



## 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.

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Prominent 19th-century landscape architect **Calvert Vaux**, best known as the co-designer (with Frederick Law Olmsted), of New York's Central Park, was the original Garden landscape architect, planning the layout of the main buildings and connecting driveways at the new Garden between 1891–95. Vaux positioned the roads and entrances in the Garden, a layout that organized the entire site and has had a lasting impact on the spatial organization and character of the Garden, enhancing its picturesque qualities and securing pleasant vistas that highlight the site's natural features. It was perhaps his final professional project.

For the three decades following Vaux's initial planning, the Botanical Garden followed an 1896 General Plan drawn by a talented and experienced civil and landscape engineer, **John R. Brinley**. During this period, the first of the Garden's living collections, the Pinetum (now known as the Arthur and Janet Ross Conifer Arboretum) was planted and its two main buildings, the magnificent Victorian-style Conservatory and the Beaux-Arts Museum (now known as the Library building), were constructed.

After the completion of the Museum in 1901, a formal approach to the building's sophisticated, classical façade was planting with 26 tulip trees, *Liriodendron tulipifera*, lined out in two double rows. The formal Tulip Tree Allée, now more than a century old, is one of the Garden's signature plantings, providing a stately canopy that frames the Library building and the playful Lillian Goldman Fountain of Life at its front entry.

In 1923, **Olmsted Brothers**, the premier landscape architecture firm of the time, led by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., was commissioned to consult on the Garden's landscape. Building on the Vaux plan, they addressed improvements needed for maintenance and to accommodate automobile traffic.

### **Distinguished gardens**

In addition to the master layout of roads, walkways, and landscapes, a number of individual, distinctive gardens were designed, again by prominent landscape designers and garden designers of the time. In 1915, **Beatrix Jones Farrand**, a well-known and highly regarded landscape architect and the only woman founder of the American Society of Landscape Architects, designed a large, asymmetric triangular rose garden for an enclosed valley bounded by a wooded, rocky ridge in the eastern section of the Garden. Excavation, rock steps, paths, overlook area (offering a breathtaking overview of the rose garden), and initial plantings were begun in 1918, but the full design was only realized in 1988.

In 1932, work began for a new Rock Garden—the second in the Garden's history—in a grassy meadow on a gently sloping swale tucked into the edge of the native Forest, with a stream burbling down a rocky slope and wandering down the glade. The project was spearheaded by **T. H. Everett**, one of the world's leading horticultural authorities and educators, a Director of Horticulture at the Botanical Garden, and a staff member for 55 years. Born in England and trained at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Everett had worked with Beatrix Jones Farrand. The Rock Garden, full of waterfalls, pools, large boulders, bog area, moraines, and woodland glades—all filled with colorful and unusual flowers—quickly became one of the Botanical Garden's most popular attractions, especially in springtime.

Also in the early 1930s, landscape architect **Ellen Biddle Shipman** designed a long perennial border along the southeast side of the Conservatory. Designed in four sections, each contributing to the whole, it blended trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs in a seemingly casual, yet complex manner. The border is known as the Ladies' Border, as it was sponsored by the Garden's Women's Auxiliary. The Ladies' Border was refreshed and redesigned in 2000 by **Lynden B. Miller**, today's leading designer of public gardens. The Ladies' Border now features an experimental element. Many plants thought half-hardy for the Garden's planting zone are being tested for their ability to survive here as the climate changes.

In 1946 and 1947, the Montgomery Conifer Collection, including 200 specimens of rare and unusual ornamental conifers, was planted on an open, rugged landscape near the Rose Garden. The plans were by **Marian Cruger Coffin**, a landscape architect known for both her knowledge of trees and deftness in

integrating individual specimens into an overall picturesque landscape, framing views and organizing a sequence of organized spaces. In 2004, this planting, completely renovated and expanded with additional new plantings as well as viewing pavilions planned by Coffin but never built, was re-opened as the Benenson Ornamental Conifers.

### **A continuing legacy of premier landscape design**

The Botanical Garden's long legacy of distinguished landscape design by leading designers of the era continues today. Two examples are the thorough redesigns of the Benenson Ornamental Conifers and Ladies' Border. Another jewel is the Jane Watson Irwin Perennial Garden outside of the Conservatory, redesigned by Lynden B. Miller in 1987. Miller's design used interesting and contrasting textures, forms, foliage, and flower color to demonstrate the diversity and constantly changing effects of perennials during the growing season. The layout preserves the linear pattern established by modernist landscape architect **Daniel Urban Kiley** in 1974, a geometric garden using a grid of squares form the shapes of perennial beds and paths. In 2004, Miller updated and refined the Perennial Garden further, reconfiguring paths and planting beds allowing for wider borders and new beds in a succession of outdoor rooms. The aging 1970s paths were replaced and new trees and shrubs added for interest.

Another recent example of distinguished garden design is the Everett Children's Adventure Garden, which opened to the public on May 1, 1998. A 12-acre "indoor, outdoor" interactive science learning facility, the layout of the Children's Adventure Garden combines the naturalistic features of woodland, meadow, and wetland for lessons in habitat and ecology. It invites children to explore and wander, to scamper through mazes and to interact with playful puzzles that teach them about nature. A pioneer prototype for other children's gardens throughout the nation, the landscape design by **CLRR Design** in Philadelphia and by **Miceli Kulik Williams and Associates** immerses both children and adults in a natural experience and playful learning.

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**The New York Botanical Garden** is an advocate for the plant kingdom. The Garden pursues its mission through its role as a museum of living plant collections arranged in gardens and landscapes across its National Historic Landmark site; through its comprehensive educational programs in horticulture and plant science; and through the wide-ranging research programs of the International Plant Science Center. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit our Web site at [www.nybg.org](http://www.nybg.org)

The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.

**Media Contacts:** The New York Botanical Garden: Nick Leshi 718.817.8658 or George Shakespear 718.817.8512

**The Henry Moore Foundation** maintains the artist's home, studios and grounds at Perry Green in Hertfordshire, England, which is open to visitors from April to October, by appointment. The Foundation also maintains and develops the world's largest collection of Moore's sculpture, drawings, graphics, textiles, and tapestries. The collection is managed from Perry Green by the curatorial staff, who are actively involved in the research, support, and curating of Moore's work worldwide. For more information or to book a visit to Perry Green, visit [www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk](http://www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk) or call +44 (0)1279 843333. All press enquiries should go to Sarah Cockburn, Communications Officer, +44 (0)113 2467467 [sarah@henry-moore.ac.uk](mailto:sarah@henry-moore.ac.uk)

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