



The Garden Conservancy's Activities in

The Garden Conservancy is not an old organization. It was founded 24 years ago, in 1989. In that short space of time, it has accomplished a great deal for the preservation and sharing of culturally significant American gardens. This effort has been recognized by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which awarded the Conservancy the prestigious Trustees' Award for Organizational Excellence in 2009. In the Pacific Northwest, too, the Conservancy's efforts are helping to realize the vision that inspired its founding.

A Short History of the Conservancy

Frank Cabot, founder of the Garden Conservancy, described himself as a "horticultural enthusiast." His description was apt: Cabot was active in a number of horticultural organizations and worked in both the international and

national realms of garden conservation. For instance, he was instrumental in founding the Aberglasney Restoration Trust for the purpose of rescuing and restoring a historic 16th-century garden in Carmarthenshire, Wales. He also built two extraordinary gardens: The first, Stonecrop Gardens, he created with his wife, Anne, at their home in Cold Spring, New York, starting in the late 1950s. A 12-acre hillside display garden showcasing woodland areas, naturalistic rock outcroppings, ponds and enclosed English-style flower borders, it opened to the public in 1992. The second, the world-famous "Les Quatre Vents" (The Four Winds), with its alternately grand and intimate garden spaces, he created on a family property in La Malbaie, Quebec.

In 1988, at the suggestion of garden writer Penelope Hobhouse, Cabot visited the Ruth



the Pacific Northwest

Bancroft Garden, a 3.5-acre dry garden in Walnut Creek, California, which Bancroft had spent 30 years developing. Bancroft and Cabot discussed her hopes and fears regarding the preservation of her remarkable garden, and their conversation was an important catalyst. Cabot understood the cultural and ecological importance of gardens for people. Inspired by Ruth's concern, he established the Garden Conservancy in 1989. The organization, as he intended it, would identify and preserve important gardens in danger of being lost after the death of their creators. By 1990, the Conservancy was an independent, membership-based non-profit with a board of directors and a mission: "To preserve exceptional American gardens for the education and enjoyment of the public."

BY TANYA DEMARSH-DODSON

LEFT: The Ruth Bancroft Garden in Walnut Creek, California, inspired Frank Cabot to create the Garden Conservancy. (Photo courtesy ruthbancroftgarden.org)

BELOW: A reception table at an Open Days Program, where members of the public were able to tour exceptional private gardens.



Today, the Conservancy is realizing this mission in multiple ways. The core effort is through the Garden Preservation Program, which provides preservation services such as long-term collaborations, short-term consultancy and conservation easements to interested gardens. Sharing gardens is as important to the Garden Conservancy as saving them. The Conservancy's Open Days Program fosters public awareness of the importance of gardens and gives garden owner-designers an insight into what it means to have their gardens be open to the public.

The Conservancy also manages an educational program of workshops and lectures designed to create capable horticultural professionals with knowledge of preservation techniques, as well as to teach the gardening public about garden design, care, sustainability and



preservation. For example, this past October, with sponsorship from the preservation project garden Rocky Hills, the Conservancy helped organize a lecture at the public library in Chappaqua, New York, entitled “Changing Climates, Changing Gardens: Protecting Plants in the 21st Century.” Through all of its programs, the Garden Conservancy promotes public policies—including funding—that enable garden preservation.

The Preservation Program

The Ruth Bancroft garden was the first of the Conservancy’s Preservation Program projects. Bancroft’s creation is now a thriving public garden protected by a conservation easement, a legal document that permanently restricts land use on a property for the purposes of preservation—even if ownership of that property changes.

In its early years, as the Conservancy worked to develop the Bancroft Garden—as well as the John P. Humes Japanese Stroll Gardens in Mill Neck, New York and The Fells in Newbury, New Hampshire—into public gardens, it evolved a pattern of working in partnership with the public

and private spheres. Nowadays, it works with local officials, gardeners, landscape designers, historians, preservationists and like-minded groups to sustain exceptional gardens and transform them into viable public gardens.

The Conservancy also offers the horticultural, technical, management and financial information and expertise required to create and operate a public garden. Consulting services and assistance with conservation easements are available from the Conservancy at reasonable rates designed to cover the direct operating costs associated with the consultation. Through the Garden Preservation Program more than 100 gardens have been helped to survive and prosper here in North America.

Opening Gardens and Educating Gardeners

The Garden Conservancy’s Open Days Program, begun in 1995 by two women on the East Coast, is the only national garden-visiting program. It gives a broad base of people across the country the opportunity to enjoy some of America’s finest private gardens. At the same time, it has

ABOVE: The Chase Garden in Orting, Washington, became a public garden with help from the Conservancy.
(Photo courtesy Marriion Brenner)

given hundreds of garden creators and owners the opportunity to open their gardens to the public. The program runs from early spring to fall each year, and the tours are self-guided. You can find a schedule and lists of participating gardens on the Garden Conservancy Web site, www.gardenconservancy.org.

In 1993, the Conservancy began its educational efforts with a garden history symposium, “Masters of American Garden Design.” Educational programs have proliferated, and the Conservancy continues to offer its members, experienced horticulturists, landscape professionals and the general public symposia on contemporary ideas relevant to fine gardening, garden design and garden preservation. As part of this effort, the organization has published a handbook: “Taking a Garden Public: Feasibility and Startup” (second edition, 2006). The handbook offers guidance to those working to create and sustain public gardens and have been widely used. An electronic version is available for free on the Conservancy Web site.

Conservation in the Northwest

The Garden Conservancy’s activities in the Pacific Northwest began within six years of its founding. In 1995, Chase Garden in Orting, Washington—a spectacular, 4.5-acre naturalistic garden perched above the Puyallup River, with a remarkable view of Mount Rainier—was named as a Preservation Project Garden, and the Garden Conservancy accepted a conservation easement from Ione and Emmott Chase for their property.

The landscape and flora of the Pacific Northwest had a profound impact on the evolution of gardening style in the post-World War II period, and the Chase’s garden epitomizes this love of place. It also reflects the influence of Japanese culture and aesthetics on the region’s approach to garden design and architecture. Ione and Emmott’s garden is an extraordinary example of 20th century Pacific Northwest modernist style.

Beginning in the 1990s, the Conservancy worked closely with the Chases to document

what they regarded as the defining characteristics of their garden so that their artistic vision for the place could be sustained. The Conservancy provided consultants to create a history of the garden based upon oral interviews with the Chases. It also founded a support group, the Friends of the Chase Garden, which currently manages public visitation and outreach and raises the funds needed to maintain the garden (see www.chasegarden.org). Conservancy staff and consultants have assisted this group with public relations, Web site development and fundraising, among other things. Since the Chases’ death (Emmott in 2010; Ione in 2004), the Conservancy has continued to assist with the management of the garden and work with the Friends group to develop a viable public garden.

The Conservancy has given preservation assistance to a number of other gardens and organizations here in the Pacific Northwest, including the Abkhazi Garden in Victoria, British Columbia; the Corbin Moore/Turner Heritage Gardens in Spokane, Washington; the Elk Rock Garden in Portland, Oregon; and the Lord & Schryver Conservancy in Salem, Oregon, to name a few. In the case of the Lord and Schryver Conservancy, the Garden Conservancy has helped to develop the appropriate documentation and reports needed to support the successful rehabilitation and preservation of gardens designed by the pioneering landscape design firm of Elizabeth Lord and Edith Schryver in their home town of Salem—including Gaiety Hollow, profiled in the Summer 2013 issue of the “Bulletin.” The founders of PowellsWood garden (Federal Way) and Soos Creek Botanical Garden (Auburn) in Washington also have consulted with the Conservancy in the process of taking their private gardens public. Lakewold Gardens in Federal Way received help for the recent publication of a book profiling its displays.

A Network of Special Gardens

In 2001, the Conservancy launched a unique Preservation Project Program here in our region called the Garden Conservancy Northwest



Network (GCNN). It reached out to emerging public gardens in the Pacific Northwest and organized a meeting at Lakewold Gardens for staff from various gardens and garden organizations in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia. The participants discussed the possibility of creating an association of the region's gardens and horticultural organizations advocating for garden preservation. This association held its first meeting the following year. The GCNN promotes communication, networking, resource sharing and professional workshops for the enhancement of member gardens, furthering their common goals of preserving and opening exceptional gardens for public enjoyment and education.

Today, the GCNN has 22 member organizations. It hosts general meetings and two workshops annually, and these are open to non-members as well as members of the Network. Topics for the workshops are selected by members and are designed to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to manage healthy non-profit organizations efficiently and economically.

Interaction among participants from the various gardens and horticultural organizations on topics of common concern is encouraged, so working ties are nurtured and processes unique to the various organizations are shared.

Visiting Gardens in the Northwest

In 2013, in part to promote the GCNN member gardens and events, a new Web site was launched: www.gardenconservancynorthwestnetwork.org. The site is designed to inform people visiting the Pacific Northwest—as well as resident gardening enthusiasts—of the public gardens they might see and horticultural events they might attend in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia.

Garden tourists also may experience private gardens in the region through the Open Days Program, which was introduced to Washington in 1999, and to Oregon in 2002. Each year, a number of beautiful private gardens are opened to the public through the efforts of the regional representatives for the Conservancy who volunteer to organize these events. Open

ABOVE: PowellsWood in Auburn, Washington, consulted the Garden Conservancy on converting from a private to a public garden.

OPPOSITE: Lakewold Gardens in Lakewold, Washington, part of the Garden Conservancy's Northwest Network of public gardens. (Photo courtesy lakewoldgardens.org)



Days information for the Northwest will be included on the GCNN Web site.

Frank Cabot's vision of America—as a place where gardens in all regions, reflecting our rich heritage and culture, are open to the public for enjoyment and education—is being realized in British Columbia, Washington and Oregon. This region's climate and culture have sustained a great gardening community and the evolution of many exceptional gardens. Those in the region who care about garden preservation can thank the Garden Conservancy for its preservation and educational efforts, as both have aided our communities in building great public gardens and a gardening public aware of the significance of public gardens. ~

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