

A Garden for All Seasons

Marjorie Merriweather Post's Hillwood

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Garden Docent Training 2019



Overview of Tonight's Material

- A Garden made to be shared
- MMP's approach to her gardens
- Important Influences
- MMP's gardens pre-Hillwood DC
- Arbremont to Hillwood – major changes
- Landscape Architects at Hillwood
- Two important new additions to Hillwood's gardens

A Garden to be Shared

- “Ours is an age in which proper recognition is being given to the importance of preserving cultural monuments of historic significance...Hillwood[‘s] gardens ...are typical of the best way of life that is fast disappearing.” [MMP, transfer document]
- Gilded Age lifestyle was “fast disappearing” and MMP wished for future generations to be able to learn about it firsthand

Louise Shelton, Beautiful Gardens in America, 1924, with photos of Hogarcito: “How few would be content to create a beautiful garden if none could see! ... In the flower garden the efforts are for ...giving back... If a garden is worthy of being shared with our intimates, can we close it to the stranger who may need [it] even more...The foreign custom of opening the fine places to the public...is one that we should freely emulate.” (MMP’s copy of this book is in HW’s library)

By the time Hillwood was completed, MMP had decided it was worthy of being a public institution.

MMP's Approach to Gardens

MMP directed landscape architects

Every garden was meticulously drawn before it was planted

Beauty is paramount

Color in every season

Formal and informal areas

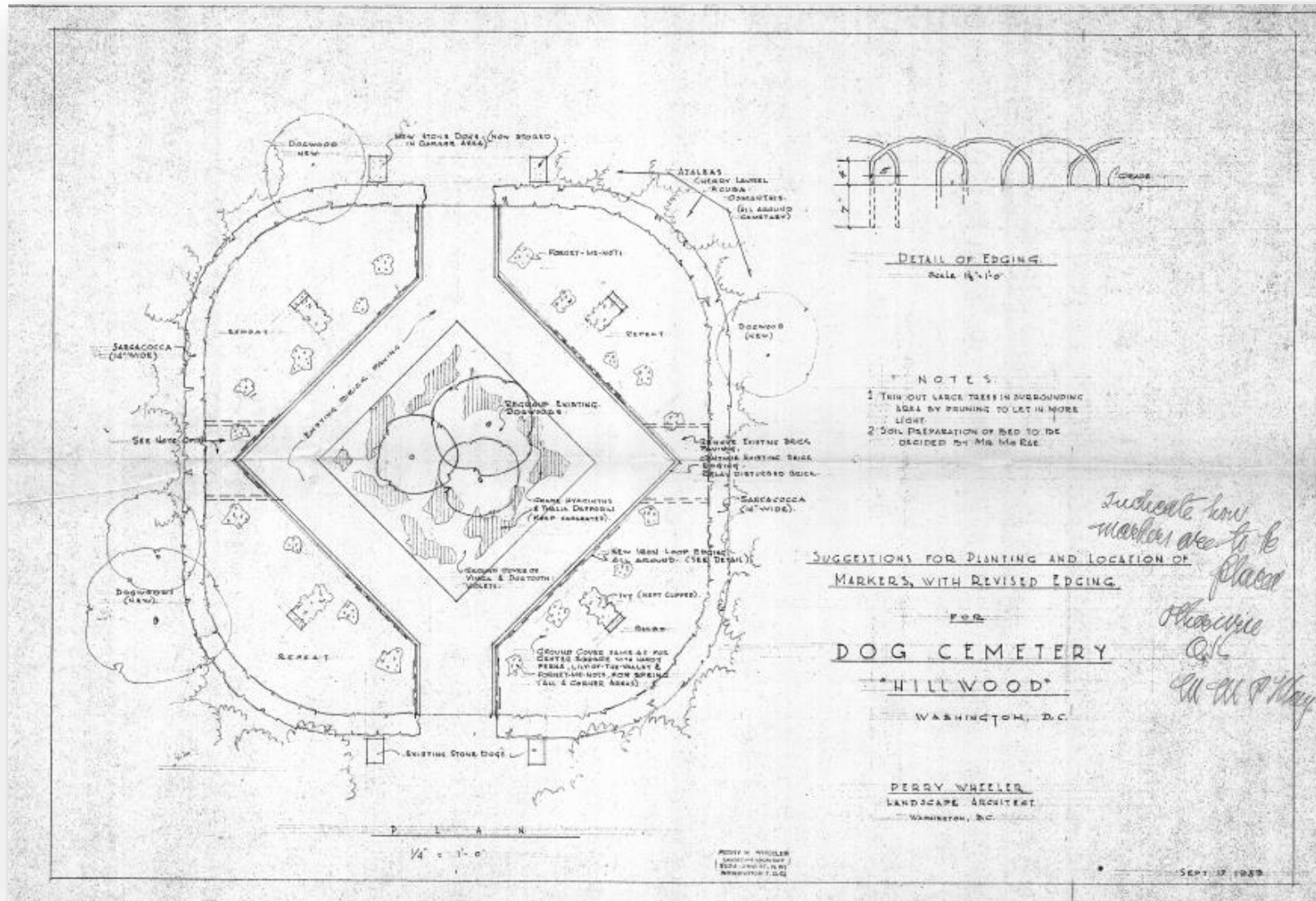
Perfection is desired, although practicality is considered

Exquisite relationship between interior and exterior

Marjorie Post Directed her Gardens

- MMP directed the overall design and feel of her gardens and asked the landscape designers with whom she worked to render her ideas and to suggest individual trees, shrubs and plants
- *“I am wondering if perhaps you might have a line on some garden design firm. I feel I am going to need some advice on the new garden at Hillwood and will be wanting to contact as large and as well organized a unit as I can, because I will probably be needing information as to where we can obtain certain types of plants, trees, and so forth, as well as suggestions for arrangements. On the other hand, we may simply need to consult them only for advice.”* MMP to McMillan and Company, August, 1955, Hillwood Archives.

Every garden at Hillwood was meticulously drawn and approved by MMP before it was installed



Beauty is the dominant theme
“She loved the beauty of gardens” Ellen Charles



Color in all seasons

“She loved color in her garden” Ellen Charles



Formal and Informal Areas

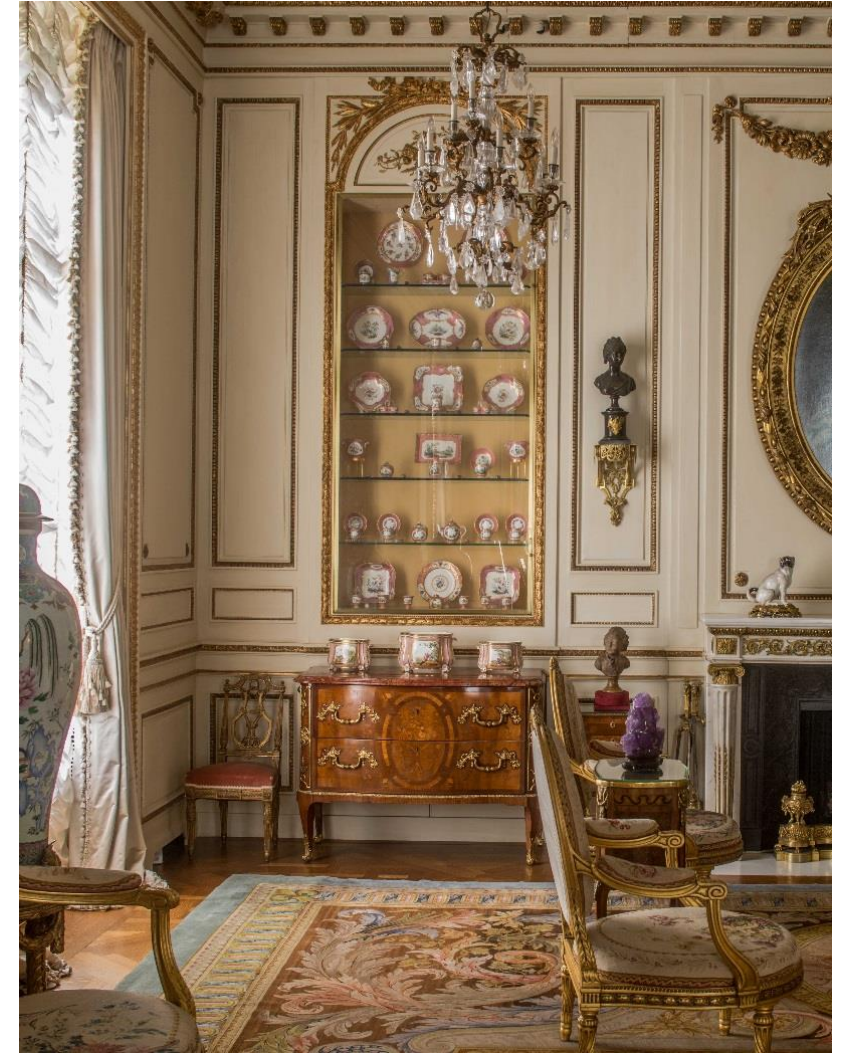


Perfection is desired

Low maintenance not a consideration, although practicality counted



Interior and Exterior Relationship



Relationship of Indoor to Outdoor Spaces

- Very careful relationship between the indoor and outdoor spaces – resulting in several significant changes to original grounds
- French parterre outside of French drawing room and below bedroom
- Octagonal garden room outside of Pavilion – steps inside Pavilion lead to doors to this small pocket garden, which functions as an anteroom to the French Parterre next door, or as the gateway to a stroll on the bituminous paths
- Lunar Lawn is on the central axis with the foyer at the portecochere. In MMP's time, guests could circulate through the house and out the door from the first floor library onto the portico and lunar lawn.

Important Influences

- “Country Place” era – ideal based on English model of the grand manor house with beautiful manicured gardens surrounding it.
- MMP visited England with her father in 1905 in a “coach and four” touring cathedrals, castles, formal and informal gardens and keeping a detailed scrapbook of her trip. Some of the ideas noted later find their way into her gardens.
- Frederick Law Olmsted: “We want a ground to which people may easily go after their day’s work is done, and where they may stroll for an hour, seeing, hearing, and feeling nothing of the bustle and jar of the city put far away from them.” (1870)

Marjorie Post's Gardens

The Boulders, her first home in Greenwich, CT (with E.B. Close)

Camp Topridge, Adirondacks

Hillwood, L.I., and Laurel Springs, S.C. (with E.F. Hutton)

Mar-a-Lago, Palm Beach

Tregaron, D.C. (with Joe Davies)

The Boulders
built 1904 – 1905,
burned down 1917



The house where Adelaide was born.

Camp Topridge
purchased 1920



Hillwood, Long Island

built in 1921, sold 1951, named C.W. Post College in 1954

NEW YORK CITY
Town & Country



IRIS AND A BROOK ON THE HUTTON ESTATE ON LONG ISLAND

The photograph provides a lesson on the possibility of developing beauty from a practical necessity. This brook is actually the overflow from the ice-box plant. It is piped under the garden, and later forms two pools, finally spilling in a cow trough



LOOKING THROUGH THE ROSE WALK INTO THE CIRCULAR ROSE GARDEN

The prototype is an old English covered walk; except that here it has been left open. The brick has been especially treated to remove any suspicion of newness and has, consequently, the appearance of having existed for years

Laurel Springs, purchased 1927

Laurel Springs Plantation
Green Pond S.C.



Deenie's new pony



This was the day after
Deenie's first ducking
paunt held her
ears with every shot.

Mar-a-Lago, built 1923 - 1927



Tregaron,
MMP 1942-55



By the time Marjorie Merriweather Post is developing Hillwood, she is a seasoned creator of gracious homes and gardens

Arbremont turns into Hillwood

- MMP bought the 25 acre estate in 1955, when she was 68 years old
- She spent 2 years renovating the house and garden
- She decided during the renovations that it would be left to the nation as a museum
- She wanted to create the perfect setting for her collections as well as a gracious space for entertaining and living, both indoors and out
- Arbore + mont = wood + hill = Hillwood. Also refers to L.I. home

Arbremont built in 1926

- Architect John Diebert; built as a residence for Colonel and Mrs. Henry Parsons Erwin
- Mrs. Erwin (Helen) was one of the Blodgett sisters
- The Blodgetts built houses for both of their daughters – Arbremont for Helen and “The Rocks” for Monica (Mrs. David St. Pierre Gaillard) across Rock Creek, both on hilltops but not “twin” houses
- Arbremont placed on axis with the Washington monument, due south by 5 miles

Arbremont's gardens

- Designed by Willard Gebhart and Rose Greely
- Reflected the lifestyle and activities of a family of five: swimming pool, stable and riding trails, circular rose garden, greenhouse, and oriental garden



MMP Changed Arbremont to suit her needs

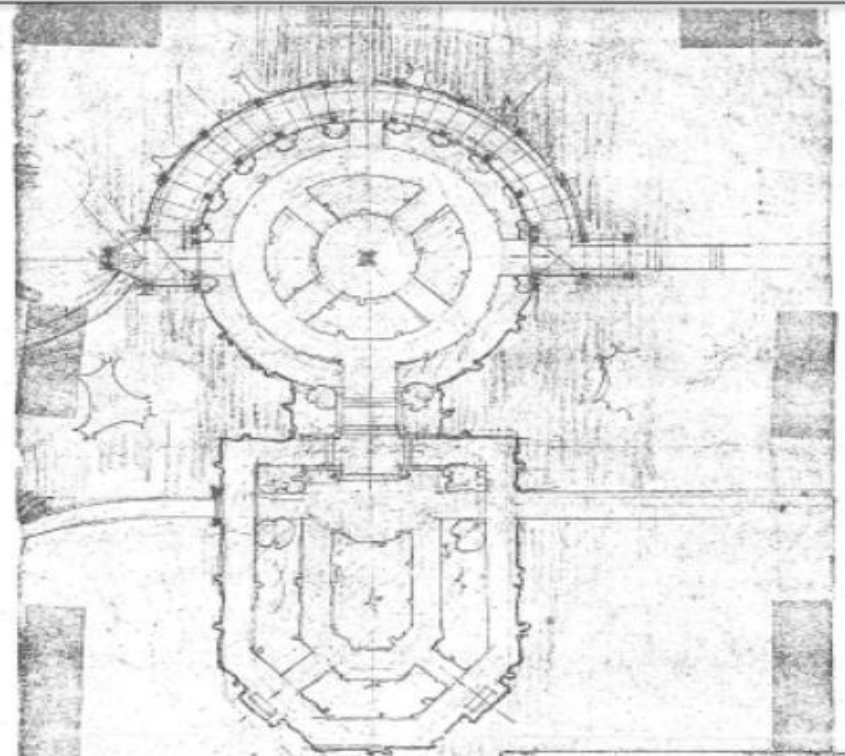
- Swimming pool was removed – was in the area where the dacha was built. MMP spent her summers in the Adirondacks.
- A fish pond, originally outside what became the French drawing room, was removed and in the footprint, French parterre installed as a private garden with ivy walls. MMP's bedroom window overlooked bedroom overlooked the parterre



What MMP Changed, continued

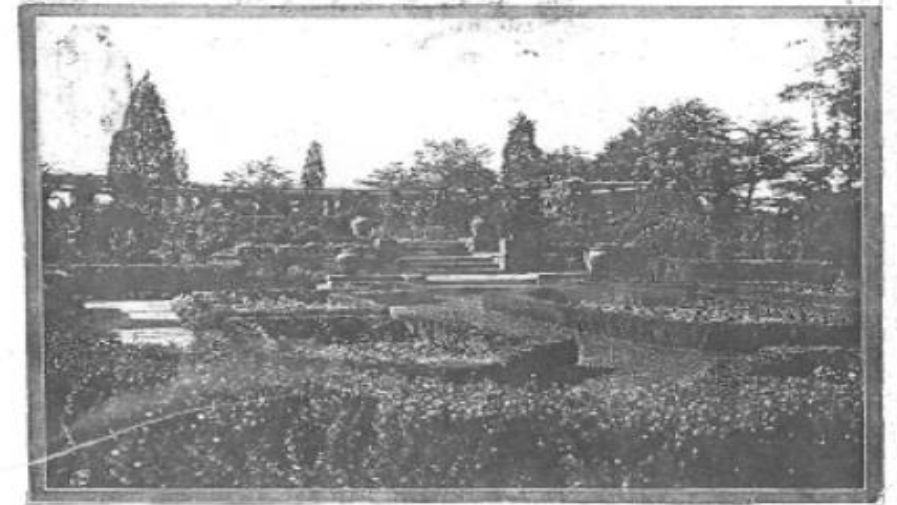
- Arbremont had a parterre, but it was located where the putting green was installed. MMP had it removed and replaced with a bentgrass putting green with 9 holes.
- The Rose garden remained essentially in the same location, and the stone steps that had been designed and installed by Rose Greely and Willard Gebhart were kept, as was the semi-circular pergola. She worked with Perry Wheeler to redesign the rose garden with a fountain in the center, planted with roses and tulips in the spring.

Arbremont's Rose Garden in T&C in 1937



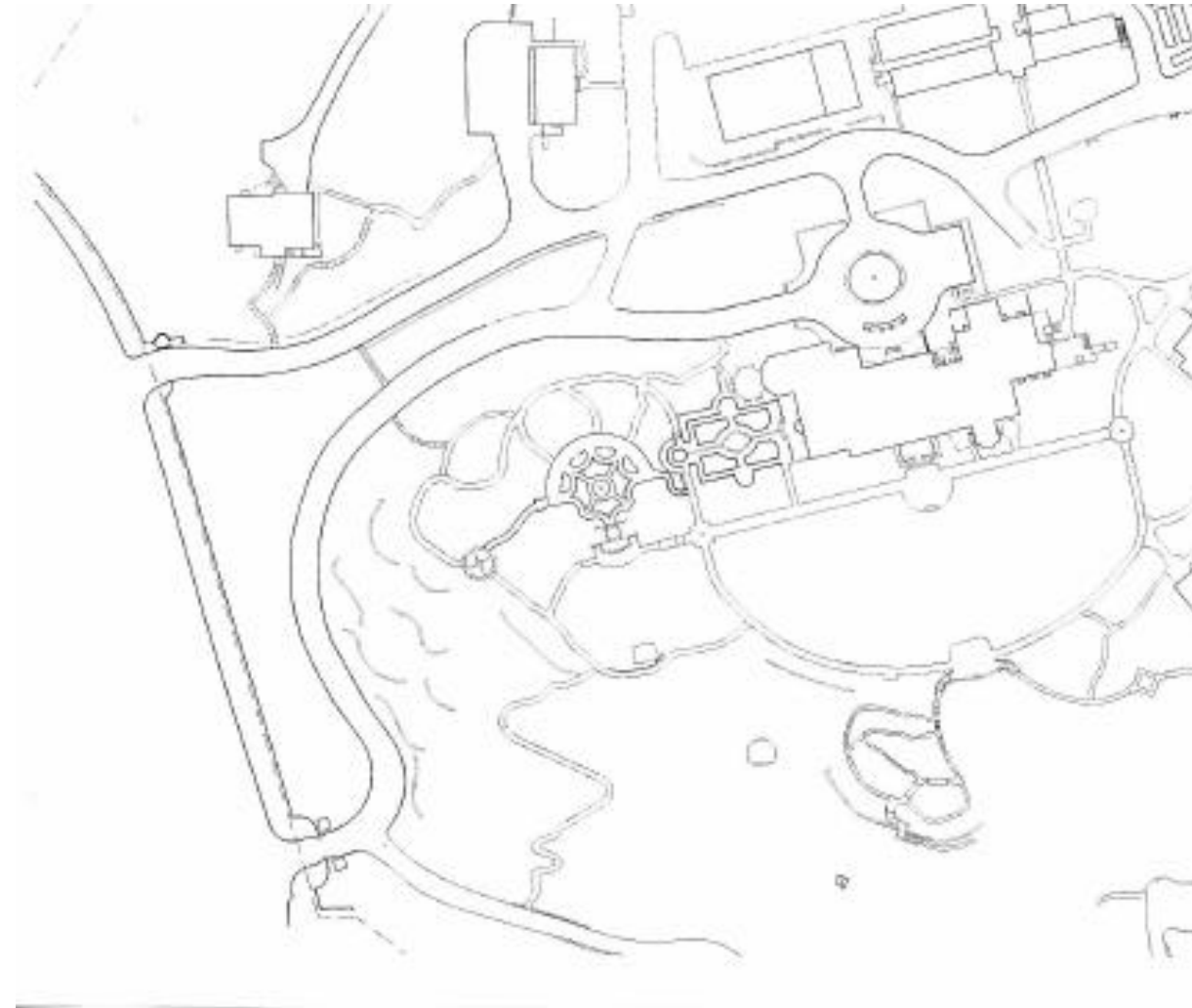
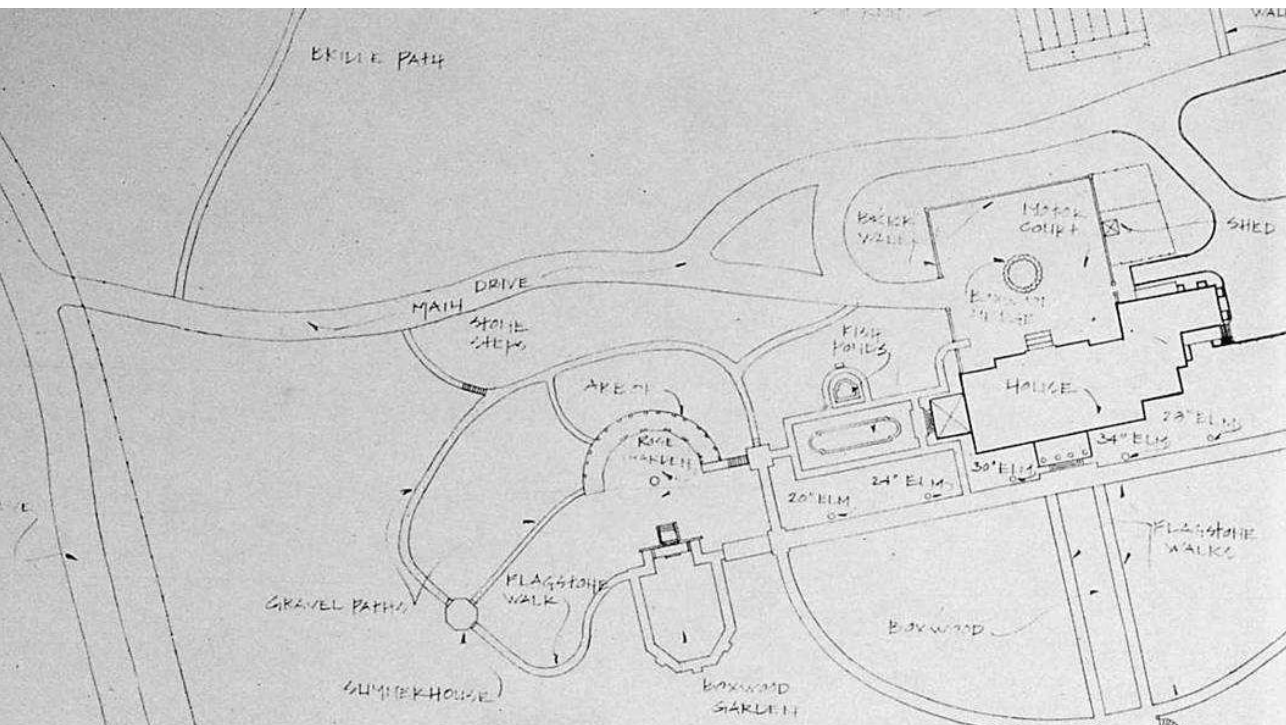
*My first job
Dec. '24*

Below—The terraced rose garden of the home of Colonel and Mrs. Henry F. Erwin in Washington, D. C. It has 15 fully laid out, each plot with an clipped box border, leading up to a terraced-ledge garden, view omitted.



Town & Country - 1937

Hillwood's new Entry Drive



Lunar Lawn Becomes Entertaining Space

- Arbremont had a boxwood allee from portico to overlook, which bisected what would become the Lunar Lawn, her biggest outdoor entertaining space.

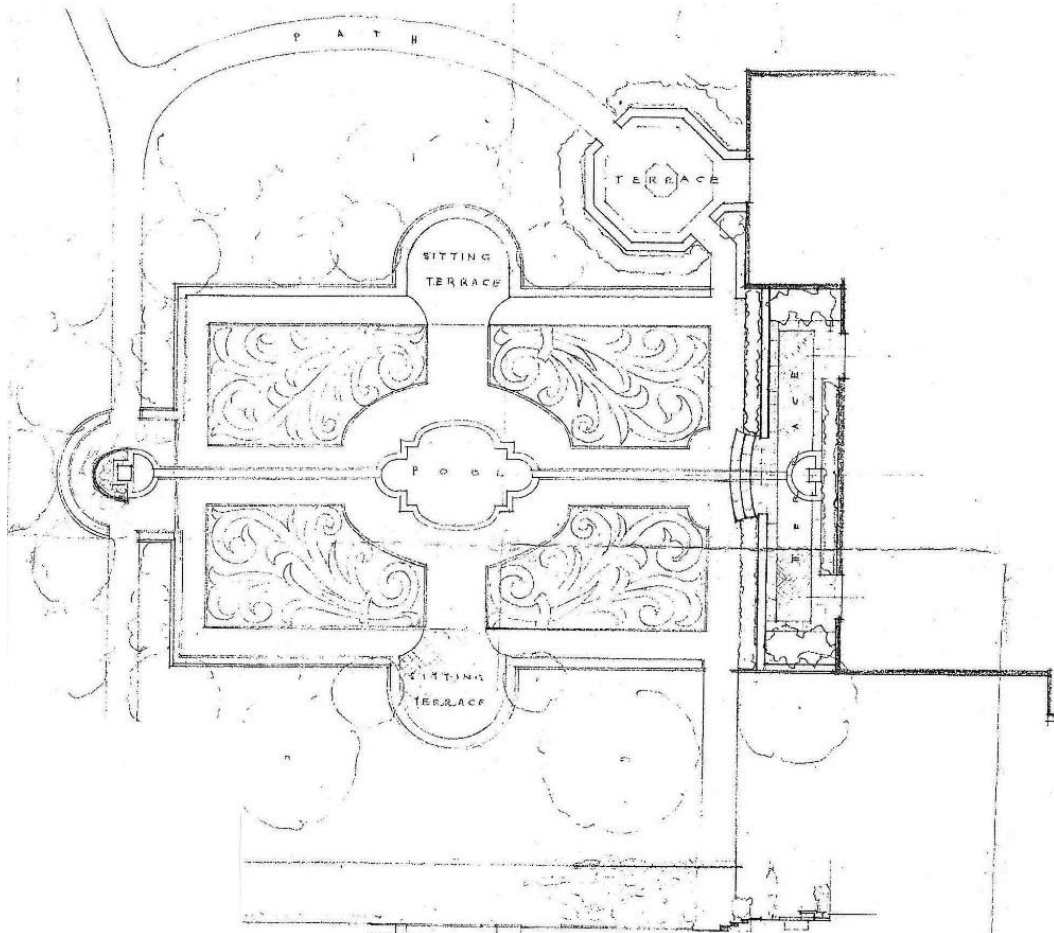


Landscape Architects at Hillwood

Innocenti & Webel

Perry Wheeler

Innocenti & Webel (1955-1957)

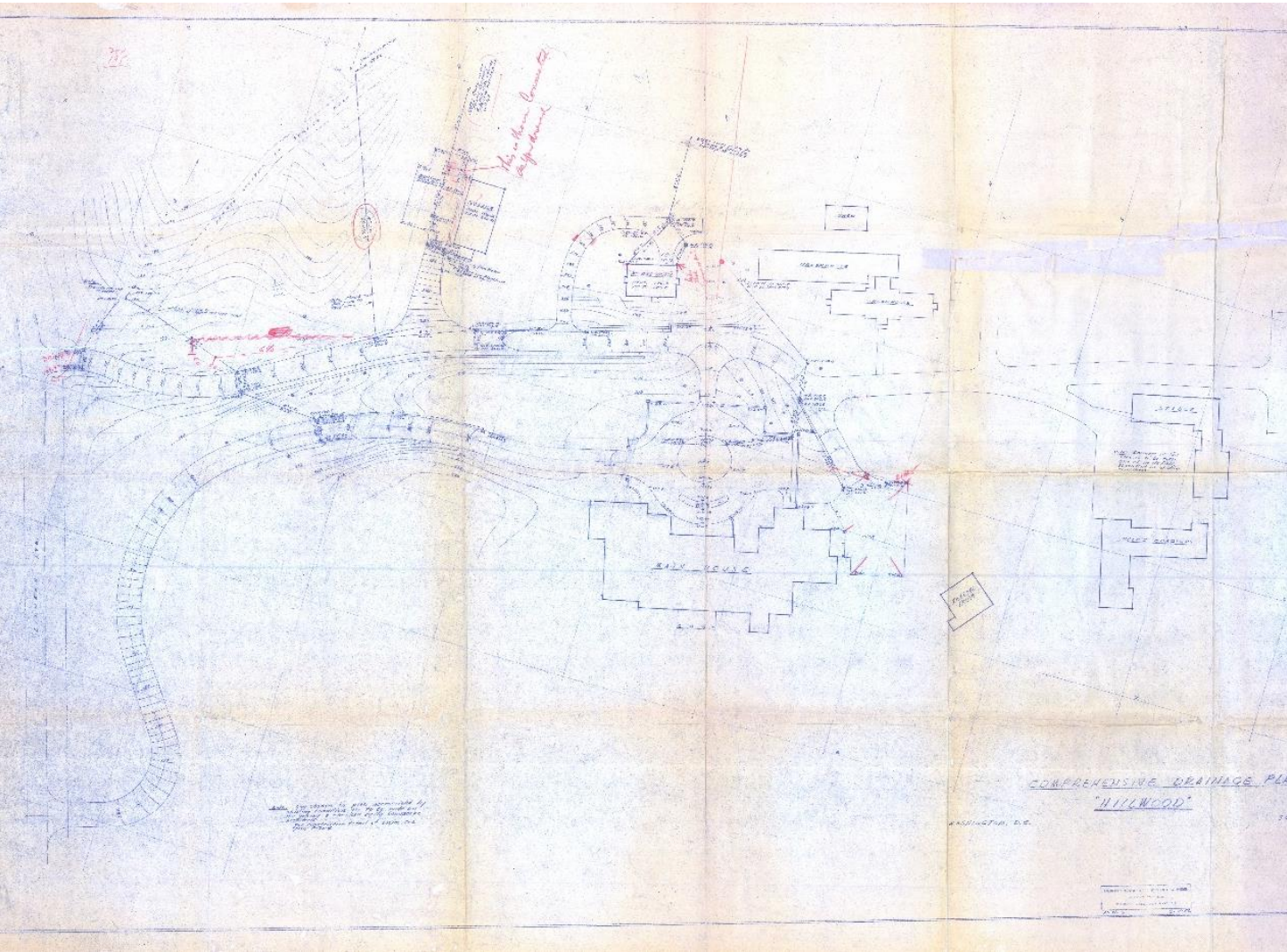


GARDEN
FOR
HILLWOOD
NIGHTON · D · C · SCALE · 1/8" = 1'-0"

Drawn by C. B. Ault
UMBERTO INNOCENTI · RICHARD K. WEBEL
ARCHITECTS
215 WEST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK 19, N.Y.

- Large, important Long Island firm established in 1931, working for many wealthy clients
- Umberto Innocenti consummate plantsman; Richard K. Webel a flawless draftsman, more academic
- Their gardens had strong formal geometries, axes, and evoked historic European gardens

Innocenti & Webel Gardens at Hillwood



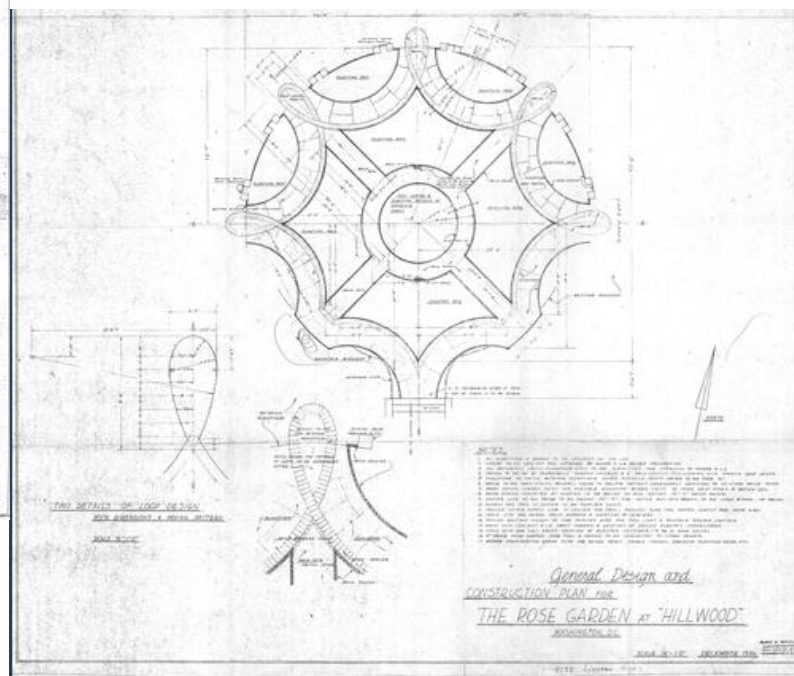
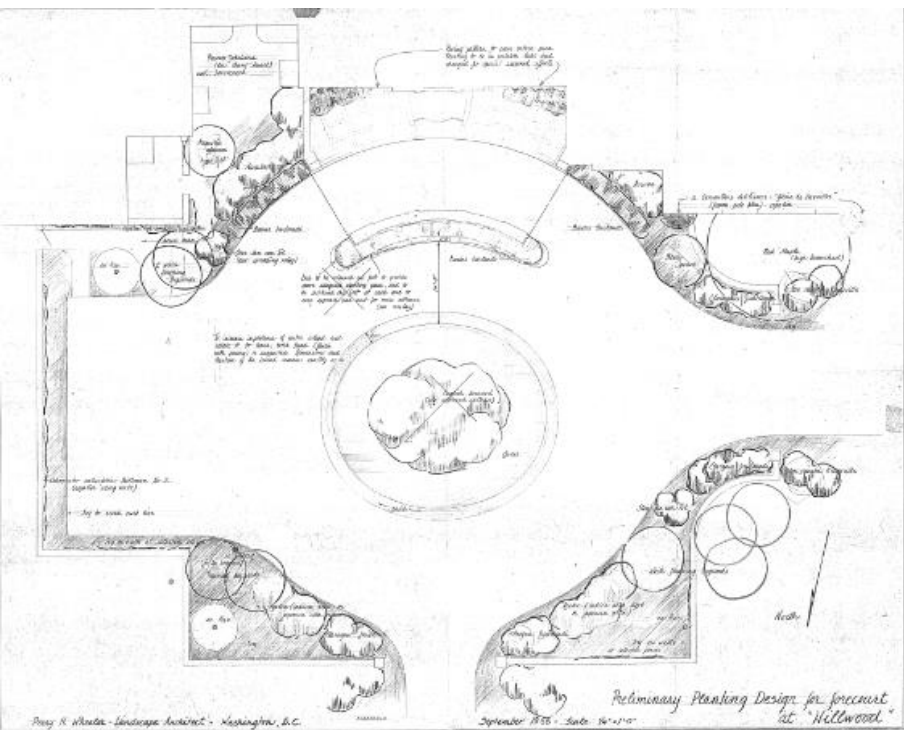
- Entry Drive
- First version of Motor Court
- French Parterre
- Octagonal Garden outside Pavilion

Perry Wheeler (1956-1959)

- “an urbane Southerner” (Higgins, Washington Post 2017)
- Born in Cordele, Georgia; BA in Landscape Architecture in 1937; moved to DC after WWII service in the camouflage unit
- Worked for many DC tastemakers, in 1961 with Bunny Mellon on White House Rose Garden (after Hillwood’s)



Perry Wheeler's gardens at Hillwood



- Refined Motor Court 1956
- Rose Garden 1957
- Lunar Lawn 1957
- Putting Green 1957
- Friendship Walk 1957
- Dog Cemetery 1959

Major additions to Hillwood's Gardens

Friendship Walk

Flagpole

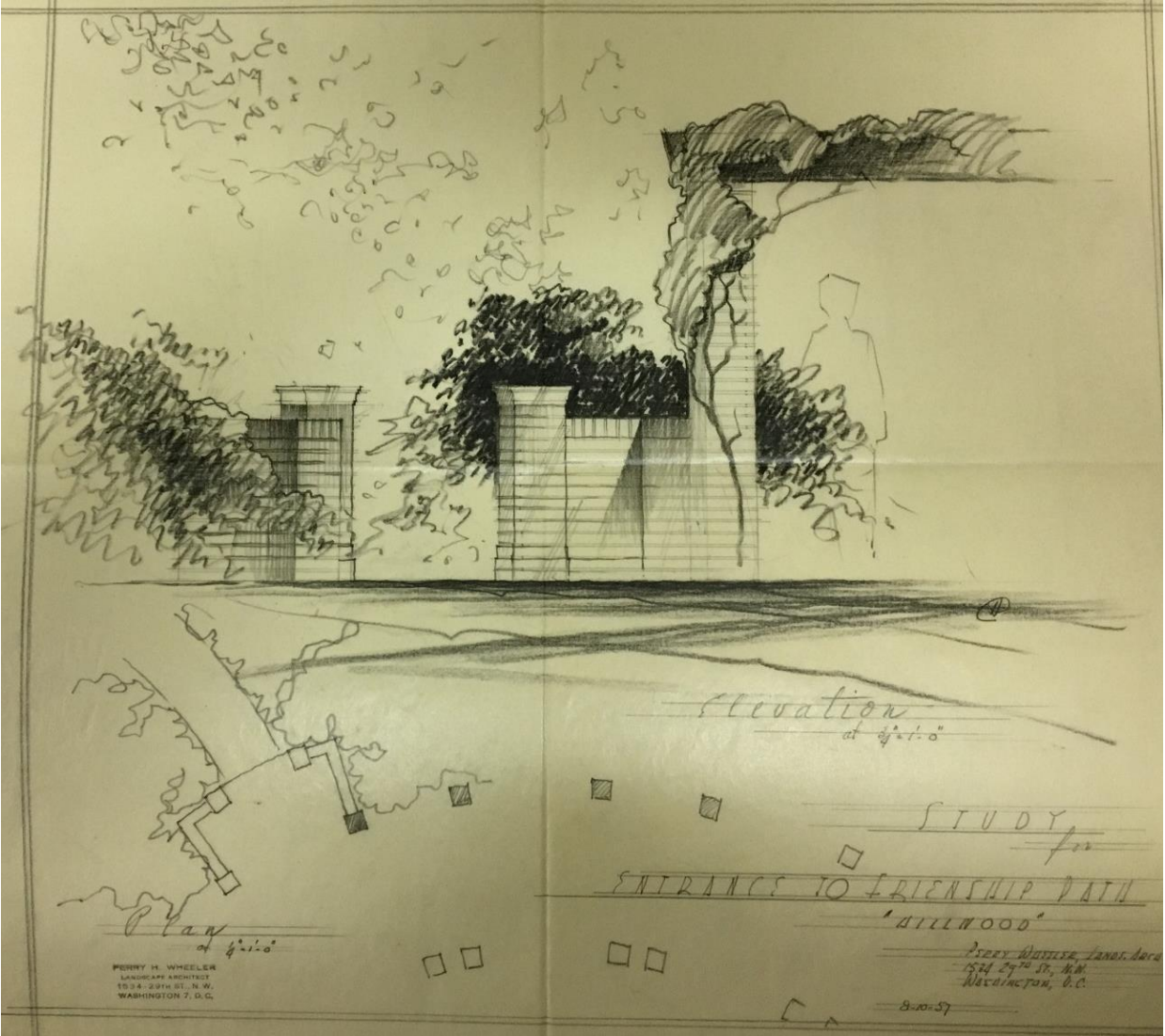
Friendship Walk

- Organized in secret in 1956 by Lady Lewis (Connie), Madame Augusto Russo (Frances), George Williams, and General and Mrs. H. Conger Pratt (Conger and Sadie)
- as “a testimonial to Marjorie... We are fully conscious of her love of beauty and the endless care she gives to her gardens.”
- contributions only from her intimate friends- diplomats, supreme court justices, ambassadors, generals, senators, socialites, cabinet members and her staff-to buy sculpture, paving, and shrubbery for the walk

“I know of no one more worthy of this recognition than Marjorie Post, or more kind and generous, yet withal so modest...I am delighted, and indeed greatly honored, to join you in this lasting expression of love.”

Letter from Anna Case MacKay to Major General H. Conger Pratt,
March 12, 1957, Bentley archives

Vision of Friends Planned by Perry Wheeler

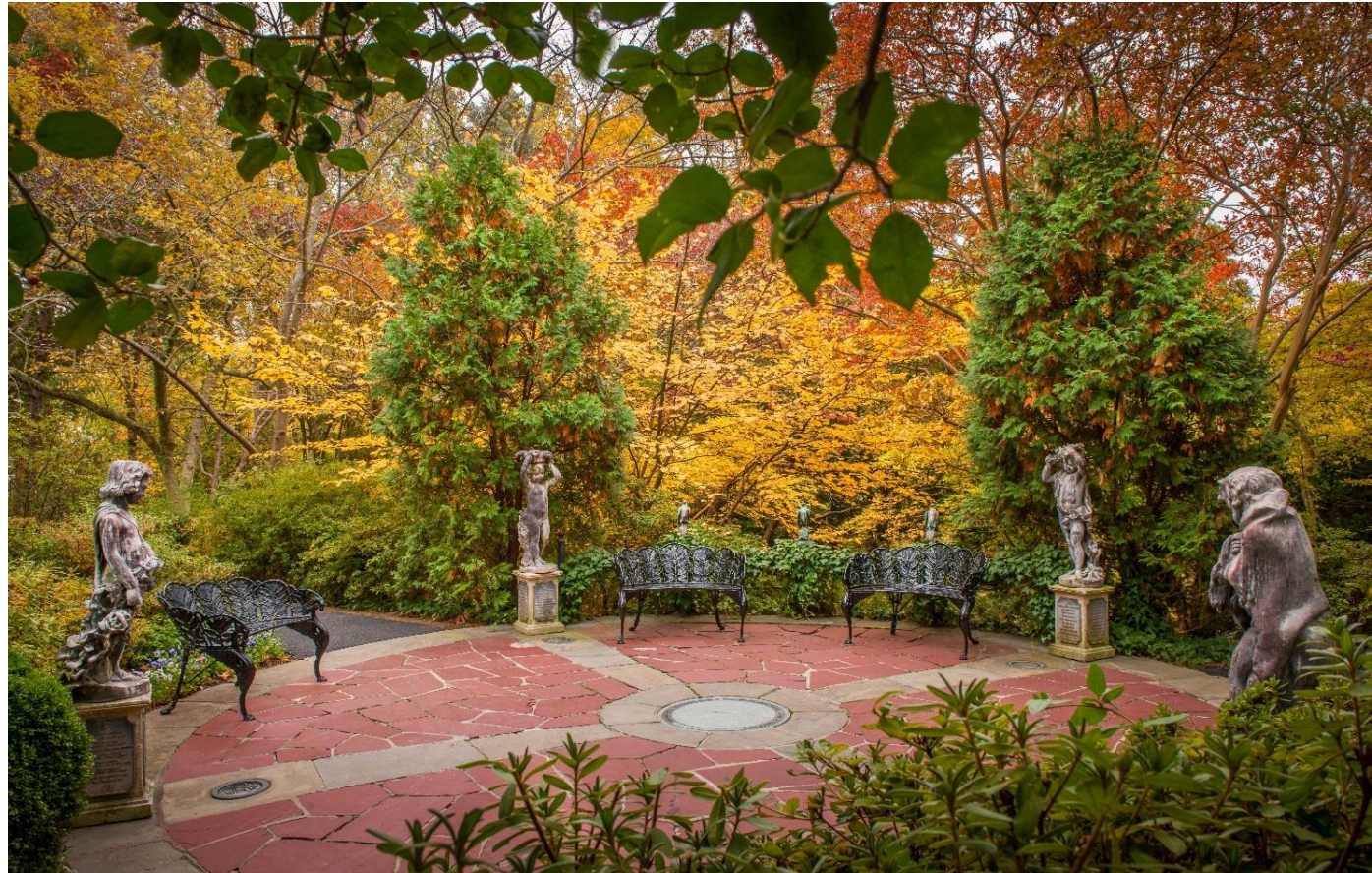


Sculptures

Marjorie Post's intimates knew well her sophisticated taste in the decorative arts, reflected in each piece of sculpture on Friendship Walk.

Lead cherubs representing the four seasons surrounding the circle are an extremely rare complete group that were cast in England in the late 18th century, set on limestone bases

Three bronze eagles by American sculptor Paul Bartlett were given by Caroline Jones Peter, his stepdaughter



Ault birdbath

A lead birdbath was given by Commander Ault, who was in charge of overseeing Hillwood's renovation

Organizers first approached him with the idea for Friendship Walk, and "with his assurances and blessing, [they] decided to go ahead with [the] plan."

The bronze plaque reads, "The birds are singing and the beauty of a garden is very close by. Presented to Mrs. Merriweather Post 1957 Cmdr & Mrs. Clyde B. Ault."

HW Archives Notes from Conger Pratt from FW dedication, 1957



Later additions to Friendship Walk



Flagpole

- “Now hear this. Now hear this. To the Commodore, all hands of all branches of the service salute you on your birthday and beg to present to you in honor of this special occasion flagstaff with yardarm to fly the stars and stripes and house ensign aboard the flag ship Hillwood. Positive bearings to the Commodore’s decision. Respectfully Officers and Crew.”
- Marjorie Post received this telegram on the morning of her 75th birthday, March 15, 1962

A Gift from a Devoted Staff

- “The one thing that HILLWOOD lacks is a flagstaff and with yardarm once again Mrs. May’s house ensign can fly – reminiscent of the SEA CLOUD”
- Staff from all 4 properties (Hillwood, Mar-a-Lago, Camp Topridge, Rosewall) was invited to “participate to any extent you might wish.”
- Outpouring of response, and over 100 contributions from \$2 to \$300 came in
- Eight bronze tablets around the base bear the names of the participants

Staff Invited to the Dedication

- Charles Cronk, 83 year old 50-year security officer for Post, retired but considered the “dean”, spoke for the staff. He cited her “never-failing kindness, friendliness and devotion” and presented the flagpole and scroll to her.
- Afterwards, a color guard of U.S. sailors hoisted the flag and yellow-and-blue pennon, Post’s personal signal on the Sea Cloud. That small flag was flown at Hillwood and Camp Topridge, when she was there.
- teen-aged fife-and-drum platoon of boys in Revolutionary costume danced a minuet with girls wearing Colonial hoop skirts and wigs

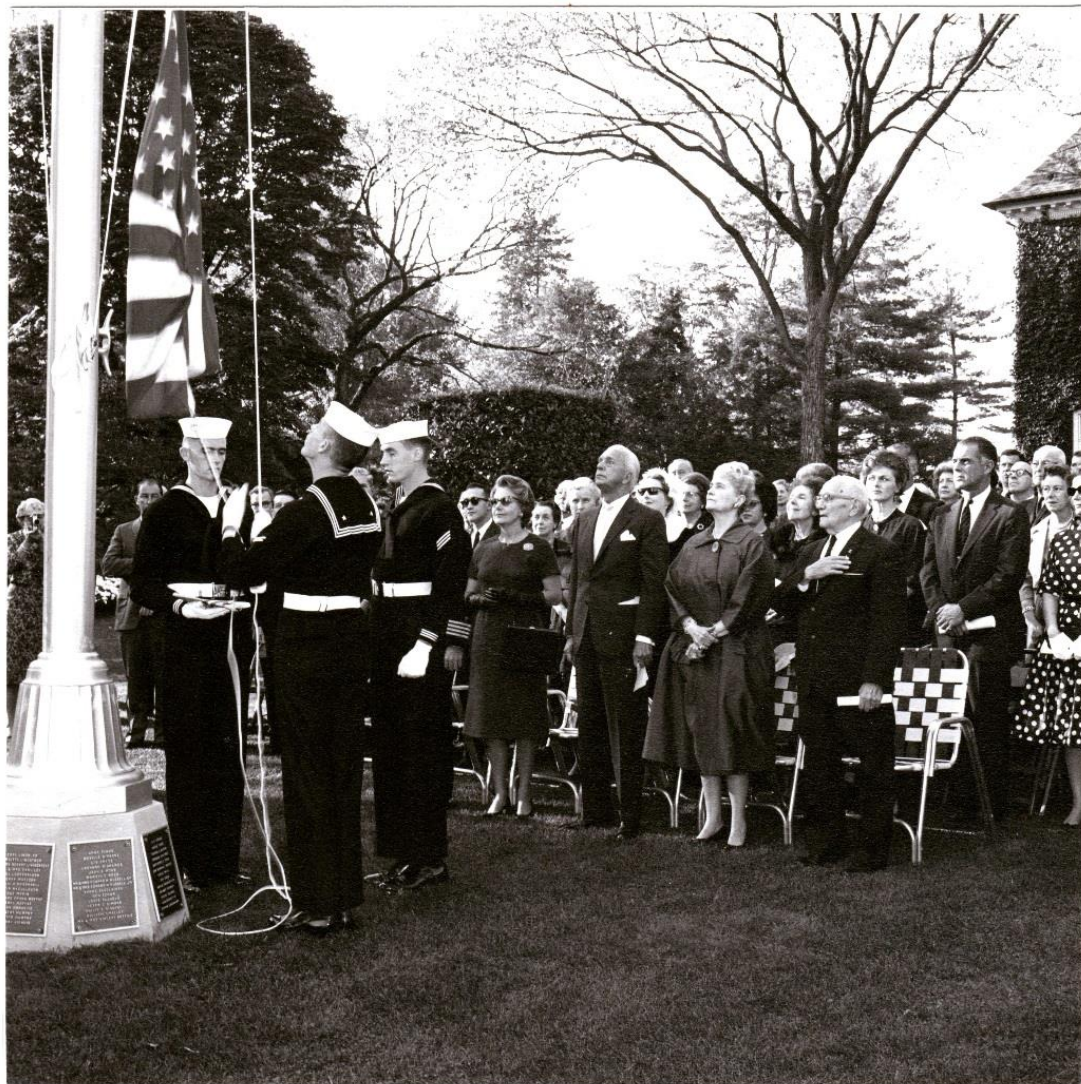
Flagpole dedication on 10/20/1962

HONORING
Commodore Majorie Merriweather Post May

On the occasion of the "COMMODORE'S" birthday, Thursday, March 15 th, 1962, we, the Officers and Crew, offer her our affectionate appreciation for her never failing kindness, friendliness, and unselfish devotion to the welfare of all of us, and as a token of our lasting esteem, we express to her warm best wishes for continued good health and happiness, and present to her this Flagpole at Hillwood.

Long may Old Glory wave, with the Commodore's flag on the yardarm.

Walter A. Blacklock	Walter J. Swirely	Frank J. Kowalski	Agnes Ranko
Margaret Antton	Arthur Field	Richard Hochler	Leonard Richards
Olona Baitkainen	George Niemi	Walter M. Korolev	Jean C. Roth
Carol M. Blythe-Riddell	Walter Manning	Walter J. Korolev	Morris C. Ross
Merrill Bailey	Edward Fogarty	Carole Koplauer	Miss Mrs. Ethel Russell
W. J. Ballester, Sr.	Clara Finckles	Joseph Lortson	Miss Mrs. Ethel Russell
W. J. Ballester, Jr.	William Ford	Olga Lindberg	Sydney Korhonen
Walter E. Beach	Capt. Karl Wagner	Edith Lindblad	Ben Fisher
Reginald Birkbeck, Sr.	Walter Gibson	Reginald Lindstrom	Levi Sjoqvist
Bertie Birde	Miss Mrs. J. S. Griffin, Jr.	Miss Mrs. R. E. Kingstone	Peter C. Simons
Wesley Blackney	Miss Mrs. J. S. Griffin, Jr.	Madeline Carl Key	Philip S. Simpfel
Anthony Brewer	Miss Mrs. J. S. Griffin, Jr.	Paul Lockenbough	William Smalley
Victoria Brown	Mabel E. Grogan	Jenny Mattson	Miss Mrs. E. K. Little
James Burrows	Frank E. Grogan, Sr.	Albin McCallough	R. J. Strubbe
Earl Basselman	Tom Hanson	Philip C. McConnell	Marion Taylor
Billy Cannella	Ray Harsanyi, Jr.	Gay Moez	Wanda J. Taylor
Walter Christie	Capt. L. Williams	Miss Mrs. R. H. Haffert	Walter J. Taylor
W. J. Colwell, Sr.	Estelle Howell	Carol Haffert	Margaret E. Veigt
Victoria Cortich	Chas. Higgins	John Harwitz	Alan E. Wallen
John Cota	David Hill	Robert Murphy	Edith Walls
Charles H. Crank	Walter Holmes	Walter Murphy	Bob White
Frank Del Monte	J. A. Howard	Harvey Nielsen	Martha Witherspoon
Edgar Exelt	Cl. Jacobson	Olga Ranko	Reuben Williams
Irma E. Frenberg	Smith J. J. J. J.	Walter R. Ranko	Walter Williams
Clarence Ellis	Eric Johnson	Louis H. Riddell	Eric J. Johnson
Franklin Farrell	Miss Mrs. Walter Jones	Leo Roffey	Monica J. Johnson



A Weekend of Celebration

- Staff were put up in hotels and given tickets to the symphony
- “I believe you to be the two most marvelous and exceptional persons in the world, to open that beautiful home to all of us and to treat us so royally. I felt like Cinderella most of the time...”
- “You’ve heard the old saying that no man is a hero to his own valet. I guess that you’re the exception needed to prove the rule, for it’s obvious that you’re heroine, goddess and lady bountiful rolled into one for everyone from the gardeners up.”

Major Themes

- MMP was intensely involved in creating Hillwood's gardens, even though she never planted anything. She had great experience in making memorable, large garden spaces.
- She had a vision for spaces that would serve her needs during her lifetime and provide public good after her death
- She worked with great landscape architects to achieve her vision
- Beauty and color in all four seasons as well as many "rooms" both formal and informal characterize Hillwood's gardens
- Her friends and staff gave her "Friendship Walk" and the Flagpole to show their admiration and appreciation for her generosity and love of beauty

Honoring and Executing Marjorie Post's Vision

- Staff maintain the seasonal displays that MMP established: tulips and other bulbs in the Spring; annuals in the Summer and Chrysanthemums in the Fall
- 5 year plan to revitalize the interstitial gardens was created with her aesthetic in mind – rejuvenating the spaces with new plant material in keeping with historic plantings
- Hardscape renovations put the same stones back in the same spots as much as possible
- The garden is living, so renewing it is a constant, and is always done with MMP's standards and style in mind

QUESTIONS?

HILLWOOD
ESTATE, MUSEUM & GARDENS