

[Library Grows Through Gardening Gifts](#)

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For nearly four decades, Genevieve Munson Trimble has worked endlessly to preserve and conserve Afton Villa Gardens in St. Francisville, La. On 250 acres of the former plantation, Trimble has executed elaborate and elegant gardening strategies, keeping thorough records of her work in handwritten journals.

Now to share her experiences and to inspire and inform other gardeners, Trimble has donated her journals to the New Orleans Town Gardeners Library of the [Southeastern Architectural Archive](#) at Tulane.



Genevieve Trimble has donated her garden journals to the New Orleans Town Gardeners Library of the Southeastern Architectural Archive at Tulane. The journals chronicle Trimble's work preserving Afton Villa Gardens in St. Francisville, La. (Photos by Kerri McCaffety)

“It's great that we can make the journals publicly accessible to anybody on a daily basis in the library,” says Keli Rylance, head of the archive.

Trimble, who is from New Orleans, recorded ? and is still recording ? every detail about gardening, from the weather to seedlings to bulbs and trees.

She notes what works and what doesn't in a large-scale enterprise that routinely involves growing 100,000 daffodils each spring.

The journals are a personal chronicle of a Southern gardener. “They are a record of her gardening efforts, but they are also a record of her life,” says Rylance.

“She's recorded events like the death of her husband and other vital relationships between gardening and her personal life.”

Along with Trimble's journals, the library also has acquired reports about Afton Villa Gardens by Neil Odenwald, a landscape architect from Louisiana State University.

Odenwald has served as a consultant to Trimble during the arduous process of designing, planting and maintaining the gardens ? a massive undertaking on the site of a 40-room mansion that burned to the ground in 1963.

“All old gardens are haunted, one quickly discovers,” writes Trimble, “in that their former owners who have loved and worked them seem forever in the shadows, possessively prescribing and dictating what not to tamper with or change.”

Like a lovely garden, a good library is ever evolving, too.

The library has recently purchased *Ladies' Southern Florist* by Mary Rion, published in 1860. It is the first gardening book written by a woman to be specifically focused on horticulture in the southern United States. The library's copy is one the author gave her own daughter and includes handwritten notes with corrections to the text.

The book adds to other examples of women's gardening endeavors already in the library, says Rylance. “It's a wonderful addition that conveys a sense of women's significant contributions to gardening history.”



The work of designing, planting and maintaining the 250-acre Afton Villa Gardens is detailed in the journals of Genevieve Trimble.

Ruthie Frierson, a past president of the New Orleans Town Gardeners and former chair of the library committee, says that the library's collections are of value to “restoration gardeners, everyday gardeners and landscape architects.”

Frierson adds that the “more people who have access to the [Garden Library](#) as a resource, the better.”

Frierson experiences “serenity and joy” in her own garden, she says. “When you dig in a garden, you think about anything. A garden is a place to relax and share.”

As Trimble notes, “The very nature of a garden ? as opposed to a building ? is that it is a living thing. Like all living things, it is constantly changing and growing, subject to the effect of time, environmental conditions, and the influences of other living things upon it.”