

**HISTORIC RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION
OF THE
GARDEN ORNAMENT AT GIBRALTAR**

by

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INTRODUCTION

The gardens at Gibraltar are decorated with a collection of forty garden ornaments that highlight focal points of the garden, creating picturesque settings and punctuating nearly every vista in the historic landscape. These garden ornaments define and enhance the overall experience of the garden as was originally intended by landscape architect Marian Cruger Coffin. Many of the ornaments were installed between 1916 and 1923 as an integral part of Marian Coffin's design for the gardens, which is based on Italian Renaissance gardens and thus, relies heavily on formal symmetry and axes with carefully placed classical garden ornaments to create attractive niches and elegant vistas. Superbly carved from Mediterranean limestone or modeled in lead, the thirty-three limestone and seven lead ornaments are rich with detail and texture. The collection remains virtually intact from the initiation of its installation beginning in 1916. See **Appendix A** for a map of the garden ornament.

This report presents the results of research conducted from 1998 through 2001 to document the origin, history, and context of the objects in Gibraltar's garden. It is intended to accompany the technical analysis and photographic documentation completed in Autumn 1998 by Norton Art Conservation for a conservation assessment survey of the collection. The particular details related to the purchase and origin of garden ornament presented in this report also serve to supplement to *The Historic Landscape at Gibraltar: A Proposal for its Preservation*, a 1997 Master's thesis written by Iris Gestram. This information is not included in the thesis due to the fact that the Sharp family had not located many of the garden ornament receipts at the time that Ms. Gestram was conducting her research.

The research presented in this report is intended to serve a broad audience, including Preservation Delaware staff and Board of Trustees, Gibraltar Gardens Advisory Board members, Gibraltar Gardens garden guides and volunteers, art conservators, horticultural professionals, garden visitors, and existing and potential donors.

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Research focusing on the history, context, and intent of the Gibraltar garden ornament collection began in Autumn 1998 with a conservation assessment survey to lay out the existing condition and future conservation treatment needs of the large and poorly maintained collection of ornament. At this time, Preservation Delaware and members of the Gibraltar Gardens Restoration Committee knew very little about the history, subject matter, and origin of the sculptures and ornaments in the collection. Historical research focusing on the collection objects was intended to inform the overall garden restoration process, as well as to guide future planning for

conservation treatment and for use in public interpretation of the gardens, such as garden tours, educational programs, signage, and brochures.

Primary and secondary research employing a variety of sources produced the information presented in this report. Together, these sources promoted an understanding of the sculpture and its role in Gibraltar's formal landscape. Archival and photographic collections in the possession of the Sharp family provided the basis of the research efforts.¹ Specifically, many original bills and receipts or purchase exist in the Sharp Family Archives to document the origin, cost, and period of installation for the garden ornaments. Photocopies of these receipts are included in **Appendix B**. A collection of Marian Coffin's original drawings, planting plans, correspondence, and maintenance recommendations exist and are invaluable for identifying the landscape architect's design intent, specifically in relation to the placement of garden ornaments. Professional photographs taken during various stages of its installation and over the years of its continued use as a private garden document the ornaments in their original context in the gardens. These photographs are an important source for identifying the changing placement of select pieces over time, as well as the introduction of new pieces in subsequent years. With the exception of the receipts for garden ornament purchases, much of the information contained in these primary sources is synthesized in Gestram's thesis, *The Historic Landscape at Gibraltar: A Proposal for its Preservation*.²

Period garden ornament catalogues provided limited identification and comparative analysis of garden ornament of the period. Finally, secondary sources about garden history and ornamentation provided contextual history and comparative analysis. For the many items without a documented history, these sources collectively enabled the author to postulate on dates of an object's creation and its installation at Gibraltar.

HISTORY

Located in Wilmington, Delaware, Gibraltar is currently a six-acre property consisting of an approximately two-acre formal landscape, a house, accessory buildings, and approximately four acres of naturalistic lawn and landscaping. As a formal, designed landscape, the authenticity of composition, character, and individual features and elements are contributing factors to the formal garden's overall significance, intent, and appreciation. The property evolved from its initial development as a large, pastoral property established in the mid-nineteenth century by the Brincklé family to

¹ Since the completion of research, some of these items have been donated to the Marian Coffin Collection at the Winterthur Archives, housed in the Winterthur Library. Other items remain in the Gibraltar Archives, in the collection of the Sharp family at their office in Centreville, Delaware.

² Some of this information is summarized in this report. For a full understanding of Gibraltar's history and context, consult Iris Gestram, *The Historic Landscape at Gibraltar: A Proposal for its Preservation*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1997. Available in the Preservation Delaware Resource Library or in the University of Delaware Morris Library.

a formal country estate owned by the Sharp family from 1909 through 1990. In 1997, Preservation Delaware, Inc. became the owner of the property.³

In 1909, Hugh Rodney Sharp and Isabella du Pont Sharp purchased Gibraltar and soon began extensive additions and renovations to the buildings and grounds, creating the estate that exists today. Foremost among these changes was the creation of a formal garden. Soon after purchasing the property, the Sharps made plans for the landscape surrounding the house. In 1915, recalling images from their frequent European travels, the Sharps hired landscape architect Marian Cruger Coffin [1876-1957] to design Gibraltar's formal gardens. Coffin, one of the first and most accomplished female landscape architects in the United States, was in the peak of her career at the time the Sharps hired her to design the formal gardens at Gibraltar. In fact, by the early 1920s, Coffin was one of the most sought after designers on the East Coast. Marian Coffin came from a well-connected and affluent family, and her social contacts with families like the du Ponts provided her with access to many elite and fashionable clients. Coffin designed gardens at properties along the East Coast, and in Delaware these commissions included Winterthur's formal gardens and later the University of Delaware's south mall and the formal garden at Mt. Cuba.⁴

GARDEN DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Marian Coffin's scheme for the garden included a simple plan in axial relation to the house, with carefully proportioned elements. The design included a sequence of three terraces and a series of garden rooms, each with its own function, design, and ambience. Coffin's gardens typically centered on basic rectilinear or axial plans combined with circular and semicircular features, and she did not depart from this style at Gibraltar. In conjunction with this structure of the garden and the harmony of plants and trees, Coffin relied on the careful placement of striking pieces of garden ornament, statuary, and benches to attract the attention of the viewers gaze and define the line of sight. The careful combination of architectural and ornamental details with plantings resulted in a complex and sensual garden that was the product of both Coffin and the Sharps, who gathered their ideas from trips to famous European gardens.⁵

Throughout the garden, garden ornaments, statues, and urns functioned to highlight and balance composition of the garden. Coffin often used benches—frequently with a curved or semi-circular shape—in her gardens, both to provide seating and to create a focal point at the end of an allée, rectangular lawn, or at a cross axis.⁶ The semi-circular bench at the north end of

³ See Gestram 1997; Gibraltar Gardens brochure; and various files at Preservation Delaware, Inc. for detail on the history and acquisition of the property.

⁴ Gestram, 3; 6-7.

⁵ Gestram, 29.

⁶ Nancy Fleming, *Money, Manure, and Maintenance*, Weston, MA: Country Place Books (1995): 29.

Gibraltar's Formal Flower Garden is a premier example of this design motif. With its ornate monumentality, the bench is a strong feature of the landscape in the Formal Garden. As an anchor at the north end of the Flower Garden, it focuses the viewers' eye and draws attention to the Southern Magnolia behind it. As a functional piece of garden ornament, it also serves as a prime viewing position for the formal landscape around it. Similarly, Coffin typically used water features such as fountains and ponds as key elements in her design. The Formal Flower Garden features a limestone fountain flanked by two simple benches. A small marble pool with a single jet fountain punctuates the end of the Bald Cypress Allée.

With the initiation of the gardens' design and installation in the spring of 1916, H. Rodney and Isabella Sharp began to amass the collection of garden ornaments that decorate the Gibraltar gardens today. The Sharps collected the majority of the garden ornaments in a ten-year period, dating between 1916 and 1926 that coincided with the period during which Marian Coffin designed and installed the garden. It is not clear which of the objects Coffin purchased, for many are not documented with receipts. Nor do Coffin's bills itemize garden ornaments. However, early in her work with the Sharps, Coffin did indicate that garden ornaments and accessories would be among the items to be calculated in costs for the garden.⁷

Many of the objects were part of Coffin's original garden design scheme, while others were added in subsequent years as the family returned from travels abroad and their tastes in garden decoration evolved and changed. During their residence at Gibraltar, the Sharp family continued to select interesting garden ornament, adding them to their collection and rearranging locations throughout the garden

The first quarter of the twentieth century was a time when H. Rodney Sharp and his family often traveled abroad, visiting Europe, Asia, and Africa. During their travels, the Sharps gathered ideas, visited with dealers, and purchased items for their garden, as well as those of their friends and relatives. . In fact, H. Rodney Sharp III relates that s his grandfather purchased sculptures in Italy and also "picked things up at junkyards" while there. At other times, according to H. Rodney Sharp III, the Sharps relied on an individual in Florida who cast concrete into garden decorations that had the look of antiques.⁸ This individual was most likely Addison Mizner, a Florida architect and interior decorator, who gained popularity in the 1920s designing estates and private clubs. In addition to his design work, he also created "ornamental stone and imitation marble" from cast stone at his factory⁹ While there is documentation of Mizner's work at the Sharps' winter

⁷ Marian C. Coffin, "Items to be figured on percentage basis." Enclosed in correspondence to H. R. Sharp, 6 January 1917. Transcribed in Gestram, 203-204.

⁸ H. Rodney Sharp III conversation with the author, 12 October 1998.

⁹ Christina Orr, *Addison Mizner, Architect of Dreams and Realities (1872-1933)*. Palm Beach: Norton Gallery and School of Art (1977): 5; 37; 52-53.

residence in Boca Grande, Florida, there is no evidence of his work having been purchased for Gibraltar.¹⁰

Marian Coffin often worked with her clients to select garden ornamentation of the appropriate scale and design for her gardens. In some cases, Coffin selected pieces herself and then forwarded her recommendations on to her clients.¹¹ It is likely that Coffin provided this advice for the Sharps. Using Coffin's intended designs and her recommendations for placement, H. Rodney and Isabella Sharp purchased many of the ornaments during the family's travels in Europe in the 1920s

The Sharps, like their relations P.S. Du Pont at Longwood and Henry Francis du Pont at Winterthur, also frequented antiques dealers in Philadelphia and New York. The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century witnessed tremendous growth in the availability of garden ornamentation. During this time, many European firms began to specialize in manufacturing and marketing new garden ornament. It was also a time when antiques dealers began to focus on the acquisition and sale of antique garden ornaments. The Sharps' collection of garden statuary and ornament reflects this trend in garden ornamentation, with many of the ornaments being of European origin and most purchased as antiques from dealers in Italy, England, New York, and Philadelphia. Several of the pieces purchased in the earliest years of the garden's installation once graced the gardens of villas in the Italian countryside.¹² In fact, the Sharps often worked with A. Olivotti & Co., a dealer of arts and antiques with shops in New York, Florence, and Venice. Olivotti supplied many pieces for Longwood Gardens, including several custom-made pieces. It is possible that the Sharps learned of this dealer from Longwood's founder P.S. du Pont, who was Mr. Sharp's friend and Mrs. Sharp's brother.

¹⁰ Inventory, The Hacienda, Boca Grande, Florida. No date, but apparently after 1932. Gibraltar Archives. In the collection of the Sharp family.

¹¹ Correspondence with Mrs. Roger Black, 1940-1941, Marian Coffin Collection, 80.MC.3, Winterthur Archives, Winterthur Museum and Library.

¹² Marian C. Coffin, *Trees and Shrubs for Landscape Effects*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons (1940).

CATALOGUE OF COLLECTION ITEMS

This report concludes with a catalogue of collection object. The items in this catalogue are presented using the accession numbers assigned in October 1998 for the conservation assessment survey conducted by Norton Art Conservation, Inc. These numbers have been used to provide a consistent system of identification and record keeping. Locations of each item are identified on the map in **Appendix A**. Full object information, including dimensions, condition, and treatment recommendations, is available in *Gibraltar Gardens Survey of Sculpture and Ornaments* by Norton Art Conservation (1999) in the office of Preservation Delaware, Inc. Photographs of each object are included in that report. Because this catalogue is intended to be used in conjunction with the photographs in the Norton Art Conservation report, only selected historic photographs are included in **Appendix C**. Conservation treatment reports on file at Preservation Delaware, Inc. include modern and conservation/restoration treatment photography of the collection objects.

0.1 and 0.2 Pair of Fruit Baskets

This pair of fruit baskets adorns the stone pillars flanking the Greenhill Avenue entrance to the Gibraltar property. This entrance accesses the courtyard, which was used as the service entrance to the estate and included access to the garages, potting shed, vegetable gardens, and a staff residence. Currently, this entrance is used as the main access to the property. A matching pair of baskets is located directly across Greenhill Avenue, atop stone columns that guarded what was once the entrance to additional support services for the estate, including additional staff housing, production gardens, and greenhouses. This property was divided from the estate and sold in the 1980s, and has since been developed as residential property, known as Greenhouse Place. Preservation Delaware does not own the stone baskets on the south side of Greenhill Avenue.

The lobed, urn-shaped baskets at Gibraltar's entrance each hold large arrangements that overflow with grapes, apples, and other types of fruit, flowers, and foliage. Though these baskets form a pair, they are not exact copies of one another. Instead, they display minor variations in the fruit/flower arrangements and in the weave patterns on the baskets. Both baskets are exceptional for their high relief carving, deep undercutting, and very naturalistic fruit and foliage.¹³ Analytical testing identifies the marble in these baskets as being of Mediterranean origin.¹⁴

¹³ Barbara Israel, *Antique Garden Ornament: Two Centuries of American Taste*, New York: Harry N. Abrams (1999): 102.

¹⁴ Analytical testing by Dr. Peter Leavens, Department of Geology, University of Delaware, November 1998. See Norton Art Conservation, *Gibraltar Gardens Survey of Sculptures and Ornaments* (1999).

The Sharps purchased these baskets in October 1930 from A. Olivotti, a dealer of arts and antiques with shops in New York, Florence, and Venice. Olivotti supplied many pieces for Longwood Gardens, including several custom made pieces. It is likely that the Sharps learned of this dealer from P.S. du Pont, who was Isabella's brother and the founder of Longwood Gardens. The purchase price for these ornaments was \$50 per basket. They were shipped from Florence Italy, arrived in New York, and were then shipped on to the Sharps at Gibraltar.¹⁵

It seems that the Sharps followed period convention in the placement of these fruit baskets on the stone piers leading into their estate for a 1935 garden ornament catalogue recommends that fruit baskets be placed in just such a way "along terrace walls, piers, and flank walls to flights of steps."¹⁶

3.1 and 3.2 Pedestals

This pair of simple, limestone pedestals is located on the Flagstone Terrace, flanking the walkway to the house. They once supported the eagles now atop the stone pillars flanking the gate to the Allée. Circa 1930s photographs show these pedestals moved to the Evergreen Terrace holding the Federal-style lead vases (29.1 and 29.2). At an unidentified date, they were moved back to Flagstone Terrace, and the vases with lion masks took their place on the Evergreen Terrace.¹⁷

6.1 and 6.2 Vases with Lion Masks

These vases are among the earliest pieces to be purchased for the garden. Though Coffin once noted in a letter that the Flower Garden Fountain was purchased before she began her work on the garden, the purchase of these urns is the earliest one documented with a receipt of purchase. Mr. Sharp purchased the pair of vases with their pedestals from A. Olivotti in May 1916 for \$500. Olivotti had shops in Florence, Italy and on Madison Avenue in New York. Because the New York address is more pronounced than the Italian location on this particular receipt, it can be surmised that the Sharps purchased them in the New York shop.¹⁸ When originally installed sometime before June 1917, they were placed along the Greenhill Avenue side of the

¹⁵ A. Olivotti & Co. To H. Rodney Sharp. Invoice, 7 October 1930. Gibraltar Archives. Original in collection of the Sharp family. Photocopy on file at Preservation Delaware, Inc.

¹⁶ Davis, John P. S. *Antique Garden Ornaments*, Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club (1991): 301.

¹⁷ Gestram, 51.

¹⁸ A. Olivotti & Co. to H. R. Sharp, Invoice, 4 May 1916. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp family. Photocopy in the collection of Preservation Delaware, Inc.

Formal Flower Garden, at locations stipulated in Marian Coffin's blueprints. They were moved to the Evergreen Trace sometime after 1921.¹⁹

7 Mercury

The Sharps purchased this nearly life-sized lead figure of Mercury in 1961 from Bert Crowther, a fine art dealer of garden ornament, ironwork, and architectural elements. Crowther's shop was located in the Syon Lodge section of London. Crowther notes in correspondence to Mr. Sharp that the Mercury came from a "beautiful old house known as Coombe Warren in Kingston, which was the home of Lady Page, the race horse owner."²⁰

Mercury was the messenger god and thus wears winged sandals and a messenger cap. The standing, nude figure is depicted in the classical manner as a clean-shaven youth with an athletic figure. His right elbow leans on a tree stump, and in his right hand he originally carried a herald's staff, which is now detached and in storage. He clutches a scroll in his left hand. This lead Mercury is most likely modeled after a marble Mercury sculpture that was first recorded in Italy in 1536. It was moved to the Uffizi in Florence where it remains on display today. Lead reproductions of this famous Mercury figure were common in the 18th through 20th centuries.

In 1999, as part of the garden restoration, the Mercury was moved from its location by crane to the site formerly occupied by Atlas, in order to restore the flagstone terrace at the end of the Evergreen Terrace (where he once stood).²¹

8 Atlas

This lead statue was an early component of the Evergreen Terrace. There is no documentation of its purchase. It is possible that it may have been purchased by Marian Coffin and included in the billing for the garden. It may have originated at the firm of H. Crowther in London, which produced lead garden ornaments, including Atlas figures, beginning in 1908. This firm later became known as Bert Crowther (see above).

Atlas, a Greek Titan, is depicted bent over carrying a sundial, in the form of a bronze armillary sphere, on his shoulders. The interlocking rings of the armillary sphere represent the paths of planets and stars in the celestial

¹⁹ Marian C. Coffin to H.R. Sharp, Correspondence, 22 March 1921. Transcribed in Gestram, 208. Lucy Powell, Photograph Album, "Gibraltar." View of Formal Flower Garden. June 1917. Gibraltar Archives. In the collection of the Sharp Family.

²⁰ Bert Crowther to H. Rodney Sharp, Esq., Letter, 18 October 1961. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp family. Photocopy in the collection of Preservation Delaware.

²¹ Gestram, 52.

spheres. One sphere is graduated in hours to serve as a sundial. The lead figure is placed upon a rectilinear stone base.

In 1995, it was damaged by a falling branch, and has since been moved into storage. At the time of the preparation of this report, Atlas was stored in the service wing of the house. The limestone pedestal that supported Atlas has also been removed. Today, the figure of Mercury stands in the place that was originally occupied by Atlas.

10 Cupids Pool Fountain/Water Spout

Situated at the northeast end of the reflecting pool, this limestone pool filler fountain rests on the edge of the pool. It depicts two putti, one astride a stylized dolphin and the other kneeling on a rock at the dolphin's side. The origin of this fountain is not known. It replaced an earlier, smaller pool ornament resembling a turtle that was located in the same position through at least 1918.²² This earlier turtle fountain is no longer present in the gardens.²³

13.1 and 13.2 Fruit Baskets

This matching pair of fruit baskets sits on top of the piers that flank the gate leading into the Formal Flower Garden from the service courtyard. The fluted, urn-shaped baskets overflow with arrangements of flowers, fruit, and foliage. The baskets rest on octagonal bases.

There is no documentation of these baskets in the Sharp family's files. However, this pair is quite similar to fruit basket finials that were widely available in the early twentieth century from American and European garden ornament dealers.

As they did with the fruit baskets located at the Greenhill Avenue, the Sharps certainly followed period convention in the placement of these fruit baskets on stone piers. Flower backer finials were very popular during the 1920s and 1930s, and retailers sold a variety of this form.²⁴ In fact, a 1935 garden ornament catalogue recommends that fruit baskets be placed in just such a way "along terrace walls, piers, and flank walls to flights of steps."²⁵

²² Photograph, Gibraltar, View of pool and poolhouse, Dated 1918. Gibraltar Archives. In the collection of the Sharp family. Copy on file at Preservation Delaware, Inc.

²³ Gestram, 52.

²⁴ Israel, 203.

²⁵ Davis, 301.

14 Curved stone bench

This striking curved bench is located at the northeast end of the Formal Flower Garden. The semi-circular seat is flanked on each side with decorative end posts comprised of a winged lion supporting on its back a scrolled armrest. A back rail supported by turned balusters follows the curve of the seat. Acorn-shaped finials top each armrest.

This bench was in its current location by 1917 and is noted on Coffin's 1916 plans for the garden. There is no documentation of its purchase or place origin. However, Coffin is known for her use of curved benches, and this one anchors her design scheme for the Formal Flower Garden.

15 and 16 Putti on Spheres

This pair of statues is located on the east side of the Formal Flower Garden, next to the perimeter wall that runs parallel to Greenhill Avenue. They were originally placed within niches formed by column-shaped Juniper trees.²⁶ Each statue includes a putto sitting on a sphere, holding a basket of fruit and flowers. They are similar, but not exact replicas of each other. Putti (cupids) are common decorative motifs for gardens, because they suggest life, bounty, and renewal. While cupids are a common garden motif, similar examples of these garden ornaments have not been found in historic or modern garden ornament catalogues.

The statues were installed in the location designated by Marian Coffin in her 1916 plan to hold sculpture. However, the location did not always feature these particular statues. They are located where the pair of lion's mask vases (currently situated on the Evergreen Terrace) originally stood. Sometime after Coffin's original garden layout, the putti statues replaced the vases. However, their exact date of installation is unknown since there is no documentation existing for these pieces. A 1920s photograph does not show them in the Formal Flower Garden, suggesting that they arrived at Gibraltar in the late 1920s or circa 1930.²⁷

17 Lead Cupids

This pair of lead cupids has been in the Gibraltar Gardens since 1916, when they were installed atop the gate pillars at the south end of the Flower Garden. They originally sat on stone spheres, with their arms outstretched and their heads turned. The cupids were moved to a new location at the end of the Flower Garden's curved south wall sometime during the late 1920s.

²⁶ Gestram, 53.

²⁷ Gestram, 53

Since then one of the cupids has been lost (most likely stolen during the property's vacancy in the early 1990s) and the other is in very poor condition. Due to its poor condition, it has been removed from its position on the pillar. As of the preparation of this report, it was in storage in the 1st floor service wing of the Gibraltar mansion.

H. Rodney Sharp purchased these cupids from Richard Lehne, a Philadelphia antiques dealer, in April 1919.²⁸ Sharp's pair of cupids matches a pair at the Winterthur Museum and Gardens that Henry F. du Pont purchased in May 1918 from Richard Lehne.²⁹

18 Putti with Cornucopia

Like putti, cornucopias are common decorative motifs for gardens, because they suggest bounty and renewal. This pair of figures features side-by-side putti –one standing and one seated. The standing figure supports a fruit-filled cornucopia. Drapery flows from the back of the standing putto. The figures stand on a rocky ground that is atop a marble base. Though the pair is similar, they do not form an exact matching set. Instead, they are mirror images, with minor differences in the facial features and the details of the cornucopia.

The Sharps purchased this pair of finials from A. Olivotti & Co. in 1930 for \$160. They were shipped from Florence, Italy to Gibraltar in October.³⁰ This pair is similar to some found at *Villa Crivelli*, a late seventeenth-century villa in Inverigo, Italy, and at the seventeenth-century French chateau, *Vaux-le-Vicomte*.³¹ However, other than the receipt from Olivotti, there is no further documentation of the earlier provenance of these objects.

These cupids were originally located on top of the pillars flanking the gate to the Allée. The exact date of relocation to their current site atop the Vestibule pillars is unknown, but presumed to be in the late 1930s or the 1940s, based on photographic documentation.

19 Flower Garden Fountain

The fountain at the south end of the Formal Flower Garden was installed by June 1917 as a central element in Marian Coffin's design for the garden.³²

²⁸ Richard Lehne, Receipt of Purchase, 4 April 1919. Sharp purchased at the same time, four other small lead figures. These are no longer present at Gibraltar, but most likely were the figures that decorated the edges of the pool. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the Collection of the Sharp Family. Copy on file at Preservation Delaware, Inc.

²⁹ Winterthur Museum, Registrar's Office, Object Files, Accession No. 69.4082.

³⁰ A. Olivotti & Co. To H. Rodney Sharp, Receipt of Purchase, 7 October 1930. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp Family. Copy in the collection of Preservation Delaware, Inc.

³¹ Israel, 203.

Coffin often used water features to highlight certain areas of a garden by drawing the viewer's attention with both the attractive visual nature of the fountain and the soothing sound of flowing water. Ringed with concentric circles of planting bed and flagstone path, the fountain is a striking feature of the garden and immediately draws the viewers' eye to the south end of the garden. It balances the large, curved bench that anchors the north end of the Flower Garden.

With its classical, Italian design, this fountain was most likely imported from Italy, though its exact provenance is not known. In 1917, Coffin notes in correspondence to Mr. Sharp that the "fountain was bought before the beginning of the garden and should not be included in cost."³³ One can only assume from this notation that the Sharps purchased the fountain with the intention to use it one day in their garden.

At the time of its initial installation, the fountain included several tiers—hexagonal base stones; a dolphin pedestal; a shallow, bas-relief basin; gargoyle pedestal; and a crowning classical female figure. This figure is based on *Allegreine*, by French sculptor, Barbedenne.³⁴ Analysis of the limestone identified warm water fossils, thus further suggesting an Italian origin. Photographs reveal that both the figure and the gargoyle pedestal soon disappeared.³⁵ However, there is no recollection or documentation of the date or circumstances of this disappearance. Possible suggestions for the disappearance of these pieces include storm damage, theft, or possibly the Sharps' decision to remove it.

The fountain was fully restored in 1999-2000 by J. N. Phillips Casting of Germantown, Philadelphia. Restoration included casting the pedestal and basin from molds made from original pieces and the fabrication of pieces long missing (gargoyle pedestal and female figure). Historic photographs formed the basis of the replication of the missing features.

20 Stone benches

These two benches were installed at the south end of the Formal Flower Garden circa 1917. Carved of limestone, the rectangular bench seats have beveled edges with egg and dart ornamentation. The bench seats rest on double volute, scrolled supports at each end. Indicated as "seats" on Coffin's

³² Lucy Powell, Photograph Album, "Gibraltar," View of Formal Garden. June 1917. Gibraltar Archives. In the collection of the Sharp family.

³³ Marian C. Coffin, "Items to be figured on percentage basis." Enclosed in correspondence to H. R. Sharp, 6 January 1917. Transcribed in Gestram, 203-204.

³⁴ A bronze sculpture marked "S. Barbedenne. Fondur 1767" is in the collection of Lyndhurst in Tarrytown, NY.

³⁵ Gestram (54) places the disappearance in the late 1910s or early 1920s, though this author has not found a photograph of that early date showing it to be missing. It is present in a circa 1920 photograph in the Sharp Family collection.

1916 blueprints for the garden, they are of classical style common for the period. The benches match others that were part of the formal garden at St. Amour, also designed by Marian Coffin and the childhood home of Isabella du Pont Sharp.³⁶ The similarity in the benches speaks to the commonality of the design and to the possibility of Coffin working with a single supplier for standard garden ornaments.

22.1 and 22.2 Eagles

Garden ornament catalogues of the early twentieth century indicate that eagles were conventionally placed atop gate piers.³⁷ At Gibraltar, this pair of eagles gazes over the Gardens from their perch atop the gate pillars from the Flower Garden to the Bald Cypress Allée. Each eagle sits on top of a stone ball with its wings held away from its body, but not spread wide. They turn their heads to look over their left wings. The balls on which the eagles sit are set on beds of concrete that cap the stone pillars.

The eagles were a later addition to the Gardens, though they date to the eighteenth century. The Sharps purchased the eagles in 1939 from Hyde and Knudsen, an antique dealer in New York City. Hyde and Knudsen often provided interior and garden antiques for Winterthur and Mt. Cuba. The purchase price of the eagles was \$450.³⁸ A similar pair of eagles surmounts the gateposts at the entrance to the Sharp family's winter home, the Hacienda in Boca Grande, Florida. There is no documentation for this second pair of eagles, though they also may have come from Hyde and Knudsen.

23.1 through 23.4 Four Seasons

Nestled in the shady Bald Cypress Allée, the *Four Seasons* are four hand-carved, limestone sculptures that depict classically draped female figures, each marked by the attribute of her season. As one of the oldest sets of sculpture in the garden with a direct connection to Marian Coffin's original design, the *Four Seasons* are especially significant because they represent the high quality of sculpture selected through the collaboration between the Sharps and Marian Coffin during the creation of the garden.

Marian Coffin viewed the life-sized sculptures as being integral to the design of an allée and stipulated that the sculpture of the *Four Seasons* be placed at specific locations with particular plantings to complement the overall appearance of the Allée. In fact, several years later in her 1940 book, *Trees and Shrubs for Landscape Effects*, Coffin described Gibraltar's allée as a

³⁶ Fleming.

³⁷ Davis, 359.

³⁸ J.A. Lloyd Hyde and Arvid O. Knudsen to H. Rodney Sharp, Invoice, 1 June 1939. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp family. Copy in the collection of Preservation Delaware, Inc.

"path...accented by a break in the center and by four large Smoketrees and, still more importantly, by nearly life-sized stone statues that once graced a pleasure house on the Brenta."³⁹ A connector between Padua and Venice, the Brenta Canal was once described as being adorned with country villas. As European and American interests in Italian Renaissance gardens, and more importantly, their ornamentation, blossomed, the villas on the Brenta became a common source of antique garden ornament or inspiration for new purchases.⁴⁰

The Sharps purchased the *Four Seasons* in 1928 from A. Olivotti & Co., a dealer of arts and antiques with shops in New York, Florence, and Venice. The sculptures are noted as being "old Padova," indicating most likely that the sculpture were purchased as antiques and originated in Padova, Italy, which is located about twenty miles southeast of Venice, and is consistent with the indication that the statues came from the Brenta region. It is however, unclear whether the term old Padova refers to their original provenience or is the name of the stone itself, for stone was often name for the region from which it was quarried. Olivotti supplied many pieces for Longwood Gardens, including several custom-made pieces. It is likely that the Sharps learned of this dealer from Longwood's founder P.S. du Pont, who was Mr. Sharp's friend and Mrs. Sharp's brother.

24.1 and 24.2 Vases with Bacchanal Masks

Set in the shady tranquility of the Bald Cypress Allée, these vases were installed circa 1923 as a component of Coffin's design for the Allée. The walkway widens in the center and forms two, opposing rectangular "breaks" that are adorned with this pair of vases.

The classic, fluted vases have Bacchanalian masks on the front and back. In addition to his role as the god of wine and revelry, Bacchus also was known as the god of vitality and the life force, making him a common element on garden ornament and fixtures. The masks of Bacchus are complimented with swags of fruit, flowers, and leaves. Bunches of grapes and rams' heads are mounted in the lowest section of the vase, below the masks. The urns sit atop a vertical base that is adorned on the front surface with a cluster of fruit and flowers tied up with a bow.

The provenance of these urns is not known, as there is no documentation of their purchase. However, analysis of the limestone indicates that it is Mediterranean, and thus these vases are most likely of Italian origin. The Sharps most likely purchased these vases in Italy in the early- to mid-1920s to coincide with the completion of the Bald Cypress Allée. During a 1922 visit to Italy, the Sharps visited the studio of Eugenio Battaglia, who

³⁹ Coffin, 93.

⁴⁰ Rose Standish Nichols, *Italian Pleasure Gardens*, London: Williams and Norgate (1929): 236.

specialized in "original works and First Rate copies."⁴¹ Looking forward to the completion of the Allée, the Sharps may well have purchased these vases from Battiglia or another ornament artisan/dealer during that visit.

A similar vase carved by a French sculptor, Jean Baptiste Pigalle, is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁴²

25.1 and 25.3 Art Deco Vases

This pair of graceful urns flanks either side of the Teahouse at the end of Gibraltar's Bald Cypress Allée. No bills or documentation of the urns exists, so their exact provenance or age is unknown. They are similar to items manufactured and available at other dealers in the late nineteenth century through the 1920s. These vases have not always been located near the Teahouse, as evidenced by a photograph dated June 1917 that shows one of the vases located at the north end of the wall between the Pool Terrace and the Evergreen Terrace. Its mate is shown in another photograph at the opposite end of the wall.⁴³ When the urns were relocated is unknown.

Four unusual handles accentuate the classic campana form of these vases. Features such as the handles and sweeping lines are typically thought to characterize the Art Deco style of the later 1920s, and a similar vase was also manufactured circa 1920 by the Galloway Terra-Cotta Company of Philadelphia. However, the 1917 photo of Gibraltar clearly places these vases much earlier than the 1920s. An identical vase was displayed at the end of the nineteenth century in a New York gallery owned by Eugene Glæzner. Gibraltar's pair of vases may have been purchased from Glæzner or at the very least were inspired by his late nineteenth-century example ⁴⁴

28.1 - 28.4 Fluted Urns with Handles

This set of four urns graces the piers at Gibraltar's main entrance on Pennsylvania Avenue. With their fluted bodies, scrolled handles, foliate finials, and domed lids, the urns are classical in style. They rest on bases that also form the capstone for the stone piers. This integration of pier and ornament suggests that the vases were installed at the same time as the wall; however, there is no photographic or written documentation of their history and no comparative examples have been located.

⁴¹ Eugenio Battiglia to H. Rodney Sharp, 9 August 1922. Correspondence. In the collection of the University Archives, University of Delaware.

⁴² O'Donnell, Patricia M., Heidi Hohomann, and Jonathan Fairbanks. *Oldfields: Estate Sculpture and Horticulture Study; Intent, Settings, Character, and Recommendations*. Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art (1996): Figure 13.

⁴³ Lucy Powell, Photograph Album, "Gibraltar," View of Pool Terrace, June 1917. Gibraltar Archives. In the collection of the Sharp family.

⁴⁴ Israel, 75.

29.1 and 29.2 Lead Vases with Swags

This pair of lead vases is decorated with restrained, Federal style decorations, including lozenges and swags. One each side is a bearded male face in bas-relief. A fluted cap covers each vase.⁴⁵

Circa 1930s photographs show these two vases placed on pedestals (3.1 and 3.2) on the Evergreen Terrace. Sometime after the 1930s, they were moved, along with the pedestals, to the Flagstone Terrace, where they are now located.⁴⁶

Their provenance is unknown, though they may have been purchased from art dealer Bert Crowther in Syon Lodge, England, who specialized in lead garden ornaments and from whom the Sharps purchased other lead items for their garden at Gibraltar.⁴⁷

30.1 and 30.2 Lead vases with snake handles

These striking lead vases flank the landing of the staircase to the Flagstone Terrace. They have elaborate, scrolling surface decorations and are most notably marked by the entwined snakes forming their handles.

The vases are pictured in an undated photograph that may date to the 1930s, but their provenance is unknown. Like the other pair of lead urns, they may have been purchased from art dealer Bert Crowther in Syon Lodge, England, who specialized in lead garden ornaments and from whom the Sharps purchased other lead items for Gibraltar.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Because the caps are not secured to the vases, they are currently in storage in the Gibraltar garage.

⁴⁶ Gestram, 51.

⁴⁷ Bert Crowther to H. Rodney Sharp, Esq., Letter, 18 October 1961. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp Family. Photocopy in the collection of Preservation Delaware.

⁴⁸ Bert Crowther to H. Rodney Sharp, Esq., Letter, 18 October 1961. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp Family. Photocopy in the collection of Preservation Delaware.

Additional Garden Ornamentation/Architecture⁴⁹

Iron railings and gates

Many of Gibraltar's ornamental elements, such as gates, were supplied by "interior architect," M. Voruz Vaux, working through the Herter Looms of New York City. The Sharps purchased the main gates to the Allée from Vaux in 1918 for \$500. At the same time, they also purchased a single gate for the pool area for the price of \$125. M. Voruz de Vaux also supplied sixteen bronze urn finials on the garden railings at the steps and terrace. The cost of these finials totaled \$62.⁵⁰ In 1924, de Vaux created a forty-eight-foot railing, (to include a gate) for the pool area. The cost for this work totaled \$1,325. The gate divides the Pool Terrace from the Formal Flower Garden.⁵¹

Some of the ironwork at Gibraltar has been tentatively attributed to Samuel Yellin, a noted blacksmith working in Philadelphia in the early twentieth century. A conversation with the Yellin forge indicates that there are records for work Yellin completed for the Sharps at Gibraltar. These records seem to suggest work on smaller accessories, rather than on gates or railings. The author of this report was not able to gain access to the Yellin records, however, it would be valuable to do so in the future in order to confirm the connection of Samuel Yellin to the iron work at Gibraltar.⁵²

Teahouse Columns

Four sixteenth-century Verona marble columns with bases and capitals decorate the Teahouse at the end of the Bald Cypress Allée. The Sharps purchased these columns from dealer Ohan Berberyan of New York and Palm Beach in 1931. Berberyan, who classified himself as a dealer of Spanish art, rugs, and tapestries, also supplied antiques and ornaments for Mr. and Mrs. Lamot du Pont Copeland at Mt. Cuba. The price of the columns totaled \$1,400 plus \$65 delivery from Baltimore to Wilmington.⁵³ It must be assumed that the columns arrived in a port in Baltimore by way of ship from Italy. The purchase of these columns coincides with the reconstruction of the garden house.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ These items, as well as other iron gates, railing, and details, were not included in the conservation assessment of the garden sculpture and ornament. Instead, they were treated as part of the hardscape treated during the garden restoration in 1998-1999.

⁵⁰ M. Voruz de Vaux, The Herter Looms, to H. Rodney Sharp, Invoice, 23 October 1918. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp family. Copy on file with Preservation Delaware, Inc.

⁵¹ M. Voruz de Vaux to H. Rodney Sharp, Invoice, 1 August 1924. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp family. Copy on file with Preservation Delaware, Inc.

⁵² Conversation with Claire Yellin by the author. Winter 1999.

⁵³ Ohan Berberyan to H. Rodney Sharp, Invoice, 24 September 1931. Gibraltar Archives. Original in the collection of the Sharp family. Copy on file with Preservation Delaware, Inc.

⁵⁴ Gestram, 41.

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Appendix A.

Map of Gibraltar Gardens
showing location of garden ornament

GIBRALTAR GARDEN ORNAMENT

