



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

# Magnolia

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## Creating a Wildlife Oasis at Belmont

By Beate Jensen, Fredericksburg, Virginia

Gari Melchers Home and Studio at Belmont in Falmouth Virginia was the early twentieth-century home of American artist Gari Melchers (1860-1932), who lived and worked at the eighteenth-century estate from 1916 until his death in 1932. A Virginia and National Historic Landmark administered by the University of Mary Washington, Belmont is also a member of "Historic Artists Home and Studios," a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Gari Melchers and his wife Corinne created a "gentleman's" farm at Belmont where they raised dairy cows and chickens and enjoyed a close relationship with nature. The 27-acre estate contains the Melchers' home, most of the outbuildings used during their tenure, and the studio where Gari painted.

The gardens surrounding the house have been restored to the period of the Melchers' residence, while fields and woodlands reaching the falls of the Rappahannock River remain undeveloped. The property is an oasis of open land in area that has seen rapid development over recent decades. In addition to serving as a house museum and art gallery, Belmont is hosting more and more visitors who enjoy the estate as a place to go for walks and enjoy the outdoors. Various forms of wildlife are also finding the 27 acres a haven from the ever increasing asphalt jungle. The role of nature preserve and recreation area is new to Gari Melchers Home and Studio, while other historic sites across the nation are finding they too can fill that need.

After farming operations ceased at Belmont in the 1950s some of the pasture land grew up in trees and shrubs. Eventually these woods were choked with invasive species, but they have now been reclaimed as natural woodlands with trails that lead from the house and gardens to the river below. Until the year 2000 two areas, about 1 ½ acre each, that had historically served as pasture and a hay field were maintained as rough lawns. One field



Photo by Beate Jensen

*Front meadow. Taken during drought June/July 2010. Lush native grasses in foreground and brown fescue lawn above.*

is directly in front of the house, while the other flanks the entrance drive and parking area. In the spring of 2000 the decision was made to convert them from cool season fescue "lawns" to native warm season meadows. Cool season grasses are used in contemporary lawns in Virginia. They are not native to the United States and germinate and grow when the weather is cool and wet, mostly in

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# CALENDAR

Please visit the SGHS Web site, [www.southerngardenhistory.org](http://www.southerngardenhistory.org), for a complete and more detailed calendar with links to individual Web sites.

**April through September 12, 2010. "Christopher Lloyd: A Life at Great Dixter,"** a retrospective exhibition at the Garden Museum, London. Lectures and related events run alongside. For information, visit: [www.gardenmuseum.org.uk](http://www.gardenmuseum.org.uk).

**May 21-August 29, 2010. "Romantic Gardens: Nature, Art, and Landscape Design,"** an exhibition at The Morgan Library and Museum, in New York City features influential texts and works of art, providing an overview of ideas championed by the Romantics who implemented them in European and North American estates and public parks. For more information, visit: [www.themorgan.org](http://www.themorgan.org) or call (212) 685-0008.

**August 14-December 12, 2010. "Losing Paradise: Endangered Plants Here and Around the World,"** Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC. This exhibition explores the beauty and diversity of the world's endangered plants through 45 works by members of the American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA). For more information, visit: [www.mns.si.edu](http://www.mns.si.edu).

**August 20-22, 2010. The American Horticultural Society and the Homestead Resort** in Hot Springs, Virginia, hosts "In the Garden Weekend." Includes presentations by André Viette, Kerry Mendez, Paul Meyer, Holly Shimizu, and the Homestead's Forrest Lee. For information, visit [www.thehomestead.com](http://www.thehomestead.com).

**August 27-29, 2010. The Garden Conservancy and Hollister House Garden** presents Study Weekend II at Hollister House Garden in Washington, CT. Includes lectures by Peter Wirtz, Page Dickey, Margaret Roach, Jill Nokes, and others. TGC Open Days Garden Tour includes Hollister House Garden and six other private gardens in Litchfield County. For information, visit [www.hollisterhousegarden.org](http://www.hollisterhousegarden.org) or call (860) 868-2200.

**September 9-12, 2010. Preserving the Historic Road 2010,** 7<sup>th</sup> biennial conference will be hosted in Washington, DC by the National Park Service, the Federal Highways Administration, the USDA Forest Service, the United States International Committee on Monuments and Sites (US ICOMOS), and Paul Daniel Marriott + Associates. For more information, visit [www.historicroads.org](http://www.historicroads.org).

**September 10, 2010. "Come to Table"—Historic Plants in the American Kitchen,** the biennial Historic Plants Symposium, hosted by the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants at Monticello. Speakers include Sandy Oliver, William Woys Weaver, and John Martin "Hoppin' John" Taylor, along with Monticello's Dr. Leni Sorenson and Peter Hatch. The evening program features noted food historian and writer Rosalind Creasey. Visit [www.monticello.org](http://www.monticello.org) for more.

**September 11, 2010. Fourth Annual Heritage Harvest Festival** at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello co-sponsored with the Southern Exposure Seed Exchange. Featured speakers: Aaron Whaley (Seed Savers Exchange in Iowa); Boston TV personality Garden Girl Patti Moreno; Sharon Astryk, author of *A Nation of Farmers*; and Christopher Lee, former chef at Alice Waters Berkeley, CA restaurant. For more information, visit: [www.monticello.org](http://www.monticello.org).

**September 10-13, 2010. Garden Writers Association Annual Meeting** in Dallas, Texas. Must be a GWA member to attend. For information, visit: [www.gardenwriters.org](http://www.gardenwriters.org).

**September 18-19, 2010. The Garden Conservancy Open Days Program,** Raleigh, NC. Explore four private gardens in Cary and Raleigh, to benefit TGC and the JC Raulston Arboretum. Visit: [www.opendaysprogram.org](http://www.opendaysprogram.org), or call (888) 842-2442.

**September 25-26, 2010. The Garden Conservancy Open Days Program,** Charlotte, NC. Explore six private gardens in Charlotte, to benefit TGC and Wing Haven/The Elizabeth Lawrence Garden. Visit: [www.opendaysprogram.org](http://www.opendaysprogram.org), or call (888) 842-2442.

**September 25-26, 2010. The Cultural Landscape Foundation** will hold *What's Out There* Weekend—the prototype for an annual, nationwide series of tours of America's designed landscapes. The inaugural *What's Out There* Weekend offers visits to 30 sites around Washington DC. TCLF is supported by NPS, the Smithsonian, Dumbarton Oaks, and the Washington DC Dept. of Parks and Rec. For more information, visit <http://tclf.org>.

**October 3, 2010. The Charleston Horticultural Society's annual fall "Gardens for Gardeners" Tour,** Charleston, SC, tours Mazyck Wraggborough, a late 18th-century neighborhood containing a diverse collection of gardens. For reservations, call (843) 579-9922 or visit [www.charlestonhorticulturalsociety.org](http://www.charlestonhorticulturalsociety.org).

**October 13, 2010. Cherokee Garden Library at the Atlanta History Center** hosts a lecture by James R. Cothran on his new book, *Charleston Gardens and the Landscape Legacy of Loutrel Briggs*, followed by a book signing and reception celebrating the Garden Library's 35th Anniversary. All proceeds to benefit the Cherokee Garden Library in honor of Mr. Cothran. For information call (404) 814-4046 or email [scatron@atlantahistorycenter.com](mailto:scatron@atlantahistorycenter.com).

**October 15-16, 2010. The 22nd Annual Southern Garden Symposium & Workshops.** St. Francisville, LA. Speakers include David Creech, historian William Seale, and ethno-botanist Mark Plotkin. For more information, call (225) 635-3738 or visit [www.SouthernGardenSymposium.org](http://www.SouthernGardenSymposium.org).

**October 22-24, 2010. The third Northern Neck Cultural Landscape Symposium** at Stratford Hall, Stratford, VA. This symposium studies the region's formal landscapes of the colonial and early national periods. For additional information, email [info@stratfordhall.org](mailto:info@stratfordhall.org).

**November 5, 2010. The Cultural Landscape Foundation and the Cherokee Garden Library at the Atlanta History Center** will host a Pioneer Regional Symposium to celebrate the recent publication of *Shaping the American Landscape: New Profiles from the Pioneers of American Landscape Design Project*. For more information, contact TCLF at (202) 483.0553 or [info@tclf.org](mailto:info@tclf.org).

**April 1-3, 2011. Mark your calendars now! The 29th Annual Meeting of the Southern Garden History Society, "River Capitol: Bridging Landscapes of the Old and New South,"** will be held in Baton Rouge, LA. Participants will see a variety of public and private gardens that reflect Anglo and Franco traditions. Proposals for papers are due by November 1, 2010 and should be emailed to Anne Legett, [wlegett@cox.net](mailto:wlegett@cox.net). The Sunday optional tour will feature outstanding private gardens in nearby Pointe Coupee Parish. Visit [www.southerngardenhistory.org](http://www.southerngardenhistory.org) for updates and further information.

**September 22-24, 2011. 18<sup>th</sup> Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens & Landscapes, "A New World: Naturalists and Artists in the American South."** Set your sites on this highly regarded conference, held biennially at Old Salem in Winston-Salem, NC. More information is forthcoming in future issues of *Magnolia*.



## Creating a Wildlife Oasis..... (continued from page 1)

the spring and fall in the mid-Atlantic area. Warm season grasses are native to Virginia and grow actively from late spring through early fall. Native grasses remain lush and green even in seasons of little rain fall.

The decision to make the change from manicured fields to native wildlife habitat was based on the fact that a field maintained as a meadow has many advantages over a lawn. Before the conversion the fields were mowed by a contractor several times a season. Now, they are mowed once a year in spring, a substantial savings in both direct expenditures and a reduction in the carbon foot print that Belmont occupies. Using native grasses reduces noise, as well as particulate and tailpipe pollution. Moreover, mowing once a year also saves money on gasoline, manpower, and equipment maintenance. The savings in expenditures and pollution are real, and the benefits to the land many.

As contiguous open land disappears, what remains must work harder to serve as a home for wildlife. Humans also need get-away locations and are seeking places to hike, walk, and observe nature. Compared to a lawn that is cut on a regular basis, meadows can better serve as home to many varieties of wildlife. A regularly cut lawn consists of a monoculture of non-native grasses that provide little or no food for wildlife. Meadows change with the seasons and are alive with birds and mammals year round. In the spring animals make their nests in the fields, and in summer they provide grass, insects, and nectar as food. The grasses, some as tall as 10 feet, are left standing in the winter so the seed heads remain as a food source, and the grasses provide protection from predators and harsh winter weather.

The decision to convert fields from cool season grasses to native warm season grasses is a huge step, and it is important to get the support and expertise of professionals

in the field. Belmont teamed up with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and their help was critical to the success of the project. The VDGIF (or a comparable state agency) or the local Cooperative Extension office should be a first contact for anyone considering the change. Once the decision has been made it is important to educate all parties involved about the process and to stick to the plan during the 2-3 years it takes to get the meadows established. Many varieties of grasses are available, and each variety has its own characteristics and merits. Meadows do not need flowers to be successful in serving as a haven for wildlife, but adding them to the seed mix makes them much more attractive to humans, especially in the first few years when the fields are still not fully established. At Belmont a variety of flower seeds were planted with the grasses, creating beauty as well as food for butterflies, insects, and a variety of birds.

The process varies from site to site, but the following steps were used at Belmont with great success:

### Establishment:

- The cool season fescue grasses already present were eradicated by first cutting the grass and then spraying the fields with an herbicide in early May.
- Two weeks later the fields were disked to break up the sod and provide good seed to soil contact.
- Immediately after disking the fields were seeded with a mixture of native grasses and flowers.

### Maintenance:

- The first summer the aggressive weeds that could shade out the emerging grass seedlings were removed by hand.
- The first spring after seeding it is usually not

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Photo by Beate Jensen

*Path leading through upper meadow. The grass walls are cut with weed-whacker in layers to keep the grasses from falling into path.*



Photo by Beate Jensen

*Example of use of native grasses on a steep slope.*

## Creating a Wildlife Oasis..... (continued from page 3)

recommended to cut the fields as the grasses need to grow and establish a strong root system.

- The second summer it might be necessary to continue hand weeding to remove aggressive weeds.

- Once the grasses have been established they should be cut in late February to early March; before the nesting season but after the hardest winter weather has passed.

It is recommended to burn grass meadows from time to time, but this can be problematic if the site is in a densely developed area. Other options include disking or mowing, or some combination of techniques. The goal is to reduce buildup of dead vegetation and to free the native grass from competition. The fields at Belmont are now in their ninth year and they are maintained exclusively by mowing in late winter or early spring. It is important to monitor the fields for invasive exotic plants and to remove

them by spot application of herbicide at first sighting. Failure to maintain the fields will allow trees and shrubs to get established and take over, and the meadow will be lost.

Generally, the larger the size of the meadow the more attractive it will be to wildlife. This does not mean however, that it is not beneficial to convert smaller plots of land to native warm season grasses. Even a small strip of grass and flowers can add beauty to a site. A 4 x 10 foot strip planted in native grasses and flowers will attract butterflies and birds in great numbers. An island of taller grasses can also be used as a directional feature: most people hesitate to cut through high grass, and its presence can serve as a passive way to move people in the proper direction. In addition, a combination of lower grasses such as little bluestem mixed with black-eyed Susan, purple coneflower, and smooth penstemon, for example, can be planted on steep slopes and other hard to mow areas. The savings in maintenance will be substantial and since these plants stay

## Mepkin Abbey Gardens—Native Plant Reclamation Project

Mepkin Abbey is a community of Roman Catholic monks established in 1949 on the site of the historic Mepkin Plantation located on the Cooper River, north of Charleston, South Carolina. Founded by the monks of Gethsemani in Kentucky, the brothers of Mepkin belong to the worldwide Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance popularly known as The Trappists. The Abbey is located on land donated by publisher and philanthropist, Henry R. Luce and his wife, the Honorable Clare Boothe Luce.

The original plantation owner, Henry Laurens (1724-1792), laid out his famous four-acre garden with many exotic plants (including invasive species such as wisteria, parasol tree, privet, and Chinaberry) along with native trees, including an entrance allee of live oaks. During the Luce Era of ownership (1939-1949) the noted New York and Charleston landscape architect, Loutrel Briggs, was commissioned to design a garden near the high bluff on the Cooper River near the site of the original Laurens house.

In 2001 Dr. Richard D. Porcher, Professor Emeritus of Biology, the Citadel, completed an "Ecological Characterization of Mepkin Plantation" report. In a survey of the land in all four seasons, Porcher identified 726 species of plants native on the 3,100 acres of Mepkin Abbey. At that time The South Carolina Heritage Trust program had recorded 1300 species of vascular plants from Berkley County. The species found on the Mepkin Abbey grounds represents about half the recorded flora of Berkley County.

In April 2007, Darrel Morrison, former professor at the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design, spent a day at Mepkin Abbey helping to design passageways through sites designated for native plants and to suggest plantings for these areas. His recommendations included the development of a woodland garden, forest reclamation garden, river and associated wetlands garden (including old rice fields), an edible forest



Photo by Peggy Cornett

*Labyrinth and meditation garden at Mepkin Abbey*

garden, a labyrinth, and a native plant meadow.

The meadow garden is an attempt to bring back the many native grasses and wildflowers indigenous to the region and to demonstrate plant community succession through time. The labyrinth, intended as a meditation and conservation garden, likewise features sun-loving native plants that thrive under moist to dry conditions. The premiere plantsman, Edmund Cuthbert, made an enormous contribution to this garden from his Low Country native plant collection and the garden also serves as a trial garden for plants to be introduced to the landscape.

The Mepkin Abbey native plant reclamation program is under the direction of Fr. Guerric Heckel. To learn more about the Mepkin Abbey Gardens, write to [Guerric@mepkinabbey.org](mailto:Guerric@mepkinabbey.org) or visit the Abbey's web site: [www.mepkinabbey.org](http://www.mepkinabbey.org)



under three feet in height they are less “wild” in their appearance and fit into most landscape plans while still providing habitat for many different kinds of birds and insects.

The benefits of creating native grass fields are many: improved wildlife habitats, cost savings, and reduced pollution. Important too is the role an historic site can have in being an example of good land stewardship. By using native plants and ecologically friendly maintenance practices historic sites can be leaders in the field.

Belmont is now a showcase where the public can see that it is possible to incorporate habitat areas on available open land. Another bonus is that humans are attracted to these fields to observe the wildlife. Since the creation of fields and trails

#### Plants Existing in the Meadow at Belmont:

##### Forbs:

Common Milkweed - *Asclepias syriaca*  
 New England Aster - *Aster novae-angliae*  
 Purple Coneflower - *Echinacea purpurea*  
 Rattlesnake Master - *Eringium yuccifolium*  
 Ox-Eye Sunflower - *Helianthus helianthoides*  
 Prairie Blazingstar - *Liatris pycnostachya*  
 Bergamot - *Monarda fistulosa*  
 Smooth Penstemon - *Penstemon digitalis*  
 Black-Eyed Susan - *Rudbeckia hirta*  
 Rosin weed - *Silphium integrifolium*  
 Ohio Goldenrod - *Solidago ohioensis*  
 Stiff Goldenrod - *Solidago rigida*  
 Cardinal Flower - *Lobelia cardinalis*  
 Venus' Looking Glass - *Triodanis leptocarpa*  
 Common Blue-Eyed - Grass - *Sisyrinchium montanum*  
 Common Yarrow - *Achillea millefolium*  
 Common Mullein - *Verbascum Thapsus*

##### Legumes:

Canada Tick-Trefoil - *Desmodium canadense*  
 Purple Prairie Clover - *Petalostemum purpureum*  
 Cow Parsnip - *Heracleum sphondylium*  
 Rush Skeleton Plant - *Lygodesmia juncea*  
 Floodman Thistle - *Cirsium flodmani*

##### Grass Forbs:

Little Bluestem - *Andropogon coparius*  
 Big Bluestem - *Andropogon gerardi*  
 Indian Grass - *Sorghastrum avenaceum* on slide  
 Balckwell Switch Grass - *Panicum virgatum*  
 Bulrush - Soft stem bulrush - *Scirpus validus*  
 Slender Flatsedge - *Cyperus odoratus* - nuts

Belmont has been included on the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. The trail is a cooperative program between many public and private organizations across Virginia. Belmont also offers a monthly tour led by Mater Naturalist volunteers. These tours have become very popular, and the users of the trail may arrive at Belmont with the intention of watching wildlife, but then discover the historic home and Gari Melchers the artist, a benefit to both them and to our site.

#### Sources:

Gari Melchers Home and Studio: To see the fields in question visit the museum in Falmouth, Virginia. You are welcome to visit our Web site at [www.garimelchers.org](http://www.garimelchers.org), or contact Beate Jensen at [bjensen@umw.edu](mailto:bjensen@umw.edu).

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The following link gives more detailed information on how to create a Native Warm Season Field. Contact the offices nearest you for specific guidance: [www.dgif.virginia.gov/quail/nwsg.asp](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/quail/nwsg.asp)

Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. The following link has information on the trail and how to get a guide book: [www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/vbwt/)

Virginia Cooperative Extension: [www.ext.vt.edu/](http://www.ext.vt.edu/)

*Beate Jensen and her husband Ken McFarland hosted the 2005 annual meeting of the Southern Garden History Society in Fredericksburg, Virginia. This article was first published in the Virginia Association of Museums newsletter, spring 2009.*

## Southern Garden History Society Board Meeting

*Submitted by Mollie Ridout, secretary, Annapolis, Maryland*

The Society's Board of Directors met on April 30, 2010 in Alexandria, VA. Outgoing president, Jeff Lewis, described changes in membership services over the past year. After many years in partnership with Old Salem, the time has arrived to move on. Virginia Hart of Winston Salem, who has served as the webmaster for SGHS for several years, has been contracted as membership services coordinator. [***New contact information for SGHS is noted on the back page of this publication.***] The society continues to have a warm relationship with Old Salem and will be participating in future Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes conferences.

In presenting the financial report, Gail Griffin emphasized that it is imperative to use our resources wisely as costs increase. Concurrently, Virginia Hart's report revealed that the society is seeing a decrease in membership numbers over the past couple of years. Members are urged to spread the word about the society's activities and encourage new members. Membership brochures are being reprinted and can be obtained by

contacting Virginia Hart. Ken McFarland is investigating future improvements to the website and ways to facilitate communication with society members. ***Magnolia*** is on a regular publication schedule now, thanks to diligence on the part of Peggy Cornett.

This year for the first time, **Certificates of Merit** were awarded for work that furthers the mission of the society. Recipients were **Weej Broderson**, for her work at Goodwood Plantation in Tallahassee; **Patti McGee** for her work in saving the Elizabeth Lawrence garden in Charlotte, NC; and **Jane White** for her two publications on the Old City Cemetery in Lynchburg, *The Book of Attributes* and *Once Upon a Time*.

Ken McFarland and Mary Anne Pickens have been named honorary board members in appreciation for their many years of service to SGHS. And after two years of outstanding leadership, Jeff Lewis handed over the gavel to Dean Norton, our new President. Staci Catron has assumed the position of Vice President, while Mollie Ridout and Gail Griffin continue as Secretary and Treasurer, respectively.

# “Returning to Mount Vernon,” SGHS Annual Meeting Review

By Staci L. Catron, Atlanta, Georgia and Kenneth M. McFarland, Fredericksburg, Virginia

For the 28<sup>th</sup> annual meeting, members of the Southern Garden History Society returned to Mount Vernon, Virginia, to explore the estate of one of America’s most significant statesmen, George Washington, to learn of intriguing research in the fields of garden history, horticulture, and archeology, and to venture to fine historic gardens in Loudoun County, Virginia. The location of the Society’s 1990 and 2000 annual meetings, the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association once again graciously hosted the 2010 meeting. Annual meeting coordinators Dean Norton (of Mount Vernon), Gail Griffin (of Dumbarton Oaks), and Wayne Amos not only orchestrated a rich educational experience, but also an enchanting three-day adventure.

The meeting convened on the afternoon of Friday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, at the conference hotel in Old Town Alexandria with the Society’s annual business meeting followed by four talks. The Director of Historic Alexandria J. Lance Mallamo gave a lean history of Alexandria, showing intriguing maps and other images of the city from the 1730s into the later part of the 20th century. Next, renowned author Andrea Wulf mesmerized the audience with the story of six “brother gardeners” of the 18th century who shared an extraordinary passion for plants: American farmer John Bartram, London cloth merchant Peter Colinson, Chelsea Physic Garden head gardener Phillip Miller, Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, and plant explorers Daniel Solander and Joseph Banks. Deborah Bell of the U.S. National Herbarium (Smithsonian Institution)

shared the “surprising find”—a new species of Gesneriaceae (*Nautilocalyx pemphidius* L. Skog)—from a plant expedition conducted over twenty-five years ago in Cerro de la Neblina in southern Venezuela. W. John Kress, Curator of Botany and Research Scientist of the Smithsonian Institution, gave the closing lecture about his extensive travels, plant research, and cultural studies in the “secret land” of Myanmar in Southeast Asia. Members later gathered for a delightful evening (including festive games) at River Farm, one of Washington’s farms and now home to the American Horticultural Society.

Saturday began with a two-hour excursion down the Potomac River aboard the charming paddle wheeler, *The Cherry Blossom*. Society members disembarked at the four-acre Pioneer Farmer Site at the Mount Vernon Estate to learn about Washington’s role as a farmer. Due to the inadequacies of 18th-century farming practices, Washington pioneered cutting-edge methods, such as the use of fertilizers and crop rotation. At the Pioneer Farm is a reconstructed 16-sided treading barn invented by Washington for threshing wheat more efficiently, a reconstructed slave cabin with small garden and chicken coop to represent the enslaved who worked Washington’s land, cornhouses, stables, and seven miniature fields of crops all of which were grown at Washington’s estate in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century. Members experienced living history interpreters who showed myriad aspects of 18th-century farm life. Members then toured Washington’s Whiskey Distillery and Gristmill. Washington was an entrepreneurial farmer who used innovative technologies at his distillery and gristmill. Living history interpreters demonstrated the water-powered mill and dis-



Photo by Linda Askey

At Mount Vernon’s Pioneer Farm Peggy Cornett, Elizabeth Boggess, and Anne MacNeil admire the Hog Island sheep, a rare breed named after a 17th-century English settlement in Virginia.



Photo by Linda Askey

Greg Brandl of Opelousas, Louisiana, enjoyed his first meeting and looks forward to SGHS coming to Baton Rouge next year.





Photo by Linda Askey

*Food, wine, music, and even hot air balloon rides almost overshadowed the magnificent view of the Potomac from Mount Vernon's veranda.*

tilling practices of the period. Society members enjoyed a delightful lunch on the grounds of this site.

The afternoon offered two intriguing lectures, the first by Therese O'Malley, Associate Dean from the National Gallery of Art (Center for the Advanced Study of Visual Arts) and the second a joint-talk by Dean Norton, Director of Horticulture and Esther White, Director of Archeology – both for the Mount Vernon Estate. O'Malley debuted and discussed her new book, *Keywords in American Landscape Design* (Yale University Press, May 2010), a twenty-year research project in written and pictorial records to compile a dictionary of landscape design vocabulary used in North America from the 17th to the mid-19th century. Mount Vernon's Norton and White told the history and efforts undertaken at Mount Vernon to understand the mysteries of Washington's Upper Garden. Extensive archeology was not conducted in the Upper Garden until 2005. This work revealed Washington's 1790s garden, which contained large linear garden beds with only a few wide paths similar to the plan of Mount Vernon drawn by Samuel Vaughan's in 1787. The archeology also revealed that the crescent-shaped flower beds of the current Upper Garden dates to the 1870s and was likely created by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. The recreation of the 1790s Upper Garden will be completed in the spring of 2011. For a more thorough discussion, see White and Breckenridge's article entitled "... Gardens abounding in much gay and Vari[e]gated Foliage": Understanding George Washington's Upper Garden (*Magnolia*, Vol. XXIII, Spring 2010).

Following the afternoon lectures, Society members explored the new Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center, which introduces the world of George and Martha Washington through an impressive collection of objects and provides a multimedia experience of the many facets of Washington's life. One portion of the museum also discusses the formation of the Mount Vernon Ladies'

Association, its dramatic rescue of George Washington's estate, the emergence of a national preservation movement in America due to its efforts, and its continued role in preserving and maintaining one of the most significant historic sites in the United States.

As evening arrived, Society members had the great honor of having the mansion and gardens of Mount Vernon "as their very own" for a few hours. Much merriment commenced as Society members enjoyed docent-led tours of Washington's famous mansion, explored the Upper Garden and the Lower Garden, delighted in horse drawn carriage rides, and had thrilling views of the estate from a hot air balloon. The highlight for many was simply relaxing with friends on the lawn overlooking the majestic Potomac and reveling in the antics of the Society's new President Dean Norton firing his handmade potato gun! The magical evening concluded in camaraderie and dinner at the beautiful Mount Vernon Inn.

## *The Sunday optional tours, May 2*

Society members enjoying the optional Sunday tours of Loudoun County gardens and homes had a day remarkable in every way. Approaching it through an avenue of enormous American box, morning stops included Oak Hill, the home of James Monroe and now the only presidential residence still privately owned. Outside and in, it remains a splendid example of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century architecture, and with its awe-inspiring furnishings it still dramatically evokes the spirit of the early Republic. A more recent creation, the Oak Hill garden is a perfect companion piece to the Monroe dwelling. Tended lovingly—and laboriously—by hosts Gayle and Tom deLashmutter, it invites visitors through and across multi-terraced, symmetrically ordered spaces featuring wide paths (some of the locally quarried paving stones displaying dinosaur footprints!) and grass panels set in a magnificent array of trees, shrubs, and flowering plants. To this, golden wheat fields just beyond the outer gate offer a perfect terminus . . . and continuum.

The name Bull Run resonates powerfully from the years 1861 and 1862. Touring Glenstone, the home of Dr. and Mrs. F. Turner Reuter, was made additionally interesting since the famed stream originates nearby. Inviting individual garden spaces and features could be enjoyed via strolls over long paths and through open areas, as well as from either of two belvederes providing elevated views. Long to be recalled is the fine old boxwood and an awe-inspiring tulip poplar of great size and age, as well as the collection of yellow and white roses enveloping the path to Glenstone's tea house—to name but several remarkable features.

Oatlands provided an ideal location for lunch.

*(continued on page 8)*

## *“Returning to Mount Vernon..... (continued from page 7)*

A National Trust for Historic Preservation property, Oatlands shares with the other sites visited today a setting in Loudoun’s beautiful rolling countryside. Joined by a remarkable grouping of early outbuildings, the 1804 main house is also complemented by extensive terraced gardens first established by George Carter in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. A century later, owner Ethel Eustis lavishly supplemented surviving elements of the Carter period with an array of shrubs, flowers, statues, and container plants to create one of the region’s best known and highly visited Colonial Revival gardens.

Journeying on after lunch, we came to the extensive and finely-laid stone walls which separate fields and pastures around the 18<sup>th</sup>-century stone house at Seven Springs. Thus echoing the material of those remarkable walls, the dwelling is set on a knoll amongst gardens which mix formal and informal elements. Courtesy of our hostess Elaine Burton, Society members thus enjoyed these spaces which join herb garden, flower beds, a lily pond, and an array of flowering shrubs, including azaleas, rhododendrons, and tree peonies, all complemented by handsome and refined statuary elements. Reflecting on house, garden, and setting it is easy to understand its being featured in such publications as *House and Garden* and *Hunt Country Style*.

Our afternoon visits also included Highland Spring, home of host Donna Hackman. Though termed a “scaled-down English garden” in a *Horticulture* magazine article, to think of this wonderful landscape as “scaled-down”



Photo by Peggy Cornett

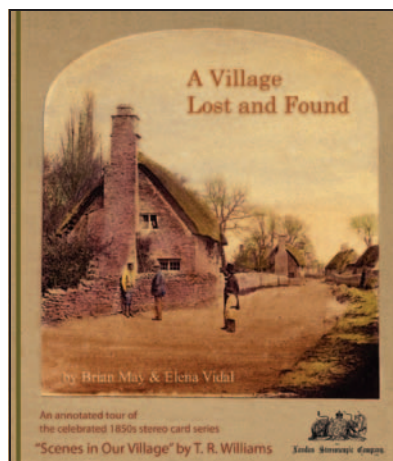
*A view of the stunning woodland garden designed and created by Donna Hackman at her home Highland Spring*

seems a conceptual reach. Here the owner has joined large areas of woodland garden, inviting water elements, and broad, extensively planted curvilinear borders with more formal spaces, including a wall-and-boxwood enclosed parterre near the Burton’s house. This terminates with a pergola and a wisteria-shaded bench where a reflective moment in this amazing day was spent enjoying the large grass panel and its surrounding colorful borders. Here also could be pondered with awe the time, love, and energy required to create and maintain not only this wonderful space, but indeed all of the gardens we had were so privileged to visit this beautiful Sunday.

## *Book Reviews*

**A Village Lost And Found**, by Brian May and Elena Vidal; Frances Lincoln Publishers, hardcover, 2010; ISBN: 978-0-7112-3039-2; list price \$60.

The English celebration of village life, which took many forms in the 19th century, is well represented in Mary Russell Mitford’s *Our Village*, published in 1819, and Elizabeth Gaskell’s Victorian novels centered on Cranford, which were dramatized recently on PBS in a series of that name with Dame Judi Dench in a starring role. Other writers championed its charms in memoirs, travelogues,



historical studies, novels, and poems, while villagers of every station recounted their tales of place in letters which moved through the post from shire to shire. Artists likewise represented its character in drawings, watercolors, paintings, and photography.

One such artist was the photographer Thomas Richard Williams (1824-1871), who was born in Blackfriars, London, and who, in the 1840s, apprenticed in the studio of Antoine Claudet. Monsieur Claudet’s *The Progress and Present State of the Daguerreotype Art* was published in 1845. He was an inspiring teacher and in T. R. Williams, as he chose to be known, he had a gifted student who would excel in both daguerreotype and stereoscopic photography. Thomas Richard Williams opened his own studio in the early 1850s in Lambeth and later moved to chambers in Regent Street where he was working in the late 1860s, when his health failed. He died on 5 April 1871, a month before his forty-seventh birthday.

In a professional career that spanned some twenty years, he achieved both popular and critical acclaim and



royal patronage. He photographed Princess Victoria on her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday on 21 November 1856, her wedding to Prince Frederick William of Prussia in 1858, and the princess with her first-born son, Prince William (1859-1941), who would become the last emperor of Germany.

The 1850s were also defined by T. R. Williams' success in stereoscopic photography. In 1856 the London Stereoscopic Company published three sets of views by Mr. Williams that gained wide, important circulation. The "First Series" was a collection of studio-composed still-life photographs, portraits, and documentary images. Next appeared the "Crystal Palace Series," comprising views of the new Crystal Palace, an expanded version of the original Crystal Palace that was recreated at Sydenham, Kent, and which opened on 10 June 1854. T. R. Williams' stereoscopic views were on exhibit at the opening, when he also photographed Queen Victoria and her entourage, a photograph that would be included in the series published in 1856.

It is the third series, "Scenes in Our Village," also published in 1856, which is the subject of *A Village Lost and Found*. The book represents the long interest of its co-author, Brian May, who collected individual cards from the series over the course of decades. He also set about compiling biographical information on T. R. Williams. Along the way he gained the collaboration of Elena Vidal, a photograph conservator and historian, who is the co-author of *A Village Lost and Found*. However, the identity of "Our Village," never mentioned in the advertisement for the series nor on the 59 cards in the original offering, eluded Mr. May's grasp. It was not until he circulated an image of "The Old Church," the first photograph in the 1856 series, that he discovered the village landmark was the Church of St. Margaret of Antioch in Hinton Waldrist, Oxfordshire. On visiting Hinton Waldrist, Brian May also found other buildings appearing in the stereoscopic series standing including the Squire's House, the Blacksmith's shop, the Rectory, outbuildings at Lovell's Court Farm, a cottage on the banks of the Thames that was operating in 2009 as The Maybush public house, and two bridges still in use.

The series of 59 images advertised in 1856 appear sequentially in the pages of *A Village Lost and Found* together with secondary views made by Mr. Williams and present-day photographs where buildings survive. Landscape views, including "The Fish Pond," are also accompanied by recent photographs shot, when possible, from the approximate spot on which T. R. Williams stood in the 1850s. Altogether these images, including genre scenes of village, domestic, and agricultural activities featuring residents of Hinton Waldrist going about the pursuits of their day, convey the photographer's warm regard for a place and the friends he found there in the early 1850s. These scenes of daily life and the small

riverside village landscape in which they were played out are a poignant reminder of the distance we have yet to walk in efforts to restore the gardens and landscapes of our own past.

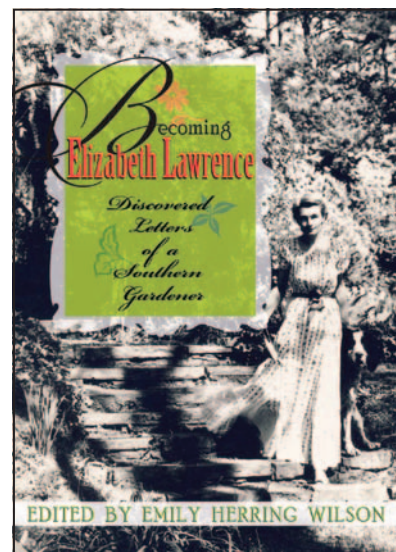
The authors are on a U.S. lecture and book signing tour and are visiting the following locations this summer: July 17 at the National Stereoscopic Convention (presenting the Keynote Address) Sandusky, OH; July 20 at the Free Library of Philadelphia, PA; July 22 at the Barnes & Noble Tribeca in New York City and July 23 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium; Tuesday, July 27 at the Downtown Independent Theatre (Sponsored by Amoeba Music) in Los Angeles, CA and July 29 at Los Angeles' Griffith Observatory for the Leonard Nimoy Event Horizon.

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



**Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence: Discovered Letters of a Southern Gardener**, edited by Emily Herring Wilson; John F. Blair, Publisher; hardcover, 2010, ISBN: 978-0-89587-375-0; 224 pages; list price \$19.95

Readers of *A Southern Garden* will recall the dedication "For Ann" that appears on the leaf after the title page. Through time, many assumed "Ann" to be Elizabeth Lawrence's sister, Ann de Treville Lawrence Way (1908-1980), her only sibling. In 2004, when Emily Herring Wilson's biography of Elizabeth Lawrence appeared, its readers learned that *A Southern*



*Garden* was dedicated to Ann Preston Bridgers, a friend and near neighbor in Raleigh, who came to be her mentor and editor. Today, few people will know or recognize her name. The few who might would associate her with "Coquette," a play she co-wrote with George Abbot that opened in New York in 1927 with Helen Hayes in the starring role. Two years later Mary Pickford won the Academy Award for best actress for her interpretation of the role in the movie adaptation. "Coquette" was a singular, stellar success for Miss Bridgers, one that came

(continued on page 10)

## Book Reviews.....(continued from page 9)

to her at the age of thirty-six, and an accomplishment she would never again equal during decades as a determined, yet frustrated playwright.

Ann Preston Bridgers (1891-1967) was the daughter of Robert Rufus and Annie Cain Bridgers (1868-1958), one of the couple's three children (of four) who remained unmarried and resided with their mother in a comfortable but modest house at 1306 Hillsborough Street. As heirs among other aunts, uncles, and cousins to the fortune accumulated by her grandfather Robert Rufus Bridgers (1819-1888), their circumstances differed from those of their kinsmen. It was the world of the mind that appealed to Ann Preston Bridgers and her sister Emily Norflett Bridgers (1892-1968), who was crippled by polio as a child. Both attended Mary Baldwin Seminary and Smith College. After a spell with the Raleigh Community Players, Ann Bridgers departed the North Carolina capital for New York City in 1923 and the acclaim that soon came her way.

Ann Preston Bridgers was one of a series of older women with whom Elizabeth Lawrence formed strong bonds, relationships which began with that she played out with her mother over the first sixty years of her life. Ann Bridgers returned to North Carolina in 1933, to Raleigh and the family's Hillsborough Street residence. She would spend long periods in western North Carolina, writing at the family's cottage. Exactly when and under what circumstances Elizabeth Lawrence and Ann Bridgers met and forged their friendship is unclear, but it surely coincided, at least, with Ann's return in 1933. Elizabeth Lawrence wrote to Ann Bridgers from Raleigh and when traveling, most often when Ann was away in western North Carolina or New York.

*Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence: Discovered Letters of a Southern Gardener* represents letters, selected and edited by Emily Herring Wilson, that Elizabeth Lawrence wrote to Ann Bridgers (and her sister Emily) beginning in 1934. These published letters are part of the Ann Preston Bridgers Papers acquired by Duke University in 1974 and held in its Rare Books, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library. A trove of information on both Elizabeth Lawrence's personal and professional life, they were an important source for Mrs. Wilson's *No One Gardens Alone*. In this new book the letters are grouped under three chronologically sequential headings. About half of those now published date to the first years of their friendship, 1934 to 1941, leading up to a second seven-year period, 1942-1948, but dating mostly from 1942 to 1946. *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence* contains no letters to Ann dating from 1947 and only one, of about 14 June, from 1948, by which time Miss Lawrence had acquired the lot on Ridgewood Avenue in Charlotte where she would build her new house in 1949 beside the house

constructed by her sister Ann and her husband Warren Way.

Although Elizabeth Lawrence and Ann Bridgers kept up a warm, loving friendship until Ann's death in 1967, and the friendship with Emily Bridgers continued to her death in 1968, few known letters appear to survive from the 1950s and 1960s. The years 1949 and 1950 are omitted from the chapter headings, however, there is at least one highly important letter written in January 1949 in the collection at Duke, which is not included in *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence*. The third and final chapter, covering 1951 to 1966 is represented by only ten letters, four of which Ann Bridgers wrote to her younger friend. In 1966 Elizabeth Lawrence wrote separately to Ann and Emily Bridgers, and those letters are the last we read in these pages.

Readers who enjoyed *Two Gardeners: Katharine S. White and Elizabeth Lawrence—A Friendship in Letters*, published in 2002, will find *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence: Discovered Letters of a Southern Gardener* a different book—and reading it a different experience. This occurs in part because of the nature of the letters, which is oftentimes chatty in tone with news of the society in which they moved in Raleigh, the decisions on formatting made by the editor or her publisher, and Elizabeth Lawrence's informal manner of writing to Ann, in which paragraphs and pages written on successive days sometimes accumulated on her desk and were mailed together—as one letter. Elizabeth Lawrence dated few of her letters beyond noting the day of the week or a day in the calendar of the Episcopal Church. The ascribed dates given in brackets in *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence* are mostly the dates of postmarks on the envelopes in which they remained until being catalogued at Duke University. The archivist/librarian penciled the date on the original letters.

The presentation of the letters in *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence*, whereby most appear simply as paragraphs or a series of paragraphs, without salutations or closings, and set apart only with dates such as "August 19" in brackets without the inclusion of the year, is contrary to long-established practice for such compendiums, leaves readers with uncertainty, and, simply, a mistake. In the pages of *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence*, the texts take on the appearance of sequential entries in a diary or journal, and they lose their critical separate identity as individual letters.

The other, larger difference between *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence* and *Two Gardeners* is that *Two Gardeners* is an extended correspondence between two gifted writers. The letters in *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence* is essentially that of one voice, Elizabeth Lawrence's, who wrote to Ann Bridgers or her sister Emily (principally in



1945), except for a half dozen letters that Ann wrote to Elizabeth and another to her mother Bessie Lawrence. Why those seven survived, and so many others apparently did not, remains unclear. But, finally, what matters does survive: the three books, *A Southern Garden*, *The Little Bulbs*, and *Gardens in Winter*, all of which reflect the generous, professional imprint of Ann and Emily Bridgers as friends, critics, editors, and champions of Elizabeth Lawrence's talent as a garden writer and storyteller.

Having written the National Register nomination for the Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden at 348 Ridgewood Avenue, Charlotte, North Carolina, I continue to be intrigued by the genesis of *A Southern Garden*. In April, while in Perkins Library engaged on research on an unrelated topic, and awaiting boxes to be brought to the Perkins Library reading room from an off-site storage location, I requested folders from the Ann Preston Bridgers Papers including letters for the years of 1940, 1941, and 1942. Like Emily Wilson, I found precious few mentions of the book that arrived so little heralded and became a classic.

But I did read a remarkable letter dated "January" and "1942." It was, in fact, written in January—Elizabeth Lawrence had dated it "1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany (sic)," but it was written in January 1949. Addressed "Dear Ann," it opened with an account of taking her niece and nephew to Sunday School at St. Peter's Church, Charlotte. In the following two paragraphs, Elizabeth Lawrence confides to Ann Bridgers the difficulties she is experiencing with building the new house in Charlotte.

*Thank you for the information on radiant heat. I shall read it and return. We cannot have it here. We cannot have anything that I have planned all of this time and that Bessie wants too: tiled floors, concrete foundation, which means copper pipes in the floor, warm in winter and cool in summer; concrete block walls—the concrete blocks are made in Charlotte by the Raglands and are the most beautiful pearl grey; metal windows that do not stick, and do not have to have sticky paint; and above all the house on the garden level, so you step out of the French doors to the terrace and to the garden. But Warren is very intelligent and he has spent two years looking into things, and his friend Major Cheshire, who is a builder, says his man is the best in Charlotte, and that his blue prints show all of the things a blue print should show. Warren's man says that the things Bessie and I want would cost several thousand dollars more than we have, and I am afraid to go on with it. Of course it can be done cheaply, but then the moisture comes through the concrete and the walls crack. That is what happened in the little gov. houses in Wilmington that I loved so much. When it rained the walls ran water and you had to mop up the concrete floors.*

*And so we arr ging (sic) to have cedar shingles that are the color of lichens, and I shall try to make the terrace*

*look part of the garden by having (eventually—I shall have to do them myself) wide stone steps and a planted stone wall.*

*The heat will be oil, and hot air. . . . Ann's house is going up very fast, and I hope to get ours started by next month. Warren has the best contractor in Charlotte. A delightful character, and he is eager for Bessie and me to get started. We love the little house we are in, but it is miserable being so far from Ann and from where we are building. . . .*

The house built in 1949 would remain Elizabeth Lawrence's residence until 1984. Ann and Warren Way's house was next door at 342 Ridgewood Avenue.

Letters have meanings shared by their writers and their readers, and values held by each. In fall 1941 Elizabeth Lawrence wrote several letters to Ann Bridgers in close succession. On about 4 November, concerned that Ann would feel pressed to answer and interrupt her writing, Elizabeth Lawrence wrote again, articulating the values she found in writing. The letter appears with only minor editing in the pages of *Becoming Elizabeth Lawrence*.

*Tuesday*

*Dear Ann:*

*You know my letters do not look to any answer. That is my theory in general as regards the pastime, but when practiced on you, it is mere self-indulgence. Correspondence is of another order. It has no connection with letter-writing, its purpose being an exchange of ideas, usually on some special subject. I have many correspondents. If they did not write to me I would not write to them. But letter-writing is an end in itself. It is the simplest, most natural, and (to the writer) the most delightful form of self-expression. He has something to say and says it (as you once so perfectly phrased it) to the most receptive person. In letters all questions are rhetorical, but they are necessary to impart the conversational tone that is inherent in the genre.*

*And you know that if I thought you would feel called upon (or even prompted) to reply, I would not write to you. You have no need for that form of expression, and it is essential to you, when you are writing, to have no demands of any sort on your energy or even your interest. That is why I hesitate to write at all at the times when you are doing concentrated work. I have learned from you that what matters in life is that all gifts are brought to their fullest development. Yours are very rare.*

*I say this from the bottom of my heart. From the top of it I cannot answer, but must say with Julie de Lespinasse:*

*Write to me often, seldom, not at all,*

*But do not think me equally content.*

*Your loving,*

*Elizabeth*

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



Southern Garden History Society

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## Awards and Scholarships

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

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

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

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

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

## Annual Membership Dues

The society's membership year is from **August 1—July 31**. The membership secretary will mail renewal notices in the summer for the 2009-2010 year. Membership categories:

<b>Benefactor</b>	<b>\$500</b>
<b>Patron</b>	<b>\$250</b>
<b>Sustainer</b>	<b>\$100</b>
<b>Institution or Business</b>	<b>\$75</b>
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*Deadline for submitting articles for the Fall issue of Magnolia is August 16, 2010.*

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