

## AHS INTERN PROFILE

# An Intern Project Helps Shape River Farm's Future

by Heather Robbins

M ELODY GRAY vividly remembers the first day of her internship at the American Horticultural Society's River Farm headquarters, because, she recalls with a laugh, it involved "helping to rescue a snake that had become entangled in garden netting." That was during the summer of 2003, when Melody was working toward a degree in landscape architecture from Texas A&M University.

As it turned out, snake wrangling was only a minor aspect of Melody's internship. She spent a large part of her time working with **Tom Underwood**—who at the time was AHS director of gardens and buildings—completing detailed surveys of the grounds as background work for a proposed new Master Plan for River Farm.

Participating in the research for the Master Plan inspired Melody to pursue a career designing for public gardens. Tom and **Katy Moss Warner**—who was then AHS president—encour-



Melody Gray

aged her to consider entering the Longwood Graduate Program in Public Horticulture, a two-year program jointly administered by Longwood Gardens and the University of Delaware that culminates in a Master of Science degree.

After graduating from Texas A&M, Melody was accepted to the Longwood Graduate Program. For her thesis, Melody decided to focus on the conceptual plan for the Liberty Hyde Bailey Walk, one of the key elements of the River Farm Master Plan. As envisioned by **Missy Marshall**, a principal in M·T·R Landscape Architects—the firm engaged to develop the Master Plan—the walkway is the central axis leading visitors from a proposed new visitor's center to the administrative and educational buildings and a vista down to the Potomac River.

Because Liberty Hyde Bailey, Jr. is often described as the "father of American horticulture," showcasing his life and achievements along this major walkway was seen as a fitting tribute. "One of the major goals of the Master Plan is to allow River Farm to tell the story of American horticulture," says Tom, "so an introduction to Bailey seemed like a logical starting point for visitors to the AHS's headquarters."

## WALKWAY CELEBRATES LIBERTY HYDE BAILEY'S LEGACY

In her Master's degree thesis, former AHS intern Melody (Gray) Shaddix provided valuable background and concepts for the planned Liberty Hyde Bailey Walk in River Farm's Master Plan. As the primary walkway and the area that will provide visitors with their first experiences on the grounds of the American Horticultural Society's headquarters, the Bailey Walk must fuse aesthetic appeal with functionality and horticultural relevance.

Melody's research indicated that Bailey's influence on American horticulture fell into four principal categories—education (especially relating to horticulture), technology, community, and publication—so she decided that all these components should be represented in the walkway's design. For instance, gardens devoted to plants that were Bailey's specialties (including palms, cabbages, brambles, bellflowers, pinks, and delphiniums) might branch off a main walkway. And some of Bailey's famous quotations could be incorporated into the design elements.

The biography of Bailey (1858–1954) includes many "firsts:" He was the first scholar to use a camera for herbarium taxonomy, he established Michigan State University's Horticulture Department as well as the Nature Study Program at Cornell University (which evolved into the 4-H program), and he chaired the Commission on Country Life, which facilitated the extension of the electrical grid and the U.S. Postal Service system into rural areas. A tireless writer, Bailey authored some 60 books on topics ranging from horticulture to philosophy, weather, and politics. Many of his publications were inclusive of several disciplines.

To Melody, Bailey's interdisciplinary approach to horticulture is a vital part of his legacy and still holds value as an approach to the design of public gardens. "Bailey imparted his passions to those around him. Public gardens should do the same: expand horizons through publications, educate to instill knowledge, utilize available technologies to reach audiences in meaningful ways, and above all recognize the responsibility to do all of this with the local community involved." —H.R.



This sketch, part of Melody Gray's thesis, shows how a section of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Walk might look.

**Robert Lyons**, director of the Longwood Graduate Program, supported Melody's interest in the project. "I certainly encourage students in our program to consider possible professional interactions with the AHS," he says. "The networking that the AHS provides is very valuable to the professional growth and development of my students."

### RESEARCHING A LEGEND

When Melody began her research, all she knew about Bailey was that he'd compiled *Hortus*, an influential plant dictionary first published in 1930. A revised edition, *Hortus Third*, is still often used as a college textbook. "The more I learned about him, the more amazed I was at how much this man had accomplished and the ideals we had in common," says Melody. "I really respect and relate to the way he made public horticulture accessible; he took people out of the classroom and into the garden to look at the plants instead of just showing slides in a dark lecture hall."

Melody's biographical research complemented her efforts to gather input for the design of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Walk. "Melody did a thorough review of the literature on Bailey, then contacted prominent landscape architects and horticulturists to get their perspective on the influence of his work," says Tom.

While working closely with Missy Marshall, Melody also conducted extensive interviews and focus groups with AHS

### Internship Opportunities

The AHS offers internships in communication/editorial, horticulture, and youth programs (summer only). Application deadlines are March 1 for Summer, August 1 for Fall, and November 1 for Winter/Spring. For additional information, visit [www.ahs.org/river\\_farm/internships\\_employment.html](http://www.ahs.org/river_farm/internships_employment.html).


staff. Based on the resulting feedback, she worked on ways to create a visitor experience that captured the essence of Bailey's contributions while being sensitive to the site and its operational needs.

### TAKING THE NEXT CAREER STEPS

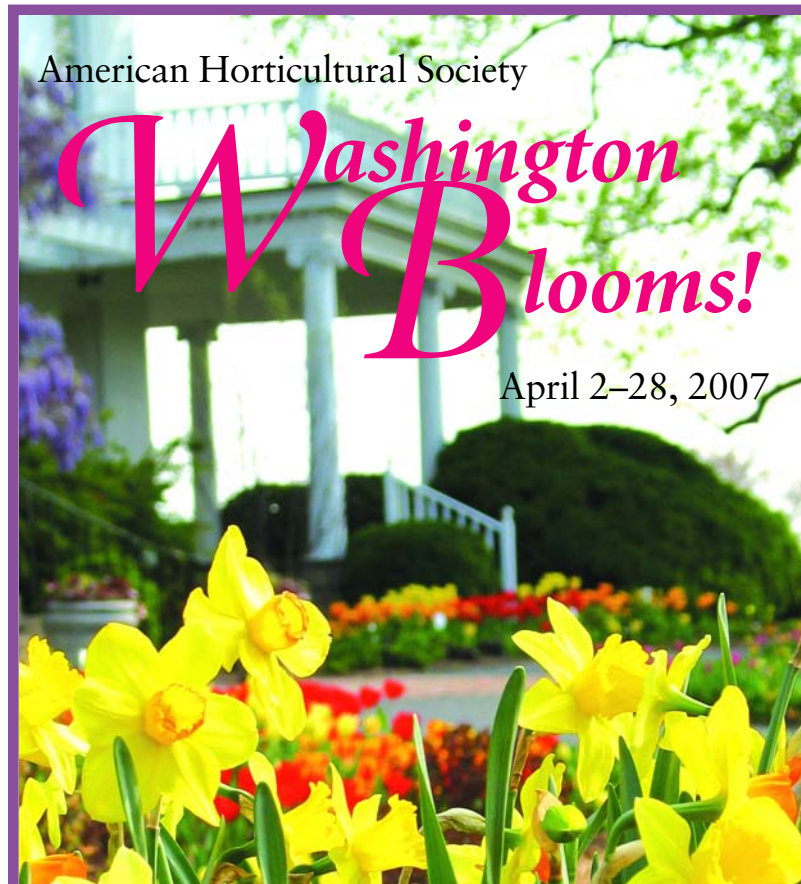
After Melody graduated from the Longwood program in May 2006, life didn't slow down a whit. She got married that summer—she is now Melody Shaddix—

and accepted a job as the development and operations manager for the Arts Council of Brazos Valley in College Station, Texas. "The staff at the AHS supported me and nurtured me during my time with them and continued to do so after I left," says Melody. "Working on the Bailey Walk was an amazing opportunity to learn and give back to an organization that has given me so much."

As the Master Plan continues to evolve, this former intern's research and creativity will have influenced a tangible element of River Farm's identity.

"Bailey's words and ideas will not only live on as the backbone of American horticulture," Melody noted in her thesis, "but as the backbone of the garden that bears his name: The Liberty Hyde Bailey Walk." 

*Heather Robbins recently completed an editorial internship with The American Gardener.*



American Horticultural Society

# Washington Blooms!

April 2–28, 2007

Join us this April for *Washington Blooms!* at River Farm. Nothing compares with the beauty of the early spring blooms in the National Capital area. Cherry blossoms, daffodils, and tulips herald the arrival of spring in an explosion of color. Mark your calendar and plan to visit River Farm and the National Capital area this April—you'll find a variety of spring delights with something for every gardener and garden enthusiast, no matter what your passion!

Visit [www.ahs.org](http://www.ahs.org) or call (703) 768-5700 for more information.



#### 2007 *Washington Blooms!* Events at River Farm

- April 7 • Spring Garden & Bulb Tour
- April 14 • Spring Garden & Bulb Tour
- April 20 • Members-Only Preview Night for Friends of River Farm Plant Sale
- April 21 & 22 • Friends of River Farm Plant Sale
- April 28 • Spring Garden & Bulb Tour

#### Ongoing for the month of April at River Farm

- Thousands of spring blooms!
- AHS Garden Shop
- Botanical art exhibit

#### More reasons to visit the National Capital Area in April

- National Cherry Blossom Festival (March 31 – April 15)
- Historic Garden Week in Virginia (April 21 – 28)