FS001 Newport’s Cultural and Historic Landscapes-
Past to Present
Friday, November 15, 2013

The layered landscapes of Newport – This session will take you on a journey from late nineteenth and early twentieth century to the present of the historical and cultural landscapes at two of Newport’s gems: The Elms and Rough Point. You will be presented with the complex challenges that historic landscapes present. Given their constantly changing nature, landscapes are not fixed in time and therefore merit thoughtful approaches to maintenance and management that account for current knowledge of invasive plants and organic gardening practices vis-à-vis the historic context, as well as planning for the future while looking to the past.

Presenters:

The Elms
Thomas J. Elmore, ASLA, LEED AP, Principal, Elmore Design Collaborative, Inc.
Jeffrey T. Curtis, Director of Gardens and Grounds, The Preservation Society of Newport County

Rough Point
Lisa Dady and Liz Spoden, NRF Education Department
Katie Parent, Head Gardener and Jim Sullivan, Head Groundskeeper
Learning Objectives at The Elms:

1. Learn about the history, design, and restoration of the Sunken Garden at The Elms and grounds and gardens at Rough Point.
2. Understand the complex issues of interpreting historic landscapes and planning for the future while looking into the past.
3. Examine the historic layers of design, treatment, and influence of these landscapes from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
4. Highlight successive alterations and influences which resulted in an aesthetic that combines the Victorian tradition of picturesque parkland with the formal parterres, sculpted greenery, and fountains of Italian Renaissance and French Baroque gardens.
5. Explore the challenges and rewards of cultural landscape management at a public institution.
6. Learn the differences between maintenance and management, as well as how to account for current knowledge of invasive plants and organic gardening practices vis-à-vis the historic context.
The Elms - Restoration of the Sunken Garden and Its Environs

1. Geographical Context

2. Brief Historical background
   • Owner - Edward J. Berwind
   • Architect - Horace Trumbauer

3. Restoration Process
   • 1992 – Historic Landscapes Project
   • 1998-1999 – Initial Improvement Plan
   • 1998-1999 – Site Assessment Report
   • 1999 – Construction Documentation
   • 1999-2000 – Maintenance Plan
   • 2000-2001 – Garden restoration
   • Summer 2001 – Centennial Celebration

A. Historical research - photographs, maps, & written descriptions

Major Dates
   • 1888 - EJ Berwind buys The Elms
   • 1899-1901 - New house built
   • 1907-1914 - Sunken garden is built
   • 1913 – Woodrow Wilson establishes federal income tax
   • 1936 – EJ Berwind dies
   • 1961 – PSNC buys The Elms
   • 1996 – Designated a National Historic Landmark
   • 1998 - 2001 - The Sunken Garden is restored

Historic Maps
   1876  1895  1899  1902  1907  1973

Historic Photographs - Major periods
   • 1888-1897 – The original Elms
   • 1914-1915
   • 1920s and 1930s
   • 1940s, 1950s and 1960s
   • 2001-present

B. Initial Improvement Plan
   • Established goals and objectives, included a brief historical background, and outlined proposed scope of services
C. Site Assessment Report

D. Construction Documentation
   • A complete set of construction documents to guide the restoration

   • Plant List
     Trees
     - Acer palmatum “bloodgood” Red Japanese Maple
     - Picea abies Norway Spruce
     - Picea pungens Blue Spruce
     - Tilia cordata Littleleaf Linden

     Shrubs
     - Buxus sempervirens Common Boxwood
     - Buxus sempervirens suffruticosa True Dwarf Boxwood
     - Chamaecyparis obtuse Compacta Compact Hinoki Cypress
     - Chamaecyparis pisifera ‘Filifera’ Threadleaf False Cypress
     - Euonymus fortune Wintercreeper Euonymus
     - Ligustrum amurense Privet
     - Rhododendron catawbiense Catawba Rhododendron
     - Taxus baccata English Yew
     - Thuja occidentalis Arborvitae

     Vines
     - Hedera helix English Ivy

E. Maintenance Plan
   • A detailed maintenance plan with clear and concise descriptions of recommended work to maintain the garden’s appearance over time

F. Garden Restoration
   • Photographs of during and after restoration
Rough Point

To supplement our presentation and walking tour, we have provided the following take-home information for you:

**FAQ’s about Rough Point’s Gardens and Landscape**

These are the 8 most-asked questions we get while working at Rough Point:

1. *Is that a real banana?* **YES!** This banana is a hardy banana, *Musa basjoo*. It very occasionally produces fruit, but these are inedible. Instead, we grow it for its unique tropical foliage and soaring height. Although it can reach up to 15 feet in one season, it certainly doesn’t start off the season that tall. At the end of each growing season, after a hard frost, we cut it down to about 12” tall. We then enclose the stumps in a circle of chicken wire, and fill this with chopped leaves from on site. Then in early April, we remove the chicken wire and spread out the composted leaves to expose the stumps. At this point, the stumps have rotted and are not looking good at all. But shortly thereafter, they begin to show new growth: by mid-May, they have grown a foot or two; by mid-June, they have shot up another couple feet. Then by mid-July, they have really filled in the back border!

2. *Do you have to dig up all the dahlias every year?* Since we grow over 35 different types of dahlias, thankfully the answer is no. We have a much easier way of winterizing the tender dahlia tubers. After the first hard frost, which for us is often in early or mid-December, we cut the foliage down and remove all the stakes, leaving the beds bare. Next, we put down a mixture of chopped straw and chopped leaves in a 2-3’ high pile. This pile is then covered with a sheet of thick black plastic (3 mil), which is weighed down with scrap lumber and rocks. These layers keep the dahlia tubers very warm throughout the winter. In the spring, in early to mid-April, we pull off the black plastic, lumber, and rocks, and store them all for the following year. Underneath, the leaves and straw have broken down significantly; this decomposed organic matter is raked and left on the bed, adding nutrients to the soil. We then apply a 2-3” layer of untreated shredded pine bark mulch to each bed. Mulching every season adds organic matter to the soil, reduces weeds, retains moisture, and keeps the beds looking neat and tidy. Then the dahlias begin to create their dazzling summer and fall display. Before you try this dahlia winterization at home, keep in mind that this method works because we have a dedicated dahlia bed. If the dahlias were intermixed with other perennials, we wouldn’t be able to do this; instead, we would need to dig each tuber and properly store it for the winter, to be replanted in the spring.

3. *How do you take care of the fig trees?* The fig trees were put in at the direction of Doris Duke, but they are not quite hardy to this area and therefore need winter protection. In late November or early December, after the leaves have dropped, we wrap groups of branches in felt moving blankets, secured with twine. We then pile chopped leaves and chopped straw at the base, so that no part of the fig is exposed to the cold winter air. In early April, we remove the blankets, and then pull back the leaves and straw from the
base of the plants and spread this compost within the bed. It takes a little while for the fig to leaf out again, but by late summer, we have a few edible figs.

3. **How often do you have to cut the hedges?** The California Privet (*Ligustrum ovalifolium*) hedges are trimmed seven times a year, with the exception being the hedge leading to the swim gate which is trimmed three to four times a year. This frequent trimming thickens the plant and helps to keep its ascetically-appealing, formal shape. Less frequent trimming would result in looser, bushier plants which tend to lose their shape in a windy location like Rough Point.

4. **How many people work on the grounds and gardens?** On the grounds crew, we have two full-time, year-round and one full-time, seasonal staff members. On the gardens crew, we have two part-time (20 hours per week each), seasonal staff members.

5. **What do you do with all the food from the vegetable garden?** We all share it! With the office staff, guides, and work crews, the NRF has a large staff, many of whom enjoy the fresh produce. If we have an especially large harvest of something, such as lettuce or tomatoes, we donate it to a local soup kitchen or food pantry.

   **What are the camels made of?** The camels were created by a local welder. The life-size frames are a combination of square tube stock for sturdy legs, rebar that provides support within the frame, and thin bars that create the surface of the camel’s body. We attach chicken wire with zip ties to these thin bars, to keep the sphagnum moss in place. To plant it, an opening is made in the chicken wire, a planting pocket of soil is put in the sphagnum moss, and the plant is inserted and held in place with florist’s greening pins. The plants—mostly sedums and hens-and-chicks—are overwintered on the camels; in the spring, some new plants are added to replace any that did not survive the harsh winds and biting cold of the site.

6. **What is the oldest tree on the property?** The oldest and most dominant tree on the property is the Turkey Oak (*Quercus cerris*) located inside the main entrance to the property. At approximately 160 years old, this tree has great historical value. It was planted on land owned by the George Caldawater family after 1851. It predated the purchase of the present Rough Point property and the work subsequently done to the landscape by Olmsted. Described by several prominent local arborists as a “spectacular specimen,” this oak was recognized in 2010 as the second largest specimen of its kind in the Rhode Island Tree Council’s Champion Tree registry. A larger Turkey Oak graces the grounds of the Chateau-Sur-Mer estate in Newport.
**Compost Tea Information and Recipe**

*What is compost tea?*
Compost tea is simply a brewed water extract of compost. Within the brewed tea, beneficial micro-organisms are leached out from the compost, suspended in liquid form and made available to the soil and plants. Our recipe also feeds the micro-organisms in the brewing process, which multiply their numbers and creates a blissful batch of beneficial microbes for our lawn or garden.

*Compost tea recipe currently used for Rough Point’s 10.8 acres:*

- 100 gal. of de-chlorinated water (allow water to sit or aerate over night)
- 30 lbs. of quality compost or verma-compost (worm castings) [NOTE: The quality of compost directly relates to the quality of tea.]
- 32 oz. organic molasses or pre-blended nutrient mix (such the mix by Sustainable Agricultural Technologies—see below)
- 16 oz. soluble cold-water kelp meal

If water comes from the tap, allow it to sit for at least 24 hours with the pump actively aerating to de-chlorinate the water. Submerge the compost in water, using a tea bag of choice (pillow cases work well). The brewing process must remain highly aerobic, so use a pump that provides a high rate of aeration and thorough mixing (such as a fish aquarium pump available at any pet store). Add other ingredients,

both molasses and kelp meal. Allow to brew for at least 24 hours. This makes a large enough batch for Rough Point’s vast lawn; for a smaller area, adjust the quantities as needed.

**Verma-Compost Supplier:**
Orner Farms, 3532 Home Camp Road, Rockton, PA 15856, 814-583 -7418

**Pre-Blended Nutrient Mix:**
Sustainable Agricultural Technologies, Inc.
836 East Main Street, Cottage Grove, OR 9742, 800-779-1709

**Olmsted Information**

**Seven ‘S’ of Olmsted’s Design (by Charles E. Beveridge, January 1986)**

1. **Scenery**: Design of "passages of scenery" even in the small spaces and in areas intended for active use. Creation of designs that give an enhanced sense of space: indefinite boundaries, constant opening up of new views. Avoidance of hard-edge or specimen planting, creating instead designs that have either "considerable complexity of light and shadow near the eye" or "obscurity of detail further away."
2. **Suitability:** Creation of designs that are in keeping with the natural scenery and topography of the site: respect for, and full utilization of, the "genius of the place."

3. **Style:** Designing in specific styles, each for a particular effect. Primarily in the "Pastoral" style (open greensward with small bodies of water and scattered trees and groves) for a soothing, restorative atmosphere, or in the "Picturesque" style (profuse planting, especially with shrubs, creepers and ground cover, on steep and broken terrain), for a sense of the richness and bounteousness of nature, with chiaroscuro effects of light and shade to produce a sense of mystery.

4. **Subordination:** Subordination of all elements, all features and objects, to the overall design and the effect it is intended to achieve. The "Art to conceal Art."

5. **Separation:** Separation of areas designed in different styles, so that an "incongruous mixture of styles" will not dilute the intended effect of each: separation of ways, in order to insure safety of use and reduce distractions for those using the space; separation of conflicting or incompatible uses.

6. **Sanitation:** Provision for adequate drainage and other engineering considerations, not simply arranging of surface features. Planning or designs so that they promote both the physical and mental health of users.

7. **Service:** Planning of designs so that they will serve a "purpose of direct utility or service;" that is, will meet fundamental social and psychological needs: "So long as considerations of utility are neglected or overridden by considerations of ornament, there will be no true Art."

http://www.olmsted.org/the-olmsted-legacy/olmsted-theory-and-design-principles/seven-s-of-olmsteds-design
One of many preliminary studies, 1877, Olmsted Archives

One of many preliminary studies, Olmsted Archives
Speakers and Presenters:

Thomas J. Elmore, ASLA, LEED AP, founded Elmore Design Collaborative, Inc. (EDC) in 1999 because of his passion for heritage landscapes and his understanding of their intrinsic value to the vibrancy of each community and their aesthetic and emotional importance to that community and country as a whole. EDC provides specialized services in cultural landscape preservation research, planning and design. Commissions include vernacular and historic designed landscapes ranging in size between ¼-acre to more than 1,000 acres and include private residences, public sites and estates, museums, campuses and related educational institutions, cemeteries, parks, and streetscapes. Mr. Elmore received his Master’s of Landscape Architecture, with a concentration in historic preservation, from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and his Bachelor of Landscape Architecture degree from the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse, New York. Mr. Elmore is a registered landscape architect in 6 states.
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Jeffrey T. Curtis is the Director of Gardens and Grounds for The Preservation Society of Newport County. Curtis joined the Preservation Society in 1985. He supervises a staff of 30 full-time and part-time employees who maintain more than 80 acres of gardens and grounds on the Society’s historic properties. The Gardens and Grounds Department also operates several greenhouses in which it cultivates trees, plants and flowers that are used in the Society’s houses and grounds. Curtis is a graduate of the University of Rhode Island College of Resource Development, with a degree in Greenhouse Management. He is also a licensed arborist

Lisa Dady is the Director of Education for the Newport Restoration Foundation and holds a Master’s degree in Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program.

Liz Spoden is the Education Assistant, has a Master’s in Public History from Indiana University at Indianapolis. Together they are responsible for interpreting the history of the NRF’s museums and collections to the public.

Katie Parent is the Head Gardener for the Newport Restoration Foundation and is responsible for managing the gardens at Rough Point and the Federal period garden at the Samuel Whitehorne House. Ms. Parent holds a Master’s degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Georgia, is a RI Certified Horticulturist, and is a CRMC Certified Invasive Plant Manager.

Jim Sullivan, the Head Groundskeeper for the Newport Restoration Foundation, holds a Bachelor’s degree in mass communications from RI College and is a NOFA Accredited Landcare Professional. Mr. Sullivan is responsible for managing the grounds of the Rough Point estate, 18th century Prescott Farm in Middletown and Portsmouth, and the grounds of the 74 18th and 19th century houses that the NRF has restored and maintains.