

# *Verschaffelt's Nouvelle Iconographie Des Camellias\**

GEORGE GRAVES  
Massachusetts Horticultural Society

**T**HE PRESENT REVIVAL of interest in camellias has caused a searching of the literature of a century or more ago. One old publication that is now being taken down from library shelves, dusted off and pored over is the collated series of monthly fascicles issued by the famous nursery concern of Verschaffelt in Ghent during the years 1848-1860 inclusive, 13 volumes in all. The text of this series has recently been republished in literal translation and a new arrangement by E. A. McIlhenny. The present study was suggested by Dr. H. Harold Hume and made from examination of the sets in the libraries of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society (12 volumes) and the Arnold Arboretum (13 volumes).

The *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias* was initiated by Alexander Verschaffelt in whose establishment was to be found growing one of the most extensive collections of camellia varieties of the time. His approach to the subject was stated in quotation marks in the "Avant-Propos" of Tome I, 1848-1849, as follows:

"Le Camellia par l'élégance de son port, la persistance de son beau feuillage, la grandeur et le brillant coloris de ses fleurs, a su faire la conquete de tous les amateurs de belles plantes. Il règne aujourd'hui presque en despote dans toutes les collections, dont il fait le principal ornement. Il récrée l'anthophile le plus blasé sur les jouissances horticoles; les Dames le recherchent pour ajouter à leur parure; et ses fleurs du blanc le plus éblouissant du rose le plus gai, du rouge le plus splendide, ou mélangées de ces diverses couleurs, accompagnent ou animent leur teint d'une façon ravissante. Point de bouquet sans Camellias; point de tableau de fleurs sans lui. Le Camellia, en un mot, est indispensable pour tout et partout."

---

\* Reprinted from *The National Horticultural Magazine*, Vol. 25, No. 2, April, 1946.

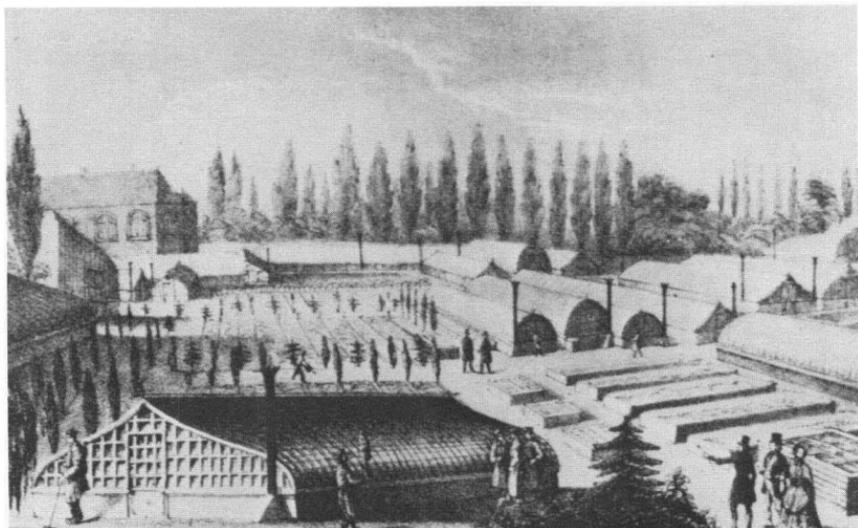


The camellia 'Verschaffeltiana'. It was one originated at Verschaffelt's Nursery and was so well liked that they gave it their family name when it bloomed in 1849. It was large (10 to 12 cm in diameter), lovely bright pink color, imbricated with each petal "crossed through the center by a broad white stripe." (Photo from book in ACS Library by Milton H. Brown.)

The quotation was from a prospectus which the text of the "Avant-Propos" suggests was circulated before publication.

These high-sounding words have in them a large portion of sales talk. It appears evident that there was a commercial aim in publishing colored illustrations together with historical and descriptive essays. The house of Verschaffelt, which Alexandre had founded in 1825, had camellias to sell as well as to look at and to write about.

That the series was intended to circulate among potential customers was suggested in one of the rare references to it in the contemporary garden literature. On March 22, 1850, F. R. Horner of Hull, England, wrote to *The Florist and Garden Miscellany*, calling the attention of its readers to the illustrated work on camellias then being published by "Mr. Alexander Verschaffelt of Ghent," not knowing that Alexandre Verschaffelt had died ten days before. Among other things, Dr. Horner pointed out that: "As Mr. Verschaffelt possesses, perhaps, every known variety of this flower, he necessarily has the opportunity of bringing out such a work as none other could have. Also, the amateur is hereby enabled to make his selection as well as if he were at the trouble and expense of making a personal inspection." This notice may have had about it an element of exchanging favors because Alexandre Verschaffelt had the year before named a variety of camellia for Dr. Horner—Docteur Horner (Liv. 8, Pl. IV, 1849).



The Verschaffelt establishment as it was pictured in *L'Illustration Horticole* in December 1854.

Little or no notice was taken of Verschaffelt's publication by the horticultural press. Years later, in 1886, the obituary notices of Ambroise Verschaffelt, the son who took over the business and the camellia publication when his father died, made no mention of the *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias* when recounting the contributions which the younger Verschaffelt had made to horticulture. It was the custom of the time not to review works that came out in parts over a long period.

A realistic statement of the purpose of the series is found in the essay on the variety *De La Reine* (Liv. 1, Pl. III, 1854), evidently inspired, if not actually written by Ambroise Verschaffelt. The aim was stated to be the making known of worthwhile new varieties and the keeping alive of the memory of those of former years.<sup>1</sup>

The Verschaffelts were genuinely interested in camellias for themselves alone, as witness the expression of hope for the eventual development of a blue-flowered variety, which was written into the essay on the variety *Carega Superba* (Liv. 1, Pl. I, 1857). Sometimes individual plants in private collections were figured. Even so,

<sup>1</sup> "La *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias* faillirait a son but, celui de faire connaitre d'abord les plus meritanes nouveautes, et en outre de perpetuer le souvenir de ce que les annees anterieures ont vu surgir de plus beau."



NOUVELLE ICONOGRAPHIE

# DES CAMELLIAS

CONTENANT

LES FIGURES ET LA DESCRIPTION

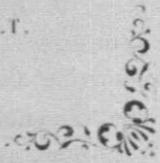
DES PLUS RARES, DES PLUS NOUVELLES ET DES PLUS BELLES  
VARIÉTÉS DE CE GENRE.

---

TOME I. — 1848-1849.

---

GAND,  
CHEZ L'ÉDITEUR ALEXANDRE VERSCHAFFELT,  
HORTICULTEUR, RUE LÉO CHAUME, 20



a glance at some of the internal evidence to be found in the collated series also supports the suggestion of its sales-literature purpose. Very often, the appearance of a variety in *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias* coincided with the offering for sale of that variety. Here are three of numerous plain instances, as translated by Mr. McIlhenny.

JACKSONII (Liv. 2, Pl. I, 1849.)

"Beginning in March 1849 we will put it for sale. We have decided to keep the same prices at which Mr. Jackson intended to sell his plants, which are included in the following classes:

Plants from 15 to 25 cm. in height, 75 francs.

Plants from 35 to 50 cm. in height, 125 francs."

EMILIANA ALBA (Liv. 4, Pl. III, 1849.)

"We are now able to furnish strong plants of this pretty camellia which is not to be found in many collections."

JENNY LIND (Liv. 12, Pl. II, 1855.)

"As we have immediately ordered a large number of specimen plants, we shall be able to offer them for sale to amateurs at the same time as the holder; that is, next fall (1856)."

The scheme of publication which Alexandre Verschaffelt had in mind was stated, evidently, in the prospectus referred to and quoted from in the "Avant-Propos." If such a prospectus existed, no copy of it was available for this study. However, Dr. Horner, who must have seen a copy of some such publication, stated in his 1850 communication to *The Florist and Garden Miscellany* that:

"It is published in monthly issues, each number containing four plates of camellias, with descriptive letterpress; twelve numbers forming the yearly half-volume, while twenty-four numbers, or the numbers of two years, constitute the volume. The work will be completed in five volumes: it being proposed to give plates of 500 of the most beautiful, or new, or perfect kinds of camellias. . . . One entire volume is now completed; the monthly parts (something less than two shillings per part) are forwarded by the editor, free of charge, to any subscriber in England."

Even though the evident intention was to have a tome or volume include two years' publication of monthly livraisons or parts (not books), an index was included from the start with each yearly

half-volume. This fact accounts for the present-day attitude that each year's issues taken together constitute a volume, of which there are 13. Apparently, the younger Verschaffelt looked at it that way, too, because title pages for one year only began not later than 1851.

Accompanying Plate 378 in Volume X of *L'Illustration Horticole* (1863) is an advertisement offering the complete work, which, the advertisement states, had terminated publication in 1860. Twelve volumes, each containing 48 plates were offered.<sup>2</sup> This statement about completion in 1860 was evidently made with some license because *Livraison 8, Plate I, 1860, of Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias* mentions the flowering of a plant of the variety *Professore Giovanni Santerelli* in 1961.<sup>3</sup>

The *L'Illustration Horticole* advertisement of 1863 mentioning 12 volumes recalls the fact that sets in some libraries contain 12 yearly volumes and others have 13 and that references to the work in bibliographies may mention either 12 or 13 volumes. In cases where only 12 volumes are present, it is the one for 1848 that is missing. The fact that no consecutive paging was done and no comprehensive index made at the conclusion of publication has made the shortage of a year's fascicles not readily noticeable.

The only general index of the work which has been long available is that given by Edouard Morren and Andre De Vos in their *Index Bibliographique de l'Hortus Belgicus*, which is available in larger libraries. Morren and De Vos did not include the 1848 plates in their indexing and their foreword refers to the work as a whole as being made up of 12 volumes with no fewer than 576 varieties.<sup>4</sup> It may have been that demand for the work was greatly increased and to meet this, the print order was increased, leaving a number of sets short the 1848 plates.

Still further evidence that the set which Verschaffelt was offering in 1863 lacked the 1848 volume was his statement that each volume contained 48 plates. The first or 1848 volume contains but 47 plates. Plate IV of *Livraison 10* is missing. A likely explanation for this gap is that the plate of the variety *Anna Zucchini* in the same *livraison* was double the normal size. Thus, the complete work of 13 volumes contains 623 plates, together with descriptions. This does not mean

---

<sup>2</sup> "Douze volumes in 4°, compose chacun de 48 planches."

<sup>3</sup> "—et cette annee encore (1861)."

<sup>4</sup> "—en 12 volumes, pas moins de 576 varietes differentes."

that 623 different camellias are dealt with. There is some duplication.

The contents of the 1848 volume precisely as listed in its index are:

Adelaïde	Grandis (Low.)
Alba imbricata (Low.)	Guthriana
— lutescens	Hendersonii
Alcina	Henri Favre
Alexina (Low.)	Il Roberti
Alfida	Jubilée (Low.)
Anna Zucchini	Leda
Augustina superba	Lord Peel
Aulica (Loddiges)	Maria-Theresa
Barnii	Marie Morren
Brillante (alba briantea)	Miniata (Low.)
Cécile de Valtange	Mistriss abby Wilder
Centifolia (Low.)	Nymphaeflora
Clymène	Prince Albert
Commensa	— de Canino
Coquettii	Princesse Mathilde
Duc de Bretagne	Radiata vera
Chartres	Reine des fleurs
Elegans chandlerii	Squamosa alba
Emelie Gavazzii	Stockwelliana
Emilia Campioni	Sulcata
Estherii	Varishii
Frezzolini	Washingtonii
Général Lafayette	

The 1848 plate of the General Lafayette was made from a picture sent by Boll "of Philadelphia" (D. Boll's correct address was Forty-Sixth Street, New York). Later, in 1853, a new plate of the same variety drawn from living material, and presumably more accurate, was published.

Plate IV of *Livraison 12, 1848*, very much resembles Plate 154 of *Annales de Gand* Volume III, 1847, even to the spelling of the name Maria Morren. It was a variety originated by H. Haquin of Ghent. Apparently the same Haquin seedling was being dealt with in Plate III of *Livraison 6, 1853*, but in a new plate and under the name of Marie Morren. Likewise, "Mistriss Abby Wilder" appears in both the 1848 and the 1853 volumes but with different plates.



Ambroise Verschaffelt photographed from Scheerlinck's "De Azalea indica L." (Tuinbow Encyclopedie I)

The variety Duc de Chartres is figured in Plate IV of *Livraison 1*, 1848, and is again similarly described but figured differently along with the variety Comte de Paris in *Livraison 6*, Plate III, 1852. There is a suspicious similarity between the Emilia Campione of the 1848 volume and the Emilia Campioni of 1854. The "Maria-Theresa" of the 1848 index refers to the "Marie Thérèse" of the text (*Liv. 1*, Pl. I), and is a different plate from that of the Marie-Thérèse figured in *Livraison 9*, Plate II, 1852, although whether two varieties are involved is not made plain by the text.

An occasional discrepancy occurs in the 1848 volume between a name over a text description and that on a plate or in the index, as for instance, *Alcinia Rosea* and *Alcina*, *Estherii* and *Estheri*, and *Washingtonii*, *Washingtoni* and *Wasingtonii*. Errors of this kind are common throughout the work. However, errors in the text were sometimes corrected. There was an erratum note pasted to the essay on *Commensa* (*Liv. 6*, Pl. II, 1848) after printing, restoring origination credit to "Donkelaar."

Originators, when known, or introducers, as well as country of origin, were rather accurately dealt with in the text. A note of correction added to *Livraison 8*, Plate I, 1859, explained that a plate and description previously published as *Paolina Maggi* (*Liv.*

5, Pl. I, 1859) should have been labelled Carolina Franzini. Likewise, those published as Carolina Franzini (Liv. 7, Pl. II, 1859) should have been labelled Margherita Coleoni. A figure of the true Paolina Maggi was promised in one of the next numbers, but failed to appear.

A preponderance of the varieties dealt with were of Italian origin because at the time, Italy was a prolific source of new camellia varieties. The compilers seemed to have had a strong leaning towards a fully double flower which is no longer as popular as it once was. In fact, few of the varieties included in the series are now in cultivation, thus making the whole work largely of antiquarian or historical interest. Comparison of camellia blooms of today with plates in *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias* for identification purposes is of doubtful value.

The pictures were painted either from plants in Verschaffelt's own collection or, as in the case of Alba Lutescens (Liv. 4, Pl. III, 1848), in other camellia collections in the Ghent area. As previously pointed out, in at least one instance. Général Lafayette (Liv. 10, Pl. III, 1848), Verschaffelt reproduced a drawing supplied by someone else.

As stated before, the publication was started by Alexandre Verschaffelt in 1848. He died March 12, 1850, after a long illness. The subscribers received notice from Ambroise Verschaffelt dated March 24, 1850, stating that he intended to carry on in his father's place. In fact, the statement in the death notice that: "Je vais continuer avec le même zèle et la même exactitude que par le passé, et qui était, du reste, confié à mes soins exclusifs" could be taken to mean that the management of the publication had been turned over to the son before the death of the father.

Beginning with 1851, the name of Ambroise Verschaffelt appeared on the title page as "editeur." The title page of the 1852 volume lists Ambroise Verschaffelt as "editeur" but the colored jacket for the January number of the same year gives the credit to "Ambroise Verschaffelt, Fils." The latter form was carried through on all subsequent title pages. It could, therefore, be assumed that a member of a third generation of the Verschaffelt family took over in 1852. However, the contemporary literature makes no mention of such a person. Apparently, Ambroise Verschaffelt carried on the business of his father until the beginning of 1870, together with his own

venture of publishing *L'Illustration Horticole*, which was established in 1854. Linden then took over the nursery business and brought in Edouard André to act as editor of the magazine in place of Lemaire. Part of the inherited business was the completion of the *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias*. It would appear that having the same initial as his father Ambroise Verschaffelt tried to clarify the situation by designating himself as the son and succeeded only in causing more confusion.

This belief that Ambroise Verschaffelt and Ambroise Verschaffelt, Fils were one and the same person is borne out by the fact that the masthead of *L'Illustration Horticole* continued to credit Ambroise Verschaffelt with the title of "Editeur" of the *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias* long after the latter publication had been completed. Also, the 1863 advertisement previously mentioned contains the statement that the camellia series was "Editée par Ambr. Verschaffelt, à Gand." The conclusion of this study is that but two Verschaffelts were concerned with the work—Alexandre and his son Ambroise. Of the two men, Ambroise seems to have made the greater contribution, not only because of longer association but because the later volumes bear evidence of better scholarship.

There is confusion, too, as to who wrote the text of the series. A study of the "Avant-Propos," which is in two parts, strongly suggests that Alexandre Verschaffelt wrote the first part of the foreword of the 1848 volume. The second part was signed by Auguste Van Geert, a Ghent nurseryman well qualified to discuss the culture of camellias. There is no evidence that Van Geert was author of any more of the text than the part to which his name is signed.

A number of essays in the 1848 volume refer to Alexandre Verschaffelt in such a manner as to suggest that the text was written by someone else. For example, it is stated of the variety *Aulica* (Liv. 8, Pl. I, 1848) that: "It bloomed at the exposition last March in M. Alex. Verschaffelt's collection of 15 new camellias." References in the same manner were made in the discussions of *Clymene* (Liv. 6, Pl. I, 1848) and *Alcinia Rosea* (Liv. 4, Pl. I, 1848). The essay on the variety *Radiata* (Liv. 7, Pl. III, 1848) states: "We have asked M. Verschaffelt for some information about this camellia." This statement would seem to make it certain that Alexandre Verschaffelt did not write that particular description. Nor did he write (Duc de Bretagne Liv. 3, Pl. III, 1848): "The drawing which we reproduce

was made from a plant that bloomed in the home of M. Alexandre Verschaffelt, and who has put it at our disposal to reproduce here; we take advantage of this occasion to express to him our deep gratitude."

Although there is no evidence in the work to support the claim. Morren and De Vos list Charles Lemaire as "redacteur principal" of the *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias* and credit Lemaire with authorship of the descriptions in the individual listings of varieties from the beginning of 1849 on. It could well have been true that Lemaire was ghost writer for Ambroise Verschaffelt because the two men were associated as editor and publisher of *L'Illustration Horticole*. It could be assumed, however, that the commercial offerings in connection with some of the descriptions were doubtless the expressions of Verschaffelt the nurseryman. There is evidence, too, that Ambroise Verschaffelt's active work on the publication went deeper. The note on the Paolina Maggi mixup previously referred to is signed "A.V."

With the evidence supplied by the work alone, it would appear that the Verschaffelts, father and son, planned the book, watched over the preparation of the plates and text and took the risk as publisher. Who actually did the work is not recorded, except in the case of the artists who made the plates, but because of the close association between Verschaffelt and Lemaire, it is reasonable to believe the latter had a part in the editorship.

(The American Camellia Society has a complete set of the thirteen volumes of this very rare book which was printed each year from 1848 through 1860. When you visit Masee Lane you will want to look at some of these volumes. Thanks to the family of Edward A. McIlhenny we have a companion one-volume translation from the French by Mr. McIlhenny, Avery Island, LA in 1945 of the preface of the Verschaffelt volumes and the description of the 623 varieties. The Verschaffelt volumes were kindly donated to the American Camellia Society by the late Sigmund J. Katz and Mrs. Katz. Mrs. Katz remains active on the Varietal Registration Committee which she had chaired for many years.)