

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

California Horticulture Oral History Series

Ruth Bancroft

THE RUTH BANCROFT GARDEN IN WALNUT CREEK, CALIFORNIA:
CREATION IN 1971, AND CONSERVATION

With Introductions by
Frank H. Cabot
and
Wayne Roderick

Interviews Conducted by
Suzanne B. Riess
in 1991 and 1992

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The Garden Conservancy

The American Rock Garden Society, Western Chapter

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BANCROFT, Ruth Petersson (b. 1908)

Gardener

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Early interest in gardening; architecture studies, UC Berkeley; marriage to Philip Bancroft, Jr.; historic house and garden in Walnut Creek; steps in creating a garden site for cactus and succulent collection, 1971, and work with Lester Hawkins, landscape architect; the freezes of 1972 and 1990; a walking tour of the garden, and discussion of plants; garden's future, and working with The Garden Conservancy. Appendices include a written record of the first year of the garden.

Introductions by Francis H. Cabot, Chairman, Board of Directors, The Garden Conservancy; and Wayne Roderick, UC Botanical Garden, Tilden Botanic Garden.

Interviewed 1991 and 1992 by Suzanne B. Riess for the California Horticulture Oral History Series. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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INTRODUCTION--by Francis H. Cabot

Ruth Bancroft's Dry Garden was the catalyst that brought about the creation of the Garden Conservancy. Not only did it serve as the inspiration for the founding of an organization devoted to the preservation of exceptional gardens, but it also served as the test case to see whether a national organization could play an effective role in building community support for the preservation of a local garden.

In late February of 1988 my wife Anne and I used the excuse of an American Rock Garden Society plant study weekend in San Mateo, California to enjoy a tour of West Coast nurseries and gardens from Monterey north to Portland. Caroline Burgess, the director of Stonecrop Gardens in Cold Spring, New York, accompanied us. Earlier the previous fall Penelope Hobhouse had come to lunch, and on hearing of our proposed trip had suggested that we must see Ruth Bancroft's Dry Garden in Walnut Creek. She described Ruth's garden as one of the very best she'd seen in the U.S.

On the afternoon of Friday, February 26, 1988, after visiting Harland Hand's garden in El Cerrito, we arrived at Ruth Bancroft's and spent a most agreeable hour or so with Ruth walking around the garden. Despite the winter protection for many of the plants, and the fact that the world of cacti and other Xeriphytes was about as far removed from alpine and rock garden plants (my primary area of interest) as possible, it was clear that we were in the midst of a great garden and in the company of a great gardener. Not only was the garden laid out in a compelling and graceful way, embellished by an appropriate and handsome structure, but the textures, shapes, and the colors of the foliage were combined in the most artful way, creating an aesthetic whole that was the equal of any combination of the more conventional perennials and shrubs that I had even seen; all this in a medium that, before that moment, I had considered hostile and of little interest. Ruth's achievement made the strongest impression on our group, one that stayed with us throughout the study weekend and the rest of the trip.

As we were leaving I expressed the hope to Ruth that somehow or other her garden would be preserved after she retired. She replied that she didn't know what to do and that it worried her greatly. She said that her children, while sympathetic to her creation, had neither the interest nor the capability to continue to maintain the garden.

As we drove out the driveway I said to Anne and Caroline that we had to figure out some way to help people like Ruth preserve their artful creations. Anne, who is on the board of the Lower Hudson Chapter of the Nature Conservancy replied (facetiously), "Why don't you start a Garden Conservancy," little knowing that her suggestion was to consume so much of our time and energy for the next five years.

The merits of the concept, and the clear need demonstrated, if Ruth's garden was to be preserved, were immediately apparent, and from that point the idea began to take shape and develop. Ruth's garden, also, was a most suitable initial test for the concept. It was a uniquely Western American garden, by no means everyone's dish of tea, and it was in an area where the will of the community rather than an abundance of affluent neighbors would make the difference. It would be a real test.

On September 30, 1988 en route to a seed collecting trip in western Sichuan, I met with Bill Hutton, a philanthropic lawyer with Howard, Rice in San Francisco to whom I had been referred by Rose Harvey of the Trust for Public Land's New York office. In mid-November of 1988 he introduced me to the Tides Foundation and suggested the initial steps to bring The Garden Conservancy into existence, as well as the use of a conservation easement and a conditional pledge as ways to achieve the preservation of Ruth's garden. In December Antonia Adezio joined me in the launching of The Garden Conservancy, and we jointly attended the first Ruth Bancroft Garden Committee meeting on March 4, 1989.

Francis. H. Cabot
Chairman, Board of Directors
The Garden Conservancy

Cold Spring, New York
September 12, 1992

INTRODUCTION--by Wayne Roderick¹

Who would I compare to Ruth? When it goes to the gardening, I think of my mother. Of course my mother never had any money to do anything much. But both of them I think would be about the same. "Use gloves to work in the soil? You use gloves to handle spiny things, and that's it." I would classify Ruth as a genuine dirt gardener. She's out there doing things with her bare hands.

One of the things I can tell you about Ruth, at the beginning of the garden in the summertime she would get up, I don't know how early, but she would be out in the garden by seven at the latest, and for the first hour she was weeding the path of the little spotted spurge, hand-weeding those paths until her knees would get so sore from the rocks, the gravel. That's what I mean by a genuine dirt gardener.

* * *

It would have to be in the fifties when I first met Ruth Bancroft. She used to go to Cal Hort meetings, and I got to know her then to say hello to. At that time one of the important things was the "show and tell" half of the meetings, and though she never brought very much to show she was into everything. Both of us are about the same that way: with something new we had to shove one another out of the way to see what this was. And then we'd talk about it a little bit.

She was just into plants, period. She had a nice collection of succulents, but the big lawn area around the house was the beautiful spot. About 1980 the two big trees fell over in the formal part of the garden, and so much of it was shade under those big old oak trees that when they fell over then all of a sudden she had gone from a shade garden to a full sun garden. That's when the formal area, to my estimation, went downhill. She lost interest in that, and had so much interest in the succulent garden that she kept on more in the succulent garden.

One of the things she was very interested in when I first met her was daffodils. She's the one who really started the Daffodil Society here--the chapter, I should say--gave money to get things organized. And

¹This introduction is edited from a taped conversation between Wayne Roderick and Suzanne Riess held at Mr. Roderick's home on December 16, 1992. Mr. Roderick is on the Board of Directors of the Ruth Bancroft Garden. He is the former head of the California section of the University of California's Botanical Garden, 1960-1976, and the former director of the East Bay Regional Parks Botanic Garden, 1976-1983. An oral history with Mr. Roderick for the Regional Oral History Office's California Horticulture Oral History Series was completed in 1991.

people don't realize, because she is rather a shy person in a lot of little ways, the extent of her iris collection, the big hybrid iris. It takes her about a month working full time just to take care of one-third of her iris.

Another thing she was very interested in is old-fashioned roses, as well as the hybrid roses. She keeps those two collections separate from each other. The old-fashioned roses are near to the big succulent garden, and the hybrid teas and other types of modern roses are on the other side of the garden, near the parking area in the back. She's also very interested in herbs, and has a very large herb garden, the fancy-scented geraniums, and lots of different kinds of lavenders.

* * *

The very broadest idea for Ruth's garden is Lester Hawkins's. He placed trees, and some of those things, placed some of the rocks. But after things grew up, a lot of this couldn't be seen any more. So she began to modify things. Say when an agave bloomed, and it was not in the best place, it was getting too much shade, so when it bloomed it would come out at very much of an angle trying to get to sunlight. Well, then she wouldn't put another one there, she would put in something that took more shade. There was that constant modification. A garden is anything but steady, and hers especially, with so many agaves and some of those big things that bloom and die.

The first time I went out to visit Ruth's garden, it was before the Big Freeze, when they were setting things out, she and Lester Hawkins. Then came the Big Freeze, December 1972, and then I started going out to see what survived and what didn't. I was working at UC Botanic Garden, but I always went out on my own, not in any official capacity. I had gotten to know her well enough at Cal Hort and I figured, "Gee, here's something going on, and I'd like to get my nose in."

Russ Beatty was getting the big list together on damage, and I helped out at UC Botanic Garden, so I went out to Ruth's to see what-all had happened. And oh, what a mess! A tragedy. I still swear that she took a truck to Los Angeles, to get new stuff to bring back, but she said they only took the station wagon. And there were only a few things they got in gallon cans; all the rest were in small pots.

The garden was new at that time, in 1972, and you would think it would not have looked like much, except that she had moved a lot of the big plants that she had stashed in her little succulent garden. How she ever got so many plants per square inch, and got them so big, and got them out to the new area! And most of them had to be propped up, until they got new roots going. What is now her herb garden was solid succulents, and I mean solid--great big plants. They moved what they could, but even then there must have been fifteen big agaves left there

that finally bloomed, and then she got rid of those and took the little side shoots and moved them into the big new garden.

The garden looked like hell after the Big Freeze. And I'd go out two or three times a year to see it. The amazing thing was, it was growing a little bit, and growing, and then all of a sudden, before you realized it, it was a beautiful spot. It grew extremely fast, and you just can't believe it, it was a nice garden, but all of a sudden it exploded to its full beauty.

By five years after the freeze, that's when it really became something to see. I'd say even earlier than that it was very very interesting, but about five years after the agaves had grown so they started to bloom. Then about ten years after it was built, all of a sudden all of the big agaves bloomed and died. It was almost a disaster in that respect, but she had so many big side pups that they filled in right away. Within a couple of years you wouldn't have known the old ones had been taken out.

Some of those single plants would be up to fifteen feet square; they really covered territory. Then when they bloomed, what a chore to remove! You'd get a chain saw, and a dump truck and a tractor. One leaf, it would be all that one man could do to handle it, and it really took two men to throw it into the dump truck. An old stump would weigh up to a ton, and that itself was a trip to the dump.

* * *

Gardens are work, and Ruth's is especially heavy work. John DaRosa, he was one of the men Ruth had working out there, and he seems to know quite well what he is doing, but he injured his back so he can't do the heavy work. Once in a while he'll come now and supervise. But he knew what everything was, and how to take care of it, and she could go away and leave him and do something else.

As far as how much Ruth works, if you want to get her on the phone, you've got to call before seven in the morning or after six at night. She's not in the house at all. She's in the garden almost every day of the week. I think this is one of the reasons she doesn't belong to the womens' clubs. Her garden is more important to her to any club. She doesn't have time. Evenings yes, when Phil was alive they always had their opera tickets, symphony tickets, all of these. He just loved those kind of things, and she liked them. But now I don't know how much she keeps up on those. When Phil was alive, come hell or high water they had to have season tickets to the opera and season tickets to the symphony.

* * *

The succulent garden is the showplace, and she knows it, and that's why most of her time is spent out there. A couple of times I have said,

"I hate bringing people here and disturbing you." "Oh no, please bring them, I enjoy it, because they can talk plants." I take visitors there to see so many of those interesting succulents that nobody can have--the big agaves--because their gardens are too small. And here you see that magnificent collection of those.

Her collection of yuccas is magnificent, too. Again, almost all of them are way too big to have even one of the big ones. But here she's got almost everything she can lay her hands on, ten or twelve large-growing yuccas. Any one of them would be too big for the average garden.

And she is growing so many of the aloes. Again, they can become quite a good-sized plant. To have such a collection, probably the only good collection in all of Northern California! Of course, quite a few of them have to be kept inside, because they are so tender. They have to be carefully sheltered. Many years back the University Botanic Garden had as good a collection, but they had to be kept in pots, so they couldn't achieve their full beauty. They didn't have the place to plant them.

See, Ruth does not mind making soil suitable. At UC it was heavy clay. She's got clay, but she does not mind going out and buying a truckload of something to add to the soil to give the drainage. In Africa, where you generally find these plants, it's always sandy soil, sharp drainage. The University can't afford to buy the soil, especially on the steep hill site they have.

Ruth will take a lot of things and plant them out and try them. She'll take a small start, and if it survives then she can plant the big one out and keep the small plant inside just in case of a big freeze. Also, she has a lot more heat than UC, and this is something else these succulent plants want is heat, and UC doesn't have it. There are different things that she has in her favor, and that she is willing to do.

* * *

Phil Bancroft just adored Ruth, and he wanted her to have anything she wanted. For instance, after the Big Freeze, when they made three trips to Los Angeles, he went along and did the driving, and made certain that the plants got well-packed, and into the car. He did everything he could to help her. I don't think that Phil thought about the garden continuing, but he certainly was there to make sure she got what she wanted for the place. He was a farmer-type, but he enjoyed seeing the garden, and he was willing to get in and help.

He could see that the orchard was dying--by this time there was very little left, because he had sold off. I think it was his father who started to sell off the big chunks of land for sub-division. I think the only thing he resented was having other houses built up right against

him. He knew he couldn't take care of all of that orchard, and undoubtedly, the way they were taxing, I think it was a relief to get rid of a lot of the property. He was always just so cheerful: "Oh, jiminy, she's got something she's been wanting for such a long time. How nice, she's got it!" That type of guy.

Behind the house is a little kind of shed-like building that is part of the old, original mansion that burned, and he had his offices in there. I never was in there. I tried my best never to bother him. Ruth was always so kind to let me take some of my house guests out there. She said how she liked seeing me come with these foreigners. She could ask them questions, and find out how they could grow something under very cold conditions, for instance. So many of these people would be from Europe, where they would be growing in pots, in hothouses.

* * *

Ruth has a degree in architecture from the University, and of course this fits in with landscape architecture, and she has a keen eye. So even though she had the garden more or less laid out by landscape architects, there has been a lot of modifying. Some of the trees got too big, so she's moved plants that would take more shade under those, and moved the sun-lovers out. And I think it looks much nicer. When things started to mature, then she could blend things better. She's a good artist.

This last summer, having the garden open two days a week, and the people coming--and of course I have to have my nose into everything, so I've become a docent--it's amazing how people just oohed and aahed seeing all these plants where they had space to grow and show their true beauty. Her placing of the plantings for the last five years or so has made it an even more beautiful garden.

Wayne Roderick

December 16, 1992
Orinda, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY--by Suzanne B. Riess

Ruth Bancroft's name is synonymous with a remarkable and beautiful garden that is her creation in Walnut Creek, California. When Frank Cabot, current chairman of the board of directors of The Garden Conservancy, was shown Ruth's garden five years ago on a trip to California, he "shivered with excitement from the experience," as he told a garden writer for the New York Times. It was this intensely-felt appreciation of what Ruth had wrought in the less-than-twenty years since she conceived of the garden that led him to form The Garden Conservancy, which organization dedicates itself to preserving for public viewing a carefully-chosen group of exceptional American gardens, of which the Ruth Bancroft Garden is the first.

In California and the West, and in The Regional Oral History Office, the Bancroft name is synonymous with dedication to gathering and preserving history, starting with Hubert Howe Bancroft's amazing Dictations, the transcribed autobiographical statements of the West that are a vivid resource in The Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley. Hubert Howe Bancroft died in 1918, and the Regional Oral History Office did not come into existence until 1955. But given oral history's mission to record knowledge of historical events as recounted by participants, we were eager to look back to the history that the name Bancroft represented. In the next decades two major biographical Bancroft family history interviews were conducted, and substantial supporting documents were deposited in The Bancroft Library.

For those reasons of precedence, Ruth Petersson Bancroft's oral history, this story of a garden and a gardener, will find its place on the shelves of The Bancroft Library next to both that of her father-in-law Philip Bancroft, whose memoir was completed in 1962, and of Philip Bancroft's sister-in-law Margaret Wood Bancroft [Mrs. Griffing Bancroft], whose memoir was completed in 1980. Ruth Bancroft's story, too, is to some degree family history. But it is more the amazing chronicle of the growth of a passionate gardener, from her childhood recollections of spring wildflowers on the hills of an earlier, bucolic Berkeley, to her current triumphs, and the tribulations of stewardship of a garden more or less in the public trust.

When in 1991 the director of the Regional Oral History Office, Willa K. Baum, a longtime Bancroft family friend by virtue of having conducted the interviews with Philip Bancroft, Sr., and with Margaret Wood Bancroft, approached Ruth Bancroft, widow of Phil Bancroft, Jr., with the request that she be interviewed on family and on her garden, Mrs. Bancroft was somewhat abashed, but characteristically agreeable. On the one hand, she didn't have time, because there is never enough time to garden and to do anything else. On the other hand, she knew that since

her meeting with Frank Cabot, and the subsequent setting in motion of The Garden Conservancy, that chronicling the garden's history was an important part of the whole picture of preservation.

The interviewer and Mrs. Bancroft met four times to tape-record. The first two meetings were in July 1991. Then a walking-talking interview later in that year, and a final interview in January 1992. For our first tapings we sat inside, talking about the past, Ruth's history, her marriage, the Bancroft family, the house, her perennial garden, her interest in collecting cactus and succulents, and the decision she and her late husband Phil made to turn four acres of what had been pear and walnut orchard into a showplace garden. After the September interview while walking in the garden, our final interview was indoors again, with the themes being how Ruth made her decisions about the garden, where she and her garden fit in a wider world of horticulture, and aspects of the conservation of the garden.

The transcripts were edited lightly but thoughtfully by Ruth. As with our interviews, where the appointments respected Ruth's priority interest in the demands of the garden, retrieval of the edited transcript had to respect the priority given the enormous effort to prepare the garden for the glamorous Founders Day event on April 8th, 1992 when Angela Lansbury, and the television cameras, and the conservation easement pledging the permanent preservation of the four-acre garden, all came together. Bemused by all of this ceremony, Ruth was doubtless still weeding the night before, and willing her garden to its best ever early-April bloom.

A fascinating addition to this oral history is a nineteen-page transcription of Ruth's small, tight handwritten notes on the garden's first year, in the volume as Appendix A. It covers everything garden-related that happened that year, every person, plant, and problem. Every weeding effort. Notably, at only one point does Ruth, as author of the garden and the "record," step back and look and say, "Things looked nice." [June 21, 1971] Wayne Roderick, who contributed an introduction to the oral history, and who contributes time to the Ruth Bancroft Garden, and to the Garden's Board of Directors, suggests that is because in the beginning it probably didn't look very nice. But five years later, in 1976, it is the lush oasis portrayed in "A Desert in the City," F. Owen Pearce's article, Appendix C. Any gardener will do well to read that year of Ruth's journal, to see the value of a journal, as well as the work involved in realizing a dream, and the necessity of being willing to weed!

We appreciate Frank Cabot's introduction to Ruth Bancroft's memoir, which serves also to introduce The Garden Conservancy, a project well

begun with Ruth Bancroft's garden. Support from that organization, and the benefactions of the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, and the very loyal American Rock Garden Society, Western Chapter, and David and Evelyne Lennette, have made this oral history possible.

Suzanne B. Riess
Interviewer/Editor

December 1992
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Ruth Bancroft

Date of birth Sept. 2, 1908 Birthplace Brockton, Mass.

Father's full name Torsten Pettersson

Occupation Professor Birthplace Sweden

Mother's full name Ruth Nelson Pettersson

Occupation Teacher, Housewife Birthplace Sweden

Your spouse Philip Bancroft, Jr.

Your children Peter Bancroft, Nina Dickerson,
Kathy Hidalgo

Where did you grow up? Berkeley, CA

Present community Walnut Creek, CA

Education Berkeley public schools, Williams Institute, Randolph
school, U.C. Berkeley.

Occupation(s) Teacher in Merced, CA

Housewife

Areas of expertise gardening

Other interests or activities Music, shell collecting, art, nature,
reading

Organizations in which you are active None any more.

I ORIGINS IN THE PAST

[Interview 1: July 2, 1991]##'

The Bancroft Family, Farming in Walnut Creek

Riess: Have you any recollections, or hearsay recollections, of Hubert Howe Bancroft?

Bancroft: Well, of course, I have no recollections, because I never met him. You see, Phil and I were married in 1939, and I had met him just the year before. And his grandfather goes back farther than that.

I remember one thing. He always drove horses and a carriage--I don't know how many horses, maybe two--and they said that whenever he'd get to a railroad track he'd drive into the middle of the track and stop to look if anything was coming, and everyone was terrified driving with him, because this is the way he drove, all the time! So I remember that everyone was sort of afraid of grandfather.

Riess: In your digging around here, your gardening, or earlier farming, has there been any evidence found of Indians living on this land?

Bancroft: No. But some years back, glass collectors came around and were digging where old privies had been--you know, they said people used to throw the bottles down there--and they didn't find anything there either, not even as recently as that.

Riess: Glass collectors, not archaeologists?

'This symbol (##) indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page following transcript.

Bancroft: No, no, just people who collected old bottles. And apparently the word went around, because two or three came at different times.

Riess: Your husband, Philip Bancroft, Jr., lived here, made his career here?

Bancroft: Yes. He was born in San Francisco, and I think he was about six when they moved out here.

Riess: He was a rancher, or farmer?

Bancroft: Yes. A farmer.

Riess: What is the distinction?

Bancroft: A ranch is supposed to have animals, horses and cattle. And we just had orchards. So I think that's the distinction. But rather than being an orchardist-- Phil, who was very modest, wouldn't think of calling himself that. He was a farmer.

The Peterssons. in Berkeley

Riess: And tell me about yourself. You are from Berkeley? Your family name is Petersson. Is that Danish?

Bancroft: That's Swedish. And both parents came to this country with their families when they were in their teens. My father came when he was a freshman in high school, and he didn't know a word of English and had to study extra-hard to answer in class, and do his homework and everything. But he did high school in three years!

Riess: Why did these families come from Sweden?

Bancroft: My mother was brought because their house burned down and they lost everything, and they thought they would start over again.

Riess: Did they have family in America?

Bancroft: No, neither of them.

Riess: Doesn't it amaze you to think of making that kind of move?

Bancroft: I know it, not knowing the language, and not knowing anyone there.

My mother's father was an engineer, and he had designed a number of bridges in Sweden. I remember knowing that.

Riess: Did he continue in that here?

Bancroft: No, I don't believe he did. I don't know what he did.

Riess: Did your family live with the grandparents?

Bancroft: No. But up until I was ten--and I don't remember when it started--we would go to Minneapolis every summer to stay with the grandparents. They had a place out on a lake, so it was a nice country vacation.

Riess: They came to Minneapolis from Sweden?

Bancroft: Yes. And my father's family came to Massachusetts.

Riess: How did your parents meet?

Bancroft: I don't know. But they did meet in the East, because they married before they came out here.

My father was a professor. He got a job at UC Berkeley. That's why they came here. And I was a few months old. So I was raised here.

Riess: When were you born?

Bancroft: In 1908.

Riess: What was he a professor of?

Bancroft: Latin.

Riess: And your mother, what did she do?

Bancroft: She was a schoolteacher. I don't know what grade she taught. That was in the East. Then, when she came here, she just took care of the children.

Riess: Are you the oldest?

Bancroft: Yes, and I have a sister two years younger, and a brother ten years younger. He just retired as a professor of English at Smith College.

Riess: Where did you live in Berkeley?

Bancroft: First we lived in the center, near the campus. Then we moved to north Berkeley, when there were very few houses. The streets had been put in, but there were very few houses on the streets, so it was nice and country-like.

I think Mr. McDuffie, of Mason-McDuffie [Real Estate], did a lot of that. And then they were planning to--. The reason Marin Avenue is so steep and goes straight up the hill is that they planned to have some kind of a funicular going up there, for all the houses that were being built.

Mr. McDuffie told me that. I knew him because he was a great gardener, and I was interested in gardening, and I used to go over to their place quite a bit.

Riess: He owned that stretch on The Uplands?

Bancroft: Yes, they had a big place, and they sold off to homes that are surrounding their original house. I haven't been there since they left. But I know a lot of their garden has been built on by people who have built houses on pieces they bought.

Riess: Where was the house in north Berkeley?

Bancroft: It was on Marin, a couple of blocks above the circle. It was pretty far down.

Ruth's First Garden

Riess: Did your mother garden?

Bancroft: No, I was the only gardener in the family. I liked it ever since I can remember.

Riess: How far back do you remember being in a garden, digging--?

Bancroft: Well, I can't remember not doing it. I think I started when I was just a little girl. I wanted to have some flowers in the garden, and no one else was interested, and Mother was very busy with her family and everything. I think I've always done it, ever since I was able.

Riess: Planting seeds.

Bancroft: Yes, I planted seeds, and people would give me plants to put in the garden. I didn't buy much, because I didn't have any money. But I accumulated things, one way or another.

Riess: So people knew you gardened.

Bancroft: Yes, friends, family friends.

Riess: Were you a successful gardener?

Bancroft: I think I did pretty well. I really can't compare. It is only in the recent years that I have had any connection at all with professionals, or UC Berkeley, et cetera. That is all recent. All the time I gardened around the house I didn't know any of those people, I just did it because I liked it.

Riess: "Successful"--I guess the answer would have to be "yes," because if things didn't work, didn't thrive, you might have just given up. Or would you have been inspired to figure out why?

Bancroft: I would have tried to figure out why. And, of course, I think everyone has failures, some have more than others. But I think anyone who's interested in gardening tries to figure out why, and just tries something else.

Riess: Was the soil reasonably good?

Bancroft: Yes, it was. I don't remember doing much in the way of amendment. I think I just planted, and things seemed to grow, so it was good soil. I probably didn't realize that.

Riess: Were there trees on the property?

Bancroft: No, there weren't. It was like most of the city lots. There was really nothing much on it. And I didn't plant any trees. I was mostly interested in perennials and shrubs, I think.

Riess: And what age were you most involved with this?

Bancroft: When we moved to that address I was about ten. So, I'd say around ten.

Riess: I am going to mine this subject for everything I can get! Were you looking in books and magazines to see beautiful gardens, or to get ideas?

Bancroft: I don't remember doing that much. I probably did. But we didn't have gardening books at home, because no one was

library and look at books, but at that time I didn't. I was just planting and watering, that's all.

Riess: Although there was a time when any story book would illustrate the cottage with hollyhocks and garden walk--that sort of garden.

Bancroft: Of course, exactly. There's that German book that was translated into English--this had children in rows, each carrying a stem with a different flower on the top. And I remember that, because those flowers used to intrigue me so much. [Etwas Von Den Wurzelkindern, by Sibylle V. Olfers--"When the Root Children Wake Up."] I loved that book.

Riess: Did you get a lot of approval for your gardening efforts?

Bancroft: I don't remember that, no.

Riess: Were there pretty gardens to look at in the area?

Bancroft: No, there weren't any gardens that I knew of around me.

Riess: Seventy years ago. Really undeveloped.

Bancroft: Where our house was, there was only one house towards the back of the very large block. And they filled in around us after we moved in, not awfully long afterwards.

Riess: Did your parents have the house built?

Bancroft: No, it was an old shingle house. Old square shingle.

Riess: Still there?

Bancroft: I think so. I haven't been by for years.

I really didn't like the house particularly. It was very uninteresting. It was just a house.

The Flowering Hills Behind Berkeley

Riess: Did your family travel much in California, so that you came to know how the state looked?

Bancroft: No, that came quite a bit later.

Riess: When would you have seen your first cactus, your first dry, desert plant communities?

Bancroft: Probably after I was married. I wasn't interested in cactus until I started this cactus and succulent garden, really. I had a few, but when I started to plan this garden I had all the succulents back here, and I thought I needed cacti for contrast, so I started buying them. But that's the very last thing I was interested in.

Riess: I asked that about traveling, because for me my whole sense of the beauty of the dry hills of California has come from drives toward Yosemite, or south through the Central Valley.

Bancroft: Well, before we moved to that house on Marin--. I skipped one house. After we left the middle of Berkeley, we moved up onto Keith Avenue, just south of Euclid. And that, again, had very few houses, but all the streets were in. So there were wildflowers growing around there in all the fields that are now houses. There were trilliums, there were ribes, beautiful ribes up toward the hills. I remember, what did they call that? Soap root [soap plant, Chlorogalum pomeridianum]--the Indians used to eat the bulb and used the lather for washing. And there would be little annuals, little patches of annuals, little feathery white things about two inches high. I don't know what they were.

I spent a lot of time wandering around, and also over into Wildcat Canyon, just looking at the wildflowers. I think that may have started me in the interest in wildflowers. Then they all disappeared as houses were built over them. And this I was very sad about, because it had been such fun to go and see them all year.

Then I'd bring pieces home to plant, and try them. Some grew, some didn't. Later I found that there are such things as annuals, and no wonder they didn't survive! [laughs] I didn't even realize--. I was awfully little then. That was before I was ten, I think. I didn't realize there were annuals and perennials.

Riess: That's a lovely country image of wandering in the Berkeley hills.

Bancroft: Yes. And because it was hilly you had quite a choice of places to go.

Riess: And the rains, and the thrill of it turning green.

Bancroft: Yes. I also collected polliwogs.

Riess: Did they survive?

Bancroft: Oh, yes. As they got a pair of legs they went into one container. And then when they got four legs they went into another container. I had this series of containers. And then when they were frogs, off they went! I remember enjoying that a lot.

Riess: Were your parents impressed by this something scientific bent? Did they encourage you?

Bancroft: I don't remember their doing anything one way or the other.

Riess: Were you a tomboy?

Bancroft: No. I really never have been athletic at all, or wanting to do too much climbing.

Riess: Were you put through dancing classes and music?

Bancroft: Music yes, but not dancing. I took violin lessons first, and then piano lessons. I took piano through high school. Then I got too busy in college.

Riess: Was the Temple of the Wings something you remember?

Bancroft: Oh, yes, we all went over there summers for their classes. A number of the professors who were friends, my father being one of them, had their children go to these classes. Yes, I enjoyed them very much. And that was dancing, of course, that's true. I was thinking of other kinds of dancing, ballroom dancing--.

Riess: And the Temple of the Wings was free spirit dancing.

Bancroft: Yes!

Riess: And it wasn't considered too bohemian, or strange?

Bancroft: Well, no, but you see we only knew professors, and I think their point of view was different from the average person. I think they had perhaps a wider view of life. I know I thought it was very interesting. I enjoyed it.

I know all the neighbors [of the Boyntons] said the children didn't get enough to eat, and what they did get was

mostly peanuts. And so the children were always at the neighbors getting food. [laughter]

Sidney B. Mitchell's Garden

Riess: Somewhere I read that you used to visit the Sidney B. Mitchell garden. When was that?

Bancroft: That was when I was in high school. I took a year off, because I was a year younger than most people in my class. My parents decided to have me take a year off so I would be the right age. And I took piano lessons then. (I was never a good pianist. I loved it but my fingers just aren't right for it. But anyway, I took piano lessons.)

Then I would often go up to see the Mitchells, walk up there. Again, it was all mostly open, the whole way over to the Mitchell's from our house on Marin.

Riess: That was on Woodmont?

Bancroft: Yes.

And he would give me bits of iris that were surplus. He hybridized a lot, and he had these fields of his hybrids, and some that weren't up to standard, or were too close to others that were already named, he'd often give me. And I just enjoyed seeing what was developing there.

Riess: Was there something developing there all year around? Iris have a short season.

Bancroft: Yes, just that three or four weeks in the spring. But he had other things in his garden. He was quite well known among horticulturists, and often when I was there someone would be visiting from some other place, or some other country, and I would be in on their conversations. So that was interesting, too.

I think, without realizing it, now that you bring it up, that may have influenced me too, his interest in all those different things.

Riess: Interest in the hybridizing?

Bancroft: And the plants, too, all sorts of plants. Now and then I would still go over there when I was in college.

I know I used to go to the University Library and read the English magazine, Gardener's Chronicle. It was a well-known one, it went on for years and years. I later subscribed to it. I used to go to the library and read that, so I got familiar with more names, and different plants.

Riess: And Sidney B. Mitchell was the University Librarian then?

Bancroft: Yes.

Riess: Was his wife involved in the garden?

Bancroft: Oh yes, she certainly was. They did it all together.

Riess: Did you actually see him hybridizing?

Bancroft: No, I don't think I did, but I knew what he did.

Riess: So, you hung around.

Bancroft: Yes. They were very friendly, and willing to answer any questions.

Riess: Did they have children?

Bancroft: No. He was quite a cripple. I don't know whether you realize that. He was very crippled.

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Bancroft: He was not attractive-looking. He was very short, and as I say, he limped badly. But he was so nice. You sort of forgot about this after you were with him.

Riess: How much space did he have up there?

Bancroft: It was a big thing. I don't know how many acres. Probably several acres. But it was one of a row of houses; that little section was built up. And Carl Salbach was the next door neighbor. And he was also an iris hybridizer.

Riess: Was this a coincidence?

Bancroft: I think Salbach came in later. I think Mitchell was there first. I seldom went over there [Salbach garden]. The Mitchells were the ones I knew.

Riess: Were those gardens, the Mitchell and Salbach gardens, open to the public?

Bancroft: I don't know. I didn't ever come across a group of fifteen or twenty people going through. But maybe that's because I didn't happen to be there at the time.

Education: Miss Williams's Institute

Riess: About your education, were you going to Berkeley High School?

Bancroft: I went to Berkeley High for the first two years, and then I went to private school for the last two years; Berkeley High was just too big, and I felt very uncomfortable, so I went to private school.

Riess: Did you go to Anna Head School?

Bancroft: No, I went to Miss Randolph's, which was a very small one. I was the only student in the Latin class; I stayed after school and she taught me Latin. So I had to do all the work!

Riess: Where was Miss Randolph's?

Bancroft: It was at the head of Derby. It was a series of little wooden buildings--I think they're still there, I think they modified them. But that's where it was.

Riess: Berkeley High couldn't have been that big.

Bancroft: Well, you see, I had been in private school before, I had been at Miss Williams's Institute in north Berkeley, so I just wasn't used to big classes.

Riess: That's quite a property, where Miss Williams's Institute was. Was that landscaped in any memorable way?

Bancroft: They didn't maintain it particularly, I don't think. It had been landscaped, of course, before the school took it over, and a lot of that remained. And a lot of it was material that could maintain itself, like a lot of the trees.

And there was a big cactus garden there, enormous opuntias and things. I never liked them especially. They hadn't--.

I just hadn't really seen them. I liked the other flowers. And this was something different.

The Churches lived on The Arlington, and their place was right next to the school. I used to go over and see him sometimes when he was, I don't know, in college, or whatever, and he would show me the flowers in his garden.

Riess: Thomas Church?

Bancroft: Yes, Thomas Church. He was just a boy then, really.

Riess: But he had a flower garden.

Bancroft: He had a flower garden, and grew things beautifully. I remember enormous dahlias.

Riess: You and he were contemporaries?

Bancroft: Yes. I really didn't know him, but I'd go to see his garden and he'd show me, and that was it.

Riess: His mother taught at the school [Miss Williams Institute], didn't she?

Bancroft: She taught there, yes. She was a very creative person. I remember both she and Miss Williams wore--. Instead of the regulation clothes that everyone else wore, they wore these long gowns, two rectangles that went down the front and down the back to the floor. No belt. It was sewn together at the sides. And they were made of beautiful fabrics, and often decorated on the edges. So they were really lovely.

Riess: It was not a smock.

Bancroft: No, it wasn't, it was really a dress, but it was different from other dresses. And they had a number of them that they would wear. I always admired the way they were decorated. But they were always the same style, hanging perfectly straight from the shoulders.

Riess: The two women must have been great friends.

Was Thomas Church already set on being a landscape architect then?

Bancroft: I don't remember that he was, no. He just had his garden.

UC Berkeley, Architecture Student

Riess: For college did you think about going East? Or was Berkeley where you wanted to go?

Bancroft: I didn't think about anyplace else, because we didn't have any money, and I would be living at home, and my father was a professor there. It was the logical place to go.

Riess: You didn't think it might be too big?

Bancroft: No, I didn't. I don't know why. Either it was a big lecture course where you didn't have to recite or do anything, you just went and took notes, or else it was a smaller class.

Riess: What did you study in college?

Bancroft: Architecture. I think I really wanted landscape architecture, but it was a new department then and did not have a good reputation. My parents said, "No, you'd better do architecture, which is a good department here, because landscape is not a good department here." So, that's why I went into architecture.

Riess: And when did you enter?

Bancroft: I guess it was 1926.

Riess: Landscape architecture was in the College of Agriculture then. Was John Gregg there then?

Bancroft: Yes, he was the head of it.

Riess: Thomas Church graduated from that program.

Bancroft: I don't know who else went, really. I didn't know him when he was going through there.

Riess: The landscape architecture department produced Geraldine Knight Scott, too.

Bancroft: Well, even in a few years the character of a school like the landscape architecture can change, I guess.

They had to take a few courses that were given in architecture, and we always felt that landscape architects were pretty dumb, because they didn't know anything. Their training was not as strict as ours--but maybe it didn't need to be.

Riess: Who were the most important professors in architecture, for you?

Bancroft: Well, John Galen Howard was there. I think it might have been his last year or so. And he would give a series of lectures which we all looked forward to. He was about the only one I think who was well known.

Riess: And [Warren] Perry.

Bancroft: Yes, he was there too. He was very well-liked. I didn't have him, but I remember him.

Riess: Did you go through the entire program?

Bancroft: No, only three years. And then the Crash [1929] came, and none of the men could get architecture jobs. And of course there were very few girls studying it then. So I decided to go into teaching, which was safe. You know, you couldn't get jobs in anything! So that's what I did, I took a year off, and then I went back to get a teacher's certificate.

Riess: What did you do in your year off?

Bancroft: I went East and stayed with my father--my parents had separated --and really didn't do much of anything. I read a lot and just had a good time. I was pretty tired after the architecture course; it was pretty strenuous. And they thought, well, there's no harm in taking a little time off and deciding what you want to do.

Riess: When did your parents separate, when in your life?

Bancroft: I was in high school, probably my third or fourth year.

Riess: Did your mother resume teaching?

Bancroft: No, she didn't, she went to work in the Recorder's Office at the University. Because she was not trained in typing and shorthand and all that, she did other work there.

Riess: There were no teaching jobs for her?

Bancroft: No. Well, you see, that had been in the East, and she would have had to get a certificate and all that.

Riess: When you contemplated landscape architecture, what kind of jobs would you have imagined getting? It was almost a new profession then.

Bancroft: It was new. Yes. I suppose designing gardens. It wouldn't be anything on a big scale, it would be more private gardens.

Riess: Were you in school with Bob and Evelyn Ratcliff?

Bancroft: No, though I met them later. They must have come later. The one person I remember was Vernon DeMars: he was a year or two ahead of me, and he was brilliant, he was very creative, he always got the top marks for his work, and he was outstanding. He was the only outstanding one that I remember. He was a very interesting fellow, a very nice fellow.

Riess: Does it seem sad to you that you didn't go on with the architecture?

Bancroft: In a way. It was such hard work, but I think if the Crash hadn't come and there would have been the possibility of a job, I would have continued.

Travels, and Teaching

Riess: When did you graduate from college?

Bancroft: I graduated in 1932 with my teacher's certificate. Then I took a year in Europe, before I got my first job.

Riess: Quite a time to be in Europe. Were you conscious of impending changes?

Bancroft: Yes, you just heard about it from people. I didn't see any marching or that sort of thing, soldiers or anything. But people were beginning to be afraid. And they said, "Oh, would there be any way of our getting to America before they destroy us!" I suppose these were Jewish people we were talking to, and they were being frightened by what was developing.

Riess: Who did you go to Europe with?

Bancroft: I went alone. A friend of mine was studying piano there, in Salzburg, and I had her as my destination because I had never gone anywhere alone. So I went directly there and stayed with her for a while and sort of got a little used to things. Then she came home and I went to Vienna and spent a winter. Then I met a woman who had just been divorced, and so she and I traveled around together. So I wasn't actually alone very much.

Riess: Quite independent. Quite changed from your high school self?

Bancroft: No, what bothered me was speaking in front of people. The size of the class--it was speaking in front of so many people that bothered me, and it always has.

Riess: Education involved so much recitation earlier.

Bancroft: Yes. And then you'd have to give two and three-minute speeches, which just terrified me. And it still would!

Riess: Did you look up your Swedish family when you were over there?

Bancroft: Yes, I did. I met just one family, and I stayed with them. And then my aunt, two families.

Riess: Did you look at gardens on that trip?

Bancroft: No, I didn't. It hadn't occurred to me to do this. I looked at architecture. This friend of mine I said I met there, she and I traveled around. We just looked at architecture and the usual tourist things, but it hadn't occurred to me to go to gardens, except the famous public ones. I wasn't into it enough then.

Riess: Then you came back and started to teach?

Bancroft: Well, I got a teaching job in Merced, a job teaching home economics, which I didn't know anything about. So I quickly went to San Jose State for a summer course [laughing], so I could start my job.

I met Phil while I was teaching there. My sister was going with a man from Walnut Creek, and he knew the Bancrofts. And they knew that I liked music, and they knew that Phil liked music, so they said, why don't we all go to a concert together, which we did, at Mills. That's what started it.

Riess: What was Merced like?

Bancroft: Merced was just a small town then. The high school was on the edge of town. I rented a place in the middle of town, as all the teachers did. It was just a nice little one main street town.

Riess: How did you get the job in Merced? There was a Teacher Placement Office on campus?

Bancroft: Yes, and they had you interview principals who had come to look for a teacher, and they'd interview people the Placement Office recommended.

Riess: How long did you teach before you married?

Bancroft: Two years, or was it three?

Philip Bancroft, Jr.

Riess: When did you marry?

Bancroft: In 1938.

Riess: Tell me about Philip Bancroft. What was he doing at that point?

Bancroft: He was running this farm, with his father. He had graduated from Harvard, but he knew he'd be running this place.

Riess: What did he study at Harvard?

Bancroft: Art and philosophy. I know he took those classes. I don't know what else. But he was interested in them, and so he did what interested him, rather than trying to get training for anything.

Riess: He always knew he would come back here?

Bancroft: Yes.

Riess: Was he the oldest son?

Bancroft: He was the only son. But he was the youngest child. He had two older sisters.

Riess: Unusual. Coming back to the farm, after Harvard.

Bancroft: Phil's father had Phil under his thumb every minute of his life until his father died. He obeyed his father in absolutely everything. It would never occur to him to question anything his father told him to do, never. And he was to run the farm, in certain ways. And this is what Phil did. Phil "couldn't do this," he "couldn't do that." Phil simply accepted it.

Riess: If you simply accept your fate you can be happy with it, I guess.

Bancroft: Yes. But there were times--. He didn't ever show his emotions too much. But I think he was terribly disappointed he was not allowed to do, or had to do, but he didn't really say much about it.

I remember once--. I may have told you this before, about his wanting to go to a concert?

Riess: No.

Bancroft: I think it was [Arthur] Schnabel who was coming and giving a concert. Somehow it was in the afternoon, so he would have had to take off work for a half a day. And his father said absolutely he could not go. That sort of thing. His father had no feeling for the things that Phil liked, like art and music. He felt they were affectations that people put on. And so Phil really "couldn't have wanted to go," and so he didn't let him. It was that sort of thing that often, I think, discouraged Phil. But he really didn't let on about it. It was all inward, his feelings.

Riess: You didn't nag or nudge or push from your end?

Bancroft: Oh no, I didn't dare. [laughs] His parents dominated everything so--. I was not very acceptable, really, because I had a few different ideas. I tried to go along their way as best I could, you know, to get along. But there were some things they didn't like about me.

Riess: And you were living here.

Bancroft: Yes. They lived in this house, and we lived in the little house where my daughter lives now.

Riess: His years at Harvard must have been heaven for him.

Bancroft: I'm sure they were. He made good friends there that he kept all the time we were married. Just maybe about half a dozen of them, they had a little group there.

The Philip Bancroft, Srs.

Riess: You knew before you married that you would be moving to the family farm?

Bancroft: Yes, and I knew we would be living in that little house, which needed quite a bit done to it, which Phil did, as he had time.

Riess: This is the house that was called the Chalet?

Bancroft: Yes, the Swiss Chalet. It looks quite a bit different now. It has been remodelled.

Riess: When you met his parents did he warn you, or prepare you in any way, for what his relationship was with his parents?

Bancroft: I don't think he realized it. It had always been this way.

Riess: But you saw it right away.

Bancroft: Yes, this is just the way it was.

Riess: Were they quite formal people?

Bancroft: In a way, yes. Every once in a while they'd invite us over to dinner in the evening. She cooked it quite often, 'tho they usually had a Filipino cook. But every once in a while they wouldn't have one. And she cooked dinner. She always wore a long dress for dinner, every night.

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Riess: They lived in some style out here.

Bancroft: Yes, they did, and I think it was mostly her doing. She was brought up in San Francisco with the socialites, you know. She was raised that way. Quite a formal social life. I had heard somebody say that coming out here, and leaving a lot of the intellectuals that she knew in the city, was hard. She kept up with some of them. But you know, when you live at such a distance--it isn't the same as living in the same area. She was very well-read, and very smart, very vivacious. [laughing] They were both wonderful company at parties, just wonderful, both of them.

Riess: Did you get closer to her eventually?

Bancroft: No, not particularly.

Riess: I wonder if she had always thought that she would be able to get Philip, Sr., away from the farm.

Bancroft: I don't think she did, I don't have that feeling. They were well-settled here when I came.

Riess: And he was very much into politics.

Bancroft: Yes, he was.

Riess: Was your husband also?

Bancroft: Yes, he was interested too. He didn't run for anything except local things. But he knew a great deal about politics.

Riess: How did you fail to measure up as a daughter-in-law?

Bancroft: Maybe I showed that I didn't quite accept a few things. One of the big complaints that they made was that I put a water-softener here in my house. The water here is very hard. And this--well this is hitting them in the face, you know, to say that their water is not perfect and that something should be done about it. There were things like that that seemed so unimportant. What business of theirs was it if I had a water-softener in my house? But they made it their great business.

You see, Phil was the one that they controlled completely, so I should be part of that control too.

The Buildings on the Bancroft Farm

Riess: What were the buildings on the property when you came out here? There was a ranchhouse where Hubert Howe Bancroft lived. I read that that was built in two halves at two different times?

Bancroft: That must be the one that this office was one part of. And I cannot figure where that building actually was. It was somewhere on this side of the road, but I don't know just where it was, probably somewhere where my rose garden is. It's gone now.

Riess: And originally Nina, your mother-in-law, and Philip, Sr., lived in The Chalet.

Bancroft: That was during World War I, I think. Then they built this house.

Riess: Tell me about this house. Who was the architect?

Bancroft: His name was [Mark] White, and someone said he was the brother-in-law of [Bernard] Maybeck.

Riess: When was it built?

Bancroft: In 1922 or 1923, somewhere in there.

Riess: Then when you came here you lived in the Chalet, and you enlarged it?

Bancroft: Yes, Phil added a room.

And then Mrs. Bancroft had a very bad heart, and couldn't take these steps, and we had two children, and a third on the way. And so they suggested we trade houses, and lower that to a ground level so there wouldn't be any steps, which is what they did. And then they added still another bedroom and bath. And my daughter, since she's lived there, has added a big room and a porch on the other side! So it has been changed quite a bit.

Riess: And what is the Bamboo House?

Bancroft: That's the second one, and we rent that now. It was built in a sort of oriental style. It had an oriental roof. And the thing on the top that was carved--what do they call it? I have no pictures of it, but when we had to re-roof the house we took that off and put it behind the house, and when we went to get it, to put it on again, it was gone. Someone had stolen it, probably from the sub-division, you see, they come through from the sub-division. I have no idea who took it. That was quite a long time ago. I don't know when they built the sub-divisions, but it was after they were there. So, it [the house] doesn't look as pretty as it used to. I used to love that top on it.

Riess: When you came out here, what did it look like? Was there a Bancroft Road?

Bancroft: That was our farm road. That was not open to the public, really. Our farm was on both sides, and the road just went through our farm. It was not paved. It was like the roads inside the farm.

Riess: And the road out here, was it called Ygnacio Valley Road?

Bancroft: Yes, that was here, and it was not as wide as it is now, and it had walnuts on both sides that met over the road. It was just beautiful, especially in the hot weather, to drive down there in all this shade. And then they widened the road and so they cut them all down. Now it's just like any other road.

Riess: By that time the sub-divisions had been established?

Bancroft: No, the sub-divisions didn't come until they taxed us out, which was, I don't know, in the 1970s. I can't remember. But they taxed us out, so we had to sell off.

Riess: Was that the decision of Philip, Sr.?

Bancroft: He and his brothers were all involved in this. He ran it, but they owned parts of it, I think. I don't know what all the legal things were.

Riess: But while you and Phil were here, the management decisions were being made by Philip, Sr.?

Bancroft: Yes.

Ruth's First Garden in Walnut Creek

Riess: When do you feel that life for you really began here? I mean a sense that it was your place?

Bancroft: Well, of course, we lived over there [the Chalet]--.

Riess: What did you have over there?

Bancroft: I had a garden right away. And of course I had a lot of things that I had grown in Berkeley, and they immediately died in winter. I didn't realize the difference in climates.

Riess: What kind of things?

Bancroft: Like pelargoniums, and I remember that particularly, because I had quite a large space for them. I had to learn the difference between gardening in Berkeley and gardening out here, and there's quite a difference. But I had a garden right away there. I grew flats and flats of things from seed. Of course I didn't have a gardener, so I did it all myself there. In fact, I did over here too for quite a while, after we moved here. I did all the work.

Riess: Did you have children right away?

Bancroft: Yes, almost. Well, I had a number of miscarriages at first. I had one baby that lived to be three days old. I heard later that it had gotten a sort of intestinal infection that was going through the hospital--they didn't tell me that at the time, but that's what they said caused it. It was premature, so it was more susceptible. Then I had a few more [miscarriages], and then I finally got started, and had children.

My mother-in-law was quite opposed to this. I was not meant to have children, and I should not insist on doing it. I had to stay in bed the whole time to hang onto them, so I wouldn't miscarry again. She thought this was just terrible, but I did it anyway. This was another objection she had to me.

Riess: To think of having someone so unsupportive so close!

Bancroft: Unsupportive is right.

Riess: Tell me more about that garden in the first house. What were you trying to grow there? What was successful?

Bancroft: I really don't remember that much. I had a lot of flowers for their color, I remember. I liked color. I didn't do much in the way of trees and shrubs, it was mostly flowers.

Riess: Did you grow vegetables, or was that done somewhere else on the farm?

Bancroft: Yes, we had a vegetable garden later when everyone was having V-gardens, Victory-gardens. That grew very well over there.

Riess: Did you ever take advantage of the Farm Advisors, people like that?

Bancroft: No, only the one on cooking and canning. I remember calling her for one or two things, advice.

The Community

Riess: Was this a farming community, in that the Bancrofts met with and consulted with fellow ranchers or farmers?

Bancroft: I wasn't in on most of that, but Phil was. The Farm Bureau, all the local farmers would belong to that. He was in all sorts of farming and political organizations. He was in other organizations too. We started the Community Concerts out here and kept that going for a number of years, and he was president of that. And he was one of the founders of the Junior Museum out here. And he started one of the youth groups, 4-H, one of the big ones. He was in all sorts of things like that.

Riess: Did this mean a social circle?

Bancroft: I was pretty active in the Children's Hospital group out here.

Remodelling the Big House, 1954

Riess: When did you move into the big house, this house we are in now?

Bancroft: Goodness, when did we? Probably 1954.

Riess: And you did some remodelling?

Bancroft: Yes. The entrance had been on the south side, and we moved it to the north side. There was a semi-circular drive that came up, with our entrance in the middle of it, and then it went out to the front drive. It was formal, with a lawn in the middle of that semi-circle. But you came into a little, tiny hall, and then you had to come directly into the living room. And the stairs went up, as they do now. In order to get upstairs you had to come through the living room, and I didn't like that.

I thought, if the kids are coming in at night, they shouldn't have to come through the living room, in case we had company, or whatever. So we changed the entrance to here, so the living room was separated. Then we had to redesign the garden, because we'd changed everything around.

Riess: I haven't seen that garden.

Bancroft: It's in a mess now, because I haven't had a gardener this year and I've been trying to do that as well as what I usually do. It's out of hand! But yes, I have a more regulation garden. I have a lawn and a perennial garden, and an iris garden and a rose garden.

Riess: My word! And that's all at that end of things.

Bancroft: Yes, that's all connected with the house, and that will not be in the Garden Conservancy. That will belong to this house, where Kathy will live.

We're going through legal things now. We're going to have to start. We wanted to give on the line that followed the oleanders, behind the iris, so it would be coming in here [gestures]. And then a curved line. Then instead of going straight across to the subdivision, the Conservancy committee thought they didn't have enough property for growing plants. So we were going to cut in a piece here, that's open, for them to have.

It made quite an irregular line. And it didn't occur to us that this is not acceptable to the city. You have to have a straight line, which would cut almost up to our house, and cut all that part of the garden off.

Riess: And there is no variance possible?

Bancroft: Well, that's what we're going to have to go to law about and see. And we're just starting that now.

Riess: I'm sure many things have come up that you never realized.

Bancroft: Never. And the people who started the Conservancy--. We all accepted that you could have the line where you wanted. You see, the city figures they're going to have a sub-division here someday. So that's why everything has to be squared off, so they can make proper lots. They'd take the house down, they'd take everything out and put in a sub-division. Well, my daughter hopes the family can stay on here forever, but you never know. They could pull a few fast ones on us and get us; taxes.

Riess: Even though the Conservancy might be here forever.

Bancroft: That is supposed to be here forever.

Riess: Interesting.

The Formal Garden

Riess: When you moved over here and changed the orientation of the entrance, did you have a landscape architect for the garden?

Bancroft: Yes. For this part, we had Osmundson & Staley--though I never met Mr. Staley.

Riess: How did you choose them?

Bancroft: His [Osmundson] was a well-known name. [pauses] Probably I wouldn't choose him now, because my tastes have changed. What he did--this was a standard layout, and I like a more informal layout, which is what I have in the garden out there. But anyway.

It's a funny thing. He came by some years after I had this succulent garden and looked at it and said, "Well, you've got a lot of plants here, haven't you." [laughter] Absolutely all he had to say! He didn't like it one bit!

Riess: And he was still pleased with the look of his garden?

Bancroft: Oh, yes. This is what almost all landscape architects do, this style. I think it's based on [Thomas] Church's work, in lots of ways. But they're not as good as he was.

Riess: It's the idea of swinging a header? And then a wonderful sweep of grass inside, and flowers beyond? Like the gardens at Sunset headquarters in Menlo Park.

Bancroft: Yes, exactly. That's what they all do.

Riess: Yet, also I thought everyone evolves and changes, but I guess not.

Bancroft: No, I think customers don't change. I think that's the thing. They want the same sort of thing, and that's what they get.

Riess: Yes, the way people all still want a traditional house, and some sort of garden in front of it?

Bancroft: But the smaller the garden the better. Less to take care of.

Riess: But no matter how small, it has to have certain ingredients, and one of those ingredients is a little pad of grass.

Bancroft: Yes, exactly. And of course I have it still, but that dates back.

Riess: And around on the north side of the house, who did this design? The lily pond and this planted area?

Bancroft: Osmundson designed this; he designed the entrance here, and the garage.

Garden Help

Bancroft: [speaking about garden help] They're all right for a little while, and then they start to goof off and then they're no good at all. I depend on Mario to tell me how they're doing, because I usually have them work with him for a while and he'll say if somebody's no good. But Mario's in Mexico now.

Riess: Does Mario do the hiring?

Bancroft: No, I do. He doesn't like to take responsibility for anything. He works hard, but you have to tell him exactly what to do. He won't tell you if something over here needs it, or if something's happening, he just does what you tell him. Then if I notice this he says, "Oh yes, I knew that." I say, "Mario, why don't you tell me these things when you see them?" But he never will: I think that's characteristic of a lot of them. I guess they don't want to sound as if they are complaining. I don't know what they feel about it.

Riess: It would be nice if Mario knew a community of competent workers he could bring to you.

Bancroft: He knows a lot. Of course, some of them don't have their papers, and others we have tried and they haven't been any good. And he's said so too, so I've had to let him go. But I ask him to find people. Now this new boy he didn't find. Somebody else told him to come. And he's turning out better than some of the others. You just can't tell.

Riess: You started out with someone named John DeRosa.

Bancroft: Oh, yes, John. He still cleans house for me once a week, he and his wife come. He was wonderful.

He was here for eleven years, and the garden looked entirely different when he was here. Later he helped me build this cactus-succulent garden, and he took care of it as well as the old garden. He had a good head. He worked hard, he worked fast. He organized things. And I've never found anyone like that since, never.

Riess: Was he from Mexico?

Bancroft: No, Portuguese. From the Azores. He's clean, he's neat, and intelligent. I am just sorry to lose him as a gardener. We're good friends.

II HISTORY OF THE DRY GARDEN

[Interview 2: July 19, 1991]##

Evaluating. Labeling. Weeding--A Morning's Work

Riess: Before we get started, I want to ask you what you have been doing today, a mini-Day in the Life of Ruth Bancroft.

Bancroft: Well today, not very much. [pauses] Every time I go out I decide I am going to do a certain thing, and I'm not going to do any weeding, and I end up doing the weeding. Every time. So that was it today, again. I got about a half a bucket full, as I went.

I am trying to list the plants in the garden and evaluate them. They must be evaluated from zero, if they died, to four. And I'll have to ask how you evaluate something that looked dead until a few weeks ago, and then is beginning to come from the base. I don't know whether that's a zero or a one. I'll have to find out how to do this. But anyway, I'm listing them, and saying whether they are alive or dead. And this is taking me a long time, because not everything is labelled yet.

I am trying to label as I go. And I have done bits here and there. As they died I've written it down to be sure I had a record of that. But now I'm trying to do a complete bed at a time, and I've only done a few of those. So that's what I was doing today, out working on one of the beds, listing the plants, and seeing what has happened to them.

And then, of course, these men were here cutting the trees, and so I'd see, now and then--that didn't take much time--what they were up to. I had only one person gardening today--often there are three or four.

Riess: Did the men working on the trees know what they needed to do?

Bancroft: Yes. They certainly did. I had this company a long time ago. In fact, I know the fellow who owns it. I think he's got one man and a helper--that's his company. Sweet's. His name is Joe Sweet. I've known Joe probably since he was in junior high. He and two other boys used to come over and look at my succulents and get pieces of this and that and the other thing. They were so excited, and they'd keep coming back, you know. And I liked it, because I like to have young people interested in something like that. And now he's got a business of it, and he also has this tree-trimming on the side. So I know him, but I haven't had him do work for a number of years. He did a very good job.

Riess: What do you do with your bucketful of weeds? Do you have a compost heap, or many compost heaps?

Bancroft: I put things in the compost if they don't have seeds in them. And if there aren't too many I put them in the garbage can. And if it's a big bunch of stuff that doesn't look too good for compost, we throw it out in the field and then it gets disced under periodically.

Riess: Do you ever come to a halt? Do you have benches where you can sit and meditate?

Bancroft: I've got benches, but I never sit on them. [laughs] I don't think I ever do sit on them. No, I just keep walking.

Riess: Do you get down on hands and knees? Do you use a kneeling bench?

Bancroft: No, I have never done that. I either squat or bend over from my waist. And I go from one to the other.

Riess: And your back has not given out?

Bancroft: Yes, I've had, periodically, a little trouble. And that's only been in the last years, and it usually clears up. I used to go to--you probably knew her, in Berkeley, an osteopath, everyone went to her--Dr. Muriel Chapman. But she died a few years ago. She had me come quite regularly, and I'm sure she kept my back from going out. And now it has, a little bit, now and then. And I can't find anyone who knows how to fix it. So, anyway, it takes a little while to straighten out.

Riess: Back problems keep some people from gardening. You were made to garden!

Bancroft: My poor gardener, though, he's been out all week. His back goes out periodically, and I guess they can't fix it. He's got a

disc that something's happened to. Last week for the first time he had pains running down his legs too, as well as his back, so he went to a doctor who has given him some medicine that makes him sleepy--I think it's just a pain killer. I doubt if the doctor will do anything else. We'll have to see. But Mario's been out since the end of last week.

Riess: Do you have Workmen's Compensation and medical coverage for the people who work for you?

Bancroft: Yes. Loreto knows about that.

Riess: Who is Loreto?

Bancroft: My son-in-law, who pays the gardeners. I keep their hours, and then he sends it to somebody who figures out all the taxes and everything else.

Collecting Succulents in the 1950s

Riess: Okay, let's go back now, to the history of the dry garden. When did you first notice and collect succulents? Was it from travels, or from gardens around here? The botanical garden at Berkeley?

Bancroft: It was definitely one thing. I went to Mrs. Glen Davidson's house. She had some beautiful oriental furnishings and things that she was selling. A friend of mine told me about it. It wasn't publicized, but she was doing it. And I went over to her house, and looked at the things, got a few small things.

Then she took me out in her garden, and she didn't have many, actually, but she did have some succulents. And I bought a few from her. That's what really started me. I really hadn't noticed them much. I love flower shows. I'd go and looked at everything. But they always keep the succulents separate, that's the trouble, they didn't mix them in with the other things. And I had just passed by that section, because I hadn't thought about it. But this purchase got me started.

Riess: Were the plants blooming? Was that an attraction?

Bancroft: No, they weren't. It was just the forms that I liked. One of them she had hybridized herself, which surprises me, because it's quite a well-known one, Aeonium 'Glen Davidson'. Here she

is, just this little place, and really didn't know too much about it, and she got this beautiful hybrid on her own!

Riess: What were the first plants that you got?

Bancroft: Well, her hybrid was an Aeonium, and I got that, and I think I got a few other Aeoniums. I don't remember what I got.

Riess: Were they unusual?

Bancroft: No, they were not.

Riess: Sedum is a succulent that people plant in perennial gardens, isn't it?

Bancroft: Yes. Of course there are hundreds of kinds of sedums, and a lot of them grow very easily, so they're very handy.

Riess: When was this that you got the plants?

Bancroft: I would say in the fifties. Then I guess I started looking for them in stores.

Riess: Where? What nurseries were out here? Or would you have gone to Berkeley Horticultural Nursery?

Bancroft: I probably would have gotten a few there. But when we started going south during Easter vacation with the kids we would visit nurseries--I being the only one who was interested--and I'd buy a carful, go from one little nursery to another. And that's the only way to get good things.

Now that I don't drive around, and after Phil died, I've done mail order. And of course they can't advertise anything, unless they've got a few hundred of them, or whatever. That isn't always the case, but they have to have enough to put in their catalog, so they don't run out immediately. So you don't get the little special things that they only have one or two of that you do if you go to the nurseries.

Riess: You were always buying small things.

Bancroft: I was buying small things. In fact I always have bought small things. I'd never get a five-gallon can, occasionally a gallon, but usually the smaller containers. They grow faster often, especially if you plant them out, than the big container things. They catch up with them.

Riess: Did you have to first figure out where you were going to put them?

Bancroft: No, I'd buy them, and then I'd figure that out. I'd buy what I liked. As a matter of fact, at first I didn't have much place; I had to keep them in the pots, because I only had this potting area. And it wasn't until I started this garden for them that I had space to spread them out.

Riess: Buying things for Walnut Creek--it seems a good location for a dry garden.

Bancroft: Yes. Of course we are too cold for a lot of things, in the winter. So you have to watch out for that. You have to protect them.

Riess: That doesn't mean you eliminate them.

Bancroft: No. You put them in the greenhouse, or bring them in the house, or protect them in some way like that.

Riess: You haven't kept the garden to plants that you know will thrive in the climate extremes here. You are pushing the limits.

Bancroft: Yes, I am pushing, and I'm pushing in the garden, too, things that are not supposed to be hardy here. I've tried a number of them, and some do all right, and some don't. But I always like to try something, if I like the plant itself. See how it will do.

Riess: Did you know and visit the Berkeley Botanical Garden's African Hill? Was that developed?

Bancroft: No, it wasn't. I can't remember when they started that. But it wasn't all that well developed when I started.

Riess: Were there other dry gardens that you could see out here?

Bancroft: No, I didn't know of any, and I still don't. But I'm sure people have them. I just don't happen to know them.

The Shadehouse, Philip Bancroft's Handiwork

Riess: Was your husband interested in all this?

Bancroft: No. He thought that if you grew something it should have a crop of some sort. He had his vegetable garden. And of course he raised pears and walnuts, that was his business. But he did all the other work. He built that shade house for me. He fixed the sprinklers. He'd do any construction or anything of that sort. He just wasn't that interested in the plants themselves.

Riess: The shade house is the Folly?

Bancroft: The Folly, yes.

The [Bancroft Conservancy] committee has decided it shouldn't be called a folly. They don't like that name. They think it's old-fashioned. So they're calling it now a gazebo. I don't think it's quite a gazebo. But anyway.

Riess: Was it built to your design?

Bancroft: No. Lester Hawkins, you know, designed the layout of the garden, the paths and mounds. And he designed the building there. And Phil built the two wings as Lester has designed.

I said to Lester, "I wish it were wider." But he said it couldn't be built that way. The center part had posts right in the middle, and you couldn't walk in to get a view of anything, you had a post right in your way. Phil wouldn't build it. Also it was flat-topped. It was just awful. Lester was not an architect, but he thought he was.

[telephone interruption]

Riess: So what did you do with this design of his?

Bancroft: An architect friend of ours said that he'd like to do it for us. So he and a friend made this model and changed the design of the center. Then Phil built it from the model. They didn't make plans, you know, but Phil figured it out. He said there isn't a right angle in the center building!

Riess: Who was the architect friend?

Bancroft: Ken Householder.

Riess: Was any particular place in mind in the design of the folly? Some garden in England?

Bancroft: I don't think so, no. Of course the English is the general type, and he probably had that in mind.

So anyway, Phil built that. He had a boy help him who wanted one of our--. We were selling off farm stuff, and he wanted one of our old trucks, and so he worked it off, helping Phil. The two of them did it together.

Formerly an Orchard

Riess: The end of the orchards coincided with building this garden?

Bancroft: Just about. We had already sold off--. [interruption to put dog outside]

Riess: The garden is on land that was orchard?

Bancroft: Yes.

Riess: The orchard came so close, right to the house?

Bancroft: Yes. And where the subdivisions are, of course, was orchard. We just had this piece that wasn't orchard.

Riess: Were there trees that screened the house from the orchard, or were you just right in the middle of the orchard?

Bancroft: No. We were right in the middle of the orchard. And the walnut trees had Black Line, an incompatibility that develops between the scion and the rootstock, so Phil had to take them out. And he said, "Here's a big, empty field. Do you want to use this for your garden?" That's how it started.

It was absolutely flat and empty because the trees were all out, so I had Lester come to design the layout, and he designed where the paths would go, and the shade houses. Then I did some planting of trees and shrubs. And when he saw that center piece he said [emphatically], "What have you done? Tear it down, tear it down, it looks horrible!" He did not like that new center. But his companion who had the nursery [Western Hills Nursery, Occidental, California] up there with him, Marshall Ollbrich, liked it. Marshall just died last week, you know. Marshall liked it, but Lester was very excited about it.

Riess: What about the fact that walnuts had been in that soil? Did that create problems?

Bancroft: There was some oak root fungus. So Phil, where each tree was taken out, put in a can of methyl bromide. Then he shot it with

a gun to pierce the can, and then quickly filled it in. He did that at each place, hoping that would get rid of it. But it has popped up in places. We have it in our garden here, too. It's just around.

Riess: Was that a home remedy of Phil's?

Bancroft: The method was a little bit his, but it's the usual thing they use to sterilize soil.

Riess: How big was that plot, then? How many acres?

Bancroft: I think it's about three and a half, or so.

Becoming Informed on Cactus and Succulents

Riess: I keep seeking influences on you, on your interest in the cactus and succulents. Were there books?

Bancroft: I gradually bought them, but I didn't have any before the interest started. I bought them because I was interested. I had other gardening books, but not on cactus and succulents. Now I've got quite a lot of books about them.

Riess: When you bought the new plants on your trips, you found out all you could about their care?

Bancroft: Yes, I would ask about it, and I learned a lot just by handling the plants. And reading about them.

Riess: Thinking about buying the plants, how can you tell when a succulent is well rooted? And not just a piece stuck into sandy soil. Is that something that you'd had to watch out for?

Bancroft: No, I haven't. I think a lot of those they sell do root rather easily. And I think a lot that you buy are also from seed, especially the cactus. They are seed-grown. In fact, as you know, you haven't been allowed to collect in the wild for some years now. I suppose there are people who do it, but the nurseries, and all the professional people, raise them from seeds and cuttings. Most of these little cactus you buy, they are all seed-grown.

Riess: The ones that you see by the hundreds at places like Cost Plus?

Bancroft: Yes, those are all seed-grown.

Lester Hawkins, the Original Designer of the Garden

Riess: Why did you employ Lester to lay out the garden? Why not just do it yourself?

Bancroft: I didn't feel capable of laying it out. I'd never really done that. He had a good reputation, and was original, and I like a person with original ideas. So I asked him to do the layout for it.

He was glad that he didn't have to plan the cactus and succulents because he said that he didn't know so much about them. He was into everything else but, I think. So it worked out well for both of us, in that respect. I wasn't taking it away from him.

Riess: He had a reputation as a designer?

Bancroft: Yes, he had designed a number of things that I had heard were nice.

Riess: How did you know him?

Bancroft: I'm not sure if it was going to the nursery--. I joined Cal Hort, but I can't remember when that was. It might have been after that, might have been through that. I don't know. As you get to know garden people, they sort of know each other and talk about each other.

Riess: Sounds like he was a little overwhelming.

Bancroft: Yes, he was. He seemed to have endless energy, and moved so fast, and did things so fast that you could hardly keep up with him. As I was saying at the meeting [preceding Friday meeting of Bancroft Garden Conservancy] he brought this whole big truckful of plants down to put in. He didn't bring cactus and succulents, but he brought other things that were put mostly at the far end of the garden--and most of them have died, as a matter of fact.

The man who came with him was planting right after he'd set them down. He'd take a can and set it here, and another can here and another can there. And as I told you, I said, "Lester, you're putting those two enormous trees two feet apart." He said, "Oh yes, oh yes," and then he'd run and put it someplace

else. The man was planting as fast as he could wherever Lester set them, just there. Things like a palm tree and a locust, two feet apart!

A friend of mine was over while this was going on. He couldn't believe it, he'd never seen such a thing. [laughter] I hadn't either.

Riess: What was he planting at the extreme ends that died? Isn't Western Hills known for the Australian plants they introduced?

Bancroft: Yes, and as a matter of fact I guess most of them were Australians. He had a few acacias--. One of the acacias is still alive, Acacia pendula, which is beautiful. He put three or four out, and oak root fungus got all except one. He brought a few eucalyptus, and then some of the shrubby things from Australia.

Riess: Before he began to do anything, what was done to the soil? Did he test the soil?

Bancroft: No, we didn't do soil testing. But he had truckloads of soil amendments brought in, and we made raised beds, and he put a whole bunch of stuff in there. He didn't always, though.

He was sort of erratic with what he did.

Riess: Did he call himself a landscape architect?

Bancroft: I'm not sure if he did. I don't think you can unless you have a license. I don't know if he had a license or not.

Riess: You told him you wanted to turn this into a cactus garden?

Bancroft: Yes, and, "Would he lay it out."

Riess: With what in mind? Circulation?

Bancroft: The arrangement of these things.

Riess: But if he wasn't planting it, how would he know what was needed?

Bancroft: Well, he planned that a pool should be where it is. He planned where the shade house was, and the pool, and then he wanted raised beds around, with paths between. And then he made--. He didn't really make any architectural drawings, but in one place he made sort of a sketch that just said, "Now, over here have the things higher, and down here, have them lower." It was just

sort of general, to see what effect you would get. Then it was up to me to do that.

Riess: It was more collaborative.

Bancroft: Yes. He planned a few things, but I didn't end up doing some of them, even, the planting.

Riess: Did he do drawings of planting plans?

Bancroft: Yes, but they were rather general. They weren't to scale, they were just sort of freehand. "This is the effect you want to have."

Riess: In color?

Bancroft: I think maybe they were. I'm not sure.

Riess: Was he working by the hour? What was your arrangement? Sounds like he was rushing through the job. Why?

Bancroft: No, he just rushes. But I don't think he was rushing through the job particularly. He kept coming, and he'd bring some rocks down, and like that.

I can't remember what the basis was for his payment. I think it may have been the time he spent on it.

Riess: Did you consider anyone else? Who else was there who might have done it? Osmundson had done the formal perennial garden.

Bancroft: Yes, and that was definitely out. I was getting so I didn't care for that kind of garden so much. No, I really didn't know people who would do it, and I really thought that he would, because he had a beautiful place at his nursery, and I thought he would be a good one for it.

Riess: The eucalyptus trees that I see, were they part of what he planted?

Bancroft: Oh, no, they were planted over a hundred years ago! That divided the two Bancroft sections. Phil's grandfather and his brother had that as a dividing line. No, he just brought a few single ones that went down there. In fact, I don't think any are left that he brought. Maybe one.

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Riess: Thinking about your choice of Lester Hawkins, he really knew plants, and published in the Cal Hort Journal. That certainly set him apart from many landscape architects you might have chosen.

Bancroft: I didn't want a standard, professional job again. And I hope we won't get it when these people come in to design the rest [master landscape plan for the Bancroft Garden]. I have said so, many times, but I am afraid they are going at it with the big names, and I think the big names get in a rut, a lot of them.

Riess: But you are on the committee that will approve that, aren't you? You can make your feelings known.

Bancroft: Yes, and I have, many times.

Riess: When we met last Friday I think it was Wayne Roderick who referred to Lester's "ditch-digger language."

Bancroft: I didn't hear it, I don't know what it was. I guess maybe when he was with men he used it.

Riess: Did he commute down from Occidental?

Bancroft: He would come down for a day, or part of a day, every now and then, and supervise.

Riess: Did Marshall Ollbrich come with him?

Bancroft: No. Oh well, maybe a few times, but not usually. I guess he had to take care of the nursery.

Riess: Is there anything about Lester Hawkins' design of the garden that has hampered your ability to plant or make choices? Or is it working?

Bancroft: I think it's working. I've changed things I've wanted to change, and that hasn't been all that much.

Riess: How did you decide on the color of the gazebo? The green.

Bancroft: I decided on the color. In fact Lester wanted to have it sort of red, and we did a little bit--or red medallions on the--. You probably haven't noticed, but there are little squares of wood under the window. He wanted these red, and we tried one or two of them and decided it was awful--I decided it was awful--and so he went along with me. I really decided on that. And I

just like green, you know. Otherwise you have a contrast, and I thought red was too big a contrast for such a big thing.

Riess: When you said the other day that you ended up making Lester lots of coffee, were you also suggesting that you were keeping out of the way when he was working?

Bancroft: Oh, he was always coming into the kitchen to get a cup of coffee when he'd be working.

No, I'd be out watching him, and I'd be in here, too. After all, I had other things to do too, and he'd come in. But he drank an awful lot of coffee!

Riess: Were there other influences on the garden? Friends who had design ideas?

Bancroft: No, I don't think anyone else helped with the designing or planning that I can remember.

The Scale of the Garden

Riess: What about the vertical scale of all this? You had small plants, and they were in. You knew how they would look as they grew?

Bancroft: Of course you have to figure what the eventual size of everything is going to be when you plan it, or plant it.

Riess: But I gathered you started with a great number of small succulents?

Bancroft: They were all small. Everything I planted was small. But a palm tree in a gallon can-- . You see the palm trees now, you have to figure their eventual size.

Riess: You started with the palm trees in one-gallon cans?

Bancroft: Yes. There's almost nothing over a gallon can size in that garden.

Riess: Have you had to move things?

Bancroft: No, I've moved almost nothing, except some things that died I've replaced.

Everything I planted I'd look up and try to get an eventual size. It wasn't always correct. But I'd always look it up, to try to leave enough space, and then fill in with the small things.

Riess: Have you kept a photographic record of the overall growth?

Bancroft: No. A friend took a lot of pictures when it was a few years old, and I do have some of those. And then periodically--. You know, a lot of people have taken pictures, but I never see any of them. I have a few that different people have taken.

Brian [Kemble] these last few years has been taking mostly close-ups of flowers, when they're in bloom. Every week when he comes he looks to see what's in bloom and takes a picture of it. He hasn't done too much of the over-all views.

Riess: All this in twenty years. What's it going to look like in forty years?

Bancroft: Yes, we'll probably have to take some things out, if they get too big. I've taken out a few eucalyptus trees already, because I was getting too much shade. Some things may have to come out, and then some may die, too. So--.

Riess: Did you put different soils in different beds? Or is it just the one kind of amended soil that was brought in.

Bancroft: No, I amended it more for the cactus, made more drainage. Well, I had to for everything, really, the cactus and the succulents. But I think I do more for the cactus than for the succulents. Most of them can take a little more nourishment--well, I wouldn't put it that way--a little more compost and that sort of thing.

Botanic Garden Connections, and California Horticultural Society

Riess: Did you know James Roof, the director of the Tilden Botanic Garden?

Bancroft: I met him a few times, yes. And I used to go over there and look at things, a lot.

Riess: Did he come out here?

Bancroft: No.

- Riess: How about the people from the Department of Botany at the University? Once this became known, did they come out?
- Bancroft: It's only in the last few years that anyone's noticed it, really. No one noticed it for years. I mean, they didn't know about it, or I don't know what. But I just kept gardening because I wanted to. This is very recent really [that it is known].
- Riess: There was an article about the garden in the Journal of the California Horticultural Society sometime in the 1970s, by Owen Pearce.
- Bancroft: Yes. That was the first one. He was the first person who had noticed it, really. And so he wrote that article. He had been out here and liked it.
- Riess: Did you go to Cal Hort meetings and take specimens and speak about things here?
- Bancroft: No. Well--I did take just a few things. But I haven't even gone to Cal Hort for a few years, because I don't like to drive, especially at night, so I haven't been there for a long time.
- Riess: If you liked to drive and could get to Cal Hort, in fact if they met right down the street, would you want to go?
- Bancroft: I think I would go, in that case. Although I get tired by evening now. I am out there every day. Not that I am doing any strenuous work. But just at it all day, one thing or another. I get sort of tired by evening.
- Riess: If they met at eight o'clock in the morning would you want to go?
- Bancroft: Well, that would cut into my day too much! I don't think anyone would want to go at that time. Everyone's too busy.
- Riess: I am beginning to wonder if Cal Hort had anything to offer to you.
- Bancroft: Oh my, I loved their meetings, just loved them. And they had displays of plants that people would bring. I just loved it; they were marvelous.
- Riess: Throughout the years you worked on this garden, the last twenty years, you have remained interested in the perennial flowering plants.

Bancroft: Um-hmm.

Riess: This garden didn't kill your interest in that.

Bancroft: No, it didn't, though I think it is a little more favored.

Riess: You are an iris gardener, too.

Bancroft: Well, iris people wouldn't think too much of it. I don't keep up with the new varieties. I've got a lot, but they are all the old varieties.

Riess: Have the perennial garden and the iris garden been on tours?

Bancroft: Oh yes, people go through the whole thing.

Riess: I mean iris tours. Iris people.

Bancroft: No, not the iris people. Sometimes the rose society has come, but otherwise it's just general garden groups. No, they are only interested in the latest ones, the real iris people.

Riess: Is it just the tall bearded that you have, or did you have some of the other varieties?

Bancroft: I had some of the others, but most of them have died. And the tall bearded are very hardy and easy to grow.

Rock for the Paths from Mt. Diablo

Riess: Tell me about the rock you have on the paths. Was that what Lester had ordered?

Bancroft: No, he did not order that, he wanted just the grey that we have in the parking area. I didn't want that, and somebody told me that a man up on the mountain was selling some of the rock from his place up there. So I got in touch with someone who could hire trucks and whatever we needed to haul it down.

Now that rock came as is, of course. They were just shoveling it out of the mountainside up at his place. So there were some big pieces, and a lot of medium. All grades, all mixed. And our paths were too narrow for any kind of a tractor or anything. So it had to be wheelbarrowed in.

We made two or three, I guess three huge piles outside the garden where these big double trucks could dump. And then we had to wheelbarrow it in from those piles. And it took months! It took the men months to do it!

Then what we did was throw the larger pieces into the beds, and try to keep the finer for the paths. So it was a slow process. I've been trying to find that rock since. I don't remember his place, but there was too much big in it, and we couldn't use that much big again. What we need is for the paths now. This is going to be an awful problem. No one has brown rock.

Riess: That worked well, just tossing the larger pieces into the beds.

Bancroft: I thought it looked more natural to put that in. Now every time we plant anything we have to rake it aside, you know, it's sort of a problem. [laughs]

Riess: Owen Pearce's article says the paths took 180 tons of rock.

Bancroft: Oh, was it? Well, that's probably right.

Riess: You had sufficient laborers then?

Bancroft: Probably a couple of men, so it took a long time, yes.

I can't remember what we had then. It was just farm help, you know.

Riess: Did you hang onto some of the farm help as the farm was being phased out?

Bancroft: No, because they really weren't gardeners. They worked in the orchards. But they could come in and shovel this rock.

Riess: You still had the orchards.

Bancroft: We had some. It was just about that time that we had to sell across the street. That was our last piece that we held on to. And it was just around that time that we got rid of that.

Family Involvement

Riess: How much of Phil's energies went into this?

Bancroft: Well, we had a professional put in the sprinkling systems. But after that, when something needed fixing that he would do. And there was a lot of fixing all the time. He was always having to fix something. And very willingly. Then he built that--I don't know what you call it, that frame with the shade cloth on top, he built those in the garden.

He liked the idea of having the garden, it was just that he wasn't interested in individual plants.

Riess: When the orchards were completely phased out, did it mean that the two of you traveled?

Bancroft: No, we didn't, because I got tied down too much. No, we did very little travelling, unfortunately. And of course he died eight years ago, and he was sick for a number of years before that. The cancer was working on him, and he wasn't even aware of it at first. So he didn't have too many years after I started that before he began to feel that he couldn't do too much.

Riess: Why did you and your family make those trips to southern California? Why was that the destination?

Bancroft: Phil's parents had built a little house in Borego Springs, and we'd go down there to visit, in the desert. Then we'd do my nurserying on the way down and back. That was primarily why we went down.

Then sometimes we'd go down to Puerto Peñasco, just over the border, because I was also interested in shell collecting, and I loved to go to the beaches.

Riess: Where is that? On the gulf, or on the Pacific side?

Bancroft: It's on the gulf, right at the very north. So we'd sometimes go down there for our vacation. In fact we often went to both places, so I could do my shelling.

Riess: How much of the year were his parents there?

Bancroft: They were there all winter.

Riess: Did they have a garden in Borego Springs?

Bancroft: Not too much. They'd sort of left in natural. At that time--I haven't been there for so long--but at that time there weren't too many houses. They'd be scattered here and there in the

desert. It was very nice. I think it's built up a lot since then.

Riess: Sounds like quite an influence on your garden. How many years of these trips were there?

Bancroft: Well, the children were small. I think it was before Kathy was born--I'm not sure.

Riess: When was this?

Bancroft: Peter and Nina were born--. They were born in '44 and '46, and Kathy was '52.

Riess: So this collecting began twenty years before the garden was built.

Bancroft: Yes, and back then I didn't go at it that hard. I'd just buy them when I'd see things.

Riess: Did you plant any of the palms earlier?

Bancroft: No, nothing until 1972. Everything in that garden is 1972 or later. No, I just had all my pots and things back here. And I had some in that garden planted out.

Riess: A lot of them must have gotten pretty big in their pots!

Bancroft: Yes, it was a mess back there. Especially some of the agaves were very big, and I had to take them out.

Riess: Could you transplant them?

Bancroft: Yes, if they weren't too big. But some of them can get awfully big, and you can't do anything. Of course and then when they bloom they die. So I lost some of them that way.

Riess: When you were in the desert did you do any wild collecting?

Bancroft: No, I didn't. [thinking] I'm trying to put all these things together. I don't remember bringing anything back from the desert. I don't think I was into it enough.

Cactus in Particular

Bancroft: Now I think of one thing: I didn't start getting cactus until I started this garden, because I was into succulents. And then when I started this garden I thought I should have some cactus for contrast. You know, all the succulents seemed to be all the same one or two shapes. So that's when I started on the cactus. So I'm sure I didn't bring things back. Of course you aren't allowed to, now.

Riess: If the desert is where you commonly find cactus, then in what area do you find succulents?

Bancroft: Almost everywhere, really. They can be up in the mountains, or along the seashore, and of course, a lot of those we buy are from Africa, and Mexico. Africa and Mexico are the places where you really get a lot of them. Some from South America.

Riess: Have you traveled to those places?

Bancroft: Only Mexico, just over the border to Puerto Peñasco.

Riess: Have you mail-ordered things from those countries?

Bancroft: No, all I've ordered were from nurseries in this country.

Riess: Have you gotten into exchange arrangements with people?

Bancroft: I haven't. I don't know how to do that. I didn't do it with shells, either. Other people know how. I just don't know how.

Riess: What do you mean, "how"? What the network is?

Bancroft: Well, I just don't have any sense of how to trade things.

Riess: There might be newsletters, for instance. Are you a member of succulent and cactus organizations?

Bancroft: No, I don't belong to the society here, the Cactus and Succulent Society. There's one that meets in Oakland, and one in San Francisco. Sacramento.

Riess: Why aren't you a member?

Bancroft: Well, I don't know. Again it's a matter of driving.

Now Brian belongs to both the San Francisco and Oakland ones. He goes to both their meetings.

Riess: What is Brian's relationship to the garden?

Bancroft: He comes one day a week and he takes care of the large greenhouse and the plants in there.

He's doing hybridizing, Aloe hybridizing. He got into this after he'd starting working here. I had a lot of Aloes, and I guess he did too, so he decided to do some hybridizing.

Riess: He is a trained horticulturist?

Bancroft: I don't think that he is a trained one, but he knows as much as any of them.

Riess: I don't think you like to join these groups.

Bancroft: I'm not a joiner. Though I do enjoy going to a meeting.

Riess: That is how you would find out how to trade plants.

Bancroft: Yes, it is, it is.

But other people ship things to people, in exchanges.

Riess: You might get some wonderful surprises.

Bancroft: Oh, I probably would, but I can't take care of what I've got, it seems to me.

Local Plant Sources

Riess: So, on the subject of acquiring plants, what good local sources are there?

Bancroft: There are very few local, but there is a new nursery in--. Well, there was Lila's Nursery in San Rafael. And she didn't have cactus. So I bought a lot of my succulents from her. She died last year. [thinking] I think that's about the only one. Some of the local nurseries would have a few, but not too much.

And then a few years ago one started in Oakland, just over the border from Berkeley, just down off Ashby, the Dry Garden. And they have a lot of nice things. But southern California is the place for more of them.

Riess: And do you travel down there?

Bancroft: No.

Wayne Roderick

Riess: When did you make the acquaintance of Wayne Roderick?

Bancroft: Goodness, I don't know. I've known him for a long time. I've just forgotten how it started, how I first met him. I remember his mother; I remember going to his mother's garden. He may remember.

Riess: You visited his mother's garden in Petaluma?

Bancroft: Yes, I remember being up there. She was a great gardener, and she knew a lot about gardening.

Riess: Did you get to know Wayne through Lester and Marshall?

Bancroft: I just don't remember, because all these people sort of know each other, and I can't remember how I got connected with different ones.

Riess: I'd be interested in whether it was through that, or whether it was through his work in Tilden, maybe?

Bancroft: Yes, when he was at the UC Berkeley Botanical Garden. Yes, that brings something back.

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Bancroft: [I was up at the garden, and I was looking at something, I was down on my hands and knees] and he walked over and I'm not sure if I knew who he was or not, as far as his name went. Then he got talking and he said, "I thought you must be really interested in gardening if you'd look this closely at a plant." [laughs] And I'm sure that's one of the first times I saw him. Of course he was there at the UC Botanical Garden for a long time before he went over to Tilden.

Riess: Has he been someone you would call advisory for you?

Bancroft: Well, actually, he'd come around once in a while, but it's just since this conservancy started that he seems to have--. I've seen him more, naturally, at the meetings, and then he's come a

few times between for this and that. But I have seen him more since this started. He has been extremely helpful in conducting tours here, training docents, making flower arrangements, and giving general support.

Record-Keeping

Riess: Your record-keeping, did that start with the first succulents you bought?

Bancroft: You know, I think I started them almost right away. But they were terribly messy. I think I've improved my methods a little bit since then. Yes, I think I kept track of what I got.

Riess: A good instinct. Was that because of your long acquaintance with how a farm should be run, and record-keeping here, do you think?

Bancroft: No. I had nothing to do with running the farm; I didn't know how they did any of it.

Riess: But keeping records?

Bancroft: No, they had a secretary and an office and Phil didn't do any of that at home.

Riess: Did you keep records on the perennials?

Bancroft: I had written down a number of them, yes. And when I was at UC Berkeley I used to go to the Library and read some of the English garden magazines--I remember one in particular, and I think I mentioned it before--and I would write down names of things that looked interesting then, and that may have started me writing names. Then I'd try to track them down, but usually I couldn't find them.

Riess: When do you think you really plunged into this, learning the plant names, the Latin names?

Bancroft: You have to know the Latin names, because with the common names, one name may apply to different plants, so you can't go by that, you have to have the Latin names.

Riess: I know it seems that I keep asking you variations on the question of how you knew how to do what you were doing, but it interests me.

Bancroft: Well, I didn't, I didn't, and anyone who does it professionally would probably sneer at the way I do things, because it just developed as I felt the need, and I don't know the correct way of doing these things. I look back, as I said, on my earlier entries, and I think I would have done better, now, on those than I did then. They weren't quite accurate enough. Now I think I'd do a little bit better.

Riess: Accurate how?

Bancroft: Where I got them and the date, that sort of thing. I don't put the day, but the year. And the year, I didn't always get that down. I'd just write down the names.

Riess: Good to have a record of where everything was purchased.

Bancroft: Yes. Of course a botanic garden would have to have the source of the material, or they're not interested, I mean the actual [place] where it grew. But I have none of that because mine is almost all bought from nurseries. So that they wouldn't be interested in any of the plants I've got because I don't have the data for them.

Riess: Has that come up, botanic garden interest?

Bancroft: I just know that's the way they are. UC has sent me a few things because they said they didn't have enough data on them, and so they wouldn't be interested in using them. And of course that doesn't bother me, because mine is all bought anyway.

Riess: Why would UC have had these things?

Bancroft: Things that had been donated. People would give them; they don't know where to get rid of them and they give them to UC. I haven't gotten too many, but they've given me a few things that way.

Riess: Was that through Wayne?

Bancroft: No, not Wayne. That was through Dan Campbell, who's on our committee.

Riess: I didn't meet him.

Bancroft: He has only come to the first few meetings. Then he was too busy and had to drop out. He's come once or twice since, but that's all.

Riess: Do you keep a daily record of the weather, the temperatures out here?

Bancroft: No, only if it's something unusual I might write it down.

Riess: You don't keep a daily journal?

Bancroft: Somewhat, but it gets behind, and things get skipped.

Riess: Have there been times that would have been useful?

Bancroft: Well, you know, I seldom look back. Once in a while I want to know when I did this, or something, and I can find it, but I don't use it all that much.

The December 1972 Freeze

Riess: The garden went in September 1972, and then you had a freeze in December 1972.

Bancroft: Yes, there was that big freeze, and it killed most of what I planted.

Riess: Was that devastating?

Bancroft: It was disappointing.

Riess: What did you do?

Bancroft: Well, I started again the next year, just the way I am doing now. I figured it doesn't happen that often, and you can't just not replant those same things, because they might have another twenty years before they'd be killed again. So I'm just replanting. Have to start over again.

Riess: After the first freeze did you leave the beds intact on the assumption that things might come back?

Bancroft: No, these were all newly-planted. There wasn't anything to come back. They really hadn't taken hold.

Riess: Did that experience alter in any way your--?

Bancroft: I lost a few things that I didn't get again.

Riess: Because they were the least hardy?

Bancroft: Um-hum.

Riess: You are philosophical about it. You didn't think in some way you had been given a message?

Bancroft: [laughs] No.

Annual Preparations for Winter in the Garden

Riess: Since then you have operated on the assumption that there might be a freeze.

Bancroft: Yes. And every winter I have covered several hundred plants. And I had this last winter too. I do it every year. And it takes two men over a month to do it, five or six weeks.

We have to make a little wooden frame, and put plastic on it. And there is always some plastic that needs replacing. And there are always a few frames that we don't use, we don't have the right size plant. And then we have to make some more. But we reuse the frames.

It takes me weeks to figure out what frame to put on what plant. I make all these lists of the sizes of frames. I go around and measure the plants and see what they will take. And then I try to match them up, and if this would go on this but would also go on that, which one should I use? Is there something else that can be used on this? You know how you have to juggle.

And then I think I have it pretty well straightened out, and my list is so mixed up I have to copy it and start over again. It's an awful job.

Riess: The frame is four wood legs--.

Bancroft: Four legs, most of them are four legs, and then the four boards around the top. Then if it is too tall we'll put four around the middle to support the long legs.

Riess: How is it attached to the soil?

Bancroft: Then when we put them in, if it's a smaller one we drive two stakes on opposite legs and then tie it. And if it's a larger one we do it on all the legs and tie it.

Riess: And you don't take them apart to store them?

Bancroft: No, we've got some old sheds back there, fortunately, left over from the farm, where we store them.

Riess: You couldn't just put them on a truck and go around and find the right one for each spot?

Bancroft: No, there are too many. Several hundred.

Every year I think, why is this so complicated? Why can't I do this faster? But it happens every year. There are so many of them, and so many size plants, and they're never going to cover the same plant again, you know, because the plants change, or die or whatever. So you have to go through almost all--. Except for some of these barrel cactus, they usually take the foot-square ones. But everything else I've got to redo, replan.

We bring them all down and I have gotten recently so I make a label with the size of the frame, and so I have the sizes to look at. And then I make my list and see what size I want. It only takes about three days to undo it. It's the planning and placing that takes so long.

Riess: And next year it will be a totally different proposition.

Bancroft: Totally different, yes. This saved some things this year, but some things died anyway, in spite of the covering.

I try not to plant some things there that are too tender. There are an awful lot I keep in the greenhouses that I wouldn't even consider putting out there. But these are the borderline things that I figure I can save if I cover them. And it helps a lot.

Riess: I wonder what they do about cold at other places, like Rancho Santa Ana or Santa Barbara.

Bancroft: Well, they don't have the cold I have, they don't have that problem. Even Lotusland they say was not affected much. It's all warmer down there. And UC Berkeley does not cover things. If they lose them they lose them, I've been told.

Actually, our committee, the garden committee here, has said they won't be able to do that, that it takes too long. And they suggested that I plant all the things that are very tender in one place and put one big cover over them. Well, that's what I've tried to do, you know, in that long bed where we cover a

lot of them, but I don't think they go well together! [laughs]
And I plant them according to how I think they look, and I may have some tender ones next to some hardy ones. I think it's very limiting to have to plant them all together in order to cover them all together. So I don't know what they are going to do about that.

Riess: How long are the plants covered?

Bancroft: We usually put them on in October, November, and then take them off in March or early April. When I think the frosts are over.

Riess: Have the materials, the polyethylene, changed, improved?

Bancroft: I've been getting some that's supposed to have a three-year guarantee the last couple of times. And so we don't have to replace them every year. I know there have been some before that, but I couldn't seem to locate them. Now I've got the three-year guarantee ones, which will save us a little work.

Riess: So when you started out each season you'd have to nail on a new top.

Bancroft: A new top anyway. Sometimes the sides would hold, but the top always went.

Riess: Do you ever do anything with artificial heat out there?

Bancroft: No. We have no electricity in the garden.

Watering. Weeding. Feeding. Etc.

Riess: Has your watering system evolved over the years?

Bancroft: No, we had the sprinklers put in right at the start, before we planted. We've made a few adjustments and a few additions, but it is essentially what we started with.

Riess: Lester's system.

Bancroft: Yes. He got the man to put them in, who was also a ballet dancer! I guess he did all right.

Most of those beds are on automatic, and it goes on at night. We have three nights to water the garden because we're using the water in this part of the garden in the daytime. And

of course we're limited as to the amount of water we've got from our well. So that works out.

I'm just having them work on this garden [perennial garden] to improve it so that we can put some on clocks the same way, because it's a hassle to water this garden. I've got a four day schedule, every hour, to move hoses and change them. I have to hire somebody just to do that, and they don't get much gardening done between. And of course I didn't have a gardener this year, so I've been doing that too. So, I've got to do something about it. [laughs] I'm having some of that changed in this garden.

Riess: What about a drip system?

Bancroft: I just can't see myself handling drip. Every time you put in a plant you've got to do something with that darned little hose. Also, I think drip would clog up with our hard water. It might not, but--. I'm considering drip for the rose beds, only, because those plants are where they're going to stay. But in the rest of the garden, you're always changing. I don't know how they do it, I just don't. Sounds good in a lot of ways. I guess it is, or people wouldn't be doing it.

Riess: Have you used chemical controls on your garden?

Bancroft: At the first I used weed killers, because we had quantities of weeds from the fields, the grass and everything. I use very little now. I think I spend too much time weeding. I've tried Round-Up on the spurge, and it seems to be by the time it's killed it the spurge has already set its seed. I just haven't done too well. I've tried a lot of them. At first it was very useful because of these large quantities of weeds and grass and not that many plants. So it was good then.

Riess: Do you experiment with soils and fertilizing, and seeing what you can change about the bloom, and so on?

Bancroft: Not much.

Riess: It's a matter of time?

Bancroft: Partly, yes. Of course Brian is doing hybridizing, and I think that would be interesting. I've never done that at all.

Riess: Do you mulch?

Bancroft: No, because we have our rocks.

Riess: But they don't keep the weeds down?

Bancroft: No. And it's harder because the weeds start from under the rock and you have to move the rock aside to get the weed out. It's slower weeding than if it were just plain dirt.

Riess: Weeding sounds like a good job for a volunteer. Sounds like a simple matter to tell a weed from a plant.

Bancroft: It isn't that simple. It should be, but they really don't know. I've had people--. I got rid of--. This fellow a few weeks ago, he pulled out a whole area of something I told him not to take, and he pulled them all out. He didn't know they were good plants. Just because there were quite a lot of seedlings in a group, he figured that they were weeds--in spite of what I told him.

Riess: Do you feed the plants?

Bancroft: Not as much as I should. I usually do, when I amend the soil, which you're not supposed to do nowadays, but anyway, I still do--.

Riess: Why aren't you supposed to?

Bancroft: You're meant to put the plant in the soil just the way the soil is, the new planting. Lester planted that way on the flat areas.

Riess: Cactus and succulents, or in general?

Bancroft: In general.

But anyway, I do put in a little. I used to do more than I do now. Most of these do not like much, not like garden plants. I think they get too fat. You know, it blows them up more. They look more natural if you don't give them too much. But I'm sure a lot could take more than they are getting.

Riess: But you do use compost?

Bancroft: I work it into the soil, along with sand and gravel.

Riess: What is in the compost?

Bancroft: It's just whatever cuttings come from the garden. And we don't put everything in. I don't put things in that are prickly, because I don't like to get my hands pricked. So roses and anything else prickly--which is a lot of the stuff in that garden--we take to the dump. But [I put in] garden cuttings, if they don't have seeds, and I put my garbage in. I've always had

two containers under the sink, one for the garbage can and one for compost. That doesn't amount to much though.

Riess: What kind of care do you take with the compost?

Bancroft: Not much. We've got too much and we don't have the equipment, so it takes much longer to rot than it should. It will take a year, rather than a few months. We just pile it up, water it periodically, and then take off the top half and use the bottom.

Riess: And you get the occasional volunteer tomato plant out among the cactus?

Bancroft: I try not to put in things like that, but the gardeners do put in plants that have gone to seed, and yes, we do get volunteers.

Riess: As you pass on instructions on handling the garden, your tendency would be to just leave it as natural as possible?

Bancroft: Yes. There will have to be someone in charge who knows about how to handle cactus and succulents, because they are really different from the other garden plants. Brian, for instance, if he's still here, he knows all about that.

And I've got a man who might be coming in another month or so who would like to work here if he can make the change and train someone for the job he's got. I think he will be good. He's interested in this.

Riess: He would be the manager?

Bancroft: No. He said he's been a manager. He wants to work with plants again. That's why he wants to come here. And he would know, if this works out. I hope I can get him, and I hope it works out. I've only met him a few times, but it sounds very promising. Pretty expensive for me is the main problem.

Riess: Have you seen evidence in the plants over the years of pollution, lead contaminants?

Bancroft: I haven't noticed it, no. I really wouldn't know what to look for, but I haven't noticed anything suffering especially. The main problem is if something begins to collapse it's usually oak root fungus.

III WORKING WITH THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY##

Introducing Frank Cabot and the Garden Conservancy

Riess: Five years ago, the Garden Conservancy didn't exist. What were you thinking would happen to this place then?

Bancroft: I was wondering. I would ask different people if they had any ideas of any organization that could take over. And no one really had any ideas. As a matter of fact, Wayne was one who suggested that I give the plants to Heather Farm! Well, I didn't think much of that, because it wasn't the plants, it was the garden that I wanted to preserve. Anyone can dig out a bunch of plants and give them, but I wanted to keep the garden.

So when Frank Cabot came and saw the garden and asked what I was planning to do with it I told him I just didn't know, that I had been worried about it.

Riess: Why did he come?

Bancroft: He came because he had heard that it was an interesting garden. He was at a convention in San Mateo for the rock garden society [American Rock Garden Society] and planned to see my garden on the same trip. He had asked a mutual friend of ours, Bill Folkham, who lives in Walnut Creek, if he could take him to see my garden.

So Bill brought Frank and his wife over. It was in the middle of winter and we had all these frames on everything, and I said, "This is no time to see the garden!"

But anyway, he got the idea. Someone told me that he had the idea that there should be such a thing, but this is what started it.

Riess: Such a thing as The Garden Conservancy.

Bancroft: Yes, to save gardens.

Riess: He could see the potential in your garden, even though it was draped?

Bancroft: Apparently. I thought it looked pretty awful with all that over it.

Riess: Then what? Did he formulate the idea that day? What was the next step?

Bancroft: Oh, gracious! I don't know if he wrote to me, or if he came out, to discuss the possibility.

Riess: Was it initially just Frank Cabot and his wife?

Bancroft: I was told that after leaving here he spoke to his wife again about saving gardens that had no endowments. His wife suggested that he start such an organization now.

He did come out shortly--. I guess he'd talked to me, but he came out, and he isn't from this area, but he knew just where to go. He got the committee together. He went to UC and got Dan Campbell, and then got connected with the Tides Foundation, which financed it at the beginning. Then The Garden Conservancy has taken over from them, so they're [Tides Foundation] not in it now, but they were at the beginning.

He knew just the people to see around here to get things started. I'm amazed. I don't know how he knew how to do that. He was driving all over the place, seeing different people.

Dick Turner and Other Local and National Committee Members

Riess: Was Dick Turner one of the first people?

Bancroft: Yes, I'm sure he was. I suspect the whole committee he [Frank Cabot] got together.

Riess: The committee that he got together, had they been acquainted with the garden before they were a committee?

Bancroft: Dick Turner had been bringing classes here. He had been coming for a number of years. And Stu Winchester, who teaches at DVC [Diablo Valley College], I'm not sure if he got him, but maybe he did. But he's on the committee. And he's brought his

classes here for a number of years. Several of them have brought classes, or people, here.

Riess: Botany classes?

Bancroft: Yes, and one of the landscape architects had brought some of his people over.

Riess: Russ Beatty?

Bancroft: I knew Russ because he did the original design for Heather Farm when I was involved in that. In the early days. So I knew him.

Riess: What was your involvement there?

Bancroft: Just bringing plants to the sales, mainly. I brought several carloadsful to every sale in those days. And helped at the sale, of course. But it was with the plant sale that I was concerned.

Riess: As you sold your plants, did you make a little network of interest in succulents? Was it meaningful for you?

Bancroft: Well, it was making money for Heather Farm. That was essentially it. And then there were other people interested in plants, selling and buying, so that was nice.

Riess: When people bought your plants didn't they get interested in your garden?

Bancroft: I didn't have the garden then. It was before that.

Riess: So you knew Russ Beatty from quite a ways back.

Bancroft: Yes.

Riess: Since you started this garden you haven't been involved with Heather Farms?

Bancroft: No, I just haven't had time, and a lot of the people who were there when I was have dropped out. You know how organizations are: people change, and you don't know them all.

Riess: Frank Cabot put this together. How did he get Angela Lansbury involved on the board?

Bancroft: She was a good friend of his wife. I guess they had known each other for years. So that's the connection there.

Riess: And Marco Polo Stefano.

Bancroft: Well, of course, he [Frank Cabot] knows all the gardeners in the East, so that's how he knew him. I guess he is very active there in garden circles. And of course he has his garden open to the public.

Riess: Did Marco Polo Stefano come to this garden?

Bancroft: Yes, he came that day we had the open house. A lot of people came from different parts of the country for that, members of the new organization.

Garden Tours

Riess: As people walk through do they give you suggestions? "Oh, you ought to have a So-and-so." Or do you think they see it as a complete piece.

Bancroft: Well, I don't think they think of changes for it.

[laughing] I remember when some local garden club came through when I was in the earlier days of this garden--of course, as I've said, they all go through the whole garden--and I guess she didn't know I was the owner. I was walking in front of her, and she was talking to another woman, and the other one said, "Well, what do you think of this garden?" And the other one said, "Well, it all depends on what you like." She did not like it. It struck me funny!

Riess: You probably have gotten that in one form or another a lot.

Bancroft: Oh yes, certainly, a lot of people don't like this kind of garden. It's not a regulation garden, and I'm sure a lot of people don't care for it. But I'm surprised, really surprised, at the number of people who do like it. That surprises me more.

Riess: Tell me the story about your husband's sister making up names for the plants in perennial garden.

Bancroft: Yes. They said that people would say, "Oh, have Lucy take you around the garden, because she knows all the plants." And Lucy would go around--she didn't know one from another--and just make up names, and talk about them. And everyone was thrilled.
[laughter] I've never seen her do it. This was before I came

along. This was when she lived at home. And of course she married and went east. This was before she was married.

Riess: Do you have a sense of mission about this garden, that you would like people to come to like this?

Bancroft: No, not really. It's just that I like to do this, and it seems too bad to tear it down. I just started it for the fun of it, and the enjoyment of it. I had no idea that people would be looking at it, no idea at all.

Riess: It is provocative at first, like looking at modern art or listening to modern music. Maybe longer acquaintance is necessary before new viewers can "relate" to it.

Bancroft: You have to get used to it, yes.

Riess: Yet Frank Cabot responded to it instantly.

Did you have any hesitation about becoming involved in the conservancy and letting all of this happen?

Bancroft: I really didn't know that it was going to be as involved as it is. There is an awful lot of legal stuff and all that I don't understand that has to go on. And it's taking much longer than I thought to get things rolling. But I guess this is what one should expect. No, I just didn't know how it would work.

Riess: They started meeting as the Bancroft Garden Conservancy two years ago?

Bancroft: Yes, and they've been coming here from the start. They figured that would be easier, for everyone to get together here, though I think if it were in Berkeley most of them would have a shorter distance to go. Anyway, they decided to have it here, and that's the way it's been.

Riess: What is your role in all of this now? So much of what you are doing these days is record-keeping after the freeze, but do you feel the garden is completed, or are you still adding to the design?

Bancroft: Oh, it's never been more than three-quarters or half-completed to start with, because I haven't done much of anything at the far end. And of course you have to keep replacing things all the time, so it's never completed.

And I am having to spend more time on things other than gardening because of the conservancy. For instance, I'm having

to try to be sure everything is labeled. A lot of things I hadn't labeled because I knew what they were. But it's a good idea to have them all labeled. And then these lists I'm making, that I've been working on today, and that I've been doing quite a bit, I wouldn't make them as complete for myself. But they want all this. There is a lot of work that I'm doing that I wouldn't have had to do otherwise.

Riess: Satisfying?

Bancroft: I don't really like to do it all because it keeps me from doing what I want to do, which is gardening, and planning the plants, and planting them.

Propagating

Riess: You have been propagating things that you would like to get in?

Bancroft: Yes. Now, of course, after the freeze I don't have as much, but I had a lot of things I wanted to get in, and planned where to put them, that I had propagated.

Riess: Have you learned a lot about propagation over the years?

Bancroft: I think just working with the plants I know more how to handle them. I noticed on some of my old charts that I had planted things out, for instance, that I wouldn't plant out now. I know better. I was experimenting, I was finding out. Yes, I've learned better how to handle them.

Riess: What do you mean, you "wouldn't plant out."

Bancroft: I know they wouldn't make it. And at that time I wanted to see if they would.

Riess: How about hybridizing?

Bancroft: I haven't done any of that, no.

Riess: It doesn't just happen accidentally?

Bancroft: Yes, it happens accidentally, and I've gotten a few volunteers of the Aeoniums. I have some very pretty ones that were volunteers. But I hadn't made a specific cross; they were volunteers.

Riess: Had you done any hybridizing in any other parts of your garden?

Bancroft: No, I hadn't. It takes an awful lot of time, and you might have one out of a thousand that's any good. I hadn't gotten into that.

Actually I would have liked that, but I just didn't feel I had the time for it.

Riess: Seems fascinating.

Bancroft: It is, it would be. And I like to see what Brian is doing with the [aloe] crosses he's making.

Riess: Has he had success?

Bancroft: Yes, he's made some very pretty things. He's had one or two that have bloomed and they've been very nice.

Fame, and the Neighbors

Riess: It's hard for me to remember that this which we are talking about is only twenty years old. Interesting that The Garden Conservancy is conserving a garden so relatively young.

Bancroft: Yes, I imagine a lot of the gardens they are considering are older gardens.

Riess: Do you know Lotusland [Garden Conservancy garden in Santa Barbara]?

Bancroft: Yes, I've been there a couple of times, on tours. Oh, it was just gorgeous. But they had millions of dollars, you know. Money was no problem. She had people collecting for her garden from all over the world, and had thirty gardeners, and all that. There is no comparison!

Riess: Did you meet her?

Bancroft: No. I think before I had been on these tours she had taken people around, but she was pretty old at that time, and she didn't go out to see people.

Riess: How much do you think your garden is considered one of the assets of Walnut Creek?

Bancroft: I don't think most people in Walnut Creek know it's here. That's true.

Riess: Do you care one way or the other?

Bancroft: No, I don't, not a bit.

Riess: More people in Cold Spring, New York know about it.

Bancroft: Exactly. And in England, and in Australia. That is, some there, not many of course. Gardeners there. Walnut Creek--? [laughter]

Riess: Do people wander in from the subdivisions and express interest? I hope they come to appreciate what is in their backyard.

Bancroft: We'll have to have their approval, you know, before we can go ahead. We have to get the approval of everyone--I can't understand this, but this is the way it is--the approval of everyone around the entire property, even though it's just this front part that's going to be in the conservancy. Isn't that ridiculous?

Riess: It is. It is probably in the nature of just posting a notice and seeing if anyone objects?

Bancroft: No, you have to go around, I think, and get people to sign something.

Riess: Who has to do that?

Bancroft: I don't know, one of us.

And some I've had a little problem with. We were talking the first year, at one of the first meetings, when we were thinking that things would go faster than they have, that we would probably have a day when we'd invite all the neighbors to see it. And we may do that. At least the people immediately surrounding it. I think we're going to have to do that.

As I said, I thought we'd have done this a couple of years ago. But things just haven't developed to the point where we're ready to do that yet.

Riess: Does newspaper publicity, the article in the New York Times about the garden and the conservancy, for instance, bring calls and visitors?

Bancroft: Just a few, not very many. It's mostly organizations that come. There are a lot of individuals too, that's true, but they're mostly garden people, and a few come because they've read those articles, but not that many.

Riess: Okay, for today, I think we're through. I'm looking forward to walking and talking and recording a conversation in the garden next time.

IV IN THE GARDEN ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1991

[Interview 3: September 6, 1991]##

Outside the Entrance

Riess: Here we are, outside the entrance structure. This was Lester Hawkins' design?

Bancroft: He designed the whole building, and we did the two wings according to his design, but my husband did not like the center at all, and I didn't either. So a friend of ours designed that for us, and Phil built that.

Riess: Did you already have planting in mind for this entrance area?

Bancroft: Yes, I wanted it for shade plants. Then we cover some in the winter with plastic, so I could put more tender plants in there. So it was a protection for certain plants that couldn't be in the garden.

Riess: As we stand here now in the outer courtyard area, can you see evidence of damage from the freeze this winter?

Bancroft: We've taken care of quite a bit of it. For instance, that big aloe still has a few heads left in it, and almost everywhere else in the garden they were completely killed. But, we have taken out three-quarters of that plant, that was dead, and this is what is left.

Riess: Let's get closer. What is the name of this Aloe?

Bancroft: That is Aloe salmdyckiana, which is a hybrid, and apparently, from this year's experience, is hardier than its parents, for which I am very grateful, because it's a very handsome one. A lot of the other aloes in this same bed are gone. We have finally taken them out. They were dead.

There isn't too much left here. Almost all the Echeverias died.

Riess: Will they fill back in on their own?

Bancroft: No, there really isn't anything left to fill in from those that are gone. They were completely killed, so we will have to replant, if I can ever get any of them again.

Riess: Is the survival of that Aloe salmdyckiana due to the eucalyptus overhead?

Bancroft: I think it probably is. Although, two others that were very badly damaged were also protected. So it must be that combined with something else. Three or four out in the open were completely killed.

Riess: What is the age of the eucalyptus?

Bancroft: That was planted when we started the garden, probably 1973. They grow awfully fast. And the pine too, the Montezuma pine, that was planted about that time. They've both grown very fast.

Riess: What is this eucalyptus?

Bancroft: This is Eucalyptus nicholii. It's one of the prettiest ones, very feathery leaves.

Riess: Last time there were one or two blooms on this cactus. [outside entrance]

Bancroft: Well, it comes in bursts. I think since you've been here we've had one or two big bursts of blooms. But they only lasted a day or two, and they seem to come in bunches, and then they're all gone for a while. And we're between them now.

Riess: Is the practice to let the bloom stay on the plant? Is there some virtue in that?

Bancroft: Not particularly, except that there are too many dead blooms in the garden to keep them all off. [laughing] If you want seed you might leave it, but I wouldn't want that. There is nothing edible in this one.

This entrance was designed as an entrance, a parking area entrance, and it's fine for a few cars, but if we have a larger group we have to have some of the cars drive way to the back of our place. There is plenty of parking back there. But after this becomes a conservancy that back will be cut off; it won't

be part of the conservancy property. So that's why we're going to have to change the entire entrance to the other side of the garden, where we'll have room for more parking. So we lose what was designed as an entrance; they'll be entering from the other side of the garden.

Riess: Is that particularly distressing?

Bancroft: It's very distressing, because it's a back door, and it's not designed at all. It has to be all redesigned.

Riess: Have you settled on a landscape architect yet?

Bancroft: No, we haven't, we haven't. We had one day when each group had about an hour, two groups in the morning and two in the afternoon. And we had our meeting after they had left, and we really didn't quite come to any conclusions. We were hoping to design it then, but we couldn't, we had to postpone it.

Riess: Now we are looking at the east wing of the entrance structure.

The Shadehouse

Bancroft: Yes, this is the east wing, and I call it a shadehouse. It has this saran shade cloth on it so it doesn't get the full sun.

Now, in here I have planted things that are too tender in the winter to be in the garden, and also tried to plant things that bloom in the winter when, if they were in the garden, they would be covered up and you wouldn't see the bloom. These are mostly aloes, and a few other things. Because being South African, you know, they bloom in our winter and early spring, most of them.

Riess: Are there any that are extremely rare and very valuable in here?

Bancroft: No, not planted out. Brian has the rarest ones, that he's brought, and he keeps them in my greenhouse. But we haven't planted any out.

Riess: Is there an automatic watering system in here?

Bancroft: No, unfortunately not, and it's been needing water for about three weeks. I just haven't gotten in here to do it.

Riess: Has this rather clement summer helped your frozen plants recover? In other words, because it has been somewhat cooler have them made the transition better?

Bancroft: I doubt it. That rain in March probably helped some things--we had a rainy March. But I guess this really has been a pretty normal summer out here.

Entering the Garden

Riess: Now we are in the garden. Something in bloom here.

Bancroft: Yes, this I was worried about for a long time, because it didn't begin to grow back from the roots until pretty late, but it finally came. It's an Erythrina bidwillii. And it's got beautiful red flowers. It is usually quite hardy, and this year proved it really is quite hardy. It's a hybrid, with Erythrina crista-galli which I have over in another part of the garden. And that is also considered one of the hardy ones, hardier at least, though it's not as hardy as this.

Riess: Was this part of the planting plan, to have this striking, rounded red-flowering low tree here?

Bancroft: No, the planting plan is what I did as I went along. The layout was done by Lester, and he planted a few things way down at the [west] end there, but not cactus and succulents. They were more--well, there were some Australian plants and different ones. But there was no planting plan for any of this.

Riess: He did the mounds and the swales?

Bancroft: Yes, he did that part, yes.

Riess: Is this [E. bidwillii] from the original planting?

Bancroft: [From] 1976. We cut it way down every year so it comes up fresh every year. I think if we left it it might become a taller tree. But this way it just makes a nice low shrub.

Riess: And you have a lot of Echeverias around the base here. Some look very new.

Bancroft: This is what's left. It was all redone last fall. I had finally gotten to fixing this bed, all planted, and now there

isn't half of it left. All that's gone, yes. So that has to be started over again.

Riess: Something like this--.

Bancroft: Now, that's a *Sempervivum*, and most of the *Sempervivums* come from the high mountains in Europe. So that came through nicely.

Riess: This looks like it could be divided. It's such a thick mat of little rosettes. Do they get larger?

Bancroft: They would if I divided it more. You see I haven't worked with that. So it just makes more and more, and smaller and smaller. But yes, they would be quite large if they were separated and had space between them.

Riess: Do you have a philosophy about this question of dividing? Would you just as soon that it grows like this?

Bancroft: I'd just as soon it did this, but if you were going to show them you would probably like a nice big one.

All of this next area was large plants of *Aloe striata* and I had five different clones here, and they were hit very badly, almost all of them killed. There were just those three or four down there that were not killed. And then I had two or three in pots that I put here, and a friend gave me a few others, so now I am starting again. But they are awfully small plants.

Riess: It is very striking looking.

Bancroft: It's a very nice aloe and it's got a beautiful flower. It's a little tender. We put sacks around them in winter to protect them a little bit. But they bloom in the winter. And at first I'd put frames over them, and the spikes hit the top and bent over, so that was no good. So now we just put sacks around the outside.

Riess: Is it an illusion, or are they all leaning southeast?

Bancroft: I think it may be the way I planted it. [laughs] But yes, they are leaning towards the sun, all these old ones are leaning out this way. Yes, they do that.

Riess: This is quite a wonderful purple flowering tree.

Bancroft: Yes, that's a *Leucophyllum frutescens*. That's a Texas native. I think it's very handsome. I love it. This *Calliandra tweedyi* next to it had sort of gotten too big and grown over it and made

it lean over, and now we're going to straighten them up. The Calliandra almost died, and now we've gotten a little room there.

Riess: Do you prune the Leucophyllum?

Bancroft: No, I haven't pruned it. It's supposedly a dwarf form. I understand the other form becomes almost a big tree. And this is as big as it's going to get, I'm sure. It's been this big for years.

Riess: When were these palms trimmed last?

Bancroft: After the freeze. All the lower fans were frozen, and even the tips of a few that are left were, but I didn't want to take everything off.

Riess: What do you have for getting up there to trim?

Bancroft: Just a regular ladder with a pole out for the third leg. And then we've got a saw on the end of a long stick so they can reach up. But some things are too high for us to reach.

Riess: What is this bloom?

Bancroft: This is an agave, believe it or not, and there is another one of the same variety. There aren't any others that look like that that I know of. It's just a tall white candle. It's beautiful. It is [looking at label] Agave bractiosa.

Riess: Oh, you are cheating!

Bancroft: I have to have everything labeled in this garden, and I'm having quite a time, because they all were labeled, and some have lost their labels. I've got to go around and renew everything.

Riess: What is this tree?

Bancroft: It's a desert willow, which is native to our southern area and goes on into Mexico. It's not really a willow at all. Chilopsis linearis. It seeds like--.. We've just spent three hours again pulling up the seedlings that have come up since our last weeding a few weeks ago.

Riess: That's what you can sell in the conservancy nature center! Seedling plants.

Bancroft: Yes, we could, but a lot of my plants are too big for most people's gardens and they wouldn't interest them.

Riess: Is the form a result of pruning?

Bancroft: No, that's what it does, and there is another one. We took a few branches out, but that is pretty natural for it.

Riess: Over the years did Lester Hawkins come back and see the results of his work and your planting?

Bancroft: Yes--. It was just in the first part of the garden that he came back. He didn't come back after that, much. He came back after that center was built and said, "Tear it down!" [laughs]

Bed 9

Bancroft: [In another section] I've taken a long time replanting this [section]. Those are almost all Echeverias. All the rare, nice ones I lost. These are some that survived, and some that just after the freeze I came out and picked a leaf that remained and potted it up, and so some got large enough to plant out now.

Riess: The planting pattern is lovely, the Persian carpet look of it all. Do you just create that as you go along, or do you put the plan on paper first?

Bancroft: What controls it is the number of plants I have available. If I have only a few I put in a little bunch, if I've got a lot I put in a bigger one.

Riess: But there is a lot of symmetry and design to this area.

Bancroft: Well, I spend a lot of time, actually, you know, planning where to put things and which ones to put next to each other, going by the size, and the color. There is such a variation in color, of the greens running into the yellow-greens, and then the other way, into the blues and the purple-greens. So I do spend time on that.

Riess: Is there a special trowel you use?

Bancroft: Just a regular trowel. Of course, the bed was clear, and the whole bed was worked, and a little stuff put in to make things grow better.

Riess: A little what stuff?

Bancroft: A little compost, mostly a little compost.

I had this empty space to work with, so I brought all my-- the way I did over here for this bed over on the other side--I brought everything down and then I decide what to put where.

Riess: And these boxes of little plants?

Bancroft: Those were taken out of here, because the plants were almost all killed, but pieces remained. I will clean those off and just keep the good heads. Then I'll do the same thing I did here, and plant in that little spot.

Riess: What do you need on one of these? How much makes a viable plant?

Bancroft: If they have a root--but most of these don't--. I'll probably plant with a short stem, because there's a little root coming at the end. But if there isn't a root I cut it off just below the rosette, and then it makes new roots just at the base of the leaves.

Riess: And right into the ground it goes.

Bancroft: Yes.

Riess: There is no interim stage?

Bancroft: Well, there should be, probably do better if I had them in a flat where I could watch them better, but I don't have room or time for that. And these are hardy, these are pretty tough ones, you know. Now, all the good ones that I lost I probably couldn't do this with a lot. I'd have to grow them and get a good root on them before I planted them out.

Riess: You mean I could just take some--.

Bancroft: You're welcome to anything. Help yourself.

Riess: But I would have to keep them away from the watered parts of my garden?

Bancroft: They need some water, just not too much. And drainage, so that if you do get a little too much water it won't rot them. I rot them too. [laughs] And if you forget to water, like in the shade house, they will still be alive. They may not look as nice as they should, but they survive a long time without water.

Riess: When this bed was worked, does that mean that your gardener also scratched all the rocks aside? And you had to replace them?

Bancroft: Yes, he scraped them all down to the front. And then I had him do it; he just sort of threw them back in here. Then I had to check to be sure he didn't put one smack in the middle of a plant, which happens very often!

Riess: And then you had to replace all the labels, too.

Bancroft: Oh, it's an awful job. Labelling. A big job.

Riess: When the gardener worked the area, does he use a rototiller?

Bancroft: Yes, he's got a rototiller. Now, this little bed he spaded.

Riess: This bench, is it as old as it looks?

Bancroft: I found the concrete legs. They had been dumped at the back of the farm. And so Phil just put a wooden top on it.

Riess: Good for lingering, but not for truly collapsing, because there is no back on it.

Bancroft: You're like Phil. Phil didn't like benches without backs.
[laughs]

Riess: This is very established.

Bancroft: They survive. This is another *Sempervivum*, and it came through the winter all right. And there is another patch of the same one we saw. Those are the only two things in this bed that came through.

Riess: When will this area look established?

Bancroft: Probably next year, anyway. Because most of these are without roots, so they have to make roots first before they begin to grow.

Riess: Are there any little animal creatures around here that come out at night and uproot these new plants?

Bancroft: Yes. I keep pushing the plants in. The squirrels dig them all up, and without roots they move very easily, and I am always sticking them back in again.

Riess: Do the squirrels dig them up in order to bury acorns, or because they are very tasty, or some reason?

Bancroft: No, just because squirrels dig. They don't seem to do anything there, they just uproot them, and then run on to the next and uproot that one. Of course, in the walnut season they plant walnuts--well, in my pots, walnut trees come up in my pots, in my flats, in everything. But of course there aren't any this season, so they just dig.

Riess: That's a wonderful grass.

Bancroft: Yes, isn't it? That's Australian. It's a Xanthorrhoea. It has a flower something like the Agave. It's a tall narrow spike, much narrower than the Agave. It's quite handsome.

Riess: Many of these?

Bancroft: It had one last year, and it had one the year before, and it's been in since 1974, and that's been the first bloom from it, in 1989.

Riess: Do you think about feeding or watering it specially to get more bloom?

Bancroft: No, there are too many things to think that way about. [laughs] I just let them take their time.

Riess: Here's another Eucalyptus.

Bancroft: Yes, now that lost about half of its branches, and I had a man and helper come in. They spent six days in here, just pruning out some of these larger jobs that we couldn't reach. That was one that he had to do a lot of pruning in.

Riess: Was this planted with the garden, or is it older?

Bancroft: Nothing in here is older than the garden.

Riess: Just those far Eucalyptus?

Bancroft: Only the ones over there, the old front drive.

Riess: What is this?

Bancroft: That is a Brachychiton, and it's also from Australia.

Riess: Why has the bark cracked?

Bancroft: I was worried about that, but a man from Australia came, and he said when he's seen them in the wild they have that too. So I

felt a lot better about it, because I was afraid something was happening to it, but it seems to be natural for it.

Riess: You've done a wonderful job of replanting over here. I came on the right day!

Bancroft: I just worked on this yesterday. And today I took out what was left in this bed, and have taken it over to put in another bed. And then I had them prepare this bed.

Bed 8

Riess: Let's give "this bed" a name.

Bancroft: This is bed 8. My beds are numbered or lettered. We have just come from bed 9. We started at 10, as we came in and went to the right.

Riess: This bed is under the shade cloth.

Bancroft: Half the bed is. In the other half, the southern half, everything was killed. They were all Aeoniums, and they are very tender, they were all killed. So we are going to perhaps make a mound there, we're not quite sure, for planting. But that will have to wait for a while.

Riess: Here's a chance to see what your soil looks like.

Bancroft: Yes, this is good soil. It was fixed last year, and it was all replanted last year. So this is in pretty good shape. And then they just added a little more compost. But things were growing nicely.

Riess: And the plan for here?

Bancroft: I'm going to put the Gasterias here, because most of them were killed, but those that are still alive were under a tree that was killed. So they are in full sun, and cooking. And so I am going to bring them into this shaded bed.

Riess: The palm we are coming to, this seems quite unusual. Looks like a big pineapple.

Bancroft: Cocos australis. I understand they use the dates for making wine, at least in South America. A friend of mine came from there, and she said they use them for making wine. When the

fruit drops the ground is just covered with these orange fruits, and there's a fragrance all around it. You can smell it for quite a distance, very sweet and nice. And they are edible. I always take a handful to eat as I walk by. They are very good.

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Riess: This is the kind of tree that I might expect to see some sort of epiphytic plants growing in. Could you do that here?

Bancroft: No. We get so hot, and I just figured they would be an extra problem, so I haven't.

Bed E

Bancroft: Now, this is bed E. After I ran around the circle in numbers, then I started the alphabet around the outside edge. If I'd made up my mind in the first place how it would all go, it would have been better, but I hadn't had these beds fixed then. This was all wiped out. These were huge aloes, much taller than that yucca.

Riess: They were planted as a backdrop?

Bancroft: Yes, they were the tree types. And I noticed they were rotting from the soil, so I cut the tops off, and I only kept a foot or so on the top, a foot of the stem, and it looked perfectly good, as if the rot hadn't touched it, but apparently it had gone way up without showing. And I planted them, and then they went. So there has been a lot of work done that doesn't show, and it's gone, it's lost.

Riess: Every year you have loss, but never a year like this?

Bancroft: Oh, no, these things have always been hardy here. Some might be slightly touched by frost, but--.

Riess: What is this one that is bound up with a rubber hose?

Bancroft: That's one where the same thing happened. It was twice as tall and it started to rot and we cut it off and dried it and replanted it. So far, that's still all right. But you can't tell yet.

Riess: How deep is it planted?

Bancroft: Only an inch or so. You're not meant to plant them deep, because they rot more easily.

Riess: How do you dry it?

Bancroft: I just laid it out and let it dry.

Riess: This is fascinating gardening. Really quite--

Bancroft: Quite different from others, yes, it is.

Riess: What are these?

Bancroft: Euphorbia seguierana.

Riess: Euphorbia takes so many forms.

Bancroft: Oh, doesn't it? Yes.

Riess: Point out the others as we come to them, so I don't miss them.

Bancroft: Most of them are in the greenhouse because--. Well, we'll come to a couple of beds that I planted, but they were almost all killed. They generally are more tender than a lot of things.

Riess: Western Hills has a lot of Euphorbias planted out.

Bancroft: Really, I had forgotten that.

The West End

Riess: What is this? How does this figure in a dry garden?

Bancroft: Well, when I come down to this part of the garden I'm not planting any cactus, and just a few succulents, and I'm getting into the drought-tolerant plants. Now, these are Australians and natives, essentially. This is Australian. This is a Grevillea.

Let me show you something here. [Walking toward where an old truck is parked. From the winch of the truck hangs a huge yucca.] One of our big yuccas began to show signs of dying, and so we cut it off. There was a big hole that had rotted into the bottom of it. We couldn't plant it with a big hole up through the center--there would just be an empty hole, you know--so we had to saw off to make it more or less flat on the bottom. And

of course it's very wet and spongy. I am waiting for it to dry, and when it gets dry enough--. I don't think we'll be able to save it. I've tried this before, and they are very hard to re-root when they get to that size. Because what is that, 18" in diameter?

Riess: Or even more. I wish everyone could see this sight. The truck is at least twice as old as the yucca.

Bancroft: That is one of the old farm trucks, that's wonderfully handy for pulling out--. We call it the crane truck. Well, they lifted this. But when the agaves die, after they've bloomed, these huge things have to be gotten out. So Mario drives this in, and hooks it up. Of course the root has to be all dug around. But then he can lift it out.

This truck was used on the farm. It's about the only--. We've got an old tractor left, but everything else was sold off.

Riess: Mario keeps it running?

Bancroft: Yes. It's sort of a problem, because you can't get parts for a lot of these things. It gets complicated.

Here is where I tried once, and that's not going to make it. It's been sitting here for a year, dying. And this is the other one [yucca]. You see, we found this big hole in there, and it's rot, just rot. But we thought that maybe--. We thought the sprinkler, which is there, might have gotten it too wet. So I'll cut that one off so it will only water that plant, and it won't come down here. And maybe we can keep it from rotting further.

Riess: And when this dries out it will be able to support itself? Or will you have to pack it?

Bancroft: No, I think that would make it rot more. I think we will just leave it open and try not to let water get in.

Riess: Do you have birds that nest in the yucca?

Bancroft: I haven't seen any in this.

Riess: This is a beautiful thing here.

Bancroft: Yes, that's another Xanthorrhoea. They are lovely. They get a trunk in time. But that's been there a long time and it hasn't started to yet.

Riess: What is this pine?

Bancroft: This is Pinus sylvestris. Lester did drop those around. When he planted he'd just take a pot and drop it somewhere, and then run over and drop another. And he dropped these all over the place. We've taken quite a lot out because they didn't do too well. Here's another one. They are growing quite differently. And here is a third one. It's a Scotch pine.

These are quite handsome, aren't they. Puya mirabilis.

Riess: There is a fine bloom back there, and another one?

Bancroft: No, they are finished, they are last year's, we just haven't cut them out. I thought they might seed.

Now this is not the same as that one over there. It's an entirely different family, from the other part of the world. But they are sort of similar. That is Dasyllirion longissimus.

Riess: What are these?

Bancroft: Agave franzosinii. I think that's a beautiful one. It's so silvery grey. I planted I guess maybe three to start with. I don't remember exactly. Then they keep offsetting and spreading, so it's quite a group now.

Riess: Can you spot the central three?

Bancroft: They have probably bloomed. This one might be one, and that one back there might. I'm not sure. I would guess that one with the wide leaves that are flopping all over was one of the original ones.

Riess: It took twenty years to bloom?

Bancroft: Well, these were in the shade. We had a big eucalyptus tree there that shaded it, and I think that delays the bloom. They'll probably be blooming faster now that they are in the sun.

Riess: They are crawling into the road. This is from an underground root?

Bancroft: Yes, and those will all be good to plant. But there are only a few kinds that do that. None of the rare ones do that. They are just single, and that's it.

Riess: This crack in the soil--.

Bancroft: [kicking at crack] There probably is one [new plant] under there. Well, maybe not.

Now, you see, these are original trees.

Riess: Great oak back there.

Bancroft: Yes, and here's another nice oak [Quercus lobata, Valley oak]. A man who knows a great deal about plants and trees was looking at that oak, and it's in trouble, because the branches are formed in such a way, and a piece had fallen off long ago--I don't know how long ago--and left a very awkward angle, so that whole section might drop off.

Riess: This one doesn't look like it's in trouble.

Bancroft: But it lost a huge branch last year. They just drop off, and there they are! They don't do it gradually.

Riess: This stand of Agave looks so sleek and clean. Usually they accumulate spider webs and leaves and odds and ends.

Bancroft: Well, at the base there are a lot of leaves in there that blow in.

Riess: What is this shrub?

Bancroft: This is one of our natives. It's a Ribes viburnifolium, I think. Yes, that's right. Which is wild currant. It doesn't have the pretty colors of the pink ones. Just sort of a nondescript flower.

We've lost three big oaks in the garden in the last ten years.

Riess: Is this a Lester Hawkins contribution?

Bancroft: Yes, this came from him. Isn't that pretty? Juniperus deppeana var. pachyphlaea.

Bed F

Bancroft: We haven't done anything in bed F yet, except to see a couple of pines. Now this shrub--. Can you see sort of a line around

there? That's the size it was. All the rest died and we had to cut it back to this. That is--.

Riess: We could advance on it.

Bancroft: [looking for label] We may have lost the label when they cleaned it out. They often throw the labels away with the trash.

Oh, I know this one. Her name is 'Constance.' It's an Australian. Oh, darn it. It's a common genus. It makes me so cross when they do that, because I had that labeled. Grevillea 'Constance', that's the name.

Riess: These poppies [Romneya coulteri] are supposed to be hard to get started.

Bancroft: They are hard to get started, and once you have them they spread all over. Actually, this is a Romneya coulteri hybrid called 'White Cloud', and it suckers even worse. We are constantly digging up suckers. You see, they go way over to across the path into the next bed. It's sort of a nuisance that way, but they are so pretty.

Riess: You can transplant the suckers?

Bancroft: Yes, that's what you can do. Or sometimes they just take a piece of a root. In the winter. It's better in the winter, to take a piece of the root and plant it, and then it will grow from that.

Riess: What is the intention here in bed F? What is the general theme?

Bancroft: [laughs] I don't know. What do you think? Your guess is as good as mine. I put larger things in here. And I was getting into the plants that don't need so much water. And I also have a few succulents in here too.

Riess: When you take people on tours of the garden, what do you say? If I weren't asking you questions, what would you be saying?

Bancroft: I would probably be saying a lot of the same things that I'm answering your questions with. Because people seem to want to know just about the same things.

Riess: Over the years have people been giving you plants? Perhaps because they are curious about how well they will do out here?

Bancroft: I don't think any of that. Of course, friends give me things. But just because they know I am interested in them.

Our board has a couple of people from the University, and they are very much interested to see how things do here, compared to the UC Botanical Garden, which is quite different in climate. So they think it would be an interesting thing to follow things and study them, in this climate.

Riess: In the future.

Bancroft: Yes, in the future.

Riess: What is this?

Bancroft: Again, this is a native. This is an *Eriogonum*.

Riess: Now we have reached another major part of the garden.

What have we here? [tree with large patch of wood in it]

Bancroft: That is a yucca, and the top was starting to lean. It had its first bloom-- Well, that was planted the first year, in 1972. It had its first bloom two years ago, and it was gorgeous. Big plume on the top. And then we noticed the thing was tipping and then we noticed the bark was getting loose on this side. And I reached, and there was a deep hole, past the center of it. Dry! So we scooped it all out, and I think we've stopped the tipping, because we put in a couple of boards with a 2 x 4 upright between them, so that the top and the bottom ones sort of hold it where it is, hopefully.

Then I didn't want to get rain in there to rot in, so I put that on, but now I don't know what to paint it with. I'd like to get sort of a color like the trunk underneath. But I don't know if one can get such a color. Looks pretty muddy for paint. [laughs]

Riess: Such a different notion of nature. Shoring it up. It's like healing the wing of a bird that wouldn't ordinarily have survived.

Bancroft: Yes, I'm sure it would have fallen by this time if we hadn't done that.

You see, it was under those cutoff branches, so the hole didn't show. I still don't know how it got so big and it was still dry inside. It wasn't a nest from any animal; there

wasn't anything in there to indicate that. Just some debris. But nothing from animals or birds.

Bed 7W

Riess: The number of this bed?

Bancroft: This is bed 7W. The other end is 7E.

Riess: And this pampas grass is permitted?

Bancroft: This is a dwarf pampas that does not seed. So they say. This is its first bloom. I planted it last year.

Riess: This shade structure is a nice architectural element. Was this Lester Hawkins's doing?

Bancroft: It was lower. Phil built this. Then it began to fall apart. So we had it rebuilt. Still a number of years ago. But we made it about three or four feet taller than the first one had been, because of that Aloe plicatilis which was hitting the top. I wanted to give it a little room, so that's why we had to raise the whole thing.

Riess: This area is looking very much intact.

Bancroft: Almost everything here, at this end, was wiped out. But from the purple to the end of the green, that was all covered, and it saved a lot of them. We had plastic on frames that went over the top and at both ends, so it was enclosed.

Riess: What is this?

Bancroft: It's an Eryngium oliveranum. Some varieties are much bluer, and I've been trying to get a bluer one. It's a garden plant, but it is prickly, so I put it out here. And that is Setcreasea purpurea. There was nothing left, in spite of its being covered, and then this all came up from the root, came up beautifully!

Riess: And this?

Bancroft: That is a Bromeliad, Aechmea recurvata var. Ortgiesii. But that is surprisingly hardy, because that was not covered.

Riess: I wish I had my camera. This aloe is such wonderful colors.

Bancroft: Yes, isn't it? Of course, there is no root on it. That makes it get better colors. As soon as they get shade or water they turn green. Either when you take the water away, or they are in trouble, then they get nice color. I stood it up because it had rotted off. I plan to plant it, but I just haven't yet. But if I laid it down, this stem would go like that, so that's why I stood it up.

Riess: And what is it?

Bancroft: [checking label] That's Aloe rubroviolacea.

Riess: Have you just put these in?

Bancroft: Yes. They were rotted, and I'm not sure, but they look as if they might make it. That one's not going to, and that's all I have of that one.

Riess: This is another of the same?

Bancroft: That is Aloe speciosa. But it is a different size. This one, I think, is going to be all right. Suddenly you find a soft spot and then that's it, but it seems to be all right, so far. They have to get their roots. Once they get their roots you can take their props away. These are newly planted, you see, those that are propped up.

Bed 7E

Riess: And we are where?

Bancroft: Bed 7E.

Riess: Is this shaded arbor over Bed 6 directly across from the entry, so that it has some symmetrical relationship?

Bancroft: I don't think it is, quite.

Riess: This is another eucalyptus. Interesting bark.

Bancroft: Yes. We had to cut an awful, awful lot of that out too. A tremendous amount had to come out.

Riess: Did you choose these species eucalyptus?

Bancroft: I chose them in that they were available, and if there was something unusual I would try it. Some have not been worth it to me; they just have the little white flowers like all of them. But some have been very nice. This is a nice one.

Riess: Where did you buy them? Was there a particular person who specialized in eucalyptus?

Bancroft: No. I know there are, but I didn't know them. I just got to see them in nurseries.

Riess: I am really struck by the bark.

Bancroft: Yes, isn't it fascinating?

There was nothing left here. This was solid with plants, the whole thing. And everything except these few Echeverias along the edge [was destroyed]--.

Bed 2##

Riess: And what do these Oreocereus hendricksenianus var. densilanatus do?

Bancroft: They should get quite tall. And they are meant to be a little hardier than some of the other woolly ones. So I'm not going to cover them. I'm going to see how they survive.

Riess: They are woolly and they are prickly, and they are about eight inches tall. What is the function of the wool?

Bancroft: It's a protection against the sun. Maybe it protects them in the winter. I don't know.

Riess: Where are these native?

Bancroft: South America.

Riess: And you have never been there?

Bancroft: No. [laughs]

Riess: Have you yearned to?

Bancroft: Not awfully. I'd like to go into parts of Mexico. And I'd like to go to South Africa and see the aloes and various South African succulents.

Riess: Will you?

Bancroft: I doubt it.

Riess: That's the pleasure of slide shows and armchair travel.

Bancroft: When I belonged to clubs and went to meetings more we got quite a bit of that and it was very interesting.

Riess: This sprouting along the trunk [Chilopsis linearis]--.

Bancroft: These should be removed, but we just haven't gotten to it. We've done it several times. But I think it's under a little bit of stress.

Riess: Here are some more of the woollies.

Bancroft: Yes. Now this one Brian spotted. Brian takes care of the greenhouse and he knows all about these things. And he spotted this. Somebody was selling all the plants out of his garden, so people were going down and buying them, and they'd have to dig out their own. So Brian brought a friend down, and I guess it took three of them to handle this thing. They put blankets and stuff around it--it's pretty complicated.

And then we had it all staked up nicely for a year or two and then Brian said, "I think it's probably taken root and we can undo it," and the next day it was down. Poor Mario and his friend, these two men had to push it up. And I think it's leaning now a little again. They propped it [laughs]. I don't know if we're ever going to be able to take the props away.

Riess: When it fell over it didn't have roots?

Bancroft: Oh, it had roots. It had the roots it had when we planted it. But it was just too top-heavy and they hadn't taken hold yet. You'd think in a couple of years it would have taken hold.

Riess: What bed are we in now?

Bancroft: We're still in 2.

Riess: Oreocereus celsianus.

Bancroft: That's one of the commonest ones of that group, but it's a very pretty one.

See, this is all new growth it made since we planted it.

Riess: How was it advertised, the sale?

Bancroft: I think he heard about it at the Cactus and Succulent Society meeting. I haven't been going to those, but he goes to both the San Francisco and the Oakland clubs. In fact, he lectures--. He's taken a lot of pictures of aloes, and he has an aloe lecture that he gives, slides, and he has another one just about things in this garden, assorted things. I think he gives other talks too. He's very knowledgeable.

He was thinking it would be nice to make a book with pictures of the garden that we could sell. Now that may be too expensive or too difficult. We haven't looked into that. But every week when he comes he looks around for something in bloom. Most of his pictures are closeups of flowers. He doesn't go for vistas or that sort of thing much. But I think he would have plenty to select from.

Riess: Ocotillo. Is there more?

Bancroft: I've tried any number, but I just can't seem to get them to grow. But I have one growing here. The one next to it, you see, has given up. That one is one of many I've planted, but the others all have died.

Riess: Why is that?

Bancroft: I don't know.

Riess: In the desert they grow very widely spaced. Maybe there is too much competition here.

Bancroft: It might be.

Bed 1

Bancroft: See, this is bed 1, and I put a lot of the white woolly ones in here. But a lot of them--. Most of these I cover in the winter, and even then I lost most of them. All this was planted, and they're all gone.

Riess: I see three varieties, four, five.

Bancroft: This lower one--. This was covered, but it started to rot inside, so I had to cut that out, and these were pieces that I took from it and planted separately. So this is one plant still with many stems.

Riess: Very tightly wrapped wool. Espostoa nana.

Bancroft: [counting] Six, seven, eight, nine--there are ten or twelve left in here.

I wish these chilopsis flowers wouldn't drop and dry on them.

Riess: And if you wanted to hybridize one, that is through the flower. Has that ever happened, or have you worked for that? For seed?

Bancroft: No, I haven't had any seedlings. And a lot of these are different families.

Bed 12

Bancroft: This is bed 12 and I have mostly the different kinds of barrels in here. I cover most of these in winter, each with a foot-square frame. Ferocactus stainsii var. pringlei. And this is a beautiful one. Ferocactus glaucescens.

Riess: From "Hel."

Bancroft: Helen's was a nursery I sent to. She was in Texas. I never met her, but I bought things from her for a number of years.

You see some of the damage here. That side [of a barrel cactus] is all gone. I should discard it. It may stay alive, but it doesn't look very nice. But I hate to get rid of it. I lost two or three like that. You know, it doesn't always show too much on some of them, so I'm leaving them.

Riess: This is mostly barrels.

Bancroft: Yes, and some Opuntias in the back, and a few agaves.

Riess: Are any of these twenty years old?

Bancroft: Oh yes.

Riess: And they would have started out how big?

Bancroft: Maybe this big [about three inches across].

These two have been in here quite a long time. That one is completely gone, but it's so beautiful, I don't want to take it out. I've never seen it available, except the once when I bought it. If I could find another I'd love it.

Riess: Ferocactus emoryi var. rectispinus.

Bancroft: Now that one is in trouble. See all the brown on the side of it. It was probably the cold that did that. It just sort of froze part of the edge. Almost killed that one. And I suspect that one over there is dead. I hadn't seen that.

Riess: Datura metaloides.

Bancroft: Yes, and it seeds like mad. I just have hundreds of them. I planted this down near the entrance and it didn't get all that much water, and the plant just stayed about a couple of feet wide. And then I put a piece up here, and with some water--. There are only two plants in here. It just spreads all over, and makes seeds all over. But it's sort of pretty. And I think it has some fragrance.

The Greenhouse

Riess: Who did this greenhouse design?

Bancroft: I had it done by a greenhouse company, Agra Tech in Pittsburg. They do a lot of big greenhouses. But I had them design it differently so I could open the sides and get better ventilation. And then half of the roof lifts up for ventilation. It's on a thermostat, so when it gets too hot it lifts up.

Riess: It's arranged in here in an artful way. Lovely.

Bancroft: These are all aloes, all through the center, and down at the end. And then these are the cactus from this country and Mexico, and the cactus over on the other side are from South America.

Riess: Are these rare?

Bancroft: Not always rare, but they are tender to the winter, so that they wouldn't survive the winter.

Riess: You know that from experience?

Bancroft: Yes, and from their reputation. Or else if I just have one of a plant--. I try to have a duplicate of what's in the garden, so that that isn't my one and only that goes out in the garden. The only trouble is that I lost all my duplicates back in the greenhouse. It got too cold. So I don't have all of them.

Riess: What accounts for the muted greens, rather than brighter greens.

Bancroft: Well, that is partly because Brian likes to underwater [the aloes] to get those colors out. If we watered those more generously they would all be equally green. Some might be a little pinker, but you wouldn't have that contrast.

Riess: Is this area burglar-alarmed.

Bancroft: No, I just have a padlock.

Outside Again

Bancroft: This is where the dividing fence will go, here. We wanted it to follow the oleanders, but the city wants it to go straight through. "A line should be straight."

Riess: That hasn't been resolved.

Bancroft: No, not yet.

Riess: But you will triumph. The fence will be so high that people cannot see over?

Bancroft: I think there is a limit of six feet, the way all these are. That was the limit then. Anyone could jump over if they want. Over there we were going to cut the oleander way back, and put the fence right up against it, and then let the oleander grow out through it. We'd have a chain link or something like that.

Riess: This article [in California Horticultural Journal] was in about 1977. The garden was five years old. ["A Desert in the City," by Owen Pearce.]

Bancroft: [looking at picture] My goodness, how could it get that big in five years. Maybe the photographer was crouched down!

I lost all of those, of course. [potted jade trees at either side of entrance]

Riess: Notocactus leninghausii [looking at caption in article].

Bancroft: Except it isn't that. He got the name wrong there.

Riess: What is this, lying here? [bed 12]

Bancroft: That poor little thing. I have the original plant up there, and it looked sort of burned and scraggly. So I thought maybe it's because there's too much sun there. So I put a piece here and it's no better. In fact something is eating it all up. Just one good shoot.

Riess: Echinocereus gentryi. What is "M.Z.?"

Bancroft: That is Millie Zink.

Riess: Does the gardener come along and clean out the pine needles periodically, or do you leave them for mulch?

Bancroft: Periodically, but it will be this way in three or four days after we've cleaned it. So we just do it periodically.

Riess: By hand?

Bancroft: He has a blower, but he has to do a lot of hand picking. This needle is so long it catches in things and it is harder to get out.

Riess: Do you regret putting the pine in?

Bancroft: No, I love this pine.

Riess: This area looks newly worked.

Bancroft: Yes, this is new, that's new.

Riess: These handsome barrels at the entrance.

Bancroft: Yes. I just put plastic over them, plastic frames. I think they are pretty hardy. I keep wondering if they are rotting anywhere and I don't know about it. Because you know they rot from the inside out often. You can just have a shell there and not be aware of it. So I hope they are alright.

Riess: What is that tree?

Bancroft: That is an acacia, and that was very bad. These are shoots that came from the base, so it did come back.

Riess: When is the last time you visited Western Hills?

Bancroft: I went back last year, when Marshall was still alive. He was very friendly as usual. We walked around, and he showed me everything in the garden, and that was nice.

Riess: Good. I was beginning to feel that you don't get away from here often enough.

Bancroft: Well, I don't. That was about the only time I took a day. A friend took me up, and we went to that and one other nursery.

[walking outside entrance] There are two agaves that are both finishing blooming. They bloomed at the same time. And it shows the two types of bloom that agaves have. You see, one is the tall, single one, and the other is the candelabra effect. And here they are right next to each other.

Riess: The tall single one is Agave ferdinandi-regis x lechuguilla. A cross. I know I don't have a name on the other one.

Will this area be in the conservancy?

Bancroft: Yes. Kathy will have a right of way to use this drive, and she will have a gate at each end.

V WORKING WITH THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY, CONTINUED

[Interview 4: February 10, 1992]##

Replacing Ferns

Riess: You were saying that because today was so wet you were at your desk, ordering plants. This garden has taken on the importance of a museum. It's startling to realize that you have to keep adding to it.

Bancroft: Oh, yes, every year I do. Of course a lot of them just stay in pots. They aren't for the garden, they aren't to be planted out. A lot of them I keep in the greenhouse, because they are tender. And I lost a lot of things, so I'm starting over again on that, too. Mostly succulents, and some cacti.

It's discouraging, really, because a lot of them I can't find in catalogues. They are rare, and they don't carry them. Some of these things will show up infrequently or never.

Riess: I remember thinking before that there should be some kind of network of exchange.

Bancroft: I don't know who they would be, really. I just don't know the people. And some of these plants will appear--. Well, especially when I used to visit nurseries I would notice that several nurseries would have the same thing, and it would be something you hadn't seen for a long time, and then when they were sold out, that's it! They all buy from the same person, and when it's sold out, you won't find it for a while. The growers grow some other things.

Riess: It's always a grower that supplies that plants?

Bancroft: No, some nurseries raise their own. Or they get them from growers who raise a lot of them, and then they distribute them to nurseries who buy from them.

Riess: What do the growers start from?

Bancroft: From seed. Oh, yes. Especially now that they aren't allowed to collect, they are supposed to do everything from seed. And I think the good ones do. There may be some who still collect, although they shouldn't. There is always that.

Riess: Do you have what it takes around here to grow from seed?

Bancroft: Oh, yes, if I had the time. I used to--. A lot of these big things in the garden I grew from seed long ago, but I just don't have time now.

Riess: Does it make a better plant?

Bancroft: It just depends. If you are comparing it to collected plants, a lot of those may be damaged because they're growing out in the wild and things happen to them. Whereas if you grow that one from seed you might have a more perfect plant. But that really isn't the main purpose of their requiring it. Places have been over-collected. They've cleaned out entire areas. And that's what they are trying to prevent.

Riess: So you need a rainy day.

In the Public Eye

Riess: I hear you are going to be on television tonight.

Bancroft: Yes, and I am curious to know what they've kept, because they came Friday, and spent most of the morning. They came at nine, and it was a little before noon when they left. So they've got all of that stuff that they've got to weed through, and choose two minutes worth. So it will be interesting to see what they do.

Riess: What did you do with them? Wander through the garden?

Bancroft: Yes, we wandered through the garden and they asked me questions about things.

Riess: Sounds like a familiar activity. [laughter]

I wonder what it's like for you to be catapulted into this kind of public eye.

Bancroft: It's hard for me, because I've always been hesitant about talking. I've told you this before. So I was sort of concerned, but it went a little easier than I thought it might.

Riess: Maybe because you've done a lot of it lately.

Bancroft: Never for tv, though. People didn't have to see me at least.
[laughs]

Riess: They probably won't keep the footage of you bending double to read plant labels.

Bancroft: I told them not to ask me, "What's the name of that one?" Because even though I know it as well as anything, I'll go blank. I do, when people say, "What's the name of that one?" So they didn't do that to me.

Riess: It's been a long time since I've seen you--months ago, last September.

Bancroft: And you've done so many things, and I've just been here the whole time.

Riess: What have you learned about the garden since September 6th when we met and walked around? You were planting and replanting a lot of sections then. And there were a lot of questions of survival.

Bancroft: Yes, and just last week I noticed one that I hoped had pulled through, and it's going. They're still going. The root is affected, and it finally just gives out.

Riess: And you would have thought that by now--

Bancroft: They would have died if they were going to, yes.

Riess: What about the great yucca that was suspended from the truck when I was here? Is it in the ground?

Bancroft: Oh yes, we planted that. But of course these things last so long just lying out in the dirt that you just can't tell if it's alive. It looks alive, but you never can tell for a long time.

Riess: Any surprises in the garden?

Bancroft: Nothing particularly good. A few more things have died back more, so that if they survive it will be just around the base. And for trees that's no good, you know. Instead of a nice

And for trees that's no good, you know. Instead of a nice trunk you've got a lot of little tiny shoots coming out all around the thing, and you can't make a tree out of that.

Master Planning: John Northmore Roberts and Associates

Riess: I know you have selected a master planner for the garden. And I want to talk about that in a minute. But is the intention in this garden to keep it exactly as it was originally designed by you and Lester Hawkins? Is the historical garden the 1972 garden?

Bancroft: I asked them not to change the central part of the garden.

Riess: But what of the case of the tree that died back?

Bancroft: Oh, well, you can't replace--you have to keep changing. I mean, I do too. There's nothing holding anyone to anything as far as variety goes. No, that's just a matter of what's available. And you can change your mind. There's nothing historical about what's been planted. It's just a lot of them were things I liked!

Riess: Have you planted things you haven't liked, that you have discarded?

Bancroft: Not many things, because I knew what they were. A few things I decided were in the wrong place, or they got too crowded because they all got too big. Some things I have taken out because they were planted when they were in sun, and then the trees have grown and shaded them, so they didn't do well. That's something that happens. It happens in every garden. You can't keep it the way it has been, you've got to keep changing.

Riess: Tell me about the firm that was chosen, John Northmore Roberts.

Bancroft: The main thing they're doing is planning the parking and the new building for--well, the visitor center, you might call it. And we're going to have to have room for a bus turnaround. We told them we'll never have more than two busses, but occasionally we have two busses. Then there has to be visitor parking. We had said twenty-eight originally, and now we decided we can do with--there just isn't room down there--parking for twenty-two.

They're coming tomorrow. They had made one plan--we had one meeting with them, with their plans, and discussed them, and it seems to me I didn't like most of the things the way they had been planned. So we've told them what we would like, and they are coming tomorrow with new ideas.

Riess: Who is "we?"

Bancroft: The committee. There are five of us.

Riess: They agree?

Bancroft: Oh yes, we've discussed it.

Riess: Who is the committee? This is the Bancroft Garden Conservancy Committee? Who is on it now?

Bancroft: Well, of course, Dick Turner.

Riess: And Russ Beatty.

Bancroft: Yes, those are the two that are controlling it most, because that's their business.

Riess: They are the committee that selected John Northmore Roberts?

Bancroft: Yes. The same five people.

Riess: What was their first approach to the planning?

Bancroft: Well, my idea was to get an architect to do it, a landscape person. But they said you can't do it that way, you have to open it out to a long list of people who are professionals, and then they submit applications. I didn't know any of these people by name, but they did.

They chose five, and then each of those submitted a book an inch thick with pictures, all about them, pictures of work they had done, resumes. We looked them over and went to see a few of their things. A lot of their work is not in the area, so I couldn't see it. I was saying I'd like to see the work of these people. But in some cases we couldn't because it hasn't been close enough to see. But we did see Roberts's, and one or two others.

Actually Dick [Turner] and Russ Beatty have been doing the deciding. I felt that his work was too formal for what I want. It was beautifully done, for a formal house, formal garden, and I was afraid that that was what they would do for me, because

that was their style. I told Dick this right from the start, and he agreed with me, but he said, they could do whatever style I wanted.

Well, I can't feel quite that way. I think people have their own style, and if this is the way they do it, it's going to be hard for them to do another style. Anyway, this is what happened. They did a very formal thing, and I said, that isn't what I want. So, now they are tackling it again, and we'll see what happens, tomorrow.

It's taken a year or two, and I don't have that much time. I wish we'd just get moving better.

Riess: All they have to do is plan the circulation and parking and design the building.

Bancroft: Yes, they're not doing the detail work of the actual planting. They're saying there should be something tall, maybe, they might do that much, but they're not doing the detail work.

Riess: This is where the planting will be up against the building?

Bancroft: They haven't gotten to that, really. They're looking at the building itself, and where to put it. They had put half of it under the oak tree, but I told them--I don't think it's even allowed, but it wouldn't be safe anyway. So they're having to make some changes like that, too.

Riess: It would be nice if the visitor center looked like the other buildings on the property.

Bancroft: Yes, I said I'd like to have the feeling of the gazebo. (I have to learn to call it that, not a folly, but I don't think a gazebo ever has wings on it.) But I wanted to have that feeling in it. I've told Dick that, and I don't think he wants that too much. And I told him again, and he said he would try to get them to have more of that feeling.

What they did in the first design was sort of early California adobe, a long wall with they said maybe tile roof, that sort of thing. Which I like, but I just don't feel I want it here. So Dick said maybe they could make it of different materials, like wood instead of the adobe. So, we'll see.

Riess: Are decisions being made about the actual garden? The four acres of garden stay intact?

Bancroft: The center part will stay intact, but around the edges, from say the fountain, between the center and the road, needs a lot done to it, and we can work on that. One of their schemes was to put parking all along that strip, because of the sound; it's undesirable because of the sound, the traffic sound. But they took out so many good things to do that, we all agreed it wouldn't do there. So, we're back to where we started, down in that far corner.

Riess: I'm glad you are having all this input, and it's really for you. In a way you could have pulled back and left it to these "experts" to decide.

Bancroft: No, because if I did that I think they'd take out a lot of plants I want to keep. I thought it was a big space down there--you know, we gave this extra piece for that--but I guess it isn't all that big.

The Conservancy and Other Friends

Riess: In the House and Garden article about the Garden Conservancy and Frank Cabot ["Champion of the Garden"], it said that Penelope Hobhouse was the person who recommended that Frank Cabot look at your garden.

Bancroft: Yes.

Riess: Did you know her?

Bancroft: She came on one of the tours is all, she came with a group. I'm not sure which one she was. I know her name, of course. I don't remember that anyone introduced me individually.

Riess: So you didn't register that.

Bancroft: No, I didn't, and I would have. I just can't understand that.

Riess: When was Frank Cabot last here?

Bancroft: He was here briefly, not too long ago. But I really didn't get a private conversation with him. I think he was mostly meeting with the Friends [of the Ruth Bancroft Garden] group. He went to their meeting, and then he came later in the afternoon, and the committee discussed a few things. Then he had to dash off to a dinner up north. So he was rushing awfully fast that day.

Riess: Have you ever had a long, long talk with him?

Bancroft: No, mostly with Antonia [Adezio]. She came recently too. Last week. She's the one who is trying to urge them to do the kind of building I want. She said I should decide. After all, it's my garden, and they should be telling me what they want to do. [laughs]

Riess: You need allies.

Bancroft: Oh, there have been no conflicts or arguments.

Riess: I mean someone on the committee who really sees it the way you see it.

Bancroft: Antonia tried to show Dick how I wanted it, and I think he's trying to work on it.

And a good friend of mine is coming on the committee, Kay Rosso.

Riess: Is she from Walnut Creek?

Bancroft: No, she lives in Moraga. She is active in Heather Farm. She used to get a lot of my plants, my surplus, to take to Heather Farm [for their sale]. She's a gal who gets a lot done, she just seems to know how to organize things. She said she'd be glad to be on the committee. She hasn't come to any meetings because this was very recent.

Riess: Did you ask her?

Bancroft: I asked Dick if she could be on. He said, "Fine," so I assume she'll be coming.

Riess: I also see that Smith & Hawken are corporate members of the Garden Conservancy, and that Paul Hawken is on the Advisory Committee. How has he been involved?

Bancroft: I have never met him. That was done through Dick, probably.

We have a new publicity lady.

Riess: Mady Jones?

Bancroft: Yes. She came to our last meeting, and she came Friday when they were filming. She seems very good. Do you know her?

- Riess: No. I only spoke with her on the telephone about the tv filming. How has the Friends of the Ruth Bancroft Garden group developed?
- Bancroft: They have gotten one together here in Walnut Creek, and they helped at our last party with the refreshments. But I think Mady is going to extend it into San Francisco and that area, try to, and get more people on it.
- Riess: That means you will be on the speaking tour in San Francisco.
- Bancroft: Well, I don't go to their meetings or anything, you know. That's all theirs. I just saw them when they came here. They came as a group once to see the garden first. And then they came and helped with that party in September. And that's it so far.
- Riess: Well, the garden does have a life of its own, without you. But on the other hand, one of the promotional pieces of literature uses the phrase "Help Keep Ruth's Dream Alive." Very personal.
- Bancroft: Yes, and I think that was a good thing to say.
- Riess: To that extent it suggests you be there to express the personal dream.
- Bancroft: Oh, I couldn't go to their meetings too. Also I think they're trying to raise money for it, and I couldn't help them with that. And they have met me; I've met some of them before. So I don't see any reason that I should go to their meetings.
- Riess: It feels awkward?
- Bancroft: It would just take that much more time. I haven't gotten much gardening done these last few years, I really haven't, because of the other things, like meetings, people coming to ask about all sorts of things, or to check on the garden. And the garden is showing it, a lot of it is falling apart.
- Riess: Is it really true that the garden is "falling apart?"
- Bancroft: Yes, it really is. I can see it definitely, because I don't have the time to fuss here and there, and decide about plantings and things. I don't know, I'm slow about that, and it takes me a while to decide, and I just haven't had the time to think about it.
- Riess: Even keeping up with the weeding?

Bancroft: Yes. I do some of the weeding, because gardeners don't see many of the weeds.

Riess: Who is working here now?

Bancroft: I still have Mario, and I have Martin, who started last year, and I think he will be good. He's in Mexico for the winter, which is fine, because there isn't that much work to do now. And he'll be back. And then I have Jim working in the old garden; he isn't working down there.

Riess: He's working in the perennial garden?

Bancroft: Yes.

Riess: I wonder if a Mexican gardener understands the dry garden plants better.

Bancroft: They might. But you know, gardening is a separate thing, and most people, and I suppose most Mexicans, don't notice plants too much, unless they happen to live out in the country where they see them growing.

Riess: This is the first time I've been here when the garden has its polyethylene decorations.

Bancroft: Yes. And Dick thinks we shouldn't put those on because it looks so awful, and people might be coming to see the garden. He thought we should plant all the things that are covered in one area and then just cover it as a unit, which would be a lot easier.

I told him they just won't go together; there's one here and there's one there, and so forth, and you can't just lump them all. So I hope I'll talk him out of that. It does look badly, and we could replace some of those frames with better-looking ones. But I do have to have a variety of sizes, and that's the thing that looks so strange.

Riess: They're not so bad. They are sort of intriguing, mysterious shapes in the garden. It makes sense that you couldn't lump them all together.

Bancroft: It takes a long time to put them on. But you have your gardeners, and you have to keep them busy all year, you can't just let them go for the fall and winter when things are letting up.

Of course, they'll probably keep Mario on. I hope so. I expect they will, because he's been here so long. He knows how to do a lot of the things. And then they'll have their volunteers.

Riess: Who will be in charge of the volunteers?

Bancroft: I suppose someone will have to be in charge, in general, of the garden. I don't know how they're going to work that out.

Riess: Is there any talk of starting someone?

Bancroft: We aren't ready yet. They really wouldn't have anything to do yet. I think we have to get our visitor's center and parking and all of that stuff organized first.

Riess: Did the John Northmore Roberts people have any more advanced ideas for protecting the plants than what you have here?

Bancroft: We haven't discussed it.

Riess: It's true that landscape architects don't necessarily know a lot about plants.

Bancroft: We've known that a long time. [laughs] A friend of mine in a nursery said if he got an order to fill he knew which landscape architect it was--I may have told you this--he knew whose it was, because of the plants. They use the same things every time. And I can understand that, because most people don't want to be bothered taking care of their garden, and they want something that is tough and takes little care. When you require that, you're limited in the number of plants you can use. So I can understand why this happens.

Riess: Sounds like an argument for using more native plants.

Bancroft: Yes, but you know they aren't all that easy, by any means.

Local Support

Riess: What came of the open house in September? Did that net new memberships?

Bancroft: It got some. Not all that many. I've forgotten what the number is. Dick knows. People will be interested, but becoming a member is another thing.

Riess: It has not become the socially correct thing to do out here in Walnut Creek?

Bancroft: Oh no, most people out here still don't know about it. Although the Friends are gals who are in a lot of these things, you know, so they may make it more so.

Riess: Is funding in place for the visitor's center?

Bancroft: No, it is not. The Rotary Club, the Walnut Creek Rotary Club, informed us that they are going to make our garden the subject of their donation this year. Well, they have a fundraising party, which is next month.

I just got the letter today. It's black tie and they have an auction, and dance--a dinner, auction, and dance. I can't remember being to one of these. But anyway, that's when they raise their money. And they said it might be from five to ten thousand dollars which we'll be getting, which would be a great help. But you know building it will just be a start.

Riess: That's great, and it will give it that social push.

Bancroft: Yes, well--. Phil had been president of Rotary in the old days, so a lot of them still remembered him. I feel very flattered that they are doing it this year. Phil got them to do it one of the years that he was active for the Heather Farm, to get a room there. So that's very nice.

Riess: What do they auction off?

Bancroft: Oh, trips.

Riess: They could auction off a dance with you.

Bancroft: That would be something. Phil and I [tape ends, but she explains that he didn't dance].

##

Replacing Plants. Spreading the Word

Riess: Thinking about the plants you want to replace, what if you sent out a letter to the botanical gardens and places with good

collections of succulents and cacti so that you could find a source of replacement plantings.

Bancroft: They don't know anything about me! I'm just another one of hundreds of plant collectors.

Riess: How can you think of yourself that way if this garden is the chief project of the Garden Conservancy?

Bancroft: I think a lot of people haven't even heard of the Garden Conservancy. I mean, we're just starting.

Riess: It would be a way of becoming known.

Bancroft: Well, Dick told me to make a list of some special things that I'd lost and I would like to get, and he may be able to locate some of them for me. But you know, it's such a long list, it's pages, and pages, and pages, and where do I start? I'd like any of them.

You know, I haven't even quite finished listing the plants in each bed. Well, there's really only one bed that's not that important left. But I've been at it all year, listing the plants, seeing what died and what survived. So they will have an idea of which plants survived--of course, we'll never have this condition again, for a long time--but which survived, and which didn't.

Riess: Are you computerized yet?

Bancroft: No, I've just got a little notebook. They will, but you see, my son Peter was saying that we should find out what kind of computer they have in New York headquarters so that we have something compatible when we do get one. There are so many computers, and they keep changing them. So that's another thing, that when we have an office then we can have a computer and put things on it. [sighs]

You know, I asked Frank Cabot when he was out here last. He said, "I don't know, they keep changing them."

Relations with the City of Walnut Creek

Riess: When I was here for a garden meeting there was a representative from the Trust for Public Land, Elizabeth Byers. What is the relationship of that group to your garden?

Bancroft: I think legally they are helping us, when we have problems.

Riess: Are you having legal problems?

Bancroft: The city [Walnut Creek] is just stalling. They keep requiring things. They said if we want to keep this curved dividing line we would have to provide a plan of how this place could be subdivided if the family has to give up this property and home. In other words, if everything was cleaned off, how would it be subdivided.

So Peter [Bancroft] has been working on that, as if there was nothing left here. And he said that the main problems he had--there was a little problem of this one lot going to be quite deep because it couldn't be divided into two because you got at it from the front--but he said most of the problems were on the back part that we aren't even concerned with. So, he's been drawing up those plans for them.

This house is probably a little too tall, so we would have to get a special something or other to keep from taking off the top floor of this house. We could get it, but it's just one of these nuisance things, ridiculous! And they wanted the houses that are on this place, if we decided to keep them, each set on a separate lot. Well, you know how they're grouped. You can't put a square around each house. It's just almost childish!

Peter spent a lot of time on this. And he said he finally brought most of the plans in on Friday. Again!

Riess: When they okay them, you can go ahead.

Bancroft: Yes, but they're saying it will take longer, and we want to have something settled before the big thing in April, you know, the party.

The 8th of April--Angela Lansbury

Riess: The party? Tell me about that.

Bancroft: Oh, well, Angela Lansbury will be coming for a day. She'll be flying up with her husband, and son, probably, from Los Angeles, and staying in the city. Then she'll come over here to meet me.

Then--and this is another way to sell tickets for the luncheon that will be in the city [Walnut Creek]--then she will give a little talk. I understand we have to write her speech for her. [laughing] Somebody's going to have to write it for her. But it should attract a lot of people, just to see her.

In the afternoon they'll have the larger donors here to meet her. And it will be in the garden. But, you know, the 6th of April can be cold and wet. And I have to have all these covers off the plants by then. I usually take them off about that time, when the danger of frost is over--it depends on the year. So we have to rush and get all that off. And maybe all these people have to be in the house if it rains. It's going to be a day!

Riess: She comes first to say hello, and meet the press. Then where is the luncheon?

Bancroft: In Walnut Creek, the new Hofmann Theater.

So, that's going to be a very busy and important day.

Riess: And you'll have a troop of people helping.

Bancroft: Yes, here's where the Friends will come in. They'll probably provide the refreshments in the afternoon.

Riess: Angela Lansbury, what fun! The speech-writer can make a few nice allusions to Cabot Cove. Do you watch "Murder she Wrote?"

Bancroft: She's the only one I watch regularly. I hate most of these programs that they have, but I like her.

Riess: It will be hard not to imagine yourself on television when you greet her--"Jessica Fletcher, the mystery writer!"

Bancroft: "I've read your books!"

She has been almost a lifelong friend to Frank Cabot's wife. That's why we got her. She is an honorary chairman of the Garden Conservancy.

Riess: And they guarantee that she will be on the plane that day?

Bancroft: Well, it's her own plane. See, they fly up in their own plane, and then she leaves the next day for Scotland, where they have a place. So she's just squeezed this in.

But I wish they'd have things here when the garden is nice. They have it in November, or April, and this is when it's all in winter.

Riess: When is prime time?

Bancroft: From late April on. Anyway, it's the only time they could get her.

Riess: Have you met her before?

Bancroft: No. Several times she thought she might come to one of our occasions, but she never did.

Riess: Will the Cabots be here that day?

Bancroft: Yes. I think Frank will lead her around.

Riess: Ideally the plans for the visitor center would be in final form to show them.

Bancroft: We hope so. One of the women on the committee's husband is very prominent in the city. She thought maybe he could speak for us. But Peter felt they shouldn't interfere with the city's doing this, at first. He works for the county, and he said they don't like having someone come in and tell them what to do. He knows how they react.

Riess: Is that Bob Shroeder?

Bancroft: Yes. Peter said now that he has everything in, there's no reason why he shouldn't try to push things along. But he felt at first that somebody shouldn't until we got further along.

Riess: What will the iris garden be like on April 6th?

Bancroft: There will be nothing. It might be in bud. But they bloom in late April. Occasionally a few in the middle of April. But April 6th, that's too early for anything.

And the roses come at the same time. Of course they're not meant to be interested in this part of the garden. They're meant to be interested in the other part. But many of those things won't be blooming yet. And there is bloom on things in the summer.

Looking at the Future

Riess: I wonder if it would be a good idea to have another article in Pacific Horticulture soon about the garden. I see that George Waters is on the national Garden Conservancy board. The article by Owen Pearce was quite a while ago.

Bancroft: Yes, Owen used to come over now and then to see the garden. But there weren't many people who came to look at it, you know. It was just my garden then.

Riess: Will they say anything about visiting the garden when they air the piece about you on KPIX?

Bancroft: You know, this is the problem, because we aren't organized yet. Our plans are to have it open with docents, say Fridays and Saturdays, with people making appointments first, so we can control the numbers. It helps to organize it, because you know I've spent a lot of time taking people around, two people, or three, whenever they've wanted to come.

And then we would have other times for larger groups. Because some clubs have their meeting on a certain day. So there would be exceptions for them. But we have to get the docent business organized first. We aren't ready for this yet.

As a matter of fact, we had a few docents at the last big party. Most of them were friends who came, and Dick and Wayne told them a few things. So they could take people around. So it's beginning, but we really aren't organized.

Riess: I get so frustrated for you! Are you just seething under the surface?

Bancroft: Well, I don't know how we could get further along until certain things are accomplished, which they aren't, yet. And of course we don't have our money yet. We have enough to get the plans ready, and they wanted to be able to show them at the Landscape Show in San Francisco. We've always had a little booth, and they'd like to be able to show the plans, even though we might change them some afterwards. But they want something to show people, so we can get our plans pretty well organized. But as far as building, that's another matter.

Riess: You've had a booth at the Landscape Show at Fort Mason?

Bancroft: Yes.

Riess: And memberships are offered?

Bancroft: Yes, they give out brochures, with a few pictures of the garden, and plants, that sort of thing. And they get a few memberships through that. Not all that many.
##

Riess: [Ruth Bancroft comments that Phil Bancroft photographed the garden over the years]

You left them as slides? Or were they printed?

Bancroft: Some may have been printed. Dick keeps them. He got them from Brian [Kemble]. I didn't realize Dick had them until the other day when he was showing them to the architects, three or four pictures from the very beginning. It showed the Folly when it was just partially built.

SF Magazine had a very good article about the garden [January 1990]. They used photographs made by a man from the east, Mick Hales, who came for a weekend to photograph the garden. The editor of SF Magazine, Sharon Lee Ryder, said they bought the pictures, and she said after the article came out they would give me the originals. But she never did! Earlier, Paula Deitz, who works for the New York Times, a very nice person who wrote the article, brought her out one day, and so I met her, and she said she was going to be starting this magazine.

Looking at the Garden

Riess: [Looking out the window at eucalyptus trees blowing in the wind] The eucalyptus make a nice background, that dark line in the distance.

Bancroft: I would be glad if they would all take them out. I have no particular love of them. And every time we have a wind it takes two or three days to clean the leaves out of this garden, it's just solid with eucalyptus leaves and bark.

Riess: Are bird and insect life here essential to the well-being of your garden?

Bancroft: I don't know if it's essential. They say a lot of them pollinate, but I don't know if we have the right ones doing the pollinating. We don't begin to have the birds here we used to

have. And as for butterflies, we seldom see one, and we used to have swarms of them all over the place. But I think this has happened in a lot of places; I've heard other people say the same thing about butterflies.

Riess: It's not just the lack of your orchards?

Bancroft: No, it's the houses around that I think are causing the problem.

Riess: But when I look out at that mimosa, I think every hummingbird must know about it.

Bancroft: Yes, and we still have a lot of hummingbirds. You know, they love the red flowers, and so many of the aloes have the red tube, and that's their favorite thing.

Riess: Do you enjoy the garden in that way, just wandering and appreciating nature?

Bancroft: Yes, I do, I feel relaxed in it. I seldom just wander, I'm always looking to see what to do. But it relaxes me.

Riess: Do you manage to be surprised by your garden each year?

Bancroft: I am. You never know just what's going to bloom when, during the summer. And a lot of the bloom just lasts a day, or possibly two days. It's interesting to see what there is, and catch it before it's gone.

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Appendix A

THE FIRST YEAR OF RUTH BANCROFT'S GARDEN
AS TRANSCRIBED FROM HER WRITTEN "RECORD"

August 21, 1971

Margaret Frost invited me to a tour with the Rock Plant Society, which visited two gardens. Mrs. Roderick's near Sebastapol, and the Western Hills Rare Plant Nursery of Lester Hawkins and Marshall Olbrich. I asked Lester if he designed gardens.

August 24

Lester came down to see the walnut orchard where we wanted the new succulent garden.

September 7

The preliminary plans arrived.

September 16

Phil and I brought the plans to Occidental to discuss them and to see his trees that were in the plans, and his plant house, etc.

September 28

The new plans, with larger plant houses and extended areas arrived. ["Before" picture taken now, or next day.]

September 29

Lester arrived and planned around for gravel, sand, etc., stepping stones. He and Phil went to Burton's Nursery to see their soil, sand, etc., and ordered to come later: 12 yards screened topsoil, 6 yards peat soil. I had already engaged Mr. Cox to come the next day to bulldoze at \$18 an hour.

September 30

Bulldozer took out the walnut trees and lined them up along Bancroft Road. Meanwhile Lester and I measured out the approximate sizes of the mounds to be planted, the pool and the buildings, and staked the ends. Then he marked out the beds with a white line of gypsum.

Mr. Cox dug out a deep hole for the pool, and using this soil and what he could scrape up started making the mounds.

Burton's delivered the soil and peat and made several piles near the mounds. We took some photos that evening.

October 1

Bulldozer worked all day making mounds and mixing topsoil and piling it on mounds.

Pacific Cement and Aggregate delivered dark sharp sand which we put in piles by Burton's soil.

The bulldozer mixed the two piles and spread these mixes on topsoil.

On top of the topsoil, on the group of mounds near the oleander hedge intended for cacti the sharp sand was spread. The other mounds were not topped with this.

Pacific Cement Aggregates also brought two loads of 3/4" road rock and spread it 4" to 5" deep on the turnaround area. This will need a third load to be delivered Monday (Oct. 4).

Strangers are picking nuts from trees.

A boy on a bike asked if he could get some walnut wood and I told him to go ahead as we were going to put up a sign for free wood on the row of uprooted trees.

That evening people were sawing and chopping out wood.

October 2

Bulldozer worked all day and finished making the mounds and topping them with soil mix.

Lester left at noon.

People are cutting wood. No need to put up a sign.

October 3 (Sunday)

We took 2nd (3rd?) group of pictures.

October 5

John is wheelbarrowing manure from the pasture to a spot in the new garden where he can put it through the shredder.

October 6

John shredded the manure. A nice pile (not enough).

October 7

Bob Huntwork from J Spray in Orinda came to see about sterilizing the soil. We decided only the mounds needed to be done now with methyl bromide. First the mounds should be prepared as for planting. \$800.

October 9

Phil and I drove into Hayward to see the flagstones for the patio. There are seconds, of mixed thickness, size and color, but we ordered four pallets which come "as is."

October 11

Stakes placed at each spot where a walnut tree has been removed.

Skipped 2 that are under gravel or turnarounds; 3rd is probably under a mound; and 4th we couldn't locate. Found 23.

Pieces of roots and branches gathered up to discard.

Arizona Patio flagstone delivered.

October 19

Lester and John leveled off the two largest mounds somewhat; removed big hard dirt clods and widened beds some in the process. John can do the other mounds.

October 20

John is leveling mounds and removing large clods.

October 21

John spread the manure on Beds 6, 8, 9, 10, 11. Collected some more in pasture to grind.

I spent most of day figuring how to distribute plastic and how much to order.

Ordered a 40' x 100' roll, 6 mil.

Ordered 3-100# cylinders meth. br.

Ordered 52-1# cans meth br.

October 26

Gas delivered, without applicators. Plastic came before. Couldn't spread plastic because of wind.

October 27

Spread plastic and piled dirt around edges 8-9 A.M.

26 cans methyl bromide put into freezer.

John dug a 2 1/2'-3' deep hole where each walnut tree was removed. Finished 18 holes.

October 28

John dug rest of holes where walnut trees were. Wind came up yesterday afternoon. Plastic sheets were blowing so that we put lug boxes on top of lug boxes that were under the plastic. These were blown down. Then lug boxes of dirt, or sacks, were put down center. Also 4" heavy and long pipes, which were tossed around. Finally John took plastic off one side and rolled it up along the other side.

October 29

After two days of wind, today is calm. Mended dozens of holes in plastic with scotch tape and relaid it.

Last night I got applicator from Walter Vodden. After lunch, soil in beds is 51 degrees, and under plastic is 55 degrees. Put 16# methyl bromide under plastic of Bed 6a, in 8 or 9 places in all (on both sides).

Set stakes for houses.

Methyl bromide in holes where walnut trees had been. 1# cans of methyl bromide, in freezer 2 days, weren't frozen. So Phil put a bullet in a can that had been dropped in the hole, and John, with gas mask on, immediately filled the hole with dirt. M.b. squirted out, or up out of hole, often. Hit Phil several times. Each can should treat an area of 8' radius.

October 30

Electric line. Phil set three poles and ran line from house to site of garden houses.

November 1

Moved plastic to Bed 2 with lug boxers set on it. Soil temp is 55 degrees F. Applied 20# methyl bromide in 10 places. 2 kettles of boiling water poured at a time into coil of dispenser. Repeated once (as needed) when liquid starts coming out instead of gas.

November 3

A hot day.

Beds 3, 4, 5 done as above, under one plastic sheet.

November 5

Bed 9 done as above.

Phil has made a form, recently, to mold the thin boards over for the round roof.

November 8

Cooler--wind and overcast in P.M., after application. Beds 7a & 11 done as above.

November 10

Rain forecast, getting cloudy. Soil temp 55 degrees F. Beds 6b and 7b, done as above.

This should empty the third 50# cylinder out (50#, but we are 5# short on Bed 6b, so used 5-1# cans, dropping them in hot water first.)

Rain 18 hours after application. (A.M. before light)
Sprinkler layout arrived.

November 11, 12, 13

Rain

November 16

Plastic taken from above beds. Very windy. Got too windy to put on new beds, after cutting it up.

November 17

Plastic put on last Beds, 1, 8, 10, pile of mix 12. Soil a little too cool to treat it.

November 18

Peter applied 26 1# cans methyl bromide to above beds. (I had put a sack of walnuts in Bed 1 to get fumigated too). Very slow work compared to the 50# cylinders.

November 20

Plastic taken from above 4 beds. Now all the mounds have been treated.

December 1, 2, 3

Stepping stones brought by Peter from Jack Corcoran's and put with bought ones, to be used in path.

December 9

Sprinkler man came to see garden (from Automatic Rain Co. in W.C.)

December 15

Grass and weeds are coming up in treated mounds (from the manure here, as well as soil) and all the flat areas. The only mound without weeds is pile 12, which was bought for topping the beds. No manure on this pile.

December 24

Sprinkler materials estimate made. Papers left with us to check over.

December 28

Grass on mounds checked after 6 days of rain. Bed 1, 8, 10 and pile of mix 12 (all treated November 18) have almost no weeds--look clean. Soil was wet when treated.

Bed 7b looks cleaner of weeds, too.

January 21, 1972

Lester and John arrived just before noon, followed by 2 trucks of rocks and a hoist. The 3 drivers and one extra man, Lester and John, put each rock where Lester indicated. He and John quickly dug a hole in a mound and the rock was dropped into position. Took photos. Then we discussed laying the sprinkling system.

January 22, 28, 29, 30

John Wick set main lines for sprinklers. Rented a ditcher for a 1/2 day Jan. 22. Photos between Jan. 22 & Feb. 9.

February 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

John Wick worked on sprinkler

February 9

Phil is starting on greenhouses--staking for posts. Postholes dug a few days later. Posts put in creosote before being dropped into holes.

February 17

Lester brought a second batch of trees for the garden and set all of them out in the garden to see about best placement. Tom de Rosier

came with Lester. They and John da Rosa worked on placing rocks in the rock wall. As the rocks were set, soil mix from the pile made for this purpose was put between and behind the rocks. Then top sand was put on thick, and sedums and dudleyas planted in part. Lester plans to spread soil over the sand. (Grass and weeds are thick over the entire area by now. While working on the wall, they got dug in and may reappear later. Lots of chickweed.)

February 18

Lester, Tom, John Wicks and John da Rosa continued with rocks, etc.

February 19 (Saturday)

John Wicks worked until three on sprinklers. John da R., Phil and Kevin poured cement into postholes and set posts for two shade houses.

February 20 (Sunday)

Phil and Kevin put up some more of houses.

February 26, 27

John Wicks finished installing sprinkler on raised beds. Later he will do around the pool, and the rock garden by the shade houses. Phil and Kevin worked on the shadehouses. Took slides.

March 1

Phil and John da R. sprayed the weeds--mostly grass, chickweed. Peter took photos of potting area. Used one tank diesel oil and Sinox general and two tanks Paraquat.

February 29

John da R. filled in more trenches dug for the sprinkler. He spent another day or two previously doing this.

March 4

Four arches to west of the shade houses were erected by Phil, Kevin, and Rudy Salinas using a walnut shaker.

March 11

Two more arches put up. Also other work done on both units.

March 14

Morning glory seedlings by the hundreds coming up in Bed 1--one of the few beds where methyl bromide killed the weeds. Ben Hager says M.b. stimulated the growth of hard shell seeds. John hoed them off. Didn't get them.

March 15

I spent a couple of hours pulling morning glory seedlings from the mounds, mostly where soil had been dug out and then replaced for the

sprinkling system. There were few other weeds here. The other parts of the mounds are too weedy to see them. Most of the weeds are
 morning glory--still coming up
 chickweed--lots
 Indian lettuce [miners lettuce] (very little, at southern area)
 mustard--very little, as yet
 Poa annua

March 18

Photo of 7 & 8 arches going up.

March 25, or later

Last arches put up.

March 30

Lester came down to check on the shadehouses. 2 arches have gotten out of shape.

Phil and Kevin are still working every Saturday and Sunday on the shadehouses.

April 6, 7

Phil disced all he could get the rig to.

Got about 11 truckloads of soil, dumped free, from a swimming pool [Anthony Pools] being dug on Treat Lane. Put a load on each low spot, mostly where walnut trees had been removed. Dig More Co., San Ramon, 828-2181.

April 11, 12

Rain

April 13

Morning glory seedlings taken again from mounds. Seem to be in the more open areas. Also took big grass and some chickweed in parts of Bed 6 where they were only sparsely scattered, to clean off these areas so they needn't be sprayed with weedkiller. Now the beds clear of weeds are Beds 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10.

Bed 8 is the only one I have not weeded out the morning glory, and there are quite a lot of small seedlings.

April 14

Paraquat weedkiller used again.

New 8 gallon Ward's sprayer arrived yesterday.

John sprayed the weedy parts on the mounds, and on the flat, especially where it had not been disced. The disced parts are getting full of morning glory, but he skipped this.

Paraquat -- 1 T per gallon, 1/2 C. per tank.

Spreader -- X-77 (1/2 C + 3 T for 8 gallons) 1/4 C. per tank.

First tankful got only 1 T spreader in the tank by mistake.
This did area around Beds 1-5, and part of 6.)

Used 10 tankfuls = 80 gallons.

Took about 4 hours.

John moved some of the piled rocks so the disc can get into more places.

April 17

I phoned Harold A. Price & Co., Richmond. Had ad in phone book for rubber. Man came out in P.M. to estimate on installation

Paraquat has killed the weeds (except morning glory, not sprayed).

April 18

Butyl rubber for pool estimate is too high for us. Materials and installation (2 men, 3 days) \$1,325.

April 19, 20

John hoed dead weeds and grass from the mounds. I weeded morning glory again. Paraquat took tops only of the small plants of these.

April 24

Lester phoned Harold Price and decided on a cheaper lining for the pool, which he ordered. It should arrive in about two weeks.

April 25

Lester and Chris Haney arrive in middle of afternoon with a pickup full of plants. Marshall came with another load, and a third man with a third truckful.

April 26

10 A.M. Started work. Set cans in garden where they are to be planted.

Rented a posthole digger from Burton's and started digging holes and planting. Worked until dark. Nothing added to soil. Water put in hole and watering basin put around larger plants, and watered again. John da Rosa worked with them until 2 P.M.

April 27

John and Chris continued planting. Finished early P.M. Lester and I returned the posthole digger in mid-morning and looked for paint for the shadehouse. Salinas dug more holes with a pick, for plants ordered to arrive on Saturday, and finished at 2 P.M.

In P.M. Lester and Chris set stones in Furr Garden [refers to name of people whose house was in that location] so I can plant *sempervirens* here.

I picked up the paint at the Paint Blender on Locust St. Then Lester mixed some black with part of it so we have two shades of burnt red to use.

John and Chris left, with plants I had decided not to use.

April 28

John started setting 3 tall stakes around each shrub and tree that was planted, so they won't be stepped on or run over. Used old tree props, mostly.

April 29

John finished staking the trees.

Salinas and son Rudy finished putting watering cups around trees and watered them with tank truck.

Phil and Kevin started painting window frames and panels to see how they look--red.

I spent the day weeding all the mounds of more seedling morning glory and a few other weeds. I do this quite often.

Nelson Nursery order delivered here.

May 4

I tied the new trees that were crooked or leaning from the wind, to the 3 stakes set around each, or a separate stake by the trunk.

May 6

Morning glory seedlings weeded again from mounds. Took 4-5 hours. The first time for old plants to appear in mounds. Took a while to grow through to the surface. Only 5 or 6 so far.

May 7

John went over the new trees, adding soil and filling holes around the roots, where needed.

May 9

John put stakes at each sprinkler head and faucet to mark them for Kenny Soto when he levels the paths. He also smoothed off the pool bottom and sides in preparation for putting in the lining.

May 10

Hot. I tied the small trees that have been blown down and can't straighten up again.

May 11

Kenny Soto spent morning spreading piles of soil (dumped here April 7). Still hot.

May 12

Trees watered. Some with hose, some with tank truck. Hot. Clods that Kenny couldn't break were piled together in a few areas, and John set the sprinklers on them.

May 15

Morning glory seedlings removed from mounds again. Took 5 hours. Still hot.

May 17

Cooler now. Kenny Soto spent morning and part P.M. finishing the leveling. Left areas of (1) piled rocks to put into beds, (2) sand and mixed soil pile, (3) stacked stepping stones to be used in path. \$135 for both days.

I spent day planning where to plant Agaves, etc.

May 18

A.M. Bed 2. First succulent planting done here. John and I planted 3 kinds of tall cactus and several Agaves, from Ch. ["Ch" references are to former chrysanthemum beds, now herb garden] beds. Not watered.

Bed 7W. 2 Agave ferox (V)[Village Nursery, Lafayette] & (O-S) [Oaks-Schultz]

P.M. Lester arrived with a huge sheet of plastic pool lining that he picked up at Harold Price Co in Richmond. We put it loosely in the pool hole and partially filled it with water.

We discussed the Bed 6 shelter, and shadehouses. Decided to use green; instead of black and red paint, on the houses.

May 19

(Well pump quit. No water for 3 days.)

John dug planting holes for Nelson Nursery plants (I have been kept watered in the shade since delivery) and a few more that Lester brought here.

May 21

Phil took moving picture.

May 22

John planted things, trees and shrubs, out and watered them (6 or so left for later)

May 23

John started feeding things, as suggested by Walter Vodden.

1. have soil wet.
2. scatter 1/3 cup Ammonium sulphate in watering basin of a 5 gallon tree. Less for smaller ones.
3. water it in.
4. repeat in about 6 weeks.

(Not any on any succulents.)

Finished next day.

May 24

Pear tree props are in a huge pile in orchard across Bancroft Rd. Any day this last piece of orchard may be taken out and the props discarded, so John has been bringing some over here to use for a fence. It takes about 2 1/2 hours to sort out the better ones, load them on the flatbed truck, and stack them here.

He got a load or two a few days ago. Now spent today on it.

May 25

John spent today, also, on getting props.

I weeded morning glory seedlings.

Bed 2 planted Opuntia microdasys. (Had come up in an Agave pot)

Took URC [unrooted cutting] of Opuntia vestita (in Bed 11-3) and put in chicken house to dry.

May 26

Took URC of Puya "alpestris" that has never bloomed, in rock garden.

A gopher had eaten out half the stems and most rosette centers, so discarded 3/4 of the plant. Put 3 or 4 pieces in chicken house to dry.

Bed 2. I set small pots of dasylirion, Hechtea, yucca, etc. in Bed 2 to see best planting location

John got another load of props.

Took a few piece of Aloe Gibson hybrid (Bed Ch. 5) to dry in chicken house.

May 28 (Sunday)

Bed 2. Watered by hand the succulents started here on the 18th and 25th (all that are here, now) for first time.

Planted Aloe Gibson hybrid cut 2 days ago.

Bed 7W. Watered two Agave ferox - 2 bucketfuls each. Planted the 18th, their first watering. Watered yucca planted Feb. 17th.

Note: most of the sempes and some of the dudleyas planted here on the rock slope and then covered with sand are very good. I haven't watered them at all. (Planted Feb. 17. Best ones get a little shade from rock. Others dried out.

Melaleuca incana, planted 6 days ago, looks dead. Gave 2 buckets water.

Melaleuca (white flowers) planted April 25 looks dryish. Gave 2 buckets water.

Ditto.

Above two alike, are at south end Bed 8 and south end Bed 9.

Pile 14 was poorly mixed by backhoe, to be used for planting in mounds. Now parts are hard as rock. Set sprinkler on it.

May 30

Weeds are seeding now, especially in area beyond mounds, among the shrubs and trees recently planted. The mounds I have kept clean.

The flat areas among the mounds are almost solid bindweed, reappearing after the ground was scraped and leveled.

Jacob Bros. order mailed today. Took 2 days to prepare it.

Main weeds are cheeseweed, grasses, filaree, and wild radish first coming into seed.

John hoed some weeds.

Bed 2 (cactus bed)

Opuntia vestita several URC from Bed 11-3, dried. Tied to stakes and stuck into soil in 3 groups.

Puya (no bloom yet, from rock garden) 2 dried URC.

1 Euphorbia antisyphilitica (Texas) from pot.

1 Jatropha

1 Agave falcata (from shady Bed Ch-3)

3 Aloe humilis (small)

5 Opuntias, assorted, from Colorado River. Potted.

Bed 3

1 Agave victoria reginae (from seed) Bed Ch-3

2 Aloe vera URC

2 Aloe saponaria hybrid (Be) URC. It rots at base easily.

3 Agave #299 (Be)

Bed 4

1 Agave species (Bis) offset. (Lvs. curve in at top)

May 31

Bed 2

3 Agave lechuguilla #1 (from Bed Ch-7)

2 Agave lechuguilla #2 (from Bed Ch-7)

Bed 3

1 Agave parryi from Bed 11-4

1 Aporocactus flagelliforme from Bed 11-4

Bed 7

1 Agave (Bis) main plant from Bed Ch-7 (offset is in Bed 4 here)

1 Euphorbia resinifera from Ch-7. [net shades put over these]

1 Euphorbia resinifera (offset)

Watered all plants put in these 2 days.

June 1, 5

Bindweed in bloom around edges and in and around shadehouses, where it hadn't been scraped.

John sprayed this with 2,4-D (the 4 day interval was due to daily strong winds then)

June 1, 2

Bed Ch-7--now that the front plants have been moved to new garden, John can get at Agave Huntington. He had to chop out one very large Agave ferox first, and only could get 1 or 2 offsets. A tough job.

I planted in bed under olive trees (to use later in new garden)

1. URC of Aloe ciliaris group

2. Aloe arborescens rooted pieces from plant in path by lathhouse.

June 3

Bed 7

1 Aloe arborescens like above

1 Aloe arborescens (C.R.)

1 Yucca gloriosa

1 Agave Huntington

All watered

Bed 8

1 Aloe arborescens

Not watered. (very rootbound. Broke pot off and cut lots of roots)

Above plants had a mix of compost, sand, and manure worked into planting hole.

Purple beech is being wind-whipped. We put a piece of bed-sheet on stakes on the west side.

Bed 1, 3, & 4

Euphorbia mauritanica scraggly URC from Mr. Whitehead. Too hot here now. (Put 2-3 smaller pieces in pots, too)

Pool. 2 boys throwing the big rocks by it into the pool. Hope it didn't make leaks.

June 5

Bed 6

Watered for 2 hrs. with sprinkler in preparation for rototilling.

Shavings (pine) delivered. Put about half the load of 35 yards along next to the bed.

Puncture weed--hadn't noticed it before. Mainly at north end of shrub area and along Bancroft Rd. I spent 2 hours pulling it out.

June 6

Other weeds (see May 30) and foxtail grass. John hoed out some of the seediest and wheelbarrowed them away, for 4 hours. Bindweed on mounds. I weeded for 4 hours.

June 7

John cut more weeds.

Trees and shrubs all handwatered again. Phil put in new pump, so after about 2 weeks of low pressure, we have normal water again.

We water these about once a week.

Bed 2

Aloe karasbergensis Steer manure worked in.

1 Cassia artemisoides (Berk. Hort Nursery \$8.50) Put peagravel under it, and along a narrow ditch dug to edge of bed, which comes out between the 2 following plants:

2 Agave lechuguilla (Texas) compost worked in.

1 Agave stricta (Hum) [Hummel Nursery, Carlsbad]

Bed 7-W

3 Sedums (all alike) from Idaho.

June 9

John cut more weeds. Rain started.

June 12

John sprayed bindweed with 2,4-D. Now getting quite bad again on flat areas, after being scraped off by soil leveler. Used 8 tankfuls (64 gallons) to do all the area among the mounds and shade houses, including what was previously done on June 1 & 5. Didn't do the area among the new trees and shrubs.

June 13

Late P.M. I ran water into the almost empty pool to half fill it. It's full of mosquito wrigglers.

June 14

Water on all trees and shrubs, using 15' hose or a bucket for more distant trees. Also watered all the cacti and succulents.

John hoed off some more scattered grass and filaree in seed (too late, probably)

Bindweed seedlings on mounds done again.

Bed 6. I had set stakes 6' apart to see how Lester's cover would look. Too many posts. So I took out half, and 12' apart is better. Start at west edge of the bed (omitting this edge post) three every 12'. This leaves 10' at the east end without a cover. Put an agave here?

P.M. Mr. Cox arrived with dumptruck and backhoe and started taking soil from under 2 oaks on other side of eucalyptus trees, near Villegas house, and piled it near pool.

June 15

Mr. Cox, 3 more hours. \$210! for 7 1/2 hours.

Put a load of sandy soil from behind eucalyptus (lots of E. lvs. and seeds in it) for pool, and three loads of it NW of shadehouses by turnaround, and 1 load of it in NE of shadehouses by turnaround. Smoothed them off.

Put lots of the soil into the pool from the piles dumped by it, using backhoe. Left some piles to use later.

June 16

Phil ran disc over weeds along Bancroft but missed most low ones, foxtail, etc., because ground is too hard.

June 19

Phil and I went to Lester's to discuss center structure, position of posts, pool edge, Bed 6 cover, etc.

Peter took pictures of garden (first with trees and shrubs planted)

Pool has soil (humus?) floating on top, so we can't see depth of soil in it. A stick indicates that it is very uneven and will need leveling.

June 20

Phoned Jacobs Bros. about order sent May 30. They didn't receive it.

I went to Mr. Whitehead's and got pieces of cactus and succulents. Trimmed them

June 21

Every Wednesday John is watering the trees and shrubs. The hose reaches most, but others he carries 2 buckets of water to each. Things look nice. Only one tiny shrub has died. It [watering] takes about 2 hours.

Bindweed seedlings not as numerous now. I still find a few in each bed. Quite a lot of old plants are now coming through into the beds. Bed 8 is especially bad.

June 23

Bed 7 and Bed 4 got a few plants (see list). Windy and overcast. Paint--2 shades of green from Pearson Lumber Co. put on panels for shadehouses, to test color. The "lighter green" is a pale blue.

June 24

No wind, after a few very windy days, so John sprayed bindweed that he didn't do before.

Phil, Kevin and Rudy fastened down plastic sheet at edge of pool. They cut off the surplus, then rolled the edge around varying lengths of 2" x 4"s that were set in the rim cut out along the edge for this purpose.

June 26

Planted by John--

- 3 *Eucalyptus nicholii* N of E. shadehouse
- 1 oak (and sheet put on W. side) N. of W. shadehouse
- 1 *geijera parviflora* N of W. shadehouse
- 1 *Acacia pendula* Bed 8
- 1 *Acacia pendula* Bed 10

I helped John with succulents into Bed 7, one in Bed 1, see list.
[Ditto] Beds 2 & 3 & 9.

June 27

Pool water is very dark and smells terrible, like low tide. Phil pumped it out, now, so soil can dry some, and have stuff raked off and then leveled. It is quite uneven after being dumped here.

June 28

Planted more in Beds 2 & 3.

Paint bought at Diamond K. in Lafayette, to try. Phil put the 2 greens on panels the next day. I think they'll be all right. Pittsburgh Paint. Japanese Yew. Rain Forest.

John made a shade of mosquito netting on a frame, with 4 legs, and put it over 2 *Yucca aloifolia* from Mr. Whitehead that we just planted in Bed 4. They looked a bit droopy and hit by the sun.

Bindweed: more and more old plants are coming through into mounds.

Puncture weed coming up again nearer Bancroft Rd. and John removed what he could find. Left other kinds of weeds, there are too many.

Melaleuca incana that looked all dead a few days after it was planted on May 22 is now showing quite a lot of tiny green shoots along the main stem. John has kept watering it even though we thought it was dead.

July 1

Shadehouses. Chicken wire put on north sides of both, and parts of ends.

Pool. Salinas raked off the sticks, etc. on top of the dried-out soil in the bottom, and leveled the soil

July 4

Bindweed weeded again. Not much, now.

July 5

Agave celsii is burning some. John made a net cover.

July 8

Pool. John is taking damp soil from the center part of the pool and putting it on the sloping sides to cover the plastic. This brings

the center part down to about 18" deep for planting the hardy waterlilies. Supplemented soil for the sides with more of it from the big piles left nearby.

Jacobs order mailed. Since the first one was lost, I had to make a new one.

July 6

Ammonium sulphate put on all trees and shrubs for second time. All had been watered yesterday. Also put on recently planted trees north of shadehouses. 1 hour to apply it, 2 hours to water it in.

July 7

Paint for shade houses bought at Diamond K in Lafayette.

July 8

Pool. After John fixed the soil, I put stones around to see where to plant the lilies and how many to order.

Shadehouse. More wire screen put up. Started painting the window frame pieces.

July 10

Planted into Beds 2, 4, 7. See list.

July 11 very hot

John watered, as usual every Wednesday.

Also had to tie quite a lot that are leaning east because of the constant wind.

July 11

Puncture vine weeded out again. Lots of new seedlings.

July 12 very hot

Phoned Van Ness Water Gardens for advice on my order. Decided on about 5' apart.

July 13 very hot

Bindweed. John used 4 tanks on the plants not gotten last time.

July 14 112 degrees here (118 in Martinez)

Waterlily order airmailed (and special delivery) to Van Ness Water Gardens.

July 17

Rocks dumped near pool might be in the way, so John moved them back so Lester can landscape around the pool.

July 18

Waterlilies arrived in morning, airmail. Phil, Peter and I spent the afternoon planting them. Soil in pool is still damp. I put the

grasses in plastic pots, sunk in pool bottom between where lilies are to be, and filled pots with the excavated soil and a little fertilizer. We had to keep wet newspapers on them, as a sharp wind was blowing and dried them quickly. Then I worked 3/4# fertilizer at each lily location in pool bottom. Peter and Phil sorted lilies and put labels outside wet paper wrappings and placed them according to my planting chart. After planting each, I put a rock on the horizontal rhizome. Then we let water into the pool while I planted the tropical lilies on the sides. I tied a rock to each one before planting it. They were looking a bit dry before the water reached them, though we doused them occasionally.,

Peter took some pictures here, and also of a few beds. Jacobs Bros. estimate was wrong--only for a part of the houses.

July 29

2 or 3 lilies in bloom!

Lester and Darius Brotman and Ludovic Filgas were here for 7 hours shovelling soil and arranging rocks (which a truck brought in the middle of the afternoon) around the pool. Used most of the piled soil.

Bed 7 Lester rearranged a few rocks.

July 21

Planted a few in Bed 7. See list.

July 29

Pool. Put 4 goldfish from our old pool. Also, anchored a piece of plywood in water for shade.

August 2

2 Atriplex in Bed 7 are growing madly. Trimmed out some of the longest branches that were beginning to go over other plants.

Weeds. Took out the few new ones on mounds.

Two spotted spurge found in 2 places for the first time in this entire garden.

Sand load for Bed 6 delivered (7 - 8 week strike is over now). Put in 5 piles along the bed.

August 3

John prepared holes and I planted Aloes --prob. hardy. In taking the Cr. hybrids from pots, a number had root mealybug (or had had it, hard to tell), cleaned roots dipped in a bucket of Malathion with Joy, then into a bucket of water. Looked clean.

Bindweed. John painted scattered plants that are growing again, too near plants to spray it.

August 5

Bindweed in open flat areas and empty mounds (8 esp.) Sprayed. Houses have all the panels on, now.

August 10

Pool. 8 more goldfish from our old pool, as we have seen 2 - 3 of the first batch and assume all are alive. The water is very muddy and hard to find anything in it. John added his 1 goldfish before he leaves on a 1 month vacation.

Lilies leaves seem to rot and disintegrate shortly after opening full. We have had a few small flowers.

Bed 6. John is preparing it for rototilling tomorrow. So far, it has been spread with shavings and watered.

John put stakes at the intersection of the branch pipes with the one that runs down the middle of the bed. Then we laid props and stakes along the shavings over the pipes. Now the rototiller must do each square separately, since the pipe is quite shallow.,

Bed 6, scattered 100# Ammonium sulphate, 80# superphosphate

August 11

Bed 6 rototilled in A.M. Peter took pictures. Then sand was shovelled on, and rototilled again. 3 1/4 hours for 1 man and John helping. John worked the soil with a fork, over the pipes where it wasn't rototilled.

P.M. I planted aloes and a few agaves and euphorbias, etc. in Beds 7, 8, 9 in holes John had prepared for me. See list.

August 12

Finished planting 5 more.

Bed 6. Phil and I put stakes down the center of the bed, where the posts for the shade cloth will be set.

Houses. Phil and Kevin are putting white primer on the lower half of the 2 houses.

Bed 7W. Gopher trapped on top of this bed.

August 15

John left for 5 week vacation Salinas will continue with the weekly watering of each tree, shrubs, succulents, etc.

Bed 4. 3 similar Agaves planted. A. rasconensis (Ger 4) [Gerlach's, Tucson, Arizona] & (Ri 1) [Richards Nursery, Hayward]

August 19

Bed 6. One or 2 weekends to build frame.

August 21

Trees. Some leaning badly. I tied up quite a lot, with green plastic ribbon.

THE END OF A YEAR IN THE RUTH BANCROFT GARDEN

A DESERT IN THE CITY

F. OWEN PEARCE

A DRAMATICALLY unusual landscape has been created during the past few years in a part of what was long called the Bancroft Farm, mostly in orchards, in Ygnacio Valley, now in the northeastern part of Walnut Creek, California.

Hubert Howe Bancroft, famed California historian and founder of the University of California's Bancroft Library, was the grandfather of Philip Bancroft Jr, the present owner. Hubert Bancroft purchased the property in 1885 when it was an extensive grain field dotted with valley oaks (*Quercus lobata*), many of which are still standing in all their statuesque glory. Several of these trees, with their broadly spreading, rounded forms and weeping lower branches, form magnificent framing and backgrounds for the house and for parts of the garden. The first Mr Bancroft planted fruit and walnut trees over the land, but in recent years encroaching residential developments and the consequent high assessments and taxes have changed the economy of land holdings in such locations. As a result, most of the Bancroft Farm has been sold and the orchards have given way to homes. The Bancrofts have retained about ten acres, and their home and gardens are in this area.

Ruth Bancroft, Philip's charming wife, is responsible for the development of the exotic garden. Her husband is the first to admit that he is too lazy to assume any responsibility for it. Lester Hawkins, partner in the Western Hills Nursery near Occidental, California, was called in at the beginning as landscape designer. The original design of the desert garden is his. He suggested the idea of the mounds and their locations and of the paths, the pool, and the shade house. He furnished eucalypts, the acacias, and other Australian plants, all of which are important elements of the garden.

Ruth Bancroft was interested in plants as a child, an interest that turned to cultivated plants as she matured. Raised in the higher reaches of the North Berkeley hills, she was enchanted with the wild flowers so plentiful at that time. She was a close neighbor of those two great horticulturists of the area—Sydney B. Mitchell, president of the California Horticultural Society for its first ten years and founder of its *Journal*; and Carl Salbach, dahlia and iris grower. These two had large gardens on adjacent properties, and through her close friendship with them she became an enthusiastic iris grower. She has continued to grow irises,



The dusky pink flowers of Aloe greenii on long, gray, suede stems are sentries by the gravel path as it wanders toward the pool

but she enlarged her interests to other plants as time passed. The present garden is the result.

After Ruth and Philip were married, the Ygnacio Valley farm became home, and about twenty-five years ago the house was redesigned and a garden was built around it. Theodore Osmundsen was the landscape architect for this garden, which featured a perennial border surrounding a sizable lawn on the south side of the house. The border is still growing in beautiful, neat order.

It is surprising to find that the lawns and borders, the great array of potted plants, mostly succulents, the lathhouse, and the five or six acres comprising the desert garden are, all of them, maintained by only two workers: Ruth herself, and her dedicated helper, John da Rosa. Maintenance is

here used in a very broad sense, for it includes not only the planting, weeding, and watering, the propagation and growing on of plants, but the continuous planning, creating, and layout of the plants and planting beds—and the care of the lawn. All the water for the garden comes from the Bancrofts' private well, but the desert garden is very sparsely watered.

The greatest of the interests in the garden is found in the growing of succulent plants, an all-inclusive term; and of other plants that do not depend on summer rains—plants found in the arid areas of the southwestern United States, Mexico, South America, Australia, and South Africa. Ruth became intensely interested in these drought-tolerant plants about eighteen years ago and began collecting them from many sources.



Notocactus leninghausii in bud and flower

The present extraordinary garden was started five years ago, in the spring preceding the freeze of December 1972. That freeze was marked by temperatures that went down to 12°F every night for almost a week, and for several days they never went above freezing in the daytime. Many plants were lost and the outlook was bleak and discouraging. However, Ruth's fascination with succulents remained, and the thought that had they been established for a longer period they might have survived the freeze persuaded her to replant those that could be obtained again. Visiting the garden now it is hard to believe that much could have been lost.

The first view of the desert garden from the entrance driveway, which borders it on the north, is nothing less than dramatic. An area of three or four acres simulates a

desert landscape. As in a desert, plants or plant groups have spaces between them so that there is an overall sense of openness. In the desert plants are naturally separated because only the strongly rooted reach for and obtain the sparse rain water. This principle of openness is not completely adhered to in this garden, for there are sizable groups of close plantings; in such cases the groups are so related in size with other plants that the spaciousness is maintained.

One such group consists of a pool, planted with pond lilies surrounded by succulent plants. *Sedum* 'Peach Glory' gives a lovely spot of color on one side of the pool. The pool and its surrounding border form a color unit that is in harmony with the adjacent plants.

The whole scene seems dominated by

agaves—agaves of numerous species, sizes, and ages, all in different stages of growth. Some are developing flower stalks for this year's bloom and some retain last year's stalks, now brown and dry. A dried stalk foretells the death of that plant this year, and it will have to be removed by tractor and chain. The root and leaves will be sawed into manageable pieces and hauled off to the dump. This saddens Ruth, for it means that these dying plants will have to be removed shortly, leaving holes to be filled by other plants.

Every agave plant is worth studying—perhaps for the variations in thorniness of leaf edges and, most rewarding, for the varied leaf colorings. The flowering stalks of mature plants rise unbelievably rapidly to a height of twenty feet. Indications that a new stalk is forming can be seen in the more slender, smooth-margined leaves in the center of the plant.

The most noticeable large agave is *Agave ferox*, with leaves up to six or seven feet long and ten inches wide at the base. One specimen sheltered under a saran cloth covering in a court behind the garage, has leaves that, after rising four or five feet from the ground, droop over sharply so that the points almost touch the ground in a grand weeping effect. Other species of *Agave* to be seen are *A. univittata*, *A. victoriae-reginae*, and *A. franzosinii*.

After the first surprising impressions of the agave "plantation" have subsided, the many other desert-type plants—trees, shrubs, and ground covers—command attention, all harmoniously displayed against the brown crushed rock imported from nearby Mt. Diablo; it covers the entire desert area, including the commodious paths, which wind their way pleasantly through the plantings. The mounds were formed with imported soil before the crushed rock, which has an average thickness of two to three inches, was laid.

Conspicuously, Ruth's Folly stands out—a gracefully designed gazebo or lathhouse with two long wings and a square-domed center structure. Webster's Dictionary defines a folly as "any foolish and fruitless but expensive undertaking." Thus, kiddingly, this structure has been named by her husband and friends. Actually, foolish and fruitless it is not. Only technically might it be called a lathhouse, for its arched, timbered frame is covered with polyethylene rather than with laths. The purpose is the same—a growing house for potted plants that need some shelter from the sun in summer and from the cold in winter. The structure is set back from the entrance drive a short distance, and it is a completely harmonious adjunct to the garden.

From experience Ruth has learned the hard way about the effects of cold and heat on succulent plants, which are notoriously tender to such conditions. To meet this challenge, Ruth has areas in the garden protected by polyethylene-covered frameworks, sometimes for individual plants, and sometimes for an extensive group of plants. The covers are removed once the cold weather has ended, except for those plants that require protection from the hot summer sun.

Other noteworthy plants join the agaves in forming this delightful desert scene. Several specimens of *Parkinsonia aculeata* are subtly placed to show off as individual plants. A member of the legume family commonly known as the Mexican palo verde, parkinsonia is evidently happy in its habitat, for volunteer seedlings are profusely distributed around the shrubby parent plants. The desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*), a member of the Bignoniaceae from dry washes in the California and Arizona deserts with lovely, almost orchid-like flowers, is represented by several flourishing specimens.

While exploring the garden observant



Shadehouse and garden entrance

eyes will notice many species of *Opuntia*, including *O. bigelovii* (teddy bear cactus), flowering stalks of the majestic *Yucca treculeana*, and several plants of the ubiquitous tamarisk from Europe and Asia which have become naturalized in many areas of the west. And to select particular species from numerous genera, we find *Aloe ferox*; several euphorbias, including *Euphorbia caput-medusae*, *E. coerulescens* and *E. myrsinites*; several eucalypts, including *Eucalyptus pendula*; and numerous small shrubs, including *Anthyllis barba-jovis*, *Coreopsis maritima*, *Hakea leucoptera*, *Cercidium floridum*, and *Grevillea* 'Canberra'. *Yucca elata* grows next to the pool.

The transition from the desert atmosphere to the house is accomplished by a screen of shrubs and trees, bordering which, on the desert side, is a large planting of irises. These border a half-hidden driveway on the west side of the house—the house being to the southeast of the desert area. The iris planting illustrates again the great task of caring for this garden. Each year one-third of the irises are taken up, the rhizomes are separated and replanted. This chore requires about six weeks of labor in the fall.

Finally we arrive at the lawn and perennial border, backed with shrubs and trees, on the south side of the house. The lawn is

roughly semicircular, the house forming the base, with the border spreading around the lawn like a huge rainbow. There is a constant change of color in the border as the seasons change. Plants included in season are *Aurinia saxatilis*, *Pri-*

mula malacoides, *Helleborus orientalis*, and daffodils and tulips in quantity.

Ruth maintains a record of all the plants in her garden, and the complete list of names fills several notebooks.



THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY:

Its Vision And Philosophy

*The following is an excerpt from a talk given by
Frank Cabot at the Longwood Graduate Program Symposium
on February 24, 1990.*

I am here today to talk about the Garden Conservancy, a fledgling organization started a little over a year ago to encourage and facilitate the transition of exceptional American gardens from private to public status in such a fashion that they will be preserved for posterity.

There are worthwhile and effective advocates for historic homes, for wilderness, and for natural landscapes of both aesthetic and ecological significance. It is time for just such an advocate in the world of gardens and the Garden Conservancy has appeared to fill the bill.

We all know of exceptional private gardens that have vanished for one reason or another, thereby enhancing a garden's reputation as an ephemeral creation, as fragile as its creator's imagination and, essentially, lost without it. In a matter of months the creation deteriorates or reverts to nature and its artistic statement is left only in memory or on film in an archive, a sad fate for what had been a multi-dimensional art form.

Houses, of course, are solid not fragile, and while they deteriorate it is over a very much longer time. Wilderness or natural areas (if they have been undisturbed) need no maintenance or management to speak of. They will remain as long as they are not encroached upon.

Exceptional private gardens are a special case. Their preservation is all the more urgent and, given their fragile and individual nature, all the more complex. Fortunately, it need not be an impossible task.

In America, most gardens of truly historic significance have been restored and/or preserved. While the Conservancy hopes to play a supportive and informative role in relation to historic gardens and to be an advocate on their behalf, its primary focus will be the identification and preservation of today's exceptional private gardens.

There are two ingredients essential to the preservation of an exceptional garden. They are Management and Money. Both are needed to do the job and neither is easy to come by.

The management (and I'm talking horticultural management as opposed to administrative management, which is more readily available), has to be capable of, at the least, sustaining the creator's vision. In effect, this means the long-term horticultural management has to be in place before the garden's creator stops gardening. Only then will there be the

continuity required to maintain the exceptional nature of the garden.

On the money side, there will be creators who are in a position to endow their gardens fully; at the other extreme, there will be situations where the creator's heirs are counting on the proceeds from the sale of the property.

While the Garden Conservancy will gladly encourage those fortunate enough to be in a position to endow their gardens, and will make sure they are aware of the mechanics of preservation, it will be those exceptional gardens whose creators are closer to the other end of the spectrum that will receive the Conservancy's time and efforts. In these instances, the funds will have to come for the most part from the area in which the garden is located.

It is probable that the situations surrounding most of the exceptional gardens the Conservancy will be working on will be more or less along the following lines:

The owner-creator will want to have his or her creation preserved and the heirs will be agreeable. He or she may not know how to go about it and may be loath to discuss the matter with friends and neighbors (gardeners generally don't want to be in a position of bothering others about their gardens).

As an objective third party, the Conservancy's *raison d'être* is to talk about such things and to help the owners achieve their objectives. Also, the professionals used by the Conservancy may well be more familiar with the legal and financial procedures involved than might be the case with the owner's professionals.

Once a dialogue is established, a logical path to achieve the goal becomes readily apparent. Since the owners must be sure that their gardens have sufficient funds behind them before they relinquish them, and if they are not able to provide these funds themselves, the chances are they will resort to a charitable pledge to be made to a non-profit vehicle formed for the purpose ("The X Garden, Inc.").

They would then convey the garden as a charitable contribution only in the event that certain performance objectives were met within a stated period of time (say, up to five years). These objectives would include the owner's satisfaction with the proposed future management and the raising of sufficient funds to endow the maintenance costs and cover plan-

ning and capital costs required by the transition.

A charitable pledge, while not in itself a binding legal promise, becomes enforceable where the charitable organization acts in reliance upon the pledge. Therefore, the new non-profit venture's successful attainment of its fund-raising targets and assumption of other responsibilities detailed in the pledge agreement would entitle it to receive the garden property, as a contribution, at the end of the performance period.

There would be tax benefits to the owners as a result of their pledge. Funds for the garden's operations could, properly, be contributed to the non-profit vehicle during the owner's lifetime. A conservation easement could be granted to a separate non-profit entity, providing current income tax benefits and reducing the value of the property for estate tax purposes. (In effect, the creators would be getting something tangible back during their lifetime for all the time, money, and effort that went into creating their gardens.) Once the pledge was consummated, there could be real estate tax savings as well.

The Garden Conservancy will be in a position to work with and provide advice to the owners as well as to provide tax "umbrella" status both before the pledge is consummated and after it as well, until such time as "The X Garden, Inc." has its own independent tax ruling.

The Garden Conservancy will also work with the owners in setting up a management committee of those who will be responsible for the future of the garden. If the logical horticultural manager is not in place, the process of finding the appropriate person will be initiated at once to ensure that the best possible candidate is in place to sustain the owner's vision when the time comes.

Of course, each exceptional garden will require a different scenario to achieve its ends. The common thread will always be the key manager and the availability of funds in the area.

It is worth emphasizing here that the Garden Conservancy itself will not own and manage gardens, but rather will facilitate the process by which they are given to separate, local, non-profit entities established for that purpose. The Conservancy will assist in setting up management groups and planning for the future of these gardens. It will also provide standards for each garden's continued operation and will encourage good horticultural and management procedures by requiring periodic review as a condition of continued sponsorship.

However, at all points in the process, control and responsibility will rest with members of the local community who serve on the Boards of these fledgling public gardens. In this way, local support and interest can be generated, and long-term stability better assured for each sponsored garden. Given America's size and regional diversity, thinking nationally and working locally has seemed the most effective route for the Garden Conservancy to take.

An appropriate question is, what do you mean by "exceptional garden" — what are the criteria? The short answer to that is, a garden that both landscape architects and plantmen respect and admire. A more reasoned answer is con-

tained in the general selection criteria that follow:

Aesthetic considerations: setting, overall design, use of plants, quality of architectural features, integration into the natural and architectural setting.

Horticultural considerations: quality of plants, cultural conditions, uniqueness of collection, diversity and variety of habitats, representation of a particular group of plants.

Historical/cultural considerations: representation of the style of the period in which it was built; special cultural, local, or ethnic significance; significant work of a well-known designer or landscape architect; illustration of the development of a region or the relation of people to the land at a point in history.

Practical considerations enter into the feasibility of sponsoring a garden that meets these criteria. These are:

Ownership: willingness of the owner to give garden to the public; willingness/ability to endow the garden; openness of the owner to change, redesign, or improvement of the garden.

Scope of effort: condition of the garden; feasibility of sustaining its spirit or uniqueness.

Scale and access: accessibility to the public; space for parking, restrooms, shop, etc.; potential space for administrative staff.

Community: availability of individuals willing to serve on management and fund-raising committees; willingness on the part of neighbors and municipality to have a public facility established; satisfactory resolution of issues such as security, fencing, lighting, and traffic.

Management: availability of qualified horticulturist(s) to succeed the creator or restore the garden; and of suitable landscape architect(s) to design modifications needed for transition to public garden and/or restore original design; existence of documentation (plans, drawings) to aid management and serve as an interpretive tool.

Maintenance: availability of maintenance staff; condition and adequacy of equipment; condition of infrastructure (irrigation, drainage, etc.).

Gardens that meet the selection criteria and for which a preservation strategy is considered feasible will be chosen for sponsorship by the Garden Conservancy. The focus on exceptional gardens is important, not only to conserve the Conservancy's own modest resources, but also to help establish a national standard of horticultural and design excellence.

The Garden Conservancy's mission is to ensure that the exceptional creations of inspired and passionate gardeners are preserved, so that others who may be susceptible will be inspired in their own right and will get to work on their own creations.

By playing a constructive role in the preservation of America's exceptional gardens, the Conservancy hopes to foster the genre to the point where it will not only require busy regional chapters to cope with their many exceptional gardens, but also to the point where garden visiting will become a popular national pastime for Americans. ☞

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A national organization devoted to preserving gardens of merit is the Garden Conservancy, formed in 1989. The group's role is to "encourage and facilitate the preservation of exceptional gardens," says Antonia Adezio, the conservancy's director.

Conservancy founder Frank Cabot defines an exceptional garden as "a garden

"A real garden where one can enter in and forget the whole world cannot be made in a week or a month or a year. It must be planned for, and waited for, and loved into being."
—Chinese proverb

that both landscape architects and plantsmen respect and admire." The conservancy's selection criteria are extensive, including aesthetic considerations (setting, overall design, use of plants, quality of architectural features, integration into natural and architectural settings); horticultural considerations (quality of plants, cultural conditions, uniqueness of collection, diversity of habits, representation of a particular group of plants); historical/cultural considerations (representation of the style of the period in which it was built, special cultural, local, or ethnic significance, significant work of a well-known designer or landscape architect, illustration of development of a region, relation of people to the land at a point in history); and feasi-

bility considerations (ownership, scope of effort, scale and access, community, management, and maintenance).

"Once the conservancy agrees to sponsor a garden," says Adezio, "our role can take on various forms. We may assist with local fund raising, identify local horticultural management, or set up a local advisory board. We have a strong feeling that the local community has to be involved. Once the structure is in place and running, the Garden Conservancy turns everything over to the local administration, but is still available for technical assistance."

The group is currently working with two gardens in California, the Ruth Bancroft Garden in Walnut Creek, a four-acre collection of exotic desert plants (see *American Horticulturist*, October 1989) and Ganna Walska Lotusland in Santa Barbara. Lotusland is the thirty-seven-acre estate of the late Madame Ganna Walska, and is named for the lotus pond that is the focus of the estate's Japanese garden. The plant collections—aloes, bromeliads, cacti, cycads, and palms—are well known for their scientific as well as aesthetic value.

Adezio says the organization hopes to identify exceptional gardens for preservation elsewhere in the United States. They

are considering three Eastern gardens, including one with extraordinary Asian and rock garden collections and another designed by an important American landscape designer.

To begin the process that will transform a garden from private to public, the conservancy asks ten pages of questions: type of garden (dry, formal, landscape, meadow, perennial, rock, topiary, water, woodland), outstanding features, condition, design history and significance, current access and visitation and community attitude towards visitation, conditions of the garden and facilities, and possible threats to the garden (adjacent development, deer browsing, insects, disease, noxious weeds, overvisitation). Site plans and photographs are also requested.

These completed questionnaires are reviewed by a ten-member screening committee, currently chaired by Marco Polo Stufano, director of horticulture at Wave Hill in Bronx, New York. Committee members then make site visits to the most promising gardens.

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A COMPENDIUM OF IDEAS, INFORMATION & NEWS

THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY COMES OF AGE

The Garden Conservancy, a nonprofit organization founded last year by well-known gardener Francis H. Cabot, has a twofold mission: to preserve exceptional

private gardens in the United States and Canada that are threatened with oblivion, and to make those gardens accessible to the public. Because gardens disappear with alarming speed once their makers can no longer maintain them (one estimate suggests that over two-thirds of this country's

outstanding privately owned gardens have fallen victim to neglect or the forces of nature), the conservancy has an understandable sense of urgency. In the short time it has been in existence, it has moved quickly in choosing two West Coast gardens for sponsorship. One is the Ruth Bancroft garden, in Walnut Creek, California, a stunning example of arid-climate gardening (see *Horticulture*, February 1986). The second is Lotusland, the estate of the late Madame Ganna Walska, in Santa Barbara, California, which features a sophisticated collection of aloes, bromeliads, cacti, cycads, and palms [*Horticulture*, December 1989]. Gardens in three eastern states are also being considered for sponsorship.

Turning a private garden into a public showpiece is no small task, and to aid in the process the conservancy has appointed a 65-member advisory committee composed of individuals from 23 states and Canada. Committee members are experts in fields ranging from landscape architecture and horticulture to plant preservation and garden history. A nine-member screening committee, chaired by Marco Polo Stufano, director of horticulture at Wave Hill, Bronx, New York, reviews gardens nominated for sponsorship and determines the feasibility of each proposal.

Once a garden is chosen for sponsorship, the conservancy works with the owners or custodians to ease its transition from private to public hands. Among the services that the conservancy provides are legal, fund-raising, and public-relations advice, and assistance in setting up horticultural maintenance teams and designing facilities to accommodate visitors.

The signs are good that, with the conservancy's help, fewer of our great gardens will be irretrievably lost. Already the organization has succeeded in attracting more than 1,000 members. Members receive a quarterly news-

letter and invitations to garden openings and other special events. Annual dues are \$25 for individuals, \$50 for contributing members and organizations. For more information write: The Garden Conservancy, Box 219, Main Street, Cold Spring, N.Y. 10516.



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January 1993

HORTICULTURE, BOTANY, AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN

The following interviews related to landscape architecture, garden design, horticulture, and botany have been completed by the Regional Oral History Office. Through tape recorded autobiographical interviews with scholars and professionals in these fields, individuals working in a wide range of gardens and arboreta, and members of native plant conservation groups, we are documenting over a half-century of growth and change in wild and cultivated California and the West. The interviews, transcribed, indexed, and bound, may be ordered at cost for deposit in research libraries.

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LESTER ROWNTREE, CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT WOMAN. 1979. Memoir about Lester Rowntree (1878-1979), horticulturist, naturalist, and seed collector. Interviews with horticulturists, botanists, and family members: Margaret Campbell, Skee Hamann, Heidi Rowntree Melas, Robert Ornduff, James Roof, Cedric Rowntree, Harriette Rowntree, Lester Rowntree, Lester Bradford Rowntree, Nancy Rowntree, Rowan Rowntree, and Jo Stallard.

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