

HILLS AND DALES  
(Ferrell Gardens)  
1200 Vernon Road  
La Grange  
Troup County  
Georgia

HALS GA-3  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### HILLS AND DALES (Ferrell Gardens)

HALS NO. GA-3

Location: 1200 Vernon Road, La Grange, Troup County, Georgia

Vernon Road National Register Historic District, NRIS No. 84001266

Latitude: 33.037638, Longitude: -85.05053 (First formal garden terrace, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: The gardens of Hills and Dales are significant as an outstanding example of an intact nineteenth-century terraced, parterre garden laid out in 1842 by Sarah Coleman Ferrell, whose design motif was based on the precedents of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque period. The gardens have been described as “the apotheosis of all Georgia box gardens.” Since their layout in 1841, the gardens have been one of the most iconic designed landscapes in the state of Georgia. The property also includes an excellent example of a Second Renaissance Revival style mansion, called a “landmark of the American Renaissance,” designed in 1916 by Neel Reid, one of Georgia’s most renowned architects of the twentieth century, to complement and overlook the garden of Sarah Coleman Ferrell.

The gardens are significant for their association with three generations of women who oversaw the layout and stewardship of the garden—Sarah Coleman Ferrell, Ida Cason Callaway, and Alice Hand Callaway—and for the high artistic quality of the garden design. The gardens of Hills and Dales are significant as an excellent example of a Country Place era estate. Beginning with the period of rapid industrialization that followed the Civil War in the 1880s and continuing until the economic downfall of the late 1920s, wealthy business leaders established private estates in picturesque rural settings that often consisted of a large main house surrounded by a landscape that included winding approach drives, lawns and meadows, massed plantings of trees and shrubs, reflective water features, garden structures, terraces, orchards, vegetables, cutting and ornamental gardens, and greenhouses. The gardens are significant in the area of Black Ethnic Heritage for the use of enslaved masons to construct the original gardens on existing cotton terraces and enslaved gardeners to maintain the terraces following their construction in 1842.

Description: Hills and Dales is a 35-acre historic estate located in LaGrange, Georgia. The property includes the historic nineteenth-century Ferrell Gardens, the 1916 Fuller E. Callaway family home, and the surrounding outbuildings and landscape.

From the massive iron entrance gates designed in 1916, a winding drive approaches the house through a grove of trees planted in the nineteenth century. The Italianate villa is sited on the highest point of the grove and is concealed from immediate view by the height of the trees. The house overlooks a 2.3-acre boxwood garden laid out in beginning 1842 in a series of six formal terraces—formerly cotton fields—running east to west. The terraces were planted next to the south façade of the Ferrell house, giving direct access to the gardens from the house. The first terrace is enclosed by an evergreen hedge that channels views of the rest of the garden along the open main axis of the garden extending away from the house toward the southeast. Boxwood mottos planted by Sarah Coleman Ferrell more than 160 years ago adorn the first terrace, along with mottos added by Ida Cason Callaway in 1918. A fountain designed by Neel Reid in 1916 is the focal point of the first terrace. The main axis passes through three successive narrow terraces, each a little longer than the terrace immediately above it. The fourth terrace, called “Labyrinth Avenue” in the garden of Sarah Coleman Ferrell, had irregular beds, a multitude of trees, a well house, cold frames, and a greenhouse. Magnolia Walk is the longest terrace in the garden. Magnolias along this terrace were reportedly planted from seed during the Civil War. At the east end of Magnolia walk is where Sarah Ferrell’s boxwood maze is said to have been. Fuller Callaway, Sr. and Ida Cason Callaway redesigned this area after purchasing the property.

West of the other terraces is the Church Garden, where Sara Ferrell designed beds outlined in the shapes of various religious symbols. It was the location of an octagonal-shaped well house and an arbor with built-in seats. The main axis terminates in a sunken garden delineated by a semi-circular stone wall with stone steps on each side leading down to a circular pool and curved seat set in a stone wall that defines the south boundary of the garden. This terrace was called “the Valley” during Sarah Coleman Ferrell’s tenure and was the location of a summerhouse. The view from the bench, looking up the terraces to the house and upper terraces, is one of the most important of the garden.

Steps and retaining walls quarried and built by enslaved masons connect the various terraces that are surrounded by areas of more informal curving paths, patterned beds with religious iconography, and fountains, pieces of classical statuary, and stone benches added in the twentieth century. Beyond the terraces are groves of trees and shrubs. Other garden areas added in the twentieth century by Ida Cason Callaway include a rock garden, a wildflower garden, a vegetable garden, and a greenhouse with a formal rose garden adjacent. Fuller Jr. and Alice Hand Callaway added a pool and bathhouse to the northwest side of the property in 1941. The hillside on the northeast side of the property is a remnant of nineteenth-century cotton terraces.

The gardens of Hills and Dales are little changed from their original design intent of 1842. Although the summerhouse and other nineteenth-century garden

structures do not survive and some of the plant material has been lost over the years, the garden retains most of the defining landscape characteristics of spatial organization, vegetation, topography, circulation, and small-scale features. Well-known Atlanta architect Neel Reid designed the Renaissance Revival mansion for textile magnate Fuller E. Callaway, Sr. and his wife, Ida Cason Callaway, in 1916 to complement Sarah Ferrell's surviving boxwood garden. The careful attention to siting and design details retained integrity of setting, location, workmanship, materials, feeling, design, and association. Throughout the twentieth century, the Callaway family, under the careful stewardship of two Callaway women—Ida Cason Callaway and Alice Hand Callaway—preserved the house and gardens. Because of the vision of the women overseeing the property since 1842, the continuity of the original landscape is one of the most exceptional aspects of the garden, particularly given the destruction of many local sites during the Civil War. Their stewardship is being carried forward by the Fuller E. Callaway Foundation.

History: Mickleberry and Nancy Coleman Ferrell moved to Troup County, Georgia, in 1832. At the Ferrell homestead, Nancy Ferrell created a garden described as having been “made most attractive ... in the cultivation of rare flowers and in the tasteful grouping of shrubbery.” Nancy's daughter, Sarah Coleman, studied at the Troup County Academy where she met and married her double first cousin, Blount Ferrell, in 1835. The couple moved to Florida to live with Blount's mother but returned to LaGrange in 1841. Sarah's father gave the couple 80 acres of the family farm. Ferrell Gardens, originally called “The Terraces”, was begun by Sarah Coleman Ferrell in 1842. Mrs. Ferrell and her mother, Nancy Coleman Ferrell, “vied with each other” in their gardening pursuits.

Sarah Coleman Ferrell's formal boxwood garden covered a series of six terraces—formerly cotton fields—running east to west. She did not implement all of her garden design at once, but in stages over a period of time. It is traditionally believed that she took a stick and began to draw designs in the soil to lay out her garden. More than likely the Upper Terrace, closest to the house, was first created and other terraces added to this. This theory is supported by a friend of Sarah's granddaughter who wrote that the first boxwood planted was ‘God is Love’ on the Upper Terrace. Steps and retaining walls were made of native stone, quarried and built by enslaved masons. The boxwoods used in the gardens were largely rooted by Mrs. Ferrell while other ornamentals were ordered from nurseries across the region, including the well-known Fruitland Nurseries in Augusta, Georgia, from whom she ordered “roses and shrubs” in 1858.

Mrs. Ferrell laid out her garden at a time when an aesthetic of enclosure and geometric composition surrounding a simple pattern of planting beds was a dominant regional convention in a state founded a mere 100 plus years earlier. Equally important to the design of Ferrell Gardens was the fact that upper-class women of the antebellum South were largely freed from the responsibility of

household work by the institution of slavery and found ample time to devote to artistic pursuits. Mrs. Ferrell wrote: "You know how I have ever loved beautiful plants and flowers. I do not say they were a part of my life; they were life itself. My idolatry has gone so far as to feel that Heaven must be the home of flowers, and without them would be incomplete. ..." She chose religious iconography to reflect her belief in the spiritual message of a garden, perhaps taking the notion promoted by arbiter of taste Andrew Jackson Downing and others that there was a moral influence in improved residential surroundings.

In 1890, the Ferrells offered to sell their home and grounds to LaGrange for use as a city park and cemetery but the council refused to ratify Mayor E. D. Pitman's offer. Future textile magnate Fuller E. Callaway, Sr. often visited with Mrs. Ferrell in her garden and, since he had shown a great appreciation for her life's work, she hoped he would be able to purchase the property after her death. Sarah Coleman Ferrell died in 1903 after tending the garden for over sixty years. In her lifetime, Sarah Ferrell developed one of the most acclaimed gardens in the South, said to be as widely known as the Shaw Gardens in St. Louis, Missouri. Her close friend, Professor Charles Carson Cox, described her landscape design skills at her funeral as being "more than passive appreciation; it implies the constructive imagination, in creating and harmonizing beautiful forms. The artist expresses his idea and character in blending the colors on the canvas, in modulating musical tones, in projecting immortal verse, and so she has written herself in the stately, aristocratic cedar and cypress, in the graceful undulations of shrubbery, and in the modest loveliness of flowers." Historic images and postcards held at the Troup County Archives illustrate the scale and artistry of her designs, especially stereographs from c. 1879 that show the original house and all six terraces.

Her husband, Blount Ferrell, died in 1908. After that, garden maintenance was interrupted until a portion of the property was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Fuller E. Callaway, Sr. in 1911 for \$8,000. The Ferrell property, valued at \$20,000, was auctioned off on December 5, 1911 by the executors of Blount C. Ferrell's estate.

Shortly after purchasing the property, Fuller E. Callaway, Sr., by then a very successful textile manufacturer, commissioned the noted architectural firm of Hentz and Reid of Atlanta to design a larger house in the Italian villa style to complement Sarah Ferrell's existing terraced boxwood garden. Beginning with the period of rapid industrialization that followed the Civil War in the 1880s and continuing until the economic downfall of the late 1920s, wealthy business leaders established private estates in picturesque rural settings known as the Country Place Era. Completed in 1916, the house is widely regarded as one of Neel Reid's finest designs and has been called "a landmark of the American Renaissance". Reid synthesized the Italian villa tradition of house and garden with the native classicism of America. Each window offered a pleasing view of

the garden and doors aligned with the garden axis. Reid formalized the winding approach drive and added other design elements typical of a Country Place Era estate in a plan that unified the design of the twentieth-century house and nineteenth-century garden. The property was renamed “Hills and Dales” to honor the topography of the site and its completion was celebrated at Fuller and Ida’s 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

Fuller Callaway, Sr. remarked that the smartest thing he ever did was marry Ida Jane Cason. When she assumed responsibility for the garden in 1912, Mrs. Callaway began restoring and expanding the gardens. She worked with a planting plan commissioned from Fruitland Nurseries to add and replace plant material in the beds and borders. At Neel Reid’s suggestion, fountains and pieces of classical statuary were added to enhance what he felt was the Italianate character of the garden while preserving the boxwood terraces. Ida Cason Callaway added a rock garden, a wildflower garden, a vegetable garden, and a greenhouse flanked by a rose garden. In 1920, the property was featured in *Country Life* magazine and later in *House Beautiful*, *House and Garden*, and in Louise Shelton’s *Beautiful Gardens of America*. For the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ferrell Gardens in 1932, Mrs. Callaway hosted a dinner for 165 members of the Garden Club of America. Ida Cason Callaway’s stewardship of the garden ended with her death in 1936.

Beginning in 1936, Fuller E. Callaway, Jr. and his wife, Alice, took over the care of the house and garden giving them the same careful attention. The gardens were featured on the first Georgia Garden Pilgrimage in 1937. A pool and bathhouse was added by Alice and Fuller Jr. in 1941. It was designed by architect Hill R. Huffman of Atlanta to blend with the existing architecture of the estate. The greenhouse was rehabilitated in 1949, and Alice Hand Callaway converted the adjacent rose garden to a herb garden. In 1950, Mrs. Callaway converted part of the vegetable garden into the Ray Garden, where she grew roses and ornamental conifers. Alice Hand Callaway and Ferrell Gardens were featured in *The American Woman’s Garden* by Rosemary Verey and Ellen Samuels in 1984. On January 21st, 1985, LaGrange temperatures dipped to -5 degrees Fahrenheit, a 100 year low. The cold killed many camellias, sentinel boxwood, and other ornamental plants at Ferrell Gardens. The Callaways continued to preserve the historic house and garden until Alice Hand Callaway’s death in 1998. Mrs. Callaway recalled: “When I first moved up here in 1935, I was frightened. I wasn’t a gardener. I was sort of overwhelmed with the responsibility. The more time and love I put into it, the more I considered it mine. I don’t think I’ve ever gone anywhere without bringing back a plant for the garden. Now it’s just a part of me.” A number of historic images and family photographs of the work done in the twentieth century are held by the Troup County Archives, the Hills and Dales Estate, the Archive of American Gardens, and the American Memory Collection of the Library of Congress. Many of these images, as well as those from the nineteenth century, can be seen on the Hills

and Dales website.

In 1998, the estate was bequeathed to the Fuller E. Callaway Foundation. In 2000, Robert and Company, under the direction of the late Jim Cothran, was selected by the Foundation to prepare a master plan that would allow the estate to be opened to the public while preserving the historic integrity of the house and gardens. The property is now known as Hills and Dales Estate and was opened to the public on October 4, 2004 following the implementation of the master plan that included a visitor center, parking, an additional greenhouse, and upgrading of several existing structures to accommodate specialized staff and service needs. The swimming pool was replaced in 2004 with a terrace that features an attractive central fountain. In 2010, the second and third floors of the house were opened for tours after a major restoration project.

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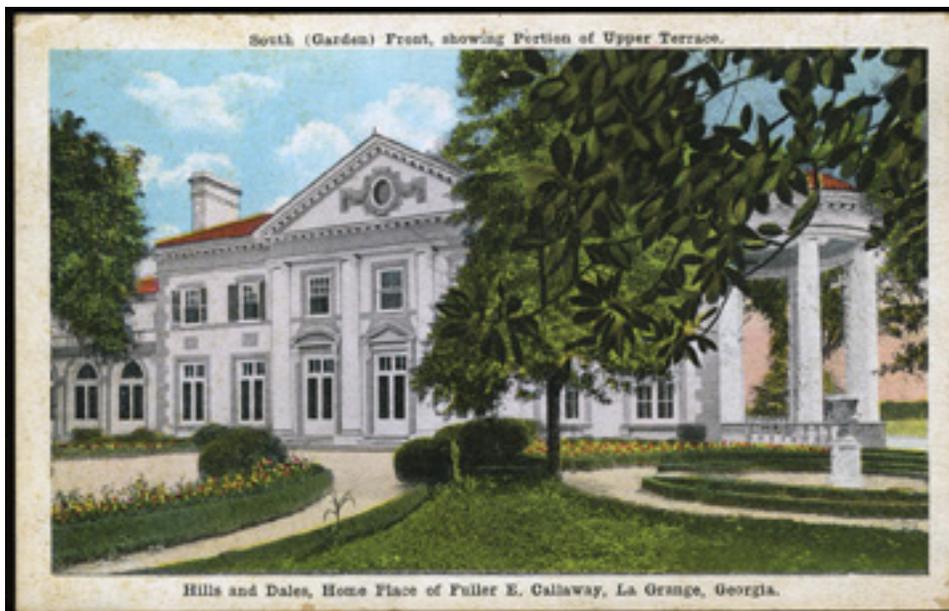
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2013 HALS Challenge Entry: *Documenting the Cultural Landscapes of Women*



Glass slide of Ferrell Gardens (Susan Hitchcock, undated).



Neel Reid house and Upper Terrace (Cherokee Garden Library, c. 1918).



2<sup>nd</sup> Terrace, Sentinel Avenue (Cherokee Garden Library, c. 1918).



Church Garden (Cherokee Garden Library, c. 1918).



Church Garden (Cherokee Garden Library, c. 1918).



Upper Terrace (Library of Congress, Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 1932).



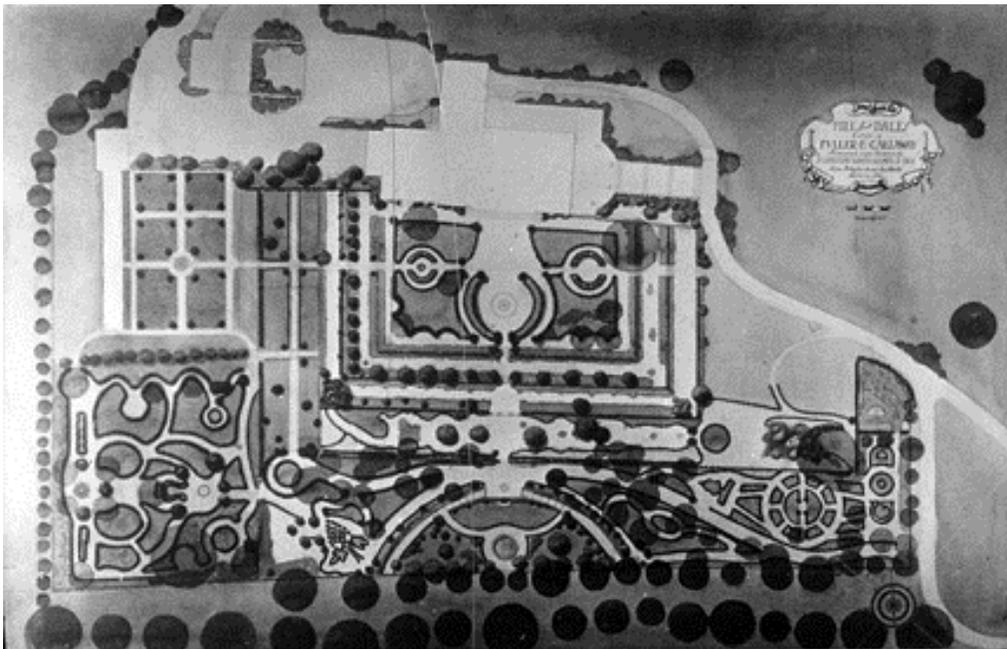
Allée of cedar trees lining Bower Avenue (Library of Congress, Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 1932).



Church Garden (Library of Congress, Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 1932).



Sunken Garden with fountain and curved bench (Library of Congress, Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 1932).



Site plan by Earl Draper (Library of Congress, Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, 1932).



Alice Hand Callaway (Brencie Werner for the Georgia Historic Landscape Initiative, 1996).



View up the terraces from Sunken Garden (Brencie Werner for the Georgia Historic Landscape Initiative, 1996).



Upper Terrace (Susan Hitchcock, 2003).



Garden walls built by enslaved masons (Susan Hitchcock, 2003).



View to Upper Terrace (Susan Hitchcock, 2003).



Bench and pool in Sunken Garden (Susan Hitchcock, 2003).



Garden cross axis (Susan Hitchcock, 2003).