

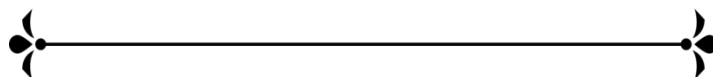
From the Archives

By

Joyce H. Munro, Morris Arboretum Archives Volunteer

A compilation of articles appearing in the *Morris Arboretum Volunteer Newsletter* in 2018





A Book from Lydia's Library

The year was 1925. The Smithsonian Institution was poised to release the first volume in a new and wholly unique series, *North American Wild Flowers*, featuring 400 life-size illustrations of flowers by artist/naturalist Mary Vaux Walcott.

This series was apparently of great interest to Lydia Morris because she paid for it before the first volume was released. In fact, Lydia was the eleventh person on the list of patrons, just ahead of names like DuPont, Rockefeller and Carnegie. Only 500 copies of the deluxe edition (five leather and linen bound volumes encased in linen-wrapped boxes with the Smithsonian seal on the cover) were published and the price was \$500. For that price, Lydia received not only a life's worth of delicately sketched wildflowers in a set of luxury books worth keeping on the coffee table, but also Mary's easy-to-comprehend descriptions of the specimens, with just a smidgen of scientific terminology.

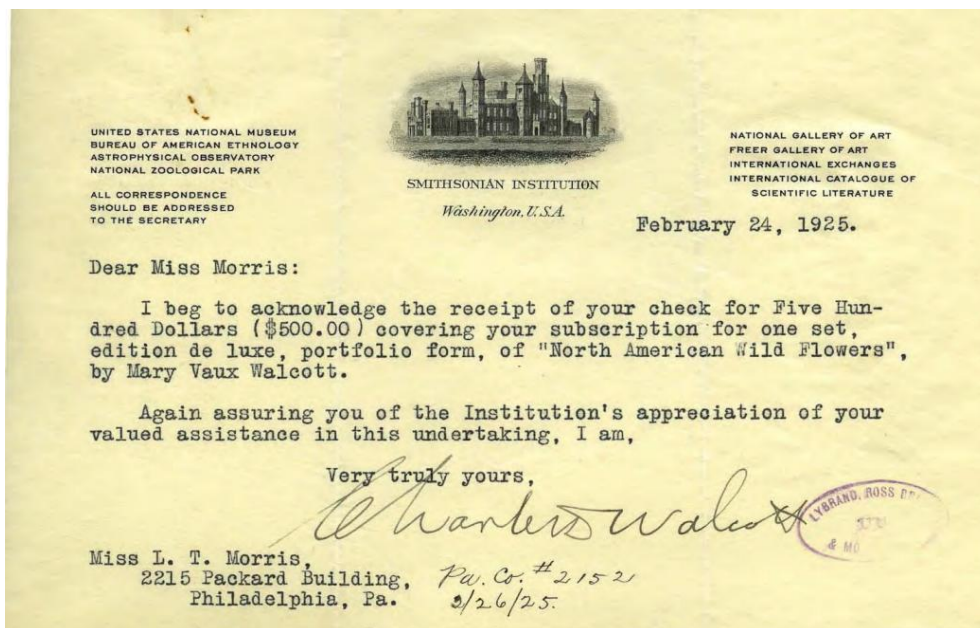
This project wasn't a frolic in a meadow for Mary. In the Forward, she admitted: "Many of the western sketches were made under trying conditions. Often, on a mountain side or high pass, a fire was necessary to warm stiffened fingers and body. In camp, the diffused light of the white tent was a great handicap, and considerable ingenuity was required to obtain a proper combination of light and shade." Happily for her original patrons and those of us—95 years later—who are aficionados of her artistry, Mary surmounted those trying conditions.

Interestingly, Lydia's receipt was signed by Charles Walcott, geologist, Secretary of the Smithsonian . . . and Mary's husband.

There's another reason Lydia may have invested in Mary's series—they were first cousins twice removed.

For more on Mary Morris Vaux Walcott—artist, botanist, mountain-climber, Washington DC hostess—read *The Life and Times of Mary Vaux Walcott* by Marjorie Gelb Jones (Schiffer, 2015).

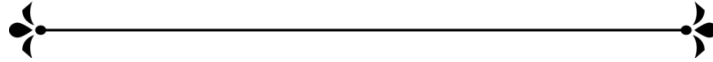
And you can view all five volumes at the Biodiversity Heritage Library [here](#)



Receipt for *North American Wild Flowers* from Morris Arboretum Archives



Mary Vaux Walcott in Canadian Rockies, courtesy of Smithsonian Institution Archives. Image SA-103



The Teahouse from Japan

In 1891, John T. Morris made newspapers—not just in Philadelphia—but across the nation. Seems he intended to build an unusual sort of house at his country estate, Compton. Any day now, he was expecting the house to arrive from Japan—its “various divisions” filling two railroad freight cars.

An entire house transported by sea and rail. Well, this was certainly newsworthy. And there was more: this house would be the first of its kind erected on U.S. soil (other than the Japanese house built for the Centennial Exposition in 1876). What made the house even more unique—it would be assembled without nails, screws or glue. But wait there’s still more—this house was dedicated to one thing—serving tea.

John ordered his teahouse when he was in Tokyo in the spring of 1890 and craftsmen assembled it while he and his sister Lydia went sightseeing in Yokohama. When John returned to Tokyo to check on progress, he was worried it would be too large. But he didn’t call a halt to things and the architects continued. Two months later, John paid for the completed house. Then it was taken apart and readied for shipping overseas. John and Lydia returned home in late summer with crates of furnishings and utensils for the teahouse and awaited its arrival.

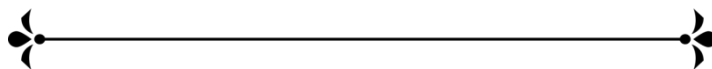
Autumn and winter came and went. Finally at the end of February 1891, the two freight cars full of house parts arrived in Philadelphia and soon after, two *sukiya-daiku* carpenters arrived from Tokyo to commence their artful joinery, piecing together this small wonder in the woods below the mansion.

Sadly, the teahouse was destroyed sixty years later in a hurricane, but its footprint is still visible. And nearby hangs Toshiko Takaazu’s bronze bell, sounding a deep-toned reminder that the “Way of Tea” has been celebrated in this place.



Photo from Morris Arboretum Archives, 2004.1.262

See photos of the teahouse and its furnishings [here](#)



Glads for Lydia's Flower Garden

The year was 1919. American troops were heading home from European battlefields and Miss Lydia T. Morris's war work in Philadelphia was winding down. In February, two months after she turned seventy, she hosted the last of the weekly wartime teas for sailors and marines at the Historical Society building. However, that's all Miss Morris was winding down. As the military receptions ended, she started another weekly event—hosting box parties at Monday musicales in the Bellevue-Stratford ballroom. Plus she was a Vice President of the Morris Refuge Association for Homeless and Suffering Animals. And a member of the Board of Directors of the Ship Society. And a member of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Society of Colonial Dames.

But sometime in late-winter, Miss Morris found time to curl up by the fire at her townhouse on Pine Street with the latest *Cedar Acres* catalog and make a list of the gladioli she wanted for the mixed flower garden at her summer home in Chestnut Hill. As she read the catalog introduction written by nursery owner, B. Hammond Tracy, I wonder if she got a lump in her throat.

“Before war-work took all of our time, the gardening habit was getting the men and women of this country, and they were planting not seeds and bulbs, tubers, and cuttings, but they were planting for hope and faith, for health and hardihood . . . Gardening for flowers, for beauty, for naturalness will never again be listed as a non-essential in the lives of the American people.”

And with that sentiment as her guide, Miss Morris chose glads named America, Dawn, Europa, Independence and Loveliness. Okay, so maybe Frank Gould, the head gardener of Compton, chose them. One chooses, another plants, somebody else waters (as the saying goes) and by mid-summer, Miss Morris had the pleasure of seeing 168 glads do their long-stemmed sword dance, in shades of pink, rose, coral, yellow and white.



Catalog cover from Biodiversity Heritage Library

B. Hammond Tracy Established 1903

MAIL ORDER DEPARTMENT

B. HAMMOND TRACY INC.
Cedar Acres No 7404 X
Gladioli

FARM AND BULB HOUSES
WENHAM, MASS.

Miss L.T.Morris,
Compton, Chestnut Hill,
Philadelphia, Pa. WENHAM, MASS. April 25, 1919

Shipped by Send BILL to Miss L.T.Morris,
876 Drexel Bldg.
Philadelphia, Penn.

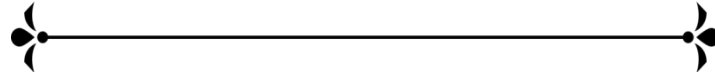
12 America	.50
12 Dawn	2.00
12 Europa	1.50
12 Golden West	2.00
12 Independence	.50
12 Lily Lehman	1.00
12 Loveliness	2.00
12 Mrs. Francis King	.50
12 Mrs. Frank Pendleton	1.00
12 Mrs. James Lancashire	3.50
12 Mrs. Watt	1.25
12 Niagra	1.00
12 Sunrise	2.00
12 Willy Wigman	.75

RECEIVED PAYMENT
MAY 15 1919
B. HAMMOND TRACY INC.
BY _____
\$19.50

(Circular stamp: RECEIVED, BEE BIRD & BURGESS)

Chk. P 603
MAY 10 1919
PLEASE SEND RECEIPT TO
876 DREXEL BUILDING.

Invoice for Cedar Acres Gladioli from Morris Arboretum Archives



The Red Rose Tradition of the Wistar/Morris Family

On a warm and drizzly Sunday in June, 1902, John T. Morris, his sister Lydia and sister-in-law Jennie went to church with twenty of their relatives, as special guests of the Tulpehocken Reformed Church. The pews were jam-packed with well over 1000 people. The service was jam-packed with anthems, Scripture readings, congregational hymns, and several addresses. And on the altar table was a huge vase jam-packed with 157 red roses.

Toward the end of the service, the roses were given to the guests from Philadelphia as payment of a debt. Turns out, the church was years behind—157 years to be exact—on its annual rent of a single red rose payable to descendants of Caspar Wistar, the lessor of the church property. And on that auspicious Sunday, the church repented of its rent arrears by holding an extraordinary service, the “Feast of the Roses.”

A more permanent symbol of the occasion was also dedicated that day—a stained glass window with a single red rose in the center, designed by Frances Darby Sweeny, faculty member of the Pennsylvania Museum’s School of Industrial Art and owner of the Decorative Glass Company.



Courtesy of the *Reading Eagle*

It should come as no surprise that the window was paid for by John T. Morris, given his high regard for his family’s legacy of benevolence in the Philadelphia region. He considered the

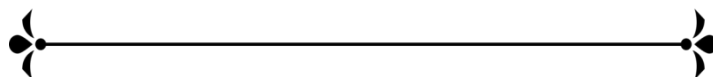
window a fitting tribute to his great-great-grandfather Wistar, who set aside 100 acres for the congregation in 1745, asking only for a floral token in return each year.

It also comes as no surprise that roses were a favorite flower of Lydia T. Morris's, so much so that she once ordered the flower garden dug up and replanted with nothing but roses—493 to be exact. Great floribunda!

And each June, the arboretum continues to recognize the importance of roses at a gala called “Moonlight & Roses.”

View photos of Lydia's rose garden [here](#).

Read more about Caspar Wistar's quit-rent of one red rose [here](#).



The Lure of a Log Cabin

“Rich Philadelphians Show Preference for Structures.”

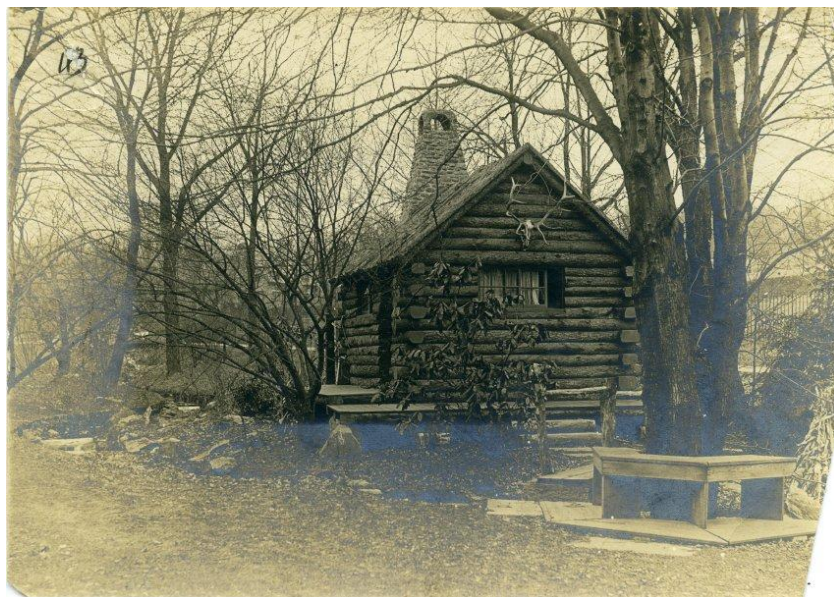
“John T. Morris of Quaker City Seeks Quietness and Seclusion in One on His Estate in Chestnut Hill”

“Philadelphia.—The boyish fancy for building a log cabin and playing Indian is being exemplified in children of a larger growth. On many of the estates of rich men log cabins are being built. Thus in a secluded corner of the estate of John T. Morris at Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, a tiny log cabin has been erected.

The interior consists of only one small room, neatly furnished in conventional log cabin style, with a Navajo blanket on the floor and a few simple articles of furniture. Here the owner of the mansion and its big grounds retires to read when he has a fancy for complete isolation.

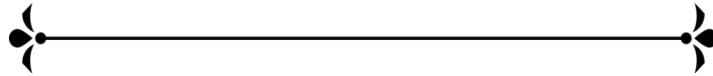
A little rustic bridge leads across a brook in front of the little cabin, and in fine weather the owner of the cabin can sit on a tiny porch and listen to the rippling water and be happy in complete seclusion and quietude, far from the big house and free from the annoyance of such modern demons of unrest as the telephone.”

The Antioch News, 8 January 1914, page 7
(and in newspapers across the nation that month!)



Morris Arboretum Archives, 2004.1.341

See more photos of the log cabin [here](#)



Compton's Rare Specimens

In 1927, Lydia T. Morris's secretary submitted registration papers to an exclusive association for a specimen newly produced at Compton. Lydia wanted to call it Compton's Rosebud. Unfortunately, that name was in use so she had to rename it. Through the years, John and Lydia registered many specimens and they always chose quixotic names like Compton's Jonquil Liphie, Compton's Buttercup Liphie and Compton's Myrtle Mystic. Each was tenderly cultivated over many months and eagerly awaited. And like anything well-bred, they were worth the effort—long-lasting, low maintenance and very attractive. But there was a downside to this species—due to certain regulations at the time, their color range was severely limited.

Rebecca Thompson Morris, John and Lydia's mother, once imported a rare specimen from England. We don't know the name she chose for hers. An even rarer specimen was raised by their father, Isaac Paschall Morris—an unusual two-color variety that deserved a name like Cedar Grove's Primrose Mystic. Alas, its moniker was simply Betsey Baker.

Like her parents and brother, Lydia invested money in these beauties. In fact, she once paid \$550 for a fine pair at an event so notable it made the newspapers in 1920. What's more, she was one of only two women who bought that day at the Linden Grove pavilion. They say buyers came from all over the U.S., even Canada. The fanciest stock was purchased by buyers from Toronto and Lydia's neighbor George Widener—at exorbitant prices. The reporter gushed that it would go down in history as one of the greatest sales ever held of . . .

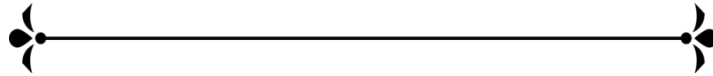
wait for it . . .

Jersey cattle.

Of all the Compton heifers registered with the American Jersey Cattle Club during the 1900s, my favorite names are Compton's Lily Liphie and Compton's Mystic Expectation. But charming names and pedigrees aside, these cows had work to do—producing lots of milk rich in butterfat.

Take a look at Compton's cattle [here](#).

Read more about the Linden Grove cattle auction [here](#).



Landscaping Compton

In 1878, just after pulling off the biggest city landscaping project of his career at Fairmount Park, Charles H. Miller made the case for “landscape adornment for rural homes” at the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Fruit Growers’ Society. He explained how the field of landscape design had become quite fashionable in cities and now was being applied to rural life. And to counter any naysayers in the audience, he argued that even the most earnest utilitarian would admit that the cultivation of the beautiful in nature is important, whether in city or country gardens. Who could disagree with that?

Miller practiced what he preached at rural estates like Stoneleigh in Villanova and Sugar Loaf in Chestnut Hill. Then it came time to apply his principles of landscape adornment to the grounds of Compton, the country seat of John T. and Lydia T. Morris. Compton was brand new—in fact workers may have still been plastering interior walls of the house when Miller came over from Mount Airy to walk the rough and uncultivated ground with John.



Morris Arboretum Archives, 2004.1.885GN

Keep in mind that John once divulged to reporters that friends had warned he’d never be able to grow anything on such barren land. Maybe Miller was thinking the same thing as they descended from the high plateau where the house stood, down over bare and bald ground. But Miller knew a thing or two about how to make it beautiful with masses of shrubs and well-placed trees, punctuated with vast lawns and curvilinear paths.

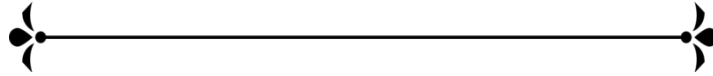
Miller had learned his trade well, first at the school for gardeners at Kew Gardens in London, then at William Bridgewater Page’s botanical garden and nurseries in Southampton. He also did a short stint as assistant to Joseph Paxton at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, London. But until coming to Philadelphia in 1858, Miller had never experienced such dramatic swell and swale. Would his principles of landscaping on flat land work on steep hillsides and deep ravines?

If John had any trepidation about the future of his land as they walked around, it was wiped away with the sweep of Miller's hand toward a small plateau below the house where he envisioned a fine flower garden. Another sweep of the hand . . . over there a pond, here an allée, down farther a park. And thus Miller brought the dry bones together to form the skeleton which John T. Morris made green and lush with stock from all over the world.



CHARLES H. MILLER

Read more about Charles Miller in *Germantown Gardens and Gardeners* [here](#).



The Bloomfield Chicks

Never let it be said that the chickens raised at Bloomfield Farm were second rate. After all, they were ordered from the Towanda Hatchery whose chicks were “of a decidedly improved quality” and diarrhea-free. Plus the folks at Towanda sold them at “fairest prices.”

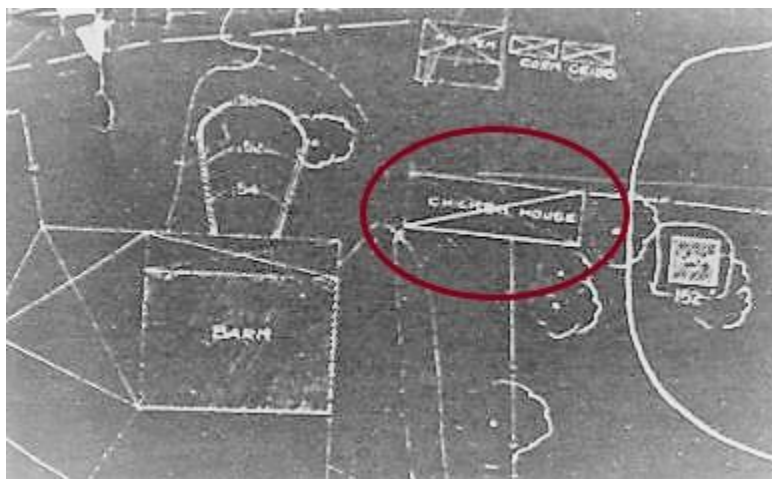
That’s what Lydia Morris’s farm manager was counting on when it came time to place his order for Barred Standard Plymouth Rock chicks every January. Evidently the Bloomfield chicken house was quite roomy because the order ran as high as 500 chicks. Then came delivery of hundreds of pounds of Pratt’s Baby Chick Food from the feed and seed store in Germantown.

Once the Bloomfield pullets started to lay, their mash was augmented with crushed oyster shells and grit to aid digestion and to make strong eggshells. So it stands to reason that a half-ton was ordered at a time.

And it stands to reason that the chicken house was full of eggs every morning come spring. How about three dozen a day? Between February and May of 1921, farm hands gathered over 5000 eggs in the hen house.

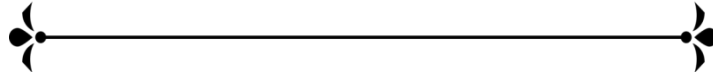
So what did they do with all those eggs and poultry? From the farm produce sales book, it’s clear that eggs were sold to staff and neighbors. But during peak laying season, eggs were likely sold to local grocers.

First-rate Barred Rock chickens were raised at Bloomfield Farm until Lydia’s death in 1932. The very next day, the Head Gardener cancelled his order for spring chicks. And eventually the chicken house went quiet.



Bloomfield Farm Chicken House, detail from 1916 topographical map by James Cresson

See Barred Rock chicks [here](#) (just imagine 500 of these cuties chirping all day!)
Check out the [recipe](#) for Chicken à la King from Lydia’s cookbook



Adieu to Bender Oak

Soon we will be saying to visitors, there was once a huge and ancient tree on this spot.
We will recall how every spring catkins dangled from its branches like strings of green pearls.



Every summer its canopy shaded us.



Every fall it looked like it was on fire.



And every winter the sun shown pale through its branches.



And oh, the things its limbs knew, of children running round and round, mothers chatting at its feet, photographers capturing its wonders for posterity, birds busy nesting, insects drilling, moss silently creeping into its shady places. We will speak of how it survived storms and pestilence and suffered the indignities of propping and pruning as it progressed into elderhood.

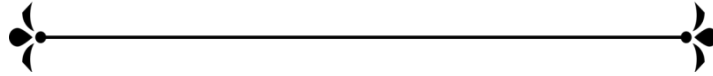
We will proudly declare that Bender Oak lived an amazingly long life and its reach was high and wide. And then we will solemnly say—that as with all living things—it reached the end of its life.

There is an oak (oh! how I love that tree)
Which has been thriving for a hundred years;
Each day I send my blessing through the spheres
To one who gave this triple boon to me,
Of growing beauty, singing birds, and shade.
Wouldst thou win laurels that shall never fade?
Go plant a tree.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox
The Englishman and Other Poems, 1912

It is a sad day indeed for our much-beloved Bender Oak.

And now, go plant a tree.



Furukawa's Bottomless Pond

Beneath the spreading katsura tree, there was once a *Sokonashi-ike*, a “bottomless” pond, fed by a stream cascading over a water-course made of stones. All around the pond, azaleas, cedars and pines clung to stones as though for dear life. We learn more about how the pond looked in 1910 from the lead article in the magazine, *American Suburbs*:

This pool in the gardens at Compton, encircled by Japanese rockwork, is an eminently successful piece of Japanese gardening. The mound at the back, on the sides and on the top of which small pines and maples and dwarf cedars, along with various Japanese plants, are grouped, makes an appropriate setting for a miniature waterfall down which tumbles a stream brought underground from a fountain at a higher level. The overflow is piped away to be used in still another fountain, lower down the hill. The pool itself is enlivened by goldfish, and patches of lilies dot the surface.

John Morris called it the “Japanese rock pond” in his recollections and noted that Furukawa [S. Furukawa] made it in 1902.

Prior to creating the rock pond for the Morrisises, Furukawa and fellow landscaper A. Kimura constructed a four-acre Japanese tea garden and village on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City. They were employed by the firm of Kushibiki and Arai, whose Oriental gardens and miniature villages were popular at international expositions in the 1890s and early 1900s.

Kushibiki and Arai's tea garden was a huge attraction to Philadelphians—but not for long. While Furukawa was busy setting stones in place for the *Sokonashi-ike* at Compton, the Atlantic City tea garden was being torn down. Thankfully, all was not lost. Matthias Homer, an auditor with the Pennsylvania Railroad, salvaged some of the remnants and hired Furukawa and Kimura to create a smaller version of the Boardwalk garden on his estate in Lansdowne.



See additional photos of the Japanese rock pond at Compton [here](#)