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## **Expanding Histories/ Expanding Preservation: The Wild Garden as Designed Landscape**

Wilderness landscapes are an inherent element of national parks. Such places are stewarded and interpreted as important contributions to understanding landscape and nature. However, wild gardens within the context of designed landscapes, while often referring to wilderness and the aesthetics of natural landscapes, have been less easily recognized as important places and sites of interpretation and preservation, much less as significant designed spaces. Preservation advocates and historians have frequently overlooked the historic contributions of designed woodlands, meadows, and meandering streams. They are neither wilderness nor designed, challenging any standard preservation treatment and interpretation. The Causeway, a country estate in Washington, D.C., designed by Ellen B. Shipman and Charles A. Platt, comprises formal gardens, cow pasture, open lawns, woodlands, wild gardens, bridle paths, and meandering streams. Drawing on the history of this site in the context of similar landscapes designed by Beatrix Farrand, Ellen Shipman, and Warren Manning, this paper considers the challenges inherent in the preservation and reading of designed landscape as wild garden. Narrating the history and experience of the landscape as a whole reveals the values and intents inscribed into this significant work of landscape architecture and expands the historical breadth and depth of contemporary landscape histories.

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# Expanding Histories / Expanding Preservation: The Wild Garden as Designed Landscape

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From the earliest days of the profession of landscape architecture, designers and patrons were interested in the natural landscapes of forests, woods, and wilderness. However, these terms have had a variety of meanings and reveal multiple and frequently shifting assumptions. Thomas Jefferson envisioned the Grove as an American equivalent of the English landscape, providing shade with the undergrowth removed, the trees pruned and thinned, and the woodland “broken by clumps of thicket, as the open grounds of the English are broken by clumps of trees” (Jefferson 1806). Frederick Law Olmsted created Biltmore forest, the nation’s first managed forest, as a landscape of scientific research, as well as a model of forest management. Jens Jensen planted a forest grove of white oak trees to surround the Lincoln council ring, a circular gathering area, in honor of both Abraham Lincoln and the American landscape. Landscape architects have been involved in the design and stewardship of forests, parks, and wilderness since the early nineteenth century, as they responded to the evolving changes in the relationship and meaning of nature and the natural landscape (Simo 2003).

Far less recognized in these narratives has been the inclusion of wild gardens as a feature of a designed, sometimes urban, landscape in the early twentieth century. Frequently sited on the edges of larger landscape plans, wild gardens were developed by landscape architects including Warren Manning, Beatrix Farrand, Fletcher Steele, and Ellen Shipman. Such landscape designs expressed a naturalistic style, drawing on a regional, even local, sometimes native, material palette. These wild gardens were highly structured designs posing as natural, suggesting a distinct hybrid of nature and art.<sup>1</sup>

Such wild gardens present a conundrum for preservation scholars and practitioners today. Designed to reference natural sites featuring a diversity of plant materials, water systems, and rock outcroppings, these gardens were intended to grow and mature in a less controlled manner than formal flower gardens or pastoral park landscapes of lawn and trees. However, this was often later interpreted to mean without maintenance, and many gardens were left to nature, as if art played no part in their aesthetics. Consequently, many lost significant integrity and what remained was increasingly hard to read. The Causeway estate in Washington, D.C., designed by Ellen Shipman and Charles A. Platt, included a wild garden and woodland landscape that after almost twenty-five years of neglect is finally getting attention. The project provides an interesting study of the challenges of reading, interpreting, and stewarding a wild garden and woodland as essential elements of early twentieth-century landscape architectural history.

## THE CAUSEWAY ESTATE

The Causeway estate represents one of the most important surviving landscape collaborations of architect Charles Adams Platt and landscape architect Ellen Shipman. The landscape comprises a small hillside and a Georgian mansion at the top of the hill, with views of the landscape and distant capital city. The estate landscape transitions from formal flower gardens near the house to open lawn embracing the hill, and finally, at the edges, to a wild garden and woodland landscape of native trees, shrubs, and a gurgling stream traversed by bridle and walking paths. The landscape reflects Platt’s description of Italian landscapes made up of formal and architectonic

spaces immediately surrounding the house with less formal, more park-like landscapes at the edges of the estates (Davidson 1995). Individual garden spaces at the Causeway were integrated into a whole through the use of simple geometries and an emphasis on sitelines and vistas and featured extensive use of stone and water, as well as an abundance of plants. This design approach was eventually recognized as a particularly American contribution to landscape architecture as it engaged the American landscape in all its glory (Davidson 1995; Morgan, Platt et al. 1995; Platt 1894) (Fig. 1).

The battle to save the Causeway, re-named Tregaron, ended recently with a preservation victory that was nevertheless a compromise. The current decision allows several houses to be built out of sight of the mansion and formal gardens, which will, in turn, generate needed funds to rehabilitate the deteriorated landscape. The struggle to preserve as much of the Causeway landscape as possible was complicated in large part by questions about the worth and meaning of its woodlands and wild gardens.

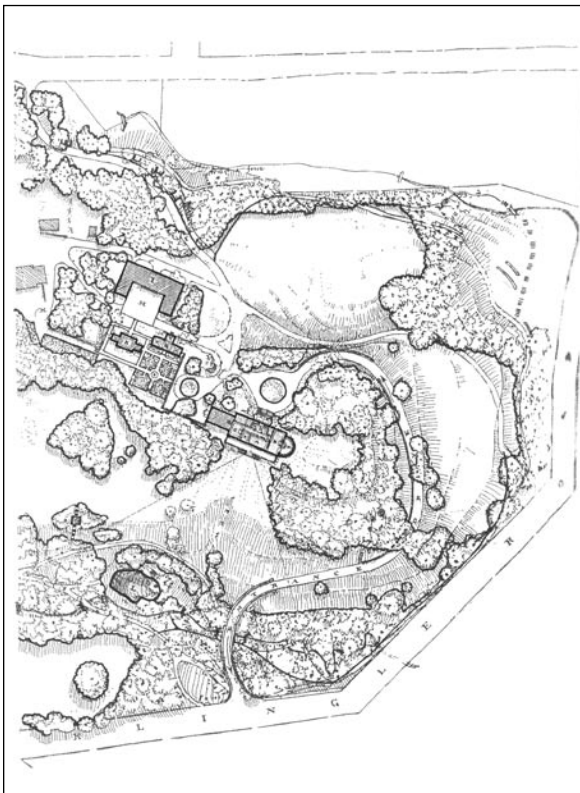


Fig. 1. 1915 plan as published in Samuel Howe's *American Country Houses of To-Day*.

Community interest in preserving the Tregaron estate began with the neighborhood-based "Friends of Tregaron" (FOT) in 1967, a group that remained loosely organized until the property was put up for sale in the late 1970s. Fearing incompatible development, FOT took advantage of the city's newly enacted preservation law by sponsoring an application to designate the property a landmark in 1979. The D.C. Historic Preservation Review Board (HPRB) designated the twenty-one-acre property, finding that "Tregaron was conceived as a country estate with sympathetically and carefully landscaped grounds."<sup>2</sup> In 1990, the estate was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

From a preservation point of view, the landscape would seem in an ideal position—it was linked with two important figures in the history of architecture and landscape architecture. While some buildings had been added, little development had encroached on the larger site, which was located in a neighborhood with the support and resources to sustain a preservation project. While the FOT was able to establish the site as a landmark, it was primarily acknowledged for its architecture and formal gardens and simply as an excellent example of a country house, rather than for its wild garden or woodland landscape. With increased recognition and efforts by neighbors, scholars, and preservation activists, the Causeway landscape now serves as a model for discourse on the complex issues of landscape preservation and in particular the dilemmas of working with a designed wild garden or landscape. This paper describes the Causeway landscape as a place straddling the edge of the city and the country, not merely in location but aesthetically. This project reflects similar interests in the landscape preservation challenges posed by Beatrix Farrand's Dumbarton Oaks Park in Washington, D.C.; the Woodstock Estate by Elizabeth Billings in Vermont; the Gwinn Estate in Ohio, featuring the work of Warren Manning and Shipman; and Longue Vue in New Orleans, also designed by Shipman. Such challenges to landscape preservation help us to describe a richer and more diverse narrative of cultural landscape histories. This paper discusses one such project and suggests the questions and challenges that arise in trying to preserve, interpret, and/or rehabilitate a wild garden or woodland landscape.

## A COUNTRY ESTATE LANDSCAPE

The Causeway landscape was designed as a country estate representing the aspirations of the clients, Mr. and Mrs. James Parmelee, as well as the vocabulary of the designers, Charles Platt and Ellen Shipman. Platt (1861-1933) had practiced as a painter and etcher and studied at the National Academy of Design and in Paris (Platt and Cortisoz 1913). As an artist and traveler, he was fascinated by architecture, landscape, and scenery and traveled to Europe where he studied Italian villas, using his sketches to illustrate a series of articles later compiled into a book in 1894, titled *Italian Gardens*. Platt subsequently embarked upon a career as architect and landscape architect. He was responsible for the initial plans for the Causeway and for the design of the mansion (Morgan, Platt, et al. 1995; Platt 1894).

Ellen Shipman (1869-1950) was described as “one of the best, if not the very best, Flower Garden Maker in America” by Warren Manning, himself a leading early twentieth-century landscape architect. *House and Garden* named her the “dean of American women landscape architects,” recognizing her role as a teacher, leader, and consummate professional (Manning 1917; Wright 1933, 50). Having established a practice in Cornish, New Hampshire, where Platt also lived, Shipman opened an office in New York City in the early 1920s, joining a growing community of women landscape architects in the city.<sup>3</sup> Professional photographers such as Mattie Edwards Hewitt, Jessie Tarbox Beals, and Frances Benjamin Johnston, published images of Shipman gardens including her own gardens at Brook Place. As early as 1912, Shipman was collaborating with Platt on projects from Seattle to Philadelphia to expand and enhance the horticultural palette of his planting designs. In 1913, Shipman was invited to collaborate in the Causeway project. There she worked with Platt’s overall concepts, beginning with a formal flower garden and extending to the wild garden and woodland landscape (Callcott 2006; Shipman).

Located in Cleveland Park, a streetcar suburb in northwestern Washington, D.C., the Causeway served as an easy refuge from the city. Grover

Cleveland and Gardiner Greene Hubbard, founder of *National Geographic*, built summer homes in the neighborhood. Hubbard’s home, Twin Oaks, a forty-acre wooded knoll, featured a large double-trunk oak within a small cow pasture, providing the namesake for the estate. While the earliest suburban developments followed the urban grid, the area to the east, where the Twin Oaks estate stood, was an extension of the Olmsted firm’s designs for Rock Creek Parkway and community, featuring large individual lots along gently winding streets such as Klinge Road, which bordered the Causeway estate (Olmsted 1903-1915).

James Parmelee, a banker from Cleveland, Ohio, and his wife, Alice Maury Parmelee, bought a twenty-acre piece of the Twin Oaks estate in 1911 from Hubbard’s daughter. Avid art collectors and patrons, they hired Platt to design the year-round country house. “The Causeway,” named after the beautiful stone bridge constructed over the stream, stood just at the edge of the growing city, close enough to feel a part of it but far enough away to enjoy its country setting (Wood 1989). A June 1912 survey by James Berrall shows the landscape was a varied and scenic setting for the new home, comprising existing woodland with areas carved out for two farmhouses, barns, and a cow pasture. An old bridle path circled the lower edges of the hill offering views into and out of the landscape.

Platt took full advantage of surrounding views and vistas, selecting the summit of the hill for the new house, just south of the original farmhouse. He designed the brick Georgian Revival mansion in keeping with many of the District’s Colonial and Federal-era estates. The Causeway retained its country-estate atmosphere, protected as it was from encroachments by the Klinge Valley chasm, Klinge Road, and the Twin Oaks estate, as shown in the Berrall survey. Samuel Howe, in his 1915 book *American Country Houses of To-Day*, included a lengthy description of the estate, noting it is “an essay which invites a certain kind of life.... It is a little realm of its own” (Howe 1915).

Similar to Dumbarton Oaks and other such estates in the Washington, D.C., area, the Causeway was presented as a country landscape within an increasingly urban setting. The primary entrance

off Klingle Road was within view of the cow pasture, where the original twin oak stood. The view of the pasture suggested that the site was a productive farm or country place, a landscape of second nature (Fig. 2). In contrast, the formal mansion and lawn, glimpsed through the trees, implied the gentleman farmer or a landscape designed for pleasure. Emphasizing the country nature of the site, Platt designed the bridge over the stream using locally quarried rock and boulders. Similar rustic stonework was used throughout the landscape in the retaining walls, bridges, and outlooks. Stone walls had been used in Rock Creek Park and were a part of a popular Arts and Crafts aesthetic, suggesting a transition between the formal architecture of the house and the natural landscape. At the Causeway, the stone entrance served exactly this purpose — to transition from the natural and rural landscape to the formal Georgian home at the top of the hill.

The Georgian-style mansion crowned the hill with the most formal of gardens set just west of the house. This garden was “stately in arrangement but promise[d] to be gorgeously diversified in color and willful with its fragrance” (Howe 1915, 213). The flower garden signified third nature and was, appropriately, enclosed. The design, completed in 1914, was Shipman’s first contribution to the Causeway landscape (Fig. 3).

South of the garden lay an expansive lawn punctuated by large trees creating pockets of shade during the hot summer months. The landscape served as a transition from the formality of the mansion with its flower garden to the woodland garden at the edges of the estate. An exotic arbor beckoned the visitor into the wild garden and woodland below. Shipman’s planting plan dated Christmas 1915 incorporated the cow pasture, stream, and bridle path into a wild garden blended into the woodland landscape that extended the full circumference of the estate (Fig. 4). The wild garden comprised a natural pond and garden seemingly merging art with nature. Native and exotic plants were featured, including ferns, rhododendrons, and water iris, as well as an abundance of spring-flowering plants. The pond, surrounded by stones layered along the bank, featured aquatic plants placed in small groupings, with a bench to one side. A high

canopy of tall trees and an understory of flowering shrubs and smaller trees shaped a series of garden spaces (Figs. 5, 6). A system of paths wound around the pond and converged as they passed under the causeway following the stream downhill.

Shipman’s design for the Causeway wild garden articulated the *genius loci* by emphasizing the topography of hills, valleys, and watercourse. She took advantage of the dappled sunlight created by the delicate canopy of small-leaved trees, in contrast to the denser shade further into the woodland. The middle story featured light shrub masses that provided a sense of scale and added fragrance and color to the garden. Wild flowers were blended in to form irregular



Fig. 2. Cow pasture along Klingle Road, 1917 (Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, Ellen McGowan Biddle Shipman Papers, #1259. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library).



Fig. 3. Formal garden, looking back at entrance gate and brick wall, 1917 (Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, Ellen McGowan Biddle Shipman Papers, #1259. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library).

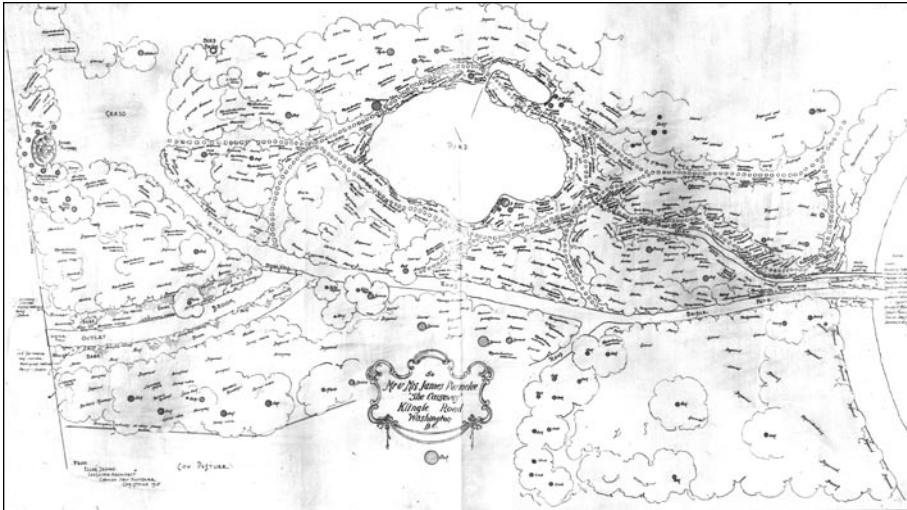


Fig. 4. 1915 plan of woodland and pond garden by Shipman (Ellen McGowan Biddle Shipman Papers, #1259. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library).



Fig. 5. Pond garden with view of bench in the background, 1917. Woman on the bench is likely Mrs. Parmelee (Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, Ellen McGowan Biddle Shipman Papers, #1259. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library).



Fig. 6. Woman (maybe Mrs. Parmelee) walking around the pond, 1917 (Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, Ellen McGowan Biddle Shipman Papers, #1259. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library).

beds enhancing the natural topography. While clearly not primeval nature, the wild garden was established as transition into what might signify first nature, the woodland and streams.

Platt and Shipman used the existing bridle path to bring hill, stream, and woodland together into a coherent design. The path moved the visitor between views of formal lawns, woods, and the expanse of Klinge Valley. Shipman defined garden areas with a variety of vegetation, drawing on rhododendrons and dogwoods as important plant families. Wildflowers, aquatic plants, and flowering trees that allowed dappled sunshine described the wild garden nearest the house, while larger, denser deciduous trees and

rhododendrons comprised the woodland along the bridle path. The path followed the primary stream around the hillside, with small bridges making access easy and serving as an edge between the natural woodland and stream and third nature, the garden or place of culture (Fig. 7). Rustic stone overlooks were placed at strategic points. The interplay of formal and informal elements, artistic and naturalistic settings, created a dynamic character for the bridle path and, in turn, the estate. This was a designed landscape through which the visitor moved in order to appreciate and enjoy an active engagement with the site and setting. There was no single vantage point from which all views could be enjoyed.



*Fig. 7. Bridle path as it passes under the Causeway, following the meandering stream, 1917 (Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, Ellen McGowan Biddle Shipman Papers, #1259. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library).*

## DESIGN INFLUENCES

Shipman and Platt's ideas for the landscape reflected contemporary interests in a variety of garden types and naturalistic landscapes. The wild garden illustrated some of the design principles espoused by William Robinson, a British gardener, author, and designer. As Robinson suggested, plant species were grouped in masses and intended to spread and naturalize. The wild garden did not have the formality or geometry of the flower garden but the curvilinear nature of an informal, wild landscape. The garden did not imitate nature but rather drew on nature's lessons, suggesting it participated in natural systems and yet

remained distinct as a designed landscape. The design was experienced through the textures, colors, and relationships of the plants to one another and to the larger landscape, as both Robinson and the famous English flower-garden designer Gertrude Jekyll had suggested was appropriate for flower gardens of any type.

While much was made by Robinson and others of the natural appearance of the plant materials, they did not necessarily choose native plants. Shipman's loose mix of native and exotic plants reflected an alternative description of what made a plant appropriate to a site. As Robinson had argued for the "rightness of plants allowed their natural settings" (Robinson 1894, xvii), so Shipman and others developed designs in which plants were aesthetically fitting and appropriate rather than botanically native, though they could be naturalized. This was the wild garden, clearly distinct from the wilderness landscape.

The Billings estate in Woodstock, Vermont, reflected contemporary interest in both the wild garden and in an American interpretation of Robinson's thesis and thus may have served as a precedent for the Causeway. The Billings family had been friends with Platt since the early 1890s, visiting him in Cornish and hiring him to help with the design of a series of Italianate terraced gardens at the estate. They commissioned a number of landscape architects following Platt, including Martha Brookes Brown Hutcheson, who likely laid out the entrance drive and borders by the house, and Shipman for redesign of the planting beds in 1912-1913.<sup>4</sup> The Woodstock estate also featured a series of wild gardens, largely developed by Elizabeth Billings beginning in the 1890s. These woodland and wild gardens, in close proximity to the formal gardens, included a fernery with cascading pools, meandering paths, a woods drive with rustic stone walls and a stone bench, and a lily pond. Billings created these gardens in an area of mature trees and dappled sunlight, adding flowering shrubs and native and exotic plants, while carefully thinning the existing plants. When Shipman visited the Billings, first in 1911 and then over the next few years, she likely enjoyed a walk through the fernery and lily-pond gardens. The woodland garden at the Causeway appears similar, with careful thinning of existing trees

and shrubs, the addition of native and exotic flowering plants, and a pond and stream as character defining elements (Auwaerter 2005). Stonework surrounding the pond is also similar to that along the Billings lily pond and woods drive.

The recently rehabilitated gardens at Gwinn, near Cleveland, Ohio, offer another contemporary example of a landscape merging a range of garden types from wild to more formal. Platt and Warren Manning, beginning in 1906, collaborated on an extensive estate for William Gwinn Mather along the shores of Lake Erie. Platt designed the Georgian mansion surrounded by formal Italianate gardens with an extensive view of the lakeshore. In 1912, Manning designed and began the process of planting a twenty-acre wild garden, offering a powerful contrast to Platt's formal landscape and mansion. Shipman visited the estate in 1914, when she was asked to provide planting plans for the flower garden. The Woodstock and Gwinn gardens illustrate the development of an American aesthetic grounded in an experience of regional and local plants and landscape. They were carefully articulated designs that drew on a vocabulary based in nature and the natural. What remained unclear was how the designers and patrons envisioned these sites over time and how they were to be stewarded as designed landscapes. However, unlike many modern designs, these were clearly not meant to be kept exactly as created. Growth and change were inherent in the design of wild gardens and woodland landscapes; the challenge lies in how much and what type.

Having developed a significant interest in wild gardens, Shipman incorporated them where she could, as she did at the Causeway. In the last decades of her practice she focused attention on the design of wild gardens and woodlands at Longue Vue in New Orleans, designed from 1935 to 1950 in collaboration with Edith Stern, the patron, and Caroline Dormon, a naturalist, author, and native-plant expert. The intent of the wild garden design was to create a "controlled, effusive wildness" (LANDSCAPES and Karson 1977, 83). While Shipman designed the estate, she worked closely with Dormon on the wild garden, as she was not intimately familiar with the plants of the South and understood the importance of using native and naturalized plant

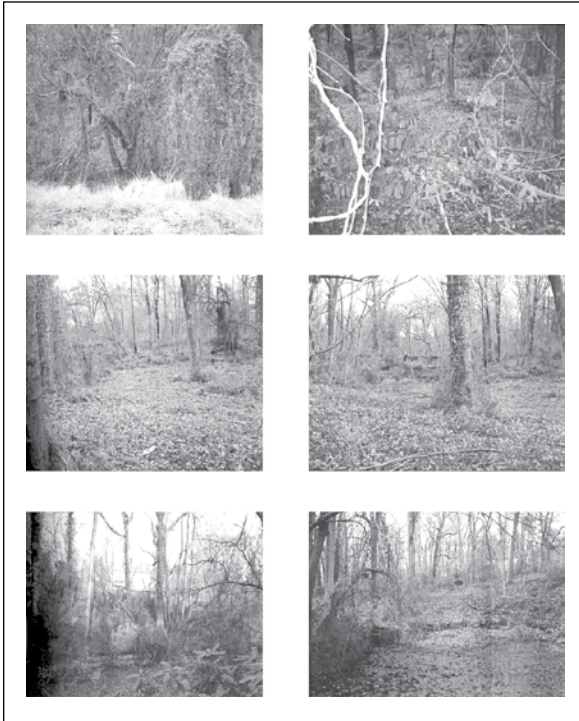
materials (Hohmann 1998). Shipman may well have first experienced wild gardens at Woodstock and at the Gwinn gardens, but it was at the Causeway that she was first able to explore the design approach in practice and at Longue Vue that she was able to express the culmination of her design praxis.

Thus, the Causeway's design reflects contemporary theory and practice of some of the leading landscape designers in Europe and the United States. It is also an outstanding work by two major early twentieth-century designers. For these reasons the preservation issues associated with later twentieth-century alterations significantly affected the integrity and significance of the site. This was particularly true for the least understood and most easily altered part of the site—the woodland.

#### **CHANGE COMES TO THE CAUSEWAY**

The Causeway estate was sold in the 1930s to Ambassador Joseph Davies and his wife, Marjorie Merriweather Post, who renamed the estate Tregaron and initiated alterations to the landscape, including the temporary addition of a golf course. Azaleas and rhododendrons were planted in the wild garden and woodland and a dacha was built in the flower garden. In 1978, the Washington International School (WIS) purchased the mansion, buildings, and approximately six of the original twenty acres. Despite landmark protection and eventual listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the property's historic value and integrity were clearly threatened by both development and deterioration (Wood 1989) (Fig. 8).

The Tregaron Development Corporation purchased the remaining 14.6 acres — the woodlands, pond garden, and meadows — with the intent of developing them with up to 180 townhouses and associated parking lots. While the Friends of Tregaron was not opposed to limited development, it established as its mission "to ensure that any additional building on the property will respect the landmark" (Wood 1987). The group was successful in convincing the city's preservation and zoning boards to reject the development plan in 1982. Subsequent proposals in 1987 (for thirty-three



*Fig. 8. Views of the woodland and wild garden prior to restoration work, 2007 (Photograph by Steve Callcott).*

detached houses) and 1998 (for up to fifty houses) were never actively pursued once community opposition became apparent. A third attempt was made in 2001, with a proposal for four large houses in the cow pasture and pond valley immediately adjacent to the causeway. While more limited in scope, the owner made clear that this was a first step in what was to include further development. After receiving a negative report by the city's Historic Preservation Office (HPO), the owner withdrew the proposal.<sup>5</sup>

Under the District's preservation law, alterations, new construction, and subdivisions are subject to review to ensure compatibility with the specific character and features that make the property significant. For proposals affecting a landmark, the law stipulates that such work shall not simply "retain" but must "enhance" the property. At the same time, the law also establishes the importance of "encouraging adaptation for current use." Under this legal framework, WIS had been successful between 1985-1995 in constructing a classroom building and a gymnasium along the estate's corridor of service buildings. Because of careful

massing, design, and location in an area of the estate intended for support buildings, both projects were approved by the District's review board as compatible additions. By contrast, the residential redevelopment proposals would have destroyed the landscape.

## **PRESERVATION ISSUES AND THEIR RESOLUTION**

Frustrated by more than twenty years of failed redevelopment efforts, the Tregaron Development Corporation approached the HPO in 2003 to discuss how a development project could be formulated that might gain approval. The HPO, concerned about the loss of integrity to the landscape after almost half a century of deferred maintenance, erosion, loss of old growth trees, the spread of invasive species, and petty vandalism, suggested that the community and HPRB might look favorably on a limited proposal for development if it included a significant rehabilitation of the landscape. The principles by which a development project might be found to retain and enhance Tregaron were outlined: the proposal should be comprehensive, accounting for the entire site; development should be clustered in the least obtrusive areas, outside of the important viewsheds, vistas, and planned landscapes; new buildings should work with the existing topography and not result in the property's being parceled into suburban-styled lots; the so-called undeveloped land should be protected in perpetuity through easements or donation to a land trust; and the proposal should include a significant landscape restoration, reforestation, and replanting plan based on the original design of the property. However, little was understood about what that restoration or replanting might mean in practice.

With these principles in mind, the development firm hired Miller/Hull, a Seattle-based architectural firm with extensive experience in environmentally sensitive sites; Oehme van Sweden Associates, landscape architects; and EHT Traceries, a preservation consulting firm. The team's first proposal called for the construction of sixteen houses – two at the Macomb Street entrance, one on Klinge Road adjacent to the twin oak in a portion of the former cow pasture, and thirteen single and paired houses along a new road to be cut through the

northern meadow, a portion of which would follow one of the original bridle paths. In order to minimize their impact as seen from the drive and within the property, the houses were designed in wood, stone, and glass, with green roofs, screened with new plantings, and sited within the woodland garden on the downward slope of Klingle Valley. The landscape restoration plan included repairs to the causeway, reestablishing the pond and surrounding walk, clearing fallen trees, enhancing the understory and ground-cover plantings based on Shipman plans, and implementing a storm-water management system (Miller/Hull 2004).

After much negotiation, the plans were revised, removing the proposed interior road and reducing and relocating the majority of houses to the northeastern edge of the property on the sloping woodland along Klingle Road, where they were sited below the existing bridle trail, largely out of view from the east meadow and drive. While generally thought to be better than the previous plan, the proposal raised a new concern for the HPRB. The members of the board wanted to be better educated about the issues of landscape architecture and preservation. Specifically, they were concerned that the Klingle Valley woodland might constitute a rare example of a wild garden, a landscape type about which they had little understanding but was known to have often been lost in other country estates. On the advice of the National Park Service landscape architect Perry Wheelock, the board determined that a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) should be prepared for the property prior to accepting a proposal for development. The development team agreed, engaging Heritage Landscapes, a specialist in the evaluation and rehabilitation of historic landscapes, to prepare an analysis of the landscape as the first phase of the CLR (Callcott 2006; Giordano 2005; Heritage Landscape 2005b).

The analysis identified six distinct landscape units from the Platt-Shipman era – the cow pasture and twin oak; the causeway and pond valley; the drive and meadows; the hilltop gardens and house; the woodland, stream and trails; and the Macomb entry, each of which was evaluated in terms of its character-defining features, current conditions, and potential for development. The landscape was found to be “a

complex design that incorporates formal and informal natural elements in a variety of ways, and should be seen as a work by Shipman in her own distinct style.” The report suggested that the woodland was the most adaptable area for development, as the houses could be sited below the view plane of the causeway, drive, and house in an area of Klingle Valley already compromised by construction (Heritage Landscapes 2005a; Heritage Landscapes et al. 2005).

When determining the integrity of a work, according to the Secretary of the Interior’s guidelines, one judges “the authenticity of a property’s historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property’s historic or prehistoric period.” In the CLR for Dumbarton Oaks Park, the landscape was considered to “retain a high degree of integrity” despite the extensive growth of invasive plant materials, a thicker canopy of trees, and alterations in the stream beds, as well as sites of erosion. Likewise, the Causeway woodland landscape was deemed by some to retain high integrity due to the quality of the extant bridle path; the remaining stone walls and bridges; the extensive evidence of other stone work, including stairs and walls; the surviving high canopy of trees and the rhododendrons, as well as remaining views and vistas. Others deemed integrity low due to the presence of significant numbers of invasive and exotic plants, the overgrowth of the canopy making the larger woodland darker and denser, the loss of one part of the streambed, and the alteration of the woodland and lawn edges. The integrity of a landscape that was intended to age and mature over many years is extremely difficult to judge. Does one consider the character of the site and its intended aesthetic or the physical characteristics and remnants of the design (Heritage Landscapes 2005b, 2; 2005c, 13; Way 2005)?

The controversy was finally resolved in 2006, when the developer, FOT, and the school entered into a legal agreement that established the terms for the preservation and rehabilitation of the estate’s landscape. The Tregaron Conservancy was formed with board members representing the school (WIS), the friends (FOT), and other community interests. The Tregaron Development Corporation agreed to transfer ten acres

to the Conservancy for rehabilitation, interpretation, and public use; an additional 3.5 acres were transferred to the school to be maintained as open space based on terms established by the Conservancy. The developer was given the right to build up to eight houses, with the Conservancy receiving funding from the sale of each house. Additional funding for the Conservancy was provided by WIS over a ten-year period to support rehabilitation efforts; the school, in turn, was given permission to expand an existing soccer field on a portion of the lawn west of the house.<sup>6</sup> With attention now turned to the specific design details, the siting and massing of the houses was revised, moving the new houses away from the pond valley and further down the hillside toward Kingle Road to preserve the bridle path and reduce potential visibility from the drive. While clearly a compromise, the agreement allows for a significant portion of the wild garden and woodland landscape to be retained and potentially rehabilitated for public enjoyment (Fig. 9).

The rehabilitation of woodlands and wild gardens is a relatively new area for landscape preservation. Challenges include describing original design and intentions and the identification of the integrity of the site and its details, as well as a serious consideration of stewardship and rehabilitation. Natural systems play a major role in the growth and maturation of the

site. However, that does not imply that such systems should be allowed to continue uncontrolled. The challenge lies in conserving the plantings, restoring the circulation systems and aesthetic experience, rehabilitating ecologies, and interpreting the place as a designed /wild garden. The fate of the wild gardens at the Causeway is not clear, but with limited funds, it will likely be the formal gardens and architecture that receive the bulk of the attention, while the wild gardens and woodland landscape will be minimally maintained. The many years of neglect are not likely to be undone.

### EXPANDING THE BREADTH OF LANDSCAPE HISTORY AND PRESERVATION

The designs of estates with wild gardens reflected the interests of the patrons and designers in a variety of landscape types. For many, this was part of a search for a distinctly American approach to landscape design. The emergence of regional styles of landscape design, from Virginian plantations to Prairie gardens, was an expression of interest in the natural landscape, native plants, and the role of art in the creation of gardens and landscapes. These interests were manifested in a variety of ways in different landscapes and regions throughout the nation. Wild gardens provided another venue for such interests

*Fig. 9. Work begins on rehabilitation of the woodland and wild garden, 2007. Invasive plant materials comprised the bulk of the materials removed in addition to dead trees and shrubs (Photograph provided by Steve Callcott).*



and pursuits. Nevertheless, it is the complexity of this rich vocabulary — and its seeming “natural” qualities — that has challenged historians and preservation professionals, as well as the public. It has been tempting to preserve one aspect of a landscape letting the rest go. However, if the bridle path at the Causeway is thought of as the spine of the property, the importance of retaining this element and its woodlands setting becomes clear; to sever this connection and divide this landscape into distinct parts would be the equivalent of dividing a house into a mere collection of rooms.

The landscape of the Causeway became the focus of interest because historians, preservation advocates, and landscape architects understood the contributions of Platt and Shipman to the full landscape, that the woodlands were not simply leftover woods but an integral aspect of that landscape. As the discipline of landscape preservation matures, the inherently complex issues of intent, growth, change, and context will continue to challenge scholars, advocates, students, and the public. Faced with designed landscapes that appear natural, as Anne Whiston Spirn has pointed out, it is often hard to see the design for the nature. Olmsted wrote “a great object of all that is done in a park, of all the art of a park, is to influence the mind of men through their imagination” (Olmsted 1871, 1-36). Woodlands and wild gardens, as with so many other garden and landscape types, offer much to our imaginations if we have the wisdom to carefully and thoughtfully steward and interpret them.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. While little research has focused on these gardens, a good overview of them can be found in Robin Karson, 2007.
2. Written designation decision of the HPRB, January 1979, on file at DC HPO.
3. Nellie B. Allen, Ruth B. Dean, Agnes Selkirk Clark, Beatrix Jones Farrand, Annette Hoyt Flanders, Louise Payson, and Isabella Pendelton.
4. The Billings family also commissioned Shipman for a variety of local gardening projects, including improvement to the grounds of the Congregational Church (1913) and the Woodstock train station, as well as a triangular park in front of the Elm Street Bridge.
5. HPO report to HPRB, July 20, 2001, on file at DC HPO. The HPO serves as the professional staff to the HPRB, submitting reports and recommendations for the board’s action. The HPRB is a mayoral-appointed board of volunteers with expertise in preservation, architecture, history, and archaeology.
6. TLP is to provide \$100,000 to the Conservancy for each house built and constructed on Macomb Street, \$60,000 for each house on lower Kingle Road, and \$500,000 for the house on upper Kingle Road. WIS is committed to providing \$1.3 million, largely through the funding of two full-time positions for maintenance of the landscape.

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