

Text of “The Spirit of the Garden” Cell Phone Tour

“So let us all have gardens, for we shall be but following in the footsteps of those past ages, and but expressing the love of gardens that has been in our hearts for generations. - MBH

Stop #1 - Instructions and Welcome

Welcome to Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center, a facility of the Morris County Park Commission. This cell phone tour will guide you through some of Bamboo Brook and will take about an hour to complete. You proceed from one “Stop” or place of interest, to the next. There are 10 Stops on this tour.

At each Stop, listen to the audio clip by pressing the Stop number.

At the end of each audio clip, listen for directions to the next Stop.

You can start, stop or replay each audio clip.

To stop, simply hang up.

To re-start, re-dial the cell phone tour number and you will automatically pick up where you left off.

To repeat a Stop, press the Stop Number again.

There are opportunities for your feedback, so please leave us a comment about your visit.

The quotes preceding each stop are from MBH book, “The Spirit of the Garden.”

Martha Brookes Hutcheson was one of America’s first women landscape architects. After studying for 3 years in the Landscape Architecture program at MIT, she began her practice in 1902. Ms. Hutcheson designed the gardens of over a dozen estates in Massachusetts and on Long Island, as well as a numerous smaller gardens in New York and northern New Jersey. She became a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1920 and was made a Fellow in 1935. Her design philosophy and principles are explained in her book *The Spirit of the Garden*, published in 1923 and re-printed in 2001. . A gardening classic, the book was re-printed in 2001.

Created during the Country Place Era, the gardens of Merchiston Farm, exemplify all of the principles in her book and incorporate many native plants and an imaginative manipulation of water as a landscape element. Believing that good gardens could bring about positive social change, Mrs. Hutcheson campaigned for the beautification of the American streetscape and town. She sought to educate a wide range of Americans in the principles of garden design through her writings, lectures and as a found member of the Garden Club of Somerset Hills. Merchiston farm was the home of William and Martha Brookes Hutcheson from 1911 to 1959. The property was given to the Morris County Park Commission in 1972 by Martha Hutcheson North and Charles McKim Norton. Placed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 1989, Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center embodies the landscape design principles of Martha Brookes Hutcheson and the Country Place Era.

Now, proceed around the left of the lawn to stand in front of the House for Stop #2, The Hutcheson House.

“We find a peace in our gardens which other places seldom give. The garden is not only the exquisite playground of the home, but the resting place of the spirit” - MBH

Stop #2 – The Hutcheson House

In 1911, the Hutcheson’s purchased this property and named it Merchiston Farm for the boarding school that William Hutcheson attended as a boy in Scotland.

At that time, they switched the house’s orientation. The former front entrance became the back of the house, where the view overlooked the sweep of fields, divided into sections each dedicated to different uses. Thus began a series of improvements based on Martha Brooks Hutcheson’s design principles with elements from the Arts & Crafts movement, and Italianate and Picturesque garden design, all filtered through Country Place Era sensibilities.

Built in the late 18th century, the original structure was a simple side hall farm house with two rooms on the first and second floors and a full basement formed with two foot thick stone walls. In the mid-19th century, an addition enlarged the home to a center hall colonial with two rooms per floor on both sides. Floor plans and elevations drawn by MBH after 1911, show the new addition having a first floor kitchen with central fireplace a servant’s room, bath and sewing room on the second floor and a stone breezeway with arched doorways connected to a ice hour with a ventilator atop the hipped roof. In 1927, architect William Bottomley enlarged the house to its present configuration. A music room was added with large bay windows and whose doorways also aligned with a garden axis. The house remains practically unchanged from its 1927 appearance with the exception of a kitchen renovation done in the 1940’s.

Looking at the grounds in this area, please note the semiformal circular lawn flanked with informal arrangements of native flowering dogwood and evergreen arborvitae. Native plants were an important part of the MBH plant palette. She was one of the early advocates for the use of native plants, lectured on their environmental benefits, and used them to great effect in her European inspired designs.

The formal bluestone walkway is bordered with English boxwood and framed by American holly and flowering dogwood. Note the front door and carved Pineapple. This colonial symbol of hospitality was added in 1848, a nod to the Colonial Revival Period so popular at that time.

When are finished admiring the house, face the stairs from whence you came. At 9 o’clock, a bluestone path leads you to Stop #3 – The Upper Waters. Take it. Make sure you read the bronze plaque on the low rock at the entrance to this path.

“Whether for its reflection or for its sound, to introduce water is to include the fantastic and the intangible, and a garden without it is robbed of poetry and romance.” - MBH

Stop #3 – Upper Waters

The Upper Waters is the first in a series of water features designed by MBH, starting with a naturally occurring bowl on this slope. Fed by a spring and part of an elaborate water collection system designed to collect storm water runoff from the nearby hillside and funnel it into the pool. The MCPC added a re-circulating system as part of the garden’s restoration.

Continue along the path. This gentle slope is planted to a mixture of native winterberry holly, mountain laurel, rhododendron, deciduous azalea, and ferns. Note the mature crabapple tree to the right of the path. Plant materials in this area are naturalized, planted in the water and very close to its edge, overhanging the water in order to gain the most effect from the reflective qualities on the pond.

Along the path you will pass an arbor.

Constructed of cedar this structure is also part of the garden’s restoration

MBH grew roses along it, when the shade from nearby trees was not a factor.

Do you see the small shake covered house behind the arbor?

Restrooms are adjacent to this structure.

Cross the narrow stone bridge over a pond to emerge onto a semi-circular small patio.

The semi-circle was a favorite design element of MBH. Look for it throughout the property.

Note the stone baskets, which are replicas of baskets originally commissioned in Italy by MBH.

So protective she was of her garden’s personality, that she had the original molds destroyed.

The MCPC commissioned new baskets to be made during the recent garden restoration.

Walk between the baskets, turn right and descend the two wide steps.

A few steps beyond, bare left and Stop #4, the Circular Pool will come into view.

Walk directly towards it, and please remember the path you are taking.

“It is not in the last necessary to associate the idea of the swimming pool with the crude masonry tanks we usually find, devoid of every bit of beauty they might lend, either in themselves as reflecting pools or as a setting for the children who bathe in them” – MBH

Stop #4 – Circular Pool

During the Country Place Era in which she worked, large residential properties were designed with many European garden design features such as allées, ha-has, terraces, fountains, and garden sculpture. Taking inspiration from the Beaux-Arts school, these garden elements were imposed upon symmetric and formal geometries, including the very important axes.

Simply put, an axis is the centerline of a view or walk. Determining an axis makes it possible to line up landscape elements to create special effects. For example, an axis in a garden might run from a doorway through a pair of identical planters, down the center of a walk, to a distant gazebo. In this case, the door and the gazebo are said to be "on axis."

MBH used axes to create symmetry and direct views. These well-defined lines were the backbone of her landscape designs. Be on the lookout for axes as you tour this property.

Originally a farm pool was located here, providing water for livestock. MBH designed the circular pool to be the central focal point, the anchor of the six axial pathways connecting the different garden areas. The pool was dug to the depth of 5 feet and constructed of concrete block, edged with rough cut stone. Fed by a stream from the Upper Water, the Hutcheson's used this as a swimming pool, arranging Adirondack chairs around it, to be enjoyed by family and friends.

The area surrounding the pool is planted with iris, pink-flowered summer phlox, blue great lobelia, lilies, and native shrubs. In midsummer, enjoy its fragrant white water lilies. The large trees in this area were used by MBH to frame the vistas that extend to the fields and beyond. Framing a vista is a technique, that uses man-made structures or natural objects to focus your eye on a scene or object in the distance.

Imagine the Circular Pool as a roundabout. Remember where you entered? Take the 2nd exit from that point. Climb the 7 shallow stairs and turn left to Stop #5, The Little House.

“And here we come to the 4th great detail, one that we can never afford to cease to search for or make excuses for: the natural rolling of land, which gives is the change for limitless effects and use through the change of levels.” – MBH

Stop #5 – Little House

The topography of this area is a continuous gentle, downwards slope. On MBH’s plans, it is denoted as “The Spills, Little House and Lower Pools”

MBH built the Little House over a small stream and embellished the stream by creating a series of spills and small pools on both sides of the structure. She used it was designed as a studio and general “getaway.”

Water flows under the house, adding sound and creating coolness.

This wetlands environment required different plants than used elsewhere. MBH grew watercress here. Perhaps it was used in tea sandwiches when her fellow Garden Club of Somerset Hills came to visit.

Enjoy the great masses of native perennials such as joe-pye-weed, orange daylily, obedient plant, turk’s-cap lily, and ferns, as well as shrubs including American elder, red-twigged dogwood, spicebush, summer-sweet, and big-leaf magnolia.

Now you have experienced some of the key design principles employed by MBH

These are:

1. Formal framing of vistas along axes
2. Structures and plantings that ease the transition from room to room
3. Water as an element of design for sound, movement and light
4. Enhancement of natural topography and features
5. Use of native plants

Heading back from whence you came, take the small grassy path steps from the edge of the Little House. In a moment, you will cross a flat stone bridge. At the end of the bridge, bare left and go up the 3 steps, then turn right and proceed to Stop #6, The Dipping Pool.

All gardens need plenty of green with varying amounts of color. Too much green and few flowers is a better fault than too much blue and little green.” - MBH

Stop #6 – The Dipping Pool

Take note of several stone pits, these were cold frames used by MBH. They were covered with glass frame tops and used to grow young plants that would later be planted in the garden. Do you see the one that is a semi circle a bit further on? That is the Dipping Pool and was used to capture rain water for a vegetable garden that was originally located in this area.

As you arrive at the pool, pass by a planting of May-flowering red buckeyes. The pool is framed by an allee of ‘Donald Wyman’ white-flowered crabapples.

Continue on toward the big stone pillars Stop #7, the Tennis Court

“The arbor may be classed as another link between architecture and the green world and be looked upon as its gateway or doorway.” - MBH

STOP #7: Tennis Court

Initially, this area was used for growing small fruits. Around 1928 the Tennis Court was constructed. The pillars held a wooden arbor on which grew first grapes and later Japanese wisteria.

The pillars around the tennis court provided another favorite design principle of MBH - symmetry.

Symmetry means that if you drew a line down the center of your garden, one side would mirror the other. MBH understood this technique and was able to modify it, and create relaxed examples and radial examples of symmetry. The Tennis Court may be rented for your special event. For information about holding a special event at Bamboo Brook, visit morrissparks.net

Proceed to the left of the Tennis Court, Stop #8, The Potting Shed

“ Going from one scheme to another, though each may be very simple is much more interesting and the combinations of arrangements to make things seem involved and mysterious are never-ending.” - MBH

Stop # 8- Potting Shed

First used as a child's playhouse, the Potting Shed gives evidence of MBH understanding that children benefit from hands-on experiences in nature. Unlike many other children of her class, her daughter, Martha, grew up in a garden, playing in the mud and learning the names of wildflowers. MBH started a number of areas school gardens. Her interest in education materialized into numerous speeches she gave on the importance of civic beautification, the use of native plants, her involvement in the Women's Land Army and her life long correspondence with plant breeders, nurserymen, and international garden designers.

Informal herbaceous plantings frame the entrance to this quaint building. Behind you, note the large Yoshino Cherry on your left and the mature Tulip Tree on your right. Both of these were planted in Martha's time.

Now face the house and head towards it and Stop #9 - The East Lawn. Enter the East Lawn through a pair of swinging gates which align with the house's front and back door, creating another axis.

“The hedge is not upstart: it has accentuated scenes of splendor from the earliest times of planting. It has lent itself as gracefully to the merrymakings of the maze as to the gardens of the Roman Emperors.” – MBH

STOP #9: The East Lawn

The East Lawn is site of the convergence of the 2 main axes in MBH landscape design of Merchiston Farm. It is surrounded by informal herbaceous plantings. Appreciate the north-south axis, leading from Longview Road across the lawn to the Reflecting Pool and Ha-Ha beyond, and the west-east axis leading from the Hutcheson House main door, down the stone steps, across the lawn and through the wooden gate to the meadow below. Note the two mature sugar maples on either side of the wooden gate. Other plant materials in this area include Bottlebrush Buckeye/*Aesculus parviflora*, Hollyhock/*Althea Rosea* and Lilac / *Syringa vulgaris*. See how the Main House, certainly the most dominant structure, does not serve as a focal point? Instead, it is used as a point of origin from which several axes move through the landscape. Stone walls, steps, hedges and plant masses were used in the East Lawn to define axes and paths and direct vistas to adjacent landscape units and wider views beyond the core.

Standing in the East Lawn, facing the house, head toward the very left corner of the house to Stops #10, the Coffee Terrace. We suggest you reach the Coffee Terrace through garden area replete with an armillary. Take note of yet another axis.

“In the plantings of gardens, clipped blocks of hedge may be introduced for the purpose of accent or contrast, or other blacks as backgrounds for seats or foundations. In the bounding of terraces, a hedge is always dignified and an important note.” – MBH

STOP #10: Coffee Terrace

This is a more intimate part of Martha’s garden that features bluestone pathways lined with English boxwood and herbaceous plantings of foxglove, iris, daylily, summer phlox, and bluestar. An old fashioned lilac flourishes near the side door. The Hutcheson’s maintained an apartment in New York City, but in 1940 at the age of 72 William, then a VP at Mutual Life Insurance Co. retired and they moved permanently to Merchiston Farm. Mr. Hutcheson died two years later. MBH continued to live here until her death in 1959. She was cremated and in keeping with her request, her ashes were scattered by the brook she loved.

You have come to the end of “The Spirit of the Garden” Cell Phone Tour.

We hope you have found Bamboo Brook to be, in the words of MBH – “.... a place of inspiration and promise, of tranquility and intense personal claim, and were held and inspired by it.”

Simply follow the house around and you will come back to where you started.

In depth tours of Bamboo Brook, with illustrated presentations are available for groups of 10+. To learn about these, please visit www.morrisparks.net.

For information on renting this property for outdoor events, please call 973-326-7600.

Bamboo Brook programs are offered through the FOFA and can be viewed at arboretumfriends.org.

The New Jersey Conservation Foundation offers seasonal programming here, details of which can be found at morrisparks.net.

We wish to thank the Garden Club of Somerset Hills for its generous support of this cell phone tour.