

**THE INFLUENCE OF THOMAS MEEHAN
ON HORTICULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES**

by

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ABSTRACT

Thomas Meehan (1826-1901) was a regular contributor to the ever-expanding body of knowledge about plants in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Born in London, but raised on an estate on the Isle of Wight where his father was Head Gardener, Meehan's interest in plants began at an early age. He studied at the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew. His fifty-three year career was launched in the United States by Robert Buist, a Philadelphia nurseryman. Meehan went on to start his own nursery, edit two successful gardening periodicals, write three books, and publish numerous articles on plants for both the scientific elite and the common man.

This thesis documents Thomas Meehan's work as a horticulturist in the United States and evaluates the influence of his work. Areas of study include his early work as a gardener, his nursery, his career as an editor and writer, his involvement with the Centennial Exposition, and his efforts to create city parks. Due to the nature of his work, Meehan's sphere of influence extended well beyond the immediate Philadelphia area. While his publications garnered a national audience which spread across the country, his nursery supplied an international clientele. Through city parks and exhibits at the Centennial, Meehan again reached both national and international audiences.

The common thread which binds Meehan's many interests together is the quest for knowledge and the commitment to share that knowledge with others. In every endeavor, Meehan was able to communicate his passion for plants, whether it be through the distribution of new plants from his nursery, editorials in his magazines, or the creation of city parks as a place to enjoy nature.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I begin to feel more strongly everyday that life is not worth living unless we can add some little to human knowledge with every day that goes over us.

Thomas Meehan to George Englemann, 26 January 1883¹

By these words, Thomas Meehan (1826-1901) ordered his world. In his lifelong search for knowledge, Meehan examined the intricacies of the plant kingdom, sharing his discoveries with both the scientific elite and the common man. His influence on horticulture in the United States was broad-spreading, reflecting his varied interests and talents. Meehan's horticultural contributions as an author, editor, gardener, and nurseryman spanned a fifty-three year period. His interest in plants led him to discover them in their native habitats, describe them in scientific and popular journals, introduce them at his nursery, and cultivate them in the garden. Yet despite Meehan's accomplishments, few have taken the time to study his remarkable career. Historians of American horticulture value the information recorded in the periodicals he edited, yet have not evaluated their impact. His nursery, founded in 1854, is given even less interest, yet was praised by contemporaries as one of the finest in the country. Despite having been described as "cut[ting] across all our fields like a shaft of light,"² Meehan is

accorded surprisingly little credit in historical treatises in the fields of botany, forestry, floriculture, city planning, and landscape gardening.

The focus of this thesis is to document Meehan's work as a horticulturist in the United States, and to evaluate the influence of his work. Areas of study include his early work as a gardener, his nursery, his career as an editor and writer, his involvement in the Centennial Exposition, and his efforts to create city parks. His other interests will be outlined briefly to give a picture of the total man.

At the beginning of his career, Meehan worked for some of the best-known and influential men at the finest horticultural establishments in the country: Robert Buist of Rosedale Nursery, Caleb Cope of Springbrook, and Andrew Eastwick of Bartram's Garden. By the end of his career, he was one of the best-known and influential men in the field of horticulture, widely respected by both colleagues and customers.³

Meehan was fortunate to settle in Philadelphia, which was in the early- and mid-nineteenth century the center of scientific thought in the United States. He valued his both the city and its inhabitants, writing that he found:

men who, anxious to excel in the arts and sciences, not only follow gardening as a pleasure, but as an enjoyment which, at the same time, brightens and quickens their intellectual part. In our good city of Philadelphia, there is scarcely an exception to the rule, that all the chief men of excellence in the arts and sciences, and also distinguished as horticulturists. We have no doubt the same rule prevails everywhere, for why should it not?⁴

Meehan quickly became an active member of the scientific community. By February 1850, less than two years after emigrating from England, he was a member of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, the oldest horticultural society in the country, where he eventually held the office of Corresponding Secretary. Meehan was elected a

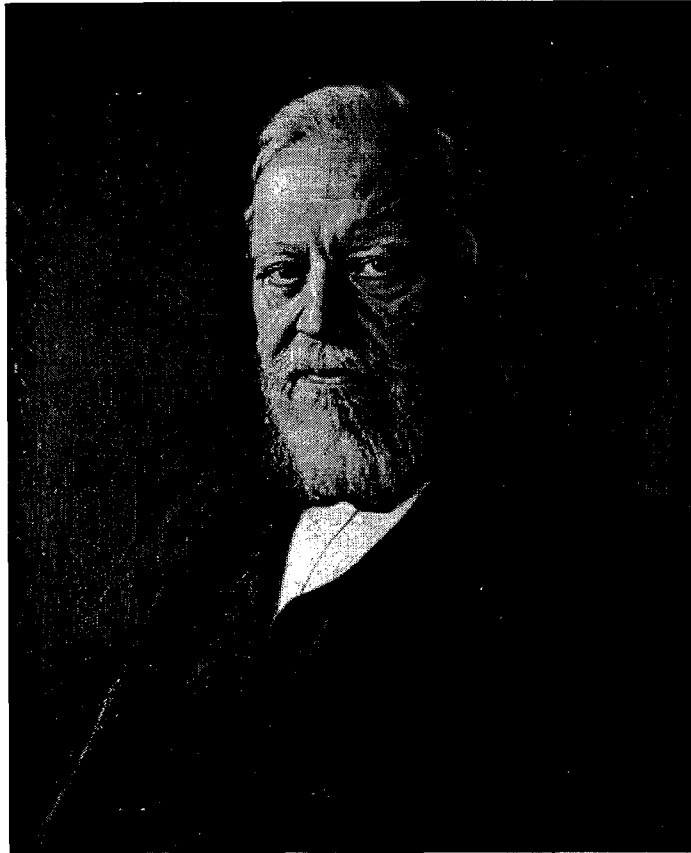


Figure 1 Thomas Meehan
Courtesy of the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation

member of the Academy of Natural Sciences, where he played an active role as Botanist, ordering the herbarium and as Vice-President. Although offered the Presidency, he declined because of his other work. Meehan was an early Fellow of the Association for the Advancement of Sciences. He was also a founding member of the Pennsylvania Botanical Society. The Governor of Pennsylvania appointed him State Botanist.⁵ The sheer number of Meehan's affiliations is staggering, and yet, he was an active member of

the above organizations, even while running a nursery and editing a horticultural journal.

His long career is fruitful ground, ripe for study, not only for the horticulturist, but the botanist as well.

Much of the information gathered for this thesis comes directly from Meehan himself, through his articles, books, and letters. While his personal papers are lost, the public man is very much in evidence.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹ Thomas Meehan to George Englemann, 26 January 1883, George Englemann Papers: Correspondence, Archives, The Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis, Missouri.

² Leighton, Anne, *American Gardens of the 19th Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 77.

³ Jellett, Edwin C. *Gardens and Gardeners of Germantown, An Address before the Site and Relic Society of Germantown* (Germantown: Horace McMann, 1914), 303.

⁴ Meehan, Thomas, ed., *The Gardeners Monthly* (Philadelphia: Charles Marot) February 1865, 50.

⁵ Bailey, L.H., "Thomas Meehan," *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1909), 595-596.

CHAPTER 2

LIFE IN ENGLAND

Family History

Thomas Meehan was born with a love for plants in his blood. His father, Edward Meehan was an estate gardener for Colonel and Lady Catherine Vernon Harcourt at St. Clare, Ryde, the Isle of White. At an early age, Edward was apprenticed as a gardener at Dublin Castle, in the establishment of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. From a subsequent employer he received the following recommendation:

Edward Meehan, has worked under my inspection for five months...during which time, he behaved himself extremely diligent, perfectly sober, and most strictly honest, and he now leaves me at his own request as he wishes to go to England to improve himself.¹

Edward possibly applied for work at Watson's nursery at St. Albans, near Potter's Bar, where he met and married Sarah Denham. Edward took a position with Oxely and Bunney's Nursery at Ball's Park, Islington. The young couple lived with or close to Sarah's parents, for their eldest son, Thomas, was born at Potter's Bar on 21 March 1826.²

When Thomas was five, his parents and two siblings moved to the Isle of Wight. Edward laid out the gardens at West Ridge, the estate of John Young, Esq. In 1838

Edward planned the gardens of Sir Francis Vernon and Lady Catherine Harcourt at St. Clare Castle. Edward Meehan remained at St. Clare until his death in 1882.

Thomas Meehan and his four brothers seemed destined to follow their father in careers in horticulture. Charles, the youngest, remained in England, and the other four emigrated to the United States. Thomas Meehan emigrated in 1848, coming to Philadelphia where he became a successful nurseryman and editor. Joseph Meehan worked as a gardener, and later ran the nursery in Germantown, near Philadelphia, when Thomas was away. Edward Meehan worked at his brother's nursery as superintendent.

William Meehan moved to California. He worked:

for a Gentleman here at Maryville [Yuba County, California] for fifty dollars per month...My work is mostly nursery work. I have grafted this winter about twelve thousand trees and shall bud this season six thousand more.³

Charles Meehan succeeded his father as head gardener at St. Clare. In a letter dated 1892

Charles wrote to his brother Thomas that

I have no doubt that Joe has told you that my position here is not altogether a pleasant one. The owner of the place (Sir Francis' brother) is very poor... I can see the place deteriorating all the time and it grieves me greatly.⁴

Of Meehan's six sisters, two, Sarah and Mary, emigrated to the United States with their brother Edward. The other four, Martha, Ellen, Elizabeth, and the youngest, Theresa, remained in England.⁵

Education and Training

Meehan's rudimentary schooling was provided by his mother. At age ten he attended school, but two years later went to work for his father at St. Clare. During this

period, Meehan continued his studies, allying himself with other young men who pursued a scheme of self-education in ancient and modern languages, mathematics, and chemistry. He learned the Linnean system of botany and subscribed to horticultural periodicals. Writing was an early hobby; Meehan's first paper was published when he was twelve years old. At the age of fifteen, Meehan wrote a scientific paper about the stamens of *Portulaca*. He also bred the first hybrid *Fuchsia*, appropriately named 'St. Clare.' Around 1846, after writing a paper on *Rubus*, he was nominated to membership in the Royal Wernerian Society, a natural history society in Edinburgh, Scotland.⁶

By age nineteen, Meehan had worked as gardener at three properties. Two associates "endeavored to get him into Kew,"⁷ and so in 1846 Meehan headed to London. Fifty years later Meehan wrote "I started for London in April 1846, but I cannot remember how I got there... I can only recollect that I sat on my trunk in Regent's Circus for an hour waiting for a Kew omnibus to come by. In the midst of thousands, I never felt so lonely."⁸

Like the other ambitious young men who came to Kew, Meehan used this opportunity to study plants and to increase his knowledge. "At that time we had only to watch visitors in the afternoon and give them information. I loved to hunt up all about my plants and air my new-found knowledge to the people who came there."⁹

At the time, Kew was the acknowledged center of botanical studies. In 1841 Sir William Hooker had moved from Glasgow, where he was a Professor of Botany, to the directorship of Kew. The gardens then consisted of eleven acres, but soon another forty-five acres of the Pleasure Grounds were acquired, and shortly thereafter the remaining

178 acres. Under Hooker's direction new glasshouses were added, including the Temperate and Palm Houses.¹⁰ Adjacent to royal properties, Kew frequently hosted royal guests. Meehan remembered the Princess Mary as a:

rollicking good-natured girl of fourteen, to whom the spirit of mischievous fun came as a second nature. Her father, the Duke of Cambridge, a general favourite with the men, usually took a daily walk through the Gardens. He had a faculty of recognizing at once a newcomer, and always asked his history, whence he came, and who were his friends.¹¹

Meehan, however, did not find a friend in Hooker. Many of the young men working at Kew took samples of plants to make herbarium specimens. In some cases, samples were taken carelessly and damaged the plants. Meehan refused to give up the names of those who were guilty of this practice. "I managed to offend the Director, Sir William Hooker. I was, for punishment, sent to work in the Cactus House, which no one cared for..."¹²

After two years and one month at Kew, Meehan received his certificate. Through a friend of his father, Meehan was engaged to become the head gardener for the Earl of Shrewsbury at Alton Towers. Shortly thereafter he was notified "that only persons of one particular religious denomination were engaged in that establishment---that the engagement with him must therefore be cancelled."¹³

Meehan decided to head to America. He had met Robert Buist of Philadelphia, the famous nurseryman, during Buist's visit to England. Buist offered Meehan a position as a foreman at his nursery on Darby Road for ten dollars per month plus board. Meehan set sail on *The Devonshire*, arriving in Philadelphia one day after his twenty-second birthday.¹⁴ Meehan's training at his father's hand, his experience working in gardens,

and his two years at Kew laid the foundation for what would become an illustrious career in his adopted country.

Notes to Chapter 2

¹ Anderson, Jeanette, Oral History #1, Jeanette Anderson Papers, copies in the possession of Elizabeth McLean, Wynnewood, Pennsylvania.

² "Thomas Meehan," *The Gardeners' Chronicle* (11 May 1901): 296.

³ William Meehan to Thomas Meehan, May 1860, Anderson Papers.

⁴ Charles Meehan to Thomas Meehan, July 1892, Anderson Papers.

⁵ Anderson, Oral History #1, Anderson Papers.

⁶ Meehan, S.Mendelson., "A Brief Sketch of the Life of Thomas Meehan," *Meehans' Monthly* (January 1902): 13-19.

⁷ "Thomas Meehan," *The Gardeners' Chronicle* (15 June 1901): 383-384.

⁸ Meehan, Thomas, "Kew As I Knew It, Nearly Fifty Years Ago," "*Floreat Kew*" *The Journal of the Kew Guild, An Association of Kew Gardeners, Past and Present* (London, 1894), 38-43.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Desmond, Ray and F. Nigel Hepper, *A Century of Kew Plantsmen, A Celebration of the Kew Guild* (Whitstable, UK: Whitstable Litho., Ltd., 1993), 55.

¹¹ Meehan, T., "Kew As I Knew It," 39.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Meehan, S.M., "A Brief Sketch," 15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

EARLY WORK IN AMERICA

Thomas Meehan was only one of many young men who made their way from Europe to the United States to make their fortunes.¹ More specifically, many who trained at Kew came to the United States, where new plants and new gardens appealed to the adventurous. Philadelphia in particular in the early nineteenth century was the center for horticultural and botanical thought, before it was eclipsed in this role by New York City.

Arriving in Philadelphia on March 23, 1848, Meehan began his fifty-three year career in the United States. Within the first five years, he was employed by two influential men in the field, Robert Buist and Caleb Cope. He also began a relationship with one of the country's most important botanical sites, John Bartram's Botanical Garden.

Robert Buist and Rosedale Nursery

Meehan had met Buist at Kew. Buist had trained at the Edinburgh Botanic Garden and upon emigrating to America,² worked for Henry Pratt at Lemon Hill in Philadelphia, the forerunner of Fairmount Park.³ In 1832, Buist and his partner, Thomas Hibbert,

bought Bernard M'Mahon's famous nursery.⁴ Like Meehan, Buist was a prolific writer, contributing generously to various horticultural, agricultural, and botanical journals, as well as authoring a popular *Flower Garden Dictionary* which ran through numerous editions. Buist offered Meehan a position as foreman in his nursery.⁵ Buist was moving his nurseries and greenhouses to a new and larger tract of land outside the city limits, in Kingessing. The new nursery was named Rosedale. Meehan was to take charge of the new nursery under a three year contract, while Buist remained in charge of the business in the city.⁶

Andrew M. Eastwick and the Bartram Botanic Garden

However, Meehan was not destined to stay long with Robert Buist. In 1850, Andrew M. Eastwick acquired the Bartram Botanic Garden, the first botanic garden in America. He purchased the property from Bartram's descendant after they defaulted on a \$15,000.00 loan. Ann Bartram Carr was John Bartram's granddaughter, and with her husband, Colonel John Carr, ran a nursery from the garden. Eastwick had enjoyed visiting Bartram's as a child, and acquired the garden with the idea of preserving everything relating to Bartram.⁷ Eastwick planned to leave shortly for Russia to fulfill a contract to build a railroad. He asked his neighbor, Robert Buist, to recommend a man who could act as "botanist, landscape gardener and farmer" to maintain the property during his two year absence. After looking for ten days, Buist asked Meehan if he would be interested in the position. Meehan was allowed to break his contract with the Rosedale Nursery and move to Bartram Botanic Garden. Meehan was only twenty-three years old.

Referring to Meehan's youthful appearance, Eastwick "told a story about some Emperor of Russia whose ambassador to some potentate had been returned with the message that a man had been expected, not a boy,-- and that the Emperor sent a handsome Beard in a box back to the cantankerous Highness, and I took the place in Bartram two days after."⁸

While he worked at Bartram's garden, Meehan met Catherine (Kitty) Colflesh, daughter of William Colflesh, Jr., a florist at nearby 53rd and Woodland Avenue. Thomas and Kitty married on February 11, 1852.⁹ Their family would increase to six children, with three of the boys following in their father's footsteps in horticulture, and the fourth becoming an official of the state of Pennsylvania.

Using a wood-shed as an office,¹⁰ Meehan gathered material for his first book, *The American Handbook of Ornamental Trees*, where he described the specimen trees at Bartram's and other botanical collections in the Philadelphia area, such as Peirce brothers arboretum, now Longwood Gardens. Meehan wrote in his introduction that "nothing has been admitted into the body of the work that has not been the result of the personal experience of the author...No tree is described as being in cultivation which the author has not himself seen..."¹¹ While at Bartram's, Meehan formed a strong attachment to the property and respect for its legendary collections, which motivated him later to save the property from destruction.

Caleb Cope and Springbrook

By February of 1852,¹² Meehan had moved to Springbrook, the estate of Caleb Cope, a wealthy Philadelphia merchant, where he stayed for one year.¹³ At the time,

Cope was President of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. He was known for his fine property, collection of hardy and tender plants, and ranges of greenhouses. Since the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew successfully flowered the exotic waterlily *Victoria regia* (now *Victoria amazonica*) in 1849, Andrew Jackson Downing, the editor of the *Horticulturist*, challenged wealthy American horticulturists to do the same.¹⁴ Cope took up the gauntlet. Sir William Hooker, Director of Kew, sent twelve seeds to Cope in March 1851. Planted in pans of heated water in a forcing house, Cope and his gardener, John Ellis, successfully brought *Victoria regia* to bloom in America for the first time on August 21, 1851, “the great event in our floriculture world.”¹⁵

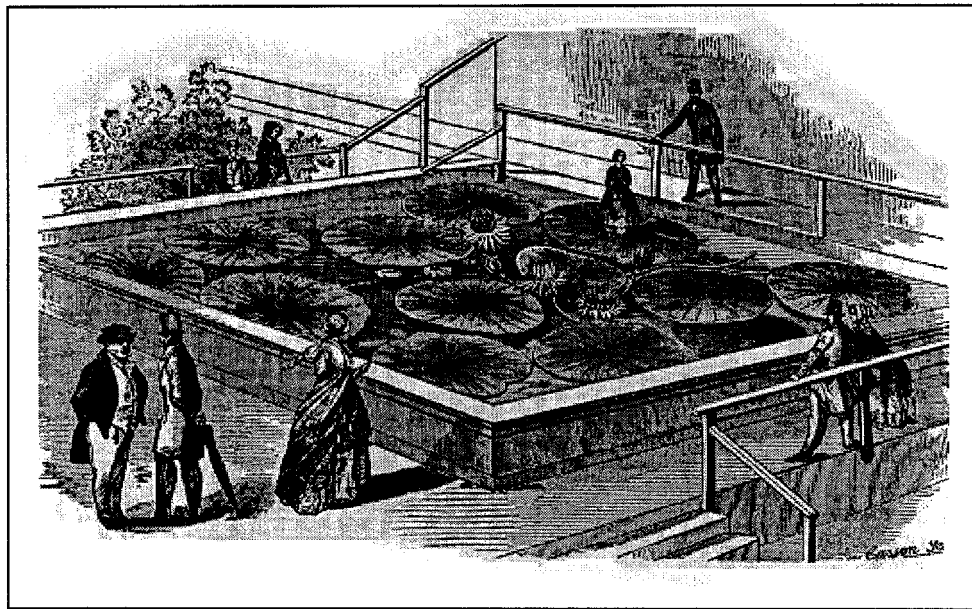


Figure 2 Giant Water Lily, *Victoria regia*
from *The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste*, December 1859, 276
Morris Library, University of Delaware

By the time Meehan joined the staff at Springbrook, the *Victoria* was opening its regal flowers, and setting seed as well. Meehan wrote to the *Horticulturist*, describing the growth of the *Victoria*, and offering seeds to anyone interested in attempting to grow the plant themselves. One who availed himself of the offer was John Fisk Allen, of Boston, who like Cope, built a special forcing house. In 1854 Allen commissioned an over-sized book lavishly illustrated with chromolithographs describing the native habitat and culture of *Victoria regia*, and included the articles which Cope, Ellis and Meehan had written for the *Horticulturist* in the text.¹⁶

Meehan regularly contributed descriptions of the “New and rare plants, flowered at Springbrook for the first time,”¹⁷ in *The Philadelphia Florist*, published in Philadelphia between 1852 and 1855. These lists give a good idea of not only the new plants that were being introduced, but the sources from which Cope obtained them. For example, Cope grew *Indigofera decora*, recently discovered by Robert Fortune in China, and distributed through Hovey’s Nursery.¹⁸

Springbrook was sold at auction in 1857. Two auction catalogs give a detailed picture of Springbrook “with its Splendid Collection of Plants.”¹⁹ In addition to the Mansion House, with its roof-top observatory, the landscaped grounds contained an ice house, coach house and stable, barns, and gardener’s cottage.²⁰ Thomas Meehan wrote descriptions of the fourteen specialized greenhouses and conservatories and of the grounds for the first catalog.

The plant collections were offered at a separate sale, with the cactus collection alone offered as an entire collection. The second auction catalog, “of Splendid and Rare

Green and Hot-House Plants, including collections of Cactaeae, Orchideae, Camellias, Azaleas, Aquatics, Ferns, etc.,”²¹ describes the plant collections, and runs to 38 pages. There are 1037 entries, and each plant was given both botanical name and a brief description. Tools, pots, and other garden implements were also sold. Three collections are worth noting. The orchid collection totalled 337 plants; the camellias 436 plants; and the cactus collection 1103 plants. Thomas Meehan bought the cactus collection,²² so perhaps his banishment to the Cactus House at Kew was a good thing, after all.

In 1853, Thomas Meehan left Caleb Cope to begin his own nursery. With \$1000.00 capital and the seeds he had collected during the past year, he moved to Germantown, where he would live for the rest of his life.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹ Schlereth, Thomas J. *Victorian America, Transformations of Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 9-10.

² *From Seed to Flower: Philadelphia 1681-1876* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 1976), 73.

³ Leighton, 76.

⁴ *From Seed to Flower*, 71.

⁵ Downing, Andrew Jackson, ed., *The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* (November 1850): 224-226.

⁶ Meehan, T., "Kew As I Knew It," 38-43.

⁷ *Meehans' Monthly* (March 1897): 78.

⁸ Meehan to Sargent, 16 August 1895, Anderson Papers.

⁹ Anderson, Oral Interview #1, 10, Anderson Papers.

¹⁰ *Meehans' Monthly* (January 1896): 17.

¹¹ Meehan, Thomas, *The American Handbook of Ornamental Trees*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1853), Advertisement.

¹² *From seed to flower*, 93.

¹³ *Horticulturist* (July 1852): 342.

¹⁴ "Magnificent Water Lily," *Horticulturist* (March 1850): 429.

¹⁵ *Horticulturist* (October 1851): 459-63.

¹⁶ Allen, John Fisk, *Victoria regia, or The great water lily of America* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1854).

¹⁷ Scott, R. Robinson, *The Philadelphia Florist* (Philadelphia, 1852). Superseded by *Florist and Horticultural Journal* (Philadelphia, 1852-55).

¹⁸ Meehan, T. "New or Rare Plants Flowered For The First Time At Springbrook This Season, No. VII," *The Florist and Horticultural Journal* (September 1853): 276.

¹⁹ M. Thomas, and Sons, *For Sale: Springbrook, With its Splendid Collection of Plants*, (Philadelphia: T.K. and P.G. Collins, 1857).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Thomas, M., and Sons, *Catalogue of Splendid and Rare Green and Hot House Plants, Including collections of Cacteeae, Orchideae, Camellias, Azaleas, Ferns, &c...*, (Philadelphia: T.K. and P.G. Collins, 1857).

²² Meehan to Englemann, 31 May 1881, Missouri Botanical Garden.

CHAPTER 4

THE NURSERY IN GERMANTOWN

A visit to Mr. Meehan's nursery, in Germantown, a suburb of Philadelphia, will well repay a lover of trees. In no other establishment are American trees and shrubs raised in such numbers. Long ago Mr. Meehan recognized two facts---that the climate of eastern America is particularly suited to deciduous-leaved plants, which grow more satisfactorily here than any other country of the world, and that American plants are best for America.¹

Partnerships and a Growing Business

Meehan settled in Germantown with recommendations of the Editor of the *Germantown Telegraph*, a paper to which he subscribed. A regular reader, Meehan felt that Germantown was a "live place and just the place for an energetic young man to settle in."² After one visit, and one meeting with the Editor of the *Telegraph*, Meehan decided to make Germantown his home.

In 1854, Thomas Meehan was joined by William Saunders of Baltimore to start a nursery and landscape gardening business in Germantown, on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Like Meehan, Saunders was a frequent contributor to horticultural publications, and a active member of the Maryland Horticultural Society. First mention of their joint endeavor is found in the monthly proceedings of the Pennsylvania

Horticultural Society, where the newly-created firm won prizes under the name of Meehan & Saunders.³ The nursery specialized in native trees and shrubs of America.

The partners first bought three acres of land in Germantown on Chew Street, at the end of Church Street, from George Carpenter, Sr. They also leased about six acres which belonged to Meehan's father-in-law, William Colflesh, Jr., in Ambler, Pennsylvania, six miles away. The partnership with Saunders was short-lived. A notice in the ninth number of the 1855 edition of *The Florist and Horticultural Journal* noted that "Messrs. Meehan & Saunders, of Germantown, have dissolved. Thomas Meehan continues the nursery business at the same place. Mr. Saunders continues the business of Landscape gardening in all its branches."⁴ Saunders went on to become a noted landscape gardener and work in the Department of Agriculture.

In 1859, Meehan's brother Joseph emigrated to the United States, and joined the firm, staying with it until after his brother's death. Joseph Meehan took charge of the new greenhouses, which were designed by William Saunders.⁵ In 1857 Meehan was listed in a Philadelphia city directory as a gardener, but by 1860 he listed as one of seven nurserymen, seedsmen, and florists in Germantown.⁶ In subsequent directories, Meehan was listed variously as nurseryman, florist, and editor.

The Civil War and the depression which followed literally wiped out the nursery industry in the South, and brought the nursery industry in the North to a standstill.⁷ Meehan entered a short-lived partnership with a man named Wandell. Despite the hardships, Meehan purchased an additional three acres in Germantown. Meehan later

wrote that no matter what the state of the firm, at the end of each week, every man received his full pay check.⁸

While he was involved with efforts to rebuild industry in the South, Meehan encouraged at least one individual to enter the nursery trade. Henry William Ravenel, of South Carolina, was a well-known authority of fungi. He collected and sold specimens to both American and European collectors. After the Civil War, with all of his savings lost in Confederate bonds and cash, Ravenel was encouraged by Meehan to start a nursery. Meehan sent both plants and money for the fledgling venture.⁹ Meehan rightly realized that plants would not only feed the bodies, but flowers calm the minds of war-torn Southerners.

Meehan soon found that it was too expensive to maintain two separate locations,¹⁰ and so in 1870, he purchased the Hong Farm from Archibald McIntyre, and a portion of Jacob Horters farm, with the new lands totaling thirty acres. Then the two original pieces, the six acres in Germantown and six at Upper Dublin were sold to William C. Royal, who opened a street through the old nursery.¹¹ All efforts concentrated on the new nursery. One of the properties he purchased had been owned by a man named Meng, a Philadelphia banker who sponsored the German plant collector, Matthias Kin.¹² Meehan added unusual plants, and visitors reported that the grounds of the nursery were like a botanical garden.¹³ Land was added until the Germantown nurseries reached seventy-five acres.¹⁴ Later, when business had dramatically increased, a branch for growing stock for wholesale orders was established at Dreshertown, Pennsylvania.¹⁵ The Fall 1900/Spring 1901 Thomas Meehan and Sons Nursery Catalogue, boasted a 150 acre establishment.¹⁶

Over time, the name of the nursery changed. Originally, the firm was called Meehan and Saunders. In the late 1860s the nursery was called Germantown and Wissahickon Nurseries. In 1870, in a letter to George Englemann, the words “and Wissahickon” were crossed out,¹⁷ reflecting the recent sale of the second nursery property. The nursery kept the name Germantown Nurseries until 1889, when Philadelphia City Directories show the firm as Thomas Meehan and Son, reflecting that Meehan had taken his son, Thomas B. Meehan, into the business.¹⁸ Three years later, Meehan’s second son, J. Franklin Meehan was added to the firm, and the name changed to Thomas Meehan and Sons.¹⁹ By 1896, S. Mendelson had also joined the firm.²⁰

In 1896, Thomas Meehan entered a new partnership agreement with his three sons, Thomas B. Meehan, J. Franklin Meehan, and S. Mendelson Meehan. This terminated the existing partnership and established a new one with Thomas Meehan retaining two-fifths of the business, and each of his three sons one-fifth. The agreement allowed each partner to draw \$1200.00 per year. The firm agreed to pay rent of six percent of the value of the land per year to Thomas Meehan. Meehan recognized that not only the land was valuable, but that the location of the business itself, close to the city, was good advertising, and contributed the success he achieved.²¹

After Meehan’s death, the firm published a garden bulletin. The 1912 issue contains a twenty-three page article about the nursery, including photographs and maps, which gives a detailed description of the offices, staff, plant material, layout, and history of the firm.²²

Retail, Wholesale, and European Trade

The nursery developed retail, wholesale, and foreign clientele. One of the earliest advertisements for the nursery was in Brinckloe's *Nursery Register* of 1862.²³

Surprisingly, the firm did not seem to advertise widely. Most of the advertisements found in horticultural periodicals were small, with only modest illustrations. According to later catalogs, the first catalog was printed around 1866 or 1867.



Ornamental Trees,
SHRUBS AND
EVERGREENS.
*Largest assortment of Seedling and Transplanted
Native Trees and Shrubs in America.*

Strong field-grown **HERBACEOUS PLANTS** in great variety. Large Sugar and Norway Maples, Elms, Ash and other trees suitable for planting for immediate effect. Beautiful four to six feet specimen plants of *Magnolia Soulangiana* on their own roots. **JAPANESE MAPLES.** Finer varieties in pots. Strong, bushy specimen plants of the blood-leaved variety, 2½ feet to 3 feet, on their own roots. **Superintendents of Parks and Cemeteries and Amateurs** requiring large quantities of stock should send us their lists for estimates.

LANDSCAPE ENGINEERING.—Plans prepared and carried out.
New descriptive Catalogue, "A Guide to Tree Planting," mailed for 6 cents in stamp.

THOMAS MEEHAN & SONS, Germantown, Phila.

Figure 3 Advertisement for Thomas Meehan and Sons Nursery
from *Garden and Forest*, April 1897
Morris Library, University of Delaware

Each customer base was offered a different catalog. The retail catalogs evolved into the most colorful and sophisticated line, with line drawings, black and white photographs, and sometimes colored inserts. One favorite insert was of the pink dogwood, *Cornus florida* var. *rubra*, which Meehan rediscovered and introduced to the trade (It had been first discovered by Mark Catesby in the early eighteenth century).

Catalogs included descriptive lists of trees, shrubs, vines, evergreens, hardy perennials, and fruits. Meehan also advertised that he kept a list of gardening positions which were open, as well as gardeners in need of positions whose "records will bear the closest investigations."²⁴

The wholesale catalogs gave basic information, including scientific and common names, with few or no illustrations, on thinner paper, and without a colored wrapper. Plants were offered for sale in lots of ten, one hundred, or one thousand, although special quotes were made for greater quantities.²⁵ In 1894, the catalog advertised that Meehan's nursery had the largest stock of tree seedlings for nurserymen in the United States, and that the quality was superior to foreign-grown stock.²⁶

Meehan was assisted with his marketing by overseas agents. S. Mendelson (after whom Meehan named one of his sons) was his agent based in New York, with Mendelson's partner, Frederick Ogerau, based in Paris. Mendelson received shipments from the nursery, and consigned them to shipping companies out of the New York harbor. He also made the freight arrangements for the nursery stock once it reached England or the Continent. A price list published in autumn 1898 of American trees and shrubs for European markets advertised that the cost of shipment to Liverpool, Havre, Hamburg, and Bremen was \$3.00 per hundred pounds.²⁷ Shipments for all parts of the country and the world were packed under the supervision of Edward Meehan, Thomas Meehan's brother.²⁸ Shipments were sent as far New Zealand and Australia.²⁹

Mendelson also kept an eye open for prospective customers, both at home and abroad.³⁰ In one letter, Mendelson advised Meehan to send a catalog to his

(Mendelson's) brother in Paris, and attach a letter authorizing the brother to act on Meehan's behalf to the French government.³¹

Plants

In the preface to the twenty-fifth edition of Meehan's Nurseries catalog, Meehan wrote that:

our collection of 750 kinds of trees, shrubs, and vines, for which we received the Centennial award in 1876, has grown to nearly double by this time...For this reason...we are careful as to the accuracy of our name, [and] many public gardens and libraries keep our catalogues as references.³²

While the nursery was known for its collection of native trees and shrubs, they also carried other trees, shrubs, fruit, fruit trees, and hardy perennials. The nursery introduced new-found plants from the American West as well as from abroad. Meehan was shrewd enough to make a nursery crop pay twice; one visitor described a two or three acre field of the snow-ball viburnum, *Viburnum plicatum*, which was a popular bedding plant, but also a popular cut flower which Meehan sold to the florist shops in Philadelphia.³³ Two of the nursery's most popular plants were the Pink Dogwood and Japanese Maple.

The Pink Dogwood, *Cornus florida* var. *rubra*, was rediscovered by Meehan in 1888 on the banks of the Wissahickon. It created quite a stir among the nurserymen. But this plant had first been discovered by Mark Catesby in 1731, and described in his book "Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and Bahamas." Meehan's nursery produced colored inserts of the Pink Dogwood for the retail catalog. One customer wrote to challenge the bright pink color of the plate, saying that it was absurdly overcolored.

Meehan responded that when he received the proofs, he compared the drawing to the flowers outside, and found the color to match.³⁴

Meehan also specialized in Japanese maples. Perhaps his first taste of their variety came at the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia, where S.B. Parsons & Son had a special bed of recently introduced Japanese plants, including the maples.³⁵ He is credited for writing the first description of the cut-leaf Full-Moon maple, *Acer japonicum* var. *aconitifolium*³⁶ in an article for *The American Garden*.³⁷ He planted one of the first specimens from Japan, brought for the Centennial in 1876, on the grounds of his nursery.³⁸ The Japanese maple became a popular motif in advertisements for the nursery.

Landscape Gardening

In the 1850s, the firm of Meehan and Saunders offered its services as both nurserymen and landscape gardeners. Meehan equated landscape gardening with art, and landscape gardeners with artists. He wrote that:

Were every one born an artist, any one might justly deem himself capable of laying out his own place in a manner capable of affording ultimately the highest pleasure, but it is not so....It is the work of a higher order of genius, to create a pleasing landscape in its generalities, and in its details...³⁹

After Saunders left the firm, it is evident that the nursery flourished, but there is not clear indication how the landscape gardening portion continued, until Meehan's son, J. Franklin Meehan, took over the department. Nursery catalogs from the late 1880s through the 1920s offered services in landscape design and engineering, including grading, road making, and planting. The department offered to "prepare plans for

remodeling old places; superintend the carrying out of them or do the entire work ourselves." Plans were also prepared for for hardy herbaceous beds, gardens, and shrubbery plantations.⁴⁰

Customers

One of Meehan's best known clients was Henry Shaw of St. Louis, Missouri. A successful dry-goods merchant, upon retirement Shaw turned his considerable talent to developing a botanical garden around his house in the suburbs of St. Louis and a park across the street, Tower Grove Park.⁴¹ A meticulous record-keeper, Shaw kept all of the orders, receipts, cancelled checks, and shipping charge slips for the goods and services to develop these two properties. Among the papers are numerous orders from nurseries across the country, including Meehan's nursery in Germantown. Not only did Shaw purchase hundreds of dollars worth of plants, but in June 1869, he invited Meehan to St. Louis to consult with him on tree planting. The consultation cost \$175.00, which covered both a \$100.00 "professional fee" and \$75.00 in expenses.⁴²

From the Shaw records, we can trace the process of procuring plants from Meehan's nursery. Plants were selected from the catalog, either wholesale or retail, and accompanied by a check drawn on Shaw's account at the National Bank of the State of Missouri. Upon receipt of the order, the nursery packed the desired plants in a sturdy box, capable of withstanding handling on the railroad. Rail handlers included the Union Line, American Express, or the Adams Express. These companies charged by the

hundred-weight. For example, in 1875, the charge to ship 690 pounds from Germantown to St. Louis was \$7.90.⁴³

From the business records of Hoopes, Bro., and Thomas Nursery, in West Chester, Pennsylvania, a picture can be drawn of the wholesale trade which Meehan conducted. Ledgers, orderbooks, and letter copybooks, dating to 1855, document the relationship between the two nurseries. In the ledgers, entries show that Meehan purchased plants like Osage Orange by the thousands, as well as other plants and seeds in smaller quantities. The letter copybooks describe an interesting situation. It seemed a common practice for Hoopes, Bro., and Thomas to fill orders for Meehan's customers, and ship them directly to the customer, first affixing labels from Meehan's nursery. This arrangement bespeaks a well-ordered and confident relationship. In one letter, Hoopes, Bro., and Thomas goes so far as to write that if Meehan should allow them "to ship them direct, it will give you a good margin on your Catalogue rates."⁴⁴ The relationship was reciprocal, for Hoopes, Bro., Thomas frequently purchased plants and seeds from Meehan's nursery as well.

Despite the ups and downs of the nursery business, the income it provided and the reliable assistance from his family allowed Meehan to pursue his other interests, studying and writing about plants and gardening.

Notes to Chapter 4

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- ² *Meehans' Monthly* (August 1892): 127.
- ³ *The Florist and Horticultural Journal* (May 1854): 149.
- ⁴ *The Florist and Horticultural Journal* (August 1855): 256.
- ⁵ Anderson, "The Battle for Breathing Spaces: Thomas Meehan and Bartram's Garden," *Bartram Broadside* (Spring 1991), 6.
- ⁶ *McElroy's Philadelphia City Directory* (Philadelphia: E.C. and J. Biddle, 1855), 440.
- ⁷ Lawrence, George, "Development of American Horticulture," *Americas Garden Legacy*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 1978), 94.
- ⁸ *Gardener's Monthly*
- ⁹ Miner, Tamara Haygood, *Henry William Ravenel, 1814-1871: South Carolina Scientist in the Civil War Era*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 113-115.
- ¹⁰ Meehan, S.M., *Meehans' Monthly* (Jan. 1902): 15.
- ¹¹ Hotchkin, S. F., *Ancient and Modern Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill*, (Philadelphia: P.W. Ziegler and Co., 1889), 331.
- ¹² Hedrick, U.P., *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 400.
- ¹³ "The Germantown Nurseries," *Garden and Forest* (29 May 1889): 263-264.
- ¹⁴ "A Visit to the Meehan Nurseries," (Germantown: Thomas Meehan and Sons, 1912).
- ¹⁵ Jellett, Edwin C., *Germantown Gardens and Gardeners*, 53-56.
- ¹⁶ Thomas Meehan and Sons Nursery, Fall 1900/Spring 1901, National Agricultural Library.
- ¹⁷ Receipt, 17 October 1880, Tower Grove Park Archives, Missouri Botanical Garden.
- ¹⁸ *Philadelphia City Directory for 1889*, 1244.
- ¹⁹ *Philadelphia City Directory for 1892*, 1328.
- ²⁰ *Philadelphia City Directory for 1896*, 1338.
- ²¹ "The Germantown Nurseries," *Garden and Forest* (29 May 1889): 263.
- ²² "A Visit to the Meehan Nurseries," 1912.
- ²³ Brinckloe, W. G. P., *The Nursery Register, Devoted to the interests of the Nursery Business* (January 1861).
- ²⁴ Thomas Meehan and Sons, Fall 1900/Spring 1901, 67, National Agricultural Library.
- ²⁵ Meehan's Nurseries Wholesale Trade List, Fall 1893, National Agricultural Library.
- ²⁶ Meehan's Nurseries, Wholesale Trade List, Fall 1894, National Agricultural Library.
- ²⁷ Meehan's Nurseries, Pricelist, Autumn 1898, National Agricultural Library.

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- ²⁸ "A Visit to the Meehan Nurseries," 1912.
- ²⁹ Hotchkin, 331.
- ³⁰ Mendelson, S. to T. Meehan, 7 December 1861, Anderson Papers.
- ³¹ Mendelson to T. Meehan, 10 December, 1861, Anderson Papers.
- ³² Meehans' Nurseries Catalogue, 1893, National Agricultural Library.
- ³³ "The Germantown Nurseries," *Garden and Forest* (29 May 1889): 263.
- ³⁴ Meehan, T., "The Red-flowered Dogwood," *Garden and Forest* (15 July 1891): 333.
- ³⁵ Meehan, T., "Horticulture at the Centennial," *Gardener's Monthly* (August 1876): 256.
- ³⁶ Meehan, T., "The Varieties of Japanese Maples," *The American Garden* (April 1888): 140-141.
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- ³⁸ "The Late Thomas Meehan," *American Gardening* (30 November 1901): 815.
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- ⁴² Receipt, 26 June 1869, Tower Grove Park Records, Missouri Botanical Garden.
- ⁴³ Receipt, 21 April 1875, Tower Grove Park Records, Missouri Botanical Garden.
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CHAPTER 5

WRITING, EDITING, AND PUBLISHING

It has been said Mr. Meehan was a prolific writer. Scanning his life we see no point where his pen may have been long at rest.¹

Meehan's permanent legacy is the vast quantity of the printed word. Through editorials in his own periodicals, articles for other scientific and popular journals, and three books, he pronounced his opinion on new scientific ideas, practical horticultural techniques, and larger issues which swept the nation. We are fortunate to have such a volume of work which, spanning fifty-two years, is the bulk of material which has been found. Unfortunately, Meehan's library, which included "five wooden chests packed to the brim" burned in the mid-1960s,² and business papers from the nursery have not been found.

While Meehan made his living through horticultural pursuits, his true interest was the study of botany:

Since I arrived at man's estate I engaged keenly in business with the main object of having the means to indulge my tastes should I grow older, and though not yet "quite out of the woods," I find an annually increasing leisure and enjoyment for observing and for study.³

He credited himself with “fair powers of observation”, although “the want of an early education and the means to procure one when older”⁴ caused him to question the value of his own work. He wrote his longtime correspondent, George Englemann of St. Louis

I have some reluctance in publishing more papers. Passionately fond of natural history, when a boy and young man, I had to abandon the pleasure to battle with disease and poverty, and during the last three or four years that I have been able to take up the broken threads I feel that I am so liable to write as new what is most likely already known. It is only that I feel our “proceedings” [Academy of Natural Sciences Philadelphia] have so little of botanical interest in them that I venture to offer anything at all.⁵

Despite his doubt, Meehan went on to write prolifically. *The Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences*, Philadelphia (ANSP) alone contain over 100 articles by Meehan. For *Torrey*, the journal of the Torrey Botanical Club, he wrote another fifty-two articles over a nineteen year period.

Ten years later he again wrote Englemann “On account of a brief trip I shall make to England four weeks from today, I am so busy getting necessary literary work ahead so that I am ashamed to seem so slow with much valued correspondence...”⁶ At this point in his career, his nursery was flourishing, recovered from the slump following the Civil War. Meehan continued to write for other horticultural publications, as well as his own.

Some of Meehan’s earliest garden writing appeared in *The Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* in August 1849, less than one year after arriving in the United States. The *Horticulturist* was founded in 1846 by Andrew Jackson Downing, the noted landscape gardener. The *Horticulturist* was the first to introduce a regular monthly publication of an architectural design or article about architecture or landscape gardening.⁷ Meehan contributed articles about flower and vegetable garden plants,

landscape gardening, and one of his most provocative articles, "Condition and Prospects of Gardeners in the United States,"⁸ which could be a treatise of concerns of professional horticulturists today. According to Meehan, the *Horticulturist* "was an embodiment of the best intellectual culture in his beautiful department of art. Its sphere was all its own."⁹

Meehan was also a regular contributor to the publication of a fellow Kewite, R. Robinson Scott. Scott published *The Philadelphia Florist*, a short-lived venture which lasted only three years. Meehan wrote of the "surprise of all his friends, who knew he [Scott] had not one dollar in his pockets, and no prospects of getting one,"¹⁰ yet starting the *Florist*, with its colored plates in May 1852. Eventually mental problems forced Scott to give up his venture.

The decline of the *Horticulturist* after Downing's death and the failure of *The Philadelphia Florist* left a gap which Meehan would ably fill.

Horticultural Writing: Periodicals

In addition to contributing to the periodicals edited by others, Meehan had a long career editing two long-running horticultural magazines: *The Gardener's Monthly* and *Meehans' Monthly*. Together, the two had a combined run of forty-one years. Both *Monthly's* commanded the attention of a national audience, with subscribers from all parts of the country. As Editor, Meehan had the opportunity to introduce new plants and new ideas to his readers.

The Gardener's Monthly

The *Gardener's Monthly* began its twenty-nine year run in 1859. In the autumn of 1858, D. Rodney King distributed a "specimen number," of a new horticultural journal to the American Pomological Society in Philadelphia. Meehan had refused King's offer to become the regular editor, but agreed to act as editor until someone else was found. In Meehan's own words:

The end of the year arrived, and still no one was found to guide the steps of the new-born child. Hitherto it had been a labor of love. Finding himself in the harness, with no chance of breaking loose, arrangements were made for a small salary, and thus he continued.¹¹

While Meehan was the *Gardener's Monthly's* only editor, it had three publishers: D. Rodney King, W.G.P. Brinckloe, and Charles Robson. Published in Philadelphia, *The Gardener's Monthly and Horticultural Advertiser* quickly boasted a substantial circulation. In the December 1859 issue, Meehan wrote that in January 1860 the publisher would print an edition of 15,000 to send to all nurserymen, seedsmen, and florists in the United States.¹² In 1875, reflecting on the impact of the Civil War on the nursery industry, Meehan recalled that the 1860 edition was "a greater number than was ever issued by any purely horticultural magazine before or since."¹³ This figure, so large in the horticultural field, was small in comparison to the agricultural and popular press. The *American Agriculturist* had a circulation of 160,000 in the late 1860s, and popular magazines like the *Ladies Home Journal* reached 270,000 in the same period.¹⁴

The cost of the *Gardener's Monthly* was \$1.50 per year. Subscribers were encouraged to act as "special agents" for the magazine, with the inducement that "any one

collecting the subscriptions of his neighbor to send with his own, is authorized to remit us but \$1 25 for each subscriber, retaining the balance for his trouble...”¹⁵

Contemporary scholars call *Gardener's Monthly* the premier horticultural publication of its time.¹⁶ Certainly Meehan would have agreed. In 1876, Meehan wrote his view of horticultural publishing in the United States.¹⁷ First, he expressed his dismay in the loss of the *Horticulturist* “our old friend.” It seemed to indicate that there was a general lack of interest in horticulture if there was only demand for one horticultural magazine, “and that a monthly one.” After Downing’s tragic death in 1852, the *Horticulturist* passed from publisher to publisher. *Gardener's Monthly* sprang up to administer to “the thousands with slender purses and small yards and grounds, and others who, in numberless ways, could be benefited by little hints of a practical caste.” In 1875, *Gardener's Monthly and Horticultural Advertiser* bought the circulation lists of the *Horticulturist*, officially changing its name to the *Gardener's Monthly and Horticulturist*.

The format of *Gardener's Monthly* changed little over the years. Regular features included Flower Gardens and Pleasure Ground; Greenhouse and House Gardening; Fruit and Vegetable Gardening; Forestry; Natural History and Science; Literature, Travels, and Personal Notes; and Horticultural Societies. Within each of these features were columns devoted to seasonal hints, communications, new plants, queries, and editorial notes. In later years, not only Thomas Meehan, but his son, contributed editorial comments.

Correspondence came from readers all over the United States. Scanning the magazine, one finds correspondence from subscribers ranging throughout most of the states and territories. A significant number were local, from Pennsylvania, Maryland,

Connecticut, and New York. Meehan's sphere of influence extended beyond the mid-Atlantic states, including Massachusetts, Missouri, West Virginia, Ohio, Utah, Nebraska, Texas, California. He also arranged to introduce news from abroad. In the first issue, January 1859, he wrote:

We are gratified in being able to announce to our readers that we have secured the services of two regular correspondents in England, persons who, from their long and practical experience, are eminently qualified for the position, and who have peculiar facilities for obtaining the earliest and most reliable information on horticultural affairs. We are also in hopes of obtaining one in Paris.¹⁸

And not only were these correspondents secured, but their information was sent by the most advanced method of the day: steam ship, as indicated by the engraving above the column titled "Foreign Intelligence."¹⁹

In 1888, Charles Marot died, and the twenty-nine year run of the *Gardener's Monthly* ended. Charles Sprague Sargent, of the Arnold Arboretum, wrote of the passing of *Gardener's Monthly*:

It is like reading of the death of an old friend....It is Mr. Meehan's long editorial experience, high character, great learning and varied practical knowledge, which made the *Gardener's Monthly* what it was. These, we are happy to know, are not to be lost to us, as Mr. Meehan will, in a somewhat different field and with new associates, continue to delight and instruct the horticultural public.²⁰

Would Meehan have preferred to continue the *Gardener's Monthly* on his own? Of this we cannot be certain. However, as Sargent predicted, Meehan soon started two new projects, a book and his own magazine, which would consume large quantities of his time.

Meehans' Monthly


Meehans Monthly, A Magazine of Horticulture, Botany, and Kindred Subjects, made its debut in June 1891. Sargent reported that "Mr. Meehan's return to horticultural journalism will be welcomed by the many readers of the *Gardener's Monthly* who felt something like a personal bereavement at the discontinuance of that excellent magazine."²¹ The format of *Meehans' Monthly* was based on Meehan's earlier book, *The Native Flowers and Ferns of the United States*, which was published between 1878 and 1881. Each issue began with a chromolithograph of a wildflower or fern by Louis Prang of Boston²² and a four page description of the plant, its habitat, and uses. Each issue was also illustrated with detailed woodcuts. Regular columns included wildflowers and nature; general gardening; the hardy flower garden; new or rare plants; fruits and vegetables; general notes; poems; and biography and literature.

Meehan was joined by three of his sons, Thomas B. Meehan, J. Frank Meehan, and S. Mendolson Meehan in this new enterprise (his fourth son, William E. Meehan had taken charge of the State of Pennsylvania's Department of Fish and Game); the magazine was published by Thomas Meehan and Sons locally in Germantown. Meehan reflected that "Most lovers of gardening were also lovers of wildflowers. There seemed to be a wide field open for the spread of gardening knowledge for the pleasure that gardening afforded...It is a pleasure to feel that the effort is so well appreciated that the magazine will continue for all time."²³ An annual subscription to *Meehans' Monthly* cost \$2.00, a bargain considering each issue contained a full-page chromolithograph plate.

Like the *Gardener's Monthly*, *Meehans' Monthly* enjoyed a wide audience. Correspondence was sent from Indiana, Illinois, Nebraska, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Washington, Georgia, and North Carolina. Meehan showed his familiarity with current events by drawing articles from both French, English, and American periodicals which he thought would interest his readers.

It seems the new publication was a success. Satisfied readers wrote that:

"Botanically accurate pictures of flowers are common,--- but the pictures in *Meehans' Monthly*, in addition, are works of art..."²⁴ Meehan seemed to enjoy a friendly relationship with his subscribers, noting that "the manner in which *Meehans' Monthly* is sustained is particularly gratifying. Not only are the subscriptions promptly paid, but are accompanied by letters of praise for the work..."²⁵



MEEHANS' MONTHLY

"The novice or amateur fond of flowers (and who is not), knowing little or nothing of the gardener's art, finds in this periodical constant guidance and instruction conveyed in a popular form."—*Philadelphia Ledger*.

"A magazine that those interested in the subject of gardening cannot well afford to be without."—*Boston Herald*.

A twenty-page magazine of intelligent and practical horticulture, Wild Flowers and kindred subjects. Illustrated with copper and steel engravings. Each issue contains a beautiful colored plate of a Wild Flower or Fern, engraved and printed by Frang & Co. expressly for this work.

MEEHANS' MONTHLY contains practical and general information on all horticultural subjects, the care and culture of trees, shrubs, hardy plants, fruits and vegetables. The chapters on Wild Flowers and Botany are written in such a simple form that the amateur has no difficulty in gaining information on a subject that heretofore has only been open to the student of Botany.

It is not a work catering to an idle hour and then to be thrown aside. As a volume for the library it is equal to the best works on botanical and general horticultural subjects, and, as such, it has a value far beyond the usual monthly magazines.

Subscription price, \$2 per year; \$1 for 6 months. Sample copies free.

In club with new subscription to GARDEN AND FOREST for one year for \$5.

THOMAS MEEHAN & SONS, Publishers,
Box D, GERMANTOWN, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Figure 4 Advertisement for *Meehans' Monthly*, from *Garden and Forest*, April 1897
Morris Library, University of Delaware

Meehans' Monthly continued during Meehan's lifetime, and after his death his son, S. Mendolson Meehan, took over as editor for a short period. After one year, in 1902, *Meehans' Monthly* was bought out by Floral Life.

Horticultural Writing: Books

Given the vast quantity of periodical literature that Meehan produced, it is perhaps not surprising that he wrote only three books. The first, early in his career, documented the ornamental trees used in the American landscape. The second was a four volume set about native flowers and ferns of the United States. In both efforts, Meehan sought to increase the body of knowledge of American horticulture. And the third was a synopsis of his second, with the information repackaged in a format that was thought to appeal to a wider audience.

The American Handbook of Ornamental Trees

During the two years Meehan worked for Eastwick at Bartram's Garden, he began to compile notes about the magnificent trees planted 100 years earlier by John Bartram. With encouragement from William Darlington, Meehan enlarged his work to include all ornamental trees in cultivation in the United States. Titled *The American Handbook of Ornamental Trees*, the work was dedicated "To the memory of John Bartram, the patriarch of American Arboriculture."²⁶ Published in Philadelphia in 1853, Meehan wrote in the opening "Advertisement" that "A small work on the hardy ornamental trees in cultivation has long been a desideratum" and since the "literature of other countries is

well represented in this respect; the author offers the present volume as a small advance towards placing America in the same position.”²⁷

Meehan, as a recent immigrant, also felt it necessary to describe his qualifications to write such an authoritative work. He briefly detailed his horticultural career: being “reared from infancy amongst extensive collections of trees, [which] became by circumstances as well as by taste the study and hobby of his riper years;” his training at Kew; and his work at “many superior establishments.”²⁸

The scope of the work was limited to those trees which were within “the personal experience of the author. No tree is described as being in cultivation which the author has not himself seen.”²⁹ Meehan begins by giving twenty-five pages of directions for cultivation of trees, including soil management, selection of trees, methods of transplanting, best season for planting, and pruning. The remaining one-hundred and eighty-nine pages are devoted to the description of trees, treating two-hundred and eighty two in all. The arrangement is alphabetical, for ease of use. Meehan cautioned that it was a practical work “without any high pretension to its being a contribution to scientific literature.” He did, however, give the latest scientific names and botanical descriptions compiled from various authors.

At the end of the work, he listed the English or Common names for the plants treated in the main body. Finally, the work concludes with an appendix of sixty-two plants which had been recently introduced into cultivation, or which Meehan had not personally observed.

A contemporary of Meehan, in a review of the book for the *Florist and Horticultural Journal*, recommended the book as useful to its readers. Meehan, by virtue of his “known practical skill” was deemed reliable. The descriptions of deciduous and evergreen trees would “enable anyone to select such trees as may best suit his purpose.”³⁰

The significance of *Ornamental Trees* is not limited to its value as a seminal work on trees used in the landscape in the United States. It documents the trees at America’s first botanic garden, Bartram’s, including the sizes and health of the trees. It also documents the horticultural collections of other individuals living in the Philadelphia area. Among them we find Robert Buist, Caleb Cope, George Washington Peirce, Humphry Marshall, as well as the gardens of John Evans of Radnor, Alexander Brown on the Delaware, and William Hamilton, at the Woodlands.

The Native Flowers and Ferns of the United States

In the late 1870s, Meehan began to work on his second book with the company of Louis Prang in Boston. Prang was the foremost chromolithographer in the country, credited with perfecting the process and producing not only fine illustrations for books, but calendars, post cards, Christmas cards, and trade cards.³¹ Together, Meehan and Prang published *The Native Flowers and Ferns of the United States in their Botanical, Horticultural and Popular Aspects*.

Today, we might look at a publication like *Flowers and Ferns* as a coffee-table book, and in fact, it may well have been. It was of a large format, with each full page chromolithograph followed by four pages of text. Meehan himself wrote that “you might

say the picture is too artistic for botanical detail, but I have to keep in view the large number of people who are fond of art and who are not botanists, but whom I hope may, by my work, someday become such.”³² In the preface to Volume I, Meehan wrote that the purpose of the book was not to be a scientific treatment of the flora of the United States, but to be an anthology to:

cull the most beautiful, interesting, and important from among the vast number of plants which grow in the different parts of our country...in order to secure the wide patronage which is absolutely necessary to sustain an undertaking of this nature, it has been deemed advisable not to devote the text exclusively to scientific description [but] to make the work serviceable and accessible, not only to the botanist proper, but also to the practical cultivator, and to the great body of intelligent people at large.³³

In his correspondence with Prang, the necessary subscription rate to make the book a success was set at 5000. Meehan was sure that this could be accomplished.

During conversation with his canvasser, he estimated that in Germantown alone at least 500 subscriptions could be raised.³⁴

Meehan corresponded almost every day with a Mr. S. R. Koehler, probably his editor at Prang's. They discussed the quality of the artwork; the length of the manuscripts Meehan was producing, and details surrounding the publication. Every two weeks, a part was issued which contained four plates and sixteen pages of text. Several years later, bound volumes were offered for sale at three rates: \$7.50 per volume clothbound; \$9.00 per volume bound in half morocco with a gilt edge; and \$10.00 per volume bound in full morocco with a gilt edge. The advertisement suggested that the four volume set was “very popular for wedding or Christmas presents.”³⁵

In an unattributed press clipping, *Flowers and Ferns* was praised as “an important, popular, and low-priced work,” yet criticized “that the plates, though sufficient



Figure 5 Carolina Jasmine, *Gelsemium sempervirens*,
from *The Native Flowers and Ferns of the United States*, Series I, Volume I
Collection of the Author

Meehan agreed. The artist, Alois Lunzer, worked from live specimens which Meehan collected and sent to him. Meehan found that Lunzer's work improved over time, and by May 1878 wrote that

He is worth double to me than he was last year. He takes more time to study the strong points, and more time to make the pictures. Taking an average for the whole year, there will be no difficulty in his making three or four first class ones a week...³⁶

The sudden death of the managing partner, Charles Robson, ended the publication of *Native Flowers and Ferns* after four volumes. Meehan revived it ten years later as *Meehans' Monthly*, using the remaining 138 chromolithographs as the basis for each monthly number. Like his nursery, Meehan used *Native Flowers and Ferns* to popularize native American plants and point out their value. Not only was he adept at writing accurate botanical descriptions of plants, but was able to share his love of gardening. In describing the Carolina Jasmine, Meehan wrote of the

deep grassy green leaves and rich golden flowers [which] speak rather of a rollicking joyousness that spring has come,---a joyousness that finds no bashfulness in its expression, but is rather anxious that all the world should know the good floral season is close at hand.³⁷

Wayside Flowers

Meehan took the opportunity to adapt the illustrations and text from *Ferns and Flowers* to a smaller publication, *Wayside Flowers*.³⁸ Published in 1881, this book contained thirty-one of the most colorful plates and the exact text from the larger four volume set. In the introduction, Meehan explained to his "gentle Reader" that this book was for those who appreciated "the beauty of the wayside flower." He also had a more practical purpose: to popularize the larger work.

The value of Meehan's writing cannot be fully appreciated. His manner of writing was thoughtful and complete, yet never fell into the flowery verbosity which often characterizes writers of the Victorian era. In comparison to popular literature of the

time, the circulation and readership was small. But in the field of horticulture, Meehan attracted a large audience, both professional and amateur. Like his nursery, through his writing Meehan's shared his enthusiasm and continuing quest for new information. His readers in the nineteenth century benefited from his intimate knowledge of the plant world, and his familiarity with scientific and vernacular literature. Meehan's readers in the twentieth century can benefit from the quantity of data he so thoughtfully recorded.

Notes to Chapter 5

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- ² "The Academy of Natural Science," *The Catalog of Landscape Records in the United States* 8, no. 1 (Bronx, NY: Wave Hill).
- ³ Meehan to Englemann, 23 May 1865, Missouri Botanical Garden
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Meehan to Englemann, 26 July 1867, Missouri Botanical Garden.
- ⁶ Meehan to Englemann, 7 May 1877, Missouri Botanical Garden.
- ⁷ Schuyler, David, *Apostle of Taste, Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 178.
- ⁸ *Horticulturist* (May 1851): 217-220.
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- ¹⁰ *Gardener's Monthly* (September 1877): 286.
- ¹¹ "A Message from the Editor of 'The Gardener's Monthly,'" *The American Garden* (February 1888): 37.
- ¹² *Gardener's Monthly* (December 1859): 184.
- ¹³ *Gardener's Monthly* (January 1875): 6.
- ¹⁴ Mott, Frank Luther, *History of American Magazines*, III (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930) 6.
- ¹⁵ Advertising Sheet, *Horticulturist* (January 1863): 6.
- ¹⁶ Mott, 161.
- ¹⁷ *Gardener's Monthly* (January 1876): 18-19.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ *Gardener's Monthly* (January 1859): 7.
- ²⁰ *Garden and Forest* (29 February 1888): 1.
- ²¹ *Garden and Forest* (25 March 1891): 144.
- ²² Freeman, Larry, *Louis Prang: Color Lithographer, Giant of a Man* (Watkins Glen, NY: Century House, 1971).
- ²³ *Meehans' Monthly* (January 1895): 20.
- ²⁴ *Meehans' Monthly* (January 1896): 20.
- ²⁵ *Meehans' Monthly* (April 1896): 80.
- ²⁶ Meehan, T., *The American Handbook of Ornamental Trees*, frontispiece.
- ²⁷ Meehan, *Ornamental Trees*, "Advertisement."
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ *The Florist and Horticultural Journal* (January 1854): 31-32.
- ³¹ Freeman, 80.
- ³² Meehan to Englemann, 27 September 1878, Missouri Botanical Garden.
- ³³ Meehan, Thomas, *Native Flowers and Ferns of the United States, in their Botanical, Horticultural, and Popular Aspect*, Series I, Volume I (Boston: L. Prang, 1879), iv.
- ³⁴ Meehan, T. to S. R. Koehler, 6 July 1878, The Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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- ³⁵ *Meehans' Monthly* (January 1892): 16.
- ³⁶ Meehan to Koehler, 1 May 1878, Missouri Botanical Garden.
- ³⁷ Meehan, T., "Gelsemium Semervirens," *Native Flowers and Ferns* Series I, Volume I, 12.
- ³⁸ Meehan, Thomas, *Wayside Flowers* (Philadelphia: Charles Robson, 1881).

CHAPTER 6

THE CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION OF 1876

The Centennial Exposition of 1876 commemorated the founding of our country in 1776. It was a showcase for the best and newest inventions both at home and abroad. In a seven month period, nearly 10,000,000 people flocked to Philadelphia to see its wonders.¹ Afterward, most of the buildings were dismantled, and the area returned to its park-like setting.

The portion of Fairmount Park transferred for the Exposition included two broad plateaus above the Schuylkill River, Landsdowne and Belmont. The 236 acre grounds of the Exposition were enclosed by a board fence nine feet tall and nearly three miles long. Traffic was guided along seven miles of walks and drives, plus a narrow-gauge railway five and a half miles long.² There were five main buildings: Main Building, Machinery Hall, Agricultural Hall, Horticultural Hall, and the Art Museum. The cost of Horticultural Hall, \$367,073.47, was paid by the City of Philadelphia, which intended to keep it as a permanent structure. The only other permanent structure was the Art Museum, now known as Memorial Hall.

Horticultural Exhibits

Horticultural Hall was the smallest of the five main buildings, but the largest conservatory built at the time, 383 long, 193 feet wide, and seventy-two feet high.³

Designed in the Moresque (or Moorish) style, Horticultural Hall was built primarily of iron and glass, but with much decorative marble and brick work. "The interior of this hall possessed an Arabian Nights' sort of gorgeousness"⁴ which was well suited to tropical palms and cactus displayed within. Among the potted plants were numerous fountains, statuary, and benches. Stairways led to observation galleries which ringed the building, both indoors and out, for views across the lush conservatory plantings and across the Centennial grounds alike. In addition to the potted plants were displays of other horticultural wares, like seeds and garden implements. Charles H. Marot, publisher of the *Gardener's Monthly*, displayed a complete set of the periodical, bound in leather.⁵

The grounds around Horticultural Hall covered forty acres.⁶ Viewing plans, the flat open gardens surrounding Horticultural Hall seem to be the focal point of the Centennial. The outdoor space available for exhibitors totalled eight acres. Fifty-six American exhibitors and twenty-seven foreign exhibitors prepared displays outside.⁷ In one of Meehan's monthly reports about the Centennial for the readers of *Gardener's Monthly*, he wrote of being chased off the grass by "the official seraph, who held the flaming sword at the gate,"⁸ when trying to examine the plants exhibited in the outdoor display. The exhibitors wrote to the Director General, explaining that they had designed their exhibits so that people would be able to examine the plants, not just admire them from the walkways.

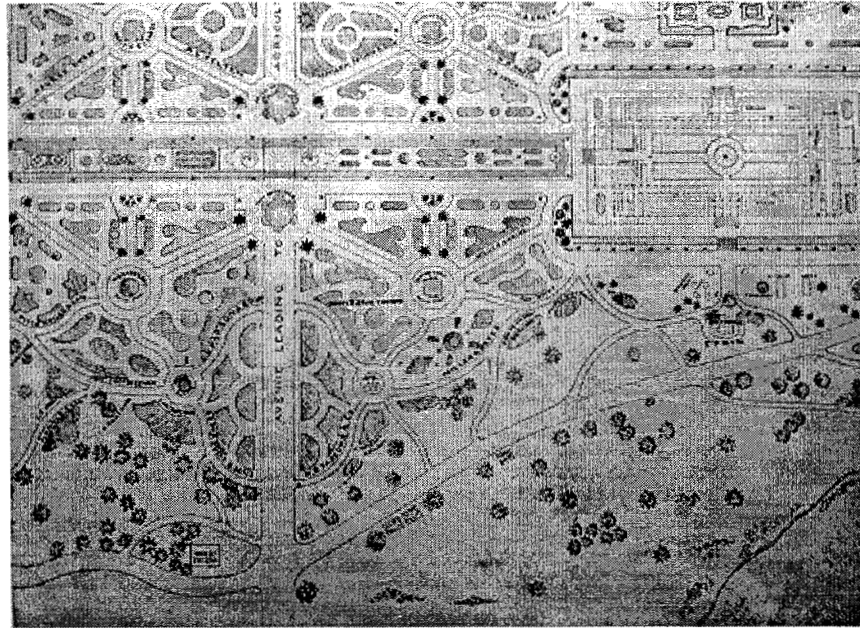


Figure 6 Landscape Plan of the Horticulture Grounds
at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876
Courtesy of the Historic Preservation Office, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia

Group XXIX of the Centennial Exposition included the horticultural competitions, including garden tools and ornaments, garden design, and plant material. The four judges of this Group were George Thurber, of New York City, William Saunders of Washington, DC (Meehan's former partner), W.D. Brackenridge of Govanstown, Maryland, and Francis Pentland of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Meehan entered the competition with an exhibit of ornamental trees and shrubs. William Saunders, wrote a narrative report for the official records, describing not only Meehan's entry, but the efforts of seven other nurserymen, including the well known firms of Robert Buist of Philadelphia, Josiah Hoopes of West Chester, Pennsylvania, and

S.B. Parsons and Sons, Flushing, New York. Saunders wrote that the “plants, selected as they were from the ordinary salable stock of commercial nurseries, afforded ample evidence of the great variety available for the ornamentation of suburban lawns and public and private parks.”⁹

The collection of plants from Meehan’s Germantown Nurseries included seven hundred and fifty kinds of plants hardy in most of the United States. Meehan’s “arboretum” was described as one of the most complete collections of hardy plants ever assembled. Meehan wrote in *Gardener’s Monthly* how he grew the plants for the Centennial display. All 720 trees were grown in boxes a year before the Exhibition, and so were transplanted with healthy rootballs. Meehan’s cost, including the commercial value of the trees and installation, was \$3000.00.¹⁰ After the Exposition closed, Fairmount Park planned to buy the collection.¹¹

The plants which Meehan chose to exhibit included both introduced and native species which were “rarely to be met in cultivation.”¹² Represented in the display were thirty species of oaks, maples, hickories, and thirty kinds of hawthorns. Native plants included the leather-wood, pawpaw, Franklin’s tree, witch hazel, iron-wood, and silver-bell. Many plants recently introduced from Japan were shown, including a yellow-flowered Siberian crab-apple. Meehan also showed hardy vines like Virginia creeper, clematis, wistaria, and Japanese honeysuckle.

In the final Reports on Awards, the judges wrote that Meehan had produced “A very meritorious exhibit.”¹³

Volunteering at the Centennial

In addition to exhibiting plants from his nursery, Meehan volunteered as a judge and as a member of the Resident Advisory Committee of the Bureau of Horticulture. In May, he acted as a temporary judge of pomological exhibits, since the Pomological Board of International Judges was not organized until later in the summer.¹⁴ He was also appointed to the International Jury upon Miscellaneous Fruits.¹⁵

The role of the Resident Advisory Committee is not clear.¹⁶ Possibly they provided on-site information for visitors or to recommend exhibits and events to the larger Horticulture Department. They had offices inside the west entrance of Horticultural Hall. In the July issue of *Gardener's Monthly* a clue to their purpose was given:

A "member" [of the Advisory Committee of the Bureau of Horticulture of the Centennial] asks us to say, and it seems but justice to do so, that the committee was never called together but once, and that the results of the exhibition, credible or otherwise, in the Horticulture Department, does not rest with said committee.¹⁷

When Meehan reported to his readers in *Gardener's Monthly*, he expresses his disappointment in the role the Horticulture Department played in Centennial Exposition. The Horticulture Department did not arrange for any special exhibitions of flowers or fruits, except for those arranged by the American Pomological Society. In November 1876 he wrote:

...We cannot but think that it was a mistake not to do for horticulture proper what the Agricultural Department did for fruits and vegetables. A continuous floral exhibition would have been a great charm...Horticulture has gained a little by the Centennial Exposition. It has exhibited good lessons in landscape gardening, in arranging bedding plants, and in arboriculture---in any other respect the great world...knows little more than if the Exposition had never been....Where the blame lies for this huge

failure we have no disposition to investigate, and it would serve no good purpose now.¹⁸

If the grand Centennial Exposition of 1876 was a disappointment to Meehan, he soon had the opportunity to create a lasting impression on the city of Philadelphia and the country, through his efforts to make city parks. What Meehan could not know was that scholars today view the Centennial Exposition as a great success, an example of the technological advancement and exuberance of the American people. Meehan's exhibit showcasing native plants reached thousands, if not millions of visitors, and complemented his similar efforts through the his nursery and writing.

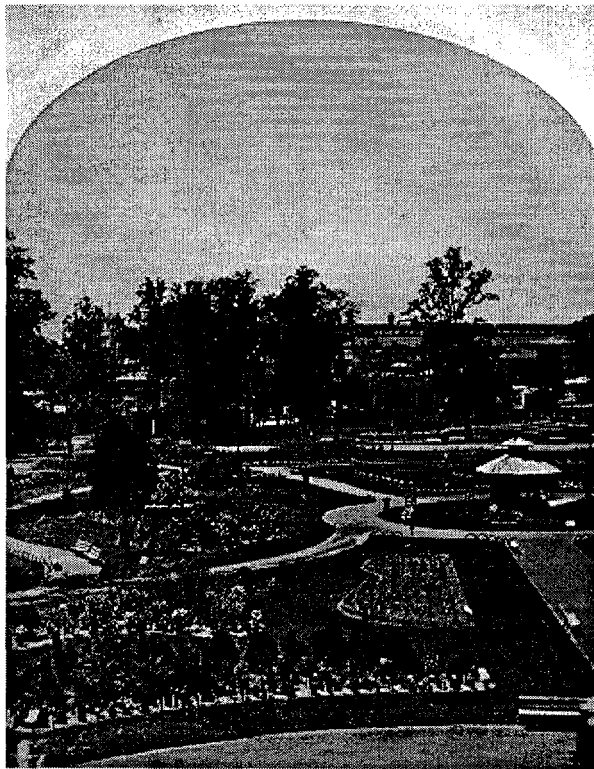


Figure 7 Stereopticon view of the Horticulture Grounds around Horticultural Hall at the Centennial Exposition
Courtesy of Kathryn Meehan

Notes to Chapter 6

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² Ingram J. S., *The Centennial Exposition, Described and Illustrated*, etc... (Hartford: L. Stebbins, 1877), 108.

³ Maas, John, *The Glorious Enterprise, The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and H.J. Schwarzmann, Architect in Chief* (Watkins Glen, NY: American life Foundation, 1973), 60.

⁴ Ingram, 113.

⁵ Burr, Samuel J., *Memorial of the International Exposition* (Hartford: L. Stebbins, 1877), 596.

⁶ Burr, 598.

⁷ Meehan, T., "Horticulture at the Centennial," *Gardener's Monthly* (September 1876): 287.

⁸ Meehan, T., "The Centennial," *Gardener's Monthly* (July 1876): 221.

⁹ Walker, Francis A., ed., *U.S. Centennial Exhibition. International Exhibition 1876. Reports and Awards Group XXIX* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippinott & Co., 1878), 15.

¹⁰ Meehan, T., "How Not To Do It," *Gardeners Monthly* (November 1877): 347.

¹¹ Burr, 598.

¹² Walker, 17.

¹³ Walker, 35.

¹⁴ Meehan, T., "The Centennial," *Gardener's Monthly* (July 1876): 221-222.

¹⁵ Ibid, 224.

¹⁶ Burr, 595.

¹⁷ Meehan, T., *Gardener's Monthly* (July 1876): 216.

¹⁸ Meehan, T., "The Centennial," *Gardener's Monthly* (November 1876): 349.

CHAPTER 7

CITY PARKS IN PHILADELPHIA

The city park movement began in the early nineteenth century with ornamental cemeteries, rural beautification projects that served two purposes: a place to bury the dead and a place of recreation.¹ Andrew Jackson Downing pointed out the relationship between cemeteries and parks in 1849, saying that "...in the absence of great public gardens, such as we must surely one day have in America, our rural cemeteries are doing a great deal to enlarge and educate the popular taste in rural embellishment." While Downing brought nature to suburban dwellers, Frederick Law Olmsted brought nature to the heart of the city. Olmsted became the movement's best-known champion, beginning a long career in 1857 when he was appointed superintendent of Central Park in New York City.² Like Downing, Olmsted believed that "the quality of the physical environment affected the well-being of the individual and, in turn, the welfare of the entire community."³ But Olmsted went one step further, and said that it was the right of every individual to have access to a healthy environment, especially if they could not afford a place in the country.

Garden and Forest regularly documented the increasing number of parks in the United States, devoting several editorials to the movement. Its editor, Charles Sprague Sargent, descended from a prominent Boston family, was an authority on trees, director of the Arnold Arboretum, and proponent of city parks. Sargent wrote:

In every city this desire for breathing-spaces, for playgrounds, for stretches of grass and the shade of trees should be encouraged. There should be no delay about getting land while it is cheap, and getting enough of it. Of course, it would not be prudent to develop fully a large park area before the population demands it. But this does not mean that a plan for development should be put off until the pressure for outdoor room is urgent. Planning by piecemeal is wasteful work, and the best park system for any city can only be attained when a design for its entire park area as on consistent scheme is secured....Parks are so essential to the wants of modern city life, and land is so expensive, that it is a shameful extravagance when the public grounds of a city are not treated in such a way that they can serve the very highest use of which they are capable, and this can only be accomplished by the careful study of trained artists.⁴

The history of city parks in Philadelphia began with the purchase of five acres on the Schuylkill River to build a pumping station and reservoirs to increase the city's water supply.⁵ More land was added over time, until forty two years later, the city bought Springettsberry, an estate formerly owned by William Penn's son, Thomas Penn. After passing through several hands, a portion of the estate had been sold at auction in 1799 to Henry Pratt, who tore down the existing house and built a new one, calling the property Lemon Hill. Pratt developed one of the most beautiful gardens in the city, and also ran a nursery, which at one time employed the newly emigrated Robert Buist. After Pratt's death in 1838, the U.S. Government bought Lemon Hill for \$225,000. Six years later, the city of Philadelphia purchased the property for \$75,000 to protect the city's water supply.⁶ In 1856, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society adopted a resolution to endorse

the efforts of the public-minded gentlemen who had banded together as the Fairmount Park Contribution, to improve the grounds of Lemon Hill and the Spring Garden Water Works.⁷ By 1863, these gardens were maintained with such a “deplorable disregard of the plain rules of rural ornamentation” that the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society appointed a committee to advise the City Council in planting the grounds. The five members of this committee were Caleb Cope, Daniel Rodney King, Thomas Meehan, Robert Kilvington, and Thomas P. James.⁸ After the Centennial Exposition, this committee continued to advise the Commissioners of Fairmount Park. Fairmount Park grew to become the one of the largest parks in the country.⁹

The work of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society was Thomas Meehan’s introduction to the growing movement of city parks in the United States. In 1883, Meehan was elected to the Common Council of Philadelphia, representing Ward 23, which encompassed Germantown. He accepted this position so that he could act to save Bartram’s Garden.¹⁰ In 1884, he introduced what became known as “Meehan’s Ordinance,” a scheme for the city to buy land cheaply in the outlying suburbs, and then to sell it at a higher price as the land around it was developed, using the profit to buy select lands for the city to develop parks. Legal counsel deemed this sort of speculation inappropriate for the city, but soon both private and public funds were made available to purchase park lands. Meehan wrote that:

I once looked upon these breathing-places for the poor in large cities with the eye of an artist, valuing them primarily as spots of beauty and ornament to the city. I look upon them now as playgrounds and places where all kinds of physical recreation can be enjoyed, and I leave the details of garden beauty and the ornamentation of the city to take a subordinate place.¹¹

The City Parks Association was formed in 1888 to help the city open small parks and squares. This Association, a group of civic-minded men and women, felt that the public parks were of “political, economic, sanitary, social, scientific, and moral” concern.¹² Parks were located both in the densely populated inner city as well as in the outskirts of the city.

Meehan wrote a detailed description of the process he developed to purchase land for new parks. Initially, Meehan negotiated directly with the land-owner, hoping for “the best bargain possible.” This approach seemed suspicious to the public, so Meehan decided that the value of the land should be decided by a jury appointed by the courts, and the money paid by the city treasury. Desirable plots of land were put on the city plan, with the goal of purchasing them sometime in the future, as finances allowed. Meehan was particularly interested in saving parcels of land which were of historic interest.

The first purchase was dear to Meehan’s heart. After A. M. Eastwick’s death in 1879, the John Bartram’s Botanic Garden fell into disrepair, and were in danger of being developed. Charles Sprague Sargent persuaded wealthy friends in Philadelphia to donate money to purchase the property. Acting as Sargent’s agent, Meehan tried to persuade Eastwick’s heirs to sell the property. When the owners refused, Meehan persuaded the city to save the garden. In an undated newspaper clipping, Meehan wrote that Bartram’s Garden was “the birthplace of American botany” and that “it should be the pride of every Philadelphia to secure and preserve this spot.” On March 7, 1889, the Philadelphia Select Council passed an ordinance appropriating three pieces of land as parks.¹³ In March

1891, city bought the first parcel of land, the gardens of John Bartram on the Schuylkill River.

By 1890, the Association had helped place a number of small parks on the city plan: Stenton Park, Weccacoe Square, Bartram's Garden, Northwood Park, Juniata Park, and Riverview Park. Private donors contributed the Starr Garden, Waterside Park, and two other parcels of land.¹⁴

Meehan was widely praised for his foresight in the matter. Sargent wrote that ...the city is largely indebted to the public spirit, the foresight and the sagacious business management of Mr. Thomas Meehan...and the thronging population of the great city of the future on the banks of the Delaware who will find health and refreshment in the parks which he has done so much to establish will bless his memory for generations to come.¹⁵

On July 4, 1893, a more tangible expression of thanks was accorded Meehan. At the official opening of Vernon Park, Meehan was presented with a solid silver plaque, inscribed with the following:

Presented to Thomas Meehan by his Fellow Citizens of Philadelphia in grateful acknowledgment of his services while a member of the Councils of Philadelphia, 1883-1892 in establishing Small Parks in the several sections of the City, for the health and enjoyment of its citizens.

As a result of Meehan's work, the citizens of Philadelphia enjoyed one of the largest and most diverse park systems in the country. The parks were not only places for recreation and the enjoyment of nature, but some were important historical sites as well, like Bartram's Garden, Stenton, and Vernon Park.

Notes to Chapter 7

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² Leighton, 191.

³ Doell, M. Christine Klim, *Gardens of the Gilded Age, Nineteenth-Century Gardens and Homegrounds of New York State* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 6.

⁴ *Garden and Forest* (24 May 1893): 221.

⁵ Boyd, James, *A History of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 1827-1927* (Philadelphia: Edward Stern, 1929), 32.

⁶ Boyd, 29.

⁷ Boyd, 149-150.

⁸ Boyd, 172.

⁹ *Garden and Forest* (24 October 1888): 412.

¹⁰ *Meehans' Monthly* (March 1897).

¹¹ *Garden and Forest* (13 July 1892): 358.

¹² *Garden and Forest* (10 May 1888): 144.

¹³ *Garden and Forest* (27 March 1889): 156.

¹⁴ *Garden and Forest* (28 May 1890): 268.

¹⁵ *Garden and Forest* (7 June 1893): 276.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Indeed, so active was he, so varied in his gifts, so great his services, that I hardly know how to present him, as nothing short of a book is sufficient to place him as he deserves to be placed.¹

Conclusion

So Edwin Jellett wrote ninety years ago, and still the challenge remains. Thomas Meehan had a profound influence on horticulture in the United States, through his writing, editing, publishing, and gardening. In all of these endeavors, he sought to increase his own knowledge, and then share what he had learned with others. His writing affected thousands of people who subscribed to his publications and bought his books, and still affect people today who turn to his writing for documentation of plants and gardens. Through his nursery, new plants were distributed which increased the palette of materials available for both the homeowner and the connoisseur. As a champion of parks, Meehan ensured a green future for the citizens of Philadelphia, which is still admired and appreciated today. Meehan's influence extends beyond his lifetime into ours, and will continue to do so.

Yet, despite the importance of Meehan's work on horticulture in the United States, much information has yet to be discovered and analyzed. Probably his horticultural work is the most easily identified. Nursery catalogs, trade lists, receipts, gardens, even plants still exist and testify to Meehan's legacy.

Recommendations

Much work remains to be done. In addition to Meehan's horticultural work, Meehan had many other interests which are suitable for further research.

- His trips to the western states and territories, including Alaska, collecting, identifying, and bringing specimens back for his own herbarium collection and for the Academy of Natural Sciences;
- His correspondence with Charles Darwin, and his interest in evolutionary theory;
- His scientific contributions as a botanist, including his many papers;
- His influence on the city of Philadelphia while an elected member of the Common Council;
- His work as State Botanist of Pennsylvania and his role in starting the Pennsylvania Department of Forestry;
- His active membership in many societies, including: the American Philosophical Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the Royal Wernerian Society.

A common thread runs through the work Meehan did outside the horticultural field: by today's standards, Meehan would be considered a gifted amateur. His real

training was as a horticulturist; botany was his passion. This trend caused him anxiety for many years when he compared his work to the famous botanist Asa Gray at Harvard University. Meehan frequently wrote of the tension between Gray and himself in his letters to Englemann and to Koehler:

I believe Dr. Gray had as much regard for me, as it is possible for him to have for anyone outside of this circle, but though I have been a heavy contributor to Science for twenty years especially, and indeed all my life, and have received honor therefore that falls to the lot of but very few, I have never had one solitary word of public encouragement from Dr. Gray, but on the other hand a great deal of criticism.²

The specialization of knowledge during the late 19th pushed individuals like Meehan to the side as college-trained scientists like Gray took the lead.³

Any or all of these topics would be suitable for further research. Thomas Meehan was a fascinating and talented man, and we have only begun to understand the scope of his genius.

Notes to Chapter 8

¹ Jellett, *Germantown Gardens and Gardeners*, 304.

² Meehan to Koehler, 10 June 1878, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³ Keeney, Elizabeth, *The Botanizers, Amateur Scientists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

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2. Botanical and Horticultural History
3. Centennial Exposition
4. City of Philadelphia
5. General Works
6. Periodicals
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APPENDIX

TIME LINE OF NOTABLE EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF THOMAS MEEHAN

21 March 1826	Thomas Meehan born at Potter's Bar, near London
ca. 1836-38	Attended a Lancastrian School
1838	Started working for his father as a gardener
1840	Wrote his first scientific paper
1843	Head gardener to Paymaster Vaux
1844	Gardener to Sir Augustus Clifford, near Ryde on Isle of Wight
1846	Elected to Royal Wernerian Society
1845-48	Gardener at Royal Botanic Garden, Kew
21 March 1848	Arrived in New York aboard <i>The Devonshire</i>
22 March 1848	Took canal boat to Philadelphia
1848	Worked for Robert Buist, Rosedale Nurseries, Kingsessing
1849	Worked for Andrew M. Eastwick, Bartram Botanic Garden
1849	Began writing articles in the <i>Horticulturist</i>
May 1850	Member of Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
February 1852	Worked for Caleb Cope at Springbrook, in Holmesburg Regular contributor to <i>The Philadelphia Florist</i>

- 11 February 1852 Married Kitty Colflesh
- 1853 Published *The American Handbook of Ornamental Trees*
- 1854 Entered a partnership with William Saunders to start a nursery and landscape gardening business in Germantown, Pennsylvania
- 1859 Brother Joseph Meehan emigrated to the United States, and after the Civil War, joins Thomas at Germantown Nurseries
D. Rodney King starts the *Gardener's Monthly and Horticultural Advertiser*, with Meehan as editor
- 1860 Elected member of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia
- 1866 Takes Wandell as short-lived partner
- 1868 Member of the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences
- 1870 Moved Germantown Nurseries to new, larger location
- 1871 Elected to the American Philosophical Society
- 1875 Elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science
Gardener's Monthly bought the subscription list to *The Horticulturist*, becoming *Gardener's Monthly and Horticulturist*
- 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Meehan displayed an arboretum of 750 ornamental trees and shrubs
- 1877 Appointed Botanist to the Pennsylvania Board of Agriculture and Professor of Vegetable Physiology by the Governor of Pennsylvania
Member of the Philadelphia City School Board for the 22nd Ward.
Elected Vice-President of the ANSP
- 1878 Published *The Native Flowers and Ferns of the United States* with chromolithographs by Louis Prang of Boston
- 1882 Wrote the horticulture section of the American edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica*
- 1883 Elected to Common Council for the 22nd Ward

- 1887 *Gardener's Monthly* ceases publication on the death of the publisher, Charles A. Marot
- 1891 Began publishing *Meehans' Monthly*
- 1891 Bartram's Garden acquired by the City of Philadelphia
- 1 July 1897 Takes three sons in to partnership, forming Thomas Meehan and Sons Nursery
- August 1901 Received the Veitch Medal
- 19 November 1901 Dies in Germantown, Pennsylvania, at age 75