A black and white photograph of a woman sitting on a fallen palm trunk by a pond, surrounded by a palm grove. The woman is seen from the back, wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved top and a patterned skirt. The pond is in the middle ground, and the background is filled with numerous palm trees under a clear sky. The foreground shows the ground and some sparse vegetation.

# Montgomery Botanical NEWS

*Advancing Research, Conservation, and Education  
through Scientific Plant Collections*

*Fall/Winter 2015*

*Volume 23, Number 2*

**Nell's Legacy 25 years later**

**Montgomery Botanical Center**  
Established 1959

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To advance science, education & conservation of tropical plants, emphasizing palms and cycads, Montgomery Botanical Center grows living plants from around the world in population-based, documented, scientific collections in a 120-acre botanical garden exemplifying excellent landscape design.

Montgomery Botanical Center is a tax-exempt, nonprofit institution established by Eleanor “Nell” Montgomery Jennings in memory of her husband, Colonel Robert H. Montgomery, and his love of palms and cycads.

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**F r o m t h e**  
**Executive Director**

Dear Friends,

Nell Montgomery Jennings, *our founder*, passed away in 1990, twenty-five years ago. Prior to that date, Nell’s careful planning and unique ideas created a *garden path* like no other! Here we are at a major milestone on that very route — the right place to look back before, again, looking forward. Thus, this SPECIAL ISSUE of our newsletter is about the progress we have made.

On the facing page, Walter Haynes highlights how Nell’s ideas led to our best successes. Her values were unique; while all gardens seek botanical beauty, what Nell put forward is a “bold collegiality,” and a long view on stability and sustainability. Pages 4 and 5 summarize exactly how far these values have taken us!

While we look back in these pages, I must mention that forward progress has certainly not slowed this year. Montgomery recently worked to host a major cycad conference. Palm and cycad fieldwork and research is ongoing. I look forward to reporting those very important advancements in our next issues. Along that theme, page 6 foretells where Montgomery will be in another 25 years — following Nell’s vision and values into the future.

But here, please let me offer just one more snapshot of our *present*. Page 7 shows the science our collection supports. Since January alone MBC has provided plant material to experts in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, France, Germany, Mexico, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK, as well as nine US states and territories, including 17 places here in Florida. This global and local sharing is yet another demonstration of how collegiality and collaboration are fundamental to Montgomery.

So please join me — let us celebrate and commemorate Nell, for the great garden and great thinking that she generously left us!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M. Patrick Griffith". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Pictured: Dr. Griffith at the Global Species Survival Commission meeting in Abu Dhabi — representing Montgomery and the Cycad Specialist Group.

# Collegueship:

## Nell's Fundamental Vision for Montgomery

Nell Montgomery Jennings founded the Montgomery Botanical Center 56 years ago. From that time, and for the 25 years since her passing:

A fundamental policy at Montgomery has been that other botanical institutions, other botanical gardens and their staffs are not our competitors. They are our colleagues.

Nell's vision applies whether our colleagues are from Miami, other parts of the United States or other countries around the world. To highlight the value of Nell's collegiality, in the past 25 years plant experts from over 30 states and from over 50 countries — from every continent except Antarctica — have come to Montgomery to work with its collections. Examples in recent years are botanists from Colombia, Hungary, and Uganda.

Shortly after Nell's death, Montgomery adopted a 4-point Planting Policy to codify and implement her vision. Plants must: (1) have scientific or educational value; (2) have a reasonable chance of growing on the property; (3) be maintained following exemplary horticultural practices; and (4) be incorporated into the collection in an aesthetically pleasing landscape design. This Planting Policy has set important parameters at Montgomery.

Requiring scientific value means, as a practical matter, that plants must come from wild collections around the world. Following Nell's emphasis on collegueship, Montgomery has partnered with colleagues in many different countries to achieve this goal. In the last 25 years Montgomery has participated in over 70 plant collecting expeditions with colleagues in over 40 different countries (see pages 4-5). Recent examples include projects in Belize, Brazil, and Cuba.

Requiring that plants have a reasonable chance of growing on the Montgomery property uses our landsite strategically to benefit as many colleagues as we can. South Florida's climate allows us to grow many species not possible elsewhere, thus making these collections available to the research community.

Requiring that plants must be incorporated into the collection in an aesthetically pleasing landscape design also follows Nell's vision. Each year our staff selects plants which are ready to leave our nursery and to be planted out on the grounds. Since 1990, the location for every new plant is determined by our landscape architect Joe Hibbard, working onsite with the Montgomery staff — a collaboration of design and science. By adding almost a thousand new plants every year, both the scientific value and the beauty of the collection have continually improved. An endowed Landscape Design Fund now provides financial support for this important process at Montgomery.

In recent years, Montgomery has been recognized with a number of honors. Most recently, Dr. Murphy Westwood of the Morton Arboretum and Botanic Gardens Conservation International wrote that among 108 accredited arboreta, "Montgomery provides a gold standard benchmark that other arboreta can work towards." The importance of these honors is that they are not what Montgomery says about itself. They are what our colleagues say about Montgomery. And we, in turn, cherish our great colleagues. Following Nell's vision, we enthusiastically work together to advance the field.

*Walter Haynes  
MBC Secretary-Treasurer*



Our founder excelled at bringing people together; Montgomery continues Nell's tradition of collaboration.

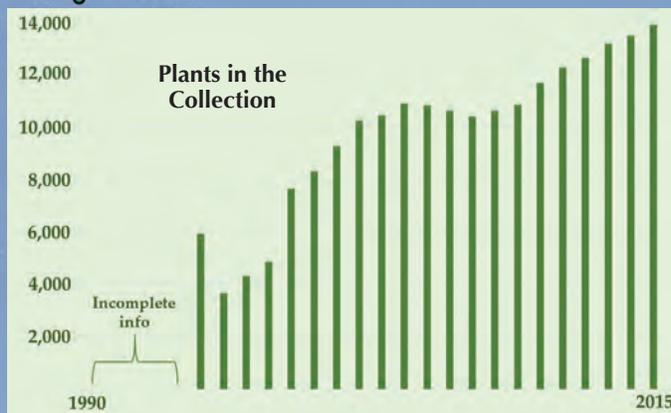


Nell's friends and colleagues gathered on the lawn behind Nell's House, 1947.

# The Growth Genera



Michael Calonje  
Costa Rica, 2006



**HOW MANY PLANTS DO WE CARE FOR?** In 1990, a full inventory was yet to be completed. That was soon underway, and diligently kept each year since. With a serious re-focus on palms and cycads in 1996, we went from under 4,000 to nearly 14,000 plants on the grounds at Montgomery — not counting our NEXT GENERATION in the nursery — over 12,000 seedlings!



Larry Noblick  
Madagascar, 1995

Twenty-five years or two and a half decades — *a quarter century* — is a common measure for a GENERATION. And that span since 1990 has been remarkable at Montgomery.

On the previous page, Walter Haynes highlights the thoughtful, deliberate policy and planning essential to our success. I am grateful for his long term role here, and the service of our entire Board of Directors, who provide that planning foundation and oversight — exceptional governance from a dedicated group, following the vision of our founder, Nell.

What can complement such good leadership? WORK — coordinated effort to advance the mission, moving botany and horticulture forward. Work that leads to tangible, measurable outcomes is best. On these two pages, I highlight just a few of the ways Montgomery measures its contributions to botany and horticulture.

# tion

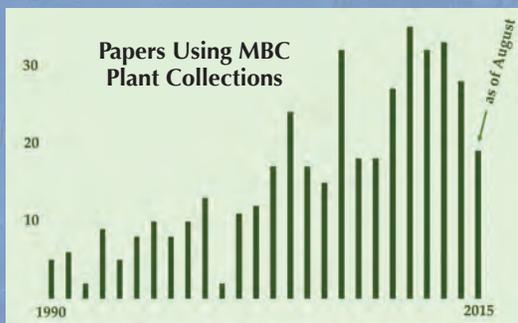
## Moving Montgomery Forward



**WHAT HAVE WE DISCOVERED?** Our Team shares their discoveries with the world – through a growing number of scientific and popular plant articles.



Terrence Walters  
China, 1992



**HOW WERE OUR PLANTS USED?** Authors and scientists certainly used the plant collection in 1990. But how that use has grown!

### HOW FAR HAVE WE GONE?

Far and wide! And always in search of the right plants for Montgomery. Closely tracking the origin of our plants is vitally important. Red dots represent plants prior to 1990, and teal dots show places we collected specimens and seeds in the last 25 years.

All of that progress inspires me! My greatest inspiration, though, is the outstanding group of people who made the progress — those who worked at Montgomery, studied our plants, went afield with our biologists, and all of you who supported our efforts. A group certainly including people of many different ages and backgrounds, but brought together by 25 years of great work.

So, what can I call this great generation — Botanical Boomers? Montgomery's Millennials? After reviewing your work, seeing the record of your progress, and thinking about the natural cycle of the plants we cherish, I know what I should call you — THE GROWTH GENERATION.

*M. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director*  
[patrick@montgomerybotanical.org](mailto:patrick@montgomerybotanical.org)

# Montgomery in 2040

## Can we know our future?

To foretell is difficult. Were it possible, we would all know what is to come, where we will be. A quick review of past predictions (*flying cars, moon colonies*) shows the peril of trusting those most minor prophets. Indeed the oracles of old kept their jobs by being vague.

Yet, good predictions *can* be based on two things: the *people* involved, and the *plans*. Montgomery's recent past shows capability and persistence, progress and focus; outcomes easily assumed when you get to know the Team — Board, Staff, Volunteers, and Supporters — and the culture of planning they create. So, twenty-five years out, what can we expect?

## PREDICTION 1: A Cherished Collection of Palms and Cycads

On a prior page you saw growth in the collection, the result of focus and planning. New cycads planted this year join the Colonel's 1932 palms and many others between. Do past plants whose popularity faded prompt us to move to another plant group? Seduction by some bright bloom or new fragrance?

NEVER. Palms and cycads provide such variety, such interest, such fascination — the devotion is absolute. And the value compounds over time — by establishing careful parameters in early years we now have unique depth and wide breadth in these two groups. The fruits (and cones) of those labors inspire the next expedition! And simply seeing seedlings in the greenhouse today makes it clear: 2040 will see more palms and more cycads; treasures that will grow with Montgomery.

## PREDICTION 2: A Landscape of Growing Beauty

Planning for the landsite as one large-scale, integrated garden began in 1932. Our modern Master Plan, annually fine-tuned each year since 1992, is absolutely based on a future vision of growing and maturing plants, framing vistas which also mature and change. Funding to continue this process is secured for the future, more evidence of how plans and people can make a prediction come true. Imagine and envision those young palms planted this year, 25 years later — towering, stately, diverse, and carefully arranged to complement and frame our midcentury landscape.

## PREDICTION 3: A Record of Service to Science

As shown on pages 4-5, growth in science tracked our increase in plants. Plans, policy and people to continue this growth are in place — bringing more colleagues and experts to Montgomery (see page 3). The class of 2040 will certainly study facts heretofore unknown by those present — and just as certainly, some fact they learn about botany will have been discovered via a plant at Montgomery.

## People and Planning

Montgomery has a great team with a clearly defined vision and a culture of planning, progress and achievements. Our prediction for Montgomery in 2040 is that we will provide a unique plant collection, in a beautiful landscape, with a robust value to science. Our three predictions sound familiar because they also describe Montgomery today.



Jeff, Xavier, Marco, Jessica, and Jason:  
the present and future of Montgomery

BACKGROUND AND PHOTO: Seedlings in the LOYD G. KELLY CONSERVATION NURSERY, visual proof of that old maxim, "...whoever plants a garden believes in the future."

M. Patrick Griffith, Executive Director  
[patrick@montgomerybotanical.org](mailto:patrick@montgomerybotanical.org)

## Team News



Jessica Sparks



Marco Perez-Alvarez



Johana Cordova



Emily Hernandez



Gregory Barber

A great group of young people moving us forward!

**Jessica Sparks** and **Marco Perez-Alvarez** are the 2015-2016 Conservation Horticulture Fellows. Jessica and Marco are Miami Dade College horticulture students. Working with plant experts at Montgomery, Jessica and Marco provide solid help and great talent, while they gain important career development experience. Our Conservation Horticulture Fellows Program is generously funded by the Batchelor Foundation.

We are also very grateful for our recently completed summer internships at MBC — much needed help at the height of our growing season!

**Johana Cordova** is a student in the Master of Environment in Conservation and Restoration program at the University of Melbourne in Australia. Vickie Murphy, MBC Nursery Curator, worked with Johana on a conservation research project focused on cycad seedlings.

**Emily Hernandez** is an undergraduate student at New York University. Emily provided vital work in nursery horticulture.

**Gregory Barber** is an undergraduate at New College of Florida. Over the summer, Gregory worked with Claudia Calonje, Seedbank Coordinator, picking, cleaning, organizing and distributing palm and cycad seeds.

Would you like to volunteer?  
To volunteer to help at Montgomery contact Tracy at (305)667-3800 ext. 114  
tracym@montgomerybotanical.org

## Cultivating Discoveries

By growing plants, Montgomery helps plant science!

### Cycad Conservation Genetics

The team is wrapping up the *Mission-Based Collections Stewardship* project, funded by the INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES (see Spring 2015 Newsletter). The one-year project compared DNA data from Montgomery's collection with plants from the wild to see how well we can conserve cycads. With results presented at conferences "A, B and C" — APGA 2015, Botany 2015 and Cycad 2015 — Papers are now being written!



### Palm and Cycad Anatomy

Two new papers explore the way these plants are put together. Montgomery's Tracy Magellan, Barry Tomlinson — Kelly Botanical Research Fellow — and Patrick Griffith, as well as Brett Huggett of Harvard University, published two papers using the plants at MBC. A study of *Bactris* stem anatomy was published in HOEHNEA, and a broad survey of cycad roots was published in AMERICAN JOURNAL OF BOTANY. The anatomy research was generously funded by the KELLY FOUNDATION.

### Palm Systematics

A great series of DNA based studies of palm relationships appeared in AMERICAN JOURNAL OF BOTANY, BIOLOGICAL JOURNAL OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY, and NEW PHYTOLOGIST. Authored by broadly based, collaborative teams including scientists from the University of Georgia, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, New York Botanical Garden, and Cornell University, these important new papers all used plant material at Montgomery. The most local of these recent palm papers, appearing in CLADISTICS, was put forward by Alan Meerow of USDA Chapman Field, along with MBC's Larry Noblick, and colleagues from FIU and FTBG, Javier Francisco-Ortega and Brett Jestrow. The recent studies provide an overall look at palms, as well as a detailed view of *Sabal* and *Syagrus*.



Volunteer Sonya de Long in the nursery.

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**CORAL  
GABLES**  
THE CITY BEAUTIFUL

## FROM THE MONTGOMERY ARCHIVE

### OUR FOUNDER HONORED BY THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA

Eleanor Foster Jennings — Nell — was dedicated to gardens and received this high honor in 1964 for her work. As shown in this issue, MBC has worked to emulate and honor Nell's legacy, following her examples of collegueship, hard work and generosity, all noted in this superbly hand-lettered citation. The medal's lower inscription, a quote from Virgil's *AENEID*, can be translated as "your delight, your ambition." In the *AENEID*, the passage goes on to anticipate a good future, set in a grove — a fitting match for Nell's vision of this garden and its future.



#### The Achievement Medal

The Garden Club of America is proud of its members with far-reaching accomplishments. Tonight we honor one of these—Mrs. Alvin Jennings.

Mrs. Jennings, a member of The Garden Club of the Branges and a former member of the Greenwich Garden Club, has shared her horticultural knowledge and her ability to create beautiful exhibits and arrangements of tropical material, while her contagious enthusiasm and unceasing efforts have been largely responsible for the creation of two arboretums, one in Connecticut, the other in Southern Florida.

Assisting her late husband, Colonel Robert Montgomery, her rare competence was invaluable in establishing the Montgomery Pinetum. A substantial part of the notable conifer collection was given to the New York Botanical Garden and the Pinetum itself was deeded to the Town of Greenwich.

Later, her part was equally great in the creation of the Fairchild Tropical Garden, the only botanical garden in Continental United States for tropical and semi-tropical plants. Since Colonel Montgomery's death, her selfless devotion to the Garden has never slackened, and under her strong leadership, the Fairchild Garden continues to broaden in scope. Scientists are deep in research projects; splendid co-operation exists with other research institutions; and the general public comes in ever increasing numbers to enjoy the landscaped demonstrations, attend the courses and lectures, and to receive the Garden's excellent publication and horticultural advice.

In recognition of her outstanding achievements; for her dynamic, intelligent, hardworking character, and her modest and generous nature, The Garden Club of America awards the Achievement Medal with deep appreciation to

Eleanor Foster Jennings

May 13, 1964