



# *The Cross Estate Gardens*

*New Jersey Historical Garden Foundation*

## NEWSLETTER

**Fall 2007**

The New Jersey Historical Garden Foundation was established under the auspices of Mr. James Spiniello. Its board is composed of volunteers interested in the preservation, maintenance, and development of public, historical gardens. The Foundation is working with the National Park Service, U. S. Department of Interior, to preserve the Cross Estate Gardens.

*The New Jersey Historical Garden  
Foundation Executive Board*

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The New Jersey Historical Garden Foundation invites you to attend the Cross Estate Gardens'

### *30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration*

**Sunday, September 23**

1-5 p.m.

at the Cross Estate

61 Jockey Hollow Road, Bernardsville

Please join us as we celebrate 30 years of volunteering at the Cross Estate Gardens! Started in 1977 by Jean Pope and her loyal group of friends who began restoring the neglected Cross Estate Gardens, our group of hardy volunteers has followed in Jean's footsteps to make the gardens the spectacular, well-cared-for gem they are today. We also celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the New Jersey Historical Garden Foundation by Jim Spiniello, who provided the structure for aiding the restoration of the gardens.

Spend the afternoon and enjoy:

- \* Tasty refreshments prepared by our volunteers.
- \* Volunteer-assisted tours of the gardens.
- \* A silent plant auction with small trees, shrubs and perennials appropriate for planting in the autumn, plus garden-related ornaments and artwork.
- \* Slide shows explaining the history of the Cross Estate Gardens.

As a fundraiser, admission is as follows:

- \* Friend: \$30
- \* Patron: \$50
- \* Benefactor: \$100

All funds raised will aid in the restoration and maintenance of the Cross Estate Gardens. Your support is always greatly appreciated!

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# A Fond Look Back at the Gardens

Marge Van Ryzin asked me to write about the development of the Cross Estate Gardens, which I began 30 years ago. It is one thing to start a project, but the gardens have become better and better because of the continuity of care by a group of volunteer gardeners and benefactors. I love coming back to see the improvements.

The beginnings were such fun. I had just finished being project director of Tempe Wick garden with the Herb Society when a Park employee, Eric McKay, asked me to come see a Youth Corps project at the Cross Estate. The patterned, walled garden contained few plants and lots of weeds. The group had some money for planting, and I fell in love with the garden.

I asked Mary Cross Spence for pictures of her mother's garden when the family lived there. The pictures showed a wonderful garden with a strong perennial base, but bulbs were lifted and chrysanthemums and annuals were planted each growing season by an experienced gardener. I could not do that, so I decided to line the beds with boxwood and, if no volunteers appeared, I could plant various groundcovers in the beds. Herb Society members helped plant the boxwood and provided other plants. I found day lilies and peonies over the wall where the nursery and lilac area now are located.

The volunteers did come and have continued to come for 30 years! The Park could not help with money, but Park Ranger Jim Holcomb took lovely pictures, as did others, so I was able to give talks to garden clubs who donated money for more plantings. A local nursery gave broken bags of mulch and fertilizer, tree companies did free tree work and the volunteers branched out into the middle lawn and azalea areas to prune and restore original plantings. We even tried to start a native plant garden in the meadow, but the deer became a serious problem in all areas.



We were about to give up the project when Jim Spiniello walked into the garden. At first, he wanted to restore the water tower, but because he felt the volunteers were such a resource for the gardens, he decided instead to set up a foundation for us and put up deer fencing wherever the Park allowed. He also helped install a new irrigation sys-

tem and paid for the tent rentals at our first "Celebration of a Country Garden."

The celebration brought back the Cross family and some of the help who had worked on the estate. We had a "thank you" tea for those who had saved the estate from development. Artists had been painting in the gardens, so we had an art sale. We sold antiques, botanicals and plant society plants.

Mrs. Cross had been a steady winner at the New York Flower show, so various arboretums, garden clubs and Mr. Colontone, the last estate gardener, all did glorious flower arrangements to decorate the mansion. Two thousand people came during that fall weekend in 1988. We made lots of money!

Marge Van Ryzin, who has wonderful organizational skills, became manager of our foundation. She also was responsible for our first brochure. She prepared the slide presentation on the history of the Cross Estate for garden talks and wrote our first newsletter for the friends group that had been established. She is still writing the newsletter!

We also began having garden symposia on garden subjects for the friends each spring and began developing a native plant area to show the public that it is possible to landscape with native plants. This garden was established in the nursery and lilac area. Jim

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## New Slide Show

On September 23 during our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, you'll have an opportunity to see a new slide show that centers on the Cross Estate Gardens' history, restoration and efforts to continue preservation. I have taken archived slides and created a new format to share. I hope you will take time on this day of celebration to see the entire presentation or even a portion of it, as there is so much happening that afternoon. It will be time well spent, as the show informs and reminds each of us how much the foundation has done in the last 30 years to maintain and improve everyone's "Secret Garden."

— Steve Palmer

## A Fond Look Back

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Spiniello again made this second attempt possible by providing a deer fence. At first, we scavenged in front of the bulldozer in a Chester housing development to rescue native plants. It was an exhausting process, but we felt good about it.

After I moved away from New Jersey, Mary Sambrook improved and finished planting the native area and also began using more historically correct plantings in the walled garden. She is a fine horticulturist and continued to improve all the gardens with the volunteers and interns until retiring in 2004 and moving back to England. Helen Mageau, who had a very successful career at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum, now is garden advisor. Lucky gardens!

Hope to see you at the 30-year celebration on September 23 under sunny skies!

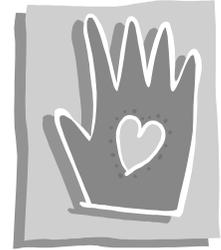
— Jean Pope

**Editor's Note:** A tree has been planted at the Cross Estate Gardens to honor Jean Pope. It is a Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) donated by Hall's Garden Center located at 700 Springfield Avenue in Berkeley Heights.

## Volunteer Report

Reeves-Reed Arboretum's loss is the Cross Estate Gardens' gain. A hearty welcome to the following new volunteers:

- ✿ *Joan Ryder*, who worked at Reeves-Reed for years, joined the NJHGF in 2002 and became president of the NJHGF and garden manager in 2006.
- ✿ *Hollace Bowers* worked at Reeves-Reed as a volunteer. She retired from her job in New York and joined us in 2005. In 2006, she became the membership chair of the NJHGF.
- ✿ *Mary Keselica* and *Carolyn Lydon* brought their vast garden knowledge from the arboretum to our gardens this year.
- ✿ *Betty McAndrew* has been volunteering for the NJHGF as our public relations person. She was the director of public relations at Reeves-Reed.



Also, many thanks to our steady week-in and week-out volunteers. The gardens wouldn't look as magnificent as they do without your work.

And farewell to Steve Palmer until next March. Steve has become a chaplain at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital in New Brunswick. We'll miss his laughter and willingness to take on all the hard jobs, and we eagerly await his return.

— Ruth Dittmann

## Visit Us Online!

Be sure to check out the Cross Estate Gardens Web site at [www.crossestategardens.org](http://www.crossestategardens.org). It was redesigned in 2006 by our Web master Ann Campbell and funded by a grant from the New Jersey Committee of the Garden Club of America. Our sponsor for the grant was the Garden Club of Somerset Hills. We thank them for their generosity. Ann continues to periodically expand and update the site. If you have any suggestions for more improvements, please use the "contact us" tab on the site.

# Renovating the Formal Gardens

The upper terrace has undergone a makeover. Old photos have helped the selection of some of Mrs. Cross' original plants. One of these is the Gas Plant (*Dictamnus albus*). They bloomed this spring with open-faced pink mauve flowers along a spike. It gets its name from the volatile gas it gives off which can be lit with a match. The flame dissipates quickly and does not harm the plant. I have never seen this plant on a deer-resistant list, but it would be worth a try since deer have keen noses and may be repelled by the smell which is not noticed by people. The lower garden will be next to get a spring facelift!

— Helen Mageau

# Spring Plant Sale a Wonderful Success!

Thanks to everyone who participated in our annual plant sale on June 2—our hardworking volunteers, led by Helen Mageau, who potted up divisions of plants

from the Cross Estate Gardens or from their own gardens, those who helped on the day of the sale and especially everyone who bought a plant.

Thanks to all of you, our sale was a great success, raising \$2,340, which was triple what we did last year and six times what we made the first year of the sale in 2005. We're eagerly looking forward to our next plant sale on Saturday, June 7, 2008.



*“No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of a garden.”*

— Thomas Jefferson



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Post Office Box 712, Bernardsville, NJ 07924*