



7 September 2007

Elleen Wyckoff, *Chair*  
**Santa Barbara County Landmarks Advisory Commission**  
c/o Planning and Development Department  
123 East Anapamu Street  
Santa Barbara, CA 93191

Dear Chairman Wyckoff:

This letter has been prepared following a number of requests from local residents. Please recognize that our goal here is to both raise concerns and offer assistance.

I had the good fortune of visiting the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden on several occasions between 2000 and 2004 in my former capacity as the Coordinator of the National Park Service's Historic Landscape Initiative and as the Founder of The Cultural Landscape Foundation. With each of these visits, I recall becoming more and more astonished at the elegance, simplicity, and originality of the founder's vision. As touted in the July 1927 issue of *The Santa Barbara Gardener*, the "New Outdoor Museum," would be known as The Blaksley Botanic Garden. The magazine's editors, Lockwood and Elizabeth de Forest, noted that with the Garden "the visitor can discover for himself the great beauty of the setting and will be delighted that such an area is to be preserved unspoiled for all time." In fact, a number of the publication's early articles discuss the original design intent to "*develop the garden in such a manner as to increase the natural beauty of the setting*" (*Santa Barbara Gardener*, August 1927) and for the Garden to "*become a valuable adjunct to practical work in our own gardens*" (February 1937).

Over the past decade or so, there have been many changes to the garden. The historic arrival experience is no longer used (but is thankfully still in place), new structures, signage, paving, and, of course, plantings have been installed as the Garden has grown and expanded. The combination of these alterations suggests the following questions: how true do these additions remain to the original design intent; and when does the Garden reach the tipping point in compromising its character-defining integrity? Additionally, as a potential National Historic Landmark in Landscape Architecture (see discussion on page 3), will these changes diminish what makes the Garden unique, thereby, diminishing funding prospects?

These questions are appropriate to raise when considering that the Garden was recognized in 2003, as a Santa Barbara County Historic Landmark – the product

of “a remarkable partnership between the Garden, the community, and the County of Santa Barbara Historic Landmarks Advisory Commission” (See the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden website: [www.sbbg.org](http://www.sbbg.org)). As testified to during the Historic Landmarks Commission hearing, this local designation carries greater restrictions than a National Historic Landmark (NHL) designation. However, NHL designation can open up avenues of funding not available to local landmarks. (The Santa Barbara County Courthouse is an excellent example of a local site that has benefited from its NHL designation in 2005.)

Recognizing that in Santa Barbara County “a designated Landmark is preserved and protected by conditions restricting its demolition, removal, alteration or use,” one is compelled to question the proposed work as outlined under Decision Item #8 regarding the Mountain Terrace Project:

“the installation of a three-tiered exhibit plaza, with three low level rock retaining walls, and a surface in a flagstone rock treatment. The total project area is 4,205 square feet, with planting beds along the edge of the retaining wall and sandstone flagstones making up the terraces.”

As this proposed work would adversely affect historic character-defining features, as well as visual and spatial relationships (which have been a hallmark of the Garden), the work would not meet *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation Projects and the Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (National Park Service, 1997).

Additionally, this proposed work should be considered within the context of other recent alterations such as the addition of a Japanese teahouse and the introduction of significant hardscaping (e.g. the paving and asphaltting over formerly dirt roads.) These changes were implemented preceding the newly announced 10-year plan for the garden as reported in *The Santa Barbara Newsroom*, July 11, 2007) and without a Cultural Landscape Report, may individually or collectively put the historic integrity of the property at risk. It is, after all, this “*higher level of historic, aesthetic or cultural significance*” that led to the County’s 2003 designation of the Garden as a “Landmark” and not simply a site possessing “Historic Merit.”

In order to address these questions, the following three areas of significance should be considered when reviewing the proposed and future work at the Garden:

### **The Garden is a Masterwork Design by Pioneering Master Landscape Architects and Designers**

The Garden was designed by Beatrix Farrand with Lockwood de Forest, Jr.; the product of the master plan by Farrand, and others between 1937 and 1943. Lockwood de Forest designed the information kiosk (similar to the one designed

by Farrand at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC). The landscape that de Forest designed in association with this kiosk was native in character, and the sandstone benches were harmonious and subordinate, receding into the larger landscape. This is a critical idea, as there was not only a general simplicity in the planting design, but all materials were organic and subordinate (e.g. simple carved benches, compacted paths);

### **The Garden was a Progenitor of a Type**

The garden represents the earliest application of native plants in a botanical collection in California. This is astonishing to consider when contrasted with other celebrated botanical gardens of its time, such as the Missouri Botanical Garden, Gray Summit, MO, (Henry Shaw, 1890s); New York Zoological (Botanical) Garden, Bronx, NY, (Calvert Vaux, Samuel Parsons, Jr., and later work by the Olmsted Brothers, 1895, 1897-1937); or, the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens, East Pasadena, CA, (William Hertich, 1904.) In all of these cases plantings included exotics, often displaying horticultural exuberance, and Victorian-inspired plantsmanship. One only needs to consider how significant native plants are today to both the arboretum and botanical garden movement to truly understand the innovation and import of the Santa Barbara approach.

### **The Garden Served to Promote a Cultural Movement**

As with Andrew Jackson Downing's work in New York's Hudson River Valley while serving as the editor of *The Horticulturist*, Lockwood and Elizabeth de Forest used the Garden as a laboratory and classroom to promote the use of native plants and promoted these ideas in the monthly periodical, *The Santa Barbara Gardener*. Produced from 1925 to 1942 by the Community Arts Association, the publication was aimed at educating Santa Barbarans on appropriate plantings and horticulture for the new architecture and the mild climate of Santa Barbara. Sydney Baumgartner in her new essay on Elizabeth de Forest (to be published by The Cultural Landscape Foundation and the University Press of Virginia in 2008) declares this publication to be "*a literary work of genius: Elizabeth's elegant prose, always with a bit of dash; Lockwood's landscape design philosophy; Elizabeth's exhaustive knowledge of plants and their culture; Lockwood's discussion of style, color, composition and proportion, with spirited responses and commentary from prominent horticulturists and designers.*" The Garden was a constant focus and was often profiled by its nationally significant designers and horticultural pioneers including E.O. Orpet, Kate Sessions, Lucy Foster Sexton, W.J. Pettingill, Lester Rowntree, Florence Yoch and Lucille Council, Hugh Evans, Francis E. Lester, Sydney B. Mitchell, Theodore Payne, and Victor Reiter, Jr.

In summation, the Garden is a visionary work of landscape architecture and landscape management that is worthy of deeper understanding to guide its change while insuring that its character-defining features are preserved and protected. **Current proposals such as the Mountain Terrace Project should**

**not be reviewed in isolation, but instead the stewards of the Botanical Garden should undertake a Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) to provide the necessary foundation for other planning efforts thus guiding the Garden into the next decade while honoring its past.**

As a former Federal employee with fifteen years of experience with the National Park Service, I believe that this landscape would make a strong candidate for a National Historic Landmark in Landscape Architecture – an elite collection of only fifty-or so such places in America. Such recognition is not only a worthy honor, but would be of great assistance in future development efforts.

If we may be of future assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line that tapers to the right.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR  
*Founder and President, The Cultural Landscape Foundation*

cc. Anne Almey, Planner, Santa Barbara Planning and Development Department; Susan Chamberlin; Barbara Lowenthal; Sue Adams; Kellam de Forest; Board of Directors, TCLF