

BEATRIX FARRAND
LANDSCAPE GARDENER
REEF POINT
BAR HARBOR, MAINE

June 11, 1946

Mr. John S. Thacher, Director
Dumbarton Oaks
3101 R Street
Washington, 7, D. C.

Dear Mr. Thacher:

Here are the notes made as a result of the talks Mr. Patterson and I have had since his return from Dumbarton. You will like to know that his liking for the whole surroundings increases with his acquaintance and he is heartily anxious to work at the problems in the way in which we can all best collaborate. I feel he is a real asset and with his fresh eye I think he will give us many suggestions as wise and new as the treatment of the sides of the herbaceous border. A copy of the notes is being sent to Mrs. Bliss together with a letter, a carbon of which is enclosed to you. But for your own ear, please let me say that I should think it would be wise to contemplate selling some of the over-size box. I have suggested to Mr. Patterson that the box edging on the walk running north and south on the beech terrace be replaced by the largest size now available, which Mr. Patterson thinks is about six to eight inches high. This ^{large} box could I think be sold as I see no immediate need for it and I have therefore suggested to Mr. Patterson writing tentatively to Mr. Thompson to see whether the Parks might be willing to consider purchasing box from Dumbarton if the decision is made to sell it. This opens the question but engages neither of us to proceeding.

Mr. Patterson says he is now hoping to be in Washington on June 20th and 21st and trusts this may be convenient to you. Mrs. Bliss's presence on his second visit is perhaps not as vitally important as it was on his first trip as there will be much detailed work to do and he wants to study certain areas fairly carefully.

Tell me quite frankly whether these notes sent you follow the lines of your thinking as after all we are a four-in-hand and not a tandem.

You will like to hear that Professor Sachs sent me a most polite note congratulating me on the appointment to the Arboretum. Perhaps as you wisely thought this appointment may make your position easier with regard to the landscape care of Dumbarton Oaks as we are now doubly bound to Harvard.

Yours ever sincerely,

Beatrix Farrand

Mr. Thacher

Suggestions discussed with Mr. Patterson with regard to
first visit to Dumbarton Oaks, May 27-28-29, 1946

Mr. Patterson and Mrs. Farrand agree entirely that additional paving while perhaps not immediately needed is desirable to provide near the orangery where the garden visitors congregate. Additional space is now or will be needed both south and north of the middle doors. These recommendations will be further discussed with Mr. Thacher on Mr. Patterson's forthcoming visit in June.

✓
✓
Mrs. Farrand strongly recommends drastic pruning of the Ficus in the orangery so that it may again be a decoration rather than an envelopment to this lovely little building.

✓
✓
Mrs. Farrand would like to see almost the whole of the east end of the orangery free of Ficus and further paving, ^{1/2 ft} done on the west end so that some of the floor space is available for the circulation of visitors. Mrs. Farrand has long felt that the covering of the beams and the "eyebrows" of the windows were too heavy and feels that restraint in the growth of the creeper would show the charming lines of the building.

Mr. Patterson and Mrs. Farrand also agree completely that safe and comfortable steps are essential between the north gate of the rose garden and the south entrance to the herbaceous border. Mrs. Farrand is therefore writing to Bryce asking for accurate figures on the difference of the levels between these two points. ^{Plays}

Certain thinning was decided upon, among other places the wall planting on the north face of the Dumbarton Oaks house and the tennis court wall, and in all likelihood to make a record of what seems desirable in the way of permanent planting and its maintenance.

Additional thinning is probably required in the plantations around the border of the east lawn and possibly some thinning in the orchard north of the herb garden and the rose garden.

D.O. suggestions - Mr. Patterson's visit May 27-29 1946

A most constructive suggestion was made by Mr. Patterson with regard to the treatment of the herbaceous border and its surroundings. As a result of their agreement the two consultants therefore suggest that instead of building walls on either side of the herbaceous border as had been previously suggested, that a heavy border of deciduous and evergreen shrubs be planted on either side of the border in order to replace the two Yew hedges which are difficult to maintain and which will become increasingly unsightly as they become more aged. Instead of a long wall down the steep slope this border of shrubs will give an informal line to the border and will moreover narrow the space quite considerably for the planting of herbaceous and annual plants. This should decrease the cost of upkeep materially. Around the two Yews at the top and bottom of the walk low stone walls might be constructed of approximately the height of the Yew hedges and low stone walls across the east end of the upper kitchen garden. The construction of these low walls and the replacement of the hedge on the sloping ground will allow the elimination of all the Yew hedges by either permanent and easily replaceable plantations or low stone walls.

The planting on either side of the herbaceous border could well be made harmonious with both the orchard on the south side and the stone walls on the north side of the steps.

✓ In the North Vista

The temporary wooden rail fence should be much more thoroughly covered with evergreen creepers such as honeysuckle or ivy, so that the rail fence would disappear and become more like a section of the wall. The re-planting and re-studying of the planting in the north vista seems a necessity as clearly the two Yew clumps on either side of the north entrance do not look well. These should be removed, possibly two big Box clumps from the rose garden might be placed in the northeast and northwest corners.

As the azaleas in the Star are magnificent as plants but overgrown as accents to this space it is suggested that the largest of these plants be taken out and used on the bank north of the swimming pool and that the overgrown plants be replaced by smaller ones of the same sort.

D. Suggestion page 3 May 27-29-1946

At Dumbarton as in most other places one of the serious problems concerns the parking of motor cars. The space in front of the south door is clearly inadequate for crowds and as chauffeur-driven cars are the exception rather than the rule in these days it would seem necessary to find a parking space more or less adjacent to the grounds and to keep the small parking area in front of the front door for cars of invalids. *pink box*

From Mr. Patterson's report it is also quite clear that creepers have been allowed to grow to undue size and that they hide the views which used to be attractive from the box terrace to the rose garden and that they over-encumber the walls and steps leading from the box terrace to the rose garden. It might even be wise to clear a space where a view of the rose garden could conveniently be seen from both the south and the north borders in the box terrace, and to restrain the creepers in their uncurbed enthusiasm.

On Mr. Patterson's next journey many of these details will be discussed and further studies made of individual areas and consultations as to the walk widenings seem also desirable.

Copy

June 11, 1946

Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss
1537 28th Street
Washington, D. C.

Mildred my very dear:

This is a "working" letter as it will embody various suggestions which Mr. Patterson and I have talked over since his return from Dumbarton at the end of May.

There has been a delay in preparing the report for you as the Arnold Arboretum has been rather insistent in receiving a preliminary report and wanting Mr. Patterson and me to get started on reconstruction work, so Oakdom has suffered and this I am sure you and Mr. Thacher will forgive.

Many details of upkeep have been talked of and I think we all unanimously agree that much thinning is required, as in many cases even two years ago at my last visit some of the plantations were clearly quite out of scale with their setting. This is particularly true of much of the orchard plantation on the hill north of the herb garden and also of the Star and some of the hill plantations north of the swimming pool; it is going to be a heart-breaking job to do this thinning as it should be done because it has been so long neglected that obviously the effect is going to be unpleasant for the first few years after the necessary pruning and removals have been done. Then too the use of the Orangery has changed since it was a happy meeting ground for your guests at tea time. Now it is a point of meeting and dispersal for the many visitors to the gardens and in a way of course it should be more impersonal and better adapted to its present purpose. I have long felt that the Ficus was too invasive and personally I should rather see it very considerably curtailed than to have it quite as enveloping as it was in the days of the pleasant tea parties. Think this over and see whether you will let us at least start to do some pruning and note the results as it progresses. This is not meant to add another detail to your many duties but simply that you should know that as always we are working hand in hand and side by side, and looking from almost the same pair of eyes at surroundings which both of us love.

Clearly a good deal of fairly costly reconstruction work will have to be done in the way of re-planting, particularly if the herbaceous borders are altered according to the suggestions made. It will in all likelihood be necessary to widen some of the brick walks and we shall - alas - have to build a safe flight of steps from the rose garden to the herbaceous border, as there is no really sensible and safe approach from one section to the other, as the approach by way of the Fountain Garden and Lovers Lane

The accompanying notes are brief and abrupt but they will show you the trend of ideas on which Mr. Patterson and I have been working. He seems in such hearty sympathy with Dumbarton and to admire its beauty so understandingly that I feel we are lucky in having so friendly an eye to help us.

At the end of this week Mr. Patterson and I trot off to the Arnold Arboretum for a day's work just to see what seems ahead of us. No one can know better than you what a privilege it is to be allowed to show my gratitude to Professor Sargent in trying to maintain the Arboretum as he thought of it when I was a student. How amused he would have been in the old days to have thought that I might come back to the Arboretum as a student and as a helper.

A very nice letter came from Professor Sachs congratulating me on the appointment to the Arboretum and I was amused to have Mr. Thacher say he thought the Arboretum appointment would in all likelihood make the Dumbarton Oaks machine run more smoothly as regards the Harvard point of view.

Your ever devoted