



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Moore in America: Monumental Sculpture at The New York Botanical Garden

May 24 – November 2, 2008

Backgrounder: The New York Botanical Garden's Legacy of Natural and Designed Landscapes

The New York Botanical Garden, a 250-acre site that has been designated a National Historic Landmark, offers a wealth of beautiful landscapes, including a hardwood Forest, ponds, lakes, streams, rolling hills with dramatic rock outcroppings carved by glaciers, and New York City's only freshwater river, which runs through the heart of the Forest in a magnificent rock gorge. These picturesque natural features have been further enhanced by more than a century of artful plantings, gardens, and landscapes designed by the nation's leading landscape architects and garden designers. As a result of both its natural and human legacies, the Botanical Garden today offers an exceptional setting for outdoor sculpture.

Scenic beauty and stunning natural features

Following the New York State Governor's approval on April 28, 1891, of The New York Botanical Garden Act of Incorporation, a site needed to be selected for the location of this new educational and scientific institution. Selection turned to an undeveloped park in the central Bronx. In 1887, a published description of this area notes, "it would be difficult to do justice to the exquisite loveliness of this tract without seeming to exaggerate...gigantic trees, centuries old, crown these summits, while great moss and ivy-covered rocks project here and there at different heights above the surface of the water, increasing the wildness of the scene." An 1893 newspaper account describes the romantic vistas of an old stone house, snuff mill, and other artifacts of previous land use, while surrounded with "almost every tree known to the American forest in the Northern clime." The underlying bedrock, dark gray Fordham gneiss, shapes many rock outcrops, rolling hills, and steep slopes, ranging from 20 to 180 feet above sea level.

The undulating topography, rich and varied soil, grand natural scenery, and dense natural forest of the chosen site were all cited by the selection committee in 1895, which was led by members of the Torrey Botanical Club and Columbia University. The combination of scenic beauty and rare old-growth Forest made the site exceptional.

The New York Botanical Garden's lands have a geological history shaped by natural forces and bear the imprint of native peoples and colonial enterprises. The river and marshland margins were used by native peoples for seasonal habitation and as a travel route. The Bronx River enters a narrow gorge within the Botanical Garden, roaring over a waterfall and then continuing a meandering journey southward. In the late 1700s, brothers Pierre II and George Lorillard purchased 50 acres along the Bronx River for manufacturing tobacco. They erected a dam, grist mill, and a 45-room mansion on the property, with a gatehouse and stable. However, the ground was too rocky and marshy for agricultural use, and the mature forest that grew on lands west of the river—the Botanical Garden's future native Forest—remained vitally intact.

A century of beautiful designed landscapes

From the beginning of its stewardship of these lands, the Botanical Garden engaged outstanding architects, landscape architects, and garden designers in planning and enhancing its landscapes. Prominent 19th-century landscape architect **Calvert Vaux**, best known as the co-designer (with Frederick

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