



MAGNOLIA

Newsletter of the
Southern Garden
History Society

"The Laurel Tree of Carolina"
from Mark Catesby, 1731

(MAGNOLIA GRANDIFLORA)

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SOUTHERN GARDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

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SGHS -- ALABAMA BOUND

Members who live near academic libraries or other likely sources of state historical journals may want to prepare themselves for the trip to Montgomery for our 1986 spring meeting by consulting two articles published some years ago, both written by Henry P. Orr:

"Decorative Plants Around Historic Alabama Homes," in The Alabama Review, January, 1958; and

"Ornamental Plantings in Eufaula," printed in October, 1963, in the same journal.

Although a few notes can hardly do justice to the riches of information available in them, excerpted below are a few items of interest to travelers into Alabama's garden and landscape past, along with comments from Mr. George Stritikus, an active member of the Society and a county agent residing in Montgomery, about the present condition of the Alabama places described by Dr. Orr.

1. Dr. Orr begins his "Decorative Plants" article appropriately with mention of William Bartram, the American naturalist, and the glowing descriptions of native plants that Bartram wrote when he traveled in Alabama late in the 18th century ("What a sylvan scene is here! the pompous Magnolia reigns sovereign of the forests...").

Mr. Stritikus says: The Garden Clubs of Alabama have developed The Bartram Arboretum at Fort Toulouse, just outside Wetumpka (just northeast of Montgomery, in conjunction with the two rebuilt forts there. Wooden walks and overlooks, as well as educational plaques, are in place; native plant materials are being added to the site, and name plates are being installed on the trees.

2. At nearby Tuskegee , Dr. Orr states, "Around Alabama's most elaborate example of the columned T-plan mansion, the Varner-Alexander home, much of the original planting is intact. Post oaks older than the house shade the extensive plantings....The trifoliate orange hedge, originally entwined by the bride of the builder of this home, yet surrounds an intimate garden near the front entrance." Among other plantings he mentions Lady Banksia roses and Virginia creeper draping the columns which give the mansion its name, "Grey Columns", and tea olives, hedges of winter jasmine, banana shrubs, and others.

"In the beautifully maintained cemetery at the north end of Tuskegee," he continues, "there is a wide-spreading specimen of Magnolia grandiflora that is reported to have been a sizeable plant in 1833."

Mr. Stritikus says that although Tuskegee is largely undiscovered and has not yet seen many restoration efforts, the Varner-Alexander home is well worth a visit.

3. Dr. Orr makes reference to the founding of Chunnenugee Horticultural Society in 1847 and to the public garden that was founded by the group soon after they organized. He claims it is the first public garden in the United States (Does this claim hold true in 1985?).

Unfortunately, Mr. Stritikus tells us, nothing remains of the garden except a plaque commemorating the effort; but interested members should inquire at our meeting about its exact location.

4. Dr. Orr mentions two sites which members will visit as a part of the Society's organized tours: Lanark, on our Saturday tour; and Rosewood, built in Lowndesboro in 1855. From Dr. H. V. Wooten's diary concerning the latter, we read that in 1856 he planted mock orange (Prunus caroliniana), cape jessamine, 22 cedars, mulberry trees, scuppernong, and many other fruits, including nectarine, quince, pomegranate, and isabella and catawba grapes.

The "mock orange", or Carolina laurelcherry, was planted in a double U hedge (W for Wooten); and Dr. Wooten made three large round flower beds in the yard, one for each daughter. Some of the trees still grow on the property.

Mr. Stritikus adds: We will tour "Rosewood" on Sunday morning (March 16, 1986). The house, which has never before been seen by tour groups, will be opened by the present owner, Mrs. Williams, for the Society members. Much of the interior is just as Mrs. Williams's parents left it, and their parents before them. It is like stepping back in time.

5. Dr. Orr gives mention to the antebellum houses of Selma, and to a very old Lady Banksia rose that grows on the grounds of First Presbyterian Church there. Mr. Stritikus says the rose still grows.

"At Magnolia Hall," Dr. Orr says, "magnolias were alternated with live oaks to border the avenue, which was interrupted on each side by a circular planting of cedars with a violet bed at the center of each." Mr. Stritikus adds that Sturdevant Hall, also at Selma, is magnificent and well worth the visit. Though the landscape is relatively modern in style, it is very well-kept and does not detract from the beauty of the house.

6. About Eufaula Mr. Stritikus says, "A spring trip to Eufaula is worth the effort!" It is only 88 miles SE of Montgomery, too far to take the entire Society as a part of our weekend meeting. Dr. Orr mentions the Governor Sparks home there; its destruction, George Stritikus tells us, prompted a now-powerful restoration movement in Eufaula.

Kendall, an Italianate mansion completed in 1864, has been restored and is presently on the market. It rests in a lovely setting of spreading oaks, American hollies, and magnolias. Until about 1936 more than 15,000 roses were grown in the gardens in the rear of this home, says Dr. Orr.

Fendall Hall, often known as the Young-Dent home, lost many of its age-old plantings to the severe weather of last winter; they included *Laurus nobilis*, *Spiraea cantoniensis*, *Clerodendron trichotomum* (harlequin glory-bower), and the first India azaleas planted in Eufaula. The house is now owned by the State of Alabama and open by appointment. It has magnificent double parlors with stencilled walls.

Dean Hall is also well-maintained. It was built in the Southern tradition of large rooms with tall ceilings, and a porch extends around three sides. The yard was planted with Carolina laurel-cherry on two sides, with a picket fence across the front. Red oleander and red crapemyrtle extend up to the very high porch on the south side.

Society members: visit Eufaula, but please plan also to visit Montgomery either before or after, and attend our annual meeting.

BOARD MEETING

The Board of Southern Garden History Society met on Thursday, October 3, 1985, at the Single Brothers Workshop, Old Salem, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, just before the Fifth Conference there on Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscape (perhaps the best conference any of us has ever attended! The newsletter welcomes your comments on it, or contributions from it.). The Board decided to provide financial support for an exhibit on Alabama gardens which Mr. Stritikus will create and show at our annual meeting in Montgomery. In conjunction with the exhibit, a printed brochure will inform members about Alabama landscape and garden history. Discussion of this project resulted also in the appointment of John Flowers, Florence Griffin, and Catherine Howett to a committee to investigate other publishing ventures which the Society may want to consider, such as the publication of "Occasional Papers" of the Southern Garden History Society. We welcome your comments and ideas.

ANNAPOLIS

Members of the Society who were not able to attend the 1985 annual meeting in Annapolis, Maryland, have another chance to see the landmark houses and gardens of the town.

On Saturday, 26 April 1986, a special tour of the notable homes and buildings of Annapolis will be conducted. The Paca house and garden and the nearby London Town Publick House will be included. Because the tour is limited to 300 persons, reservations are advised.

For information: Historic Annapolis, Inc., Tours and Events, Old Treasury, State Circle, Annapolis, Maryland 21401. Telephone: (301) 267-8149 (Annapolis); or (301) 269-1910 (Baltimore)

IN PRINT

Peggy Cornett Newcomb, Popular Annuals of Eastern North America, 1865-1914, available from Dumbarton Oaks Publishing Service, P.O. Box 4866, Hampden Station, Baltimore, Maryland 21211. Price: \$15.00. (Ms. Newcomb, assistant to the superintendent of grounds at Monticello, has provided us a very thorough compendium of Victorian annuals.)

Catherine M. Howett, "Notes Toward an Iconography of Regional Landscape Form: The Southern Model," in Landscape Journal, v. 4, no. 2 (1985). (This essay was originally presented as a paper at the Third Annual Wave Hill Conference in American Garden History, on October 15, 1983.)

William B. O'Neal and Christopher Weeks, The Work of William Lawrence Bottomley in Richmond, published by the University Press of Virginia, Box 3608, University Station, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903. (\$24.95) The Press telephone number is (804) 924-3468. (Mr. Weeks writes that Mr. Bottomley, a New York architect who specialized in Georgian revival houses and built many of them across the South, was also much involved with the development of the landscapes of those houses. He kept a close watch on garden form and layout and design, and also recommended period plant materials to his clients, urging them to visit older gardens of their areas.)

ON HAND

Members of Southern Garden History Society may request membership brochures by writing to the Society's address: Drawer F, Salem Station, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27108. Ample supplies are on hand, and interested persons should be informed about our activities.

NEEDED: Information and contributions for our winter issue. Send them to the editor now, or until about mid-February.