



**Beatrix Farrand
Garden Association**

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beatrixfarrandgarden.org

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Hill-Stead and Bellefield gardeners unite.

Hill-Stead Gardeners Visit Bellefield

The volunteer gardeners of the 1920 Beatrix Farrand sunken garden at the Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, Connecticut, visited Bellefield this past June. Undaunted by the rain, the entire group took a detailed tour of Bellefield during which there was a lively exchange of Latin names and historic plant information. The Bellefield group looks forward to a return visit to Hill-Stead in late September.

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THE GARDEN GATE

Issue No. 6 Newsletter of the Beatrix Farrand Garden Association Fall 2008

President's Report

Once again our beloved garden has had a banner year. Many individuals and touring groups have found their way to Beatrix's 'secret garden' inspired by word of mouth and our website, designed by David Hayes of the National Park Service. Prearranged groups, one from the Stamford Garden Club and another composed of the volunteers who maintain the Beatrix Farrand garden at Hill-Stead in Connecticut, were given guided tours of the garden by Anne Symmes, our extraordinary Director. Some tours arrive by surprise, as did a group of over 52 garden enthusiasts from Hudson, Ontario, on July 8th just as our weeding group was gathering. Anne gave an impromptu lecture from the terrace and we all were delighted to host such interesting, knowledgeable visitors.

One amusing detail in these last two years was occasioned by the Hudson Valley Tour Guide listing my phone number instead of the garden's information number. At all hours I pick up the phone to a voice asking, "Where are you located?" "What hours are you open?" "I'm in Poughkeepsie, how do I find you?" After explaining who I am and laughing, I supply details and often have interesting conversations. One woman at 3AM said to my sleepy voice, "I expected an answering machine!" Hopefully the mistake will be corrected in the next printing.

Early into our spring gardening, our group accepted an invitation to visit the gardens at Dumbarton Oaks, which Beatrix Farrand designed for Mildred and Robert Bliss. (See Anne Symmes' article enclosed)

Our main garden event – the 3rd Annual Bellefield Design Lecture and garden tea party that annually celebrates Beatrix Farrand's birthday, was once again a great success. (See Kate Kerin's article enclosed)



Cynthia Witman, Jim Smith, Helen Page, Linda Freisitzer, Allelu Kurten and Virginia Bickford prepare for the Tea Party.

Several weddings and post-wedding photo sessions (arranged through the National Park Service) graced the summer garden and, once again, the Hudson Valley Ramble will include our Bellefield garden on the weekend of September 20-21 so we hope that many people will find and enjoy the fall garden.

Our special fall event will be the Garden Club of America's Zone III Meeting hosted by the Garden Club of Orange and Dutchess Counties. The Past-President's reception and cocktail party will take place in the garden the evening of September 17th with our very own Kate Kerin offering a talk about the history and significance of Farrand's 1912 design. An awards dinner will follow at the Wallace Visitor Center. The Garden Club of America awarded two Founder's Fund Awards for the restoration of Bellefield, sponsored by the O&D Garden Club, and since this will be the first time many of the Zone members will have seen the garden they helped to restore, we're working hard on the preparation.

And, once again, we are deeply grateful to our National Park Service friends who tackle the endless woodchuck problems, and other heavy tasks like maintaining the lawn and trimming the hedge to name a few. This year the National Park Service replaced our dying American elm with a new *Ulmus parvifolia*, an elm variety chosen for Dumbarton Oaks by Farrand and still thriving there. We hope it will grow rapidly and gloriously SOON!

Above all my thanks go to our extraordinary group of loyal weeder-volunteers: Doris Adams, Virginia Bickford, Linda Friesitzer, Debby Glynn, Helen Page, Luise Seelbach, and Cynthia Witman. Barbara Peelor is a recent and welcome addition to our group. We are thrilled that Cara Prieskorn is joining this year to help with publicity and special events and Kate Braun helps us in many ways, not the least of which is to beautifully maintain our growing member list and data base. Kate Kerin, our co-vice-president is our wise advisor, guiding us both in our current pursuits and future dreams. Special praise goes to our amazing supporter and treasurer, Jim Smith, for trimming the wall vines and weed-whacking around the stones as well as keeping us in line and our finances in order. Under the guidance of our Director, Anne Symmes, we have established a camaraderie that inspires us all.

To the many members and friends who care for the garden and support our work I can only say that this miracle would be impossible without you.

Allelu Kurten, *President*, BFGA

Remembering Bev

In June of 2006, just before our first Bellefield Design Lecture, I was running into the garden to check on last minute details when saw a woman with her husband walking their dog along the paths. She told me that she loved the garden and walked there every day so I asked if she would enjoy working in the garden. Bev Polistena shortly became a member of our volunteer group, bringing along her daughter, Cynthia, an expert gardener. For two years we were inspired by the two of them working side-by-side and becoming treasured members of our group. This summer Bev died very suddenly and unexpectedly. She was an extraordinary woman — a healer, a wise and caring woman and a friend to all. The loss to us is irreparable and we will cherish her memory as we cherish her daughter as our own.

Allelu Kurten

Third Annual Bellefield Design Lecture

On Saturday, June 7, 2008, the Beatrix Farrand Garden Association welcomed over 100 guests for the third annual Bellefield Design Lecture, “The Architect as Client: Stanford White at Box Hill”, given this year by Samuel G. White. Afterward, visitors took advantage of a perfect afternoon and strolled across the lawn from the Henry A. Wallace Visitor Center, the lecture site, to visit the Beatrix Farrand Garden at Bellefield in its peak bloom. Volunteers from the Beatrix Farrand Garden Association hosted an heirloom plant sale and a reception, replete with a birthday cake for Farrand, who was born 136 years ago on June 19, 1872. Staff from the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt Garden Association set up an irresistible garden boutique in the Morgan Room, the living room at Bellefield.

Samuel White is a partner in the firm of Platt Byard Dovell White Architects, focusing on new designs in historic settings that both reinforce and reinterpret their contexts. White is also the author of several critically-acclaimed books: *The Houses of McKim, Mead & White* (1998); and, with his wife Elizabeth White, both *McKim, Mead & White: The Masterworks* (2003); and *Stanford White Architect* (scheduled for release this fall).

McKim, Mead & White was the most prominent architectural firm in America at the turn of the twentieth century. Stanford White, one of the partners, possessed an inventive and intuitive talent for design that makes his hand clearly legible in the collective works of his firm. Box Hill, White’s own country home in St. James, New York, was, according to Samuel White, a “laboratory for architectural ideas,” and a testament to White’s “determination to live better than his clients.” As Stanford White’s great-grandson, and one who grew up spending time at Box Hill, our speaker brought unique insights to his discussion of both person and place.

McKim, Mead & White are responsible for many famous landmarks in Hyde Park alone, where their work includes the Vanderbilt Mansion and Staatsburgh (the Mills estate), as well as several private residences. Just prior to Farrand commencing work



Stanford and Bessie White, circa 1904

at Bellefield for Thomas and Sarah Newbold, McKim Mead & White extensively renovated the house. Bellefield represents what is possibly the only collaboration between these design luminaries, and it was certainly the clients that made this possible. Farrand (at that time still Beatrix Jones), was Thomas Newbold’s cousin. In the details of her full name, Edith Newbold Jones Wharton, Farrand’s famously literary aunt demonstrates the closeness of the connection. The Newbolds were also close friends of the principal architect, Charles Follen McKim. There is irrefutable evidence that McKim came out of retirement to work on this project for the Newbolds, and completed the conceptual designs prior to his death in 1909.

This annual lecture series represents a collaboration between the Beatrix Farrand Garden Association, the National Park Service, and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, in partnership with the Hyde Park Visual Environment Committee and the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt Historical Association. The aim of the Bellefield Design Lectures is to bring noted speakers on topics including art, architecture, decorative arts, and gardens to the Hudson Valley where centuries of exceptional design have been preserved for public enjoyment. These lectures also raise funds for the ongoing restoration and preservation of the Beatrix Farrand Garden at Bellefield.

Old-Fashioned Impatiens

By Anne Cleves Symmes, Director, BFGA

Impatiens balsamina commonly known as garden balsam or lady slipper is an old favorite though often forgotten in modern gardens. This plant, listed in Beatrix Farrand’s planting plan for our “Pink Border,” is admired for its long bloom-time from July till frost. A native of Southeast Asia, it is grown as an annual here, happily seeding in from year to year. When we started ours in the pink border we discovered a range of colors from white to pink to salmon and even bright oranges. By yanking out the “wrong” colors before seed pods developed, we were able to narrow our volunteer plants down to a pleasing range of pinks in just a couple of years.

Upright in posture and sporting blossoms close to the stem, *Impatiens balsamina* have a distinctive almost tropical look. Ours grow from 18" to 24" tall in part shade, though they are known to grow as high as 3' in full sun. They prefer organic, moist soil, but are tough in a variety of situations and are not bothered by pests or disease. This summer as the Japanese beetles descended upon us, we were happy to have them there, unfazed and blooming their hearts out.



Impatiens balsamina

Beatrix Farrand Garden Association Visits Dumbarton Oaks

After last year’s delightful and informative Design Lecture given by Gail Griffin, Director of Gardens at Dumbarton Oaks, our BFGA group yearned to visit Washington, DC and see Farrand’s masterpiece there. We were fortunate to be able to visit in April among the dogwood and cherry blossoms and have a chance to focus on the early spring “bones” of the garden. Gail graciously and generously gave us the grand tour despite being deeply involved in the preparations for an extensive April celebration of the wedding anniversary of the original owners of Dumbarton Oaks, Mildred and Robert Bliss.



Gail Griffin leading the tour.

and lower terracing. The effect of the journey minimizes the dramatically steep slope on which the gardens are sited, but at the same time uses it masterfully to conceal and then to reveal, just at the right moment, the next intimate garden experience or breathtaking view.

To see the giant wisteria throughout the garden, some of whose ancient trunks we witnessed being pruned to within an inch of their lives, was of great interest to us. When we learned the frequency of the effort and stood before the very crew climbing and balancing at great heights with sharp tools, we felt encouraged, even emboldened about our constant effort to keep wisteria tamed on mere ten-foot stone walls at Bellefield. Beatrix Farrand’s instruction on maintenance for the great number of vines trailing along, not only the house and the orangery, but



Campbell Symmes Ives frolics in the garden.

trellises and structures throughout the garden was very particular: nothing was to be left unkempt — let that be a constant lesson to us all.



Dorris Adams and Luise Seelbach taking in the view at Dumbarton Oaks.

A number of us took Amtrak down to Washington and even the several hours of delay we encountered felt like time well spent in horticultural camaraderie and the pleasures of the club car. We stayed at the charming little Tabard Inn at DuPont Circle where we also enjoyed a delicious and distinctive meal. But the greatest blessing of our trip was being with Gail who had managed to put aside her innumerable duties to offer us such an informative and entertaining tour of the garden. Soaking up the forms and shapes of Farrand’s intricate but extensive designs and drifting through the palette of her plants there at Dumbarton Oaks, informed and inspired us as we returned home to work on our smaller, simpler but wonderful garden here in Hyde Park.

I have a story that might interest newsletter readers. It was told to me by Daisy Suckley, of blessed memory:

The ground hog, or woodchuck, presently causing some anxiety among the Beatrix Farrand Garden volunteers may deserve more respect and consideration than the bulletin suggested in its Fall, 2006 issue. I suspect he is a descendant of one of Mrs. Morgan’s many animal friends. One day she discovered in a cellar window areaway a woodchuck who had gotten his head stuck in a tin pail. With a little help, she was able to pull the pail off the suffering animal’s head. Her kindness was repaid, she said, by regular visits from the same woodchuck who seemed to stand and nod to her in solemn gratitude every time they met.

It’s the sort of story I like to remember about Mrs. Morgan.

The Rev. Canon James Elliott Lindsley, D.D.