



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

Magnolia

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Weesie Smith: Alabama Gardener and Champion of its Flora

By Fred Spicer, Chicago, Illinois*

Birmingham, Alabama, cannot claim the historical depth, garden- and otherwise, that many notable Southern cities can. Founded in 1871, it's a youngster. Charleston started in 1670, New Orleans in 1718, and Savannah in 1733. Even Atlanta, the emblem of the "new south," is older by thirty-four years. But Birmingham does claim Weesie Smith, and in doing so embraces a woman who not only paved the way for public access to the natural beauty of her state but taught many others—through generous gardening—how to make pieces of it intrinsic parts of their daily lives.



PERSONAL

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1927, Louise Walker Goodall spent much of her childhood outdoors, riding her ponies throughout the mostly rural suburb of Mountain Brook, and gardening with her nearby grandmothers. Her grandfather, Robert Jemison, Jr., was the original developer of Mountain Brook, a planned community envisioned as an elegant country retreat just "over the mountain" from the heavy industry driving Birmingham's young economy.

After completing college, Weesie married, and the growing family built a modern home in Mountain Brook on a sloping, 4.5-acre wooded site on Pine Ridge Road in 1955. Weesie studied biology, geology, and chemistry at Birmingham Southern College in the mid- and late 1960s to deepen her understanding of the natural world. At the same time, she explored countless back roads, hills, valleys, meadows, outcrops, and wet places to see it first-hand, and to learn the plants and animals that lived there. She befriended everyone with common interests—and they befriended her—from amateur gardeners to wizened botanical sages, from members of the Red

Mountain Garden Club to academic professionals, from hillbilly plant-hunters to nationally-known nurserymen. She offered knowledge and plants widely, openhandedly, always with grace and humility, and with specific advice on how to be successful with plants others deemed too rare, finicky, or fragile to bother with.



Weesie Smith.

Photo by Michael Hayman.

She created a signature woodland garden on Pine Ridge Road that was toured extensively, photographed regularly, written about effusively, and probably envied more than once. A smaller garden, in the Forest Park

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CALENDAR

September 21-22, 2018. 12th Annual Heritage Harvest Festival at Monticello, Charlottesville, VA. Celebrate the revolutionary legacy of Thomas Jefferson workshops, lectures, tomato tastings, and family-friendly activities. Featured speakers include Peter Hatch, Michael Twitty, Ira Wallace, David Shields, Craig LeHoullier, and many more. Visit: www.heritageharvestfestival.com

October 5-6, 2018. SGHS State Ambassador's Program, "300 Years of Plants on the Move in Texas," in historic Nacogdoches, TX. The SGHS State Ambassadors will join with Stephen F. Austin State University Gardens and Friends of Historic Nacogdoches, Inc., to celebrate Texas' Tricentennial in gardening with tours, lectures, and a reception. Nacogdoches, Texas, first a Caddo Indian settlement, then a Spanish village and mission in 1716, later grew into a thriving Anglo town and, therefore, is considered the "Oldest Town in Texas." As a special treat, attendees will be able to participate in a rare plant sale at the SFASU's Pineywoods Native Plant Center. Lectures will cover a broad sweep of gardening history in Texas beginning with the Spanish era through modern introductions. Speakers include Greg Grant, David Creech, Jeff Abt, and will feature keynote speaker, William (Bill) Welch. The event will be held at the prestigious, newly restored Fredonia Hotel and Convention Center. Set amongst the East Texas forest between Lanana and Bonita Creeks, Nacogdoches was also designated "The Garden Capitol" of Texas by the state legislature. Don't miss this opportunity to hear great speakers, enjoy local history, and to experience the interesting horticulture of this charming East Texas town. For more information, email: fobni@yahoo.com.

October 18, 2018, 7:00 pm. Cherokee Garden Library Lecture, Atlanta History Center, Amy Stewart "Wicked Plants: The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother & Other Botanical Atrocities."

Author Amy Stewart shares her diabolical tales of the dark and mysterious side of the plant kingdom. Combining history, medicine, science, and legend, Stewart's *Wicked Plants* entertains, enlightens, and at times, alarms. The A to Z compendium of "bloodcurdling" botany is irresistible to even the most seasoned gardeners and nature lovers. Visit: www.atlantahistorycenter.com/lectures

October 19-20, 2018. 30th Annual Southern Garden Symposium and Workshops: "The Changing Nature of Gardening," in St. Francisville, Louisiana. Featured speakers include celebrated authors Andrea Wulf, Rick Darke, and Doug Tallamy. More information will be available at: www.southerngardensymposium.com

October 27, 2018. "Going Native!" symposium sponsored by the Central Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association, featuring Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home* and *The Living Landscape*; Ian Caton of Wood Thrush Native Plant Nursery, and Jim Hurley of Blue Ridge PRISM. Symposium takes place at the Blue Ridge Community College, Weyers Cave, Virginia. Visit: <https://csvgma.org/event/>

November 1-4, 2018. Heritage Rose Foundation Annual Conference, hosted by the Antique Rose Emporium. Visit: www.heritagerosefoundation.org

April 26-28, 2019. 37th Southern Garden History Society Annual Meeting in Birmingham, Alabama. Lectures will be held at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens and the meeting hotel is the Embassy Suites, 2300 Woodcrest Place. For reservations call (205) 879-7400 or (800) 362-2779 by March 26. Meeting registration information will be sent in early 2019. Visit www.southerngardenhistory.org for further details.

Weesie Smith: Alabama Gardener (continued from page 1)

neighborhood of Birmingham, followed in 2000 and almost right up to her death in 2016, Weesie hosted tours there, sharing precious plants, and humbly offering her knowledge to those who asked.



ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST & COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER

Widespread land development for timber, power, highways, and housing motivated Weesie Smith to save the best of the native plants that stood in the way. She was one of the first promoters of “plant rescues” and she worked with numerous corporations to overcome hurdles preventing their legal removal from soon-to-be developed lands. She documented rare and endangered plants in current and future right-of-ways, and advised on land management plans. She made extensive lists, sometimes camping out overnight for full immersion. Weesie mobilized volunteers to dig for themselves and, invariably with some or all of her five children in tow, filled her station wagon with load after load of trees, shrubs, perennials, and ferns for her Pine Ridge Road garden (and others), saving them from bulldozers and rising water.

John Randolph described the “battle for Alabama’s wilderness” from 1969: Weesie helped to found the Alabama Conservancy (now: Alabama Environmental Council), serving as president in 1972-3. Serious work began with their Bankhead Wilderness Study Team in 1970, to which Weesie was appointed. In 1971, their “Wild Areas” proposal made it to the U.S. Congress; testimony before both houses followed. Many of the Alabamian’s opponents believed no wilderness worth preserving remained in the eastern US, but they were mistaken, and they underestimated the group’s persuasiveness and determination. The Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1975, sponsored by Alabama Senator John Sparkman (and co-authored by Weesie), was passed as a result. The most pristine areas of the Bankhead National Forest, the Sipsey Wilderness, were now off-limits to timber and mineral extraction, preserved for the benefit of its many species, and for the public. Continuing efforts led to the preservation of additional wild and unique habitats, Dugger Mountain and Cheaha Wilderness areas in the Talledega National Forest. Truly wild Alabama—tens of thousands of acres—is still preserved in these special places, thanks to Weesie and her Alabama Conservancy compatriots. Next, with Weesie as their representative, the Interagency Council for Environmental Education was formed to devise a plan for a new environmental education curriculum for Alabama schools. When The Nature Conservancy became active in Alabama, they named Weesie a trustee, relying on her expertise to

prioritize sites for conservation and stewardship.

Locally, Weesie helped to found Friends of Jemison Park in 1955. The popular, linear park with trails and gathering spaces sits astride picturesque Shades Creek, which runs through Shades Valley in Mountain Brook. The wooded, waterside park was part of Robert Jemison’s original vision for his new city. Weesie consulted with the city on park expansion, plant identification, invasive species controls, development of interpretive material, and new plantings—always urging the use of appropriate native species through this beautiful natural corridor and elsewhere.

Weesie was an active member of Mountain Brook’s Red Mountain Garden Club, a Garden Club of America (GCA) charter, for almost sixty years, mentoring veteran and younger members alike. Members of its sister club, the Little Garden Club, long-benefited from her guidance as well. She received a number of GCA awards at all levels, including the seldom-bestowed Eloise Payne Luquer Medal, in 1976, for her conservation work. She was a founding member of the Alabama Wildflower Society and served on the President’s Advisory Committee of the

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Birmingham News, February 24, 1966.

Internationally known landscape designer Zenon Schreiber advises the development of what would become the Birmingham Botanical Gardens' Kaul Wildflower Garden with Barbara Orr (Bobbe) Kaul and committee members (from left) Louise (Weesie) Smith, Margaret Wimberly, and Sue Kinner.

Weesie Smith: Alabama Gardener (continued from page 3)

Birmingham Freshwater Land Trust. Their efforts resulted in the Red Rock Ridge & Valley Trail System in 2012. She was also a long-standing member of the Rare Plant Group, an august and serious club of the nation's finest plantswomen. Known as "the Rares," the group grew out of friendship, a love of garden travel, and a passion for rare and interesting plants. At Birmingham Botanical Gardens, Weesie volunteered for nearly forty consecutive years and served on the board and various committees. In 1997 she was given the Friends' Ida C. Burns Volunteer of the Year award, the organization's highest honor.



BOTANY, HORTICULTURE & GARDENING

A largely self-trained botanist, Weesie Smith became one of the foremost experts in the native plants of Alabama and the southeastern US, with proficiency in identification, habitat description, and nomenclature. Her Pine Ridge Road garden began modestly at first with traditional plantings around the house. But the woodland beckoned. Soon invasive Japanese honeysuckle and unfriendly poison ivy were stripped, and trees were selectively thinned to let the healthiest thrive. The resultant gaps of sunlight nurtured swaths of woodland perennials, and choice shrubs and small trees, that Weesie skillfully added. Many were rescued from wild areas just before impending development would have wiped them out. Over time, the Pine Ridge Road garden grew into one of the region's most beautiful and diverse private collections of Southeastern native plants, many surprisingly rare. It included distinct forms of well-known plants, and several plant species new to science.

Keen observation showed her how and where native plants grew in the wild; this informed where they would do best in her garden. In one roadside area, a road crew had dumped a pile of alkaline slag, a steel by-product and

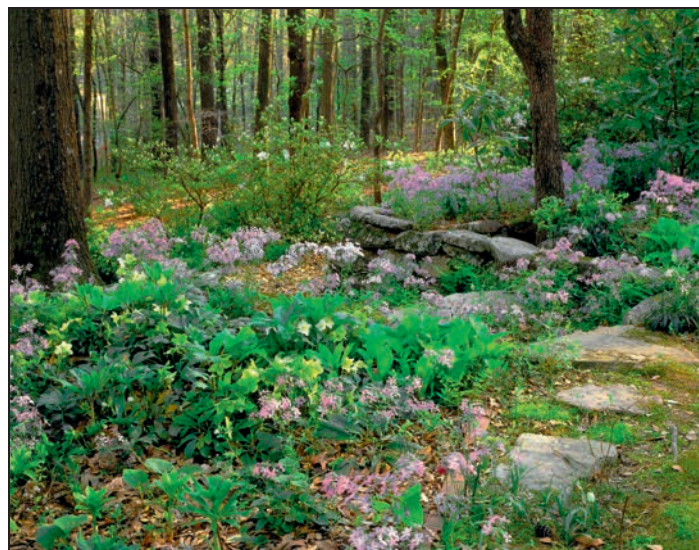


Photo by Mary Gray.

Weesie Smith's garden at her first home on Pine Ridge Road, Mountain Brook, Alabama.

common road base. The slag had spilled down the slope and would have been a concern for the average gardener. Weesie seized the opportunity, however, and grew sweeps of lime-loving perennials in her otherwise acid woodland. A smaller, eclectic town garden followed. She filled it with choice plants—sun lovers this time, denied to her in the shade on Pine Ridge Road. They shared space with selections from her former garden that were coaxed into new roles. Visitors were astonished to see plants from northern California sharing space with limestone glade denizens from Alabama, among others.

The Pine Ridge Road garden—meandering paths laid out beneath a canopy of tall pines, oaks, and hickories—gained a certain repute and was featured in full chapters in two books, Jim Wilson's *Masters of the Victory Garden* (1990) and *Eden on their Minds* by Starr Ockenga (2001). For many years, photographs of her garden regularly appeared in *Southern Living*. Weesie also contributed to other books and publications including the GCA's landmark series *Plants That Merit Attention*, where she represented the South, providing research and photographs, and assuring each region was represented. Lots of gardeners can grow lots of different plants. Weesie grew rare plants very well. She propagated them, and then generously shared them. In the gardening universe of the Southeast (and beyond), many of the "who's who" felt fortunate to call Weesie their friend (and she would modestly return the compliment). Plants from her gardens were liberally distributed to private collectors, commercial propagators, nurseries, and botanical institutions alike.

Among public institutions, Birmingham Botanical Gardens was the greatest beneficiary: four decades of her largesse in the form of thousands of plants from the wilds of Alabama, and Pine Ridge Road, to the five-acre Kaul



Photo courtesy Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

Kaul Wildflower Garden Gazebo.

Wildflower Garden. From the outset of that garden's development in the late 1960s, Weesie assisted in shaping landscape architect Zenon Schreiber's design, and placing and installing a multitude of plants. A self-described "compulsive weeder" she formed and led a hands-on group that met weekly to help staff maintain the garden as it matured. With keen vision, sharpened through propagation and observation, she taught the volunteers exactly which plants to pull, so seedling wildflowers would multiply. Her guidance was invaluable. In the mid-2000s, discussions arose concerning replacing railroad cross-tie steps that traverse the site (to avoid annual replacement of the rotting ones). Weesie summoned the spirit of its creator and deftly ended the debate, asking, "If Mr. Schreiber wanted stone steps, don't you think he would have built them?" At her urging, the position of Curator of the Kaul Wildflower Garden was established in 2007.

Among the other public gardens to which Weesie gave plants and assistance are the Morris Arboretum, Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania; the Henry Foundation, Gladwyne, Pennsylvania; Planting Fields Arboretum, Oyster Bay, New York; Yew Dell Gardens, Crestwood, Kentucky; the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Athens, Georgia; and the Atlanta Botanical Garden, Atlanta, Georgia. Of special note is her relationship with the Mt. Cuba Center—widely known as one of the best native plant gardens of Piedmont flora in the United States—owing in part to Alabama plants and Weesie's considerable contributions.

Weesie's generous nature and gentle urging meant local nurseries sold native plants. The owners of Alabama nurseries Wildflower (in Wilsonville) and Alabama Nursery Company (in Tarrant), each selected several superior forms of native plants obtained from Weesie for commercial introduction. Many of their stock plants were dug from the paths in the Pine Ridge Road garden, and Weesie remembered every glade, glen, and woodland each species had come from. Plant Delights Nursery (Raleigh, North Carolina) offers a southern maidenhair fern, *Adiantum capillis-veneris* 'Alabama Lace', from Weesie; Woodlanders Nursery (Aiken, South Carolina) carries a dwarf form of red buckeye, *Aesculus pavia*, originally from Pine Ridge Road. Several horticultural selections of native plants made from her garden bear her name (although Weesie would politely demur of the honorific), including a great catchfly, *Silene regia* 'Weesie Smith', and her "trademark" blue phlox, *Phlox stolonifera* 'Weesie Smith'.

Louise "Weesie" Walker Goodall Smith tirelessly championed the beauty and diversity of her native Alabama. She was an effective,

early spokesperson for the conservation of Alabama's wildest places; an active volunteer with more than ten organizations (several of which she helped to found); a self-taught botanist and consummate gardener; a talented plant propagator and generous plant sharer; a humble, bighearted teacher and willing mentor; and a great friend to countless people she touched through her work, her interests, and her many talents.

Contributors: Dr. John Floyd, Walker Jones, Donie Martin, Jan Midgley, Mike Rushing, Anne Smith, Fred Spicer, Louise Wrinkle, Library Archives of Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Special thanks to Alleen Cator and Jason Kirby.

**The author is the former executive director and CEO of the Birmingham Botanical Gardens and is currently executive vice president and director of the Chicago Botanic Garden.*



Phlox stolonifera 'Weesie Smith' creeping phlox.

Photos courtesy JC Raulston Arboretum at NC State University.

Anne Spencer's Garden Restoration Continues

By Jane Baber White, Lynchburg, Virginia

The garden of Harlem Renaissance poet Anne Spencer in Lynchburg, Virginia, is the oldest known restored garden of an African American. For those not familiar with Anne Spencer (1882–1965) the website annespencermuseum.org summarizes her life, her poetry, and her garden. In Anne Spencer's time, the garden was her inspiration as well as her refuge from the injustices of her life as a brilliant black woman in a southern town and in a time of great social injustice. The garden was designed by Anne but executed by her devoted and creative husband Edward. Thirty-five years ago, in 1983, I took on the challenge of restoring it with the Hillside Garden Club, a member club of the Garden Club of Virginia. Sources used were Anne's own poetry, the remnants of the walkways and physical structures of the garden, numerous old photographs of the garden taken throughout the Spencer's sixty-five years there, and personal memories of Chauncey Spencer, their son. The restoration was based on these factors and a particularly important photograph of the garden as it appeared in 1937.

The results have been featured in books and national and international magazines for many years and visitors from around the world have come to enjoy the small garden and feel its intimacy and warm spirit. Most recently the house and garden were featured in two major publications: a ten-page spread in the international design magazine *The World of Interiors* and an article by Jeffrey Beam, "Sacred Spaces: A Look Inside the Home of Harlem Renaissance Poet Anne Spencer," with beautiful photographs by John M. Hall in *Southern Cultures* magazine, <http://www.southerncultures.org/article/sacred-spaces/>

The Hillside Garden Club still maintains the site on a twice-weekly basis with the occasional help of an arborist and other garden specialists. The landscaping budget is about \$2,000 a year. Over the years, we have struggled with challenges to the original garden design and plantings. Anne Spencer's roses—including her original Aloha, American Pillar, American Beauty, and Blaze Roses—have suffered from excessive heat and drought, black spot, and Japanese Beetles. Maintaining these early-twentieth-century rose cultivars and the long border of surviving perennial flowers—including peonies, daylilies, anemone, phlox, "sweet pea," and bulbs—likewise has been challenged by the increasing shade of two massive and magnificent native trees—a Southern Pecan and Southern Red Oak—which now dominate the small garden.

They offer welcome shade to the hundreds of visitors (and garden volunteers) and provide a very desirable site in the summer. If they were going to be removed, that

should have been when the garden was restored in 1983, but at the time it never occurred to us. Because the garden is so small and narrow—only 45' wide x 125' long—and completely inaccessible (because of neighboring properties, fences, and terrain), removing the trees would be a prohibitively costly and monumental endeavor today. In addition, the oak's root system—which is traveling along the inside of a one-hundred-ten-year-old concrete retaining wall and causing it to lean precariously, and wrapping around the substantial posts of the authentically restored grape arbor—presents another future problem.



Photo by Jane White.

Anne Spencer's garden cottage, Edankrall, built in the 1920s by her husband Edward, where she wrote much of her poetry. The whimsical cut-out sign on the roof is a source of much discussion.



1920s photograph shows Anne and Edward Spencer with two grandchildren standing on the edge of the garden pond, amidst a profusion of flowers. The family's pet crow, Joe, is at the feet of the smaller child, and by the cast iron head, a gift from W. E. B. DuBois. The grape arbor, the pole of the Purple Martin house, and the family home are in the background.

Anne Spencer's own words helped justify the initial preservation of these trees, however, in her poem:

For Jim, Easter Eve

If ever a garden was a Gethsemane,
with old tombs set high against
the crumpled olive tree—and lichen
this, my garden has been to me.
For such as I none other is so sweet;
Lacking old tombs, here stands my grief,
and certainly its ancient tree.

Peace is here and in every season
a quiet beauty.
The sky falling about me
evenly to the compass. . .
What is sorrow but tenderness now
in this earth-close frame of land and sky
falling constantly into horizons
of east and west, north and south;
what is pain but happiness here
amid these green and wordless patterns, —
indefinite texture of blade and leaf;

Beauty of an old, old tree,
last comfort in Gethsemane.

But there was *no* significant shade in Anne Spencer's garden during its prime, which provided ideal habitat for Purple Martins, which enjoy wide open spaces. Edward Spencer was so successful in attracting these birds to the three Purple Martin boxes on twenty-foot-tall (non-telescoping) poles that he was featured in the local newspaper several times in a column by noted ornithologist Ruskin Freer, and visitors came to marvel at the spectacle of the birds. Although the bird houses have been restored, only squirrels and domineering birds tried to live there until we put up a screen, not visible from below, behind each entrance hole. Anne Spencer encouraged the Martins, which are notorious for controlling insect pests, by growing Concord, Caco, and Niagara grapes on her arbors for the birds to eat (and not neighboring children). Two of those varieties are grown on the arbor today.

The flowers growing in the perennial border along the east fence line are all survivors, and many are from Anne Spencer's original plantings. Other old-fashioned flowers were given from the gardens of friends of Hillside Garden Club members. Such shared plants as daffodils, cowslips, iris, daylilies, tansy, hibiscus, black-eyed Susan, daisies, and hollyhocks were added in the beginning and during the next thirty-five years. All colors were acceptable; it didn't matter if something clashed with something else. We, like Anne Spencer, were thankful for flowers that survived on their own. Over ten years ago Peggy Cornett,

another frequent garden visitor and advisor, provided some appropriate perennials and small shrubs from the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants at Monticello, which have thrived.

In 2008 Bill Noble, former project chair for the Garden Conservancy, assembled an advisory committee of knowledgeable experts in historic gardens, including Reuben Rainey and Mary Hughes of the University of Virginia and Peter Hatch, then director of Monticello's gardens and grounds. They met with a small group of Hillside Garden Club volunteers and members of the Board of Directors of the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum. They analyzed our problems and questions from many directions and formulated recommendations for short-term priorities as well as for future projects requiring additional financial resources. These results gave us added confidence and we have been able to institute almost all of the suggestions. Perhaps the most important benefit of the relationship was the assurance to move ahead and know that we had been going in the right direction.

Gardens evolve, and this is particularly true of the beloved garden of Anne Spencer. It is now well over one-hundred years old and definitely mature in its charming setting. There are many other details that are important in maintaining this significant garden, most notably keeping an informal cottage garden feel to the place. Considering its historic importance, and considering that it has been maintained completely by volunteers since its restoration on the most modest of budgets—it's a very special place indeed. In a phrase coined by Reuben Rainey, "The restoration *captures the spirit* of Anne Spencer's garden of inspiration," which has always been our ultimate goal and is a compliment we treasure.

A visit to the garden is free, and the museum house is open by appointment for a fee. Visitors are often greeted by Anne Spencer's granddaughter, Shaun Spencer Hester, director of the House Museum. The garden entrance is located at 1313 Pierce Street, Lynchburg, Virginia, 24503, and is open daily, dawn to dusk.



Photo by Jane White.

Spencer garden design where the cast iron head sits on the edge and spouts water. Anne's own water lilies, Edward's Purple Martin house, the towering trees, and the recently restored grape arbor and wisteria pergola recreate the original structural elements of the 1937 garden design.

Book Review

Public Parks, Private Gardens: Paris to Provence, by Colta Ives, published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art; distributed by Yale University Press | hardcover, 208 pages, 200 color illustrations | ISBN: 9781588395949 | March 2018, list price \$50

“Public Parks, Private Gardens: Paris to Provence” is both the name of an exhibition on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, 12 March through 29 July 2018, and a book of the same title written by Colta Ives, published by the museum in conjunction with the exhibition, and distributed by Yale University Press. The two are essentially one; however, each features images and works that are not seen in their counterpart. I had the opportunity to read *Public Parks, Private Gardens* earlier this summer, before a visit to New York in late July, which included hours on two days in that exhibition and in “Visitors to Versailles: From Louis XIV to the French Revolution,” also on view at The MET. This immersion in French art and garden history was extended the following weekend by the pleasures of a third show, “Napoleon: The Imperial Household,” on view most of this summer in Richmond at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

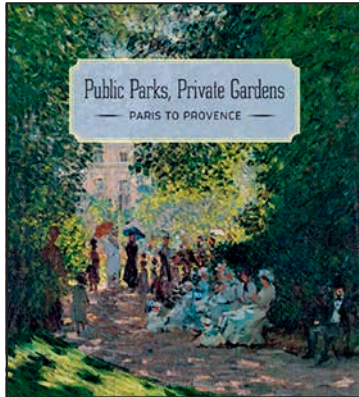
Colta Feller Ives (b. 1943), the author of *Public Parks, Private Gardens: Paris to Provence*, brought her long experience in nineteenth-century French art to this late-career project. Now Curator Emerita at The MET, she was on the staff of the museum from 1966 until her retirement. Her scholarship and related work as a landscape designer animates the five principal essays in the book and clearly informed the mounting of the exhibition in the smaller-scale, lower level galleries of the museum’s Robert Lehman Wing. There the center court, anchored by an historic Italian fountain and linked to the surrounding galleries by axial passages, had the appearance of a conservatory, with massed potted plants and curved slat benches.

In “Revolution in the Garden,” the opening chapter in Ms. Ives’ book and the subject of the first gallery in the exhibition, the French adoption of the English Picturesque is posited as the basis for the changing tastes in landscape design in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century France. This embrace of the new, with strong literary and philosophical underpinnings, gave rise to an ever-

increasing interest in horticulture, the creation of public parks, unprecedented private gardening, and the wide adoption of flowers, parks, and gardens as subjects by the Impressionists and other artists and photographers of nineteenth-century France. The period also saw the redesign and rebuilding of Paris by Baron Georges Haussmann (1809-1891) under Napoleon III, beginning in 1853. These developments are reflected in the plans, etchings, engravings, paintings, and drawings illustrated in the book and arrayed on the walls of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The influence of the Empress Josephine (1763-1814), the first wife of Napoleon, her gardening at Malmaison, and her patronage of Pierre Joseph Redouté (1759-1840) cannot be overstated. Colored engravings of the roses and other plants grown in the gardens at Malmaison appear in The MET exhibition, while beautiful items from the splendid Service of Plants of Malmaison, produced by Sevres in 1803-1805, was featured in the Richmond show.

In “Parks for the Public” Colta Ives chronicles the transformation of royal properties into public parks



Camille Corot. "Ville-d'Avray: Corot's Father and His Wife in the Garden," ca. 1845. Private collection.

after the French Revolution. Of these, the Forest of Fontainebleau, formerly a hunting preserve of the ancient regime, totaling over 40,000 acres, immediately captured the appreciation of French men and women of every station. Its great trees and primordial grounds simultaneously attracted artists, photographers, painters, and draftsmen, whose venerating images of the forest gained a wide acclaim in their time and have held their appeal to the present. Gustave Le Gray (1820-1884) and Eugène Cuvelier (1837-1900) photographed scenes in Fontainebleau in the middle decades of the nineteenth century while Camille Corot, Augustin Enfantin, Claude Monet, Théodore Rousseau recorded their views in oil paint. The gardens and grounds of the *Jardin des Plantes*, the *Jardin des Tuileries*, the Luxembourg Gardens, the *Parc Monceau*, and the *Bois de Boulogne*, among others, and smaller public gardens were photographed and painted by Monet and an equally prominent group of artists, including Eugène Atget, Charles Marville, Gustave Caillebotte, Vincent van Gogh, Edouard Manet, Camille Pissarro, Georges Seurat, and Edouard Vuillard, among others. Ms. Ives identifies Claude François Denecourt (1788-1875) as an ardent champion of Fontainebleau, noting his authorship of some three dozen guides beginning in 1839, of which the most popular had been issued in seventeen editions by Denecourt's death.

The private gardens of nineteenth-century France were often of a different design and of an often smaller scale than those of the royal and aristocratic gardens of the prerevolutionary years, while retaining, as well, a requisite symmetry, whether balanced or exact. Their character and plantings, including new introductions to the market, were influenced by contemporary garden handbooks and manuals, more popular in their intent, yet still reflecting degrees of the formality favored in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ms. Ives notes two of these and includes three full-page images of representative garden designs from *Plans raisonnés de toutes les espèces de jardins* by Gabriel Thouin (1747-1829) in 1820. The invention of the Wardian Case in about 1829, which enabled the transport of tender plants from their native lands to England, France and other markets, and the pioneering development of glasshouses by Joseph Paxton (1803-1865), culminating in the Crystal Palace of 1851, also contributed to the new wave of garden making in France and across Europe.

The new public parks in France as in England, where the Joseph Paxton-designed public park at Birkenhead opened in 1847, and private gardening created a large demand for garden furnishings and equipment. Companies such as J. J. Ducel et Fils met this demand and offered customers a wide range of seating furniture, fountains, benches, pots and planters, and other gardening accessories. One of the firm's catalogues, opened to show

its product range, was featured in the museum exhibition in a case along with a page from the 1877 catalogue of A. Durenne, Maître de forges, which shows his company's offering of cast iron garden benches. Well-preserved examples of nineteenth-century French garden tools and eight watering cans from the vast, celebrated collection of historic gardening accessories and equipment assembled by Mark K. Morrison, the landscape architect, are displayed in two cases in the exhibition. A similar can appears in a photographic still life of ca. 1842 by Hippolyte Bayard (1801-1887).

Paintings by the aforementioned artists and others are featured in "Private Gardens," in the book and the exhibition, including those by Claude Monet of his own garden at Giverny, with its water lilies and irises, and a scene featuring his wife Camille in their earlier garden at Argenteuil. It was painted some three years after Auguste Renoir pictured "Monet Painting in His Garden at Argenteuil." Both feature plantings of hollyhocks, a favorite of the period. The finer representation of hollyhocks, however, is Corot's beautifully realized "Ville-d'Avray: Corot's Father and His Wife in the Garden," which is easily one of the most engaging and evocative

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Charles Marville. "Bois de Boulogne," ca. 1858-59. Albumen print. Private collection.

Book Review.....(continued from page 9)

paintings in the entire exhibition and the companion book.

For the artists in nineteenth-century France who incorporated figures in their garden scenes, whether family members or friends, or the occasional stranger, it was a natural next step to paint portraits in their patron's own gardens, those of the artists, or imaginary gardens. Colta Ives identifies, with illustrations, the well-known precedents for this practice, Elizabeth Vigée Le Brun's 1783 portrait of Marie Antoinette, Franz Winterhalter's 1854 portrait of the Empress Eugénie—the wife of Napoleon III, and earlier works by Thomas Gainsborough and Frans Hals painted in England and Holland, respectively.

In 1874 Edouard Manet and Auguste Renoir visited Claude Monet at Argenteuil and painted Camille Monet (1847-1879) and the couple's son simultaneously, probably side by side, from slightly different vantage points. Both included a colorfully-feathered rooster, a hen, and a chick in their paintings, but in different positions. Manet included his friend Monet in the family scene, tending flowers in the center ground with a watering can at his side. Both artists would have known their mentor's 1872 portrait of his son, "Jean Monet on His Hobby Horse," posed on a nearby garden path. Mary Cassatt's beautiful portrait of her sister, "Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly," of 1880, is another of the master works in this exhibition. She is seated on a gravel walk, lined by a border planted with coleus, gladioli, and roses, which carries diagonally to a glasshouse in the background.

The revival of floral still life painting was another natural progression in the careers of nineteenth-century French painters. This chapter of *Public Parks, Private Gardens* and the gallery devoted to this subject in the exhibition features works by many of the artists already noted herein and many of the finest, most appealing paintings in the exhibition. The revival likewise drew on Dutch and French precedent, including the works of Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744-1818), a favorite of the French court. Ms. Ives' account and the paintings aligned in The Metropolitan Museum gallery follow on the splendid exhibition mounted in Dallas, Richmond, and Denver in 2014-2015 and documented in the accompanying catalogue, *Working Among Flowers: Floral Still-Life Painting in Nineteenth-Century France*, also published by Yale University Press.

Here again the Empress Josephine exercises a critical role. She acquired one of the earliest, most important works of the revival, "The Tomb of Julie," painted in 1803-1804 by Jan Frans van Dael (1764-1840) for Malmaison. Frans van Dael was a colleague of Gerard van Spaendonck (1746-1822) at the *Jardin des Plantes*, where van Spaendonck, a Dutchman, taught Redouté and others in the art of floral painting. At The MET



Edouard Manet. "The Monet Family in Their Garden at Argenteuil," 1875. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Claude Monet. "Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe," 1865. Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

bouquets of mixed flowers painted by Gustave Courbet, Eugène Boudin, Edgar Degas, Henri Fantin-Latour, and Odilon Redon appear alongside works composed of a single flower, including Adolphe Braun's ca. 1854 photograph, "Rose of Sharon," "Dahlias" by Eugène Delacroix, "Peonies" by Edouard Manet, chrysanthemums by Boudin, Monet, Renoir, and Caillebotte, "Lilacs in a Window" by Mary Cassatt, and sunflowers and irises by Van Gogh. Gustave Caillebotte painted the chrysanthemums growing in the gardens of his country house at Petit-Gennevilliers, standing at an easel among the tall flowers. He and Monet are both well-known as artist/gardeners.

The three flower containers pictured in the book are joined by three others in the exhibition, of which a metallic-glazed jardinière by Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer and Clement Massier is the star. It bears a very close resemblance to the container rendered in colorations of green, blue, teal, and purple in Edgar Degas' iconic "A Woman Seated beside a Vase of Flowers" of 1865.

The exhibition also offered light-hearted diversion in the way of two short historic films, "The Sprinkler Sprinkled," a comedic work of 1895 by the French

cinematographer Louis Lumière (1864-1948) and a film of Claude Monet at an easel in his garden at Giverny, made in 1915 by Sacha Guitry (1885-1957).



On this visit to New York, as in the recent past, I have walked through Central Park from my hotel on the Upper West Side to The Metropolitan Museum and The Frick Collection on Fifth Avenue. The images of the aged trees and groves at Fontainebleau, featured in the book and the exhibition, prompted me to think anew of Frederick Law Olmsted's life-long admiration of trees, as I enjoyed the shade of some of the oldest trees in Central Park, a number of which were surely standing in his lifetime. I was reminded also of a work by John Singer Sargent, that is among this nation's most admired examples of a portrait in the garden, that of Frederick Law Olmsted, standing beside flowering rhododendron at Biltmore Estate.

Davyd Foard Hood
Isinglass
Vale, North Carolina

For the Love of the Snail (Flower): Monticello's Caracalla Bean

By Peggy Cornett, Charlottesville, Virginia

Long before I grew the vine and smelled the flower I was infatuated with the Caracalla Bean. It only took one declaration by Thomas Jefferson, who called it "the most beautiful bean in the world," and I was on the trail of a new and mysterious flower. This was over thirty years ago, soon after I joined Monticello's Gardens and Grounds department under then director Peter Hatch. Through *Hortus Third* (the primary plant reference at that time) we discovered that Jefferson's *Phaseolus caracalla* (also commonly called Snail Flower, Corkscrew Flower, Snail Bean, Snail Vine, and Caracol) had been re-classified into another genus, *Vigna caracalla*, (and which now has been reallocated to its own genus, *Cochliasanthus caracalla*). After searching our most reliable suppliers we eventually discovered a seed source from a popular English catalog, Thompson & Morgan (T&M), a company that has been around since 1855. We spent what seemed like an exorbitant price at the time for a packet containing about six small seeds, which we germinated in the Monticello greenhouse. We soon discovered that the beautiful Caracalla indeed deserved to reign with our regal Hyacinth Bean (*Dolichos lablab*; now *Lablab purpureus*), a show-

stopping flower that continues to grace the vegetable garden bean arbor where Thomas Jefferson intended to display "arbor beans white, scarlet, crimson, purple." And while one would believe the opposite to be true, in fact the Hyacinth Bean is scentless, while the lovely blossoms of the unfortunately named Snail Vine exude the most delicious fragrance imaginable.

(continued on page 12)



Caracalla Bean climbing on the authors second story back porch.

Photo by Peggy Cornett.

For the Love of the Snail.....(continued from page 11)

Several years later I described my curiosity about this vine and its association with Jefferson in two articles, published in the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants annual journal, *Twinleaf*. In 1994 I observed our success in bringing it to flower and waxed poetic about our infatuation with its spiraling, mollusk-like, intoxicatingly scented lavender and white blossoms:

“Its seeds ripen slowly and, for the past two years, we have not succeeded in beating the first killing frosts [at Monticello]. Any effort to preserve them will be justified for the reward of its blossoms’ aroma alone, which is so deliciously seductive that, blindfolded at twenty feet, anyone would confuse it with Chinese Wisteria.”

The following year, in “Jefferson’s Botanical Perseverance,” I delved further into Jefferson’s desire to obtain it. In the letter to his friend Benjamin Watkins (cited above) where Jefferson justly called it “the most beautiful bean in the world,” he continued: “...the Caracalla bean which, though in England [is] a greenhouse plant, will grow in the open air in Virginia and Carolina. I never could get one of these in my life. They

are worth your enquiry.” My article went on to ponder how and when Jefferson first encountered the vine and I suggested that he possibly saw it in the greenhouses at Kew Gardens, which he visited during his grand tour of English gardens with John Adams in 1786. Jefferson might also have known the Caracalla through Philip Miller’s *The Gardener’s Dictionary*. The 1768 edition, housed in Jefferson’s library, described it as follows: “... a kidney-bean with a twining stalk ... grows naturally in the Brazils, from whence the seeds were brought to Europe.” Miller observed further: “It is very common in Portugal, where the inhabitants plant it to cover arbours and seats in gardens, for which it is greatly esteemed ... for its beautiful sweet-smelling flowers” Additionally, Miller alluded to the difficulties in perfecting seed and over-wintering the Caracalla in England, a problem also encountered in Virginia.

Another source of information was available to Jefferson through Philadelphia nurseryman and author Bernard McMahon, who listed the “Twisted-flowered kidney-bean” as a “Hot-House Herbaceous Perennial Plant” in the lengthy appendix of his book *The American Gardener’s Calendar*, 1806, an important reference which Jefferson owned.



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Digging the root of the Caracalla in early November before a hard freeze.

My research led to later discussions about the Snail Flower. By 1839, Robert Buist’s *The American Flower Garden Directory* gave this description: “. . . snail-flower is a very curious blooming plant, with flowers of a greenish yellow, all spirally twisted, in great profusion when the plant is well grown.” During the 1890s, New York nurseryman and writer Peter Henderson noted that the bluish-lilac flowers were “. . . valued by florists for their delicious fragrance and for their resemblance to Orchids.” And, in his *Notes on Edible Plants*, 1919, Edward Lewis Sturtevant observed that this tropical species was often grown for its showy, sweet-scented flowers in the gardens of North and South America, southern Europe, and India.

But, by the early twentieth century, Liberty Hyde Bailey’s *Cyclopedia* perhaps sounded the impending death-knell of this once popular flower: “It is an old-fashioned glasshouse plant in cold

climates, but is now rarely seen.” It took our perseverance as garden historians in hot pursuit of a historic novelty to bring the beautiful Caracalla back to Monticello and to regain its former popularity. For few flowers garner as much excitement and sheer plant lust than the Caracalla. In 2016 a *Wall Street Journal* reporter, Bart Ziegler, got wind of this garden sensation and lead his article, “A Guide to Planting Heirloom Flowers—With Links to Thomas Jefferson and More,” with the saga of Monticello’s Caracalla quest. The resulting stampede quickly overwhelmed and exhausted the entire season’s mail-order supply.

Cultivating the vine is relatively straight forward and most gardeners find success in bringing it to flower. But in northern climates, this may not occur until very late in the season and often brings disappointment when the vine is cut short by a hard freeze. After all, in its native environment, and in warmer zones or in a greenhouse, the Caracalla, which is related to Kudzu, is a fairly formidable perennial vine. But there are ways to trick this plant if you allow it go semi-dormant during the winter months and treat its large fleshy root more like a dahlia. This is what I have done for the past fifteen years or more. By growing the plant in a large pot, sunk in the ground beside a downspout off my second story back porch, I’ve successfully maintained a massive plant that grows

more and more magnificent each year. At the end of the season, before a hard freeze is in the forecast, I cut the vines to about five feet and, with a spade, I sever the roots growing out of the bottom of the pot, and haul it out of its summertime domain. Luckily my basement door is not far and I drag the heavy pot into the cool, semi-dark room where it stays all winter. By leaving several feet of the vine I’m able to bring it back to life in the spring and start its journey twining up the downspout to run along the back porch railing and on to the roof and beyond. By bringing it to flower in mid-summer the vine has time to set seed by fall, which I share with Monticello’s production facility.

Beate Ankjaer-Jensen, SGHS board member and cultural resource manager at the Gari Melchers Home and Studio in Falmouth, Virginia, is equally successful in cultivating the Caracalla both at her work and home garden. She likewise is very skilled at saving seed each year, which she generously shares. Her tip is to collect the pods as they are beginning to harden and turn from green to tan. With this method you can harvest before the first hard freeze each fall. Another important tip has to do with the method of storage. The pods need to be kept in a closed box for, once the seeds ripen, the pods twist and crack open, shooting the seeds in all directions. It’s quite a fascinating phenomenon, which adds to the curious nature of this beautiful, spiraling flower.



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Caracalla Bean on the bean arbor at Monticello.



Photo by Peggy Cornett.

Photo of Caracalla seeds twisting open.

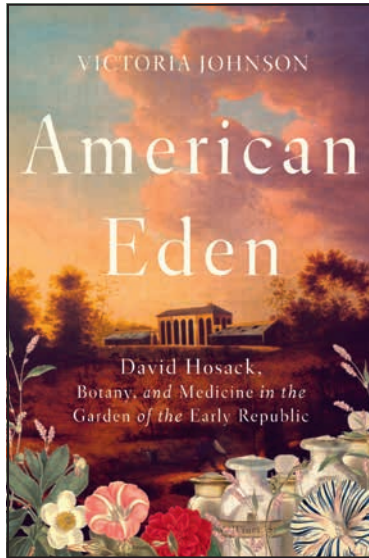
In Print

American Eden: David Hosack, Botany, and Medicine in the Garden of the Early Republic, by Victoria Johnson | Liveright Publishing Corporation, *A Division of* W. Norton & Company, 2018 | Hardcover, 461 pages | ISBN-10: 1631494198; ISBN-13: 978-1631494192 | List price \$29.95

On a clear morning in July 1804, Alexander Hamilton stepped onto a boat at the edge of the Hudson River. He was bound for a New Jersey dueling ground to settle his bitter dispute with Aaron Burr. Hamilton took just two men with him: his “second” for the duel, and Dr. David Hosack.

As historian Victoria Johnson reveals in her groundbreaking biography, Hosack was one of the few points the duelists did agree on. Summoned that morning because of his role as the beloved Hamilton family doctor, he was also a close friend of Burr. A brilliant surgeon and a world-class botanist, Hosack—who until now has been lost in the fog of history—was a pioneering thinker who shaped a young nation.

Born in New York City, he was educated in Europe and returned to America inspired by his newfound



knowledge. He assembled a plant collection so spectacular and diverse that it amazes botanists today, conducted some of the first pharmaceutical research in the United States, and introduced new surgeries to American. His tireless work championing public health and science earned him national fame and praise from the likes of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Alexander von Humboldt, and the Marquis de Lafayette.

One goal drove Hosack above all others: to build the Republic's first botanical garden. Despite innumerable obstacles and near-constant resistance, Hosack triumphed when, by 1810, his Elgin Botanic Garden at last crowned twenty acres of Manhattan farmland. “Where others saw real estate and power, Hosack saw the landscape as a pharmacopoeia able to bring medicine into the modern age” (Eric W. Sanderson, author of *Mannahatta*). Today what remains of America's first botanical garden lies in the heart of midtown, buried beneath Rockefeller Center.

Whether collecting specimens along the banks of the Hudson River, lecturing before a class of rapt medical students, or breaking the fever of a young Philip Hamilton, David Hosack was an American visionary who has been too long forgotten. Alongside other towering figures of the post-Revolutionary generation, he took the reins of a nation. In unearthing the dramatic story of his life, Johnson offers a lush depiction of the man who gave a new voice to the powers and perils of nature.

Gardeners, plant-lovers, and historians will appreciate the stories Victoria Johnson discovered about botany in nineteenth-century America and David Hosack's herculean efforts in creating the first botanical garden in the young Republic.

Members in the News

As Mount Vernon's Director of Horticulture, **Dean Norton**'s effort to cultivate industrial hemp has not gone unnoticed. An August 8 article in *The Washington Post* (“At George Washington's Mount Vernon, a luscious crop of cannabis nears harvest time” by Michael E. Ruane) and an August 23 interview on NPR's Morning Edition have given Mount Vernon's latest four-acre hemp plot some national attention. According to their website, Mount Vernon planted hemp to expand its interpretation of George Washington's role as an enterprising farmer. As the first historic home of the founding fathers to plant hemp, Mount Vernon will use the plant as an interpretative tool to help better tell the story of Washington's role as a farmer. The harvested hemp will be used in fiber-making demonstrations onsite. The 2015 Industrial

Hemp Law enacted by the Virginia General Assembly has ensured their crop is fully legal.



Photo of Dean Norton amid the hemp by Katherine Frey, *The Washington Post*.

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