

MISS IMA HOGG

(1882 - 1975)

and her gardens at

BAYOU BEND,
Houston, Texas

*With photographs of the
gardens today by*

Rick Gardner

*Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston.*



Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Archives

Last September, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), opened a new educational centre, the Kilroy Center to include spaces for special programming and a publicly accessible research library, and serve as a leading resource dedicated to American art, culture, and history. This event might have been of only passing interest, except that the MFAH is situated within 14 acres of organic, historically maintained gardens. Gardens which, like the Museum Collection itself, are a result of the full life of a singularly talented woman , Miss Ima Hogg.

Ima Hogg was born in 1882, the daughter of the first native-born Texas Governor, (1891 to 1895) James Stephen Hogg. Ima had an older brother Will and two younger ones Mike and Tom. James was prescient enough to buy an estate where it was rumoured that oil could be found. James died in 1906; his will prevented the family from selling the plantation which was just as well, as oil was found in 1918. It was the wealth from this oil which allowed the family to make their large art collections and make numerous donations to charities. . James brought his children up to have an interest in individual and public welfare, and Ima and her brothers decided that as their wealth came from the land, it somehow belonged to the land and the people who lived on it and from it.

As a young girl, Ima showed herself to be talented as a pianist and studied in New York, Berlin and Vienna. She was to be the founder of the Houston Symphony Orchestra and its leading patron; one of her friends being Artur Rubinstein She became a skilled art collector, and from the 1920s, committed herself to the

collection of early American decorative arts which were housed at her home at Bayou Bend, bought by herself and her brothers in 1925. She had suffered from severe depression from 1918 for three years, which is why she gave up her idea of being a concert pianist, and became a supporter of mental health education, founding the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health in 1939. The Foundation was set up to conduct research, and to survey mental hygiene conditions in Texas. On the entry of the United States into World War II, the Foundation researched methods to prevent mentally unsuitable candidates from enlisting in the military, and provided counselling to those traumatized by the war. After the war, the Foundation expanded its educational and philanthropic focus, providing mental health care to the elderly and disadvantaged. It still exists today.

It therefore unsurprising that Ima Hogg became interested in landscape design and gardening, as she believed that gardens and working in gardens was an antidote to depression. A fact that has been researched and proven in the decades since. A house was commissioned from John Staub in 1927, to be called Bayou Bend, and it was there that she housed her collections and made her gardens. She intended for her public gift of Bayou Bend and its collections to tell the full story of American history to the citizens of a state that was barely a century old, and for its gardens to carry on the traditions of the great 19th-century estates of the Northeast and Southern regions.



In 1966, when Bayou Bend was opened to the public Ima Hogg foresaw the need for expanded visitor amenities. She purchased an additional parcel of land to the 14-acre estate in 1969, specifying that it be used for building a visitor and educational centre.

The Gardens at Bayou Bend



The 14 acres of gardens at Bayou Bend—for the last decade, all organically maintained—embody the vision of Miss Hogg, who avidly engrossed herself in architecture, landscape architecture, and garden design and who was as passionate and avid a collector of plants as she was of art.

The Bayou Bend Gardens were originally, in Miss Hogg's words, "nothing but a dense thicket." Undaunted, she worked with a succession of talented gardeners, including Ruth London, to create outdoor rooms for living and entertaining, not just settings to be admired from within the house

*Archive photograph courtesy of
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Archives*



She adapted these plantings to a domestic scale and to the Houston Gulf Coast climate, creating a total environment encompassing house and garden in the years 1930s to 1950s. These exquisite gardens and paths bordered by native bayou woodlands are nationally recognized as among the most significant in the South. They are noted for rare Duchesse De Caze pink camellias (whose leaves have been used for millennia to produce common tea), that are no longer available in commercial nurseries, along with varieties of azaleas, gardenias, antique roses, and seasonal plantings that keep the gardens in bloom all year.

While the gardens' historic character is meticulously maintained, the grounds also serve as a site for innovative research involving the preservation of vintage species no longer available in commercial nurseries.

Bart Brechter, curator of the gardens at Bayou Bend since 2001, comments, "The historic value of the gardens, along with the intent behind them, make Bayou Bend unique. In the 1920s the nation saw Texas as a western state. I think Miss Hogg

wanted to capture instead the southern influence of East Texas, and, by adapting the Country Place Era design that was sweeping the East Coast, Bayou Bend was established as an important part of American landscape design."



The Clio Garden

The heavily wooded 14 acres (5.7 ha) include eight formal gardens. Three of the gardens are named for a statue of a goddess or muse displayed in the garden, Clio, Diana and Euturpe. The other gardens are named White, East, Butterfly and Carla

Vintage plantings: For more than half a century Miss Hogg and a succession of gardens curators have rigorously maintained the historic character of the estate's heirloom plantings. Camellias, magnolias, azaleas and daffodils are just some of the species originally planted by Miss Hogg that continue to thrive. Brechter's goal is to ensure their survival so that cuttings can be dispersed to replenish other historic gardens across the country.

Texas A&M EarthKind Research. Because of its commitment to environmentally friendly gardening methods, the museum actively contributes to horticultural research, including collaborating closely with the EarthKind project of Texas A&M University. EarthKind practices use research-proven gardening and landscape techniques to preserve and protect the environment—recycling beneficial yard wastes and reducing water, fertilizer, and pesticide use. The objective of Earth-Kind landscaping is to combine the best of organic and traditional gardening and landscaping principles to create a horticultural system based on real-world effectiveness and environmental responsibility. Under Bart Brechter's direction, Bayou Bend is the site of an experimental plot of EarthKind-sustained azaleas, plants that have a reputation as difficult to grow.

Dogwood Propagation. Hidden among the vintage azaleas and camellias is dogwood tree that has defied Houston summers for more than three decades. With leaves and blooms that are 30 percent larger than an average dogwood, this monumental, 27-foot specimen qualifies as "Champion" and is known as cultivar Bayou Bend. It is also remarkably disease-resistant. He is currently working to propagate the tree and make it available in local nurseries.

The Avery Island Camellia Project. Brechter is returning to the original source of Miss Hogg's rare camellias, Avery



Island's Jungle Gardens, near New Orleans, to find the exact specimens from which to take cuttings and begin replenishing Bayou Bend's camellia collection. Brechter is also directing an initiative, in association with [the](#) Greater Gardens of America Preservation Alliance, to identify Jungle Gardens' more than 300 varieties of the plant that over the years have lost their identities; Brechter expects the identification project to take a decade to complete.

The Art Collection is one of the nation's foremost holdings of early American painting and decorative arts with more than 5,000 objects dating from 1620 to 1876, including paintings, furniture, pottery, glass, textiles and silver.

www.riveroaksgardenclub.org/BayouBend.cfm

www.mfah.org/visit/bayou-bend-gardens

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Further Reading:

Lousie Kosches Iscoe : *Ima Hogg, first lady of Texas*. The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health 1976

Virginia Bernhard: *Ima Hogg: The Governor's Daughter*.
Texas State Historical Assn, 1984

To be released as paperback in March 2011

http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Ima_Hogg

<http://library.rice.edu/search?Subject%3Alist=Manuscripts>

<http://atlantis.coe.uh.edu/webscapes/bayoubend/edu/bib/ima.htm>

