



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

Magnolia

Publication of the Southern Garden
History Society

Vol. XXXVIII

No. 1

Summer 2026

John Baxton Flowers III and the Seedtime of the Southern Garden History Society

By Ken McFarland, Brandon, Vermont

A 2002 commemorative issue of *Magnolia* marked the Southern Garden History Society's twentieth birthday. Appropriately, it featured an article by Flora Ann Bynum on our "Founding and Early Beginnings."¹ Chair of Old Salem's landscape restoration committee during this SGHS founding period, Flora Ann herself was key to the story, as was the legendary Chapel Hill-based horticulturist and garden writer William Lanier Hunt. At Old Salem's initial Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes conference (RSGL) in 1979, it was Bill Hunt who first suggested a garden history society for the South, a group to be modeled after the UK's Garden History Society. The third person crucial to the story was John Baxton Flowers III, a name Flora Ann cited repeatedly in her 2002 account.



Photo Credit: Eleanor Flowers.

SGHS cofounder John B. Flowers III and Eleanor Simons Flowers at their home in Hendersonville, NC.

As the 1970s founding director of Durham's Stagville Preservation Center of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, John was adept at crafting programs and conferences. At Flora Ann's request, he played an important part in helping her and her Old Salem colleagues to organize the initial RSGL program, and

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CALENDAR

October 21, 2026. Cherokee Garden Library Fall Program: Ashley Wright McIntyre Lecture, featuring renowned British conservationist and author Isabella Tree, *The Book of Wilding*. Visit: <https://www.atlantahistorycenter.com/event/ashley-wright-mcintyre-lecture-featuring-isabella-tree/>

April 8-10, 2027. The 80th annual Colonial Williamsburg Garden Symposium. Details about the program will be available on the colonialwilliamsburg.org website.



April 16-18, 2027. The 43rd annual meeting of the Southern Garden History Society will take place in Brenham, Texas. This meeting will highlight the unique garden history, horticulturists, and plants of the Lone Star State. Attendees will explore the renowned Antique Rose Emporium and private residential gardens, all with the chance to experience the beauty of Texas bluebonnets and native wildflowers in bloom.

Meetings will be headquartered at the **Barnhill Center** in historic downtown Brenham, with accommodations available at the **Hampton Inn & Suites** and **Holiday Inn Express & Suites**. We look forward to capping off the weekend with a grand Texan dinner! More details and registration information will be shared on our website, www.southerngardenhistory.org/events/annual-meeting/

43rd Annual Meeting

SOUTHERN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY | 2027 ANNUAL MEETING



Pyrite Salsman

SAVE THE DATE

Brenham, Texas

APRIL 16-18

Y'all come!

Bluebonnets & Bluebells
The Culture and Horticulture of
Washington County

Step into a Texas spring, bursting
with wildflowers, history, and
antique roses.

Watch for registration details in
WINTER 2026
southerngardenhistory.org

he continued to provide guidance for the event, serving on the conference planning committee into the 1980s. A quick glance at that RSGL 1979 brochure signals the partnership. Completed registration forms, we see, were to be mailed not to Old Salem but to Stagville's Durham address, with checks being payable to "Stagville Preservation Center." In May 1982, the planning committee devoted Friday afternoon of RSGL number three to a garden tour in Hillsborough and then a visit to Stagville eighteen miles to the east where John spoke on North Carolina's eighteenth-century landscape and garden history.² Initiated by John Flowers, that RSGL-Stagville connection continued for over twenty years.³

Recently, this author has enjoyed several telephone conversations with John Flowers at Tulip Hill where he and his wife Eleanor make their home in the Western North Carolina town of Hendersonville.⁴ Readers may recall that like John, I also was employed at Stagville Preservation Center, working as site manager there from 1984 to 1999.⁵ In the late 1980s, I joined the RSGL committee and also began an involvement with the Society that

continues to this day. John and my discussions thus shared many common points of reference as he reinforced and expanded on Flora Ann's 2002 recollections, while also remembering some of his own distinct experiences relating to the creation and early activities of the conference at Old Salem and of SGHS.

He recalled, for example, that RSGL participants immediately warmed to Bill Hunt's garden history society concept, their enthusiasm helping to push the idea along. Beginning in late 1979, Flora Ann, Bill, and John thus met twice to discuss next steps, the trio gathering at the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill.⁶ Many months passed, however, before December 1981, when they met a third time and all began to gel.

As Bill Hunt found his time consumed by work at the N.C. Botanical Garden, it fell to Flora Ann and John to take on many of the "legwork" tasks required to transform a good idea into functioning reality. First came the often-tedious work of preparing bylaws and articles of incorporation. Flora Ann and John were not new to

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Photo Credit: Old Salem Museums & Gardens.

John Flowers, Charles Duell, and Rudy Favretti at first RSGL conference.



Photo Credit: Wikipedia.

Bennehan House, site of Stagville Preservation Center offices.

Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes

*A Conference for the States of the Upper South**

Sponsored by

OLD SALEM, INC.

REYNOLDA GARDENS OF WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

and

STAGVILLE PRESERVATION CENTER OF THE NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL RESOURCES

APRIL 26-28, 1979

WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

*Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky



Flyer for first RSGL conference where Bill Hunt proposed a garden history society for the South.

Photo Credit: SGHS website.

John Baxton Flowers III ... (continued from page 3)

such efforts, however, the former had experience with various garden-related and volunteer organizations and the later had a background in helping to found the Stagville Preservation Center and in the creation of non-profit support groups.

Building a talented yet geographically diverse board of directors was crucial for the new Society to have a proper start and for it to be led by people with garden/landscape expertise.⁷ Fortunately, bolstered by their RSGL efforts and other connections, Flora Ann, John Flowers, and Bill Hunt had developed a network of garden-connected acquaintances spanning a wide area of the South. Flora Ann's 2002 "Founding and Early Beginnings" includes proof of their successful recruiting efforts, with board members in states ranging from Maryland across to Texas. John Flowers recalls the process well, having himself taken on the task of contacting Hugh Dargan in South Carolina and Catherine Howett in Georgia, to name but several directors he enlisted for Society service.

Amazingly, this was achieved in just a few months, and by May of 1982 all was set for a first Society board meeting that would be held on Friday, May 6, immediately in advance of the RSGL opening. (Coordination of RSGL

with Society board meetings became standard practice, although the timing of conferences would be shifted to a fall date beginning in 1983.) It was a busy few hours for new board members. Along with holding "a very serious discussion of the goals and purposes of the society,"⁸ the group approved a slate of officers including P. Duncan Callicott of Nashville as president and John Flowers as vice president. Of course, a garden history society would be a will-o'-the-wisp without members, but any worries along that line ended immediately when twenty-four 1982 RSGL conferees promptly signed up.

John Flowers recalls the second board meeting held in Nashville the following October even more fondly than meeting number one. Here, he says, things coalesced. New directors shared a sense of camaraderie and a feeling of energy, commitment, and direction that offered assurance that this new Southern Garden History Society was on solid ground and could look forward to a bright future. *Ex officio* President Duncan Callicott chaired the gathering, the Nashville native and Franklin, Tennessee



Photo Credit: Greg Grant.

William Lanier Hunt, SGHS cofounder.



Photo Credit: Sally Gant/Old Salem, Inc.

SGHS cofounder Flora Ann Bynum and husband Zach.



Photo Credit: Susan Epstein.

Reynolda Gardens, RSGL cofounder with Old Salem and Stagville Preservation Center.

resident being perhaps best known for his association with Cheekwood and subsequent work as a private landscape architect. As Flora Ann recalled, "Duncan entertained us royally with visits to historic garden sites in and around Nashville."⁹

Like so many landscape architects in the South, Callicott had studied at the University of Georgia, a connection to be noted since the importance of Georgia citizens to our growing Society became increasingly evident. There, in her role as the new Society secretary, Atlanta resident Florence Griffin was joined at the 1982 Nashville board meeting by another Georgian, charter member Jane Symmes, who attended as a guest.¹⁰ (Charter members were those who joined within the first year following the Society's formation.) During this period, as well, Nashvillian and Georgia-trained landscape architect Ben Page became yet another charter member who would soon join the board and later serve as a Society president.¹¹

John Flowers continued to play a central role during these early years of the Society, a time when standard activities were just being established. Of these, the spring annual meeting became arguably the most basic feature of our year-to-year operations, the first one occurring in Atlanta in April 1983. SGHS secretary Florence Griffin agreed to oversee the organization of this initial meeting, a function that went on from Friday evening, April 15, through Saturday, April 16, the event thus being shorter than today's typical meeting. The brochure reminds us

that this was no coming together of dilettantes, but that Florence Griffin, John Flowers, Flora Ann Bynum, and the other officers of the Society understood our mission to be serious and scholarly. Board member and University of Georgia Professor Catherine Howett reinforced that point with her Saturday morning introduction to the Atlanta Historical Society's exhibition *A Land of our Own: Landscape and Gardening Traditions in Georgia, 1783-1983*.¹²

This first annual meeting brochure further supports this serious and scholarly vision:

"(The Society's) purpose is to promote the study of the history of landscapes, gardening and horticulture in the South, collaborating with the American Horticultural Society and other similar organizations in the United States and abroad which have the same objectives of preservation and restoration." The second paragraph continues: "The Society will endeavor to locate and index relevant materials. Its future plans include the establishment of a library housing documents, plans, designs, drawings, catalogs, papers, photographs and slides connected with the study of southern garden history."¹³

Clearly, our three founders, and joined by members of the first board of directors, took the Society's raison d'être

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CONFERENCE NOTES

The emphasis of the conference will be on the states of the upper south: Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee and Kentucky.

Registration will be limited to 125 persons. The attached registration form should be completed and mailed with the registration fee before April 2, 1979. Make checks payable to Stagville Preservation Center. Cancellations received after April 15, 1979, will receive only partial refunds.

Rooms for participants have been reserved at the Hilton Inn,

located one mile from Old Salem. Make reservations directly with the Inn at 420 High Street, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27101 or (919) 723-7911. (Specify that you are with the garden and landscape restoration conference sponsored by Old Salem, Inc.) Room rates are \$23-\$27 for single rooms and \$30-\$34 for double rooms.

Limousine service is available to the Hilton Inn from Winston-Salem and Greensboro airports. If traveling by car, the Inn can be reached by taking the Cherry Street exit coming east on highway I-40 or the Broad Street exit coming west on I-40.

REGISTRATION FORM

Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes
April 26-28, 1979
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Name Miss _____
Mrs. _____
Mr. _____

Address _____
_____ Zip _____

Name(s) to Appear on I.D. Badge(s) _____

Registration Fee at \$70 per Person: (Includes all conference expenses and all meals except 2 breakfasts. Room not included.)

Total Amount Enclosed \$_____ (Make Checks Payable to Stagville Preservation Center.)

Mail Registration Form and Fee to: Stagville Preservation Center
Post Office Box 15628
Durham, North Carolina 27704

Please provide information on any garden or landscape restoration project with which you are currently involved. A brief description will be adequate.

Office Use Only

No. _____

Date _____

Registration form for first RSGL conference, note role played by Stagville Preservation Center.

John Baxton Flowers III ... (continued from page 5)

seriously.

The annual meeting was soon reviewed in the Society's first publication, humorously titled *Hoe & Tell* but

formally named *THE BULLETIN OF THE SOUTHERN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY*.¹⁴ That *Hoe & Tell* article reminds us of John Flowers central and esteemed place

A Conference for the States of the Upper South

Old Salem again will serve as the setting for "Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes," the third conference to be held dealing with historical horticulture in the upper southern states. The program will present topics of interest to professional and layman alike and provide an opportunity to learn and share information in the field of landscape restoration in the South.

Registration

Registration may be made by returning the enclosed registration card with the conference fee of \$115. to Mrs. JoAnn Grote, conference registrar, Old Salem, Inc., Salem Station, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27108, telephone 919-723-3688. The conference fee includes the four meals and all other features listed on the program.

Registration is limited to 100 persons, and reservations will be accepted as they are received. Full registration fee will be returned if cancellation is made by April 23, 1982.

Hotel Accommodations

Rooms for conference participants have been reserved at The Hilton Inn, located one mile from Old Salem. Reservations should be made directly with the Inn before April 22 by completing and mailing the enclosed card. Room rates are \$35 for single, \$45 for double.

Courtesy van service is available to The Hilton from the Winston-Salem airport; limousine service is available from the Greensboro airport. By automobile, the Inn can be reached by taking the Cherry Street exit coming east on Highway I-40 or the Broad Street exit coming west on I-40. The Inn has a van available to assist people in getting to Old Salem.

Sponsoring Organizations

OLD SALEM, INC., is a non-profit educational corporation organized in 1950. It is responsible for the restoration of Old Salem, the Moravian congregation town founded in 1766, and the operation of nine house museums and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts in the historic district.

REYNOLDA GARDENS, which were designed in 1917 by Thomas W. Sears of Philadelphia, were donated in 1958 to Wake Forest University by the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation. The gardens and greenhouses are located on the former estate of Richard J. Reynolds, founder of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.

STAGVILLE PRESERVATION CENTER, located in Durham, is a cooperative venture of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, and the Stagville Center Corporation. It is the first state-owned center for the teaching and development of historic preservation and its related technology in the United States.

Conference Planning Committee

Flora Ann L. Bynum, Chairman
Landscape Restoration Committee, Old Salem, Inc.

Gene Capps, Director
Department of Education and Interpretation,
Old Salem, Inc.

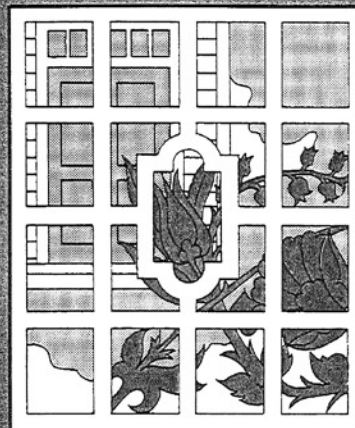
John B. Flowers III, Researcher
Stagville Preservation Center
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

Philip S. Page, Horticulturist
Old Salem, Inc.

Preston Stockton, Superintendent
Reynolda Gardens of Wake Forest University

Camilla Wilcox, Education Coordinator
Reynolda Gardens of Wake Forest University

THE CONFERENCE LOGO on the cover represents four periods in Southern gardening. The white pattern is one from Sauthier's Edenton map of 1767 showing a garden pattern at Pembroke Plantation. The doorway is Georgian from the 18th and early 19th centuries. The flowers came from a book of Victorian designs, and the garden pattern resembles the early 20th century lattice work garden fences used in many Southern gardens.



Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes Program

May 6-8, 1982
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Thursday, May 6

- 10am - 1pm Registration and book display
Old Salem Reception Center
- 1:30 Welcome to Old Salem
Arthur Spaugh, Jr., president,
Old Salem, Inc.
MESDA auditorium
- 1:45 - 2:45 "The Use of Archaeology in Determining Early American Gardens,"
William M. Kelso, resident archaeologist at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Charlottesville, Virginia
- 2:45 - 3:15 Break
- 3:15 - 4:45 "Creating a Country Garden Within an Urban Setting,"
Mrs. William W. Griffin, chairman,
Tullie Smith House Restoration,
Atlanta, Georgia
"Interpreting the Historic Landscape,"
Gene Capps, director of education and interpretation, Old Salem, Inc.,
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
- 6 - 7:30 Dinner, Salem Cotton Company Restaurant
The Brookstone Mill
- 8:00 "Early Botanical Activity in the South,"
Dr. David H. Rembert, Jr., professor of biology, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina
Ballroom, Hilton Inn, lower level
- 9 - 9:15 Break
- 9:15 Informal sharing session

Friday, May 7

- 9am - 10am "Gertrude Jekyll's Influence on American Gardens,"
Rudy Favretti, professor of landscape architecture, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut
MESDA auditorium
- 10 - 10:30 Break
- 10:30 - 11:30 "The Southern Estate Garden, 1890-1940,"
Pled Duncan Callicott, executive director, Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center at Cheekwood, Nashville, Tennessee
- 11:45 - 12:45 Walking tour of Old Salem Gardens and picnic lunch
- 2:00 Busses leave Hilton Inn
- 3:30 - 5:00 Tour of Garden of Chatwood (1790), Hillsborough
- 5:30 Buffet supper at Bennehan House (1787), Stagville Preservation Center, Durham
- 7:15 Welcome to Stagville
Mrs. John A. McPhaul, president, Stagville Center Corporation and Margaret Lane Peterson, head, Preservation Education, North Carolina Division of Archives and History
- 7:30 "Landscape Garden History of North Carolina through the Eighteenth Century,"
John B. Flowers III, research historian, Stagville Preservation Center

Saturday, May 8

- 8 am Busses leave Hilton Inn for Reynolda House
- 8:30 - 9:30 Breakfast at Reynolda House
- 9:30 - 10:00 Welcome to Reynolda House and Gardens
Nicholas B. Bragg, executive director, Reynolda House, Inc.
Brief background history of Reynolda Gardens
- 10 - 11:00 Group A: "Authentic Plant Material for Restored Gardens," Philip S. Page, horticulturist, Old Salem
Group B: "How to Research, Lay out, and Develop a Restored Garden," an in-the-field session with Rudy Favretti
- 11 - 12:00 Group A: "How to Research, Lay out, and Develop a Restored Garden"
Group B: "Authentic Plant Material for Restored Gardens"
- 12 - 12:30 Guided tours of Reynolda Gardens and Greenhouses
- 12:30 Conference ends

Old Salem exhibit buildings are open weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Sundays 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Tickets may be purchased at the Old Salem Reception Center. Reservations for tours of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts may be scheduled at the reception center or at MESDA. Reynolda House is open for tours 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Sundays 1:30 to 4:30 p.m., closed Mondays.

Brochure for 1982 RSGL conference, note conference committee members list.

in SGHS happenings, he having the honor of offering the closing dinner's final words. Thus, *Hoe & Tell* notes: "President Duncan Callicott turned the evening's remarks over to John B. Flowers III, vice president, who expressed the gratitude and appreciation of the entire group to the Atlanta membership for the wonderful meeting. His remarks were ended with a toast to the Atlanta members, and cheers followed. The first annual meeting was a huge success!"¹⁵

A look at our website's *Magnolia* page shows that *Hoe & Tell* enjoyed a three-issue run, the website also revealing that its editor was none other than John Flowers. Our vice president thus was leading the way in producing a print document that regularly went out to the membership, providing updates on Society activities, news of upcoming meetings and conferences, and reports describing garden restoration projects. Ranked in importance with the annual meeting, it would become another pillar of Society operations. *Hoe & Tell* would be superseded in Fall 1984 by a SGHS publication with a new look and a new name, *Magnolia*, its formal masthead noting that Arkansas resident Harriet Jansma was now editor.

Topping the names on that masthead in 1984 was "John B. Flowers," he having become the Southern Garden History Society's second president. Society cofounder Flora Ann Bynum appeared as secretary-treasurer, a position she held for many years as she continued to be the Society's "guiding hand." Though Bill Hunt had been titled honorary president from the outset, John Flowers thus became the only one of the three Society founders to assume our highest office.

For eight more years John continued to provide SGHS leadership and direction, from 1984 to 1986 as president, then as immediate past president, and lastly as a member of the board of directors until 1992. He also wrote for *Magnolia*, his Winter 1986 article addressing the history of the garden at his ancestral Eastern North Carolina home, Flowerly Dale. In addition, he chaired the publications committee of the Society, exploring ways of improving and expanding the range of garden history-related material it produced.¹⁶ The board expressed their appreciation at the end of John's final board term, the spring 1992 minutes noting: "A great vote of thanks was given Mr. Flowers for his service to the society as a founding member and a board member since the society's formation."

Although John's involvement with SGHS would lessen in the 1990s, he remained committed to our mission as a regular member, while he also attended annual meetings whenever possible to hone his garden history knowledge as well as to connect with long-time friends and colleagues. Other career opportunities, however, would lead John away from Stagville Preservation Center and the N. C. Division of Archives and History. Thus, in 1984 he moved south to become founding director of the Thomasville

(Georgia) Cultural Center. Later, he served as director of development at Charlotte's Community School of the Arts, after which he held senior positions at Ketchum, Inc.; at Laurinburg, North Carolina's St. Andrews University; and in his final position prior to retirement in 2005 as vice president emeritus for institutional advancement at Augusta University in Georgia.¹⁷

Today, John looks back with a combination of great satisfaction and pride at the founding moments and

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Candid shot of John Flowers during first RSGL conference.



Candid shot of John Flowers during first RSGL conference.

Photo Credit: Old Salem Museums & Gardens.

Photo Credit: Old Salem Museums & Gardens.

John Baxton Flowers III ... (continued from page 7)

early years of the Southern Garden History Society. Our organization thrives in 2026 because of that 70s-80s momentum and the impact of the John's labors and commitment, joined to the enduring dedication of Flora Ann Bynum, and the vision of William Lanier Hunt. And, they were Tarheels all!



Author's note:

I have pursued three main goals in writing this article. First, and most basically, the aim was to remind SGHS members of the central role played by John B. Flowers III in founding a garden history society that has now logged over four successful decades and which shows every sign of remaining healthy for many more years. Unfortunately, since members are regularly reminded of co-founders Flora Ann Bynum and William Lanier Hunt through awards bearing their names, the involvement of John Flowers has slipped into the shadows. I hope this piece will help correct that unfortunate, though unintentional, development.

A second goal is to capture a bit of the excitement and enthusiasm that infused SGHS during those early days. Clearly those emotions had been ignited by the Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes Conference, its success fueled not only by the talents of Flora Ann Bynum and the Old Salem staff but also by John Flowers and the resources of Durham's Stagville Preservation Center. Of course, any such recollection must also emphasize the input and support provided by the Reynolda Gardens of Wake Forest University and the planning committee efforts of the Reynolda Gardens' Preston Stockton and Camilla Wilcox, joined by Old Salem staff members, such as Gene Capps and Sally Gant, with the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA).¹⁸ They developed a synergy that not only heightened the quality of the conference but also most surely carried a drive for excellence into the Southern Garden History Society.

Finally, to understand events of this period, readers should recall the Southern Garden History Society's North Carolina roots, a connection that underlies much of this article. In the spring 1992 board minutes, Georgia director Anne Carr summed up the importance of our Tarheel origins in a discussion about a possible SGHS headquarters move from Old Salem. In her suggestion of Chapel Hill as new SGHS home versus Georgia or Virginia options, she stressed that "the *heritage of the society* (is) in North Carolina."¹ (Author's italics.)

This reference to "heritage" is more than Old North

State nostalgia or boosterism. The author recalls the energy, spirit, and belief in future possibilities that in the 1970s and 80s pervaded the Stagville Preservation Center and the N.C. Historic Preservation Office, as well as at Old Salem and other museums and historic sites across the state. We were people on a mission to save and preserve what remained of our historic cultural landscape across a range of high-style dwellings to vernacular structures such as houses built by the enslaved laborers at Stagville Plantation. Old Salem staff and volunteers like Flora Ann Bynum, in particular, were leading the way in exploring the overall landscape of a particular group, the Moravian settlers, and educating the public as to the plants favored in their gardens. It was an exciting time, surely shared in other states. Yet, it was in North Carolina where a sufficient "head of steam" developed, leading to programs exemplified by the conference on "Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes."

Endnotes

- 1 https://southerngardenhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Magnolia_SummerFall_2002.pdf#page=3. Hereafter cited as Bynum, "Founding and Beginnings," 2002.
- 2 The reader's attention is also drawn to the John Flowers essay, "People and Plants: North Carolina's Garden History Revisited," one of eighteen such compositions found in the 1984 publication *British and American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century: Illustrated Essays on Garden History*. Published by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the book was co-edited by founding board member Peter Martin. For more, see: *Magnolia: Newsletter of the Southern Garden History Society*, V.2, no. 1 (Summer, 1985).
- 3 Stagville Preservation Center initially coordinated its efforts with the N. C. State Historic Preservation Office in Raleigh, an arm of the Division of Archives and History of the Department of Cultural Resources. Administration of activities at Stagville later fell to the office of the Division director, then Dr. William Price. In each instance, support for Stagville's involvement with the Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes conference remained strong.
- 4 Tulip Hill is named from the prominent tulip poplars (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) present at the site.
- 5 In the 1990s the official site name became "Historic Stagville."
- 6 Bynum, "Founding and Beginnings," 2002.
- 7 The first directors were Flora Ann Bynum, Winston-Salem, North Carolina; P. Duncan Callicott, Nashville, Tennessee; Hugh G. Dargan, Camden, South Carolina; John B. Flowers III, Durham, North

- Carolina; Glenn L. Haltom, Natchez, Mississippi; Catherine M. Howett, Decatur, Georgia; Florence P. Griffin, Atlanta, Georgia; Peter E. Martin, Williamsburg, Virginia; Geraldine M. Moncrief, Monroe, North Carolina; Jerry S. Powers, Houston, Texas; David H. Rembert, Jr., Columbia, South Carolina; and A. St. Clair Wright, Annapolis, Maryland.
- 8 Bynum, "Founding and Beginnings," 2002.
 - 9 Bynum, "Founding and Beginnings," 2002.
 - 10 Jane Symmes would later serve on the board of directors. Our website *Magnolia* index has numerous references to Jane's Society involvement and other achievements.
 - 11 Readers will recall that Ben and his wife Libby's many contributions were recognized in April 2026, when both were awarded the Flora Ann Bynum Medal at the Williamsburg annual meeting.
 - 12 For a full discussion of Catherine Howett's 1983 talk and the *A Land of Our Own* exhibit, see: <https://southerngardenhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/Magnolia.2026.XXXVII.3-1.pdf>
 - 13 For this first conference brochure, see: https://southerngardenhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/AnnualMeeting_1983.pdf
 - 14 Founding board member Hugh Dargan gets credit for the name *Hoe & Tell*. See: https://southerngardenhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/Hoe_and_Tell_Summer_1983.pdf
 - 15 *Hoe & Tell* #2
 - 16 These conversations ultimately led to the publication in 1993 of *Magnolia Essays, Occasional Papers of the Southern Garden History Society*. The first of these, and to date the only one, was a paper by Catherine Howett student and former board member Lucy Lawliss entitled *Residential Work of the Olmsted Firm in Georgia, 1893-1937*.
 - 17 For more on John Flowers' career and background, see: <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/1001>
 - 18 Preston Stockton worked for almost four decades as Reynolda Gardens manager, while Camilla Wilcox was Reynolda Gardens' long-time curator of education. Per his online *Winston-Salem Journal* obituary, Gene Capps served as Old Salem's director of education and interpretation and later as vice president of interpretation. (See: <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/special/ead/findingaids/1001>.) Sally Gant is now director of education, emerita at MESDA, the location of most RSGL presentations.

William C. Welch (1939-2026)

By Greg Grant, Center, Texas

The Southern Garden History Society mourns the loss of Dr. William C. "Bill" Welch, who passed away June 8 after a lifetime devoted to horticulture, scholarship, and the cultural landscapes of the American South. His influence shaped the gardens we tend, the plants we cherish, and the historical narratives we preserve. For our Society, Bill was not only a respected scholar but also a leader, mentor, and friend whose presence enriched every gathering and every conversation.

Bill joined the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in 1972 as extension landscape horticulturist. He embodied the land grant mission with uncommon grace, bringing horticultural knowledge to county agents, nursery professionals, civic groups, and home gardeners across Texas and the South. His work was practical, accessible, and rooted in the belief that horticulture enriches everyday life.

His contributions to Southern garden history were equally profound. Bill served the Southern Garden History Society as president (1996-98) and later as a board member and a honorary director. He served on the coordinating committees for SGHS annual meetings in

Houston and Fort Worth and helped organize a regional Texas State Ambassador's gathering in Nacogdoches in 2018. His leadership helped shape the Society's identity and strengthened its commitment to interpreting the cultural traditions that define Southern landscapes. In

(continued on page 10)



Bill Welch rustling roses.

Photo Credit: Greg Grant.

William C. Welch ... (continued from page 9)

2016, he received the Flora Ann Bynum Medal, the highest honor of the Southern Garden History Society. He also received the William Lanier Hunt Award in 2024 for significant contributions to Southern garden history. These honors place him among the most influential figures in the Society's history and reflect the deep respect held for his scholarship and generosity.

Bill's writing shaped the horticultural imagination of the South. His monthly columns for *Southern Living* magazine introduced millions to Southern plants, traditions, and design sensibilities. He contributed regularly to *Neil Sperry's Gardens*, *Texas Gardener*, and other publications, and served as a contributing editor for "Horticulture Update," the Texas AgriLife Extension newsletter. His books became foundational texts for gardeners across the region. *Perennial Garden Color* taught readers how to harmonize perennials, annuals, and roses. *Antique Roses for the South* helped spark the renaissance of heirloom roses. *The Southern Heirloom Garden* explored the cultural traditions that shaped Southern gardens. Later works including *The Bountiful Flower Garden*, *Heirloom Gardening in the South*, *The Bulb Hunter*, and *The Rose Rustlers* cemented his legacy as one of the South's "most influential horticultural authors."

Thomas A. Christopher wrote, "I can think of very few contemporary horticulturists who have had an equal positive impact." His words capture the breadth of Bill's influence. Bill recognized early that the roses, bulbs, and perennials surviving in abandoned homesteads and rural cemeteries were not merely botanical curiosities. They were living cultural artifacts. Christopher noted that "any plants that had survived for so long in Texas with such minimal care could be valuable resources to contemporary gardeners." This insight helped inspire the Antique Rose Emporium nursery in Brenham, Texas, and fueled a national movement toward time-tested garden plants.

Bill's scholarship also illuminated the cultural traditions that shaped Southern gardens, including contributions too often overlooked. In *Heirloom Gardening in the South*, he highlighted the enduring creativity and resilience of African,

English, German, and Spanish cultures whose influence permeates Southern horticulture. His work broadened the narrative of Southern garden history and deepened our understanding of the people who shaped it.

Bill's influence extended far beyond his writing. He was a beloved educator whose programs reached county agents, nursery professionals, master gardeners, civic groups, and home gardeners across Texas and the South. His colleagues described him as "the greatest ambassador



Dean Norton and Bill Welch.

Photo Credit: Greg Grant.



Greg Grant and Bill Welch at the SGHS annual meeting in Charleston, SC.

Photo Credit: Greg Grant.

we have for the work we do in Extension Horticulture.” He played a central role in developing the Texas Certified Nursery Professional program, creating the exam and organizing the classes that helped professionalize the nursery industry. His contributions earned him the prestigious Arp Award, the highest honor of the Texas Nursery and Landscape Association.

For more than thirty years, Bill served as landscape design chairman for the Texas Garden Clubs. He coordinated their nationally accredited landscape design study courses and earned lifetime membership in the organization. Renee Blaschke wrote, “He has always freely shared his knowledge and expertise with all of our members throughout the United States.” His generosity of spirit endeared him to gardeners across the country.

Those who knew Bill spoke not only of his expertise but of his kindness. Nancy Thomas wrote, “Always the teacher, he shared information from his own experiences to help others learn.” His personal gardens in both Texas and Louisiana reflected his design sensibilities, welcoming and harmonious, shaped by a lifetime of observation and practice. He was a gifted speaker whose storytelling brought horticultural history to life and regularly spoke to packed crowds across the South.

Bill’s awards were seemingly endless. Along with the SGHS honors mentioned previously, he received

the American Horticultural Society’s Great American Gardeners Award, the Garden Club of America’s Distinguished Service Medal, lifetime membership in Texas Garden Clubs, and the Texas Extension Service’s Superior Service Award. Yet he remained humble, always eager to share knowledge.

His legacy lives on in the gardens he shaped, the plants he preserved, the books he wrote, and the countless people he inspired. It lives on in the Southern Garden History Society, whose mission he championed with scholarship, enthusiasm, and heart. Bill Welch taught us that gardens are repositories of culture, community, and continuity. His life’s work ensured that the stories of Southern gardens will continue to be told, tended, and treasured.

His legacy also lives on in his numerous understudies, including myself. Bill changed my vision, my career, my soul. I work for the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service because of Bill, I’m a writer because of Bill, and I’m a member of the Southern Garden History Society because of Bill. In 1991 he had me attend my very first Southern Garden History Society meeting in St. Francisville, Louisiana. Thanks to Dr. Welch, I became friends with both William Lanier Hunt and Flora Ann Bynum. And thanks to Dr. Welch, I see beauty deep within the soul of every gardener, their landscapes, and the stories they tell.

(Remembrances on page 12)



Bill Welch in his garden in College Station, Texas.



Bill with a bed of his favorite rain lilies, Zephyranthes cv.

Photo Credit: Greg Grant

Remembrances of Dr. William C. Welch:

Bill Welch changed everything for me! We first met in his office at College Station. I had come needing advice about a proposed garden for The Old University Building in Nacogdoches, Texas. Realizing I was a young novice, he advised me to “read.” Read everything you can lay your hands on. Read people’s personal letters, read their private journals, read newspapers from the period in question. Scour them for horticultural references. Learn! Learn was his advice.

It was at that meeting he told me about the Southern Garden History Society. “You must join.” Bill was a champion for the Society. “Right now, Elizabeth Lawrence’s books are all the rage among them. Read those too,” he said.

Soon after that, I attended my first SGHS annual meeting in St. Francisville, Louisiana (1991). A new world had opened up to me. It was revolutionary. My world had been turned upside down, and I had been set on a different path. And it was great fun besides... Thank you, Bill.

Jeff Abt



I first came to know Bill Welch through his writing, long before I had the privilege of meeting him in person. His monthly columns in Southern Living magazine were a constant source of inspiration and practical advice for my own gardening journey, and through his words, I first glimpsed the depth of his knowledge and passion for horticulture. When we finally met at a Southern Garden History Society meeting in North Carolina in 2001, I was struck not only by his expertise, but by the warmth, humor, and generosity with which he engaged everyone around him. Bill had a way of making each conversation feel meaningful, whether sharing a story about an heirloom rose or offering thoughtful encouragement to budding gardeners.

Dr. Welch’s commitment as a horticultural educator is remarkable. He will be remembered not only for his expertise in horticulture, but also for his kindness and dedication to sharing knowledge. His love for Southern gardens and his support for fellow gardeners and historians touched many lives. Though he is no longer with us, his legacy lives on in the gardens he helped create and in all those he inspired.

I could share much more about the impact Bill Welch had on horticulture, gardening, education, and garden history in the South, but I will close by sharing that he was a beloved friend who supported my research and writing in garden history for over two decades. His unwavering encouragement had an immeasurable positive impact on my career and life.

Staci L. Catron



I was blessed to call Bill Welch my friend, and it is hard to believe he is gone. Such a kind and generous man—a true “people person” and connector who generously shared his vast knowledge and experience. Bill befriended the extended Haltom family, starting with my late mother-in-law Glenn over forty years ago at Southern Garden History Society meetings.

My first SGHS annual meeting was in 1991 at St. Francisville, where I met my gardening kindred spirits, Bill Welch among them. I had read Elizabeth Lawrence’s books some years prior, and because I had poured over Bill’s book Perennial Garden Color, those connections and plants became a part of my landscape for good.

My bookshelf holds Bill’s other books, and as I referenced them in the early 1990s, he championed my efforts to restore the Eudora Welty Garden and share its story in One Writer’s Garden. Bill generously gave me cuttings from Elizabeth Lawrence’s ‘Old Blush’ climbing rose, French Roman hyacinths, and more. Through Bill’s rose rustling and plant introductions, I developed a special love for old garden roses.

Like his heirloom flowers, Bill lives on in our lives. We are all blessed to have known him.

Susan Haltom



My interactions with Bill were sporadic, limited to annual and board meetings. It was always a pleasure to see him and chat, but he hung with the smart members for obvious reasons.

I do remember three specific moments. We were in Savannah for the 1989 SGHS annual meeting, and the

Mount Vernon annual meeting was next. As usual with SGHS meetings, we were having dinner at a stunning location, and I was freaking out about my upcoming meeting and how I could match or top the Savannah experience. I must have seemed intelligent that day, for I was sitting at Bill's table, and he was so incredibly kind, recognizing my concerns and assuring me in the "Bill Welch way" that it would be fine.

At the Texas meeting in 1993, the biggest distraction was the Blue Bell ice cream factory just down the road. Bill saw my hesitancy to sit for the next lecture and said, "Are you okay?" I responded, "I would really like to go get ice cream and skip the lecture." Bill replied: "I would if I could." The ice cream was delicious.

I had the pleasure of lecturing at Texas A&M with Bill as my host and spent quality time with this amazing man. The one thing I came away from that opportunity, that of course I already knew, was how loved he was by his students and the community.

Bill Welch was the quintessential Southern Gentleman. His warm smile, gentle manner, politeness, and utmost integrity made him a class act and respected by all. Bill was so accomplished and smart yet never condescending. He was always available to answer questions and offer sound advice, especially to students and those just starting their careers in horticulture and/or preservation. Those who knew Bill Welch were truly blessed. The SGHS has lost an icon; he was loved by all and will be sorely missed.

Dean Norton



When I first met Bill Welch on the second floor of the horticulture building at Texas A&M, I really wasn't sure what was happening. It was like meeting a tornado. Between the people, the plants, and the stories, I knew I was learning something — I just wasn't sure what. But there was one thing I couldn't miss: his excitement for plants, for preservation, and his genuine desire for people to enjoy their gardens.

Right there in his office I could tell he had determined it was time for my journey to begin. His encouraging boot got me out the door that day as a 23-year-old, and that winter of 2003 I met many members of the Southern Garden History Society. That journey changed my life as I pursued heirloom flower bulbs. He was gracious to let me rob his garden, but more gracious in letting me rob his knowledge. Of course, he never saw it as robbing — he saw it as a chance to make sure the things that mattered most in his life, people and plants, were not forgotten.

It is with fondness that I look back on the adventures we shared, and with sadness that there will be no more of them. But this I know: long after we ourselves are gone, the plants will remember and tell the story for us.

Chris Wiesinger
"The Bulb Hunter"

Magnolia summer 2026 Correction:

The article "Scotland's Garden and Landscape Heritage: A Sister Group Across the Atlantic" in the Spring 2026 issue of *Magnolia* noted that Scottish gardener Robert Bailey, who worked at Monticello in the 1790s, also worked "at the White House in Washington." This is a misquote from the Monticello website which states that "during Jefferson's presidency, Bailey worked as a gardener at the *President's House* (author's italics) in Washington, D. C." Several sources indicate that the first use of the term "White House" dates to 1811 this predating the British burning of the building by three years. The exact degree of Bailey's involvement at the President's

House prior to the Scotsman's 1804 death calls for further investigation. KMM



White House ruins ca. 1814, painting by George Munger.

Photo Credit: Wikipedia-White House
Historical Association

From the President

A Year of Progress and a Look Ahead

Greetings,

I hope that by the time this issue of *Magnolia* reaches you, cooler temperatures have finally arrived. It has been a long, hot summer throughout much of the South, and I suspect many of our gardens—and gardeners—are ready for a change of season.



Susan McLeod Epstein

It has also been a busy and productive year for the Southern Garden History Society. As we look toward the year ahead, I thought it was worth pausing to reflect on what we have accomplished together.



A Memorable Annual Meeting in Williamsburg

Our annual meeting in Williamsburg was an extraordinary weekend of lectures, garden tours, fellowship, and history as we joined in commemorating America's 250th anniversary—complete with appearances by a few of our “Founding Fathers.” The strength of our annual meeting continues to be one of the hallmarks of SGHS and a wonderful expression of our educational mission.



Magnolia: Celebrating a Remarkable Legacy

For more than four decades, Peggy Cornett and Ken McFarland have made *Magnolia* an essential part of the Southern Garden History Society, generously sharing their knowledge, talent, and devotion with generations of members. We are deeply grateful for their extraordinary service and pleased to welcome past board member Jessica Russell Hilton who will become editor in 2027, carrying forward the tradition of scholarship, storytelling, and connection that has long defined *Magnolia*.



Keeping Garden History in Front of Us

Ken McFarland continues to take us on his weekly online journeys to gardens, landscapes, people, and

places throughout the South and beyond. These posts have become an important way for SGHS to educate and engage members between issues of *Magnolia* and our annual meetings.



Investing in the Next Generation

Thanks to the generosity of our members and friends, the Randy Harelson Scholarship Fund continues to grow. This fund allows us to introduce students and emerging professionals to SGHS and to the fields of garden history, horticulture, landscape preservation, and related disciplines. It is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our mission.



Remembering Dr. William C. Welch

This year our members mourn the loss of our longtime Honorary Board member and dear friend, Dr. Bill Welch. Bill's extraordinary career at Texas A&M University and his enthusiasm for Southern gardens and plants influenced generations of gardeners, horticulturists, and garden historians. His legacy will remain an important part of SGHS for years to come. Stay tuned as there will be a way our organization will honor Dr. Welch and his significant contributions.



Building a Stronger Society

Our ad hoc Sponsorship Committee raised more than \$15,000 this past year, helping us keep annual meeting registration affordable while setting even more ambitious goals for our upcoming meeting in Texas. We are also pursuing grant opportunities that can help fund specific projects and extend the reach of the Society. Our Website Committee has become a permanent standing committee and continues to expand our online presence, improve access to SGHS resources, and develop new services for our members.

Perhaps most importantly, the Society remains in sound financial condition. Careful stewardship, increased

sponsorship support, and the generosity of our members have allowed us to meet our obligations while maintaining healthy reserves and investing in programs that advance our mission. *SGHS Financial Snapshot below.*

Our goal remains straightforward: maintain a financially sound Society while using our resources thoughtfully to advance education, preservation, scholarship, and member engagement.



We Asked. You Told Us.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our membership survey this spring. The takeaways can be viewed on another page. Your responses were thoughtful, candid, and remarkably consistent. Members strongly value SGHS’s educational mission, *Magnolia*, and the annual meeting experience, while also telling us that you would like more opportunities to engage with the Society—and with one another—through the year. Your board is using these responses not simply as information, but as a guide for action.

One of the first initiatives to grow directly from the survey is a **members-only online directory**. Participation is entirely voluntary, and members who opt in choose what contact information they wish to share. Whether you are traveling, researching a historic garden, seeking expertise or recommendations, or simply hoping to meet others who share your interests, we believe the directory can become a valuable benefit of SGHS membership while fully respecting individual privacy.

Many survey respondents also indicated that they would be willing to volunteer their time or expertise. Because the survey was anonymous, however, we have no way of knowing who you are! If you were one of those

members—or if you simply would like to become more involved—please reach out. We would be delighted to hear from you.



Looking Ahead

All of these efforts—our annual meeting, *Magnolia*, scholarships, online programming, regional engagement, partnerships, and new member resources—serve the same purpose: **to strengthen SGHS while remaining firmly grounded in our mission to study, preserve, and share the garden history of the American South.**

None of this happens without you.

Thank you for your membership, your generosity, your knowledge, and your continued commitment to the Southern Garden History Society. If you have an idea, a concern, or simply want to become more involved, please contact me at susanmcleodepstein@gmail.com. It may take me a few days to respond, but I am always glad to hear from you.

And if your membership renewal happens to be sitting in your spam or junk email, we hope you will take a moment to find it, then renew and send it our way. Your support allows SGHS to continue educating, preserving, connecting, and inspiring all who share our passion for Southern gardens and landscapes.

With sincere appreciation,

Susan McLeod Epstein
President
Southern Garden History Society

(Members Survey on page 16)

	Prior Year 2024-25	Current Year 2025-26	Change	%
Operating Income	\$191,727	\$196,215	\$4,488	2.34%
Operating Expenses	\$140,418	\$139,908	[\$510]	(0.36%)
Cash & Reserves	\$117,835	\$177,331	\$59,496	50.49%
Scholarship Fund (included in cash reserves)	\$69,181	\$84,331	\$15,150	21.90%
Annual Meeting Sponsorships	0	\$15,000		

SGHS Financial Snapshot.

2026 SGHS Membership Survey – Key Takeaways

(82 respondents)

What Members Value Most

1. **Promotion and preservation of Southern garden history (highest-ranked purpose)**
2. **Magnolia**
3. **Annual Meeting**
4. **Camaraderie and networking**

Skills Members Are Willing to Share

Members most frequently offered expertise in:

- Academic and historical research
- Editing and writing
- Horticulture and garden design
- Fundraising and sponsorship development
- Event planning

Priorities for Membership Growth & Retention

Members strongly favored:

1. **Partnerships with universities, public gardens, museums, and related organizations**
2. **Hands-on experiences, workshops, tours, and field programs**
3. **Recorded lectures and annual meeting content**
4. **Scholarships and support for younger professionals**

Recurring Suggestions

- Increase regional and Ambassador events between annual meetings.
- Develop more opportunities for younger members and students.
- Expand partnerships with academic institutions and public gardens.
- Make annual meeting content available through recordings or virtual programs.

- Create more opportunities for members to connect throughout the year.

Concerns Raised

- Annual meeting costs may be limiting participation.
- New members need stronger onboarding and mentoring.
- Some members would like more access to fellow members through an opt-in directory.
- *Magnolia* should remain high-quality and be published consistently.
- SGHS should clearly communicate its mission and value to prospective members.

Recommended Board Priorities

1. **Expand partnerships with universities, gardens, and preservation organizations.**
2. **Increase regional/Ambassador programming.**
3. **Pilot recording selected annual meeting lectures.**
4. **Strengthen student and young professional engagement.**
5. **Explore ways to reduce participation barriers (travel, lodging, scholarships).**
6. **Develop a clearer member recruitment and retention strategy.**

One-Sentence Summary

Members overwhelmingly value SGHS's educational mission and annual meeting experience, while expressing a strong desire for more year-round engagement, regional programming, partnerships, and opportunities for younger members.

Southern Garden History Society

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August 1, 2025 - July 31, 2026

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(continued on page 16)

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

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

Aimee Moreau, SGHS Administrator
Post Office Box 631
New Roads, LA 70760
Phone: (336) 298-6938
Mobile: (318) 421-9144

Email: membership@southerngardenhistory.org

Memberships can now be made electronically on our website!
www.southerngardenhistory.org

Deadline for submitting articles for the next issue of Magnolia is November 1, 2026.

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