

# Historic Plants in a New Setting: The Evolution of the Hunnewell Building Landscape

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**The plantings and the landscape in the immediate vicinity of the Arboretum's Hunnewell Building have undergone repeated changes since the construction of the building in 1892. The 1993 renovation of the building called for a landscape renovation as well.**

The need for plantings in the newly contoured landscape in front of the Hunnewell Building provided a valuable opportunity. It was a chance to transform the area into a living exhibit that would explore the history of the Arboretum through plants. By planting species relevant to the Arboretum's botanical explorations of eastern Asia, we hoped to introduce visitors to the ancient connections between the floras of Asia and North America that have been the focus of Arboretum research for well over a century.

In 1858 Harvard's Professor Asa Gray, arguably the preeminent botanist of his day, published a benchmark paper in which he hypothesized a close floristic relationship between the floras of eastern North America and eastern Asia. Gray based his theory on some of the first botanical specimens brought to the West after the opening of Japan by Commodore Matthew Perry in 1854. Later in the nineteenth century, Charles Sprague Sargent, the Arnold Arboretum's founding director, inaugurated the Arboretum's exploration of the floras of eastern Asia with a full understanding of Gray's hypothesis and an awareness of the climatic similarities of the two regions. Sargent reasoned that many plants of eastern Asiatic origin would prove hardy when culti-

vated in the Arnold Arboretum. As a consequence of a continuing series of Arboretum expeditions to China, Japan, and Korea, scores of new woody ornamentals have been introduced into Western gardens and now grow in close association with their eastern North American counterparts in the Arnold Arboretum and elsewhere across North America.

The plants the Arboretum staff have chosen for the new landscape demonstrate these close floristic relationships and simultaneously reinforce the original taxonomic planting established for the Arboretum by Sargent and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. This scheme followed the Bentham and Hooker system of plant classification, which was then current and widely accepted, and arranged the plant families according to their degree of morphological complexity.

The magnolia family falls near the beginning of the Bentham and Hooker sequence, and several existing magnolias have been retained in the Hunnewell landscape, including *Magnolia kobus*, *M. zenii*, a picturesquely multistemmed star magnolia (*M. stellata*), and several varieties of the saucer magnolia (*M. x soulangeana*).

For the majority of the new plantings the existing collections of the Arboretum served

as the source. Large specimens were carefully dug, moved, and incorporated into the site, including three large specimens of *Enkianthus campanulatus* and a solitary specimen of *E. perulatus*, both from Japan. Among the larger trees moved from another Arboretum location was a thirty-five-foot specimen of a hybrid tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera* x *Liriodendron chinensis*) that truly exemplifies the close floristic relationships between China and eastern North America. Only two species of the genus are known, one (*L. tulipifera*) widespread in eastern North America and the other (*L. chinensis*) of scattered and localized distribution in eastern and central China. Separated from one another in nature by thousands of miles on opposite sides of the globe, the two species now grow together in the Arboretum. While the two are distinct in form, they have remained similar enough genetically to produce hybrid progeny when artificially crossed. The hybrid plant now installed in front of the Hunnewell Building has special Arboretum associations. It was raised from seeds obtained from intentional cross-pollinations made by Professors Clifford Parks and Norton G. Miller (a former Arboretum staff member) at the Coker Arboretum on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Interestingly, the tree of *Liriodendron chinensis* that was used in these experiments was a gift to the Coker Arboretum from the Arnold Arboretum; it had been grown from the seed originally received from the Lu Shan Arboretum in China. And the hybrid plant itself was a gift from the Coker Arboretum to the Arnold Arboretum, received in 1981.

Each of the plants that shape the newly planted landscape has its own historical associations with the Arboretum. For example, the large specimens of the longstalk holly (*Ilex pendunculosa*) represent a species introduced into Western gardens by Charles Sprague Sargent when he first traveled to Japan in 1892. The Arboretum's most famous plant collector, Ernest H. Wilson (1876–1930), is memorialized



*The flower of Liriodendron tulipifera x chinense, which now grows in the landscape of the Hunnewell Building. Photograph by Rácz & Debreczy.*

by three individuals of the so-called three-flowered maple, *Acer triflorum*, which constitute a small grove along the curved ramp that facilitates wheelchair access to the building. This maple, introduced into cultivation in the West by Wilson, is a distinctive ornamental tree noted for its loose, papery, reddish- or yellowish-gray bark and for the spectacular golden yellows and pumpkin shades of its leaves in fall. Seeds of this species were collected by Wilson in October 1917 in the forests of Korea and sent to the Arnold Arboretum. So impressed was Wilson by this handsome species in its native habitat that he wrote to Sargent urging that all of the seed be sown. He considered the plant to be the best ornamental located on his last expedition to Asia for the Arboretum. The three young individuals in the new Hunnewell planting will ensure the species' continued presence at the Arboretum for generations to come.

The incorporation of two genera of the Theaceae, or tea family, strengthens the taxonomic sequence that ordered the original

planting plan. The genus *Stewartia* is represented by a wonderful thirty-foot specimen of *S. pseudocamellia*, an early summer-flowering tree native to Japan and Korea with a dual ornamental value in its attractive camellia-like flowers and its exfoliating, mottled bark. While two species of *Stewartia* are native to the southeastern United States, they were not included in the Hunnewell landscape for reasons of hardiness and cultural requirements. Instead, a specimen of *Franklinia alatamaha*, the Franklin tree, has been chosen to represent the American branch of the tea family.

Of all the woody plants native to the eastern United States, few, if any, are surrounded by a more interesting history than *Franklinia*. Briefly told, it was first discovered growing on the banks of the Altamaha River in northeastern Georgia in 1765 by John and William Bartram of Philadelphia, but it was not brought into cultivation until 1773 when

William Bartram revisited the area. Like species of *Stewartia*, the Franklin tree produces beautiful camellia-like flowers that appear continuously from late summer until fall, when its leaves turn scarlet. The plant quickly became a horticultural novelty even before 1785, when it was described and named by Humphrey Marshall (John Bartram's cousin) to honor Benjamin Franklin, the foremost American scientist, philosopher, and statesman of the day. As a consequence, it was soon extirpated from its very limited native habitat and was last seen as a naturally occurring plant in 1807. Although now extinct in the wild, *Franklinia* has persisted in cultivation, with the majority of individuals in cultivation today having originated from the plants in the Bartrams' Philadelphia garden.

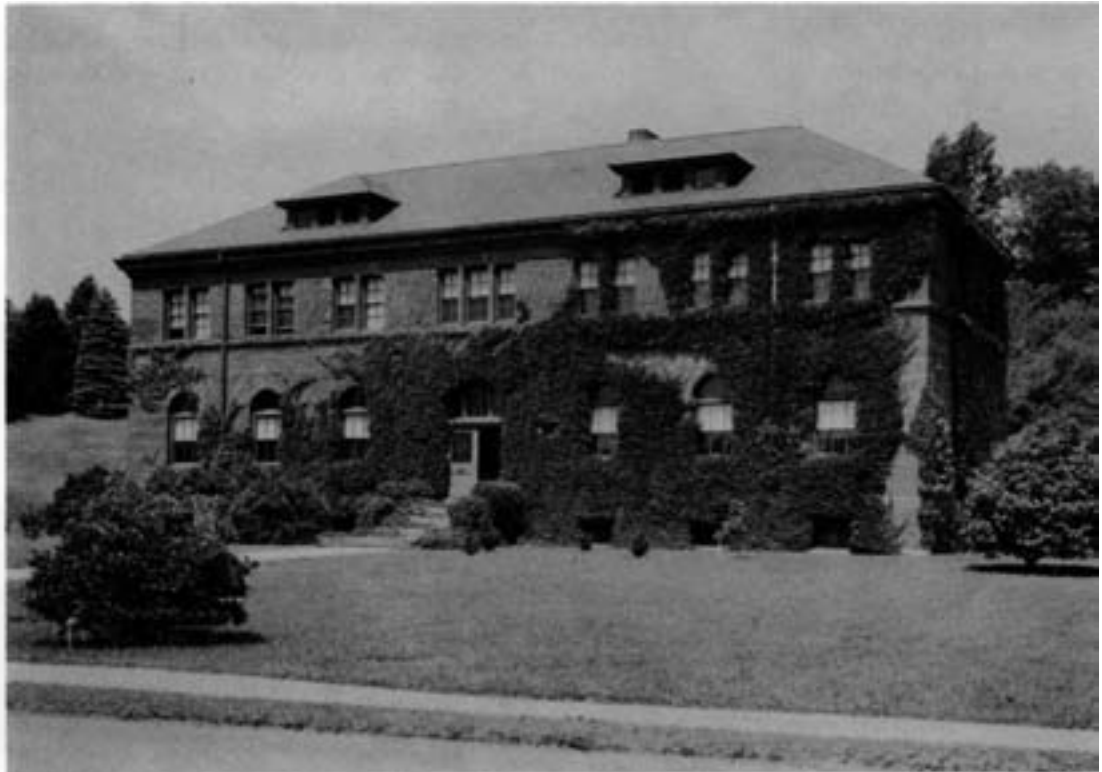
The photos below provide a visual summary of changes in the Hunnewell Building's front yard over the past hundred years.



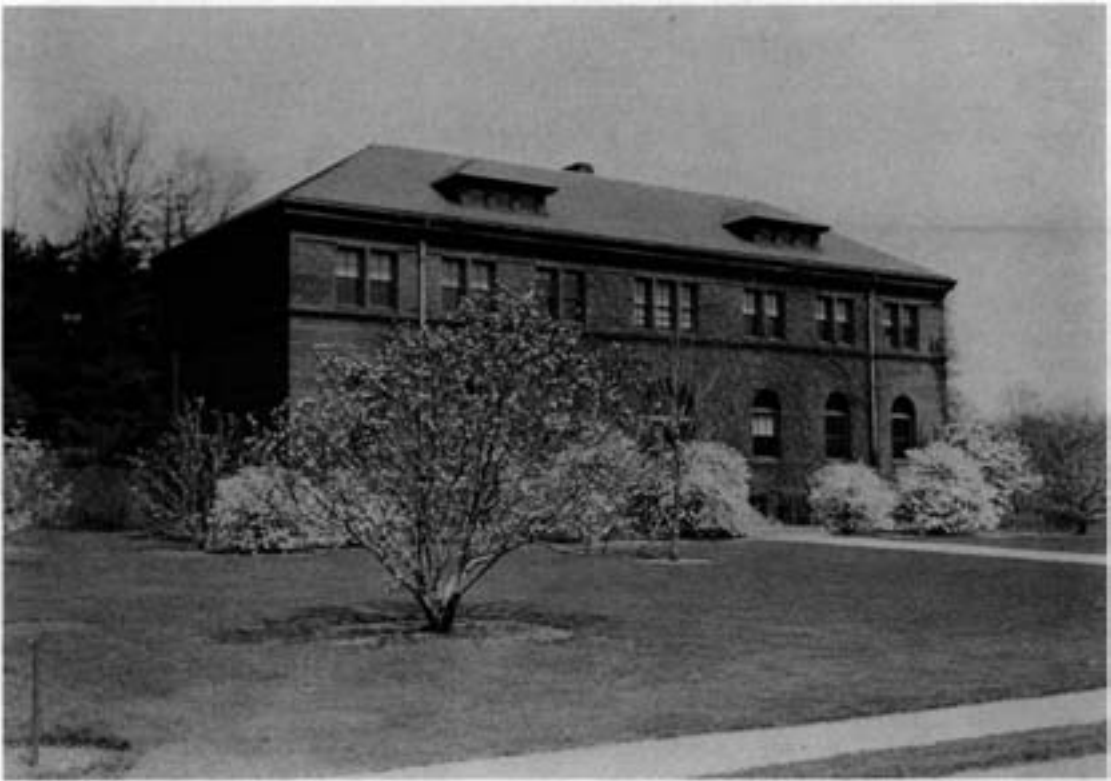
*The Hunnewell Building under construction in 1892. All photos are from the Archives of the Arnold Arboretum.*



Shortly after the Hunnewell Building was completed in 1892, Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*) was planted on its walls. By May 1903, when the photo above was taken by T. E. Marr, the vines had reached the roof, and other landscape elements began to assert themselves. The dominant feature in the photograph is a hedge of barberry, *Berberis* sp., clearly intended to separate the building from the public thoroughfare. Note also the large flowering shrubs planted in front of the building and the *Hydrangea* in flower behind the barberry hedge.



By 1917, when this photograph was taken, the *Berberis* hedge had been removed, along with many of the large flowering shrubs, producing a much more open landscape. Two magnolias are clearly visible in the photograph, a specimen of *M. stellata* in the left foreground and a *M. x soulangeana* in the right background. The Boston Ivy has been left to ramble freely over the front of the building, creating a dramatic "Olmstedian" effect typical of the period. Photo by G. R. King.



*As the landscape matured, more magnolias were planted in front of the Hunnewell Building. In this photograph, taken in May of 1928, the magnolia theme is well established, with a young, leafless *M. acuminata*, in the center of the photo, poised to become a dominant feature in the future. In the left foreground is *M. x soulangeana* 'Candolleana' (AA #15160-A), which grows in the same spot today. Photo by Walter Merryman.*



*The same view in 1952, with both the *M. acuminata* and *M. 'Candolleana'* at full maturity*



*The Hunnewell Building in August 1992, a year before renovation. The several specimens of *Magnolia stellata* are over twenty feet tall and the *Ilex pedunculosa* over fifteen. The sheer mass of plants creates the impression of an overgrown foundation planting that completely masks the bottom two stories of the building.*



*The new look of 1993. Photo by Warren Patterson*