Gov. Mouton Camellia Grandchild Blooms on Mrs. H. Griffin’s Lawn

by Corinne Judice
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The grandchildren of the original Governor Mouton camellia tree is blooming on the lawn of Governor Alexandre Mouton’s granddaughter, Mrs. Harry L. Griffin, Lafayette.

The January exhibit at the Edwin Lewis Stephens Library, Southwestern Louisiana Institute, is featuring the well-loved Governor Mouton Camellia, and other species of the winter blossom. Much of the data surrounding the development and location of the first camellia, originated by and named after Louisiana’s first democratic governor, was lent to the library by Mrs. Griffin and her husband, Dean Emeritus of SLI Harry L. Griffin.

According to Miss Pearl Segura, associate professor of Library Science and Reference Librarian, who set up the exhibit, the original “Governor Mouton” camellia bloomed on the grounds of “II Copal,” the governor’s estate.

The camellia tree grew to such grand height and strength that, at one time, a chain was fastened into it for attachment of a hitching post for horses.

The lovely “II Copal” was located in the Southeast section of Lafayette, or the airport section. Typifying the gracious beauty of old Southern mansions and estates, a print of the estate by Persac, is also on display.

Unfortunately, the lovely home burned down and the fire even scorched the greenery of the first “Governor Mouton” camellia tree.

A cutting from the same tree adorns the front lawn of the Griffin home on General Gardiner Street, and cuttings from the front lawn plant have developed on the back lawn of the Griffin property.

A portrait of the famed Louisiana governor at the time when he was serving as United States Senator, is in the library’s exhibit and so is an original painting of the camellia he founded painted by Bernard Wynne and given to Dr. and Mrs. Griffin.

It pictures to perfection the pure red irregular double flower with its mottling of white.

Governor Mouton left specific instructions as to the care of the camellia which he originated and loved, Miss Segura said.

Also of interest in the exhibit is a history of the Governor Mouton Camellia, including a picture of Miss Eugene Hernandez, who, as a Southwestern student, reigned as Queen Camellia. She was the former Miss Petesey Mouron, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Mouton of Maurice, and a great-granddaughter of Governor Mouton.

The “Message of the Governor” delivered when Mouton assumed his governorship, is on display as is a genealogy of the Mouton family tracing the line down to the founder of Vermilionville, now Lafayette, by Jean Mouton.

Among the books on camellias which are shown are “Camellias in the Huntington Gardens” by Hertrich; Hume’s “Azaleas and Camellias” and ‘Culture of Azaleas and Camellias in New Orleans Soils” by Garic.

The books are interspersed with Chinese and Japanese vases and figurines, since camellia history gose back to the Orient.