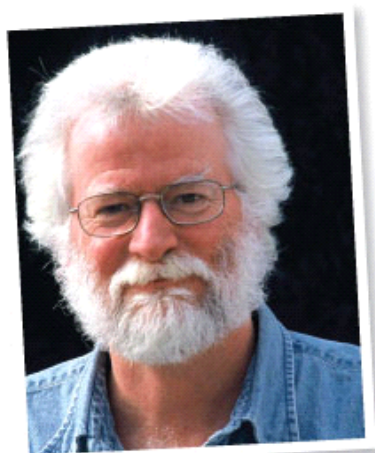


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Retroactive Greening

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“The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.” Thus spake Shakespeare, in *Julius Caesar*, Act III. A memorable line, but it need not always be true.

Horticulture, particularly the public garden sector, reverses that scenario. We offer a unique brand of redemption for people and institutions whose practices weren’t always beyond reproach, but whose legacies have compensated for, if not wholly expiated, a multitude of alleged sins.

I say “alleged” because this is a complicated topic. Amassing obscene wealth is a fraught process. Abraham Lincoln said, “It has been my experience that those with no vices have very few virtues.”

Google the term “robber baron” and one of the first hits is Cornelius Vanderbilt, descendant of a Dutch farmer who arrived in America as an

indentured servant in 1650. Fast-forward a few generations and there’s Cornelius, fabulously wealthy thanks to his New York shipping companies, squeezing millions in tribute to refrain from poaching business from government-subsidized shippers.

Skip ahead a few begettings and descendant George is building Biltmore Estate in western North Carolina, complete with the obligatory Frederick Law Olmstead-designed garden. The mansion and gardens, long open to the public, sit on 8,000 acres of field and forest. That’s over 12 square miles, half of Manhattan Island. Impressive, but a mere sliver of the original mind-boggling 125,000 acres, nearly 200 square miles—bigger than all the Florida Keys combined, bigger than several European countries. Imagine owning so much land, you’d never see most of it.

When one mentions public horticulture, the name duPont is inescapable. Besides the obvious Longwood Gardens, there’s Nemours, Winterthur and marvelous Mount Cuba Center, where it’s all about natives. Where did the money come from? From chemicals and a centuries-old legacy of blowing stuff up. E.I. duPont, the first of the clan in America, built a gunpowder factory, now the Hagley Museum, in Delaware in 1802. Each estate includes gardens worth visiting, but Longwood stands alone, a fantastic sprawl that no government entity could conceive. Building Longwood required Pierre duPont, a dreamer with bottomless pockets.

Henry Ford’s bold innovations overshadow his anti-Semitism, dealings with Nazis and his German factories’ use of POW slave labor. His legacy includes Fair Lane, a National Landmark with magnificent public gardens designed by pioneer naturalistic landscaper Jens Jensen. Having toured with the Perennial Plant Association years ago, I can

attest that it's well worth a stop by anyone in this business.

Speaking of PPA visits, this year we toured the wonderful Sarah P. Duke Gardens, adjacent to Duke University. As I wandered the Japanese garden, the terraces and numerous water features, not once did it occur to me that those lovely 55 acres are rooted in cotton mills, antitrust suits and all the reeking baggage that comes with cigarettes. But that's the legacy of brothers Benjamin Newton Duke and James Buchanan "Buck" Duke.

It's common now to say the gulf between the Haves and the Have-Nots has never been wider. I beg to differ. It's uncommon now to hear the epithet "robber baron," though it's occasionally deployed to label Silicon Valley billionaires. Wealth will always attract sniping—some justified, some not.

History isn't made with tweezers. The creation of great beauty isn't always pretty. Anton Chekov wrote, "I don't understand anything about ballet. All I know is that during the intervals the ballerinas stink like horses." Elizabeth Taylor said, "Success is a great deodorant."

Attention, landscapers and designers: Got a client whose legacy could stand a little deodorizing? Let not the good be interred with their bones. Help them think green. **GP**

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