

# The Culture of Camellias

## ARCHIVED ONLINE EXHIBIT

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*An exhibition chiefly from the*  
**Phelps Memorial Collection of Garden Books**

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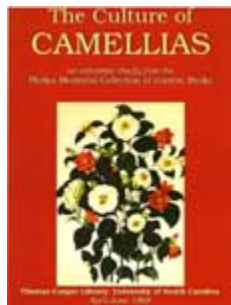
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## INTRODUCTION

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Among the University of South Carolina's hidden treasures is one of the major collections in the United States of rare illustrated books about the camellia, its history, cultivation, and early varieties. The collection was formed by Mrs. Sheffield Phelps (Claudia Lea) of Aiken. Mrs. Phelps was the first president of the Garden Club of South Carolina (1930-33), and her daughter Miss Claudia Lea Phelps succeeded her as the Club's third president (1936-38). The Phelps Memorial Collection of Garden Books was donated to the University by Miss Phelps in 1959 on her mother's death, with additional acquisitions in the 1980s after the dispersal of the Phelps home at Rose Hill, in the centre of Aiken. The Rose Hill gardens were well known for their trees and shrubs, including many camellias. There are camellia varieties named for both Mrs. Phelps and Miss Claudia Lea Phelps.

This exhibition tells the story of how camellias were brought from the Far East in the early 1700s to Europe, and then to America, how they were identified and named, and how the major varieties were developed by 19th-century specialist growers. The exhibit includes some of the very earliest published depictions of the camellia, from as far back as 1702, as well as gorgeous handcolored copperplate engravings from the heyday of camellia books in the early and mid 19th century.

# ISLAND 1: NAMING THE EXOTIC

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## 1 Island 1: Naming the Exotic

### The origins of the name camellia

Georg Joseph Kamel, 1661-1706,  
"Herbarium aliarumque stirpium in insula Luzone Philippinarum,"  
appendix in John Ray, 1627-1705, *Historia plantarum; species hactenus editas insuper multas noviter inventas & descriptas complectens*.  
London: M. Clark, H. Fairthorne, 1686-1704.



The name camellia honors a pioneer botanist in the Far East, a German Jesuit missionary to the Philippines, Georg Kamel, who died in Manila in 1706. Kamel went to neither Japan nor China, and he is unlikely to have "discovered" the camellia. He was, however, well-known in Europe for this work on oriental plants, published as an appendix to a leading British botanist's work in 1704. Recent research has shown that the the plant group was probably first reported and described by a German physician Andreas Cleyer, who had twice visited Japan in the 1680s, with a trade mission in 1682-84 and again in 1685-87. The earliest British information on the plant, probably from dried specimens sent back from Amoy in the 1680s by John Cunningham, was by the botanist James Petiver (1663-1718), in a communication in the Transactions of the Royal Society (1702), where he describes it as "Thea chinensis," and in plate XXXIII of his *Gazophylacii naturae et artis* (1702-1709). Images from several of these camellia pioneers are available through the [International Camellia Society's Camellia Treasury](#).

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### Kaempfer: the Dutch in the Far East

Engelbert Kaempfer, 1651-1716,  
"Tab. XXVIII: the Tea,"  
from *The history of Japan: giving an account of the antient and present state and government of that empire; of its . . . minerals, trees, plants . . . animals . . . and fishes . . . illustrated by many copper plates*. Translated by J. C. Sheuher. 2 vols.  
London: printed for the publisher, 1728. South Carolina College Library, book 2362.



The fullest early account of the plant we now know as the camellia was given by a Dutchman, Engelbert Kaempfer, who lived in Nagasaki in the early 1690s. Kaempfer's *Amoenitates Exoticarum* (1712) gave nearly two-and-a-half pages to the plant, under the Japanese names of *Tsubakki* and *sasanqua*, with accompanying illustrations. Following Kaempfer's death, his specimens and papers were obtained by the British scientist, Sir Hans Sloane, who arranged for this English translation of Kaempfer's *History of Japan*; this plate from the *History* (from the Winyah Indigo Society library, Georgetown, South Carolina) shows the closeness of the camellia to the tea plant.

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### Edwards: the "Chinese Rose" in Lord Petre's Stove-House

George Edwards, 1694-1773,

"Plate 67: The Peacock Pheasant from China [1745],"

from his *A natural history of birds : most of which have not been figur'd or describ'd, and others very little known from obscure or too brief descriptions without figures, or from figures very ill design'd.*

London: Printed for the author, at the College of Physicians in Warwick-Lane, 1743-1751.



This is the first colored engraving of a camellia published in the West, and the first drawn from a living specimen. Edwards's book depicted a series of birds in appropriate settings. The branch on which Edwards has perched this bird is described by him as a "Chinese rose," but is recognizably a *Camellia japonica*. Edwards's accompanying text here describes the Rose (which "I drew from Nature") and recounts that "this beautiful flowering Tree" had been raised "by the late curious and noble Lord Petre, in his Stoves at Thorndon-Hall in Essex." Harold Hume points out that the branch is "of considerable size," so that, if Edwards were drawing "from life," Lord Petre's camellia must have been growing in England for some years prior to publication of this plate in 1745.

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### Japanese vs. Linnean nomenclature

Georg Dionysius Ehtret, 1708-1770,

"Camellia. Tsabekki [1778],"

from Christoph Trew, 1695-1769, *Hortus nittidissimis*, Nuremberg: n.p. [1768-1786].



This plate, based on a watercolor by the German botanical artist Ehret, records a significant transition, using both the original Japanese name *tsabekki* (or *tsubakki*), and the new scientific name *camellia*. In his great *Systema natura* (1735), the Swedish botanist Linnaeus had developed the binomial system of genus and species for the naming of plants. As noted above, the genus *camellia* honors the Jesuit missionary-botanist Georg Kamel (1671-1706), while the species name *japonica* record the first known origin of the plants. Later, other species (notably *sasanqua*) would be identified within the genus.

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### William Curtis's Botanical Magazine, 1788

"No. 42: Camellia Japonica,"

from William Curtis, *The Botanical Magazine; or Flower-Garden Displayed: in which the most ornamental Foreign Plants, cultivated in the open ground, the Green-house, and the Stove, will be accurately represented in their natural colours*, volume II.

London: for W. Curtis, at his Botanic garden, Lambeth-Marsh, 1788.



This is the first detailed handcolored engraving of a single camellia flower. Curtis, a London nursery-man, had recently founded what would become one of the most important botanical and horticultural periodicals of the next fifty years. In his text Curtis notes that "the Camellia

is generally treated as a stove plant , " but it seems "one of the properest plants imaginable for the conservatory," and only "the high price at which it has hitherto been sold" has prevented it being "hazarded" as an outdoor plant like the Magnolia.

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### **The Earl Macartney's Embassy to China, 1792-1794**

"Camellia sasanqua,"

from Sir George Staunton, 1737-1801, *An authentic account of an embassy from the King of Britain to the Emperor of China*, 2 vols., London: G. Nicol, 1797.



In 1792-1794 Staunton, a career diplomat and colonial administrator in the Caribbean and later the East India Company, traveled to Peking in a grand entourage as Earl Macartney's secretary, on the first formal embassy from Britain to the Chinese imperial court. In his 1830 list of camellia varieties, Booth refers to Staunton's illustration and identifies it with the variety called "Lady Banks's Camellia," introduced to Britain in 1811 by Captain Welbank of the East India Company.

## ISLAND 2: CAMELLIA CULTURE—THE EAST INDIA TRADE AND COMMERCIAL HORTICULTURE

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### **Camellias and the U.S.-China trade**

original watercolor, possibly Chinese, late 18th century, headed in ink "John Charnock."

Very little is known about this picture, except that it came to the University from the Phelps home at Rose Hill, when Miss Phelps's estate was dispersed in the 1980s. On first acquisition, it was catalogued as "probably Chinese," with the note that "Mrs. Sheffield Phelps's family, the Leas, had been involved in the China trade from Philadelphia in the early 19th century and it is possible that this painting descended in her family." Recent rematting has exposed the ink name at the head of the picture, though whether this was the painter or owner is unknown.

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### **Redouté: Camellias in Revolutionary France**

Pierre Joseph Redouté, 1759-1840,  
"Gordonia pubescens,"  
from his *Jardin de Malmaison*,  
Paris, 1803.



Redouté, originally a painter of stage scenery from Luxembourg, first studied the flowers at the Jardin de Malmaison in the mid-1780s, contributing illustrations to L'Heritier's *Stirpes Novae* in 1784-1785 and then moving to London, where he learned new techniques deployed in this later publication. This plate of the distinct species *Camellia Gordonia*, which had been mounted on a very acidic card backing, has recently been given initial treatment by Thomas Cooper Library's Preservation Department.

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### **The East India Company, 1: Captain Rawes**

"*Camellia reticulata*: Captain Rawes's Camellia,"  
from *The Botanical Magazine, New Series*, Vol.I, 1827



The early camellia varieties in Britain were all imports from the Far East, brought back by naval or merchant ships as exotic gifts for family or friends. The species shown here was imported by Captain Richard Rawes of the East India Company in 1820 for a relative, Thomas Carey Palmer, Esq., of Bromley, Kent, who had his own conservatory. The first published description, by John Lindley in the *Botanical Register*, considered *reticulata* a distinct species, separate from the *japonica*. Because the only specimen was still in private hands, the two Curtis daughters, who painted this picture for

their father's magazine, filled out details from the better-known *Waratah* and single red camellias.

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### **The East India Company, 2: Variegata**

"Camellia japonica variegata,"

from William Beattie Booth, 1804?-1874; Alfred Chandler, 1804-1896, *Illustrations and descriptions of the plants which compose the natural order Camellieae: and of the varieties of Camellia japonica cultivated in the gardens of Great Britain*.

London: J. and A. Arch, 1830-31. Issued in parts (original printed wrappers bound in).



This "Double-striped camellia," variegata, was one of the first double camellias to reach Britain, and it too illustrates the connection of camellia developments with the East India trade. It was brought back in 1792 by another of the East India Company's captains for "the late John Slater, Esq.," who worked in the Company's London headquarters, India House.

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### **Kew Gardens and the Horticultural Society**

William Beattie Booth, 1804?-1874

"History and description of the Species of Camellia . . . that have been imported from China," in *Transactions of the Horticultural Society*, 7 (1830).



This paper, read to Sir Joseph Banks's Horticultural Society in two sessions in August and September 1829, is a landmark in formal recognition of the camellia, listing six species and twenty-three different varieties. Landed gentry were usually elected fellows of the society, while their head gardeners might aspire to become "corresponding members," and send in reports without attending meetings. Booth was described in the headnote simply as "Garden Clerk."

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### **Cultivating the Exotic in an English Climate: Greenhouse Development**

John Claudius Loudon, 1783-1843,

*The Green-house Companion . . . with a natural arrangement of the principal green-house plants*. 3rd ed.

London: Whittaker, Treacher, 1832.



Through at least the 1820s, the camellia was treated as too exotic for the British climate. Greenhouses with stoves were first introduced in Britain in the seventeenth century. The steady expansion of British activity overseas (in Asia, Australia, and the two Americas) brought home thousands of new and exotic plants. Aristocratic patronage led to development of greenhouses and sun-warmed conservatories, such as these from Loudon's standard book (originally published in 1824); eventually quite modest Victorian suburban villas might boast a "conservatory," often an arch or cone-topped octagon with Gothick woodwork, derived from the more ambitious designs reproduced here. Loudon's

frontispiece shows two varieties of *camellia japonica*, both imports: the red *waratah*, *oranemoneflora* (imported in 1806) and the white Lady Hume's Blush, though in the text the author noted that "New varieties are continually originating, by the nurserymen and other growers, from seeds." It took several years for a new hybrid to flower and reach the dignity of recognition, a name and illustration.

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### The Greatest of Camellia Books

Clara Maria Pope, illus.,  
"Plate 1: Single White, Single Red, Sasanqua,"  
from Samuel Curtis, 1779-1860, *A monograph on the genus Camellia*.  
London: J. & A. Arch, 1819.



This large (though slim) volume is generally recognized as the greatest of English illustrated camellia books. As the [title-page](#) indicates, the author of the text drew the major credit, though the volume is now treasured chiefly for its stunning illustrations. Samuel Curtis was a cousin of William Curtis (of the *Botanical Magazine*), married William's adopted daughter, and for a while edited the magazine. He eventually moved to Jersey, to a warmer climate, to pursue his interest in raising camellias. Clara Maria [Leigh Wheatley] Pope, the daughter of one artist and wife of two others, first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1796, beginning with miniatures and renderings of nursery-tale characters. In her later career, she was primarily known for her flower pictures, shown at the Academy regularly from 1816 until her death in 1838.

Curtis's [preliminary table](#) could list only twenty-nine camellia varieties as known in 1819, and of those four of Captain Rawes's recent imports could not be described, because they had not yet bloomed. Pope's five hand-colored plates, each measuring 27.5 x 22 ins., included eleven of these varieties:

- I. Single red, single white, sasanqua.
- II. Double white, double striped.
- III. Pompone or Kew blush, double red.
- IV. Anemone flower'd or waratah, rose colored or Middlemist's camellia.
- V. Buff or Hume's blush, myrtle-leaved camellia.

Alongside plates I and III are displayed delicate uncolored proof copies of the original aquatints, also from the Phelps family collection at Rose Hill.



## ISLAND 3: BRITISH IMPORTS AND VARIATIONS

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### Enter the Nurserymen, 1

"No. 2047: *Camellia Axillaris*,"

from John Sims, *Curtis's Botanical Magazine; or Flower-Garden Displayed: in which the most ornamental Foreign Plants, cultivated in the open ground, the Green-house, and the Stove, are accurately represented in their natural colours*, volume 46 [n.s. 4]

London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1819.

This import, brought back from China by a Mr. Roberts, was a sign of the future of camellia-growing: Roberts had given it, not to a friend or relative, but to a commercial nursery, in Fulham, then on the London outskirts.

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### Enter the Nurserymen, 2: Cultivating Variety

"*Camellia Chandlerii*,"

from Edward Bourne Buckingham; Alfred Chandler, 1804-1896, illus.,  
*Camellia Britannica*.

London: Sherwood, Gilbert, & Piper, 1825. Library label of Henry Wood, Lewisham.



This beautifully-produced book was essentially a sales catalogue for Alfred Chandler's Vauxhall nursery. The seven new varieties illustrated were all seedlings of the *anemoneflora orwaratah*, which had been planted in 1819 and flowered for the first time in 1824-25. Shown here is Chandler's greatest prize, that he named after himself, though he soon followed with other varieties such as *Chandlerii elegans*.

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### Enter the Nurserymen, 3: Loddiges and the *Botanical Cabinet*

[Edward William Cooke or Jane Loddiges?],

"*Camellia japonica incarnata*," from Conrad Loddiges & sons,

*The botanical cabinet, consisting of coloured delineations of plants, from all countries, with a short account of each, directions for management, &c, &c.*, vol. 2 (1817).

London: J. & A. Arch [etc.].



The letter reproduced here explains one of the most intriguing recent additions to Thomas Cooper Library's garden book collection, a set of early-19th century original drawings and hand-colored proof engravings. They had been passed down to the writer, Bernard Cooke, from his grandfather, Edward Cooke, son-in-law of the team of a London nurseryman and botanical publisher Conrad Loddiges. Happily the four volumes recently offered to the library by a dealer included the sequence A-COR, with the camellia illustrations, by Edward William Cooke and Jane Loddiges.

Shown here is an original water-color for an early volume of Loddiges's *Botanical Cabinet* (1817-1833), alongside the equivalent engraving (reversed) from the magazine. In his text, Loddiges suggests that camellias were still a new phenomenon, entering "the

greenhouses of Europe" in profusion only "within the last fifteen years." *Incarnata* had been imported from China as recently as 1806, for Sir Abraham and Lady Amelia Hume, of Wortlebury, Hertfordshire, and named Lady Hume's Blush from a faint pink tinge between its petals.

**Loddiges's series** ran for sixteen years, eventually totalling over 2000 handcolored plates of different plant varieties, most from their own nurseries at Hackney, near London. The close overlap between horticultural knowledge and commercial self-promotion is shown by the 51-page *Catalogue of plants which are sold by Conrad Loddiges & sons, nursery and seedsmen*, bound into the end of this volume, offering eleven varieties of camellia japonica.

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#### Enter the Nurserymen, 4: Two Guides for Home Gardeners

Charles McIntosh, 1794-1864,

*The Greenhouse, Hothouse, and Stove*. New ed. London: William S. Orr, 1840 [engraved title: 1838].

Shown with: Robert Tyas, 1811-1879, *Popular flowers. The camellia: its propagation, cultivation, and general treatment, in all seasons: to which is added, a select list of favourite varieties*. 4th edition.

London: R. Tyas, 1843. Disbound: modern wrappers.



The small-format book and even more modest pamphlet shown here indicate the spread of the 19th century English camellia craze from wealthy patrons to hardworked suburban gardeners and humbler fans. Both offer practical advice on propagating and protecting camellias. *Donckelarii*, introduced from the East in the early 1830s, was named in honor of the chief gardener at the Louvain Botanical Garden. Tyas copes without a greenhouse, advising readers to bring their plants indoors (where the temperature he notes will be 55 to 60 degrees).

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#### Enter the Nurserymen, 5: Growing Camellias Outdoors

"Camellia japonica Fordii, or Mr. Ford's Camellia,"  
from *Paxton's Magazine of Botany*, vol. 2 (1841).



This beautiful foldout plate shows one of the varieties raised from seed in the warmer West of England. It was named for the man who first raised it, William Ford, by his relatives, Lucombe and Pince, of Exeter, who were nurserymen in Exeter. The editor of this magazine, Joseph Paxton, was head gardener to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth House. It was Paxton's **huge greenhouse at Chatsworth** that inspired his innovative design of a "Crystal Palace" to house Prince Albert's Great Exhibition in 1851. On Mr. Ford's Camellia, Paxton commented that "It is highly pleasing thus to find our native varieties rivalling any of those imported from China."

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### **A Victorian guide to early camellia imports from the East**

From Jane Loudon, 1807-1858,

*The ladies' flower-garden of ornamental greenhouse plants*. 2nd edition.

London: W. S. Orr, [1849].



In this plate, Mrs. Loudon shows three varieties of camellia with the related *Thea viridis* (green tea). The oleifera or oil-bearing camellia may have been first brought to Europe from China on the return of Lord Macartney's embassy in the 1790s, but was reintroduced in 1820 by Captain Nesbitt of the East India Company for the Horticultural Society. *C. Maliflora*, like *reticulata* four years later, had been imported in 1816 by Captain Rawes for Mr. Palmer of Bromley, though it was soon distributed by a commercial nurseryman Mr. Lee. *Thea viridis* had been established in Europe by Linnaeus himself in 1763, in his Botanic garden at Uppsala in Sweden, and was brought thence to Britain in 1768.

## ISLAND 4

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### 2 Island 4: Berlèse's Iconographie and Nouvelle Iconographie

#### The first great European camellia book: the Baumanns

"Camellia rubra plena,"

from Carl Baumann; Napoléon Baumann,

*Bollweilerer Camellien-Sammlung dem ... A.P. de Candolle*. 4 parts in 1.

Bollweiler: [s.n.], 1828-35.



The *rubra plena* or double red camellia had first been imported to Britain in 1794 by Sir Robert Preston. This book shows the spread of the camellia craze from Britain to France and Germany. The German-speaking Baumann brothers illustrated 49 different varieties that they had grown at their nursery at Bollweiler, in the upper Rhine area of France, and this work appeared in both German and French editions.

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#### Classifying camellia varieties: the Abbé Berlèse

Lorenzo Berlèse, 1784-1863, "Tableau synoptique du couleurs du genre Camellia,"

from his *Monographie du genre Camellia: . . dans l'autre sont peintes, en deux gammes ascendants, les nuances des couleurs propres aux Camellia connus, avec leurs dénominations spécifiques*. 2nd edition. [Paris]: L. Bouchard-Huzard, 1840.

shown with "Anemoneforme: Camellia Chandlerii elegans," from Berlèse, *Monographie du genre Camellia : traité complet sur sa culture avec la description et la classification de chaque variété*. 3rd edition.

Paris: Chez H. Cousin, 1845.



The Abbé Berlese (1784-1863) was the greatest camellia scholar of the nineteenth century. Though he was born and died in Italy, Berlese carried out his magisterial studies in Paris, where his private wealth allowed him to establish his own greenhouses. The first edition of this book, published in 1837, began to establish a formal classification system for camellia varieties. His first classification efforts focused on color, not flower-form, and one of the biggest problems in color-description in the 19th century was that expensive engraved books were handcolored, with inevitable variations of shade or tint. **The color chart** from his second edition was Berlese's ultimately-doomed attempt to provide a single standard for color descriptions.

By his third edition, Berlese based his developed **classification system** on flower-form. This plate is one of seven illustrating the main flower shapes that European growers had developed. Alfred Chandler's *Chandlerii elegans* had first been described in the catalogue he did with William Booth in 1831. By this third edition, Berlese was listing 701 varieties.

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#### Berlèse's Iconographie



J.J. Jung, illus.,

"Camellia Mazeppa,"

from Lorenzo Berlèse, 1784-1863 *Iconographie du genre Camellia; ou, Description et figures des camellia les plus beaux et les plus rares: peints d'après nature*. 3 vols.

Paris: Chez H. Cousin, 1841-43.

One of the Abbé Berlese's most influential projects was the huge three-volume set of camellia illustrations, the *Iconographie*, covering 300 varieties, that he initiated with J.J. Jung in 1841. The early history of the camellia, its importation from the East, and its association with aristocratic patronage, contrasts sharply with the flower's increasingly raffish social connotations in nineteenth-century France. The variety shown here was named for the hero of one of Lord Byron's poems. Perhaps the best-known literary reference to camellias is Alexander Dumas's *La dame aux camélias* (1849), the basis for Verdi's opera *La Traviata* (1853). Soon after the completion of this work, in 1846, the Abbe himself abandoned camellias; in 1846, quite unexpectedly, he sold off the whole of his huge camellia collection to a commercial garden enterprise, gave up the studies that had made him famous, and returned to Italy.

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### The camellia in Italy

Luigi Colla, 1766-1848,

*Camelliografia, ossia, Tentativo di una nuova disposizione naturale della variet... della camellia del Giappone e loro descrizione*.

Torino: G. Pomba, 1843.



Parts of Italy were ideal for growing camellias, and this is one of the earliest Italian camellia books. The two plates here, the only illustrations in the volume, illustrate the parts of the flower used to distinguish varieties, and the stages of fruit, seed and germination.

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### The center of 19th century European camellia development

"Vue d'une partie de l'Etablissement horticole d' Amb. Verschaffelt,"

from *L'Illustration Horticole, Journal Special des Serres et des Jardins*, vol. 1 (1854).

Gand: Imprimerie et Lithographie de F. et E. Gyselynck.



This illustration of the Verschaffelt nursery greenhouses, in Belgium, from another long-running Verschaffelt periodical series, shows graphically the huge horticultural industry that grew up in the 19th century to meet the constant demand for new varieties of flowers and shrubs. The firm had been founded in 1825 by the grandfather Alexandre, who was succeeded by his son and grandson, both named Ambroise.

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### The Verschaffelts: European camellia illustration after Berlèse

"Camellia Principessa Rospigliosi,"

from Ambroise Alexandre Verschaffelt, 1825-1886, ed.,



*Nouvelle iconographie des camellias: contenant les figures et la description des plus rares, des plus nouvelles et des plus belles variétés de ce genre.* Vol. 4 (1853). 13 vols.  
Gand: Verschaffelt, 1848-60.

Continuing Berlèse's work in his huge *Iconographie* was this much more manageable (but much longer-running) series, the *Nouvelle Iconographie*, issued in monthly parts by a major Belgian nursery, Verschaffelts.

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### **Naming camellias for the heroes of European nationalism**



"Camellia Kossuth,"

from Ambroise Alexandre Verschaffelt, 1825-1886, ed.,

*Nouvelle iconographie des camellias: contenant les figures et la description des plus rares, des plus nouvelles et des plus belles variétés de ce genre.* 13 vols. Gand: Verschaffelt, 1848-60. Vol.6 (1857)

While the majority of early 19th century camellia varieties were named for aristocratic patrons or commercial growers, a feature of the years after 1848, the year of nationalist revolutions, is the naming of a new variety after a national hero or leader. The Verschaffelts' varieties included, for instance, one named for the Italian nationalist hero, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Louis or Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894) was the patriot leader who had fought in vain for Hungarian independence in 1848.

## ISLAND 5

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### 3 Island 5: Camellias in America

#### **An American grower's guide from the early 19th century**

Herman Bourne,

*Flores poetici. The Florist's Manual, being an introduction . . . for cultivators of flowers.*

Boston: Munroe and Francis; New York: Charles F. Francis, 1833. Alfred Chapin Rogers Collection.



American camellia-growing at first centered on New York, where several nurseries vied to have the largest selection available (as Bourne makes clear in his description of William Prince's Linnean Botanic Garden). The co-publisher attests to an increasing interest centered also on Boston, where the grower Hovey was working. Bourne's interpretation of the language of camellias is "Unpretending excellence."

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#### **A Philadelphia Camellia Grower in the 1850s**

Philadelphia: P.S.Duval [1857].



This engraving shows the impressive nursery of one of several Philadelphia growers, MacKenzie, on Camellia Place. Other 19th century American growers of Scottish background included Thomas Hogg and Robert Buist. Mrs. Phelps's family, the Leas, came from Philadelphia, which may account for the presence of this separate plate in the collection.

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#### **American camellias and American cities**

"Camellia Triumph of Philadelphia,"

from Ambroise Alexandre Verschaffelt, 1825-1886, ed.,

*Nouvelle iconographie des camellias: contenant les figures et la description des plus rares, des plus nouvelles et des plus belles variétés de ce genre.* Vol.9 (1860)



Along with New York and Boston, Philadelphia was a center for the American camellia craze in the mid-19th century. Several of the earlier American varieties were named for cities or towns, often in excruciating Latin derivatives (*Camellia japonica novaboraci*, for instance, honored New York).

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#### **Naming camellias for American heroes**

"Camellia Washingtonii,"

from Ambroise Alexandre Verschaffelt, 1825-1886, ed.,



*Nouvelle iconographie des camellias: contenant les figures et la description des plus rares, des plus nouvelles et des plus belles variétés de ce genre. Vol.1 (1848)*

Other American varieties paralleled the European growers in honoring national heroes. Indeed the variety shown here was only one of three camellias named for George Washington, two red and one white. In his 1838 catalogue, the New York camellia grower Michael Floy could list alongside *Washingtoni* and *Jeffersoni* (and of course *Floyi*), *Franklinii*, *Jacksoni* (also called *Landrethi* after its first grower), and even *Clintonia*. This plate is from the second major European camellia series, produced by the Belgian camellia growers the Verschaffelt family.

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### What are camellias saying in the language of flowers?



Catherine Waterman, b. 1812,  
*Flora's Lexicon: an interpretation of the language and sentiment of flowers, with an outline of botany.*  
Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1852.

Nineteenth-century flirtation affected to see a distinctive coded meaning in every flower. Waterman's often-reprinted giftbook (the library also has an edition of 1842) puts a better spin on the camellia than some other guides, which interpret it as "Indecision in love."

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### Camellias in antebellum South Carolina



Mary Catherine Rion, 1826-1901,  
*Ladies' Southern Florist.* 2nd ed.  
Columbia, SC: Peter B. Glass, 1860. Inscribed by the publisher.

The Southern climate allowed the camellia to be grown outdoors, rather than under glass. It is traditionally claimed to have been introduced into South Carolina as early as 1786, by Andre Michaux, when he visited Middleton Place, near Charleston. Certainly, one of the Philadelphia growers, David Landreth, established a branch in Charleston from 1818 till 1862, and several other growers were based there. The camellias at Magnolia Gardens were introduced in 1848 by the Rev. John Grimke Drayton, who eventually had 300 varieties. A major area nursery was established in 1859 at Augusta, by a Belgian grower P.J. Berckmans.

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### Harold Hume and the Phelps Collection



"Camellia japonica Claudia Lea,"  
from H. Harold Hume, *Camellias in America.*  
Harrisburg, PA: McFarland, 1946.

The collection of garden books displayed here was built up and donated to the university by Mrs. Sheffield (Claudia Lea) Phelps and Miss Claudia Lea Phelps of Rose Hill, Aiken, SC.



The standard history from the American camellia revival of the 1940s, by Harold Hume, was based in part on the Phelps books. Hume knew Mrs. Phelps and included the variety named for her, introduced by an Augusta grower in 1939, which is a delicate pink color. Ten years later, in 1949, another Augusta nursery introduced a second variety named for the Phelpses, the Claudia Lea Phelps, larger, and pinker, though splashed with white. Shown with the Claudia Lea from Hume's book is Miss Phelps's locally-printed guide, *A camellia note book*, illustrated by D. T. Waring [Augusta, Ga. : Walton, ?1940], which reprinted several of her own short articles on the history of camellias from the *Bulletin of the Garden Club of America*, together with *a simple guide to camellia classification* and varieties.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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### Some web resources on camellias and camellia history:

- [The American Camellia Society](#)
  - [The International Camellia Society](#) including the ICS Camellia Treasury of historic camellia images
  - [Who was Captain Welbank](#)
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### Print resources on camellias consulted for this project:

George Graves, "Verschaffelt's *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias*," pp. 167-177, in *The American Camellia Yearbook 1978*, Fort Valley, GA: America Camellia Society, 1978.

Blanche Henrey, *British Botanical and Horticultural Literature before 1800*, 3 vols., London: Oxford University Press, 1975.

William Hertrich, *Camellias in the Huntington Gardens*, San Marino, CA: Huntington Botanical Gardens, 1954.

H. Harold Hume, *Camellias in America*, Harrisburg, PA: J. Horace McFarland, 1946.  
--Part I, "Historical," includes chapters on the importation of camellias from Asia to Europe and on early American camellia growers, while part IV, ch. 23, gives an annotated bibliography of camellia literature. In his preface, Dr. Hume acknowledges the help he had received from Mrs. Sheffield Phelps.

Hume, "Camellia History from Petiver to Linnaeus," pp. 3-7, in *The American Camellia Yearbook 1946*, Gainesville, FL: America Camellia Society, 1946.

Hume, "Kamel-Kaempfer-Linnaeus," pp. 259-264, in *The American Camellia Yearbook 1952*, Gainesville, FL: America Camellia Society, 1952.

Roger Mortimer, *Camellias: an exhibit of XIXth Century Books*, Columbia, SC: Thomas Cooper Library, 1986.

Claudia Lea Phelps, "A short history of camellias," pp. 39-44, in her *A camellia note book*, [Augusta, Ga.: Walton, ?1940].

--especially useful because based on the Phelps Collection books.

[Davy-Jo Stribling Ridge], *The Memorial Collection of Garden Books of Mrs. Sheffield Phelps and Miss Claudia Lea Phelps*, [Columbia, SC: McKissick Memorial Library, 1960].  
--this listing covers all aspects of the collection, not only the camellia books.

Patrick Scott, *The Culture of Camellias: an exhibit chiefly from the Phelps Memorial Collection*, Columbia, SC: Thomas Cooper Library, 1999.

--the full text of the slightly more extensive exhibit on which this site was based.

E.T.H. Shaffer, *Carolina Gardens*, Garden Club Edition, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1939.

--Aiken and Rose Hill on pp. 195-203.

James Stokes, "Early Occidental Camelliana, Part II: Camellia descriptions prior to 1695," pp. 264-283, in *The American Camellia Yearbook 1952*, Gainesville, FL: America Camellia Society, 1952.

Allan Stevenson, *Catalogue of Botanical Works in the Collection of Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt*, 2 vols [3 parts], Pittsburgh: Hunt Botanical Library, 1961.