



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

Magnolia

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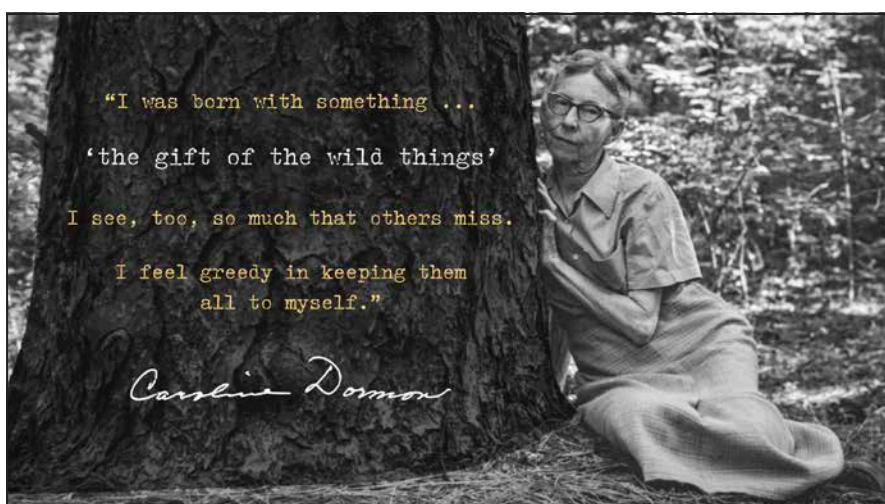
Plant Talk: The Friendship of Caroline Dormon & Elizabeth Lawrence

By Andrea Sprott, Charlotte, North Carolina

FIRST, A DISCLAIMER

By the time this article goes to print, the author will be thirteen years into what she lovingly (and realistically) refers to as riding the coattails of one of this country's preeminent writers of garden literature. As garden curator of the Elizabeth Lawrence House & Garden in Charlotte, North Carolina, the author can be called an Elizabeth Lawrence expert, but she is *far* from a Caroline Dormon expert. While Dormon became a bit familiar in preparation for the talk given at the 2023 Southern Garden History Society annual meeting in Natchitoches, Louisiana, there is a world to learn about this Louisiana naturalist. Really, there's a world to learn about *both* women—two brilliant trailblazers—each of whom left a unique, indelible mark on the world of Southern horticulture.

Dormon and Lawrence's nearly thirty-year friendship was forged primarily through correspondence. In today's world of instant *everything*, developing a friendship through letters may be considered a slow and difficult way to get to know someone, but that is not the case with these two. Almost from the outset, their connection was strong, and struck a chord on several levels. They supported and influenced one another, their work, and their gardens. It is through their letters—thankfully preserved in collections at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Eugene Watson Library, Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana—that we have the opportunity to get to know them in a different way. It is also through these letters that one sees the significance and importance of celebrating—and rekindling—the connection between



their two legacies. Indeed, one can argue this is what the Southern Garden History Society is all about.



“THE GIFT OF THE WILD THINGS”

Getting to know Caroline Coroneos Dormon (1888-1971) is an amazing experience. She was nothing if not a

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CALENDAR

November 1, 2023. “A Fall Gathering for SGHS Members and Friends,” at Agecroft Hall in Richmond, Virginia. Visit Ambassador events on southerngardenhistory.org.

April 12-14, 2024. Annual SGHS meeting in Wilmington, NC. Meeting headquarters will be at the Embassy Suites Hotel on the Cape Fear River. [See article on page 12] The meeting will include walking tours of private gardens and historic Wilmington sites, social hour at the Burgwin-Wright House and Garden, and final dinner on board the battleship USS North Carolina. Visit southerngardenhistory.org for more information.

April 20-27, 2024. Historic Garden Week in Virginia, sponsored by the Garden Club of Virginia. The Historic Garden Week guidebook is available online at www.vagardenweek.org.

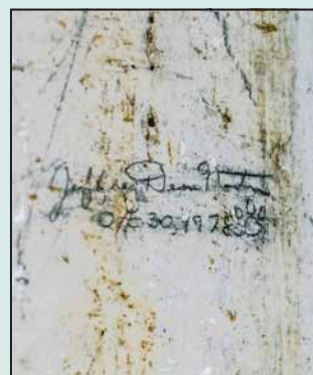
April 25-27, 2024. 77th Annual Garden Symposium at Colonial Williamsburg. Virtual and in-person options will be available. More information to come at colonialwilliamsburg.org.

Members in the News

The summer 2023 issue of *Preservation*, the magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, features the **Anne Spencer House & Garden Museum** in Lynchburg, Virginia, with an interview of Anne Spencer’s granddaughter, **Shaun Spencer-Hester**, who serves as the site’s executive director and curator. The article by Anna Katherine Clemmons details the rich history of this Harlem Renaissance poet and gardener who welcomed many renowned visitors such as W.E.B Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King Jr., and Zora Neale Hurston among many others. The article is illustrated with early twentieth-century black and white images of the Spencer family in the garden and numerous full-color photos by Lincoln Barbour of the house interiors and garden features, including Edankraal, Anne Spencer’s writing cottage in the garden, built by her husband Edward.

Clemson World, the magazine of South Carolina’s Clemson University features a cover story entitled “A Mount Vernon Original,” about 1977 CU alum **Dean Norton** who, for over half a century has spent his career as director of gardens and grounds at George Washington’s Mount Vernon. The lengthy profile by Sara Ann Grant includes numerous photos of Dean in the gardens, picking and sharing raspberries, and

discussing the history of Mount Vernon’s gardens, farms, and landscape.
<https://clemson.world/mountvernon-original/>



Photos by Ashley Jones.

Clemson World University Magazine.

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powerhouse, and one wonders how she had the energy to achieve all that she did. Dormon is considered Louisiana's first true conservationist, her efforts helping protect the state's vast natural and cultural treasures. She is further recognized as one of a handful of people who have significantly influenced this country's natural history.¹

Dormon became an expert in just about everything that interested her, and her interests were numerous. Here is a brief snapshot of her life's work:

- archaeologist and ethnologist
- author
- botanist
- "First Lady of Forestry"
- illustrator
- native plant enthusiast
- naturalist
- pioneer conservationist

She was fiercely independent and outspoken, plus she had a quick wit and an acute intellect. Nor did she suffer fools or mince words, and she had little-to-no tolerance for being told something could not be done. Even though she suffered with lifelong poor health, she fought through it and accomplished amazing things.

*"I was born with something—I call it 'the gift of the wild things'—and because I am simple myself, and have a sympathetic heart, I can understand animals and simple people to an unusual degree. I see, too, so much that others miss. When I know so many lovely things, I feel greedy in keeping them all to myself."*²

Dormon was a force of nature with a brain that never quit, a "fragile dynamo."³



"I HAVE NO GREEN OR GROWING HAND"

As stated earlier, this author has been studying Elizabeth Lewis Lawrence (1904-1985) for thirteen years. As an interpretive conduit between her legacy and the present day, one feels a strong bias in consideration of her being a total literary and horticultural standout, but others think so as well. Lawrence is recognized as one of the twenty-five greatest gardeners of all time,⁴ and it is widely held that she is further considered one of the three biggest influences on Southern horticulture, sharing that short list with Thomas Jefferson and J. C. Raulston.

In comparison with Dormon, it is easier to sum up Lawrence's life's work:

- landscape architect
- plants-person of encyclopedic knowledge
- internationally celebrated writer of garden literature

When it comes to Lawrence, simplicity is deceiving. Nothing about her is simple. She had a depth of complexity that pervaded everything she did, and every part of her legacy. She was quiet and inquisitive, and, like Dormon, had a quick wit, was highly intelligent, and did not suffer fools. Lawrence was interested in many topics—art, literature, poetry, music, history—but from the time she was a small child, she was ceaselessly fascinated by plants. She had the mind of a scientist, the heart of a poet, and the hand of an artist—with words, plants, and design.

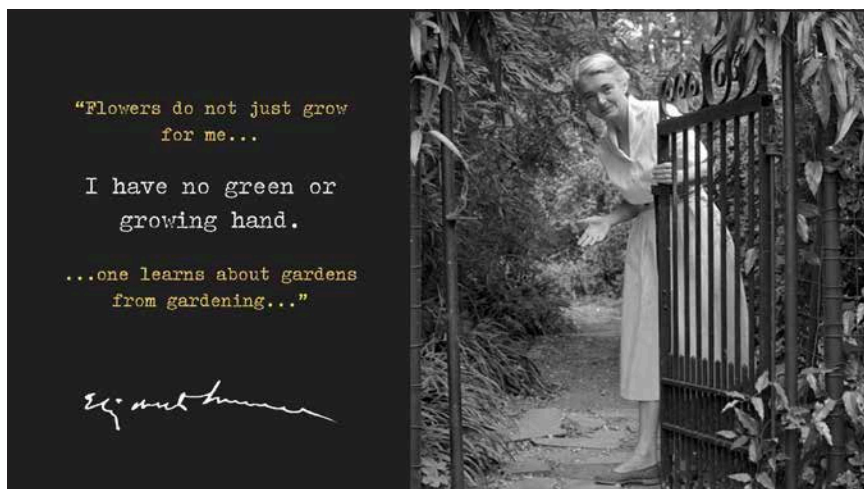
In "An Apology for Myself as a Gardener,"⁵ she writes,

"Praise a gardener for abundance of bloom, and he will say modestly, 'I don't know how it is, but flowers just seem to grow for me.' Flowers do not just grow for me. I have no green or growing hand. ... Although I have gathered as much information as I can from all sources reliable and unreliable, one learns about gardens from gardening."

Lawrence was a deep thinker who skillfully wove her multi-faceted wisdom into a tapestry of timeless writings.⁶

How do these two women, who lived over eight-hundred miles apart, come together in the first place? Fittingly so, they met through a letter. Lawrence gained national acclaim for her first book, *A Southern Garden: A Handbook for the Middle South*, published in 1942. Soon thereafter, she accepted a request to travel to Shreveport, Louisiana, to speak to Shreveport's historic Woman's

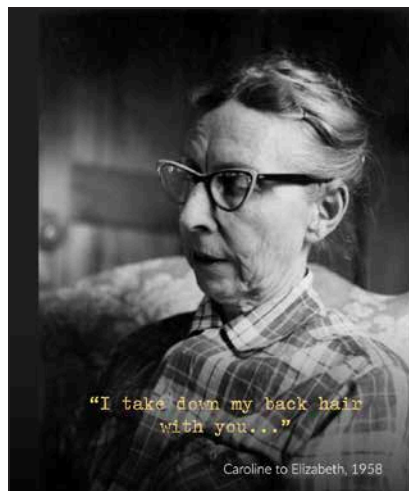
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Department Club in November 1944. On October 26, Dormon wrote to invite Lawrence to visit her 110-acre home, Briarwood, if she could extend her stay by a day.

"My Dear Ms. Lawrence; This is to invite you to come see us in our hollow tree in the wildwood. ... We will have lunch under the pines and beeches... You can see native Louisiana trees and flowers 'as is', with no landscaping."



had super keen observation skills coupled with a teacher's love of accuracy. They adored and studied plants to the point of near obsession. Both were meticulous in noting

details, and almost compulsive in sharing all they knew, and, even more excitedly, all they had learned.

"There are very few people who really know plant material, though many think they do."

They also shared their connections with fellow gardeners and experts all over

Dorman wasted no time in letting Lawrence know she recognized a sympathetic soul.

*"I feel that you are the sort of person who would enjoy a clump of Indian Pipes, even if you had to look in the middle of a brush-heap to see them!"*⁷

Although their meeting in person at this time was not meant to be, the North Carolinian could not even wait to get home to write her new Louisiana friend.

"Dear Miss Dormon: It made me heartsick to turn down such a delightful invitation as yours, but I did not dare give up my reservations, which I had had for a month."

She went on to confirm Dormon's recognition of a kindred spirit:

*"I am so eager to see you and ask you about some of the things in your book which is very exciting because it has so many things in it that I have always wanted to know about."*⁸



THE BLOSSOMING OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP

Within several months, letters and packages of plants begin traveling through the mail between Louisiana and North Carolina. Over the course of twenty-seven years, conversation hardly ceased, and it covered all aspects of growing things, from soil to weather. There was a *lot* of exchange concerning plant identification. Both women

the country. For the sake of getting things right, specimens were sent to the most knowledgeable plants-people at the highest levels of study.

*"Yes, it is upsetting the way plant mis-information is being flung around by the 'plant specialists' and 'authorities'! How I wince when I see a native shrub recommended as a 'good horticultural subject', when no one but God knows what said shrub wants, and even Bailey and E. Wilson say it is 'difficult' in cultivation! The truth is, if a plant is attractive, they recommend it, when THEY HAVE NEVER ATTEMPTED TO GROW IT."*¹⁰

Researchers will be fascinated by how Dorman and Lawrence's personalities come out through their communication. Dorman's letters have an undercurrent of tension, anxiety, or urgency—not unwarranted, by any means. Lack of money, decimation of rare and prized plants by foraging wildlife—"vile, big grasshoppers," gophers, armadillos, and even cattle, along with unannounced (human) visitors, and the ravages of drought and storms are frequent subjects. Numerous exclamation points and underlined words exhibit raw expression, freely communicated in the safe space of their dear friendship.

Lawrence's letters convey a more measured voice, more subdued, with an increasing cloud of melancholy as her mother's health declined, time and energy for focusing on writing and design work became less available, and publishing roadblocks were encountered with greater frequency. Lawrence was strong-willed, but arguing with editors and publishers depleted her, surely more than she would have liked. She found it exhausting assuming

all aspects of running the household, managing nurses, undertaking garden design projects, continuing to work on manuscripts, writing a weekly column for the *Charlotte Observer*, and tending her own garden.

Even through all of this, the Dormon-Lawrence

correspondence is imbued with comfort and ease. They trusted and confided in one another, and respected and valued one another's strengths and insights. The significance of their bond was communicated in many ways. The most endearing phrases are often the least anticipated. From

the less reserved Dormon, "I take down my back hair with you..."¹¹ and from Lawrence, "I love you dearly."¹² Both statements reveal a lot using few words. One does not get the sense that Dormon takes down her "back hair" with many, and the author knows that Lawrence reserved "I love you" for only a few of her closest friends.

Crucially, they offered one another moral support. Managing the pull of outside obligations due to their respective careers and expertise—public speaking engagements, special requests, entertaining visitors from near and far, and even attending award ceremonies—was a struggle. However, both were confident that ultimately their contributions would positively far outweigh any of the immediate discomfort and personal cost.

Dorman and Lawrence understood the challenges of dealing with editors who wanted to "correct" their work, or make it read more like what their audiences are used to. They both resisted attempts by editors to remove their unique voices and erase their personal observations of, and connections with, local or regional culture—all of which contributed greatly to making their work so revered today.

They gave one another heartfelt, meaningful support in dealing with editors, publishing houses, and being pulled in too many directions. One letter from Dormon illustrates this point to a "T":

"Dearest Elizabeth; Stop being so supine!!! Bow up your back, arch your neck, even spit and scratch a little—but tell that McAdoo he is NOT going to murder your book! If you give him leeway, he will have it sounding just like Flower Grower or Popular Gardening—which are not worth picking up off the floor. Just tell him that you wrote the book after long years of

experience, and have done a vast amount of research, and you know that the material is authentic.

And furthermore, if he wants to make your book sound just like everyone else's, why not have the same person write all the garden books?? It would save a lot of time!

... Get fightin' mad—you hear me?"¹³

They met in person only a few times. It may seem odd that they did not have more face-to-face interaction but perhaps that is part of what kept their connection sincere. As a natural-born writer, Lawrence was careful and efficient with her words—

each had weight and contributed to the whole. Dormon did not have the time to afford much more than a typed page at a time, which also made her writing efficient in a different way.

After their first meeting in 1958, Dormon wrote Lawrence:

"You came up to my expectations---which is as strong as I can make it!

The way we saw eye-to-eye on so many things is little short of amazing."

Later in the same letter, she relayed part of a conversation with another friend:¹⁴

"I said, 'Thank you God for giving me Elizabeth.'"

As one turns through the literal pages of their relationship—year after year, decade after decade—one thing is striking: any sadness, vexation, illness, or tale of woe recounted melts away at the first mention of fresh buds unfurling in one another's gardens. The natural world growing right outside their door was the elixir they needed to rebuild their mental strength and motivate them to double down on their resolve to make it through whatever the future may bring.



"WHAT YOU GOT IN BLOOM?"

Much of their plant talk centered around one time of the year in particular. Both women found magic and

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delight in winter.

"Wish you were here to walk out with me each morning, to see the buds swelling—late winter is so much more interesting than summer!"¹⁵

In the mid-to-late 1950s, one of Lawrence's main focuses was her manuscript *Gardens in Winter*, for which she asked Dormon to provide illustrations. Since Dormon would only draw what she grows or has at hand, Lawrence ordered bulbs and sent them to her Louisiana friend. Other plants were dug from her garden, carefully packed in Charlotte, and sent to Briarwood, Dormon's 110-acre home in Saline. When a plant could not be ordered or dug, budded branches or stems were sent via airmail. Letters went back and forth at a feverish pace during this time. On more than one occasion, the postman dropped a letter from one, and immediately picked up a letter to the other.

Bulbs were a frequent source of inspiration in their letters. This was not surprising in terms of Lawrence, who wrote *The Little Bulbs* (Criterion Books, 1957), but it is enlightening to learn that Dormon was also bitten by the bulb bug. On visiting Briarwood for the first time in January 2023, this author's heart filled with pride and joy on finding Dormon's copy of *The Little Bulbs* on the shelf in her cabin. At the top of Lawrence's bulb love list—and perhaps also Dormon's—is *Narcissus* of all kinds.

"I go mad as a hatter in daffodil time!"¹⁶



Photo by Bayli Brossette.

Narcissus bulbocodium at Briarwood.

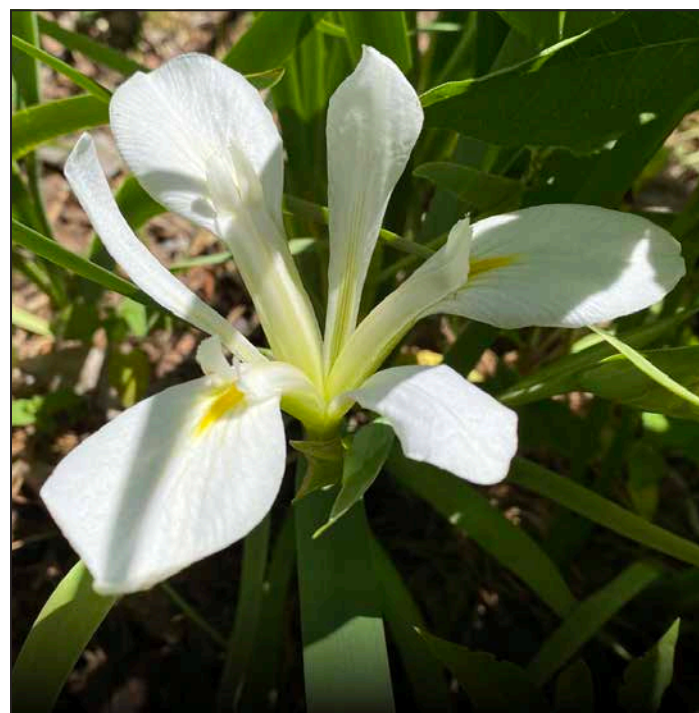


Photo by Andrea Sprout.

Iris Mac's White at ELH&G

Both women were sticklers for getting to the accurate identity for every plant they come across. Both loved daffodils that grew in old dooryards all over the South. One of particular interest for Dormon was a small double locally known as "rose jonquil." It is a "little almost orbicular thing, small stem about 6 inches, rich yellow, and of course exquisitely fragrant," that her sister-in-law got from an old lady at Mt. Lebanon, Louisiana, "an old town settled befo' de wah, by Virginians and South Carolinians—cultured people, who treasured their flowers."¹⁷ One does not find that either she or Lawrence ever feel 100% assured of the true identity of this sweet bulb.

Another daffodil interest was the hoop petticoat daffodil, *Narcissus bulbocodium*. Although none of Lawrence's original bulbs remain in her garden in Charlotte, some of Dormon's still grow at Briarwood. They talked about all kinds of plants—from Olympic hybrid lilies to *Lycoris albiflora*; there's a lot about deciduous magnolias; and from *Phlox pilosa* to *Prunus mume*, which Dormon proudly raised from seed she received from a Japanese correspondent.

A plant they discussed with great interest, and one which was forever linked to Dormon, was the Louisiana iris. Several that still grow in Lawrence's garden came directly from or through Dormon, who tells her friend in Charlotte:

"After the first flower, I go into a state of delirium, which lasts till all are finished. ... After you start with

them, you will understand—it is a virulent disease, and exceedingly contagious!”¹⁸

Lawrence was especially taken with a dwarf white one from Dormon:

*“Your white iris—Mac’s White—is on my desk. One of the most exquisite of all lovely things—too precious to leave in the garden.”*¹⁹

There is a small, deciduous suckering shrub in Lawrence’s garden that intrigued the author almost from the first day of work there. Dormon found it—un-labelled and unloved—at Sam Stokes’s old nursery.²⁰ She asked Stokes what it was, and he said he did not know, but he had heard it was a single flowering almond. He agreed to let her have it. She thought it a lovely thing, and extolled its virtues to anyone who would listen. She enjoyed the cherries it made and loved that the birds enjoyed them too. Eager to get it into wider cultivation, Dormon sent a piece to Lawrence.

They went back and forth about this little cherry’s identification for months. It did not answer to any description either can find. Lawrence sent a piece to Dr. George M. Lawrence, renowned botanist, and director of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium at Cornell University, who finally gave them what they needed, its proper name, *Prunus humilis*. The author put the varietal name “Caroline Dormon” to it because its provenance is so special, and everyone loves a plant with a backstory.

This unassuming dwarf Chinese bush cherry, which Lawrence planted in front of her house in October 1957,

is a reminder that the personal connections we make can be so important. And the connection between these two women—and their gardens—is important. I think this quote from Lawrence sums it up nicely:

*“If I weren’t worked to a nub I would write you very often, for hardly a day goes by but I think of something I want to say to you, and one never goes by without my thinking ... how few such gardeners there are in the world for me to love.”*²¹



THEIR GROWING LEGACIES TODAY

Even though Dormon fought back when anyone intimated that she had “gardens,” she was indeed a gardener of the highest order. It takes great knowledge and skill to harmoniously integrate all kinds of plants into a natural landscape. Briarwood was never meant to be a garden *per se*, but it certainly holds an amazing collection of plants of all kinds. Today, Briarwood Nature Preserve, owned since 1971 by the Foundation for the Preservation of the Caroline Dormon Nature Preserve, carries on the work started by Dormon by preserving wildflowers native to the South and educating the public.

For Lawrence, her well-designed garden was experimental, brimming with plants from all over the world for the purpose of finding out what grows well in the Middle South. This small (1/3 acre) urban lot was planted in layers, where there’s always something in bloom, and one season effortlessly rolls into the next.

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Prunus humilis Caroline Dormon at ELH&G.

Photo by Andrea Spratt.

Plant Talk: The Friendship of... (continued from page 7)

Today, the Elizabeth Lawrence House & Garden, owned and operated by the Wing Haven Foundation since 2008, and managed in partnership with the Garden Conservancy, is a unique, dynamic historic property that serves to preserve, promote, and celebrate the horticultural and literary legacy of one of America's preeminent writers of garden literature.



THE POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD IS STRONG

Much of the vast network of correspondents of both women consisted of people who acted in response to their published writings. Many of those relationships were lifelong connections. Few of those were as rich, as deep, and as strong as the connection between Caroline Dormon and Elizabeth Lawrence. Through almost thirty years of correspondence, these two amazing women shared their passions, frustrations, and expertise. They pushed one another to be better, to remain true to their guiding principles, and to stay curious. In effect, they helped magnify the unique magic that each brought to the world. That magic was centered around their love of plants. The best part is that their legacies continue to grow—literally and figuratively—and they continue to inspire us all.

To learn more about Caroline Dormon and Briarwood Nature Preserve, and Elizabeth Lawrence and the Elizabeth Lawrence House & Garden, and to help support the work being done to preserve, share, and expand their legacies, visit briarwoodnp.org and winghavengardens.org.

The author wishes to thank and/or credit the following persons and resources:

- Randy Harelson, president, Southern Garden History Society
- Sara Rebstock, archives assistant, Cammie G. Henry Research Center
- Bayli Q. Brossette, curator, Briarwood/Caroline Dormon Nature Preserve
- Elizabeth Way Rogers
- Warren & Fran Way
- *Charlotte Observer* Collection, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library, Charlotte, NC
- Elise Smith

All Dormon photos and documents are from the Caroline Dormon Collection at the Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Eugene Watson Library, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana.



Bayli Q. Brossette & Andrea Sprott.

Endnotes

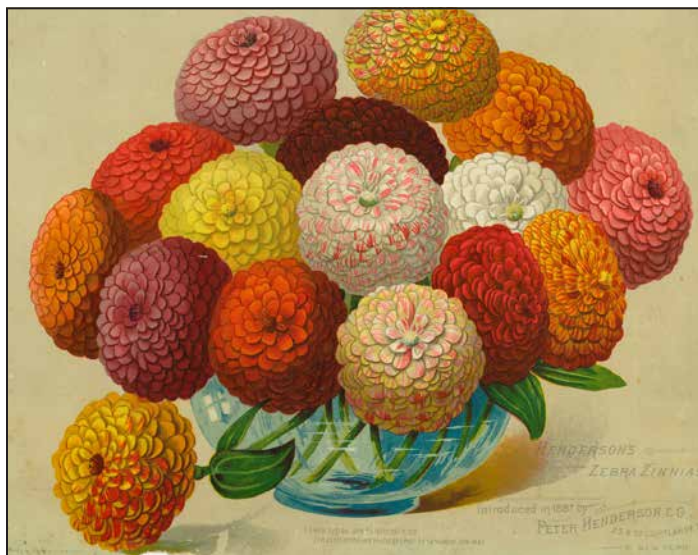
- 1 Brown, R. 2017. Eight Naturalists That Changed Outdoor History. The CLYMB. <http://blog.theclymb.com/out-there/8-naturalists-changed-outdoor-history>. [Accessed: 23 February 2023].
- 2 Caroline Dormon, application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, 1942.
- 3 To learn more, the author recommends her biography by Fran Holman Jackson, *The Gift of the Wild Things: The Life of Caroline Dormon* (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1990).
- 4 *Horticulture* magazine, June 2004.
- 5 Elizabeth Lawrence, *A Southern Garden: A Handbook for the Middle South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942).
- 6 To learn more, the author recommends the Lawrence biography by Emily Herring Wilson, *No One Gardens Alone, the Life of Elizabeth Lawrence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).
- 7 Caroline Dormon to Elizabeth Lawrence, 26 October 1944, Elizabeth Lawrence Collection, Cammie G. Henry Research Center, Eugene Watson Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches.
- 8 Elizabeth Lawrence to Caroline Dormon, "Friday—on the train", Caroline Dormon Collection, Cammie Henry Research Center, Eugene Watson Library, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches.
- 9 Lawrence to Dormon, undated 1947.
- 10 Dormon to Lawrence, 29 June 1947.
- 11 Dormon to Lawrence, undated 1958.
- 12 Lawrence to Dormon, 7 June 1957.
- 13 Dormon to Lawrence, September 1960.
- 14 Dormon to Lawrence, 11 January 1960.
- 15 Dormon to Lawrence, "Briarwood, Sad'dy—", 1958.
- 16 Dormon to Lawrence, 26 January 1958.
- 17 Dormon to Lawrence, May 1957.
- 18 Dormon to Lawrence, 11 March 1945.
- 19 Lawrence to Dormon, undated.
- 20 Sam Stokes Nursery is located near Forest Hill, LA and has been in business for over a century.
- 21 Lawrence to Dormon, undated.

The following Zinnia posts appeared on the SGHS website August 10, 2023:

Zinnias

By Ken McFarland, Brandon, Vermont

Recently our new Southern Garden History Society administrator Aimee Moreau shared a photo of zinnias just cut from the garden of Randy Harelson and Richard Gibbs in New Roads, Louisiana. It was a well-composed image, and the zinnias were truly stunning. Those who attended the Natchitoches annual meeting will also recall famed Louisiana artist Clementine Hunter's depiction of zinnias in some of her most striking works. Of course, for many of us enjoyment of the brightly colored beauty of zinnias is a simple matter of stepping into our own gardens or taking a walk down the street.



Zinnias, Peter Henderson and Co. New York Catalog 1887.

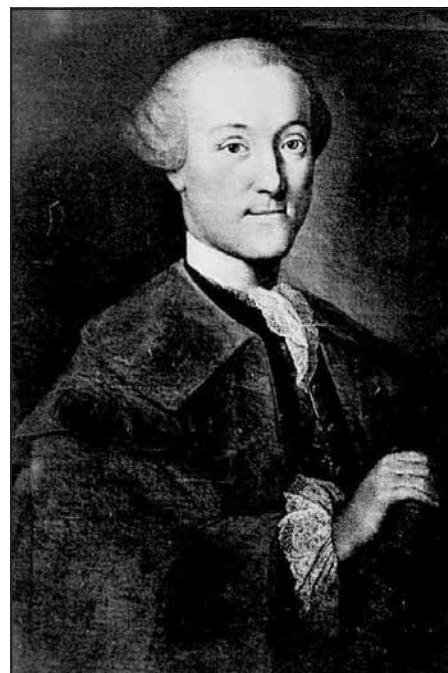


Zinnia verticillata, *The Botanist's Repository Comprising Colour'd Engravings of New and Rare Plants Only*. Henry Andrews. Printed by T. Bensley and published by the author No.5 Knightsbridge, 1805.



Zinnia elegans, *William Curtis, The Botanical Magazine, or Flower-Garden Displayed*. London. 1787

Learning more about these multi-formed and many-hued favorites, as with so many subjects, requires only a mouse click or two. Active--or armchair--gardeners can then spend hours expanding their plant history knowledge and zinnia how-to skills. For those who find long-



Johann Gottfried Zinn.

Wikipedia image.

term staring at computer screens wearisome, there are of course books and articles to be found covering the topic. Highly recommended, for example, is the zinnia section in *Popular Annuals* by *Magnolia* editor and Monticello Curator of Plants Peggy Cornett.

These many sources remind us that the wild zinnia (*Zinnia grandiflora*) is a tough native of Mexico and neighboring regions. Though first taken to Europe in the sixteenth-century, they get their name (courtesy of Carl Linnaeus) from the German professor of anatomy and botany, Johann Gottfried Zinn (1727-1759). Zinn spent his final years at Gottingen, directing the university's botanic garden, experimenting with zinnia seeds received from Mexico, and writing about the results.

While striking in its natural setting, the *Zinnia grandiflora* lacked general acceptance by gardeners, particularly in the United States. One 1908 source describes early zinnias as "coarse," while their colors were "muddy." However, a zinnia that came to Europe in the late-eighteenth century, the Linnaeus-named *Zinnia elegans* proved to be more popular and commercially successful, especially in France.

In *Popular Annuals* Cornett notes that decades would pass, however, before experiments by French growers resulted in showier zinnias, some bearing a resemblance to the dahlia, a plant also native to Mexico and having a history very similar to the zinnia. *Popular Annuals* details this period of development during the second half of the nineteenth century, as does a variety of on-line resources.

Work by growers in the U.S. did not forever lag

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behind developments in Europe. Certain names in particular stand out as grower-entrepreneurs who helped zinnias come into their own in the second half of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These include two Philadelphia-based seed suppliers, Thomas Meehan (1826-1901) and Henry Augustus Dreer (1818-1873), along with Californian John Bodger, his “Dahlia Flowered Zinnia” becoming in the 1920s a Bodger seed business standout and continuing success. Interestingly, however, all three individuals had immigrated from either England or Germany.

To explore historic zinnia sources, visit the *Southern Plant Lists* found on our “Resources” page. Confirming observations in *Popular Annuals*, earlier offerings were highly limited, and one can only guess how much space gardeners were giving zinnias. In 1802 the famed Philadelphia horticulturist Bernard McMahon listed

only “*Zinnia multiflora*” and “*Zinnia pauciflora*,” termed respectively “Red” and “Yellow.” (The common name today of *Zinnia pauciflora* is Peruvian zinnia.) In 1810, Baltimore “Seedsman” William Booth also offered red and yellow zinnia seeds, common name only. Three decades later Arkansan Jacob Smith was growing the above-mentioned *Zinnia elegans*, exclusively it appears, and acquired from an undesignated source. Again, it was indeed a narrow palate.

We know the situation is different now, thanks to nineteenth-century French growers along with work by Meehan, Dreer, Bodger, and many others, today’s gardeners having almost limitless options and sources to spread a wealth of zinnias across the landscape. Their story is summed up in one line on the Chicago Botanic Garden website where zinnias are termed “the hardest-working flower in summer garden.”



Zinnias in Beate Ankjaer-Jensen garden, Brandon, VT. Photos by Beate Ankjaer-Jensen.

The Zinnia on the Ceiling of Walter Anderson’s Cottage In Ocean Springs, Mississippi

By Randy Harelson, New Roads, Louisiana

The locally famous Gulf Coast artist Walter Anderson is considered by this writer one of the finest American artists of the twentieth century. Born in New Orleans in 1903, Anderson lived most of his life in or near Ocean Springs, Mississippi. His extraordinary work as an artist included painting in oil and watercolor, pen-and-ink drawing, linoleum-cut block printing, building and decorating pottery (with his family’s famous Shearwater Pottery), woodcarving, and mural development and painting for Ocean Springs’s high school, community

center, and a small room in the artist’s own home on the grounds of Shearwater Pottery.

The small mural completed in the last years of Anderson’s life - he died in 1965 - is a depiction of a single day in the life and spirit of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and also an illumination of Psalm 104.

“The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment.”

Psalm 104:2

The mural covers the four walls and ceiling of a room only 12-by-14 feet. The artist kept the room locked until

his death. When his wife and children entered the room after his death they were amazed by what they saw. The plants and animals of the Gulf Coast come to life on the four walls, magically progressing from dawn to dusk and on through the night. The ceiling is covered almost entirely with an image of a single zinnia flower, suggesting the glowing sun in the noonday sky.

In a short poem, Anderson writes:

Oh, zinnias,
Most explosive and illuminating
Of flowers,
Summation of all flowers,
Essence of excentric form,
Essence of concentric form!

Clearly Anderson considered the zinnia of enormous importance both in its placement in his mural, and in his writing of it so emphatically.

Randy Harelson's Notes:

1. In his poem, Anderson spells "Excentric" in his own eccentric way.
2. A beautiful essay by Redding Sugg makes up the text of the book **A Painter's Psalm: The Mural in Walter Anderson's Cottage** with photographs by Gil Michael (Memphis State University Press, 1978)
3. Redding Sugg is also the editor of **The Horn Island Logs of Walter Inglis Anderson** (Originally published Memphis State University Press, 1973. Currently in print, University Press of Mississippi, 2020)
4. The Walter Anderson Museum of Art in Ocean Springs has a good website with photographs of the little room and its extraordinary mural.]

<https://www.walterandersonmuseum.org/littleroom>

Remembering Genevieve Trimble

By Randy Harelson, *New Roads, Louisiana*

Genevieve Trimble died on September 8, 2023, at the age of 102. 'Miss Gen,' as many of us called her, was a grand Southern lady and a remarkably accomplished gardener and garden creator. She may be best known for her creation of Afton Villa Gardens in St. Francisville, Louisiana. In 1972 she and her husband Morrell purchased the ruins of Afton Villa, a gothic plantation home that burned to the ground in 1963. In its ruins and across its thirty acres Miss Gen developed a garden that has become famous. She told me that an LSU landscape architecture student, Steve Coenen, did a study and garden concept in the 70s that greatly influenced her decision to leave the ruins and make the garden directly inside the remains of the house.

Photo of the gardens: Photo courtesy of Afton Villa Gardens



Genevieve Trimble.

She also transformed a neglected rose garden in City Park into the New Orleans Botanical Garden working with garden director Paul Soniat and horticulturist Jerome Lebo and others in the 1980s. But when I think of Miss Gen's great talents, I

always remember her incredible ability to speak to a group. No matter how large her audience, Genevieve Trimble would come forward, always in a daffodil yellow jacket, with no notes, and speak in complete sentences – never an "um" or a pause to find her thought – and

speak on her subject from beginning to end, never departing from the point of her message. She was quite simply the finest public speaker I ever heard. She was one of my favorite lady friends, and I will miss her dearly, along with her hundreds of other devoted friends.

Miss Gen is the author of *Afton Villa, The Birth and Rebirth of a Nineteenth-Century Louisiana Garden*.

“A Perfect Rage for Gardening,” Wilmington, April 2024

By Ken McFarland, Brandon, Vermont

Late summer is when Society members begin to look forward to the next annual meeting, now set for April 12-14, 2024, in Wilmington, North Carolina. The city has a fascinating history, but as a boy growing up in Durham this author saw Wilmington mainly as a place that slowed down the family Studebaker as it rolled on to Carolina or Wrightsville Beach. The great exception to this disdainful attitude was huge, literally huge at 35,000 tons, the Battleship North Carolina (now the Saturday annual meeting dinner site). The city, however, also became forever linked to horticulture because of its annual azalea festival, an event which began with great success shortly after World War II and which continues to be one of Wilmington’s major offerings. A strong mental image survives of the massive banks of azaleas in the city’s Greenfield Park.

As readers might suppose, Tarheel schools had a North Carolina history requirement. While no memory survives of a teacher calling our state a “vale of humility between two mountains of conceit” (i.e., South Carolina and Virginia), we did learn that North Carolina developed more slowly than said “conceit mountains” largely because of the absence of good ports. Wilmington, the state’s most populous city, was the one notable exception, though it still lacked the same import-export level as Hampton Roads or Charleston. Thus North Carolina became the “Rip Van Winkle state,” only beginning to catch up with the onset of the railroad age. Wilmington prospered through the antebellum era largely as an outlet for the state’s large naval stores industry.

Students also learned that Wilmington was the last significant Confederate States port receiving imported goods, thanks to the success of blockade runners and the protection offered those fast ships by Fort Fisher, located at the mouth of the Cape Fear. The massive earthen fortress fell in January 1865, however, owing to a final large-scale Union sea and land assault, cutting off one of the last sources of supplies to Confederate military units. As we all know, the Civil War ended only a few months later.

This one-time student has no recollection, however, of teachers discussing Wilmington’s most painful historical moment: the Insurrection of 1898. A story recounted in many print sources and online, the bloody coup d’état resulted in the murder of at least sixty (and perhaps many more) African American citizens, the overturn of the duly

elected city government by white supremacists, and the destruction of the Black-run *Daily Record* newspaper. The coup’s success resounded across the state, the South, and the nation and was a milestone of the Jim Crow era.

Like all such successful urban centers, Wilmington featured many notable gardens, as will be examined at the 2024 meeting. A study of antebellum newspapers offers a look at professionals who were providing help to Wilmington’s garden owners prior to the Civil War, along with sources for various garden supplies, seeds in particular. Examples can be found in *The Wilmington Daily Herald* of 3 March 1855, when one W. D. Wilson, a self-described “practical gardener and horticulturist,” noted his presence in town and promoted his services to those needing gardening assistance, as seen in a detailed advertisement included below:

W. D. WILSON,
PRACTICAL GARDENER AND HORTICULTURIST,
has located himself here for the purpose of carrying on the above business. He will receive orders to lay out GARDENS in any style to suit the taste of employers, and will also attend to PLANTING TREES, trimming Hedges, and pruning all kinds of Shrubbery, Roses, &c. &c. Budding and Grafting done in season. The practical knowledge he has acquired induces him to believe that he can in every case give satisfaction, and he hopes by strict attention to his business to receive a share of the public patronage. Being authorized to act as Agent for one of the largest and best Nurseries in the country, he will receive orders for all kinds of Fruit and Ornamental Trees, Shrubbery, Roses, Grape Vines, Strawberries, &c. &c. &c. Orders left at the Drug Store of Messrs. C. & D. DuPRE, will be promptly attended to.
Feb 8 287-tf

Daily Herald advertisement for W.D Wilson.

Readers might note that Wilson could be contacted via DuPre’s drug store on Market Street. As seen in another 3 March 1855 clipping, DuPre’s advertised their supply of seeds and other garden needs in the *Daily Herald*, seed-seller DuPre and gardener-horticulturist Wilson thereby complementing each other handily.

GARDEN SEEDS! GARDEN SEEDS!!
JUST received from Landreth’s Seed Garden a large and choice collection of Garden, Grass, and Flower Seeds, Herbs, Onion Sets and Asparagus Roots; also a supply of Nebraska Peas, for sale wholesale and retail by
Dec. 12, C. & D. DuPRE; Drug, Market st

Daily Herald advertisement for DuPre’s drug store.

Since North Carolina was a slave state it can safely be assumed that a great deal of gardening was done

by enslaved workers. In this author's look at the *Daily Herald* page featuring the W. D. Wilson and DuPre's advertisements he found them near a commonly-encountered run-away slave notice. Here James E. Metts was offering \$100 (approximately \$3,500 in today's money) for carriage driver and house servant "Frank," who is described as literate and capable of forging passes. While Frank probably did not work in gardens, this advertisement reminds us of the place enslaved labor played in the overall economy.

In the 1990 Winter issue of *Magnolia*, E. David Scott, then executive director of the Historic Wilmington Foundation, discussed the gardening activities of Eliza Jane DeRosset, whose husband Armand DeRosset was a prominent Wilmington merchant. The DeRosset terraced garden and house (now the City Club) are a long-standing Wilmington landmark sited at the corner of Dock and South 2nd Streets. David Scott's discussion of the garden activities there spans a period from the 1840s to the 1870s, and one wonders if Eliza DeRosset made use of W. D. Wilson's garden services or purchased supplies from nearby DuPre's. In an 1845 letter to her daughter Kate (then at a Northern school) she does note that Wilmington was seeing "a perfect rage for gardening," requesting that when she returned home Kate might bring her "some Tube roses"²⁴ or any plants I have not got..."²⁵ The Scott article goes on to mention a variety of gardening topics and plants referenced in the DeRosset

papers. A complete reading is encouraged via the SGHS website.

Eliza DeRosset died in 1876, but daughter Catherine²⁶ lived into the age of Airlie, a garden which continues to be a major Wilmington attraction, and which will be on the annual meeting Sunday tour. Although Airlie's formal garden origins start in the mid-1880s and reflect the efforts of Sarah Greene Jones and husband Pembroke Jones, its establishment as a true public facility dates only to the late 1990s. Yet, as early as 1909 the Jones's extended an invitation for a visit to "any one [sic] who cared to drive or walk through the place and enjoy the sight of the flowers." A feature attraction was "Mrs. Jones'

(continued on page 14)



Airlie Oak.

Photo credit: Airlie Gardens.



Facade of Bellamy Mansion at sunset.

Photo credit: Bellamy Mansion Museum.



Birdseye view of the Bellamy Mansion.

Photo credit: Bellamy Mansion Museum.

"A Perfect Rage for Gardening"... (continued from page 13)

rose gardens," said by one observer to be "one of the most beautiful sights that he had ever seen."²⁷ Airlie, however, has attractions that long predate the Jones garden, the most notable being the oldest live oak in the Old North State. Probably a seedling during the age of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, core samplings show it would have been growing healthily when the Roanoke Island colony was established in 1585. Society members will also enjoy a visit to Mount Lebanon Chapel (completed in 1835), an integral part of the Airlie history and landscape.

Clearly there is much to see and learn in Wilmington. It can be reported that whatever "look down the nose" attitude this author might have had about the Cape Fear city as a youngster reversed itself totally when he became an adult. Many visits there over the span of the 1980s and 90s in particular revealed a richness of cultural resources far more compelling than Carolina Beach. Do come!



DeRosset House and gardens.

Historic Wilmington Foundation.

Introducing SGHS's New Administrator, Aimee Moreau

On Sunday afternoon of the Natchitoches annual meeting, many of us met Aimee Moreau, registrar for the 2023 annual meeting and our new Southern Garden History Society administrator. She and SGHS board president, Randy Harelson, organized the meeting that attendees consider one of our finest. Randy and Aimee are neighbors and friends in their town of New Roads, Louisiana. Since June, Aimee has combined the organizational, technical, and marketing skills that she used for the meeting to administer Southern Garden History Society's membership records, collaborate with its officers and board members, and maintain its website.

In addition to her work with SGHS, Aimee works as speech pathologist with the Point Coupee Parish school board treating articulation disabilities, language delays, stuttering, and training of alternative communication to special needs students. She is race director for Rocketkidz Foundation and organizes River Roux Olympic Triathlon and Louisiana Triathlon. She also serves as the marketing director for the City of New Roads to organize and manage city events including Market at the Mill, Wine Down on False River, Boo-and-Brew, and the New Roads Car Show.

Aimee began to acquire the skills necessary for event management during her early years of race directing in 2015. She has applied her knowledge of graphic design, web design, social media outreach, email campaigning, database management, and marketing to the many other opportunities in her community and now, SGHS.

She has a passion for running and has completed several triathlons, marathons, and other competitive events. Many in her town know Aimee as the "go-getter," as she is frequently called upon for advice or information on fundraising, starting a project or event, and marketing ideas in New Roads.



Aimee (center) is mother to Allie, sophomore at LSU, and Ava, a student at Catholic of Pointe Coupee High School, and is a proud and loving owner of Weimaraner Gunner.

Frances Parker—A Fond Remembrance

By Susan Hitchcock, Columbia, South Carolina

It is hard to start a tribute to my dear friend Frances Parker, who passed away almost a year ago. I came to know Frances and her beloved husband, Milton, rather late. We got acquainted at several SGHS annual meetings, and I considered her a mentor and friend. We discovered that we both had careers in laboratory technology at the Medical University of South Carolina many years ago before embarking on careers centered around plants.

Frances was one of the most gifted propagators I have ever known, and I have known a few good ones, including my late husband, Jim Garner. She had a nursery for many years on Sycamore Street in Beaufort, where she bred many notable salvias including ‘Anthony Parker’ and ‘Christopher,’ both named after grandsons. I never got to see Frances before she died due to Covid, so I wasn’t able to get the ‘Anthony Parker’ that she put aside for me. Jenks (Farmer) says he has it and will bring one to my new garden next time, so I am hopeful. Frances shared many plants from her amazing garden with me over the years, so I feel very lucky for that. She and Milton were stewards to a very significant Federal-style house on East Street, but it was the garden that was the real star. She always joked that they laid out the garden before they ever moved into the house. Everyone including Penelope Hobhouse, Rosemary Verey, Martha Stewart, and countless Garden Conservancy tours made their way as a rite of passage. She lamented in her later years when she could not keep up the maintenance, but it always looked spectacular to me especially when all the citrus was in fruit.

Frances was a self-taught, internationally-respected plant propagator and garden designer. She was greatly influenced in her knowledge of gardens by her own grandmother and mother. In Beaufort, Frances designed and consulted on numerous gardens in the Old Point Neighborhood including the Castle and the Robert Smalls house. She also worked extensively on Spring and Brays Islands and was responsible for the design and caretaking of the gardens at Auldbrass Plantation in Yemassee, S.C., designed in 1939 by Frank Lloyd

Wright. She had many protégées over the years, including the head gardener at Lambeth Palace. A few years ago, I organized a trip to England for Frances and Milton and Jim and myself, and we visited Lambeth and got a private tour of the garden from Alistair.

For many years Frances served as a consultant to both *Southern Living* and *Southern Accents* magazines. Frances was an active supporter of the Historic Beaufort Foundation, and Milton was a founding member. She also served on the tree board for Beaufort County and was an early supporter of the Beaufort County Open Land Trust.

Frances was an accomplished cook and hosted numerous dinner parties including many memorable holidays with everyone seated around her large dining room table. Some of my fondest memories were just sitting in her wonderful kitchen with windows overlooking that garden. There were always blossoms of something in small vases, and she always had my English breakfast tea on hand. Like me, she loved British mysteries, so ETV was always on in the evenings after we sipped sherry. A highlight of every visit was seeing the downtown gardens she was working on. Like another friend, Patti McGee, Frances Parker was a beloved member of her community who will be greatly missed and really cannot be replaced.

[Frances Dawsey Parker died May 6, 2022, in Beaufort, South Carolina at the age of 80. A service and celebration of her life was held June 11, 2022, at the Parish Church of Saint Helena in Beaufort.]



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

Photo by Susan Hitchcock



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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 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>	<i>\$250</i>
<i>Sustainer</i>	<i>\$125</i>
<i>Institution or Business</i>	<i>\$100</i>
<i>Joint</i>	<i>\$60</i>
<i>(two individuals living in the same household)</i>	
<i>Individual</i>	<i>\$40</i>
<i>Student</i>	<i>\$15</i>

*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
Mobile: (318) 421-9144

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 November 30, 2023.

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