

## *Gulf Coast Camellia Society Convention Highlights*

**Story and Photographs by Bill Perkins of Brookhaven, MS**

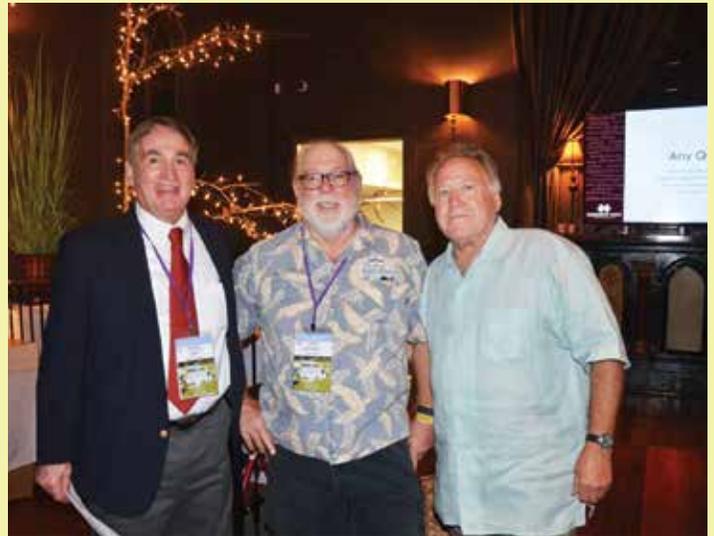
The Brookhaven Camellia Society is honored that Brookhaven was chosen for the venue of the 2019 annual conference of the GCCS. We see many of the GCCS members at our annual show each year and are delighted for so many more GCCS members to have experienced Brookhaven and its environs with us Monday and Tuesday October 7th and 8th during the conference.

The Event Center at “The Homestead at Brookhaven Nurseries” was the main location for our conference meetings. The former Brookhaven Nurseries owned and operated by Frank Burns for 70 years has been converted into a special events venue since it closed a few years ago upon Frank’s retirement. The greenhouses have been removed, the stately home of the Burns family has been refurbished to become “The Homestead Guest House”, and a new modern multi-purpose “Event Center” built on the grounds behind The Guest House.

Registration began at The Event Center at noon Monday the 7th. A welcome social at the Perkins family home “Woodleigh” kicked off the conference Monday afternoon. “Woodleigh” has been the residence of Bill Perkins, Sr. who established the BCS in 1953 and his brother Tom Perkins who was well known in the ACS and the ICS. Tom planted a wide variety of camellias including many he personally sourced from China and Japan. That evening we enjoyed a dinner banquet at a private venue restaurant Mitchell’s with a complimentary wine and brew bar.

There was a guided a tour of The Great Mississippi Tea Company’s plantation Tuesday afternoon. This is one of the few commercial tea operations in the USA. It was established in 2012 and reached commercial production last year with buyers for their premium teas currently in London and Texas. The owner, Jason McDonald and his partner Timmy Gipson enlightened us on the art of tea cultivation, production, and marketing-the entire gamut of the industry. The owners have expanded their operations by planting an additional 7 acres at the Brookhaven plantation and have acquired land on the Big Island of Hawaii where they have recently planted their initial crop.

The finale was the President’s Banquet Tuesday



Left to right: GCCS President Dennis Hart, Gary Bachman and Bill Perkins.

night at “The Mallard” at Lake Dixie Springs. The original Mallard was built when the resort lake was constructed in 1939. The current Mallard is the third generation. Unlike the previous two, which were rustic lodge style, the new one only open for less than 2 years is elegant, spacious, and modern overlooking the lake from a hillside. The President’s Banquet was held in The Chapel, the restaurant’s special event venue. The Chapel was formerly the First Methodist Church in the nearby village of Bogue Chitto built in 1879. Ted Malta, the owner of the new Mallard had the vision to acquire the church, which had not been used in years after a modern one had replaced it, and to move and incorporate it into the new Mallard.

Dr. Gary Bachman, better known as “The Southern Gardener”, was the key speaker at the President’s Banquet. He is nationally known for his horticulture television and radio program “Southern Gardening”. Gary is well known in Brookhaven from previous presentations over many years for various events. Hosting such a conference is not a first for the Brookhaven Camellia Society. About 30 years ago the International Camellia Society was held in New Orleans at The Monteleone Hotel then several days in

# THE CAMELLIA CHRONICLES

Brookhaven. Over 200 attended from the ICS membership across the planet. Thomas H. Perkins, III, a Brookhaven native was the president then of the ICS. Better known as “Brother” he presided over the ICS twice and the American Camellia Society once. He was well known for leading one of the first groups into China on a cultural visit once President Nixon established diplomatic relations with the Peoples Republic of China in the early 1970s. During his tenure lasting 6 years presiding over the ICS he led tours of the ICS to China 4 times, Japan 4 times, South Africa once, England 3 times, Italy twice and France twice.



Timothy Gipson giving a tour of The Great Mississippi Tea Company to convention goers.



Eddie and Cynthia Martin of Belle Chase, Louisiana standing in front of the Perkins' home.



Left to Right: Pat Phillips, Betty Ann Perkins and Susan Hultgren.



The raffle prize was 'Alba Plena' painted by GCCS member Kaye Kaberlein of Summit, Mississippi.



Kay and Ken Clark of Baton Rouge, Louisiana.