BEATRIX FARRAND SOCIETY

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Dartington Hall Courtyard, 2023, photo by Hannah Hoggatt.

Beatrix Farrand at Dartington Hall

by Catherine Orme

In June 2023 the trustees of Dartington Hall Charitable Trust in Devon, England celebrated Beatrix Farrand's extensive work with the gardens at Dartington that began in the 1930's. The Trust commissioned English landscape designer Dan Pearson to review the current state of the gardens and prepare a masterplan for their renovation, restoration and enhancement. Mr. Pearson specialises in naturalistic perennial planting and was the recipient of the 2022 Beatrix Farrand Society Achievement Award.

Dartington Hall is Farrand's only commission outside the United States. The property of over 1000 acres includes a medieval manor house and a residential courtyard constructed between 1388 and 1399 for King Richard II's half-brother, John Holand. Starting in the middle of the sixteenth century the house belonged to eleven generations of a single Devon family, the Champernownes, who managed the house and property for nearly 400 years. When economies forced the family to sell the property in 1921, the house was dilapidated, the grounds derelict, and the garden completely overgrown.

In 1925 the American heiress, Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst and her husband, Englishman Leonard Elmhirst, purchased Dartington Hall following their search for a location for their planned educational campus. They were seeking a site where they could pursue their progressive educational experiment, focusing on the possibility of a utopian "abundant life."

In 1925, as the property was being upgraded for their teaching goals, the Elmhirsts successfully attracted gifted teachers from a wide range of literary, cultural, artistic, ecological, farming and forestry

disciplines. They also recruited open-minded students eager for an alternative educational experience; their own children became part of this group. Many luminaries of the day, including Igor Stravinsky, Imogen Holst, Benjamin Britten, Ravi Shankar, and Bertrand Russell became involved with the Dartington experiment.

Laying Stone Path in Courtyard, Early 1930's.

The Elmhirsts major program of restoration and rehabilitation of the grounds focused on the site's central portion, the 28 acres surrounding Dartington Hall and its courtyard. H. Avray Tipping, the English Garden designer and distinguished architectural editor of *Country Life* magazine, was the first professional hired by the Elmhirsts to begin garden restorations. Tipping exposed the architectural aspects of the Tiltyard (a medieval field for practicing jousting)* which was later transformed into an open-air theatre, and designed the site's Sunny Border along the edge of the Tiltyard, and the Private Garden. Tipping also recommended Stewart Lynch to the Elmhirsts, who became the garden superintendent for many years.

In 1933 the Elmhirsts hired Beatrix Farrand to serve as their consultant advisor for the property. Farrand had previously designed a magnificent Chinese garden at Applegreen in Old Westbury, Long Island for Mrs. Elmhirst and her first husband, Willard Straight. Farrand made only four visits to the Dartington Hall garden, but she and Mrs. Elmhirst carried out the plans by extensive correspondence. (Drawings and correspondence relating to the project are currently located in the Dartington archive.)

Farrand's most prominent contribution to the property was upgrading the Courtyard. When she first arrived at Dartington Hall she had found it a "farmyard space" with awkward levels, a central gravel path and little planting. Based on Farrand's design, the site a visitor experiences today is both lovely and deceptively simple: a central lawn surrounded by an oval of level stone paths, and fairly minimal planting against the quadrangle walls.

The oval has beautiful contrasting textures of cobble, limestone and York paving; its design required extensive groundwork, significant levelling, and a drainage system. Farrand's planting design included magnolia grandiflora, wisteria, roses and honeysuckles on the grey walls, and camellias and azaleas along the garden walks. It is reminiscent of her understated landscaping on the Princeton and Yale campuses.

Farrand's designs also provided Dartington Hall with a vision for its Wilderness area, which ran up the hillside above the Tiltyard. She redesigned it as a Woodland with three connecting walks -- Spring Bank, Camellia and Rhododendron. She used native material whenever possible, particularly as background planting.

Additional Farrand design work included widening the Sunny Border path, adding steps to link the Tiltyard (which had become an open-air theatre) to the main drive, and the Woodland area. Farrand also prepared designs for the Loggia and Private Garden, the Great Lawn, and areas near the former Dance School and the Children's Playhouse. Two additional areas she designed were later redesigned by others: the Forecourt by George Wolton and the Heath Bank by Percy Stephen Cane.

*In jousting, two opponents typically fight on horseback with lances.

Sunny Border at Edge of Tiltyard (currently Open-Air Theater), photo by Carey Marks https://www.CareyMarks.co.uk

Farrand visited local nurseries, provided detailed lists of plants and precise drawings for fencing and seating, and worked closely with Stewart Lynch. As work on the estate progressed between visits, she continued to provide extensive ideas, plans and plant lists in her written correspondence.

As in her gardens in the United States, Farrand's horticultural designs at Dartington reflected a naturalistic approach to planting, as espoused by Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson. Fortunately, her site already had many magnificent ancient trees, including swamp cypress in the Courtyard, a splendid trio of Lucombe oak on the south lawn with beech and holm oak towering above them, a turkey oak on the Great Lawn, an ancient line of sweet chestnut and mature london plane trees above the Tiltyard, as well as the ancient "12 Apostles" Irish yew hedge which separates the Sunny Border from the Tiltyard.

Farrand's last visit to Dartington was in July 1937, but the letters between Farrand and Mrs. Elmhirst continued to be prolific. During the Second World War Mrs. Elmhirst, with directives from Farrand, focused her own energies on the garden. She wrote to Farrand, "I find I have a great desire to add to the permanent beauty of Dartington in these days when everything seems so transitory."

In 1957, in Farrand's 83rd year, she wrote of her work at Dartington in a letter to the Elmhirsts,

> Your Dartington prospers and continues and its beauty grows under your hands and with the skill and love you give it. Probably it is unlikely that it will be my good fortune to see it again, but in memory the lovely hills, the distant views, the quiet valleys and the great trees are all vividly with me. . . Such happy days they were for me, with you both, perhaps the happiest of a long working life.

Farrand was not to see Dartington Hall again before her death in February 1959.

The garden suffered from staffing shortages during and after World War II. In 1946 Percy Cane was appointed to address that neglect, to continue fulfilling Farrand's plans, and to further enhance the property. He did not always agree with Farrand's work, nor publicly acknowledge it, but he did not modify her Courtyard or her Woodland designs.

In 1972 the Anglo-American landscape architect Lanning Roper wrote in *Country Life*,

> Mrs. Farrand laid down the principles which have always been followed. She insisted that the old grey stone walls and towers should tell their own story, enhanced by, but also subservient to a controlled landscape in which grass, evergreens and the great forest trees of beech, oak and plane played the major role. Paths, where possible, were to be paved. Colour was never an end in itself, and this ideal the garden still reflects, although there are bursts of blooms . . . flowering through the seasons. The success of her precepts is well illustrated in the great courtyard, where her use of river-worn cobbles and limestone setts with York paving has created a court of exceptional quality.

Stone Path in Courtyard, photo by Hannah Hoggatt.

The Dartington Hall Charitable Trust, formalized in 1932, continues the mission to deliver progressive learning programs in the arts, ecology and social justice and has a year-round program of art and craft short courses in theatre, music, dance and film events.

Catherine Orme has a MS in Library Science from the University of Chicago and has studied plantsmanship at the Chelsea Physic Garden in London as well as conservation of historic parks and gardens at the Architectural Association in London. She is a member of the Beatrix Farrand Society's Board of Directors.

Notes

A drawing identifying the areas of Dartington designed by Beatrix Farrand is on the next page.

The Dartington Hall Park and Garden is listed Grade II* by the National Heritage List for England (NHLE). Grade II* identifies particularly important properties, of more than Special Interest. Only 5.8% of listed properties are Grade II*. The Garden is also a Royal Horticultural Society Partner Garden.

Dan Pearson has created a 30-year plan for "editing" the garden. The Trust has launched a fundraising drive and hired a new gardener, Neville Evans, who is already working on some of these improvements. The public is encouraged to visit and experience the site. The Dartington website is https://www.dartington.org.

Central Portion of the Dartington Hall Grounds, depicted by James Stewart, https://www.jamesstewartart.co.uk

Areas Designed by Beatrix Farrand

1. Forecourt, later redesigned by George Wolton in 1991
2. Courtyard
3. Great Lawn
4. Landscape at the former Dance School
5. Landscape at the Children's Playhouse
6. Woodland landscape with three connecting walks
7. Stairs linking the Tiltyard (Open-Air Theatre) to the main drive, the Woodland and the Private Garden
8. Loggia and Elmhirst's Private Garden
9. Widened Sunny Border path
10. Heath Bank, redesigned by Percy Stephen Cane

Dumbarton Oaks Gardens

A Collaboration between Designer and Client: Beatrix Farrand and Mildred Bliss

In 1920, after a long search for a home in the Washington D.C. area, Robert and Mildred Bliss purchased a 1801 Federal-style house in Georgetown, which they named Dumbarton Oaks. The subsequent years saw many changes made to the original home and landscape, and significant additions to both. The site eventually grew to approximately fifty-four acres from the original six.

Mildred Bliss, who was closely involved with site's development, hired Beatrix Farrand to transform the areas around the house and to design a mix of formal and informal terraced garden rooms on steeply graded farmland. Farrand worked hand-in-hand with her client to plan, build, and maintain the site's landscape until her retirement from the project in 1947.

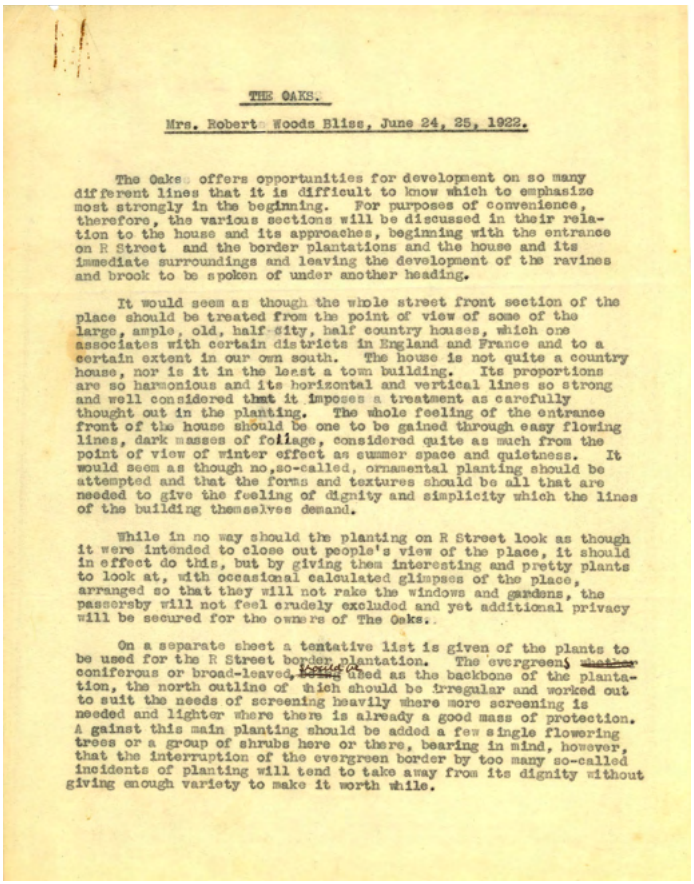
Farrand's letter to Mildred Bliss of June 24–25, 1922, contained in the Dumbarton Oaks Garden Archives, laid out her proposed plans for Dumbarton Oaks gardens, and marked the beginning of what was to become a defining project in her career. It also inaugurated one of the most felicitous and productive collaborations between a designer and a client in the history of landscape architecture that would last over two decades. This typeset letter with added corrections in Farrand's hand is reproduced here in a transcription by Anatole Tchikine.

The Oaks.

Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, June 24, 25, 1922.

The Oaks offers opportunities for development on so many different lines that it is difficult to know which to emphasize most strongly in the beginning. For purposes of convenience, therefore, the various sections will be discussed in their relation to the house and its approaches, beginning with the entrance on R Street and the border plantations and the house and its immediate surroundings and leaving the development of the ravines and brook to be spoken of under another heading.

It would seem as though the whole street front section of the place should be treated from the point of view of some of the large, ample, old, half city, half country houses, which one associates with certain districts in England and France and to a certain extent in our own south. The house is not quite a country house, nor is it in the least a town building. Its proportions are so harmonious and its horizontal and vertical lines so strong and well considered that it imposes a treatment as carefully thought out in the planting. The whole



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While in no way should the planting on R Street look as though it were intended to close out people's view of the place, it should in effect do this, but by giving them interesting and pretty plants to look at, with occasional calculated glimpses of the place, arranged so that they will not rake the windows and gardens, the passersby will not feel crudely excluded and yet additional privacy will be secured for the owners of The Oaks.

On a separate sheet a tentative list is given of the plants to be used for the R Street border plantation. The evergreen[s] ~~shall be~~ coniferous or broad-leaved, ~~being~~ used as the backbone of the plantation, the north outline of which should be irregular and worked out to suit the needs of screening heavily where more screening is needed and lighter where there is already a good mass of protection. Against this main planting should be added a few single flowering trees or a group of shrubs here or there, bearing in mind, however, that the interruption of the evergreen border by too many so-called incidents of planting will tend to take away from its dignity without giving enough variety to make it worth while.

First page of the letter from Beatrix Farrand to Mildred Bliss, June 24–25, 1922. B BF 1922.06.24, Garden Archives, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University.

R Street façade East Gate (with the Porter's Lodge dummy to the right) in 1930–31. 1.15, Garden Archives, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University.

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Probably the heaviest mass of large plants will be required on the line between the front door and the street running south from the west entrance.

As a protective fence along the southern front, it is suggested to try and keep the present stone retaining wall if it can be made to last and adapting an iron fence to its top which could be used in modified design along the whole south front, taking, for instance, the good eighteenth century model of the dart picket or halberd picket. The design for these might be determined later as it may be a possible convenience to the border planting to be able to do this~~, particularly~~ from the R Street front, and a permanent fence might be troublesome to deal with. However, the permanent fence might be essential if thefts of plants are likely. No planting should be countenanced which in any way would distract ones [sic] attention from the simple and beautiful lines of the grades and the magnificent oak trees which surround the house. It is, therefore, suggested that the planting of this south front of the house be in a sense as permanent, and, if one may so say, impersonal, as possible, leaving the more delicate arrangements to serve as attractive objects for the walks and paths which will some day be worked out on the north slopes.

A screen of fairly large evergreens, box yews, or holly, will have to be used on the southwest corner of the house in order to hide the service entrance from the front. The exact position of these different plantations

Southern and eastern facades of the Orangery with the house behind in ca. 1925–26. 35.15, Garden Archives, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University.

is difficult to determine academically, and the most important groups should be placed on the ground as alterations of grade, root space and exact angle of vision should be the controlling factors, rather than their exact position upon a planting plan.

For the south front of the house, a pair of large Buxus suffruticosa, approximately four to five feet high and if possible about six to eight feet in diameter, will probably be the best plants to use for the spaces on either side of the front steps, placing the center of the plant ~~in~~ [added in ink: opposite] the space between the pairs of windows. This will allow plenty of light to come in to the basement windows and yet will partially mask them. A splash of Hedera helix dentata (the large-leaved English ivy) should be planted on both east and west wings; on the east wing between the east library windows and on the west wing west of the pantry window. Another plant of ivy of the palmata variety (a small-leaved sort) will give a different texture and yet an evergreen effect if set out on the wall west of the west dining room window. A white jasmine might look well on the angle east of the east salon window. Underneath the west library window and near the pantry window a group of flat and fat dwarf English yew (Taxus baccata var. repandens) will make a round-headed and dark-colored group somewhat balancing the larger round-headed group which the two large box plants will make on either

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side of the main entrance.

It is possible that clipped wall shrubs might add to the appearance of the front of the house, but the writer feels that the proportions are so good that little should be done until after experiment has been made as to exactly where the accents are needed.

As the service road is likely to be brought in from the side street and approaching the house at an angle of approximately forty-five degrees, it will be by its position fairly sell [self?] screened from the front and only an occasional tree or shrub will be needed to hide it completely.

The North Vista in 2015. Photo: Anatole Tchikine.

The north front of the house with its vista, cedar edged, may be developed in so many different attractive ways that it is difficult not to be distracted. Clearly a long pool would be beautiful in spring and autumn. The only question is whether it would have the same charm in winter and if the pool could be kept full in winter or whether it would mean a studied decoration for an empty concrete tank. Obviously, however, a large white maple tree is required on the east side of the vista to balance the large tulip tree on the northwest angle. There is also a possibility that a plant of Magnolia grandiflora (the evergreen Magnolia) would be well-placed in the inner angles of the vista where they would be seen in winter even if the western one was hidden by the horse chestnut in summer. As the north court of the house is extremely successful in its proportions and design, the planting should also be carefully studied so that it shall balance and the small irregularities in design [added in ink: to] conceal~~ed~~ [added in ink: them] by planting. For instance, the runway on the west side of the court might well be hidden by a square ivy covered railing simulating a hedge and on the east side of the court a real hedge could be planted of approximately the same dimension and in front of both the real and imaginary hedge separate plants could be set at regular spaces. Again, the treatment of the wall on the north of the house should be carefully studied as here the writer is convinced that the clipped evergreen thorn, or other rough, bushy wall-shrub such as are used in England, largely evergreen in character, would give good shadow and pleasant interruption to the surface of the brick without spoiling the proportions of the building.

No definite suggestion is made with regard to the planting under the north gallery as it is felt that this is one of the most important pieces of planting to be done, requiring both delicacy and solidity of treatment and where exactly the right material should be used to get a continuous effect without coarseness or monotony, it is possible that a combination of Japanese Andromedas and Abelia might be used.

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On the northeast corner of the house two magnificent oaks trees inclosed [sic] by the low brick wall inevitably suggest the making of a green garden which would in a sense be a part of the rooms looking out on it. The east wall of the library is the hardest part of the planting of this scheme. A heavy mass of evergreen foliage is required in the southwest angle. This may be obtained in one or two or three ways, either by planting a temporary large cedar tree which shall be taken out later when the wall covering develops, or by planting and patiently waiting for a wall covering of heavy texture such as the large-leaved ivy or the evergreen magnolia pinned to the wall as it is so often grown in England, or another evergreen wall-shrub of heavy foliage which should be kept clipped. The main carpet of the green garden should be, in the writer's opinion, a small-leaved plant with evergreen foliage, such as the periwinkle (Vinca minor), using both its blue and white varieties. The main, central plat had probably better be of one plant, or possibly interrupted, if there is danger of monotony, by one or two evergreen Azaleas or Andromedas. The borders should, however, be somewhat varied and plants of coarser leaf could be used, such as Pachysandra, Hypericum, Berberis repens etc. Groups of small bulbs might be planted among the vinca or other ground cover in order to give early flower and on the east side of the garden shade-loving plants, such as some of the evergreen ferns and early spring flowering varieties, could be used in combination with Christmas roses, Tiarella (foam flower), Galax, Shortia and Vancouveria. There should not be much planting on the brick wall, and whatever is used should be very fine in leaf, as every effort should be made to exaggerate the already large scale of the oak, by making the surrounding plants very fine and delicate in foliage and growth. The use of too much Evonymus is not advised as it will make rather a bristly ground cover. It may be useful in certain spots where just this effect is required on the house or garden wall.

The exact solution for the steps from the east windows of the music room must be arrived at before a decision can be reached as to the planting of this section. The terrace which was spoken of may work out conveniently as the present steps seem to make an awkward pocket approach from the back of the corridor leading to the Orangery. The north side of the Orangery will naturally be flagged as it will be a pleasant place to sit on hot sunny mornings. It is, therefore, doubtful whether it will be possible to continue the border of evergreen ferns along the Orangery wall. This would, however, be attractive if they would not be too much damaged by the wear and tear of chairs and tables being pushed against them. The south side of the Orangery, with its great Magnolia, should be planted with some evergreen ground cover, such as the hybrid St. John's

Wort (hypericum Moserianum) with snow drops and an early iris planted through it. Probably

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the list of plants already suggested for the Orangery can materially be added to after thinking and seeing what is used for the same purpose abroad. Certainly two more names should be added, the blue Solanum capensis and the orange-colored streptosolen Jamesori [jamesonii]. The materials to be used in the Orangery will have to be renewed and replaced from time to time when they are out of bloom or unattractive, and in order that a succession of plants may be kept in good condition it will be necessary to construct quite a large so-called pit in which these plants can be wintered and kept in the approximate temperature which will be used for the Orangery. Standard wisterias will also be attractive to force and an occasional climbing rose in a tub or early daphne or cherry will make a pleasant change without entailing much trouble or expense. The pit to be constructed should not be smaller in floor area than the Orangery itself, and, if possible, it should be larger in order to allow space for replenishment, as much of its usefulness will be as an overflow from the Orangery and its reservoir. As it is unlikely that all of the plants for the Orangery can be obtained at short notice, it will probably be time enough to start the pit next autumn or winter. In the meantime, Gray[1] might look for the plants needed and report as to what he finds and in what condition. A duplicate list of the Orangery list is sent in order that Gray may have the list of materials wanted.

The planting around the tennis court should be carefully studied. It is not quite clear whether it had better be in the main deciduous or evergreen in character. As it will not be conspicuously in view from the house, at any rate at present, it may be advisable to make the main part of it deciduous, using the heavy stone walls as backgrounds for fine climbers such as roses, clementis [clematis], jasmine etc., and keeping the plantations to the varieties of spring and autumn flowering and fruiting plants.

The east front of the house really presents the hardest problem at present as the grading must be restudied

The Rose Garden in 1929. 40.11, Garden Archives, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University.

before it can be made a satisfactory platform for the house. The various suggestions as for shortening up the terraces in different directions were made verbally and can hardly be more crystalized until studied immediately on the plan. The more the problem is considered, however, the more it seems clear that the rose garden must be practically flat in appearance and that a large stone wall on its west side, if properly designed, would make a considerable part of its charm. The wall and steps, while not in any way ambitious or pretentious in scheme, could be a vital part of the plan and if made of fairly large rough stone, perhaps buttressed as many of the old stone walls are and simple in parapet, whether of iron, or stone, or hedged, ~~it~~ would hardly give the dressed-up appearance so repellent in many modern gardens.

The lower herbaceous garden should, in the writers [sic] mind, be

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a very much less prim design than the rose garden, with considerable masses of perennials, none of them large in size, but giving a sort of general friendly mixture of color and form and entirely different in type from the upper level. A list of some of the different flowers suggested for the herbaceous garden is also enclosed and tentative suggestions for some of the groupings.

[1] William Gray, the head gardener at Dumbarton Oaks from 1922 through 1937 [note by Anatole Tchikine].

Bridge over the brook in Dumbarton Oaks Park in 2021.
Photo: Anatole Tchikine.

The pool below the herbaceous garden, with its grassy seats and slopes may be made an unusual frame for an out-of-doors picture. It is so entirely romantic in type that all sorts of plants of the weeping-willowish variety will be appropriate, but as so much of its treatment must be a subject for later study any suggestions with regard to its future development are withheld for the present.

The whole scheme for the north slopes of the property should properly be studied from the ground itself rather than from any plan, as the contours and expressions of the ground will control the plantations more strongly than any other feature. The brook certainly could be widened and dammed up at various points and used as a mirror in which to reflect large plants [corrected in ink: plantations] of azaleas and iris, or overhanging dark masses of hemlock, with water-loving plants growing on the~~ir~~ still surface, and walks arranged on the different levels so that the plantations could be seen from above as well as from their own level. It is hoped that one ravine could be given over to a mass of azaleas, another to a plantation of Magnolias and crabs, and that a walk be arranged of the different varieties of lilac following the west boundary and in general making the old fashioned "circ~~le~~ [correction in ink: circular] walk" which was so usually a part of every eighteenth century design. It is also hoped that a part of the grounds could be developed as a "Wilderness" where hollies, yews, ivies and spring flowering Magnolias and winter flowering shrubs would make an attractive walk to be followed in winter. Another part of the grounds should have a primrose garden, possibly surrounded by a nut walk. A large mass of forsythia planted on one of the hillsides and in combination with the blue Lungwort and daffodils will be attractive at its own moment, and in the writer's mind the development of the north part of the place should be on the lines of a series of interesting plantations, each thought out for a certain season, and easily reached by a good walk and yet not conspicuously in view when it was not at its best.

Obviously the place for the big kitchen garden is in the area between the present gardener's house and the east terrace. The survey shows it to be the only approximately level part of the ground and there is no reason why it should not be worked attractively into the scheme of walks leading from the house around the boundaries. The cutting garden should be thought out as a part of this scheme and espaliered and cordon, small fruit and large, should be planted on either side of the walks and also on the hillsides

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sloping down from the terraces to the garden. This would seem to tie the whole scheme of house, terrace and green garden, swimming pool and kitchen garden, into a unit.

The suggestions are made for consideration. The first, that an oak rift paling be used on Lover's Lane [sic] in combination with the present retaining wall where the wall is needed. The paling could be spaced so that intervals would show glimpses of the place without making it a part of the public highway.

These notes should not be considered as more than suggestions and jottings, the result of only a few hours acquaintance with the Oaks and are subject to alteration and change of mind on the owners [sic] and designers [sic] part.

[Added in ink: The orangery & garden & planting lists follow tomorrow. B.F.]

Anatole Tchikine is Curator of Rare Books at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

Visit Us at Garland Farm, Beatrix Farrand's Last Home and Gardens

Open Days

Thursdays, 12:00 to 3:00 p.m.
June 20 to September 19 (excluding July 4)
Suggested Donation - $5

New Frederic Church Exhibit

In the summer of 1855, the Hudson River School artist Frederic Church, along with his friend Charles Tracy and 26 friends and family - and a piano - visited Mount Desert Island. Thus, they are considered by many to be the first summer visitors to the island. They stayed in Somesville, from which they set out daily to discover - and, in some cases, name - many of the same places visitors enjoy today. During the visit, Church created a set of 19 charming "cartoons." One could imagine these were produced on a rainy island day to amuse the children in the group. The originals remain with the Tracy family and have been rarely exhibited. They have been published only once: to accompany the Tracy Log Book in 1997. The Beatrix Farrand Society will exhibit the full series of enlarged and annotated facsimiles at Garland Farm for the summers of 2024 and 2025.

T (Tracy) and W (Winthrop) as they appeared starting on a hunting expedition. A neighbor's dog volunteers. Image courtesy of John Taylor.

Seasonal Entrance - Grass Parking Lot
475 Bay View Drive
Bar Harbor, ME 04609

Use this address for wheelchair accessible entrance:
1029 US Route 3
Bar Harbor, ME 04609

From Ellsworth: Cross the bridge from Trenton onto Mount Desert Island, and bear left on Route 3, continuing through the traffic light, and proceeding a couple miles. When you cross the Mount Desert Narrows (a beautiful creek flowing into the bay), keep an eye out on the left for Garland Farm's 1029 mailbox and a gravel driveway.

For our seasonal grass parking lot, continue on Route 3 about 500 feet past our mailbox and turn left onto Bay View Drive, then make your first left into the grass parking lot.

From Bar Harbor: Pass Hadley Point Road on your right, then proceed 2/3 of a mile before taking a right onto Bay View Drive. Bay View Drive appears quickly on a high-speed roadway, so finding it requires close attention. Once on Bay View, make your first left into the grass parking lot.

The entrance near our mailbox is for wheelchair access and off-season access only. All other visitors should use the parking lot off of Bay View Drive.

Inquiries regarding a visit may be directed to visit@beatrixfarrandsociety.org. For more information on accessibility, the gardens, the library at Garland Farm, and more, visit www.beatrixfarrandsociety.org

2024 PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Pre-registration is required.
Visit beatrixfarrandsociety.org/programs to secure your spot.
A Zoom option is also available for all programs.

A Month On Mt. Desert, 1855: Revisiting The Tracy Log Book

John Taylor
Thursday, July 11 at 4:00 pm
Exhibit opening to follow at 5:00pm
Garland Farm
$10 members / $20 non-members / free for students
Discounted admission also applies to members of the Mount Desert Island Historical Society

John Bigelow Taylor is a photographer and publisher. He lives with his partner, Dianne Dubler, in New York's lower Hudson Valley. Together they have produced the photography for over 300 books. Mr. Taylor is the great-great-grandson of Charles Tracy, who along with Frederic Church and 26 others visited Mt. Desert in the summer of 1855. The Tracy party, as it was known, is often cited as the first summer visitors to the island. Charles Tracy's diary - what he called his Log Book - recounts the visit in wonderful detail. The diary, now in the Morgan Library, was enhanced with a charming series of 19 cartoons created by Church - no doubt to entertain young members of the party on a rainy Somesville day.

The originals, which remain in the Tracy family's archives, have been reproduced in a large format to be displayed for 2 years at Garland Farm. Mr. Taylor will discuss the Log Book and its history of publication including the 1997 edition, edited by Anne Mazlish, and a new forthcoming edition.

Planting Fields: A Country Place and Its Makers

The Beatrix Farrand Society Annual Lecture

Witold Rybcznski
Thursday, August 8 at 4:00 pm
Holy Family Chapel, Seal Harbor
Free admission

The Country Place Era is a landscape history term that refers to the period from about 1890 to 1930 when wealthy Americans built country estates that were noted for their exceptional houses and gardens. Planting Fields, on Long Island's North Shore, is both exemplary and unusual. Unlike most country places, this was not the result of a concentrated building campaign but of a three decade evolution that involved two sets of owners, two separate houses, three architects, four landscape architects, and several artistic talents, each reinforcing and expanding the work of their predecessors.

Witold Rybczynski is the author of more than twenty books, including an award-winning biography of Frederick Law Olmsted. His latest is *The Story of Architecture* which the New York Times Book Review called an "expansive account that traces the influence of social, technological, and economic shifts on architecture across the centuries." He is an emeritus professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Brave the Wild River: The Untold Story of Two Women Who Mapped the Botany of the Grand Canyon

Melissa Sevigny
Thursday, August 22 at 4:00pm
Garland Farm
$10 members / $20 non-members / free for students

Melissa Sevigny will join us virtually for this program, which will be live-streamed in the barn at Garland Farm.

In the summer of 1938, botanists Elzada Clover and Lois Jotter set off to run the Colorado River, accompanied by an ambitious and entrepreneurial expedition leader, a zoologist, and two amateur boatmen. With its churning waters and treacherous boulders, the Colorado was famed as the most dangerous river in the world. Journalists and veteran river runners boldly proclaimed that the motley crew would never make it out alive. But for Clover and Jotter, the expedition held a tantalizing appeal: no one had yet surveyed the plant life of the Grand Canyon, and they were determined to be the first. Through the vibrant letters and diaries of the two women, science journalist Melissa L. Sevigny traces their daring forty-three-day journey down the river, during which they meticulously cataloged the thorny plants that thrived in the Grand Canyon's secret nooks and crannies.

Melissa L. Sevigny is a science reporter and author of three books, most recently *Brave the Wild River* (W.W. Norton, 2023), which won the National Outdoor Book Award for history. She's worked as a science communicator in the fields of space exploration, water policy, and sustainable agriculture. She lives in Flagstaff, Arizona.

The Next Century of Stewardship at Dumbarton Oaks

Jonathan Kavalier
Thursday, August 29 at 4:00 pm
Neighborhood House, Northeast Harbor
$10 members / $20 non-members / free for students

Jonathan Kavalier has served as Director of Gardens and Grounds at Dumbarton Oaks since 2018, and has spent the past 24 years working in public garden management and horticulture in the Washington DC area and abroad. Jonathan will offer a virtual exploration of Dumbarton Oaks as he shares the design history and management over the past century, along with contemporary guiding principles that are influencing future stewardship preservation priorities. He will present challenges and opportunities that come with historical gardening in a 21st century context, and highlight some of the work the gardeners at Dumbarton Oaks are pursuing to ensure its preservation and relevance in the next century. Jonathan is the editor of the revised *Beatrix Farrand's Plant Book of Dumbarton Oaks* (2022). A book sale and signing will follow the program.

The Art of the Seed

K Greene, Hudson Valley Seed Company
Thursday, September 5 at 4:00pm
Garland Farm
$10 members / $20 non-members / free for students

Hudson Valley Seed Company is known not only for their beautiful seeds, but also for their wonderful packaging. Each year, the company commissions contemporary artists from around the United States to tell the story of a particular seed variety. That art and those seeds combine to create an Art Pack, a unique celebration of the diverse stories of seeds and their stewards. Greene, creative director and company co-founder, will discuss the artistic value of seeds, plants, and the stories surrounding them. A full display of seeds from Hudson Valley will be available for sale after the talk.

Jenna Jandreau photograph.

Support Beatrix Farrand Society - Gift a Membership

Because of memberships and donations, Beatrix Farrand Society is able to steward Garland Farm, and continue to offer programs to our communities.

If you are already a member, please consider gifting a membership, which includes:

- the annual *Beatrix Farrand Society Journal*,
featuring articles from experts and professionals in the fields of
history, landscape architecture, horticulture, climate science, and more

- access to Beatrix Farrand's Library at Garland Farm, by appointment

- invitations to workshops, programs and special events by email

- membership discount on programs and event, and items in the BFS Shop

Membership Levels

$45 - Individual
$90 - Family
$500 - Organization
$500 - Farrand Friend
$1,000 - Reef Point Society
$5,000 - Benefactor (new level)
$10,000+ - Leadership Circle (new level)

To purchase a membership, visit www.beatrixfarrandsociety.org, or mail a check to:
Beatrix Farrand Society, PO Box 111, Mount Desert, ME 04660

Plant Profile: Bearberry / Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)

by Dr. Lois Berg Stack

Most American gardeners and nature lovers know *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* by one of two common names: bearberry or kinnikinnick. Linnaeus gave bearberry its redundant botanical name: *Arctostaphylos* (Greek) and *uva-ursi* (Latin). Both mean "bear grapes", a reference to the plant's round red fruits that are eaten by bears in the wild and by birds and small mammals in our landscapes. Algonquians called it kinnikinnick, meaning "mixture", because they used the dried leaves in smoking mixtures. They also called some willows and dogwoods kinnikinnick because their inner bark was used in smoking mixtures. In New England, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* is generally called bearberry.

Native range: Bearberry is native to much of North America, including all Canadian provinces and northern U.S. states, as far south as northern California and Virginia. Within Maine, it is native to all counties except Aroostook. It is also native to parts of northern Europe and Asia.

Taxonomy: The genus *Arctostaphylos* is a member of the Heath Family, Ericaceae. It is a large family, containing about 4,000 species organized into about 125 genera. The genus *Arctostaphylos* is comprised of more than 50 species. Most of them are evergreen shrubs or small trees commonly called manzanita, and most are native to western North America. Just three species of *Arctostaphylos* are low-growing groundcovers, bearberry being the most familiar to us.

Ericaceae is well represented in Maine's native flora, which includes not only bearberry, but also highbush blueberry, lowbush blueberry, cranberry, inkberry, huckleberry, lambkill, bog rosemary, trailing arbutus, wintergreen, mountain fetterbush, and several rhododendrons such as great rosebay, Labrador tea and rhodora. Many of these plants are familiar to hikers who see them in natural areas, and to gardeners who plant them in their landscapes.

Description: Bearberry is a low-growing plant that forms a beautiful and durable groundcover. It rarely

Bearberry in a natural area on Cape Cod. Even in this minimally managed area, note that few weeds invade a good bearberry mat. The roots help to stabilize the sandy bank in this partially shaded site. (July 19, 2018). Lois Stack photo.

This rather stressed bearberry is in dry gravelly soil along a hiking trail in Birch Harbor. The sparseness of the leaves allows a good view of the clusters of bright red fruits. (July 21, 2023). Lois Stack photo.

Bearberry in a landscape setting. This is one plant that has expanded over the years, a reminder to space plants widely. (photo undated) Lois Stack photo.

Left: Several fungi can cause leaf spot diseases on bearberry. The spots on this plant were minor, and the causal organism was not identified. The problem has occurred a few times in this plant's lifetime, never with long-term damage. In other climates, like the moist-winter Pacific Northwest, leaf spots can kill bearberry. (May 13, 2018).
Right, top: Bearberry's spring flowers are attractive, and reminiscent of blueberry flowers. (May 18, 2011).
Right, bottom: In late fall, bearberry's evergreen leaves take on a reddish/purplish winter color. (December 23, 2023).
All photos by Lois Stack.

exceeds 6" in height because its thin, flexible woody stems grow outward and lie flat on top of older stems, forming a dense mat. These stems are reddish, but are covered by a loose, silvery, papery outer layer. The stems are not obvious at first glance, because the evergreen leaves cover them. New branch tips produced in spring are pale green and soft-hairy, becoming smooth and red-brown as they mature.

The leaves, which alternate left-right-left-right along the stems, are simple (only one flat blade per leaf) and small (maximum 0.5" wide and 1.25" long), with rounded tips and without any hairs or teeth on the edges. They are pale green at first, but become dark green, leathery and glossy with age. In fall, many of the leaves take on a red-to-purple tint, remain evergreen through the winter, and are a welcome sight as the snow melts in spring.

Bearberry flowers appear in April-May. The white-to-pale-pink flowers are urn-shaped, similar to those of blueberry, and appear in small clusters at branch tips. They are attractive when seen close-up, but are not bold enough to add significantly to the plant's appearance. After being pollinated mostly by small native bees, the flowers develop into round, mealy, bright red fruits, less than ½" diameter. These fruits persist into winter if not eaten by wildlife.

Ecology: Bearberry is long-lived and hardy to USDA Zone 3. In nature, it is generally found in sandy to rocky soils at open edges of forests, and on sand dunes, balds and barrens. It is not found in places with wet soil, poor drainage, or hot moist summers. It performs best in full sun, but tolerates light shade. It is salt-tolerant, and is found along the coast.

As with other Ericaceous plants, bearberry's roots don't develop root hairs like most of our garden plants. Rather, bearberry roots have more complex "hair roots" that are inhabited by fungi. In these mycorrhizae (fungus-root symbiotic relationships), the plants provide water and sugars to the fungi, and the fungi partner with the plants to obtain minerals from the soil. This allows bearberry to live in very infertile soil where other plants are not competitive. Over time, as the thick mat of stems forms a solid cover over the ground, the seeds of many weedy plants don't penetrate down to the soil where they can germinate. And if the seeds do germinate, the resulting plants are less competitive in

the infertile soil. If you look closely next time you're out for a hike; you'll see broad areas covered by bearberry, with few if any other types of plants growing through the matted stems. Like other Ericaceous plants, bearberry performs best in acid soil, which is another deterrent to many other plants.

In the landscape: Buy plants in spring, when plant selection is best. Plant healthy hardened-off young transplants in coarse, well-drained acidic soil and full sun. Some gardeners have reported difficulty in transplanting and establishing bearberry, but proper plant and site selection generally ensures success. Water at planting time and occasionally in the first season to establish the plants, but do not fertilize. Mulch to reduce weeds until the bearberry becomes its own weed barrier. No pruning is needed except to restrict the planting at the desired boundaries.

Open sites are best, as soils in sunny sites are drier than those in shaded sites, other things being equal. And as with many other full-sun plants, flowering decreases as shade increases. Once established, bearberry produces the layered low-lying branches that outcompete most weeds. Bearberry stabilizes soil, especially on dry sandy slopes and sand dunes, and in low-irrigation landscapes. It requires very little maintenance once established, and needs no fertilizer if natural recycling of nutrients is allowed to occur.

Above: Bearberry fruits. (September 12, 2023).
Below: Bearberry and creeping juniper invading each other in a lovely mosaic. Eventually, at least in this site, the juniper won the battle. Both plants are excellent low-maintenance native groundcovers. (photo undated). Lois Stack photographs.

Pests and diseases are minimal. Deer sometimes browse lightly on the foliage, and a few species of songbirds and small mammals feed on the fruits in fall and early winter. Leaves sometimes dry and turn brown from sun and wind in an open exposed winter, and leaf spot can develop when plants are stressed. Leaves affected by these problems drop and decompose, contributing nutrients and organic matter to the soil. Bearberry's salt-tolerance makes it a good groundcover for rocky coastal landscapes. It is beautiful when planted where it can spread naturally among rocks or over stone walls. It is a very useful substitute for grass lawns in many situations, because it can be walked on occasionally for weeding purposes without suffering damage, and walkways or large stepping stones can direct more frequent pedestrian traffic.

Personal notes: My husband and I have grown bearberry for more than 30 years, with very minor

problems. A few times, the plants have displayed a small amount of winter burn and leaf spot as the snow receded in early spring, but the affected leaves deciduated and the blemish was covered quickly by new growth. As a groundcover, bearberry extends outward for many feet, and needs a quick pruning at edges of paths and stepping stones perhaps every other year. The centers of the plantings have never become bare. A few weeds do need to be removed, especially at the edges of the plantings where fewer stems provide a thinner weed barrier, but we spend only an hour or so over the course of each summer, 10 minutes at a time, bending over and pulling weeds when we see them, an easy task when the weeds are small. In one area, we planted bearberry adjacent to creeping juniper, and the juniper has expanded faster than the bearberry. We could have maintained the juniper-to-bearberry ratio through periodic pruning, but we've enjoyed watching the competition as the planting changed.

Dr. Lois Berg Stack is an ornamental horticulture specialist and a member of the Beatrix Farrand Society Advisory Council.

Above: Herbarium specimen from Beatrix Farrand's Reef Point Gardens, collected by Kenneth Beckett, who worked at Reef Point in 1954. At Reef Point the bearberry was located on both sides of the path leading down the slope from the Garden Club House toward Frenchman's Bay. In this planting, bearberry was paired with bunchberry; together, they would have formed a beautiful mosaic and produced a succession of seasonal interest, with both flowering in spring and fruiting in fall, followed by bunchberry's fall foliar color and bearberry's winter color. This plant specimen was part of the herbarium that Farrand developed to document the plants of Reef Point, and to educate students about plant identification and use. The remaining 938 of her herbarium vouchers are now part of the University of California's herbaria. (image courtesy of the Beatrix Farrand Society)

Below: Watercolor of bearberry by Kate Furbish (1834-1931), who spent her life documenting Maine's flora. Based in Brunswick, Maine, she travelled to every county in the state, and collected more than 8,000 botanical specimens, now housed at Harvard University. From her field sketches and her live and pressed plant samples, she created about 1,300 beautiful and meticulously detailed botanical watercolor illustrations, now part of Bowdoin College Library's Special Collections & Archives. Her botanically accurate watercolor captures bearberry's beauty perfectly. Note her careful documentation of both flowers and fruits, the young roots that sometimes develop on the stems as they grow outward from the main stem, and the papery outer layers of the stem that exfoliate to expose the reddish base layer. (image courtesy of the George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections & Archives, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine)

The Terrace Garden at Garland Farm. Photo by Brenda Les.

Climate Effects on Heaths and Heathers at Garland Farm, Winter 2023

by Mary Roper, Garden Manager at Asticou Azalea Garden and member of Beatrix Farrand Society's Board of Directors

The polar vortex has been dominating winter conditions for some years now in Coastal Maine, giving a sudden taste of genuine arctic cold on many occasions. It easily overcomes any buffering the Atlantic Ocean traditionally offers.

Last winter, on February 4th, 2023, the Mount Desert Island area survived an arctic blast with a record-setting minus 17 degrees Fahrenheit, recorded at the East Surry NOAA station, along with high winds producing a wind chill effect of -38 F. Bar Harbor recorded – 16 F with a wind chill of -48 F, and Cadillac Mountain dropped to -20 F, with a wind chill of -62F. Our local thermometer registered -15 F in Northeast Harbor, with plenty of wind.

These extreme temperatures followed an unusually warm January, and twelve days after the historic lows the area basked in a new record high of 55F degrees on February 16th. MDI residents have found themselves defining new parameters of the term "temperature swing."

Many landscapes, farms, gardens and people were impacted. Not a single cherry or peach tree bloomed on Mount Desert Island nor much of the East Coast, and many apple blossoms were lost a little later with a hard frost. Early season azaleas and rhododendrons bloomed only at ground level, where they were protected by a thin cover of snow, or not at all, limiting bloom throughout Asticou Azalea Garden to half or less.

Even *Rhododendron maximum*, a hardy, late bloomer, showed slight bud damage by mid-February, with a visibly brown interior growing tip (meristem) inside the bud. Many rhododendron buds were completely brown inside by mid-February, and failed to bloom at all in early June.

These bud and branch losses were a product of insufficient dormancy. The prior warm weeks in January had drawn sap into the stems, and when the record lows occurred in early February there was no time or environmental cue for the stems and buds to "dry down" and enter dormancy. Plants unprotected by an evergreen windbreak or an adjacent building were especially hard hit.

The January/February temperature extremes provide a unique opportunity to understand how climate change translates to plants and gardens in the MDI area, and leads to new questions for effective historic preservation.

In late April 2023 Brenda Les, Grace Brown and I met at Garland Farm to review the winter impact on the Terrace Garden heaths (*Erica*) and heathers (*Calluna*). Using a simple four-point system, we evaluated the impact of the winter extremes on Garland Farm's 20 varieties. With a nod to our subjective, single-day point of view, we found the following:

- The performance of three varieties was excellent:
  - *Erica carnea* 'Springwood White' **
  - *Erica vagans* 'Mrs. D. F. Maxwell'
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Rosea'

- The performance of four varieties was good:
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'County Wicklow' **
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Hammondii' **
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'H. E. Beale' **
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Kinlochruel'

The remaining varieties were sufficiently damaged to substantially impact their performance.

- Listed from least to most damaged, six varieties had moderate to substantial damage:
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Tib' **
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Tenuis'
  - *Erica carnea* 'Springwood Pink' **
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Aurea'

The Terrace Garden at Garland Farm. Photo by Brenda Les.

  - *Erica carnea* 'Ruby Glow' **
  - *Erica carnea* (unknown cultivar)

- The final seven varieties performed poorly, with significant dead sections and winter burn:
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Alba Rigida'
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'J. H. Hamilton'
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Kuphaldtii'
  - *Erica carnea* 'Vivelli'
  - *Erica carnea* 'King George'
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Flore Pleno'
  - *Calluna vulgaris* 'Alportii' **

Of the 40 varieties of heaths and heathers listed in the July 1954 edition of *The Bulletins of Reef Point Gardens*, ten were particularly favored by Beatrix Farrand, based on her admiring descriptions of their performance. Eight of these ten varieties are present at Garland Farm and are identified with a double asterix ** in the list above. (The remaining two are not present.) Only one plant in the terrace beds was lost completely, namely a *Calluna vulgaris* 'Alportii'. The overall success was likely due to the generous protection offered by a thick and effective cover of fir boughs, and well-maintained beds during the growing season. The losses could have been worse.

Conditions have changed substantially on the Maine coast since 1954, as four of Farrand's particularly valued performers are now, 70 years later, very weak performers. Was the snow cover more reliable then, despite the coastal setting in Bar Harbor? Fortunately,

three varieties, namely *Erica carnea* 'Springwood White,' *Erica vagans* 'Mrs. D. F. Maxwell,' and *Calluna vulgaris* 'Rosea' performed excellently despite the brutal conditions and an additional four more performed quite well.

Due to climate change, Maine's coastal sites have warmed from USDA zone 5B to zone 6A, which is a potential asset for the heaths and heathers. Unfortunately, the temperature swings that accompany this shift strongly impact both wild and cultivated flora and govern the metabolic responses to minimum temperatures. We are seeing the increasing variability surpass the usefulness of the minimum lows zone map we have used for decades. A -15 degrees F hardiness rating has been a safe bet for plant selection in our 5B USDA zone, yet plants with a hardier constitution, rated to -25 degrees F, were damaged in the February 4th -15 degrees F conditions, if they were early bloomers.

Since the mid-season and late-bloomers were unaffected, we can surmise the early bloomers move sap quickly, respond to warmth readily, and are thus quite vulnerable to the whiplash of vortex conditions. A new USDA "variability map", detailing the temperature fluctuations now in play, rather than the typical swing averages, could help link the species impacted by these emerging conditions.

Despite our tendency to plant *Ericas* and *Callunas* together, they do not occur together in native stands. The *Ericas* originate as alpine plants native to the Pyrenees. According to recent research they only reached the British Isles through human endeavor, initially via the smuggling trade in the 16th to 18th centuries, and later through intentional introduction. They prefer an early, deep snow cover in winter, and cool, moist air in the summer, like most alpine plants. Both parameters are potentially weakening in Coastal Maine, with unstable winters and persistent summer droughts becoming much more common.

The competitive strength of *Calluna* was already visible in 1944, as Fay Hyland and Ferdinand Steinmetz published *The Woody Plants of Maine*. *Calluna vulgaris* was naturalized in the three counties of Franklin, Oxford and Cumberland by then, typically in fields adjacent to dwellings. *Calluna* likes disturbed soil. Now it is naturalized in five Maine counties, having added Hancock and Penobscot, and also a dozen northern and eastern states. The displacement of native plant communities is now significant enough to place *Calluna vulgaris* on the invasives list in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and North Carolina. *Calluna* is allelopathic, generating root conditions favoring itself, and also plenty alluring, like the consuming character Heathcliff, of *Wuthering Heights*, set in the moors. Can the love affair last?

In Scotland, a long tradition of controlled "muirburn" rejuvenates the heathland on a 20-year cycle, benefitting grouse populations, sheep grazing and the heather itself. The burn is carefully managed for a varied landscape of mixed maturation, with young, mid-range and old stands present. *Calluna vulgaris* clearly has staying power once established.

Both *Calluna vulgaris,* the common heather, and *Erica vagans,* the Cornish heath, could reach invasive status in Maine. The recent introduction of the heather beetle, as a deliberate intervention for *Calluna* populations in Massachusetts could control wild populations enough to permit the qualified maintenance of our historic, managed collections in Maine. Many factors are at play in this evolving ecological and social climate. Varieties that excel are clearly shifting as new forms of winter emerge. Local collections and non-commercial propagation is essential to historic preservation as long-standing nurseries disappear, and exchanges with other preservation-focused organizations become increasingly important to maintain rare varieties.

Erica carnea 'Springwood White,' *Erica vagans* 'Mrs. D. F. Maxwell,' and *Calluna vulgaris* 'Rosea' have passed the 2023 vortex test with ease. At least we have three stalwarts identified for the new weather regime, and several more to utilize with a reasonable expectation of success.

Many thanks to Brenda Les, Beatrix Farrand Society Chairman of Grounds and Gardens, and Botanist, and to Grace Brown, Gardener at Asticou Azalea Garden and Plant Data Recorder of Mt. Desert Land and Garden Preserve, for their assistance in this evaluation effort. A special thanks to Jan McIntyre, for her expert curation of the Heaths and Heathers at Garland Farm.

Frederic Church, "Loch Annie," 1855. Drawn while on Mount Desert Island, honoring Annie Tracy, daughter of his host, Charles Tracy. Private Collection, NY, photography ©John Bigelow Taylor

Frederic Church's Mount Desert Idyll, Summer 1855

by Victoria Johnson

Frederic Church (1826-1900), following in the footsteps of his teacher Thomas Cole, visited Mount Desert Island repeatedly to sketch and paint. His longest stay was in the summer of 1855, when he joined friends at a month-long house party in Somesville. What follows is an excerpt from Victoria Johnson's manuscript-in-progress, a biography of painter Frederic Church, scheduled for publication by Scribner in 2026.

The horse careened around the bend, rocking the wagon dangerously. A moment later Church was thrown from his seat. He somersaulted through the air, hitting the ground hard, but quickly jumped to his feet and climbed back into the wagon, reassuring his friends that he was fine. After his death-defying adventures in the Andes, a tumble from a wagon on a pleasant summer day in New England didn't much rattle him.

Church had returned to Mount Desert Island, the scene of past painting excursions he had taken in Cole's footsteps. This visit, in August 1855, was different from those trips. With his two sisters—Elizabeth, thirty-one, and Charlotte, twenty-three—he had joined a month-long house party with several other families. The unofficial patriarch of this impromptu clan was Charles Tracy, a genial lawyer whom Church knew from the Century Association in New York. Traveling by train, sailboat, and wagon, more than twenty-five men, women, and children had converged on three houses at the northern end of Somes Sound, a fjord-like waterway stretching from the heart of the island down to the sea. The day after they arrived, a piano joined them by sailboat.

Church was twenty-nine years old when he brought his sisters to Mount Desert Island. Fresh from his triumph with his painting *The Andes of Ecuador*, he was brimming with optimism and energy. The two things he loved most—exquisite natural surroundings and the company of witty, joyful people—were both in abundance on Mount Desert Island. He raved to his new companions about the beauty of this island he had come to love, with its blazing sunsets and serene lakes, and he took pleasure in showing them his favorite haunts from visits past.

The two things he loved most—exquisite natural surroundings and the company of witty, joyful people—were both in abundance on Mount Desert Island. He raved to his new companions about the beauty of this island he had come to love...

The spirit of the happy days spent studying at Thomas Cole's home in Catskill, New York, hovered over Church that summer as he settled into an extended surrogate family whose members, like the Coles, loved music, stories, games, and mountain hikes. Each morning began with prayers and hymns in the parlor, led by an Episcopal minister from Boston who had joined the gathering with his wife and several of his children. After the service, if the weather was fair, the guests set out in groups to roam around the island, tramping through mossy forests up to bare summits where they could see for miles across sparkling waters.

The hikers unfurled blankets in the whipping wind and pinned them down with picnic baskets and the weight of their own tired bodies. Church kept the wind at bay by pulling on one of his South American cloaks. He carried a siphon coffeepot on these outings and passed around steaming cups of coffee. Dessert was harvested from thickets of tart, tiny whortleberries. On one excursion, one of Tracy's daughters lost her copy of *Don Quixote* after setting it down in a thicket to meander in search of berries. The others fanned out, pulling aside gnarled gray branches and peering underneath, but the volume remained lost. They gave up and abandoned it, as Tracy noted in his diary, "to be gnawed by rabbits, dissolved by showers, and finally to mingle itself in the substance of moss and lichens." [1]

When the picnickers headed back along the grassy lanes that wound through the forest, Church was seized by an impulse to jump from the wagon and race home on his own. He was propelled by the same fizzing energy that had sent him hurtling on foot down volcanoes ahead of his mounted guides in the Andes two years earlier. Walking and running through the woods for five miles, he reached the house before the rest of the picnickers, who arrived to find him "fresh as morning." [2]

One week after the house guests had unpacked their clothes and books, another young man around Church's age arrived to join the party. His name was Theodore Winthrop, and he was a lawyer-in-training at Tracy's firm. In Winthrop, whose true passion was not law but literature, Church found a kindred spirit who combined the soulful depths of Thomas Cole with the eccentric, energetic playfulness to which Church himself inclined. When Winthrop walked through the countryside on a beautiful day, he was sometimes overtaken by an exuberance that made him turn somersaults on the grass and vault back and forth over fences like a boy. Church also discovered that Winthrop was a fellow lover of puns and long, funny stories. The day after Winthrop's arrival, Tracy wrote in his diary that "Mr. Winthrop has become a favorite immediately, and he enters into everything with true zest." [3]

When a sunset proved too dramatic or a lake too misty to resist, he sometimes slipped away from the house alone to sketch and paint.

The young men had a great deal to talk about. Unlike almost everyone else Church had ever met, Winthrop

[1] Charles Tracy, The Tracy Log Book, 1855: A Month in Summer, edited by Anne Mazlish (Acadia Publishing Company: Bar Harbor, 1997), pp. 67-68. My account of the 1855 summer party is largely drawn from this invaluable source. I am also grateful to John Wilmerding for a conversation about Church's visits to Mount Desert Island.
[2] Ibid., p. 68.
[3] Ibid., p. 69.

knew firsthand the romance and challenge of traveling in South America. Just a few years earlier, Winthrop had signed on with an American expedition seeking the best route for a planned canal across Panama. Several men in his party had died of starvation after getting lost in the wild for more than a month. Like Church, Winthrop had seen scorpions and feasted on plantains and trekked through jungles where jaguars hid. The two quickly formed a bond, and Church and Winthrop became the spirited ringleaders of fishing and hiking trips.

Some days, the weather kept everyone indoors—except Church. When the wind and rain whipped the trees furiously and the fishing boats bobbed at their moorings among the whitecaps...Church went out into the storm to watch the waves slamming against a rocky promontory called Schooner Head...

Church's skin began to brown and freckle as he ranged day after day over the island. When a sunset proved too dramatic or a lake too misty to resist, he sometimes slipped away from the house alone to sketch and paint. Occasionally he went fishing with one or two of the other men, bringing home dozens of mackerel to add to the long table where the party gathered for their communal meals. Other days, he rounded up a few of the children and drove them in the wagon around the island. He drew cartoons of the party's adventures to entertain everyone, and he dreamed up a coat of arms for the house party and joked about painting it on the side of the wagon. One day, he made a gorgeous sketch of a lake edged with spruces and firs and wrote "Loch Annie" at the bottom. Church had taken notice of Tracy's eldest daughter, Annie, a beautiful girl of seventeen.

In the evenings, Church's sense of humor and high spirits made him a star of the parlor games that filled the house with laughter. The friends acted out charades by candlelight, trying to get the onlookers to guess at words like "portrait" and "courtship" and "indolence." They also played a game called the Dumb Orator, in which one person read a dramatic speech while another person conveyed it in histrionic gestures. With his quick wit and elastic body, Church excelled at these games.

Some days, the weather kept everyone indoors—except Church. When the wind and rain whipped the trees furiously and the fishing boats bobbed at their moorings among the whitecaps, the guests sat by the fireplace, sang around the piano, played backgammon, or read aloud. But Church went out into the storm to watch the waves slamming against a rocky promontory called Schooner Head, eight miles away on the eastern side of the island. He was fascinated by water in motion.

On the morning of August 18, Church and Winthrop set off on a hike with seven other members of the house party, among them two boys and five girls and young women, including Church's sisters, Charlotte and Elizabeth. Later that day, the boys returned to the guesthouse with the wagon, saying that all the others had decided to hike up a mountain near Somes Sound. By eleven o'clock that night, the rest of the party still hadn't returned. They had left that morning without warm clothes or blankets to protect them against the cold night air, and the parents who had been waiting at home for their return began to panic, imagining a fall from a cliff in the dark, hypothermia, a drowning. Tracy and several other men set out through the woods, shouting for the lost hikers. No answer came back but their own echoes. After hours of searching, Tracy sprained his knee badly, and he limped into the house near dawn with no news for his wife and the other frightened parents.

There they had built a bonfire of driftwood and fashioned a large bed from evergreen boughs....Church had passed the hours in making sketches...

Soon after sunrise, Church returned to the house, alone. He told Tracy that he had led the party up the mountain, but their progress had been so slow that the sun had set when they were only halfway to the summit. He and Winthrop had guided the group down through the pitch-black forest until they came to a little lakeside beach. There they had built a bonfire of driftwood and fashioned a large bed from evergreen boughs. The two young men had sat up and kept watch while everyone else slept. Church had passed the hours in making sketches, first of the silhouettes around the bonfire and then of the sleepers on their rustic bed. When the sky

grew light, Church raced through the woods back to the guest house to fetch a wagon and bring them all safely home.

Church and Winthrop, both highly experienced outdoorsmen, had misjudged the strength and energy of their companions, but they had also proved themselves resourceful and attentive in a crisis. When the hikers arrived home in the wagon, they were tired but cheerful. "They all declared they had a capital time and that the conduct and skill of the gentlemen was admirable," Tracy noted in his diary.

Summer, and with it the time of the house party, came to an end. The leaves of the blueberry thickets began to turn crimson, and plumes of goldenrod waved across the fields and along the lanes.

Before the guests dispersed, they held a country ball for some of the Mount Desert Island residents they had met. Church spent the whole day helping Mrs. Tracy set up the house for the party. The celebrated young painter dabbled briefly in sculpture as he cut vegetables into flower shapes to decorate the platters. Winthrop made a lobster salad. Chairs were moved and sandwiches and desserts were laid out in the supper room.

Summer, and with it the time of the house party, came to an end. The leaves of the blueberry thickets began to turn crimson, and plumes of goldenrod waved across the fields and along the lanes.

Around sixty guests crowded into the house that evening. As they laughed and talked, candles flickered atop of a pine tree trimmed with vines and strings of cranberry. Dancing partners sashayed the length of the cleared-out dining room to the music of a fiddle and a flute. The islanders knew how to dance, one of them later recalled, thanks to their wintertime dancing classes in the empty carding room of the island's wool factory. In one of the parlors, people sang at the piano together.

Some of the bonds formed in that idyllic August of 1855 remained intact despite the resumption of busy city lives.

Winthrop improvised a funny poem and recited it during the soup course. The guests caroused as late into the night as at any splendid New York ball, with the last guests saying their goodbyes at two in the morning.

In early September, most of the house party left the island, scattering to New York, Boston, and Hartford. Church's sister Charlotte returned to her parents in Hartford, but he and his sister Elizabeth remained on the island for another week, accompanying Mrs. Tracy and her daughter Annie to a guest house at Schooner Head. Church and Annie thus had a whole week to become better acquainted. After leaving Mount Desert Island, Annie and her mother spent a night in Hartford with the Church family before going on to New York.

Some of the bonds formed in that idyllic August of 1855 remained intact despite the resumption of busy city lives. Winthrop and Church stayed close and were soon making plans for a wilderness trek together the following summer. Elizabeth Church came down from Hartford to stay with the Tracys in New York, and she and Mrs. Tracy exchanged warm letters. Annie's parents visited Church in his studio at the Art-Union to see his work in progress, and on occasion he dined with the Tracy family at their home.

People in New York began to speculate about Church and Annie. After a winter party at the Tracys' house, one young guest reported to his sister what people were saying. "Miss Annie Tracy, one of the prettiest girls in all New York, will one day, if prophets tell the truth be the wife of Mr. Church the great artist." [4]

Dr. Johnson, a writer and historian, gave a talk for the Beatrix Farrand Society in August 2023 on her book American Eden (Liveright/Norton, 2018), a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award. Her visit to MDI was in part to conduct research for her forthcoming biography of Frederic Church.

[4] Joseph Hodges Choate, 13 December 1857, in *The Life of Joseph Hodges Choate*, edited by Edward Sanford Martin (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 204.

BEATRIX FARRAND SOCIETY

The Beatrix Farrand Society (founded 2003) is located at Garland Farm, on Mount Desert Island in Maine. Garland Farm was the landscape architect and gardener Beatrix Farrand's last home and garden. It is the mission of the society to foster the art and science of horticulture and landscape design, with emphasis on the life and work of Beatrix Farrand.

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