



Roots and Seeds

An appreciation of Michael Floy, Sr.

On the north wall of the Keeping Room hangs a portrait of Michael Floy, Sr., the great-grandfather of Jane Thacker Floy Mather, Stephen T. Mather's wife.

Michael prized the portrait enough that in his will he stated, "My portrait I leave to her [Deborah Sniffen Floy, his second wife] during her life and thereafter will belong to my son James Floy and his heirs..."

From a family record in the Homestead attic, we learn that Michael Floy was born 18 December 1775 in Devonshire England and emigrated to New York City in July 1800.

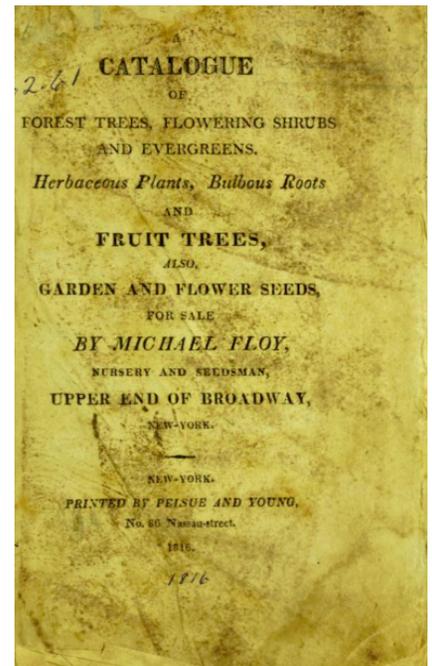
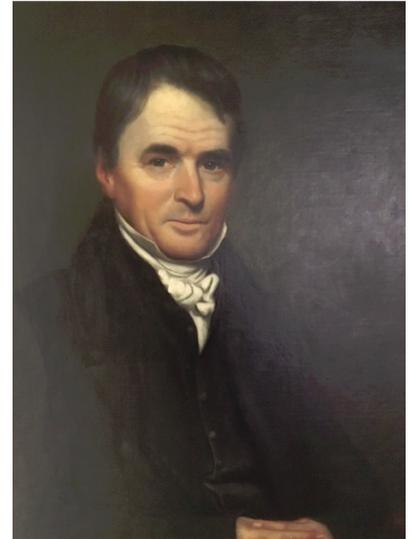
On his naturalization filing in 1807, Michael Floy listed his occupation as "Gardner" (sic). In fact, he was a noted horticulturist and identified himself as "Nursery and Seedsman" on the sales catalog he produced in 1816.

A retrospective article in the National Horticulture Magazine in 1953 reads, "What are believed to be the first importations of Camellias into the United States were the plants received by John Stevens, Hoboken, New York, in 1797 or 1798, and Michael Floy of New York in 1800."

Michael Floy owned ten acres of land between Fourth and Fifth Avenues from 125th to 127th Streets in Harlem, which he purchased for \$8500 in 1827. (Yes, ten Manhattan acres, and yes, \$8500!)

Michael Floy, Sr. had four children by his first wife. Michael Floy, Jr. died in 1837; the surviving son and two daughters had no interest in continuing the nursery business.

Michael married first, Margaret Ferris (b. 23 Aug 1778) on 8 Dec 1802. Margaret died 25 July 1825. He subsequently married Deborah Sniffen (b. 7 Sep 1789) on 6 February 1828. Michael Floy, Sr. died on 23 April 1854. Deborah died 9 Mar 1866.



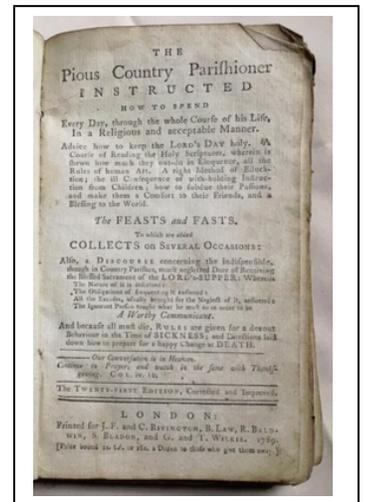
In the attic, in addition to the Floy family record, there is a small book of Common Prayer, "A Pious Country Parishioner." The flyleaf reads "Given to Michael Floy 18 Nov 1793. It was presented by Denys Rolle Esq.. Rolle (1725-1797) was, at that time, the largest landowner in Devon. In addition, he was noted as a philanthropist and a benefactor of charities.

In his will, Michael Floy, Sr. directed that "The plants and shrubs of my nursery and greenhouse may be sold by my executors at any time in their discretion." Although much of the property was retained by the heirs, the nursery business ceased upon his passing.

A transplant himself, Michael Floy, Sr. not only took root but purposefully and abundantly flourished in America. His is a story now firmly and lastingly grafted to the history of the Mather Homestead.



Book of Common Prayer: The Pious Country Parishioner



A. B. VANDERFOEL, 25 Wall St.
LARGE ORNAMENTAL TREES FOR STREET PLANTING.—AILANTHUS, MAPLE, and every other kind of trees for fall planting, for sale at the HARLEM NURSERY, corner of 125th street and 4th avenue.
 To planters purchasing by the dozen or hundred, a liberal deduction will be made. The trees being large and in the finest order, the proprietor desires to dispose of them this fall, to make room for a younger growth. A large assortment of Fruit Trees, Ornamental Shrubs, and Green-house Plants, for sale at the lowest prices. Particular attention is invited to a choice variety of Camellias.
 The Nursery is situated on the line of the Harlem Railroad, and the cars stop at 125th street thus making the access from the city easy and pleasant.
 The subscriber, having associated with him Mr. Wm. Mitchell, a practical gardener from England, is prepared to offer every article in the horticultural line, on the most favorable terms.
MICHAEL FLOY,
 05 1m Harlem Nursery, cor. 125th st. and 4th avenue
 All orders left at No. 23 Nassau st. between Cedar and

25 October 1849 advertisement in The Evening Post

In upcoming Mementos, we will look the lives of his two sons who followed different paths...and at two second cousins of Jane Thacker Floy Mather, each of whom is remembered for an historical first.