



CHP: Preserving a natural legacy for two decades

By capturing and maintaining the features of the past we gain a fuller picture of how our ancestors thought and felt. What can be more tangible than the living antiques of the garden, plants that have the ability to connect us to the people, places, and events of the past?

Two decades ago, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation made a commitment to this natural legacy by establishing the Thomas Jefferson

Center for Historic Plants, a unique program dedicated to collecting, preserving, and distributing historic plant varieties and to promoting a greater understanding of the history of gardening in America.

This bold and creative idea, echoing Thomas Jefferson's lifelong work in preserving and distributing rare and useful plants, was initiated by author and historian William Howard Adams, who was then a member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees. Peter Hatch, then as now Monticello's director of gardens and grounds seized Adams' challenge and carried his vision forward. Realizing that Monticello was uniquely equipped to assume a leadership role in developing such a program, Hatch's report to the board in November 1985 emphasized the real need, especially among historic



The Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants is based at Tufton Farm.

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Monticello



Center for Historic Plants

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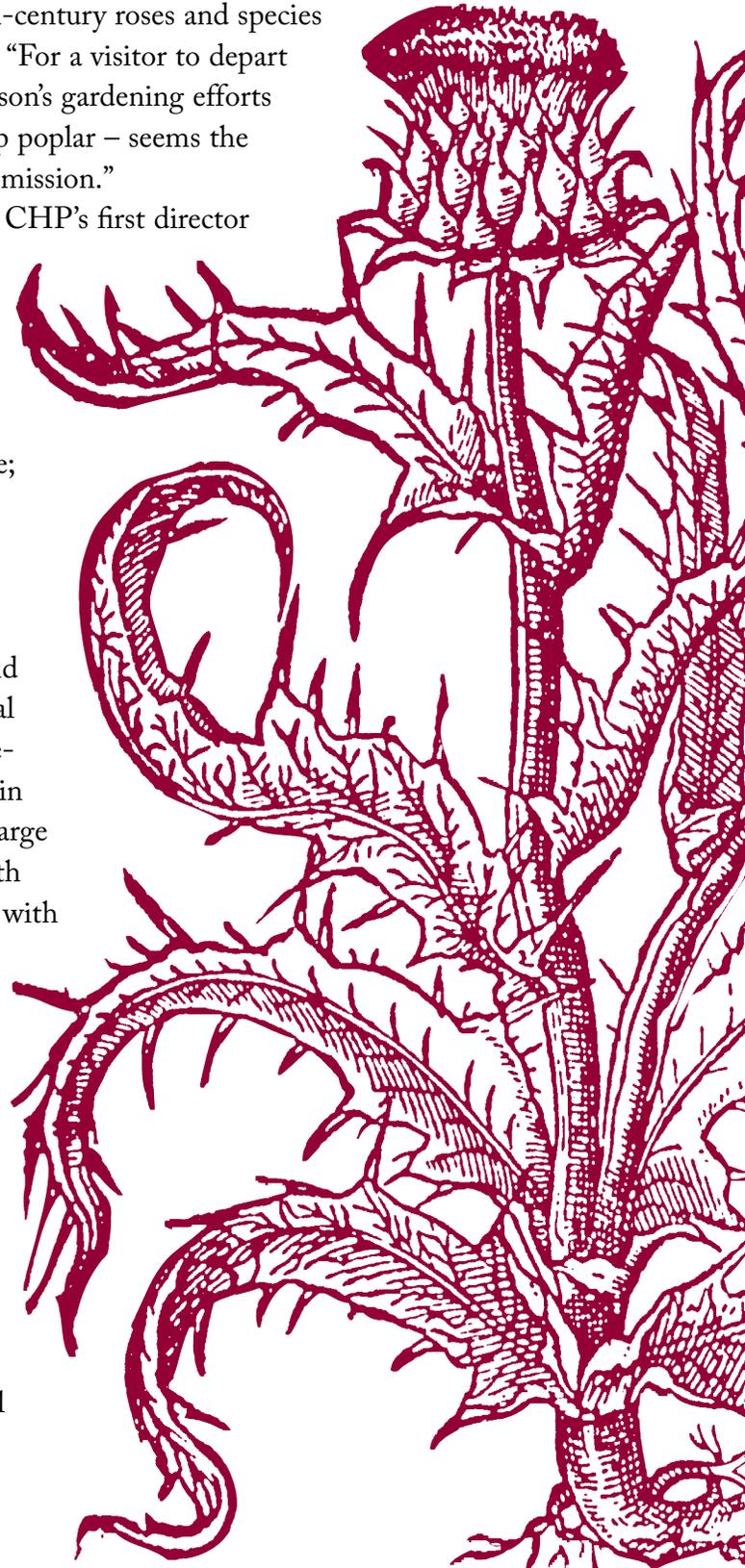
restorations, for an organization dedicated to disseminating “what might be called heritage plants – from seedlings of our original trees to ancient cultivars of carnation to 18th-century roses and species narcissus.” Hatch’s proposal concluded: “For a visitor to depart Monticello with a living scion of Jefferson’s gardening efforts – perhaps a seedling of his original tulip poplar – seems the ultimate fulfillment of our educational mission.”

In 1986, the Foundation hired as the CHP’s first director John Fitzpatrick, former horticulturist of the renowned Connecticut nursery White Flower Farm. Fitzpatrick, a first-class plantsman, possessed outstanding organizational skills plus horticultural and managerial experience; qualities that this ambitious program demanded. He guided the Center’s operations until 1992.

Tufton Farm, one of Jefferson’s five satellite farms in Albemarle County and within sight of Monticello, was a logical choice as the site for the Center’s three-acre nursery and headquarters, housed in a refurbished barn on the property. A large production greenhouse, cold frames, lath house, and stock beds were added and, with each passing year, the nursery’s garden areas and collections have expanded considerably. A series of nursery managers, beginning with Robert Sacilotto, have overseen the Tufton Farm facility. Today the operations are supervised by Marc McVicker and Dennis Whetzel, both highly respected and experienced horticulturists and growers.

A nursery in Dunbar, Scotland, Plants from the Past, served as a model

Woodcut of an artichoke plant by John Gerarde. Thomas Jefferson grew artichokes in his kitchen garden. The Center for Historic Plants offers seeds of this historic plant for home gardeners.



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for the CHP. Hatch visited there during the summer of 1985 and found that the nursery's owners, David Stuart and James Sutherland, had established it was practical to find and propagate 300-year-old cultivars of herbaceous ornamentals. Hatch developed plans for the Monticello



**A view of the CHP's
Léonie Bell Rose
Garden.**

nursery, the plants to promote, and the retail operation with the Plants from the Past nursery in mind. The compelling arguments for the preservation of garden plants made by Stuart and Sutherland in their 1987 book, *Plants from the Past*, served to confirm and strengthen the CHP's commitment to expand its scope beyond the core collection of Jefferson-related plants from the Monticello gardens.

Today, among the hundreds of plants under cultivation at Tufton, are exclusive collections of heirloom roses, dianthus, iris, and peonies containing rare and, in some cases, one-of-a kind specimens. In the spring of 1998 – thanks to a donation from Louis Bell honoring his late wife Léonie Bell, an author, editor, plant illustrator, and rose authority – a separate garden was installed for a significant collection of Noisette roses. Considered among the first rose hybrids in America, the Noisettes tell the fascinating and complex story of 19th-century rose breeding and development. The octagonal-shaped garden, designed by landscape architect C. Allan Brown, contains nearly 40 different varieties, including roses propagated from specimens documented to the early 1800s.

The CHP nursery propagates more than 600 different varieties of plants annually – including bulbs, perennials, herbs, wildflowers,

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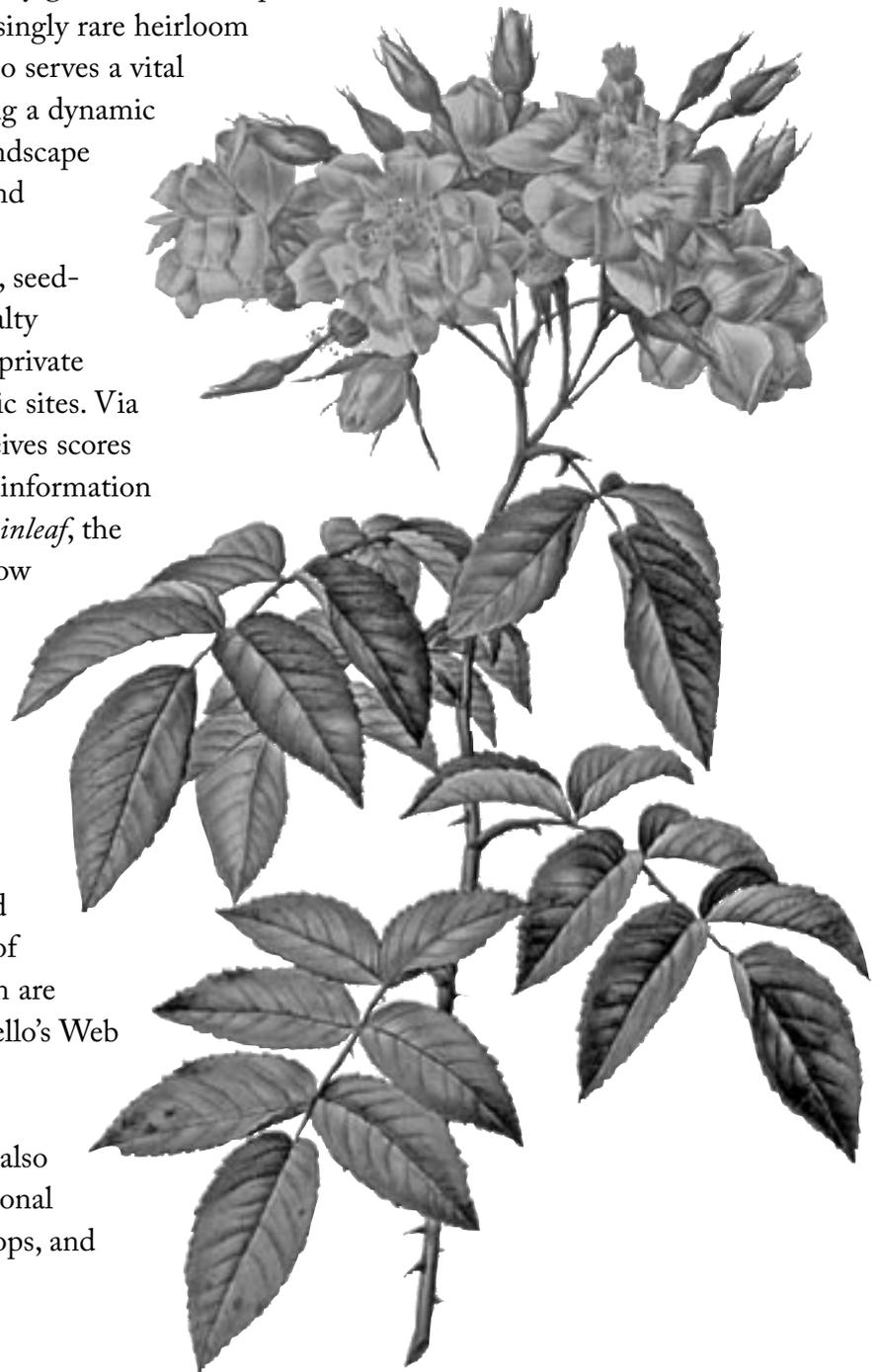
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houseplants, shrubs, trees, and fruit trees – for the Garden Shop at Monticello, Monticello’s mail-order gift catalog, and its online shop. Seeds packaged by Monticello and CHP gardeners are perennial favorites, and the seeds exclusively collected from the Monticello gardens are popular mementos. Each year, close to 50,000 individual packets are produced and distributed.

While the Center’s primary goal is to locate, preserve, and propagate these increasingly rare heirloom horticultural varieties, it also serves a vital educational role by fostering a dynamic network among historic landscape preservationists, national and international public garden associations, plant societies, seed-saving organizations, specialty nurseries and seed dealers, private collectors, and other historic sites. Via the Internet, the CHP receives scores of queries and requests for information from around the globe. *Twingleaf*, the program’s annual journal now in its 18th year, provides original research and substantive, in-depth articles on a host of topics pertaining to Jefferson and his lifelong interests in botany, horticulture, gardening, and natural history. The series of essays from this publication are accessible through Monticello’s Web site.

**A double musk rose
(*Rosa moschata
plena*) painted
by Pierre-Joseph
Redouté.**

The Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants also sponsors numerous educational programs, lectures, workshops, and



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special tours. Since 1992, the CHP has hosted an annual open house at Tufton Farm in May, celebrating the rose, dianthus, and iris collections in peak bloom. One of the event's highlights is an informal rose identification workshop, to which members of the public are encouraged to bring their "mystery" roses and try and stump the experts. This year's CHP Open House will be held Saturday, May 27.

— PEGGY CORNETT

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the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants,
a position she has held since 1992.*

COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org