



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

Magnolia

Publication of the Southern Garden
History Society

Vol. XXXVII

No. 3

Winter 2026

In Memory of Catherine M. Howett: *Landscape Architect, Historian, Educator, and Early SGHS Leader*

By Ken McFarland,
Brandon, Vermont

Many Society members will know by now that our third president Catherine Mahony Howett has died. An FASLA landscape architect and University of Georgia professor emerita, she was a charter SGHS member and a founding board member who served as president from 1986-1988. Possibly readers have seen the moving online remembrance

of Catherine written by her friend and colleague Suzanne Turner for The Cultural Landscape Foundation website: <https://www.tclf.org/remembering-catherine-m-howett>. This writer recalls early conversations with Catherine during 1980s annual meetings and being deeply impressed with her professional-academic gravitas and appreciation of the many guise in which landscape history could present itself. (Specifically, we discussed landscapes of slavery, such as at Stagville Preservation Center in North Carolina where the author then worked.) With that in mind and in tribute to Catherine Howett, this article's main focus is on an important Southern historic landscapes exhibition she oversaw during the Society's cradle days.

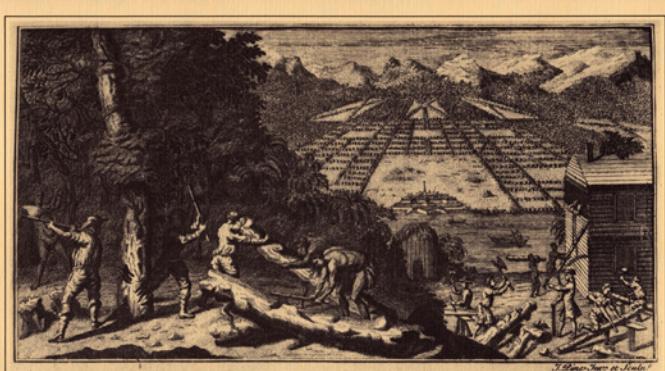


Photo Credit: Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.

Catherine Howett, c. 1980, Catherine M. Howett collection, Cherokee Garden Library, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center

Readers attentive to the history of SGHS may recall that our first annual meeting occurred in Atlanta in April 1983 and that a highlight was the just-mounted Atlanta Historical Society's (AHS) exhibition curated by Catherine and titled *Land of our Own: 250 Years of Landscape and Gardening Tradition in Georgia, 1733-1983*. Catherine, moreover, heightened the enjoyment of SGHS members

(continued on page 2)



LAND OF OUR OWN

The cover to the Land of Our Own catalog.

Inside this Issue

- Pg. 8 Mark Catesby's Southern Journey
- Pg. 13 Historical Trees: Preserving Legacy and Longevity
- Pg. 15 Angel Oak



CALENDAR

March 20-21, 2026. The Garden Club of Charleston will celebrate its 104th birthday in 2026, while its spring tour of homes and garden with mark ninety years of celebrating the “holy city’s” renowned collection of domestic architecture and designed landscapes. Spanning two days, the event begins with Friday, March 20, visits to sites south of Broad Street, while on Saturday, March 21, the focus shifts to the Ansonborough neighborhood. Along with enjoying garden layout and horticultural variety, participants will also get in a look at home interiors not typically open to the public.



For tickets visit the Garden Club’s website at:
https://thegardenclubofcharleston.org/Annual_House_and_Garden_Tours

You are cautioned to buy tickets ahead of time as these tours sell out every year.

April 10-12, 2026. “In Search of the Colonial Landscape, ‘A Revolutionary Idea,’” 42nd annual meeting of the Southern Garden History Society, held in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. To celebrate the nation’s 250th anniversary, this meeting will explore Williamsburg’s restored gardens and the nearby campus of William & Mary. Two optional Sunday bus tours will feature visits to the James River

Plantations in Surry County and Charles City County. See detailed review of the meeting in this issue. Visit southerngardenhistory.org/events/annual-meeting/



April 16-18, 2026. Colonial Williamsburg’s 79th annual garden symposium, celebrating American gardens. Registration information will be available in fall 2025. Visit: colonialwilliamsburg.org/garden-symposium

April 18-25, 2026. Garden Club of Virginia: Historic Garden Week. This beloved statewide event will include unique tours organized and hosted by forty-eight member clubs located from the foothills of the Shenandoah Valley all the way to the beaches of Tidewater. For information, visit: gcvirginia.org/historic-garden-week/



Photo Credit: Garden Club of Virginia.

Restored gardens of Gari Melchers Home and Studio in Falmouth, Virginia.

***We wish to thank our
annual meeting sponsors:***



**Nelson Byrd Woltz
Landscape Architects**

through a 1983 pre-tour discussion on the displays that she and a skilled team of professionals had assembled. Although focused on a single state, *Land of our Own* provided a template applicable to other states and regions, while also laying out a wide field of potential study areas for students of landscape history.

Catherine came well prepared since in the years prior to 1983 she had established credentials fully up to the challenges of curating *Land of our Own*. Having received her MLA at UGA in 1976 (she had previously earned an MA in English at the University of Chicago), she worked as a State of Georgia planner and then a practicing landscape architect until she joined the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design faculty in 1979.

How then was this exhibition laid out, what were the main themes, and what did it encompass? We surely realize that since the title includes “250 Years” the display material, text panels, and catalog will be arranged chronologically. A reader with only a smattering of knowledge of Georgia history, moreover, knows that the years from 1733 to 1983 witnessed events that were beyond the imagination of early-eighteenth-century residents of the colony. Thus, *if seen as a whole*, the lessons conveyed by Catherine and her colleagues through *Land of our Own* will be those of almost head-spinning change.

Two and one-half centuries is indeed a long time, so it might thus be helpful to recall that it spans the lives of only three octogenarians. That said, arguably the greatest landscape changes were seen by the first of three theoretical “eighty-somethings,” especially one who might have been a member of Georgia’s Muscogee/Creek or Cherokee population.¹ While Catherine and the exhibition team could devote only limited space to loss of land by Indigenous peoples, there is reference not only to their lives and landscapes before colonization but also to the fact that subsequently original inhabitants “were

persuaded that every cession of land was the last as the tide of white settlers moved inland...”²

The rejection of British rule provided a central theme for this early phase of *Land of our Own*, Ken Burns’ 2025 *American Revolution* series recently reminding us of how the overthrow of Crown authority affected territories long held by Native Americans. This first eight-decade period (octogenarian #1, ca. 1733-1815) also witnessed the 1751 legalization of slavery in Georgia, thus throwing over the dream of James Oglethorpe and the other founders to create a colony populated by small farmers. As well, legalization of slavery ipso facto led to major landscape changes as planters using enslaved labor took advantage of former Native American acreage to grow staple crops of rice, indigo, hemp, and especially cotton. Beginning early in the nineteenth century this process received a mighty boost when the recently created State of Georgia began a series of land lotteries that aided expansion over Indigenous territories by both small farmers and large-scale planters. As the *Land of our Own* catalog notes, “Two-thirds of the entire land area of Georgia was distributed in less than thirty years this way.” Thus, “the cotton-culture juggernaut pushed the Creeks and Cherokees relentlessly westward, until they were finally—and shamefully---driven out of the state.”³

As Georgia’s broad landscape dramatically changed over the Revolutionary era, other events of interest to garden historians were also recorded in *Land of our Own*. Being a landscape architect, Catherine Howett surely enjoyed an examination of James Oglethorpe’s highly lauded Savannah town plan, now a National Historic Landmark district which has been visited several times during SGHS annual meetings. As an attentive student of the plant world, she would also have taken equal pleasure

(continued on page 4)



“Audience Given by the Trustees of Georgia to Delegation of Creek Indians,” by William Verelst, oil on canvas, c. 1734, Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library

Photo Credit: Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library



Map of the State of Georgia prepared from actual surveys & other documents for Eleazer Early by Daniel Sturges and engraved by Samuel Harrison, 1818.

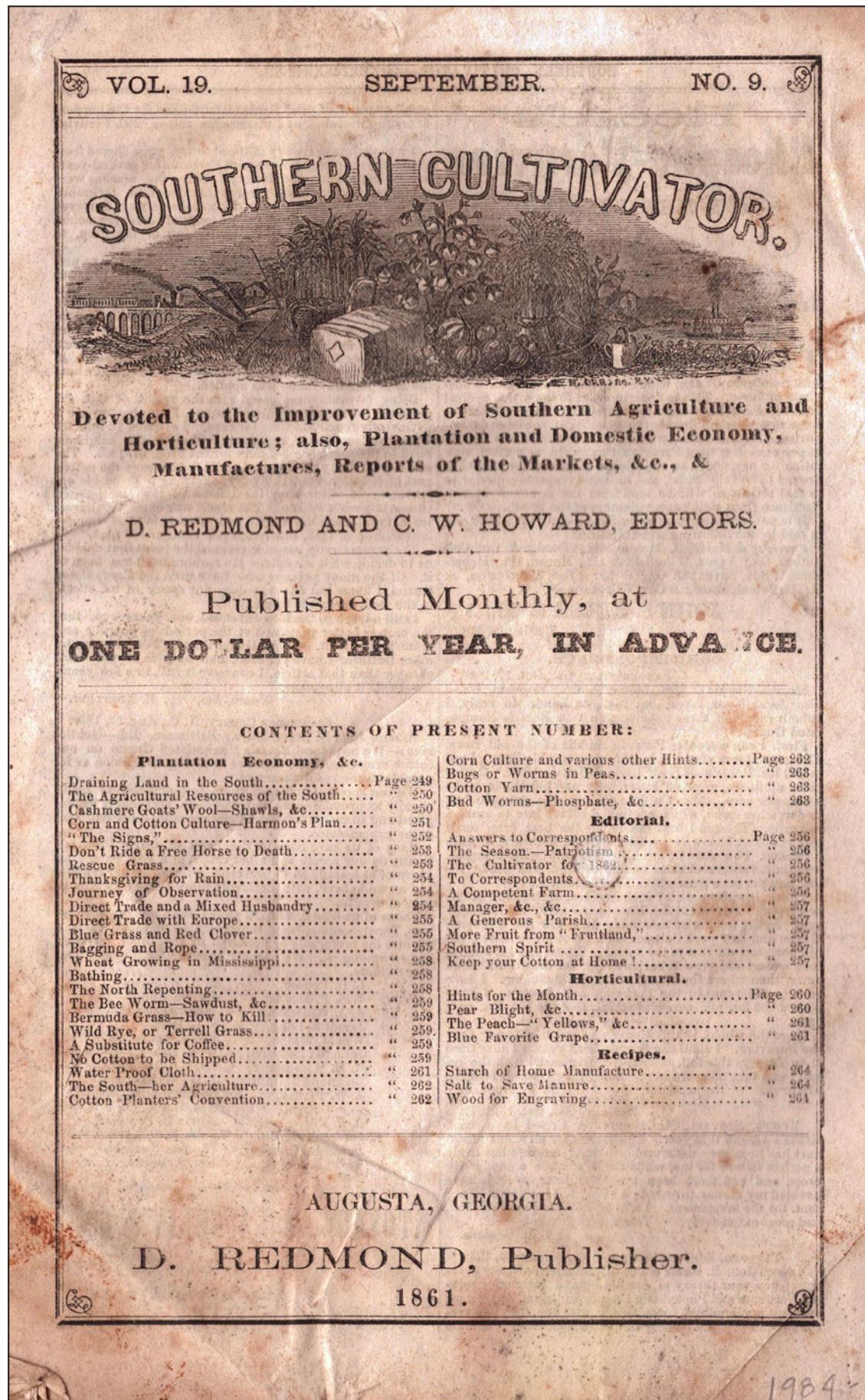
Photo Credit: David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries.

In Memory of Catherine M. Howett: ... (continued from page 3)

in devoting exhibition space to Savannah's Trustees' Garden, this having been patterned after London's Chelsea Physic Garden. As well, she made certain that the work of early naturalists and plant explorers Mark Catesby, John Bartram, and William Bartram was duly covered.⁴

While our first imaginary Georgia resident of eighty-plus years would have witnessed these events and possibly encountered such people as the Bartrams, the second octogenarian (e.g., born in 1815 and died in 1900) would see the impact of colonial and early statehood developments unfolding in the nineteenth century, the age of canals, steam power, and railroads. It was also a period when cotton would come to reign across the state's Black Belt,⁵ Georgia ranking as the nation's second largest cotton producer in 1850 (behind only Alabama) with about one-half million bales going annually to market at mid-century.

Land of our Own thus examined the plantation landscape settings of cotton production and, to a lesser degree, other staples. Covering millions of acres,



Title page of Southern Cultivator, published in Augusta, Georgia, September 1861,

most of Georgia's plantation lands were an agricultural landscape, field after field devoted to growing crops. Around and near the numerous "big houses," however, the grounds would have been a landscape of service buildings including kitchens, kitchen gardens, smokehouses, dairies, and privies. Fencing of varying forms was crucial to keeping out free-ranging livestock.⁶ As well, many such sites included formal gardens, a practice beginning in the eighteenth century and becoming ever more common during the 1800s. (Though not referenced specifically in the exhibit, the 1840s LaGrange gardens at Hills and Dales, as it became named in the twentieth century, offers an especially good example.)⁷ Often at no great distance stood quarters for enslaved families, usually being one- or two-room houses set out symmetrically in single or parallel rows and often featuring small fenced spaces for gardens, domestic fowl, and swept yards.

During the Antebellum period planters and small farmers alike travelled to buy, sell, trade, or record deeds at the newly created towns and county seats such as Columbus, LaGrange, and Macon. Such urban spots were

appearing at crossroad sites and along rivers on ceded lands and after a fashion echoed Savannah with their grid pattern layouts of wide streets and areas set aside for public use. The AHS exhibition also noted how such villages developed around colleges and spas, this being represented in a ca. 1828 map of the resort development ironically termed Indian Springs.

In the 1840s one such new town would be Atlanta. This railroad hub was then less than two decades old when it would be devasted during the 1864 eponymous Civil War battle, that story being duly recorded in *Land of our Own*. Our nineteenth-century octogenarian, then age fifty-something, would see a landscape impacted in ways comparable to (and in places worse than) the American Revolution era. Had that Georgia resident been an enslaved African American, they would have seen their bonds broken with the arrival of Union troops enforcing the Emancipation Proclamation, followed by the permanent protection of the 13th Amendment.

Yet, bondage to the land continued after 1865

(continued on page 6)



Sibley Cotton Mills and powder mill chimney, Augusta, Georgia.

Photo Credit: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

In Memory of Catherine M. Howett: ... (continued from page 5)

through debt peonage. Large plantations were sectioned into smaller farms, and the crop-lien system made hard-scrabble share-cropping the primary and poverty-inducing means of working fields. Concurrently, orchard production profits grew for some farmers, Georgia, of course, becoming especially famous for its peaches.⁸ Cotton farming, however, continued dominant, now to be joined by the extraordinarily rapid growth of cotton manufacturing and mill villages in towns such as LaGrange and Augusta. Georgia thus came to epitomize the concept of the “New South,” perhaps in no way better reflected than by the 1895 “Cotton States and International Exposition,” hosted in Atlanta, the state capital since 1868.

Finally, the third theoretical octogenarian, born in 1900, could possibly have been welcomed by Catherine Howett when the AHS exhibition opened in 1983. They would also have seen Atlanta’s population rise from 90,000 in the early 1900s to over two million in 1980, Atlantans now living in a sprawled-out metropolitan landscape. Thus, terrain marked at the century’s start by narrow roads, horse-drawn conveyance, and railways would become increasingly characterized following World War II by multi-lane highways and an ever-growing level of auto and large truck traffic.

During the early twentieth century prominent



Preliminary Plan of Piedmont Park, Atlanta, Georgia, Olmsted Brothers, L. A. Brookline, Mass, February 17, 1912, Job #02744.
National Park Service Olmsted Archives



Bird's-eye View of the Cotton States and International Exposition, 1895, by W. L. Stoddard, photographer, VIS 170.4052.001.

Photo Credit: National Park Service Olmsted Archives.

Photo Credit: Atlanta History Center, Photograph Collection, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.

landscape architects also left their mark on the changing face of urban Georgia. As an example, *Land of our Own* singled out Atlanta's Druid Hills community, one of Frederick Law Olmsted's late projects and now home to Emory University and divided into multiple National Register districts.⁹ As elsewhere in the nation, moreover, and reflecting the influence of the City Beautiful Movement, parks also became important features of the urban setting. Again, Atlanta provided Catherine Howett and her colleagues with an example, in this case the Olmsted Brothers' design for Piedmont Park, former site of the Cotton States 1895 exposition and continuing today as a crucial "lung" for this major Southern city.

The exhibition's Atlanta focus reflected not only the city's central role in hosting *Land of Our Own*, but it also showed Catherine Howett's keen interest in Georgia's capital and urban landscapes. This interest is demonstrated among her remarkable body of publications that preceded and followed the 1983 AHS exhibition.¹⁰ Therein she addressed myriad topics in a manner that drew the praise of fellow landscape architects and historians—an example of particular significance to Society members being her book, *A World of her Own Making: Katharine Smith Reynolds and Landscape of Reynolda*, published in 2007.

Beyond kudos for her publication and exhibition talents, professional recognition and academic success came to Catherine in many other forms. Reflecting her obvious talent and potential, she received the first ever Neel Reid Research Award from the Peachtree Garden Club in 1979, an honor that surely elevated the status of a new SED faculty member who went on to rise to full professor, serving as such from 1989 until her 1999 retirement as professor emerita. Beyond her base in Georgia, Catherine was to share her knowledge and talents with other high-stature organizations such as Dumbarton Oaks, the American Society of Landscape Architects, Pennsylvania State University, Harvard, and, of course, the Southern Garden History Society. We remain deeply thankful—and proud—that she was one of us.

*The author would like to thank Staci Catron, Cherokee Garden Library senior director, Society past president, and honorary board member and Gail Griffin, honorary board member and long-time SGHS treasurer for their invaluable perspectives on the life of Catherine Howett and their help in making this article ready for publication. KMM

(Endnotes)

1 Partial inspiration for this perspective on human age and the passage of time comes from the lifespans of Georgia's founder, James Oglethorpe, who lived from 1696 to 1785, and his friend Yamacraw headman, Tomochichi, who died in his nineties. A second influence is an awareness of gerontological studies on going

at the University of Georgia. See: <https://publichealth.uga.edu/research/research-institutes/institute-of-gerontology/>

- 2 Exhibition catalog, text by Catherine Howett, *Land of our Own: 250 Years of Landscape and Gardening Tradition in Georgia, 1733-1983*, The Atlanta Historical Society, Atlanta, Ga, 1983, 13. Hereinafter cited as *Land of our Own*. Readers are encouraged to explore the variety of sources available relating to the Compact of 1802 which led to the departure of Indigenous groups from all land with the boundaries of present-day Georgia.
- 3 *Land of our Own*, 15
- 4 *Land of our Own*, 13.
- 5 The term "Black Belt" relates to the region of rich soil that spreads across several states. For more on the topic, see: <https://www.gcsu.edu/ruralstudies/understanding-black-belt-region>
- 6 Many Georgia plantation landscapes were of a smaller scale than the stereotypical examples with gargantuan mansion houses and fields tended by hundreds of enslaved laborers. Although they have been moved from their original location, the dwelling and outbuildings of the Smith Farm at the Atlanta History Center continue to offer an example a type of plantation setting once to be found across much of Georgia. See: <https://southerngardenhistory.org/news/atlanta-history-center-goizueta-gardens-smith-farm-atlanta-georgia/>
- 7 For more on Hills and Dales, see Gardens Page post: <https://southerngardenhistory.org/news/hills-and-dales-estate-lagrange-georgia/>
- 8 While most readers might associate the term "orchard" exclusively with fruit growing, one of Georgia's most profitable industries involved producing naval stores. The basic ingredient came from pine tree sap derived from "turpentine orchards" to be found in the state's eastern regions, the resulting products being chiefly shipped via Savannah. For more details on the industry, see: <https://davidcecelski.com/2019/07/29/the-turpentine-trail/>
- 9 The first of what was to be a series of publications entitled *Magnolia Essays* addressed this topic. Catherine Howett served as editor of the initial essay, which was published in 1993. Written by her UGA student Lucy Lucy Lawliss, it was entitled *Residential Work of the Olmsted Firm in Georgia, 1893-1937*.
- 10 <https://placesjournal.org/assets/legacy/pdfs/rethinking-the-conservation-of-urban-open-spaces.pdf>

Mark Catesby's Southern Journey

By Staci L. Catron, Cherokee Garden Library Senior Director

[Note: The article and images are reprinted from the Cherokee Garden Library's magazine, *Garden Citings* Fall 2025 with permission from the Cherokee Garden Library, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.]

Due to the overwhelming generosity of the sponsors and patrons of the Library's 50 Years & Growing event on May 7th, the Cherokee Garden Library has acquired a second edition of Mark Catesby's monumental work entitled *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands...*, published in London in 1754. An aspiration of Library leaders for decades, this acquisition further advances the Library's nationally recognized collection and elevates the work of the Cherokee Garden Library.

English naturalist and artist Mark Catesby (1683-1749) created the first comprehensive scientific study of North America's flora and fauna. His documentation offered a detailed catalog of species in the American colonies and the Caribbean. Catesby published his groundbreaking two-volume magnum opus, *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*,

in installments in London between 1729 and 1747, with Catesby presenting Part 1 to Queen Caroline in May 1729. After he died in 1749, English naturalist and ornithologist George Edwards oversaw the publication of the second edition in 1754 to provide for Catesby's surviving family—his wife Elizabeth and their children.



False mastic (Sideroxylon foetidissimum) and eastern chipmunk (Tamias striatus), Plate 75, Mark Catesby's The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands, Volume II, 1754, QH41 .C292 1754, Cherokee Garden Library – Historic Collection – Oversize Storage, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

London bookseller Benjamin White published the third edition in 1771.

Mark Catesby's *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*, created during the British colonial era, has significance for multiple reasons. The work is a foundational scientific source, a declaration of exceptional artistry, an early example of ecological awareness, and a critical historical record of lost or endangered species and habitats. His comprehensive

volumes also significantly influenced future generations of naturalists.

The life and contributions of Catesby have been documented in academic volumes; some are noted at the end of this article for in-depth study by readers. However, a brief overview of his first and second expeditions to parts of North America provides an initial understanding of how his significant work came into being.



First Expedition

Driven by a passion for studying the natural world, Mark Catesby began his first American journey in April 1712, arriving in Virginia with his sister, Elizabeth Catesby Cocke. His brother-in-law, Dr. William Cocke, served as the personal physician to Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood. This connection provided Catesby with important access to colonial society. For seven years, Catesby focused his efforts on the flora and fauna of Virginia, documenting his observations and collecting specimens. His travels included a 1714 jaunt from the lower James River to its source in the Appalachian Mountains, as well as visits to Bermuda and Jamaica.

His brother-in-law introduced Mark Catesby to two of the most powerful and wealthy men in the Virginia Colony: William Byrd II and John Custis IV. These connections proved vital, as Byrd and Custis

(continued on page 10)



Eastern kingsnake (Lampropeltis getula) and coastal dothobble (Leucothoe axillaris)], Plate 52, Mark Catesby's The Natural history of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands, Volume II, 1754, QH41.C292 1754, Cherokee Garden Library – Historic Collection – Oversize Storage, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

Mark Catesby's Southern Journey ... (continued from page 9)

were also keen naturalists who recognized the importance of studying flora and fauna to the colony's economic success. He completed his initial fieldwork and returned to England in 1719.

Supported by his family and others, Catesby began extensive fieldwork. He documented, collected, and sketched a wide range of flora and fauna, many of which were previously unknown to European scientists.

By sending specimens and seeds to contacts in England, Catesby was able to build his scientific reputation, secure the patronage that would fund his future expeditions, and ensure the eventual publication of his masterwork.



Second Expedition

Mark Catesby's second journey to North America, between 1722 and 1726, was possible because of organization and financing by a group of investors and the Fellows of the Royal Society of London, including the influential sponsor Sir Hans Sloane, the president of the Royal Society. Sloane was a crucial figure in securing funding for Catesby's second expedition. Other support included Catesby's personal connections with English and American colonial elites and his burgeoning reputation in scientific circles.

Mark Catesby arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, in May 1722. Over the next four years, he traveled hundreds of miles

on foot, horseback, and by canoe, exploring, collecting, and sketching botanical and zoological specimens throughout the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. He also followed rivers to their sources in the Appalachian foothills. Between 1725 and 1726, Catesby visited the Bahama Islands, studying and collecting specimens from the natural world before returning to England.



Mockernut hickory (*Carya tomentosa*), pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*), and northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), Plate 38, *Mark Catesby's The natural history of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands, Volume I, 1754*, QH41 .C292 1754, Cherokee Garden Library – Historic Collection – Oversize Storage, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.



Omissions and Biases in Catesby's Work

During his travels, Mark Catesby relied heavily on the expertise, labor, and guidance of enslaved African Americans and Native Americans. Catesby's descriptions of non-Europeans reflect the European colonial views and

power dynamics of his time. His accounts often excluded or minimized the significant knowledge contributions of Indigenous populations and enslaved Africans about local flora and fauna.

Enslaved African people furthered his studies by sharing valuable information about the flora and fauna of the region. Some scholars highlight Catesby interviewed enslaved individuals to understand their uses of plants for sustenance and medicine. Additionally, enslaved

people had extensive knowledge of the landscape, which helped Catesby navigate challenging terrain. Their labor was fundamental to the plantation system that dominated the geography of Catesby's work.

Native Americans served as Catesby's guides and teachers during his expeditions. He interacted with the region's prominent tribes, including the Muscogee and Cherokee. Catesby recognized his debt for their hospitality and assistance as guides and porters, but his descriptions of them were often dismissive or biased. Further, Catesby did not fully acknowledge Indigenous individuals' deep ecological knowledge, gained over centuries of experience, although it was a critical supplement to Catesby's European-based botanical understanding.

(continued on page 12)



Cuban parrot (*Amazona leucocephala*) and smooth snake-bark (*Colubrina elliptica*), Plate 10, Mark Catesby's *The natural history of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands, Volume I*, 1754, QH41 .C292 1754, Cherokee Garden Library – Historic Collection – Oversize Storage, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

Mark Catesby's Southern Journey ... (continued from page 11)



Publication

During this journey, Catesby and those who collaborated with him collected thousands of plant specimens, hundreds of animal specimens, and fossils to send back to his sponsors in England, to create an extensive visual and written record of North America's flora and fauna. Upon returning to England in 1726, Mark Catesby undertook a long, arduous process to publish *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands*. Facing considerable financial hurdles, he managed the entire production himself, from etching and coloring the plates to securing subscribers. To finance the expensive production, Catesby published the book in installments, seeking subscriptions from prominent patrons and institutions, like the Royal Society of London. The final two-volume work was initially issued in eleven separate parts, each containing twenty plates. Catesby's is a remarkable example of self-published, monumental works from the eighteenth century.

Catesby's detailed, artistic illustrations and scientific observations in *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands* remain valuable for understanding the biodiversity of colonial America and its subsequent changes, particularly as a record of species that are now extinct, like the passenger pigeon and the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. His work also demonstrates early recognition of ecological relationships and the impact of human activities on the natural world.

To view the breathtaking Catesby volumes or explore related resources by scholars, we invite you to schedule an appointment and delve deeper into these topics.



Resources at the Cherokee Garden Library for Study:

Allen, Elsa Guerdrum. *The History of American Ornithology before Audubon*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1951.

Attenborough, David, Susan Owens, Martin Clayton, Rea Alexandatos, Royal Collection (Great Britain), Queen's Gallery (Edinburgh, Scotland), and Queen's Gallery (London, England). *Amazing Rare Things: The Art of Natural History in the Age of Discovery*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007.

Catesby, Mark and Alan Feduccia. *Catesby's Birds of Colonial America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

Catesby, Mark and George Edwards. *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands: Containing the Figures of Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Serpents, Insects, and Plants: Particularly the Forest-Trees, Shrubs, and Other Plants, Not Hitherto Described, or Very Incorrectly Figured by Authors: Together with Their Descriptions in English and French: To Which Are Added, Observations on the Air, Soil, and Waters: With Remarks upon Agriculture, Grain, Pulse, Roots, &c. : To the Whole Is Prefixed a New and Correct Map of the Countries Treated Of*. London: Printed for Charles Marsh ... Thomas Wilcox ... and Benjamin Stichall ..., 1754.

Dean, Patrick. *Nature's Messenger: Mark Catesby and His Adventures in a New World*. First Pegasus Books cloth edition. New York, NY: Pegasus Books, 2023.

Fishman, Gail. *Journeys through Paradise: Pioneering Naturalists in the Southeast*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000.

Harris, Stephen A. *Catesby's Natural History*. Oxford: Bodleian Library Publishing, 2024.

McBurney, Henrietta. *Illuminating Natural History: The Art and Science of Mark Catesby*. London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2021.

McBurney, Henrietta, Windsor Castle Royal Library, and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. *Mark Catesby's Natural History of America: The Watercolors from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle*. London: Merrell Holberton, 1997.

Nelson, E. Charles, and David J. Elliott. *The Curious Mister Catesby: A "Truly Ingenious" Naturalist Explores New Worlds*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2015.

Sloan, Kim, Joyce E. Chaplin, Christian F. Feest, and Ute Kuhlemann. *A New World: England's First View of America*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Taylor, David. *South Carolina Naturalists: An Anthology, 1700-1860*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998.

Historical Trees: Preserving Legacy and Longevity

By Glynn Percival, PhD, and Sean Henry

Historical trees are living monuments that connect us to the past, offering a glimpse into the natural and cultural heritage of a region. These trees, often centuries old, are in delicate balance with their environment. As they age, most of the energy produced by their leaves each year is used to maintain existing tissues, defend against pests and diseases, and reproduce (fruit and seed). Less energy is stored in reserve, making mature trees more susceptible to stress and environmental changes. Over time, these trees are exposed to storms, wounding, drought, waterlogging, heat stress, as well as pests and diseases, which can lead to wood decay, root disorders, and other structural deficiencies. These issues increase the risk of failure and require ongoing management to preserve their legacy. Protecting these trees is not only an ecological responsibility but also a cultural imperative, as they serve as irreplaceable links to history, biodiversity, and community identity. Their survival ensures future generations can experience the beauty and stories they embody.



The Importance of Inspections

Regular inspections of historical trees are essential to identify structural defects, such as broken branches, cracks, split unions, decay, and root issues. These inspections help prevent failures that could lead to personal injury or property damage, while also revealing early symptoms of stress, including insect infestations and disease problems. Addressing these issues early can prevent decline and ensure the tree's longevity. Thorough inspections should be performed at least annually and after major storms to safeguard these irreplaceable natural treasures.



Pruning Historical Trees: Balancing Preservation and Health

Pruning older trees requires careful consideration to balance preservation with health. Common pruning goals include reducing the risk of failure, improving health by increasing light and air penetration, and reducing branch density. However, pruning carries a cost to the tree, as it creates wounds and reduces leaf surface area. For historical trees, removing dead, dying, diseased, broken, and crossing branches is often sufficient to maintain health

and safety.

When reducing branch density, removal and reduction cuts should focus on branch ends to improve light and air penetration and reduce the weight on the portions of the branch most likely to break. Stripping interior portions of the crown is discouraged, as it reduces the tree's ability to photosynthesize, promotes growth at branch ends, and weakens branch taper, increasing the likelihood of branch failure during storms. Routine live-branch removal does not benefit historical trees; no more than 25% of the live crown should be removed during any single operation.

Crown reduction is not a preferred goal for historical trees and should only be undertaken when necessary to address branches interfering with buildings, traffic, utilities, security lights, or other structures; correct storm damage; or resolve structural defects. When reducing the crown, branches should be cut back to lateral branches that are at least one-third the diameter of the cut to minimize the risk of dieback. In some cases, cabling and bracing are preferable alternatives to crown reduction, as they preserve the tree's natural form while addressing structural concerns.



Soil and Nutrient Management

Historical trees growing in lawns or confined areas without fertilization or natural leaf decay can deplete the soil of essential elements, reducing their life expectancy. Landscape soils are often disturbed, lack organic matter, and are inherently low in nutrient content. Competition with turf for nutrients further exacerbates deficiencies in these trees.

Fertilization can prevent nutrient deficiencies and support the health of historical trees. Soil testing is recommended to detect and prevent nutrient-related stress. Adjusting soil pH is often necessary to ensure nutrient availability, and secondary and micronutrient deficiencies should be treated promptly. These measures help maintain the vitality of older trees, allowing them to continue thriving for generations.



Root System Care: Protecting the Foundation of Historical Trees

The root system is the foundation of a tree's health,

(continued on page 14)

Historical Trees: ... (continued from page 13)

and its care is critical for preserving aging trees. Moisture stress and root loss are common threats to these trees. During droughts, stomata in leaves close to reduce water loss from transpiration, which inhibits photosynthesis. Mature trees survive droughts largely on stored reserves, making irrigation essential to prevent moisture stress. Trees require approximately one inch of irrigation water per week during the growing season when rainfall is insufficient. This is equivalent to 625 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet of root zone. Irrigation water can be supplied gradually using a drip system or applied in one or two applications per week. Overwatering, however, can saturate the soil, promoting root disease and root death. Tensiometers installed in the root zone can help assess the need for irrigation and prevent excessive watering.

Compacted soils pose another significant threat to aging trees, as these dense soils resist root growth, reduce soil oxygen levels, and inhibit water retention, all of which can lead to root death. Aeration treatments tailored to the soil, tree, and extent of compaction can alleviate these issues. The use of an air spade is an efficient way to de-compact soils with little to no root damage. These treatments may incorporate organic matter, biochar, fertilizer, pH adjusters, and beneficial fungal associations (mycorrhizae) to improve soil health and support root growth. As many venerable trees tend to attract tourists and visitors who want to view the ancient giants, sometimes it is necessary to erect physical barriers around the tree to prevent excessive foot traffic from compacting the soil in the critical root zone at the base of the tree.

Mulching is a highly effective practice for improving the soil environment as it moderates soil temperatures, conserves soil moisture, provides organic material, and buffers against compaction. A two-to-four-inch depth of mulch over the root zone is optimal. While smaller rings of mulch provide some benefit, wider coverage is preferable, as roots extend beyond the *dripline*, or the tips of the branches. Mulch and soil should not accumulate against the tree's stem, as this can lead to decay and other issues.



Preventing Root Loss

Root loss is the most common factor leading to premature decline and death of mature trees. Physical injuries, such as construction, compaction, installation of underground utilities, or sidewalk repair, can damage roots. Hidden factors, including root disease, excessive soil

moisture from grade changes, or competition with turf for water and nutrients, can also contribute to root loss. Protecting the root system is essential to preserving the health and longevity of historical trees. The root system of a tree often extends further than people think--beyond the reach of its branches, so it is important to prevent or moderate changes to the environment anywhere near this zone.



Integrated Pest Management

Integrated pest management (IPM) principles are vital for managing pests and diseases that weaken older trees by defoliating them or causing stem and root damage. IPM involves periodic inspections to detect pests and other plant health problems. When pests are identified, they are maintained below levels that impact plant health through cultural, biological, or chemical treatments. This proactive approach helps preserve the health and structural integrity of historical trees, ensuring they remain resilient against environmental stressors. Consistent plant health care not only prevents irreversible decline but also supports longevity.



Lightning Protection

One of the biggest killers of large old trees is damage from a lightning strike. The most vulnerable trees are those that are the tallest, near bodies of water, alone on a hill, or of a species susceptible to strikes such as tulip poplar, pine, oak, ash, and elm. Installation of a lightning protection system by a certified arborist is highly recommended for mature trees located in geographical regions that are susceptible to lightning strikes. These systems, when properly installed and maintained, are very successful in protecting these valuable trees from damage or death caused by lightning. Without this protection, a single strike can cause catastrophic structural failure, internal decay, or even immediate death, erasing centuries of growth and cultural significance. Investing in lightning protection is a forward-thinking measure that preserves both ecological and historical value for future generations.



Maintaining Stability and Longevity

Maintaining a stable environment around historical trees is critical to delay their transition from maturity to decline and death. Preventive treatments should be applied to maintain plant health and structure rather than remedial measures once decline begins. Cultural practices, including pruning, fertilization, root system care, and pest management, can improve the structure and increase the longevity of historical trees. Stability ensures these trees can withstand environmental stressors such as drought, soil compaction, and changing climate conditions, reducing vulnerability to pests and diseases. By prioritizing proactive care, we safeguard their structural integrity and ecological value, allowing them to remain vibrant symbols of heritage for years to come.



Preserving Trees for Future Generations

Historical trees are irreplaceable treasures that embody the natural and cultural heritage of a region. They serve as living witnesses to centuries of environmental change, human history, and biodiversity, offering invaluable educational and ecological benefits. Iconic examples include the Major Oak in Sherwood Forest, United Kingdom, linked to the legend of Robin Hood; the Angel Oak in South Carolina, admired for its sprawling beauty; and the General Sherman Tree in California, the largest known single-stem tree on Earth. Their preservation requires a comprehensive approach that includes regular inspections, thoughtful pruning, soil and nutrient management, root system care, and integrated pest management. By maintaining a stable environment and addressing issues proactively, we can ensure that these living monuments continue to thrive, enrich ecosystems, and inspire future generations with their enduring legacy.

Angel Oak

Location: *John's Island, near Charleston, South Carolina*

The Angel Oak is a southern live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) located near Charleston, SC. This impressive tree measures approximately sixty feet tall and has a trunk that is twenty-six feet in circumference. Its massive, sprawling branches cover an area of over 17,000 square feet with the largest branch being over 185 feet long. The tree has survived many storms as it is estimated to be about four hundred to five hundred years old, however it was damaged during Hurricane Hugo in 1989. With care and skillful pruning, it has managed to make a recovery in the ensuing decades since that awful storm. Named for the owners of the former estate on which it once stood—Justus and Martha Angel, the land is now owned by the City of Charleston, which manages the tree and surrounding grounds as a public park. Arboricultural investments are continually made to preserve this historic tree such as installing cables to hold together weak branches, a lightning protection system, as well as props to help support the heavy horizontal limbs. With regular care and protection this living link to the past will hopefully survive well into the future.





Southern Garden History Society
PO Box 631
New Roads, LA 70760

Magnolia grandiflora reproduced courtesy
of Rare Book Div., Special Collections
Dept., UVA Library.

Presort First Class
US Postage
PAID
Waynesboro VA
Permit 115



Awards and Scholarships

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

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

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

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

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

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

Annual Membership Dues

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

<i>Benefactor</i>	\$500 and above*
<i>Patron</i>	\$250
<i>Sustainer</i>	\$150
<i>Institution or Business</i>	\$125
<i>Joint</i>	\$75
<i>(two individuals living in the same household)</i>	
<i>Individual</i>	\$50
<i>Student</i>	\$15

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

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 March 30, 2026.

Officers

President: Derek Wade, Charleston, SC
Vice-President: Susan McLeod Epstein, Charleston, SC
Secretary: Adam Martin, Atlanta, GA
Treasurer: Steve Erickson, Birmingham, AL

Editors:

Peggy Cornett
Monticello, P.O.B. 316
Charlottesville, VA 22902
(434) 984-9816
Cell (434) 465-5297
pcornett@monticello.org

Associate Editor:

Staci Carron
Atlanta History Center
130 W. Paces Ferry Rd, NW
Atlanta, GA 30305
(404) 814-4046
scatron@atlantahistorycenter.com

Board of Directors

Jeff Abt, Nacogdoches, TX
Barbara Adkins, Harpersville, AL
Leslie Bird, Fredericksburg, VA
Thomas Baker, Washington, DC
Frances Carter, Tallahassee, FL
Carla Foster, Crockett, TX
Eric Jackson, Winston-Salem, NC

F. Todd Lasseigne, Theodore, AL
Judy Boyce Perry, Portsmouth, VA
Jessica Russell, Jackson, MS
Peggy Singlemann, Richmond, VA
Tim Smalley, Athens, GA
Ex Officio, Past President
Susan Haltom, Ridgeland, MS

Honorary Board Members

Staci Catron, Atlanta, GA
Gordon Chappell,
Williamsburg, VA
Gail Collman Griffin,
Bethesda, MD
Susan Haltom,
Ridgeland, MS

A. Jefferson Lewis III, Athens, GA
Kenneth M. McFarland,
Brandon, VT
Ben Page, Nashville, TN
Mary Anne Pickens, Columbus, TX
William C. Welch,
College Station, TX