NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Although our state fared better than many did across our country, it has certainly been a long and unusually cold winter in Georgia. Hopefully, the glorious landscape emerging with the sights and colors of spring is a signal that winter is behind us.

My own garden in middle Georgia is now punctuated by the bright colors of daffodils, hyacinths, summer snowflakes, and other spring bulbs as well as flowering shrubs, trees, and vines – forsythia, Viburnum tinus, quince, tulip magnolia, fruiting plum, late-blooming camellias, Carolina jessamine, and coral honeysuckle. In several areas sweet violets, natives – bird's-foot violets, trillium and Atamasco lilies – and my favorite reseeding spring annual, Johnny-jump ups carpet the ground. I am fortunate that I was able to include so many early blooming herbaceous and woody perennials in my landscape. However, if you are limited in space, remember that you can either use that time-tested landscaping trick of borrowing the view of a neighboring landscape, or you can enjoy visiting a private or a public garden – both have the advantage of someone else doing the work of planting and maintaining!

A garden that most definitely warrants a springtime (or anytime) visit is the gardens at Oak Hill in Rome GA. In January those attending the dedication ceremony of a Blue Star Memorial Marker placed on the grounds of Berry College, were treated to a tour of Oak Hill, Martha Berry's home, and the gardens surrounding the home by the director, Tim Brown. At the GCG Board of Directors dinner later that evening, Brown was presented with a well deserved GCG Seal of honor for his work to restore the gardens to their original design. Director Tim Brown has graciously contributed a feature article for this newsletter in which he shares some of the historical background regarding Martha Berry, her home, and the surrounding gardens.

The 2015-2017 GCG term holds new duties for me so this will be my last newsletter. It has been an honor and a real pleasure to serve as one of the Editors of Scatter Info as We Bloom and Grow.

Jane Hersey, Landscape Design Editor
Martha Berry loved her gardens. A popular story about her involves the enormous plate-glass window in the dining room of Oak Hill, her ancestral home in Rome, Georgia. During a 1928 renovation, Berry insisted on a window as large as possible so that she could have a better view of the garden while dining. Her architect refused: he believed such a large expanse, unheard-of during the 1920s, would be disproportionate and not altogether tasteful. So, Martha Berry sent him to another family property to work on a separate project—and had the window installed while he was gone. The window remains today, framing one of the most beautiful and historic gardens in Georgia.

This tale is indicative of Martha Berry’s determination, particularly in matters relating to Oak Hill. Her father had purchased the farm in 1871, when Martha Berry was six years old, and reared his large family there. Situated at the top of a steep ridge overlooking the Oostanaula River’s floodplain, the original house burned and was rebuilt in 1884 in the Greek-Revival style. Martha Berry’s mother, Frances Rhea Berry, lived at Oak Hill until her passing in 1927, when the house, which had never been plumbed or electrified, became the property of Martha Berry—and part of the Berry Schools.
By the late 1920s, Martha Berry was one of the most famous women in the world. Her boarding school for poor children, founded in 1902, had become internationally famous after a 1910 visit from Theodore Roosevelt. The Berry Schools captured America’s imagination, and early introductions among the country’s elite resulted in deep friendships—and generous patronage—among people such as Thomas & Mina Edison, Henry & Clara Ford, and Martha Berry’s best friend, Emily Vanderbilt Hammond.

Recognizing Martha Berry’s need for first-class accommodations when receiving important visitors, Mrs. Hammond presented a massive donation to modernize Oak Hill—both the house as well as the landscape. Work began in 1928 to transform a 19th-century farmhouse and grounds into a fashionable estate befitting the most discerning patrons. The house gained 6 ½ bathrooms, a central-heating system, and servants’ quarters; the renovated Oak Hill would feature a butler’s pantry, a paneled library, and a magnificent dining room, complete with Zuber wallpaper and a spectacular view.

The grounds were similarly transformed. Mrs. Hammond enlisted Robert B. Cridland of Philadelphia, one of the most esteemed landscape architects of his time, to create a master plan for Oak Hill. Cridland’s 1916 book, “Practical Landscape Gardening,” had undergone five reprints by 1924; he had worked for the Vanderbilt family at their Hyde Park mansion and was the landscape architect for Avondale Estates, an early planned suburb near Decatur, which necessitated an office in Atlanta. His work in Georgia enabled a close affiliation with the Berry Schools, and correspondence between Cridland and Berry was lively. During their ten-year professional relationship, Cridland produced dozens of landscape plans, eventually designing every important sector of the vast Berry campus.

Cridland’s bold new design for the Oak Hill estate was implemented in stages, beginning with the construction of formal gardens and paths surrounding the main house. Three Cridland-designed summer houses provided shady respite for garden visitors, and walkways were laid with colorful native stone from the Berry quarry to match the Ford buildings on campus. The entire ridge behind the house was transformed; to complement the main gardens’ geometry, Cridland designed the Hillside Garden on the steep slope, creating a series of paths to celebrate the site’s natural contours.

Oak Hill’s entrance was relocated almost a full mile north on Highway 27—the gates were repositioned to enter the estate directly across from the Berry Schools’ entrance. Cridland carved a new, winding driveway so that visitors passed through a natural, yet controlled, landscape; as one nears the house, Oak Hill becomes visible, culminating in a dramatic view upon the final approach. The entry drive was punctuated with a fanciful bridge of native stone, and subsequent designs implemented ornamental ponds and an extensive network of woodland trails. Sugar maples and dogwood trees were planted in abundance.
The complexity of Cridland’s designs was astounding. In the primary garden alone, more than 100 separate species of shrubbery and flowers were included on the planting list, and the modestly sized rose garden contained 292 separate rosebushes. Cridland’s attention to detail appealed to Martha Berry, as well as his commitment to practicality and the use of native species in his designs. Every inch of the landscape was given a brilliant new purpose, and no element was overlooked. Views and vistas, in particular, were important to Cridland, and he always attempted to display the most advantageous and dramatic aspects of key garden elements.

Throughout the 1930s, Martha Berry enriched her gardens, acquiring exotic flora and seeds whenever she traveled; never one to pass up an opportunity, she returned from Mobile, Alabama, with two bronze fountains from a hotel that was being demolished. A 1932 trip to Italy motivated the construction of the Sunken Garden, arguably the most impressive location at Oak Hill; an appeal to Hirohito, Emperor of Japan, resulted in a gift of Japanese cherry trees, which still grace the Sunken Garden with an explosion of pink blossoms every spring.

Martha Berry was able to enjoy her new gardens for more than ten years. When she passed away in 1942, the loss reverberated throughout Georgia and affected every aspect of the Berry Schools. She had been an absolute ruler, and when she died, the Berry Schools struggled with identity. No one was able to match her ability to monitor every detail, and the priorities of the institution changed. As the Berry Schools faced financial and social challenges during the coming decades, the condition of the Oak Hill gardens varied, and their meticulous care was not a priority. Although the house had become a museum, Oak Hill no longer held its place of prominence, and attention to the grounds waned. Maintenance of the Hillside Garden was abandoned entirely, and the site was overtaken by invasive plant species such as Chinese privet, English ivy, wisteria and mahonia.

The rejuvenation of the Oak Hill gardens began in 2012 with the discovery of a box of rolled documents that turned out to be Robert Cridland’s original blueprints and planting plans for the estate. A veritable treasure chest of information, the documents provided details of most of Oak Hill’s landscape, and many blueprints were personally signed by Cridland himself. At the suggestion of Garden Club of Georgia members, the Martha Berry Museum utilized these documents to apply for the GCG Historic Landscape and Garden Grant, which was awarded in 2012 to begin restoration of the Hillside Garden; an additional award in 2013 extended restoration efforts to the trails around the Oak Hill ponds.

The Garden Club of Georgia’s Historic Landscape and Garden Grants have jumpstarted a full-scale effort to eradicate the mountains of invasive flora that had taken over Oak Hill’s wooded areas. As the Hillside Garden restoration proceeded, exciting details emerged; stone garden seats were uncovered that were built into the hillside, and an ornamental water feature, described in “Garden History of Georgia 1733-1933”, was discovered. The removal of vegetation allowed the architecture of the trails to emerge, and during spring 2013, hundreds of daffodils were able to
bloom for the first time in decades. Most importantly, the view behind Oak Hill has returned. The house’s location on the ridge was always critical to its identity, with a breathtaking vista overlooking the fertile fields below. Obscured by overgrowth for many years, this vista has been restored, and visitors once again have a sense of the house’s high position above the floodplain.

Utilizing Robert Cridland’s original plans, the long-term goal at Oak Hill & The Martha Berry Museum is to return the grounds to their c. 1935 appearance—and to a condition of which Martha Berry would approve. The restoration of the Oak Hill gardens is an exciting, ongoing project, and enormous progress has been made so far; with enthusiastic supporters like The Garden Club of Georgia, the future of the gardens seems bright. The potential is thrilling: because of the wealth of original documents, Oak Hill could become the most perfectly restored historic landscape in America.

*Oak Hill & The Martha Berry Museum is open from 10 am to 5 pm, Monday through Saturday. For more information, visit [www.oakhillmuseum.com](http://www.oakhillmuseum.com) or call 706-368-6789.*
THE FORMAL GARDEN

Photo from “Garden History of Georgia 1733-1933”

Photo taken in Modern Time

1928 Garden Planting Plan by Landscape Architect Robert Cridland
Japanese Cherry Trees in the Sunken Garden

Detailed Garden Plan including the hillside paths
“Garden History of Georgia 1733 – 1933”
Mark your calendar now

LANDSCAPE DESIGN SCHOOL

Course III of the XXVII Series of Landscape Design School sponsored by National Garden Clubs, Inc., Laurel District, and the Marietta Council of Garden Clubs has been scheduled for April 20 & 21, 2015 at the Marietta Educational Garden Center, 505 Kennesaw Avenue, Marietta GA. Check the GCG Website for additional information and the registration form.

Remember – the courses do not have to be taken sequentially. Also, Course III presents an excellent opportunity to refresh. For those of you that are already an Accredited Consultant, check to see if you need to refresh to maintain your accreditation or need to refresh to attain Master Status.

Course II of the school was held in January. Fifteen students have now passed their second course and qualify as Provisional Landscape Design Consultants. CONGRATULATIONS!!!

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