

SUMMER 1992
\$3.50

Maryland

MAGAZINE



Paca's Colonial GARDEN

THE MUDDY OLD
MONOCACY

ADMIRAL
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FARMING'S
SUMMER RITUAL

THE GREEKS





WILLIAM PACA GARDEN

NEW INSIGHTS
ON COLONIAL
GARDENING

By SUSAN STILES DOWELL
Photos by MICHAEL J. NEVROS



ARE YOU FAMILIAR with a vegetable called the cardoon? Can you grow and ripen a pineapple in a single Maryland summer? Does the image of a wallflower bring something more to mind than a refugee from the dance floor?

If so, you're on the horticultural cutting edge and among a growing number of gardeners turning to America's colonial past for the charm and excitement of cultivating the old species in the old ways. Treat yourself to a tour of one of the finest early horticultural sites in America: the William Paca Garden in Annapolis where only plants popular between 1760 and 1780 are grown and a lovely two-acre landscape duplicates with archeological exactitude terraces, walls, outbuildings, and a fish-shaped pond that were on the site more than two centuries before.

Since opening to the public in 1973 at the instigation of Historic Annapolis, Inc., the non-profit organization credited with rescuing most of that city's endangered colonial landmarks, Paca Garden's salient attraction has been its miraculous discovery and restoration. For sheer drama, the story of the recovery of the 1765 William Paca House rivals anything reported in the exciting years leading up to the Bicentennial.

Who could have guessed that pulling down the superstructure of the old 200-room Carvel

Far from the Paca House, dozen four original parterres, at different levels, is a wilderness area with a shallow pond traversed by a bridge in the popular 18th century Chinese style.

Hall Hotel to restore the landmark house inside would also lead to the discovery of Mr. Paca's garden? Beneath the rubble of a demolished bus station and parking lot to the hotel's rear, archeologists unearthed the extensive remains of a fall of terraces, an undulant depression that was a pond, traces of a sophisticated water system, foundations for several outbuildings, and footings for walls that circumvented the property. The find was considerable enough for the State of Maryland to purchase the site from Historic Annapolis, Inc. and restore it.

Re-creating the garden of the gentleman Paca—a lawyer, statesman, patriot, and Governor of Maryland about whom history is vague because his personal effects haven't survived—proved an exercise in research involving much more than reconstruction from archeological traces. Mrs. St. Clair Wright, who headed the all-inclusive search to give the garden form and personality, witnessed how often serendipity contributed another piece to the puzzle.

Paca's full length portrait at the Maryland Historical Society was examined for its garden backdrop, detailed and deliberate enough to have been directed by Paca himself. The artist Charles Willson Peale, wrote about the portrait in 1772: "I have spent some time about Mr.



Paca's whole length ... he is resting on a pedestal ... in the distance is a View of his Summerhouse."

The two-story white summerhouse in the painting was subsequently used as a model, complete with winged Mercury on top, by restoration architect Orin Bullock for the garden's pavilion. It was made to scale in stucco and placed on what is likely to be the original foundation at the rear center of the property. A bridge in the popular Chinese style of the 18th century, also in the painting, was constructed for its original footings, and the pond filled to former size by damming the spring and restoring Paca's sophisticated water system.

A composite picture of Annapolis' fine 18th century gardens, which a French visitor found better than any he had seen in America, has slowly emerged. That picture places the properties of the Paca House, Brice House, Hammond-Harwood House, and the no longer standing colonial Governor's Mansion contiguous to one another. The rapidly flowing spring at the lower end of Paca's Garden would have nourished some of this verdure and, according to the archeological remains, attracted Indians and supported an early tannery. To William Paca must go the credit of seeing the benefits of a spring on in-town property and converting a

TOP LEFT: Rose campion, widely grown in 18th century Europe, thrives in the Paca Garden.

ABOVE LEFT: The fragrant heliotrope or "cherry pie" plant is grown from seed procured from Monticello's Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants.

ABOVE RIGHT: The arbor in the vegetable garden was designed from a detail found in a circa 1900 photograph showing the Charles Carroll House in Annapolis.

tannery's putrid swamp to a veritable waterworks. Seventeen years after Paca sold his house and grounds, the system was still functioning and pleasing at least one happy bather.

Young Belgian noblewoman Rosalie Stier, renting the Paca House with her parents and siblings in 1797, wrote of her enjoyment of "... the finest garden in Annapolis in which there is a spring, a cold bathhouse well fitted up, and a running stream! What more could I wish for?" The bathhouse was rebuilt during the garden restoration, not on its original foundation which was lost after two centuries, but at the far corner to match the springhouse that was built on an extant foundation over the spring. The stream-fed cold bathhouse, a luxury in-town, recalls the early American predilection for taking frigid "plunge baths" year round.

Barbara Paca is a seventh generation member of the family who carries on the gardening tradition as a horticultural historian and landscape architect. She has researched the English antecedents of the garden. "Paca was deeply conservative and in that tradition looked back to the great Whig gardens of England," she says. "His wilderness, or informal area [as compared to the formal fall of terraces above], came from the naturalizing influence of the English. He

A rustic arbor in the fruit and vegetable section of this abundant townhouse garden is espaliered with seckel pears.

OPPOSITE: Tents for a June wedding are set on a terrace above the flower parterre. Botanical varieties that Paca would have known between 1760 and 1780, like orange butterfly weed and pink stoke-sia, bloom profusely in summer.



may have even based the design of his fish pond on one at Wroxton Abbey which he could have seen when studying law in London." About making a "wilderness" a mere stone's throw from the forest primeval, Barbara Paca suggests tongue-in-cheek humor; "Who could do a wilderness garden better or derive more wry satisfaction from its placement than a colonial living on the edge of the real thing?"

To enclose the garden, which was large enough at two acres to accommodate the big shallow pond, restoration architect James Wollen researched old brick walls in Annapolis. He knew that the cap he made for the continuous wall was correct when infrared photography of a side of the house which abutted the long-since demolished wall disclosed, at just the right height, a profile of a wall cap matching his own design!

Good fortune followed Paca Garden's restoration right to its conclusion. Instead of a facsimile of an 18th century garden, the State of Maryland had literally resurrected one of the finest and rarest gardens in America. Director of the garden Lucy Coggins, elaborates on this distinction: "Remember that this was a townhouse site and an uncommonly large one," she says. "In so many instances, the colonial locale that had been a town became a city, and all its open

[garden] sites were built over. There were hundreds and thousands of gardens in early America. Now, they're gone. It's rare to experience this authentic aspect of colonial life."

Coggins, who studied historical horticulture at the Arnold Arboretum in Boston and has worked at Paca Garden in various capacities since 1983, has watched the site evolve. "When it was restored," she says, "it was such a miracle that, naturally, the entire emphasis was on the restoration. In nineteen years, our plant material has matured, and new primary source research has been done about period gardens. We're now coming into our own as a specialized site featuring native and imported plants—vegetables, flowers, and trees—that were known to have been grown in a Maryland garden between 1760 and 1780, roughly the time Paca would have been ordering and planting the material for his garden."

Coggins suggests that a new story is emerging from this fertile site that's no less timely than the garden's rebirth for the Bicentennial. It's about gardening, the current favorite American pastime, and specifically about historic gardening, a trend that's gaining popularity for its use of the old varieties and its subtlety in marrying landscape with architecture.

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A garden framed a house in colonial times by systematically offsetting the classical proportions of the architecture with ordered shapes and progressions of its own. "This is a very different concept from the contemporary house and lot," says Coggins. "Today's garden plan is far less involved with the house." When Barbara Paca studied the garden's contour plan to impose a systematic grid, she actually referred to Euclidian geometry for the proper proportions. She observed, too, the fish-shape of the fish pond that was visible for Paca from the two-story porch, an antique Elizabethan feature at the back of the house. Such a garden conceit may have been a sophisticated 18th century pun.

Although the traces of what Paca had on the upper terraces were obliterated by the hotel foundation, four parterres in the formal geometric grid-style of the 17th and 18th centuries were created and enclosed like great big outdoor rooms with evergreen hedges of cedar, myrtle, and hemlock. The parterres, which have individual themes of English boxwood, hollies, old-fashioned roses and flowers from 1760–1780, not only typify the earliest most highly stylized European fashion impressed on the American landscape but also exhibit the kaleidoscopic varieties the colonists were relishing in their gardens.

Behind a hemlock hedge and double hollyhocks looms the Naval Academy Chapel. Love Lies Bleeding, Jacob's Coat, and Prince's Plume in the flower parterre typify the gaudy flowers favored by 18th century plantsmen.

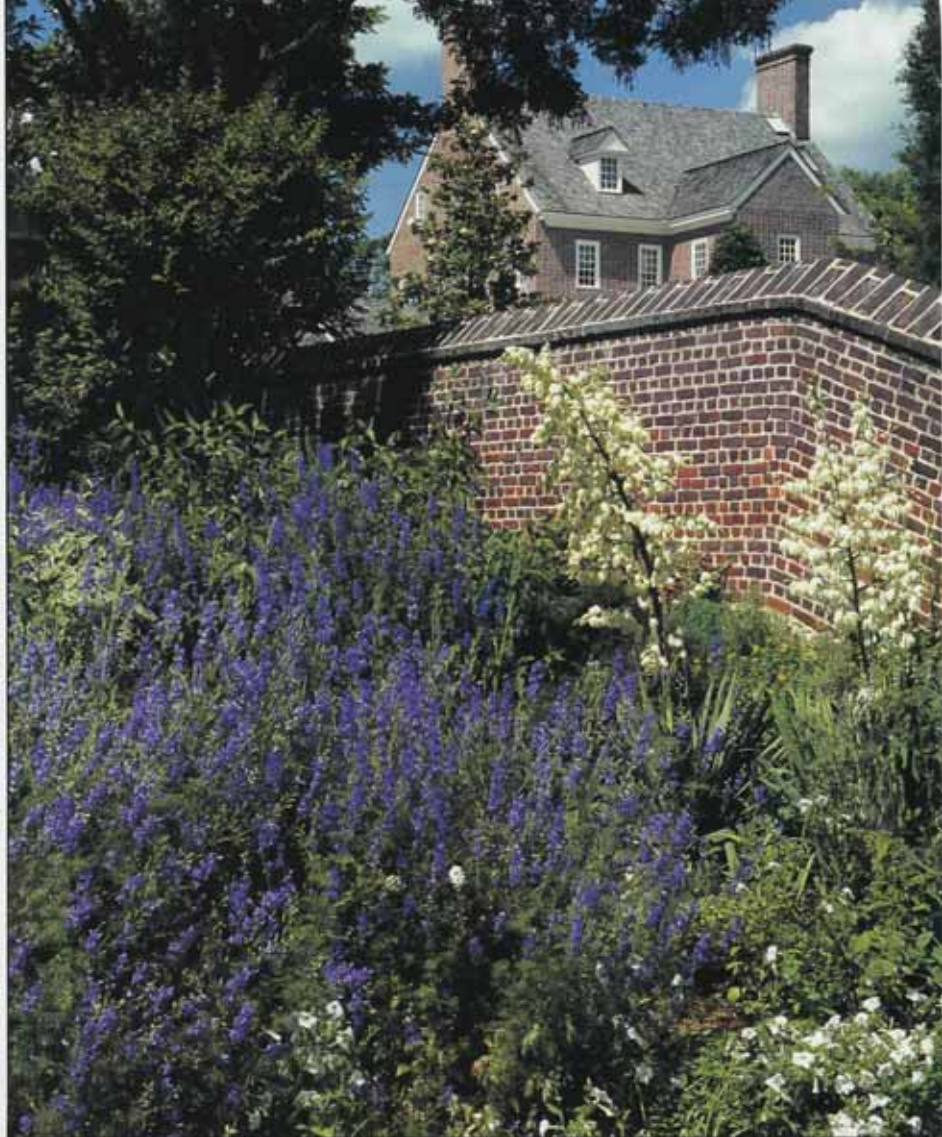
TOP RIGHT: Yellow lantana is grown for summer display in pots.

ABOVE RIGHT: Rocket verbena thrives in the dog days of summer.

FAR RIGHT: Paca's two-acre garden is enclosed by a brick wall with a rounded wall cap. Larkspur compliments the blooming native American yucca.

No one can know precisely what plants and flowers Paca enjoyed because no records survive of his gardening, and no soil samples were taken at the time of the archeological survey to analyze for pollen content. Phytolith technology, a method of analyzing living plant particles in the ground, had not yet been developed. What survived from the past and helped Paca Garden's staff build a realistic 18th century horticultural system are the published period horticultural books, illustrations, records of plant suppliers, newspaper ads, and diaries and letters of avid local gardeners.

William Faris, an Annapolis silversmith who lived near Paca, laid out his extensive gardens in the 1760s and kept a journal of his efforts. From Faris, the Paca Gardens borrows the apparently popular colonial custom of potting flowers for placing in the garden in summertime, like jasmine standards, red "fish" geraniums, and balsam, an impatiens with a myriad of colonial names. Alyssum, larkspur, and heliotrope were avidly used heat-resistant bedding flowers. Visual peculiarities like "Love Lies Bleeding" transfixed them. Indigenous American flowers like golden rod and wild astors, that were the rage in Europe, were transplanted from local fields. Many of the flowers in the summer's flower



parterre are grown from seed on the grounds. Over the centuries, seed selections made for disease resistance have altered modern varieties and the originals aren't available locally.

For sustenance, all colonial gardens had fruit and vegetable production nearby. In the townhouse garden, where space was at a premium, economy dictated a clever arrangement of pleasure and utility. To one side of Paca's

TRAVEL GUIDE William Paca Garden

Directions: From route 50, take Rowe Boulevard into Annapolis to the end of Rowe, at College Avenue. Turn left on College, three blocks to King George Street. Turn right at King George, proceed three blocks to Randall Street and turn right onto Prince George Street. In the second block of Prince George, on right, is Paca House. Enter the garden through the main house, front door.

Hours: Open every day but Tuesday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday 12 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Admission: Paca Garden only; \$2.50—Combined Garden and Paca House; \$5.00. Special group tour rates available. Phone: 410-267-8149

pleasure garden are the fruits, vegetables, and herbs. The arrangement is conjectural, based on new research into colonial gardening showing use of raised beds, bordering with herbs and boxwood, and espaliering trees not only to save space but also to hasten the ripening in the heat of an adjacent wall.

Paca Garden's success with growing and ripening a pineapple, the ultimate test of the 18th century gardener, was cause for celebration two years ago. Perfecting the cultivation of obsolete vegetables like the cardoon (similar to swiss chard), Good King Henry (like spinach), and sea kale has extended to cookery as well. Lucy Coggins consulted Parkinson's book on horticulture published in 1636 to learn how to cook the bitterness out of the cardoon!

To fully appreciate the sophistication of the 18th century Paca House town garden, you must visit, take the tour, and contemplate in a verdant nook all the wonderful thought and effort that creates a whole new appreciation of gardening. ♦

SUSAN STILES DOWELL, a free lance writer from Monkton is a regular contributor to Maryland Magazine. She writes for Southern Accents and other magazines on homes and gardens.

