



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

Magnolia

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Second Decade of the Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes Conference

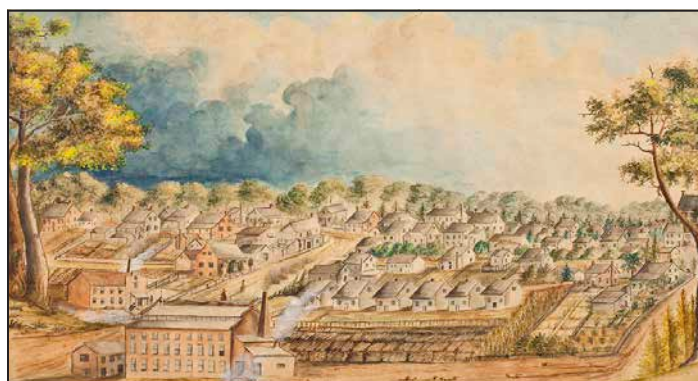
By Kenneth M. McFarland, Brandon, Vermont

Our article “Conference Leaves a Forty-Year Legacy” led off the Summer 2021 *Magnolia* with a look at the founding and early days of Old Salem’s Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes (RSGL) conference. The authors also promised to continue examining RSGL over its long lifespan. Since the 2021 article chiefly focused on the 1979 premier RSGL, much ground remains to be covered.

While participants grew accustomed to biennial conferences, the early offerings were not quite so regular. (Readers are reminded that the respective brochures for each can be seen on the SGHS website under Events/Landscape Conference.) For example, the 1979 event was followed by another in 1980, a year was skipped, and then RSGL for 1982 was followed by another in 1983. Then came a 1985 conference, after which the every-two-year pattern became an unchanging model.

In addition, the early conferences were not always held in the fall; only later did this become standard practice. For example, the first RSGL took place in April 1979, while the third was offered in May 1982. The shift to fall only, however, was not without reason. Our Summer 2021 RSGL article also discussed the founding of the Southern Garden History Society (SGHS). Members of the new group began meeting each spring, thus effectively closing off spring meeting opportunities for RSGL but also cementing the hand-in-glove relationship between Conference and Society.

As well, several noteworthy changes separate the 1985 program from earlier offerings, signaling features that would characterize RSGL for the remainder of its history. First, it ceased to be termed “A Conference for States in the Upper South,” and instead was tagged “A Conference for the Southern States.” Additionally, for the first time, the event was given a unique name, i.e. “400 Years of



Courtesy Old Salem Collection, ACC P 17.

Salem from the west, att. Maria Steiner Denke, ca. 1852, showing the cotton mill in the foreground at the left. The artist was a botany teacher at Salem Academy.

Southern Gardens and Landscapes.” This grew out of current interest, especially in North Carolina, in the 1585 English settlement of the Roanoke Island colony. This was then underscored in Davyd Foard Hood’s keynote talk, “The South—its people and their Landscapes Through 400 Years of History.”¹ In turn, with the interesting exception of the 1987 program, “Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes” became the underlying, generic name of the event until its demise after 2019.

Conference planning continued under the steady

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CALENDAR

April 27-30, 2023. 76th Annual Garden Symposium, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, “Digging the Garden: Horticulture, History, and Archaeology.” Join renowned horticulturists, archaeologists, historians, and guest experts as we examine best practices through an historical lens, using the past to inform the present and future. Featured speakers include garden historian and author Mark Laird, garden writer and television personality Charlie Nardozzi, Missouri Botanical Garden Kemper Center Supervisor Dari McKelvey, and garden and design consultant for the Massachusetts Horticultural Society Kerry Mendez. For more information and registration visit: colonialwilliamsburg.org

June 18-23, 2023. Annual Historic Landscape Institute: “Preserving Jefferson’s Gardens and Landscapes,” in Charlottesville, Virginia. This one-week course uses Monticello’s gardens and landscapes and the University of Virginia as outdoor classrooms to study historic landscape preservation. Lectures, workshops, field trips, and practical working experiences introduce the fields of landscape history, garden restoration, and historical horticulture. Visit: www.monticello.org/hli

Of Interest

An extremely rare, ca. 1850 cobalt-decorated redware flowerpot was sold recently at auction for \$15,000. The flowerpot is part of a small group made by Absalom Bixler in the mid-nineteenth century to commemorate the courting of his wife, Sarah, in 1824. Impressed on the pot is a decorative bird-on-

flower and “ABS. BIXLER. TO HIS WIFE. SARAH 1824” around the rim. Bixler’s bird-decorated flowerpots represent iconic examples of Pennsylvania-German folk art and are rarely made available for sale. The “mate” to this flowerpot resides in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



*Please refer to the SGHS website for upcoming calendar items, descriptions, and links:
www.southerngardenhistory.org*

Second Decade of the Restoring... (continued from page 1)

leadership of Flora Ann Bynum, committee members typically gathering in the snug front room of her Old Salem home. Old Salem staff members joining her included Director of Education and Interpretation Gene Capps and a series of horticulturists, beginning with Robert Hyland, followed in coming years by Phillip Page, Julianne Berckman, and Darrell Spencer, to take readers into the 1990s. Given a long-term connection with the conference facilities of the Museum of Early Decorative Arts (MESDA), it was fitting that by 1985 MESDA Director of Education Sally Gant also joined the committee.² Conference cosponsor, Reynolda Gardens of Wake Forest University, was represented initially by Superintendent Ann Cathey, but by 1982 Reynolda Gardens Superintendent Preston Stockton and Education Coordinator Camilla Wilcox had assumed committee roles they would continue for many years. Readers may recall that Stagville Preservation Center was a third conference sponsor, and through the early 1980s SGHS co-founder John Flowers continued to represent Stagville Preservation Center on the planning committee.³ Subsequently, and for the rest of the 1980s and beyond, that spot was filled by Elizabeth Buford and current *Magnolia* co-editor Ken McFarland.

This committee crafted programs that drew praise from participants while developing a strong platform of steady quality and enjoyability that helped to carry the conference over many coming years. In teasing out various components of this success, it is hard to overstress the importance of the venue. Old Salem offered not only its early Moravian town atmosphere, but it was, beyond that, the organization's keen interest in accurately interpreting Salem's garden layouts and historic plants that offered a starting point for a broader conversation on Southern gardens and landscapes. While conference opening functions and formal presentations typically occurred at the MESDA auditorium, a wide array of scheduled activities also took participants to other Old Salem, Salem College, and Reynolda locations...inside as well as outdoors.

Memorable lodging and dining opportunities complemented these program activities. For example, this writer finds it impossible to recall RSGL conferences without also having fond thoughts of the Brookstown Inn. Just a short walk from Old Salem itself, "The Brookstown" became the principal RSGL hotel in 1987. It was, and is, a fine example of North Carolina's many adaptively reused industrial buildings, the

earliest section having been built by the town's Moravian Church in 1836 as the Salem Cotton Manufacturing Company.⁴ On the dining side, the conference generally provided several dinners and a lunch. These were often set at the Salem Tavern or Reynolda House, and were invariably the place for wonderful historic plant conversations plus more than a little garden gossip. Of course, many new friendships were formed as well.

Perhaps most fundamentally, however, it was the excellence of the RSGL presenters and their topics that

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Sally Gant. May 2016.

Photo by Martha Hartley.



Flora Ann and Zack Bynum.

Courtesy Sally Gant/Old Salem, Inc.

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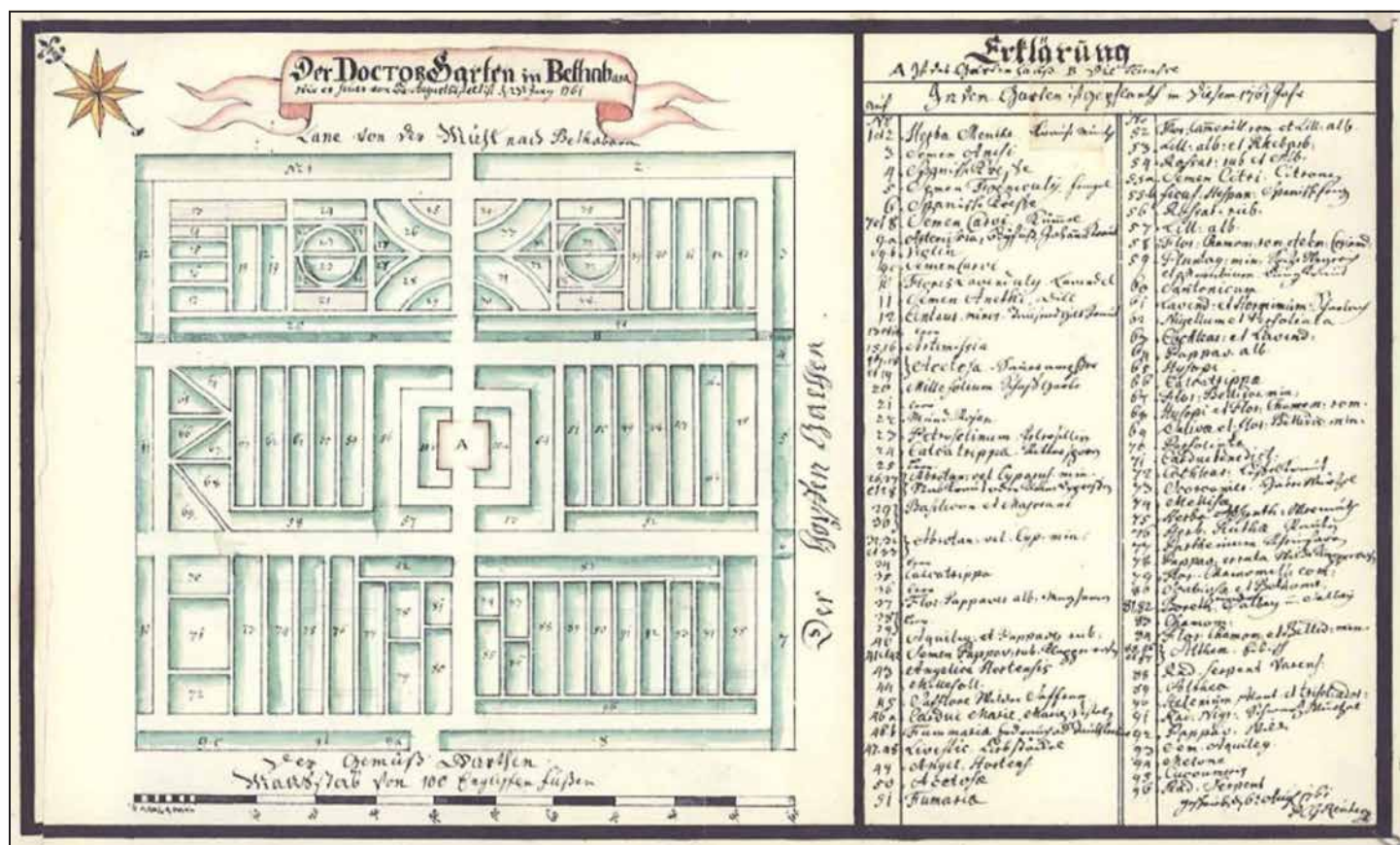
lent the conference a cutting-edge quality. Our Summer 2021 *Magnolia* article, which, as noted, focused mainly on the 1979 program, devoted a paragraph to Garden Club of Virginia landscape architect Rudy Favretti. As mentioned there, Favretti had become a well-known name among students of garden restoration through his and his wife Joy's handy book *Landscapes and Gardens for Historic Buildings* (1978). Rudy would become a versatile RSGL regular, addressing topics of a broader, academic nature, as in his 1982 talk "Gertrude Jekyll's Influence on American Gardens," while also getting "down in the dirt" with such "in-the-field" sessions like "How to Research, Lay out, and Develop a Restored Garden." Such presentations, along with his affable personality, made Rudy Favretti a real hit with conferees.

From its early days, RSGL underscored the

importance of archaeology as a critical tool in the study of historic gardens/landscapes. Indeed, the 1980 program opened a continuing conference dialogue on the topic, with St. Mary's City, Maryland, archaeologist Gary Stone speaking on "Archaeology and the Rediscovery of the Landscape of the Colonial Chesapeake."⁵ The very next



Old Salem from the northwest, ca. 1790.



Hortus Medicus at Bathabara, Christian Gottlieb Reuter, 1761.

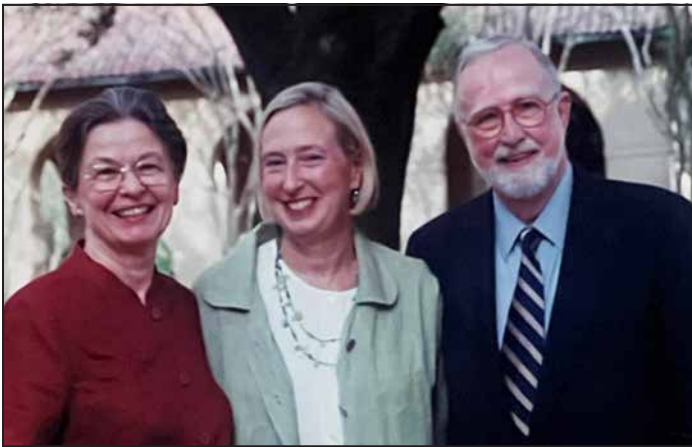
RSGL (1982) then brought in Bill Kelso, at that time Monticello's "resident archaeologist," to give the opening presentation, "The Use of Archaeology in Determining Gardens." To close out RSGL's first decade, John Clauser, Jr., senior archaeologist with the North Carolina Office of State Archaeology, brought the topic close to home with his 1989 talk "Using Archaeology as a Tool in the Restoration of Bethabara's 1759 Upland Garden."⁶ Immediately afterwards, participants toured the Upland Garden site in person, John Clauser being on hand to illuminate points made in his presentation.⁷

RSGL also brought in respected scholars from the university side of historic gardens and landscapes scholarship. Our previous conference article noted that in addition to his other activities, Rudy Favretti also served as a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. RSGL of 1979 also featured Professors George Rogers, University of South Carolina, and Hubert Owens, University of Georgia, School of Environmental Design, to speak on early Charleston

gardens and plantation gardens respectively.⁸ In 1983, RSGL featured another Georgia School of Environmental Design professor, Catherine Howett, whose keynote talk examined "Southern Gardens: Landscapes of Memory, Myth, and Metaphor." (It should be noted that Catherine was also a charter member of SGHS and the third Society president, serving from 1986 to 1988.)

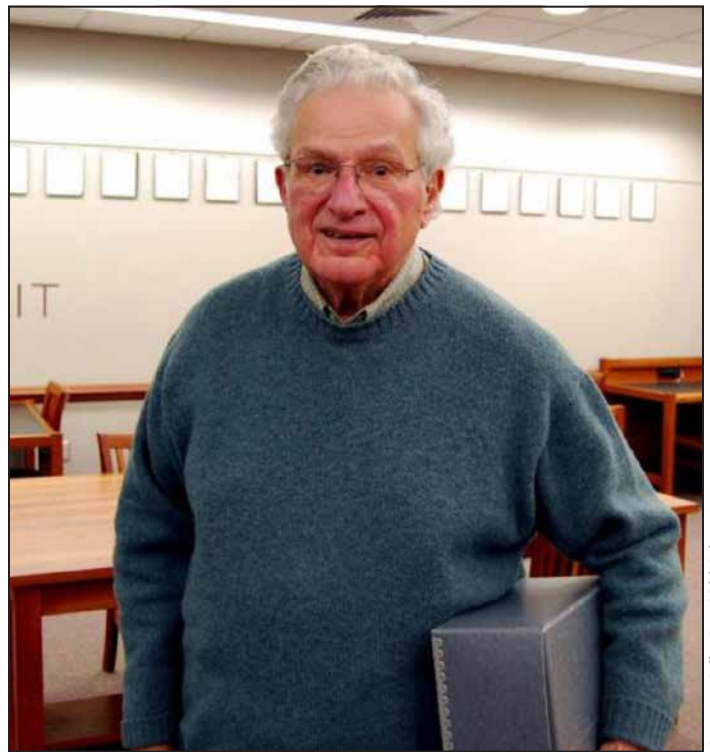
Two years hence Susan Turner, then associate professor of landscape architecture at Louisiana State University, made her first of several RSGL presentations, this one

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Catherine Howett, Susan Turner, and John Howett.

Courtesy Susan Turner.



Rudy Favretti, professor in Landscape Architecture, University of Connecticut.

Courtesy Sally Gant/Old Salem, Inc.



Reynolda Museum & Gardens.

Second Decade of the Restoring... (continued from page 5)

entitled “The Southern Plantation Landscape: Meaning and Myth.” In 1989, she was to keynote the conference with “Gardening for Pleasure in the South: A View from Three Centuries,” a talk echoing that year’s conference theme.⁹ A classmate of Catherine Howett while in the University of Georgia MLA program, Susan was subsequently on the board of SGHS. Readers will surely recall that in 2019 she received the first William Lanier Hunt Award for her impressive body of work relating to the “field of Southern garden history,” to borrow language from the nomination.¹⁰

Topics covered by other speakers helped to expand and deepen the RSGL definition of gardens and landscapes while examining the impact of individuals whose influence extended well beyond the American South. In 1985, Reuben Rainey, then chair of the Division of Landscape Architecture of the University of Virginia, addressed “The Memories of War: Reflections on Battlefield Preservation.” Two years later, Charles Beveridge, editor of *The Olmsted Papers*, 1987 keynote talk introduced us to two Frederick Law Olmsteds. The first was a young Connecticut native who traveled through and wrote extensively about the antebellum Southern states and slavery. The other Olmsted gained great fame as a landscape architect, undertaking many important post-bellum projects in the states that drew his attention before the Civil War.

Given the high quality of RSGL programs, an element of the arbitrary might slip in while highlighting certain speakers and particular talks. For this author, Pat and Jack Holden’s 1987 look at “Maison Chenal’s Louisiana Creole Garden” stands out as especially memorable. (That recollection, moreover, would be made more vivid by a visit to Maison Chenal during the 1991 St. Francisville SGHS annual meeting.) It is easy, of course, to have similar lasting recollections of a 1987 presentation by Harriet Jansma, of Fayetteville, Arkansas, on “Death and



Reuben Rainey (left) “*The Memories of War: Reflections on Battlefield Preservation*,” Brent Heath (right) “*Old Bulbs of Southern Gardens*.”



John Siewers House, 1844. Home of Flora Ann and Zachary Bynum.



Bynum house, setting for RSGL planning committee meetings.

Forsyth County Digital Archives.

Courtesy Sally Gant/Old Salem, Inc.

Habitation: Nineteenth-Century Cemeteries in the South” or of Art Tucker of Delaware State College speaking in 1989 on “Saving and Using Antique Ornamental Plants.”¹¹ Readers who wish to dig deeper are fortunate that the SGHS website provides multi-faceted access to RSGL information, beginning with the previously noted links to each conference brochure. In addition, as time passed *Magnolia* offered increasingly detailed discussions of RSGL programs, both prior to and after each conference. Moreover, a number of pre-conference “Summaries of lectures and suggested readings” will soon be available to website users.

While some events comparable to RSGL might not survive even ten years, the Old Salem event was only beginning its long run of biennial activities as the 1990s opened. Our next *Magnolia* article on the conference’s history will explore reasons for its enduring success, underscoring how RSGL planners continued to broaden the range of garden- and landscape-related themes and subjects that to be brought under discussion.

Endnotes

- 1 Davyd Foard Hood was then employed by the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office.
- 2 For more on Sally Gant’s RSGL involvement, see *Magnolia*, Vol. XXIX, No. 2, Spring 2016, 11.
- 3 Founded as Stagville Preservation Center, this state-owned property in Durham is now known as Historic Stagville. McFarland assumed the job of site manager in 1984.
- 4 Further information on the building’s history can be had at: <https://www.digitalforsyth.org/photos/9367>
- 5 Gary Wheeler Stone went on to focus on Revolutionary War history and retired as historian for the Monmouth Battlefield State Park in New Jersey.
- 6 For further details on Bethabara, visit <https://historicbethabara.org/>
- 7 Ken McFarland North Carolina state editor conference reviews in *Magnolia* start in with 1987 RSGL, Winter 1988, Vol. 4, No. 3, Spring 1988, Vol. 4, No. 4.

- 8 Hubert Owens (1905-1989) found the University of Georgia’s landscape architecture program and went on the head the School of Environmental Design. Further details are at: <https://www.tclf.org/pioneer/hubert-bond-owens>.
- 9 For further details, see K. McFarland conference review, *Magnolia*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Autumn, 1989, 2-3.
- 10 The author wishes to thank Susan Turner for providing details of her friendship and professional relationship with Catherine Howett. For more on her receiving the Hunt Award, see *Magnolia*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2, Spring-Summer 2019.
- 11 Harriet Jansma is a charter member of SGHS, who served as *Magnolia* editor from 1984 until 1990.



Davyd Foard Hood admiring the Reynolda Gardens perennial border.



Cottage in Pointe Coupée Parish.

Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Courtesy Pat and Jack Holden.

Highlights of the History and Cultural Landscape of our Annual Meeting Site: Natchitoches, Louisiana

By Randy Harelson, New Roads, Louisiana

Natchitoches, Louisiana might be seen as where east meets west in early American history. In 1690 the Spanish explorer Alonso de Leon forged a trail following a Native American trade route from Mexico into Texas. That trail's path became the (Spanish) King's Highway, El Camino Real de los Tejas, and after the Civil War, the Old San Antonio Road. Beginning near Mexico City and passing through Texas, it ended in Natchitoches. The similar names of Nacogdoches and Natchitoches recall the Caddo Indian name of the local indigenous people who lived in that part of Texas and Louisiana.

In 1714 Louis Juchereau St. Denis established Fort de Natchitoches along the Red River to defend the western boundaries of New France.¹ Friendly with the indigenous Caddos, St. Denis helped establish Natchitoches as a trading post for the French, Spanish, and Caddo people.

The 2023 host hotel of Southern Garden History Society is Chateau Saint Denis, named for this early leader. Today, not far from the location of St. Denis' original fort built in 1716, stands Fort St. Jean Baptiste, within the historic district of Natchitoches.² The historic replication is based on actual plans from the period. St. Denis commanded the fort from 1722 until his death in 1744. A bronze bust of St. Denis stands guard on Front Street near the riverfront.

The French and Indian War ended in 1763 with the defeat of France, forcing them to cede the Louisiana Territory to Spain. The Spanish governed the territory almost entirely up to the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The complexity of this land dispute, with both Spain

and France fighting for their claim of ownership of Caddo homeland, made for a curious culture of inclusion that in some ways remains in Natchitoches today.



The American Cemetery

The American Cemetery dates to 1737, and is considered by many "the oldest cemetery in the Louisiana Purchase." St. Denis is said to have been buried there, but no marker survives. But a very famous old rose from the American Cemetery does indeed survive. This is the Natchitoches Noisette Rose discovered around 1870 growing among the graves. Today a beloved antique rose, this one is a repeat-bloomer, compact and clean, with light pink flowers, double, cupped, slightly swirled with a strong myrrh fragrance.



St. Augustine Catholic Church, Isle Brevelle

Lunch on Saturday will be served by the ladies of St. Augustine Church in Isle Brevelle, Melrose. St. Augustine is considered the cultural center of the Creole community.



Cane River Plantations

Natchitoches visitors almost always head out to see the remaining plantation homes and farmland still planted with cotton and pecans. Cherokee and Oaklawn are still private homes. Oakland is now owned and managed by the National Park Service.



American Cemetery.



Melrose Plantation.

BonAir Photography

Melrose Plantation

On Saturday evening March 25, dinner will be served on the grounds of Melrose, a home owned and managed by the Association for Preservation of Historic Natchitoches. The complex history of Melrose includes the Metoyer family, mixed race Creoles, often called Creoles of Color. The Metoyers are still active leaders in the Cane River community today.

The plantation is also famous for its mistress Cammie Henry, who moved there around 1900 and lived in the house until she died in 1948. She is most famous for making Melrose a kind of artists' colony and inviting artists such as writers Lyle Saxon, Rachel Field, Ada Jack Carver, Francois Mignon, and Harnett Kane. Painter Alberta Kinsey also enjoyed time at Melrose.

But perhaps Melrose's most famous resident is Clementine Hunter, an artist who spent her entire life on the plantation. Hunter, whose first name is pronounced Clem-en-teen, was born around 1887 and died in 1988. She began painting in the 1930s, inspired and encouraged by artists working at Melrose. Today she has become one of Louisiana's most notable artists.



Clementine Hunter.



A Look at the Movie *Steel Magnolias*

Much as with Savannah and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, Natchitoches, Louisiana also received national attention after the release of the 1989 film *Steel Magnolias*. Today when citizens of Natchitoches talk about history they draw a simple line - before the movie or after the movie.

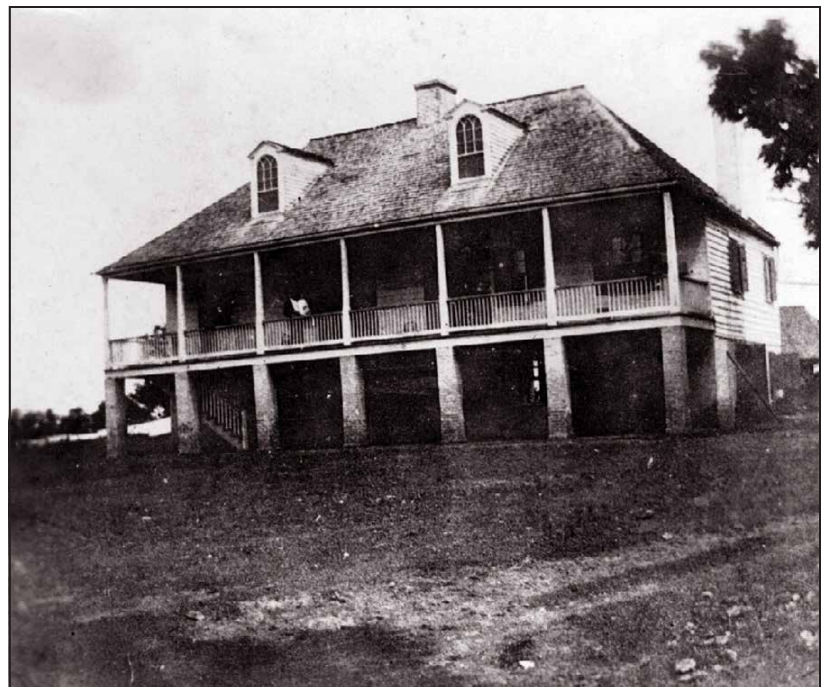
Robert Harling wrote *Steel Magnolias* as a play. The author grew up on the Cane River and wrote his play in just ten days after the death of his sister Susan Harling Robinson in 1985. It took just a few years to reach Hollywood. An amazing cast of stars was assembled: Dolly Parton, Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Daryl Hannah, Olympia Dukakis, and newcomer Julia Roberts as Shelby, the character who represents the playwright's sister Susan. *Steel Magnolias* was one of those films that reached an enormous audience because it touched on tender humanity through humor and character. In the South we love "characters" - that means people with all the quirks and failings of the human species. Bless their hearts. *Steel Magnolias* was filmed entirely on location in and around Natchitoches. Today

Robert Harling lives at Oaklawn Plantation on the Cane River.³

At a 2019 screening at the Turner Classic Movies Film Festival, Robert Harling said, "Part of the magic of film is that people know the story, they know the actresses, they know it's been translated into a zillion languages, and the fact that this simple story of a small American town and a community of women reaches out and speaks to everyone around the world...What writer wouldn't love that universality!"

Endnotes

- 1 In 1699 a French-Canadian soldier and explorer named Louis Juchereau de St. Denis commanded a fort south of what was to become New Orleans. Originally called Fort Mississippi, it had been renamed Fort de la Boulaye by the time of St. Denis's arrival.
- 2 Fort St. Jean Baptiste is managed as a Louisiana State Park. The park's website says, "*The fort replication was based upon Ignace Francois Broutin's plans and on extensive archival research in Louisiana, Canada and France. Construction began in 1979 under the direction of the late Samuel Wilson, Jr. and the Louisiana Office of State Parks. Building materials were obtained locally, and many 18th-century techniques were employed in the replication. Nearly 2,000 treated pine logs form the palisade and approximately 250,000 board feet of treated lumber went into the construction of the buildings. All of the hinges and latches were handmade at a nearby foundry. Further historical research is ongoing.*"
- 3 Born in 1951, Robert Harling graduated from Northwestern State University in Natchitoches and then went on to Tulane for a law degree.



Melrose Plantation -The Big House. Photo taken during the Hertzog era-1847-1881.

Patti McGee – A Remembrance

Evelyn “Patti” McGee of Sullivan’s Island, South Carolina, passed away on November 11, 2022, after a long illness, surrounded by her loving family. Patti had a long history with the Southern Garden History Society, serving on the board for many years and, in 1989, she also joined the advisory board for a new national nonprofit, The Garden Conservancy. The following remembrance was written by her close friend and SGHS board member Susan McLeod Epstein of Charleston, South Carolina.



Patti McGee first appeared on my radar when I was just getting back into the professional world of horticulture after raising two children. I visited her garden on one of the spring tours and fell in love with her collection of clivias. I wonder how many people she influenced over the years with her clivias and how many of us are cultivating and cherishing that collection? I know I am.

It was over twenty years ago that we became friends, when I would often call her to ask if she would put her garden on tour. She was always generous with opening her garden, but she was not content with just a “warm body” as a garden docent. She wanted someone knowledgeable, with a passion for plants. That is where the “CHS Docent Course” was born. I would often docent for her and if I could not, I would find someone that was the perfect fit. She quickly became my mentor and teacher, and her garden became a place of learning. I often stopped by to see what new plants were in the garden that I needed to learn about and possibly even grow. If Patti was growing it, then I needed to grow it as well. I watched as her garden transitioned from a sun garden to a shade garden. Gradually, she too had to learn a whole new plant pallet. She introduced us to so many new plants and insisted the Latin name be learned as well as the common name.

Patti frequently opened her garden for out-of-town private groups in Charleston. She and Peter loved to entertain, especially in the garden. She had a gardening reputation from friends near and far and frequently she and her garden were the ones most requested. I do not recall one group that she turned down and even at times, if she could not be there, she

would allow small groups to dine and tour the garden in her absence.

Patti also was passionate about history and especially Charleston’s rich garden history. Garden historian Jim Cothran would visit from Atlanta and between the two of them, I found myself immersed in plants and our history—and then eventually on the board of the Southern Garden History Society. Members of the Society were the rock stars of my world, and I immediately had standing because I was a friend of both Patti’s and Jim’s. In 2016, I chaired the Annual Meeting of the SGHS in Charleston, and Patti had offered to host the Thursday night board dinner. Not long before the event, Patti and Peter sold their beloved house and garden on Anson Street and informed me they were moving to Sullivan’s Island but not to worry, they would still host the supper. Not only was the new garden ready, but she also made succulent centerpieces that everyone adored.

Shortly before she died, I was able to visit with Patti and she was as optimistic as ever, planning what she wanted to add or change in the garden. I will always have fond memories of Patti as she was a dear friend, constant inspiration, and teacher in my life. Thinking of her, I am reminded of the quote by Vita Sackville West “The most noteworthy thing about gardeners is that they are always optimistic, always enterprising, and never satisfied. They always look forward to doing something better than they have ever done before.” That was Patti, and she will be sorely missed, but her memory is well rooted in my life and garden.

Susan McLeod Epstein



Evelyn Moore McGee.

Courtesy Garden Conservancy.

Southern Garden History Society

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August 1, 2021 – July 31, 2022

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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.

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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 Rebecca Hodson, SGHS Administrator.

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

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Rebecca Hodson, SGHS Administrator
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