THE LAND IN ‘HER NATURAL DRESS’

Explorers and naturalists like Mark Catesby, John and William Bartram, and John Lawson visited North Carolina during the 18th century in search of plants and animals for their wealthy patrons in Europe, who were eager for the newest, exotic specimens from the New World. Lawson, who helped Christopher von Graffenried found the town of New Bern, wrote “A New Voyage to Carolina,” which was the first natural history of the colony. The plants found in North Carolina by these explorers like cinnamon (Cinnamomum albidum) and blue lobelia ( Lobelia siphilitica) were promoted as wonder drugs but failed to live up to the promise, while others like butterfly weed (Asclepias tuberosa) were used in collectively treat pleurisy, a serious lung disease common in the 18th century.

BUILDING THE GARDENS

A lack of historical and archaeological evidence for the original Palace gardens created a challenge during Tryon Palace’s restoration in the 1950s. Landscape architect Mosely Williams agreed, “to create an appropriate setting for the handsome Georgian brick mansion by having gardens constructed and planted like those which flourished from 1790 to 1770 at comparable estates in Great Britain.” Williams tried to balance the ideas of accurate restoration with the desire to create an aesthetically pleasing garden for the modern visitor. The result is a garden that has an essentially 18th-century flavor.

HERITAGE PLANT SALES

The popular Heritage Plant Sale held each spring and fall draws crowds of garden lovers every year when the Tryon Palace Gardens are free and open to the public. The plant sale allows buyers to speak with Tryon Palace gardeners and volunteers before purchasing any of the unique and rare plants on display.

CULTIVATING THE PAST

Governor Tryon expressed little interest in horticulture and made only a few references to gardens in his letters. Two maps of New Bern drawn while the Palace was under construction in 1769 reveal two different garden plans. In 1783 Palace architect John Hawks gave plans of the Palace gardens to Venezuelan traveler Francisco de Miranda, who was in New Bern, as part of his tour of the newly formed United States.

It was not until 1991 that Tryon Palace researchers discovered the garden plan in the collections of the Academia Nacional de la Historia in Venezuela. The plans for the gardens suggest a strong French influence.

TRYON PALACE RESTORATION

Mosely Williams

Mosely Williams, a native of Canada, and former member of the faculty of Harvard University and North Carolina State University, designed the existing gardens during the restoration of Tryon Palace in the beginning of the 1950s.

Having assisted in the restoration of the gardens at Mount Vernon and Stratford Hall, he was considered an expert in 18th century landscape.
The grandeur of the Palace roomed before visitors as they crossed the front gates and take a walk back in time along the marbled entrance avenues surrounded by expansive lawns.

The wilderness garden is an important source of food for early colonists that produced various seasonal vegetables for the household as well as herbs for cooking, fragrances, and medicinal purposes. Larger crops like corn would have been grown in neighboring fields. Observing the abundant fruits of the land, in 1763 Tryon noted, "Peaches, Nectar Figs and Plums are in perfection, and of good Sorts."

Honoring Tryon Palace benefactors Mr. and Mrs. John K. Kellenberger, this walled garden is an example of an 18th-century ornamental layout in which plants were grown for their decorative qualities. Through Tryon was not always to have such a garden, it reflects the more formal gardens popular in other colonies.

This formal garden, designed in the style of a 19th-century English garden, is named in honor of one of the original leaders of Tryon Palace restoration, Robert B. Marlin. It features boxwood hedges that define the flower beds. Statues representing all four seasons line the west wall of the garden, which is seasonally planted with spring bulbs, summer annuals, and autumn chrysanthemums. Tulips and yarrow were part of colonial landscapes. Many plants featured in the Latham Garden like chrysanthemums and crane fly grass (Empodisma indica) were not.

A town garden of brick walls edged with clipped boxwood (Buxus sempervirens) was created for the homes in 1791 which was relocated to its current location in 1866. The two reproduction summer houses in the rear garden are built on structures that appear in an 1862 drawing of the Stanly House and would have been used for a shady escape from the summer heat.

In honor of Gertrude Swann Carraway, who was one of the leaders of Tryon Palace's restoration, this garden was named. The garden is a collection of rare perennials and herbaceous plants selected for their attractive foliage and flower color.

This example of an early 19th-century urban garden includes a swept yard, flower bed, and plants that could be used in the kitchen and for other practical purposes, which was common for a middle-class family of that period. Seasonal hours.