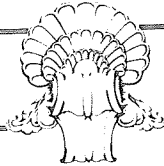


THE BLOEDEL RESERVE

Volume 1 Issue 2

Fall 1989



From the Director

Many of our guests are fascinated by the Visitor Center and stories about its occupants. This issue of our Newsletter features Angeline Collins and the construction of the residence she called "Collinswood". Much of this information about Mrs. Collins was obtained and provided by Lawrence Kreisman as part of his research for our book, *The Bloedel Reserve: Gardens in the Forest*. We hope this insight into some of the early history of the Reserve will enrich your next visit.

Richard A. Brown, Director

The Collins of Collinswood

When visitors ask questions concerning the early history of the Reserve, one finds that both the land and the people offer a wealth of opportunities from which to extract fascinating information. This article will take the reader back to 1861, and introduce the Collins family, which began the development of the property now known as The Bloedel Reserve.

Angeline Burdett-Coutts Jackling was barely two years old when her parents, Daniel and Grace Grennan Jackling, crossed the plains in a wagon train headed for San Francisco. It was 1861, and she and her family were en route to the wilderness of the North Pacific coast. The journey was undertaken with optimism since Daniel's brother, Lawrence Grennan, had

established sawmills at Utsaladdy on Camano Island which some claim were the first on Puget Sound.

Following their arrival in San Francisco, the family boarded a sailing ship owned by Grennan to continue the long trip up the coast to their new home. The next decade contained some dramatic changes for Angeline and her family. Both her father and uncle died and the Grennan interests in the mills were sold.

It was in 1873 that their mother decided to move the family to Seattle. Four years later, at the age of 18, Angeline was married to 42 year-old John Collins, a widower.

Collins was an immigrant from Ireland and began his American experience as an adolescent cutting timber and working in the sawmills of Machias, Maine. At the age of 22, he decided to try his luck in the timber rich wilderness of Puget Sound. He probably knew that the Machias firm of Pope and Talbot had established a mill and built a

company town at Port Gamble. Arriving there, he found work for ten years with the Puget Sound Mill Company. His earnings were invested in a hotel there, as well as in purchasing a major interest in the Occidental Hotel built in Seattle in 1865.

His business endeavors invariably were tied to increasing Seattle's visibility and economic stability. His real estate holdings included the Seattle Hotel, rebuilt in 1889, on the triangular site of the Occidental Hotel, in the Collins Block located on the site of his first home, and various other valuable properties. He was one of the incorporators of the Seattle and Walla Walla Railroad, a move to counter the decision by the trans-continental railroad to place its terminus in Tacoma instead of Seattle. Although the line was never completed, its connection to Columbia City, Renton, and the coalfields at Newcastle stimulated the economy. Collins was involved with opening up and operating the Talbot and Cedar River coal mines and organized the first gas company. He also actively fought for a city-owned water supply, something that did not occur until after the disastrous 1889 fire. Collins quickly became a prominent public figure and a leader of the Democratic party in the state. Beginning in 1869, he was elected to the Seattle City Council for three successive terms. In 1877, he was elected the city's sixth mayor.

And then in 1878, Angeline Burdett-Coutts Jackling became his wife. By all accounts, it was a good match. John Collins was already a most respected businessman and civic activist, a position enhanced

by Mrs. Collins who stepped into the role of hostess with ease and undertook civic responsibilities of her own.

As a representative to the Territorial Legislature during 1883-84, John Collins urged a \$6,000 appropriation for the University of Washington.

As a delegate to the Democratic national convention that nominated Grover Cleveland for president, he met and became a trusted friend of Cleveland, a relationship that required Mrs. Collins to spend much time in Washington D.C. In addition, their commodious Victorian home, located at 702 Minor Avenue on First Hill, served as a hospitable gathering place for the many famous visitors who passed through Seattle.

After Collins' death in 1903, Mrs. Collins continued to entertain notables in her famous "blue drawing room on Minor Avenue."

Mrs. Collins was a charter member and twice president of the Sunset Club, president of the Seattle Garden Club, and

But perhaps her greatest and most lasting contribution to the region was Collinswood, the country estate on Bainbridge Island that began as a dream and which she, her son Bertrand, and architect J. Lister Holmes made a reality in a clearing overlooking the Sound.

The Hunting Lodge at Agate Point

In 1904 Angela Collins bought 45 acres at Agate Point for a weekend and summer retreat on the beach. A few years later, she purchased more property bringing the retreat to 67 acres. According to the recollections of Virginia Clarke Younger, a granddaughter, Mrs. Collins' son John and stepdaughter Emma Downey expressed interest in the land as well. At Angela's suggestion then, the three of them drew straws for sections of the property. John and Emma both got beach property. Ironically, Mrs. Collins, who had bought the property originally because she wanted to be on the water, drew

the property on the bluff with no access to the water.

John and a Scandinavian carpenter named Erickson proceeded to build a one room beach house—a huge living/dining room with a fireplace at one end. John used

the lodge frequently during hunting and fishing expeditions on the island. His privacy did not last long. Mrs. Collins made up her mind that even though John had gotten the property in the draw, she still wanted to be on the beach, "so she just moved in." Her granddaughter, Mrs. Younger, remembers that the house was "a truly tossed together summer home," new rooms being added whenever the spirit moved Mrs.

Collins. She had a carpenter build on two bedrooms and a small kitchen and, at a later date, a large kitchen.

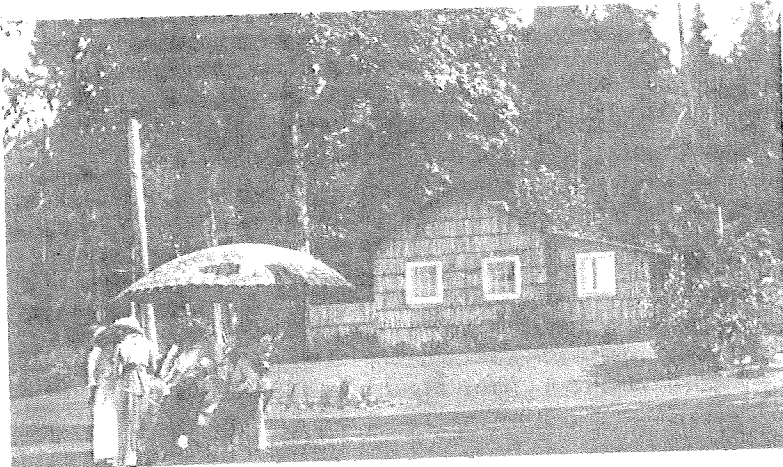
At the time, there were few roads on the island, and most transportation was by boat. There was a steamer that made a regular stop at the dock at Port Madison. Later on, there was also a stop at Agate Point. Groceries were ordered from Seattle and picked up at the Port Madison store on the *Clara Seagull*, the Collins family launch. When not using the launch, the family used an old Indian trail along the shore to get from one place to the next. At points, it abutted the angular trail cut in the 1870s by the Puget Sound Telegraph and Cable Company when poles were strung for the first wire to complete the cable system that established a telephone system on the island. That same cable was also used to carry local mill quotations to San Francisco lumber buyers. Eventually, a road was cut from Port Blakely to Agate Point, and the first cars were brought over to the island.

Collinswood Takes Shape

Mrs. Collins and her son "Bertie" spent a good deal of time discussing construction of a permanent summer home on the property. According to Mrs. Younger, they disagreed over where the house should be built.

"Grandmother wanted to build it on the lowest possible point of that property," she recalled, a site later occupied by tennis courts. However, Bertie quite accurately pointed out to her that even if she lived down there, she still would not have access to the beach...the advantages of building the house on the highest point would be the view that, since she couldn't walk down to the beach with ease anyway, she might as well really be way up on top of the hill.

Having convinced her of where the house would go, Bertie then encouraged his mother to have it done in the French style and proposed to design it himself. Al-



Lawn party at the Collins hunting lodge, ca.1905. Courtesy Casper Clarke

a patroness of the Seattle Art Museum and Seattle Symphony.

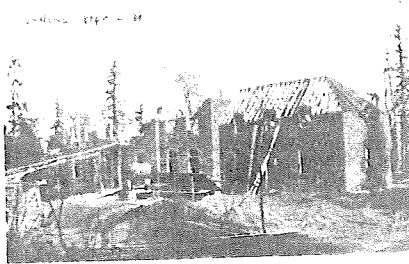
By the time of her death in 1947, she had raised four children, Edana, John Francis, Edward Bertrand, and Catherine—and had made a significant impact upon Seattle's social scene.

though he had no architectural credentials, Bertie had been well educated and had early on developed a keen appreciation for art and architecture which directed the course of his life. He had been sent to Thatcher School in Ojai, California and Middlesex School in Massachusetts and was graduated from Harvard University in 1914. Here he may have studied architecture during the heyday of teaching in the Beaux Arts style. He and his fellow students would have been exposed to the ornament and decoration of American residences in the Georgian, French and Italian Renaissance styles.

As a Navy Lieutenant during the First World War, he had traveled widely throughout Europe and had spent some time in Paris, visited Versailles and the chateaux country. Bertie formed a deep affection for eighteenth century French Renaissance architecture and often returned to France to re-access it. Family photograph albums reveal some of the buildings that must have influenced his decision to design his mother's home in that style rather than the more common Georgian or English Tudor style of estates in the late 1920s.

In discussion with his mother, he planned a three story house with an area for formal entertaining, a dining room, and a library on the ground floor, bedrooms on the second floor, and a third floor that was intended to house a variety of relatives.

Bertie's strength lay in his esthetics, his eye for detail and his love for eighteenth century French architecture. A First Hill clinic in that idiom caught his attention, and upon learning that the architect was J. Lister Holmes, he made an appointment to review some of his residential work in that character. Impressed, and knowing he needed technical assistance to turn his ideas into reality, Bertie presented Holmes to his mother and a pleasant relationship was established. The site was viewed and the needs of the family recorded. The architect was contracted to



take Bertie's sketches and finalize them into measured drawings and to oversee construction of the house which began in 1930. Mrs. Collins was 62 when the home was finished a year later.

With the construction of the house, the scene was set for the years to unfold and for the charm of the woods and the style of the home to catch the imagination of Mr. and Mrs. Bloedel. In 1950, they purchased Collinswood, which consisted of 67 acres, the home which was not quite finished and no developed gardens.

During the next thirty years, those visionary plans and decisions that shaped the evolution of the gardens that greet the visitor today unfolded.



The Visitor

The once private retreat has become a public destination.

With the publication of a two-page feature in *Sunset Magazine* that appeared in the July, 1989, issue and some attractive and effective publicity in *Western Living* magazine, a Canadian publication similar in format to *Sunset*, considerable interest in the Reserve has been generated. A significant number of inquiries and visits appear to be directly linked to the publication of these articles.

We understand, that an Italian publication, *Habitare*, published a short feature on the Reserve in May, but we have not seen it as yet.

Resource

With Mr. Bloedel's suggestion that the Reserve become a resource to the Bainbridge community, we were pleased to be a part of the Bainbridge Arts Council garden tour, "Bainbridge in Bloom" and a showcase for an excellent display of works by local artists, all featuring a botanical theme. The garden tour was virtually sold out with a substantial number of the art pieces being sold.

Equally well received was Theatre in the Wild's production, "Dance the Dragon Home", which was performed the last two weekends of July. With the pressure from the cast and explosive print and TV coverage, the play sold out almost before the posters were up, a remarkable response. The play was a delight with more than one person carrying away the notion that, "If one looks an adversary in the eye and gets to know them, it is hard to stay enemies." And, "If one uses a sword in anger, it will kill the thing you love".

And finally, the four Midsummer Concerts produced by Seattle Camerata and the Arbor Fund as a salute to members have been full to overflowing and greeted with appreciation.

Accessibility

We were delighted when the user of a motorized wheelchair left her phone number and volunteered to come back and help us with some ideas for making certain areas of the gardens easier to access. Now a staff person need only be notified by radio that a wheelchair is on the grounds, and a small portable ramp can easily be placed at the step into the Zen Garden area. Plans are under way to design an access to the Moss Garden side of the Reflection Pool so that the entire Mid-Garden area can be more completely experienced by the wheel-chair bound. The self-guiding materials continue to be well used by all visitors.

Staff

A Volunteer Staff of over 50 continues to supplement the Paid Staff and has given over 1,675 hours since January of this year. The number of tours led by Docents reflects the desire of visitors to come to the gardens. In April, there were 22 guided tours, in May 41, and in June, 27. Tours are already booking for the fall months and we are getting inquiries for next spring!

Members

A number of members have called to inquire about the 'rules of the road.' First, the good news is that membership rates will remain at \$25 per year. A membership means the holder of the membership may visit the gardens an unlimited number of times during the year and bring up to three additional persons at no extra cost. Members still must make reservations to tour the reserve. Because of the steady interest in the gardens and our commitment to keep the number of visitors per day to about

150, we urge you to make your call at least 24 hours before you wish to come.

Outreach

We are pleased with the number and varying ages of students who are coming with their class or with park programs to experience the Reserve. It is well at this point, perhaps, to recall Mr. Bloedel's definition of a student and education. "Education is experience and a student is one who is open to experience." Indeed.

Fall and Winter

Garden information sessions will be held again this fall and winter from 9:30 am til noon. The sessions will include coffee at 9:30, lecture at 10:00 am and then enter the gardens by 11:00 am to practice what you have learned. Class size will be limited and there is a \$2.00 fee for materials.

The schedule will include:

- October 10, "What Makes the Best Fall Color"

- November 14, "The Winter Garden at its Best"
- January 9, "General Pruning"
- January 23, "Rhodies Only: Feeding and Pruning"

In December, we will add musical afternoons on an occasional basis.

For information and reservations, phone the Reserve.



We are saddened by the death of Virginia Merrill Bloedel, 87, benefactor, philanthropist, visionary.

Become a Member of the Bloedel Reserve and receive the following membership benefits:

- Periodic Newsletters
- Notification of events
- 10% off The Bloedel Reserve: Gardens in the Forest
- Unlimited visits to the Reserve with up to three guests.

Cost: \$25 per year
Hours: Business: 9-5 Mon-Fri
Visitor: 10-4 Wed-Sun
Fees: Adults \$4
Seniors \$2
Students \$2
Children under 5 free

Reservations: (206)842-7631 V/TDD

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