

## Uncovering, Documenting, and Preserving the Legacy of American Gardens

"After fifty years, it's exciting to know where one of our teahouses went!" exclaimed Jennifer Gracie of Gracie, a New York firm specializing in Asian décor, when she received a call from Julia Cencebaugh Kloth, the Garden Conservancy's curator of documentation and archival collections.

We were also delighted to learn of the precise provenance of the teahouse at the John P. Humes Japanese Stroll Garden. John Humes, the American ambassador to Austria from 1969 to 1975, became fascinated with Japanese aesthetics while traveling in Japan. In 1960, he purchased a *shoin-zukuri* style teahouse from Gracie, a New York firm then known as Gracie Orientalis, for his garden in Mill Neck, NY, on Long Island's North Shore. The teahouse was prefabricated from the finest native cedar harvested on the island of Formosa (now Taiwan), as shown in the historic photos below.

The lumber was carefully selected for beauty of grain, then hand-waxed. The teahouse was assembled in its entirety on Formosa, meticulously inspected, then disassembled and shipped to the United States, where it was reassembled in a traditionally landscaped tea garden overlooking a koi pond.

The creation of the ceremonial teahouse at the Humes Garden is just one of many stories being uncovered as our preservation department develops a Garden Conservancy Documentation Program. Envisioning a program that would capture and celebrate the spirit of a garden and serve as an educational tool through an online experience, Garden Conservancy board member Suzanne Rheinstein made a generous donation to launch the Conservancy's newest preservation initiative.

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The ceremonial teahouse at the John P. Humes Japanese Stroll Garden in Mill Neck, NY Photo by Marion Brenner Inset photos: Gracie Orientalis crews collecting and transporting native cedar on Formosa in the 1960s to construct their signature teahouse Historic photos courtesy of Gracie





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Two gardens were selected as our first documentation projects: the John P. Humes Japanese Stroll Garden and Rocky Hills. The Humes Garden, created for Ambassador John Humes and designed by Douglas DeFaya in 1962, is a seamless integration of Japanese landscape design and the naturalistic terrain of Long Island's North Shore. Rocky Hills, a woodland garden in Mount Kisco, NY, was masterfully created over half a century by innovative interior designer Henriette Granville Suhr and her husband, art conservator William Suhr. Documentation of Rocky Hills has been made possible, in part, with support from Don and Fran Herdrich, long-time advocates of Henriette Suhr's garden.

The Conservancy's documentation program seeks to capture the essence of something that is largely experiential: the beauty of a garden and the many stories it embodies. This presents unique challenges, and requires taking an innovative and layered approach to create a multi-dimensional portrait of a garden. To that end, our preservation department is researching and collecting pictures, letters and notebooks, drawings, maps, and plant lists to build comprehensive digital and physical archives. We have engaged Udris Film, photographer Andre Baranowski, and several archivists who are collectively helping to record the sounds, sights, insights, stories, and experiences that inspired the creators and other individuals key to the evolution of each garden's development.

Our goal is to bring gardens to life in a new way by creating an online educational tool that will continue to be available and provide important insights for years to come. What were the creators' goals for

the garden? What were the sources of their inspiration and how did their vision for the garden evolve over time? What did they want their legacy to be, and how did they want their garden to affect others?

The story of each garden is being put into historical context with information about the property's chain of ownership, significant events and changes, as well as the life story and legacy of the garden's owners and creators. A comprehensive timeline is being compiled for easy reference.

To make these resources available to researchers and scholars, a finding aid, which will serve as a directory, is being developed, as well as a bibliography of sources and works cited.

The work is complex and ongoing. We continue to interpret materials and are designing digital presentations to distill the archival collection for depth and comprehensiveness, and for online use in an accessible and truly engaging way. As the preservation department further develops the program, more materials will be made available and additional gardens will be documented. A short introductory "trailer" of clips from the initial shoots with Udris Film at Rocky Hills and the Humes Garden can already be viewed at [gardenconservancy.org/preservation](http://gardenconservancy.org/preservation). Further documentation web pages are being developed.

Director of preservation Pamela Governale notes that garden preservation is a process of managing change. "Art, nature, and culture intersect in gardens; gardens have been sources of inspiration and study for centuries. What we are creating is a multi-media platform to share our garden archives to educate and inspire the public."



The interior of the Humes Garden teahouse overlooks the tea garden and koi pond. Photos by Andre Baranowski





*Magnolia 'Elizabeth'*, a handsome deciduous pyramidal tree with fragrant yellow flowers

## Rocky Hills Magnolia Collection

William and Henriette Suhr's garden, Rocky Hills, contained extensive plant collections including a grove of magnolias and unique specimens unavailable in the nursery trade. Beginning in the 1950s, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden operated a field research station at the Kitchawan Reserve in Ossining, NY. Located just a few miles from Rocky Hills, the reserve contained a two-acre magnolia field and greenhouses, where the now-famous 'Elizabeth' magnolia was developed and later patented. In 1990, Henriette heard that Kitchawan Reserve was closing and that some of the specimens from the collection needed to be relocated. She adopted sixteen magnolias, which continue to flourish at Rocky Hills as part of the magnolia collection. In a filmed interview at the garden in June, Scot Medbury, executive director of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and a longtime friend of Henriette, provided the inside story of the Kitchawan magnolias. The magnolias are only one part of Rocky Hills' horticultural treasures, as Henriette also planted dozens of varieties of rhododendrons, azaleas, tree peonies, irises, lilacs, ferns, and blue conifers.



James A. Petry, Jr. being interviewed at the Humes Garden

## Life at the Humes Garden in the 1960s: A Rainbow Every Day

Documenting the John P. Humes Japanese Stroll Garden continues to yield exciting finds. James Petry, who assisted the garden's original designer, first-generation Japanese-American Douglas DeFaya, with its installation in 1962, was interviewed this June by Garden Conservancy president James Hall. Petry shared many fond memories of working with DeFaya, whom he described as an ingenious artist. One day, when John Humes admired a rainbow over the garden and commented that he would love to see one every day, DeFaya wasted no time. "Within weeks we had the irrigation guys raising these very tall poles of copper piping [topped] with sprinkler heads." At the top of the stroll garden, Humes could turn a valve and by the time he walked down to the teahouse, there would be a magnificent rainbow overhead.



Archival materials being sorted at the Chase Garden

## Fall GCNN Workshop Spotlights Documentation

Documentation of both plant collections and gardens was the theme of the Garden Conservancy Northwest Network (GCNN) fall workshop on Saturday, November 17, at Lakewold Gardens in Lakewood, WA. Garden Conservancy director of preservation Pamela Governale and archivist Chloe Kadel, who has been helping the Garden Conservancy document the Chase Garden in Orting, WA, discussed the benefits of documentation, the archival process, and how to manage a collection once it is archived. Pamela also provided an overview of the Conservancy's new documentation program. In the afternoon, garden manager Nancy Kartes and plant records assistant Alex Wright, both from Bellevue Botanical Garden, and Heronswood botanist Ross Bayton discussed the documentation of their plant collections. They were then joined by Bloedel Reserve's horticulture director Andy Navage for a panel discussion.