



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

Magnolia

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Dream Gardener: Pioneer Nurseryman Bertrand H. Farr

by George H. Edmonds

Review by Historic Iris Specialist Anner M.
Whitehead, Richmond, Virginia

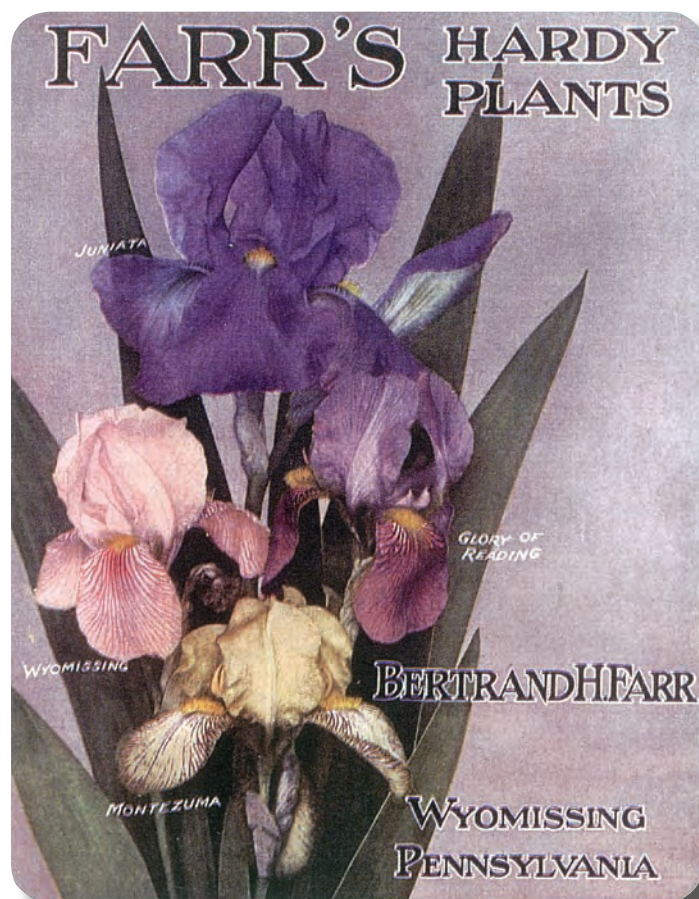
Writing in his *Southern Gardens, Southern Gardening*, 1982, the eminent horticulturist William Lanier Hunt (1906-1996), a founder of the Southern Garden History Society, recounted:

The most popular nurseryman back in the twenties was that charming and delightful man Bertrand Farr at Wyomissing, Pennsylvania. The subtitle of his catalog was Better Plants by Farr. Bertrand Farr had the best of everything at Wyomissing. He bred daylilies, he bred the first "red" iris, he offered the first Chinese tree peonies [. . .] He was called upon as the judge supreme, from Boston to Washington, for the big flower shows.

As the nephew of the owner of the renowned Lindley nursery in Greensboro, North Carolina, and protégé of Violet Niles Walker, a prominent member of the Garden Club of Virginia and the Garden Club of America, Mr. Hunt had heard many stories, and knew whereof he spoke, although he might have drawn his line further south.

When the James River Garden Club of Richmond, Virginia required a prominent judge for their 1921 spring flower festival, the first of a series of enormous public extravaganzas of the 1920s staged during the bloom season of the newly adopted City Flower, the fashionable Iris, they brought in Bertrand Farr. The show extended for three days, and, according to the front page of the *Richmond News-Leader*, May 5, attracted visitors from as

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Front cover of 1909 catalog

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CALENDAR

February 19-20, 2009. Southern Garden Heritage Conference, The State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. The conference will begin with a reception and presentation honoring noted landscape architect Ed Daugherty and coinciding with an exhibition at the Cherokee Garden Library in Atlanta, "Edward L. Daugherty, a Southern Landscape Architect: Exploring New Forms." [See article in this issue] Noted author Bill Welch will discuss the "roots" of Southern gardens and antique roses. Sara Van Beck will talk about daffodils in Georgia landscapes from a historical perspective, Jim Cothran will discuss cemeteries and their importance in preserving heirloom species and cultivars, and David Cozzo will discuss Native American gardening. For further information, call (706) 542-1244 or email garden@uga.edu

February 28, 2009. "Back to our Roots: The Southern Garden Revisited," Atlanta Botanical Garden, Atlanta, Georgia. The Atlanta Botanical Garden and the Georgia Perennial Plant Association present a day-long exploration of time-tested techniques for creating bountiful, healthy home gardens. Speakers include Ann Armstrong, David Cavagnaro, Chris Wiesinger, Stephanie Van Parys, and David Bennett McMullen. Call (404) 876-5859 ext. 2558 for further details.

March 2-3, 2009. "Gardens for our Time," the Davidson Horticultural Symposium, Davidson, North Carolina. The 25th Davidson Horticultural Symposium celebrates this special anniversary by examining the evolution of the garden, providing both a reflective and a futuristic look at garden design and procedures. Historically, gardens were planned to meet physical, social, and cultural demands; today's gardeners must also meet those demands in both personal and community gardens. Practical gardeners want to know how to deal with issues of water and rural pests in urban sites. Artistic gardeners seek the pleasure of growing new ornamentals and vegetables and of using creative designs that work today. Speakers include Charles Birnbaum, Don Boekelheide, Don Booth, Bruce Clodfelter, Nigel Dunnett, Ellen Kirby, and Mark Weathington. More information can be found at www.davidsonsymposium.org; by phoning (704) 655-0294, or emailing mwwstewart@bellsouth.net

March 28, 2009. "Back to Basics," 2nd Annual Garden Symposium will be held at Old City Cemetery Museums and Arboretum, in Lynchburg, Virginia. Pre-symposium activities on Friday, March 27. For more information contact the Cemetery Center at (434) 847-1465, email Dawn Fields, Visitor Services Manager at dawn@gravegarden.org, or visit www.gravegarden.org.

April 3-5, 2009. Annual Meeting of the Southern Garden History Society in Camden, South Carolina. Plans are nearing finalization for the society's major annual event, which will include presentations at the Fine Arts Center of Kershaw County, dinner at The Terraces, walking tours of private gardens, and a day-long Sunday bus tour to Mulberry Plantation, Milford Plantation, Stateburg, and Pearl Fryar's topiary garden in Bishopville. Confirmed speakers include Walter Edgar, Jim Kibler, Marty Daniels, and Austin Jenkins. SGHS board member Davyd Foard Hood is coordinating the meeting with the Camden Garden Club. Registration brochures will be mailed to SGHS members. You must be a member to attend. Call Davyd Hood for more information at: (704) 462-1847.

April 18-25, 2009. Historic Garden Week in Virginia. Visitors will step through the gates of more than 250 of Virginia's most beautiful gardens, homes, and historic landmarks during "America's Largest Open House." Three dozen Historic Garden Week tours present a rich mosaic of some of the country's finest properties at the peak of Virginia's springtime color. Sponsored by The Garden Club of Virginia, local events are scheduled from the Atlantic Ocean to the Allegheny Mountains and will span the centuries from the early 17th through the early 21st. For Garden Week information: (804) 644-7776; gdnweek@verizon.net. As part of Historic Garden Week, special programs will be offered at Monticello and its new Monticello Visitor Center April 18-19. On Sunday, April 19, at 6:00 p.m., Monticello presents "An Evening on the West Lawn," with tours of the house, followed by a lecture by Peter Hatch, "The Restoration of the Flower Gardens at Monticello." A reception and garden party on the West Lawn will follow. Attendance for this evening event is limited and registration is \$40 per adult. To register, call (434) 984-9826. For more about Monticello's special programs, visit: www.monticello.org

May 1, 2009. "The Natural Rhythm of Gardening," the Colonial Williamsburg Garden Symposium, Williamsburg, Virginia. Colonial Williamsburg's 63rd Garden Symposium will focus on the natural, seasonal rhythms of our landscapes and how to create gardens that are both aesthetically rich and ecologically sound. Speakers include Felder Rushing, horticulturist, writer, and lecturer, will begin the symposium with his philosophy on "*Slow Gardening: Enjoying Our Gardens in a Hectic World*." James van Sweden, author and founding partner of Oehme, van Sweden & Associates in Washington, D.C., will present "*Natural Gardens: Embracing an Aesthetic of Region and Seasonal Change*." Renee Shepherd, owner of Renee's Garden seeds, will discuss "*From the Ground Up: What's New and Unique from Seed?*" and David Howard, horticulture consultant, who will discuss the trends in gardening he has observed during his 30 years of gardening in England. Information: (800) 603-0948; www.CWF.org

May 2, 2009. Garden Club of Georgia Historic House and Garden Pilgrimage, Waynesboro, Georgia. Tour includes 7 historic homes and gardens, including St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Burkeland and Garden. Proceeds support the Georgia Historic Landscape and Garden Grant Program. For more information, call Nancy Buttermark, (706) 437-8833.

May 23, 2009. Annual Open House at Tufton Farm, Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants, Charlottesville, Virginia. Visit the CHP headquarters and nursery for the day and enjoy the historic roses, iris, dianthus, peonies, and spring-flowering perennials in bloom. The featured speaker, author Andrea Wulf, will discuss her book, *The Brother Gardeners*, followed by a book signing in the nursery. The popular workshop on rose propagation and identification takes place in the afternoon. Refreshments will be served, and plants, seeds, books, and gardening tools and accessories will be available for sale. Visit www.monticello.org, or call (434) 984-9816.

May 27 – 30, 2009. Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation Annual Meeting, St. Louis, Missouri. At the Confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers: managing regional change in urban and suburban cultural landscapes. The riverfront and historic landscapes of the Mississippi River Valley will be the backdrop for discussions of cultural landscapes—rural, urban, suburban and small town—especially, but not limited to those with a relationship to waterways. This diverse setting represents the goal of this year's meeting: an interdisciplinary converging of ideas about changing cultural landscapes and their interpretation, treatment, sustainability and management. www.ahlp.org

September 12, 2009. Annual Monticello Heritage Harvest Festival at Tufton Farm, headquarters of the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants, Charlottesville, Virginia. This family-oriented event highlights non-profit organizations promoting organic gardening, the preservation of traditional agriculture, historic garden and seed preservation, and regional food. Enjoy a day of workshops and presentations by noted gardening experts, including William Woys Weaver, author of the ..., apple authority Tom Burford, traditional herb specialist Kathleen Maier, and many others. Co-organized by Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, and assisted by Piedmont Virginia Master Gardener groups. For information, call (434) 984-9836 or visit: www.monticello.org and www.HeritageHarvestFestival.com

September 24-26, 2009. "Returning to our Roots—Planting & Replanting the Historic Southern Garden," the 17th biennial conference on **Restoring Southern Gardens & Landscapes**, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The year 2009 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the RSGL Conference, which was first convened at Old Salem in 1979. In celebration of this milestone, the 2009 conference returns to its roots in addressing plants and planting of historic gardens in the South. Sessions will include case studies of historic landscape and garden restoration, practical information on planning and maintaining the historic garden, and sources for heirloom and historic native plants. For program and registration information: (336) 721-7361, sgant@oldsalem.org

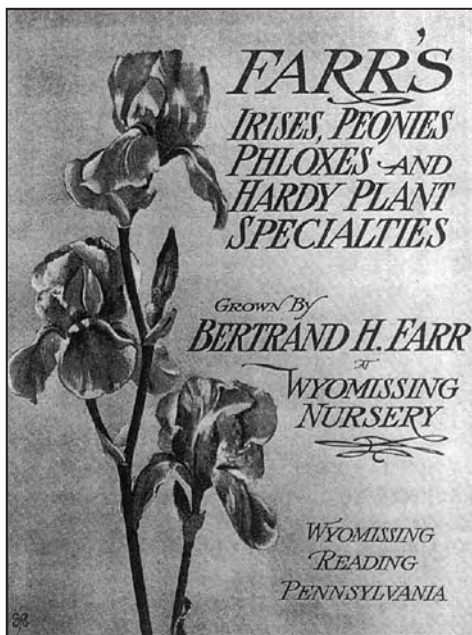
Dream Gardener.....(continued from page 1)

far away as Newport, Rhode Island. Maud Carter Clement (1879-1969), the first historian of the Garden Club of Virginia, whose account of the Club's activities from 1920 to 1930 appears in the Club's official history, *Follow the Green Arrow*, 1970, stated: "This was the first flower show held south of Washington, and it is amazing to think of its far-reaching influence."

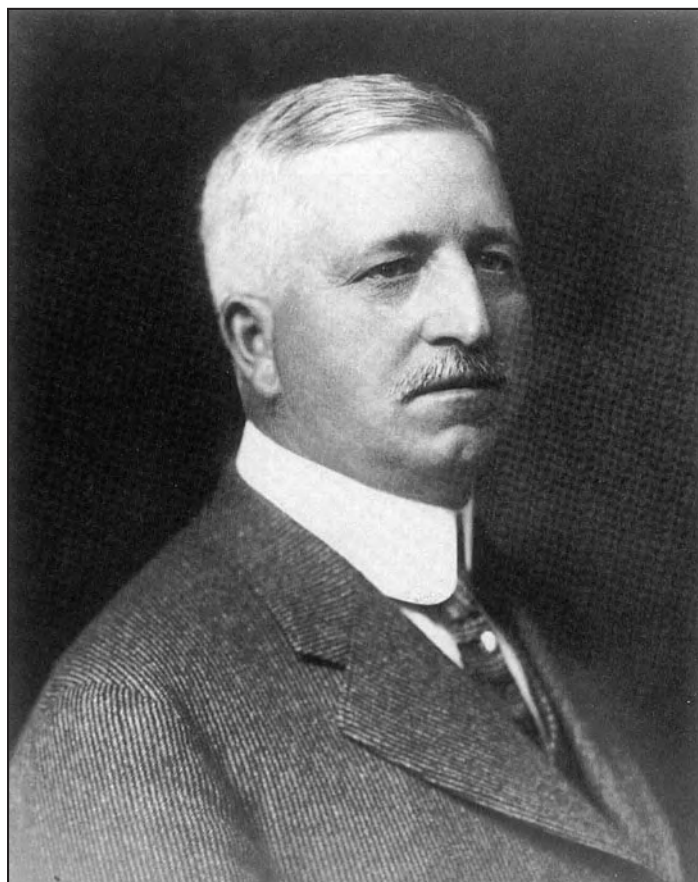
Mr. Farr returned to Richmond in 1923 to present a talk to the Club on "Iris and other Perennials," and to judge the multi-day flower festival at the City Coliseum. Preeminent among the nation's commercial growers of irises and peonies, a past President of the American Peony Society and current Director of the rapidly growing American Iris Society, he, himself, was a notable added attraction. On May 18, Gladys Shaw, writing in the *Richmond News-Leader*, quoted him as having observed, most charmingly, that Richmond's flower show was "far more beautiful than Philadelphia's that season," and the table decorations on exhibition exceeded those of the New York show in "beauty of appointments."

Although the ostensible goal of the Richmond flower festivals was to encourage interest in gardening, civic beautification, and conservation among the general population, the 1923 festival was also a fund raiser. The newly formed Garden Club of Virginia, of which the James River Garden Club was the organizing member, was to host the national convention of the Garden Club of America the following spring, and it was intended that hospitality be well beyond reproach.

Hosting so prestigious a social event, as well as staging ambitious public festivals and engaging the support of Mr. Farr, a horticultural expert renowned not only for his homespun affability, but also his refined sensibility and carriage trade commercial operation, would have signaled clearly to those sensitive to such nuances that the gentlewomen of Virginia, and by extension the South, were reasserting a



Cover of Farr's first catalog - 1908



Undated photo of Bertrand H. Farr in Farr Nursery Co. Collection

position of prominence on the nation's cultural map.

The story of Bertrand H. Farr (1863-1924), his nursery, and his influence, has been told before. It has been told reverently and earnestly, but never comprehensively. Perhaps the deep affection Mr. Farr inspired during his lifetime, or the bereavement so widely experienced following his sudden death at home on October 11, 1924 after a cerebral hemorrhage, have deterred critical examination.

The primary documents which form the foundation of Farr studies are comparatively few. First is a fragmentary autobiographical sketch in the collection of the Farr Nursery Company, published in the January, 1925 Farr Memorial edition of the *Bulletin of the American Iris Society*. Appearing also in this issue are reminiscences and expressions of esteem from Mr. Farr's friends in the horticultural world, including Madison Cooper, publisher of the magazine, *The Flower Grower*; Professor A. P. Saunders, editor of the journal of the American Peony Society; Robert Swan Sturtevant, landscape architect and editor of the *Bulletin of the American Iris Society*, and others. A handful of newspaper accounts, the obituaries, and scattered references in the contemporary gardening press survive. We also have Mr. Farr's commercial catalogs,

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Dream Gardener.....(continued from page 3)

along with the autobiographical anecdotes he included therein, the factual accuracy of which, so far as I am aware, has never been examined.

Although these materials have been collected and shuffled, polished, recombined, and republished over the years, typically with scanty attribution, few useful new insights have been forthcoming. The canonical account



Fall 1895, Spring 1896 catalog cover from a nursery that supplied Farr with irises

of Mr. Farr, therefore, while correctly according him a position of importance in American horticulture, and especially in the world of irises where he has apparently most been revered and best been remembered, has tended to be simplistic, and important issues have been neglected.

Now, in the centennial year of Bertrand Farr's first commercial catalog, George Edmonds, a retired teacher of English at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, brings us our first monograph on Mr. Farr, a labor of love which expands our understanding of its subject as an individual, and especially, as a businessman active in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, in refreshing ways. In 2006, Mr. Edmonds, a native of Wyomissing, a turn of the century suburb of Reading, published *Wyomissing – An American Dream: Enterprise Shaping Community*.

Dream Gardener: Pioneer Nurseryman Bertrand H. Farr is an attractive, if modest, independent publication distinguished by the inclusion of a generous number

of period illustrations. Among these are reproductions of images from rare tinted glass lantern slides, and representatives of the early color photographs from the J. Horace McFarlane Company which have made Bertrand Farr's elegant nursery catalogs among the most coveted by collectors of horticultural ephemera. Texts of Mr. Farr's poems, and the recollections of a hale nonagenarian who shared details of her childhood in the Farr gardens, enrich the narrative uniquely.

The title of the book is a reference to Bertrand Farr's "Dream Garden," an elaborate public display garden developed by Mr. Farr over several years. Proximate to his nursery, it featured specimen plants, notably lilacs, mock orange, and peonies, and broad winding paths leading through naturally sloping terrain toward Wyomissing Creek. The title also evokes the sense of poetic reverie, and the suggestion of obsession, or impracticality, which arises from the subject himself.

It must be understood that Mr. Edmonds is not a specialist in horticultural history. Accordingly, he has relied, for better or for worse, upon the expertise and assessments of others as conveyed through personal interviews and previously published works, to develop significant portions of his story. But Mr. Edmonds has



From 1911 catalog with Farr's caption: Farr's new Iris "Juniata." "This shows the graceful fountain-like effect of the foliage and relative height. The tallest variety in my collection."

also brought a fresh perspective to his subject, and it is this candid, even skeptical, approach to some problematic issues, including what he describes as the “limited factual record,” as well as his thorough familiarity with the local economic milieu in which Bertrand Farr operated, which will make his book as interesting to those familiar with the subject as it will be useful for those who are not.

Ultimately, it is the “limited factual record” that poses challenges to our ability to achieve a satisfying understanding of Bertrand Farr’s life, and work. Parts of the story remain undocumented; some accounts are inconsistent; there appear to be *lacunae* in the chronology. The simplest telling of the story of his early life is this: Born October 14, 1863 in mountainous Windham, Vermont, to a farming family, Bertrand Farr moved with his family when he was five to Wisconsin, where they resided for several years before moving further west to an area near Webster City, Iowa. There, his father, Orlando, established a four hundred acre cattle farm. Young Bertrand, who had several siblings, was much attracted to the terrain, vegetation, and birds of the prairie, and would later include lyrical evocations of his experiences of its beauty in his catalogs. There is some indication that his father enjoyed recreational gardening, and that young Bertrand was interested in growing flowers.

Bertrand was educated in the schools of Webster City, and also at a private high school in Rochester, Minnesota, the home of his uncle. After graduating at seventeen, he obtained a teaching certificate and became an Iowa county school teacher. He was clearly an intelligent, imaginative, and eloquent individual, and wrote poetry throughout his life. But there was also some thought that he was musically gifted, so in the fall of 1883 he went east to the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where, in the



Farr's iris field ca. 1907

course of two years’ study he discovered he was not a piano prodigy. During this period, he explored the horticultural attractions in the area, including the Hovey nursery.

Returning to Iowa in 1885, he appears to have established a music business of some sort, of which few traces can be found. At this point, the picture becomes less clear. He apparently returned to Boston circa 1888, but whereas his account says it was to visit, another says it was to complete his education. Shortly, however, he removed to Philadelphia, where he obtained a position drawing on his musical experience. If According to his sister, he actually became an apprentice piano tuner in a factory. The duration of his sojourn in Philadelphia is uncertain, but it appears that when his employer went out of business, he decided to settle in Reading. He worked there, apparently successfully, as a piano tuner in 1891, and beyond, and in 1904 went into partnership in a music store, of which he eventually became the sole owner.

In 1896, his thirty-third year, Mr. Farr bought property, several lots, in the newly laid out suburb of Wyomissing, and made plans for a home there, which he built. He also returned to Iowa and married Anna Willis. Oddly, despite the fact that they grew up in the same town, and were contemporaries at the New England Conservatory of Music, the two were said not to have known each other before his return from Boston. There were no children.

It was apparently during the final years of the century, that Bertrand Farr resolved to earn his living through horticulture, and began to develop those collections of plants which would form the substantial and diverse initial inventory of his nursery.

Mr. Edmonds introduces his narrative by directing our attention to the Farr nursery catalog of 1908, the



Page from 1915 catalog

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inaugural issue. He speaks immediately to the essence of the Farr mystery. How, he asks, was it possible that Bertrand Farr, a comparatively young man, a piano tuner and music store owner, should, with no known formal horticultural training, assemble a collection of plants which would, within roughly a decade, develop into the substantial commercial operation announced by that catalog? By Mr. Edmonds' count, 1,667 distinct horticultural cultivars and ornamental species were offered, including comprehensive collections of irises and peonies, many of European origin, as well as a group of original bearded hybrid irises, "Farr's New Seedling Irises," which were among the first modern *Iris* cultivars to be raised in the United States.

Mr. Edmonds recognizes the enormity of the investment of time, labor, and money needed to bring the enterprise about, and this interests him, as well it should. It has always seemed there was more capital in the formative years of the nursery than is accounted for by the established facts of its owner's life. In any case, notwithstanding Mr. Farr's tendency to refer to himself as a hobbyist, and his famous statement that his intent in opening the nursery was to realize his desire to live and work among beautiful flowers "regardless of any monetary returns," a confession which, while no doubt sincere, also served admirably to introduce him to potential customers as something between a gentleman farmer and a romantic fellow amateur, his was clearly never a casual backyard operation.

Because of the sheer numbers of cultivars involved, the volume of plant material that was imported from England and the Continent, and the logistical and economic realities of preparing and maintaining fields, of managing staff, of establishing, propagating, and growing on sufficient stock to offer publicly in that first catalog, it is obvious that the nursery must have been conceived on a substantial commercial scale from very early on. Interestingly, Mr. Edmonds research indicates it may never, in fact, have been



Photo of peonies from 1915 catalog

very profitable.

Following his introduction, Mr. Edmonds offers detailed separate accounts of Mr. Farr's work in the first two decades of the century with irises and peonies, with attention also paid to hardy plants generally, and roses. Mr. Farr's contribution to sorting out the confused *Paeonia* nomenclature at Cornell University after 1906 is acknowledged, and his later commercial relationship with the geneticist Dr. A. B. Stout, Director of Laboratories at the New York Botanical Garden, with whom he shared an interest in developing new daylily (*Heemerocallis*) cultivars, is explored. Mr. Farr's work as an importer of bulbs, including rare exotic bulbous irises, as documented in his specialty catalogs, notably that of 1911, is not discussed.

The accounts of Mr. Farr's local philanthropic activity, and his interest in public education and civic beautification in Wyomissing, are illuminating, as is the discussion of the transition of the nursery after the First World War toward landscape design and installation, with a concomitant shift in inventory toward evergreens and specimen plants. Bertrand Farr's later relationship with a group of shadowy business partners in Wyomissing, textile manufacturers and property developers whose support afforded him the freedom to develop his interests independent of many business stresses, but, in the end, apparently resulted in the loss of the property he had developed, including the Dream Garden, receives close scrutiny.

Throughout the book, Mr. Edmonds, seeking always to allow the subject to "speak for himself," has depended heavily on the nursery's catalogs, and the personality-driven copy Mr. Farr wrote for them, for information, and insight. The perils of this approach are self-evident; however, so far as I am aware, Bertrand Farr published no formal *vita*, and contributed very few articles to the national horticultural press, although his advertising appeared in periodicals as diverse as *National Geographic*, and *The Fra*, Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft journal, in addition to the expected garden magazines. Accordingly, the catalogs invite close scrutiny. Mr. Edmonds, who also appreciates the commercial function of these, traces their evolution in form and content as a reflection of the evolution over time of the Farr nursery. Ultimately, Mr. Edmonds' goal, which he achieves, is for his reader to understand that Bertrand Farr, notwithstanding his close identification with several distinct genera, was also, and fundamentally, an "all purpose and passionate nurseryman," widely respected in his day. We learn that J. Horace McFarlane, whose company was responsible for the design of the nursery's publications, regarded Mr. Farr, as "a great plantsman [who left] a great record of acute plant inspiration joined with rugged honesty." We

come to appreciate the observation by Richardson Wright, editor of the magazine *House and Garden*, as recorded in the Farr Memorial *Bulletin*, that Bertrand Farr established sound standards of beauty for new garden cultivars where hitherto there had been none.

A few quibbles: Mr. Edmonds documents some of his references in source notes, and there might have been more of these. For instance, I can discover no citation for an intriguing direct quotation on page thirty-seven referencing an unnamed journal article. The bibliography is adequate, although given the questioned reliability of at least one of the sources, and the arcane nature of others, notably the “Iris Chronicles,” which are simply informal collections of primary documents produced in mimeographed form by and for members of the American Iris Society studying historic irises during the 1960s, annotation would probably have been helpful. Also, some of the information provided by floral societies which closes the book is arguably excessive, and likely soon to become dated.

Mr. Edmonds’ book is a thoughtful and worthwhile contribution to the literature on Bertrand Farr, which many will find interesting, and enjoyable. However, we still require a comprehensive scholarly analysis of Mr. Farr from a broader historical, geographical, and social perspective.

I would welcome additional discussion of Mr. Farr’s engagement with his contemporaries, including not only prominent floral society members and members of the local and national garden clubs with whom he shared a mission to educate the public, but also the international plant industry, with whom, especially during and after the Great War and the initiation of the Federal Plant Quarantine, he shared common economic challenges.

It might also be useful to examine some awkward issues. For example, the observations by John C. Wister, President of the American Iris Society, in the Farr Memorial *Bulletin*, to the effect that the Farr Nursery was not well kept, that it looked “dilapidated” and rare plants were neglected. There are also the questions raised by “Ute Chief,” an iris introduced by Mr. Farr as his own origination in his 1920 catalog. In the 1929 *Alphabetical Iris Check List* of the American Iris Society, “Ute Chief” is declared a synonym for ‘Alcazar,’ the name of a hybrid bearded iris introduced in 1910 by the venerable French firm Vilmorin-Andrieux et Cie, which indicates the Society considered the two to be the same plant.

Additional attention to Mr. Farr’s marketing strategies might also yield intriguing insights. For instance, Mr. Edmonds has observed appeals to notions of social class in the catalogs, to which I would add, notions of hierarchies of sensibility:

“There is a peculiar charm about the Iris that appeals irresistibly to those whose taste for the refined and delicately



Photo of peony border from 1920 catalog

beautiful leads them to seek a close acquaintance with it. The rare and ethereal beauty of its soft, iridescent coloring, and its frail, orchid-like formation, is likely to pass unnoticed by the careless observer, and by those whose fancy is caught only by the more gorgeous and striking things, and who only know the Iris as the common ‘Flags’ of the old fashioned gardens.”

When this passage appeared in the 1908 catalog, Iris was not yet a fashionable garden plant in North America, although Bertrand Farr fully intended to make it one. By 1921, it was the coming flower, and the new City Flower of Richmond. And finally, inviting consideration, particularly in relation to that shifting constellation of horticultural and sociological notions subsumed in the familiar phrase, “old fashioned garden,” is the subtle rhetorical posture developed by Mr. Farr for his visually and tactually rich catalogs.

Comprised of an authoritative delivery of abundant specialized information, interspersed with dreamy personal recollections and sentimental anecdotes delivered in an intimate, even confiding, tone, and featuring a compelling direct appeal to nostalgia, real or newly conjured forth, it is well wrought for its purpose: to establish fellowship between the passionate nurseryman and his inspired customer, and to generate commercial enthusiasm, not, as might be expected, for archaic or quaint plants, but for highly developed modern cultivars of familiar categories of garden plants.

In the introduction to his first catalog, we find what I understand to be Bertrand Farr’s professional credo, his description of the enduring appeal of the hardy garden:

“Hardy Plants have always appealed to me. They are permanent features of the garden, and there is a personality and a sense of companionship about them that makes one grow attached to them. [. . .] They are a part of the old associations and the home life, like members of the family. How tenderly we protect them from any harm that may befall

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The Return of the American Chestnut

By Ken McFarland, Stratford Hall, Virginia

Under a spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

A number of *Magnolia* readers will recall the sixteenth annual gathering of the Southern Garden History Society in 1998. Based in Asheville, North Carolina, the meeting took place primarily at Biltmore House and Estate, and provided a close up (and distant) look at one of the South's grandest properties, most beautiful cities, and amazingly majestic settings—the Great Smoky Mountains. The region's forests were at major part of the story. In learning the details of that story, however, Society members were reminded they would not see something that had been a central component of the forests at the time of Biltmore's founding: the American chestnut tree. During a session at the Folk Art Center on the Blue Ridge Parkway Forrest MacGregor of the board of directors of the American Chestnut Foundation revealed that hope was not lost, however, as he discussed his organization's work. For at least some in attendance this was a first encounter with the effort underway to restore a tree that had once stood healthy and tall across a broad swath of the United States of America and into parts of Canada. Even more so than village smiths, mature trees we learned, themselves “mighty” and “large” and “strong as iron bands,” survive only in minute numbers at rare, isolated locations. And even there their future is always uncertain.

The range of the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) extended from sections of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia along the Appalachian Range north into New York and New England. Most of Tennessee and Kentucky was populated with the American chestnut, while it also spread across parts of Indiana, thrived in about half of Ohio and covered the states of West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and most of Maryland. Apart from sheltering blacksmith shops, the chestnut figured largely in the economy of these areas, from the perspective of its famous fruit and even more because of the many uses for chestnut wood. Regarding the former, chestnuts had provided sustenance for wildlife and had been a staple item for many Native American families for time out of mind. In the era after European settlement the nuts of *Castanea dentata* were a favorite of American colonists



Photo courtesy of Stratford Hall

Stratford Hall executive director, Paul Reber, and other staff join George Thompson of the Virginia Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation in planting a donated chestnut tree

and their post-Revolutionary successors, rural and urban alike. Farmers in the Chestnut range could not only profit from the sale of the nuts themselves, moreover, but they also helped to fatten hogs in free-range days when such livestock could forage for their food much of the year.

Chestnut timber, in turn, joined oak and pine in providing frames and roof shingles for houses and other buildings, and the relative ease with which it could be worked made it popular with cabinetmakers as well. Rot resistant, the wood also proved an excellent fencing material. Though showing their age, segments of chestnut “Virginia” split-rail fences can yet be found, while the wood was also sufficiently rot resistant to set into the ground for post-and-board fences, as well as for telegraph poles and railroad ties. In various ways, moreover it became emblematic of life in rural America and was thought a fit subject for painters and poets alike. And these trees could be true giants of the forest. While typical chestnuts could have a 5 foot diameter and stand 90 feet tall, one North Carolina tree is said to have had a diameter of 17 feet. The largest trees topped out at 120 feet in height. Hikers exploring mountainous areas once home to millions of healthy chestnut trees can still come across some of their slowly decaying trunks, while stump sprouts at times avoid the blight long enough to produce nuts encased with sharply pricked husks.

The Chestnut Blight

Those of a certain age might remember large and healthy trees, but within the lives of all but the most

elderly, chestnuts have been succumbing in large numbers to one of the most infamous and perhaps best known arboreal plagues—the chestnut blight.

The story of the American chestnut took a dramatic turn in the first decade of the twentieth century with the introduction of a rapidly traveling Asian fungus leading to the blight. First noted in New York City, this fungus spread across the native chestnut range at an average of fifty miles per year traveling via either wind-blown spores or carried by insects, birds, and other wildlife moving about the forest. By the middle part of the century few trees had been spared the effects that in less than fifty years had devastated the chestnut population.

Restoration

Since 1983 the American Chestnut Foundation has worked both to bring back a chestnut that is resistant to blight, as well as to making the story of the chestnut and of the Foundation's task known to the public. The former effort began to crystallize in 1989 at Meadowview, Virginia with the establishment of the Wagner Research Farm. Here scientists undertook a process known as backcross breeding, this involving crossing the blight-resistant Chinese chestnut (*Castanea mollissima*) with the American chestnut. The Foundation aimed ultimately to produce a tree that is by every outward characteristic an American chestnut but which retains the resistance to blight possessed by its Chinese chestnut forebear. As this process was underway the Meadowview operation was expanded through the acquisition of additional farms, while the Foundation formed alliances with organizations and institutions across the chestnut range. An important goal now to ensure that the trees that have been successfully backcross bred are also adapted to specific regions with the overall range.

The organizations' public education efforts have



A group of huge old "virgin" American chestnut trees up to 13 feet in diameter deep in the Great Smoky Mountains of western North Carolina; photo taken about 1890. Note the men at left and center. A foreign blight wiped out this extremely valuable species between 1900 and 1930. (Photo courtesy of Shelley Mastran Smith)

involved such presentation as that given by Forrest MacGregor at the Society's 1998 meeting, the creation of fifteen state chapters, and the establishment of an excellent website, www.acf.org. In turn, this invaluable source of information on the American chestnut is supplemented by state chapter websites. *Magnolia* readers are highly encouraged to visit the Foundation and state chapter sites to learn more about various educational and outreach activities underway.

One specific means of both distributing blight-resistant young chestnuts and of bringing the Foundation's efforts to the attention of a broader audience has been the donation of trees for planting at historic properties of major significance. In Virginia, these sites have included Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and Poplar Forest, James Madison's Montpelier, and most recently Stratford Hall, Northern Neck home of the Lee family. At such important locations, it is hoped, not only will these "re-birthing" American chestnut trees thrive but also they will continually remind visitors of their giant predecessors which once stood nearby...and of the efforts of dedicated individuals and organizations to ensure that one day these individual specimens will one day be joined by numerous other American chestnut trees as they repopulate the forests of the eastern United States.

Photo courtesy of American Chestnut Foundation



Pollen from this tree in Adair County, Kentucky is used in the National American Chestnut Restoration Program

Edward L. Daugherty, *A Southern Landscape Architect*

By Staci L. Catron and Jennifer E. Yankopolus,
Atlanta, Georgia

I think of myself as a form giver and have found that the simplest forms can elicit the deepest response. – Edward L. Daugherty, Fellow in the American Society of Landscape Architects

With a vibrant practice that encompasses residential, commercial, and institutional projects in eight states and abroad, Edward L. Daugherty is one of the most significant post-World War II landscape architects in Atlanta and the Southeast. Although the breadth and depth of his work are extensive, many common threads run through his designs. However, nothing is more evident than his regard for people: whether the landscape architects he has mentored, the professionals he has collaborated with, or the people his designs touch. This sensibility was cultivated at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University where he learned analytical thinking and the value of honoring the human scale. While there, he adopted the dictum coined by landscape architecture professor Norman Newton that continues to guide his work: “Design can *be* good only insofar as it *does* good.”

Daugherty was born in 1926 into a family that “moved plants every day of the year.” He spent the first three weeks of his life at his grandparents’ home in Summerville, South Carolina, and has lived in Atlanta ever since. As a small boy, his family lived on West Peachtree Street near Lombardy Way, which at the time was on the outskirts of the city. On their way to and from Spring Street School every day, he and his siblings crossed through a four-acre woodland, which they spent countless hours exploring. His explorations continued with numerous backyard projects for him and his family. His parents moved to East Paces Ferry Road in the Buckhead area of Atlanta in 1939, and his grandmother and aunt moved next door two years later. His mother, grandmother, and two aunts, all South Carolina



Edward L. Daugherty, 2008

transplants, “gardened mightily and loved it.” If he wasn’t making room for more ‘Pride of Summerville’ azaleas in his mother’s garden, he was transplanting camellias and putting cottonseed meal on boxwood for his grandmother.

Following a childhood passion for architecture, Daugherty began his design training in the Georgia Institute of Technology’s architecture program in 1943. He was quickly disappointed to find that buildings were being designed with little regard for the site: “I felt that if I were going to be a competent architect I ought to know something about how to make buildings and land work better together.” Consequently, he decided that studying landscape architecture for a year would enhance his skills as an architect.

In 1947, after serving in the army, Daugherty began his study of landscape architecture at the University of Georgia under Hubert Bond Owens. Owens had established the university’s first degree in landscape architecture in 1926 and tirelessly promoted the profession throughout the state. He described landscape architecture as



Daugherty, with his baby brother, Bill, constructing his first house in his parents’ backyard in Atlanta, Georgia in 1940

“the fine art of arranging buildings and objects upon the land for human use and enjoyment.”

Under the encouragement of Professor Herschel Weber at the University of Georgia, Daugherty applied to Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. After three years of study there, he received both his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in landscape architecture. He subsequently worked briefly for renowned landscape architect Dan Kiley, and then left for England to study town planning at the University of Liverpool as a Fulbright scholar. While there, he bicycled through the countryside visiting the new towns being built around London to replace housing lost in World War II. He was particularly impressed by the planned green belts and saw their value for Atlanta: “It was humane, and human in scale. That was my hope, that in coming back to Atlanta it was something I could bring as ideas and concepts.”

When Daugherty returned to Atlanta in 1953, he opened his first office on the sleeping porch of his parents’ house. That same year he received his first significant commission, a master planting plan for the Georgia Institute of Technology campus. His work initially focused on the area around the nineteenth-century hilltop buildings, adding much-needed greenspace. As the campus expanded into the 1970s, his work there continued, including the grounds of the Alexander Memorial Coliseum, Price Gilbert Library, M.L. Brittain Dining Hall, infirmary, civil and electrical engineering buildings, bookstore, and student center, making the campus a more functional and enjoyable place for students and faculty.

In his fifty-five year career, Daugherty has designed many master plans for public and private schools and public universities. In 1957 he had the opportunity to work with eminent California landscape architect Thomas D. Church on the Center for Continuing Education at the University of Georgia in Athens. Church helped Atlanta architects Stevens and Wilkinson develop a site

plan for the \$2.5 million modern building. Church created a landscape design that reflected his contemporary style, with free-flowing lines that Daugherty described as a “molasses flow of asphalt through a pecan orchard to encourage one to circulate.”

In their collaboration, Church looked to Daugherty for advice about the appropriate plants for the Georgia Piedmont. Daugherty reviewed bids and supervised the installation of Church’s vision in cooperation with Owens. While the Center for Continuing Education is extant, Church’s work has been compromised by several additions.

Another significant institutional project in Daugherty’s career is Pace Academy in Atlanta. In 1972, Pace hired Daugherty to evaluate the site and develop plans to address the present and future needs of the campus. The school occupies the grounds of the former Ogden family estate, which contained axial terraced gardens designed in the 1930s by notable Atlanta landscape architect William C. Pauley. To accommodate new buildings and preserve the remnants of Pauley’s work, Daugherty designed a covered walkway and a plaza between the classroom buildings and the gymnasium. The plaza, a popular gathering place for students and teachers, occupies the site of the original swimming pool.

At Pace Academy, Daugherty not only made the land a functional place for the students, but he preserved trees and other flora along with remnants of Pauley’s gardens. A respect for the past and a love of trees are signatures of Daugherty’s work: “I think it’s important for one to have a sense of continuity or where you’ve come from, to give you some guide as to where to go. I see no point in undertaking a project which means you’re going to destroy something entirely in order to ‘rebuild it.’”

Daugherty’s work at the Governor’s Mansion in Atlanta, Georgia, also demonstrates his guiding sensibility for the past. The mansion is located on the former site of

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Upper Garden designed by Daugherty at Pace Academy, Atlanta, Georgia, 1974



Remnants of Historic Landscape at Pace Academy, Atlanta, Georgia, 1972

Edward L. Daugherty.....(continued from page 11)

Woodhaven, the estate of Atlanta Mayor Robert Foster Maddox and his wife Lollie Baxter Maddox, who designed the original elaborate grounds, including a terraced garden. Hired by the state of Georgia in 1967, Daugherty worked with the sixteen-member Gardens and Grounds Committee and collaborated with other professionals, including Owens and Pauley. One of Daugherty's objectives was to enhance the setting of the new formal Greek revival-style building designed by Atlanta architect A. Thomas Bradbury. He also adapted the original drives to new circulation needs, developed unobtrusive parking for visitors, saved a large number of trees, preserved the historic terraced garden, and created new gardens to serve the governor's family and state visitors.

Daugherty's design for the West Garden created a formal space with two strong axes that extend the building's architectural lines into the adjoining landscape. The minor north-south axis descends by concentric stairs to the Spring Flower Garden. The major east-west axis receives guests from the State Reception Room. Sixteen trees in large containers are grouped around the center terrace. From the end of the west terrace, a view of the historic terraced garden below provides an unexpected surprise.

Situated near the State Dining Room, the East Garden features a more contemporary and intimate design. It is filled with traditional Southern plants, including boxwood-bordered beds along the walls, which were originally planted with flowering crabapple trees, groupings of hydrangeas, and a groundcover of pachysandra and ajuga. The East Garden is useful for small groups—sunny in the morning and shady in the afternoon.

Throughout his career Daugherty has applied his skills to improving the urban landscape. For two decades he worked with Marietta, a historic town 25 miles northwest of Atlanta. He was first hired in 1958 when the town sought to improve

retail and commercial business in its downtown, which is organized around a square with Glover Park at the center. Officials were considering turning Glover Park into a parking lot. Daugherty proposed an alternative, a scheme that alleviated the traffic and parking issues and preserved the park. His efforts succeeded in dissuading officials from destroying Glover Park.

In the early 1970s, Daugherty was invited back to Marietta, which was still in decline. At that time, downtowns throughout the United States were losing customers to the new businesses and retail developments popping up on their outskirts. Recognizing the complexity of the problem, Daugherty engaged team consultants: economist John C. Gould, traffic planner John D. Edwards, urban designer Arnall T. Connell, and architectural historian Hubert Lee Dunagan.

Daugherty and his team held "public listenings" where residents expressed their hopes for the future of downtown Marietta. They spoke of the need to preserve the park and the town's historic character, revitalize the shops, provide play areas for children, beautify the town, and improve traffic flow.

The redevelopment plan that Daugherty and his team crafted addressed the economic, cultural, and historical significance of Marietta. The study considered many broad issues, starting with the economic feasibility of revitalizing the downtown, traffic alternatives to alleviate congestion, and the identification and preservation of historic structures. Recommendations for the 200-acre area were devised to be implemented over ten years. Today, Marietta Square is one of Georgia's most successful and vibrant urban spaces.

Some of Daugherty's other notable non-residential projects include the Atlanta History Center and the Atlanta Botanical Garden as well as numerous parks and greenspaces throughout the Southeast. Hahn Woods, a greenspace and teaching forest near Emory University in Atlanta, demonstrates his ability to adapt to the varying circumstances of each project. The land's varied history includes functioning as a sluiceway for the Houston Mill, a horse paddock, and, most recently, as a landfill for construction debris. In transforming the site, Daugherty preserved many native plants and trees and planted additional ones as well. Species native to the Georgia Piedmont can be found here, including flowering dogwood, river birch, sweetgum, yellow poplar, box elder, yellow pine, hickory, and white oak. Native plants are reoccurring elements in Daugherty's designs: "I try to look at the natives primarily because natives always know what to do. They know how to behave. They know the soil, or they wouldn't be here."

The trails Daugherty designed for Hahn Woods



Historic Terraced Garden, Georgia's Governor's Mansion (Garden History of Georgia, 1933)



Hahn Woods Master Plan, Atlanta, Georgia, 1993

in 1993 take visitors through the five-acre landscape. Beginning at the high parking loop, visitors descend into the forest, where the quarter-mile trail hugs the south branch of Peachtree Creek. At one point, the remains of an iron turbine, remnants from the county's first hydroelectric project, are visible. The short upper trail around the meadow encircles mounds planted with maples, American hollies, and Southern red oaks.

Beyond institutional and commercial projects, much of Daugherty's body of work is residential, from small modest homes to grand estates. Regarding his approach to residential projects, Daugherty says, "I've always tried to make gardens or spaces that were appropriate to their situation. In fact with residences I constantly insist that clients feel comfortable in the space. And I want them to feel that it fits, just like a good pair of shoes."

The Comstock's approached Daugherty in 1970. They had acquired a four-acre wooded hilltop valley and were enthusiastic about building a residence in the woods. Some of the family's needs included areas for tennis, golf practice, a basketball goal, and a cutting gardening of roses as well as space for one or two big dogs. Daugherty collaborated with Atlanta architect Clyde Pearson to develop a site plan. Pearson, the Comstocks, and Daugherty agreed that the south slope below the ridge would be the ideal location for the house. Daugherty designed the driveway to parallel the ridge and loop around it to arrive at the main house, creating an open lawn for play with large oak trees at one edge.

The Comstock project was featured in the March 1980 issue of *Landscape Architecture* in an article titled "New Road, New House Transform a Country Property." Author Steven L. Cantor, an associate in Daugherty's office, described elements of the design: "Every side of the new house opens toward a different outdoor space. From each major space of the house, our design provides a short view into an intimate courtyard or terrace, which in turn

frames a long view into the surrounding woods."

Daugherty recently completed a residential commission in Atlanta for the Childress family. The twenty-acre site is bordered on three sides by National Park Service lands. Daugherty used granite pavers to distinguish the Childress' driveway from the public road. The sinuous drive then traverses through woodlands, which Daugherty filled with native trees, shrubs, and ferns, and leads to a gentle unfolding of the bold architecture of Jim Choate of Surber, Barber, Choate & Hertlein of Atlanta. The sunny perennial garden beside the house and the lush, native plantings on the west side help soften the rectilinear forms of the architecture.



Childress Garden, Atlanta, Georgia, 2008

From his beginning on a sleeping porch to his practice today, Daugherty has always maintained a small office, yet many landscape architects completed their training there. Owens often called Daugherty's office his "finishing school." Landscape architect Tess Canfield said of her experience working with Daugherty: "The education I received working for him has profoundly influenced me. I am one of the many who are deeply indebted to him."

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Edward L. Daugherty.....(continued from page 13)

In addition to mentoring dozens of landscape architects, Daugherty taught an elective course on landscape architecture at the Georgia Tech School of Architecture. During the ten years he taught, enrollment grew from ten to forty. And as Daugherty had done, some of the architecture students even switched their profession to landscape architecture.

Daugherty's consideration for people—those who use the spaces he creates and his fellow professionals—also extends to his sense of civic responsibility. Spencer Tunnell II, a landscape architect who got his start in Daugherty's office, said of him, "Edward has been devoted to his hometown of Atlanta, Georgia, and served the local community in significant ways always with the concentration on improving the living environment." Beginning with cofounding the Atlanta Arts Festival in 1954, he has served as a board member of the Atlanta Botanical Garden, Trees Atlanta, the Atlanta Urban Design Commission, and the Mountain Conservation Trust of Georgia. He has also offered his time and design skills to neighborhood associations, churches, and other community groups.

When interviewed by The Cultural Landscape Foundation in 2007, Daugherty reflected on one of the driving passions in his work: "One of the greatest pleasures I think I've gotten out of the practice of landscape architecture literally is making people comfortable." This often makes for a subtlety in his work: as in the sense of relief that parents can experience in his garden at the Henrietta Egleston Hospital in Atlanta or the synergy in Marietta where history, greenspace, and vibrancy unite. In his application of form, Daugherty elevates the human in everyone.

Cherokee Garden Library and The Cultural Landscape Foundation

In 2006, the Cherokee Garden Library, one of the special collections of the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, became the repository of the Edward L. Daugherty Collection. The Cherokee Garden Library is currently hosting an exhibition, *Edward L. Daugherty, A Southern Landscape Architect: Exploring New Forms* (October 17, 2008 to October 10, 2009), which traces his seminal works in landscape architecture, urban planning, conservation, and historic preservation from 1953 to the present. The exhibition also includes The Cultural Landscape Foundation's oral history module featuring Edward Daugherty. Visit www.tclf.org.

Founded by the Cherokee Garden Club of Atlanta in 1975 under the leadership of Anne C. Carr, the Cherokee Garden Library serves as an educational resource center

for those interested in gardening, landscape design, garden history, horticulture, floral design, botanical art, and ecology. With more than 20,000 books, photographs, manuscripts, seed catalogs, and landscape drawings, the Cherokee Garden Library preserves significant works in American horticulture and botanical history. As part of its mission, the library presents exceptional programming and exhibitions throughout the year for the community.

The library serves the Atlanta History Center garden curators, students, gardeners, horticulturists, and landscape designers as well as other private individuals, nonprofit institutions, and commercial firms. As an essential element of the mission of the library, the staff encourages public access to the collection, supports instruction in its extensive scholarly resources, and offers a space for concentrated study and interdisciplinary academic collaboration.

The Cultural Landscape Foundation (TCLF) is the only not-for-profit foundation in America dedicated to increasing the public's awareness of the importance and irreplaceable legacy of cultural landscapes. Through education, technical assistance, and outreach, TCLF broadens the support and understanding for cultural landscapes nationwide in hopes of saving our priceless heritage for future generations. In 2003, TCLF launched the *Pioneers of American Landscape Design Oral History* initiative in an effort to document, collect, and preserve the unique, first-hand perspectives of renowned landscape practitioners, and to make them available for future generations of stewards, designers, and researchers.



Exhibition Opening: Edward Daugherty and Charles Birnbaum, The Cultural Landscape Foundation

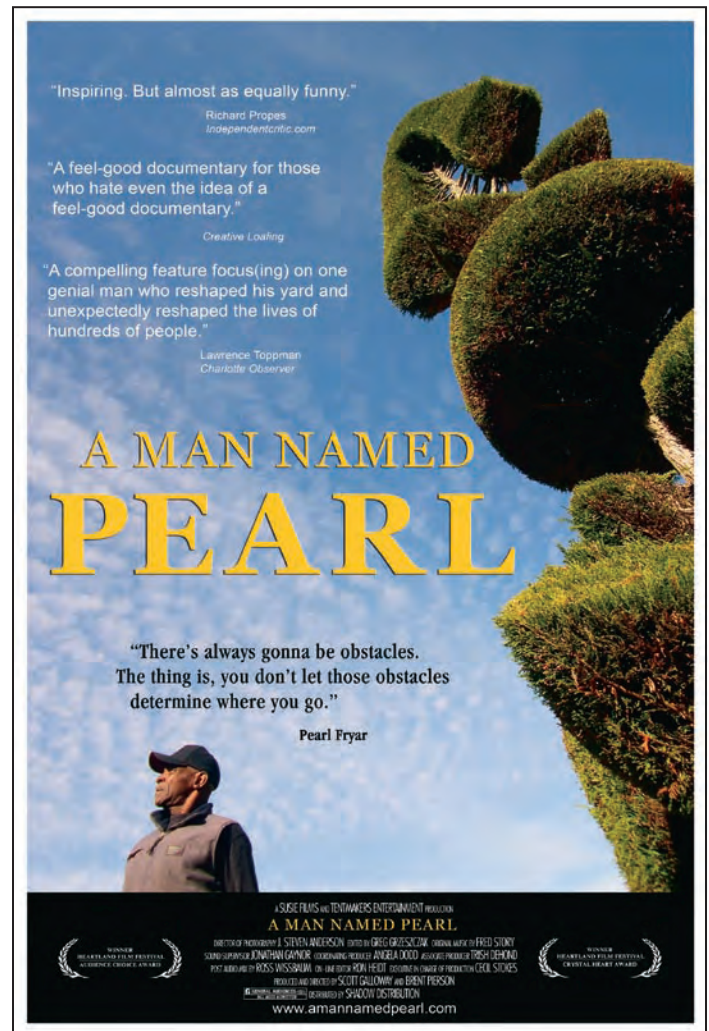
SGHS Annual Meeting includes a visit to the Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden

SGHS Annual Meeting includes a visit to the Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden

Pearl Fryar began work on the three-acre garden in 1984 in an effort to win "Yard of the Month" for his home on the outskirts of Bishopville, South Carolina. The well-manicured, sculptural plant forms that comprise Fryar's living vision of peace, love and goodwill often began as salvaged seedlings from a local nursery. Recognized by art and botanical enthusiasts, the visually whimsical garden is maintained year-round by Fryar for visitors from around the world. The Friends of Pearl Fryar's Topiary Garden has been organized to help care for and preserve the garden and assist Pearl as he educates and inspires others to achieve their creative potential.

The Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden is the subject of a new feature length film entitled *A Man Named Pearl*. The film chronicles the story of Pearl's dazzling garden as well as his extraordinary life, both of which serve as inspirations to his family, his community, and the thousands of visitors who come to experience Pearl's world each year. The film traces Pearl's journey from a small town sharecropper's son to an internationally-acclaimed artist, and from his initial goal to win "Yard of the Month Award"—a goal instigated by a bigoted remark—to the many accolades that followed, including museum exhibitions and his status as the celebrated cultural icon of his impoverished town. Now 68, the soft-spoken Pearl has just one wish for all those who wander through his living art: they must leave feeling differently than when they arrived. Told in a candid and often humorous way *A Man Named Pearl* opens both hearts and minds and is an expression of Pearl's genuine belief that anyone can rise above obstacles and social barriers. The film is distributed by Shadow Distribution and is directed by Scott Galloway and Brent Pierson. For more information call Karen O'Hara, Shadow Distribution (520)326-0813. The garden Web site is: <http://www.fryarstapiaries.com>

The Fryar Topiary Garden is now a preservation project of The Garden Conservancy, a national, non-profit organization founded in 1989 to preserve exceptional American gardens for public education and enjoyment. The Garden Conservancy works with gardens in a number of ways and tailors its services to the individual needs of each garden. A limited number of gardens are designated as Preservation Projects and receive intensive guidance in



DVD cover for the film *A Man Named Pearl*

the transition from private to non-profit ownership. In some instances, a garden is determined to be so significant and under such a threat that the Garden Conservancy will intervene and assist with short-term management. Other gardens, where ownership is secure but organizational, programmatic or financial planning assistance is needed to ensure future success, receive short-term assistance. Other important Conservancy Preservation Projects of interest to SGHS members include the Elizabeth Lawrence Garden in Charlotte, North Carolina and Montrose, the home of Nancy and Crauford Goodwin, in Hillsborough, North Carolina.

The Garden Conservancy is headquartered in Cold Spring, New York. To find out more about this organization, visit their Web site at www.gardenconservancy.org or write to P.O. Box 219 Cold Spring, NY 10516; (845) 265-9396

Remembrances of Florence Griffin

By Gail Griffin, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC

Florence Griffin was a woman of great kindness and insight. When we first met in

1973, Florence (my future mother-in-law) was wearing pearls, a white cotton shirt, a khaki skirt, and brown oxfords, and I was wearing red platform heels and as short a skirt as I could manage. After our meeting, Florence called her friend Jane Symmes and told her that we were just alike. Only a perceptive (and kind) woman could have seen our similarities at that stage. In our years of friendship since that meeting, Florence has counseled me and has guided me through all aspects of my life—marriage, motherhood, and career (always tactfully avoiding any discussion of my choice of dress). She shared with me her great delight in being a member of the Southern Garden History Society and the opportunity of knowing so many like-minded spirits.

In the weeks since Florence died on August 11, 2008, I have had the pleasure of speaking with several Southern Garden History Society members about their memories of friendship with Florence. Her kindness and insight, plus her humor and playfulness, come through in each memory.

Lucy Lawliss, who has returned to the East Coast to be at George Washington Birthplace National Monument in Fredericksburg, Virginia, wrote:

“Even though it has been 15 years—I can’t believe it—I clearly remember the lovely afternoon I spent with Florence at her home as she gently guided me through some final edits on the Olmsted essay that I submitted to the Southern Garden History Society for its first Magnolia Essay. She brought me to a guest bedroom and sat me at a simple and sturdy, antique I’m sure, desk on a straight wooden chair. With only the most cogent hints that came from quiet visits to the room, she let me work out several awkward sentences that I had struggled to make readable. The whole time I was in the room, I could feel a warm glow emanating from within the house and I was sure this was an experience from another time when true teachers spent time with their students and the result was a new understanding of language and its purpose. When we were finished and the essay was edited, I was joyous that I had had such an opportunity. Florence was ageless in the sense that she seemed to me to be an example of what must always have been true—women throughout our history who were of such quiet intelligence and grace that their effect rippled far beyond their home environment. I feel so lucky to have known Florence.”



Florence Griffin sits beside the “Tullie Smith Farm” 1860s garden, recreated at the Atlanta History Center

Bill Welch wrote of Florence in a different role:

“Diane and I were having a wonderful visit with Bill and Florence Griffin on a Saturday in early spring. We decided to go out from Atlanta on a ‘bulb hunt’ in search of the illusive pink Roman Hyacinth (*Hyacinthus orientalis*). These smaller, simpler versions of the common garden hyacinth are native to southern France and are my favorite fragrance of all flowers. They bloom in late winter and early spring and were once popular in southern gardens although rarely available today. The white and blue forms are more easily found but the pink ones are quite rare.

“My interest in them goes back many years and was shared with Flora Ann Bynum, from Old Salem, North Carolina, who was the best grower and authority that I know. Flora Ann and Greg Grant served as the ‘Roman Hyacinth Police’ and pronounced judgment on the authenticity of my somewhat limited and varied collection. Florence Griffin provided enthusiastic support and credibility with her personal library and keen academic skills. We lost our dear friend, Flora Ann, in the winter of 2006, leaving the burden to Greg who cheerfully pronounces his opinion when asked (and sometimes even when not!). My first sighting of the rare pink form of the Roman Hyacinth was in Mangham, Louisiana, where Diane’s dad grew up and we had an old house and garden. Mrs. Childress was a retired home economics teacher and lived two doors down. She had a wonderful garden filled with heirloom plants and was always eager to share. She had a small border of the pink hyacinths and shared a few with me. She cautioned ‘you must divide them every three or four years or they will disappear.’

"I was driving while Florence was scanning neighborhoods in small Georgia towns for signs of the hyacinths. Bill Griffin and Diane could always find plenty to talk about and were in lively conversation when Florence interrupted telling me to "stop and turn around." She had noticed a round bed of pink flowers surrounding a redbud tree. We pulled into the driveway and began our strategy. We rang the doorbell and a very nice lady appeared who was delighted that we had noticed her hyacinths. They had been given to her many years ago and she even offered to share some with us. We had a small spade and bags ready in the back of my car. Diane and Bill Griffin continued to engage the lady in conversation while Florence and I began furiously digging. We didn't want to be greedy but the temptation was certainly there.

"The lady almost insisted that I also dig a rather large specimen of The Green Rose (*Rosa chinensis* 'Viridiflora'). I labored on the rose while Florence repaired the digging damage to the hyacinth planting and loaded the freshly dug bulbs. We presented a few of the bulbs to Flora Ann and Greg who agreed that they may be 'authentic.' Florence was mortified that the ones she took would be devoured by voles in her garden and ultimately gave them to me. I continue to grow them at our garden in Louisiana. Diane and Bill Griffin acted as though Florence and I were a little 'over the top' in our enthusiasm. We continued bulb hunting that afternoon but found nothing nearly as interesting as the pink hyacinths. The rose thrived in our Texas garden and I think of our bulb hunt every time I smell the hyacinths."

Ed Shull wrote of another side of Florence:

"While all will tell you of the depth of Florence's abilities I can only add a bit of breadth by relating my most enduring memory, which happened standing at the bar at a SGHS meeting ordering drinks and having an undoubtedly serious conversation. Florence ordered a bourbon and water, continued her end of the conversation and, without missing a beat, instructed the bartender to add 'just a splash more' as he poured the bourbon. The bartender said 'yes ma'am' and we floated back into the crowd. No muss, no fuss. Besides the superior intellect and grace, Florence was great fun."

Catherine Howett remembered:

"Having strong faith in the 'communion of saints,' I find myself haunted by memories of Florence. What was the mystery of that personality that keeps summoning me back to thoughts of her? She was one of the most zealous and fastidious scholars I have ever known, and yet pursued her passion for knowledge outside the university setting that would have been a natural one for her. And how

many fields of knowledge, in each of which she acquired a formidable authority? Southern furniture, crafts, decorative arts, and folkways; historic regional landscape traditions, horticulture, historic preservation, and probably others of which I'm not even aware. She might have been intimidating, if she had not been so much fun, so generous in sharing and so glad to encounter fellow enthusiasts. 'Enthusiasm,' I've decided, was the secret of Florence's irresistible good nature—the Greek root of the word means to be possessed or inspired by a god. Florence was that impossible thing—a joyful, enraptured perfectionist. The notion that her soul might now 'rest in peace' doesn't work at all for me; how could she be happy without a project? I prefer to believe that she is at last free of nuisance interruptions, distractions, and delays, and fully engaged in the ecstatic and creative work for which her whole life was a preparation."

Ben Page recalled early SGHS days:

"One of many fond memories I have of Florence Griffin from almost 20 years ago is the first time we went on a Southern Garden History Society board meeting and our group spent the entire morning in deep discussion about the dreams we all shared for the organization. One of the small but lovely things about the group which emerged was the unique variations in the cadences and inflections of southern accents brought to the table by each person from all over the South. Florence proceeded to tell us during the meeting of the importance of documenting extant 19th-century 'planashun' landscapes in the upper South before they disappeared. Because I wasn't familiar at that point with the particularities of that lovely middle Georgia southern accent, I spent the entire time thinking that 'planashun' was the name of a specific house in North Georgia, instead of an agricultural type of operation known as a plantation. The memory of that wonderful time and that kind and gentle woman brings a smile to my face every time I allow myself an opportunity to reflect on the importance of friendships."

Kay Haltom wrote:

"When Tom and I first moved to Atlanta, Florence and Bill recruited us for the Antique Study Group. They had known Tom's parents, Bob and Glenn Haltom, from the very beginning of the Southern Garden History Society, and we frequently asked their opinion about purchases of antique furniture that we were considering. One day we asked them to go with us to look at a pie safe that we had seen and liked. Florence looked carefully at the pie safe and every other piece of furniture in the shop. On the way out, she said to the owner 'You have a very

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Remembrance of Florence Griffin..... (continued from page 17)

interesting shop.’ After we were outside, Florence turned to us and said ‘Everything in there was made last week. Let me show you some pie safes.’ We then proceeded to Florence and Bill’s house where we viewed the multiple pie safes in their collection, some of which were hidden away in a room filled with museum-quality furniture. The advice they gave us was to buy only the best of whatever we were collecting. They were both dear friends and we miss them greatly. We think of them whenever the Oakland rose they gave us is blooming.”

And, lastly, from Ken McFarland:

“Recalling Florence Griffin now brings fewer pinpoint memories than it does engender a wonderful reverie spanning many years of involvement with the Southern Garden History Society. Along with Flora Ann, Florence was the Society for me, representing all that was worthwhile in the organization and joyful in being a member. She is one of the few people ever known to me whose face I envision in a near photographic manner, and similarly with no effort I can clearly hear her call my name. Of course as I think of Florence I recall Bill Griffin too, and I think back to just how comfortable

and welcome I felt in the company of them together. I remember, for example, while we were on one of our post-meeting bus tours telling them a story from my graduate school days at Chapel Hill. Now, I lay no claim to being a great story-teller, and this one involved a (poorly rendered) Scottish accent. If there are accepted grading standards for story-telling, this probably would have earned a ‘C’ at best. Yet, by their response you would think never had a better and funnier tale been told. The recollection of that kindness and gentility will be with me as long as I retain a scintilla of cognitive ability.”



I always smile when I remember a moment many years ago when Florence and I were standing in her driveway in Atlanta, looking at her garden around us. She pointed out a beautiful mop-head hydrangea that was deep in the woods and lamented to me that she had been planning on moving that hydrangea “but I have just been so busy these past thirty years.”

I am happy that she had been so busy, working with the Southern Garden History Society, and being our friend.

Postscript: A Bygone Member ‘Remembered’ in the News

The January 3, 2009 edition of the *Winston-Salem Journal* carried a feature by columnist David Bare recalling his friend and mentor—and ours—Flora Ann Bynum, who died in March 2006. Mr. Bare, a former gardener at Old Salem, begins his article with a description of the sunset hibiscus, *Abelmoschus manihot*, which he had enjoyed in Flora Ann’s garden on Main Street in the historic Moravian village restoration. It is quite obvious that Flora Ann’s influence has had deep and abiding impact upon his interest in historic plants. The following passage from Bare’s article, “A Garden Takes on the Imprint of its Creator,” could have been written as much about Florence Griffin as of Flora Ann:

“It is hard to watch the inevitable decline of gardens that have lost their gardeners. Though Flora Ann always had help in her garden, there was never any doubt whose garden it was. Like any good garden, it was a mirror of its creator. Though we often try to preserve gardens as

the legacy of the gardener, it seems an honorable but ultimately hollow attempt. The gardener brings something creative to the garden with each passing season—something inexplicable but as necessary as a fresh layer of compost.

“Plants are living history. The stories they carry through cultures blossom along with their flowers. We add our personal histories to their horticultural, biological, and historical stories. They are perfect repositories of these stories because they are living, constantly returning things.

“As we grow older the metaphors that the garden is so steeped in—life, death, resurrection, continuity—become more poignant. Their stories resonate with a deeper level of significance. The winter garden at the end of the year is an obvious reminder of the gardener’s mortality. But the seeds in the back of the desk drawer, forgotten in the garage or tucked into the cold soil carry the germ that begins the season anew.”

Dream Gardener.....(continued from page 7)

them during the long winter, and how eagerly we watch for their first appearance in spring! If we are absent, the letter from home will tell us that 'The peony clump (the one mother planted) is in full bloom,' or that 'The big red poppy (that was our special pride) is bigger and more gorgeous than ever.' When we get back to the old place we can scarcely restrain our impatience to hasten at once to the garden to see them again [. . .] And that is the charm of the 'old-fashioned Hardy Garden'; it is Home, with all of its tender memories and associations, old and new; and the flowers that bloom there unite the Spirit of the Past with that of the living Present."

Dream Gardener: Pioneer Nurseryman Bertrand H. Farr, by George H. Edmonds, GHE Books, Andover, MA; with copious illustrations, including many period photographic images, portraits, lists, and color plates from original nursery catalogs. Brief bibliography, limited source notes. Soft-cover; 158 pages; ISBN: 978-0-615-23865-4. August 2008

This book may be had by sending a check payable to "GHE Books" in the amount of \$25.00, which includes postage: to GHE Books, 45 Martingale Lane, Andover, MA 01810.

Members in Print

Flowers and Herbs of Early America, by Lawrence D. Griffith, photography by Barbara Temple Lombardi. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in association with Yale University Press, New Haven, CT; 292 pages, including index; hardcover, 2008, ISBN: 978-0-87935-238-7

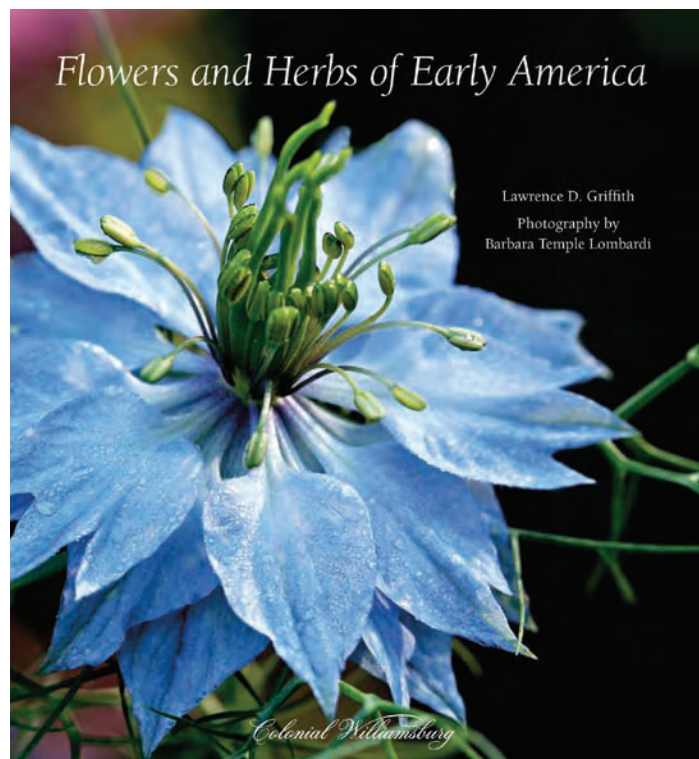
The plants of America's colonial and early federal gardens have been gloriously revived in a new book from Colonial Williamsburg, written by Colonial Williamsburg curator of plants Lawrence Griffith with photographs by staff photographer Barbara Temple Lombardi. Griffith drew on years of archival research and field trials to document the great variety of early American flowers and herbs and to explore how they were cultivated and used.

"I grew plants such as the hound's-tongue, ragged robin and costmary just for the sake of their names. I grew short plants like pennyroyal, all-heal, and strawberry blite and tall plants like crested cockscomb and the joe-pye weed," Griffith recounts. "I came to know—completely by chance—the cinnamon-colored American groundnut, whose convoluted shape is mystifying, and the swamp milkweed, whose predation by orange aphids is equally so. Plants about which medicinal claims were made came to my notice: St. Mary's thistle, blessed thistle, and motherwort."

Griffith's mission was "to demonstrate the palette of plants they might have grown in colonial Virginia and the feasibility of their growth."

Elegant period hand-colored engravings, watercolours, and woodcuts provide provocative visual counterparts to Lombardi's exquisitely detailed photographs.

"The flowers and herbs found in Colonial Williamsburg's gardens have always been a subject of interest and affection on the part of our guests," said Gordon Chappell, the Foundation's retired director of landscape and facilities services and a past president of the Southern Garden History Society. "Lawrence Griffith and



Barbara Lombardi have produced a distinctive work that will appeal to all who love gardens."

Flowers and Herbs of Early America is an invaluable companion for today's gardeners, who will appreciate the advice of a master gardener on how to plan, choose appropriate species and maintain a beautiful period garden. Not only is this a useful work for the garden historian, historic gardener, and cottage gardener, but it has great relevance to 21st-century gardening," said Frank Robinson, executive director of Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, Virginia.

Gifts from Janet and Fred Brubaker of Somerset, Pennsylvania, Teresa and Ken Wood of Chester Springs, Pennsylvania, and the Mars Foundation of McLean, Virginia, have made possible this exquisitely photographed and meticulously researched book of Colonial Williamsburg's Historic Area flowers and herbs.



Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden
(story on page 15)

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 2008-2009 year. Membership categories:

Benefactor	\$250
Patron	\$150
Sustainer	\$75
Institution or Business	\$50
Joint	\$40
Individual	\$25
Student	\$10

For more membership information, contact:

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Deadline for the submission of articles for the spring issue of Magnolia is March 1, 2009.

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