



Magnolia

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

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William Bartram's Botanical Discoveries

By Brad Sanders, Athens, Georgia

Following the publication of *Travels through North & South Carolina, Georgia, east & west Florida, etc* in 1791, William Bartram became the most celebrated American naturalist of the late eighteenth century, both in America and abroad, while he also became a mentor to a new generation of American scientists. Much of his acclaim is owing to the enduring popularity of *Travels*, which recounts his exploration of the American Southeast in the years 1773 through 1776. Although Bartram's stated purpose for traveling in the Southern colonies was to search for new and interesting plants, armchair travelers were enthralled by reading of his adventures battling alligators on the St. Johns River, his descriptions of sublime Florida landscapes and the sylvan paradise of the Altamaha River, and his encounters with Native Americans. Indeed, many people admit to skipping over the pages of plant lists to get to the next exciting adventure.

The purpose of William Bartram's exploration was botanical in nature and his travels were funded by the wealthy Doctor John Fothergill of London. The very first paragraph of Chapter 1 in *Travels* tells us,

AT the request of Dr. Fothergill, of London, to search the Floridas, and the western parts of Carolina and Georgia, for the discovery of rare and useful productions of nature, chiefly in the vegetable kingdom; in April, 1773, I embarked for Charleston, South-Carolina, on board the brigantine Charleston Packet, ...

During the next three-and-a-half years Bartram did, indeed, describe numerous plants that were new to science. Many of his discoveries have entered the horticulture trade and are now common inhabitants of our modern gardens. Yet, of over a-hundred plants identified as Bartram discoveries, only eighteen note William Bartram as the authority. There are several reasons why Bartram received so little credit. He was removed from the world of European academic botany, where the Linnaean



Franklinia.

system was becoming widely accepted. The practice was for American plant collectors to send their specimens to Europe where the descriptions and names would be

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Photo by Brad Sanders.

Jack Randolph “Randy” Harelson—1951-2024

“He held us all in the light.”

Randy Harelson, beloved Society president, died March 5, 2024. Randy was a long-time active member who served on the board of directors before becoming president in 2022. Organizing the 2023 annual meeting in Natchitoches, Louisiana was one of Randy’s greatest achievements. In addition, though diagnosed with cancer, he actively partnered with Vice President Derek Wade in planning the 2024 Wilmington annual meeting.

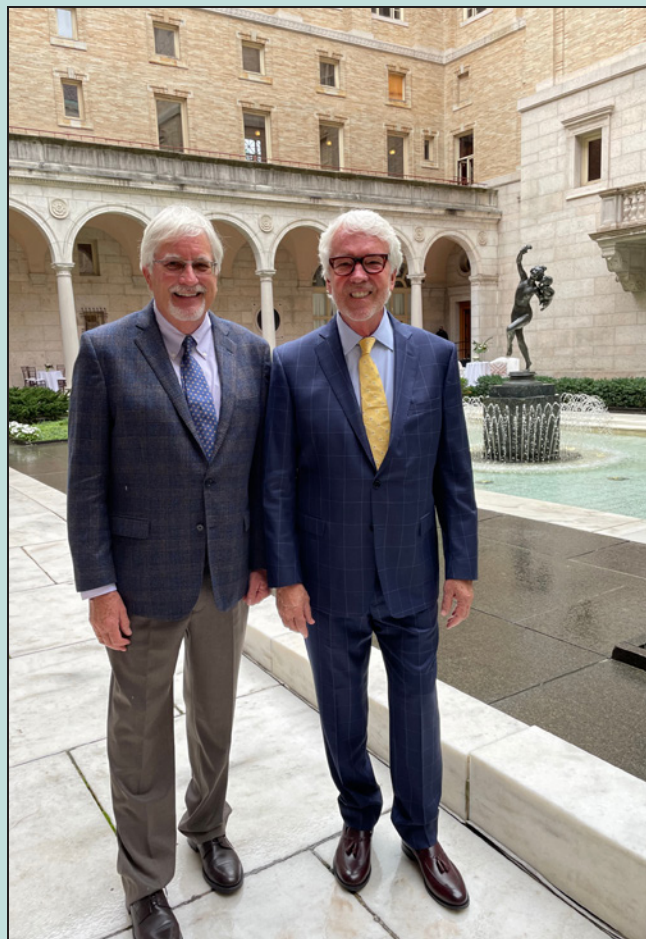
Born in Macon, Georgia, he was raised in Baton Rouge, where he received degrees from LSU in art education. A lifelong gardener, he studied horticulture at Harvard University’s Arnold Arboretum and later served as assistant horticulturist for the Blithewold Mansion, Gardens & Arboretum in Bristol, Rhode Island. In 2006 Randy and his husband Richard Gibbs discovered the ca. 1800 Lejeune House in New Roads, Louisiana, on what remained of the former five-hundred-acre plantation where the

town of New Roads was originally formed. Randy and Richard planted an arboretum there of well-chosen trees and plants documented to be in Louisiana by 1860. Randy’s interests were many and varied and included the authorship of nine published books. He also coauthored and collaborated with eminent photographer Richard Sexton on the beautifully illustrated *New Roads and Old Rivers*. Randy had been a Quaker for the last several years of his life, reflecting his peaceful and loving nature. His care for animals was underscored by his over fifty years of vegetarianism.

In his announcement of Randy’s death on the SGHS website, Derek Wade expressed the profound loss felt by all: “Randy’s affections for our Society, its members and mission were evident in his enthusiastic leadership. He loved gardens, plants, history, and people profoundly, and he embraced each person he met as a forever friend. He was one of the most loving and caring people I have ever known.”



Randy Harelson.



Richard Gibbs and Randy.

Photos courtesy Richard Gibbs.

William Bartram's... (continued from page 1)

published by a botanical authority. William's father, John Bartram, was an accomplished botanist, yet most of his discoveries were named by Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae*. It seems that the naming and publishing of new plants was considered a group effort that transcended individual glory. This worked against Bartram because in the interim of his return to Philadelphia and his publishing *Travels* in 1791, his specimens languished in London waiting for their descriptions. During that time many of his plants were described in publications by Linnaeus, Thomas Walter, Humphrey Marshall, and William Aiton. André Michaux is the author of some Bartram plants that had appeared in *Travels*, possibly because Michaux was a better botanist and gave more complete descriptions.

As part of his agreement with Fothergill, Bartram sent his drawings and specimens to London, where Dr. Daniel Solander of the British Museum was engaged to write the descriptions and create a botanical name. William Bartram, though being an observant naturalist and talented artist, was not skilled in the Linnean system of botanical names and depended upon Solander's work for authority. Solander, however, was likely preoccupied with the many plant specimens that he and Joseph Banks had collected during the Cook expedition to the South Pacific and could give little attention to Bartram's collection. Circumstances changed when Dr. Fothergill died in 1780 and Solander died in 1782, after which Sir Joseph Banks purchased the Bartram collection from the Fothergill estate. Subsequently, Bartram's specimens and drawings were first left to the British Museum and now reside in the Natural History Museum in London. There are 247 Bartram specimens residing in the Natural History Museum today, including thirty-eight specimens that Bartram sent to Robert Barclay.

Bartram was not a jealous person and seems to have never begrudged any of the authors for naming his plants. However, in a letter to Robert Barclay in 1788, Bartram wrote:

"I collected these specimens amongst many hundreds others about 20 years ago when on Botanical researches in Carolina, Georgia and Florida [,] duplicates of which I sent to Doctor Fothergill; very few of which I find have entered the Systema Vegetabilium, not even in the last Edition.

The number of specimens that I sent were submitted to the examination of Doctor Solander which by returns I received from the Doctor (the nos. corresponding with those of my duplicates) appear'd most of them to be either New Genera or Species; soon after Doctor Solander deceas'd & Doctor Fothergill soon after followed him. I have never learn'd what became of the specimens.

These remains with some more than I have kept by me to this time, which I cheerfully offer for the inspection

and amusement of the curious, expecting or desiring no other gratuity than the bare mention of my being the discoverer, a reward due for traveling several thousand miles mostly amongst Indian Nations which is not only difficult but dangerous, besides suffering sickness, cold & hunger. But with a perfect Sense of gratitude I with pleasure acknowledge that Noble Fothergill liberally supporting me whilst in his employ with ample pecuniary assistance."

Bartram fans who garden like to devote a part of their space to creating a Bartram Garden. Let's look at some of the important and interesting plants that William Bartram discovered that might inhabit such a garden.

Franklinia, *Franklinia alatamaha*

The one plant that Bartram would claim for himself is Franklinia. Few of our native plants have generated as much interest and research as Franklinia. John and William Bartram discovered the shrub on October 1, 1765, at Fort Barrington on the Altamaha River when it still had some red fall leaves and seed capsules. The Bartrams would have seen no flowers because Franklinia blooms in mid-summer. William revisited the Franklinia site several times during his sojourn in Georgia and collected seeds that he propagated upon his return to Philadelphia. By 1814, no Franklinias could be discovered living at Fort Barrington, and no other Franklinias have been found living in the wild anywhere in the world. All existing Franklinias are descended from plants that were grown at Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia. Franklinia is not difficult to propagate, and it grows well in many parts of the country, except where it was discovered. It is susceptible to *Phytophthora*, a root rot disease that lives in soil where cotton was cultivated. The best practice for growing Franklinia in the Piedmont or Coastal Plain of the Southeast is to grow it in a pot with sterile soil and keep it on an impervious surface so the pot does not touch native soil. Franklinia is a member of the Tea family and will hybridize with other members of the family, including the native *Stewartia* and *Gordonia*. Franklinia's closest relative in Asia is *Shima*, which is also used to hybridize with Franklinia.

Painted buckeye, *Aesculus sylvatica*

Bartram wrote of *Aesculus sylvatica* several times while traveling throughout the Piedmont of Georgia and South Carolina, but he described the plant only towards the end of *Travels* and then it was from the Cape Fear River in North Carolina. Painted buckeye is an understory shrub that grows ten-to-twenty feet tall. The leaves are a striking, deep red color when they unfurl in early spring.

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William Bartram's... (continued from page 3)

In its native range painted buckeye attracts little notice, because it grows often in the shadow of larger trees it does not reach perfection. When placed in sun or part sun, the plant fills out and becomes an attractive garden specimen.

Oakleaf hydrangea, *Hydrangea quercifolia*

Bartram discovered this beautiful and easy to grow native while traveling on the Lower Creek Trade Path near Roberta, Georgia, in July 1775. On page 382 of *Travels* Bartram wrote, "I OBSERVED here a very singular and beautiful shrub, which I suppose is a species of Hydrangia (*H. quercifolia*)." He goes on to give an excellent description of oakleaf hydrangea.

Bottlebrush buckeye, *Aesculus parviflora*

Bottlebrush buckeye has become very popular in the last several decades. Bartram found this lovely native growing on the banks of the Chattahoochee River in what is now Fort Moore military reservation. He saw bottlebrush buckeye in late July 1775, when it was in full bloom. Bartram wrote a decent description, but gave the

plant no name. Thomas Walter published a description in 1788 from a specimen collected at a disjunct population in North Augusta, South Carolina.

Fevertree or Georgia bark, *Pinckneya pubens*

Pinckneya is an unusual and uncommon plant that grows in wet areas of the coast from Savannah into northeast Florida. John and William Bartram apparently discovered Pinckneya on the same day that they discovered Franklinia. In John Bartram's diary for October 1, 1765, he mentions only the discovery of "several very curious shrubs." On page 16 in *Travels* William Bartram describes Pinckneya upon visiting Fort Barrington again, and on page 468 he reveals that the "very curious shrubs" discovered in 1765 are, indeed, Franklinia and Pinckneya, what Bartram called *Bignonia bracteate*. The plant was described and named by André and Francois Michaux in *Flora Boreali-Americana*. It was named in honor of General Charles Pinckney, a friend of Francois. Pinckneya is related to the Chincona, also known as Peruvian bark, of South America from which is derived quinine.



Photo By Brad Sanders.

Bottlebrush Buckeye.



Photo By Brad Sanders.

Painted Buckeye.

Rocky Shoals spider lily, Chahaba Lily, *Hymenocallis coronaria*

While awaiting the conclusion of the Indian Congress in late May 1773, Bartram bided his time by exploring around Augusta and up the Savannah River. He wrote of some new plants,

UPON the rich rocky hills at the cataracts of Augusta, I first observed the perfumed Rhododendron ferruginium, white robed Philadelphia inodorus, and cerulean Malva; but nothing in vegetable nature was more pleasing than the odoriferous Pan-cratiium fluitans, which almost alone possesses the little rocky islets which just appear above the water.

Major John Eaton LeConte wrote, "It is undoubtedly the species observed by Bartram, mentioned in his *Travels* as the *Pan-cratiium fluitans*; but as, although it almost always grows under the water, it never can be said to float, I have thought proper to change the name given to it by him, particularly as it has never been before described or admitted into any system."¹

While shoals spider lily is very specific about growing conditions, it can be grown in a water feature so long as it has clean, flowing water. This can be provided with a recirculating pump.

Large flower evening primrose, *Oenothera grandiflora*

While exploring the Tensaw River near Stockton, Alabama, Bartram discovered a new primrose, which he described and named *Oenothera grandiflora*.

EARLY one morning, passing along by some old uncultivated fields, a few miles above Taensa, I was struck with surprise at the appearance of a blooming plant, gilded with the richest golden yellow, stepping on shore, I discov-

ered it to be a new species of the Oenothera (Oenothera grandiflora) Caule erecto, ramoso, piloso, 7, 8 pedali, foliis semi-amplexi-caulibus, lanceolatis, serrato-dentatis, floribus magnis, fulgidis, sessilibus, capsulis cylindricis, 4 angulis, perhaps the most pompous and brilliant herbaceous plant yet known to exist.

The name, however, is officially attributed to Charles

Louis L'heritier de Brutelle by William Aiton, who included it in *Hortus Kewensis* and reported that it was introduced in 1778 by Dr. John Fothergill, obviously from seeds provided by William Bartram. It is probable that news of the scientific name reached Bartram in time for him to include it in *Travels*.

Large flowered evening primrose is easy to grow and reseeds readily, which is evidenced by its having naturalized in other parts of North America and Europe. A gardener need plant seeds for this lovely plant only once.

Golden St. John's wort, *Hypericum frondosum*

Bartram discovered this lovely plant on Patsiliga Creek in

Taylor County, Georgia.

I observed growing on the steep dry banks of this creek, a species of shrub Hypericum, of extraordinary shew and beauty (Hypericum aureum.) It grows erect, three or four feet high, forming a globular top, representing a perfect little tree; the leaves are large, oblong, firm of texture, smooth and shining; the flowers are very large, their petals broad and conspicuous, which, with their tufts of golden filaments, give the little bushes a very splendid appearance.

Endnotes

- 1 John LeConte, *Annals of the Lyceum of Natural History Of New York*, V. 3, 1836, 145.



Oakleaf Hydrangea.



Large Flowering Primrose.

Photo By Brad Sanders.

Photo By Brad Sanders.

SGHS 2024 Annual Meeting, Wilmington, NC, April 12 -14, 2024

By Judy Boyce Perry, Portsmouth, Virginia

2024 Southern Garden History Society Fortieth Annual Meeting. Dedicated to the memory of Jack Randolph "Randy" Harelson.

Wilmington, North Carolina celebrates its gardens year-round, but most particularly with an April Azalea Garden Tour. The Southern Garden History Society (SGHS) annual meeting began one week after that tour, as organizers warmly welcomed us.

Here the Cape Fear River flows directly into the Atlantic making Wilmington an important seaport since the 1700s. Many early buildings survive--restored and in use. Whereas commerce was long the mainstay here, tourism now reigns. Thus, citizens of Wilmington have a vibrant city that also preserves its historic flavor. It is also a gateway to popular beaches where visitors flock and is on their "must see" list when taking a break from sun and sand.

Some SGHS members opted for a first-day guided walking tour of Oakdale Cemetery. North Carolina's oldest rural cemetery, it was chartered in 1852 by the NC General Assembly. Now one-hundred acres, it was part of the Rural Cemetery Movement, the goal being larger suburban burial grounds with a garden-like designs. A 1911 pamphlet stated, "nature seemed to have molded the ground for that purpose and left it for man to beautify." The beauty of the monuments and sculptures alternate with towering flora to create an outdoor museum and arboretum.

Later we gathered for our business meeting, Vice-President/Acting President Derek Wade recognizing this as beginning our fifth decade and saying, "With forty years behind us, we look forward to continued dedication to our historic gardens." He then introduced Travis Gilbert, executive director of Historic Wilmington Foundation, as our emcee, after which ninth-term mayor

Bill Saffo welcomed us, noting that Wilmington is one of the oldest cities in the state. He proudly expressed that Wilmington's passion for gardens remains fervent.

To a standing ovation, thanks were made to the 2024 Wilmington host planning committee: Landon and Connie Anderson, Larry Hovis, Travis Gilbert, Christine Lamberton, Debbie Reed, Leslie Randall and Ray Kennedy. After reading about the meeting, you will understand why we are so appreciative.

Business continued with Richard Gibbs and Aimee Moreau, on behalf of Randy, passing the gavel to new SGHS President, Derek Wade. Richard, Randy's husband,



SGHS members gather at the famed Airlie Oak at Airlie Gardens.



Dinner on the fantail of the USS North Carolina.

Photo by Charles Perilloux.

Photo by Charles Perilloux.

noted the gavel was made in 2010 from a Mount Vernon Boxwood. Appreciation was expressed for the donations (\$11,000) made in Randy's name before and since his passing and the desire to have these funds have a special impact to mark his memory.

Dr. Chris Fonvielle, Jr. began the afternoon lectures. Author and professor emeritus at UNC-Wilmington, he scanned the region's history beginning with the Cape Fear Indians dating back eight-thousand years. By the 1700s the seaport was settled by Europeans and Africans mainly engaged in agriculture. First rice, then resin and lumber from the long-leaf pines, became the cash crops, and by 1769, one-thousand people lived here. The nearby Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge in February 1776, our speaker noted, brought defeat to the British, while famous son, William Hooper, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. By 1840 Wilmington was the most

populous NC city, with cotton the cash crop, while new railroads took the cotton to market bringing prosperity to the area. This same railroad became the lifeline of the Confederacy. At this time, 40% of the population were enslaved African Americans. The end of the Civil War changed all, and Wilmington declined. Many plantations were abandoned but amazingly, a cotton exporting company found a way to build a successful business that boosted the regrowth of Wilmington as a port." Today tourism is the city's greatest commerce and it has spurred the restoration of the historic river district and promotion of area beaches.

Next came Nick Dawson of Belvedere Property Management in London, who overviewed restoration work at Orton, and neighboring Kendal, Plantations. Orton, circa 1735 began as a Cape Fear River rice plantation. The original Antebellum home by Colonel

Maurice Moore remains today on twelve acres of ornamental gardens. A Moore direct descendent, Louis Moore Bacon purchased the plantation in 2010 and began extensive work on the grounds. Previous landscape architects have included Robert Swan Sturtevant and Charles F. Gillette, and at present, SGHS member Benjamin G. Page Jr. The gardens remain closed for restoration work.

"Evolving Southern Gardens and Building an Unexpected Oasis" were the subjects of local author Barbara Sullivan., Formerly an attorney and a Foreign Service officer, Sullivan moved to Wilmington in the 1980s and discovered the joys of coastal gardening. Aware of the need for local information, she wrote and photographed *Garden Perennials for the Coastal South*. Her subject centered on adapting to the climate changes and the important connections in nature that continue the cycle of life in plants, insects, and birds so that we can assist in the adaptations to change. Planting natives and biodiversity are key strategies. Eliminating chemicals, gas powered equipment, and re-thinking lawns are just a few of her suggestions to consider the "Web of Life."

Our evening began in the ca. 1770 Burgwin-Wright House garden, where while sipping and nibbling we met host committee members and renewed



SGHS 2024 board on fantail of USS North Carolina.

Photo by Charles Perilloux.



SGHS President Derek Wade speaks before dinner on the USS North Carolina.

Photo by Charles Perilloux.

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SGHS 2024 Annual Meeting... (continued from page 7)

friendships. Dinner followed at the 1874 St. Thomas Preservation Hall, KMM. Before the meal, President Derek Wade toasted our dear friend and past President Randy Harelson. We felt Randy's presence surely among us.

Saturday began with horticulturist and Lutheran pastor Henry Rehder, Jr, speaking on the Venus flytrap (*Dionaea* spp.). This unique plant is only found in Wilmington and neighboring counties. Here a prehistoric meteor strike created deep depressions forming an exceedingly acidic environment. Murky soil at the bottom and sandy soil on top of these depressions created the perfect environment for these insectivorous plants. Rehder expanded on efforts to keep the Venus flytrap population safe. He also assisted his uncle to develop the

Stanley Rehder Insectivorous Plant Reserve, now a part of Wilmington's Parks and Recreation system.

The Azalea Garden Tour in Wilmington is a regional spring highlight. Our next speaker, educator, historian, and former tour chair Elaine Henson, noted that many decades ago "pilgrimages" to view the local azaleas at peak bloom had become a ritual. Thus, came the first Azalea Festival in 1949, leading to the Azalea Garden Tour in 1953 hosted by the Cape Fear Garden Club. A feature that continues to this day is the crowning of the Azalea Queen, and their numbers have included Polly Bergen, Esther Williams, and Kelly Ripa.

Airlie Gardens, Wilmington's showplace, hosts an Azalea Festival garden party and this segued to speaker, Janine Powell, Airlie Gardens and New Hanover County

Parks development director. The gardens, she noted, were created in 1886 by Sarah Jones as a private family retreat. Designed as a naturalistic setting, this large garden features thousands of azaleas, camellias, magnolias, palms, wisteria, and live oaks. The five-hundred-year-old Arlie Oak is tended with care as it is the "mascot" of the gardens.

The Gullah Geechee Culture encompasses descendants of Africans enslaved along the lower Atlantic rice, indigo, and cotton growing coast. The Gullah Geechee language developed among multi-linguistic people who brought a rich heritage of African cultural traditions to the region, including arts, crafts, and spiritual expressions. Speaker Michelle Lanier, director of North Carolina Historic Sites, is a folklorist and public historian and a member of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission. She grew up in the Carolinas and has focused on the history of the African American diaspora. Apropos for her audience, she spoke on herbs used as healing plants as well as talismans. She also noted that some Gullah homesteads may have a reliquary of items meaningful to protecting the inhabitants, not fully understood by a passer-by. It is important to realize the deeper meaning that comes with these artifacts, which have a tradition throughout a long ancestry.



Oakdale Cemetery.

Photo by Charles Perilloux.



Reception at Burgwin-Wright house & gardens.

Photo by Charles Perilloux.

Historic Wilmington Foundation executive director, Travis Gilbert, spoke on the city's preservation movement. Gabrielle DeRosset (1863-1963), as a member of the Colonial Dames, began that movement in 1930. First, the Historic District was identified, followed by acquisition and restoration of endangered residences and public buildings. The 1770 Burgwin-Wright House was opened to the public in 1951, while the Latimer House, ca. 1852, with slave quarters, was acquired in 1963 and restored as headquarters of the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society. In 1966 the Society created the Historic Wilmington Foundation to affect the restoration of properties. The Foundation established a signage system for historic properties

with different colors designating the age of the structure in question. "Residents of Old Wilmington," he noted, is a volunteer group in the Historic District working to preserve the historically significant properties and quality of life. They have recently spearheaded the restoration of brick street pavement revealed when doing repair work.

Thus informed, members went to the Historic District. The large 1861 Greco/Italianate Bellamy Mansion came first. A prominent home in the district, its original formal gardens included elliptical and circular parterres with native species and colorful blooming plants. Five *Magnolia grandiflora* (planted ca. 1870) still thrive. Other notable tour sites were the 1770 Burgwin-Wright House and Gardens and the 1852 Latimer House. The former's colonial-style gardens feature an orchard, an heirloom rose garden, and a parterre designed by noted Williamsburg landscape architects Alden Hopkins and Donald Parker. Purchased by the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society in 1963, the Latimer house is now the LCHFS headquarters.

Four nearby places of worship of distinctive styles were opened for us. First was, the 1875-76 Moorish style Temple of Israel, which is the oldest synagogue in North Carolina. Next came, the Gothic Revival St. James Episcopal Church, which was erected in 1839-40 and features an early graveyard, with dates from 1745 to 1855. The First Presbyterian Church is the third church on the property. The site now includes a mix of Gothic and Tudor buildings. Notably, Woodrow Wilson's father, Rev. Joseph R. Wilson, served here from 1874-1885. The Spanish Baroque Basilica of Saint Mary, was built in 1912 without steel or wood beams or framing and without nails, using a brick and tile structurally and in a creative design. The builders were the Guastavinos from Spain, famed for their cohesive construction system.

In addition, seven memorable private gardens awaited



Airlie Gardens bottle chapel honoring Minnie Evans.

Photo by Charles Perilloux.

us. Speaker Barbara Sullivan's garden featured native and well-adapted non-native plants in a labyrinth garden, while at the Williams-Holladay June Reichert's personal artwork is prominent with a large fountain being a focal point. The Elliott-Brown House (Bill and Patricia Braswell) is located on an old creek bed with welcoming shade under a large pecan tree. Wiley-Williams Cottage, home of Bill and Patrician Barrow, encompasses the former studio of noted Wilmington artist, Elizabeth Chant (1865-1947). The Worth House, an inn run by Jennifer Bloomberg and Jeff Mason, features a brick walkway, mature pecans, and seating around the main water feature. At the Maria McKoy House Wilmington artist Suda Tuggle has created a yard as an extension of her art. And lastly, came the Wallace House where Inza Watson and Blair Booth have filled their garden with plant gifts from friends and family, each sharing its own memory. A bit exhausted, we returned to the hotel before taking water taxis to the Battleship North Carolina.

The huge guns greeted us with their strength and might, while the sight of the after deck with skirted tables plus river and city beyond was a postcard memory. Chatting with fellow members, we noticed elegantly attired people, including a lovely Miss North Carolina! After a delicious meal host committee member Ray Kennedy announced the evening's entertainment. A USO organizer, he had entertained troops around the world. The show began with singers, dressed in blues and reds and performing beloved patriotic songs. Then came a tribute to the service spouses and families waiting at home, and lastly a gentleman wowed us with Andrew Lloyd Webber's "The Music of the Night" from Phantom of the Opera. The applause was long and heartfelt. Then came the Grand Finale--beautiful firework displays just for us.

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SGHS 2024 Annual Meeting... (continued from page 9)

Who would have thought to create such a flourish? Of course, it was our dear Randy Harelson. He had “kept his hand” in the planning of this meeting, and this one thing he wanted so very much to happen, and so it did!

On Sunday some members said good bye while others began a day of exploration at Airlie and private gardens. First came Chuck and Karen Roots’ home, aptly described as “symbiotic perfection between architecture and botanical garden.” The driveway approach featured winding paths directing our view to the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired home. Either path featured interesting planting groups and thoughtfully placed sculpture and garden oddities. Water features included both tumbling streams and others that meandered to a large lake. Looking back from the lake to the house you understood the owners love of the outdoors. A comfortable open terrace living space was situated overlooking the pool. Here, granite overhangs overflow with water into smaller pools, while potted plants softened straight edges of natural stone. It was difficult to leave, but thanking our hostess, we boarded buses for Airlie Gardens.

Arlie began in 1886 as a private retreat for Sarah and Pembroke Jones. This sixty-seven-acre property was transformed in 1901 into a lush naturalistic garden estate featuring camellias, azaleas, magnolias, and live oaks. Now a New Hanover County public garden, trails lead to spots of interest including, of course, the Airlie Oak. Maps in hand, we could go at our own pace. An unusual site is the Bottle Chapel created by local artists in honor of the African American folk artist and former admissions gate keeper, Minnie Evans. Different colored and sizes of glass bottles comprise the walls of this most extraordinary memorial. The restful Mount Lebanon Chapel (1835) was



Photo by Charles Perilloux.

After dinner fireworks viewed from the deck of the USS North

reached with a pleasant walk through the park.

After Airlie came the 1930s Forest Hills neighborhood, with lunch at Percy and Lilian Smiths’ Memorial Garden. Large trees sheltering celebrated azaleas created a perfect setting for food and friendship. Later came the nearby Zumbro home, notable for its walled, terraced garden and fine bronze fountain. The house features a second floor sleeping porch overlooking a dining patio, while a swimming pool is now a grandchild favorite. The last garden was Robert and Monica Fulk’s. Located mainly at the front of the home, it slopes from a large bricked terrace. The site also includes a welcoming gazebo and a small walled contemplative garden. All of this was a reminder that gardens are an important part of life in Wilmington. Back at the hotel, many of us headed up to the rooftop bar for a last view of the city, plus a toast to a wonderful 2024 SGHS annual meeting and to dear friendships shared with Society members.

Graduate Fellowship Awarded

Mason Marshall, a student at Texas A&M University, received the James R. Cothran Graduate Fellowship to attend the 2024 SGHS annual meeting. The fellowship, named in honor of longtime member and former president, Jim Cothran, provides complementary registration to the recipient plus a \$1000 stipend to



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Mason Marshall.

defray travel and lodging expenses. Mason is a native Texan working on his Ph.D. degree. His research and dissertation involve a Texas native wildflower, prairie coneflower (*Ratibida columnifera*), and a better understanding of the gene pool with the goal of introducing superior varieties.

After attending the meeting, Mason stated, “I am grateful to the society, the scholarship committee, and Dr. [Bill] Welch for their support and guidance, and to all the wonderful people I met who share a dedication to preserving and celebrating Southern garden heritage. The fellowship has not only enriched my knowledge but my spirit too, fostering a deeper appreciation for the art of gardening in the South.”

The “Pig Tight” Osage Orange: America’s Living Barbed Wire

By Ken McFarland, Brandon, Vermont

Few plants seem to stir up conversation more than the Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*), though it’s not a garden favorite, and people rarely rave about its beauty.¹ This again proved true during our recent Wilmington annual meeting, when a chat between this author and a Texas member easily drifted from the American chestnut to what is most commonly termed “bois d’arc,” or simply “bodark/bodart,” in many parts of the South.

Readers familiar with Osage orange probably remember their earliest awareness of bodark, most likely by spotting its large greenish fruit, often called “hedge apples” and sometimes “monkey brains.” Some have known it from childhood, while others discovered it as adults. That moment of awareness came quite late for this writer, in summer 1984 to be specific, upon becoming site manager of Stagville Preservation Center. (Now known as “Historic Stagville,” this state-owned site in Durham was an initial cosponsor of the Old Salem Southern Gardens and Landscapes conference.)

On the edge of the woodland surrounding the eighteenth-century Richard Bennehan House, several clusters of softball-size fruit covered the ground. Staff members called them “horse apples,” a term I had previously associated with another equine-related item. As well, the fruit was said to be poisonous, though it was quickly obvious that some forest creatures were nibbling on it. The question of the fruit’s noxiousness became moot when I later encountered a Guilford College



Credit: Wikipedia public domain.

Bodark, leaves and fruit.

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Courtesy Gordon Chappell.

Osage oranges in forecourt of Williamsburg governor’s palace.

The "Pig Tight" Osage Orange:... (continued from page 11)

group sampling pieces of this bodark bounty. No heed was paid to a warning about possible dangers of ingestion.

Just as the fruit could not be called "eye-catching," the actual shrubs and trees at Stagville bore nothing of the stately nature of the site's white oaks and one great American elm (now lost). Standing out in my memory are vicious thorns, gnarly undergrowth, and seemingly rot-proof, but clearly dead, tangled older-growth wood. Almost certainly before barbed wire, Stagville residents had set out Osage orange trees in hedgerows to keep free-ranging livestock away from the house site and kitchen garden. Typically, the young trees would have been planted in rows and then pruned as they grew so as to produce many thorny shoots. Intertwining, they would over time create a hedge that was said to be "horse high, bull strong, and pig tight."²

Its use as live fence is indeed how *Maclura pomifera* became known across the Southern states, eastern North America, and the Midwest during the Antebellum years and just after the Civil War, prior to being superseded by "devil wire." And like the Osage orange at Stagville, it lingers in many corners of the nation.

Osage orange thus is clearly widespread, but does it grow in my adopted state of sometimes chilly Vermont?

Yes, is the answer, and what is said to be "Vermont's largest" tree can be found twenty minutes away at Middlebury College. In a blog post of 2010, campus horticulturist Tim Parsons, describes this one example as having a relatively small, forty-inch circumference. How this came to be at Middlebury is a mystery, Parsons says, but the easily identifiable fruit is notorious for rolling down its "Stewart Hill" location.³

Many readers will know that the true native range of *Maclura pomifera* excludes Vermont and Historic Stagville but instead is limited to parts of Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.⁴ As noted previously, the term bodark is derived from "bois d'arc," the term attached by French explorers to bows (and tomahawk handles) made by indigenous peoples from the "tough as nails" Osage orange wood.

The bodark gained greater prominence in the early nineteenth century. In a 2003 *Twinleaf* article Peter



Credit Ken McFarland.

Osage orange at Middlebury College.



Credit Irene Spurrier.

Spreading bodark "bushes" in Texas Osage orange native range.



Photo by Irene Spurrier

Osage orange limbs rot free after thirty years in water.

Hatch, then Monticello director of gardens and grounds, notes that Osage orange “might have been the most significant horticultural ‘discovery’ of the (Lewis and Clark) expedition.”⁵ Hatch goes on to describe efforts by Meriwether Lewis to get slips and seeds into the hands of Thomas Jefferson, and later to the famed Philadelphia nurseryman Bernard McMahon and prominent plantsman William Hamilton, the process ultimately leading to their successful growth and distribution. By the late 1820s, Osage orange was available commercially and again quoting Peter Hatch “by the mid 19th century it became the most commonly planted plant in America,” adding the amazing fact that “60,000 miles of bodark was reported planted in 1868 alone.”⁶

That statistic is itself a story, but there are many more yarns about the humble (or not-so-humble!) bodark. One is the impact of Osage orange hedges on the Civil War Battle of Franklin, Tennessee. There Federal troops were to make highly effective use of a bodark from a hedge row and shape it into an almost impenetrable abatis to foil Confederate assaults, thus previewing the extensive use of barbed wire in World War I a half-century later.

Another favorite tale relates to two Osage orange trees once growing in the forecourt of the Colonial Williamsburg Governor’s Palace. For decades they welcomed Palace visitors, but how did *Maclura pomifera* connect to a re-envisioned colonial Virginia landscape? The answer is: it did not.⁷ Perhaps the larger specimen was a nineteenth-century survivor, present when twentieth-century palace restoration began. Lead landscape architect Arthur Shurcliff apparently liked the bodarks, and the two remained untouched. But what about the hedge apples? Almost as deadly as cannon balls, the falling

fruit represented a danger to visitors. Former Colonial Williamsburg garden director Gordon Chappell reports that regular, and sometimes dramatic, attention was needed, saying that once “we sent the tree crew out to crawl up in the tree with sticks (and) knock as many of them down as possible.”⁸ More often the offending tree was simply roped off, Chappell recalls.

Many more bodark stories remain to be told, and if you have one to share please send it to the *Magnolia* editors. Perhaps we can work yours and others into a future issue. Meantime, keep an eye out for tumbling “monkey brains,” and beware of those vicious thorns. You too might discover why a bodark hedge could be “pig tight.”

Endnotes

- 1 “Osage” in Osage orange is derived from a link between the Osage Nation of indigenous people and the wood of the tree. The genus was named *Maclura* to honor the Scottish-American, William Maclure, a prominent early-nineteenth-century scientist and philanthropist. Of note, Osage orange is dioecious, and thus plants are either female or male.
- 2 *The Middlebury Landscape*, “Strange Fruit Falling from the Moon,” 10 October 2010, Tim Parsons, <https://sites.middlebury.edu/middland/2010/10/25/strange-fruit-falling-from-the-moon/#:~:text=Middlebury%20College%20is%20in%20possession,tree%20in%20Virginia%20of%20321>.
- 3 “Strange Fruit.”
- 4 Applying the term “Evolutionary anachronism,” some researchers have theorized the Osage orange once had a seed spreading symbiotic relationship with a now-extinct creature, e.g. the ground sloth. Thus, their native range at this earlier time may explain why *Maclura pomifera* is hale and hearty far away from Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. The theory is not widely embraced.

- 5 Peter Hatch, “The Garden Plants of Lewis and Clark: ‘Public Treasures.’” www.monticello.org.
- 6 Hatch, “Garden Plants.”
- 7 The age of a *Maclura pomifera* at the Patrick Henry home Red Hill in Virginia is estimated at ca. three-hundred years. A national co-champion tree, it shares the honor with a tree in Delaware, raising the question of how each came to be in areas outside the Osage orange native range.
- 8 Honorary director and former SGHS president Gordon Chappell notes that these trees were removed when their roots began to cause structural damage. In an email of April 25, 2024, he also recalls growing up on a Georgia peanut farm (a fifth generation Chappell). Osage oranges still stood in hedgerows, he said, but no one recalled how they got there.



Credit: Patrick Henry's Red Hill.

Ca. 300-year-old Osage orange at Patrick Henry’s Red Hill, Brookneal, VA.

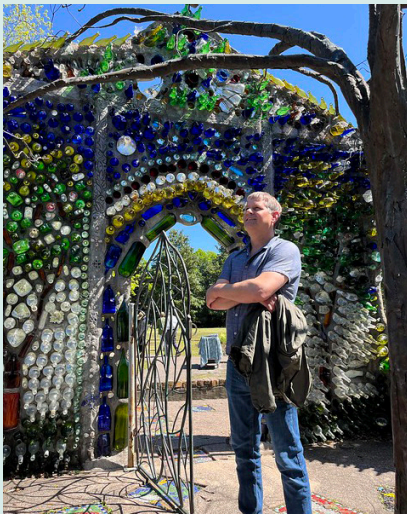


SGHS Annual Meeting Field Trip



Photos courtesy Peggy Cornett.

SGHS members spent the morning touring the breathtaking gardens at the Frank Lloyd Wright inspired home of Chuck and Karen Roots.

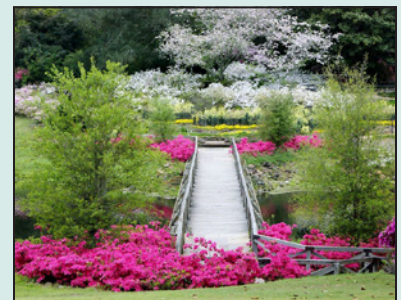


Bottle chapel with Justin Stelter.



Ben and Libby Page after Sunday picnic luncheon.

Mark Your Calendars for future SGHS Annual Meetings



March 7-9, 2025.
Bellingrath Gardens and Home, Mobile, Alabama.



April 10-12, 2026, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia



Magnolia
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Cereus Mysterious: Eudora Welty's Night-Blooming Cereus Club

By Janice Runkel, Eudora Welty House & Garden, Jackson, Mississippi

What would incite you to snore up, long after midnight, to the pink-black peaks of a strange or even a friend, carrying (of all things), a handful of matches? For a twenty-something Eudora Welty and her talented band of correspondents, it simply took the presence of a flower. Long before becoming a Pulitzer Prize-winning literary icon, Welty and her creative companions of Jackson, Mississippi, organized themselves as the "Night-Blooming Cereus Club." These women. Don't take it as cutesy, life's not mysterious?

Throughout the Great Depression and the trials of the years to come, their late-night jaunts to see the elusive influence of Euphorbia organica illuminated many a small-town night, and these adventures would go on to inspire significant scenes in Welty's fiction—all the while preserving a peculiar Southern tradition that took root at least a century before.

This tradition, of course, in the past-social, post-horticultural phenomenon in which proud cereus growers would announce an imminent bloom to the newspapers often in the form of an open invitation for friend and stranger alike to converge on their porch to witness the spectacle late at night. (It is not uncommon for cereus flowers to start blooming around 10 p.m. on late 11.)

Beyond past horticultural interest, such occasions made a fine excuse for individuals to socialize while the flowers slowly opened in the background. In Mississippi newspapers alone, cereus references date back to the 1820s—more than a century before Welty and her young companions, inspired by the tradition and craving a little diversion, made a point of frequently sending these cereus. By 1934, they would start calling themselves the Night-Blooming Cereus Club.

(Continued on page 11)



Night-blooming cereus at the home of Brent Labatut, New Roads, LA

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- Pg. 9 *Formal Garden of the Bellamy Mansion, Albemarle*

Correction

In the previous printed issue of *Magnolia* (Vol. XXXVI, No. 1) two beautiful photographs of night-blooming cereus on the cover and page 3, were erroneously credited. The photographer is Brent Labatut of New Roads, Louisiana. The PDF version on the SGHS website has been corrected.

Flora Ann Bynum Medal Award To Jeff Lewis

Dr. A. Jefferson “Jeff” Lewis III received the Flora Ann Bynum Medal at the April 2024 Southern Garden History Society’s annual meeting in Wilmington, NC, April 12-14. The Flora Ann Bynum Medal honors members who have rendered outstanding service to the Society and is named for one of the Society’s founding members.

Lewis has served SGHS as co-chair of the 2008 annual meeting, president of the Society, and an honorary member of the board of directors. He has chaired and served on various committees, assisted with a major revision of the bylaws, aided codification of the Society’s policies and procedures, and more recently defined eligibility and procedures for the Society’s undergraduate scholarship, graduate fellowship, and young professional grant. He has received various awards during his career, but according to him none more appreciated than the Flora Ann Bynum Medal.

Lewis received degrees in horticulture and botany from Clemson University. Following Air Force service in the early 1970s, he returned to Clemson and completed

his Ph.D. in plant physiology. He served as an instructor of horticulture at Clemson, later becoming assistant professor of horticulture at Virginia Tech.



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Gail Griffin and Staci Catron presenting Jeff Lewis with the Flora Ann Bynum Medal.

In 1983, he became associate professor, and later professor, of horticulture at the University of Georgia with full-time responsibilities in extension floriculture. In 1989, he was appointed director of the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, a unit of the university, but remained on the university horticulture faculty until retirement.

Welch Receives William Lanier Hunt Award

William C. “Bill” Welch received the coveted William Lanier Hunt Award at the 2024 Southern Garden History Society’s annual meeting in Wilmington, NC, April 12-14. The Hunt Award recognizes individuals and organizations who have made exceptional contributions to fields closely aligned with the mission and goals of SGHS but goes beyond service just to the Society. It is akin to a lifetime achievement award named in honor of one of the Society’s founders, William Lanier Hunt.

The certificate reads: “The Southern Garden History Society hereby presents the William Lanier Hunt Award to William C. “Bill” Welch recognizing an exceptionally long and preminent career to discover, promote, understand, and preserve Southern garden history.”

Welch received his B. S. Degree in landscape horticulture from Louisiana State University. He later earned his M.S. and Ph.D. in Extension education and horticulture from LSU, joining the Texas A&M University horticulture faculty in 1972.

Welch’s many awards include the Flora Ann Bynum Medal for exceptional service to SGHS. His Hunt Award marks the first time a member has received both honors. He also received the Superior Service Award from Texas A&M for his work in providing educational information to county extension agents and the general public. Other awards include the Distinguished Garden Medal from the



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Bill Welch received the William Lanier Hunt Award from SGHS President Derek Wade.

Garden Club of America, and the Great American Gardeners Award from the American Horticulture Society.

He has worked closely with Texas Garden Clubs in developing landscape design courses and was awarded lifetime membership in TGC.

Welch has written

extensively for various magazines, along with authoring several books: *Perennial Garden Color*, *The Southern Heirloom Garden*, *The Bountiful Flower Garden*, *Heirloom Gardening in the South*, *The Bulb Hunter*, and *The Rose Rustlers*. His speaking engagements have been as prodigious as his publications.



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Awards and Scholarships

The *Flora Ann Bynum Medal* honors members who render outstanding service to SGHS. The medal stands uppermost among SGHS awards. Any current, former, or honorary board member may submit nominations.

The *William Lanier Hunt Award* recognizes members, non-members, and/or organizations that have made an exceptional contribution to fields closely aligned with the mission and goals of SGHS. Any SGHS member may submit nominations.

SGHS bestows the title *Honorary Director* (Board of Directors) on individuals who have rendered exceptional service and have made significant contributions to SGHS. Any current, former, or honorary board member may submit nominations.

SGHS presents the *Certificate of Merit* to a member or non-member whose work (a singular project or collective effort) advances the mission and goals of SGHS. Any SGHS member may submit nominations.

SGHS provides *Undergraduate Scholarships*, *Graduate Fellowships*, and *Young Professional Grants* for the express purpose of attending the annual meeting. Bona fide junior and senior students enrolled in college and university majors relevant to the mission and goals of SGHS are eligible to apply for scholarships. Graduate students studying in germane fields may apply for fellowships. Young professionals within five years of having graduated and working in related disciplines may apply for grants, as well as older individuals who have made career changes within the last five years. SGHS members are urged to promote awareness of these opportunities.

SGHS posts details, eligibility, and directions for submitting applications on the organization's website: www.southerngardenhistory.org. Those without internet access can receive a copy of this information by mail; contact Aimee Moreau, SGHS Administrator.

Annual Membership Dues

The Society's membership year is from *August 1—July 31*.
 Membership categories:

| | |
|---|------------------|
| <i>Benefactor</i> | \$500 and above* |
| <i>Patron</i> | \$250 |
| <i>Sustainer</i> | \$125 |
| <i>Institution or Business</i> | \$100 |
| <i>Joint</i> | \$60 |
| (two individuals living in the same household) | |
| <i>Individual</i> | \$40 |
| <i>Student</i> | \$15 |

*Contact the membership administrator if you would like to pay more than \$500 via credit card. For more membership information, contact:

For more membership information, contact:
 Aimee Moreau, SGHS Administrator
 Post Office Box 631
 New Roads, LA 70760
 Phone: (336) 298-6938
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Email: membership@southerngardenhistory.org

Memberships can now be made electronically on our website!
www.southerngardenhistory.org

Deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of Magnolia is August 15, 2024.

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