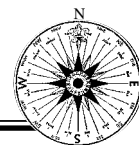


Winter 2009

The Beatrix Farrand Society NEWS



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George B. Dorr on Mount Desert

By Ronald H. Epp

Beatrix Farrand's best-known commission on Mount Desert Island was the private garden she developed for John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his wife at The Eyrie in Seal Harbor in the 1920s and now known as the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden. The couple's granddaughter Ann Rockefeller Roberts celebrated another aspect of Farrand's career, the landscaping of the renowned carriage road system in *Mr. Rockefeller's Roads: The Untold Story of Acadia's Carriage Roads and Their Creator* (Down East Books, 1990). Few people, however, know about the importance of Farrand's relationship with George Bucknam Dorr (1853-1944), the founder and first superintendent of Acadia National Park. Both embraced the gardening principles of Charles Sprague Sargent, founder of the Arnold Arboretum and Farrand's mentor as well as Dorr's step-cousin. The absence of surviving correspondence between Farrand and Dorr leaves many questions unanswered.

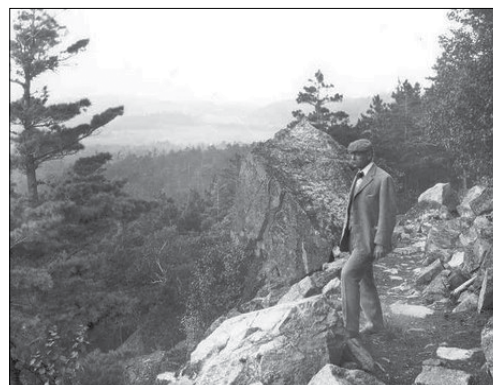
Long before the establishment of Acadia National Park in 1919, the estate of Dorr's parents, Charles and Mary Dorr, impressed the young Beatrix Jones. Her journal of 1893-95 (now in the collections at the Environmental Design Archives, University of California, Berkeley) describes the distinctive qualities of Oldfarm, the Dorr's ninety-acre property on Frenchman Bay located two miles south of Reef Point and built in 1880. Her journal entries imply that she visited Oldfarm frequently over many years. "The spiraeas at the entrance to the garden are very effective and have grown well. *I. callosa* was very striking in spring and early summer with its red young shoots," she wrote. The landscape was initially planted with ornamental shrubs and plants from the Dorr family's summer home in Canton, Massachusetts. In 1896 twenty acres of Oldfarm became Mount Desert Nurseries, providing plant stock to the Bar Harbor community. The nursery's wide array of hybridized plants earned medals from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and the Society of American Florists. Dorr's nationally renowned nursery would provide plants for many of Farrand's Maine commissions.

George Dorr may have given Beatrix Farrand one of her first clients. At the urging of one of Philadelphia's most prominent physicians, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, Dorr contracted with Beatrix Jones to clear a wetland owned by Mrs. William H. Bliss (Anna Dorinda Blaksley Bliss) at the foot of Champlain Mountain. While the rationale for this recommendation is not documented, Dorr's confidence in Beatrix most likely grew from their shared experience with the island flora.

In the early 1900s, Edith Wharton turned to her niece and to Dorr for expert advice on landscaping The Mount, her new home in the Berkshires. Ten letters from Wharton to Dorr trace his visits to the Lenox property and reveal her enthusiasm for his horticultural expertise. As a result of his suggestions about developing a wild garden at The Mount, Wharton named a path after him, the only named path on this historic property.

In 1917, Beatrix wrote an article for *Scribner's* magazine on "The National Park on Mount Desert." In the article she writes of Dorr's "unswerving and far-sighted devotion to the ultimate usefulness of the island . . . for the use of the people at large." Farrand acknowledges Dorr's "self-sacrificing enthusiasm" in promoting the wild garden concept, integrating into appropriate landscapes plants such as "great osmundas, trilliums, and other moisture-loving plants" that will attract a diversified bird population. While Farrand wrote a number of articles for widely known professional publications such as *Garden and Forest*, Dorr shared his thoughts about history, horticulture, and conservation in the *National Geographic* magazine as well as *The Sieur de Monts Publications* and his best-known work, *Acadia National Park* (1942). Dorr and Farrand advised Rockefeller on the extensive carriage road system in the park. They were keen on providing public access to the splendors of the park and neither asked for compensation for their services.

After Dorr's death in 1944, Farrand must have been aware that his conservation plans for Oldfarm were not implemented by the National Park Service. This foreshadowed her own difficulties in finding support for her educational objectives at Reef Point. Despite these disappointments, in an earlier era Farrand and Dorr interpreted and modified the extraordinary landscapes of Mount Desert Island in a lasting way. 🌿



George B. Dorr on Mount Desert, 1920s.
Courtesy William Otis Sawtelle Collections and
Research Center, Acadia National Park

Ronald H. Epp is the author of a biography of George Bucknam Dorr to be published by the Library of American Landscape History and the University of Massachusetts Press in 2011.

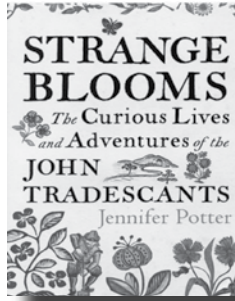
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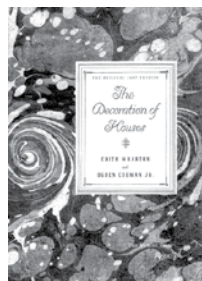
Winter Reading

By Judith B. Tankard

This year's roundup of winter reading includes a number of good books on history, design, and horticulture. One of the most intriguing titles is *Strange Blooms: The Curious Lives and Adventures of the John Tradescants* by Jennifer Potter (Overlook Press, 2008). The Tradescants, both father and son, were famous royal gardeners and plant explorers in seventeenth-century Britain. *Tradescantia virginiana* (spiderwort), *Liriodendron tulipifera* (the tulip tree), and *Aquilegia Canadensis* (red columbine) are among the plant introductions into Britain from Tradescant the younger's early trips to Virginia. Readers already captivated by Philippa Gregory's racy fictionalized accounts of the lives of the Tradescants in *Earthly Joys* and *Virgin Earth* will find much more to savor in this well-researched volume, with excerpts from original sources, extensive notes, and an exhaustive bibliography. An ideal companion to this book is Anna Pavord's *The Naming of Names: The Search for Order in the World of Plants* (Bloomsbury, 2005). Illustrated with plates from herbals and other early manuscripts, this book paints the broader picture of plant exploration and knowledge. Pavord, who is known for her best-selling *The Tulip*, presents the fascinating story of the evolution of plant classification from Islam to the New World in an unusually attractive book.

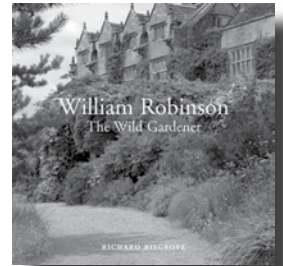


New editions of Edith Wharton's books are always welcome and the reissue of two early nonfiction classics will be a great interest to BFS members. Both are published by Rizzoli in conjunction with The Mount Press and can be ordered directly from The Mount by logging on to www.EdithWharton.org (proceeds will benefit the restoration of Wharton's Massachusetts estate). These volumes are faithful facsimiles produced on high-quality paper and a treasure for anyone without the original editions. *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), with coauthor Ogden Codman Jr., was Wharton's first book. It set forth their ideas about the historical traditions of interior design as they applied to the early twentieth century. A new introduction by the renowned scholar Richard Guy Wilson provides insight into the era and the importance of the book. *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904) is Wharton's seminal work on garden design in which she reveals her passion and expert knowledge of the history and character of the Italian garden. Wharton's words, "the (Italian) garden must be studied in relation to the house and both in relation to the landscape," were certainly taken to heart by her young niece, who not only



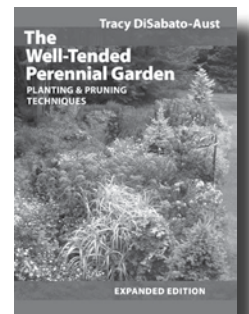
saw most of the gardens on her 1895 trip abroad but also drew inspiration from them in her own design work. John Dixon Hunt provides an excellent introduction to the new edition that explains, among other things, the controversy surrounding the illustrations—Wharton wanted garden plans, while the publisher insisted on dreamy pictures by Maxfield Parrish (some things never change!). One small quibble is that the captions that appeared on the original tissue overlays for the photographs were not reproduced, leaving the reader to refer to the list of illustrations in the front matter.

One of Farrand's great mentors was William Robinson, whom she first encountered on her 1895 trip. Richard Bisgrove's new book, *William Robinson: The Wild Gardener* (Frances Lincoln, 2008), concentrates on the importance of Robinson's writings that include his two most famous books, *The Wild Garden* (1870) and *The English Flower Garden* (1883), and a host of horticultural journals that he edited. Robinson, who was first and foremost a plant lover, eased the transition from bedding-out with showy annuals to borders filled with hardy plants, all of which Bisgrove discusses in detail. Farrand, who had copies of most of his books in her library, put Robinson's principles to good use in her garden designs, most notably Dumbarton Oaks.



A book of more local interest is *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities! Notes from a Gloucester Garden* written and illustrated by Kim Smith (David R. Godine, 2009). This pleasant book about the author's quarter-acre cottage garden near the sea in Massachusetts is reminiscent of Celia Thaxter's *An Island Garden* (1894) with its personal narrative, quotations from other authors, and enchanting color drawings. The book is divided into two parts: creating the framework, in which she discusses her favorite trees and shrubs, and candidates for the borders, such as peonies, roses, daylilies, and much more. This is definitely not a practical handbook, but one of inspiration and intangibles.

Master Gardener Carolyn Hollenbeck highly recommends two must-haves for hands-on gardeners, the new edition of Barbara Damrosch's *The Garden Primer* (Workman Publishing, 2008) and the expanded edition of Tracy DiSabato-Aust's *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* (Timber Press, 2008). Damrosch's book, first published in 1988, has since become a classic. It is filled with practical gardening advice that is entertaining and astute. A popular lecturer, Damrosch operates Four Season Farm in Harborside, Maine. DiSabato-Aust's book is one of the most useful and frequently consulted volumes by gardeners—more than 180,000 copies of the book have been sold! Enthusiastic readers join the chorus in praising the book's down-to-earth approach and practical information on maintenance and other issues that even Master Gardeners can learn from. 🌿



Who Was Little Boy?

Lee Patterson recently shared two letters to Beatrix Farrand that he found in the files of his father, Robert W. Patterson, who was Farrand's trusted adviser at Reef Point and the architect of the Farrand Wing at Garland Farm. These intriguing letters were written to young Beatrix by an unknown admirer who called himself Little Boy. The only clue to Little Boy's identity is the date—September 26, 1885—and the address on one of the letters: 127 East Thirty-fifth Street, New York City. Thanks to the search engines on the Internet, the editor discovered that Professor John C. Curtis, an associate member of the American Society for Psychical Research, was living at that address in 1885. Further investigations showed that the brownstone building is still standing and that the ASPR remains active. The society was founded in 1885 by a group of distinguished scholars, including William James, "to explore the uncharted realms of human consciousness." Perhaps a member of the BFS might know more about the elusive John C. Curtis or the identity of Little Boy?

The letter is addressed to "Exhalted Trixiana!" He writes, "It was very good of you to cheer your lovelorn little boy with such a bully letter . . . My life at present is consumed by one-horse-power gas engines. I am busy helping the architect about plans for the new medical college, & we naturally couldn't tell where to put an engine till we knew what an engine was like! So I took the prancing horse-car this afternoon, & prowled among the gas engines till dinner time. My study table is a litter of plans, pencils, rulers, drawing pins, gas-engine circulars, measuring tapes, compasses, & imaginary table tops made of bits of paper! I shall have to go to Boston Monday or Tuesday night, spend some hours at the Harvard Medical College building, & return the same day. How I should

like to play hooky, take the night train for Bar Harbour, & slyly steal to your dining room window just at lunch time, & suddenly rise up there with a whoop out of the geranium bed! What a shock it would be for Sprite in the window seat!"

"As for your sketch from memory of the plantain eradicator, it is idle for your genius to try to hide itself by attributing the cartoon to the late Raphe S. Urbino [Raphael]. R. was an excellent wall-painter, & had some success with children, but he never could have equaled that. The only things I don't think the drawing quite does justice to are the lines of beauty that swell graciously upward from the ankle. But this is hypercriticism." He concludes his letter to thirteen-year-old Beatrix: "As I came up Centre Street from gas-engine dom, I met the 7th Regt. marching down that thoroughfare. Col. Clark told me they were hard at work bringing up their drill to do them credit on the 24th when our citizen soldiers will turn out en masse to head the great popular welcome on your return with your attendant pa, to whom & your inestimable ma & to yourself, dear princess, the much love of your ever loyal LITTLE BOY."

An earlier, undated letter, written aboard the *R.M.S. Republic* is addressed to "the fair and gracious Highness of The Lady Beatrix, Heredity Princess of Poole and of Iris, Countess of Birch, and Landgravine of Schingel-Kleinhausen." Little Boy appends a sketch of the "huge felt slippers" that visitors to the royal castle of Stolzenfels are required to wear in order to save the parquet floors." Both letters provide delightful glimpses into Beatrix's childhood. 🐾



Drawing by Little Boy.
Courtesy Lee Patterson

Plant Profile: *Stewartia koreana*

By Carolyn Hollenbeck

One of the more fascinating trees at Garland Farm is the *Stewartia koreana*, with its lovely exfoliating bark, attractive white flowers, persistent seed capsules, and good fall color. Since the tree is located adjacent to the garage and next to the driveway, it is visible from the Farrand addition, the barn, and the field beyond that was once the Garlands' vegetable garden.

Stewartia koreana was introduced to the west from Korea (where it is called the silk tree) in 1917 by the famed plant collector Ernest Henry Wilson. The tree, which is classified as a member of the Family *Theaceae* and the Order *Ericales*, is deciduous, oval to pyramidal in shape, and has upright spreading branches. A mature specimen grows 20 to 30 feet high.

Its leaves are bright green, alternate, and simple with fine serrations. Fall color ranges from purple to orange or red, but a few specimens exhibit little coloration. The three-inch flowers are white with yellow stamens and five or six concave petals. Since they open over a long period of time, it is possible to observe bud, flower, and capsule at the same time.



Stewartia koreana's exfoliating bark.
Courtesy Carolyn Hollenbeck

They are flattened compared to those of *S. pseudocamellia koreana* (Japanese Stewartia), which are more cup-shaped, a characteristic that aids in differentiating the two species that share similar characteristics. The flowers give way to a pointed, five-valved fruit capsule that becomes triangular and reddish brown when mature. The distinctive bark of the *S. koreana* is smooth underneath, ranging in color from a light gray to an orange-brown. All these colors may be present on the same tree, with older bark exfoliating and flaking off in irregular pieces.



Stewartia koreana's distinctive flowers and buds.
Courtesy Carolyn Hollenbeck

The tree requires sun with some shade and an acidic soil that is moist, cool, well-drained, and high in organic matter. *S. koreana*, which is hardy in zones 5B through 7, offers a high degree of pest resistance, but is often difficult to propagate and to transplant. Propagation can be accomplished from softwood cuttings or from seeds. Some sources suggest that the seeds require a double dormancy to germinate and if they do germinate, the viability rate is low. Softwood cuttings are a challenge to root and need to enter dormancy before transplanting. Once established, however, *S. koreana* requires little maintenance other than occasional pruning of lower limbs to expose more of the fine bark. (To compare the various trees, visit the national collection of *Stewartias* held at the Polly Hill Arboretum in West Tisbury, Massachusetts—ed.) 🐾

The Quotable Gardener

"The landscape architect must subordinate himself to the elements given him (and to) the wishes of the client."
Beatrix Farrand, 1907

From the Library Shelves

By Marti Harmon

Among the many generous donations to the BFS Library, we have received several rare and interesting books, including a copy of *The Mount Desert Nurseries Catalog* (1926). This was the plant catalog of George B. Dorr, founder of Acadia National Park and Beatrix Farrand's friend and neighbor at Reef Point (see article in this issue of *The Beatrix Farrand Society NEWS*). The introduction to the catalog contains an enchanting description of the island: "Mount Desert Island, lying where the northern flora meets the southern, and where the ocean, ebbing and flowing with a twelve-foot high tide, tempers the climate winter and summer, is fitted uniquely for the growth of the hardy perennial plants, children of northern and of alpine regions. They grow in it with vigor and bloom with a brilliance rarely seen elsewhere." The catalog lists Dorr's extensive inventory and offers expert advice about the plants, such as: "Vines, rightly used, are the highest value in architectural and landscape planting." On the subject of irises, Dorr comments: "The collection of these today comprises the best varieties obtainable, and none other." Of the fifty-nine varieties of roses, over half are hybrid teas and the lists of phlox, peonies, and astilbes would be hard to match today, especially at the cost of 35 to 50 cents each. Thank you to

Edward and Cassandra Stone for this welcome addition to our rare book collection.

Many island gardeners are familiar with the publication by the Garden Club of Mount Desert of Edgar Wherry's *Wild Flowers of Mount Desert Island, Maine*. The 1928 edition is still the standard by which all native plant lists are judged. Wherry's other book, *The Guide to Eastern Ferns* (1937), contains delicate line drawings, a glossary of botanical terms, and suggestions as to where to plant specific ferns. In addition to these volumes, we have received two classics by the famous English plant collector, Frank Kingdon Ward, *Rhododendrons for Everyone* (1926) and *Assam Adventure* (1941), relating to his botanizing trips to Tibet, China, Burma, and Thailand. Copies of these books were in Beatrix Farrand's Morning Room at Reef Point.

Although not on the subject of gardens and horticulture, we have received two interesting books that relate to Beatrix Farrand's mother: M. A. Flory's *A Book About Fans* (1895), with a chapter on fan-collecting by Mary Cadwalader Jones (see collection of fans and lace at the Bar Harbor Historical Society), and Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, which is inscribed "Mary Cadwalader Rawle, 1868." Thank you to rare book hounds, Jim and Emily Fuchs, for donating these volumes.

If you are interested in visiting the Library at Garland Farm or have books or periodicals you might like to donate, please email library@beatricefarrand.org. 

Patrick Chassé Scholarship Fund

BFS members and friends are invited to contribute to this new educational fund established at Garland Farm. Please send contributions made payable to The Beatrix Farrand Society (indicating the fund on the memo line) and send to The Beatrix Farrand Society, P.O. Box 111, Mt. Desert ME 04660.

New Website

Look for the launch of The Beatrix Farrand Society's new website www.BeatriceFarrandSociety.org early in 2009. It has been renamed and redesigned with many new features.

Beatrix at Princeton

For those of you who missed the article on Beatrix Farrand's important landscape at Princeton University, log on to <http://paw.princeton.edu> and search under "Growing the Campus" published in the June 11, 2008 issue. There are also several letters about the article (including one by the editor of *The Beatrix Farrand Society NEWS*) in the September 24, 2008 issue.

Let Us Know What You Think

If you have any comments, suggestions, or ideas for *The Beatrix Farrand Society NEWS*, please contact the editor at Editor@beatricefarrand.org. We'd love to hear from you.