

Georgia's Historic Landscape Initiative

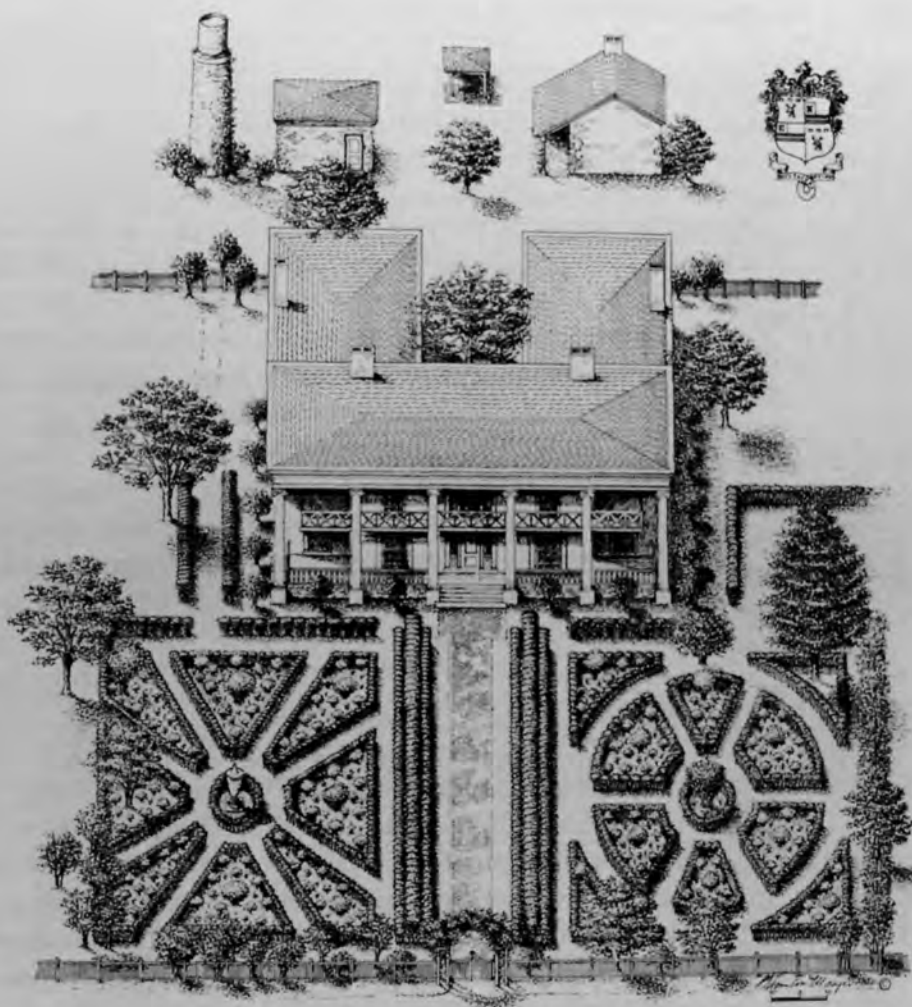
by *Mary Ann Eaddy*

An understanding of the history of the American South is incomplete without an appreciation of the importance that land has held for the region's inhabitants. In Georgia, the landscape changes from mountains to coastline, from fertile farmland to inland swamps. As people have lived on the land, they have altered it, sometimes enhancing its beauty. Like historic buildings, the historic landscapes that remain are tangible links to the past.

One important type of historic landscape is the garden. While these historic places provide both beauty and enjoyment, they also represent significant cultural and social aspects of Georgia's heritage. By their nature, historic gardens are often fragile, and it is important to identify and record them. A recognition that these resources need to be formally acknowledged and their preservation encouraged was the impetus for Georgia's Historic Landscape Initiative.

For over a decade, the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Garden Club of Georgia, Inc., a nonprofit organization with approximately 16,000 members, have collaborated on projects to promote an appreciation of the state's landscape heritage. Since 1996, the two organizations have cosponsored a Historic House and Garden Pilgrimage in communities across Georgia. Tour and ticket proceeds support the Garden Club's Historic Landscape and Garden Grants—matching grants available to local governments and nonprofit organizations to rehabilitate or restore historic landscapes and gardens. The Historic Preservation Division worked with the Garden Club to develop this program and serves as an advisory member of the grants awards committee. Proceeds exceeding \$70,000 have resulted in funding for over 30 projects to preserve Georgia's historic gardens.

From the beginning of the partnership, the Historic Preservation Division and the Garden Club recognized the need for a statewide inventory of historic gardens and landscapes. This information would be valuable in several ways: to identify often overlooked resources and record some that may be lost in the coming years, to use gardens and landscapes as an educational tool and an opportunity to promote awareness of cultural landscapes, and to identify properties potentially eligible for the National Register and Georgia Register of Historic Places.



1848-1863

Valley View on the old road between Cartersville and Rome, home of the Sproulls and Fouches, is one of Georgia's best preserved mid-nineteenth century cotton plantations. Triple hedges of Carolina cherry and box are an interesting feature of its garden. Such herring-bone brick walks were general throughout the State.

One Eleven

FIGURE 1

Plans such as this one of Valley View in Bartow County are found throughout the *Garden History of Georgia* publication. (Illustration by P. Thornton Marye, AIA, Courtesy of the Garden Club of Georgia, Inc.)



FIGURE 2
Savannah's squares are distinctive features of the city's historic plan and are popular with tourists and local citizens. (Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources)

With the pilgrimage and the grants program underway, the Garden Club sought ways to identify Georgia's historic gardens and landscapes. After forming the Historic Landscape Initiative Committee, the main question was how to approach such an inventory, considering its broad scope and the lack of funding.¹ After much discussion, the committee decided to narrow the scope of the inventory and to rely primarily on volunteer efforts.

In 2002, the Garden Club, working with the Historic Preservation Division, the Cherokee Garden Library at the Atlanta History Center, and the National Park Service Southeast Regional Office, launched the Historic Landscape Initiative to identify, record, and promote Georgia's garden heritage.² Using the publication *Garden History of Georgia: 1733-1933* as the foundation, garden club members are determining which significant gardens remain, which are changed, and which are destroyed. (Figure 1) Inventory documentation is housed in the Cherokee Garden Library in Atlanta. Library interns have been assigned to assist in garden surveys and records maintenance, and records are available to anyone interested in Georgia's garden and landscape heritage.

Garden History of Georgia was the logical starting point for the project. In 1933, Atlanta's Peachtree Garden Club produced the book in recognition of Georgia's bicentennial. The goal was "to make this a comprehensive record of gardening in Georgia from Oglethorpe's day, 1733, to the most modern garden of 1933."³ (Figure 2) In 1976, the Garden Club of Georgia reprinted the book as part of the national bicentennial celebration. *Garden History of Georgia* is one of seven publications produced in the South from 1923 to 1939 that contribute to a statewide garden survey.⁴

FIGURE 3

The antebellum Boxwood or Kolb-Pou-Newton House in Madison, Morgan County, is known for its formal gardens. (Courtesy of Janet L. Coleman)



Garden History of Georgia is divided into three sections: early gardens (before 1865); modern gardens (as of 1933); and garden club projects, institutional gardens, and school gardens and campuses. The publication contains 163 entries.

As an organizational approach, the decision was made to divide the entries into geographic areas that coincide with the Garden Club of Georgia's seven districts. A historic preservation district chairman is responsible for coordinating efforts among clubs and for encouraging clubs to compile information on their communities' historic gardens.

The committee developed a survey form for use by volunteers. After an initial field test, changes were recommended and the survey form was revised. In March 2002, three of the committee members participated in a National Park Service, Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) Documentation Guidelines symposium in New Orleans. The symposium was helpful to ensure that the information requested for Georgia's project was, as much as possible, consistent with recordation needs being discussed for HALS documentation needs and standards.

From the beginning of the project, training for volunteers was essential. In August 2002, the first workshop was held at the historic Hay House in Macon. Recent landscape preservation activities were summarized. An overview of Georgia's garden heritage provided context. An explanation of the survey form and resources available from the Cherokee Garden Library followed. Workshop participants tested the survey form using a nearby historic garden as a case study. Two other workshops followed, one at Dunaway Gardens in 2003, the other in Milledgeville in 2004. Workshop content expanded to include project status reports and resources available for researching individual gardens.(Figure 3)

FIGURE 4

The H. B. Tompkins House and Gardens in Atlanta, Fulton County were designed in 1922 by architect Neel Reid. (Copyright by and courtesy of James R. Lockhart)



What has been discovered since the initiative began? Thirty-eight gardens have been surveyed. Twenty-five are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, either as a component of an individual listing or as part of a historic district. Listing is usually based on association with a historic house. Eighteen gardens identified in 1933 no longer exist or are in extremely poor or neglected condition. Some are parking lots; others faded away due to neglect. Some, however, have evolved over time, retaining remnants of their early form, but changing with the tastes of new owners. Eight gardens not mentioned in 1933 also have been surveyed. Four of these are listed in the National Register; another is being nominated.

Now, the initiative's goal is to complete the inventory based on *Garden History of Georgia*. The Historic Landscape Initiative Committee is evaluating the most effective way to accomplish this. Even in this early stage, however, it is clear that the project has a wide range of research challenges. Gardens identified through the initiative are only a small portion of what once existed and what still may exist. (Figure 4)

More emphasis on landscape survey is needed. Many individual gardens justify further research, from both historic and design perspectives. Because gardens often were associated with significant houses and individuals, they provide insight into social and cultural history. Further archeological and document research may offer clues to historic landscapes, particularly where restoration is desired. Landscape architects and horticulturists interested in garden design and heirloom plants would find a wealth of information through further investigation. The impact of development and changes in land ownership and use may interest planners. Many of the gardens are linked to the women who nurtured them and, in some cases, brought them back to life. Their stories need to be told. The role of African Americans in

the development of many of these gardens is largely unknown, but undoubtedly significant, which also opens the question of gardens developed by African Americans for their personal use. More research is required.

Certain observations can be made at this point in the initiative. One is the valuable discovery of the wealth of Georgia's landscape heritage and the people and organizations concerned about preserving that heritage. Another is the value of pulling together the resources and expertise of various groups to accomplish a goal that otherwise would not have been possible. Working with dedicated members of the Garden Club of Georgia has resulted in better appreciation of the power of volunteers and a continuing respect for an organization committed to service.

As a result of this project, knowledge about Georgia's historic gardens continues to be discovered, and information useful for future research is being made available to the public.

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Notes

1. Members of the Historic Landscape Initiative Committee include Mabel Milner, Brencie Werner, and Lee Dunn of the Garden Club of Georgia, Inc.; James R. Cothran, FASLA; Staci Catron-Sullivan, Director of the Cherokee Garden Library at the Atlanta History Center; Susan Hitchcock, landscape historian, National Park Service Southeast Regional Office; and Mary Ann Eaddy of the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources.
2. The Cherokee Garden Library was founded in 1975 by the Cherokee Garden Club. Now part of the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, the library contains over 6,500 volumes on Southern gardening and horticulture.
3. Loraine M. Cooney, *Garden History of Georgia: 1733-1933* (Atlanta, GA: Peachtree Garden Club, 1933), n.p. The quotation is included in "A Message from the Georgia Bicentennial Commission."
4. Davyd Foard Hood, "'To Gather Up the Fragments that Remain,' Southern Garden Clubs and the Publication of Southern Garden History, 1923-1939," in *The Influence of Women on the Southern Landscape: Proceedings of the Tenth Conference on Restoring Southern Gardens and Landscapes, October 5-7, 1995, Old Salem, Winston-Salem, North Carolina* (1997), 172. This excellent article identifies garden surveys in Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Kentucky.

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