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June 28, 1941

Prof. Paul J. Sachs
Fogg Museum of Art
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Mr. Sachs:

In a letter which is going today to Mr. Thacher and to Mrs. Bliss a tentative brief report on the Dumbarton Oaks grounds policy is being sent them for sharp criticism, suggestion, and much needed improvement. Will you give the sketch of the report your attention and see where I have omitted material questions and whether the questions we all have in mind seem to be covered.

We are hoping that either business or pleasure may bring you and Mrs. Sachs in our neighborhood this summer as we should like to show you our attempt at a Northern acid-soil garden.

With kind regards, I am,

Yours very sincerely,

Beatrix Farrand

REPORT SUBMITTED FOR CRITICISM AND SUGGESTION.

The splendid gift from the Hon. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss of Dumbarton Oaks house, collections, and grounds to Harvard University carries with it the need for a re-study of certain problems in grounds management. The transfer of ownership from an intimately personal control to a necessarily more impersonal but an enduring educational institution must alter the point of view from which the gardens are considered. The responsibility of keeping up the integral units of the design is fully realized and accepted by Harvard together with the recognition of an alteration in certain principles of maintenance. It is not necessary to emphasize that the first duty of an educational institution is to use its resources for the benefit of its students; and for them the teaching staff, library and collections are of paramount importance. At the same time the training of the eye to an understanding of outdoor beauty should be acknowledged as a vital part of the student's life at Dumbarton Oaks. The composition of the views from the windows at which they may study, the unconscious infiltration into their minds of daily familiarity with garden problems and their solution must be important.

It is hoped that the larger simple lines of the design may remain reasonably unchanged as none of them have been established without much thought. The entrance roads, wide lawns, flower terraces, Lovers Lane Pool, Green garden, and North vista all seemed to fit the landscape better than other features which were discussed and in some instances tried. There is no intention implied or latent that the design be kept unchanged, but the suggestion is made that alterations if considered be made only after careful study and with a reasonable hope of their fitting into an already established scheme. Therefore certain few principles should be taken into account.

One of the characteristics of the Dumbarton Oaks grounds is a pleasant sense of withdrawal from the nearby streets, together with the feeling of an intimate connection with all that a great city can offer. This quiet and seclusion should be preserved by care and re-planting of its boundaries, and as the students will mainly be in residence during the leafless months of the year evergreen plant material should make up the bulk of its boundary shields. For the same reason the plants immediately surrounding the house should be mainly evergreen. The open lawns to the south and southeast of the house were designed to give a sense of spaciousness and ease of scale and therefore these should be preserved and well kept up.

The trees, many of them of great age and beauty, should be intelligently cared for and re-planting done to ensure the eventual replacement of some of the older growth. The shrubs are of somewhat secondary importance but nevertheless are vital to the design as a whole, so that the Forsythia hollow, the Box ellipse, the Crabapple knoll, the Cherry slope, and the White Azalea plantation should be maintained and replaced when they show deterioration.

The effects of flowers in the fountain terrace and the herbaceous border are important to carry on with care and study of colour effect at the season they will mainly be seen. The roses in the large central level of the terraces will inevitably become less important as the clipped Box edging and free standing plants encroach on the smaller growth; but the proportion of the design should be kept and the edgings restrained from becoming hedges and the clipped plants from growing into trees, which would be too large in scale for the area.

In order to provide for replacement of the plants which seem inevitably associated with Dumbarton Oaks it may be wise to start a small nursery for Box, Yew, Holly, Oaks, and other plants which are costly to buy in large size.

The use of the greenhouses must be studied. Adequate but not extravagant quantities of potted and cut flowers should be provided for the house and in certain places for the garden. There should, however, be a reduction made in the amount of flowers used but not of their quality. It should be possible to reduce the greenhouse growing space with resulting reduction in labor and heating costs.

The start of a plant record book such as is found useful at the Universities of Chicago, Princeton and Yale is suggested. Such a book keeps in an easily accessible and yet alterable form a record of the different units, whether these be buildings and their surroundings, or open spaces, and the types of planting that have seemed fitting and effective.

The use of the grounds should be encouraged by guided parties of school children, Boy and Girl Scouts, and other like groups. The grounds should be of real value to these students as well as to those in residence at Dumbarton Oaks itself. The "Catalogue House" should be made of increasing usefulness; its changing displays of well chosen illustrations of the Dumbarton Oaks plant material and birds are full of information for nature classes and students of outdoor life.

June 28, 1941.

*Respectfully submitted,
Beatrix Tanager*