

# East Texas Historical Journal

---

Volume 29 | Issue 1

Article 11

---

3-1991

## The Gardening Sentiments of an Early Texas Pioneer

Jeffry Abt

Leabeth Abt

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj>



Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Tell us how this article helped you.

---

### Recommended Citation

Abt, Jeffry and Abt, Leabeth (1991) "The Gardening Sentiments of an Early Texas Pioneer," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 29: Iss. 1, Article 11.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol29/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SFA ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in East Texas Historical Journal by an authorized administrator of SFA ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu](mailto:cdsscholarworks@sfasu.edu).

## DOCUMENTS: THE GARDENING SENTIMENTS OF AN EARLY TEXAS PIONEER

by *Jeffry and Leabeth Abt*

For most people, the mention of Texas in the early 1800s brings to mind ugly, dirty towns full of lawless ruffians. Very few would think of Texas settlers growing flower gardens or planting trees and shrubbery for the mere aesthetic value. On a trip to Texas in 1854, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted painted a horrible picture of East Texas. This is confirmed by Melinda Rankin, who wrote *Texas in 1850*:

...it appears that the neglect of attention to the cultivation of flowers in Texas, must evidently be regarded as a want of good taste. Nothing presents a greater evidence of refinement than a tasteful adornment of dwellings and their environs, with trees and flowers; and it would be a great advance towards refined and decent civilization in Texas, if more attention were paid to the transplanting of forest trees and shrubbery around buildings.

Yet, there were exceptions.

Thomas Stuart McFarland moved to Texas from Louisiana in 1830 with his father, William McFarland, and other family members. At the age of twenty-two, Thomas McFarland bought 640 acres from Chichester Chaplin for \$200. He then formed a stock company and divided the tract into 356 lots that were shared among the members. McFarland surveyed these lots and established San Augustine, the first town in Texas to be laid off on a purely American plan with two lots near the center kept for a public square. This was the beginning of his career as surveyor, officeholder, and farmer.

Thomas McFarland was no ordinary settler. In his journal he mentions Homer, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, and indicates a keen interest in the political career of Napoleon Bonaparte. He was shrewd in business and quick to see opportunities, as he wrote to his daughter, Kate, in 1879:

Seeing that we have a country where a man may have a reasonable industry everything he needs for comfort and good living, it seems strange that our whole population should not be independent and even rich having all things in abundance.

But more than this, Thomas McFarland's journal reveals a man who thought it a "task of importance" to bring to bear the civilizing influences of a beautiful garden. The many references to gardening in Thomas McFarland's journal unveil a man with a taste for beauty and order in his garden.

The reminiscences which follow are from the journal Thomas McFarland kept over a period of four years (1837-1840). The original manuscript and other family papers can be found in the Special Collections, Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin State University. A

---

*Jeffry and Leabeth Abt are professional gardeners in Nacogdoches, Texas.*

recent publication of the journal was made in 1981 by the Newton County Historical Commission:

\* \* \* \* \*

February 1, 1837

My garden was finished to-day, all excepting the gate;-This my second garden, that I have paled in;-a good garden is full half support of a house or family: and there is no pleasure so interesting as that to be found in the arrangement and beautifying of the different productions of nature, in well arranged gardin.

February 4th, 1837

Yesterday I determined to give up old garden to the growth of fruit trees, flowers, vines, grapes &C which (as i have another) will be most profitable-Consequently transplanted several trees in it-

9th Feb. 1837

Yesterday I had a number of seeds sown in my new garden for a beginning-such as-Lettuce, cabbage, pepper, onions, mustard, fenel, parsley &c-also a number of Shrubs, viz- the Althea, Sweet rose, running rose, sage, dwarf apples, &c, and herbs,- tanzey, mint, sorrell, and a handsome bed of Strawberries, & yarrow- N.B. my father appears particularly partial to strawberries and milk, a luxury by the bye, which is but seldom enjoyed in this country.

Roses in my garden I have planted,  
Thorns upon same, around the bud are formed  
A shield *nature* 'gainst the lover granted  
As in trouble he walks the garden round

I planted there some other roses too  
The vine is small and formed to entwine  
As lovers hearts when *One* is made of *two*  
So that death alone can o'er make them twain.

Tanzey here is found that tastes so bitter  
And yarrow too on the same bed is set  
And there is neither, weed, grass nor litter  
Where these herbs by dew from heaven are wet.

A fine bed of Strawberries all in rows  
You'l find on the side that's tow'rd the west  
And near to them a few dwarf apples grows  
That's fair to look upon and sweet to taste.

On the side that most to the South includes  
I've planted Figs, as suiting best the clime  
And I love this tree when covered with vines  
It sounds so much like Abrams good old times.

As we pass around towards the centre  
I'll show you roses all cov'ring over  
Encircling about the door we enter  
To an arbour with beans vines for cover.

If any one to view this garden spot  
 Would on himself a little trouble take  
 He something there would find, if pleasing not  
 That would a *tho't* on past & future wake.

I've sought the muses, to assist my strain,  
 My genius inspire, to the love of song,  
 Yet, to describe the garden, all is vain;  
 It was commenc'd in haste and all is wrong.

So heres an end for the present of poetical description; my fire burnt down  
 & I'm cold and now to rest-

Feb'y 11th 1837

The greater portion of today I have occupied in transplanting of trees, replanting my orchard &c- I have had sixty one peach trees set out (in the ground allotted of an orchard) today, besides sixty five that were there before, making in all an hundred & twenty six peach trees-and I have another orchard of about 80 peach trees and still another of 20 or more-making more than 230 *peach trees*, and 200 more in nursery.

I also planted out several other trees in the yard and garden, most of which were fruit trees-

61 peach trees in orchard  
 2 mulberry trees in yard  
 4 walnut do in do  
 7 Fig trees in yard  
 4 do in garden  
 10 do slips in old garden  
 1 china tree in yard  
 1 Althea Shrub do  
 90

Making ninety trees  
 transplanted today in dif-  
 ferent parts of the farm  
 -Value \$400-

"It is a pleasing task" to work with the young trees, to prune off the useless branches, and loping off whatever is unsound to bend the twig as the tree should stand: assisting nature as it were, in teaching "the young buds to shoot"- While young, there is nothing but what may be shaped after the style ones own mind; how easy to bend the young trees as we desire the ones to grow; and the child, if taken in due season is alike susceptible of bias, and may be taught to act with rationality in every respect, or to the contrary according to the principles or character of the tutor;-

Saturday 18th Feb. 1837

Yesterday commenced pailing in my yard which I have pretty well set with china and walnut trees, besides others- have got the most of posts set around the yard,-

Tuesday 22nd Feb 1837

...And yesterday my brother brought from Capt. Stedum's ten small black locust trees, the whole of which trees I have set out in different directions about my yard. This is an acquisition of which I am very proud as serve much to ornament a place, and are as yet, but rarely found in Texas-

Monday 27th February 1837

...Went home with Augustine and got some, white mulberry seed, which I wish to plant, for the purpose of commencing to raise silk worms- Mrs. Augustine promises to furnish me with some *seed* of the *Silkworm*.

Friday 17th March 1837

...Today procured of Capt. S. Brown about 30 young apple trees, which I have out in different parts of the place; some in the old garden, some in the yard, some in the peach orchard where I have oats sown.

May 4th 1838

*Eight years expires today.* about nine of the clock, since I first crossed the Boundary of the U.S. and entered Texas. The Country at that time was comparatively a wilderness and the few who inhabited it, were of an unruly, turbulent and savage disposition, generally; though at that time there were some who possessed principles of worth, and men of honor and weight of character. Some of the most prominent men of the present time were then in the country.

Texas since that date has been the theatre of strife and disquietude, of trouble and misery, and the seat of war with all its calamities, and horid outrages, yet, notwithstanding all its trouble and difficulty, our country has flourished largely and still continues to prosper most gloriously.

(Diary continues after move from San Augustine to Belgrade)

1st of March 1839

Commenced the other day to garden, Sowed peas, mustard, Lettuce, &c- A garden well cultivated is the most pleasant view, the farm can have in the agricultural line-When the heart is troubled or the mind morose or feverish, a walk in a garden handsomely arranged, is sufficient, to give relief-The human feelings are such, that every variety of antidote to unhappiness are resorted to by those who suffer, and whilst the mind is capable of acting in concert with reason, we should provide the means of cure before we are attacked by the disease- We should rather choose some remedy indicated by nature, or at least in which there is no harm, nor abuse of person or intellect that like the vulgar world, to seek the haunts of dissipation & riot; which instead of giving relief to the burthened mind, but adds to the catalogue of miseries, and distress and ruin- A garden has a tendency to draw the mind from its troubled thro'ts, while at the same time it inspires a love of order and arrangement such as represented on its plan-Another important lesson taught by the garden is this: The features of the mind of him, whose design it is, is here plainly indicated; if we have a love of order is exhibited if we are profuse or economical the traits are alike evinced, or if we are fond of the ornaments of nature, or are only pleased by the prospect of having appetite satiated 'tis plain to be seen if the mind is chaste, elevated, enlarged, sordid, or if it is fancifull imaginary, poetic, or confused by worldly concerns, how easy can the lines of every portrait be traced; nor does it require even the experienced eye, to scan that which is indicated in such striking colours-

When so much of our mind and sensations are exhibited in the appearance of our garden, and so much of our pleasure and happiness depend upon a well regulated and handsome garden—Should we not bestow special care upon its order and culture? The same observations (nearly—are applicable in all our domestic arrangements, order, embellishment, variety, cheerfulness, and constant vigilance to prevent the rising of weeds, or other rancorous growth, with constant attention (or cultivation) to the germinations of a tender nature—

April 18th 1839

On taking a view of our garden I find the following different species of Vegetables, which I think does very well for the time we have been cultivating it, only six weeks:-

2 Peas 2 kinds in Bloom	30 Onions
4 Beans 2 kinds	31 Melons
5 Butter beans	32 Althea
6 Long Pea	33 Cypress vine
7 Cucumbers	34 Flower Bean
8 Squashes	36 Pinks- 2 kinds
10 Radishes, 2 kinds in use	37 Thyme
11 Carrots	38 Cockscomb
12 Beets	41 Touch-me-not 3 kinds
13 Parsnips	42 Flags, yellow
14 Cabbage- in use several times	43 Red Poppies
15 Eschallottes-do	44 Merry gold
16 Mustard 2 kinds- in use	45 Jerusalem Apple
18 Lettuce 2 kinds	46 Sun Flower
20 Tongue grass 2 kinds in use	47 Rhue
21 Ocre	48 Balm
22 Corn	49 Egg Plant
23 Kale	50 Mint
27 Pepper 4 kinds	51 Saffron
28 Tomatoes	52 Hoarshound
29 Cellery	53 Peach trees, June peach

May 2nd 1839

Rain, rain today for the first time in nearly four weeks- 26 days without rain- Sowed radishes and set out a good many things.

3rd

This morning we set out or transplanted a great many plants, consisting of touch-me-nots, cox-comb, poppies, pinks, sunflowers, peppers, merry-gold, tomatoes, cabbage &c and- five chance of potatoe plants-  $\frac{1}{3}$  an acre.

May 19th 1839

CUCUMBERS!! CUCUMBERS!! 1st time this year eaten or ate today! We could have had them three or four days sooner, but saved the first coming for seed!

March 1st 1840

Myself and brother arrived at home today from Calcasiu where we purchased a lot of goods from A. Bourgeois & Co. on six months time.

We have been absent six days- the goods consist of a common assortment of such articles as we have not on hand.

While gone we stayed going and coming 2 nights at Maj. Cowards, one at Smith's on the river, Calcasiu, and two nights at John Spark's on the Sabine River.

The trip was attended with as much success as usual on such occasions- During the trip we procured the following variety garden herbs trees and shrubbery-

1 Sweet fennel	10 Hoarhound
2 Raspberry	11 Mullen
3 White rose	12 Sour orange
4 Red velvet rose	13 Pumgranates
5 Monthly rose	14 Privy
6 quince	15 October Peach
7 Strawberries	16 Red flowering Althea
8 Yellow flower name not known	17 Sage
9	18 Plumbs

Which will enlarge our hitherto very small variety- In a new country it is a task of importance, to acquire a good variety of garden shrubbery- I have found it difficult to obtain even a common assortment-

### BOTTANY

April 16th 1840

The following is a list of the shrubs, herbs and vegetables now in our garden.

Names		Whence they came
1 Althea Red		
2 Althea white	Marsh Mallow	
3 Raspberry	Rubus Idacus	
4 Strawberry	Fragaria	Texas
5 Rose white	rosaalba	Scotland
6 Rose Red velvet	rosa damascen	Belgium
7 Rose monthly	rosa mundi	England
8 quince	Pyrus, Cydonia	Supposed France
9 Sour Orange	Citrus aurantium	Indies
10 Pomgranate		
11 Privet	Ligustrum	E. Indies
12 Hoarhound		
13 Mullen		
14 Peach October	Amygdalus	
15 Plum	Prunus domesticus	America
16 Sage	Salvia Officienalis	From Greece
17 Sweet Fennel	Anethun furiculum	Canaries
18 October Pink	Dianthus carnation	Italy
19 Sweet Pink red & verigated	Dianthus	Italy
20 Saffron	Crocus	
21 Cucumber	Cucumis	Egypt
22 Marygold	Calendula	S. America
23 Garlic	Allium	East
24 Parsley	Apium	Egypt
25 Gourd	Cucurbita	Arabia or Astrean
26 Potatoes Irish	Solanum, Tuberosum	Brazil
27 Radishes	Raphanus sativus	China
28 Tobacco		Mexico

29 Spear Mint	Mentha viridis)	
30 Peppermint	Mentha piperita)	Europe
31 Penny royal	Mentha	Pulegium)
32 Cabbage	Brassica	England
33 Egg Plant	Melongena	W. Indies
34 Tomatoes	Solanum	Italy
	Lycopersicum	
35 Bunch Beans	Phaseolus	E. Indies & U. States
36 Garden Peas	Vicia, Faba	Egypt
37 Red Beet	Beta Valgaris	Europe-Madera
38 Turnip	Brassica rapa	do Holland &c.
39 Lettuce	Lachica	
40 Mustard		
41 Cresses	Cress	Crete
42 Squashes		
43 Balm		
44 Coxcomb	Celosia	
	Russian	
45 Touch-me-not		
46 Sun flower	Helianthus	America
47 Cypress vine		
48 Pretty-by-night	Circaea	Germany
49 Yellow flag	Iris	Europe
50 Blue flag	Iris	Texas
51 Rhue		
52 Palmchristial		
53 Sugar cane	Sacharum Officinarum	Brasil
54 Musk mellon		
55 Fig tree	Ficas Carica	Asia
56 Holly Hock		
57 Catalpa	Bignonia	Indigenous
58 China tree		
59 Black haw		
60 Peaches	Amygdallus	
61 Hemp	Cannabis sativa	
62 Shuckcorn		
63 Balsam		
64 Thyme	Thymus vulgaris	Spain
65 Eshallot	Alliam Ascalonicum	Palestine-Asia
66 Onions	do	do
67 Bachelor buttons	Lychuis diurna	Eng. or Scotland
68 Coriander	Coriandrum statioum	
69 Lady Pea	Cicer	Spain
70 Love Creeper	Bignonia radicauss	Via & Canada
71 Humlus or Hops	Indigofera tinctoria	Asia, Amer. & Africa
72 Worm Wood	Artemisia	Absinthium
74 Carrot	Daucus Carota	Fleming
75 Parsnip	Pastinaca Sativa	
76 Walnut Black	Inglans nigra	Indigenous
77 Lark spur	Delphinium	Europe

17th April 1840

The whole vegetable Kingdom is now green and beautiful; the trees are nearly in full foliage and the grass is large and fine for grazing.

Garden-looks well, promises fair, some flowers already- there is a good prospect of beans as there is a great many very small ones, also the garden looks well.