

Magnolia

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

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Blossom Circle The Life of Julia Lester Dillon

By Diane Erdeljac, Piedmont Hospital, Atlanta, Georgia

Many people in society remain obscure regardless of their accomplishments. Julia Lester Dillon is one such example. She was a woman who persevered regardless of the challenges she faced, attained success in spite of the societal environment in which she lived, and left an "unremembered" imprint on the cities of Augusta, Georgia and Sumter, South Carolina. Julia Dillon's achievements as a horticultural educator and landscape architect were significant, however, and deserving of recognition.

Records at Magnolia Cemetery, Augusta, Georgia, provide March 9th, 1871 as Julia Lester Dillon's birth date.¹ Her lineage can be traced back to the Revolutionary War. According to the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Julia was born in Warren County, Georgia.² She was a descendant of William Hill of Virginia (1760-1849) who, in 1776 at the age of 16, enlisted in the militia as a Soldier of the Virginia line. He was a pensioner who later died in Georgia.³

Emma Mason of Augusta, Julia's niece, provides further information concerning Julia's parents. According to Mrs. Mason, both parents were born in



Julia L. Dillon

Warrenton, Georgia where they eventually owned a plantation.⁴ Julia Dillon's father, Benjamin D. Lester, was born in 1842. The Lester name, according to Mrs. Mason, originated from England and is a derivative of the name of Leicester. Julia's mother, Mrs. Martha Pemble Lester was born in 1847⁵ and her lineage was probably of English and French origin.⁶ Julia had one sister (Emma Service) and two brothers (William P. and Benjamin Eli).

Julia's parents moved to Augusta when Julia was a child. According to the *Sumter Daily Item*, in 1875, when Julia was four years old, a tornado "swept the roof off her father's home."⁷ The family migrated to Augusta and moved into Julia's great-grandmother's house at 408 Ellis Street. Mrs. Mason states, "The house was called 'Lesterholm'. It was a beautiful Colonial home with six bedrooms and white columns." Julia lived in the house until she moved to Sumter in 1921.⁸

The *Augusta Chronicle* reveals the Lester family was a "prominent Georgia family." Mrs. Mason notes, "Julia's parents were strict Methodists. They preferred to shun attention, dancing and consumption of alcoholic beverages." The Sexton's records in Augusta, Georgia reveal that Julia's father

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CALENDAR

May 26th, 2001. 9th Annual Open House at Tufton Farm sponsored by the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants at Monticello. Speakers are Douglas T. Seidel on the roses of Easton (PA) Cemetery and noted author and PBS-TV host Liz Druiitt, currently assistant garden editor of *Southern Living* magazine. For information, call (804) 984-9822; www.monticello.org. To be placed on the mailing list for Monticello's "Saturdays in the Gardens" programs, write: Monticello Public Affairs Department, P. O. Box 217, Charlottesville, VA 22902.

June 1st-October 13th, 2001. "Lost Gardens of New England." An exhibition at the Bowen House in Woodstock, Connecticut based on drawings, watercolors, and historic photographs of New England gardens that no longer exist or have only partially survived. For information, call (860) 928-4074; fax (860) 963-2208. The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Bowen House, Roseland Cottage, P.O. Box 186, Woodstock, CT 06281. [see article in this issue.]

Through **June 8th, 2001.** "The Art of Botanical Illustration," An exhibition in Special Collections University of Delaware Library. The exhibition focuses on four centuries of books containing illustrations of flowering plants. For more information, call (302) 831-2229 or consult Special Collections' web page at: www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec

June 10th-22nd, 2001. "Preserving Jefferson's Landscapes and Gardens," the 5th Annual Historic Landscape Institute, sponsored by Monticello and the University of Virginia. Two-week curriculum includes lectures, field trips, and hands-on gardening activities. For information, contact Monticello's Public Affairs Department (see above) or Peter Hatch at (804) 984-9836; phatch@monticello.org, or visit the web-site at: www.monticello.org.

August 3rd, 2001. Gunston Hall Plantation's Annual Garden Seminar. Topic and speakers to be announced. For information, call (703) 550-9220 or (800) 811-6966; web site: www.GunstonHall.org; e-mail: historic@GunstonHall.org.

September 27th-29th, 2001. "CULTIVATING HISTORY: Exploring Horticultural Practices of the Southern Gardener," 13th Biennial Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes at Old Salem in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The theme will explore historic horticultural practices in the South. For more information, contact Keyes Williamson, conference chair, Old Salem, Inc., Box F - Salem Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27108, telephone (336) 721-7377, e-mail: facilities@OldSalem.org or visit their web site at: www.oldsalem.org/planandplano.html

September 22nd, 2001. "Garden History Seminar: 75 Years of Williamsburg Gardens," at Colonial Williamsburg in Williamsburg, Virginia. Speakers include SGHS members Gordon Chappell, Kent Brinkley, Mary Hughes, Wesley Green, and Laura Viancour. For more information, contact the conference registrar at (757) 220-7174; e-mail: tdailey@cwf.org

October 14th-18th, 2001. 9th International Heritage Rose Conference in Charleston, South Carolina. This conference will focus international attention and educate the public on the historic contributions of Charleston as the source of the Noisette Rose, the first class of rose to be developed in America. Speakers will include both regional and international rose experts such as: John Meffert, Greg Lowery, Marie Butler, Malcolm Manners, Greg Grant, Odile Maquelier, Trevor Nottle, Phillip Robinson, Marijke Peterrich, and Rosamund Wallinger. Post conference tours will include opportunities to visit Brookgreen Gardens, Medway Plantation, Mepkin Abbey Gardens, Magnolia and Drayton Hall Plantations, Wadmalaw Island, and the Charleston Tea Plantation. Hosted by Ruth Knopf; honorary chairs: Mrs. Joseph H. (Patti) McGee and Mrs. Alexander Sanders. For general questions about the conference, e-mail: roseconf@webtv.net or contact Charleston Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, P. O. Box 975, Charleston, SC 29402. Phone (803) 853-8000. For registration and payment questions only, e-mail: coned@cofc.edu or phone (843) 953-5822.

October 19th-20th, 2001. Southern Garden Symposium in St. Francisville, Louisiana. For information, contact Laura Thompson in Baton Rouge, fax (225) 925-9215.

April 18th-21st, 2002. 20th Annual Meeting of the Southern Garden History Society in Natchez, Mississippi. Dr. Elizabeth Boggess, meeting chair, is planning a special anniversary event.

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was a dry goods clerk⁹ and her mother promoted helping others of less fortunate means by teaching reading and writing to adults working at the King Cotton Mill in Augusta.¹⁰ The Martha Pemble Lester School in Augusta was named in her honor and presently the building, no longer functioning as a school, stands as a memorial to Julia's mother.

Julia completed her childhood education at Augusta public schools. After graduation, she continued her studies at Peabody College in Nashville, Tennessee where she graduated in 1890. During that time, Peabody was an exclusive, elite college whose main emphasis was to produce teachers. After graduating, Julia taught school in Augusta at Davidson



*"A Rose Garden, As Beautiful As It Is Rare"
Twin Gables estate, c. 1922*

Grammar School from 1890 - 1892, Houghton Grammar School from 1896 - 1904, and became a principal of Milton School in Louisiana from 1905 - 1906. The last professional entry from the Alumni Directory of Peabody College states, "at present Sec'y and Stenographer for Dr. T. E. Oetel, 638 Green St., Augusta, Ga."¹¹

Julia's personal life did not appear to progress as successfully as her career. According to the Peabody College records, on December 27th, 1892 she married William B. Dillon who died on May 6th, 1894 before their second wedding anniversary. According to Mrs. Mason, their marriage was not a happy one. She states, "Julia developed diphtheria early in the marriage and became totally deaf." Although she wore an acoustical, Mrs. Mason believes Julia was never able to hear. Julia's husband, unable to accept his wife's deafness, looked elsewhere for female companionship. The records at Magnolia Cemetery state, "William Bennett Dillon ... died 5 May, 1894, age 35 of unknown causes. Married but wife's name not given. Lived at 406 Ellis Street.... He was a school teacher."¹² Julia maintained the Dillon name, which originated in Ireland and was linked to the Count of Roscommon lineage. Considering the time period and Julia's background, it appears the Dillon name held significant importance to her.

When questioning Mrs. Mason, the topic of "personality" was presented. Mrs. Mason describes Julia as "buxom and strong, assertive secondary to the difficulties she

had to overcome, and independent." She also states, "Julia was well dressed, wore blouses and skirts to hold her acousticals, loved perfume, and liked to maintain her home."

After becoming deaf "Julia wanted to find a profession in which her disability would not be an obstacle."¹³ The March 9th, 1951 *Sumter Daily Item*, on the occasion of Julia's 80th birthday, quotes her reminiscing about gardens. Julia states, "I remember the first garden I ever saw. I was four years old at the time but the beauty of the moss and tea roses made a lasting impression." Julia wanted an education in landscape gardening and despite her disability, was strong enough to pursue her ambition. Her obituary in the *Augusta Chronicle*, 1959, notes that she worked at the landscape branch at Columbia University in New York, however, notification of Columbia University Alumni department reveals no record of Julia graduating from the University. *The Sumter Daily Item* (March 9th, 1950) states that she "studied landscape architecture in New York and Boston schools," but it is not known at this time if Julia Dillon held a degree in landscape architecture. Mrs. Mason remarks, "She learned her field through studious efforts at Northern institutions." She received her landscape education by the time she was 40 years of age. Mrs. Mason believes Julia excelled at her chosen career and her works and writings would prove this opinion to be true.

After Julia's studies in the North she returned to Augusta. The timing was right for a Southern landscape architect. Augusta was the final stop for any trains leaving New York and it offered a mild winter climate and great golfing



The rose garden at Twin Gables today.

conditions for the wealthy Northerners. Various prominent figures maintained seasonal homes in Augusta. Many of the residents would bring their gardeners; however, the gardeners were not trained in Southern landscaping and did not know what was indigenous to the area.¹⁴ According to the *Sumter Daily News* (March 9th, 1951), Julia Dillon received her "first,

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professional commissions in laying out gardens of winter residents upon the 'Hill'. A number of that city's finest gardens which are proudly shown today were first laid out by Mrs. Dillon... Her work gained wide recognition and soon commissions came to lay out courthouse grounds and public works in towns in Georgia, North and South Carolina, and



Twin Gables c. 1922

Florida." Mrs. Mason recalls that Julia's work included the selection of plants, educating the gardeners, arranging for garden laborers, and helping with the planting and maintenance of the gardens. A bulletin dated 1916 from Julia's church, St. Paul's Episcopal, advertised Julia as a landscape architect.

As a result of Julia's work in Augusta, she became acquainted with many of the residents from the North. The March 9th, 1951 *Daily Item* notes, "Wealthy New Englanders, including Mrs. J. Peirpont Morgan and the Whitneys, invited Mrs. Dillon to spend summers with them and showed her the gardens on their Newport, RI, and Long Island estates."

One prominent family Julia was consulted to work for was the Hardy's, a wealthy Chicago family who built Twin Gables, their winter home, in 1914. Mrs. Mason remembers visiting Twin Gables while Julia worked on the gardens and the main pictures of interest in a book Julia would write were those of Twin Gables. The home is presently owned by the state of Georgia and occupied by the family of the president of the Medical College of Georgia.

Julia also was acquainted with many of Augusta's local citizens. According to Mrs. Mason, "Julia befriended either Mathieu Berkman or his son Prosper, founders of Fruitland Nurseries." Mr. Berkman and Julia would write to Julia's sister, Emma, a resident of China, requesting of Emma to send them exotic plant seeds. Emma would comply with their wishes. Julia would use the seeds on her winter home landscape projects and Mr. Berkman would plant his on the nursery grounds. The nursery would later become the Augusta

National Golf Club, home of the Masters Golf Tournament.

Julia was commissioned to use her skills throughout the South. According to the March 9th, 1950 *Sumter Daily Item*:

From 1911 to 1916 she [Julia] served as a Southern garden editor for *House and Garden* magazine. From 1914 to 1917 she planned and planted the grounds of 14 post offices and custom houses for The United States Treasury Department in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. Among the small parks she planned and planted are those in Eastman and Waynesboro, Ga. Her large parks and school grounds extend throughout the South.

Julia remained involved with *House and Gardens* after 1917. In 1923 she wrote an article titled, "Southern Foundation Plantings." The first paragraph reveals Julia was not only aware of the horticultural aspect of her career, but also realized the importance of over-all landscape architecture. Julia states, "The character of the planting must be decided by the architecture of the building, by the material used in its construction, by the surrounding growth



Twin Gables today.

of trees or shrubs, by the nature of the slopes or levels on which the house is set and by the character of the soil and exposure."¹⁵ A photograph of Julia at the age of 55 also was discovered in a 1926 issue of *House and Garden*. The photograph of Julia is situated between pictures of two prominent professors associated with horticulture. The caption under her picture states, "Mrs. Dillon's writings on horticultural matters in the South have given her a prominent place in gardening circles."¹⁶ Julia was evidently highly respected for the level of achievement she had attained.

Eventually, owners of winter homes were able to relocate to Florida. According to Mrs. Mason, Sidney Ferguson, a local banker, wanted to attract more visitors to the Augusta

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area so he asked Julia what she felt would be a good nickname for the city. Julia replied, "It's already named - it's the Garden City of the South." Ferguson liked it and the deciding committee agreed. Julia's obituary states she was the co-author of naming Augusta the "Garden City of the South," a title that the city retains to this day.

Julia's work in Augusta became well known throughout the South. As a result, in 1920, at the age of 49, she was lured away from Augusta by a request from the town of Sumter, South Carolina. According to W. A. "Bubba" McElveen, a local Sumter archivist, "...through the generosity of 37 spirited citizens, the old Blanding Home was purchased and given as a gift to the city for a park... The home was moved to 437 W. Hampton Ave.... Dillon was hired by the city of Sumter to develop and landscape the park."¹⁷ The park, named Memorial Park, was established to honor 22 Sumter men who had died in World War I. The land contained 61/2 acres and sold for \$25,000.¹⁸

The 1920s was a period of history not known for hiring women into fields outside of traditional women's roles. Although Julia had proven her expertise as a landscape architect by 1920, she had to overcome dual barriers as a woman who also was deaf. It appears she did not have a problem with these obstacles. Mr. McElveen believes a Peabody classmate of Julia's, Mr. H. G. Osteen, founder of the Sumter Daily Item, knew of Julia's knowledge and encouraged the city to hire her. Sumter not only was progressive in hiring Julia, but also advanced in becoming the first incorporated town in America to provide a council manager form of government, which opened the doors for a landscape architect to be hired. According to Ralph H. Ramsey, Jr., a writer for the University of South Carolina in 1922, "Mrs. Julia Lester Dillon who took charge of it [the park] has the title of City Landscape Architect and is the only woman in the United States to hold such a position."¹⁹

After Julia's arrival in Sumter, according to Robert D. Palmer, an Augusta native, Julia lived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. B. C. Wallace. Their home, located on Haskell Street (later named Park Avenue), was situated across the street from the park. According to the Augusta City Directory of 1923-1924, Julia lived at 10 Park Avenue. It is not known if she lived with the Wallaces solely before the construction of Julia's house was complete, for the City Directory of 1928 provides 227 N. Purdy Street as her residence. She built her home, a two-bedroom bungalow, which she called "Roscommon Cottage,"²⁰ within walking distance of Memorial Park. Robert Palmer remembers Julia as a "very pleasant but firm woman."

The land purchased for the park was in need of Julia's handiwork. According to a presentation of the Sumter Garden Club, the park contained "beautiful oaks, pines, and magnolias ... which had surrounded the old home.... The open land where vegetable gardens and crops had been planted would provide ample space for playgrounds and plantings."²¹

Julia Dillon worked diligently on the park. Cassie Nichols,

a historical writer, reveals that Julia could be seen each day "headed for the park in her little one-seated car with her little dog beside her, and for each day she had many definite plans. There were no idle hours and soon results began to show."²²

Mrs. Dillon was assigned two men to help her with the work at the park. Their names were "Bob and Poss (as they were called)."²³ Cassie Nichols describes the completed park as follows:

"For the backgrounds, she [Julia Dillon] planted trees and thick shrubbery of many varieties, some unknown in Sumter. There were borders of magnolias, hollies, *Photinias*, *Ligustrum*, *Japonicas*, Carolina cherries and Japanese oaks. Here and there were stately Himalayan cedars, Italian cypresses, junipers and spruce. "For color there were *pyracanthas*, which in spring were white with blooms and in fall and winter loaded with orange and scarlet berries. Nandinas with their rich red berries made bright spots in winter.

"...And flowers were everywhere - each month having special favorites. Flowering shrubs and flowers were planted so that colors would harmonize. There were pink and white dogwoods, spireas, red bud trees, *philadelphus* and pearl bushes. Daffodils, in different shades of yellow and pansies furnished color beneath the taller shrubbery. Pink crab apples were grouped with Chinese forget-me-nots; while beneath white flowering almonds were daffodils and dark blue larkspurs. There were plantings of white flowering peaches complemented by golden forsythia and yellow jasmine. In summer there were crepe myrtles and altheas. On another side was a border of ferns, azaleas, Japanese iris, mountain laurel and myrtles with a background of tall evergreens. To give color at different seasons were beds of gladioli, larkspur and phlox. There was a border of iris of varied shades 250 feet long with here and there dogwoods and flowering crab apple trees.

"Blooming at different seasons were patches of cornflowers, stokesias, candy tuft, poppies, columbines, sweet Williams, snapdragons, delphiniums, zinnias, marigolds, daisies.

"Near the main entrance on Hampton Avenue stood a pergola with climbing roses covering the columns and lattice work. Here the May Queen was crowned each year and the Maypole dance was one of the exciting forms of entertainment."²⁴

In 1921, the city started operating the first playground in the center of the park,²⁵ and Julia Dillon worked with the Sumter Civic League in developing the playground.²⁶ Swings and seesaws were installed and a wading pool was added in 1924. According to Bobby Brown, a former Sumter citizen, Mr. R. A. Porter built the bandstand, which was located near

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the back of the park. Band concerts, conducted by L. C. Moise or Mr. Girard, were provided on Friday nights. A small fishpond and green benches also were made available to the visitors. During the day Julia taught knitting, crocheting, embroidery, and other handiworks.²⁷ The City's first two tennis courts were established at Memorial Park and a third court was added in 1929.²⁸

According to McElveen, Mrs. Dillon was polite and decisive in the rules governing the park. Children were made aware of areas they could and could not approach and abided by her rules. Cassie Nichols states, "Because of her love for children, Mrs. Dillon planned for their pleasure; they loved her dearly and followed her rules to the letter, even when counting carefully the number of pansies they were allowed to pick."²⁹

Beyond gardening, Julia Dillon enjoyed writing and apparently wanted to share her knowledge of Southern horticulture with others. In 1922, at the age of 51, Julia wrote a book titled, *The Blossom Circle of the Year in Southern Gardens*, published by the A. T. De La Mare Company, Inc. of New York. The dedication reads, "To My Sister EMMA SERVICE LESTER In Her Beautiful Chinese Garden Far Across the Blue Pacific." Mrs. Mason states:

"Emma left Augusta at the age eighteen to become a Methodist missionary in China. However, she soon felt the Chinese had more to teach her than she could teach them. Emma became interested in the artistic value of the Chinese culture. She became a teacher at McTier School (location unknown) teaching English. She also became a personal friend of Sun Yat Sen, the first president of the Republic of China. Framed on Mrs. Mason's wall is silver chop-sticks presented to Emma (Mrs. Mason's namesake) after her first dinner with the president. Emma eventually married Dr. Lewis Chase in 1930."³⁰

As stated earlier, Emma would send Julia plants from China. Margaret Britt states:

"In the March 1941 issue of the *Flower Grower Magazine*, the column from Sumter was entitled 'Romance of my Garden,' and it told of the development of lovely Chosen daisies grown from seeds

sent from Shanghai's Jessfield Park by a missionary sister of the writer. These hardy chrysanthemums from Korea are the originals from which all other chrysanthemums have been developed. At the close of the article, the writer said, 'Anyone wishing to try these chosen daisies will be supplied with seeds as long as they last.' The response was overwhelming-212 requests coming from 36 states, three Canadian provinces and ten Canadian towns and cities. As a sequel to these letters with seeds from Sumter, answers enclosing gifts of seeds were received from people of other states."³¹

Julia's motivation for writing the book is clearly stated in the first chapter. Julia informs the reader that no books at that time (1922) had been written on the subject of gardening South "of the Mason and Dixon Line."

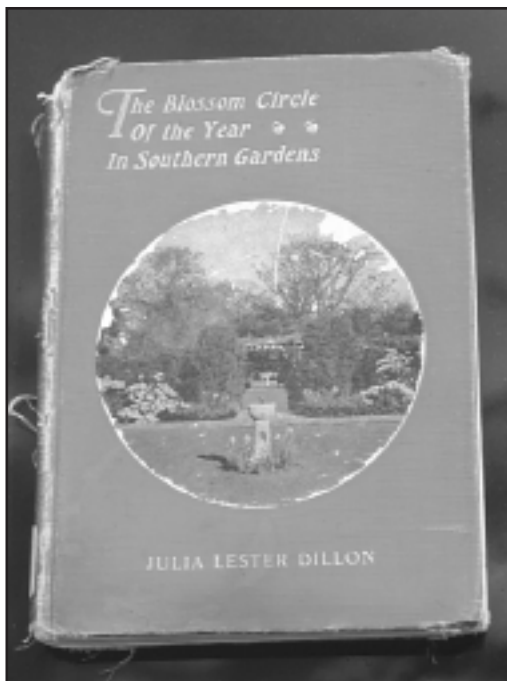
The title of the book implies, and the words written in the book reveal, Julia wanted to inform the reader that anyone could have a beautiful garden twelve months of the year. Each chapter is devoted to this goal. Julia ends her book with what appears to show her enthusiasm for gardening. She states:

"The men and women who make gardens will find them safety valves for the spirit when things go wrong. They will not tire of garden making, for the fascinating part of it is that it is never finishes. They must plant in faith, water with hope, take counsel of patience; then, if they are long-suffering and kind, they will reap an abundant harvest of joy and peace and happiness...."³²

Julia also wrote an eighteen-page pamphlet called "Landscape Design, Twenty Lessons," published by the Osteen Publishing Company of Sumter. A copy of the pamphlet has not been located at this time.

Mrs. Dillon contributed more than Memorial Park to the town of Sumter. The Sumter Daily Item (1951) states:

"By the time the park was completed, Sumter had become so appreciative of Mrs. Dillon's service, they hired her as the Superintendent of Parks and Trees for the city. She held that position until July 1948. In addition to planning Memorial Park, she also developed Anne Park, Loring Place, Warren Park and Eastwood Park.



The Blossom Circle, published in 1922.

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The grounds of Trinity Methodist Church, the Church of the Holy Comforter, First Presbyterian Church, Temple Sinai, Edmunds High School, Lincoln School, Savage Glover School, Central Elementary School, Carnegie Library and Tuomey Hospital bear the hallmark of her work. She also planted the first landscape development at Shaw Air Force Base.”

As head of the Department of Trees and Parks, Julia Dillon appeared very diligent in her promotion of the beautification of the entire town of Sumter. On the occasion of her 79th birthday, the March 9th, 1950 Sumter Item states:

“Street trees all over town — a treat to the visitor’s eye — have been planted by her. More than 2,000 crepe myrtles, as well as chestnut oaks, white oaks, 100 pecans, dogwoods, redbuds and shade trees which now decorate the city’s thorough-fares are the result of her efforts.”

The following year the same newspaper printed, “Not a tree could be taken down without her approval — and her work in preserving the fine old oak trees ... added immeasurably to the beauty of this city.”³³

In 1932, Julia wrote an article in a newspaper (Sumter Banner), which reveals her concern about the trees situated in Sumter. The article states:

“The program of tree care, which has been followed by Sumter, requires that no service company-telephone, telegraph or light and power-can remove branches from the trees at any time without the permission of the city council or their authorized authority and the cutting must be done under supervision.”³⁴

Beyond publishing her book, Julia also wrote articles for two magazines: House and Garden, as previously mentioned, and The Flower Grower. The date of her first article for the Flower Grower, titled “January Activities in Southern Gardens,” is not known, however it appears to be January 1937. In the article she provides information concerning plants, planting, and the care of gardens during that month, confirming her expertise on the topic. (Figure 4) The majority of the articles Julia wrote throughout the years for Flower Grower were directed at providing the reader with valuable gardening information needed to maintain a garden for the month in



“A Living Mirror to Multiply the Gardens Glories”
Twin Gables, c. 1922

which the article was written. The article dated June 1954 would be the last one she wrote for the magazine. It was a very short column concerning roses. At the bottom of her article an announcement stated a new writer would introduce a monthly feature called “Southern Ramblings.” It also stated Julia would continue “to charge the imagination of her numerous friends with tips on southern gardening.”

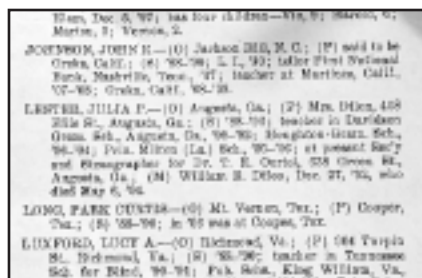
Julia also wrote articles for newspapers. Among them were The State, A Columbia, S. C. newspaper, The Atlanta Constitution, and The Sumter Daily Item, a local newspaper. The title of her articles published in The State was “Garden Planning and Planting for South Carolina.”

In these articles she not only addressed planning and planting for each month of the year but also addressed topics such as the labor intensiveness of gardening, landscaping entrances and exits, and bulbs for indoor bloom.

Concerning local publications, on August 10th, 1938, an anniversary edition of the Sumter Daily Item titled “44th Anniversary and Progress Edition - Sumter Known Throughout Country For Its Beautiful Gardens” features four front-page articles written by Julia. The articles discuss the home and gardens of the Borough House, the Sumter Garden Club, the Iris Gardens of Sumter, the park system, and the attention the town of Sumter draws from people for its beautiful gardens.

Julia not only worked diligently on gardening projects and on writing articles for publications, but also was an activist who promoted the founding of a community garden club. She helped establish the Sumter Garden Club in 1927. A booklet titled, “History - Sumter Garden Club, 1927-1977” begins with an introduction highlighting Julia’s life. It states,

“A history of the Sumter Garden Club, and indeed all garden club work in Sumter, must begin with Julia Lester Dillon.... In March 1927, under the leadership of Mrs. Dillon, the Sumter Garden Club was organized ...”³⁵ The purpose of the club was “the improvement in civic beautification, and the seeking of knowledge of How to Grow, What to Grow, and Where to Grow...”³⁶ The first president of the club was Mrs. R.C. Williams and Julia was one of three members of the executive committee.³⁷ The club had 22 members in 1928 and by 1950 there were 100 active members. The first flower show of the



Julia Dillon's obituary

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club was held on October 5th, 1928. In 1930, the club became a charter member of the State Federation of Garden Clubs, presently the Garden Club of South Carolina, Inc. Julia Dillon was president of the club in 1935 and 1936 and honorary president from 1937-1945. Ten years after the beginning of the Sumter Garden Club, Julia designed the Iris Seal used by the club to promote the Iris Gardens located in Sumter and to raise money for other civic promotions. Today the seal can still be seen throughout the streets of Sumter.

In 1934, the garden club "established the first garden center in South Carolina in a little English cottage on the grounds of the home of a club member."³⁸ In 1964, a new garden center, the Alice Boyle Garden Center, was erected in Sumter. Inside the center, hangs a plaque that states, "Julia Lester Dillon - Artist - Author, City Landscape Architect, Designed Memorial Park, Inspired Garden Club Work in Sumter."³⁹

During the last year of her life, due to declining health, Julia lived with Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Crocker of Augusta.⁴⁰ She died of a cerebral thrombosis on March 24th, 1959 and was buried at Magnolia Cemetery in Augusta, next to her husband.

Julia Dillon was well known in Sumter during her lifetime and she contributed much to the cities of Augusta and Sumter. Today, many of the trees and flowers she planted still exist. Over the years Memorial Park has deteriorated, but signs of its regeneration are appearing. New brick entrance



Magnolia Cemetery - Augusta, Georgia

walls are presently being installed. Hopefully in the future, the park will represent the ideal Julia worked so hard to achieve.

Julia accomplished much for the citizens of Augusta and Sumter. It is this writer's hope that her efforts will become better known among their citizens. Julia Lester Dillon has earned recognition within the context of historical landscape architecture. That recognition appears long overdue.

[This paper was the result of a research project for James Cothran's historic preservation course at Georgia State University in Atlanta. Ms. Erdeljac is a registered nurse at Piedmont Hospital with a bachelor's degree in art history. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in historic preservation.]



End Notes

¹ "Sexton's Papers." Magnolia Cemetery. February 19th, 2000.

² "DAR"

³ "DAR"

⁴ Mason, Mrs. James M. Personal interview. March 18th, 2000.

⁵ "Sexton."

⁶ Mason.

⁷ "Mrs. Dillon Has 80th Birthday." *The Sumter Daily Item*. March 9th, 1951.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Sexton."

¹⁰ Mason.

¹¹ "Class of 1890." *Alumni Directory of Peabody College*. Nashville, TN. 116.

¹² "Sexton."

¹³ Mason.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Julia Lester Dillon. *The Blossom Circle of the Year in Southern Gardens*. New York: A. T. De La Mare, 1922. 108.

¹⁶ "Portrait." *House and Garden*, November 1926: 118.

¹⁷ "A Look Back." Bubba McElveen, July 23rd, 2000. www.theitem.com/lookback/

¹⁸ Deed: The State of South Carolina. Sumter County. Deed Book S-4 p. 418, August 1st, 1919. Figures 1 and 2.

¹⁹ Ralph H. Ramsey, Jr. & A. Green. *Sumter County - Economic and Social*. Columbia: Department of Rural Social Science of the University of South Carolina. 19.

²⁰ Mason.

²¹ Mrs. R. D. Graham. "Sumter's Parks," Sumter Garden Club, Sumter, South Carolina. May 27th, 1958.

²² Cassie Nichols. "Reminiscences of Sumter's Beauty." Historical Sketches of Sumter County. Vol. II. Sumter: Sumter Co. Historical Commission. 1981.39-43.

²³ Nichols. 41.

²⁴ Nichols. 41-42.

²⁵ Graham. 2.

²⁶ *Sumter Item*. 1951.

²⁷ Nichols. 43.

²⁸ McElveen.

²⁹ Nichols. 43.

³⁰ Mason.

³¹ Margaret U. Britt. *History Sumter Garden Club 1927-1977*. Sumter, South Carolina. 17.

³² Dillon. 195.

³³ *Sumter Item*. March 9th, 1951.

³⁴ Julia Lester Dillon. "Many Lovely Trees Adorn Sumter Streets," *Sumter Banner*, August 1st, 1932.

³⁵ Britt. 1.

³⁶ Nichols. 548.

³⁷ Sumter Garden Club, "The Sumter Garden Club Year Book - 1927," Sumter, SC 1927.

³⁸ Britt. 2-3.

³⁹ Nichols, "Garden Club Council Vital to Sumter." W. A. McElveen.

⁴⁰ *The Augusta Chronicle*, March 25th, 1959.

Of Interest



The North American Cottage Garden Society and the North American Dianthus Society have combined to produce a quarterly journal, *Small Honesties*, edited by Rand B. Lee, president and founder of the two organizations. Rand Lee is a renowned Dianthus authority and lectures often on the topic. The publication contains numerous articles on cottage garden plants and sponsors seed exchanges. Additionally, it includes "The Gilliflower Times," the former journal of NADS. For more information, contact Denis Garrett, Membership Secretary, NACGS/NADS, Inc., P.O. Box 188, Pegram, TN 37143-0188.

Tour Australia's Historic Gardens. The Australian Garden History Society is sponsoring a tour of the gardens of Australia in October especially for members of American garden history societies. The three-and-a-half-week tour will look at the history and development of Australia's gardens from the earliest colonial gardens to contemporary and native gardens. The full tour is October 11th to November 6th. For those not able to take the full tour, shorter components are offered from October 11th to 27th, and from October 26th to November 6th. The SGHS office, (336)-721-7328, has a few copies of the tour brochure and application forms. Questions can be addressed to the tour coordinator in Australia, Ann Cripps, E-mail: aghs@vicnet.net.au. The Australian Garden History Society has a very comprehensive website: www.vicnet.net.au.

Lost Gardens of New England

Images of New England gardens, many long since vanished, will be on display in the Carriage Barn at Roseland Cottage in honor of the 150th Anniversary of the Garden at Roseland Cottage. An exhibition of town, country, and suburban garden images, c. 1790-1930 will run from June 1st through October 13th, 2001. The exhibit is free and will be open during regular museum hours, Wednesday through Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. until October 13th.

Featuring more than 40 images of New England gardens from the SPNEA's library and archives, the exhibition is rich in documentary evidence of how the region once looked. *Lost Gardens of New England* includes watercolors, historic photographs, prints, stereo view cards, garden supply catalogues and even the mid-19th-century nurseryman's bill with a list of plants for Roseland Cottage. Visions of ideal outdoor spaces range from a country gentleman's estate to a picturesque landscape surrounding a suburban villa to a romantic garden in the early 20th century.

The gardens at Roseland Cottage were first laid out in 1850 according to the theories of prominent landscape

designer of the time, Andrew Jackson Downing. The original boxwood hedge, 600 yards in length, surrounds the 21 flower beds. Ten beds containing 4,500 annual and perennial flowers fill the remaining eleven beds.

SPNEA, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, headquartered in Boston, is a museum of cultural history that preserves, interprets, and collects buildings, landscapes and objects reflecting New England life from the 17th century to the present. SPNEA owns and operates 35 historic properties throughout New England, including Roseland Cottage, a National Historic Landmark.

[For information, see the Calendar listing on page 2.]

Membership Directory

A directory of Southern Garden History Society members was mailed to each member April 20th-21st. This is the first membership directory the society has published.

The directory was prepared by Paula Chamblee, SGHS membership secretary in the Old Salem office, which serves as headquarters for the society. Names are listed alphabetically, with addresses, telephone number, e-mail and fax if available. Brief information on any historic landscape/garden projects in which a member is involved is given, where available. Also, a list is given of members by states.

The directory includes all memberships through March 28th, 2001. A supplement will be issued when necessary to include new members since that date, and corrections.

New membership brochures available

A new supply of membership brochures has been printed. Members who wish copies to pass along to prospective members, or to take to meetings, are asked to call the society membership secretary, Paula Chamblee, at 336-721-7328, or e-mail pchamblee@oldsalem.org.

Notices for membership dues renewals were mailed April 20th for the year beginning May 1st, 2001, through April 30th, 2002. Renewals are coming in well, the membership secretary, Paula Chamblee, reports.

The George Mason Memorial: A Historic Garden on the National Mall

by Emily Coleman Kangas, Gunston Hall

George Mason, the patriot who in 1776 wrote these famous words in the Virginia Declaration of Rights: “That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain inherent natural rights...among which are the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety,” soon will have a place of honor on the National Mall among the monuments to our most revered public figures. An active debater in the Constitutional Convention and a staunch advocate for human rights, George Mason was among the first to call for freedom of the press, tolerance of religion, and other democratic principles. His words served as the model for the U.S. Bill of Rights, the document that protects many fundamental individual rights.

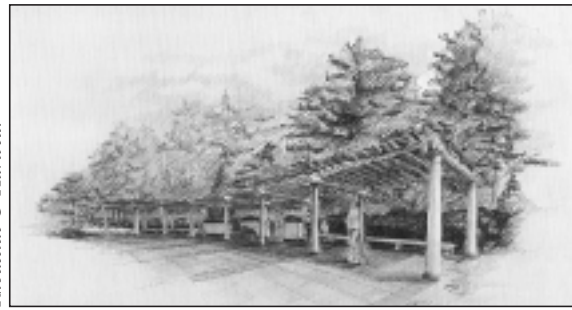
The George Mason Memorial, which is scheduled for construction this fall near the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, will be vastly different from the typical marble monuments in Washington, D.C. There will be the requisite bronze figure of George Mason, but in a unique twist the memorial will feature prominently a garden integrated into a historic site called the Pansy Garden, an area that has featured a garden since the 1800s.

The site originally featured a Victorian style garden in the 19th century. In the early 1900s it was called Fountain #4, one of four gardens designated by the McMillan Commission — a group tasked with reviewing the status of the National Mall’s open spaces — and the only one still in existence. The three accompanying gardens were casualties of the 1962 construction



of the George Mason Memorial Bridge, more commonly known as the Fourteenth Street Bridge. In 1929, the National Park Service redesigned this lasting remnant into the Pansy Garden, which now consists of concentric beds around a spacious circular

Architectural drawings courtesy of Rhodeside & Harwell.



View of the George Mason Memorial trellis.

fountain.

The George Mason Memorial’s design preserves and renovates this historic garden, while adding the memorial as a complementary component. J. Carter Brown, chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, the governing body which approved the memorial’s design, praised the renovation: “It is the essence of historic preservation, to preserve and enhance an historic site.... This is the original garden and the original shape.”

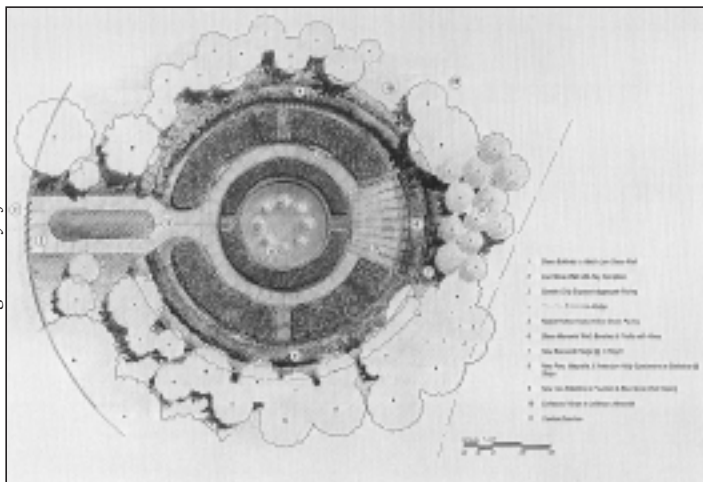
Designed by Rhodeside and Harwell, an Alexandria, Virginia landscape architecture and planning firm, the memorial’s design features gardens that comprise a remarkable 75% of the site. An overlay of four centuries, the design will incorporate plants sustainable in modern times, elements of the 20th-century pansy garden, and historic native plants or native derivatives found in the 18th century. Images from the 19th-century Victorian era also inspired the design.

Faye Harwell, the memorial’s principal designer, wanted to preserve the historic setting of the site and to create a garden that would be attractive in many seasons. She was determined also to create a design which would suggest the 18th-century garden at George Mason’s home, Gunston Hall Plantation. According to records written by Mason’s son John, George Mason frequently sought respite in his beloved garden because he was troubled by gout, a disease that made it difficult to walk and limited his mobility. Currently under excavation by Gunston Hall’s team of archaeologists, the formal garden’s prominent feature is an allée of English boxwood, thought to be among the oldest in the country and planted in George Mason’s time. In recognition of this history, the George Mason Memorial will include a similar hedge made of American boxwood.

Not all plants and shrubs slated for inclusion in the memorial were as easy to select, as was the American boxwood. The criteria for choosing appropriate plantings were those native plants that were commercially available and disease-resistant; plants that were resistant to heat and did not have high water requirements; and plants that were similar in

continued on page 11....

Architectural drawings courtesy of Rhodeside & Harwell.



The George Mason Memorial as seen from above.

*George Mason Memorial...
continued from page 10*



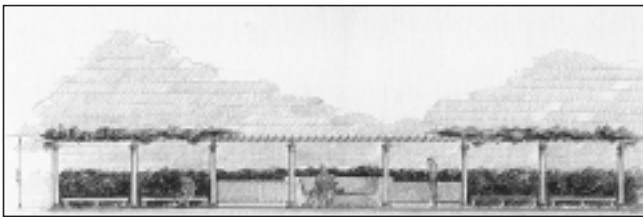
Rebirth of the Oatlands Greenhouse

By Karen Mazza, Oatlands Head Gardener

species and variety to those typical of 18th-century gardens, in order to achieve an aesthetic and historic blend. The reality that most 18th-century cultivars no longer are grown led, in many cases, to the selection of cultivars similar in characteristic and color to the older varieties.

Visitors to the memorial will see plants in constant change, and flowers will be visible from late March through November. Respecting the garden's tradition, pansies will remain in the garden and will be installed annually by the National Park Service, the agency that will maintain the memorial. The pansies and other annuals are expected to include a subdued palette of white, cream, blue, and violet shades and will be situated in the inner circle surrounding the fountain.

The perennial beds, which will include hundreds of plants, will border the pansies in primarily whites, pinks, creams, and a smaller amount of blues and warm yellows. Some of the perennials to be featured will be rose creeping phlox, 'Summer Snowflake' candytuft, germander, 'Bath's Pink' Dianthus, yellow flag iris, 'Aglaya' shasta daisy, 'Oestfriesland' sage, 'May Night' sage, and 'Rose Wine' sage. Cultivars of these plants are known to have existed in the 18th century. An additional 12 cultivars of



Sketch of the George Mason Memorial as a restful, contemplative setting.

Architectural drawings courtesy of Rhodeside & Harwell.

native perennials and bulbs also will be included in the garden.

Evergreen trees and shrubs, flowering trees, and deciduous shrubs will comprise the main "green" component to the garden and will include American holly, white pine, flowering dogwood, American boxwood, and blackhaw viburnum. Another nine species to be included are cultivars of native plants. In addition to trees and shrubs, a trellis has been designed from wood, steel, and stone columns to aid in the overall shading of the memorial during Washington's hot summers. The trellis will be covered with native wisteria and sweet autumn clematis vines and will frame the area in front of two stone walls, which will be inscribed with some of Mason's most enduring words. In the center of these walls will be the statue of Mason himself, reclining on a bench and thinking, perhaps, of life, liberty, and happiness...just as he likely did in his garden at Gunston Hall.

Gunston Hall Plantation is open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for guided tours and special events. The plantation features a circa 1755 mansion, reconstructed outbuildings, formal gardens, and historic livestock on 550 acres in Northern Virginia. Its visitor center includes a museum and shop. Located on Mason Neck just off I-95 and Route 1, Gunston Hall is an educational agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Call (703)550-9220 or (800)811-6966, or visit for more information on the plantation or the George

Mason Memorial.

The Oatlands greenhouse, one of the oldest and most historically significant in America, had been in continuous use as a propagation house for over 150 years before it was abandoned in 1970. By 1984, when I began volunteering in the garden at Oatlands, cars were allowed to park up against this aging brick outbuilding sited to the West of the mansion.

The history of Oatlands Plantation began with George Carter, great grandson of Robert "King" Carter, who inherited over 3,000 acres in Loudon County, Virginia. He began the construction of his mansion in 1804 and his propagation house in 1810. Records show accounts from that time listing "160 lights of sash 8" x 10" for greenhouse." Mr. Carter's greenhouse design was very similar to specifications published in the 1804 edition of *The American Gardener* by John Gardiner and David Hepburn. The greenhouse glass room faced south with a thick, whitewashed masonry back wall designed to store reflective heat during the day for slow release at night. The back room on the North side provided insulation from north winds and the basement below it contained the greenhouse heating source and storage for tall plants in winter. The greenhouse also was used to grow small out-of-season crops. Elizabeth Carter, George Carter's wife, wrote in her diary on February 17th, 1860, "Snow squalls today and a nice little dash of asparagus from the greenhouse." For a short time (1898-1904) after the Carter's sold



photo courtesy of Oatlands Plantation

Iron framework, pointing of mortar joints in west wall.

Oatlands to Stilson Hutchins, who never moved to the property, the North room was divided into four sections and housed a caretaker family. At various times, sheds have been attached to the West end.

It was no surprise that the wife of the next owner in 1903, Edith Morton Eustis, realized the greenhouse's potential and continued to use it, but not without some modern alterations. In 1904 a Lord & Burnham greenhouse roof of cypress and glass on an iron frame and a hot water pipe heating system were installed. A new south-facing knee wall was built, and finally, an elegant new entrance with a small gabled roof was attached to the greenhouse front. Two tiny thread-leaf Japanese maples, planted to flank the doorway, have grown today into magnificent specimens that nearly cover the front of the greenhouse. Over the years, Mrs. Eustis used the greenhouse to propagate annuals
continued on page 12....

Rebirth of Oatlands...
continued from page 11



photo courtesy of Oatlands Plantation



Interior of greenhouse, warming bench in far right corner.

and English boxwood for the garden, and cut flowers for the house.

There have been numerous attempts over the last thirty years to raise funds to stabilize and restore this unique structure. Oatlands is a co-stewardship property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Not until the Trust architect, Bill Dupont, reported the building close to collapse, did collective energies coalesce to save Oatlands' rare jewel. Under then executive director Linda Glidden's guidance, an application was made to the Getty Foundation's international competition for a project preparation grant. Matching funds of \$63,000 were awarded to Oatlands to develop a Historic Structures Report (HRS) for the Carter buildings, the first step on the road to restoration. For eight months conservation professionals combed the archives, did archaeology, measured and investigated the greenhouse and the other buildings and developed the HSR providing condition reports, drawings, historic documentation, and guidelines for preservation, future use and interpretation.

Armed with the HSR and with supervision from the Trust, H. Baker, Oatlands' Restoration Project Manager, began the hands-on work with Kevin Keane and his crew from Millstone Restoration. They disassembled the brick knee wall and in the process discovered the remains of the original, stone knee wall underneath. The Eustis wall was restored in 1999 using an old mortar mix recipe H. Baker describes as "labor intensive," which incorporated sand brought from nearby Goose Creek and wood ashes from the wood stoves of staff members. The recipe called

photo courtesy of Oatlands Plantation



Newly refurbished greenhouse circa 1904.

for 6 parts sand, 2 parts lime putty, 1/2 part ash, and 1/2 part clay. To this mixture, he added 1/2 part Portland for "body and strength." The next step was to re-point all joints on the exterior walls and on the interior walls where brick was exposed. The inside walls had been coated with a thick layer of fine plaster. In describing his approach, H. Baker said, "Only loose plaster was removed from the inside walls. If plaster stayed on, we left it on. We didn't want it to look new, we just wanted to stabilize it." The Carter outbuildings were originally built from brick fired on the plantation. Where replacement bricks were needed, they were harvested from other areas of the property to replace the weather-damaged originals.

Exciting discoveries were made while excavating soil from the basement. One of the brick stoves that vented to the warming bench on the back wall of the glass room and two brick steps were uncovered and re-pointed. A brass stencil with George Carter's name on it was found at sub-soil level. It may have been used to label barrels and crates being shipped from Oatlands

photo courtesy of Oatlands Plantation



Recent picture of 1904 entrance flanked by mature Japanese maples.

Plantation.

Where possible, materials of the appropriate vintage were used in restoring the greenhouse. In August 1999, a thunderstorm ravaged many mature trees on the property. Although heart-breaking, it had a constructive outcome. One of the felled trees was an old spruce. Milled on site into fragrant, clear floorboards, the tree provided an authentic floor to replace the rotted one in the North room. Large oak timbers from a local mill slated for demolition were used to upgrade the supporting structure to meet new building codes. Atop the center wall of the greenhouse is a parapet wall. After it was stabilized and rebuilt with Oatlands brick, the existing asbestos cement shingle roof was replaced with a standing-seam metal roof. The terne-coated stainless was chosen for its ability to be flashed in the "traditional" way.

As of this writing, window sash and glazing bars are being constructed from cypress, and the metal works are being recast. The garden staff is looking forward to holding horticulture classes in the North room potting shed in the winter of 2002, and if all the systems are installed, propagating plants in 2003. Before our goals can be realized, there are more funds to be raised and more decisions to be made. If the West end shed is rebuilt,

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Rebirth of Oatlands... continued from page 12

could it house restrooms, a necessary component for public use? Would the East end provide better public access than the main entrance to the glass house, thus avoiding the great misfortune of



photo courtesy of Oatlands Plantation

West end of greenhouse before removal of carriage shed.

pruning back two remarkable old Japanese maples? We are confident that these challenges and others will be met as the greenhouse restoration moves toward completion. Before too long, one of the oldest greenhouses in America will be back in production. ♣

Members in the News

The April 2001 issue of *Fine Gardening* contains a response by garden historian **Dr. Denise Adams** in the magazine's "Q&A" section on historic plants for a 1740 New England house.

Atlanta garden writer and designer **Ryan Gainey** and Nashville landscape architect **Ben Page** were profiled in the March-April issue of *Southern Accents*. The article features numerous photographs of their gardens and a full-page portrait of Ben.

Kansas City garden writer **Marty Ross** has an article on "Dianthus - a quintessential cottage-garden plant" in the summer 2001 issue of *Country Gardens*. In the same issue, Marty's container plants are featured to represent the Midwest in the magazine's "Regional Gardening" segment.

The March 2001 issue of *Landscape Architecture* magazine includes an article by William E. Welsh on the **Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants**, with a feature on the center's Léonie Bell Rose Garden designed by landscape architect and garden historian **C. Allan Brown**. This collection of roses includes many rare Noisette varieties donated by the garden's consultant, Douglas Seidel.

Susan Lueck of **Chatwood** reports that the North Carolina estate (recently purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Rex and Ellen Adams) is featured in the June 2001 issue of *House Beautiful*, with photographs by John Hall. The gardens and home were open to the public on March 12th for the National Trust's Open Garden Day and were prominently featured in the Trust's *Open Days 2001 Garden Directory*.

Monticello's **Peggy Cornett** received the "Quill & Trowel Award" from the Garden Writers of America for her article "In the Company of Gardeners" published in the January 2000 issue of *Twinleaf*, the annual journal and catalogue of the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants. ♣



In Print

The New Louisiana Gardener - *Nouveau Jardinier de la Louisiane*, by Jacques-Felix Lelièvre. English translation of this 1838 publication, with an introduction, by Sally Kittredge Reeves. Published by the Louisiana State University Press in cooperation with the Southern Garden History Society. 186 pages. 16 color photographs, 6 halftones. ISBN 0-8071-2479-6. \$29.95

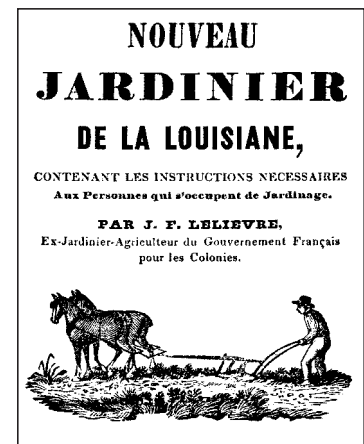


The Southern Garden History Society is pleased to have commissioned the English translation and publication of Jacques Felix Lelièvre's *Nouveau Jardinier de la Louisiane* along with an introductory essay by Sally Kittredge Reeves to explain the significance of the little volume and its place in horticultural history. Written and published by Lelièvre in New Orleans in 1838, the *Nouveau Jardinier* is published here in an English translation for the first time. It was the first of only two books on Louisiana gardening to be

written in the nineteenth century. The book drew upon the confident spirit of eighteenth-century Enlightenment France, forming a bridge from the writings of French horticulturists to an American audience. Optimistic, ambitious, and progressive, the guide urged gardeners to manage nature by acclimating new species and constantly improving native ones through the application of innovative scientific techniques. More European than Old South, Lelièvre's techniques were perhaps better suited to France than Louisiana, but modern horticulturists can still learn from the upbeat spirit of overcoming obstacles that pervaded Lelièvre's guide.

An introduction by Sally Kittredge Reeves, archivist of the New Orleans Notarial Archives, gives historical context to the translation that follows, detailing the author's reasons for coming to America and his struggles to make a new life, his employment at and eventual ownership of a bookstore in New Orleans, and his reasons for compiling the *Nouveau Jardinier* and publishing it in Francophile New Orleans. Reeve's discussion of the New Orleans publishing world offers telling details about book production and bookselling at the time.

The initial inspiration and strong continued support for this project came from Shingo Dameron Manard of Covington, Louisiana, a dedicated member of the Southern Garden



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In Print...
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History Society Board of Directors for many years. A well-worn original copy of the book is part of Mrs. Maynard's library. She credits her awareness and enthusiasm for the book to Samuel Wilson Jr., F.A.I.A., distinguished architect and noted historian of New Orleans who shared his copy of Lelièvre's book with her many years ago. She also involved the late Professor Joseph Ewan of the Missouri Botanical Garden, who wrote to her in 1995, "The history of Horticulture will profit enormously from your searches."

The board of directors and the publications committee of the Southern Garden History Society are indebted to Sally Reeves for her translation of the book and for the many hours of research she devoted to reviewing primary source material in France and in the United States for her scholarly introduction. Dan Gill, Orleans Parish Horticulturist for the Louisiana State University Cooperative Extension Service, ably assisted with updating names of plants and horticultural terms. Dr. William C. Welch, chair of the publications committee and president of SGHS from 1996-1998, tirelessly persevered over a four-year period to guide the project to its completion, bringing us this delightful horticultural gem.

Ordering Information for SGHS Members: The New Louisiana Gardener is available to SGHS members for the special price of \$25 plus \$3.50 postage; make checks payable to Southern Garden History Society. Send orders to: Kay Bergey, publications secretary, SGHS, c/o Old Salem, Inc., Drawer F, Salem Station, Winston-Salem, NC 27108. For additional information, call Kay at (336) 721-7378.

Ladies' Southern Florist (1860) by Mary C. Rion. A facsimile edition of the first book written for southern gardeners, with a new introduction by James R. Cothran and Debra McCoy-Massey. 185 pages. Cloth. ISBN 1-57003-420-6. \$19.95



First printed in 1860 on the eve of the Civil War, *Ladies' Southern Florist* by Mary C. Rion was the first book to provide gardeners in the South with a comprehensive list of ornamentals - trees, shrubs, flowers, bulbs, and roses - ideally suited to the southern climate. The author was trained at a young age in both plant collecting and gardening, and this small but pivotal work is equally significant as the earliest garden book in the South written by a woman. Prior to its

publication, southern gardeners had to turn to English garden books or guides geared to northern gardeners, which offered little in the way of advice on growing plants in a region characterized by mild winters, hot and humid summers, and periods of extended drought.

This facsimile edition of *Ladies' Southern Florist* not only offers a historical perspective of gardening but also serves as a wonderful resource at this time of growing interest in garden history, period gardens, and heirloom plants. While many of the 150 plants described by Rion had long been favorites, she also featured many newly introduced specimens that found instant favor with southern gardeners, including camellia

(*Camellia japonica*), gardenia (*Gardenia jasminoides*), crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*), and a wide selection of roses. Whether enjoyed for its historic merit or employed as a guide for selecting traditional time-tested plants, Rion's work celebrates the timeless joys, pleasures, and rewards of gardening in the South.

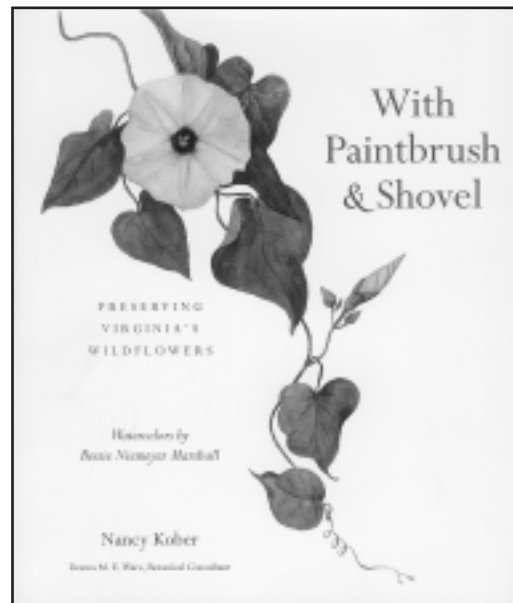
For ordering information, contact the University of South Carolina Press, 718 Devine Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29208; or call (803) 777-5243 or toll free (800) 768-2500; or visit their web site at: www.sc.edu/uscpres

To purchase copies of *The Live Oak Trail* by Carolyde Phillips O'Bryan (reviewed in the Winter 2001 issue of *Magnolia*, Vol. XVI, No. 2) send \$25 plus \$3 shipping to Goodwood Museum & Gardens, 1600 Miccosukee Road, Tallahassee, Florida 32308. Checks should be made payable to Goodwood. A portion of the sales of this book goes toward the ongoing restoration at Goodwood.

Book Review

With Paintbrush & Shovel: Preserving Virginia's Wildflowers.

Watercolors by Bessie Niemeyer Marshall. By Nancy Kober with Donna M. E. Ware, Botanical Consultant. University of Virginia Press. 288 pages with 222 botanical watercolors, 13 photographs, 1



map. Hardcover. ISBN 0-8139-1969-X. \$42.95

Through recent years much of the interest in 20th-century Virginia garden history has focused on the creation of the Colonial Revival gardens in Williamsburg, the work of landscape architect Charles F. Gillette, or the role of the Garden Club of Virginia in the promotion of Historic Garden Week in Virginia and the renewal of earlier landscapes through its restoration grant programs. *With Paintbrush & Shovel: Preserving Virginia's Wildflowers*, however, provides a valuable look at a very different gardening effort, one occurring late in the interwar period. An interest in native wildflowers

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Book Review...
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was not an entirely new enthusiasm for gardeners in Virginia, but one that had grown in the opening decades of the century, and particularly after World War I, when garden club members took notice of changes in the Virginia landscape prompted by road construction and Federal building projects. The old byways, meadows, and rural landscapes, celebrated in publications like Wallace Nutting's *Virginia Beautiful* in 1930, were being lost, replaced by paved roads, motorways, and suburban development.

In Petersburg, Virginia, a project supported by the Works Progress Administration in 1935 was undertaken that sought to redress the loss of a horticultural heritage while providing work for women heads of households in the financially difficult years of the Depression. Ella Agnew, the state director of the WPA Women's Work Division in Richmond, conceived the project; its first goal, the Lee Park Wildflower and Bird Sanctuary, was enhanced by a parallel objective, the creation of the Lee Park Herbarium. The initial ten-acre site for the wildflower sanctuary was set aside in the larger 462-acre park including Willcox Lake created by the city of Petersburg in 1921. With the receipt of the first WPA funds (\$11,425) in December 1935, the preparation of the land began under the supervision of Mary Donald Fraser Claiborne (1890-1950) and the on-site direction of Mary Webb Jones. By April 1936 the public was invited to see the results of the first plantings, and by 1940 the Lee Park Wildflower and Bird Sanctuary had spread over 25 acres and received about \$127,000 in funding from the WPA and the city. Some 500 different species of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees had been planted or transplanted, trails created, and rustic benches, stairways, and other features added in the park. The plants were marked and identified as part of the educational program of the sanctuary. It quickly became the prototype for four other WPA-funded wildflower sanctuaries in Virginia; one of these, in Norfolk and designed by Charles Gillette, evolved into the Norfolk Botanical Garden.

The Lee Park Wildflower and Bird Sanctuary served a valuable purpose in its time, however, with the cut of Federal funds in November 1940 and the outbreak of World War II, the support and maintenance of the Petersburg Garden Club failed to sustain it. By the early 1950s the sanctuary tract had largely returned to being an undefined part of the larger park. The Petersburg project, recounted in this story focusing on the lives of the women engaged in it, would probably have suffered oblivion except for the parallel creation of the Lee Park Herbarium. Through the course of the plantings, women employed in the project dried, pressed, mounted, and labeled some 325 specimens of wildflowers and plants growing in the sanctuary. But this, too, might have gained little notice except for a confluence of events in early 1937. In January of that year, Bessie Niemeyer Marshall (1884-1960) and her family (including the younger of her nine

children) moved from Halifax, Virginia, to Petersburg where her husband, semi-retired and suffering from Parkinson's Disease, had taken a short posting as temporary rector of St. Paul's Church. For years, Bessie Marshall had supplemented the family income by painting lampshades, tables, china, and other decorative furnishings. After the Marshalls moved into the rectory, which stood across the street from Mrs. Holden's residence, the WPA administrator put into effect an idea of practical necessity. Mrs. Holden later recalled the genesis of the series of botanical watercolors executed by Bessie Marshall.

"I had a difficult time classifying the plants for the herbarium. One day an idea was formed. I would have the wild plants painted in their natural colors, laying particular stress on their botanical points, then garden club members would know their names."

Her artist was at hand, and in March 1937, the same month she showed some 25-flower paintings in an exhibit for the Petersburg Garden Club, Bessie Niemeyer Marshall began painting the Lee Park wildflowers with WPA support. Over the course of three years, to August 1940, she would paint about two-thirds of the species included in the herbarium. The pressed specimens and watercolors were then mounted in notebooks and deposited in the Petersburg Public Library. Mrs. Holden revived the work in 1946, Mrs. Marshall commissioned to paint more watercolors, and in 1948 the Petersburg Garden Club was awarded the Massie Medal of the Garden Club of Virginia for its production of the Lee Park Herbarium.

Although the Lee Park Herbarium was much praised at the time, the notebooks languished in the public library until April 1969 when a selection was shown during the Petersburg tour of Historic Garden Week. The memory of that exhibition gave rise in the Petersburg Garden Club to a fuller appreciation of the herbarium. Since then, the notebooks have been moved twice to ever more secure repositories, and restoration has begun on the deteriorating mountings. This book is another indication of the revived commitment. While the Lee Park Wildflower and Bird Sanctuary had its brief moment in the sun, and the herbarium has its value to scholars and botanists as "the primary surviving record of the species that grew in a particular place at a key point in Virginia's environmental history - a time when 'the efficiency of bulldozers had not yet reached critical proportions'," Bessie Marshall's beautiful watercolors, represented by 222 full-color reproductions in this book, are now available to all. Forty years after her death, Bessie Marshall has gained a measure of public recognition for having "captured the soul of the flower in her work" and secured this appraisal by the Massie Medal committee of the Garden Club of Virginia.

-Davyd Foard Hood, Book Review Editor



photo courtesy of Helen Marshall Fediznik

Bessie Marshall in 1937, the year she began painting the Lee Park wildflowers



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