

EVERGREEN

PLANTING FIELDS FOUNDATION
PLANTING FIELDS ARBORETUM, OYSTER BAY, NEW YORK

FALL/WINTER 2012 NEWSLETTER

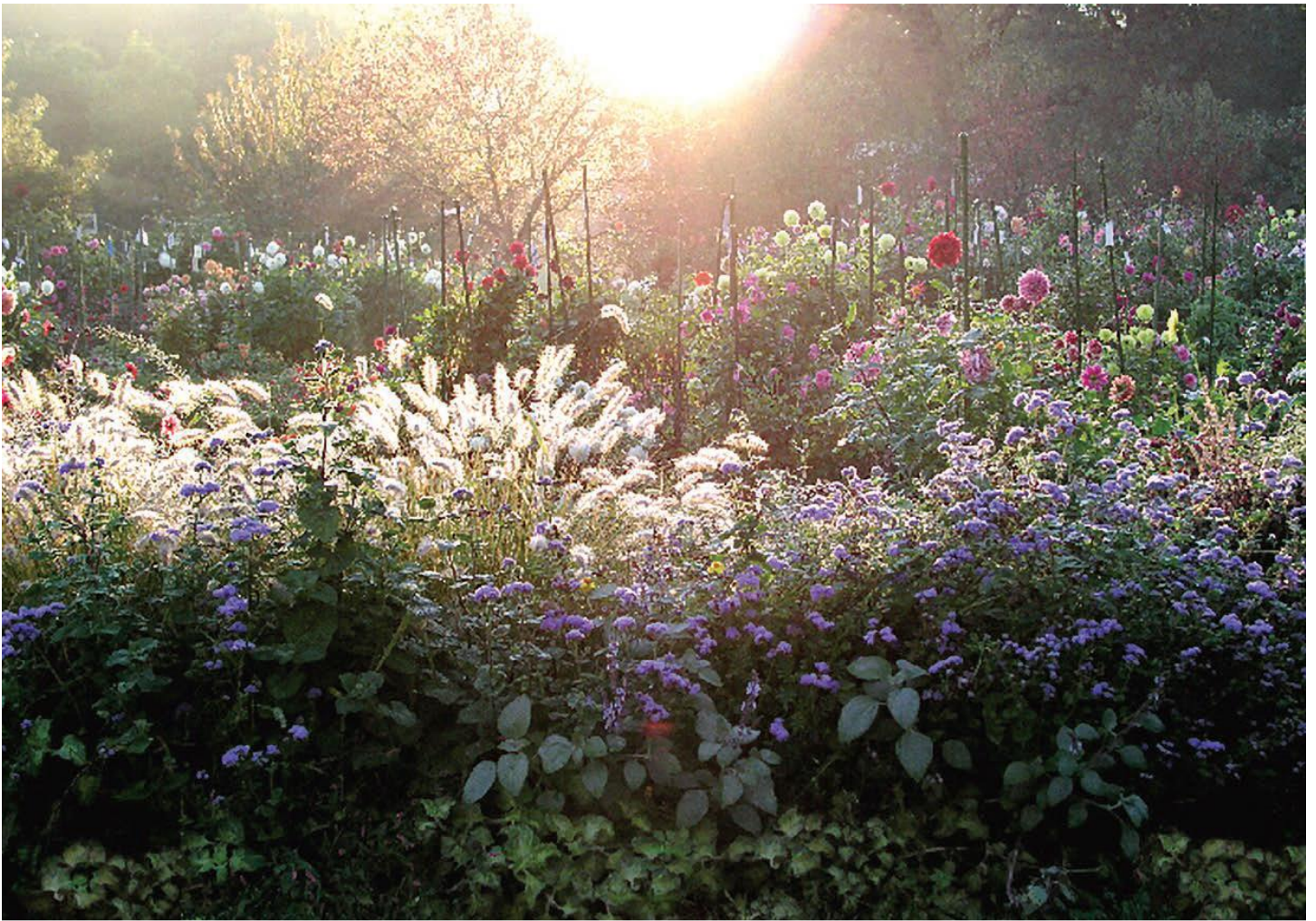
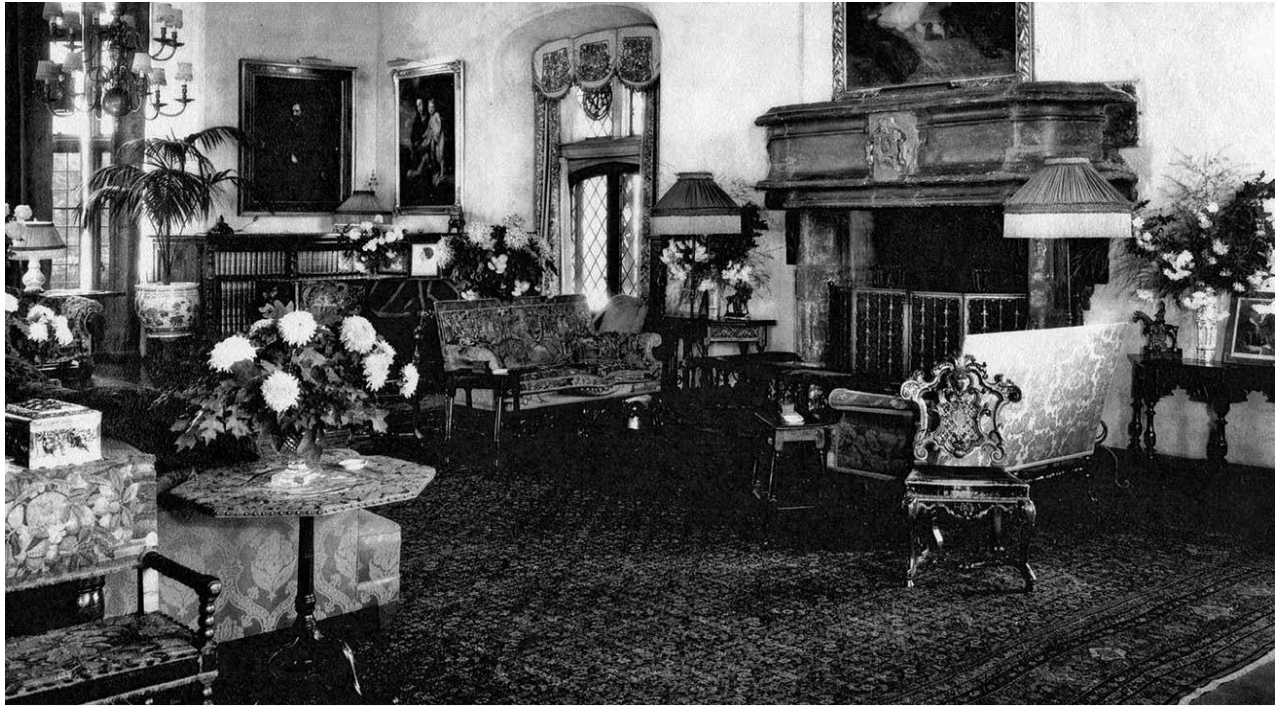


PHOTO: BILL BARASH

The Dahlia Garden in the Fall

Fall at Planting Fields is a glorious season when the park and its gardens are filled with a myriad of colors of every hue. There is a richness of scents and textures in flowers, berries and foliage that is extraordinary. Maple, oak, birch, beech and sassafras species offer different yellows, oranges and maroons. Shrubs in the Synoptic Garden and around Coe Hall provide a variety of fruit for migrating birds. The Dahlia Garden (above) is at peak form during the fall season.



The History of the Dahlia at Planting Fields

Dahlias have been a feature at Planting Fields at least since the 1920s when they appear in profusion in many historic photos of Coe Hall interiors taken by Mattie Hewitt about 1922, shortly after the mansion was built. In the Gallery are four arrangements and four more in the Great Hall (see photo). There are four additional dahlia arrangements in other rooms, twelve

altogether; dahlias are the dominant flowers in a group of ten historic room photos.



DAHLIA .. GARDEN .. 2012



Patricia Alice



Taren Grove Millennium



Wyns Mystique



Lolita



Kelvin Floodlight



Scaur Swinton

Dahlias are native to Central America and Mexico where it is the national flower. In 1571 the Spanish expert on medicinal botany, Francisco Hernández, who became the personal physician to King Philip of Spain, left for Mexico and the Philippines where he collected specimens for seven years. Three indigenous artists accompanied him. One of them, Francisco Dominguez made at least three drawings of dahlias. The entire manuscript recording the expedition, translated into Latin, was not published until 1651 in Rome as *Rerum Medicarum Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus Seu Nova Plantarium, Animalium et Mineralium*

Mexicanorum Historia. One of the dahlias from a copy of the book at the John Carter Brown Library (Brown University, Providence Rhode Island) is shown here.

In Europe, sustained interest in dahlias did not become established until the late eighteenth century when in 1776 they were named posthumously for Anders Dahl, one of Linnaeus's students. The first cuttings of dahlias did not arrive in Spain from Mexico until 1789 and the plants were first grown in England in 1804. The double varieties first bloomed in Belgium about 1830 and after that there was very little interest in single forms. 1840 is the earliest date that dahlias appear in an American nursery catalog. They had been imported from England and had been grown in the garden of Mr. G. C. Thornburn of Astoria, New York.

The dahlia is genetically unstable; it has eight sets of chromosomes instead of the conventional two, and is therefore predisposed to diversity. A great moment in dahlia history occurred in 1872 when a double red form with reverse quilled flowers appeared. The plant's endless source of novelty has meant that for over two hundred years an average of more than one hundred new cultivars have been annually introduced.

The history of the dahlia at Planting Fields dates back to the estate era of the property. Mr. Coe admired dahlias because of their bold texture and rich colors. In the mid-1980s Paul Callahan, a dedicated volunteer turned employee, reintroduced dahlias to Planting Fields. Raised beds were constructed near the Carriage House in rows to allow visitors to view dahlias in a display setting. This garden was maintained solely by volunteers under his direction.



Rerum Medicarum 1651

With Paul's sad passing in 1995, efforts were made to redesign a commemorative garden that would embody his passion for dahlias in a garden setting while educating the visiting public.

In 1997, construction began on a new garden. Elements of the surrounding hardscape were echoed in the garden so that it would blend into its surroundings. The garden was designed by Dwight Andrews with input from arboretum staff, Mid Island Dahlia Society members and Peter Tilles, trustee of the

Planting Fields Foundation. The implementation of the garden was both labor intensive and costly. The construction of the garden was generously donated by Peter Tilles. In the spring of 1998, the garden was completed and ready for planting. The Mid Island Dahlia Society offered to unconditionally maintain and develop the garden as one of the largest and most spectacular dahlia collections in the Northeast. Under the direction of Steve Nowotarski, Mid Island Dahlia Society members donate nearly 2000 hours a year of expertise to growing 400 dahlia plants of show and garden quality. In 2011, a breast cancer awareness pink dahlia bed was added as the central bed. The beautiful pink dahlias are surrounded by a collection of pink petunias generously donated each year by White Flower Farm. As the years go by new types and varieties have been added. The latest addition is a collection of low growing dahlias that are fully double. These dahlias do not require staking and are available in a wide range of colors. In addition, Mid Island Dahlia Society is beginning to build a collection of antique dahlias over 75 years old. This collection will show the evolution of modern dahlias. The members of Mid Island Dahlia Society are at the garden every Wednesday morning 9am -11am. Visitors are invited to stop by to view the garden and ask questions. The Mid Island Dahlia Society acknowledges the outstanding cooperation of the staff of Planting Fields and the Director, Vincent Simeone. Over the years this blending of State and private efforts has been the key to the success of this outstanding garden.