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SANTA BARBARA BOTANIC GARDEN

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

MAUNSELL VAN RENSSELAER, DIRECTOR

November 23, 1946  
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Dearest Mildred:

Here is a slightly revised second dose. Don't bother to read the report too carefully, but if you have time to glance through it and let your piercing eye find the mistakes and omissions or faults of syntax, you will greatly help your ever devoted colleague and Garden twin.

Beatrix Farrand

per *Katharine Miller*

Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss  
1537 Twenty-eighth Street  
Georgetown, Washington, D. C.

November 22, 1946

Re: Santa Barbara Botanic Garden

REPORT

The gift made last summer by a friend of the Garden is an evidence not only of generous thought and action, but also of belief in the institution and its present and future usefulness to the art of horticulture, the community and the state. The funds added for development of the grounds carry with them an obligation to consider the proposed improvements with care so that the changes contemplated may prove wise and far-sighted rather than temporarily effective and easy to carry out.

The small acreage of the Garden and its topography and the two highroads, (one cutting directly through the property, and the other making its western boundary,) impose conditions to which any design for the area must conform. Further limiting factors are three levels which can not be altered; the first is the established floor-grade of the library; the second is the ground level at the foot of the memorial boulder, and the third is the level of Mission Canyon Road where the future pedestrian entrance is placed. These are the determining elements on which the plan for the working center of the institution must be made. On the recognition of these limits the design must be constructed.

In considering the wise use of land to which the public is welcomed, certain other factors must be taken into account. Easy access for foot passengers and vehicles must be provided and graded walks of pleasant width arranged so that visitors will not only be

attracted by first impressions but also that the casual sight seer may get an agreeable idea of whatever small portion of the grounds he may choose to visit.

In the present instance the first and most difficult problem to solve is the placing of a parking space and main entrance so that ordinary, daily motor traffic may be accommodated on the Garden's own property. The problem of providing parking space is recognized as one of the major difficulties in designing today. It would be obviously unwise to try and provide for the rare days when 200 or 300 cars may be expected but it would be equally unwise to rely on perpetual use of the highroad for the Garden's daily needs. It is quite possible that the two roads may later have to be widened for traffic needs which can not now be foreseen; therefore, the highroad should be regarded only as an overflow parking space, and normal needs provided by the Garden itself for the average number of visitors.

The planning problems in this Garden are a challenge to any designer as the limits of acreage and physical conditions must be met and incorporated into a close design which, when carried out, should appear easy in its solution. The heart and circulation system of a plan must be as closely interwoven into the design as the articulation of the human frame, which is built on the support of the spine and its allied bones for stability. The working center of the Garden lies in the area bounded on the south by the gardener's dwelling, and on the north by the north end of the Meadow. The eastern limit is Mission Canyon Road and the western side is the brink of Mission Canyon itself. The plan for this



space must be compact, as limiting conditions are fairly rigid. The design should be carefully considered and only altered in the future if changes occur which are now impossible to foresee.

A summer's work on an allied institution has taught much in a renewed realization of the working excellence of good design; the Olmsted plan for the Arnold Arboretum, made over 60 years ago, has not required change in any major line. In the plan for this Garden there should be considerable flexibility in the area outside the heart of the plan, but service and circulation roads, public access and utilities should be placed permanently.

In order to start structural design accurate information is needed regarding the topography of the area, therefore a survey has been authorized and is now being made of the center portion into which the plan must be integrated rather than imposed. Later a further survey will be needed for the rest of the property so that levels and boundaries may be accurately determined. After the main design is made and tried on the ground to see whether it will fit, and if it needs alteration, the secondary plan may be made, but the heart plan is dominant and all plans for roads and walks must be coordinated with the established lines and grades of the controlling design.

The new parking space and entrance, wherever placed, will entail much destruction of present plant material, but this should be recognized as inevitable and the friends of the Garden told why such a drastic move is necessary. If the public can be kept informed and

told of the plans for the future much misunderstanding and criticism will be forestalled.

It may not be generally realized that plants are really the ephemeral parts of even a garden design, and that they require replacement, renewal and constant control. The progress of this youthful institution illustrates better than any words how brief a time is needed for establishing plantations and of the need for constant replanting of subordinate groups. In the older sister arboretum the plantations have required fairly frequent change, but the roads and main paths are still in the same places.

All friends of the Garden doubtless realize that in pictorial composition design is controlled by the painter, whereas in landscape art the control lies in the natural formation and type of ground into which the plan should be harmonized without apparent difficulty.

Understanding of the needs of the Garden and the opportunity to plan for the future may be helped if a brief report is presented to those intimately interested in the Garden as well as the larger public. A sketch plan would aid in clarifying the question as otherwise it will be hard to understand the temporary destruction of trees and plants and the need for walls controlling the new parking space levels and the remodeling of the whole approach which is focused on the memorial boulder.

The Board will grasp the problem more quickly than those who are not immediately connected with the Garden management. They will realize that courage and foresight will be required of them as mistakes in faulty design are expensive, and their approach will be

impersonal as their responsibility is a double one, first to the public which they serve, and second, to the giver of the funds which make the direly needed changes possible.

The design now in preparation will place a new parking space where it fits the contours with least dislocation. The walk and steps from Mission Canyon Road to the boulder will be a part of the plan, and the extension of the Meadow southward, together with an outline of the vitally needed service circulation roads and the equally essential boundary protective plantations. Road and walk surfacing should be taken into account, plantations to attract visitors at all times of the year, and the recognition of certain essentials such as adequate watering system, ample work yards and the proper placing of buildings when needed.

A door is opening into the future, it is for us to walk out into the new life which lies before the Garden.

Beatrice Farrand