



# MAGNOLIA

Bulletin of the  
Southern Garden  
History Society

*"The Laurel Tree of Carolina"*  
from Mark Catesby, 1731  
(MAGNOLIA GRANDIFLORA)

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THE FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING OF SGHS, IN CHARLOTTESVILLE, JUNE 1987  
An Introductory Note from our President:

Thomas Jefferson was among the very first of his countrymen to approach the design of landscape from a theoretical and philosophical perspective. From his study and reflection upon the question of how a university ought to be physically designed, the plan for Virginia's "academical village" took form; from his endless musing upon those elusive principles of composition that might transform an ordinary domestic and agricultural landscape into a work of art, Monticello emerged. He was, moreover, acutely sensitive to the special character of his own region, and anxious to see it realize the full potential of its natural and cultural resources.

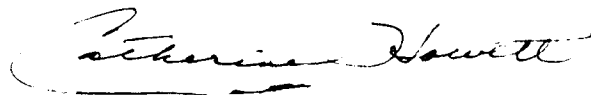
For members of the Southern Garden History Society, therefore, Charlottesville is a symbolically important place, quite apart from its many other attractions. Yet all of the special feelings associated with just being there, visiting the town and the campus and the university, were wonderfully enhanced at our June meeting by the excitement of learning so much more about the ongoing landmark restoration efforts that seem to be advancing on so many fronts at once: archaeology, architectural reconstruction, historic horticulture, social history and interpretation. Peter Hatch and his colleagues at the Thomas Jefferson Foundation did a superb job of planning -- offering us an experience at once broad and deep, and graced by a warm and generous hospitality that met in every measure the fabled standards of Mr. Jefferson.

continued --

President's message, continued:

We were on the go strenuously, chaperoned through the UVA gardens on Friday afternoon (and not just between the raindrops!) by Will Rieley and Rudy Favretti, who have had a part in their re-design; and on Saturday and Sunday, seeing Monticello (including the recently opened Visitors' Center), the Breemo Historic District, and Montpelier at really close range, walking and talking, listening and learning. We ate lunch on Saturday perched on hay bales in the grove at Monticello, seeing it with new eyes after Peter's discussion of the way Jefferson chose to depart from his English model in order to preserve the woodland shade that the warmer climate of Virginia made so inviting.

And just to help us grasp that important distinction between "sublime" and "picturesque" Nature that had so absorbed the landscape critics and commentators of the eighteenth century, our reception at the close of the afternoon on Saturday was preceded by a brief but spectacular lightning storm, which we surveyed from the terrace at Monticello, watching the dark clouds roll away, seeing a different, rain-washed garden sparkling in the returning light. What more could we have asked for?



#### ANNUAL MEETINGS

1988: Detailed plans are now made for our sixth annual meeting, which is scheduled for May 20-22, 1988 at Nashville. Mark your calendars now and plan to be with us for our tours of Cheekwood, private gardens of the Belle Meade area, Belmont Mansion house and gardens, and other sites of the city.

On Sunday, May 22, we will continue our tradition of offering an optional tour of historic sites and landscapes of the area surrounding the city, including the Hermitage, Cragfont, Wynnwood, and Fairvue.

The planning committee, organized by SGHS Board member Ben Page and his wife Libby, is hard at work to enable us to tour and hear about as many important gardens in the Nashville area as the weekend will allow, and to keep costs reasonable so that every member can afford to attend.

1989: The SGHS Board has also received a suggested date for the seventh annual meeting at Savannah from its organizer, Mary Helen Ray. This meeting is being planned for May 11-13, 1989.

We have now enjoyed annual meetings in Atlanta (1983), Natchez (1984), Annapolis (1985), Montgomery (1986), and Charlottesville (1987). The Board continues to try to plan meetings long in advance, in order to allow members from all parts of our large region to attend. We welcome your suggestions.

Three members of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation staff at Monticello have generously provided portions of their presentations to members at the meeting. Because of their length, we are able to include only two of them in this issue, and hope you will look forward to the third, Bill Kelso's talk on landscape archeology at Monticello, in a forthcoming issue. We are grateful to be able to share all three with all SGHS members.

THE PAINTED LADIES: FLOWER GARDENING AT MONTICELLO

by Peter Hatch, Gardens Superintendent

"Nothing new has happened in our neighborhood since you left us; the houses and the trees stand where they did; the flowers come forth like the belles of the day, have their short reign of beauty and splendor, and retire, like them, to the more interesting office of reproducing their like. The Hyacinths and Tulips are off the stage, and Irises are giving place to the Belladonna, as these will to the Tuberoses, etc; as your mama has done to you, my dear Anne, as you will do to the sisters of little John, and as I shall soon and cheerfully do to you all in wishing you a long, long good-night.

--Thomas Jefferson to Anne Cary Bankhead, 1811

Thomas Jefferson's interest in gardening was the result of a wide-eyed curiosity about the natural world. Even the site for Monticello was chosen, at least partly, for its intimacy with what Jefferson called "the workhouse of nature...clouds, hail, snow, rain, thunder, all fabricated at our feet." Jefferson's approach to horticulture was essentially scientific. When he said that "the greatest service which can be rendered to any country is to add a useful plant to its culture," he was assuming the role of an experimental plantsman cultivating 250 vegetable and 150 fruit varieties in his kitchen garden, 180 species of ornamental trees and shrubs, and nearly 120 species of herbaceous flowers. Monticello was a garden laboratory.

The flower gardens at Monticello functioned in a number of different ways. While the flowers served as a meteorological barometer to the passage of the seasons as well as a study collection of native plants, they also served as a kind of theater in which Jefferson interacted with his family, assumed his fatherly role, and directed himself the drama of the natural world. Perhaps there is no other subject which reveals more about the human Thomas Jefferson than gardening, particularly in the flower garden with his daughter Martha and his granddaughters, Anne and Ellen.

In 1811 Jefferson wrote Charles Willson Peale and said that "No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden. Under a total want of demand except for our family table I am still devoted to the garden. But though an old man, I am but a young gardener." Jefferson was a "young gardener" in many ways. His passion often outstripped his skill and the saga of many horticultural projects, from grape culture to experimental sugar maple plantations, begun with dreamy visions that dissolved before the harsh realities of the Virginia climate and an

unruly plantation structure. We hear the innocence and optimism of the New World when Jefferson remarked that "there is not a sprig of grass that shoots uninteresting to me," or when, in 1767, he noted upon the appearance of a prickly poppy (Argemone mexicana) bloom on July 18, "this is the 4th this year." Jefferson's open-eyed vigilance reflects his almost child-like appreciation of natural phenomena rather than any horticultural wizardry.

Throughout the letters in Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book, which includes not only Jefferson's garden diary but all his correspondence related to horticulture as well, one observes a union of gardening and sociability. Often he would preface a serious letters on the future of the republic with an offering of roots, seeds, or cuttings, or a discourse on the desirability of cultivating sesame.

Garden gossip also threaded its way through the interchange of letters between Jefferson and his daughter and granddaughters. He would chide them for their inattention to the flowers about the house or announce that gardening (along with music, poetry, sculpture, painting, architecture, and perhaps oratory) was among the seven "fine arts." They responded with attempts to impress him with discoveries of new flowers or tales of the family plantings.

Years after Jefferson's death, his granddaughter Ellen recalled the heyday of flower gardening at Monticello:

I remember well when he first returned to Monticello, how immediately he began to prepare new beds for his flowers. He had these beds laid off on the lawn, under the windows, and many a time I have run after him when he went out to direct the work...I was too young to aid him, except in a small way, but my sister, then a young and beautiful woman,...was his young and active assistant. I remember the planting of the first hyacinths and tulips, and their subsequent growth. The roots arrived, labelled each one with a fancy name. There was Marcus Aurelius, and the King of the Gold Mine, the Roman Empress, and the Queen of the Amazons, Phycbe, the God of Love, etc....Eagerly and with childish delight, I studied this brilliant nomenclature, and wondered what strange and suprisingly beautiful creations I should see rising from the ground when spring returned...Then, when spring returned, how eagerly we watched the first appearance of the shoots above ground. Each root was marked with its own name written on a bit of stick...and what a joy it was for one of us to discover the tender green breaking through the mould, and run to grandpa to announce that we really believed Marcus Aurelius was coming up, or the Queen of the Amazons was above ground! With how much pleasure compounded of our pleasure and his own...he would immediately go out and verify the fact, and praise us for our diligent watchfulness. Then when the flowers were in bloom, and we were in ecstasies over the rich purple and the crimson, or pure white, or delicate lilac, or pale yellow of the blossoms, how he would sympathize in our admiration, or discuss with my mother and elder sister new groupings and combinations and contrasts. Oh, these were happy moments for us and for him!

The flower gardens also served a scientific function for Jefferson. They comprised a botanical study collection of native wildflowers; in fact, 40% of the flowers cultivated at Monticello were North American natives. Plants such as blue-eyed grass (Sisyrinchium angustifolium), yellow star-grass (Hypoxis hirsuta) mayapple (Podyphyllum peltatum) and spotted wintergreen (Chimaphila maculata) were hardly treasured florist's flowers, but rather represented a museum of local botanical curiosities.

Jefferson was proud of the natural productions of the New World. His only published book, Notes on the State of Virginia, was written in part to refute the claims of European scientists that America's natural life, from its animals to its native people and its plants, was an inferior copy of Europe's. Wildflowers cultivated at Monticello, such as the cardinal flower (Lobelia cardinalis), Virginia blue bell (Mertensia virginica) and Atamasco lily (Zephyranthes atamasco), are still prized in European, especially English, herbaceous borders for their large and striking blossoms. Other native plants, today relatively unknown, also graced the Monticello flower garden, including such southeastern natives as the American larkspur (Delphinium exaltatum) and American colombo (Swertia caroliniana), and plants which came to him from the western expeditions that he sponsored and supported.

Bernard McMahon, a Philadelphia nurseryman who served as curator of the Lewis and Clark expedition's botanical collection, was a major influence on Jefferson. McMahon's American Gardener's Calendar was this country's definitive horticultural guide during the first half of the nineteenth century; it appealed to Jefferson because it was the first major work to deal with the unique problems of American gardeners, and especially with its continental climate, which prohibited the use of so many English techniques and plants. In 1808, two years after publication of the first edition, Jefferson instructed Anne in a letter to use it as a guidebook for her gardening. And when McMahon sent tulips to Monticello, he urged that they be planted as directed in the book. One may observe striking parallels between notations in Jefferson's garden book regarding spacing and cultivation of plants and the practical instructions in the Calendar.

McMahon also reinforced Jefferson's custodial pride in the culture of American plants. It was in the Calendar that American gardeners were first urged to comb the local woodlands and fields for "the various beautiful ornaments with which nature has so profusely decorated them." Wildflowers were particularly well suited for mid and late summer when early American gardens, so dependent on European cool-weather plants, "are almost destitute of bloom." McMahon continued: "Is it because they are indigenous that we should reject them? What can be more beautiful than our Lobelias, Asclepias, Orchis, and Asters....and a thousand other lovely plants, which if introduced, would grace our plantations, and delight our senses? In Europe plants are not rejected because they are indigenous, on the contrary they are cultivated with due care; and yet here, we cultivate many foreign trifles, and neglect the profusion of beauties so bountifully bestowed upon us by the hand of nature."

Contrasting markedly with Jefferson's collection of native plants, and portraying most elegantly the role of "belles of the day," was a collection of what may be called "florist's flowers" -- species highly refined through selection and breeding by skilled European plantsmen. Tulips, hyacinths, anemone, carnation, ranunculus, and Primula were among the notable cultivars grown at Monticello. They were purchased from McMahon and included striped, fringed, and multi-colored tulips, double flowered hyacinths, a silver-striped form of crown imperial lily, an early-blooming variety of Crocus vernus, and double-flowered forms of tuberose, anemone, and wallflower. It is unfortunate that although McMahon and other American nurserymen carefully specified the names of fruit cultivars, they provided few names of these flowers; one must refer to English sources for names and illustrations of these belles. One commonly used cultivar name, 'Painted Lady,' was applied by English growers to varieties of sweet pea, sweet William, carnation, cottage pink, and even to a form of scarlet runner bean during the early nineteenth century.

However, a majority of the flowers grown at Monticello were cultivated in their species form, unimproved from the natural state. Many had only recently been introduced into cultivation. The garden heliotrope, which Jefferson described as "a delicious flower...the smell rewards the care," was introduced into France from Mexico in the middle of the eighteenth century. By the time Jefferson was sending seeds home from Paris in 1786, garden forms had not yet been improved. The species form is a tall plant with very pale blue flowers.

Other species flowers grown by Jefferson at Monticello that have now been improved dramatically include the pansy (Viola tricolor), peony (Paeonia officinalis), gladiolus (Gladiolus communis), and most daffodils and roses. Though many of these species plants are extremely difficult to find in cultivation today, others are wildly successful, even weedy, reminders of early American flower gardening. The bouncing bet (Saponaria officinalis), perennial pea (Lathyrus latifolius), cornflower (Centaurea cyanus), and blackberry lily (Belamcanda chinensis) were all grown by Jefferson.

Jefferson wrote to Bernard McMahon in 1811: "I have an extensive flower border, in which I am fond of placing handsome plants or fragrant, those of mere curiosity I do not aim at." We have listed a few of the handsome plants, the 'painted ladies,' but it was the fragrant flowers that were probably more esteemed in early American gardens. Jefferson described several of them, including the heliotrope and the flowering acacia, a greenhouse shrub, as "delicious." Species such as the mignonette (Reseda odorata) and the tuberose (Polianthus tuberosa) were cultivated primarily for their sweet perfume.

But although Jefferson did not "aim at" flowers of curiosity, numerous novelties took the stage at Monticello, particularly in the summer months: the Venus fly trap (Dionaea muscipula), sensitive plant (Mimosa pudica), cockscomb (Celosia cristata), Joseph's coat (Amaranthus tricolor), and Four o'clock or marvel of Peru (Mirabilis jalapa) were among them. There were many plants with novelty fruits as well, from the balsam apple or squirting cucumber (Momordica balsamina) to the Chinese lantern (Physalis alkekengi), the money plant (Lunaria annua), and Jerusalem cherry (Solanum pseudocapsicum).

It is difficult to pin down the nature of early American flowers. Like Jefferson's "belles of the day" they presented a diverse parade in a variety of roles. There were the painted ladies, florist's flowers, usually bulbous plants that were easily transported across the ocean and distributed by sophisticated urban seedhouses. There were the unadorned wildflowers and species plants, more easily propagated by seeds and conveniently collected from the wild or passed from family to family. Some of these were aggressive plants, like daylillies and bouncing bet, and they still today define an early American settlement in their fits of harlotry. Finally, there were the plants of curiosity that provided some comic relief from the floral pageantry. Thomas Jefferson grew them all.

THE THOMAS JEFFERSON CENTER FOR HISTORIC PLANTS  
by John T. Fitzpatrick, Director

Plants are essential elements in garden restoration, and the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants is an ambitious new project initiated to collect, preserve, and distribute plants of historic significance for American gardens. The Center is being sponsored by the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, which owns and operates Monticello, and will build on the collection of varieties grown by Jefferson which are already in the restored gardens at Monticello. The Center will be a resource for persons and organizations in need of information about appropriate varieties for garden restorations, but it would be a mistake to think that these plants are only good for period gardens. The plants that are sold by the Center are worthy plants in their own right, and deserve to be used in modern gardens.

What do we mean by historic plants? It is a difficult question to answer until some limits are defined. There are John Fitzpatrick's historic plants -- those plants that have been important in my life, such as Bearded Irises, Gesneriads, and Gentians. And every person has plants of importance to himself or herself. Thomas Jefferson was a man of tremendous curiosity and energy who grew a broad range of plants, collected from Europe and America, at his home, Monticello. His collection of plants was extraordinary but at the same time typical of his times, and altogether makes a fascinating subject for study. The Center for Historic Plants is naturally concentrating on Jefferson's plants and those grown in America during his lifetime; but as the program grows, we expect to be able to make a fair representation of historic plants grown in America up to the early twentieth century.

The Center will seek to build working relationships with plant and garden societies for mutual benefit. The building of the collection of plants and educational programs are obvious areas where cooperation will be possible. I trust that the SGHS and its members will be ready and willing to work with us and contribute to the development of the Center.

What are these old varieties, and what can be said about them? Looking back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is possible to say that among people who grew flowers, there was an inclination to double flowers, multi-colored flowers, and fragrant flowers. If we were to characterize the late twentieth-century preferences in flowers, we would say they loved compact, self-colored, scentless flowers. Times and taste change. And this is one of the joys of historic plants -- they tell us about our past, who we were, and connect us in a way that furniture and literature cannot. Consider some of the names of flowers illustrated in Furber's Twelve Months of Flowers:

High Admiral Anemone	Lady Margareta Anemone
Glory of the East Auricula	Loves Master Auricula
Palto Auriflame Tulip	Narciss of Naples
Duke of St. Albans Auricula	Monument Anemone

What different impressions these names leave from the sorts of names we find for modern varieties!

The Center will consist of a nursery or production area at Tufton Farm, adjacent to Monticello. There we will have greenhouse, coldframes, stock beds, and an old barn converted to office, storage, workroom, and meeting room. The shop, exhibit, and display garden will be located beside the Shuttle Station at Monticello, and will be open in August, 1987, in a tent on the site, with the beginnings of gardens and a good selection of plants.

Among the historic plants that we are propagating at the Center are the following:

Hyacinths, prominent in Furber's prints, were introduced to Europe in the mid-sixteenth century and were quickly developed. Philip Miller reported nearly 2000 varieties in 1733. This was an important bulb in early American gardens at least through the eighteenth century. A limited selection of doubles is available today.

We cannot discuss historic bulbs without mentioning tulips. They were brought to Europe from Turkey early in the sixteenth century and were quickly popularized and developed. They became a craze which resulted in financial ruin for a number of speculators. In 1796, James Maddock, a prominent English nurseryman, listed 665 kinds of tulip for sale. Tulips have held their popularity in American gardens, though tastes for the striped and multi-colored have given way to solids and pastels.

The Florentine Tulip is a very different kind of tulip. It is smaller, slightly fragrant, and very persistent in gardens. It was an established garden plant in Europe by 1600 and came very early to America. It is naturalized at Monticello and in certain southeastern Pennsylvania sites where it was brought in by German immigrants. The Center will distribute offspring of MONTicello's naturalized bulbs.

The Tassel Hyacinth (Muscari comosum) has also naturalized at Monticello, but there is no record of this particular variety being planted by Jefferson. Bernard McMahon sent Jefferson bulbs of the Feathered Hyacinth, a form of Tassel Hyacinth, which may actually have



been Tassel Hyacinth. We are propagating from the naturalized colony for future sales.

Two species of the Crowfoot or Ranunculus Family were highly prized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and are seen throughout the Furber prints of 1734. Both the Turban Ranunculus and the Poppy Anemone were bred to a high degree of perfection and diversity. Their dried tubers are easily transported, which may have contributed to their early introduction to America. Today, mostly mixed colors of each of these are available; I know of no early varieties in existence. There is an opportunity to breed and select varieties to match the prints and descriptions of cultivars of the past; perhaps one of you will accept this challenge. The Turban Ranunculus was an important florist's flower in England by the early eighteenth century, and James Maddock listed 800 varieties in 1792. An advertisement in a Virginia newspaper of 1786 offered 600 sorts of double Anemones! It would appear that these members of the Ranunculus Family were the daylilies or hostas of their day.

Various Primroses were grown in colonial gardens; perhaps the Cowslip (Primula veris) and the Primrose (Primula vulgaris) reminded the early colonists of home. The Polyanthus is thought to have originated as a chance hybrid between these two by the seventeenth century. Until the mid-eighteenth century, Polyanthus were some shade of red, but then the edging of yellow or white appeared and became the standard type of Polyanthus until late in the nineteenth century. They are called the "Gold-laced" or "Silver-laced" Polyanthus. Another early garden hybrid is the Old Sulphur Yellow Primrose: named Primula X variabilis in 1825, it is still found in old gardens today, valued for its long bloom period and clusters of soft yellow flowers.

Pinks were highly developed cottage garden flowers by the seventeenth century, and there is documentation for pinks being grown in variety in the colonies by the mid-eighteenth century. Some of the antique varieties that we are propagating at the Center are 'Musgrave's Pink,' also known as 'Green Eyes' because of the gray-green center to each bloom; 'Inchmery,' a flesh-colored very fragrant variety from the eighteenth century and 'Purple Jagged Pink,' a single deep pink-colored species found in a Delaware cemetery by Dr. Arthur Tucker.

What can I say about ancient roses that has not already been said? All of the following were being grown in American gardens by 1700: Sweetbrier (Rosa eglanteria); Rosa alba semi-plena; Rosa gallica 'Officinalis' and 'Versicolor,' also known as Rosa Mundi; Moss Rose (Rosa centifolia 'Communis'); and Dwarf Burgundy Rose (Rosa centifolia 'Pompon de Bourgogne'). The Center is also growing the Persian Yellow Rose (Rosa foetida persiana), introduced in 1837, and the first widely grown double yellow rose. It was an important feature in many mid-nineteenth century American gardens.

Just in case you have the impression that we have all of the historic plants that we could possibly want, I will mention two plants that we are in search of. I would like to be propagating Hosta plantaginea, the species form that was introduced to England from China in 1780. The form called 'Grandiflora,' introduced in 1841, is the one generally

grown today. I am also looking for the double Maltese Cross, Lychnis chalconica plena, illustrated by Parkinson in 1629, and described in glowing terms. Can anyone help us out?

The Center will promote American plants, especially worthy varieties that are being overlooked and varieties that were used early in our garden history. Seedlings of Jefferson's Tulip Poplar are being grown and sold. Some of the others we will offer are Carolina Jessamine (Gelsemium sempervirens), Canada Lily (Lilium canadense) grown from seed, Sweetbay (Magnolia virginiana), Wild Pink (Silene caroliniana), Bird's-foot Violet (Viola pedata), White Cardinal Flower (Lobelia siphilitica 'Alba'), and Wake-robin (Trillium grandiflorum) grown from seed and division, not collected plants. The last native plants I want to mention is Twinleaf, given the botanical name Jeffersonia diphylla in 1793, to honor Jefferson's contributions to the natural sciences. It is a choice ground cover for shaded areas, with small white flowers resembling those of Bloodroot, in early spring.

The Center will also sell antique cultivars of fruits and vegetables. There are organizations already at work on these groups of plants, such as the Seed Savers Exchange, North American Fruit Explorers, and some specialist nurseries and seed companies. We will concentrate on fruits grown by Jefferson, such as 'Roxbury Russet,' 'Esopus Spitzenburg,' 'Albemarle Pippin,' and 'Calville Blanc d'Hiver' apples, and 'Breast of Venus' and 'Indian Blood' peaches. We are propagating from a fig tree believed to correspond to Jefferson's imported 'Marseilles' fig, which he described as "incomparably superior to any fig I have seen."

You can see that this is a large undertaking, and that in order to be successful we will need to work with many people and organizations. Preserving historic American garden plants is a project in which we can all participate. I know I can depend on the members of the Southern Garden History Society to do their part.

#### SGHS SECRETARY RECEIVES FIRST MINNETTE C. DUFFY AWARD

We are proud to share the news that our Secretary-Treasurer and founding member, Flora Ann Bynum, has been honored by the Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina as the first recipient of the Minnette C. Duffy Award, established to honor an individual each year who has made an outstanding contribution in the area of landscape preservation.

The award, which is to be presented on November 14, 1987, on the campus of St. Mary's College in Raleigh, will honor the person whose research and efforts have resulted in the restoration of the gardens at Old Salem, the establishment of an outstanding series of seminars, "Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes," held there biennially, and the founding of our own Society. The award is well-deserved, as every member of Southern Garden History Society knows. Details will follow in our winter issue, as well as a list of Mrs. Bynum's publications about the gardens at Old Salem.

Magnolia, the Bulletin of our Society, is published with the assistance of editors in every state of the region, who collect and pass on your articles and news and information on garden and landscape history. With the additions of new editors from Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia, our slate of editors is now complete:

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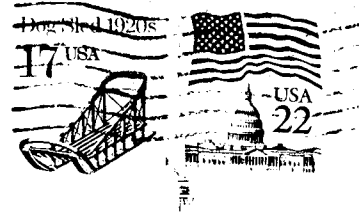
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Please send your garden history articles, news and information to your state editor or to our associate editor, Peggy C. Newcomb, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., Box 316, Charlottesville, VA 22901. Your submissions for our winter issue should be received by Feb. 1, 1988.

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