



Magnolia

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

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Discovering the Musk Rose in America

By Marie Butler. Presentation for the 9th International Heritage Rose Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, October 2001.

The discovery of *Rosa moschata* in America is replete with what we here in the South hold dear: our heritage of early colonial history, our deeply held religious convictions, our belief in educational excellence, our strong ties to our gardens, and, above all, our abiding and loving family bonds.

Intrigued by Graham Stuart Thomas's chapter on the mystery of the musk rose in his *Climbing Roses Old and New*, we began our quest for *Rosa moschata* in our native Virginia. Surely we thought some vestige of it might be found surviving in one of the many old Virginia plantation

repeat flowering rose among the many other favorite plants that survived the early colonial voyages across the Atlantic. As our interests in finding the musk rose increased we were not aware that Mrs. Helen Watkins had, indeed, found this rose at the Hillsborough School for Girls when she became interested in the history of Hillsborough, North Carolina, in 1970. Since it was our custom to visit her garden in late May when she graciously opened "Chatwood" to old rose enthusiasts, we did not see the musk rose in flower. Here at our latitude of 35.5 degrees the musk rose blooms, not "in the fall of the leaf" as Parkinson in 1629 wrote of its

blooming in England, but in early to mid-June. Nor did we know that Ruth Knopf and Carl Cato had found two specimens of an unusual musk-like plant in the Burwell plot in Elmwood Cemetery in Charlotte, North Carolina. They were reluctant to make any identification without careful study. Ruth Knopf contacted the keeper of the plot and learned of fascinating family ties with the Burwells of Hillsborough, North Carolina; later the Burwell descendant shared genealogy study notes that proved invaluable to the unraveling of the mystery of the history of *Rosa moschata* in America. While the horticultural importance of having found the musk rose at two sites in the South, Hillsborough and later Charlotte, North Carolina, is significant in itself, the historical impact of these discoveries was yet to be revealed. The finding of *Rosa moschata* in Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia, added another chapter in the story of our quest for this ancient rose.

Perhaps at this time in our story of the musk rose it is better to relate the later findings of *Rosa moschata* as they are separate and distinct findings and as yet appear to have no direct relationship to the North Carolina and the Richmond, Virginia discoveries. While these later findings do not have the genealogical history connected with the other sites, they are



Musk Rose blossoms from the Crenshaw Plot.

gardens and burial grounds. Having gardened with herbs and heirloom plants for over thirty years and having read John Gerard's and John Parkinson's descriptions of the rose, we thought that surely our colonial forebears would have brought with them this very special climbing and

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CALENDAR

April 6th-7th, 2002. "Chapel Hill Spring Garden Tour" will visit the Gardens of Historic Greenwood Neighborhood. Proceeds benefit the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill. Contact: Patty Griffin, Communications Manager, Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau; call (888) 968-2060 or (919) 968-2060; e-mail: pgriffin@chocvb.org. Visit the Web site at: www.chocvb.org

April 16th-17th, 2002. 12th Annual Biedenharn Garden Symposium. Program includes lectures and workshops. For information, Emy-Lou Biedenharn Foundation, 2006 Riverside Drive, Monroe, LA 71201; or call (318) 387-5281. Visit the museum online at: www.bmuseum.org

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 will be a special anniversary event. Brochures have been mailed to all SGHS members. For more information, contact: Elizabeth Boggess, conference coordinator, SGHS Natchez Conference, P. O. Box 1756, Natchez, MS; call (601) 442-2787, fax (601) 445-3770; e-mail: oldigger@bkbkbank.com

April 21st-23rd, 2002. "Colonial Williamsburg's Garden Symposium: Gardeners and Their Gardens," co-sponsored by the American Horticultural Society and *Fine Gardening* magazine. Speakers include Jim Wilson, Holly Shimizu, Sydney Eddison, Cole Burrell, and Don Haynie. For more information: Williamsburg Institute, P. O. Box 1776, Williamsburg, VA 23187-1776; call (800) 283-9486 or (757) 220-7182; fax (757) 565-8630; e-mail: tkinkead@cwf.org. Visit the CW Web site at: www.history.org

April 25th-27th, 2002. "Southern Garden Heritage Conference," sponsored by the University of Georgia, School of Environmental Design in Athens, Georgia. For details, call Neal Weatherly (706) 542-0943 or Jeff Lewis (706) 542-1244.

April 27th, 2002. "In Search of the American Garden," Fifth Annual Spring Symposium of the New England Garden History Society. Speakers include: Gary Koller, Tom Woods, Mac Griswold, James Yoch, and Therese O'Malley. For information, contact: Allyson Hayward, NEGHS, (781) 235-3307; e-mail: AMHayward@aol.com. The event will be held at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, Elm Bank Horticulture Center, 900 Washington St. Wellesley, MA 02482.

May 3rd-5th, 2002. "12th Huntington Symposium on Old Roses," San Marino, California. This conference features national and international speakers, and 3 symposium workshops. Contact symposium coordinator Clair Martin: The Huntington Botanical Gardens, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marion, CA 91107; call (626) 405-3507; fax (626) 405-3501; e-mail: cmartin@huntington.

May 15th-19th, 2002. "André Michaux International Symposium" (AMIS), a celebration of the life and work of 18th-century botanist, explorer and plant collector André Michaux (1746-1802/3?). Speakers include noted author and ethnobotanist Mark Plotkin, James L. Reveal, Professor Emeritus at the University of Maryland, and SGHS board member James Cothran. For further information, write: AMIS, P. O. Box 942, Belmont, NC 28012, or contact Jeanne Miller, symposium coordinator, (704) 868-3181; e-mail: miller@dsbg.org. For symposium updates, go to: www.michaux.org

May 25th, 2002. 10th-Annual Open House at Tufton Farm Nursery, the headquarters of the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants. Morning lectures held at the Monticello Visitors Center, followed by informal tours and workshops on rose identification at the nursery. For information, write to: Center for Historic Plants, Monticello, P. O. Box 316, Charlottesville, VA 22902; or call (434) 984-9816. Visit the Monticello web site for calendar items at: www.monticello.org

June 6th-8th, 2002. "International Conference on Uses, Diversity, and Systematics of Cyperaceae," hosted by the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium of Delaware State University and sponsored by the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the USDA. For further information, contact Robert Naczi at: rnaczi@dsc.edu

June 9th-21st, 2002. "Preserving Jefferson's Landscapes and Gardens," the 6th Annual Historic Landscape Institute, sponsored by Monticello and the University of Virginia. Two-week curriculum includes lectures, field trips, and hands-on gardening activities. For information, contact Monticello's Public Affairs Department at (434) 984-9822;

publicaffairs@monticello.org; or Peter Hatch at (434) 984-9836; phatch@monticello.org; or visit the Web site at: www.monticello.org

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

August 16th-17th, 2002. "North American Plants – Their Cultural History," the 3rd biennial Historic Plants Symposium, hosted by the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants at Monticello. Speakers include: Dr. Arthur Tucker, Denise Adams, Douglas T. Seidel, Mark Laird, Peter Hatch, Peggy Cornett, and Cole Burrell. For information, contact Peggy Cornett at (434) 984-9816; pcornett@monticello.org

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

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of historical significance in themselves. About 1985 Ruth Knopf found yet another *Rosa moschata* blooming both single and double in an old garden near Saluda, South Carolina. It is of interest to note that this plant had come to the Saluda garden about 1925 and had been rooted from a cutting from a garden in Colleton County near Charleston, South Carolina.

In autumn of 1998 yet another discovery of *Rosa moschata* occurred. Peggy Cornett, Director of the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historical Plants at Monticello near Charlottesville, Virginia, wrote of this finding in *Twinleaf: Annual Journal and Catalogue No. 2, 2000*. Again, history is intimately bound with this discovery. As she wrote in



Rosa moschata by Pierre Joseph Redouté

that issue of *Twinleaf*, she, Douglas Seidel, consultant for the Léonie Bell Rose Garden, and CHP nursery manager, Diane Lowe, found the "Musk Cluster Rose" at "The Recess" at Bremono some forty miles from Monticello. Records that C. Allan Brown discovered at the University of Virginia indicated that this specimen, tended by Raymond and Frances Orf, the later the great-granddaughter of Gen. John Hartwell Cocke, was purchased by the General from Benjamin Prince's Nursery in 1815. Mrs. Orf said that the Musk Rose was original to General Cocke's garden of the 1807-08s. [Another rose found on the site, now identified as 'Champneys Pink Cluster', also may date to General Cocke's original garden. This rose has since disappeared from the Recess garden.] Her grandmother, Frances Grace Cabell (1852-1929), "always made a fuss over the roses, especially the 'Musk Cluster'." General Cocke's family lived at "Recess" until moving in 1820 to Upper Bremono. General Cocke was a close friend of Thomas Jefferson who had advised him on the building of Cocke's Palladian mansion "Upper Bremono." He also was a champion of higher education and supported Jefferson in his creation of the University of Virginia, serving on its board of trustees for thirty-three years. General Cocke's papers at the University provided documentation of his orders from Benjamin Prince's Long Island Nursery as well as William Prince, Jr.'s Nursery, The Linnaean Botanic Garden, also on Long

Island:

Sept. 4, 1815: "I have a great number of very handsome Roses.... The White musk or cluster rose is very ornamental. It flowers in clusters of Roses all the Fall (till winter.)" This was in reference to Cocke's order of T... shrubs and Plants for November shipment to Bremono. Later on, Cocke noted on 14 March 1826 receipt of "1 double white musk Rose, 75 cents from William Prince, Jr.'s Nursery."

Having related the later, separate incidents of finding *Rosa moschata* in South Carolina and Virginia, we now return to the discoveries of *Rosa moschata* that are uniquely tied to colonial family history in Virginia and North Carolina. As we all know, Mrs. Helen Watkins first found the musk rose at the nineteenth-century Hillsborough School for Girls when she catalogued the plants found in that garden for the Hillsborough Historical Society. She also learned that Burwell family pre-Civil War diaries and letters mentioned the rose. Robert Armistead Burwell and his wife, Margaret Anna Robertson, daughter of Margaret Anna Spotswood, founded the Hillsborough School for Girls in 1837 when Mr. Burwell served as Presbyterian minister there from 1835 until 1848. And it is here that history and genealogy must be our focus as we relate the discovery of the musk rose in America. Mrs. Watkins's extensive genealogical studies concerning the Burwells, information found at the Hillsborough School for Girls, materials gleaned by Charles Walker from the State Archives in Raleigh, North Carolina, and our extensive investigations at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, Virginia, lead to remarkable findings and exciting possibilities concerning the musk rose and its relation to these families. To validate and add to the history of the Burwell family we are indebted to Mabel Y. Andrews who gave Ruth Knopf a copy of her Burwell genealogy studies.

According to Mabel Y. Andrews' *The Burwell Genealogy* the Burwell family originated most likely on the borders of England and Scotland known as the Eastern Marshes, and a record exists that at Barwick on the Tweed the Burwells settled as early as 1250. Other English counties were homes to the Burwells, and variations on the name existed as well. The earliest Burwell in America was Edward, son of Edward, baptized at Foddington, Bedfordshire in August 24, 1579. He was a member of the Virginia Company and a grantee under the Charter of 1607 from James I. The only son of Edward and his wife Dorothy Bedell was Major Lewis Burwell who was baptized at Amptill in 1621, came to Virginia about 1640, and was a member of the deputation sent to invite Charles I to Virginia. He settled at Carter's Creek in Gloucester County, Virginia, and married Lucy Higginson, daughter of Captain Robert Higginson who fought against the Indians in the bloody uprising of 1621. Lucy and Lewis Burwell built a brick home and had adjacent to it the family burial grounds. Their son, the Honorable Lewis Burwell of Carter's Creek, Gloucester County, and Queens Creek, York County, Virginia, married Abigail Smith, niece of Nathaniel Bacon, Sr. who left his property, not to his rebel son, but to Abigail and her descendants. Abigail died in 1672, and Lewis Burwell married Martha Lear.

Lewis Burwell, born in 1684, son of Major Lewis Burwell, inherited Kingsmill Plantation from his father (via Abigail Smith). Located about four miles from the colonial capital of Williamsburg, Kingsmill was ranked among the best plantations on the James River. On the original patented eight hundred fifty acres Lewis Burwell and his second wife Martha Lear built a large brick mansion two stories

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high, four rooms to a floor, with two wings or offices. The front grounds were terraced to the river where a wharf provided access for river travel for many years between there and Williamsburg. Lewis and Martha Burwell's second son, Armistead Burwell, born in 1718, married Christian Blair, daughter of the Honorable John Blair, President of the Counsel and cousin of Commissary Blair. Armistead and Christian Blair Burwell lived at "Stoneland" in Mecklenburg



Marie Butler being interviewed for NPR by Martha Woodroof.

County in south central Virginia not far from the North Carolina and Virginia border. They had two children. Lewis Burwell, born at "Stoneland" on September 26, 1745, served as a colonel in the War of Revolution and married Margaret Ann Spottswood, daughter of John and Mary Dandridge Spotswood and great-granddaughter of Governor Spotswood. The second son of Armistead and Christian Burwell was John Burwell, born November 13, 1746; he married Anna Powell, lived in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, and had six children. Their only son, Armistead Burwell, was born December 13, 1779, and married Mary Cole Turnbull of White Hill near Petersburg. He is buried in Blandford Cemetery in Petersburg, Virginia. Armistead and Mary Burwell's eldest son, Robert Armistead Burwell, was born June 12, 1802, in Dinwiddie County, Virginia. He graduated from Hampden Sydney College, a Presbyterian College, in 1823, and was one of the three graduates of the first class at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond in 1829; he was ordained at Peaks Church, Bedford County, Virginia in 1831 and was a minister at Wood's Church in Chesterfield County, Virginia, from 1831 until 1835. He married Margaret Anna Robertson of nearby Petersburg, Virginia, whose mother was Margaret Anna Spotswood, the wife of Lewis Burwell, making them distant cousins. Her mother's sister, the "remarkable" Mrs. Susan Catherine Spotswood Bott, reared Margaret Anna, the great great granddaughter of Governor Alexander Spotswood. The young Burwells lived for a while at "Ellerslie," as noted in the memoirs of John Bott Burwell, *The Lacy-Burwell Anthology*, p. 130, item 22:

"I was born in Chesterfield, County, Virginia about two or three miles from Petersburg on October 23, 1834, at a place called Ellerslie, it having been purchased after my father moved from it by a wealthy gentleman of that place, called Dunlop and made a most beautiful county seat. My father was at that time pastor of a Presbyterian church near there.

My mother was an enthusiast on the subject of flowers, a taste she inherited from her Aunt Bott. It was a saying in town that nothing, no matter what, that Mrs. Burwell stuck in the ground failed to grow."

From Ellerslie the young Robert Burwell family moved to Hillsborough, North Carolina, where, to augment her husband's small and uncertain salary of four hundred dollars as minister of the Hillsborough Presbyterian Church, Mrs. Burwell founded "Mr. and Mrs. Burwell's Female School" at the manse. The twelve Burwell children filled the house, and the Hillsborough School for Girls, which evolved from a day school to a boarding school offering grammar school and high school courses in languages, music, painting, and religion, became well known in neighboring states and served as a model for similar female schools in North Carolina. In 1837 Mr. Burwell closed the school and moved to Charlotte, North Carolina. There he was principal of Charlotte Female Institute where the main administration building was named in his honor; Mrs. Burwell's portrait hangs in the reception room. Later this college was renamed Queen's College. He served also as minister at Paw Creek Church in Mecklenburg Presbytery from 1859 until 1863. Their son John Bott Burwell became a partner in the operation of the school in 1859. Mrs. Burwell died in 1871 in Raleigh and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte, North Carolina. As Mary Clare Engstrom of wrote in her biographical sketch of Robert Armistead Burwell, "A legend in her own lifetime, Mrs. Burwell was hailed widely as a superior administrator, teacher, wife, mother, gardener, and conversationalist. Tall and imposing in appearance, highly gregarious, and endowed with great energy, she embodied many of the characteristics of the colonial Spotswood family." John Bott Burwell and his father were joint principals at Peace Institute, now Peace College, in Raleigh after Mrs. Burwell's death. Retired from teaching in 1875, Robert Burwell stayed on in various capacities at Peace College, ministered to a church in Oakland, and in 1882 received a doctor of divinity degree from The University of North Carolina. In 1895 at age ninety-two he died in Raleigh and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Armistead Burwell, the son of John Bott Burwell and the nephew of Robert Burwell was born October 22, 1839, served as Captain in the Arkansas Cavalry and was badly injured in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1864. He returned to Charlotte, North Carolina, where he eventually was appointed to the Supreme Court of North Carolina for two years. His wife Ella Jenkins was a close friend of Mrs. Stonewall Jackson. He was buried in Elmwood Cemetery in Charlotte, North Carolina. Their son, Armistead Burwell, born in 1877, married Helen Azile Rhyne, and their granddaughter, Mabel Y. Andrews, of Raleigh, North Carolina, maintained the Burwell family plot in Elmwood Cemetery, Charlotte, North Carolina, when Ruth Knopf and Carl Cato found the musk rose growing there. Each took cuttings. In time the cuttings rooted and shared by Ruth and Carl prospered and flowered. As we studied the available data, it became clear to all of us that the Burwell Musk Rose was *Rosa moschata*. Cuttings rooted by Ruth and Carl went to collectors here in the east as well as to those in California.

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Again the story of the Musk Rose returns to Virginia. For many years we thought *R. moschata*, so revered by the early herbalists, surely would have been brought to Colonial Virginia. In reading Dorothy Hunt Williams's *Historic Virginia Gardens* (1975) we found references to the musk rose in Pavilion IV at the University of Virginia and also on Jefferson's mountaintop. A response to an inquiry to Peter Hatch, Monticello's director of gardens and grounds, negated finding the rose at the Monticello site. Peter Hatch wrote:

"Thank you for your interest in the possibility of a surviving musk rose here at Monticello. Unfortunately there are none. Jefferson grew roses as ornamentals around the house and ordered two musk roses from the William Prince Nursery of Long Island in 1791. In the very near future I plan to re-establish some rose plantings and would hope to find the musk roses as part of that plan. I would bet you could obtain the true musk rose from the Huntington Botanic Garden in Los Angeles by writing their horticulturist."

The Huntington's horticulturist at that time, John McGregor, did have the true *Rosa moschata*. Upon seeing a specimen of the Burwell single musk rose growing at Ruth Knopf's, c.1981, he declared it to be a plant for which he had searched for years. He immediately traded her twelve tea roses for a rooted cutting of the single musk rose. We carefully searched Pavilion IV and encountered only disappointment.

At this point the story of the musk rose in America takes another historical turn. Located on Oregon Hill high above the falls of the James River in Richmond, Virginia, capital of the Old Dominion State since 1780, Hollywood Cemetery is draped upon hills and valleys and graced by venerable arching trees that have shaded generations of Richmonders. A garden cemetery dating from 1848, the cemetery has been held captive in time and suggests an era quite remote from modern Richmond. Here within its one hundred eighty-five acres are the graves of three presidents, six governors, twenty-two Confederate generals, eighteen-thousand Confederate soldiers, and numerous others prominent in Virginia's history. As one would suspect, the cemetery also is the home of many roses, many notables too great in number to list. Indeed, it is a private reserve in which anyone interested in the history of Virginia as well as the rose could easily while away an entire day without exhausting all possibilities for there is always another mystery down this street or beyond that stone. It was on a sodden, late July day, rare in our simmering summers of glare and haze, accompanied by Charles Walker and Judy Holly, that we walked under rain, sun, and shade through the calm of Hollywood Cemetery and followed our usual route, roughly from West to East. Treading wet grasses, we listed many roses to be viewed in the fall or the following spring. It was just at the point when fatigue had begun to overwhelm curiosity that we noted in the distance what we thought was a Noisette rose that had previously gone unlisted in our notes. Wet to the knees as well as somewhat dampened in enthusiasm, we approached a plant long neglected, seven or eight feet tall, pushing out lax canes from a base reckoned to be two feet in diameter. It held but a scant number of blooms, but they were enough. Most of the flowers were double; however, an arching branch bore single flowers. It was immediately clear that we had chanced upon *Rosa moschata*, the autumn musk of the old herbalists, of Gerard in 1597, of Parkinson in 1629, of Baughin in 1671, of Hermann in 1762, and of Philip Miller in 1768. Someone remarked that the discovery of this plant made the trip worthwhile. We all agreed.

Since the plant is located on the Crenshaw plot in Hollywood Cemetery, it has carried that name since its discovery. At first we had no notion that the Crenshaw Musk had any relation to the Burwell Musk, yet when Helen Watkins wrote us that the Crenshaws possibly were related to the Burwells who were descended from Governor Alexander Spotswood of Virginia, the American mystery of the *r. moschata* deepened. At this point we began pondering the relationship of the musk rose to the Burwell family. It seemed logical that when they left Virginia and went to Hillsborough they took cuttings of the rose with them, and then it went on with them to Charlotte, North Carolina. We decided to investigate other burial grounds of the Burwell family. In October of 1985 we searched the neglected cemetery at Carter's Grove, c.1750, the home of Carter Burwell and generations of Burwells until 1838, near Williamsburg, Virginia. We found nothing but age eroded stones. Subsequently we drove to Abingdon Episcopal Church in Gloucester County, Virginia. There in the churchyard one stone bore the following inscription: "...remains of the Burwells were removed in 1911 from the graveyard at Carter's Creek." Alas, we found no Musk Rose growing among the tombstones there. Investigations in Williamsburg, colonial capital of Virginia, led to many old roses, none of them *Rosa moschata*.

Having cited the Burwell lineage, we now focus our attention on the Spotswood genealogy. Having read in Graham Stuart Thomas that the musk rose possibly had been imported from South-western Europe, North Africa, or Maderia, and after learning of possible Spotswood ties to the Crenshaws and the Burwells, Governor Alexander Spotswood became the focus of investigations. Spotswood, Spotswoodes, or Spottiswoodes are an ancient race of Scot Border Barons. In *Colonial Families of the United States*, Robert Spotswoode, the first authentic founder of the family, is reported alive in 1260 A.D. His son, The Rev. John Spottiswoode, was buried in Westminster Abbey. His son Robert Spottiswood was Surgeon to the garrison of Tangier and father of the Spotswood who would later come to Virginia. Robert Spottiswood married Catherine Mercer, widow of Gov. Elliott of Tangier. Their son, Alexander Spotswood, was born in 1686 on an English man-of-war in the harbor of Tangier. He married Anne Butler Brayne. After a distinguished career in England, he was appointed Postmaster General of the American Colonies, Major General, and Commander-in-Chief of the Colonial Army and lived in Virginia from 1710-1740, during which time he was governor of Virginia and led an expedition of "gentlemen" across the Blue Ridge mountains. For this he supposedly was knighted. The gentlemen who accompanied him were thereafter called "Knights of the Golden Horse Shoe" and were presented with small golden horseshoes inscribed and set with garnets. Interested in mining and the manufacture of iron, Gov. Spotswood established vast land holdings in Spotsylvania County, Virginia. His daughter married Col. Bernard Moore of Chelsea in King William County, Virginia, from whom descended Robert E. Lee and The Carters of Shirley Plantation. His second daughter married Capt. Nathaniel W. Dandridge, R. N., son of Capt. William Dandridge uncle of Martha Dandridge Custis, wife of George Washington. In 1745 his son John married Mary Dandridge, daughter of Capt. Wm. Dandridge. Their son, John, married Sarah Rowzie, and owned the estates of Orange Grove, Sedley Lodge, and Horseshoe, all in the original Spotswood grant.

John Spotswood, son of John and Sarah Rowzie Spotswood was born in 1774. John Spotswood's sister, Susan Catherine Spotswood, born in 1776, married Dr. John Bott of Petersburg, Virginia, a graduate of the University of Edinburgh. Mrs. Bott was esteemed as a

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gardener and surely taught her niece Margaret Anna Robertson not only the disciplined tenets of her Presbyterian education but her gardening skills as well. John's brother Dandridge, born 1789 at Orange Grove, Orange County, Virginia, married October 29, 1818, Catherine Brooke Francisco. Born in 1801, their son William Francisco Spotswood married Isabella Matoaca Dunlop, daughter of James Dunlop of "Montview" Petersburg, Virginia. (Recall that John Bott Burwell was born at "Ellerslie," later bought by Mr. David Dunlop in 1839.) The Spotswood name figured prominently in Virginia families, history, and commerce. Inquiries with Crenshaw descendents in Richmond resulted in no validation that they and the Alexander Spotswood family are related; however there is speculation that such a relation does exist and most certainly will lead to further investigations.

Among the monuments on the Crenshaw plot is one in memory of Spotswood Dabney Crenshaw, born April 7, 1787, in Hanover County, Virginia, and his consort Winifred Graves Crenshaw, born August 5, 1792, of Orange County Virginia. They were cousins. Those buried in the Crenshaw plot in Hollywood Cemetery include Lewis Dabney Crenshaw, 1817-1875, eldest child of Spotswood Dabney Crenshaw and Winifred Graves, and his wife Ann Abigail Crenshaw, third daughter of James Bosher and Ann Herbert Hopkins, 1822-1885; their daughter Ann Elizabeth Crenshaw (September 16, 1826-September 1, 1901), who married James H. Grant (April 10, 1890- November 12, 1870). It was Ann Elizabeth Crenshaw Grant who was one of twenty women serving on a board of managers for the May 3, 1865, establishment of the Hollywood Memorial Association of the Ladies of Richmond. Among their infant children buried there is Charles Spotswood Grant (July 24, 1852-April 2, 1853). His monument immediately attracted our attention with its wreath of



roses
Monument of infant child, Charles Spotswood Grant (July 24, 1852-April 2, 1853), with wreath of roses encircling a horseshoe.

encircling a horseshoe-like inscription "Charles."

Indeed, the discovery of the musk rose in America retains its aura of mystery. While the Saluda and the Brema *Rosa moschata* findings have validation of their origins, the Burwell and the Crenshaw findings do not. Over the ensuing years we pondered the family lines, those inseparable links to the past that mark Virginia's heritage of family, religion, education, and love of and dedication to our land and our gardens. Was there some chance that the Crenshaw Musk Rose was of Spotswood origin, having been brought from the warmer lands of its origins near Tangier? Or was this prized *Rosa moschata* a Burwell treasure? What was it that was so important about *Rosa moschata* that inspired Robert Armistead and Margaret Anna Burwell to take it with



Musk rose in Crenshaw plot at Hollywood Cemetery

them from Chesterfield, Virginia, to Hillsborough, North Carolina, and then on to Charlotte, North Carolina? As Graham Stuart Thomas entitled his chapter in *Climbing Roses Old and New* "The Mystery of the Musk Rose," so also may we think of the discovery of *Rosa moschata* in America as an historical puzzle still challenging us down through the ages. Perhaps in Sangerhausen in 2003 we shall conclude the unraveling of this horticultural and genealogical mystery.

In closing we want to share information recently forwarded to us from Douglas Seidel, consultant for the Léonie Bell Noisette Garden at "Tufton," The Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants' display, nursery and propagation center. Spurred by her readings and studies of the early herbalists, the old rose manuals, and rose catalogs old and then current, Léonie Bell's correspondence in the mid-1950s

Fall Board Meeting Report

By Flora Ann Bynum, secretary-treasurer



The SGHS board met in Old Salem, Winston-Salem, North Carolina on September 29th, 2001 following Old Salem's biennial "Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes" conference. The first topic of discussion was how best to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the society in 2002. It was decided to publish a special edition of *Magnolia*, giving the history of the society's formation and early years, charter members, first officers and directors, data on each annual meeting, and reports on society activities. Peggy Cornett is chair of special anniversary celebrations and will be heading up this project along with Flora Ann Bynum.

Beth Boggess, chair of the annual meeting, reported that the meeting's Gala Garden Evening at Elms Court on Saturday night, April 19th also would be a celebration of the society's 20th



Board Members in Winston-Salem, NC September 2001

anniversary. She outlined plans for the entire weekend and a budget; the board approved both.

James G. Cothran reported on plans for the society's 21st annual meeting, to be held in April 2003 in Atlanta, Georgia, with the theme, "Atlanta's Landscape Legacy." Betsy Crusel and Sally Reeves are investigating hotels for the 22nd annual meeting, which will be held in New Orleans in 2004.

Mrs. Reeves reported that she had given a number of talks on *The New Louisiana Gardener*, of which she did the English translation and introduction. She felt the book, which was published by The Louisiana State University Press in cooperation with SGHS, was selling well.

A report from James I. Barganier on plans for the 2002 fall board meeting was reviewed. This meeting will be held the weekend of September 28th in Montgomery, Alabama, with Mr. Barganier as host, assisted by Dr. Edgar G. Givhan.

Officers attending the fall board meeting were Gordon W. Chappell of Williamsburg, Virginia, vice-president of the society, who presided at the meeting; Flora Ann L. Bynum of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, secretary-treasurer; Peter J. Hatch of Charlottesville, Virginia, immediate past president; and Peggy L. Cornett of Charlottesville, editor of *Magnolia*.

Board members attending were: Dr. Elizabeth M. Boggess of Natchez, Mississippi; Fletch Coke of Nashville, Tennessee; James R. Cothran of Atlanta, Georgia; Betsy Crusel of New Orleans, Louisiana; Gail Griffin of Bethesda, Maryland; Davyd Foard Hood of Vale, North Carolina; Patti McGee of Charleston, South Carolina; Mary Anne Pickens of Columbus, Texas; Sally K. Reeves of New Orleans; and M. Edward Shull of Cantonville, Maryland.

Board members unable to attend the meeting were: Kenneth M. McFarland of Fredericksburg, Virginia, society president; Dr. Edgar G. Givhan II of Montgomery, Alabama; Larry Paarlberg of Tallahassee, Florida; and Barbara Wells Sarudy of Monkton, Maryland. ♣

In Print

SGHS member **Linda L. Copeland** of Atlanta, Georgia, has co-authored with Allan M. Armitage, also of Atlanta, a book titled *Legends in the Garden, Who in the World is Nellie Stevens?* The book tells the stories behind American garden plant names—for example, who was Nellie Stevens holly named for, who was George L. Taber of the azaleas, Annabelle of the hydrangeas, Frances Williams of the hostas?

Stories of places and people associated with popular garden plants, accounts that until now have not been compiled, are told in the book. It may be ordered for \$24.95 plus \$3.00 shipping, a total of \$27.95, from Green Leaves Press, 214 Camden Road, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30309.

Charleston Hosts 9th International Heritage Rose Conference in Grand Style

By Peggy Cornett, editor

During a clear, mild, and stunningly beautiful week in mid October 2001 an international gathering of heritage rose enthusiasts convened in Charleston, South Carolina. Headquartered at historic Charleston's luxurious Westin Francis Marion Hotel, the meeting brought together professionals and serious amateurs from as far away as New Zealand and Australia to share their love of old roses and to learn more about the history of



Ruth Knopf, Jane Waring, Dottie Kerrison, Mimi Cathcart, Jody Anderson at Middleton Place Garden.

a particular class of roses, the Noisette, which had its beginnings in this historic North American port city.

John Meffert, master of ceremonies, began the formal meeting on Monday October 14th with an overview of the rich history of Charleston, which in the mid-1700s was considered the wealthiest and most influential city in Colonial America if not the world. Mr. Meffert outlined the city's various transitions over two centuries to the period in the 1960s when the historic restoration movement began. Through this narrative, he interwove the life of John Champneys, whose plantation was the site of the original cross between the musk (*Rosa moschata*) and 'Old Blush' (*Rosa chinensis* cv.) resulting in 'Champneys Pink Cluster', America's first rose hybrid. Most conference participants were familiar with this famous event, which took place sometime during the first decade of the nineteenth century. When John Champneys observed a rose in his garden that combined the best qualities of the fragrant European musk and the ever-blooming China, he was astute enough to realize the importance of this new variety and shared it with his neighbor and rose-fancier, Philip Noisette. Noisette, the son of French gardeners, had been appointed the director of the first botanical garden in Charleston and eventually became an independent nurseryman. He sent seedlings of Champneys pale pink hybrid to his brother Louis in France. Louis Noisette subsequently development and refined this promising rose and his creations would eventually grace the gardens of the Empress Josephine at Malmaison. Ultimately, Louis Noisette's skill as a rose breeder



resulted in an entirely new class of roses, deservedly named after him. The rest, as they say, is history.

Charleston rosarian and conference chair Ruth C. Knopf followed with a presentation describing her quest for and rediscovery of old Noisettes throughout the South. Ms. Knopf told the story of some of her unique finds in ancient cemeteries and old South Carolina gardens, including "Fewell's" and 'Lamarque'.

Gregg Lowery, owner of Vintage Gardens Nursery in Sebastopol, California continued the story of the evolution of John Champneys rose beginning with Louis Noisette's 1814 introduction, 'Blush Noisette', the first generation offspring of 'Champneys Pink Cluster'. This new variety was without doubt more refined, with highly doubled blossoms and a shapelier, more compact habit. Lowery described some of the best Noisettes available today, including 'Princess of Nassau', with clusters of fully-double, white flowers tinted pink. He credited Léonie Bell with finding the old 'Frazier's Park Musk', or 'Lingo', which is very representative of the early Noisette hybrids.

Lowery also acknowledged the contributions of the 19th-century Long Island nursery Robert Prince & Sons, which offered many old Noisette roses. William Prince, who himself corresponded with Champneys prior to the introduction of 'Blush Noisette', was noting the very latest forms of Noisettes as they were being developed by French breeders. At the time, crosses with teas and other roses such as Bourbons, were resulting in larger, richer colored flowers and Prince created sub classifications,

listing them as Tea Noisettes and Bourbon Noisettes.

Marie Butler's talk on the rediscovery of the musk rose in North America (reprinted in full in this issue) was read by Malcolm Manners, professor of horticulture at Florida Southern College in Lakeland. Greg Grant, garden writer, educator, and plant hunter, followed Ms. Butler with a closer look at " 'Old Bush' and the Roses of China," detailing the second part of the equation that resulted in the Noisette rose. Mr. Grant entertained the audience with stories of rose discoveries throughout the South, especially South Texas, where the combination of high temperatures and drought produce some of the harshest growing conditions on earth. The Chinas, teas, and



In Boone Hall's Garden.

polyanthas, he maintains, are the best roses for the Southern climate, and his slides of 'Old Blush' surviving in San Antonio, New Braunfels, Navasota, Independence, and Roundtop Texas confirmed his premise.

The afternoon was spent at Hampton Park, site of the newly installed Noisette Study Garden. Malcolm Manners reviewed the importance of the garden, where similar varieties are being grown side-by-side for comparison and verification of identity. Thus, the garden is significant in bringing together in one place many of the

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Rose Conference ...

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older named varieties from many sources. John T. Fitzpatrick, currently at Cornell University, originally conceived the idea of the study garden. Mr. Manners, who is now heading the research aspects of this garden, will be doing DNA analysis to see if plants that are apparently identical, morphologically, are also genetically identical. Some of the roses have been in the ground since 1999, but others were only recently planted and the garden is still a work in progress. JoAnn Breland is the horticulturist charged with the care of these plantings.

Gwen Fagan ended the day with a superb presentation on "Teas, Chinas and Noisettes at the Cape of Good Hope" following dinner in the ballroom. Ms. Fagan is known internationally for her work in the restoration of historic gardens in her native South Africa, and for her comprehensive book, *Roses at the Cape of Good Hope*.

October 15th began with Malcolm Manners again, who substituted for David Ruston, the only speaker unable to attend. Mr. Manners detailed his DNA studies verifying the genetic sequence of events by which the single musk and 'Old Blush' crossed, resulting in the 'Champneys Pink Cluster', which in turn was the parent of the 'Blush Noisette'.



Dr. Rex W. Thomson, New Zealand; Jane Waring, Charleston, SC; Mike Shoup, Texas; Henry Flowers, Texas; Dr. Malcolm Manners, Florida

Odile Maquelier, organizer of the 8th International Heritage Rose Conference in Lyon, France, gave a scholarly presentation on the complex history of 'Blush Noisette' and the Tea-Noisette roses in France. Ms. Masquelier, founder of the nonprofit organization "Roses Anciennes en France," discussed the many sorts of Noisettes arising from French breeders such as Vibert, Noisette, and Laffay, as well as the contributions of works by Johann Hermann and of Claude Antoine Thory and Pierre Joseph Redouté, who described and illustrated the early roses of France. Ms. Maquelier also brought new light to our understanding of the French word, Noisette, which she maintained has nothing to do with hazel nuts, but rather is connected to an old French word for "noisy people." Thus, the hotly debated Charlestonian way of pronouncing it as "noise-ette" instead of "nwa-zet" may be more appropriate in this case, although Gilles Noisette, a descendant of the original breeders who attended the meeting, did not agree. In the end, conference attendees tended to stay with the pronunciation they preferred, despite a compromise proposal of



Sisters Tutta Mood and Ruth Knopf at Hampton Park.

"nose-ette."

Garden historian and writer Trevor Nottle told the fascinating story of the Asian rose trade. Mr. Nottle, the speaker who traveled the greatest distance from Adelaide, Australia, looked at the colorful history of the rose beginning with Ancient Greece to 20th-century Britain. He discussed many of the significant figures in the development and dissemination of the rose, such as Sir Joseph Banks, and showed slides of roses depicted in art throughout the ages. Phillip Robinson, co-owner of Vintage Gardens Nursery, then gave an insightful presentation, "Tea-Roses – Wrong or Right," about the problems created by incorrect rose identification. Mr. Robinson, who is widely respected as one of the most reliable authorities on old and modern roses in America, has used his years of experience growing and carefully observing roses to sort out the names and histories of many important varieties.

The entire afternoon was spent on a walking tour of Charleston's "Heritage Rose Trail," a gift from the city in honor of the Heritage Rose Conference. This citywide effort by a corps of volunteers has resulted in the planting of Noisette roses in more than twenty sites, including churchyards, city cemeteries, and in private gardens throughout the historic district. JoAnn Breland created the city's plantings and a brochure map of the trail is available. The roses planted by Ruth Knopf at Boone Hall, located outside of town but considered part of the rose trail, provided the most mature and impressive display of the entire conference, and the garden was visited Wednesday afternoon.

The final day began with Marijke Peterich's presentation on the "Preservation of Old Garden Roses in Bermuda." Ms. Peterich served as president of the Bermuda Rose Society for many years and worked to rewrite the *Bermuda Rose Book*, a useful reference guide and definitive account of the many distinct and unusual varieties that have survived on this island. The culture of roses in Bermuda dates back to the Spaniards who first occupied the island in 1639, and have long intrigued rose experts throughout the world. Rosamund Wallinger then discussed the work she has done to painstakingly research and restore Gertrude Jekyll's 1908

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The Life of Mary Catherine Rion

By Debra P. McCoy-Massey, Atlanta, Georgia

"The making of a garden is much like the formation of character – the loveliest mature characters are often the result of many early mistakes."¹

Opportunities for expression of intellect were restricted for women in the South during the nineteenth century. Upper class women were expected to be educated, to be capable correspondents, trained in the arts (particularly music and painting) and to act as unobtrusive partners in society. Women were the caretakers, the child-care providers, or the household managers. The garden became a place for women to demonstrate their command of horticulture and design. For practical reasons kitchen gardens were an extension of household responsibilities but the flower garden provided an outlet for artistic expression by women in both design and in the use of color. Flower gardens were also a favorite subject of women painters of this era.

In July of 1860 a small, practical guide to southern gardening was published in Columbia, South Carolina. The author, Mary Catherine Rion, was a vibrant, active southern woman who managed to pull this project together as she cared for a growing family in a time of national turmoil. In the Preface of *Ladies' Southern Florist*, Mary Catherine states that she was "desiring a book on Flower Gardening which might be adapted to the South, and, at the same time, written in such a manner as to be intelligible to one not a professional Florist." She goes on to say that she gathered the works on flowers that were accessible and modified the content for southern conditions of climate and soil, guided by her experience as a gardener. She credits the works of Buist, Breck, and Watson specifically along with the Patent Office Reports and other valuable congressional publications for the content of her book. In her own words, "I am alone actuated by a desire to place in the hands of the Ladies of the South such a work as I in vain sought, when I commenced the culture of my Flower Garden."

This early work is the first garden volume to be published by a woman in the South. There were two printings of the book prior to the start of the Civil War. The publishing houses of South Carolina were shut down after the Civil War and there are very few original copies of *Ladies' Southern Florist* available. The book is accurate and useful for those wishing to plant and propagate a southern flower garden. The author is an interesting profile in the character of a southern woman.

Mary Catherine Weir – The Early Years

Mary Catherine Weir was born on March 16, 1829 in Sparta, Georgia. Her father, Samuel Weir, Jr., moved his wife Margaret and son, George, from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to Sparta in the late 1820s. The family moved to South Carolina by 1829 and in 1833 a third child, Margaret Elizabeth, was born. Samuel Weir was the editor of several newspapers in the Camden and Lancaster area of South Carolina between



1829 and 1836. The family was split when Margaret returned to her original home in Pennsylvania, leaving the older children, George and Mary Catherine to be reared by Samuel. The reasons for the separation are unknown, but contemporary accounts suggest that the couple "did not agree." Samuel became editor of *The Southern Chronicle*, a newspaper in Columbia, in 1840. At that time his household included his son George, Mary Catherine and two slaves.²

Mary Catherine grew up in the care of her father whose strong personality was legendary. Samuel was devoutly Presbyterian, a talented musician, a staunch believer in states rights and dedicated to education for both girls and boys. Because of his work and social status Mary Catherine,

no doubt, spent her early life in the company of educated and well-read individuals. Mary Catherine's musical education could also have come from her father for Samuel Weir was a music director at the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia.³ Julian Selby states, "Mr. W. had a deep bass voice – which would have called for a rasp to smooth it down, while his daughter, Miss Kitty, sang remarkably sweet."⁴

Educational opportunities were abundant for girls of her social status in South Carolina with classical subjects such as Greek and Latin available for girls in some schools. By the early nineteenth century, botany, gardening, and plant collecting along with French, English composition, reading, and music also were an acceptable part of the education of young ladies.⁵ It is possible that Mary Catherine's interest in gardening and horticulture began with her schooling. Her accomplishments would indicate that she was an excellent student.

Upon the death of her father, Mary Catherine, age 18, was invited to live in the home of William Preston where she resided for two and half years.⁶ Mr. Preston was the president of South Carolina College in Columbia and he often housed "young men of promise" attending the College.⁷ William Preston's sister-in-law, Caroline Hampton Preston, owned a home in Columbia (the Hampton-Preston House) whose gardens were

described by *Gardens of Colonies and State*: "Among the noted private gardens of Columbia was that of the Preston family. The grounds covered a large area and were filled with shrubbery and flowers of costly varieties." In the late 1840s, the house became the "center of social activity in the city"⁸ when Caroline and her husband John Preston returned to Columbia. Mary Catherine was a resident of the William Preston household at that time and may have been influenced by the beauty and design of that garden.

James Henry Rion

While living in the Preston household, Mary Catherine met her future husband, James Henry Rion, a scholarship student at South Carolina College. Born on April 17, 1828 James Rion was the son of Henry and Margaret Hunter Rion of Montreal, Canada. James's father died the month before he was born and his mother moved to Savannah where she



Mary Catherine Rion's home.



Side yard of the Rion house.

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Mary Catherine Rion...

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served as the housekeeper for the Pulaski Inn. James Rion attended the Chatham Academy for several years, excelling in math and history. He was employed in an ice business before moving with his mother at the age of 14 to Pendleton, South Carolina, where his education continued at the Pendleton Male Academy. Shortly after the move Margaret Rion became employed as the housekeeper for John C. Calhoun at his home, Fort Hill.⁹ James Rion had as his classmates at the Pendleton Male Academy the three youngest Calhoun boys, John, James and William. Throughout his life James Henry enjoyed a close relationship to the Calhoun family, including Calhoun's eldest daughter, Anna Maria Calhoun Clemson, and her husband Thomas Clemson. James Rion served as an attorney to Thomas Clemson and their interests and financial affairs were co-mingled until James Rion's death in 1887.¹⁰

Before graduating from South Carolina College with highest honors in 1850, James Rion returned to Savannah for a brief period. James was asked to draw up a plan for Bonaventure Cemetery on property owned by a former acquaintance.¹¹ In a letter to the editors of the *Savannah Daily Republican*, James Rion provided the following description of the land that would become Bonaventure Cemetery:

"Long rows of venerable oaks meet the eye on every side, running in single lines in some places, again forming extensive avenues, beautifully arched, a la Gothique by the interlacing branches of the lofty trees on either side. These rows cross, not in stiff right angles, but in angles varying from the quite acute to the very obtuse. The hand of man has done this much, in planting these living colonades, and Dame Nature has not been sparing in her favours, but besides having kindly assisted in the growth of these 'sturdy sons of the forest,' she has richly festooned them with a magnificent drapery of moss which hangs in all possible forms, and conceals the blending of the branches of the trees that form the avenue, thus completing the arch and giving it at once a strange and enchanting appearance. In the spaces, not occupied by these long lines of oaks, is seen the gloomy cedar, which, as if to give variety to the scene, is planted 'in orderly disorder,' while around are branches of the low palmetto, and occasionally, Georgia's favorite tree, the stately Magnolia."¹²

James also exhibited knowledge of other cemeteries of the time as he opens his July 25, 1849 letter to the *Savannah Daily Republican* with these words:

"The observing traveler rarely passes through any county without being struck with the appropriateness of some spots for certain purposes. Here he thinks would be a favorable situation for a town, there for a fortification, or there for a summer retreat. Nature has certainly intended that this should be so; Gilbralter, she designed for a fortress; a view of the maps will at once tell where she wished cities to flourish; Mount Auburn and Chapell [Chapel] Hill, she formed for cemeteries; and to come nearer home, has she not very plainly pointed to Bonaventure as a fit place for the good people of Savannah to bury their dead? Any one who has been there would surely answer yes."¹³

Although the survey maps and original drawings of Bonaventure no longer exist, there seems to be little doubt that James Rion was involved in the plan.

Mary Catherine and James Henry Rion – The Marriage

Despite family differences, Mary maintained a relationship with her Pennsylvania relatives and her mother. In 1850 Mary Catherine returned to Harrisburg to the home of her uncle to await her marriage to James Rion. Correspondence from Mary Catherine to James Henry Rion (Henry) during their separation survives. The letters speak of love and the every day occurrences of Mary's life in Pennsylvania. She speaks of a wide circle of friends and a warm relationship with her aunt and uncle. She also sent messages to her future mother-in-law that showed a shared affection. The letters are playful and charming, "Oh darling, this is a lovely day: the wind fans the leaves gently and the sun is half hid beyond the mountains. The birds are twittering in the bushes, in almost as tuneful notes as the day you kissed me in time to their music. But the melody is wanting to make the harmony. Fanny is gone and I have no one to talk to of you..."¹⁴ The letters speak of her deep commitment and affection for her future husband and her willingness to make their place in life with whatever they had.

On December 11, 1851 James Henry Rion and Mary Catherine Weir were married at the home of her Uncle, J.W. Weir in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. That same year James Rion accepted a position teaching math, history and military science in Winnsboro, South Carolina, at the Mount Zion Institute. Winnsboro would serve as the Rion's residence throughout their marriage. James Rion taught for several years and served on the board of Mt. Zion Institute for years after he left teaching. He also served on the board of South Carolina College. In 1854 he passed the bar and began a successful law practice. In addition to his law practice James Rion served as president of the Planter's Bank of Fairfield, owned a granite quarry, and was involved in a number of businesses in the area surrounding Winnsboro.¹⁵

1857 was an extraordinary year for the Rion's family. There is an account of an incident in 1857 in which a friend of James Rion named John Player insulted Mary Catherine. When Mr. Player refused to apologize, James Rion shot and killed him. Mr. Rion was acquitted of manslaughter in what is reported to be an unusual court case.¹⁶ The Rion's also acquired a house in 1857 located on South Congress Street.¹⁷ It was at this house that they raised nine children: Preston (1852-1923), Margaret Hunter (1854-1918), Floride Calhoun (1856-1923), Kitty (1858-1883), William Calhoun (1861-1889), Holbrook (1863-1920), Lucy Tenney (1866-1940), John Weir (1869-1872) and Hanna (1874-1924).

The children were named for people that were of importance to the Rion family. Their names also served as a visible link to families of power and prestige. Preston was the namesake of the family that housed both Mary and James in the late 1840s. Margaret Hunter was James Rion's mother. Floride Calhoun was the name of John C. Calhoun's wife, as well as one of the daughters of Anna Calhoun Clemson. Kitty is the nickname that James Rion used for Mary Catherine, William Calhoun is named for the youngest Calhoun child that was a particular favorite of James and Mary Catherine, John was named for Mary's uncle, and Hanna for the wife of James W. Weir, the aunt and uncle with whom Mary Catherine lived prior to her marriage.

The name Holbrook could have come from several different sources. Samuel Weir borrowed liberally from a publisher named Holbrook from New York for most of the years he edited newspapers in South Carolina. The dedication to *Ladies' Southern Florist* is inscribed, "To My Friend,

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Mary Catherine Rion...

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A.M. Holbrook, Esq., of New Orleans, (To Whom This Volume Owes Its Existence).¹⁸

There is a third story involving a Holbrook and Mary Catherine. In the winter of 1864 Mr. Fahnestrck, a rich banker in Washington, D.C. wrote to Mary Catherine attempting to locate a cousin, Lieutenant Holbrook of Pennsylvania, who was taken prisoner by the Confederates. Lieutenant Holbrook was imprisoned in Richmond, but had been moved and could not be located. Mr. Fahnestrck offered to reciprocate any services rendered to his cousin for any Confederate soldier. Mary Catherine "promptly instituted a search" of prisons in Columbia, Andersonville, and Charleston. Lieutenant Holbrook was located in Charleston, in failing health, struggling to overcome pneumonia. Mary Catherine requested a transfer of the prisoner from the hospital to her house so that reciprocal arrangements could be made for a Confederate soldier. Lieutenant Holbrook spent several weeks convalescing in the Rion house during the war. Mary Catherine's ability to access both General Wardel and Provost Marshall Gayer of Charleston in the middle of the war and secure release of a prisoner to her custody speaks to the authority and connections she had at the time. Lieutenant Holbrook died less than a year after his release. Mr. Fahnestrck secured the release of Capt. John L. Jones of Liberty Hill, entertaining him in Washington, D.C. before Capt. Jones returned to South Carolina.¹⁹

Mary Catherine's powerful Northern relatives are credited with sending letters of immunity for her homes during the Civil War. The house in Winnsboro and a plantation house were considered safe places for the valuables of friends. In addition, friends whose houses were burned are reported to have found safe haven on the Rion properties. The Rions were generous with their time and wealth, particularly with widows of Civil War soldiers.²⁰

Life Without Henry

At the death of James Rion in 1887, the accumulated loss of her husband and other family members took a toll on Mary Catherine. Her brother and sister died in the 1850s, her mother and mother-in-law in the 1860s, and by 1875 all of the Calhoun children were gone. Three of her children died before 1887. She suffered the death of another son and granddaughter in 1889. One account describes her as "very restless... (seemed) to find it hard to adjust to her changed circumstances."²¹ Mary also experienced some hearing loss that might have further isolated her.²² She settled the estate of her husband personally by corresponding with Thomas Clemson and his attorneys about settling their shared financial investments as well as dealing with other financial matters.²³

Mary Catherine's youngest child Hanna excelled in the acceptable intellectual pursuits of women of the time. An accomplished pianist, painter and gardener, she performed on concert tours with her husband, had her artwork shown nationally and internationally, and planted

gardens in a number of her homes.²⁴ Hanna's independent nature and intelligence provided opportunities for the later years of her mother's life to be full and productive. Hanna's musical career prompted Mary Catherine to travel abroad in 1894 and 1895. Mary wrote a series of articles describing her travels that were published as letters to the editor. She sailed to Europe on the *Augutsa Victoria* in August of 1894 and docking in Cuxhaveu, France, in the same month. Most of her time on this trip was spent in Germany. Letters to the editor make observations about the people, the opera, the experience of traveling and the various places visited. Mary Catherine was invigorated by the travel. They returned from Europe in 1895.²⁵

Mary Catherine Rion died in Reading, Pennsylvania, in July of 1901 while visiting Hanna.²⁶

Ladies' Southern Florist

The house on West Congress Street in Winnsboro, South Carolina, is the site of Mary Catherine's articulated ideas about gardening. In *Ladies' Southern Florist* she defers to personal judgement, "Every one must suit their own taste as to the plan or design of the flower garden, as no rule can be laid down for this." Characteristically she then defines in great detail the shape and width of walks and beds and the types of plants that were suitable for a front planting. The gardens at the Congress Street residence reflected these ideas. According to an early sketch the garden contained a boxwood lined walk with complementary trees on each side. There was an old elm tree to one side of the house and a matching

hardwood on the other. The front fence was planted with wild orange and the front lawn is rounded by plantings on each side.²⁸ Hanna Rion, in *The Garden in the Wilderness* (1909), speaks of returning to her mother's garden: "I stood outside the fence an exile. Gazing past the straggling, aged box borders, my eyes sought in vain the beautiful old tracteries of paths – the curves of symmetrical beds. Alas! Beds and paths had intermingled in an universal neglect."²⁹ The garden at the front of the house today suggest the ideas of Mary Rion still, although the boxwood encroaches on the walkway and the integrity of the front beds is harder to see. The two large trees are no longer in the front yard, although there is a stately Magnolia to the left front. The garden at one time contained "rare shrubs, boxwoods, roses, bulbs and cut-flowers for every season" according to an account written in the 1960s.³⁰

In a recent article, "Women Garden Writers," Susan Schnare, states, "Most women garden writers have been wealthy, intelligent, and educated, with ample time in which to garden, observe, and write. They usually wrote for women, perhaps because they felt men would not listen to them. Often they directed their work toward women of all classes, but many of their recommendations excluded all but their wealthier readers."³¹ Certainly Mary Catherine was intelligent, educated, and wealthy. In *Ladies' Southern Florist* she identifies her intended audience as



Rion family photos belonging to Mary Rion's great granddaughter Nell Sprott of Winsboro, SC.

photos by Candy Sherburne

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Mary Catherine Rion...

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educated women. Her book, however, is a model of simple, accurate information easily understood by anyone that has an interest in the flowers, trees, shrubs and vines that have the potential for decorating a southern landscape.

Hanna wrote of her mother and *Ladies' Southern Florist*, "It makes my heart ache to read her pages so abloom with eternal spring, and realize the lastingness of the inanimate over the human, for gardening is long over for Mama. But her share in my garden is very large; she may still be my preceptor through her legacy of words, and perhaps after all the reason my flowers thrive so well is because of their guardian spirit."³² Mary Rion's

"legacy of words" easily withstands the test of time and is a valuable resource for gardeners still. A facsimile edition of the *Ladies' Southern Florist* was released in June of 2001 by the University of South Carolina Press offering a resource for period gardens, heirloom plants and a comprehensive list of ornamental ideally suited to a southern climate.

[Debra P. McCoy-Massey, M.A. History/Historic Preservation, co-wrote the Introduction to the facsimile reprint of Mary C. Rion's 1860 edition of *Ladies' Southern Florist* (published by the University of South Carolina Press, 2001). Davyd Foard Hood, book review editor, reviewed this reprint in the Fall 2001 issue of *Magnolia* (Volume XVII, Number 1).]

End Notes

¹ Hanna Rion, *Let's Make a Flower Garden* (New York: McBride, Nast and Company, 1912), 3.

² Julian A. Selby, *Memorabilia and Anecdotal Reminiscences of Columbia, South Carolina and Incidents Connected Therewith* (Columbia, SC, R.L. Bryan Co., 1905), 57.

³ Julian Stevenson Bolick, *A Fairfield Sketch Book*, (Clinton, SC, Jacobs Brothers, 1963), 78-80.

⁴ Selby, *Ibid.* 57.

⁵ Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle*, (New York, New York University Press, 1994), 33-93.

⁶ Nelle Spratt, Family information about Mary Rion, James Rion and the Rion children provided by an interview with a great granddaughter Nelle Spratt.

⁷ James A. Gabel, "James Henry Rion 1826-1886: Confederate Colonel Who Could Have Been King: The Life of colonel James Henry Rion," (Huron, South Dakota, A presentation of the South Dakota Genealogical Society and the South Dakota Historical Society Joint Convention May 22, 1993. Updated and corrected in 1995; on file in the manuscript division of the South Carolina Library.

⁸ The Garden Club of America, *Gardens of Colony and State: Gardens and Gardeners of the American Colonies of the Republic before 1840*, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 235. And Information on the Hampton-Preston House provided via the Internet web site and a telephone conversation with the historian of the house.

⁹ Terry Shaw, "Peter Wiltberger Creator of a Cemetery at Bonaventure" (Savannah, GA, Bonaventure Historical Society, Volume 3, No. 11, August 1997.) Taken from Bernard E. Bee's obituary of James Rion, April 10, 1887 in the Journal of South Carolina Bar Association.

¹⁰ Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr., *The Calhoun Family and Thomas Green Clemson, The Decline of a Southern Patriarchy*, (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1983), pp. 80, 136.

¹¹ Shaw, *Ibid.* Letters from James Rion reproduced from the Savannah Daily Republican, June 25, 1849.

¹² Shaw, *Ibid.*

¹³ Shaw, *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Letter from Mary Weir to James Rion, June 1, 1851. Letters provided by Nelle Spratt and James Gabel.

¹⁵ Bolick, *Ibid.* and Spratt.

¹⁶ Gabel Interviews, *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Bolick, *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Mary Catherine Rion, *Ladies' Southern Florist* (Columbia: Peter B. Glass, 1860).

¹⁹ Mary Ellen Cunningham, "Long Ago at Litchfield." This letter was part of correspondence to Nelle Spratt. The original is in the possession of Charles Alexander Robinson III, the great grandson of Captain Leroy Jones, the Confederate office involved in the exchange.

²⁰ Bolick, *Ibid.*

²¹ Gabel Interviews, quoted from *Through the Years in Old Winnsboro* by Katherine Theus Obeir in 1940.

²² R. B. Hannahan, Testimony from the death of Colonel Rion provided by James Gabel.

²³ There are a number of letters in the Thomas Clemson papers housed at Clemson University from Mary Rion regarding the disposition of business affairs between the estate James Rion and Thomas Clemson.

²⁴ June McMaster Roehrs, "Radcliff Honors Hanna Rion as one of 16 prominent U.S. Garden Writers," (Columbia, SC, The State Newspaper), provided by Nelle Spratt.

²⁵ "Winnsboro News and Herald," October 26, 1894.

²⁶ Bolick, *Ibid.*

²⁷ Mary Catherine Rion, *Ladies' Southern Florist* (Columbia: Peter B. Glass, 1860).

²⁸ Bolick, *Ibid.*

²⁹ Hanna Rion, *Ibid.* 202-203. Also Mary Hill Brawley, "The Art of Gardens, Visions of the Garden by Women Painters, Photographers and Garden Writers in the South," (Old Salem, NC, from *The Influence of Women on the Southern Landscape, Proceedings of the 10th Conference on Restoring Southern Landscapes, October 5-7, 1995, 1997*), 100-119.

³⁰ Bolick, *Ibid.*

³¹ Susan E. Schnare, "Women Garden Writers" (Old Salem, NC, from *The Influence of Women on the Southern Landscape, Proceedings of the 10th Conference on Restoring Southern Landscapes, October 5-7, 1995, 1997*), 83-99.

³² Hanna Rion, *Ibid.* 68

Rose Conference ...

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garden at Upton Grey, Hampshire, England. Ms. Wallinger and her husband John moved to the Manor House in 1984 and immediately began the enormous task of restoring the virtually derelict house and garden. They spared no expense and effort to track down the pre-1908 plants specified by Jekyll for this 4-acre garden, including many old roses. Ms. Wallinger's recently published book, *Gertrude Jekyll's Lost Garden*, is an account of this horticultural adventure. G. Michael Shoup gave the final formal presentation of the meeting on his personal odyssey "In Search of the Forgotten Roses." Mr. Shoup, a founder of the renowned Antique Rose Emporium in Brenham, Texas, has been a key figure in the collection, preservation, and dissemination of heirloom roses for over 20 years. Mike Shoup has had a hand in many of the projects discussed by the previous conference speakers and his

presentation emphasized the interconnectedness of this worldwide community of rose enthusiasts.

Middleton Place was the setting for the meeting's final dinner and acknowledgements, as well as high-spirited revelry that had many attendees and conference organizers dancing the Charleston. The 9th International Heritage Rose Conference was years in the making and could not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the conference steering committee and a host of volunteers and organizations. Special accolades go to the key organizers – Patti McGee, Mimi Cathcart, John Meffert, and Dottie Kerrison. All would agree, however, that the success of this meeting was due primarily to one person, Ruth Knopf, whose vision, quiet persistence, disarming Southern manner, and abiding love of old roses energized an entire city to honor one of its most precious legacies.

Elms Court: the Evolution of a Natchez Garden

By Elizabeth M. Boggess, Natchez, Mississippi

When the Southern Garden History Society meets in Natchez to celebrate its twentieth anniversary (April 18th-21st, 2002), members will have the opportunity to visit examples of all three basic housing types: the town house, the plantation, and the suburban villa. The society will hold a gala garden party and dinner-dance Saturday evening, April 21st, at Elms Court, a suburban villa situated on 150 acres of land.

In 1852, Frank Surget purchased the estate as a gift to his daughter Jane Surget Merrill, wife of Ayres Merrill, Jr., and already the mother of a hopeful family. The original house was a simple double-pile with portico, and had been built about 1835 for the two unmarried daughters of Lewis Evans, Sheriff of Adams County. Ayres and Jane Merrill, however, had a large family (13 children, of whom nine survived to adulthood), and required a larger establishment. It is to the period of the Merrill family occupancy (ca. 1852-1895) that Elms Court owes its present appearance, with extended wings and elaborate cast-iron galleries intended to convey the impression of a Mediterranean



Elms Court - photo by Van Jones Martin, used by permission of Martin-St. Martin Publishing Co.

villa. Ayres and Jane Merrill also began an elaborate landscape plan, creating a series of terraces both for drainage control and for plantings of various kinds. Although the terraces themselves survive with only minor erosion damage, there are only a few areas in which the intended plantings can be determined. These are a broad terrace with a few surviving nut trees (below the present swimming pool), which may represent the site of an orchard and nuttery, and an area with a lover's-knot rose garden, in which the outline of the bushes can still be seen (beyond the present parking lot). It appears that the Merrills never completed any additional formal gardens. The site of the house was relatively open in the late nineteenth century, rather than the heavily wooded surroundings of the present time.

The Merrill family left Natchez in the early years of the Civil War, renting the house to friends, and did not return until early in the 1870s, just prior to Mr. Merrill's death (Mrs. Merrill had died in 1867). The children attempted to maintain the



property by conducting commercial dairy operations, but borrowed more money than they could repay. By the mid 1890s the principal lender, who was Jane Surget Merrill's first cousin, was forced to foreclose. James Surget gave the house to his



Elms Court from the garden - photo by Van Jones Martin, used by permission of Martin-St. Martin Publishing Co.

daughter Carlotta at the time of her 1902 wedding to David McKittrick. McKittrick began the transformation of the grounds almost immediately. McKittrick created the present approach to the house, with massed azaleas flanking the front lawn, lavish use of ruscus (butcher's broom), and large ornamental storage jars as accents leading to the black and white marble forecourt. He converted the area immediately behind the house from a work-yard to a formal space, laying flag stones to create an axial path and planting fast-growing vines, notably the large wisteria now forming an arbor over the back steps (ca. 1904). He also planted a number of specimen shrubs in the area immediately behind the house. McKittrick created a shrubbery-garden on the next lower terrace, which formerly had several large pomegranates, and laid out a grass tennis court on the third terrace (now the site of the swimming pool). There was a large vegetable garden east of the present parking lot, on a slightly lower level.

McKittrick passed on his vision for the grounds of Elms Court to his daughter, Grace McKittrick MacNeil, who took over responsibility for the gardens at his death in 1954. She began by implementing her father's plans for the area immediately behind the house, replacing the flagstones with a brick axial walk, and flanking it with wide borders inspired by English herbaceous borders. In the early 1980s she retained the services of William Garbo ASLA of Jackson, Mississippi, to guide her and assist her in this work, forming a partnership that was to continue for the rest of her life. Together they expanded the borders along the brick walk and created a bed of seasonal flowers and bulbs in front of the one-story dependency, as well as the smaller garden "room" along the southeast side of the house. Garbo designed the pool and pool buildings, and the roofing structure, which covers the remains of the 1850s gas-manufacturing apparatus, as well as the beds surrounding the

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Members in the News



The front cover of the February issue of *Horticulture* magazine features a large picture of 'Black Parrot', a 1937 tulip being sold by SGHS member **Scott Kunst** of Old House Gardens, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the issue includes a six-page article by Scott, titled "Tulips with a Past," with three full-page color illustrations and a chart of "antique tulips at a glance."

SGHS president **Kenneth M. McFarland** recently published *The Architecture of Warren County, North Carolina: 1770S-1860S*.

Landscape historian **C. Allan Brown** of Charlottesville, Virginia spoke on "Town and Country – New Perspectives on Historic Tidewater Gardens," at a seminar held January 16, 2002 at Sotheby's in New York City. The subject of the seminar was "Gunston Hall and its Tidewater Neighbors: New Research on the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake House."

The September/October 2001 issue *Carolina Gardener* magazine contains "Barnsley Gardens: Reclaiming the Spirit," an article by Sheila Turnage. **Barnsley Gardens** in Adairsville, Georgia was the mid-19th century estate of Godfrey and Julia Barnsley. For information about visiting this historic Victorian house and garden, call (877) 773-2447 or (770) 773-7480.

Ben Page, landscape architect and former SGHS president from Nashville, Tennessee, was a featured speaker at the Davidson Horticultural Symposium XVIII in March 2002.

An article titled "A Chapter in Southern Garden Writing, The Correspondence of Elizabeth Lawrence and Caroline Dorman," by SGHS member **Karen Cole** of Deland, Florida, appeared in the Fall 2001 *Journal* of the New England Garden History Society. **Judith Tankard** of Newton, Massachusetts, who also is a SGHS member, edits the *Journal*. The article on Elizabeth Lawrence and Caroline Dorman cites research done by SGHS board member **Dayd Foard Hood** of Vale, North Carolina, discussing the work

done by Southern garden clubs in the interwar period publishing surveys of gardens and garden history in the South. Mr. Hood's research was published in the 1997 proceedings of the Tenth Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes.

The April 2002 issue of *Horticulture* magazine contains an article on "My Urban Arboretum," by the magazines Midwest reporter **Marty Ross**. Marty is a contributing garden writer for the *New York Times* as well, and has an article in the January 6th, 2002 issue on a 2000-piece table setting commissioned by the King of Denmark as a gift to Catherine the Great in 1790, which is hand-decorated with wildflowers of Denmark.

Savannah's **Mary Helen Ray**, an active and long-time SGHS member, was recognized in "Digging In: Georgia Garden Club Ladies Mean Business," an AP article published in the February 15th *Winston-Salem Journal*. The article describes the political muscle of the Garden Club, which has aggressively fought against billboard clutter and has won lawsuits challenging roadside tree-cutting policies. Ms. Ray has been a part of the Garden Club efforts since the 1970s, when politicians basically ignored members because "they were a bit more ladylike." Now the tone has changed, according to a Garden Club volunteer lobbyist. The "little steel magnolias" have become "the pit bulls" when it comes to battling the DOT and billboard lobbyists.

Peggy Cornett was interviewed for a National Public Radio feature on the rediscovery of the musk rose (*Rosa moschata*) and the preservation efforts of the **Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants**. The interview by Martha Woodroof, which was taped in August and aired in December, included Marie Butler and Jane Cox and their work to preserve the musk rose in Richmond, Virginia's Hollywood Cemetery. To hear an audio version, go to www.npr.org and follow the "npr archive" to Morning Edition, December 11th, 2001, and search for "Musk Roses." ♦

Elms Court...

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swimming pool, and the caladium borders on the intermediate terrace. He also began a systematic daybook of garden activities, which has been maintained by the two gardeners employed at Elms Court now for more than 20 years, and has prepared a plan of the surroundings of the house which accompanies a plant list. The plan and plant list are available to visitors to the gardens.

Mrs. MacNeil also refined the approaches to the house through the wooded area, by naturalizing a variety of bulbs for seasonal color. The September-blooming lycoris, primarily red with occasional drifts of white and yellow, attract many visitors each year, but the winter and spring daffodils and hyacinths are equally well known. Following in Mr. McKittrick's theories of

the natural in the landscape, Mrs. MacNeil planted hybrid native azaleas throughout the wooded area, and encouraged beauty-berry, may-pops and trilliums to reproduce and spread. As mature trees fall, the canopy changes, and there are new patterns of dappled light to be experienced each season of the year as one passes through the wooded area, deliberately reminiscent of an English landscaped park.

Grace MacNeil died in 2000. The present owner, Mrs. MacNeil's younger daughter, is continuing with her mother's intentions for the grounds and gardens of Elms Court, occasionally substituting her own favorite plants. William Garbo ASLA continues to provide advice and assistance.

Publications Available Through SGHS



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

Breaking Ground: *Examining the Vision and Practice of Historic Landscape Restoration*, (1997 proceedings of Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes Conference at Old Salem.). \$10 (plus \$3.95 postage). *NC orders add 6.5% sales tax.*

The Influence of Women on the Southern Landscape, (1995 proceedings of conference cited above). \$10.00 (plus \$3.95 postage). *NC orders add 6.5% sales tax.*

SPECIAL OFFER: If purchasing both **Breaking Ground** and **The Influence of Women**, the total cost for the two volumes is \$15 (plus \$3.95 postage). *NC orders add 6.5% 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. Price includes postage and tax.

Individual Back Issues of Magnolia: \$5 each, including postage and tax.

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