Mr. Dawson, Plantsman

by Sheila Connor Geary and B. June Hutchinson

There is a special magic experienced in growing plants, and Jackson Thornton Dawson not only was attuned to the magic, he was a master of it. William Trelease, who later became the first director of the Missouri Botanical Garden, met Jackson Dawson in 1884 and described him as "capable almost of resurrecting a dead stick and certainly of coaxing into vigorous growth a twig found in the pocket of a shooting jacket weeks after this had been laid aside" (Trelease, 1929).

Dawson started work at the Arnold Arboretum in 1873 as Charles Sprague Sargent's first staff member, and his career as propagator and superintendent spanned forty-three exciting years in the Arboretum's development. During these years he raised and distributed throughout the world 450,718 plants and 47,993 packets of seed and received in return from collectors, arboreta, and botanic gardens 174,200 plants and 27,729 packets of seed. Approximately 15-20% of the Arboretum's current living collections are the result of his labors.

Sheila Connor Geary, Assistant Librarian, has been at the Arnold Arboretum since 1970. She is a graduate of the Massachusetts College of Art. Having lived at 1090 Centre Street, Dawson's Arboretum home, she has long been interested in both Jackson Thornton Dawson and his family. B. June Hutchinson, a long-standing Friend of the Arnold Arboretum and an active volunteer since 1970, has been researching with Sheila Connor Geary the early history of the Arboretum.
Jackson Dawson was born in East Riding in Yorkshire, England, on October 5, 1841, and lived there for five years. After his father's death, Jackson and his mother, Elizabeth Thornton Dawson (1821-1870), came to New York City. Their voyage to America was a perilous one, lasting sixty-five stormy days. The seas were so turbulent that their small vessel, The Garrick Trask, was driven almost to the Gulf of Mexico. Memories of that journey stayed with Jackson, and a later opportunity to ride the Staten Island Ferry caused the small boy to plead with his mother not to take him on a boat again!

Elizabeth (Betsy) Dawson settled with her son on Cherry Street near the Brooklyn Bridge and earned a living by sewing elaborate tape measures for the fashionable tailors of New York. In 1849 a cholera epidemic broke out in New York City. In later years Jackson Dawson would describe the death carts which were driven through the city streets each day and the eerie call from the drivers to "bring out your dead". Fortunately the Dawsons survived the epidemic, but the horror of the experience was undoubtedly a factor in Betsy Dawson's decision to move to Massachusetts.

Betsy and Jackson went to live with her brother, George J. Thornton. He, his wife Elizabeth, and their three children lived in Andover, where George had a nursery and greenhouse. It was here at the age of eight that Jackson first began to work with plants. He stood on a soap box to reach the workbench and put in cuttings. He was a willing worker and apparently loved plants from a very early age. One family story relates how he hoarded his money and instead of spending it on a toy, purchased a basic text for botany students of the period, Mrs. Lincoln's Botany (Phelps, 1831 or 1833).

Jackson remained in Andover until he was a young man, attending school in the winter and working in his uncle's business in the spring and fall. When he was fifteen or sixteen years old, he was apprenticed to C. M. Hovey and Company, a noted nursery in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts.* Jackson was diligent, and family records depict a young man who spent long hours working and learning. He was a talented flower-arranger and was soon in charge of the bouquet department at the Hovey nursery. In the evenings he attended a business college, French's Commercial and Nautical Institute, located at 94 Tremont Street in downtown Boston. Established in 1848, the institute became known as French's Business College (1848-1901) and was one of the oldest commercial schools in the United States.

Family records also are clear as regards Dawson's personality. A picture of him as a youth reveals an exceedingly handsome face with merry eyes and dark hair. He was well-known for his endless fund of stories and jokes, which he told with great skill and wit. Dawson was fond of relating an early incident that reveals his storytelling ability. One evening, as Dawson and his friends waited for

Betty Blossom Johnson, in a biographical sketch of her grandfather, Jackson Dawson, recalled that he was a patient, loving man who always had time for the children of the family. “He was never too busy or too preoccupied that he wouldn’t tell us some fascinating story about a little shrub or a big tree, or perhaps the cuttings or grafts he was at work on. And how he could tell a story! Weaving together the details of a plant’s journey from some far corner of China or other distant locale to its present spot. His memory was prodigious and I believe he knew intimately every fact about every plant of the many thousands he had raised. He was so modest, it wasn’t until decades later, I was to learn what an important part he, himself, had played in raising these plants” (Blossom, 1957). Dawson’s granddaughter also described his bushy mustache and twinkling eyes. Both are evident in this photograph of Dawson taken when he was thirty years old and working at the Bussey Institution. Photographer unknown.
the doors at the business school to open, he entertained his companions with an Irish joke. William Warren, an actor performing at the nearby Boston Museum, stopped to listen. When Dawson finished telling the story, Warren asked him, "Are you Irish, my son?" Mischievously, Dawson answered him with a sentence in Irish dialect, but hastened to add, "No, thank heavens, I'm not." Warren offered to help Dawson with a stage career, but the young plantsman had already chosen his life's work. Warren was indeed a capable judge of Dawson's talents. One of the most popular 19th century comedians, he appeared on the stage in Boston for approximately fifty years and was a member of the stock company at the Boston Museum on Tremont Street, where at that time curiosities as well as paintings were exhibited and theatrical performances presented.

Jackson Dawson's first public recognition in the plant world came in 1861 when he was twenty years old. Scotch heather labeled as "growing wild within twenty miles of Boston" was displayed that year in a July exhibition at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. A card accompanying the exhibit identified the exhibitor as "a young gardener of Cambridge." Since heather had never been found growing wild on the American continent, the exhibit aroused considerable excitement, and the judges sent a letter to the exhibitor, requesting him to identify the location of the plant. No reply was forthcoming, with the result that the judges declared the incident a hoax. Later, Dawson came forward and explained to the judges that his employer originally had forbidden him to speak. On August 5 he led them to the farm of Charles H. Thwing in Tewksbury, Massachusetts, where heather was indeed growing. The Society awarded Dawson their gold medal and gave him a prize of ten dollars in gold. Since heather in fact is native only to parts of Europe, that growing in Farmer Thwing's land did appear there by accident; later accounts suggest that the heather may have grown from seed which had fallen from packing crates discarded near the site. Charles Mason Hovey suggested the heather may have been mixed in a shipment of pear trees that his nursery supplied to a farmer whose land was upstream from the site of the find. However, at the time everyone believed that Dawson's find was a native plant. Even the eminent Asa Gray, upon reviewing the facts, supported Dawson.

Dawson continued to work at the Hovey Nursery and to attend business school until August 1862, when he joined Company G of the Massachusetts 19th Volunteers to fight in the Civil War. He was shot in the battle of Fredericksburg on December 11, 1862. According to a family account, a hole in his jacket over his heart led his companions to believe him dead until they realized that Jackson was still breathing. The Confederate sharpshooter had aimed well, but the bullet had been stopped by the Bible that his mother had given him when they parted. He had instead fallen from
a second bullet and spent the next six months in a hospital in Washington, D.C., recuperating from a leg wound.

While recovering, Jackson was not idle. He served as a hospital orderly and helped with the floral decorations for a fund-raising fair sponsored by the Sanitary Commission. Established on June 9, 1861, and functioning until 1866, the Sanitary Commission provided medical care and supplies for the Union Army and was the forerunner of the American Red Cross. Frederick Law Olmsted, America's first landscape architect and the designer of the Arnold Arboretum, was Executive Secretary of the Sanitary Commission and played a major role in the effective functioning of this organization during the Civil War.

Jackson’s ready wit won many friends for him during his army days, and family accounts suggest he also earned a reputation for being an excellent cook, frequently preparing meals for Company G. Jackson became an American citizen while he was in the Army and cast his first vote in a battlefield ballot box in the Presidential election of 1864. He did not forget his love of plants during the trying war years and collected and sent home to New England packets of seeds and rare plants from the southern states through which he travelled. It is likely that his two former employers, Thornton Brothers and Hovey Company, received his collections. At the end of his enlistment in 1864, Jackson returned to Boston and worked for a time for his old employer, the Hovey nursery.

In December 1866 Jackson married Mary (Minnie) McKenna in Andover, Massachusetts. Specific information about the life of Mary McKenna Dawson is meagre. She was born on Saint Patrick's Day, March 17, 1842, in New York City. Her family may have originated in County Kildare, Ireland, as this was the home of her younger brother, Terrance. By early 1868 Mary and Jackson were living in the gardener’s cottage of the John Dove Estate in Andover where Jackson was working as gardener. Later photographs of the estate show greenhouses and suggest that the grounds were elaborate. Two sons were born in the gardener's cottage, William Francis on February 10, 1868, and George Walter on March 16, 1870.

In 1869, the first year of President Charles W. Eliot's administration at Harvard University, the Bussey Institution was organized. On March 8, 1871, Francis Parkman, historian and horticulturist, was appointed to the original faculty of the Bussey Institution as Professor of Horticulture. This was the first such position established at any American college or university and came thirty-six years after Benjamin Bussey created, in his will, trusts that would establish a School of Agriculture and Horticulture at Harvard.

Parkman resigned his position at the Bussey Institution at the end of the academic year due to failing health, but he did see the first enrollment of students in September 1871 and oversaw the planning and construction of the greenhouses, one of the first ranges construct-
The greenhouses and headhouse of the Bussey Institution. Jackson and Minnie Dawson and their seven children lived in the apartment over the headhouse from 1871 to 1886. Although Jackson Dawson was employed by the Bussey Institution only from 1871 to 1873, he continued to work at the Bussey greenhouses until the Arboretum constructed its own facility in 1886. During the time he worked in the Bussey greenhouses Dawson grew some plant material for Leopold and Rudolph Blaschka, the artists responsible for the Ware Collection of Glass Flowers at Harvard's Botanical Museum.

* For an interesting hypothesis concerning Parkman's influence on the selection of a Director for the Arnold Arboretum, see Walter Muir Whitehill, "Francis Parkman as Horticulturist", *Arnoldia* 33(3):169-183.
Motley on March 26, 1878, Laura Blanchard on January 29, 1881, and Henry Sargent on March 24, 1886. The Dawsons often named their children after relatives, but they also included names of family friends. Minnie Motley was named for her mother and the Motleys who were descendants of Benjamin Bussey and lived at Woodland Hill, the original Bussey Estate. Laura Blanchard was named after a prominent family in the area. Henry Sargent probably was named after Charles Sprague Sargent's cousin, Henry Winthrop Sargent.

The year following Dawson's arrival at the Bussey Institution, Charles Sprague Sargent was appointed Director of the Harvard Botanic Garden, a newly created position that included the administration of the Bussey Institution as Professor of Horticulture. In addition, on November 24, 1873, Sargent received his third and ultimate charge as Director of the Arnold Arboretum. Sargent held all three positions concurrently for several years; he was Director of the Garden until 1879 and a professor at the Bussey until 1877. Thirty-two years old when he assumed these responsibilities, Sargent was known for his determination, rather than for his scholastic ability; he had yet to publish a single scientific paper. But Sargent neither allowed an opportunity to pass nor overlooked the merits of any situation, and one of his first official acts as Director of the Arboretum was to hire Jackson Thornton Dawson. Although now officially an Arboretum employee, Dawson continued to work in the greenhouse of the Bussey Institution since the Arboretum did not have a propagation facility and, in fact, existed only as an official document and 120 acres of the Bussey Estate.

By 1874 Sargent estimated that Dawson had propagated "several thousand trees and shrubs" (Sargent, 1874). Mindful of the Arboretum's charge "to grow every tree and shrub capable of withstanding the climate of Massachusetts" and wishing to complement the plants raised from seed sent from all over the world, Sargent turned to the native woody flora of New England to expand the Arboretum's collections. Dawson described his role in this undertaking in an article in a Boston newspaper many years later: "In one year I collected 50,000 native shrubs to plant in the Arboretum. I also collected all the laurels and the yews" (Dawson, ca. 1911). As the Arboretum's first plant collector (Sargent made a collecting trip to California and Nevada in 1878), Dawson centered his collections around eastern Massachusetts. A horse and wagon would be rented, and he would set out for Lynn or Swampscott, Taunton or Plymouth. His records indicate that the North Shore was the location for many of his collections; his trips surely included a visit with his relatives in the area.

The Arnold Arboretum archives contain Dawson's early handwritten accession books. The earliest entry for plants collected by Dawson and still growing at the Arboretum is for several *Ilex verticillata* which he collected in 1872 in Reading, Massachusetts. These
plants are growing in the deciduous holly beds behind the *Aesculus*

Dawson's workload increased as Sargent began to explore and combine his various administrative responsibilities. In 1875 he described his progress in combining activities at the Bussey greenhouses in two separate reports, one as Director of the Arnold Arboretum and one as Director of the Botanic Garden. In the report on the Arboretum he notes that "the Green-houses of the Bussey Institution having been placed at my disposal for uses of the Arboretum, they have been devoted to the raising of forest and ornamental trees and shrubs for future plantations...and 165 species have been added to the
collection. Probably over 100,000 ligneous plants have been raised
during the nine [preceeding] months" (Sargent, 1875b). And in the
report on the Botanic Garden he notes that "the department of pro-
pagation of the Botanic Garden has been transferred to the Arbore-
tum with excellent results in every way, materials for the botanical
classes [held] during the winter, which were formerly raised at the
Garden, are now either raised at the Bussey Institution or purchased"
(Sargent, 1875a).

When Dawson was not engaged in propagating, raising, or collect-
ing plants, he had the nursery areas to manage and the planting to
supervise. Although Sargent always described the nursery plants as
being in "excellent" and "flourishing" condition, it was evident that
overcrowding had become a serious problem by 1876, and under
Dawson's supervision the nurseries were expanded on a yearly basis.

Dawson collected another 2,500 specimens of New England plants
during 1877, and as a partial solution to the problem of overcrowding,
the policy was adopted that year to "select six of the best specimens
of each species, and plant them in the nurseries" (Sargent, 1878).
This policy freed excess plant material for the vigorous program of
plant distribution accompanying the Arboretum's acquisition drive.
To Dawson fell the responsibility of collecting and preparing the
plants and packets of seed to be sent to arboreta, botanic gardens,
nurseries, and individuals. It was through this interaction that his
reputation as a skilled propagator and plantsman began to grow.

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a road system and an arrangement of plantings for the Arboretum
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tion of the road system was initiated in 1883, no permanent plant-
ings, except for border plantations, had been attempted, but now
plant material grown in the nurseries could be moved into the per-
manent collections. By 1885 Sargent was able to report that "Trees
and shrubs to the number of 2,574 have been moved from the different
nurseries into permanent boundary and other plantations" (Sar-
gent, 1886).
Road construction in the Arboretum began in 1883, and the plant families in the permanent systematic collection were sited as the road work progressed. Top: This photograph, taken in October 1890, shows the area around Lily and Bussey Hill Ponds. Bottom: Construction of the roadway at the Walter Street entrance, October 1899. Photographs by the Boston Park Commission.
Sargent intended that native plant material be used along the roadways. By 1886 one third of the road system had been completed, and Dawson was able that year to collect and plant in permanent positions along the completed portions “62,000 shrubs from the woods in different parts of New England” (Sargent, 1887).

Sargent’s only interest in the Bussey Institution was in its facilities and staff. His relationship with the Bussey could not have been improved by hiring Charles Edward Faxon in 1882 as his second Arboretum staff member. Faxon, like Dawson, was originally on the Bussey staff, having been an instructor at the Bussey since 1879. Now that the Arboretum was beginning to develop rapidly, the tension between the two institutions must have escalated even further. Although Dawson continued to carry on his work at the Bussey greenhouses long after Sargent’s Arboretum office was moved to the nearby Sargent family estate, a description of a new greenhouse for the Arboretum appeared in Sargent’s annual report of 1886. At the time Sargent characteristically referred to the new arrangement as an improvement.

A dwelling house, with an acre of ground adjoining the Centre Street entrance, has been taken on a long lease from the Trustees of the Adams Nervine Asylum. A small propagation house, better adapted to the reduced requirements of the Arboretum than the larger houses of the Bussey Institution which have been occupied for this purpose during several years, has been built at this point. The rest of the leased land will be used as a frame yard and nursery: the dwelling house will be occupied by the superintendent of the Arboretum (Sargent, 1887).

Jackson and Minnie Dawson moved in the summer of 1886 to the house at 1090 Centre Street, their home for the remainder of their lives. Plants soon were crowded into every available niche of the new greenhouse, which measured only 50 by 20 feet. “This workshop — this tiny greenhouse,” wrote Ernest Henry Wilson, “is the cradle of the Arnold Arboretum, and Jackson Dawson is, and has been from the commencement, not only nurse but foster-father also” (Wilson, 1916a).

Dawson’s knowledge of plants was uncanny. Often working with material that would be brought into cultivation for the first time through his efforts, his successes were legendary. Charles Sargent doubted there could be any problem in propagation that Dawson could not overcome and considered no one superior to him in ability. In 1882 Dr. Emil Bretschneider, physician to the Russian Legation at Peking, sent to the Arboretum its first wild-collected seed of Asiatic plants. Bretschneider had also sent in 1879, 1880, and 1881 similar collections of north China plants to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Museum d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris, and the Imperial Botanic
1090 Centre Street, the Dawsons’ home and the site of the Arboretum’s first greenhouse and nursery area, was leased from the Trustees of the Adams Nervine Asylum by the Arboretum in 1886. The property has a long history of ownership. A deed dated January 4, 1769, describes the original farm as “situated on both sides of the road leading from the Jamaica Plain Meeting House, so called, to Dedham”. Later deeds recording divisions of the property are dated 1806, 1872, and 1877. In 1882 Annie May Glover conveyed her parcel, now containing 1090 Centre Street, to the Adams Nervine Asylum. Top: This photograph of 1090 Centre Street was taken by Jackson Dawson’s son, William, around 1900 and shows on the doorstep one in the succession of brown collies that were Jackson’s constant companions. Bottom: This photograph, taken in 1900 or earlier, shows the view from the second floor of the house looking toward the Bussey Institution. Photographer unknown.
An undated group photograph taken by William Dawson in the greenhouse at 1090 Centre Street. The envelope for the glass plate negative lists the members of the group, from left to right, as "Father, Wm. Dawkins, Charlie, Martin Daly, Harry and Gus Gilman." From archival records at the Arboretum, Martin Daly can be identified as Dawson's assistant. Gus Gilman, the man in uniform, was the member of the Boston Police Force permanently assigned to patrol the Arboretum. Dawson's grandchildren, Charles William Dawson and Frances Dawson White, recall that Patrolman Gilman was stationed at the Arboretum for many years and rigorously enforced the Park Department's rules, particularly the one that forbids the picking of flowers. Charlie is Charles Jackson Dawson, who by the time this picture was taken may have already established the family nursery business, Eastern Nurseries. Harry is Henry Sargent Dawson, the youngest of the Dawson children, who later took over the management of Eastern Nurseries. William Dawkins cannot be identified.

Gardens, St. Petersburg (Leningrad). The three institutions were successful in germinating most of the seeds received, but in England and France all attempts with the oaks failed. Dawson was able to propagate almost all of the seed including Quercus dentata and Quercus variabilis. On October 15, 1882, Bretschneider wrote to Sargent, "I am glad to hear that the acorns I sent you last autumn have germinated, and I accept your kind proposal to forward a few specimens of the young plants to Europe. I have several times sent acorns to Paris and London. They have never germinated" (Bretschneider, 1882). How pleased Sargent must have been to supply this material! The Bretschneider collection represented 91 different genera; Dawson was able to propagate all but 6, and 18 of the original Bretschneider plants (or propagants from the plants), including the two oaks, are still growing at the Arnold Arboretum.

Dawson delighted in his profession; he loved plants, and he loved to share his knowledge with the hundreds of plantsmen who came from all over the world to visit with him in his greenhouse or to
walk with him through the Arboretum. Ernest Henry Wilson and Jackson Dawson were both colleagues and friends. The one letter in the Arnold Arboretum archives written by Dawson is to Wilson in China. Wilson first met Dawson on a Sunday afternoon, April 8, 1899, seven years before he began his plant collecting for the Arboretum. “My first knock at the door of his home was answered by his hearty ‘come right in.’ . . . the few days I spent in the Arnold Arboretum in Jackson Dawson’s company were more than ordinarily profitable to me. He, in that generous way of his, showed me all over the establishment and I was astonished and bewildered at what I saw, more especially at the size of the shrubs and trees raised from seeds, cuttings or grafts by the skilled craftsman who was my guide” (Sargent, et al., 1916). It would be impossible to reconstruct fully the conversations between Dawson and his visitors during their walks, but Wilson once described Dawson commenting on the different plants in the collections:

“This plant came from —, this was raised from seeds which came from Dakota or from the White Mountains, that from seeds collected by Bretschneider in China or by Sargent in Japan; this is a grafted plant, and that is from a cutting received from — in — . . .” (Wilson, 1916a).

Dawson shared his knowledge of plants in other ways, and anything calculated to further genuine interest in horticulture was sure to find ready support from him. He became a member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1872 and was actively interested in its work throughout his life, serving as a member of several committees and publishing papers in the Society’s publications. By 1885 he was no longer “a young gardener of Cambridge”, but an established plantsman able to speak with authority on the art of plant propagation. On March 7 of that year he lectured on the “Propagation of Trees and Shrubs from Seed”. The lecture was published in the Transactions of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society for the Year 1885 and was considered so valuable a paper that it was reprinted 39 years later in the Year Book of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society (Benson, 1929). In 1894 Dawson spoke at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society on budding and grafting; according to Albert Benson, “after the lecture many of his hearers gathered about him . . . the scene was a master with his disciples” (Benson, 1929). Dawson lectured again in 1909 on “The Different Methods of Propagation of Plants”.

Dawson was one of the original 120 members of the Gardeners’ and Florists’ Club of Boston and was elected president of the club in 1893, six years after its founding. The object of the club, described in typical Victorian terms, was “to unite the individual interests in horticulture, that they may better lift up and carry forward all that tends to advance the interests of its members” (The Gardeners’ and
This lovely photograph is another example of William Dawson's work. His comment on the negative envelope describes the photograph as "the first picture of the original Dawson rose". Jackson Dawson described his rose in 1911 in the magazine Country Life in America: "I obtained the Dawson rose in 1883... It grew about nine feet high, spread fifteen or twenty feet, and was covered with thousands of flowers in the early part of June" (Dawson, 1911).
Florists' Club of Boston, 1893). Dawson was also, for a number of years, a member of the Society of American Florists and served on the executive committee of the Society from 1895 through 1897. On September 6, 1911, the Horticultural Club of Boston held its first meeting. Jackson Dawson was one of the original 20 charter members. In a printed program for the 300th meeting of the Club on May 9, 1951, these early members were described as “the horticultural giants of their day . . . those whose names are written in capital letters in the annals of horticulture” (Bromfield, 1951).

In the early 1900’s there was some controversy among committee members at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society concerning the awarding of cultivation prizes. The problem had troubled the prize committee before. Who was to be given the prize, the estate owner or the gardener? The decision was made to publish the names of both in the Society’s Transactions. In 1909 George Robert White, a Boston philanthropist and an influential member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, gave the Society $2,500, the interest from which each year was to be used to award a gold medal “to the man or woman, commercial firm or institution that has done the most during the year to advance the interest in Horticulture in its broadest sense” (Benson, 1929). In 1910, the first year the medal was awarded, it went by unanimous vote to Charles Sprague Sargent, estate owner, scientist, and Director of the Arnold Arboretum. The following year it was awarded to Jackson Thornton Dawson, gardener, plantsman, and Propagator of the Arnold Arboretum.

In addition to his work as a plant propagator, Dawson’s hobby or avocation (he called it his by-play) was rose hybridization. He played an important part in the production of a new race of roses of American character, the ramblers, and between 1894 and 1909 won nine silver medals for his roses from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

Dawson described how he began to work with roses in the June 15, 1911, issue of Country Life in America, a popular periodical of the era. The issue was entitled the Rose Lovers Number. Charles Sprague Sargent was the consulting editor, and the two lead articles were written by Sargent and Dawson. The cover illustration was a watercolor of the Sargent rose, painted by George W. Dawson, Jackson’s second son. Jackson Dawson noted that he “began hybridizing roses in the early eighties . . . with the white-flowered variety of [Rosa] multiflora. I made my first cross with multiflora and General Jacqueminot [a famous old hybrid rose introduced in 1852, dark crimson in color] . . . Of course I hoped to get double or semi-double roses, and I also wished to retain the hardiness and climbing habit of multiflora. At first I failed, but at last a break was made and all sorts of forms were secured. As usual, most of them were worthless” (Dawson, 1911). At a meeting of the Horticultural Club of Boston on February 4, 1914, Dawson revealed that it took three years

Both Francis Parkman and Charles Sprague Sargent were rose fanciers and surely influenced Dawson. As early as 1874, entries in Parkman’s garden diaries record conversations with Dawson about the proper method for handling rose cuttings and successful watering techniques. According to Walter Muir Whitehill, Parkman “is said to have had at one time over a thousand varieties” of roses in his garden near Jamaica Pond which, due to his arthritis, he often tended from a wheelchair (Whitehill, 1973). “One of my dreams” is how Sargent described his ambition to have an extensive collection of hybrid roses at the Arboretum. In a letter to J. H. McFarland, editor of *The American Rose Annual*, Sargent even suggested that some wealthy person might come forward and aid in establishing such a collection and thus “perpetuate his name in the world of horticulture for at least a thousand years” (McFarland, 1917).

Jackson and Minnie Dawson’s children must have been a source of great pride to them. The wide range of talents and interests in their children’s lives attest to a sensitive upbringing and to the influence of a father dedicated to propagating and hybridizing plants, an influence reinforced by uncles who were nurserymen and florists. Surrounded by plants at the Dove Estate, the Bussey Institution, and the Arboretum, it was natural the Dawson children would develop interests and choose careers that included plants and the landscape, careers not only in horticulture and the nursery trade, but in botany, landscape architecture, photography, and painting.

The oldest child, William, spent the summer of 1880 employed as an office boy by the Arboretum. He worked under the direction of John Robinson, who was in charge of the herbarium at Dwight House, a cottage on the grounds of Holm Lea, the Sargent family estate in Brookline. Dwight House held the herbarium, library, and Director’s office until 1892, when Horatio Hollis Hunnewell donated funds for the construction of a building on the Arboretum grounds. Although William Dawson eventually chose engineering as a profession, a choice that branded him by the family as somewhat of a renegade, he had as an avocation the study of photography. His subject matter was often nature, particularly landscapes. Through the generosity of his family, the Arboretum has some of William’s glass plate negatives. Several of his photographs appear in this article.

George, the Dawson’s second child, attended the Massachusetts
Minnie, Harry (locks unshorn), and Laura Dawson photographed in the greenhouse by their oldest brother William about 1891. The greenhouse was small, and pictures were taken just inside the door with the subjects posed against the first bench. As adults, these three Dawson children each managed Eastern Nurseries.

Normal Art School, now the Massachusetts College of Art, and graduated in 1893. He continued his studies at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and became an Instructor in Instrumental Drawing at the University of Pennsylvania in the fall of 1893. By 1911 he was Professor of Freehand Drawing and Watercolor, and in 1921 the University awarded him an honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts. Well known as a painter in watercolor of gardens, landscapes, and flowers, his knowledge of plants eventually led to his designing gardens and teaching landscape design.

Charles, the third son, attended classes at the Bussey Institution and worked there as a gardener in 1895. In 1901 he incorporated Eastern Nurseries, using 1090 Centre Street, the family home, as a business address. Originally some of the land at Centre Street was used as a nursery, but soon after the business became established, the plants were grown in Holliston, Massachusetts. On the cover of the nursery's first catalog, published in 1901, M. M. Dawson was listed as manager. Minnie Dawson remained manager of the business
Two of George Walter Dawson's paintings done while he was still a student at the Massachusetts Normal Art School. Both were painted in the Arboretum. The house in the top picture probably is 383 South Street. George was one of the founders of the Philadelphia Watercolor Club and was its president for twenty-five years. He designed gardens in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Charles Jackson Dawson and Frances Dawson White generously allowed us to photograph the original paintings.
A portrait of the Dawson family taken on Labor Day weekend, 1901. First row, left to right: Jackson Thornton Dawson (1841-1916); Mary Elizabeth Dawson (on Jackson's lap), the daughter of William Francis and Julia Hoffman Dawson; Mary McKenna (Minnie) Dawson (1842-1902). Second row, left to right: Minnie Motley Dawson (1878-1922); Julia Hoffman Dawson, the wife of William Francis Dawson (1871-1954); Henry Sargent (Harry) Dawson (1886-1938); William Francis Dawson (1868-1939); Laura Blanchard Dawson (1861-1930). Third row, left to right: James Frederick (Fred) Dawson (1873-1941); Charles Jackson (Charlie) Dawson (1871-1902); George Walter (Walt) Dawson (1870-1938). Not included is Bessie Minnie Dawson, who died soon after her birth in 1875. Photograph by W. Dawson.

for many years. In the beginning she was assisted at times by Laura Dawson. Eventually, Henry Dawson and his wife Pauline joined them. Although Charles died in 1902, the nursery remained in the family until 1974. George designed a display garden adjacent to the nursery and lived there during the summer months, and Laura moved to a house at the nursery after the death of her father.

James, the fourth son, became a landscape architect. He studied landscape architecture at the Bussey Institution, receiving his degree with the Harvard class of 1896, and joined the office of Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot. He became an associate of the firm in 1906 and a full partner in 1922. After James's death, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., noted that "the design of public parks and park systems enlisted ... much of [James's] effort and even more of his enthusiasm" (Olmsted, 1941). James is credited as principal designer of a great many projects of Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot, and the park systems he worked on included the Seattle and Spokane Park Systems in Washington, the Essex and Union County Parks in New Jersey, the Louis-
ville Parks in Kentucky, and Fort Tyron Park in New York. Among many other projects, he also designed the arboretum at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Both Minnie and Laura Dawson attended Girls' Latin School. Laura went on to Radcliffe College and immediately after graduating in 1903, became a resident instructor at Lowthrope, a school of landscape architecture for women. The school, located in Groton, Massachusetts, had been founded in 1901 by Mrs. Edward Gilchrist Low.* Laura considered teaching her most important accomplishment. She described Lowthrope as having "grown...from a trembling vision with one student, to a substantial professional school of first rank" (Dawson, 1928). This opinion was shared by Charles W. Eliot, who wrote in 1916 that "Lowthrope is the best place I know for training women to be landscape architects" (Cogswell, [undated]). In 1946 Lowthrope, along with some of its faculty, students, and equipment, was taken over by the Rhode Island School of Design.

Mary Dawson died in 1902, leaving Jackson with only Minnie and Laura at home. When Laura's sister, Minnie, married Harold Hill Blossom, a landscape architect who worked for a time with James Dawson at Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot and taught at the Lowthrope School, Laura assumed more responsibility for both the family business and the care of her father. Although only Laura and Jackson lived at 1090 Centre Street, it was the site of many family gatherings. The Arboretum archives contain an account of a Dawson Christmas written by William Judd, then newly employed by the Arnold Arboretum. The year was 1913, when Jackson was 72 and the Dawson children all long past childhood. However, the Christmas gathering was perhaps particularly festive since it also was an occasion to greet a new family member, Hazel Lease, James's new wife. Judd's diary describes the scene:

Then came my first Christmas away from England & it certainly felt strange, but still I found I possessed some good friends which certainly took the feeling away a good deal. Mr. Dawson was good enough to ask me to spend the day with him, which I gladly accepted. We enjoyed a capital New England Xmas dinner partaken of by about twenty persons at four o'clock. Several of his children & also Mr. & Mrs. Wilson were there. There was lots of good things to eat & drink, including turkey, "grape fruit," & champagne. The table looked very cheerful lit with candles, & the large logs blazing brightly on the open door fireplace, gave

* Mrs. Low is described in a Lowthrope pamphlet as "the great granddaughter of the founder of the Bussey Institute" (Cogswell, [undated]). Presumably she was a descendent of Benjamin Bussey.
it a wonderful appearance of Xmas. Almost all the candles were extinguished when the plum pudding was fired & everybody was happy. After dinner several more friends turned up & we spent a very enjoyable evening with music, etc. & moreover there were presents for everybody & the old gentleman gave me a nicely illustrated book on the “Wildflowers of N. America” by Mathews (Judd, 1912-1915).

According to custom, the newest member of the family was served the plum pudding first, and in order to insure good luck “the pudding must be aflame when she received it” (White, 1980). Francis White, Jackson’s oldest grandchild, remembers her grandfather was quite liberal in his pouring to accomplish this feat.

The next major passage in William Judd’s diary about Mr. Dawson was written almost three years later.

Today Aug. 5. 1916 Mr. Dawson was buried having died on Thursday Aug. 3. about 3 o’clock in the afternoon. His illness has lasted since last April, & he has done no work since that time. There was a large number of people at his funeral service today at St. Johns Episcopal Church, Jamaica Plain, at 12.30 pm. after which the body was buried at Andover, Mass. at Christ Church. In his death the world loses a very skillful & celebrated gardener & one who will be hardly replaced (Judd, 1915-1921).

On Wednesday, August 9, 1916, William Judd wrote in his diary:

Prof. Sargent came to see me & gave me to understand I was to succeed Mr. Dawson as propagator of the trees & shrubs for the Arnold Arboretum . . . If I ever become so skillful a propagator as Mr. Dawson I shall feel more than satisfied with myself (Judd, 1915-1921).

After Jackson Dawson’s death the Horticultural Club of Boston appointed a committee to plan a suitable memorial. The committee wanted the memorial to reach beyond the limits of the Club and published a subscription announcement that described their intentions and enlisted the support of “all who appreciated the man and his great work” (Roland, [undated]). The committee noted that it hoped to receive “small sums, particularly . . . since his friends are everywhere throughout this country and . . . everyone of them will want to contribute something” (Wilson, 1920). The Club raised three thousand dollars and placed the amount with the Trustees of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. The interest was “to be used for prizes, lectures and medals, or, as the trustees may direct” ([Roland], 1924). In 1927 the Society established the Jackson Dawson Memorial Medal, awarded by vote of the Trustees “for skill in the science
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and practice of hybridization and propagation of hardy woody plants” (Benson, 1929).

The tributes written in 1916 in memory of Jackson Dawson are filled with the fulsome praise that characterized the memorials of the period. He was described as “The Walt Whitman of Horticulture” ([Horticulture], 1916) and “One of the world’s greatest gardeners” (Boston Globe, 1916). However, the theme that occurred most often was that Jackson Dawson was a man loved and respected for his personality as well as his ability, a man who left a living legacy of beautiful things to all.

Charles Sprague Sargent wrote in his annual report of 1917 a memorial to Dawson’s work. “Dawson brought to the Arboretum industry, intelligence, imagination and entire devotion, and much of its success is due to his labors” (Sargent, 1918).

References

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"Jackson Dawson had a most genial, straightforward temperament. His was a nature irrepressibly and perennially kindly. To his intimates he extended a strength and depth of friendship of profound intensity, and it begat like friendship in return. To know him was to love him, and to love him dearly. He was a good citizen, a most desirable neighbor, a priceless friend and the dearest father; a sturdy, upstanding, whole-souled man, every inch of him" (Mische [President of the American Association of Park Superintendents], 1916). Photographer unknown.
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