



Magnolia

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

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Southern Garden History Society Annual Meeting: Williamsburg, Virginia

By Eric Jackson, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

The Southern Garden History Society gathered in Williamsburg, Virginia, for its 42nd annual meeting during a season of layered commemoration: the nation's Semi-quincentennial and the Centennial of Colonial Williamsburg. Over several clear spring days, members saw Williamsburg as a historic landscape still under active care, where archaeology, horticulture, planning, and interpretation continue to shape the visitor experience.

The weather cooperated beautifully. The Williamsburg Lodge placed us in the middle of the Colonial Williamsburg Historic Area, with gardens, streets, taverns, and lecture rooms all close at hand. Tulips seemed to appear at every turn. The spring display also hinted at one of the recurring questions of the weekend: how Williamsburg's landscape reflects both eighteenth-century evidence and the twentieth-century restoration that gave the historic area much of its present character.

As always, the meeting was also a reunion, that social element continuing to be one of the Society's strengths. The study of garden history is often carried forward through lectures, articles, archives, and excavation reports, but it is also sustained by conversations on garden paths, over meals, and aboard buses moving from one site to the next.

It opened in the Williamsburg Colony Room with



Southern Garden History Society with the Fife and Drums.

Photo Credit: Sarah Street.

the annual business meeting and awards presentation. Members thanked Derek Wade for his steadfast service as president and welcomed Susan Epstein as incoming

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Staci Catron Inducted as Honorary Member of ASLA

Readers of the Cherokee Garden Library's *Garden Citings* Spring 2026 issue will know that in November 2025 our *Magnolia* associate editor, Staci Catron, received the high recognition of induction as an honorary member of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA). They also will know that Staci serves as senior director of that publication's source, the Atlanta History Center's Cherokee Garden Library (CGL), which along with its other important roles in collections development and research serves as the records repository for the Southern Garden History Society. No better spot could be found, given CGL's core mission of collecting and preserving Southeastern garden history, with a strong focus on public access and diverse community traditions. Anyone familiar with CGL, moreover, realizes that its institutional impact is of not only regional but also of truly national importance.

Of course, we all know Staci is as a Society past president and honorary member of the SGHS board of directors. Co-author of *Seeking Eden: A Collection of Georgia's Historical Gardens*, Staci was also installed in 2014 as an honorary member of the Garden Club of America (GCA) in recognition of professional accomplishments and collaborations that have gained her a national reputation as a scholar, a landscape historian, and an ardent preservationist. Her preservation achievements gained further high recognition in 2023 when she received the GCA's Historic Preservation Medal recognizing "her significant contributions as a garden preservationist and a scholar."

If you have not yet seen it, we highly recommend exploring the *Garden Citings* piece in question at the link found at the

close of this article.* The reader can gain here a fuller understanding of the ties that connect ASLA, and most especially the Georgia Chapter of the organization, to Staci Catron, the CGL, and a wider community of shared interests, mission, and goals. (CGL also houses the ASLA Georgia Chapter's records.) One also learns that as an honorary member she has joined a group of Georgians that is stellar by any measure, including the former first couple, President Jimmy and First Lady Rosalynn Carter.

*https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/app/uploads/2026/04/CGL_Garden_Citings_Spring-2026_WEB.pdf



Curt Jackson and Staci Catron at the National Leaders, Outstanding Awards, and Honorary Members Luncheon, American Society of Landscape Architects national meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, October 9, 2025.

president and Thomas Baker as incoming vice president. Gail Griffin was named an honorary director in recognition of her distinguished service and contributions to the Society, while Derek Wade received the Certificate of Merit for his leadership during an especially difficult period following the death of President Randy Harelson. The Garden Club of Virginia received the William Lanier Hunt Award for exceptional service in the understanding, furtherance, and preservation of Southern garden history, with Ben and Libby Page each winning the Flora Ann Bynum Medal in affection to honor their many years of dedication to the Society.

Four scholarship and grant recipients were also present. Trishia Nguyen, a senior in horticulture at Texas A&M, received the Undergraduate Scholarship. Sierra Roark, a doctoral candidate in anthropology and historical archaeobotany at the University of North Carolina, received the James R. Cothran Graduate Fellowship. Young Professional Grants were awarded to Haley Bowers, a gardens educator at Old Salem Museums & Gardens, and Hayden Hammons, a landscape architect at CARBO Landscape Architecture and adjunct professor at the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture at Louisiana State University.

Friday afternoon's lectures centered on Colonial Williamsburg, both as an eighteenth-century town and as a twentieth-century restoration. Mark Wenger, who served for thirty-two years as senior director of Facilities and Planning at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, opened with "Williamsburg: Here and Now." His talk placed the town within a longer history of planning, from the Wren Building to the Capitol, and introduced

the Frenchman's Map, zoning, building codes, and the physical organization of Williamsburg as one of the first planned towns in British America.

William D. Rieley, founding principal of Rieley & Associates, followed with "John Custis IV: Making His Fashion His Fancy." His subject was Custis Square, which members would visit later that afternoon. John Custis IV, who lived from 1678 to 1749, was one of the "Brothers of the Spade," a circle of Enlightenment-era men deeply interested in plants and gardening. Rieley

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Scholarship, fellowship, and grant recipients Haley Bowers, Sierra Roark, Trishia Nguyen, and Hayden Hammons.

Photo Credit: Sarah Street.



John Whitaker, Anna Byrn, Peter Hatch, Dean Norton, Nick Lucchetti, Jack Gary, and Judy Perry.

Photo Credit: Peggy Cornett.

SGHS Annual Meeting: ... (continued from page 3)

described Custis Square as a foundational site for garden archaeology in America. For members who would like to continue studying the plants associated with Custis, the Society's *Southern Plant Lists* includes Peter Hatch's compilation of plants sent by Custis to Peter Collinson in London.

Jack Gary, associate vice president for Historic Resources at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, then spoke on "Shurcliff and Beyond: Colonial Williamsburg's Master Landscape Plan." Arthur Shurcliff, Colonial Williamsburg's chief landscape architect from 1928 to 1941, shaped the gardens, streetscapes, and town landscape during the early restoration years. Much of what visitors now recognize as Williamsburg's garden character owes something to his work. Gary placed Colonial Williamsburg's new fifty-year master plan, designed by Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, in conversation with Shurcliff's first comprehensive plan of 1929. He also discussed the Foundation's current interest in strengthening the visitor's sense of immersion by expanding thresholds and boundaries, while recognizing both the colonial era and the early twentieth-century Colonial Revival as periods of significance.

Friday afternoon concluded with visits to Custis Square and the Governor's Palace gardens, plus time to explore gardens on the east end of town. At Custis Square, Colonial Williamsburg archaeology staff spoke about how the open ground, marked by excavation and research, offered a different kind of garden experience from the enclosed and planted spaces elsewhere in town. At the Governor's Palace, gardeners and landscape staff shared practical details about maintenance, plant care, and the history of the restoration. Those conversations were among the most valuable parts of the visit.

That evening, members gathered in the hotel lobby for a procession to Shields Tavern, accompanied by Colonial Williamsburg's Fifes and Drums. The evening cooled as the group moved through the historic area. Drinks and conversation in the Shields Tavern garden led into dinner by candlelight inside the tavern.

Saturday began with another set of lectures. Tony



Ben Page, Derek Wade, Susan Epstein, and Libby Page enjoying the splendor of Colonial Williamsburg.

Photo Credit: Sarah Street

Orband, associate director of Grounds and Gardens at William & Mary, gave members a preview of the afternoon's campus tour. Speaking on his fortieth birthday, Orband described the campus' recent recognition as an arboretum, its wildlife corridor work, the student worker program, and the long development of the Revely Garden in partnership with the Garden Club of Virginia. He also discussed the Sunken Garden, the threat of beech leaf disease moving in from the Northeast, the role of urban forestry on campus, the university's urban wood program, and the Kale-Anderson Daffodil Tribute Garden.

Nick Luccketti, president and principal archaeologist of the James River Institute for Archaeology, presented "Gardens Revealed: Archaeological Investigations at Bacon's Castle, Mt. Pleasant, Virginia, and the Miles Brewton House, Charleston, South Carolina." Luccketti has been surveying and excavating Virginia sites since 1974 and is internationally recognized for discovering the original 1607 James Fort. He conducted landmark excavations at Bacon's Castle in Surry County, Virginia in the 1980s and his work at this 1665 Jacobean brick house uncovered the earliest complete formal English garden plan in North America. Luccketti would reappear on the Sunday Surry County tour, several sites bearing the mark of his long involvement.

Peggy Singlemann, host of Virginia Home Grown and retired director of horticulture at Richmond's Maymont, spoke candidly about the practical realities of garden restoration. She moved between restoration history and working knowledge: protecting historic fabric during

garden work, coordinating with nurseries far enough in advance to source appropriate plants, and using tools such as Google Earth to help expand a site's visual record over time. One comment stayed with many of us: "We are now the environment." It was a reminder that historic landscapes are not separate from ecological change. They are part of it.

Candy Crosby then spoke about the Garden Club of Virginia, with particular attention to its Historic Landscape Research Fellowship Program, which includes the William D. Rieley Fellowship and the Rudy J. Favretti Fellowship. She reviewed several past fellowship projects, including Sabine Hall, Eyre Hall, Greenville, Upper Bremo, Lower Bremo, Tuckahoe, Sherwood Forest, Morven Park, the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Western State Hospital, Blandy Experimental Farm, the State Arboretum of Virginia trails projects, and two gardens designed by Ellen Shipman. The fellowship's value lies in restoration and documentation.

The final Saturday morning lecture came from Lynn Crump, retired landscape architect with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Focusing on scenic preservation, Crump spoke about scenic resources as public assets, including mountain views, rural roads, urban vistas, rivers, and historic landscapes. She also explained the practical steps required to protect them, such as forming coalitions, mapping viewsheds, and documenting scenic quality to make it legible for decision-makers. In Virginia, scenic resources are included in the ConserveVirginia strategy, which layers conservation priorities across the state. Her most direct advice was memorable: "If you don't document it, you can't say that it's important to you."

After lunch, members

walked about selected gardens on the west end of Colonial Williamsburg and the campus of William & Mary. At each Colonial Williamsburg garden, landscape and gardening staff spoke about the site and answered questions. A highlight was meeting the staff entomologist, who troubleshoots pest problems throughout the historic area, implements integrated pest management, and develops spray programs for orchard care.

The John Blair Kitchen garden, designed within the Shurcliff landscape tradition, offered a small, enclosed herb garden near the kitchen dooryard. Its beds were filled with herbs and flowers in a manner suggestive of early "physick" gardens. At the Bryan House garden, an arbor covered with trumpet honeysuckle and American wisteria

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The enduring elegance of the Governor's Palace grounds.

Photo Credit: Staci L. Catron.

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opened toward boxwood parterres. The garden's design drew from patterns shown on Claude Joseph Sauthier's maps of North Carolina towns from around 1769.

Visiting the Taliaferro-Cole House offered a look a site associated with Thomas Crease, an eighteenth-century Williamsburg gardener who lived there for many years. The site's topography has remained largely intact, while three separate rectangular areas, each enclosed and planted differently, help convey the scale and organization of a working town lot.

Archaeology was underway at the Peter Scott House and Shop. This lot, long interpreted as a working kitchen garden and plant nursery, is now being studied to answer questions about Peter Scott, the cabinetmaker associated with the property, and the lot's relationship to Custis Square. Colonial Williamsburg archaeologists spoke about artifacts and evidence connected to the property's history, from its purchase by John Custis IV in 1714 to its later use and destruction by Continental soldiers in 1775.

The Custis Tenement garden offered a different kind of lesson: how a historic garden responds to modern plant disease. Because there was limited archaeological evidence for a colonial-period garden on the site, Shurcliff looked to Sauthier's eighteenth-century town maps for pattern and form. The resulting parterre garden, with crushed shell and brick paths, has been partially enclosed by boxwood. In 2022, the garden was replanted with boxwood varieties selected for resistance to boxwood blight.

The James Geddy House garden was among the most refreshing stops because of its utilitarian character.

A vegetable garden framed with border beds, it gave some sense of the more ordinary productive gardens that likely filled many urban lots. Compared with the more ornamental Colonial Revival gardens, it was quieter and perhaps closer to the daily reality of many eighteenth-century households.

The tour continued to the end of Duke of Gloucester Street and onto the William & Mary campus. The Sir Christopher Wren Building, the first structure on campus



Comradery among SGHS members as they explore a Williamsburg garden.

Photo Credit: Peggy Cornett.

and the oldest college building in the United States, provided the starting point. Tony Orband led members through the first portion of the campus tour, discussing significant trees near the Wren Building and the recently installed Revely Garden. He noted that the campus grounds, more than two-hundred acres, are maintained by a staff of around thirty, with additional student and volunteer support.

William & Mary's recent arboretum status has brought new attention to campus trees, and the university is using IrisBG as both a management tool and a public-facing resource for tree identification. The Sunken Garden, despite its name, is not a garden in the usual sense but a 2.7-acre sunken lawn framed by trees in the old campus core. Designed in the early twentieth century and constructed in 1935, it connects visually and spatially to the rear of the Wren Building and remains one of the campus's most familiar gathering places.

The Revely Garden had a longer gestation, having its origins in Charles Gillette's 1926 Beaux-Arts campus plan for William & Mary but not being built at the time. Beginning in 2018, with encouragement from the college's twenty-seventh president, Taylor Reveley, and his wife, a partial realization of the design moved forward with support from the Reveleys, other donors, and the Garden Club of Virginia.

Displaying thirty-thousand daffodils, the Kale-Anderson Daffodil Tribute Garden honors two longtime employees whose offices overlooked the field from the nearby Wren and Brafferton buildings. To underscore the point, local daffodil expert Vivian Herbert had prepared an impressive display, with cut flowers arranged by all thirteen daffodil divisions and examples of favorite cultivars.

On Sunday, members chose between two excursions. One route visited the plantation sites at Sherwood Forest, Westover, and Berkeley in Charles City County. The other, which this author joined, traveled to Surry County, that tour beginning with a ferry crossing of the James River and a first stop at Smith's Fort, a property originally presented by indigenous leader Powhatan to the early tobacco planter John Rolfe when Rolfe married Powhatan's daughter Pocahontas in 1614. The remains of the fort are still visible, though our tour focused on the plantation house and surrounding landscape, 1970s dendrochronology dating the existing dwelling to 1763. Ultimately it was acquired by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, which in 1935 worked with the Garden Club of Virginia to restore the eighteenth-century-style domestic garden. Our Saturday speaker Nick Lucchetti met the group there and spoke about his long archaeological association with the site.

From Smith's Fort we continued to Bacon's Castle, where Nathaniel Bacon never lived and which is not a

castle. It is, however, the site of the largest documented seventeenth-century garden in America. The Jacobean-style house was built for Arthur Allen, who died in 1669, four years after its completion. The property passed to his son, Arthur Allen II, who laid out the garden around 1680, likely drawing on garden traditions he had encountered during his education in England. The garden was rediscovered in 1983, when Nick Lucchetti and his archaeological team uncovered evidence of a rare seventeenth-century pleasure garden that also helped sustain the Allen family. Today the large central sections are in grass, while the surrounding border gardens are maintained by a part-time gardener. Among the pleasures of the visit were the hawthorn hedge, masses of columbine, and several kitchen garden crops.

The final stop was Chippokes State Park, located across the James River from Jamestown and often described as one of the country's oldest continually farmed plantations. Granted in 1619 to militia officer and House of Burgesses member William Powell, over time it was farmed by various owners, often non-resident. Its last private owners were Ohio timber magnates Victor and Evelyn Stewart, who gave the property to the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1968, the site opening as a state park in 1970.

Here members toured the Jones-Stewart Mansion and grounds containing thirty-one buildings, including a pre-1820 enslaved quarters, believed to be the oldest such building on a Virginia state property. Of great interest was Evelyn Stewart's "Paradise Gardens," which date to the 1920s, one Henry Blount serving as gardener. Stewart, an avid gardener, developed the space in an English formal style and planted it heavily with crape myrtles and azaleas. A member of the Garden Club of Virginia, she first opened it to the public during Historic Garden Week in 1932. During our visit, the garden had an enveloping quality. Tall, twisting crape myrtle trunks formed a loose overhead structure, while azaleas bloomed heavily beneath and around them.

By the time the bus returned to Williamsburg, the meeting had given members a wide view of garden history in practice. We had heard from archaeologists, landscape architects, horticulturists, preservationists, public garden staff, scholars, and volunteers. We had seen gardens shaped by excavation, documentary research, Colonial Revival design, campus planning, scenic preservation, pest pressure, plant disease, and daily care.

The annual meeting remains one of the Society's best forms of learning. It brings members into direct contact with historic places and with the people responsible for studying and caring for them. In Williamsburg, those encounters felt especially apt, as the gardens and landscapes continue to reward close looking, careful research, and ongoing conversation.

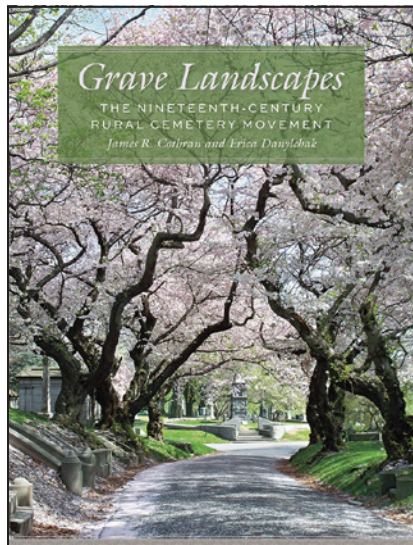
Book Reviews

Grave Landscapes: The Nineteenth-Century Rural Cemetery Movement, by James R. Cothran and Erica Danylchak | University of South Carolina Press, 2018 | Hardcover, 304 pages | ISBN-10: 1611177987; ISBN-13: 978-1611177985 | List price \$49.99

In early 2012 the Southern Garden History Society lost a stalwart friend with the death of past-president and long-time board member James Cothran.

Many of us knew Jim through his regular attendance at annual meetings, his contributions to *Magnolia*, his role as a university educator, and most especially from his books. He had a keen interest in Charleston, a focus of two of the South Carolina native's publications. Reviews of both of his Charleston-focused studies (published in 1995 and 2010, respectively) have appeared in *Magnolia*, along with an examination of his 2003 work *Gardens and Historic Plants of the Antebellum South*.

Jim Cothran's interest in early burying grounds and cemeteries was also well known. Indeed, his final *Magnolia* contribution was the Winter 2012 article "Hollywood Cemetery: A Quintessential Garden Cemetery of the 19th-Century," co-authored by his one-time student at Georgia State University and award-winning architectural historian Erica Danylchak.* The essay closed by recalling Jim's recent death and noting the authors' upcoming book on the rural cemetery movement.



Six years passed, however, before publication in 2018 of *Grave Landscapes: The Nineteenth-Century Rural Cemetery Movement* (University of South Carolina Press). While an in-print notice appeared in the Winter-Spring 2018 edition of *Magnolia*, this is our first full-scale review of Cothran and Danylchak's important study.

The title points to events unfolding in 1800s America, a century of tremendous geographical and population expansion. For background, however, the authors cross the Atlantic and discuss attitudes towards death and interment from classical antiquity through the medieval period, along with shifting views over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Readers will be familiar with the scene presented by early burying grounds, both in Europe and places here that saw the first colonial arrivals: grave markers of various sizes and designs clustered together, sometimes closely packed, and usually in a churchyard.

Frequently those stones reveal both who lies below and how they viewed death. Bones, skulls, and other evidence of bodily deterioration (*momento mori*) remind passersby of their own mortality and the terrors of eternal damnation. Especially evident in New England, such sentiments softened in time with the weakening of Calvinistic influences that had underpinned Puritanism. Concurrently, however, population growth and the tight clustering of graves led to increasingly unsanitary



Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, VA, decorating day 1867.

Image Credit: VCU Libraries via Wikimedia.

conditions. In an age when putrid air and mysterious miasmas were linked to deadly diseases a need for change became abundantly clear. Thus, in the early 1800s cities so affected led the way in creating the rural cemeteries examined in *Grave Landscapes*. (Derived from the Greek for sleeping place, *Koimētērion*, “cemetery” used as term for a burial place is highly reflective of Romantic-era attitudes about death.) Such interment sites, however, would be more than simply broad acreage where graves could be placed farther apart. Instead, they heralded a fresh approach to landscape design.

To understand that new thinking fully the authors discuss the dramatic change in garden tastes that spanned the eighteenth century, Great Britain taking the lead. They thus recount how the Tudor-Stuart fashion for

highly structured and geometrically organized gardens largely yielded to the *jardin Anglais*. The newer naturalistic settings borrowed ideas from seventeenth-century landscape paintings to artfully interweave trees, water, and fields with features such as bridges and small temples to fashion overall designs sometimes termed “Picturesque,” or when further simplified and made more pastoral, “Beautiful.” In time, these sites might also include monuments to the dead as well as mausolea, thereby becoming true elegiac landscapes.

Such gardening ideas also spread throughout continental Europe. (More broadly, this reflected the growing influence of Romanticism in reaction to the previous dominance of Enlightenment thinking.) It wasn't until 1804, however, that sanitary burial practices

on a large scale melded with Picturesque settings at the new Père Lachaise cemetery in Napoleonic Paris, a site enduringly famous for its winding tree-lined roads, park-like feeling, and awe-inspiring monuments. Père Lachaise, in turn, would soon become the inspiration for suburban Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery, the starting place in Cambridge and Watertown, Massachusetts of the rural cemetery movement and the inspiration for similar burial grounds around the nation.

Grave Landscapes thus looks closely at the Mount Auburn story, exploring first the burial sanitation problems that faced the growing early-nineteenth-century Boston area. Readers learn of the reform momentum and the resulting establishment in 1831 of Mount Auburn, one of the central founders being Dr. Joseph Bigelow. Acutely aware of the burial crisis, Dr. Bigelow, himself a botanist, helped to enlist help from the recently created (1829) Massachusetts Horticultural Society in planting out the new Elysium. It was, as well, the Horticultural Society's first president, General Henry Dearborn, along with engineer, surveyor, and proto-landscape architect Alexander Wadsworth,



Photo Credit: Ken McFarland.

Late 18th-century marker, Brandon, VT old town burying ground.

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who envisioned and installed the Picturesque design for the initial seventy-acre site...ponds, mounts, and all.

Mount Auburn, in turn, served as the bellwether for a succession of rural cemetery installations beginning in the Northeast, but also appearing soon in the South and Midwest. Moreover, it serves as a pivot point for the authors to explore the people and places that followed the Mount Auburn prototype, either from the outset or later borrowing elements from its design. Detailed descriptions frequently joined by a fine array of site plans, contemporary views, and modern photographs expand our awareness of such early examples as Philadelphia's Laurel Hill, Brooklyn's Green-Wood, and Baltimore's Green Mount. (Note the naturalistic tone offered by their names.) In the South, Macon, Georgia's Rose Hill appeared first, followed soon by such famous cemeteries as Richmond's Hollywood and Bonaventure in Savannah.

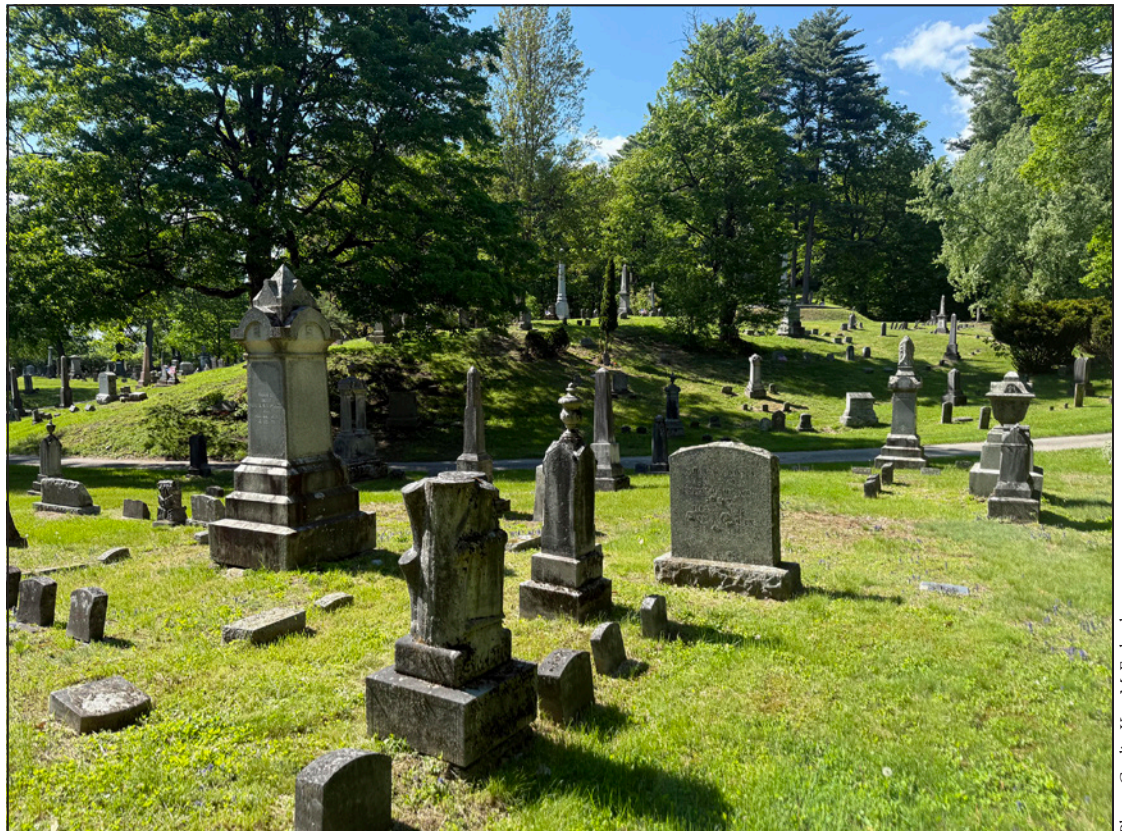
Subsequent chapters dig into details of rural cemetery location (proximity to urban centers), design (roads, pathways water features), enclosures (entrance gates, boundary walls, plot boundaries, and fences), and architecture (chapels, monuments, and mausoleums). Here, for example, the use of Egyptian Revival forms and motifs revealed the funeral connotations they held in the public imagination, appearing in gate and cenotaph design (e.g. the Sphinx Civil War memorial at Mount Auburn) plus pyramid and obelisk grave markers. Any publication coauthored by Jim Cothran, of course, will surely encompass a discussion of plants, which became far more crucial in rural cemeteries than in earlier graveyards. Since such burial places also came to be widely recognized as arboreta, readers will appreciate the discussion of cemetery trees and in particular the expansive listings of trees and shrubs at Laurel Hill and Cincinnati's Spring Grove. SGHS members are especially aware of the visual and emotional impact offered by live oaks draped with Spanish moss at numerous Southern cemeteries, as they are

with the softening effect provided by various flowering and colorful plants, such as azaleas and roses.

While roses often convey personal feelings, cemetery monuments can also symbolize emotional bonds. Perhaps best known is the weeping willow, but as addressed in a full chapter, human sentiments and the stone carver's art took many forms in rural cemeteries. Draped urns, bas-relief floral arrangements, plus stone trees with sawn-off tops and limbs join Christian and Jewish symbols such as angels, crosses, open bibles, and Stars of David to list some of the favored "set-in-stone" statements of respect and love.

Grave Landscapes moves on from such discussion of details to examine the broader impact of rural cemeteries on public parks, garden suburbs, and the landscape architecture profession. Readers may recall that over time these naturalistic burial places became increasingly fashionable gathering spots for the general population, their numbers soon greatly exceeding those who came only to mourn the deceased. The need for separate public parks therefore became manifestly apparent, with rural cemeteries joining famous European parks to provide the principle models for park layouts.

Promoted vigorously by Andrew Jackson Downing, New York's Central Park became the prime example of such landscapes for the people, with Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted getting credit not only for the



Pine Hill, Brandon, VT rural cemetery established late 1850s.

Photo Credit: Ken McFarland.

massive park's creation but also for being the first such professionals termed "landscape architects. As well, *Grave Landscapes* notes that contemporaneously with Central Park the first garden suburb, Llewellyn Park was under construction in New Jersey less than twenty miles away. A private development and not a public landscape, Llewellyn Park joined by Lake Forest in Illinois are additional reflections of the naturalistic design influence of the rural cemetery movement.

Grave Landscapes concludes with a look beyond Vaux and Olmsted to others who stood out over the nineteenth century as rural cemetery/public park-garden suburb designers and to the developments that led to the 1899 founding of the American Society of Landscape Architects. The list includes such talented amateur cemetery creators as Bigelow and Dearborn at Mount Auburn and moves along to noteworthy immigrants like the Scottish architect John Notman (Philadelphia's Laurel Hill and Lynchburg's Spring Hill) and the highly trained and experienced Prussian landscape gardener Adolph Strauch (Spring Grove in Cincinnati). The need for the level of professionalism evidenced by the latter two in particular became manifest as clients witnessed the difference between the work of untrained landscape designers and that of practitioners such as Notman and Strauch.

Educational opportunities in the field, however, would remain limited mainly to employment with established specialists like Olmsted, himself an autodidact, or through other forms of extramural training. Thus, it was only

the year 1900, the final twelve months of the nineteenth century, that saw the establishment at Harvard of the country's first full-scale program in landscape architecture, a course of study that remains widely recognized for excellence. (Its founders, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and Arthur Shurcliff are well known for their work in the South, as are numerous Harvard graduates.) To bring matters full circle, the authors highlight the fitting nature of Harvard's close proximity to Mount Auburn Cemetery, the two near neighbors being highly important milestones in the story of the rural cemetery movement and of developments it helped to engender.

Grave Landscapes is to be applauded not only for the excellent writing but also for the numerous finely-reproduced illustrations (noted above) that provide stellar visual complements to the subject matter. Additionally, many readers will appreciate the wide body of sources cited in endnotes and bibliography, plus the richly detailed index and the appended bibliographical essay. That gratitude will also extend to the two other appendices, the first offering extended sketches of several standout rural cemeteries and the second being a larger list containing only the basic details. Succinctly stated, this is a masterful work that should have a place of the bookshelf of any landscape historian.

*Erica Danylchak holds degrees in history from Boston University and heritage preservation from Georgia State University. She has worked in archival science at

the Cherokee Garden Library and Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center and in preservation as executive director of the Buckhead Heritage Society. Danylchak served as a research fellow for the Georgia Historic Landscape Initiative and in 2009 received the Jenny D. Thurston Memorial Award from the Atlanta Urban Design Commission. She currently works in the historic preservation field and lives in Atlanta.

Reviewed by Ken McFarland, Brandon, Vermont

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Image Credit: Wikimedia Commons.

Thomas Chambers painting of Mount Auburn Cemetery ca. 1850 in National Gallery.

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Southern Women, Southern Landscapes: Cultural Reflections on the Garden, 1870-1970, by Judith W. Page and Elise L. Smith

This article first appeared in the Jackson, MS newspaper *The Clarion Ledger* on March 29, 2026. Creativity and courage take root in *Southern Women, Southern Landscapes*, a new work co-authored by two members of the Southern Garden History Society.

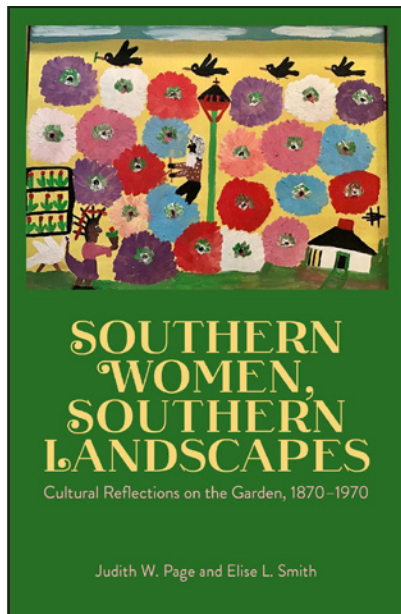
Intensely researched and visually engaging, *Southern Women, Southern Landscapes* expands our understanding of eleven women who changed the South—Black, white, rich, and poor—whose enduring cultural contributions are all, in some way, rooted in the land.

Along the way, we'll pause at wild places, living gardens, foreboding swamps, and working farms. Each woman in this book felt pulled to a certain landscape that grounded her senses, nourished her creativity, and bolstered her courage to face the social, political, and environmental upheavals that occurred from 1870 to 1970. Perhaps you can relate.

Many chapters feature household names. Readers will instantly recognize writers such as Eudora Welty and Zora Neale Hurston, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helped reshape the national conversation about slavery. Other names may be less familiar but no less fascinating, like the African-American folk artist Clementine Hunter, whose bold painting graces the cover, and the fierce conservationist, author, and botanical artist, Caroline Dormon.

Especially impactful are the pictures. Full-color reproductions include woodcuts, drawings, paintings, and folk art, which often appear alongside poems and passages from novels. Archival garden images, botanical studies, and hand-drawn planting diagrams are also delightfully plentiful, heightening our sense of the humanity, talent, and at times unexpected modernity of these twentieth-century figures.

One particularly striking inclusion is a previously unpublished poem by Harlem Renaissance poet Anne



Spencer of Lynchburg, Virginia. A civil rights activist, librarian, and gardener, Spencer's home and Arts & Crafts-era garden doubled as her private refuge and an active salon for Black intellectuals; among her guests were other women in this book.

Another highlight is a delicate watercolor of native plants by Harriet Beecher Stowe—an unexpected reminder that the famed author was also a careful observer of the natural world with remarkable artistic talent.

To bring these wide-ranging stories together at last, in one volume, the authors travel the South, retracing the landscapes that spoke so deeply to their subjects. They visit preserved gardens, historic sites, and cemeteries. They comb through archives and personal collections. And then, the real work begins.

After gathering these many threads, they weave them together with their own insightful cultural connections, often drawn from their shared academic backgrounds in art and literature, and their previous works on women and landscapes. The result is a thought-provoking blend of essays, excerpts, and images.

For Mississippi readers, the book offers special points of connection: One full essay is devoted to Welty's vivid depiction of Delta landscape in her novel, *Delta Wedding*. Another dives deep into Margaret Walker's use of plants in poems and novels that grapple with the cultural and racial tensions of the twentieth-century South. Finally, a rare photograph captures a young Myrlie Evers—years before the assassination of her husband, civil rights leader Medgar Evers—pictured joyfully with Walker and other members of the all-Black Spade and Fork Garden Club in Jackson.

Moments like these underscore one of the book's most compelling insights: gardens become spaces of beauty and refuge, but also sites where larger cultural transformations take root. After all, landscapes do not simply surround us. They shape us. And as this book suggests, they may also be quietly nourishing revolutions yet to come.

Ultimately, *Southern Women, Southern Landscapes* offers a new way of looking at the past. And perhaps, a new way of looking at the ground beneath our own feet.

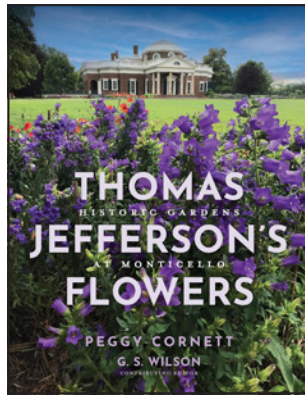
So don a pair of "stout boots," as Harriet Beecher-Stowe would implore, and embark on this reflective journey with two capable guides: Authors Judith W. Page, professor emerita in the University of Florida's Department of English, and Elise L. Smith, professor emerita in the Millsaps College Art Department. Within these pages, you'll soon discover for yourself what Caroline Dormon's biographer Fran Holmon would call "the gift of the wild things."

Reviewed by Jessica Russell Hilton

In Print

Thomas Jefferson's Flowers: Historic Gardens at Monticello, by Peggy Cornett, UVA Press, 2026

This richly illustrated book examines Jefferson's gardening friendships in the United States and abroad, his many botanical and horticultural influences, and the role of

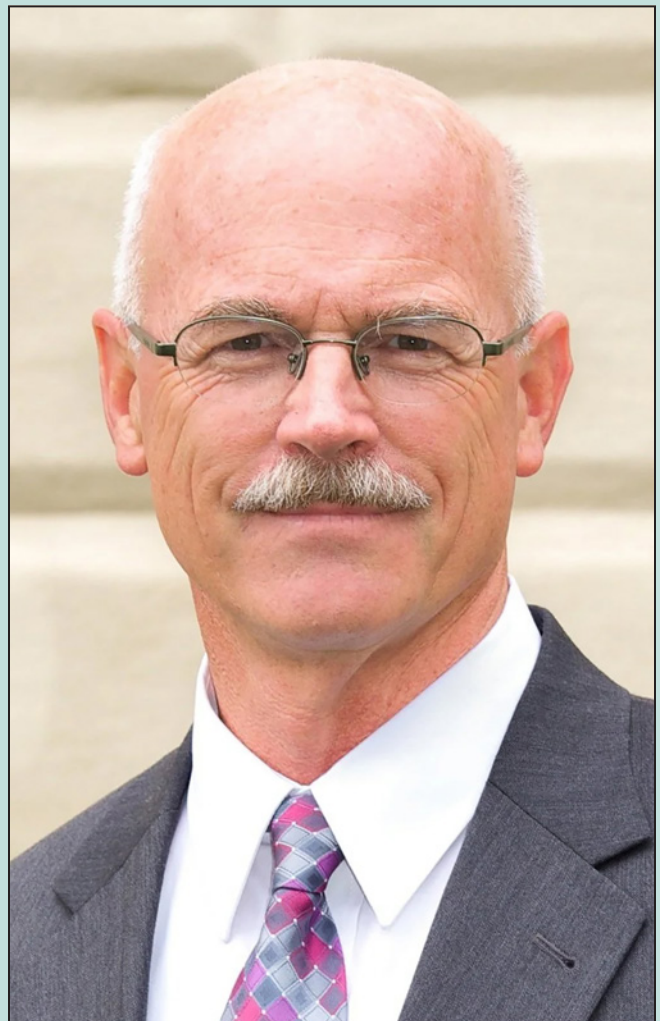


his family relationships—as well as of enslaved individuals such as Wormley Hughes and Burwell Colbert—in his gardening pursuits. Informed by Monticello's ongoing research and the preservation and educational efforts of the Center for Historic Plants, the book by Peggy Cornett, Monticello's curator of plants, includes a comprehensive annotated list of the flowers documented by Jefferson in the gardens at Shadwell, Monticello, and Poplar Forest, affording visitors, gardeners, and scholars alike a handy reference that is eye-catching, substantive, and comprehensive.

Dean Norton Named Honorary Member of the Garden Club of America

Few faces are more familiar to SGHS members than that of Mount Vernon's Director of Horticulture and Livestock Emeritus Dean Norton. A charter member, long-time board member, past president, and frequent speaker, Dean has been honored by the Society with the Flora Ann Bynum Medal. His other awards have included (but are not limited to) the Daughters of the American Revolution's Conservation Medal in 1999, the American Horticultural Society's Great American Gardeners Award in 2006, and in 2020 the Garden Club of America's (GCA) Elizabeth Craig Weaver Proctor Medal for exemplary service and creative vision in the field of horticulture and historic preservation. Of course, for many of us Dean will be most esteemed and honored for hosting four Mount Vernon-based annual meetings, an amazing feat by any measure.

Now, further recognition has come to Dean Norton in the form of induction as an honorary member of the GCA, again underscoring the significance of his decades of service to the cause of historic landscape preservation. Readers will also recall that in being so honored by GCA, Dean now joins the company of other SGHS members so recognized, including Staci Catron, Peggy Cornett, Patti McGee, and Judith Tankard. Those who wish to learn more about this achievement, plus watch a video clip of the formal presentation and Dean Norton's response, simply search online "Dean Norton GCA."



Dean Norton.

Photo Credit: GCA.

Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage: A Sister Group Across the Atlantic

By Ken McFarland

This *Magnolia* editor recently joined Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage (SGLH), an organization that shares interests and goals with the Southern Garden History Society. A look at their website soon makes the visitor aware of the commonalities that encouraged the author to become a member. These range from the study of large estate pleasure grounds, to examining kitchen gardens, and to the exploration of vernacular landscapes and urban design. Recent activities and scholarship are shared via online newsletters plus an excellent annual electronic journal, *The Pleasaunce*. Readers can find the current issue (as well as earlier editions) using this link: <https://www.sglh.org/the-pleasaunce-journal/>. They will discover in the Winter 2024 edition, for example, a collection of essays and numerous fine images exploring kitchen/walled gardens. Anyone who might think that the design and construction of brick walls is a relatively simple matter will be enlightened indeed by what they learn here.

Like our Society, SGLH organizes tours of sites of interest, such as their June 2025 study day at the seventeenth-century Drumlanrig Castle in Dumfriesshire. An article written by Sara Barron discusses their time there, including an enviable opportunity to examine a trove of landscape-related documents. (For full details, see: [https://www.sglh.org/news/sglh-visit-to-drumlanrig-by-](https://www.sglh.org/news/sglh-visit-to-drumlanrig-by-sarah-barron/)

sarah-barron/) Of course, for those who remain fascinated by “the 45,” the story of Drumlanrig's association with a retreating Charles Edward Stuart and his Jacobite followers offers another enticement to visitors.

Pondering Caledonian landscapes also brings to mind the ties between gardening there and early gardening practices in North America, and, in our case, the American South. For example, a recent conversation with fellow *Magnolia* editor and Monticello's curator of plants, Peggy Cornett, offered a reminder that Thomas Jefferson joined other wealthy landowners in engaging a Scottish gardener. This was Robert Bailey (d. 1804), who in the 1790s worked not only at Monticello but also at the White House in Washington. Some readers may also recall Kent Brinkley's discussion of Scottish gardeners in his fall 1997 *Magnolia* article, “The Professional Gardener's Trade in the Eighteenth-Century,” in which he notes “Scottish gardeners appear to have been the most sought-after gardeners in Georgian England.” Of course, they were in demand on this side of the Atlantic as well, the various reasons being cited in Brinkley's excellent article.

Perhaps future issues of *Magnolia* or website postings can examine more deeply the many landscape history/gardening ties linking Scotland to the US and thus SGLH to SGHS. Brief reference to SGLH events on our pages may also be of interest to our members who find themselves traveling to the land north of the Tweed.



SGLH 2025 study day site at Drumlanrig Castle.

Photo Credit: David Lockhart.

Pearl Fryar

Our SGHS website's Gardens page post of March 29, 2025, offered a look at the Pearl Fryar Topiary Garden in Bishopville, South Carolina. That post also recalled the Society's Sunday tour of North Carolina native Fryar's garden during the 2009 Camden annual meeting. Sadly, we note the April 4, 2026, death of the creator of this world of evergreen shrubs artfully shaped into a seemingly endless array of shapes and sizes.

Internationally known for his intricate topiary designs, Fryar defined his work more basically as "I cut up bushes."

As noted in the Gardens post, Fryar's shrubbery endeavors began in the 1980s as part of general landscape improvements at his suburban Bishopville home. (Famous for rescuing dying plants from local home centers, Fryar soon won the "Yard of the Month" award.) His weekdays involved employment with the Coca-Cola Company. Weekends and evenings, however, were increasingly devoted to topiary labors, Fryar gaining acclaim for working into the night aided by his vehicle headlights. As might be expected, his endeavors drew ever more attention and compliments from a growing number of visitors, one guest observing "you can feel some kind of spirit within it." Such a spirit was also reflected by the living words shaped in his front lawn: "Love" "Peace" "&" "Goodwill."

For more on Pearl Fryar, readers are directed to the *Magnolia* Index found on our website and more particularly

to the 2006 documentary film *A Man Named Pearl*. While Fryar was indeed uniquely talented, it is comforting to know that a new generation of topiary talent has appeared in the person of Ohio native Mike Gibson, who first came under Fryar's tutelage and now operates his own Columbia, South Carolina, business, Gibson Works, LLC.



Pearl Fryar Fishbone Tree.

Photo Credit: Wikipedia, Bubba 73.



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Awards and Scholarships

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

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

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

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

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

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

Annual Membership Dues

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

<i>Benefactor</i>	\$500 and above*
<i>Patron</i>	\$250
<i>Sustainer</i>	\$150
<i>Institution or Business</i>	\$125
<i>Joint</i>	\$75
(two individuals living in the same household)	
<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 August 31, 2026.

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