

Presentation of Nancy Putnam Howard Award for Excellence in Horticulture To Madalene Hill —June 14, 1997

Presenter: Rexford Talbert

Born in Texas, reared in Kansas, the eldest of 13 children who in the Great Depression left high school before graduating to help support her family. Hers has been a lifetime of support and giving, a frustrated "botanist" who has done more to further the use and delight of herbs than any other single individual that I know. In spite of excursions into careers as diverse as being an IBM manager, and retirement projects that ranged from eggs to gladiolus, it was her childhood love of nature and her early introduction to useful plants by the first generation German and Dutch settlers in Kansas that always led Madalene back to herbs.

Madalene was a single mother of two children during the war years. She remarried in 1950 to Jim Hill, with whom she shared a love of gardening. In 1957, Madalene and Jim began the retirement project that was to become Hilltop Herb Farm. This was not originally intended to be a business, only a hobby. The farm grew like "Topsy," especially after 1967 when meals began to be served. Madalene was always sure at the end of each of the first few years that "that would be it." Jim and Madalene were both amazed at the pace at which Hilltop grew. The delicious meals that Madalene served brought worldwide fame to Hilltop. The guest list, which often included our astronauts and Russia's cosmonauts, was a rather diverse grouping of political, economic and professional clientele whose common interest was the enjoyment of the best food seasoned with the best herbs. Hilltop was ahead of its time in many ways.

From her extensive travels each summer, Madalene collected many herbs that had never before been seen in North America. Ever the generous person, she shared new treasures with commercial growers and home gardeners alike. Because of her generosity, herb growers throughout the U.S. have been beneficiaries. Through her work with HSA, the International Herb Association and the Texas Herb Growers & Marketers Association, Madalene has shared her expertise and knowledge and has increased the visibility and credibility of all herb growers. She was the first recipient of the IHA's Professional Award in 1991, and in 1995 was honored by the Texas Herb Growers & Marketers Association with their Lifetime Achievement Award.

A number of extremely popular herb plants presently in the trade can be credited to Madalene's work through the years. Among them are: 'Arp' rosemary, which she collected in the tiny East Texas town of Arp, and the 'Hill Hardy' rosemary, grown originally at Hilltop Herb Farm. *Tagetes lucida* (Mexican mint marigold) was brought to her by a Mexican-American visitor; *Origanum xmajoricum*, her favorite oregano for the kitchen, was brought originally from California by a peripatetic

NASA engineer (it was sold as "Rex Oregano" for years until more positively identified); red-stem applemint (*Mentha xgracilis*), a wonderful mint for the kitchen found its way to the farm from Southeast Asia. A large number of flowering salvias, grown in the early 1970s at Hilltop, are now beginning to be more widely distributed.

Her expertise as a writer is well known throughout the herbal world. From 1978 until 1984, Madalene and her daughter Gwen Barclay wrote a monthly column "Thyme Being," in the *Houston Home & Garden Magazine*. This partnership also produced the herbal best-selling book *Southern Herb Growing* as well as the herb section for the *Houston Gardenbook*. Articles from Madalene appear regularly in a number of magazines, including *The Herb Companion*, *Texas Gardener*, and Neil Sperry's *Gardens*. She has contributed articles to The Herb Society of America's *Herbarist*, as well as serving as editor in 1978-79.

Madalene has helped spread the word of the use and delight of herbs since the late 1950s with lectures to garden clubs, women's groups, hospitals, 4-H clubs and home economics classes. She has spoken to practically every unit within HSA and has presented cooking demonstrations to as many as 800 people for giant fund-raising events. She taught regularly at LePanier and the Rice Epicurean Market in Houston and for "standing room only" classes for seven years at the Zona Spray Cooking School in Hudson, Ohio. She lectures regularly at annual conferences of the Texas Herb Growers and the International Herb Association, and in 1995 presented a program for the Garden Writers Association of America.

Madalene is a longtime member of the International Herb Association, the Texas Herb Growers & Marketers Association, the Garden Writers Association of America, the Houston Culinary Guild, the Houston Culinary Historians and *Les Dames d'Escoffier*, and has been very active in past years in the Federated Womans' Club and the Houston Chamber of Commerce.

Madalene became a member at large of The Herb Society of America in 1958 and founded the South Texas Unit in 1968. She served as chairman, director, secretary and treasurer through the years, in addition to numerous committee chairmanships. She was awarded the prestigious Helen de Conway Little Medal of Honor in 1978. In 1981 she chaired the Annual Meeting of the Society in Houston. Madalene served as national president of HSA from 1986-88, and was instrumental in bringing the organization to its new home in Ohio. She has continued to be very active on the national board of directors, serving on the President's Advisory Committee for several terms of office. The Library Feasibility subcommittee was initiated by Madalene, and the Rosemary Circle, also her brainchild, was devised to honor members who have been active for over 25 years.

In her later years, she has developed a series of wonderful gardens that are attracting hundreds of visitors for tours. The International Festival Institute at Roundtop's collection of herbs is rapidly growing as Madalene searches out the

plants lost in the aftermath of the terrible tornado that destroyed Hilltop Herb Farm in 1983. She feels that she has the best of all worlds: beautiful countryside and gardens, historic surroundings, exquisite music, good food and lots of friends and interesting visitors to keep things exciting.

The opportunity to present HSA awards has visited me an even half-dozen times in my 30 plus years as a member of The Society. A joyous part of that duty is the privilege of reading all the many wonderful things said about the nominee from their sponsors. That joy is especially magnified when the recipient is someone who has shared those years with you and who in fact is your own herbal mentor and loving friend.

I now present to Madalene Hill the Nancy Putnam Howard Award for Horticultural Excellence. Nancy would have heartily approved of this selection.