

Halcyon Memories

I first met Peggie Boegner 46 years ago when she appeared one sunny morning “out of the blue” in the living room of the 200 year old farm house we had just moved into. Standing in the midst of sparse furnishings and packing crates, she introduced herself, “I’m your neighbor.” We toured the empty house together and parted with Peggie’s assurance that we should be good friends as well as neighbors.

My wife, Irene, soon was invited to join the Board of Old Westbury Gardens, and ten years later I found time to become involved as well with preservation. There was a lot to be done. A Preservation Committee was formed with an architect, trustees, and staff and became quite active in restoring the Gardens from years of deterioration.

During that time, I became known, to Peggie, as “the man who fixes things.” We were friends by then and I was often introduced as “my neighbor,” “my friend,” or “the man who fixes things,” and sometimes all three.

Often, when I returned home from work, there would be a note by the phone to “call Mrs. Boegner – she’s fit to be tied!” which, when translated, meant she had something on her mind that was not going away until something was done about it. So, I would call, set a time to visit, and upon my arrival find Peggie ready with a pad and pencil for each of us to make a list, define the problems and then hand it over to me as though I would fix it or at least suggest a solution.

Determination was never lacking in Peggie. This would have been difficult to cope with were it not that I always found



*Remembering
Peggie . . .
1906-2006*

See pages 4&5 Caption TK

it easy to agree with her – not to please her but because she had taste, credentials, and knew the territory better than any of us latecomers to the scene. Her mind could cut through the complexity of a problem, enabling her to give a simple answer in a few words.

We would meet often, not to discuss preservation, which Peggie understood in a different sense than I did, but to exchange ideas and discuss what she thought was appropriate for the future of Old Westbury Gardens. It was during that period, that along with Mary Phipps, we wrote the mission statement we are still using today. Often Peggie would hand me several handwritten pages of her thoughts about the Gardens’ purpose and care from Director to gardener, from visitor to Trustee, and her worries over not spending more than what we have in “real money – money on hand,

not to be earned by some future event or hopefully given.” She asked me to keep her written thoughts together because they expressed her wishes for the Gardens’ future. I still have them.

During preservation work, several trunks containing thousands of letters and photographs dating from 1860 – 1950 were discovered in an attic passageway. Peggie and I decided to put together this material and her memories to create a book that would faithfully portray the gracious way of life that existed here during the early part of the century.

By the time we started to write *Halcyon Days* in 1983, a system of respectful concern for the others’ feelings and opinions was in place that would allow us to effortlessly sort through and organize these documents, letters, and

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President's Letter

In a way, my journey with Peggie ended where it began: at the Thatched Cottage. At our first introduction, over lunch, Peggie wondered what my favorite spot was at Old Westbury Gardens. I told her of my fascination with her straight-out-of-a-fairy-tale playhouse. Peggie's last visit to the Gardens occurred on a sun-filled and balmy day. We had intended originally to have lunch together, but we decided to change our meeting to a late-afternoon tour. I found Peggie waiting for me in her golf cart, Herma beside her, directly in front of her Thatched Cottage, beaming with delight as she pointed to Jay Cochran's son Rafe playing in his favorite sandbox.

We had a wonderful time that afternoon. Herma and I spoke afterwards about how Peggie looked beautiful, appeared so happy, and made us both smile as we drove around and took pictures of her beloved gardens.

Peggie had a fascinating and rewarding life. I feel fortunate and privileged that she shared some of her stories with me. Before I started as President of Old Westbury Gardens, Peggie and her granddaughter, Dita Graham Nickson, invited my wife Connie and me to dinner. That was my second glimpse of Peggie's vibrancy, devotion to her family, how she loved to be with people, and of her zeal for the Gardens. We met many times after that, and on each occasion I learned something new about her life and times at Westbury House. During one lunch, we discussed the 1930's, the topics ranging from the family's association with Charles Lindbergh to her visits to the newly established State Park at Jones Beach.

I was often surprised by Peggie's spirit of adventure. She had a zest for life unusual for a person of any age, let alone someone approaching her 100th birthday. With the unstinting assistance of Herma, her wonderful friend and companion, Peggie was constantly on the move: having dinner in Manhattan with her son Gordon, traveling to West Point, seeing Al Gore's film on the environment, visiting her favorite Starbucks, indulging in her newly developed taste for pizza, and writing her own speech for a party in honor of Carol Large's achievements as Old Westbury Gardens' out-going president.

A while back, I happened to mention

Chairman's Letter

We all feel the loss of Peggie Phipps Boegner in our own special way, and wish that she could have been with us to celebrate the 100 years of her life in and next door to Westbury House. She had arrived as an infant from London, as the house was ready to receive her. She had been born surrounded by her mother's Grace family.

Peggie led a glorious life on the estate, which became her favorite of the many houses her family frequented throughout the years. So, upon inheriting the property in 1958, it was her vision to present to the public the core of its beautifully designed landscape surrounding the tasteful Stuart house. She had the fire, tenacity, and taste to see that its intrinsic qualities remained, and that it would live up to its inclusion in Peter Coates' *Great Gardens of the Western World*.

From the beginning, Peggie undertook a challenge that was greater than her resources. Perhaps wisely, she barely knew what she and her lady directors were committing to. The directors were from each of the five branches of the Phipps family, complemented by a majority of non-family ladies.

Peggie believed deeply in the value of

the land: manicured, wooded, farmed, and pastured. She stuck to her standards, and insisted that its use not destroy it, allowing future generations to appreciate it.

In her final years, Peggie grew to love the many visitors, and she could be found on the grounds or in Westbury House, speaking with individuals or groups of school children, who were heard to chant, "Peggie. Peggie. Thank you. We love you!"

Obviously, her passion was contagious, and many people devoted their time and resources to supplement the one third support from the J. S. Phipps Family Foundation. As trustees, friends, and public, we will be challenged planning for responsibilities and costs, responding to procuring and managing income streams to maintain expanded open space. We are now forming a vision of sharing and education, while preserving the integrity of the original planned landscape and the setting of the house, which are so interdependent.

May Old Westbury Gardens remain a haven for beauty and quality. And may Peggie never be forgotten for insisting that it happen!

Mary S. Phipps

the movie "Snakes on a Plane." Peggie revealed her brother Ben's interest in snakes, and her own feelings that they were much maligned. In fact, it had always been her desire to write a children's book about a cute and friendly snake!

This past summer, Peggie arrived during the intermission of each Picnic Pops concert. She circled the main lawn in her familiar golf cart, greeting old friends and new acquaintances, children, trustees, and volunteers. For me, she was the personification of Old Westbury Gardens: charming and elegant, familiar and surprising. I will miss her.

Jean Nockert



Halcyon Memories

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photographs. We never had an argument during these three years. We traded our differences. If Peggie didn't want to use a particular photograph of herself, I would agree and she would ask what I wanted in exchange. "I want the Fourth of July picture on the front cover and your mother on the back." (Originally, it was the opposite). What we both felt strongly about was "done" without any further discussion.

Of course there was a safety catch to offset any deadlock. Peggie was aware I probably would not change my mind about a cause I believed in, so before reaching that point she would look me right in the eye and say in a soft voice, "Dick, you needn't fuss about this any more," which, more often than not, I was happy to hear.

Peggie worried a great deal about her writing ability – I would say "You write like you speak and that is wonderful. You have nothing to worry about." However, she insisted in seeing some editors in spite of my assurances and during a visit to a publisher's editor she was told the writing style was fine – good, but the book's content is a little weak to be a success. "It lacks interest; you know, family secrets, scandal...too much happiness." Peggie simply replied, "I don't recall being happy was ever boring," and we left content that her style was good and the path we chose to follow was the correct one. She reiterates in her introduction to Part II of *Halcyon Days*:

"Most of my memories are seen through the eyes of a child, for it was during the first quarter of this century, while we were all at home, that Westbury House and its gardens were the focal point of our lives. Through all those years, nothing momentous or extraordinary ever deeply touched Westbury. I have no tales to tell of changing fortunes, catastrophes or scandals, or even triumphs. Nonetheless, I hope that the peaceful years and even tenor of its ways have marked Westbury House and the Gardens as I believe they are – a precious rarity in this changing world."

What I thought would be a year in the dark room making hundreds of photos turned into two years to get the quality we wanted in the book. In between dark room sessions, I would escape the fumes by writing Part I – the story of Henry Phipps



Caption TK

birth to his son Jay's moving into Westbury House. Peggie wrote her memories from childhood through the opening of Westbury House to visitors beginning with "Westbury House and I are twins, both having come into existence the same year."

We were both happy to get a publisher, Viking, only to have them undergo a reorganization, which excluded coffee table books that were not sure fire sales winners, and subsequently backed out of our contract. Peggie said, "Dick, you have to find a new publisher." This was not as easy to do as writing it down on a "to do list." I was all Phippsed out. Carrying a series of dummy pages with photos and several chapters of the book, I made the rounds of five New York publishers. They were intrigued by the photography and the authenticity of the content, but they didn't know what to do with it. Their sales departments had formulas to determine what quantity would have to be produced for a costly book like *Halcyon Days* to make a profit. Each held the prototype several months while deciding. It was 1986 before we signed a contract with

Abrams and a year later finally saw *Halcyon Days* on bookstore shelves.

There were countless publicity events during this time – early morning coffee and cake talks at department stores, local TV interviews, and book signings. The people came to see and hear Peggie. My role of stepping in to answer questions Peggie couldn't diminished as her shyness lessened and her confidence grew. Soon she was saying to me, as she was announced to the audience, "Dick, you needn't fuss about this," and would proceed to the platform alone. It was a wonderful transformation to see because it was natural and not forced – born of her enjoyment of such interchange with people. In later years, one of her greatest delights was greeting and talking with visitors to the Gardens.

I remained Peggie's "neighbor, good friend, and man who fixes things" until she passed away this fall just shy of her 100th birthday.

I shall miss her.
Richard Gachot

Friends News/December Dinner

The Fall Boutique, originally scheduled for October 17, was held on November 7. This fun event offered unique vendor booths, light luncheon fare, an exclusive raffle and a silent auction. Marlene Brown Fine Jewelry, Christie Brothers, North Shore Saddlery, Leonce Antiques, and other vendors donated a portion of their sales to the Gardens.

Old Westbury Gardens will hold its annual black-tie December Dinner Party on Friday, December 1st, 2006, in the Red Ballroom of Westbury House, which will be newly dressed in all its holiday splendor. Megan de Roulet and Sandra Lessing will chair the event. Proceeds will benefit Old Westbury Gardens operations and selected preservation projects.

For more information on Friends' events or the December Dinner Party, contact Raena Blumenthal at 516-333-0048, ext. 308



Dita with Peggie, 1906



Peggie with her beagle, Butterfly, 1914 . . . below, Peggie, 1951



Peggie, 1912



Peggie just before her wedding to James Gordon Douglas II, 1929



Peggie at the Orange Hunt Club, 1936



Peggie with her son Gordon, 1938 . . . Dita Douglass coming out party, 1948



Dita Douglas, Dita Phipps, and Peggie, 1940





With niece Susan Cochran and daughter Dita Naylor-Leyland . . . With Tilly



Admiring art . . . With Tilly by the Thatched Cottage



With Gardens' visitors . . . Relaxing in the backyard



With Tilly in the Hamptons



With John Norbeck



With Irene Gachot

Thanksgiving 2004, from left: Nicholas Naylor-Leyland, Michael Douglas, Jean and Gordon Douglas, Dita Nickson with Serena, Dita Naylor-Leyland, Peggie, Hubert Phipps, and Graham Nickson.



With granddaughter Dita Nickson and great granddaughter Serena Nickson



Preservation News

The Preservation Committee has been meeting regularly to identify and prioritize restoration projects throughout the Gardens.

One of the highlights of a visit to the Gardens is the Walled Garden with its Gertrude Jekyll-inspired perennial plantings, lily pond, and fountains. The focal point of the area is the graceful treillage work echoing the perimeter of the pond and punctuated mid-section by a picturesque pergola of deceptively complex construction. Built by George A. Crawley in 1906, this area was designed to complement Westbury House, creating an ensemble of house and grounds.

Despite repair and maintenance efforts over the years, the dome of the pergola has deteriorated to the point of collapse, and water infiltration has caused peeling paint and rotted areas in the redwood constructed columns and lattice work, clearly indicating the need for a major restoration. The project has been awarded a highly-competitive New York State Environmental Protection Grant, signifying a critical and timely need for the restoration to be addressed, and acknowledging the standing of Old Westbury Gardens as a responsible steward of the property, and a leader in preservation planning. The grant of \$157,500 requires a matching amount from the Gardens. We are confident that this pergola project will receive enthusiastic community support.

Another ongoing project is the stabilization of the iconic 18th century wrought iron “Combermere” Gates at the main entrance. The gates are undergoing some minor repairs by Les Metalliers Champenois, including restoration of several finials crowning the perimeter railings on either side. As that phase is completed, the railings will be inspected for rust, peeling, and exposed surfaces, and will be carefully hand-sanded, primed, and painted with appropriate rust inhibiting products, ensuring the long-term structural integrity of this signature, welcoming feature. Bollards have been placed at the entrance to prevent oversized vehicles from damaging the entry surrounds of the gates. These vehicles are being redirected to the Post Road entrance.

On the upper level of the gallery to the pool, cracks have developed in the cement coping supporting the iron rail



Caption TK

face. In the tunnel to the lower gallery, moisture is dripping from the coping above onto the wooden capitals, columns, and bases. Water is also infiltrating between the exterior stucco finish and interior walls, causing the stucco to crack and separate. Working with staff, the Preservation Committee has discovered that the water source is an irrigation system installed in 1995. The sprinkler heads have since been reconfigured to spray away from the hardscape features. Additionally, excavation around the upper gallery coping revealed several open seams in the rubber membrane protecting the unexposed base of the coping from water infiltration. Open flashings will also be repaired and French drains tested on a regular basis to be sure water is being carried away from the site. Overgrown plant material will also be removed to allow for improved air circulation and drainage.

While this work is underway, the cracks in the interior of the swimming pool will be repaired with an appropriate material such as gunnite, and then marble dusted. The steps leading from the lake to the pool area are also being repaired. Over the years

the limestone pavers, which are extremely sensitive to moisture and freeze-thaw phenomenon, have deteriorated beyond recognition. We will examine the brick foundations, create a new concrete base, and reset salvaged pavers on the new base.

The East Lake Bridge, also in this area, has been stabilized by utilizing the existing arch supports. A new rustic fence, based on the original design, will be applied on both sides. Treads will be installed on the walkway to prevent slipping while crossing.

In Westbury House, in a third floor bedroom once occupied by Peggie Phipps, a leak has caused damage to a magical, hand-painted paper mural, mounted on canvas. The damaged paper will be examined by a paper conservator, removed, stabilized, and stored, while the source of water infiltration is determined. The roof tiles are deteriorating where they come in contact with the copper roof and flashing, thus allowing water infiltration into the room. The Preservation Committee will address this situation shortly; and will keep you updated on our other latest achievements and plans.

A Special Note of Thanks

Mr. T.A. Cox came forward this Centennial Year to express his profound appreciation of Old Westbury Gardens with a gift of \$75,000 to complete the total restoration of the Bakewell Entrance Gates. Then, in honor of Peggie’s 100th Birthday Celebration, he matched the New York State grant of \$158,000 for the Pergola, allowing work to begin in her beloved Walled Garden.

Originally from Oklahoma, Tom had been in the navy 50 years ago with Peggie’s son, Gordon Douglas, who first brought Tom out to Old Westbury Gardens for a visit. His delight in Peggie and the love for the Gardens has remained for all this time, as it still does from his home and garden in Maine.

Thank you, Tom. As Peggie was, we are grateful for your enthusiasm and friendship. We also want to take this opportunity to let others know what a joy it is to preserve the magic of Old Westbury Gardens.

Mary Phipps



Saving Space

As is obvious to all who live here, the percentage of preserved, open space remaining on Long Island is limited, and continues to dwindle. In an effort to stem the tide of overdevelopment, a \$50 million Environmental Bond Act was approved by Nassau voters in 2004, allowing the county to purchase land, maintain waterways and wetlands, and provide improvements to parks and other areas. As recommended by a 10-person Environmental Program Advisory Committee appointed by County Executive Tom Suozzi, land purchases were made in seven locations, including Meyers' Farm in Woodbury, and the Northwood and Pulling Estates in Oyster Bay. Fortuitously for all, but especially for Old Westbury Gardens' members, also purchased were a total of approximately 47 acres from the adjoining Boegner Estate. Having this additional



Caption TK

land added to our existing total of 160 acres will further allow the Gardens to perpetuate and expand Peggie Boegner's vision of providing a wide open and peaceful environment for visitors for future generations of Long Islanders.

On September 7, a bill signing ceremony and press conference was held at the Gardens, attended by a number of representatives of the media, legislators, envi-

ronmentalists, and other local leaders. Mr. Suozzi signed an Open Space Bond Referendum which, if approved by the voters in November, will provide an additional \$100 million toward land preservation through a charter amendment creating an environmental fund via a dedicated tax. It is estimated that the cost to the average tax payer will be about \$16 per year, for 20 years.

Statue Study

This summer, a member of our Horticulture Department, Tom Cross from Williston Park, undertook a condition study of the statues on the grounds of the Gardens. A business student who recently graduated from Adelphi, Tom plans to take courses in landscape architecture with a focus on preserving and reestablishing landscapes.

The study was designed to formally document the descriptions of the various statues and the manner in which their style, size, and other characteristics relate to the rest of the Gardens. (Jay Phipps had an interest in Greek and Roman mythology). Locations were plotted using a hand-held GPS unit. All statues, including their bases and footings, were photographed from all sides, at a distance and close-up, using high-resolution, digital photography. These images facilitated full documentation of flaws and advanced weathering, and allowed for

detailed examination of defects.

With the help of preservation consultants, Tom is researching the material make-up and methods of cleaning the statues. This information will allow for a needs assessment for the proper care and restoration of these unique pieces of Gardens' history.



Meet the Staff

This summer, John Norbeck invited Lorraine Gilligan to join Old Westbury Gardens to assist the Trustees and staff in identifying, prioritizing and achieving short and long term goals for the property. Ms. Gilligan brings 28 years of expertise in historic site management, most notably as Executive Director of Planting Fields Foundation. Among other goals, she looks forward to overseeing preservation projects, and lending direction to collections management, fundraising and grant oversight, and interpretation and education programs among.

Raena Blumenthal recently joined the Development Department as Fundraising Events Manager. Raena has prior experience working for non-profit organizations and has a Masters Degree in Journalism. With fond memories of strolling through the grounds during visits as a child, Raena feels very fortunate to have joined the staff.



**The Dianne Wittlinger
Memorial Tree Fund
and The Volunteer Tree Fund**

Donations to both funds have been received from June-October, 2006 in memory of the individuals as follows:

- Andrew Sinagra
- Antigoni Moreland
- Charles Goetz
- Dean Widner
- Eleanor Magditz
- Elsie Thompson
- Helga Middeke
- Jack Corwin
- Joanne Grant
- John Conlon
- John Marra
- Joseph Meile
- Lina and John Sarnicola
- Margaret Boegner
- Marie Keyes
- Michael LiCalzi
- Mitch Bloom
- Ralph Ruocco
- Rizzacasa Sisters
- Roberta Nargentino
- Rose Limmer
- Vickie Naney

Gone but not Forgotten

Three members of the office staff have left the Gardens this season. Lisa Romeo served very ably as Coordinator of Volunteers and Public Programs, beginning in May of 2004. Receptionist and Special Projects Associate Enid Kanterman greeted office visitors since March of 1999. And starting in May of 2005, Vanessa Mahnken was a fixture at Friends functions and other affairs as Fundraising Events Manager. Lisa is presently employed as an office coordinator in an architectural firm in Manhattan. Enid is enjoying a much-deserved retirement. Vanessa, who has a Master's Degree in English, is returning to school in hopes of becoming a high school teacher. Much as they all will be missed at the Gardens, we wish them well in their future endeavors.



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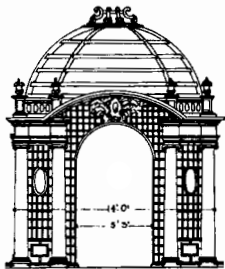
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