



- *Landscape Architect*
- *Author*

Julia Lester Dillon

1871–1959

Inducted 2003

Described as strong, independent, and persevering, Julia Lester Dillon became one of the first authorities on southern landscape architecture. Born in Warren County, GA, Julia's parents moved to Augusta when she was a child. After graduating from public schools in Augusta, she went on to Peabody College in Nashville to prepare for a teaching career.

At age 21, Julia wed William B. Dillon. Early in the marriage she contracted diphtheria, which left her deaf. Before the couple's second anniversary, her husband suddenly died. Giving up her teaching career, Julia was determined to find an occupation where her physical disability would not be an obstacle. Her love of gardens since childhood persuaded her to pursue an education in landscape gardening in New York and Boston. Around the age of 40, Julia returned to Augusta to practice her new craft.

The time was ripe for a southern landscape architect. Wealthy northerners liked Augusta for its mild climate and great golfing. Many began to maintain homes there. And while they brought their own gardeners, they weren't trained in southern landscapes, not even knowing what plants were indigenous to the area. Julia's first professional commissions were with these homeowners.

In 1914, Julia worked with the Hardy's, a wealthy couple from Chicago who built a winter home in Augusta. Called Twin Gables, it is now the home of the President of the Medical School of Georgia and still benefits from Julia's early garden plans.

"The men and women who make gardens will find them safety valves for the spirit when things go wrong.... They must plant in faith, water with hope, take counsel of patience; then, if they are long-suffering and kind, they will reap an abundant harvest of joy and peace and happiness. "
 – Julia Lester Dillon

Julia's career blossomed with commissioned work on

courthouses, large parks and school grounds throughout the South. She was the co-author of Augusta's slogan, "Garden City of the South."

The city of Sumter, S.C. lured Julia away from Augusta to develop and landscape Memorial Park. This huge project led to her being offered the job of City Landscape Architect, the only woman in the U.S. to hold such a position. By the time Memorial Park was completed, Julia was hired as Sumter's Superintendent of Parks and Trees. During her tenure, which lasted until 1948, not a tree could be taken down without her approval.

In addition to her city job, Julia was an author - writing a book at age 52. According to Julia, *The Blossom Circle of the Year in Southern Gardens* was the first book written on the subject of gardening in the South. She then wrote a pamphlet entitled *Landscape Design - Twenty Lessons* and served as *Home & Garden* magazine's Southern Garden Editor from 1911 until 1916. She wrote numerous gardening articles for newspapers throughout the south.

As an activist, Julia inspired garden club work, promoting the founding of the Sumter Garden Club in 1927. The club grew to 100 active members in 1950.

Julia Lester Dillon literally blazed a trail for southern landscape architecture. She is a Georgia Woman of Achievement.

Additional Resources

Sumter County Museum
Diane Erdeljac
(770) 234-0109