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lifestyle: GARDENING

Robert Fortune (1812-1880) was chosen to go to China, after it opened its doors to foreigners, to search out, collect and return with plant specimens never before seen in the West. He succeeded with a dazzling collection of plants, including azaleas, chrysanthemums, tree peonies, primulas, weigela, forsythia and many others. He even brought back the Oriental technique of dwarfing conifers. He made a further trip to China for the East India Company to observe the closely guarded tea production with the view of introducing it to India. Though he had to disguise himself as a native, he succeeded in his clandestine mission and tea growing was established in India with *Camellia sinensis*, the tea plant. Just outside of Charleston on Wadmalaw Island thrives the only working tea plantation in America, growing more than 300 varieties of tea from *Camellia sinensis*. However, the most recent information indicates that it has been bought by Bigelow tea company and is therefore no longer independent.

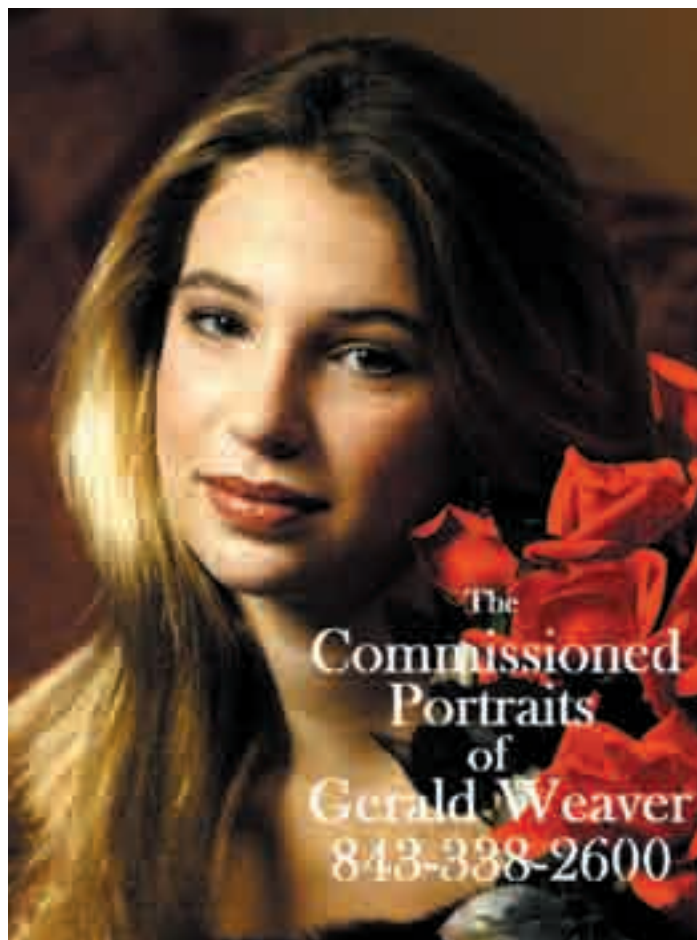
Ernest 'Chinese' Wilson (1876-1930) began his collecting career at the tender age of 22 for the famous British nursery, James Veitch & Son. Later he collected for the Arnold Arboretum in Massachusetts whence his finds were distributed widely throughout the United States. His multiple excursions to China resulted in an outstanding number of plant introductions, including flowering cherries, clematis montana, Japanese dogwood, cotoneaster, kurume azaleas, hydrangea and jasmine. One trip also resulted in a falling boulder breaking his leg in two places. Injured three days distant from the nearest medical help, he was carried by litter along narrow and dangerous mountain passes. Upon meeting a mule train traveling in the opposite direction, his litter was laid on the ground while the mules, gingerly it is hoped, stepped over him!

Andre Michaux's name (1748-1802) is familiar in the Charleston area where he settled for a time in 1785 and started a garden and nursery. His travels took him to England, Spain, Persia and the United States on behalf of Louis XVI of France to collect for His Majesty's "Jardin du Roi." In 1768 he presented camellias from Japan to Henry Middleton of Middleton Place Gardens outside Charleston, said to be the first planted in this country, whence they proliferated as indispensable components of Southern gardens. Michaux also introduced crape myrtle from the Far East, fragrant tea olive, Chinese tallow tree, mimosa and the ginkgo tree.

The gentle French missionary priest and amateur botanist, Pere Armand David (1826-1900) was the first foreigner to see the exotic dove tree, *Davidia involucrata*, growing in Sichuan Province, China. Although he did not bring back live specimens, he brought knowledge of its existence, which so whetted the appetite of insatiable British collectors that the Veitch nursery dispatched 'Chinese' Wilson in 1899 to find it and bring back seeds. This he finally achieved with no little difficulty, and the dove tree was introduced to the waiting Western world. Though rare, it does grow and bloom in various Southern locales, including the University of Georgia campus in Athens and the Sarah Duke Gardens in Durham, NC.

For more details of these and other intrepid explorers and their fascinating expeditions, see *The Plant Hunters* by Toby Musgrave, Chris Gardener and Will Musgrave.

— Barbara Hodges



The
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 Portraits
 of
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