program will end with SGHS member and well-known lecturer Greg Grant speaking on "Fragrant Plants." Greg has recreated the cottage garden and environs of his grandmother's home in Arcadia, Texas, where he has experimented with many plant possibilities for Texas. ♣

Members in the News

Judith B. Tankard's recent book, *a Place of Beauty: the Artists and Gardens of the Cornish Colony*, won a "Quill and Trowel Award" from the Garden Writers Association of America. Judith recently received a Gold Medal from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society for her advancement of knowledge of the history of New England gardens. **Brent and Becky Heath**, co-owners of Brent & Becky's Bulbs in Gloucester, Virginia, also were recipients of the MHS Gold Medal award. [For more information about all the winners, contact MHS spokesperson Kathy Sharkey (ksharkey@masshort.org), or click on the "Events/Press Releases" at www.masshort.org]

The May-June *Southern Accents* includes several articles about SGHS members. The first, a four-page story titled "Rose Revival," highlights **G. Michael Shoup**, founder of the Antique Rose Emporium based in Brenham, Texas. Color photographs of old roses illustrate the article. [For information about ARE, telephone (800) 441-0002, or visit their web site at: www.weAREroses.com] The Garden Conservancy's "Open Days" program is illustrated with a photograph of **Chatwood Garden** in Hillsborough, North Carolina. [Information about the Conservancy and the "Open Days" program and directory can be obtained by telephoning (888) 842-2442. The directory lists by city the names and locations of private gardens participating in the program and the dates they will be open to the public.] Finally, the personal garden of Atlanta landscape architects **Hugh and Mary Palmer Dargan** is featured in another article, which cites the Dargan's many projects in America and England. Color photographs show the Dargan's six-year-old garden surrounding their 1930 brick bungalow. ♣

Anne Carr Receives GCA Award



The Garden Club of America (GCA) has awarded Anne Coppedge Carr the Amy Angell Collier Montague Medal for “outstanding civic achievement” for the creation and development of the Cherokee Garden Library. This national award was one of only eleven presented at the annual Garden Club of America meeting Awards Banquet in May 2001. Anne Carr, of Atlanta, Georgia, served on the SGHS board for many years and has remained a faithful member.

SGHS board member Jim Cothran paid the following tribute to Mrs. Carr: “Beginning in 1976 with Anne’s vision and her continued stewardship for over twenty-four years, the Cherokee Garden Library has developed into one of the country’s finest collections of historic garden books, pamphlets, nursery catalogs, and ephemera relating to American/Southern horticulture, landscape design, and garden history. This unique collection represents a truly noteworthy achievement, offering scholars, garden preservationists, and laymen alike an opportunity to understand, explore, and document many facets of our garden heritage. It is to Anne Carr that we are indebted for this outstanding civic achievement.”

Former SGHS board member Jane Campell Symmes, of Madison, Georgia, echoed Jim Cothran’s remarks by stating: “Though her civic achievements are many and worthy of the award, I think that her founding and development of the Cherokee Garden Library is a landmark gift of great distinction for Atlanta and indeed the nation. It has provided unparalleled opportunity for the study of historic landscapes, gardens, and horticulture, not only for Southerners, but also for many from the rest of the United States and abroad who make use of the facility by mail or telephone. Though of great value now, it will only become more so in the years to come.”

The Cherokee Garden Library also is the repository for the archives of the Southern Garden History Society. ♣

Eudora Welty’s Garden Reborn

Submitted by Flora Ann Bynum

The restoration of the iris bed at the home of Pulitzer-prize winning Southern author Eudora Welty is described in the spring issue of *Roots*, the journal of the Historic Iris Preservation Society (HIPS). Miss Welty, who died July 23rd at age 92, had lived most of her life in the family home, built in 1925 in Jackson, Mississippi. The garden Miss Welty and her mother worked on together for some forty years is currently being restored. The house and garden will now become a museum open to the public. SGHS member Susan Halton of Jackson is project director for the restoration of the Welty garden, and she had contacted HIPS for assistance with restoring the iris border.

The iris planting measures approximately 3 feet by 56 feet, swelling to ten feet into the center of the perennial border of the garden. Several members of the society did considerable research and study to assemble the iris needed for the project. A collection of 160 rhizomes representing 41 separate species and cultivars were donated

in late summer of 2000 by HIPS members for planting in the border of the Welty garden.

SGHS member Dr. Arthur O. Tucker of Dover, Delaware, serves as international director for HIPS. For information on joining the society, contact Andree D. Wilson, 15 Bracebridge Road, Newton Centre, MA 02495, e-mail wilson@huhepl.harvard.edu. Additional information on the society and on historic irises can be found at <http://www.worldiris.com>. ♣

Spring 2001 Board Meeting Report

— Flora Ann Bynum, secretary/treasurer

Three new members elected to the SGHS Board of Directors at the society’s annual meeting held in New Bern in May are Fletch Coke of Nashville, Tennessee; Betsy Crusel of New Orleans, Louisiana; and Sally K. Reeves of New Orleans. Retiring from the board after serving two consecutive terms of three years were James Barganier of Montgomery, Alabama; Nancy F. Haywood of Houston, Texas; and J. Dean Norton of Mount Vernon, Virginia. According to the society’s bylaws, directors are elected to serve a term of three years and then are eligible for a second term of three years, after which they are not eligible for re-election until they have been off the board for one year.

Directors who have served a term of three years and were elected for a second term of three years are James R. Cothran of Atlanta, Georgia; Gail Griffin of Bethesda, Maryland; Davyd Foad Hood of Vale, North Carolina; and Larry Paarlberg of Tallahassee, Florida.

At the annual meeting, Kenneth M. McFarland, society president, thanked the retiring board members, Mr. Barganier, Mrs. Haywood, and Mr. Norton, for their years of service to the society. Mrs. Griffin was chair of the nominating committee; serving with her were Dean Norton and Mary Anne Pickins of Columbus, Texas.

The board at its May meeting heard reports from the chairs of upcoming annual meetings. Dr. Elizabeth M. Boggess of Natchez, Mississippi, asked for suggestions for speakers and exhibits for next year’s meeting, to be held in Natchez April 18th-21st, 2002. “Return to the River: A Gala 20th Anniversary” is the meeting’s theme.

Jim Cothran reported that several committees were already at work planning the 21st annual meeting, to be held in Atlanta in April 2003. The theme “Atlanta’s Landscape Legacy” has been selected. The Atlanta History Center has offered its facilities at no cost.

Betsy Crusel sent a report that plans were underway for the 22nd annual meeting, to be held in March 2004, in New Orleans. She has contacted a small hotel in the French Quarter, and has started meetings with local garden authorities.

Ken McFarland asked board members for suggestions for improving the society’s Web site, www.southerngardenhistory.org, and for suggestions for appropriate links for the site.

Gordon W. Chappell, society vice-president, reported on progress of the society’s project to compile a historic plant list of the South. He said he had received within the last few months six or eight more documented lists, but the collection was still weak in lists of plants grown in the middle states of the antebellum South. He plans to continue work on the lists for six or eight more months.

Mr. Cothran discussed the possibility of a museum of Southern garden history. ♣

Annual Meeting in New Bern Reveals the Carolina Coastal Plain

Reviewed by Peggy Cornett



The 2001 annual meeting of the Southern Garden History Society, held in historic New Bern, North Carolina May 4th-6th, brought members to a fascinatingly diverse, yet often unexplored region of the South. Conference planners Perry Mathewes and Carleton Wood, along with many others, creatively organized a remarkable weekend filled with lectures, garden and house tours, receptions, and dinners.

The roster of speakers was perhaps the finest ever assembled for an annual meeting, and their well-prepared and inspired presentations were all outstanding. Friday afternoon, the topics ranged from the regions natural history, explored by Doug Rader, senior scientist of the NC Environmental Defense, to the gardening accounts of a plantation mistress, described by John Sykes. [See this issue's lead article.] The lively Catherine Bishir, senior architectural historian at the NC State Historic Preservation Office, combined humor and cultural history in her talk on "Pine Trees, Pigs, and Palladio," and Tryon Palace horticulturist Rebecca Lucas prepared us for the after-hours tours of the historic gardens and of the palace by candlelight. At the conclusion of the dinner on the South Lawn, author and musician Bland Simpson provided the evening entertainment with song and readings from his book, *Into the Sound*.

Departing from the standard meeting format, the itinerary called for a full-day trip to Edenton on Saturday, which included an extended visit and lunch en route at Somerset Place, an antebellum plantation in Creswell, North Carolina. [See lead article.] The leisurely pace allowed meeting participants to relax and take in the rural ambiance of Somerset, and to explore the private gardens of Edenton, North Carolina before dining by the sound. We approached Edenton by strolling through the expansive landscape of the Hayes Plantation overlooking Edenton Bay. Roses were of particular note throughout the gardens, and a few of the many varieties in bloom included 'Old Blush' China, Chestnut Rose, 'Souvenir de la Malmaison', 'Duchesse de Brabant', 'Safrano', and 'Isabella Sprunt'. A high point of the afternoon was the opportunity to wander through The Homestead, the 18th-century house and private gardens of Ross and Frances Inglis on Water Street.

Sunday morning began with Larry Earley's presentation on the remarkable story of the longleaf pine tar, pitch, and turpentine industry. Carleton Wood, formerly of Tryon Palace and presently director of the Elizabethan Gardens in Manteo, discussed the maps

and Carolina works of Claude Joseph Sauthier, which are important documents depicting New Bern and Tryon Palace. Staff archaeologist Patricia Samford considered the conflicts and difficulties inherent in determining the true nature of the Tryon Palace gardens. Perry Mathewes, curator of gardens, concluded the conference with a look at the natural history depictions and descriptions made by naturalist John Lawson, who was a founder of New Bern.

Included in the conference materials was a very informative booklet, containing not only the meeting itinerary, tour descriptions and list of participants, but also a lengthy article on the chronology and history of Tryon Palace and biographies and accounts of early New

Bern gardeners whose gardens no longer exist. One such person was Lavinia Ellis Cole Roberts, an avid gardener during the late 1800s. All that remains of her exceptional garden, which included around 500 rose bushes, thousands of daffodils and irises and numerous flowers, is

her "List of Flowers 1885." A gift for all attendees at the annual meeting was a packet of Japanese Spider Lilies, *Lycoris radiata*,

collected from a colony once established on her property. According to family lore, Lavinia Roberts' brother-in-law, Captain William Roberts, was with Commodore Matthew Perry when he opened Japan to American trade in 1854. The young captain brought bulbs to Lavinia, and these were the first to be grown in North America. Plants from the lists of Lavinia Roberts and other New Bernian gardeners are now being grown by the gardening staff of Tryon Palace Historic Sites & Gardens in the Mary Kistler Stoney Flower Garden. This commemorative garden will help future generations remember the gardening legacy of New Bern and the Carolina Coastal Plain.



1 - Ken McFarland, Beate Jensen, Traci Maier, Lindsay Woodruff, Paul Schmidt at waterfront in Edenton, NC.
2 - Tryon Palace Gardens

3 - Tryon Palace South Lawn with tent for dinner and annual meeting
4 - Tryon Palace Gardens 5 - Perry Mathewes, Chris Morash, and Davyd Hood at Somerset Place 6 - Hayes Plantation near Edenton, NC. Built 1815. 'Old Blush' Roses in foreground. Photos taken by P. Cornett

Book Review

A Year In Our Gardens: Letters by Nancy Goodwin and Allen Lacy. University of North Carolina Press. 240 pages, hardcover. ISBN 0-8078-2603-0. \$27.50

In the future, when garden historians are assessing the important American gardens of the later-twentieth century, they will need look no further than the pages of *A Year In Our Garden* to understand the genius of place that defines Montrose. Nancy Goodwin's evocative, intelligent descriptions of this important garden, nurtured and richened on the bones of an earlier plantation landscape in Hillsborough, North Carolina, is one of the many pleasures rewarding readers of this book, comprising letters she exchanged with Allen Lacy. His engaging letters in reply indicate why he has enjoyed a long success as a garden writer and how he has come to be a foremost influence on American gardening through the last quarter of the twentieth century. Nancy Goodwin and Allen Lacy met in May 1985 when he and his wife accepted an invitation to visit Montrose, its garden, and to look over the young mail-order nursery that Mrs. Goodwin established there in 1984 (and would operate until 1993).

An enduring professional and personal friendship grew from this visit, based largely on their passion for gardening, and it quickened through common interests and a background they shared but had not fully realized. Both had been students at Duke University in the 1950s when Allen Lacy had taken a course in Victorian literature under her father, Dr. Richard Sanders. Whether their paths had unknowingly crossed then is uncertain, neither remembers the other, however, gardening, music, and literature came to be the stuff of each of their lives. Allen Lacy, after taking a doctorate at Duke in 1962, pursued an academic career as a professor of philosophy, settling in New Jersey, and later becoming a gardening columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* (1979-1985) and the *New York Times* (since 1986). In 1972 he and his wife purchased an overbuilt early nineteenth-century farmhouse in Linwood, New Jersey, whose acreage had been reduced over time to a suburban one-third acre lot measuring 100 feet by 155 feet. That small parcel became and remains his garden. In 1958 Nancy Sanders married Craufurd D. W. Goodwin, an economics educator, and in 1962 they returned to Durham and to Duke University where he, too, had gained a doctorate in 1958, and became a professor of economics. In 1977 Craufurd and Nancy Goodwin purchased and moved into Montrose, which had been home to members of the Graham family since 1842; it stood on a residual tract of sixty-one acres, bordered on the South by the Eno River.

These parallel courses come to a rich fruition in *A Year In Our Garden* through an exchange of letters that begins with Mrs. Goodwin's letter to Allen Lacy on December 20th, 1977 and concluded with his to her on January 6th, 1999. While these dates effectively bracket 1998, this book does not represent a yearlong chapter simply lifted from the longer correspondence of friends. As often as not, they had kept in touch through telephone conversations, visits, occasional letters, and faxes. Instead, it resulted from Nancy Goodwin's suggestion to Lacy that they undertake a correspondence,



with a view to eventual publication, expanding on the fact that they both gardened in Zone 7a, but in locations of differing latitudes and soil types, and with varying results.

Readers will instantly recognize a literary kinship to *Dear Friend & Gardener*, a collection of letters exchanged between Beth Chatto and Christopher Lloyd through 1996 and 1997, published in 1998 by the late Frances Lincoln. Yet they are very different books. Beth Chatto and Christopher Lloyd both garden on grounds of a large scale, and each is the author of several books recounting their garden making in Essex and East Essex, respectively. Allen Lacy enjoys the life of a college professor, journalist and writer, and gardener, in more or less equal measure. Proportionally, there may be some fitness to the size of his garden, and his extensive container gardening, which serves as the experimental grounds for his writing. Nancy Goodwin is primarily a gardener at Montrose where "At last I could make the garden of my dreams. I could run out of time, but never out of land." The developed gardens at Montrose, which she opens for guided tours and seminars, cover some five acres or more of the twenty acres that are maintained as house grounds.

Much of the charm and appeal of this exchange lies in how these differences of circumstance shape their respective point of view, and more so in the warm affection and respect each holds for the other. Accounts of their gardening accomplishments (and some few failures), pleasure in the simple acts of garden making, studied plant selections and combinations in borders and pots, the exchange of seeds, plants, and seedlings between Hillsborough and Linwood, and views of favored nurseries and their offerings are shared in lively fashion. And, so too, are accounts of personal, private matters, visits to doctors and surgery, the death of Dr. Sanders, interest in the Bloomsbury circle, appreciation of the works of Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Vaughan Williams, and several paragraphs on yellow jackets that followed on Mrs. Goodwin stepping on a nest. They agreed on the appeal of "The Church in the Wildwood" but dissented on the charm of the night-blooming cereus (where I, as the steward of a plant that may well be half my age, happily side with Allen Lacy). In paragraphs occurring through its pages they also explain the influences on their careers as gardeners: for Allen Lacy, growing up in Texas, his mentor was his fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Harkey, who taught him "the wonder of gardening" while he helped her breed bearded iris on Saturday afternoons; for Nancy Goodwin, who hails from a family of gardeners, her tutor was her father who "taught me more about gardening than anyone else."

In December 1998 Allen Lacy sent Nancy Goodwin a copy of *Dear Friend & Gardener*. She quickly wrote in return:

"Thank you for sending Christopher Lloyd and Beth Chatto's letters. I read good things about them (in *Homeground* and elsewhere) and will read them a bit at a time, because this may be one of those books that is sad to finish. If I restrain myself, I can make the pleasure last a long time."

Readers of *A Year In Our Garden* will share those sentiments.

- Davyd Foard Hood, 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% sales tax.*

Breaking Ground: Examining the Vision and Practice of Historic Landscape Restoration, (1997 proceedings of Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes Conference at Old Salem). \$12.95 (plus \$3.50 postage). *NC orders add 6% sales tax.*

The Influence of Women on the Southern Landscape, (1995 proceedings of conference cited above). \$10.00 (plus \$3.50 postage). *NC orders add 6% sales tax.*

Bound Sets of Magnolia Back Issues. Includes Vol. I, No. 1 (Fall 1984) through Vol. XIV, No. 4 (Winter/Spring 1999), with index. \$50.00. Price includes postage and tax.

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Annual Membership Dues

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

The membership year runs from May 1st to April 30th. Members joining after January 1st will be credited for the coming year beginning May 1st. Write to membership secretary at:

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