

In the Library

Sheila Connor

***Hortus Nitidissimis Omnem Per Annum Superbiens Floribus Sive Amoenissimorum
Florum Imagines, or A year in a brilliant garden of exquisite flowers represented
in beautiful pictures***

In September 2002, the Arnold Arboretum received a query from John Flanagan, librarian at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, about our copy of *Hortus Nitidissimis*, one of the great florilegias of the 1700s. Because the *Hortus* was issued serially over a span of forty-two years (1750–1792), few if any extant copies are complete. In 2002, however, funding was provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to create a complete online *Hortus* by digitizing illustrations and text from copies held by the Natural History Museum, London, and the Royal Botanic Gardens. Because the Arboretum's copy includes ten plates (numbered 181–190) not found in either of the other two, these also became part of the "virtual" edition, and with the Arboretum's participation Kew was able to create an "Ideal Hortus," now online at www.kew.org/data/trew.

The extant copies of *Hortus Nitidissimis*, estimated to number fewer than twenty, vary widely since each of the engraved plates was hand colored, often by different artisans. The Arboretum's copy, accession number 16,641, is bound as a single volume rather than as three, as is the case with most. It was added to the library in October of 1907 through the generosity of the Skinner family, as attested by the bookplate, which states that the 22.10 pounds paid for the book to William Wesley and Sons, a British book dealer, came from Skinner funds. In 1904, Francis Skinner, a friend and neighbor of Charles Sprague Sargent, the Arboretum's first director, donated five thousand dollars for the "purchase of books for the Arnold Arboretum."

Skinner often volunteered at the Arboretum and for four months in 1880 had traveled with Sargent through the Far West, examining and comparing forests for the nation's tenth forest

census. Early in 1907, Skinner's son, Francis Jr., contributed an additional five thousand dollars, suggesting that the books purchased with the money be considered a memorial to his father's interest in the Arboretum and its work.

Sargent used these donations frequently to order books, selecting many titles from Wesley's "Natural History and Scientific Book Circular." Excerpts from his orders and from the published Wesley catalog have occasionally been "tipped-in" to books that were purchased. A typed note tipped-in inside the cover of the *Hortus*, for example, states: "Trew, *Hortus nitidissimis*, the copy forwarded is more perfect than that in the Kew library, and has ten plates more than under Pritzel No. 9,500. Wesley [handwritten]." In fact, according to Stafleu and Cowan's *Taxonomic Literature*, the Arboretum's is the most complete set known to exist.

Kew's website includes a wealth of information about this great flower book, including a detailed history of its publication by W. J. Tjaden along with information about the physician and amateur botanist and horticulturist C. J. Trew, in whose garden the plants illustrated in the *Hortus* grew and who is often listed as its author. Of special value on the website is the translation of the *Hortus* into English. Readers can choose to view either the Latin transcription or its English equivalent, "which makes the rarest and most famous antique botanical books" accessible to a broad audience. Two of the Arboretum's ten singular illustrations are printed on the inside covers of this issue. The Arboretum's *Hortus* itself can be seen in the Horticultural Library in Jamaica Plain.

Sheila Connor is Horticultural Librarian and Archivist at the Arnold Arboretum.