

November 13, 1940

Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss,
Dumbarton Oaks,
3101 R Street,
Washington, D.C.

Dearest Gardening Twin and Robert too:

How relieved you must be to know that Dumbarton is now safely across the bridge and under the shield of permanent Harvard. While the wrench is desperately hard, the sense of security is entirely worth while, and I am glad for you that you have this comfort in spite of the pain it has meant.

Naturally, Max and I followed every hour of all the opening festivities, from the staff reception, of which Mr. Russell told me, to the formal reception, all the conferences, and the intervening lunches, dinners and festivities. I wish we might have been there with you, but frankly neither of us are valid yet for so continuous a performance. Max is definitely getting better and strong and is very wisely taking care of himself and, but for eyes which trouble him still from time to time, and a lack of endurance, he is all right. As for me, there is no question of a gentle voice muttering pleasant inanities as to my being well, because that is not true, but it is true that I am definitely stronger than two months ago,

and that the troublesome stone bruise on the sole of my foot is also definitely disappearing. It has been a long, hard, uphill trek, but after all, the bank account has been very steadily overdrawn for well over forty years and I suppose pay day must come sooner or later. You can put me off your mind definitely as to worry. It is a terrific bore and hard to gauge just how slowly to go and, of course, there are many tumbles on the uphill road, but it is all right, and I hope by the end of the winter that I shall at least be valid for a reasonable, mild day's work.

Naturally I am heart-broken not to have been able to make the last personal visit to Dumbarton, but that, after all, is only a minor regret.

Now, as to the general work. Miss Havey and I have been in close communication and I have written her fairly fully about all the different things and am grateful, beyond measure, to her for having carried so much of the work in my absence. Lettering is entirely safe in her hands. She is really extraordinarily good at it in spacing and quality.

I go back to your letter of July 24th.

1. Delighted the Forsythia arch cartouch has been cut, benches finished, and am keen to see where the bird bath has been placed

near the step platform.

2. Lilac circle. I hope this has worked out to your satisfaction.

3 & 4. Service gates and caps made and in place. Excellent. I hope to have photographs of these from Miss Havey.

5. Decision to use limestone quite correct.

6. Paint colors being worked on; blue satisfactory and hope the creams and reds are good by this time and the greens also.

7. Terrior seat probably now finished.

8. Quite sorry the shell was not feasible for the fountain in the lilac trellis.

9. Finials being made in fruit for south wall of Dumbarton.

I, too, am sorry this has had to be, but hope it is not disappointing to you.

10. Hurray, for the usability of the bamboo iron seat!

11. Decision made on Dumbarton Oaks Park.

12. So foolish of me not to have told Bryce to move the drain from the east side of the ellipse so that it would not drench the newly placed seat.

13. Delighted the bluestone path north of the Museum is good.

14. I felt sure the trellis on the south side of the service driveway would work out well.

15. Regarding the finishing of the planting around the south building.

Now, as to the letter of October 19th. I pass

over all the political and war situation as, if we went into this, the real business end of this letter would never be reached.

Mr. Russell told me about Robert's unfortunate accident and I grieved deeply for him, knowing how terribly he would mind and how hard it would be for both of you. I trust it is all over and settled now.

As to the great white oak. You do not say which one this is, but I suppose it must be the one in the Green Garden, which has been ill for the last two years. It will be a dreary loss to have it go, but I confess not being surprised as I know Mr. Thompson, Bryce and I actually wondered whether the tree would come into leaf this last summer. Of course, this Green Garden tree may not be the one you speak of. It might be the one at the foot of the east lawn or one of the big ones down by the brook. I fear, however, it is the one in the Green Garden. Shall you try and replace it by a youngster? It would seem to me most desirable to do this even though it will look awkward for a number of years. I do not know whether I should have the courage to do it myself, but I know it ought to be done!

Miss Havey has sent me her sketch drawings for

1. The big inscription on the west wall of the north Museum Building. It seemed well spaced and good.
2. The sketch for the "eared" seat against the west wall of the

west loggia. I wish it had not been quite so rococo, but you know best whether it fits in with its rather elegant surroundings and fine detail.

3. The bench for the niche in the Museum entrance, which seemed to me excellent.

4. The sketch for the bench, two chairs and table for the platform in the court.

5. The position of the cornerstone and notes as to its charming inscription.

Miss Havey tells me you are working on inscriptions for the front door. Perhaps these are for the painted ones you and I have discussed for the inside of the vestibule, where they would look so handsome as wall decoration. She also tells me you are asking for bench designs for the ellipse and that you had a vague notion of using something like the bulk of the benches in the north vista. I think she must have mistaken your ideas on this as you and I have always "seen" the ellipse as a very quiet and almost classical place, so that the benches for this space we have always thought of as being nearly purely classical and without much ornament. Perhaps in a rather fine material, and if not, of marble or some fine stone. Miss Havey also says you are going to have the inscriptions cut on the Forsythia circle and along the outer rim of the Forsythia circle. I shall be

keen to know what these are. One thing has not been mentioned and that is the necessity for some sort of a wooden gate across the hazel walk when the transfer is made to park. This, I think ought to be in mind unless it has already been accomplished.

The several things you and I have talked of for the dim future are probably to be laid away for the present, such as the dipping well, the wall dial and the little wall around the south parking space opposite the front door. It would seem to me well to study this last fairly soon, as the more general use of this parking space, perhaps unwatched with as much care as in the past, will make some sort of barrier imperative. I should dearly love to be "in" on this.

What a comfort and relief it must have been to Bryce to know that he and his men are to go on in the care of their beloved grounds and with you nearby.

Please feel entirely free to write me or to keep silent. I am quite able to work for a short space of time and there is no place which lies nearer my heart than Dumbarton, and of which I think more steadily, affectionately and gratefully. You and I are so twined in among the roots and growth of the place that we can never separate from it, and are tied thereby to each other. As you are not only going through the

struggle of final settling and unsettling, but the moving and transfer, I shall expect no news from you until there is a time which is not stolen at three o'clock in the morning.

As Berkeley Updike has been staying with us, we sent him up to Santa Barbara just to have a "look see", and as our car was taking him up, I sent a series of questions to Lucking, which he has answered satisfactorily. They are mainly routine questions as to the need of fertilizers, pruning and general upkeep and these I will answer to him and send a carbon to you of the letter which goes to him and send another carbon to Mr. Russell. As I hope to go to Santa Barbara before very long, it seemed to me sensible for me to ask you if you would like me to have a look at Casa Dorinda. It would seem to me rather sensible.

Now an end to this long screed. With a fond hug,
even though in type,

Your ever own,