

Travels with Magnolias in England and America, 1973-74

by J.C. McDANIEL

For eight years now, most recently last November, I have been making occasional visits to the Gloster Arboretum, Frank and Sara Gladney's horticultural and natural development at Gloster, Mississippi. For about the same period I have been corresponding with Neil G. Treseder, England's connoisseur of new and rare Magnolias. Last September I toured his nursery establishment at Truro, Cornwall and he took me to several of the great gardens in southern Cornwall. With exchanges of plant material, some of the same Magnolias and other ornamental woody plants have been growing in Cornwall, in Mississippi, and here at Urbana, Illinois. I won't give a complete travelogue of my latest summer and fall trips, but will use them to illustrate some of the successes and failures in moving plants around, from one region to another.

Both Mississippi and England, and to a lesser extent central Illinois, have some native woody ornamentals commonly planted, but all three have drawn on foreign sources, and hybrids, for much of their current ornamental planting. At Gloster the camellias were flowering, and in that area so was an unusually hardy giant *Agave* species, far from its original home in the mountains of Mexico. Gloster's woods include native stands of four Magnolias (*M. grandiflora*, *M. virginiana australis*, *M. acuminata* and the all-white petalled form of *M. macrophylla*), all four of which have been introduced to central Illinois and to England. At all three places some of the Asian Magnolias and their hybrids thrive, though some seen in Cornwall have failed or done poorly at Gloster, and more have failed in winters in the Urbana, Illinois climate. On the other hand, most American species grow better with the hot summers at Urbana, compared with their slower start and frequent lack of full maturity in the cool seasons of England.

Parts of England, Cornwall particularly, can grow some Asian Magnolias that in America have flourished, if at all, only in favored temperate spots along the coast from central California to Puget Sound. England has led the San Francisco area in selection and propagation of cultivars in *M. campbellii* and other large flowered Asian deciduous species, some of which are much hardier than *campbellii*, Hillier and Sons at Winchester, one of the two English nurseries with the most extensive Magnolia lists (Treseders' is the other) have in their 1973 catalog *M. campbellii* var. *alba* and subspecies *mollicomata* seedlings, plus 8 cultivars, all English selections ('Charles Raffill', 'Darjeeling', 'Ethel Hillier', 'Kew's Surprise', 'Lanarth', 'Sidbury', 'Wakehurst' and 'Werrington'.) No American nursery, so far as I know yet offers even one of these eight. Perhaps some California collector, or the Strybing Arboretum has

ordered them for West Coast tests. Hillier offers vegetatively propagated material in *M. dawsoniana*, *M. sargentiana* (both typical and var. *robusta*) and *M. sprengeri* (both 'Diva', which the nursery regards as typical, and var. *elongata*.) In *M. × veitchii*, both 'Isca' and 'Peter Veitch' are offered.

Hillier offers 13 cultivars in *M. × soulangiana*, the most recent of which is 'Lennei Alba', and in *M. × loebneri* the typical (?) form (A.G.M. 1969) plus 4 named clones, of which 3 ('Leonard Messel', 'Neil McEacharn' and 'Snow-drift') apparently are unavailable from American propagators. Mr. Harold Hillier told the tour group I was in that his *M. × loebneri* favorites were 'Leonard Messel' for pink flowers, and 'Merrill' for white. He had not seen 'Ballerina', 'Spring Snow' and 'Willowood', all selected in the U.S. Scions of my two are being furnished to him.

The rarest evergreen magnolia I saw in England (only at Caerhays Castle in Cornwall) was *M. nitida*. Hillier lists it as unavailable this year. Hillier and several other English propagators offer cutting grown plants of *M. delavayi*, another native of southern Yunnan, of which Hilliers Manual of Trees and Shrubs says: "With the exception of *Rhododendron sinogrande* and *Trachycarpus fortunei* and its allies, this magnificent species has probably the largest leaves of any evergreen tree or shrub grown out of doors in this country (England)." *M. delavayi* also thrives in the coastal redwood area of California, but has not found a congenial home in the Southeast. Two plants at the Gloster Arboretum, Gloster, Mississippi, froze to the ground last winter, but now have sprout growth.

Some of the Todd Gresham hybrids, not yet offered for sale there, are listed as growing in the Hillier Arboretum at Jermyns, Ampfield. These include 'Peppermint Stick', 'Raspberry Ice' and 'Royal Crown', all *M. liliflora* × *M. × veitchii*; and 'Crimson Stipple', 'Delicatissima', 'Rouged Alabaster' and 'Sayonara', which are from the cross of *M. × soulangiana* 'Lennei Alba' by *M. × veitchii* ('Peter Veitch'). Jim Gossler at 1200 Weaver Road, Springfield, Oregon 97477 in 1973 offers both 'Royal Crown' (which flowered for him after -12 degrees F.) and has flowers about 10" across, and 'Rouged Alabaster' with 12" flowers.

The Gloster Arboretum has populations of later crosses made by Gresham, many of which have grown remarkably fast in the six seasons they have been in Mississippi. Many have flowered in the past two seasons. Some may be selected for naming. The Gossler cultivar of *M. campbellii*, 'Hendricks Park' (from Eugene, Oregon) has grown two years at Gloster, but is too small to bloom.

M. grandiflora is much the most popular of American species in England. I did not encounter it in Belgium, where I took one side trip. The tallest *grandiflora* tree I saw was in the R.H.S. gardens at Wisley. There and at a few other places it stood somewhat in the open, but more generally it was planted against buildings or walls, as is usual, too, with *M. delavayi* in southern England. *M. grandiflora* was in bloom in August and September, as were plants of *M. virginiana* in Kew Gardens.

In England, these and other American species very seldom form seeds. Vegetative propagation of *grandiflora* is usual in the nurseries, by layers and

cuttings. 'Exmouth' is the most ancient and popular cultivar. Hillier offers also 'Angustifolia', 'Ferruginea', 'Goliath' and 'Undulata', along with non-cultivar *grandiflora*. 'Baldwin', a Tom Dodd selection from Baldwin County, Alabama, has been offered by Pickard's Magnolia Nursery at Canterbury. Treseders' Nurseries are building up a stock of some other recent American selections.

The English trip was mainly a package tour offered to members of the International Plant Propagators' Society and their relatives. We flew in a chartered TWA plane from New York on August 18, and returned there September 5, 1973. In between, we had ample opportunity to learn much of the southern English countryside, towns, gardens and nurseries, plus English food and some general tourist attractions. On the 19th, the whole 140-strong U.S. and Canadian group saw the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, in the London environs. For the next several days we split into 4 tour groups, busing on different routes. My group, Tour D, led by Richard Martyr, principal of the Pershore College of Horticulture in Worchestershire, went to Stratford via Oxford, Blenheim Palace and some nurseries the first day. The second night's stop, after going through the Cotswolds and seeing more nurseries and Pershore College, was at the hill town of Malvern. From Malvern we crossed the Wye, went into Wales, and came back by the Long Ashton Research Station near Bristol, a leading institution in fruit propagation (chip budding greatly favored), then to Bath in late afternoon. The fourth day, after visiting Stonehenge and various more modern institutions, wound up at Salisbury. We toured back to London, where Mary Nell and I caught a plane to Brussels the next morning, visiting Belgian friends and intensively touring their country (and a little of France) for 3 days while most of the IPPS party went to Amsterdam and saw Dutch horticulture. The whole group, after return to London, toured Exbury Gardens, Waterer's and other nurseries south of London, before attending the 3-day conference of the Great Britain and Ireland Chapter of IPPS, at Berkshire College of Education, near Reading.

PART II.

Highlight of the 1973 British IPPS Conference, for me, was the second day, when we went to the famed Hillier Nurseries and Arboretum near Winchester. Quoting from the preface by Harold R. Fletcher, former keeper of the Edinburgh Royal Botanic Garden, in the 1973 edition, *Hilliers Manual of Trees and Shrubs*:

"Hillier and Sons cultivate, in all some 14,000 different kinds of plants, and gradually these are being incorporated into the Jermyns Gardens and Arboretum at Ampfield near Romsey, which now covers some 85 acres . . . All these plants are named with the care and authority associated with the naming of the plants in the botanic gardens of the country. In fact the Hillier gardens and arboretums do constitute a great British botanical garden - financially unaided by the State, by University, or by City; a botanic garden established by the foresight and enterprise and immense knowledge and capacity for hard work of Harold Hillier."

Wisley was visited before we returned to London, and it is another great horticultural institution, supported by the Royal Horticultural Society.

One item I missed seeing there, on a very hot day for England, was the original *Magnolia* 'Norman Gould', which Hilliers Manual says is "reputedly a colchicine-induced polyploid form of *M. stellata*, resembling that species in general habit and leaf," and with similar white flowers. This clone should be of interest to hybridizers, for its possible use to secure hardy and fertile hybrids with both tetraploid and hexaploid magnolias.

Truro, not far from Land's End, was reached by train on my last long side trip before returning to America. Neil G. Treseder and his wife met us there and were our hosts for two days in Cornwall. Neil's book, which promises to be the most authoritative work on garden magnolias yet produced, is with the publishers in London at this writing.

Cornwall, at least on its south coast, has the nearest English equivalent to the San Francisco climate. In some of the gardens I visited with Neil, there were large coast redwoods and tall tree fern specimens. Caerhays Castle, near the Channel, has the largest and best representatives of some of the more unusual magnolias in England, and of Asian *Rhododendrons*. There, for instance, are numerous original trees, now quite large, of such cultivars as the beautiful *M. campbellii* 'Kew's Surprise' (an intersubspecific hybrid with subsp. *mollicomata*), the type tree of *M. sprengeri* 'Diva', and the recently introduced 'Caerhays Belle', bred there by crossing *M. sargentiana robusta* X *M. s.* 'Diva'. Neil says that 'Caerhays Belle' has even more beautiful flowers than 'Diva'. Unfortunately, in my experience with grafts of it at Urbana, Illinois, it is less hardy than 'Diva' and some other hybrids of 'Diva', but enough hardier than *sargentiana robusta* to promise a good future for it in Zones 7 through 9 in America.

Treseders' Nurseries list of rare magnolias includes some *campbellii* cultivars and several others not propagated by Hillier, among them *M. dawsoniana* 'Chyverton', a red flowered form of this later flowering Chinese species, described as having narrow petalled flowers fading to carmine pink as they mature. 'Chyverton', at Urbana, has been a vigorous grower (top worked on *M. acuminata*) and in the past two springs was uninjured by April freezes that damaged new growth on 'Diva'. I am looking forward to its first flowering in 1975 or later.

F. Julian Williams, current master of Caerhays Castle, and Mrs. Williams have two young sons also interested in horticulture. One is growing Fuchsias, and the other Dahlias. We enjoyed tea with the family at the Castle, after a strenuous tour through the hilly woods of flowering trees and shrubs on another hot, humid day. New plantings are still being made, but open garden space at Caerhays has become scarce.

Other Cornwall gardens contributing cultivars to *M. campbellii* include Lanarth (owned by another branch of the Williams family); Trengwainton (near Penzance) which originated the Trengwainton Pale Form propagated by Treseders' (= 'Handsome Gift?'); and Trewithen. From Lanarth I brought back buds of an unintroduced hybrid between *campbellii* and *soulangiana* which I hope inherits some of the latter parent's hardiness.

I had previously secured a plant import permit, and the inspection formalities were over quickly at the Plant Quarantine room at JFK Airport.