

ROBERT W. PATTERSON

BAR HARBOR
MAINE

ARCHITECT

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

March 1, 1956

Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss
1537 Twenty-eighth Street NW
Washington 7, D.C.

Dear Mrs. Bliss:

Thank you very much for sending me the letters which Mrs. Crowninshield received in the course of her efforts to stir up interest in Reef Point. It is very good of her to have done so much, and I hope she did not end by feeling that she had been asked to help in accomplishing something which perhaps should not be accomplished at all. It is discouraging to find how ready some of her correspondents have been to believe things that are not true, but it shouldn't be too hard to straighten them out. Whether or not they will show any real interest in doing anything constructive is another matter.

The first misconception is that \$20,000 must be raised to repay me. The fact is that nothing needs to be raised for this purpose. Thanks to the generosity of some local friends of Reef Point, it is all arranged that if a tax-exempt organization takes title to Reef Point, it will cost them nothing at all to do so.

The second wrong idea is that Mrs. Farrand has failed in trying to make Reef Point work. It is true that she has convinced herself that the project would not thrive in the future in the way in which she had hoped it would, but of the fourteen members of the Reef Point corporations, I believe she is the only one who feels this way. If the corporations had owned the place, or had had any money, I am sure they would never have allowed it to be abandoned. As you know, the members did everything possible to prevent it, but their hands were tied.

Mrs. Farrand did not fail in trying to get students to come to the gardens, because neither she nor anyone else ever tried to get them. That was something projected for the future, after the place had been endowed. There were, nevertheless, many students who visited the place to study the plants and their arrangement. Occasionally, in the case of such well-known "students" as the Bush-Browns and a few others, they were allowed to see the library. It is more or less true that no one looked at the books, but the only reason was that almost no one could get into the house. Some years ago Mrs. Farrand issued cards to a few people, permitting them under rather particular conditions to use the library at certain times, but in a very short while the cards were called in, and no more were ever issued. Since then the library has been closed, except to those few friends who knew Mrs. Farrand well enough to ask for permission to see the books.

The gardens have certainly been visited by tourists, to

The tune of about 5000 a year for a good many years. Mixed in with the tourists, however, have been many who came to study and learn. Their numbers cannot be estimated, since in general no one spoke to the garden visitors unless the visitor spoke first. The most recent known instance of this type of visitor was last fall, when two agitated people found the gardens closed and said that they had driven from Ohio for the sole purpose of making their third or fourth visit to Reef Point.

The idea that it would break Mrs. Farrand's heart if the gardens were to continue is, of course, nothing but a sentimental fiction. Since the day when I first offered to buy Reef Point, she has known that I was hoping to get it into the hands of some group that could carry on the gardens. The irrefutable evidence of her feelings in this respect is her offer, made several times and in writing, to contribute \$1000 a year for the rest of her life to any organization which is willing to try to keep the gardens going.

That seems to cover most of the wrong impressions that have been given to Mrs. Reid and others, but there is one more thing that I would like to make perfectly clear. I have helped Mrs. Farrand with Reef Point for a good many years, and I am of course the owner of the place at the moment. Because of these facts, it may appear that I am promoting the continuance of the gardens in order to unload a white elephant, and to create a consulting job for myself, neither of which is the case. The place is by no means a white elephant, and since I have promised Mrs. Farrand that, if the gardens are not to be properly maintained, I will see to it that they are destroyed, I could get out from under very nicely through the sale of plants, land, and the gardener's house and greenhouse. A job in connection with Reef Point is, frankly, the last thing I am looking for, since I simply do not have time for it. If the place is to be continued I can help out with ideas and advice if they are wanted or needed, but that is all. The reason for this gratuitous explanation is that I think it should be made clear to everyone that all those who are advocating the continuance of Reef Point, including me, are doing so for purely impersonal reasons.

Yesterday afternoon six of the local members of the Reef Point corporations sat down and discussed the whole situation for two hours. The conclusions reached were these:

1. No organization can be expected to take over the gardens without an adequate endowment, since maintenance cost are too high to make it practical to raise the amount needed on an annual basis.
2. It is very unlikely that a general appeal, even if nationwide, would produce very much in the way of endowment funds.
3. Since taxes are assessed on April 1, and garden work must begin soon after that, a decision must be made before April 1 as to whether the gardens are to be continued or abandoned.
4. Since the time is limited by the tax assessors and the growing season, a decision must be made before the proper machinery is set up to receive any sizeable gifts with proper tax

benefits to the givers. To get around this difficulty, the Max Farrand Memorial Corporation might take title to the place temporarily, - probably for one year, provided that it had evidence that an endowment would be forthcoming.

The first of these conclusions is fairly obvious, since there seems to be no group in sight that is willing to commit itself to raising \$20,000 a year.

Everyone seems to agree that a general appeal for funds should be made if the project goes ahead, and that every effort should be made to get widespread and continuing interest aroused. There is not, however, any reason to think that such an appeal would produce more than a few thousand dollars. The Garden Club of America and its member clubs should be brought into the picture if this can possibly be done, but it does not seem likely that they would produce any large amount of money.

The April 1 deadline is, of course, much too close at hand, but it can't very well be helped. The suggestion that the M.F. Memorial take over is a partial way around this, but it must still be known within the next three weeks whether or not there is any chance that the place will be endowed. All this is obviously shaping up into what sounds like an ultimatum! To be perfectly open about it, however, it must be admitted that you now appear to be the only possible saviour of Reef Point. I hope you will understand that neither I nor anyone else thinks you should be its sole saviour, nor are we asking you to save it. A fund whose income would provide a large part of the cost of running Reef Point is a tremendous thing to expect from any one source. It is simply that there seems to be only one source in sight. I wish there were others, and perhaps there are, although there is no evidence of them; and unfortunately a definite commitment is needed if we are to gain the time necessary to look for them.

Everyone who is really interested in seeing Reef Point preserved seems to be willing to contribute time, effort and money within the limits of their abilities, but no one has yet appeared who is able to make any large gift of money. Locally, where the real interest should come from, there is plenty of willingness, but no chance whatever of raising an adequate endowment. Of the members of the Garden Club of Mt. Desert, Mrs. Edward Browning Jr. is the only one who has so far shown any interest. She is making up for all the others, is getting the facts of the case before Mrs. Fergus Reid, and will be a tremendous help if the gardens are kept. There are others who are equally interested, and there should be no lack of workers. The fact remains, however, that their work cannot be expected to produce the one thing that is needed at once: the definite prospect of an endowment.

The baby which Mrs. Crowninshield accuses you of leaving on her doorstep is a mere embryo compared to the one I am leaving on yours, and I cannot tell you how sorry I am to be the one to put it there. Perhaps the wisest thing is to leave it in its coma and let it expire. Certainly you have no obligation whatever to do otherwise.

This long letter tells you many things you already knew, but they have been put down here for the record, and so that you can pass along parts of this letter if there is any reason to do so. There is one more thing to add. The members of the Max Farrand Memorial Corporation who met yesterday took no formal vote on the question of accepting the Reef Point property temporarily. Mrs. Farrand and many of the other members do not know of the meeting nor of the informal decisions reached there. Acceptance of the property would have to be by a vote taken at a properly-called meeting. There are no legal barriers to such a step, however, and we all feel certain that a majority of the members would vote in favor of it under the right conditions. Mrs. Farrand is the unknown quantity, but I think that she would agree to having the corporation take the place for a year if the whole thing were explained, as of course it would be. It does not, however, seem wise to run the risk of upsetting her unless there is some definite prospect of going ahead, so perhaps it would be best if this plan were not very widely discussed for the time being.

The letters from Mrs. Crowninshield are being returned to you. Whatever may happen, everyone at this end is sincerely grateful to you and to her for your interest and your efforts to keep Reef Point from disappearing.

Very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert W. Patterson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Robert W. Patterson

January 13, 1956.

Dear Mrs. Reed :

I appreciate your sending me such a nice letter, and I was sorry you could not be here for our meeting. At the last minute Mrs. Crowninshield came into the meeting, and she feels very strongly that some one, some where, should do something to try to keep the Reef Point Gardens open to the public. Mrs. Erastus Corning, who goes to Bar Harbor for a part of the summer, said that the entire thing had happened so quickly and so quietly, that many of the members of the Mt.Desert Garden Club did not even know what Mrs. Farrand had done. I have been trying to think what could be done, and I wonder if the first step would not be for you to write a full explanatory letter to all your members, telling them what had happened, and that The Garden Club of America would like to do something to save the gardens. It would be frightful to have that garden disappear entirely.

My idea would be to notify your members just what the situation is. Then perhaps you could ask one member to head a committee to investigate what should be done. I would suggest either Mrs. Frederic Rosengarten, maybe Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, who is so interested in it, or Mrs. John J. O'Brien, who is also a member of the Michigan Garden Club. Mrs. Thomas Thatcher's daughter, Mrs. Edward Browning, Jr., I am told would be an excellent person to head up a Committee. I would suggest a small committee of three or four and I strongly advise that some local people be asked to be on the Committee. I feel it should be a community group, rather than a Garden Club group, but the start must be made by the Mt.Desert Garden Club.

Mrs. Crowninshield feels that a group could find out how much money is needed to have the garden continue. I understand about \$20,000 must be raised to repay Mr. Patterson. A Committee probably could write letters to all residents of Mt.Desert and certainly some money would be collected. This Committee should bring back to your club what it would involve to have the garden open. It would really be a committee to investigate what should be done. Now, no one knows just what the situation really is or what should be done about it.

I will be interested in your reaction to these ideas. Hasn't your club got the planting around the Jackson Memorial Hospital well started by this time, and wouldn't they be interested in a new project ? Perhaps admission could be charged to see the garden, perhaps the members of the Mt.Desert Garden Club could act as guides. It would certainly be an educational project. I would like to see a draft of any letter you send out to your members, and I think the sooner a letter can go out, the better. I am sure your members will be full of suggestions and ideas. Do feel free to give me your frank opinion on all this.

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Sincerely yours,

(Sgd) Etheldreda S. Reid

Mrs. Fergus Reid, Jr.
President.

Mrs. Homer Reed,
Berwyn, Pa.

Sunnycroft
Berwyn, Pennsylvania.

January 30th, 1956.

Mrs. Fergus Reid, Jr., President
The Garden Club of America
15 East 58th Street
New York 22. N.Y.

Dear Mrs. Reid:-

Upon receipt of your letter of January 13th I endeavored to get in touch with all members of the Executive Committee of the Garden Club of Mt.Desert by sending them copies of your letter together with my report to you of January 8th. In many cases I was able to reach the members personally.

I now have the opinion of fifteen out of the nineteen members of the Executive Committee and all fifteen feel that the Garden Club of Mt.Desert cannot assume any responsibility in regard to the Reef Point Gardens.

Most of those to whom I talked recalled that the problem of Reef Point had been presented and had been fully discussed at our Annual Meeting held September 1st and again at the meeting of the new Executive Committee held soon thereafter on September 6th, both meetings being well attended.

Mrs. Lincoln Cromwell who has been very close to Mrs. Farrand and understands the problem presented by Reef Point, will see you very soon after which I am sure you will appreciate the reasons for the position that the Club has taken.

With kindest regards, I am

Very sincerely yours,

(Sgd) Anna Wetherill Reed

(Mrs. Homer Reed) President
Garden Club of Mt.Desert

AWR:ewp