



Submitted photo

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# Green roses important to legend of railroad

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On June 5, I gave a lecture on iconography of roses at Wyck in Philadelphia, looking at frescoes and paintings dating back to ca. 1450 B.C.

The house at Wyck dates from 1690, but the rose garden dates from 1820 and includes some roses unique to Wyck, such as "Lafayette," which commemorates the visit of Gen. Lafayette to Wyck.

The roster of speakers included Stephen Scanniello, former rosarian at the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens. Stephen delighted us with stories of roses and his attempt to establish a Heritage Rose District in New York City. With 17 sites, such as Trinity Church Cemetery & Mausoleum, Scanniello has supervised plantings of roses that have direct connections to neighborhoods.

Particularly intriguing is his planting of the Green Rose in African-American neighborhoods. In his book "A Rose by Any Name," co-authored with Douglas Brenner, Scanniello relates, "This bizarre flower plays a pivotal role in The Green Rose of Furley Hall, a historical novel about Quakers guiding slaves to freedom along the Underground Railroad during the Civil War.

Author Helen Corse Barney drew upon stories of her Quaker ancestors, such as William Corse, a Baltimore nurseryman with abolitionist sympathies who planted "Viridiflora" at his estate, Furley Hall. Plants survived there until the property was bulldozed for row-house construction in 1953, the year Barney published her book.

Local legend — arising, perhaps, from the novel — says that Underground Rail-

road conductors signaled to one another by wearing a "Green Rose."

Since the publication of his book, however, Scanniello has been contacted by the family of Helen Corse Barney and was told that this legend was relayed to them by their African-American servants at Furley Hall, i.e., the legend existed well prior to the novel. Adding further support to this claim, Henry Chandlee Forman's *Tidewater Maryland Architecture and Gardens* pinpoints the Green Rose in a plan supposedly created in 1952.

The Green Rose, *Rosa chinensis* "Viridiflora," is intriguing, but if you expect something like a "Peace" rose in Kelly green, you will be sadly disappointed. The Green Rose consists entirely of ragged sepals with no petals and the odor of black pepper. The Green Rose apparently arose as a mutation of "Old Blush" China rose during the 1830s, probably around Charleston, S.C. It is truly an American rose.

The "flowers" of the Green Rose result from a genetic anomaly, called phyllody, of the "floral organ identity genes," whereby some or all of the organs of the flower are replaced by leaf-like organs.

The Green Rose can be easily cultivated in the same manner as a hybrid tea rose. It can be acquired from a number of dealers in old roses, such as Antique Rose Emporium in Brenham, Texas (<http://www.antiqueroseemporium.com/>) or Vintage Gardens in Sebastopol, Calif. (<http://www.vintagegardens.com/>).

On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call 302-857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.

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