

Notable Women in the History of Horticulture

David R. Hershey

Additional index words. teaching, horticultural pioneers

Summary. Ten women horticulturists who made important contributions to their science are briefly profiled, since virtually no horticulture textbooks mention notable women horticulturists.

Many women horticulturists in history deserve greater recognition in college horticultural curricula, especially as women now often make up a majority of horticulture majors. Notable women from horticultural history have generally been overshadowed by the more numerous male horticulturists, despite the women's outstanding contributions. Bailey's *Cyclopedia of Horticulture* listed only two women horticulturists, Annie Jack (Woolverton, 1914) and Theodosia Burr Shepherd (Bailey, 1925), among 160 biographical sketches of North American horticulturists.

This study compiles biographical information on 10 notable women horticulturists who deserve to be included in college horticultural curricula. The women are listed in alphabetical order.

Jenny Foster Butchart (1868-1950)

Butchart's legacy is the world famous Butchart Gardens in Victoria, B.C. (Butchart Gardens, 1990). The gardens were part of the Butchart estate, which was surrounded by the family cement business. Butchart started gardening by creating a Japanese garden 100 yards from a limestone quarry. When the quarry played out, Butchart was dismayed by the 50-foot-deep mudhole and resolved to beautify it. The 5-acre Sunken Garden took 10 years, great expense, and much labor to build. When topsoil was in place and beds formed, Butchart swung from the lip of the quarry in a boatswain's chair to plant ivy on the quarry walls.

Department of Horticulture, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742-5611.

The fame of the garden spread, and thousands of visitors a year came to see it. The foremost horticulturists in Europe sent Butchart new plants. Once, she was showing the garden to the British adventurer Frederick Bailey, and he suggested that he knew of a rare flower, named for him, that she lacked (Appleton, 1980). She led him to a bed of *Meconopsis betonicifolia Baileyi*. He was astonished, since he had only recently discovered it in Tibet, but Butchart's contacts were so good that the seeds Bailey had sent to the Edinburgh Botanical Garden had already been shared with her. The blue poppy is still a feature of the garden.

Beatrix Farrand (1872-1959)

Farrand began her career at the Arnold Arboretum in 1893 under Charles Sprague Sargent (Dumbarton Oaks, 1982). She became a plant materials expert and one of the most talented landscape gardeners in the United States. She was restricted to the private sector because she was a woman, but she nonetheless created many superb landscapes for private citizens and private colleges and universities. She excelled in planting design, and her emphasis on proper landscape maintenance and preservation of the design concept was a rare innovation.

Her most famous garden is Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C. Other landscapes she designed are found at Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, Princeton Univ., Yale Univ., Univ. of Chicago, Oberlin College, and California Institute of Technology. Private estates she worked on include "Grove Point" in Great Neck, N.Y.; "Eolia" in New London, Conn., and "The Eyrie," the estate of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., in Seal Harbor, Maine. She was the only woman among the founders of the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Annie Jack (1839-1912)

Born in England, Jack arrived in America in 1852 to attend a ladies' seminary in Troy, N.Y. (Woolverton, 1914). She later taught school near Montreal and, with her husband, developed their farm, "Hillside." The garden became well known for its production of small fruits and vegetables and even had a

"Bailey's Cyclopedia of Horticulture listed only two women horticulturists.

greenhouse for flower crops. In 1905, Liberty Hyde Bailey praised her garden as "one of the most original gardens I know" (von Baeyer, 1984). Jack is remembered most for her horticultural writings, including her many articles in *Canadian Horticulturist*. She also wrote a newspaper column called "Garden Talks" in the *Montreal Daily Witness*. In 1903 she published the first horticultural volume in Canada, titled *The Canadian Garden: A Pocket Help for Amateurs*.

Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932)

Jekyll lived in England and worked as an artist early in her career. She did not gain fame as a landscape gardener until rather late in life beginning in the 1890s. She receives much of the credit for developing the concept of the modern garden (Massingham, 1966). Jekyll teamed with landscape architect Edwin Lutyens on many projects.

Her ideas are preserved in her 14 books, many of which are still widely available in new editions. Volumes include *Wood and Garden* (1899), *Wall and Water Gardens* (1901), *Roses for English Gardens* (1902), and *Colour Schemes for the Flower Garden* (1914). Jekyll has been called "the first horticultural Impressionist," an apt title, given her background in art. She is known as a landscape gardener, rather than a landscape architect, because she was an expert in plant materials and their use in the landscape.

Martha Logan (1702/04-1779)

Logan married at 15 and had eight children. She started a successful nursery business in Charleston, S.C., in the 1750s. She corresponded with John Bartrum, botanist to King George III, and provided him with seeds and plants. About Logan, Bartrum wrote, "I hope to have plants...by the favour of an elderly widow lady, who spares no pains nor cost to oblige me. Her garden is her delight" (Hollinsworth, 1962).

Logan is most famous for publishing the first horticultural "book" in America in 1752. It was titled *The Gardener's Kalender* and was published first as part of *The South Carolina Almanac* and in various almanacs for decades thereafter (Robbins, 1975).

Jane Loudon (1807-1858)

Loudon, née Jane Webb, published a science-fiction novel, *The Mummy*, in 1827. The famous horticulturist John Claudius Loudon admired the book and wanted to meet the author, whom he thought was a man (Hollinsworth, 1962). Instead he found a young woman, Webb, whom he later married. He dictated his enormous writings to her, since he was physically unable to write. Instead of going on a honeymoon, she tran-

scribed his manuscript, which became 1150 pages of fine print.

Loudon learned horticulture from her husband and soon became an authority in her own right. She wrote *Mrs. Loudon's Gardening for Ladies* in 1840 and *The Ladies' Country Home Companion* in 1845. She also wrote and illustrated five books for women on ornamental plants, one each on annuals, bulbs, and perennials, and two on greenhouse plants. Her books were influential in her native England and also in the United States.



Fig. 1. Annie Jack (from Woolverton, 1914).

Isabella Preston (1881-1965)

In 1912, Preston enrolled in the Ontario Agricultural College and became involved in plant breeding projects with Professor J.W. Crow (von Baeyer, 1984). She never completed her studies but continued to work for Crow. In 1916, she successfully crossed two lily species, a cross thought to be impossible. The cross produced the 'George Creelman' lily, an excellent hybrid used in breeding programs into the 1960s.

In 1920, Preston began 26 years as Specialist in Ornamental Horticulture at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa. She worked on six genera: lily, rose, lilac, Siberian iris, columbine, and flowering crabapple. Her breeding program was highly successful, producing 80 cultivars of *Prestonia* lilacs bred to be extremely hardy for prairie conditions, and many cultivars in the other genera she specialized in.

Preston also wrote extensively, including two books on lilies, many articles, and booklets on ornamentals. She even gave radio talks on horticulture and answered gardening questions by mail, dictating up to 60 letters a day.

Theodosia Burr Shepherd (1845-1906)

Shepherd was born in the Iowa Territory and suffered many hardships, including the death of her mother when she was 3 years old (Bailey, 1925; Hollinsworth, 1962). As an adult, poverty drove her to advertise in a magazine barter column to supply California wildflower seeds and Calla lily bulbs in exchange for clothing for her daughter and household items. This business became tremendously successful. She then began supplying flower seeds and bulbs to large seed

“She was hired for the position because men were not allowed to work on ornamental plants in wartime and was told ‘We don’t really expect you to get anywhere.’”

companies in the East. Soon she was making \$1000/year, a sizeable sum in the 1880s, and had founded the California seed and bulb industry. Seed merchants Peter Henderson and W. Atlee Burpee visited the West Coast after receiving Shepherd’s seeds and bulbs and soon began West Coast production themselves.

Shepherd next established a retail florist business in Ventura, Calif. The business became very successful and was incorporated into a stock company, one of the first companies in the United States owned and operated by women. In addition to her seed and florist businesses, Shepherd was a successful flower breeder. She made tremendous improvements in nasturtiums, cosmos, abutilon, begonia, and petunia. Among her creations are ‘Golden West’ California poppy, ‘Oriole’ rose, and ‘Heavenly Blue’ morning glory.

Harriet Williams Russell Strong (1844-1926)

Born in Buffalo, N.Y., Strong was educated by private teachers and in Miss Mary Atkin’s Young Ladies Seminary in Benicia, Calif. (Cole, 1936; National Cyclopedia, 1927). She married a mining company superintendent and had four daughters. Then in 1883 her husband committed suicide, and Strong had to defend legal claims against her husband’s estate for 8 years. During this time she became a notable horticulturist, engineer, and public citizen.

She became a pioneer in the California walnut industry when she planted 150 acres of walnuts on her farm near Whittier. Her walnuts won many prizes, including a silver medal at the Paris exposition of 1900. Her farm also grew oranges and white pampas plumes, which figured prominently in the 1884 Presidential campaign of James G. Blaine, nicknamed the “Plumed Knight.”

She was a pioneer in irrigated agriculture and received a patent in 1887 for a design of dams in the Grand Canyon for flood control and to store water for irrigation. She was an early advocate of using the Colorado River for irrigation and development of hydro-electric power. She was also active in politics, civic affairs, and women’s education issues; she also composed music, started a successful water company, and drilled oil wells.

Cynthia Westcott (1898-1983).

Westcott received a PhD from Cornell Univ., then became the first professional “Plant Doctor” for 50 gardens a week around Glen Ridge, N.J. (Westcott, 1957). Westcott’s first book, in 1937, was *The Plant Doctor*, a calendar of pest control for the Northeast. In

1946 she published *The Gardener’s Bug Book*, still a classic, even though she was self-taught in entomology. Her *Plant Disease Handbook* is still a standard reference. Her most popular book was *Anyone Can Grow Roses*.

In 1943, Westcott went to work for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture on azalea-petal blight, a devastating disease in the South. She was hired for the position because men were not allowed to work on ornamental plants in wartime and was told “We don’t really expect you to get anywhere” (Black, 1975). She single-handedly solved the problem, then began a personal crusade to teach the industry, the public, and the authorities what to do. Her major professor, H.H. Whetzel, wrote about her, success, “It is with a great deal of pride that I learn that one of my old students and assistants has put it over on the boys who heretofore worked on the azalea blight” (Black, 1975). Westcott received many awards and was named a Fellow of the American Phytopathological Society.

Literature Cited

Appleton, F.M. 1980. The Butchart gardens. *Horticulture* 58(4):34-40, 42-43.

Bailey, L. H. (ed.). 1925. Mrs. Theodosia B. Shepherd, p. 1596. *Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture*. Macmillan, New York.

Black, B. 1975. The communicative crusader, a very personal glimpse. *Garden J.* 25:80-83.

Butchart Gardens. 1990. The Butchart gardens. Butchart Gardens, Victoria, B.C.

Cole, R.G. 1936. Harriet Williams Russell Strong, p. 147. In: D. Malone (ed.). *Dictionary of American Biography*. Scribners, New York.

Dumbarton Oaks. 1982. Beatrix Jones Farrand (1872-1959) fifty years of American landscape architecture. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

Hollinsworth, B. 1962. Her garden was her delight. MacMillan, New York.

Massingham, B. 1966. Miss Jekyll: portrait of a great gardener. Country Life Ltd., London.

National Cyclopedia of American Biography. 1927. Harriet Williams Russell Strong, p. 34-35. James T. White, New York.

Robbins, M.L. 1975. Martha Logan. *HortScience* 10:449.

von Baeyer, E. 1984. Rhetoric and roses, a history of Canadian gardening, 1900-1930. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, Markham, Ont.

Westcott, C. 1957. Plant doctoring is fun. D. Van Nostrand, Princeton, N.J.

Woolverton, L. 1914. Mrs. Annie L. Jack, p. 1581. In: L.H. Bailey (ed.). *Standard encyclopedia of horticulture*. Macmillan, New York.

For the special "Women in Horticulture" issue of Pacific Horticulture (Summer 2019), we've called out the following stories in the online archives; this is but a sampling of the rich content that's available to search and explore on our website. The Most Lively Art. Gardening as a science, an art, and a source of joy by Margedant Hayakawa, 1979. Marcia's Garden: A Conversation. by Marcia Donahue and George Waters, 1989. Horticulture has been defined as the culture of plants, mainly for food, materials, comfort and beauty.[1] According to an American horticulture scholar, "Horticulture is the growing of flowers, fruits and vegetables, and of plants for ornament and fancy." [2] A more precise definition can be given as "The cultivation, processing, and sale of fruits, nuts, vegetables, and ornamental plants as. They work as gardeners, growers, therapists, designers, and technical advisors in the food and non-food sectors of horticulture. YouTube Encyclopedic. 1/5. Throughout history, women were largely excluded from the realms of science and medicine, except for nursing or midwifery, but there are some rare exceptions of women in medicine, tracing back to ancient times. The mid-1850s marked a turning point in society's view towards women working in science and medicine, although they would still struggle to be seen as equals for the next hundred or so years. This is by no means an exhaustive list of notable women in medicine. You can find many more recognised by STEM Women, alongside others from the wider field of science and technology. Throughout history, women have made significant contributions to medicine and we have benefitted from many incredible breakthroughs.