



# The Cross Estate Gardens

New Jersey Historical Garden Foundation

## NEWSLETTER

Fall 2015

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, but not funded by, the National Park Service, U. S. Department of Interior, to preserve the Cross Estate Gardens.

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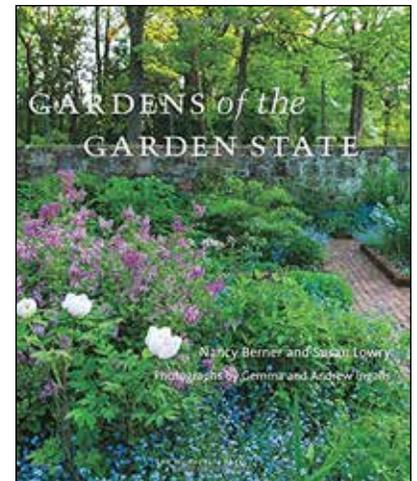
Newsletter/Website/Publicity:

Ann Campbell

## Talk & Tea

Thursday, October 22, 2015 from 1-3 p.m.

Please join us on Thursday, October 22 for our annual Talk & Tea. Our speakers will be authors Nancy Berner and Susan Lowry, whose new book *Gardens of the Garden State* features the historic walled garden of the Cross Estate Gardens on its cover. Nancy and Susan will take us on a visual tour of some of their chosen 29 spectacular public and private gardens in New Jersey. Copies of *Gardens of the Garden State* will be available for purchase. Cross Estate Gardens volunteers will again prepare and serve our superb tea, featuring savories, sweets and tea or cider.



The Cross Estate Gardens Talk & Tea will be held again at the First Presbyterian Church of New Vernon, 2 Lee's Hill Road, New Vernon. Registration is \$25 for New Jersey Historical Garden Foundation members and \$30 for non-members. Registration checks, payable to NJHGF, may be sent to New Jersey Historical Garden Foundation, PO Box 712, Bernardsville, NJ 07924.

## SCA Volunteers

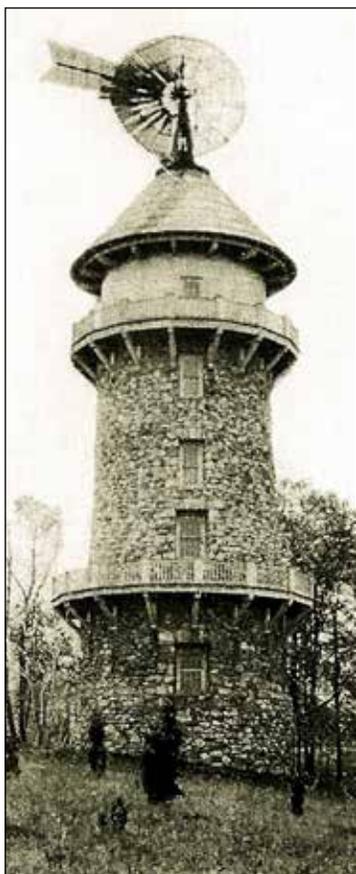


The Student Conservation Association (SCA) volunteers once again helped us out in the Cross Estate Gardens for three Wednesdays in July. These wonderful and dedicated high school students

from a variety of states throughout the country worked very hard weeding, watering, planting and mulching our various gardens. Our sincere thanks and appreciation to them for jobs well done! Good luck to them all.

## The Water Tower

Tucked away along the headwaters of the Passaic River, the Cross Estate goes back to the early years of the twentieth century when wealthy people built grand country mansions as summer retreats in the “Mountain Colony” located in Somerset and Morris Counties, NJ. The Cross Estate gardens and buildings provide a glimpse of a lifestyle that is now all but a memory.



*Water tower prior to mid-1920s*

The early twentieth-century landscape of the Cross Estate, characteristic of the Arts and Crafts period, includes a formal walled perennial garden, a wisteria-covered pergola, a mountain laurel allee, and a garden of native plants. Large specimen trees such as Silver Maple, Copper Beech and Chinese Sequoia (Dawn Redwood) can be found on the grounds.

The property now known as the Cross Estate was part of some 300 acres assembled by Mr. and Mrs. John Anderson Bensel between 1903 and 1906. The Bensels called their country property “Queen Anne Farm.” They built a 23-room stone house along with appropriate

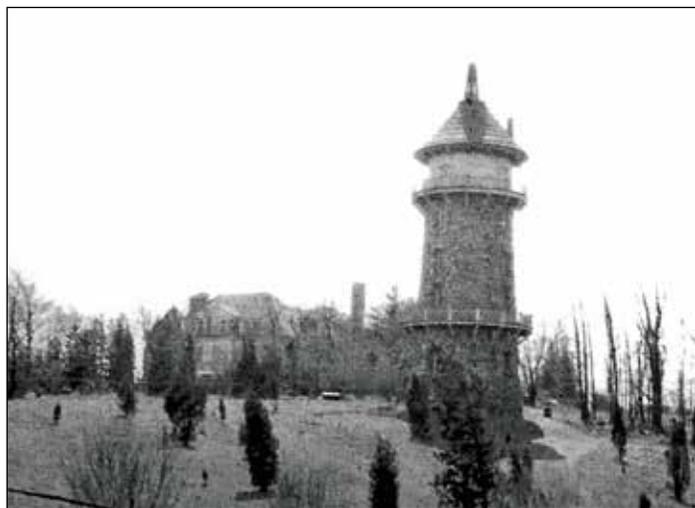
outbuildings, including a five-story stone water tower capped with a wooden windmill. Wind power pumped water from a well below to a wooden storage tank at the top of the tower. Since the tower is located at a high point on the property, the weight of the downward-moving water provided enough pressure to force water all the way up to the third floor of the main house in what is known as a gravity-fed plumbing system. In 1929, after a storm damaged the original windmill, the new owner, William Redmond Cross, replaced it with an electric pump, which is still used today to provide water to the Cross Estate mansion, several outbuildings, and the gardens. As the

trees were relatively small at the time, the water tower dominated the landscape. Decorative as well as functional, the water tower had two exterior wooden balconies that afforded scenic views of the countryside. It is typical of structures that were designed to make isolated estates in the early 20th century self-sufficient.

A few facts that we know about the water tower:

- The stone is granite, most likely locally quarried. The granite rubble stones and vernacular masonry style are the same used in the exterior of the house and elsewhere in similar estates in the area.
- The two wooden balconies originally surrounding the second and fifth floors were removed for safety reasons.
- The tower once echoed a similar feature in the house. The house that the Bensels built had an octagonal corner turret in the area that is now the terrace. After Mr. Cross’s death, Julia Cross substantially changed the house, and the turret was replaced with the terrace.
- In the mid-1920s the wooden windmill was broken in a storm. As Mrs. Bensel visited the property rarely after her husband’s death in 1922, it is believed that the water tower was electrified after the Cross purchase of the property in 1929. Since then it has supplied all of the water to the houses and grounds.
- The National Park Service is replacing the wooden doors and windows to minimize weather damage.

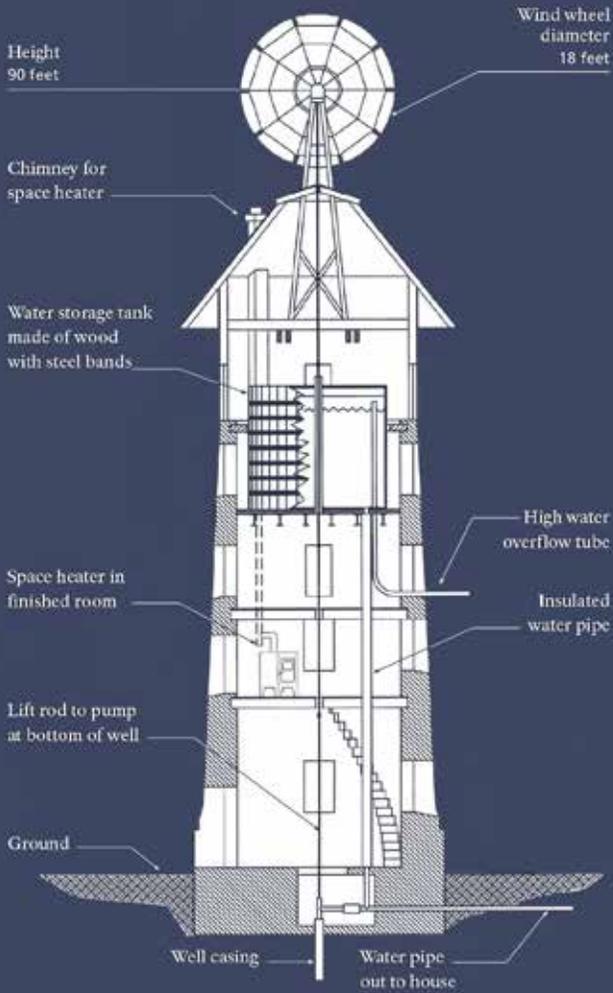
The historic water tower had been hidden from view for the past sixty years by the various invasive trees, such as Norway Maples and Norway Spruces, that grew up



*The water tower in 1929, close by the Cross Estate mansion*

### Water Tower Cross Section

The water tower has five floors with windows to provide views of the countryside. A fourteen foot high, 18,500 gallon water tank dominates the upper levels. The wooden balconies on the second and fifth floors deteriorated over time and, as a safety precaution, the National Park Service removed them in the 1980s.



*Drawing by Stephen Fogle, NJHGF Board Member.*

around the tower. While it has continually served the very important function of supplying water to the Cross Estate Mansion and the surrounding gardens, its uniqueness and magnificence were lost to visitors. In the early 2000s, the Cross Estate Garden volunteers opened up the view slightly by cutting down some of the invasive trees and shrubbery, creating a visual path to the water tower. In 2014, thanks to generous grants from the Garden Club of Somerset Hills and the New Jersey Committee of the Garden Club of America through the Garden Club of

Madison, plus a wonderful donation from Jean and Dan Pope, the volunteers were able to further cut down the invasive trees and shrubs blocking the view of the water tower and lay down a 95-foot bluestone path leading the eye towards the tower. They also planted 21 native trees and shrubs — Flowering Dogwood, Shadblow Serviceberry, red and white Eastern Redbuds and Bottlebrush Buckeye — in the cleaned out area around the new Tower Walk.



*The Water Tower in July 2015, after installation of the bluestone walkway and surrounding native trees*



*Now that the view to the Water Tower has been opened, the Water Tower has become a popular inspiration for visiting en plein air artists.*



## *The Cross Estate Gardens*

*New Jersey Historical Garden Foundation  
Post Office Box 712, Bernardsville, NJ 07924*

### **Join our Volunteers**

**F**rom early April through the middle of November, our hearty group of men and women volunteers meets every Wednesday morning from 9 a.m. to noon to work in the various gardens at the Cross Estate. Refreshments are provided during our 10:30 a.m. coffee break under the pergola. Please join us every Wednesday morning or whenever your schedule allows. All levels of expertise are

welcome. For more information, please call Janet DiMauro at (908) 223-1622 or Joan Ryder at (973) 376-0348, or email [info@crossstategardens.org](mailto:info@crossstategardens.org).



### **Tours of the Cross Estate Gardens**

**T**ours of the gardens are available every Wednesday at 10 a.m., from mid-April through October. Tours take approximately one-half hour. If your group would like to schedule a tour of the gardens on another day or time, please contact Joan Ryder at 973-376-0348. There is a suggested donation of \$5 per person for group tours.

### **Visit Us Online**

**B**e sure to check out the Cross Estate Gardens website at [www.CrossEstateGardens.org](http://www.CrossEstateGardens.org). You can also visit us on **Facebook**—search for Cross Estate Gardens or go to [www.facebook.com/pages/Cross-Estate-Gardens/146692902063110](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Cross-Estate-Gardens/146692902063110).



### **Become a Member**

**T**he NJHGF is always looking for new members to support its all-volunteer work in the Cross Estate Gardens. Every dollar donated goes into the gardens. Please become a member today, if you're not already a supporter. Membership rates are as follows:

Individual	\$25	Family	\$40
Friend	\$100	Sponsor	\$250
Patron	\$500		

Please mail your check, payable to NJHGF, to NJ Historical Garden Foundation, PO Box 712, Bernardsville, NJ 07924-0712. Thank you.