

A History in Roses

Many thanks to Jerry Spencer for his paper, "The Roses of Hanover Square" as a resource on the origin, description and debut dates of all varieties, and for the magnificent photographs of the roses.

Landscape Architect Jerry Spencer designed Hanover Square's rose garden that surrounds the fountain. Years of experience as a member of the world-famous Sea Island Company's landscape design team became a priceless gift in the form of Mr. Spencer's donation of time and loving attention to detail. Each rose variety was selected after much careful thought and exhaustive research.

The antique roses in Hanover Square's garden were ordered from "rose ranches" in Texas. There, garden historians have coaxed nearly extinct historical plants back to health. The so-called "old roses" were collected from the ruins of plantations and forgotten corners of overgrown gardens, brought to rescue nurseries and patiently nurtured back to their former glory. Each of the old roses in Hanover Square has a historical significance that correlates to the history of our nation, and more specifically, to the history of Brunswick.



Hanover's Floral Timeline

Blush Noisette: The First American, 1817

John Champneys, a rice planter and amateur rose breeder near Charleston, tried his hand at

Blush Noisette

creating a new rose variety when he crossed a pink musk rose with a red China variety. He then sent the resulting plant to his friends, the renowned Noisette family in France, professional hybridizers who did further refinements. The result was a prolific, vigorous, compact double-flowering *Blush Noisette* recognized as the first American rose in 1817. Unlike the more demanding tea roses, the *Blush Noisette* variety supplies Hanover Square with color in abundance without the need for special pesticides, pruning or nutrition throughout the growing season. This hardworking rose,



Blush Noisette

planted on the long sides of the rectangular beds inside the fence surrounding Hanover Square's fountain, represents the emerging importance of the South in our nation's early years.

In 1817, the blooms on one *Blush Noisette* rose bush could easily have outnumbered the human population of Brunswick, Georgia. The War of 1812 had been particularly devastating to coastal communities. The fledgling United States was drawn into what newspapers of that time referred to as "an unbroken series of disaster, disgrace,

defeat and death."

The conflict extended the impact of the Napoleonic Wars between Britain and France into the New World. A paralyzing embargo of ships departing from the United States to any foreign port crushed the fragile, emerging economy of seaports like Brunswick. British naval superiority had bred a ruthless mindset that put every vessel on the sea in danger. American citizens were forcibly removed from ships to be pressed into service by the British, who brazenly classified any able-bodied seaman who spoke fluent English as a "deserter" from the Royal Navy. The new American government rightfully identified this practice as nothing more than kidnapping. In 18 months of fighting, official counts of over 11,200 American soldiers lost and 8,000 British dead did not claim to be accurate or adequate. The destruction, disease, starvation and misery took a much higher toll than half-hearted attempts at battlefield reports.

Although Brunswick had sustained strong alliances with Britain in its early years, reports of atrocities committed by occupying British forces in other parts of the country terrified local families. The new conflict defeated the city's attempts to regain population after the Revolutionary War. Soon, Brunswick's small cluster of abandoned homes and businesses was lost in a sea of weeds.

When the war ended, American ships were able to reach French ports once again. The *Blush Noisette* rose traveled across the sea and back, a symbol of reassurance that the terror of war had passed. The new country was free to enjoy the many gifts of natural resources and the spirit of innovation. Just two years after the *Blush Noisette* made its debut, families began to return to Brunswick in sufficient numbers to require the building of a public school—the second oldest in the state; sixth oldest in the nation.



Cramoisi Superieur: A Sailor's Delight, 1832

*Cramoisi
Superieur*

The resolution of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe opened new maritime opportunities throughout the world. Discoveries made at the height of the seafaring era introduced exotic plants to Europe

and the United States. Port cities were often the first to see new acquisitions that had been carefully tended on long voyages. Roses from China infused a new palette of rich reds and crimsons to the species. *Cramoisi Superieur's* double-cupped Red China blooms that fade in Brunswick's hottest weather are invigorated in cooler months, supplying Hanover Square's gardens with late fall and winter color.

The city had struggled through yet another period of desolation in the early 1820s, despite the appeal of having a new public school in town. In 1825, the State of Georgia allowed Brunswick to hold an improvement lottery in Savannah. The object was to raise money to build a two-story school, jail and courthouse building in Hanover Square, with a Masonic temple located in the upstairs level. The following year, two opportunistic developers, Urbanus Dart and William Davis, petitioned the state for headrights to unclaimed, unimproved lots or those upon which taxes had not been paid. The state granted their request, effectively giving most of the unsold or abandoned lots to the two men, free of charge, in hopes that their plans would revitalize the struggling city.

Dart and Davis recruited other local men of means, as well as a group of Northern investors, to form The Brunswick Company. Among their ambitious plans was a canal designed to redirect shipping trade from the ports of Darien and Savannah into the Port of Brunswick. By supplying cotton planters along the Altamaha River a shortcut into Brunswick's harbor, the developers reasoned that they would soon claim the lion's share of that expanding market. The group also began working on attracting rail service to the city, thus opening up a dazzling array of opportunities.

By 1829, *The Sherwood Gazette* claimed that Brunswick had a jail, courthouse and an academy plus 30 houses and stores. A degree of cautious optimism crept back into its own as the port began to grow, despite numerous

frustrating delays in building the Brunswick-Altamaha Canal. Nearby plantations in the county had begun to take advantage of southeast Georgia's long, hot summers to grow valuable long-staple cotton. The premium fiber was shipped out on graceful 4-masted schooners to ports all over the world.

By 1832, it appeared that the destiny of the city was to be heavily dependent on its maritime strength, whether from diverted inland river traffic or ocean-going vessels. The two industries—cotton production and the shipping

trade—were interdependent and flourishing as vigorously as the *Cramoisi Superieur*.



Archduke Charles: Hardy Changeling, 1837

When it was introduced to the world in 1837, the *Archduke Charles* rose fascinated gardeners

*Archduke
Charles*

with its chameleon-like changeability. When blooms first open, the crimson outer petals frame neat pink centers. Later in the duration of each blossom, the entire flower changes to a solid crimson in color. Since the plant is extremely hardy and blooms vigorously, each bush is covered with flowers in varying stages of color transition. Considering the year in which it was introduced, it is appropriate to note how the *Archduke Charles*, which brings enduring beauty to Hanover Square's fountain garden in the hottest months, not only survives, but thrives on change.

The year that changed everything in Brunswick, 1837, brought very little of which to be proud. Just a year after the city obtained its first charter in 1836, the Brunswick Company commissioned George R. Baldwin to re-survey all Old Town lots. The purpose was to definitively locate the lots included in the headrights claim filed in 1826. This action obliterated the original measurements that had been approved by the colonial Trustees. The contours of Hanover Square were affected slightly, but the mass of its land was intact as the northernmost border of the park was shifted to the west. This action would fuel bitter conflict, accusations and costly legal remediation in the future.

The Panic of 1837 was an economic disaster that plunged land values and prices for cotton, timber and other commodities. Usage of the Port of

Brunswick dropped, and local planters withdrew support for projects such as the embattled Brunswick-Altamaha Canal just one year into its construction. The highly anticipated development of rail access for the city was put on hold. The official 1835 US Census listed fewer than 10 families residing in the city. (The majority of Glynn County's population lived outside the city on plantations located on the barrier islands, and to the north of the city.) The initial drop in land and commodity prices was but an early indicator of a ten-

year period of economic hardship for the nation in general, and the South in particular. Like the adaptable *Archduke Charles*, Brunswick was in a constant state of change.



Safrano

Safrano: A Triumph of Science, 1839

This fragrant tea rose was introduced in 1839, and is recognized as the first rose produced by controlled hand-pollination, as opposed to natural insect pollination. It ushered in a new era of

scientific rose breeding, typical of American ingenuity and progress. The *Safrano* supplies a changing color palette, with its plum-colored new foliage and double flowering blooms that change from deep saffron-yellow or apricot buds to pale-buff fully opened flowers.

Deep into the economic depression that followed the Panic of 1837, Brunswick faced difficult choices in 1839. The Academy, the free public school of which the city had been justifiably proud, lost its initial building and was without facilities at that time. Although city fathers had started work on a new structure for the school, uncertain finances delayed its completion. Holding classes in Hanover Square, the heart of the city, was agreed upon as a reasonable solution. The Academy's classes met in the all-purpose public building in Hanover Square from 1838-1840. The courthouse/jailhouse/Masonic hall added "schoolhouse" to its job description. This decision offered an opportunity for Glynn County to continue its legacy of assigning a high priority to education.

Despite years of hardship, Brunswick endured and emerged victorious. Progress always comes at a price, but this time, Brunswick's leadership made the right choice, even if school children had to share facilities with court clerks and convicts for a time. Our predecessors rightfully decided that an educated citizenry, fully prepared to embrace new ideas, such as the new scientific process that produced the graceful *Safrano* rose, was well worth the investment.



Marie van Houtte: The Well-dressed Belle, 1871

The *Marie van Houtte* rose, a spectacular tea rose introduced in 1871, boasts large lemon-yellow flowers with unique coloration of delicate

Marie van Houtte

pinkish-lilac petal tips. The color of the flowers varies considerably from blossom to blossom on the large, prolifically blooming bushes. Typical of the high Victorian era, this rose is showy, with a flamboyant personality and determined constitution.

By 1871, Brunswick, Georgia was beginning to enjoy the rewards of its determination to not only survive Reconstruction, but to seize any opportunity to improve its lot and build a solid future for its citizens. Immediately after the end of the Civil War, the City Council set about cleaning the parks and streets, and draining ponds in the city. After a mentally unstable prisoner in the Hanover Square jailhouse set fire to his cell in an escape attempt, city fathers decided to repair and enlarge the original structure. A new guardhouse and courtroom were created, as well as an expanded second-story space to be rented to the Masons. In 1870, the city began preparations to install streetlights in the corners of Hanover Square, and recorded its first official consideration of fencing the square to keep out the livestock.

Trade had begun to pick up at the port. Distant western states needed railroad ties and lumber for building brand-new cities. The shattered South could no longer grow labor-intensive crops like cotton on large plantations, but the healthy, upright pine trees that took over the empty fields were a treasure for the taking. Prosperous merchants and “lumber barons” built lovely homes in the city, complete with gardens filled with stunning new rose varieties like the *Marie van Houtte*. It was a time to bloom and be properly proud. Brunswick was coming back.



Madame Antoine Mari: Southern Lady, 1901

*Madame
Antoine Mari*

With its camellia-like open blossoms, the lovely *Madame Antoine Mari* thrives in Brunswick's mild climate. Named after the wife of its breeder, it was reported to be his favorite rose. The flowers initially open in shades of pink, which age genteelly to a rich cream color. Like a typical Southern lady, this rose requires little attention as it blooms nearly

continuously throughout the years, and offers its beauty to all who are fortunate enough to encounter it.

In 1901, the year that *Madame Antoine Mari* was introduced to the horticultural world, Brunswick was solidly on its feet. The Port of Brunswick was thriving, the sting of Reconstruction was fading and the city's leaders had several highly visible accomplishments to their credit.

The stunning new red brick and limestone City Hall building was complete in Queen Square, after lean years of economic hardship and construction delay. The Ladies Park Association could congratulate itself for bringing the pressure to bear on the city to remove all buildings from Hanover Park, and transforming the space into a lush garden setting, accessible to all. Only a year prior, another battle to maintain the integrity of the square had been won as the city definitively passed an ordinance that allowed electric streetcars to be installed on all streets, alleys, sidewalks and squares—except Hanover.

In October 1901, another group of women in Brunswick, the Ladies Memorial Association (also referred to in some documentation as the Memorial Association of Brunswick) undertook the task of additional landscaping for Hanover Park. The group had worked tirelessly for years to raise the funds for a memorial statue to honor Confederate troops, and at long last, it looked as if they would meet their goal. Their request for the city to move the park's bandstand away from the proposed site of the memorial (south and east of the original location) was approved. Also, the city decided to honor an additional request to re-coat the fence around the perimeter of the park with coal tar, a preservative agent that gave the ironwork a handsome, crisp black finish.

It was appropriate to round out the collection of antique roses in Hanover Square with a specimen that becomes even lovelier as the color fades from its first bloom. If roses are symbolic of the halcyon days of Brunswick that defined the city's character and appearance, then the *Madame Antoine Mari* reflects the character, grace and enduring beauty of the women of Brunswick, first guardians of historic preservation and beautification of the city.