



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

# Magnolia

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## 39<sup>th</sup> SGHS Annual Meeting in Natchitoches

By Adam Martin, Atlanta, Georgia

Louisiana welcomed the Southern Garden History Society again after twelve years. The last meeting was held in Baton Rouge in 2011. That visit was preceded by the meeting at Mount Vernon in 2010, so it is befitting that we again returned to Louisiana following the 2022 gathering in Alexandria and Mount Vernon. This year we visited a small town that many members may know but struggle to pronounce as locals do, and even fewer can spell: Natchitoches (Nak-o-tish).

The city is located 165 miles northwest of Baton Rouge along the Cane River.

Randy Harelson acted as both Society President and lead organizer for this meeting, which was five years in the making. Indefatigable and a ceaseless promoter of others, his infectious excitement guided and motivated the dozens of people who helped create a hospitable and welcoming weekend.

Natchitoches greeted members with open doors, warm smiles, and even a welcome sign across from the hotel on Friday morning, March 24. Members were free to explore the city's historic sites, churches, shops, American Cemetery, and campus of Northwestern State University at their own pace. At each site, docents were excited to introduce us to their city and teach us about their history. A local garden club created fresh flower arrangements at Trinity Episcopal Church for our benefit. The American Cemetery offered a quiet moment for reflection under the tree canopies. Appreciating the warm spring weather just as much as we were the displays of potted tulips, at peak bloom, across the city. Clouds gradually filled the skies as the morning progressed; eventually, the threatening rain encouraged members back to the Chateau Saint Denis Hotel in time to convene at the Natchitoches Events



Photo by Thomas Baker.

*SGHS members gather beneath the spreading live oak at Melrose Plantation.*

Center for the afternoon business meeting and four lectures.

Jeffery Girard opened the lectures with a macro examination of the geology and indigenous people of the area. Girard first explained the origins of the Red River which traces its headwaters in New Mexico. Physically oriented, we were then introduced to the Caddo peoples who lived in the region for millennia, and it is from them Natchitoches gets its name. Suzanne Turner introduced

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## William Lanier Hunt Award Presentation

During the SGHS annual meeting Evelyn “Patti” McGee was presented posthumously with the William Lanier Hunt Award. The award recognizes professionals, accomplished nonprofessionals, and organizations that have made exceptional contributions to fields closely aligned with the mission and goals of SGHS. These fields include, but are not limited to, land conservation, garden design and preservation, landscape and garden history, ecology, botanical art, and botanical and horticultural knowledge. The award is equivalent to a lifetime achievement award. The SGHS board unanimously approved of this presentation.

The following acceptance letter was read by Beverly Rivers, Patti’s close friend of over thirty years, on behalf of the family.

*Dear Chairman Jeff Lewis and Members of the Southern Garden History Society,*

*We are deeply honored and touched that you have awarded Patti McGee, our wife and mother, the William Lanier Hunt Award posthumously. There is no doubt in our mind that mom would be overjoyed to receive this honor. She deeply respected the Southern Garden History Society and was a proud member of the board of directors for many years.*

*Mom’s love of gardening grew out of her deep love of Charleston and her desire to create and nourish beautiful and contemplative places in both her home and in the city that she loved. She was always striving to improve the world, one perennial at a time! During her years on the board of the Garden Conservancy she worked tirelessly to help preserve important gardens all*

*around the country. One of her favorite projects was saving the Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden. We are delighted to learn that Elizabeth Lawrence was a close friend of William Lanier Hunt; a fact that mom certainly knew but we did not.*

*Of the many honors our mom has received over the years for her gardening work this award resonates deeply with our family. She was after all a Southerner, a gardener, and a former history teacher, so this truly captures many of her passions.*

*Thank you so much for recognizing her lasting legacy in the world of horticulture and the South and honoring her with this meaningful tribute.*

*With deep gratitude,*

*Peter McGee, Madeleine McGee, Evelyn McGee Colbert, and the rest of the McGee, Wichmann, and Colbert families*



Photo by Jeff Abr.

*Nomination Chair Jeff Lewis with Beverly Rivers, Patti McGee’s long-time friend from Charleston, SC.*

**The Southern Garden History Society has sadly lost several important members in the past year.** The Society’s website includes a remembrance by Susan Hitchcock of long-time member Frances Parker, who died in Beaufort, SC, on May 6, 2022. The website also includes a remembrance of Joel Fry, curator of Bartram’s Garden in Philadelphia, who died March 21, 2023.



Photo by Susan Hitchcock.

*Frances Parker visiting the gardens of Mottisfont, a National Trust Property in Hampshire, England, in 2009.*

**Mark Your Calendars:** The 2024 annual meeting of the Southern Garden History Society will be held in Wilmington, North Carolina, April 12-14.



## 39<sup>th</sup> SGHS Annual Meeting... (continued from page 1)

us to the dynamic culture of the Creole that developed from the various cultures that influenced the area over the last four hundred years. Her lecture reviewed the unique architecture and landscapes that developed from the various influences of the Spanish, French, and African traditions. She addressed efforts to preserve the physical and intangible elements of this unique culture. The next lecture was a natural progression into the methods utilized to document physical structures and landscape elements with 3D photogrammetry. The presenter was Jason Church of the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training, which is located on the Northwestern State University campus in Natchitoches. Landscape architect Jeffrey Carbo gave the final lecture, presenting several of his landscape designs that draw on the historical context of the area to create contemporary

landscapes. Carbo reviewed his process for determining materials, plants, and forms that respect historic traditions but function for his clients today. Society members would visit one of these landscapes along the Cane River the following day.

Friday evening cocktail hour and dinner were also served locally, at Merci Beaucoup, a short walk from the hotel. With libations in hand, members had plenty of time to catch up with old friends and get to know new faces. Those wishing to get rest returned to the hotel to prepare for the busy day ahead. Several local establishments

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Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Welcome sign at the Natchitoches Visitor Center.

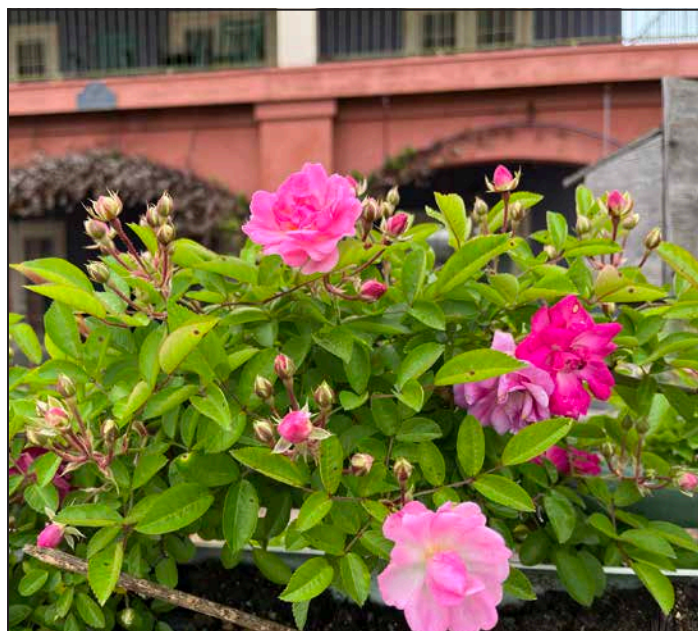


Photo by Peggy Cornett.

'Peggy Martin' Rose across for the Chateau St. Denis Hotel and meeting headquarters.



Photo by Jeff Abt.

Andrea Sprott presenting her PowerPoint-illustrated talk on the friendship of Caroline Dormon and Elizabeth Lawrence.



Photo by Jeff Abt.

Randy Harelson and Jeff Lewis with Susan Haltom, who was named honorary board member along with Gordon Chappell (who was not at the meeting).



## 39<sup>th</sup> SGHS Annual Meeting... (continued from page 3)

greeted anyone looking for additional conversation. Curious regulars quickly welcomed us visitors, happy and proud to tell us more about their city.

On Saturday morning, lectures continued across the street from the hotel at the Events Center. Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation Executive Director, Nicole Hobson-Morris, answered audience questions with poise as technology issues were resolved. Hobson-Morris reviewed how the people and places concentrated along the Cane River tie in with the broader historical perspective of the state of Louisiana and her division's efforts to promote and protect those resources. Next, Dustin Fuqua, who is a cultural resource program manager at the Cane River Creole NHP shifted the focus to two sites that members would visit later in the afternoon, Oakland and Magnolia plantations.

During breaks, members had the opportunity to purchase books at the pop-up bookstore, "The Conundrum." A diverse selection of fiction and non-

fiction items relevant to the area and lectures was available for those interested in learning more. Members were able to buy the book by the next lecturer, Wayne Stromeyer, co-authored with Trenton James, *Early Camellias in Louisiana*. Stromeyer recounted how he and James found themselves on a journey to find and save historic camellia varieties in Louisiana, and then the arduous task of identifying the unknown varieties they discovered. Rounding out the morning lectures, Andrea Sprott of



Jason Church, chief of technical services division, NCPTT.

Photo by Jeff Abr.



Archaeologist and author Jeffrey Girard.

Photo by Jeff Abr.



Landscape Architect Jeffrey Carbo, whose private garden on the Cane River was visited.

Photo by Jeff Abr.



SGHS Treasurer Gail Griffin was awarded the Certificate of Merit for facilitating the scanning and indexing of all issues of *Magnolia*, which are now easily searchable through our website.

Photo by Jeff Abr.



the Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden revealed the friendship between Caroline Dormon and Elizabeth Lawrence. Sprott detailed how the two garden writers started and continued corresponding. Through many quotes from their letters, she expertly wove together a story that not only revealed their friendship but also the personalities of both women.

Primed with context about the geology, culture, and history of the landscape, members were ready for a full afternoon visiting six sites along the Cane River. The first stop was to St. Augustine Catholic Church, which serves as a social center for the Cane River Creole community on Isle Brevelle. The Confraternity of Christian Mothers welcomed us with warm smiles and a delicious lunch of rice and beans, meat pies, and rum-infused bread pudding that fed both body and soul. Congregants recounted the history of their ancestors who created the church revealing tangible connections that made the people and traditions relevant and interesting today. Most poignant was the recital of the community matriarchy's personal history, Marie Thérèse (Coincoin), by her descendant

who managed to channel and translate the essence of her ancestor showing the significance of her story to audiences today. Melrose Plantation, which was built by Thérèse's enslaved descendants, was the site for Saturday's dinner and tours. Fr. Charles B. Ray invited us to visit the church, and he entertained members with charismatic energy.

Traveling upriver, members visited Oakland Plantation at the Cane River Creole National Historical Park and the privately owned Cherokee Plantation House. Both plantations were started by French Creoles and produced

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Photo by Peggy Cornett.

*SGHS president and annual meeting coordinator Randy Harelson leading tours at Melrose Plantation.*



Photo by Staci Carron.

*African House at Melrose Plantation.*



Photo by Charles Perilloux.

*Cherokee Plantation*



Photo by Staci Carron.

*Members gather at Oakland Plantation with wine bottle courtyard.*



## 39<sup>th</sup> SGHS Annual Meeting... (continued from page 5)

various cash crops, most prominently cotton through the labors of enslaved people. Members were allowed to explore Oakland Plantation's forty-five acres that contain approximately forty historic structures. Significant features include the 1821 main house, bottle garden, live oak allée, cabins of enslaved people, overseer's house, plantation store, doctor's cottage, cook's cabin, carpenter shop, and various agricultural structures. The bottle-lined parterres

were filled with verdant new growth of perennials and bulbs capturing the attention of many members. Climbing the steps up to the porch gave members a better view to identify plants and the different kinds of bottles used to line the beds.

At Cherokee Plantation, a banana shrub (*Magnolia figo*, formerly *Michelia figo*) greeted – or accosted depending on your olfactory preference – members with



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Clementine Hunter grave marker at St. Augustine cemetery.

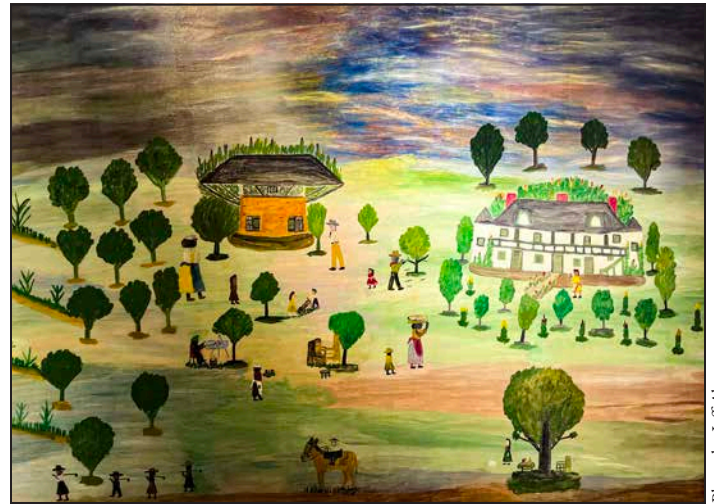


Photo by Jeff Abt.

Clementine Hunter's painting of the African House and Melrose Plantation House.



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

The Confraternity of Christian Mothers graciously prepared and shared lunch at the St. Augustine Catholic Church.



Photo by Charles Perilloux.

St. Augustine Church.



its heavy and exotic banana fragrance. Tom Whitehead, professor emeritus at Northwestern State University gave members a tour of the sumptuous interiors filled with historic furniture and vibrant wallpapers. The high canopy of the live oak allée easily accommodated the buses upon our departure back to the hotel.

After a quick refresh and change of clothes, members were drawn back to the busses by the promise of beautiful gardens and libations on a visit to a private residence along the Cane River. Introduced the prior day by designer Jeffrey Carbo, they were set free to explore the beautifully designed landscape with a drink and snack. Live oaks were planted around a round sunken bowl, Carbo's modern interpretation of the traditional driveway lined allée. Formal gardens close to the residence dissolved into naturalistic fern glades and a bog garden along the river full of flowering Louisiana iris.

As mentioned previously, the final stop of the day was to Melrose Plantation where members learned more about the Black Creole Metoyer family who started the

plantation and successive owners including Carmelite (Cammie) Garrett Henry, who purchased the property in 1899 with her husband John. Cammie restored the structures on the property and expanded the main house. She also saved threatened historic structures and art across the parish, moving them to Melrose. She hosted many writers and artists at Melrose during the early twentieth century. Members were able to see books inspired or written at Melrose on the bookshelves in the main house.

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Photo by Jeff Abt.

*Atamasco Lilies, Zephyranthes atamasca.*



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

*Ca. 1965 photo displayed at Briarwood of Caroline Dormon leaning against her favorite longleaf pine, "Grandpappy." USDA Forestry Service.*



Photo by Jeff Abt.

*Flame Azalea at Briarwood.*



Photo submitted by Peggy Cornett.

*Peggy Cornett with Grandpappy longleaf pine.*



## 39<sup>th</sup> SGHS Annual Meeting... (continued from page 7)

They also saw many paintings by self-taught Black folk artist Clementine Hunter who was born not far from Melrose. It is her painting, *Zinnias*, that illustrated the meeting brochure and promotional materials. Hunter painted scenes from daily life, giving her audience a glimpse into African American lives. Her artwork was on spectacular display in the loft of the Africa House where Hunter painted different scenes creating a 360-degree installation. After tours and exploring the many structures onsite, members convened for dinner and fellowship under a tent on the lawn.

Sunday morning was free for final goodbyes with friends not attending the afternoon picnic at Briarwood Nature Preserve, the home of Caroline Dormon. Members who did attend the Briarwood tour started with a delectable box lunch under a pavilion at the preserve and then convened under the pines before splitting off to explore the gardens. Paths snaked through forests revealing many flowering native species. The flame azaleas (*Rhododendron austrinum*) and sweet shrubs (*Calycanthus floridus*) were at peak bloom. Standing beneath a massive and rare longleaf pine, which Dormon called “Grandpappy,” was a highlight for many. Members were

invited into Dormon’s log cabin, which was decorated with natural memorabilia, handmade art, pressed botanicals, and Dormon’s books. After wandering through the rooms once to view her collections, a second stroll through allowed more time to connect to the essence of the space and tangentially, Dormon. Nature decided it was time to wrap up our visit and the weekend as thunderstorms tracked east toward us. Our departure was well timed, a few miles down the road the rain started, following our coach back to Natchitoches. Back at the hotel, remaining members reminisced on the events of the weekend and said goodbye to the next wave of people departing after the storms passed. Members electing to stay one final night serendipitously gravitated to the same restaurant for food and one last opportunity to foster new connections and deepen existing friendships, thus strengthening the foundations of the Society.



Local student attendees Gloria Church and Mason Medler at Caroline Dormon's house in Briarwood.



Tour group at Briarwood Nature Preserve.



Greg Grant leading nature walk at Briarwood and noting rare native *Amsonia*.



# Battling Boxwood Blight in Historic American Gardens

By Keeli Michael Windham, Madison, Georgia

## Introduction to boxwood blight

Boxwood is a quintessential garden shrub that has been used in landscape design since ancient times. The beloved evergreen is an irreplaceable component of American gardening history as gardeners have used boxwood in their designs since our country's founding. Today, many historic gardens retain historic boxwood that are, for distinct reasons, irreplaceable. However, boxwood blight is threatening the future of this cherished shrub in historic American gardens.

The fungal pathogen *Calonectria pseudonaviculata* causes boxwood blight in the United States while in Europe it is caused by both *C. pseudonaviculata* and *C. henricotiae*. According to the Horticultural Research Institute, the most common first symptoms of boxwood blight are light to dark brown, circular leaf spots with dark borders, followed by rapid defoliation (particularly in the lower canopy) and black streaks on infected stems.<sup>1</sup> If left unaddressed, boxwood blight leads to plant death. The boxwood blight pathogens produce infectious spores (conidia) that are incredibly sticky and are easily spread via contaminated garden tools, clothing, shoes, and animals. Boxwood blight thrives in temperatures ranging from 64°F to 77°F (18 to 25° C) with moist conditions as the blight pathogens require water to produce spores for germination to cause infection. Boxwood blight can also spread through its microsclerotia that survive in soil and plant debris. Landscaping tools that can become vectors for the disease include pruners, saws, rakes, hoses, equipment, tarps, gloves, vehicles, and other maintenance or installation accessories. Boxwood blight can also travel long-distance through the introduction of infected boxwood to existing plantings.<sup>2</sup>

Boxwood blight was first reported in the United States in 2011 and has since extended to many Southern, Eastern, Midwestern, and Western states.<sup>3</sup> Historic gardens, both public and private, are being targeted due to the pathogen's highly transferrable nature as well as the type of boxwood present in historic landscapes. Particularly susceptible to boxwood blight are the dwarf English boxwood (*B. sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa') and the American boxwood (*B.*

*sempervirens*).<sup>4</sup> The English and American boxwood are the most common boxwood planted in historic American gardens.

Because there is no cure for the disease, the horticulture industry has outlined boxwood blight best management practices (BMPs)<sup>5</sup>, which are available to assist in preventing the introduction of the disease and helping to manage the disease if infection is present. Guidance on boxwood blight BMPs is steadily updated and published as new research and findings are available.<sup>6</sup> Extension agencies, such as the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension, Purdue Extension, and Virginia Cooperative Extension, publish research outlining boxwood blight BMPs. One of the leaders in publishing the most current guidance regarding all aspects of boxwood blight BMPs for the ornamental horticultural industry is the international USDA-funded Horticultural Research Institute Boxwood Blight Insight Group (BBIG). BBIG is a group of scientists working on a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture – Specialty Crop Research Initiative project. The four-year boxwood blight program, which began in 2020, is the largest federally funded research initiative ever conducted on boxwood.<sup>7</sup>

Preventative BMPs include sanitizing tools, mulching to reduce spore-splash, and scouting for early signs of infection. Another preventative BMP includes not shearing boxwood to reduce thick interior growth which

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The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Removal of historic eighty-plus year-old boxwood at the Governor's Palace West Privy Garden at Colonial Williamsburg. "Boxwood Blight Strikes Colonial Williamsburg." Accessed May 15, 2023. Garden & Gun Magazine.



## Battling Boxwood Blight... (continued from page 9)

reduces light and airflow. There are two BMP strategies for the management of blight-infected boxwood. The first strategy is to protect and maintain diseased boxwood, implementing BMPs like sanitation, mulching, and no shearing, with the second management strategy being the complete removal and replacement of infected boxwood.<sup>8</sup>

While there are publications available regarding boxwood blight BMPs, guidance regarding BMPs that focus specifically on boxwood at historic sites has not been outlined. This is an issue because the current BMPs do not consider some of the constraints of managing a historical site. For example, certain historic properties are unable to use mulch in their gardens because the material would not have been available historically, thus resulting in a historically inaccurate garden. In other instances, boxwood maintained as edging and *parterres*, amongst other forms, must be sheared to keep their historical appearance. Another issue unique to historic sites is the removal of infected boxwood, a suggested management BMP. Non-historic properties can easily remove diseased boxwood and replace it with a less susceptible cultivar; however, for historic sites, removal and replacement is the last resort because their boxwood is historically important because of their age, associations with important historic figures, connections to important eras of landscape design, and much more.



### Thesis research

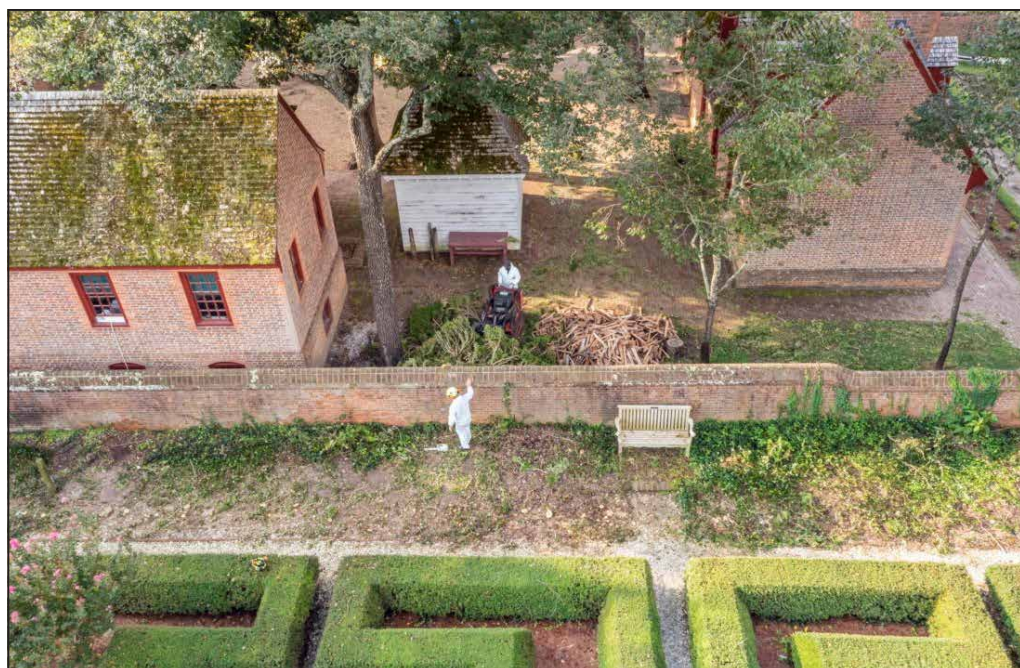
Having read dozens of news releases and publications highlighting the continued devastation of boxwood blight at historic sites, I decided to focus my Master of Landscape Architecture graduate thesis on the impact of boxwood blight in historic American gardens. The subject presented an opportunity to dive into three topics that are close to my heart: horticulture, historic preservation, and landscape design. The research, which took place between the fall of 2021 and the fall of 2022, was spurred by three issues: the lack of published material pertaining to boxwood blight in historic gardens, specifically what was being done to combat or manage the disease

and its success, in combination with the rapid spread of the disease and the absence of a cure. The intent of the research was to produce a resource for historic garden managers, documenting the BMPs currently implemented at historic sites (to prevent blight and to manage blight) and highlighting the overall effectiveness of the different methods.

During my research, I conducted interviews with historic site managers and garden curators at eleven historic American sites. Categorized by state, the eleven survey sites are as follows: *Georgia*: Hills & Dales Estate (LaGrange), Founders Memorial Garden (Athens), and Swan House (Atlanta); *North Carolina*: Biltmore (Asheville) and Carl Sandburg Home National Historic Site (Flat Rock); *Virginia*: Montpelier (Montpelier Station), Mount Vernon (Mount Vernon), Colonial Williamsburg (Williamsburg), and Stratford Hall (Stratford); *Massachusetts*: Peace field (Quincy) and Longfellow House National Historic Site (Cambridge). Of the sites surveyed, I was able to visit Hills & Dales Estate, Founders Memorial Garden, and Biltmore. Additionally, I had the opportunity to travel to Mount Vernon for the 2022 Southern Garden History Society's annual meeting as a recipient of the James R. Cothran Graduate Fellowship.

The overarching goal of the survey interviews was to identify what boxwood blight BMPs were currently implemented, if any.

Of the eleven historic sites, Hills & Dales Estate, Swan



The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

*After boxwood removal, the Colonial Williamsburg Landscapes team implemented recommended management BMPs which included the disposal of all material from the site and burning the remaining debris. "Boxwood Blight Strikes Colonial Williamsburg." Accessed May 15, 2023. Garden & Gun Magazine.*



House, and Colonial Williamsburg were implementing BMPs to manage current boxwood blight infections which included fungicide applications, sanitation, scouting, excluding new boxwood from the site, and quarantining gardens from visitors. These three sites had experienced the spread of the disease and continual reinfection in their gardens, despite applying all the optimal boxwood blight BMPs that are recommended by the horticultural industry for boxwood blight management. Thus, it was concluded that boxwood blight BMPs being applied to *manage* the disease had not proven effective at these historic sites. In contrast, research results showed that the application of BMPs to *prevent* the introduction of the disease on site had the potential to be effective. Mount Vernon, Biltmore Estate, Montpelier, Stratford Hall, Longfellow House, Peace field, and Founders Memorial Garden were applying preventative boxwood blight BMPs. Preventative boxwood blight BMPs include sanitation, scouting, and excluding new boxwood from the site. The research showed the application of preventative BMPs may be effective for one of two reasons: because the preventative BMPs are successful or because the sites have not yet experienced the introduction of the pathogen. Further research should be conducted to determine the efficacy of all proposed boxwood blight BMPs, whether they be for the prevention or management of boxwood blight.

Considering the intense pressures of dealing with a rapidly spreading, highly destructive, and incurable disease under the constraints of maintaining a historic site, historic garden managers continue to face the issue with patience and poise. There are general recommendations for historic site managers in conclusion to my research:

First, historic sites should focus on maintaining healthy boxwood by evaluating boxwood cultivation conditions, addressing conditions that are not optimal, and providing proper maintenance and care. Improving the boxwood environment and providing optimal care can improve boxwood health to create a more resilient plant as a preventative measure for boxwood blight. Managers of historic sites are encouraged to create a boxwood blight action/readiness plan in the situation where blight has been identified on site. Additionally, they are encouraged to continue to educate themselves on this disease, including visitor awareness programs.

Historic sites with no current blight are encouraged to apply all preventative boxwood blight BMPs that can be used under the constraints of managing their historical site. Sites with current blight on site are encouraged to remain vigilant in their applications of BMPs to manage the disease and prevent further infection of other historic boxwood on site.

Protecting the longevity of boxwood in historic American gardens ensures an irreplaceable piece of our gardening history is preserved and we can all do our part

by educating ourselves on the disease specifics, becoming familiar with early signs of infection, and providing support to our historic American sites as they battle with boxwood blight.



## Endnotes

- 1 Marc Cubeta et al., *Best Management Practices: Boxwood Health Production and Landscape Management* The Horticultural Research Institute (Columbus, Ohio, 2020).
- 2 Cubeta et al., *Best Management Practices: Boxwood Health Production and Landscape Management*; Chuan Hong, "Saving American Gardens from Boxwood Blight," *The Boxwood Bulletin* 58, no. 3 (2019), [https://boxwoodsociety.org/uploads/58\\_3\\_2019\\_Spring.pdf](https://boxwoodsociety.org/uploads/58_3_2019_Spring.pdf).
- 3 Ivors, "Prevention and Management of Boxwood Blight;" Hong, "Saving American Gardens from Boxwood Blight."
- 4 Ganci, Ivors, and Benson, *Susceptibility of Commercial Boxwood Cultivars to Boxwood Blight*.
- 5 Best management practices (BMPs) are horticultural industry standards governing all aspects of plant or species-specific management and care, from correct pruning techniques to pest and disease management.
- 6 Adria Bordas et al., "Best Management Practices for Boxwood Blight for Professionally Managed Landscapes and Public and Historic Gardens in Virginia," (September 26, 2016: Virginia Cooperative Extension, November 15, 2021 2016), Extension Service Publication. <https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=2388>.
- 7 "Boxwood Blight Insight Group," Horticultural Research Institute 2022, <https://www.boxwoodhealth.org/>.
- 8 Virginia Cooperative Extension, "Expanding on the Boxwood Blight Management Decision Guide."



## About the author:

Keeli Michael Windham is a historical landscape architect and horticulturist. Having received her degrees from the University of Georgia, Keeli had the opportunity to work as a graduate assistant for the College of Environment + Design for three years as a consultant on projects involving historic landscape master planning and management, historical restoration design, and heritage plant research. Her graduate thesis research focused on the impact of boxwood blight in historic American gardens, investigating the management techniques involved with protecting *Buxus sp.* Keeli has established a landscape design practice, *KMW Historic Landscapes & Gardens*, out of Madison, Georgia, specializing in historical landscape architecture.

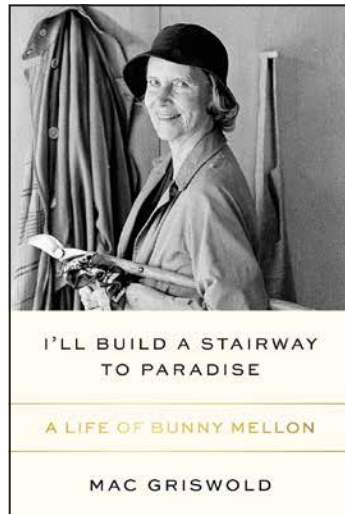


# Book Review

*I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise: A Life of Bunny Mellon*  
by Mac Griswold, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, publisher  
| hardcover, 560 pages, 2022 | ISBN-10: 0374279888,  
ISBN-13: 978-0374279882 | List Price \$40

In life and death, remembered as a socialite, gardener, garden designer, collector, patron, and philanthropist, Bunny Mellon has enjoyed a strong, seemingly unflinching, hold on the imagination and admiration of many. A woman of lifelong privilege, she was born in New York City on 9 August 1910, née Rachel Lowe Lambert, the daughter of Gerard Barnes Lambert (1886-1967), successively president of Gerard B. Lambert Company, Lambert Pharmacal (later Warner-Lambert, now a part of Pfizer), Lambert & Feasley, and the Gillette Safety Razor Company. The days of her late childhood and youth were lived at Albemarle, the Lambert estate at Princeton, New Jersey, where the mansion designed by Harrie T. Lindeberg (1880-1959) stood on grounds created by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957). Bunny Lambert was enrolled as a student at Foxcroft School, Middleburg, Virginia, in 1926 and graduated in the class of 1929.

In the event 1929 was a fateful year for multiple reasons. Having sold his stock in Lambert Pharmacal in 1928, Gerard Lambert had divested himself of virtually all of his stock holdings by mid 1929 and thereby avoided the losses suffered by so many others in the October market crash and subsequent declines. Lambert's purchase of Carter Hall, a late-eighteenth-century stone house on substantial acreage at Millwood, Clarke County, Virginia, in 1929 would also prove influential in his daughter's life. There, she saw first-hand her father's second employment of Harrie T. Lindeberg, to dramatically improve and expand the country house. The rural estate grounds of Carter Hall, now a mansion, were also enhanced, and it was here that Bunny Lambert first practiced her talents as a designer and gardener in the period before her marriage in 1932. On 26 November she became the wife of Stacy Barcroft Lloyd Jr. (1908-1994), a handsome, well-born Philadelphian, ardent equestrian, and Princeton graduate. By late 1933, having resided briefly in Pennsylvania, the Lloyds returned



to Carter Hall to live. Stacy Lloyd bought and published *The Clarke Courier*, the local newspaper, and next launched *The Chronicle of the Horse*. In 1937 Stacy and Bunny Lloyd, now the parents of a son, bought a small acreage adjoining Carter Hall on which to build their own house. Charles Newman Read (1886-1956), a now little-known architect, designed a handsome two-story stone house for the couple, perfectly-sited, substantial, elegant and well-built, whose charm and presence would echo years later in the building up of Little Oak Spring. Bunny's garden making, exercised at Carter Hall before and after her marriage, further honed at the property they named Apple Hill with its gardens, greenhouse, and carefully-crafted grounds, would also come to full fruition at Little Oak Spring.

Rokeby Farm, the four-hundred-acre country estate of Paul and Mary Mellon in Fauquier County, near Upperville, was then, as now, a pleasant country drive away. The couples became friends. After Mary Mellon's death in autumn 1946 and Bunny's divorce from Stacy Lloyd in March 1948, Bunny Lloyd (1910-2014) and Paul Mellon (1907-1999) were married in New York City on 1 May 1948. Thus, began the greater chapter in a storied life played out on an international stage but centered on the greatly enlarged estate grounds at Rokeby Farm and Oak Spring, where Bunny developed elegant, expansive gardens,



*Mac Griswold, garden historian and author, whose writings of people and place are enhanced by a sure knowledge of social and cultural history.*



*A view in the herb and kitchen gardens on the Lower Terrace at Oak Spring, looking northwest with the School House (right) and Guest House (left) in the background.*

Elysian Magazine



created an important garden library, and died, age 103, on 17 March 2014. Much of their life together was first recounted in Paul Mellon's memoir, *Reflections in a Silver Spoon*, published in 1992.

Mac Griswold's *I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise*, published in November 2022, is the second of two lives of Bunny Mellon written with the family's cooperation. The first, *Bunny Mellon: The Life of an American Style Legend*, was written by Meryl Gordon and published in 2019. The plaudits, however, had begun earlier, soon after her death and the execution of her bequests. On 10 February 2017, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts opened an exhibition, "The Rachel Lambert Mellon Collection of Jean Schlumberger," which featured the many pieces of jewelry and decorative arts designed by the legendary French-born designer, owned by Mrs. Mellon and gifted to the museum. A catalogue was published in 2019. *The Gardens of Bunny Mellon*, a lavish tribute written by Linda Jane Holden, with photography by Roger Foley, and a foreword by Sir Peter Crane, president of the Oak Spring Garden Foundation, was published by Vendome in 2018 (This writer attended a book-signing at Trinity Church, Upperville, on 28 October 2018.)

Readers know Mac Griswold as a garden writer and co-author with Eleanor Weller of *The Golden Age of American Gardens, Proud Owners, Private Estates, 1890-1940* published in 1991. [See book review in *Magnolia*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, by Ken McFarland] She brings knowledge and skill to this new work along with a valuable, unique qualification, an early acquaintance with Bunny Mellon that became a warm personal friendship. They first met in the 1950s, when Mac Johnston Keith was a classmate at Foxcroft (1956-1959) of Eliza Winn Lloyd (1942-2008), Mellon's daughter of her first marriage; the students became lifelong friends. The genesis of *I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise* came later, in the 1990s, when Bunny Mellon asked Ms. Griswold "to help her write her memoirs." Their collaboration continued up to a critical period in 1999-2000, marked by Paul Mellon's death on 1 February 1999, a battle that erupted almost immediately over the management and control of Rokeby Farms and the Mellon assets for which Bunny enjoyed a life estate, and a cruel

accident on 6 May 2000 in New York that left Eliza Lloyd Moore with quadriplegia and an inability to speak. In 2001 she was brought to a house at Oak Spring Farm. Bunny Mellon was age 89 when the accident occurred: she was in her ninety-eighth year when her daughter died on 7 May 2008. Mac Griswold spoke of their shared days with friends at Foxcroft at her funeral held on 13 May at Trinity Episcopal Church, Upperville, where she was buried in the Mellon plot.

The memoirs discussed with so much interest in the

1990s by Mrs. Mellon and Mac Griswold would never be written. The two talked last, face to face, during Advent 2012 over drinks and dinner, served on trays in her bedroom at Oak Spring Farm. Their conversation about Eliza, Bunny's daughter, Mac's friend, was followed after dinner by a turn to Trinity Church and Mellon's choice of scripture readings for the service ahead. Mac Griswold returned to the guesthouse for the night. Rachel Lambert Mellon died in the early



"Flower Beds in Holland," painted ca. 1883 by Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) at The Hague, is a brilliant treatment of pastel, single-color beds of hyacinths. It was included in a major gift to the National Gallery of Art in 1985 by the Mellons.

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon | National Gallery of Art

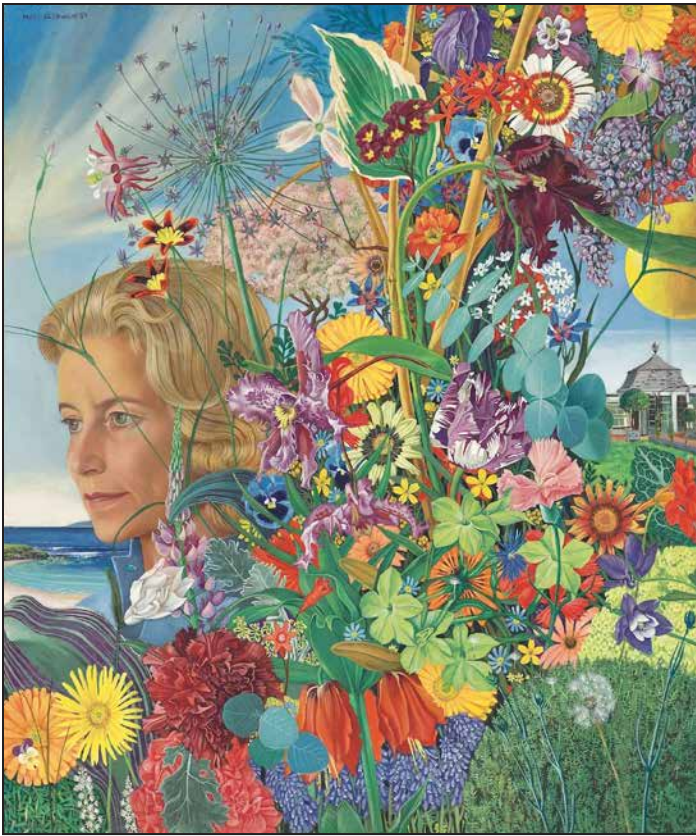
morning of 17 March 2014. Mac Griswold's biography of Bunny Mellon ends with her funeral on 28 March 2014 at Trinity Church. It is a fascinating account, enriched and enlivened by the details of an extraordinary life. But what makes it so appealing for readers, this one in particular, is that *I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise* is also a story of friendships, those of Bunny Mellon for whom her loyalty held, namely Evangeline Bruce, Hubert de Givenchy, Robert Isabell, Jean Schlumberger, and John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, for whom she designed the White House Rose Garden, those for whom it failed, and that of a gifted writer and her subject.



Historic Garden Week in Virginia, 15-22 April 2023, featured four houses and gardens, which were residences of Rachel Lambert Mellon. Carter Hall and Apple Hill were two of three properties on the Clarke County Tour on Saturday, 22 April. The Hunt Country House & Garden Tour, featuring four properties in Fauquier and Loudoun counties, was held over two days, Thursday-Friday, 20-21 April, and required two tickets. Oak Spring, the Brick

(continued on page 14)





Oak Spring Garden Foundation.

"Bunny Mellon," 1964, Mati Klarwein (1932-2002). Mr. Klarwein, a German-born painter who became a French citizen in 1965, best known for his design of album covers from the 1960s to his death, produced this surrealistic portrait during a stay in New York in the early 1960s.

House on Rokeby Farm, which was designed by William Adams Delano (1874-1960) for Paul Mellon, home to him and his first wife from 1941 to her death in 1946, and the residence of Paul and Bunny Mellon from 1948 until their move to Little Oak Spring, and its gardens, was one of three properties on the Regular Tour (\$50). Little Oak Spring, the home of Paul and Bunny Mellon from 1955 until their



Photo by Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Bunny Mellon, loppers in hand, and wearing the "working gardener" attire designed for her by Hubert de Givenchy (1927-2018).

deaths in 1999 and 2014, respectively, its gardens, grounds, greenhouse, the Oak Spring Gallery, and Paul Mellon's Broodmare Barn, comprised a separate (\$75 advance ticket) tour. (This writer participated in the Clarke County Tour.)

Davyd Foard Hood  
Isinglass  
Vale, North Carolina

[Editor's note: for more about Oak Spring Garden Foundation, visit [www.osgf.org](http://www.osgf.org).]

## Remembering Rudy J. Favretti (1932 – 2023) Landscape Architect for The Garden Club of Virginia

The designer of important historic Southern landscapes, Rudy J. Favretti, died on April 13, 2023, at the age of 90. Rudy was a well-known landscape architect from Connecticut when, in 1978, The Garden Club of Virginia (GCV) hired him to be their architect for the club's mission of restoring historic landscapes in Virginia. The GCV's restoration work began in 1929 and from that time had only the top landscape architects in the country working on their projects. Rudy's

qualifications of strong academic credentials, serving as a professor at the University of Connecticut, and a career in work on over six-hundred individual and collaborative designs, master-planning endeavors, and preservation projects in historic landscapes prepared him for the many restorations he designed for GCV.

He brought a fresh new perspective to historic garden interpretation, and a more realistic one. The Colonial Revival esthetic of boxwood parterres in "everyman's"



garden was not an accurate picture of the era. The vision for his first GCV garden restoration at Historic Smithfield in the western part of the state, reflected how the more rural setting that certainly would have existed at the time; thus, he removed the boxwood, installed simple fencing, walks, and a colonial-style kitchen garden at the rear of the house.

For more than twenty years, Rudy designed or added to over nineteen GCV restorations across the state. A partial listing includes Centre Hill Mansion-Museum (Petersburg), Prestwoud Plantation (Clarksville), Ker Place (Onancock), Belle Grove Historic Plantation (Middletown), James Madison's Montpelier, Gari Melchers Home and Studio at Belmont (Fredericksburg), Maymont Mansion (Richmond), George Washington's Mount Vernon, and Bacon's Castle (Surry). The last listed is considered to be the most significant garden restoration in America. Archaeology on this site revealed a surprisingly sophisticated design for this seventeenth-century house. This oldest documented brick residence in Virginia, in a highly rural location, continued to astound as layers of earth were removed to uncover a large formal garden. With such evidence in view, Rudy was able to piece together a noteworthy restoration of the original garden, with modifications to simplify maintenance. His final project for GCV was the bowling green at Mount Vernon, one of this nation's most significant landscapes. It was a fitting tribute to this gentle, gracious man who is revered by his colleagues and by the members of GCV.

And lastly, the GCV established a Research Fellowship in 1995 for landscape architecture students. Rudy oversaw this fellowship each year, and now the Rudy J. Favretti Fellowship is a tribute to his work. The Fellowship documents may be found on the GCV website, [www.gcvirginia.org](http://www.gcvirginia.org), as well as information on his work on the GCV restorations. The *Historic Virginia Gardens*, by Margaret Page Bemiss is an insightful account of the restored gardens from 1979 – 2007 and includes those done by Rudy.

The Garden Club of Virginia will be forever grateful for the work accomplished under his guidance, and the gardens remain as a testament to his excellence in the field of historic landscape restoration.

Judy B. Perry  
The Garden Club of Virginia  
The Southern Garden History Society



#### Editors' notes:

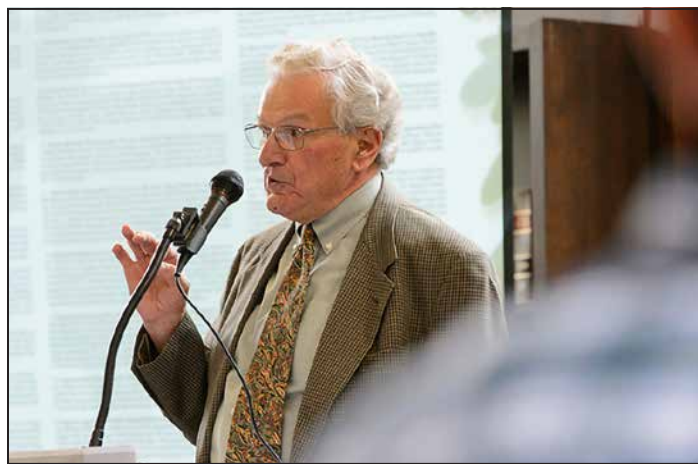
In the late 1970s Rudy played a key role in the recreation of Thomas Jefferson's grove at Monticello. He also became an integral presence for the Restoring

Southern Gardens and Landscapes Conference (RSGL) at Old Salem and during the early days of the Southern Garden History Society. [see *Magnolia* index]

Many people not only knew Rudy, but his friends often have their own favorite "Rudy stories." My favorite (Ken McFarland) dates to Rudy's retirement from the Garden Club of Virginia and took place during a RSGL conference. Rudy and I were enjoying a drink at a restaurant near the Brookstown Inn when he mentioned his retirement and then said he was recommending me for consideration as his replacement. After expressing my very great gratitude, I was deeply saddened to reply "but Rudy I'm not a landscape architect." I never knew why he leapt to that assumption.

Peter Hatch, Monticello's director emeritus of gardens and grounds, has stories that relate to major changes in his life brought on by Rudy: "... we wouldn't be where we are, if it weren't for 'Fred Ready' (as the Monticello groundsmen called him). I met Rudy, along with Suzanne Turner, Dick Lighty (Longwood Gardens), Colonial Williamsburg's Landscape Architect Donald Parker, and other worthies at a historic landscape conference in Mobile, Alabama in 1976, or so. I was young and brash, but I showed slides of Old Salem's historic landscape plans and of the gardens. Most of the audience had never heard of Old Salem. Rudy then began work on Monticello's recreation of Jefferson's Grove and suggested that Monticello hire me when the superintendent of grounds left. So here we are."

Peggy Cornett adds: "My memories revolve around his lack of skill with slide shows. I recall an entire carousel of slides either exploding or falling all over the floor before one of his presentations in the Reynolda House parlor during a RSGL conference. He had a good life. His books were seminal for historic landscape restorations. I recall *New England Colonial Gardens* (pub. 1972). I had a worn-out copy of *Landscapes and Gardens for Historic Buildings*, which he co-wrote with his wife Joy Putnam Favretti."



Rudy Favretti in 2012, speaking at an event celebrating the Great Lawn at the University of Connecticut.

Photo by Peter Morenus/UConn





Southern Garden History Society  
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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](http://www.southerngardenhistory.org). Those without internet access can receive a copy of this information by mail; contact Rebecca Hodson, SGHS Administrator.

## Annual Membership Dues

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

<i>Benefactor</i>	<i>\$500 and above*</i>
<i>Patron</i>	\$250
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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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Aimee Moreau, SGHS Administrator  
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New Roads, LA 70760  
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Mobile: (318) 421-9144

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Memberships can now be made electronically on our website!  
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*Deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of Magnolia is August 1, 2023.*

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