



Tulips and daffodils now grow on the ground once owned by George Washington. The daffodil was considered the "Poor Man's Rose" during the Depression.

## Display Garden Ablaze With Spring Blooms

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GLOUCESTER, Va. - In the sandy soil of the Tidewater region of Virginia near the tiny village of Gloucester, daffodils crowd onto the banks of a shaded pond and stand proudly in straight field rows.

Surely George Washington, who once came by this land when his brother made a bad bet, would be proud of the way the soil has been used for the past three generations.

Today the owner of 10 acres -

the farm has gone up and down in size over the years - are Brent and Becky Heath who hybridize daffodils. Or, as they say, "We breed daffodils."

The couple, standing in front of a large building that houses some of the operations of their business, talk to a group gathered for a tour of the farm.

Brent explains, "I got here because my grandfather, Charles Heath, who was a Yankee, came for a visit (in 1900) and fell in love with the area and bought a place and



Becky and Brent Heath check out some of the blooming daffodils in their display garden near Gloucester, Va. The couple has a hybridizing operation where many varieties of daffodils and tulips grow.

## HOMESTEAD NOTES

then became a 'Damn Yankee. He noticed people picking little daffodils that had naturalized. They were picking them and taking them down to the steamboat landing...they were shipping the little daffodils to northern markets.

"A cottage industry had begun. It seemed to be quite a nice little, promising industry. But he had seen bigger and better daffodils in Europe, England and Holland...bigger flowers and longer stems."

Taking this into account, Charles imported bulbs and they grew well so he imported more bulbs and began to sell them to local people.

Brent continues, "By the time the Depression rolled around, Gloucester and Mathews Counties had more daffodils than anywhere else in the country." The daffodil was considered the "Poor Man's Rose" during the Depression.

Brent's parents, Katharine and George Heath, were the next generation to take over,

owning and operating the Daffodil Mart in Gloucester County.

Brent said as a child, that teachers would let kids out of school to pick flowers in the spring at two cents a bunch. If you'd hustle, you could make a bunch of money in a day's time.

He remembers four to five tractor-trailers loaded with the spring flower leaving the farm in peak season.

In 1972, after working for four years as director of a nature camp, Brent began to buy the Daffodil Mart from his mother. In 1978 when he and Becky married, he said, "I had a nice

business. I loved the daffodils and I collected a lot of different varieties...but I just had a price list of daffodils, I wasn't a great businessman."

Brent describes Becky, a former music teacher in the public school system, as "more orderly" and the one responsible for computerizing the operation.

The business grew "dramatically" with 1.5 million in sales. Three years ago the couple sold it to White Flower Farms, with the understanding they they could continue to do what they do best. This year they were notified that they were no longer

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In 1900, Heath's grandfather, who was from the north, visited the area and admired the daffodils that had naturalized. A cottage industry was born when he picked and shipped the flowers to northern markets via steamboat. He had daffodil bulbs imported from England and Holland. The flowers grew bigger and with longer stems in the sandy soil.



Three years ago, the Heaths with 1.5 million in sales, sold most of the business to be able to devote more time to lecturing and educating. They kept 10 acres to continue to hybridize flowers. People from all over the world visit to admire the gardens when in bloom.