

BEATRIX FARRAND
LANDSCAPE GARDENER
REEF POINT
BAR HARBOR, MAINE

August 2, 1950

Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss
Hotel Miramar
Santa Barbara, California

Dearest Mildred:

How entirely delightful to have a real letter from you, it was quite unexpected as visits to a playmate in the hospital eat into a day.

Yes - I too, have wondered whether a twelve-month in the drip of Washington might become difficult to meet without too much loss of vitality and energy, but that bridge does not have to be crossed. The news of Robert's steady progress under the skilled hands of excellent Wills (to whom my ever affectionate regards) and the kindly supervision of Koefod is an enormous relief. One is glad to have such things in the past tense and Santa Barbara is a civilised and kindly place where care and skill are neatly given without loose ends.

The Van Rensselaer situation is almost tragic, his whole interest lies in the Botanic Gardens, and his psychological record makes it practically impossible for him to meet the needs of the garden. He is such a nice man and has given such devoted service that one laments and yet in another way one accepts his departure. The person for whom I am quite as sorry as for Mr. Van Rensselaer is his wife. His nervous condition for years past has made a heavy drain on her physically and nervously and I feel convinced she has not been easy in mind for some time past on several different counts. This is from assumption on my part and not from definite information.

Please think over the question of the further continuation of the Botanic Garden - it has seemed to me in considering the situation without Mr. Van Rensselaer that a good possibility lay in administering the gardens, using its major income for upkeep, development and a better supervised staff. Then, in order not to neglect the vitally important scientific side, ask for gifts for specific publications or enterprises. To this arrangement I should be willing to subscribe, and probably you would also give toward such an end. The scientific writer must be a person of standing and an estimate should be submitted on a project such as Erigonum or whatever other line might be best followed. How does this suggestion appeal to you? There must be certain physical jobs done in the garden and plantations made, altered and renewed, this could be done by the administrator, leaving the research and writing to be done quite independently as funds were made available.

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Yes, I do hope the Dumbarton Oaks files will be of use to students, it is certainly wise to have them all in one place, and I hope good Miss Sweeney will not be swamped by the avalanche of material. It is good to know that you are pleased to have it.

The Harvard situation is a very prickly one. They are totally insensible to anything relating to landscape art or the beauty of plants, and their obsession as to centralizing at Cambridge is a steep stile to climb. Quite confidentially the Arnold Arboretum is suffering from this same obsession.

We lamented your absence this year, but the azaleas bloomed outrageously well in spite of your not having been there to see them. The progress is steady, although of course far slower than one would like, but we do make some headway. We have had quite remarkable gifts of fine books, a fund was given for the purchase of rare and worth while volumes and over thirty have been added of fine quality. The cataloguing is going forward and so is the herbarium and visitors flock to the garden, dressed in bathing suits or balldresses. Our major task is now indoors listing, filling book gaps and the formidable job of making the Gertrude Jekyll plans available - this means repair and cataloguing some 5000 items. No small undertaking.

Regarding the Ventenat, would you agree with me that temptation should be stoutly resisted as to adding pure botany books, and to apply energy to the books on design, horticulture and the history of gardening. The great botanical books can be found in the various libraries which have to serve botanists rather than gardeners, so aside from the great ones you have - the folio Redouté and a good representative group of herbals - it would seem as though prints, books such as Krafft, Puckler, Muskave and many, (to me at present unknown) 18th and early 19th century monographs were more important.

When you have plans tell me of them. The William Phillips's are in Northeast Harbor and are coming to the library this afternoon, both looking so handsome and so well. They reported you as possibly both going abroad when Robert is really better again.

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There is so much to speak of both as to our Children, Dumbarton and Reef Point, as well as myriads of other things that this letter would go on for a week if even a few of them were started.

A soft rain is falling and the greens against the grey sky, with the damp flowers hanging their heads are lovely.

You know how constantly you are both in heart and mind, so why reiterate?

My very dearest to Robert and to you, admiration as well as respect and devotion.

The books of Gertrude Teikye's own photographs are a mine of joy, & open one's eyes as to the breadth of her arranging person's sensitive appreciations -

A nice letter from Mr. Bullard reports a pleasant visit to you, & Robert's continued perfect progress.

Yours ever & constantly

Trix.