

Earliest book in South on gardening written by Fairfield resident

Mary C. Rion's book
recently re-released

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It's a natural for Fairfield County gardeners and historians.

The earliest garden book in the South authored by a woman, "Ladies' Southern Florist," was written by Fairfield County resident Mary C. Rion.

Rion is the great-grandmother of current Winnsboro resident Nelle McMaster Sprott.

A facsimile edition of the book, originally published in 1860, has recently been re-released by the University of South Carolina Press.

The book provides a comprehensive list of trees, shrubs, flowers, bulbs and roses that are well-suited to the southern climate. Prior to the original publication of the book, southern gardeners were forced to turn to English garden books or guides geared to northern gardeners, which offered little advice on growing plants in a region characterized by mild winters, hot and humid summers and periods of extended drought.

The book contains advice on garden preparation, transplanting and watering.

Concerning watering, Rion wrote, "The blooming of most plants is improved by copious watering during their season of flowering; but this should only

be tried with the healthy and vigorous ones. During times of draught, in hot weather, many sickly plants are killed by injudicious watering. For these, the best medicine is shade."

In her book, Rion featured both traditional plants and many newly introduced specimens that found instant favor with southern gardeners of the time including camellia, gardenia, and crepe myrtle.

Concerning daffodils, jonquils, iris, crocus and snowdrop, Rion wrote, "All of these bulbs should be transplanted in the fall, while they are dormant. The bulbs should be planted two and a-half inches deep, in light rich soil, though they will grow in any soil not too stiff.

"All bulbs delight in sandy soil. Separate the roots every three or four years, leaving them in the ground during the winter. Cultivate all of these plants in clusters for effect. A handsome arrangement of them can be made in waves, circles and various figures, by close and uniform planting."

Included in this edition are new introductions by landscape

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architect and urban planner James R. Cothran and Debra McCoy Massey, who provided a sketch of Rion's life.

Rion was born in 1829 in Sparta, Georgia. Shortly after her birth, her father relocated the family to the Camden/Lancaster

area of the state where he assumed the editorship of several local newspapers.

She married James Henry Rion in 1851. The couple moved to Winnsboro so that James Henry Rion could assume a position at Mt. Zion Institute.

Mary C. Rion was trained at a young age in both plant collect-

ing and gardening. Once she married, Rion found time to indulge her interests but found few books offering advice on preparing and planting flower gardens in the south. As a result, she set out to combine her firsthand knowledge with that of northern gardeners, and wrote the book.



LADIES' SOUTHERN FLORIST

MARY C. RION

A FACSIMILE OF THE 1860 EDITION
WITH NEW INTRODUCTIONS BY
JAMES R. COTHRAN AND
DEBRA MCCOY-MASSEY