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Gardens for a Beautiful America, 1895-1935. Photographs by Frances Benjamin Johnston

Sam Watters

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Gardens for a Beautiful America, 1895- 1935, written by Sam Watters and published in collaboration with the Library of Congress, presents for the first time 250 colored photographs of urban and suburban gardens taken by Frances Benjamin Johnston- photographer of presidents, celebrity authors, tastemakers, and estates of the County House Era.
At the opening of the 20th century, as artist and progressive, Johnston was front and center in the movement to beautify America. Gilded Age industrialism had brought at new prosperity to life coast to coast, but at the price of once pristine forests, rivers, and blue skies, wrecked by continental railroad building and factory pollution in growing cities.
As guardians of home and community, wealthy women rallied clubs and societies to green America through design and horticulture. To show all gardeners, rich and poor, what a garden should be, they turned to Frances Benjamin Johnston.
Johnston s colored lantern slides have not been seen since the 1940s. They picture New York town house yards, Long Island villas, California hillside terraces and plantations of the South identified by Watters over years of research and travel.
Johnston produced each slide for illustrated lectures she presented to gardening women. Today, these hand-painted miniatures on glass still resonate with her crusading message: garden the nation back to America the Beautiful, one elm, one rose, one fountain and one boxwood terrace at a time. Preserve our wildflowers and forests for future generations.

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