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Edith Wharton and Beatrix Farrand: A Life-long Garden Friendship

By Eleanor Dwight

Beatrix Farrand, the niece of renowned American novelist Edith Wharton, shared many interests with her talented aunt who was just ten older than she, and perhaps the most important one was gardening. While Farrand was a trained landscape designer, her aunt was no horticultural amateur. Wharton, whose most famous novels are *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*, created three ambitious gardens in her lifetime, one in Lenox, Massachusetts, at The Mount, and two in France after the First World War. Farrand's two most celebrated extant gardens are Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., and The Eyrie in Seal Harbor, Maine. Although the two women practiced different professional disciplines, they were brought together by the emotional satisfaction gained from gardening.

Their love of gardening probably started in Newport, where their mutual grandmother Lucretia Jones's flowers enlivened the grounds of Pencraig, her country house on Aquidneck Island. There the girls observed the beauty of plant life on the New England shore. As adults, the two visited each other frequently and while apart, they wrote to one another. In their letters, as in their friendship, matters of the garden figured prominently. In July 1923, Edith wrote to Beatrix: "I wish you were lying out under my trees this afternoon—the little place really sparkles with freshness, in spite of the heat, which is creeping up again after a respite. And it's so much tidier, and more nearly finished than last year . . . Oh, if only you and I could talk across the fence!"

Farrand even contributed to Wharton's designs for gardens. In Lenox, in the first years of the century, Farrand gracefully incorporated a two-thousand-foot-long driveway and a kitchen garden into The Mount's grounds. She also advised in the creation of the rose garden at Pavillon Colombe, Edith's eighteenth-century home just north of Paris. Full of pride for her niece's talent for landscaping, Wharton shared her esteem with others. Writing to her friend Jane Clark, Wharton excitedly exclaimed: "I'm glad that you've been to Dumbarton and have seen the garden that my niece Beatrix Farrand made out of wilderness."

Their shared love of gardening is not only apparent from their letters, but also from articles they each wrote over the years. Wharton passionately expressed what her garden meant to her, writing in the 1920s for an American magazine: "To one who has fought for years with the ruthless gales of the Rhode Island sea-coast, and the late frosts and burning suns of the Massachusetts mountains . . . who has returned in the spring to the blackened corpses of carefully sheltered hemlock hedges and box-borders . . . there is a foretaste of heaven in the long leisurely progression of the French summer." She luxuriated in the "blessed sense of leisureliness and dependableness of the seasons in France, of the way the picture stays in its frame instead of dissolving like a fidgety tableau-vivant creates a sense of serenity in the mind inured to transiency and failure."

Farrand, on the other hand, expressed her love in a more subdued style: "The object at Reef Point is primarily to show what outdoor beauty can contribute to those who have interest and perception that can be influenced by trees and flowers and open air composition. Such interest is never likely to diminish and a taste for gardening can add much to life. Intimate contact with growing things, observation of passing seasons and changes give interests and flavor to each day."

When they grew older, they turned to their gardens as places for rest, repose, and reflection. Wharton chose to spend her last decades in

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2 Wharton/Farrand, continued from p. 1

France, where she kept two estates, Pavillon Colombe, just north of Paris, and Chateau Sainte Claire, in Provence, both with glorious gardens. On her way north in the spring of 1937, Wharton became ill, and it was near her flowers at Pavillon Colombe that she spent her last days. She could be found either in her wheelchair in the garden or on her terrace looking out over it. Her friends recalled that Wharton, once bursting with an insatiable restlessness, now became in tune "with the silences of the natural world." She died later that summer, in August.

Farrand, growing old in the 1950s, chose to move from her beloved Reef Point to a simpler Maine refuge in Salisbury Cove, not far from Frenchman's Bay, which had inspired her all her life. There, at the small farmhouse of Garland Farm, she designed for herself and housekeeper, Clementine, a beautiful quarter-acre garden, whose flowers she could see through her large windows. After a lifetime of pleasurable and challenging horticultural activities, aunt and niece each chose to spend their last days surrounded by the plants they loved.



Eleanor Dwight is the author of four books, including *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* (Abrams, 1994).

Renewal

**is good for the self--
and good for the BFS.
PLEASE renew your
membership soon and
grow along with us.**

Restoration Progress

2004

- ✓ Electrical Rewiring
- ✓ Greenhouse Foundation
- ✓ Barn Door + interior
- ✓ Insulation of Cape & Addition
- ✓ Chimneys
- ✓ BFS Office Setup
- ✓ Field Parking Improvement
- ✓ Drainage Corrections

2005

- ✓ Critical Tree Support/Pruning
- ✓ Library Shelving Installation
- ✓ Front Garden Fence
- ✓ National Register Listing

2006

- ✓ Painting Farrand Addition
(original color)
- ✓ Cultural Landscape Report
- ✓ Reglazing
- ✓ Restoration Shrub Pruning
- ✓ Restore + Paint Gallery Rails
- ✓ Field Nursery Preparation
- ✓ New Roof on Barn

2007

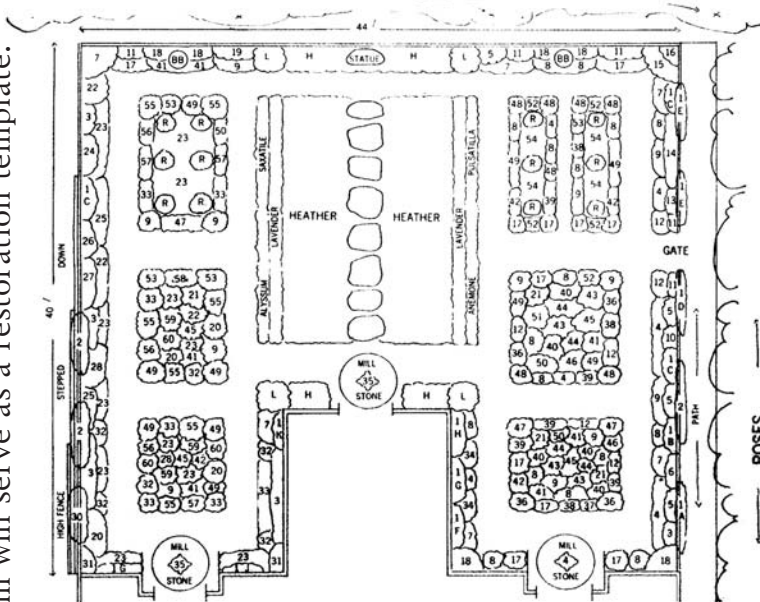
- ✓ Critical Tree Work--Part II
- ✓ Painting Cape (original color)
- Begin Barn Education Center
- Add Public Restrooms
- Begin Garden Restoration
- Front Path Restoration
- Rear Garden Fence
- Glass Porch Restoration

Save the Date:

**2007 Annual Meeting of the
Beatrix Farrand Society
Saturday, August 4, at 10 AM,
at Garland Farm**

Following the business meeting,
the public is invited at 11:15 to a presentation
by Pressley Associates, of Cambridge, MA, of
The Garland Farm Cultural Landscape Report

This **Planting Plan** from the 1962 Alice Roche article on the gardens at Garland Farm will serve as a restoration template.



Planting Plan for the Perfect Dooryard Garden

“Wish List”

Resources:

- Documents and photos of Beatrix Farrand designs
- Books with Beatrix Jones or Beatrix Farrand bookplates.
- Reference books in art, architecture, horticulture, design, planning, and botany.
- Personal correspondence, furnishings, and objects from Mrs. Farrand.

Equipment:(new /used)

- Fixed-bed Photocopier
- Large-screen Television
- Microfilm Reader
- Bookshelves
- Flat Files
- 4-drawer File Cabinets
- Sawhorses
- Greenhouse Oil Heater

Garden Tools:(new/used)

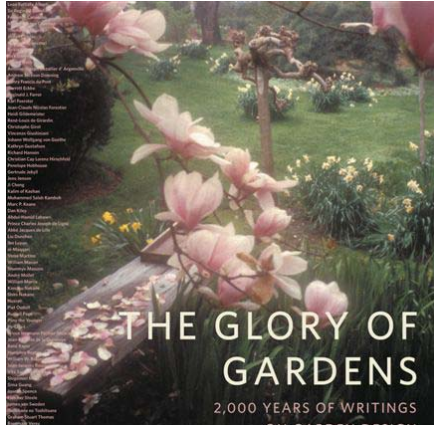
- Leaf Blower
- Rakes
- Spades
- Lifting Forks
- Lopper Shears
- Pruning Shears
- Wheelbarrow



THE QUOTABLE GARDENER.....

“No gardener can afford to overlook or neglect the study of designers of the past.”

Beatrix Farrand, 1955



***The Glory of Gardens*, by Scott Tilden, who will present a BFS lecture on Saturday, August 25 at 10 AM. (See BFS Events/Programs List on page 4.)**

Booksigning to follow.

From the Library Shelves

Although Beatrix Farrand’s English mentors were Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson, the book she frequently turned to was Thomas Mawson’s *The Art and Craft of Garden Making*. The 1900 first edition in her library at Reef Point proved to be very useful from the design point of view. Farrand’s was a working library, as opposed to a collector’s library. A great many of her books were design and horticulture guides which she used in her own practice. Mawson’s book reflects the major ideas of the period, most of which can be found in Farrand’s best work.

—DianeKostial McGuire

Rent a Piece of History...

The ca. 1800 Cape at Garland Farm is for rent. This classic 4-bedroom home is one of the historic treasures on this National Register property, and provides support to the BFS through its rental income. Would you or someone you know like to live or work next to Beatrix Farrand’s last home and gardens?

For details, call **L.S. Robinson Realtors, 207-244-5563**, or e-mail Facilities Chairman Jim Fuchs: jcafuchs@mindspring.com.





2007 BFS Events and Programs

July 28. Lecture by William Cullina, 10AM, followed by a Fern and Moss Propagation Workshop, at 11:15 AM.

Bill's presentation, "It's Not Easy Being Green: Outstanding Native Ferns and Grasses for the Garden." Affiliated with the New England Wildflower Society's Garden in the Woods since 1995, Cullina is the author of several books, including one on grasses, ferns, and mosses that is scheduled for publication in 2007.

August 4. BFS ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING, 10 AM, followed by a public presentation by Pressley Associates of the Garland Farm Cultural Landscape Report, 11:15 AM

August 5. Garden Conservancy Open Day, 10 AM-4 PM

Garland Farm, and three private gardens in Somesville, Northeast Harbor, and Manset, will be open to the public for viewing, as part of the Garden Conservancy's national preservation program. \$5/person. Details at: www.opendaysprogram.org

August 15. Summer Fix-it Day at Garland Farm, 9 AM-3 PM

Come and pitch in with hands-on organizing, repairs, and restoration tasks in the gardens, library, barn, and workshop. Picnic lunch.

August 25. Lecture by Scott J. Tilden, 10 AM

Scott Tilden's talk explores some of the celebrated gardens featured in his new book, *The Glory of Gardens: 2,000 Years of Writings on Garden Design*. From Biltmore to the Alhambra, he reveals the design principles which underlie many of the world's great gardens. Tilden will also share stories of the lives of designers, from André Le Nôtre and Frederick Law Olmsted to Pete Walker and Fernando Caruncho. Copies of his book will be available for signing.

September 8. Lecture by Susan Tamulevich, 10 AM

This lecture focuses on Beatrix Farrand, Mildred Bliss, and the creation of the world-famous gardens at Dumbarton Oaks, which provides an excellent example of the link between enlightened patronage and the creation of works of art. Tamulevich is an art historian, writer, and exhibition curator. Copies of her book, *Dumbarton Oaks: Garden into Art*, will be available for signing.

Tickets at the door. Parking on Bayview Drive. The Summer Lecture Series is underwritten by the Baltimore Community Foundation