

# Magnolia Gardens, the GGAPA, ASA & You!

James Thornton—Conyers, Georgia

Take a long look at the sunrise photo. Close your eyes and imagine you are alongside Thomas Drayton and his wife, Ann, as they venture up the Ashley River into the swamp or rather jungle-like terrain. You witness the beginning of Magnolia Plantation. The year is 1676.

Fast forward through the centuries. You watch the establishment of Magnolia Gardens in the late 17th century, the explosion of beauty and expansion through the 18th century. Then in the 19th century its continued development on a grand scale vaulted the gardens into one of the greatest public gardens in America. Amazingly, this national treasure is still under the Drayton family ownership.

Follow the images from 1907 to 2009 as the beauty of the gardens continues to grow. But not all is well. Close your eyes again. You are now in the 21st century and have been invited by Tom Johnson, director of gardens, along with representatives from 10 public gardens to form an alliance to locate, collect, promote, and defend ancient azaleas and camellias from extinction. The plants are endangered due to the commercial development of private and public gardens as well as a general lack of value by the public.

The outcome is the formation of the Great Gardens of America Preservation Alliance (GGAPA). Miles Beach, director of camellia collections, is president of the Alliance.

Ok, so what? Seems like a really worthwhile endeavor

but what will it do for me?

Well, you see, over the years a lot of these ancient plants have gone missing for one reason or another and these gardens need replacements to maintain their heritage. As an azaleophile, this is a project that will ultimately benefit you, me, and generations to come. This is where the Azalea Society of America (ASA) can play a part. Read on!

The ASA has formed an alliance committee to interact with the GGAPA. It's headed up by **Maarten van der Giesen** with **John Brown**, **Bob Stelloh**, **Jim Thornton**, **Buddy Lee**, **Tom Johnson**, and **Bart Brechter**. These folks are attacking major problems, like developing a "list" of ancient azaleas, which is being handled by **Bob Stelloh**. This list will provide the names and descriptions of the azaleas that were planted at Magnolia during the 1700s.

We have some help from Galle in his book, *Azaleas*, and better yet, records of plants provided by Taylor Drayton Nelson. The records were handed down to Taylor from his grandfather. Plants that were known as 'Beauty of Reigate', 'Charles Encke', 'Diadem de Spa', 'Imbricatum', and 'Madam Iris LeFebure' are just a few of the hundreds listed. By the way, the log was transcribed by B.Y. Morrison in 1949, and thanks to Taylor we now have it to use as our base inventory.

All this leads to another, even greater problem—finding these plants! And that's where "you" come in.

Hopefully, some plants may still be on the market, like 'Formosum', 'Glory of Sunninghill', and 'Fielder's White'. But we're looking for the more "ancient" plants like the ones above. We might find these plants in somebody's yard, in an old cemetery plot, or a little known public garden. We need to locate the plants that are available to us for taking cuttings. Or, better yet, a place where we can obtain the whole plant. Whatever! Wherever! We have to try!

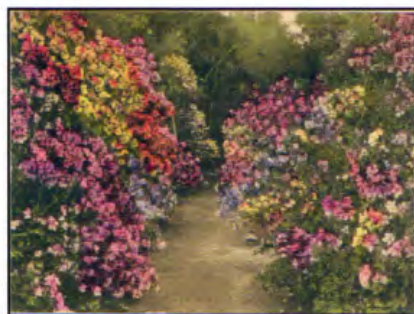
Sadly, all the while, we have to realize, some of these plants may be gone forever. 'Tis a pity, let's not allow other azaleas to follow the same path to extinction. You can help prevent this. Any information, including pictures, you have would be greatly appreciated. Contact the Azalea Camellia Alliance at: [ACAalliance@yahoo.com](mailto:ACAalliance@yahoo.com) or for information concerning Magnolia Gardens visit [www.magnoliaplantation.com](http://www.magnoliaplantation.com). To view the list of ancient azaleas, go to: [www.greatamericangardensalliance.org/Magnolia.htm](http://www.greatamericangardensalliance.org/Magnolia.htm).

*Jim Thornton is a co-founder and the first president of the Oconee Chapter. He has served as a director, vice president, and president of the Azalea Society of America.*

*Special thanks to Magnolia Gardens staff Taylor Drayton Nelson, Tom Johnson, Richard Ketcham, and Jane Knight as well as ASA member Bob Stelloh.*



▲ Daybreak at Magnolia 2009  
▼ Artist's rendering 1907



▲ The gardens 1907  
▼ The gardens 2009

