

Rose Ishbel Greely, a Pioneer in DC Landscape Architecture

By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

Rose Greely¹ was born in Washington, DC, on February 18, 1887, the fourth of six children of Arctic explorer and Medal of Honor recipient, Major General Adolphus Washington Greely and Henrietta Hadson (Nesmith) Greely. She was described as “tall, statuesque, with a fair and lovely complexion and a tactful and charming personality. She was always beautifully dressed, with style and taste... However, Rose did have an impressive personality and could out talk any man.”²

The family lived in an historic house in “Foggy Bottom” (1914 G Street, NW), one of the oldest neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. She attended the Abbot Academy, an independent boarding preparatory school for women in Andover Massachusetts, the National Cathedral School, an independent Episcopal private day school for girls and spent a year at the Finch School, a private secondary school for girls in Manhattan’s Upper East Side in New York City. After she “made her debut,” was presented to polite society (a former big deal for debutantes) in 1905, she traveled abroad for two years with her family in Europe, Central America, and Asia.

Deciding not to go to college, she pursued other interests. She took short courses at the Maryland Agricultural College (University of Maryland). One source suggested that she wanted to learn how to grow potatoes in eastern New Hampshire where her family maintained a summer place on Lake Conway. She studied interior design or decorating at the Art Institute of Chicago, metal work in Washington, DC, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and silver repoussé and enameling on metal in Florence, Italy.

The Cambridge School

In 1916, Rose Greely was one of six young women to enroll in the first year of a new three-year program at The Cambridge School of Architectural and Landscape Design for Women under the leadership of Henry Atherton Frost. Frost, a professor of architecture at Harvard, saw a need for such a program since women were excluded from Harvard. A non-degree program, she completed the landscape architecture course in 1919 and the architecture course in 1920.³



Rose Ishbel Greely (1887 - 1969)⁷
Photo Credit: Jane Grimball Greely

The discipline of landscape architecture for women was in its infancy. Her time at the Cambridge School was very beneficial as it was to afford her major networking opportunities throughout her career. She found employment in Boston for two years with several landscape architects, including Fletcher Steele and was a staff writer for *The House Beautiful*, where she refined her philosophy and developed her ability to write about landscape design.

In 1923, she returned to Washington and joined the office of architect Horace Peaslee as a draftsman. In 1925, she became the first woman licensed to practice architecture in Washington, DC, and a year later, established her own firm, initially at 1623 H Street, NW, and later at 1701 I Street. Her staff consisted of a secretary (Katherine Heaton) and two draftsmen (typically Cambridge School graduates). With the passing of her father in 1935, she moved her office to her home in Georgetown (3131 O Street, NW).



'Rose Greely', a Gable Hybrid[®]
Photo Credit: Bob Stelloh

The Practice and her Philosophy

Among Greely's clients were established members of Washington society: appointed government officials, local business leaders, investment bankers, ambassadors, real estate developers, military figures, and elite institutions. Given the recession-proof nature of the region and the quality of her work, she survived the depression in the 1930s and World War II in the 1940s. Over the course of her career, she designed more than 500 projects of all sizes from city homes and gardens, townhouses, and estates in downtown Washington to properties in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. Then there were the very large and significant projects like governmental housing projects, museums, embassies, schools, and the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Harford County, Maryland. One of her really major outliers was the remodeling and landscaping of a cattle and sheep ranch in the Rio Grande River Valley, five miles from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Don't you know that being creative with adobe in a Spanish Colonial style and desert flora was something of a challenge.

"Rose Greely designed gardens that reflected the architecture of the house, conformed to the local landscape and site conditions, responded to the lifestyle of the owner, and employed the vegetation and material of the region."⁴ She viewed landscape design as a matter of composition, which blended the structures with their surroundings, and common elements of her designs included: azalea, crepe myrtle, holly, clematis, rose, spirea, hydrangea, evergreens, annuals, perennials, and bulbs; and she was always searching for new plant

combinations and color arrangements that would endure and grow more lovely with every passing year.

If the reader is interested in learning more about Rose Greely's philosophy, perspective, and work ethic, the best internet source that I found was an article written by Joanne Seale Lawson for the Historical Society of Washington, DC, entitled *Remarkable Foundations: Rose Ishbel Greely, Landscape Architect*.⁴ By far, however, the best source of information on how she combined the disciplines of architecture and landscape architecture is the collection of original architectural drawings, client files, and miscellaneous papers (1909-1961) in the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia at Charlottesville.⁵

Her Accomplishments

In 1936, she was elected a fellow by the American Society of Landscape Architecture in recognition of her many contributions to the field. She was the first Cambridge School graduate to be so honored. She was the only woman to work on the Advisory Committee of the Williamsburg, Virginia Restoration Project.

In 1956, she retired from full-time practice due to arthritis, bringing to a close her career of nearly 40 years. Through her writing, her projects, and her speaking engagements, she advanced the public's understanding of horticulture, architecture, urban planning, and garden design. Perhaps more importantly, she served as a positive example and mentor for women pursuing careers in architecture and landscape architecture, fields heretofore largely dominated by men.

Rose Greely passed away at her home on May 23, 1969, at the age of 82. A memorial service was held at Christ Episcopal Church, located at the corner of 31st and O Streets, just down the street from her home and just a few blocks from the busy intersection of Wisconsin Avenue and M Street, in the heart of Georgetown. Her ashes were scattered at the family summer home on Lake Conway in New Hampshire.

'Rose Greely' — the Gable Evergreen Azalea

In 1940, Joseph Benson Gable introduced 'Rose Greely', an excellent white evergreen azalea that was subsequently used by Bill Guttormsen

(Greenwood Hybrids), Henry Yates ('Frostburg'), Al Reid ('Linwood Pink Giant', 'Linwood Salmon'), and Don Hager ('Son of a Gun') in their respective breeding programs.

The Gable Farm was in Stewartstown, PA, so it was unlikely that their paths would cross on a routine basis. I've found nothing to indicate that Gable was a supplier or a client, so I don't know how it came to be that he named a plant for her. A survey of the guide to the Rose Greely Architectural Drawings and Papers at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia did not reveal correspondence between the two.⁵

Fortunately, to learn more about 'Rose Greely', we have the benefit of the Gable chapter in *Hybrids and Hybridizers*, which was produced by the Potomac Valley Chapter, ARS Gable Study Group. This group consisted of Caroline Gable, Jane and Ray Goodrich, Velma and Russ Haag, George Miller and was chaired by George Ring. The book's Gable chapter contained information from Gable's later notebooks and file cards. From Gable's notes, it is pretty clear that he was pleased with this result of a complex 16 year breeding plan. One note concluded with, "Flowered nearly

200 and got one hose-in-hose white which is D3G or 'Rose Greely' [single quotes added], easily a hardier white than we ever grew here before. Still think I made this cross in a country cemetery, dark of the moon, with a rabbit foot in each pocket."

Appendix C of the Gable chapter presents descriptions of selected Gable evergreen azaleas that were developed, named, and introduced by him. 'Rose Greely' appears in this list of Gable introductions, but the last name is incorrectly spelled Greeley. I thought it would be useful to look at other sources for information to see if the misspelling was widespread and to compare the descriptions and the formulae. See Table 1.

When the International Rhododendron Register and Checklist (Second Edition) was published in 2004, I noticed that there were three Es in Greeley. Knowing that wasn't correct, I contacted the late Jay Murray (the US registrar) and shared with her the information that I had obtained from John Greely, Rose Greely's nephew. A correction was published in the *Corrections to the International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* (2004), First Supplement, p.47. So, for the record, the correct spelling of the Gable's white cultivar is 'Rose Greely'.

Table 1 - A Comparison of 'Rose Greely' Spelling, Descriptions, and Formulae from Four Major Sources⁶

	<i>Hybrids & Hybridizers</i>	Lee (<i>The Azalea Book</i>)	Galle (<i>Azaleas</i>)	<i>International Rhododendron Register and Checklist</i>
Cultivar Name Spelled	'Rose Greely' and 'Rose Greeley'	'Rose Greeley', incorrect.	'Rose Greeley', incorrect.	'Rose Greeley', but corrected in Supl #1.
Description	White with chartreuse blotch; single, 2 ½", hose-in-hose, frilled, sweet scented. Early midseason. Dense, spreading. Hardy, become more so with age. 6' wide and 7' tall in 25 years.	Spreading, low, dense; early midseason; flowers single, hose-in-hose, 2 ½", white with chartreuse blotch, sweet scented; one of the finest early whites.	White, blotch yellowish green, hose-in-hose, 2 ½", sweet scented, early; spreading low dense; good hardy early white.	Fls single, hose-in-hose, 65mm wide, white, with a chartreuse blotch; sweetly scented.
Formula	[(<i>poukhanense</i> x <i>mucronatum</i>) F ₂ X (<i>poukhanense</i> x 'Hexe') x (<i>poukhanense</i> x <i>kaempferi</i>)]	One parent was a second generation <i>poukhanense</i> X <i>mucronatum</i> cross; the other (<i>poukhanense</i> x 'Hexe') X <i>kaempferi</i> .	((<i>poukhanense</i> x 'Mucronatum' cross) X (<i>poukhanense</i> x 'Hexe') X <i>poukhanense</i>)	(<i>yedoense</i> var. <i>poukhanense</i> x <i>mucronatum</i>) F ₂ X (<i>yedoense</i> var. <i>poukhanense</i> x 'Hexe') x <i>yedoense</i> var. <i>poukhanense</i> x <i>kaempferi</i>)

Notes and References

1. Curiously, some places give her middle name as Ishbel and some places give it as Isabel. No explanation has surfaced. The other curiosity is that some people spell her last name Greeley. In 1987, I contacted the late John Chapman Greely, her nephew, and he said "The spelling of Greely as "Greeley" is a common mistake from which all members of our family suffer." [Greely, John C., Personal communication by letter. August 8, 1987.]
2. Block, Faith F. Jones, Cambridge School, *Rose Greely - A Tribute*, Draft: 2/23/77.
3. The Cambridge School was incorporated in 1924. In the early years, it was a non-degree program. Most states required a formal degree for individuals to register as a licensed architect. An effort was made to interest Harvard, Radcliffe, and Columbia into becoming degree granting affiliates, but all declined. Finally, in 1932, Smith College agreed to such an arrangement and the Cambridge School became a formal graduate school affiliated with Smith College. The first master's degrees were awarded in 1934 and bachelor's degrees in architecture and landscape architecture were added in 1936. Degrees were retrospectively granted to Cambridge School alumnae who had already completed the program. Rose Greely, however, did not have an undergraduate degree, so she was not eligible. In 1938, the Cambridge School became fully integrated with Smith College. Due to financial difficulties and a lack of support from Smith College, the Cambridge School program was closed in 1942.
4. Lawson, Joanne Seale, "Remarkable Foundations: Rose Ishbel Greely, Landscape Architect." *Washington History*. Spring/Summer 1998. 10(1): p 53.
5. Rose Greely Architectural drawings and Papers, 1909-1961, Accession #10772, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.
6. The descriptions in Table 1 vary in detail, but don't seem to be contradictory. The formulae are another matter. Since Gable is the source for the formula in *Hybrids and Hybridizers*, it should be viewed as the correct information. The IRRC is in agreement with Gable's formula, differing only in presentation. The Lee and Galle formulae, however, are incorrect.
7. Photo 1 is a picture of Rose Ishbel Greely from an internet page entitled "Early Women of Architecture in Maryland" (www.aiaarmcom/rose-greely.html). The caption states that the picture was provided by Jane Greely. The late Jane Grimball Greely (1925-2019) was the wife of the late John Chapman Greely (1924-2010), who was the nephew of Rose Greely (1887-1969). The original source therefore is family.
8. Photo 2 is a picture of 'Rose Greely' taken by the late Bob Stelloh in the Hager garden in Hendersonville, NC. It is from the pbase.com image collection maintained by the Azalea Society of America.

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William C. Miller III is a recipient of the Brookside Gardens Chapter's Frederic P. Lee Commendation (1988) and is twice the recipient of the ASA's Distinguished Service Award (1995 and 2002). He was chairman of the ASA's Glenn Dale Preservation Project, and co-chairman of Dick West's Ten Oaks Glenn Dale Project. He is past president of the Brookside Gardens Chapter, a former vice president of the ASA, a past member of the ASA Board of Directors, past co-chairman of the ASA's Membership Committee, past chairman of the ASA's Public Information Committee, the longest serving member of the ASA's Editorial Advisory Board, and a frequent contributor to *The Azalean*.

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