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APRIL 15, 2022

PLANTING FIELDS BEGINS RESTORATION OF ITS HISTORIC MAIN ENTRY DRIVE REVITALIZING ITS VISIONARY OLMSTED BROTHERS DESIGN



Planting Fields Landscape

Revitalization includes replacement of diseased and dying Beech trees with a new double allée of native oak, removal of unused ticket booth, restore regular drive width, and restoration of historic drive margin plantings to renew landscape historic integrity

Oyster Bay, New York – April X, 2022 –Beginning this month Planting Fields Foundation and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation will undertake landscape restoration projects to transform the visitor experience and revitalize the visionary Olmsted Brothers design for the landmark historic estate. The first phase of this transformation includes a complete restoration of the Olmsted Brothers design for the Entry Drive, implementation of multilingual wayfinding and interpretive signage, a new visitor information pavilion, and a consolidated ADA accessible pathway system from the main visitor parking lot to key historic areas of the site.

The most visible changes happening this spring are the removal of diseased and dying Beech trees to make room for a new double allée of native oak trees, and the removal of the unused ticketing booth, to enlarge the open space, and restore important views and vistas of the original winding drive. This Spring, visitors will also be able to enjoy the newly restored Heather Garden, one of the earliest designed by the Olmsted Brothers firm, and the only one on Long Island.

“We are thrilled to embark on this multi-phase transformation of our historic site,” said Gina J. Wouters, executive director of Planting Fields Foundation. “Although the disruptions may be unsettling to visitors during some parts of the project, these changes will ensure a sustainable future for Planting Fields’ extraordinary environment. Landscapes take time to develop into their full maturity. We are not only making improvements for the present, what we plant today will provide habitat for birds and other animals and create beauty and shade for generations to come.”

“Planting Fields is a complex site that integrates a classic historic landscape along with innovative plant collections and sustainable natural ecosystems. It is a perfect balance of historic site, public park and modern arboretum and this project will only enhance this alliance” said Vincent A. Simeone, Director of Planting Fields Arboretum State Historic Park.

To begin planning the landscape restoration, Planting Fields Foundation engaged Heritage Landscapes LLC to bring a highly detailed Planting Fields Cultural Landscape Report (PFCLR) to fruition. A group of individuals from Planting Fields Foundation, New York State Parks, and Heritage Landscapes formed the Planting Fields Cultural Landscape Report working committee.

The PFCLR is a foundational document that gathers, illustrates, and communicates the cultural landscape origins, evolution, current and future directions, based on federal preservation guidance, integrated with site issues and imperatives.

“A key step at the outset of the Planting Fields Cultural Landscape Report process was to develop guiding statements that would underscore the work we set out to accomplish,” said Patricia M. O’Donnell, PLA, FASLA, AICP, F. US/ICOMOS, founder of Heritage Landscapes. “It was important for us to balance the historical significance of the Olmsted Coe landscape and the evolved arboretum, situating the preservation and stewardship of the designed historic landscape of the private ownership period and the stewardship of post-Coe collections as equally valued.”

The Guiding Statements are:

- To preserve, restore, and steward the private ownership periods of Planting Fields designed historic landscape, for overall landscape character, within the context of current and future needs including presentation and learning.
- To steward the valued post-Coe collections and landscapes for presentation and learning, managing compatibility into the future.

The landscape restoration will continue over several years and is based on extensive drawings and historic material from the Olmsted Brothers firm housed in the Planting Fields Foundation archives and the Olmsted Archives at Fairsted in Brookline, MA. Integrated aspects of these initiatives also improve habitat on this biodiverse property.

Background

An emblem of the Country Place Era, historic Planting Fields benefits from a complex, expansive, creatively-shaped designed landscape. The property as we know it today was envisioned by William R. and Mai Coe and constructed from 1913 through 1955. The Coes secured leading landscape architects and architects, artists, and craftspeople to shape this remarkable estate. The earliest recorded mention of the name “Planting Fields” can be traced to a 1689 deed. Referencing the rich soils of the area, the name comes from the Matinecock, a division of the Algonquin Nation, who settled the area in the 1600s and celebrated the land for its fertility.

Today, the site exists as a place that is multidimensional, preserved, and open to the public, yet is still a “hidden treasure” with many opportunities for enrichment and broader visitation. This naturalistic, highly choreographed former private estate continues to evolve as a public designed landscape, historic site, and arboretum. The landscape includes scenic passages, a remarkable collection of rare plant specimens and acres of increasingly important ecological systems and habitat. The landscape of Planting Fields is both history and prologue, past and future.

The historical sequence of the designed landscape begins with Helen and James Byrne who purchased Upper Planting Fields in 1904, adding more adjacent acreage through 1913 and worked with landscape architect James Greenleaf.

From 1913 to 1955 William R. Coe was the guiding force at Planting Fields with his children and spouses (Mai Coe, married 1920 until her death in 1924; Caroline Graham Slaughter, married in 1926 until his death in 1955) present as influencers and users. After the original house burned down in 1918, The Coes hired the Olmsted Brothers firm to work with architects Walker & Gillette to design the grounds in the style of an English landscape garden. In 1952 W.R. Coe established Planting Fields Foundation (PFF) and at the time of his death in 1955, the site was given to the people of the State of New York.

Unusual for an estate landscape, the original 409-acre footprint remains intact, nestled between Oyster Bay and Locust Valley on the North Shore of Long Island, and only 30 miles from New York City. Planting Fields is a rare extant example of a largely intact, comprehensive Olmsted Brothers residential commission. The landscape embodies and displays the character and contributing features as documented in 1955, to a greater or lesser degree by location, expressing the vision of William R. Coe shaped by the Olmsted Brothers and Coe's grounds superintendents and staff. Evidenced by over 400 landscape architectural studies and plans, hundreds of historic photographs and correspondence, the Olmsted Firm was highly instrumental in shaping this landscape to express landscape beauty and feature botanical collections. Careful assessment of this documentation of archival materials yields clarity about the intent and outcomes of their vision, to embark on well-informed landscape preservation initiatives.

The public-private partnership of Planting Fields Foundation (PFF) and New York State Parks (NYS Parks) has persisted for seven decades and, like the landscape, has evolved. What remains constant is a shared commitment to stewarding the site for its many assets and for all those who seek to enjoy it. Since 2019, Planting Fields has undertaken major steps to gain a thorough understanding of its Olmsted Brothers landscape, to undertake a multi-year restoration, conservation and adaptation process that repositions this critical heritage to revitalize the human and nature-shaped designed cultural landscape to yield transformative results. For more information about Planting Fields Foundation and the Cultural Landscape Report visit www.plantingfields.org

About Planting Fields Foundation

Created beginning in 1913 by insurance magnate William Robertson Coe and his wife, Mai Rogers Coe, heiress and daughter of Standard Oil partner Henry Huttleston Rogers, Planting Fields is an estate on Long Island's Gold Coast that is a historical testament to American art, architecture, landscape, and horticulture. Located in Oyster Bay, New York with a landscape designed by the Olmsted Brothers Firm, the grounds feature 409 acres of greenhouses, rolling lawns, formal gardens, woodland paths, and outstanding plant collections. Designed as an integrated composition of the built and natural world, the original historic estate buildings and landscape remain intact including Coe Hall, a 65-room Tudor Revival mansion designed by Walker & Gillette. The interior of the house is a showcase of artistry and craftsmanship with a distinctly American aesthetic that features original ironwork commissions by Samuel Yellin and murals painted by artists Robert Winthrop Chanler and Everett Shinn. Planting Fields is included in the National Register of Historic Places. Founded in 1952 by W. R. Coe, Planting Fields Foundation is a not-for-profit public educational foundation chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. With regular exhibitions, conservation and educational programs, Planting Fields Foundation strives to preserve and make relevant to all audiences the heritage of Planting Fields. For more information visit www.plantingfields.org.

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

The mission of the Office of Parks, Recreation and **Historic** Preservation (OPRHP) is to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all **New York State** residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, **historic**, and cultural resources.

From the shores of Long Island to the mighty Niagara Falls, New York's 180 state parks offer countless opportunities to explore your natural environment, escape from the grind of the everyday and experience exciting new adventures. Beaches, boat launches, hiking trails, campsites, and golf courses all await you! For more information visit www.nyparks.org.

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