



Royal Horticultural Society  
x  
Garden Club of America  
Interchange Fellowship  
Mid Term Report

Sam Fry  
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Hawk Mountain, October 2022

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## 0.0 Arrival

Leaving Philadelphia International arrivals hall, the enveloping humidity of a late summer's day was my welcome to the United States. A taste of a new climate that would provide endless opportunities throughout the coming year. From the sanctity of the air-conditioned taxi I made my way westward to Longwood. Eyes fixed verge-side, the new flora of Pennsylvania slowly came into focus from a moving blur. The anxiety of leaving my life behind abated as familiar plants reintroduced themselves to me. Foxglove Trees, *Paulownia tomentosa*, an aggressive invasive species here, littered the highway shoulder. Unintentionally coppiced through the rapid roadside maintenance that resulted in the large leaved colonies bending and bowing in the traffic turbulence. The dark furrowed bark of Black Locusts, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, stood in the background softly foiled by their pinnate leaves. As the grey retreated and the green grew, flashes of yellow began to appear along the road, Goldenrod, *Solidago sp.*, fluttering in the breeze. Drawing closer to Longwood purples and pinks presented themselves. New-England Asters, *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*, and Joe Pye Weed, *Eutrochium purpureum*, emerging from the untamed grass and scrub, intermingling with the grasses and most beautifully with the Goldenrod bringing Robin Wall Kimmerer's Braiding Sweetgrass to mind.

Pulling onto Red Lion Row, my new home for the next twelve months, an image of true Americana led away into the distance. Pastel clapperboard houses spaced between a spread of mature trees, covered porches looked south towards the towering Tulip Trees, *Liriodendron tulipifera*, of Longwood Gardens. In a stroke of wonderful serendipity a London Plane, *Platanus x acerifolia*, stands guard opposite my bedroom window. A plant so prominent of my time in London now present in my next step forward.

## September through November

### 1.0 The Idea Garden

My first week was to be a thorough induction into the many cogs of the Longwood machine, but the first day was my own - a day to explore the garden. And that I did. Fifteen miles and seven hours later I had walked almost every path and seen every section filled with beds and borders. Familiar friends and new acquaintances greeted me at every turn; The meadow a plethora of Goldenrod, Joe Pye Weed, and Asters, abundant with natives exotic to me. The flower walk a spectrum of colour progressing along the length of the brick-laid path, Angel's Trumpets, *Brugmansia arborea*, suspended above the swathes of colour. The main walk way lined with Foxglove trees leading the way to the main fountain garden, a display of fountains that is unrivalled the world over, set against pristinely pruned formations of unblighted Box, *Buxus sempervirens*. Bordering the main fountain garden and beneath the soon-to-be finished west conservatory lies The Idea Garden where I would spend the next two months.

The Idea Garden's original intention was to be an educational space; The perennial borders were to align with the various plant identification classes offered by the Continuing Education programmes and the Professional Horticulture programme. An ornamental kitchen garden to demonstrate how a variety of food is grown. The combination beds to showcase the mixed border, an element more uncommon here than I realised. The annual beds, a space for vibrant colour that starts with bulbs and is replanted with seasonal annuals throughout the year. The children's garden, an outdoor playground where children can engage with various garden elements. Finally the herb garden and container garden, two bordering spaces, one open one enclosed, that provide opportunity to learn where spices and herbs originate, and how decorative a pot display can be. During my time in the Idea Garden I would be lucky enough to garden in each, learning from the fantastic horticulturalists who manage each, and about the plants that inhabit them.

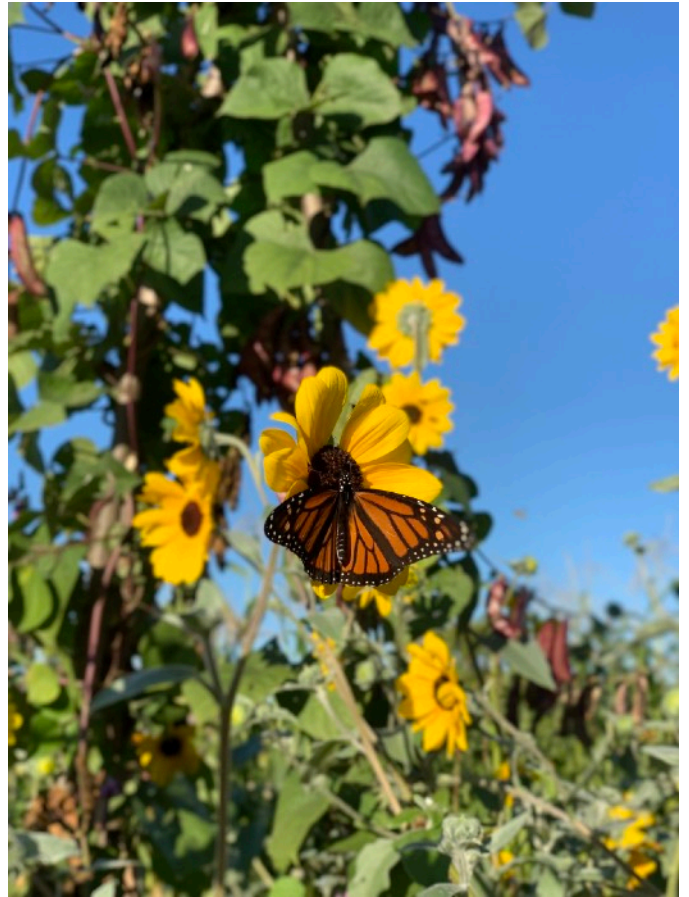
## 1.1 The Vegetable Garden

My first day was one of those perfect gardening days - the morning was crisp and the sky clear. A gentle ease into a new environment, watering the containers, finding my feet. Harvesting from the vegetable garden followed, a spread of produce from a variety of late summer crops. Cultivars reeled from Alex Correia, the senior horticulturalist stewarding the space. No two peppers or tomatoes alike, each uniquely significant. Alex's intention is to foster an educational and productive garden. Filled with prolific crops and plants holding major cultural significance within North America, it is a garden that rivals the best that Britain has to offer in my opinion. Inspiration is drawn from bastions of English kitchen gardens, like Gravetye Manor, but the result here is a step beyond beautiful curation and efficient seasonal succession. The garden this year produced over 2000lbs (over 900 kilograms) of produce that was given to the local food cupboard. This figure is hard to come by, a heartfelt letter pinned to the team's noticeboard from the food bank, the briefest of mentions in the Horticulture department's town hall meeting. No fanfare, no proclamation of larger numbers than the year before. Quietly providing to those who need it. The way in which the vegetable garden truly excels, is in the empathetic and compassionate planting choices. Crops are chosen for the community, those who use the food cupboard the most, who use the produce in their cooking. The vegetable garden is both beautiful and prolific, but the thoughtful intention behind it is what sets the garden apart.





Mid-September harvest from the vegetable garden



Monarch butterfly on *Helianthus agrophyllus*



Me about to take Marigolds to the compost



## 1.2 Wildflowers and Chanticleer

Before September's end, I was eager to make the most of my weekends. Through generous invitation by a senior professional horticulture student, Rowan Nygard, I indulged in my first wildflower walk in a new country. Rowan is a skilful botanist with a focus on fungi and the minute details of the natural world. We wandered through a local preserve towards several spots he had wanted to return to check on the foliage of orchids and the seed pods of others. The walk was a comforting familiarity, leafs crunching underfoot, progress made in increments of yards before stopping and stooping over a flower or fungus. Names and faces new to me were introduced. *Epifagus virginiana*, Beech Drops, a parasitic wildflower found only on the roots of Beech trees. *Chimaphila maculata*, Striped Wintergreen, a berry bearing low-growing evergreen. Our walk ultimately leading to a rock formation unique to the Appalachians, the mountain range of the east coast. A serpentine barren, composed of serpentinite, at the top of the hill in a clearing of trees. Amongst the leaf litter and brash pushed up a glistening white flower at quarters on the stem, *Spiranthes ochloreuca*, Yellow Ladies' Tresses. My first North American orchid. The addictive rush came fast, scrambling from rock to rock, tip toeing through the understory to find more and more in flower. We found about thirty in total, a successful first walk but it didn't end there. More serpentine barrens followed. To a private swimming pool carved into the green bedrock of serpentinite that had a creeping *Phlox sp.* around its edges, to another forest and trail leading to flowering treasure. The final find of the day was *Symphyotrichum depauperatum*, Serpentine Aster. A threatened species in Pennsylvania due to its loss of serpentine habitat, and a globally imperilled species due to its unique habitat.

After satiating my wildflower desires, gardens beckoned. How else to start my American garden journey other than setting the bar highest with a visit to Chanticleer. A late September visit meant that the garden was over the peak and in the gentle roll down to autumn but it still exceeded expectations. With *Anemone x hybrida* 'Honorine Jobert' in full stride alongside *Liriope muscari* I entered the garden. I spent hours walking every path, exploring every bed. In each area of the garden you're greeted by a small nook with the planting list within. A fantastic way for everyone to enjoy the garden, and to learn what is in flower and what is



growing - the cure for plant blindness. The garden on a whole was a beautiful escape, however the meadow above the pool and the gravel garden resonated with me above all else. I took a moment and sat a while by the meadow - watching hummingbirds dart from *Salvia* 'Amistad' to *Asclepias tuberosa* to *Agastache*. A life affirming point of reflection.

The gravel garden took me in a different approach, gently traversing its twisting and turning paths, climbing its steps and absorbing the planting. *Yucca rostrata* climbing above the flowers to a glaucous eruption. *Calamagrostis x acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' and *Stipa ichu* providing gently ebbing movement juxtaposed by the sharp rigidity of *Agave Americana* and various *Opuntias*. Softly declining *Echinacea purpurea* 'Rubinstern' fighting for its final breaths as *Melinis nerviglumis* pushes its tender pink panicle. A textural delight at every angle that I cannot wait to explore all over again the second it reopens come spring.



*Spiranthes ochloreuca*, September 2022



The Gravel Garden, Chanticleer

### 1.3 The Combination and Perennial Borders

The days grew shorter and so did my remaining time in The Idea Garden. As weeks passed I became more comfortable and confident in an increasingly familiar place. I asked to stay a while longer and I was fortunately able to do so due to the unfortunate absence of a team member. As part of my overstaying, I helped pick up the responsibilities of the horticulturalist on leave which was to assist in tending the combination and perennial borders alongside Helen Wagner, a part time horticulturalist. Together we tackled a list of tasks left for us; Removing aggressively self seeding and spreading plants like *Vernonia*, *Aster cordifolius* 'Avondale', and *Solidago*. Cutting back the perennials unable to be standing in the colder seasons. Removing annuals past their prime. The list kept us busy in between other projects, seed collecting and cleaning from the vegetable garden, and starting the seasonal projects.

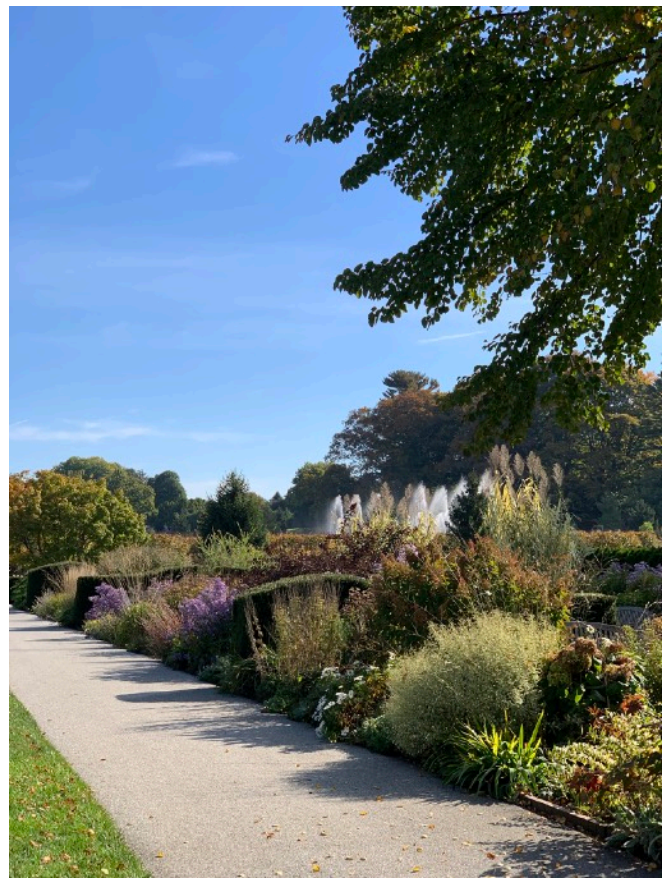
The first of the seasonal tasks was preparing the containers for Autumn and Winter interest. *Hydrangea quercifolia* and *Lindera angustifolia* were standout performers, both turning beautiful shades of scarlet. Juxtaposed against the glaucous persistent foliage of the Arizona Cypress, *Cupressus arizonica*. Then rolled on the first signs of Christmas, the train display. A temporary installation of model trains that was to be densely planted with late season flowers and grasses. A medley of *Chrysanthemum* cultivars offered showy colours interspersed with Little Blue Stem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*, a grass new to me that has fast become a fixation. Contrasts of silvery foliage from *Ajanía pacífica* against the intensely fruited Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, a native dioecious Holly. Whilst the temporary nature of the display was initially deterring to me, the success of the combinations and the clear enjoyment by so many of the guests forced me to reevaluate my attitude towards the installation. It drew people into the garden, children engaged with it far more than other spaces of the garden. It wasn't a permanent display but was it by default unsustainable or bad for the environment? The *Salvia* 'Waverly' were inundated with hummingbirds seeking out the last vestiges of nectar. Cat Birds, *Dumetella carolinensis*, prolific throughout the planting. The final glimmers of stained glass on the wind, the dwindling Monarch butterflies, *Dumetella carolinensis*, slowly making their long journey south fed on the plants. The woody plants used were planted in their pots,



waiting to be returned to the nursery for another life. The herbaceous perennials and annuals whose final destination was to be this display came in fibre pots, compostable alongside their plants, all of which remains on site. I expected to experience a new array of plants, but I did not anticipate to have my views challenged and then dispatched so readily.



The Combination Borders



The Perennial Borders

## 1.4 Chasing Fall Colour

An image quintessential to the North Eastern states is that of the mosaic of colour that Autumn brings across the landscape. Determined to make the most of my fleeting year, I planned an excursion North to the heart of Pennsylvania to see with my own eyes the fabled foliage. Camera and trail mix in hand, fellow Brit and RHS bursary recipient Morgan Russell and I departed one brisk October morning on our 572 mile trip. Blessed by a hot summer willed with drought and a cooler beginning to autumn, the leaves were slow to fall but particularly vibrant.

We drove north through rolling countryside, reminiscent of the fields of my childhood but unenclosed and wilder. Passing through Reading, and old coal towns the picture postcard of Americana. Clapper-board houses flanked brick town houses before giving way again to sprawling landscapes undivided by hedges or fences. We could see the Appalachian Mountains on the horizon, and slowly began to climb in elevation as we neared our first destination, Hawk Mountain. Recommended to us by many for the opportunity to watch migrating raptors, it gave us so much more. We arrived shortly after opening and had the trails to ourselves. The drive up had been spectacular but our walk out of the car park left our mouths agape. Leaves falling like blossom, colourful and bountiful. The ground a carpet golden and red hues. Within moments we crested the first slope and were presented a vista forever seared into my brain. Forest spreading vast into the horizon - an Impressionist vision of beauty and colour subdued by the early morning mist coating a snaking river. Morgan and I stood side by side absorbing the natural majesty, joined by twirling hawks far above us. We met through circumstance but became fast friends, to share that moment with someone was one of my greatest privileges. We soon tore ourselves away to continue higher, stopping at every opportunity of an overlook to experience one of the single greatest things America has to offer, its' landscape. The path grew rockier but we were delighted by the seedpods of a native orchid, the Yellow Lady's Slipper, *Cypripedium parviflorum*. In time we reached the apex of our hike, the prime spot for a bit of twitching. Turkey vultures, *Cathartes aura*, circled and climbed on the updrafts whilst a pair of Sharp-shinned Hawks, *Accipiter striatus*, even higher still. From there we descended and started onto our second destination, Pine Creek Gorge.



On we drove through rural farmland, chasing the Appalachian Mountains growing ever nearer. A mistake on my part, but the gorge wasn't our desired stop. Mistaking Pine Creek for the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon, we drove between steep inclines skirting the edge of Pine Creek. Fully in the throws of Autumn, we walked the river for a while beneath the falling of golden leaves. Aspen, *Populus sp*, stood either side of the trail, their course older bark gradually transitioning to a smooth pristine white. We made the decision not to head further north in pursuit of the Pennsylvanian Grand Canyon, instead heading northeast through the Susquehannock State Forest towards the Allegheny National Forest. By this point I could no longer comprehend the cacophony of colour, an assault on my vision from the autumnal blur passing as we drove. After spending the entire day together in close company, our conversation was certainly waning, other than periodic exclamations as we took turns opening up new views that bombarded us with yet more natural majesty and my expletives at trees so colourful.

After a night spent in an unheated cabin nestled amongst static trailers, we were eager to rise and seize the opportunity of another trail solely for the two of us. Driving along single tracked roads, over train tracks, between crimson and gold trees, we pulled into Kinzua Bridge State Park. An object of my fascination from before leaving London, my excitement was bubbling over. We entered the visitors centre and were instantly met by a breathtaking view of the former bridge, framed by the tinted window and the fading colours of fall. The bridge was once the tallest rail bridge in the world at the time of its construction, standing at 301 feet above the ground. Eventually it was turned over to the state, and became a pedestrian bridge crossing the valley, before a tornado tore through the area, collapsing half of the bridge in 2003. In 2011 it reopened, a skywalk still at 300 feet but only a portion of the distance. The twisted and torn steel remains in place offering a wondrous post-industrial landscape reclaimed by nature. Looking out to the end of the skywalk there was a lone figure. Close enough to having it to ourselves. With trepidation we made our way out as the trees fell away besides us. The valley was a channel for wind, we felt the cold rush against our faces. The trees showed the signs of the increased exposure being past the peak of colour, a mass of skeletons and browning leaves, stunning nonetheless. Reaching the furthest point out across the valley we were directly over Kinzua Creek. Looking

east and west we could see miles of unabated forest. Swathes of evergreen conifers amongst the kaleidoscope of earthy tones. We soon ventured down into the gorge along the sweeping trail. Passing no one for the entire descent, we took in the flora. American Witch-Hazel, *Hamamelis virginiana*, welcomed us down to the creek, bending and bowing above us with her profusion of yellow clusters. A rickety wooden bridge guided us over the river with signs of American beavers, *Castor canadensis*, from gnawed on stumps. We climbed the other side of the gorge, looking back across the mangled struts and rails. Seedheads swayed throughout the cold unmoving metal, ghosts of spring and summer. Botanical and industrial senescence in unison, the teardrops of Milkweed, *Asclepias*, and the spires of Mullein, *Verbascum*, complimenting the torn riveted metal.

Soon after we circled back and found ourselves again facing the extruding bridge before us, but no longer only our own. One final visit to the end. Slowly strolling next to the rail, the gap between the sleepers open to the forest below. We stood, faces to the cold, watching the wind roll through the valley before making the return journey to Longwood. Six hours flying through mountains and farmland, passing over rivers and through towns, chasing fall in reverse back to the less progressed colour as it returned to green.

The trip had a profound effect on me. It left me with a hunger to see more of the great American landscape, and so grateful to have had the opportunity to see some of the most beautiful views I have seen in my life, alongside a good friend.

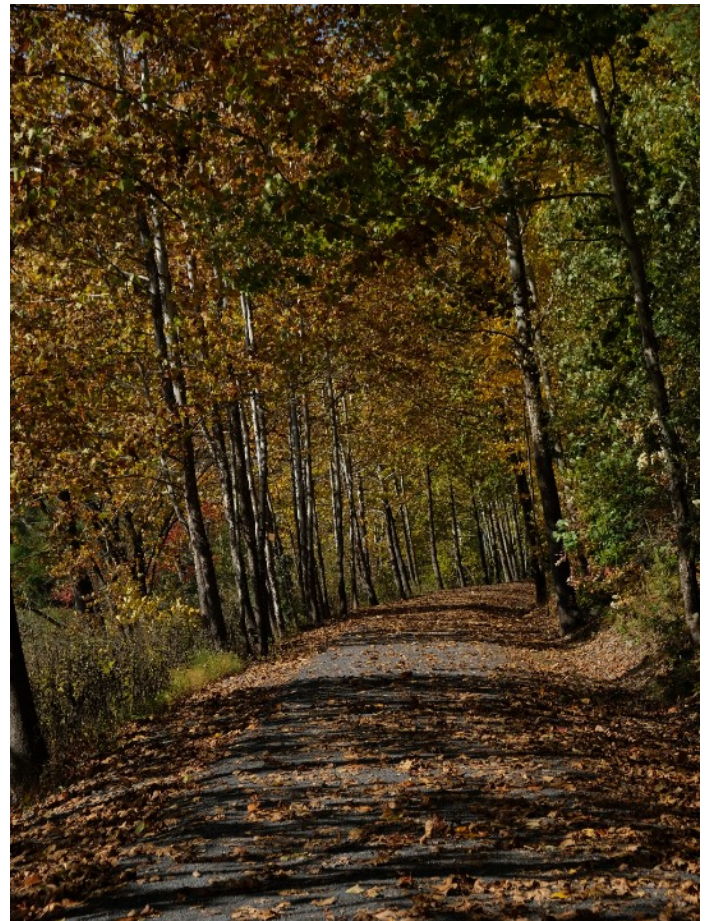




Morgan and I at Kinzua Bridge, October 2022



Hawk Mountain, October 2022



Aspen lining the trail along Pine Creek Gorge



I was back less than a week before opportunity called, to again find the vibrancy of autumn, but this time in Connecticut. A group of Senior Professional Horticulture students and I made our way up on a whistle stop tour of locations. At the crack of dawn Kinga, Allison, Brandon, and I departed for New England. We circumnavigated New York City, the Manhattan Skyline visible across the Hudson River with the sun low over it. Quickly replacing grey for green, turning to crimsons and ochres. Interstates lined by thick forest, the dark bark of *Nyssa sylvatica* topped with fiery red leaves prominent against the glowing foliage. Our first port of call was Broken Arrow Nursery, a wonderland of rare and unusual woody plants. We were toured by the family that owns and runs the nursery, who showed us incredible hospitality and such a fantastical variety of beautiful shrubs and trees set in the rolling Connecticut hills. Armed with a shopping list with requests from previous RHS/GCA Fellow Grant Hughes and other gardeners from a GCA dinner after letting slip my intention to visit, I perused their polyhouses and benches in search of horticultural treats. With over 7000 taxa on site, the nursery is closer to a botanical garden, with many unique introductions such as a copper coloured Witch Hazel, *H. virginiana* 'Copper Curls'. The Broken Arrow team's kindness not only extends to visitors, but to its future. The site is protected from any future development, with the eventual goal of converting the grounds into an arboretum. After filling our brains and notebooks with lists upon lists of dream plants we thanked them profusely and headed on our way to the next stop, Hollister House.

Upon recommendation from Tom Coward, Hollister House was my contribution to the trip other than the bacon and egg bagels to start the day. He had told me it was one of the great English inspired gardens to visit and it did not disappoint. With kind hospitality again, the director George Schoellkopf took us on a tour of the garden in the dying afternoon light. Hollister House and garden are nestled in the shade of a wooded hillside. Past its floriferous prime, the structure of the garden shone through. Neatly clipped hedges amongst seedheads, with architectural plants and the beautiful bark of *Stewartia pseudocamellia* particularly of note. After a tour detailing the history of the house, the garden, and their future, we thanked George and the head gardener, Krista Adams, and started on our return journey to be back in time for work the next morning.





Broken Arrow and the colour of Connecticut, October 2022



Me with Hollister House, October 2022



## 1.5 Bulb Planting

One of the significant projects of the year at Longwood is bulb planting on the Flower Walk, a 600 foot bedding display that is a riot of colour throughout the warm season months. I was involved throughout the two week planting period, helping to layout and plant around 300,000 bulbs into the tilled earth. A medley of *Tulipa*, *Hyacinthus*, *Narcissus*, *Hyacinthoides*, *Camassia*, *Allium* and *Fritillaria*. Come spring a display that will transition blue to purple, pink to red, orange to yellow, and a final show of white. The effort brought together the students and the outdoor teams to tackle the piles of bulbs. Painted into swathes and drifts, then laid out by hand and spaced equally. The positioning looked picturesque before planting, an ocean of bulbs spread across the mounded beds beneath the soft falling of leaves. Using hori-horis and planks of wood we marched down the borders. In time a well oiled machine moving from swathe to swathe. Planting alternating varieties of Tulips, combinations of Alliums and Daffodils, and meshes of Fritillaria, Alliums, and Camassia with Daffodils. A long physical slog but the results will show in April, and hopefully the two different Tulips I got confused which was which won't be too obvious.



Bulbs laid out across the Flower Walk



Bulbs laid out across the Flower Walk

## 1.6 Gardens of the North East

One of the greatest things about horticulture is the hospitality of gardeners, and that I have been fortunate to find in spades in America. Betsy McCoy, stalwart of the Garden Club of America, has been unfathomably generous with her home and time. She was quick to invite me to dinner at her house when I arrived, and has always been at the end of the phone or on the other side of an email whenever I have needed help or guidance. In warmer weather she took me on a tour of her garden, a beautiful sanctuary amongst the trees of Delaware. Her hosting wasn't confined to the boundaries of her home, also being a volunteer at Mt. Cuba Center she welcomed me into the garden and toured myself and other Longwood students around. Offering us an insight into the history of the garden, how she has seen it change as we walked the leaf laden paths. Mt. Cuba is a stunning garden, but its beauty is only compounded by the fact it is an entirely native garden. Their focus is educating the wider American world on the beauty and value of native plants, and to propagate and protect the plants and their habitats. I saw it only in its autumnal decline but it was beautiful regardless, the care and the attention to the natural world was around ever present. From their collection of Trilliums (32% of North American Trillium species face extinction), to their trial beds where they assess native species and their cultivars for horticultural and ecological value, ultimately freely publishing the results for anyone to access and utilise.

Through another dinner hosted by Betsy I was introduced to Coleman and Susy Townsend. Upon learning of my trip to Connecticut and Broken Arrow Coleman added to my shopping list Japanese Bugbane, *Actaea japonica*. When I delivered his order I was kindly invited for a tour and cup of tea. Coleman being an ardent Great Dixter supporter, we got along swimmingly from the get go. We strolled around the garden in the late afternoon sun, amongst the drone of mosquitos and the ascending staccato calls of a Pileated Woodpecker. Through stumpy and curated meadow, with all yellow removed which is quite a feat given the local abundance of *Solidago* and *Helianthus*. Stunning specimen woodies decorated the landscape; Two Sugar Maples, *Acer saccharum*, stood as headers in the meadow. *Liquidamber styraciflua* 'Gumball' retaining its verdant green long past its contemporaries as you look down towards the pond. The River Birch,

*Betula nigra* stand with prominence within the textural meadow that skirts the 18th century farm house. A textural delight provided by the clouds of Purple Lovegrass, *Eragrostis spectabilis* and the yellowing plumes of Hubricht's Bluestar, *Amsonia hubrichtii*. Coleman left me to revel in the meadow whilst he greeted Susy returning from work. Frothing grass bounded towards the house punctuated by the seedheads of Rough Blazing Star, *Liatris aspera* and the golden feathers of *Calamagrostis brachytricha*. A wrap around porch jutted from the house, within it rocking chairs watched over the garden, a postcard of the American dream. Standing there I felt overcome with a pang of belonging, a sudden realisation that I was there in that moment, doing exactly what I had hoped to achieve with the Fellowship: exploring a new world of horticulture, of people, and of landscape, following in my fathers footsteps but along my own path. Coleman and Susy returned and we meandered on, whilst I was quietly elated in the actualisation of my dreams. Passing through towering hedges we entered into the ruin garden. A skeleton of a historic barn now enveloped in greenery. Against the back wall a gentle cascade of water. A smattering of leaves decorated the dark flagstone paving. A Sourwood, *Oxydendrum arboreum* hung over the dark stone of a low pool of water, maroon ubiquitous between the Sourwood's flowers and the Boston Ivy, *Parthenocissus tricuspidata* dripping from the wall. In the corner an arching *Brugmansia arborea* underplanted by Mexican Sunflower, *Tithonia rotundifolia*. We moved onward until we stood atop the barn's former hay loft ramp, now open to the sky, looking out over the garden as a whole. Pieces of the garden mosaic transitioning into each other as they wrapped around the house. Further the Townsend's hospitality reached as they invited me for a cup of tea, their comprehension of British culture evident. We sat on the terrace looking out over the garden, dogs snuffling at my feet, discussing plants, gardens, and Longwood as the sun dipped below the westward trees. Visiting their garden was a profound experience for me, and I am so very grateful for their kindness and hospitality.

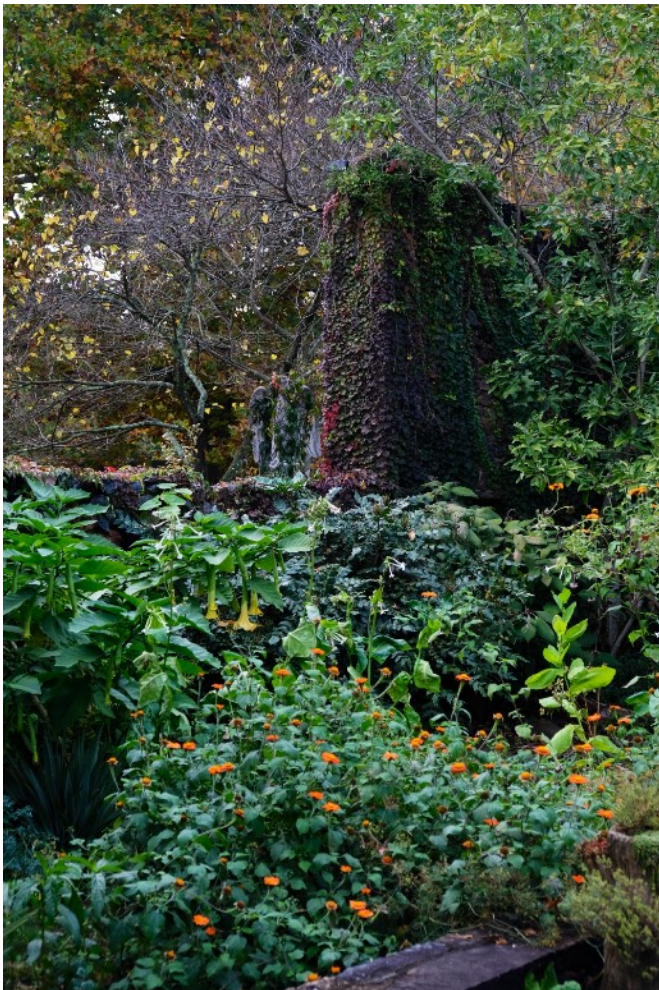
As autumn progressed, the gardens in America's Garden Capital began to close. Final open weekends flurried by, a last chance to walk the paths here and the vestiges of fall there. One garden had been on my list since starting my application to the RHS x GCA Interchange Fellowship, Andalusia House and Gardens. I have spoken time and time again about the kindness of gardeners, no



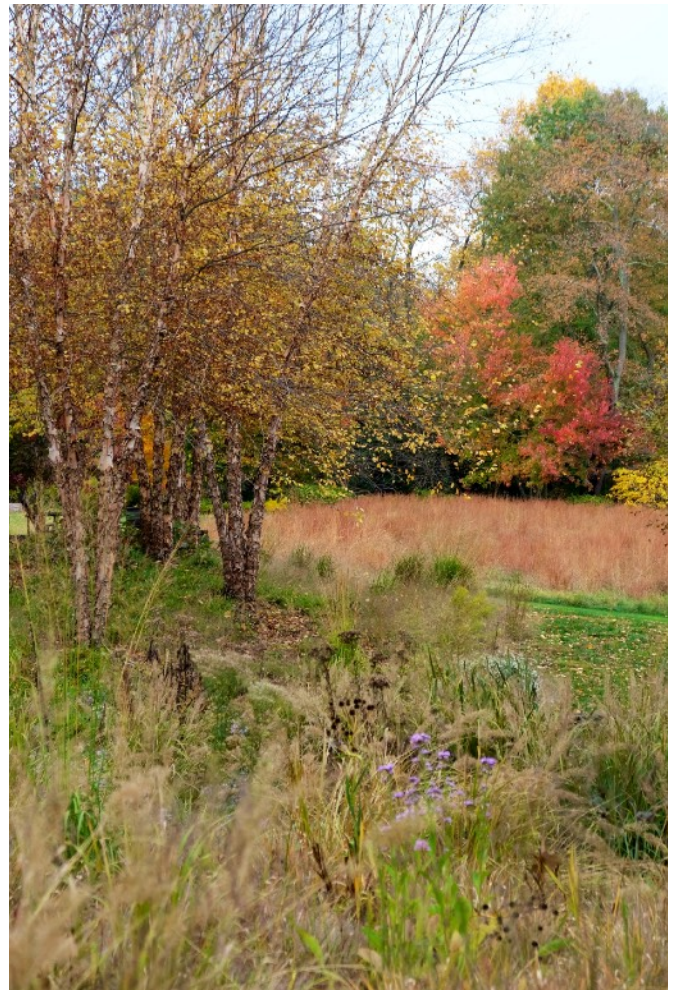
one more embodies that than Kristin Biddle. Andalusia is the ancestral home of the Biddles, founded on the banks of the Delaware just out side of the city of Philadelphia. In preparation for applying for this program, Kristin was incredibly generous with her time and knowledge, offering me kind feedback and insight into my application and the GCA, despite having never met me. In the throws of Autumn, a group of ProHorts and I arranged to visit on the penultimate open weekend of Andalusia. She welcomed us with open arms, and again, offered her undivided attention and time as she took us around the estate. Gravel crunching underfoot Kristin vibrantly told us the history of her family and the grounds. How architect, Thomas Ustick Walter had designed a columned porch on the main house before going on to design the dome and wings of the Capital building in Washington DC, strikingly similar and quintessentially American. How Arabella Lennox-Boyd had implemented a design in the garden, it's British inspiration shining through. Timber framed greenhouses lent against an imposing red-brick wall, all the while roses still in bloom led towards the house, flanked by *Chrysanthemum* 'Peaches and Cream' an uninterrupted profusion of blooms. Towering trees commanded the landscape, most notably the Pennsylvania state champion Willow Oak, *Quercus phellos* that stood guard over the driveway into the house. Unfortunately in an unavoidable decline, it still gave life despite losing its own, its branches alive with Downy Woodpeckers, *Picooides pubescens* feasting on insects within the deadwood. We found ourselves the final guests of the open weekend, stood alone with the head gardener and Kristin, watching the golden light of autumn dancing on the ripples of the Delaware as it lapped against the bank.

The kindness and hospitality of my host country and its gardeners is not exclusive to the gardens I have listed, but only a small selection of what I have been shown in my short time here. I was warmly welcomed by Andy Schenck of Sam Browns Nursery for a behind the scenes tour of his amazing collection including a chartreuse Dawn Redwood, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* 'Soul Fire' of his own introduction. An after hours visit to Wintherthur, another DuPont property and spirit partner garden to Longwood thanks to Faith Redcay who invited me for a run around the grounds where in March it comes alive with Spring bulbs. To Phillips Mushroom farm where I was introduced to Stump, an American

game involving catching hammers and hitting nails in one swing by a past ProHort despite having never met them before. A fleeting visit to Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia as part of a food tour of the city organised by yet another previous ProHort. If Autumn is this beautiful and full of opportunity, I cannot imagine what spring will bring.



The Ruin Garden at the Townsend's Garden

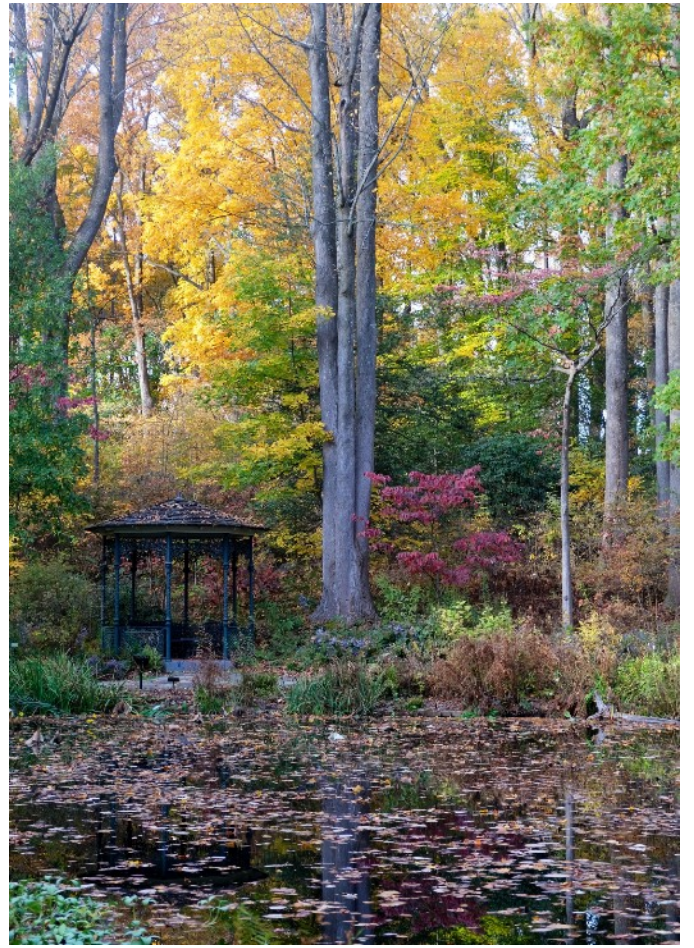


Looking out over the meadow at the Townsend's Garden





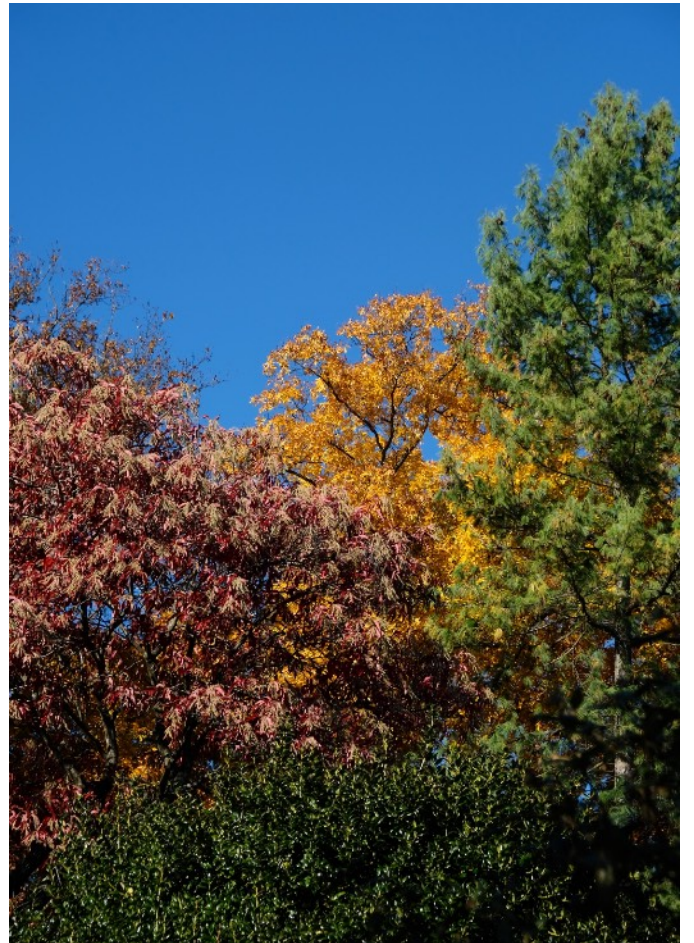
The Pond at Mt. Cuba Center



The Pond at Mt. Cuba Center



The columned porch at Andalusia



*Oxydendrum arboreum*, *Pinus strobus*, and *Liriodendron Tulipifera* at Andalusia



## November through January

### 2.0 The Conservatory

November arrived and the garden outside was quiet. The bulbs were planted. The majority of cutbacks were completed. The trees stood largely leafless, bare limbs waving in the wind. With a slight ache I left the Idea Garden and the team there, although only moving a couple hundred yards up the hill to the conservatory for my next rotation I would no longer spend lunchtimes laughing and listening to exuberant stories with them.

With slight trepidation I entered under the glass to a new world of constant colour and drama. Bringing with me an eagerness to learn, to experience an entire new world of horticulture, and an opportunity to push my boundaries. In my first few days the Chrysanthemum Festival was drawing to a close. An otherworldly flower show comprised of a plethora of Chrysanthemum varieties and forms. Vast hanging baskets an ocean of flowers, extravagant herbaceous topiary creating fans, bonsai, standards, whatever one could imagine but at its heart, Chrysanthemum.

The conservatory is split into many spaces; The green wall, the largest living wall in America at its installation. The East, a permanent display of tropicals and exotics full of fanatical and storied plants from Longwood's equally rich history. The Main which is where the magic really happens, walkways of seasonal bedding that offer a display unparalleled the world over. The Garden Path, a brick pathway of horticultural wonder brimming with colour and interest. And a variety of smaller spaces each as beautiful as the last. The Orchid House, The Silver Garden, The Children's Garden, The Camellia House, and The Acacia Passage.

The garden as a whole feels to be in a period of transition, none more so than the conservatory, being the focus of the expansive Longwood Reimagined project. Recently losing several historic spaces in preparation for the construction of the new West Conservatory. A medley of new areas are imminent, a Mediterranean inspired conservatory, a space for bonsai, a new restaurant, a redeveloped educational and administration hub, and the reinstatement of the historic Cascade Garden. The only garden in North America designed by renowned Landscape Architect Roberto Burle Marx.



## 2.1 Botanical Splendour

As Thanksgiving approached, the distant bells of Christmas could be heard. Something I had already seen people frantically preparing for, but now here. Longwood Christmas is something people talk about with hushed voices to those who have yet to experience it, a mythical being that rears its head once a year. This year the nature of the beast being Botanical Splendour. I received an email detailing my deployment. A call to arms for the students. Each and every one of us assigned a team, a role, and a purpose for the festive install. I would be working on the West and South West walkways. I read through my comrades names and read through the meticulous instructions over and over. Lists of plants to be saved, their locations and numbers. Lists of the plants arriving to replace them, Poinsettias and *Kalanchoe*, vibrant reds and oranges for the season. The conservatory was to be closed for a week to create the magical Christmas wonderland, and we would be starting promptly on a Sunday afternoon the second the conservatory shut its doors.

The time came and we all splintered into our groups, rushing to get to work. Tearing at the Chrysanthemums in the beds we separated herbaceous from woody, woody from soil, in preparation for the compost. A compost train made its rounds, an electric cart no wider than the pathway pulling along three trailers, one for each of the main ingredients of the floriferous display. As we dismantled beds trees began to arrive. Impressive cut trees began to be installed at significant points within the glass house. One would spin at the heart of the orangery, another on the exhibition stage, and the tallest of twenty-four feet standing centrally at the end of the water as one entered the conservatory. Once beds were emptied of plants the preparation began. Turning over and levelling of soil. Clearing the remnants of Chrysanthemum petals and straggling root-balls. Teams jumped from walkway to walkway finishing off others once they were done themselves. Radio chatter a constant background as install leads directed a whole other army behind the scenes ferrying plants and materials to and from the north door, the main entry point to the conservatory for staff. Late evening rolled around and the beds laid bare. Lifts danced around the trees, people still delicately lighting trees to give the perfect display without a single stray bulb well

into the night. Tired we all made our way back through the woodland towards the Row, where we would all begin again early.

The following morning trolley-loads of plants greeted us by the walk ways. Working in duos of one unpotting, one planting, we crawled our way along the beds. To dig the tool of choice was a flattened brick trowel, a large rounded paddle that was close to the width of the pot. Looking down the walkway was a sea of students hacking at the ground with these specially made trowels, undeniably faster than standard trowel or hori. Managers passed by commending or critiquing planting, navigating the conservatory holding the folded planting plans in their hands like maps, captains of their ship. As plants began to dwindle teams would bomb burst to other projects, pulled into more tree decorating or different planting. There wasn't a moment to spare.

Quiet rumours began to ripple through the conservatory, whispers of donuts, bagels, and coffee. By midmorning we were given a break, down to lower production, where the greenhouses of research and production were lined with tables filled with trays of bagels and donuts being served by the heads of section. A communal gathering of horticulturalists chatting and laughing. Before long we were whisked away as the beds beckoned and planting was still to be done. Walking back with a different set of fed eyes, the display was starting to take shape. Living trees alternating swirls of *Guzmania* and *Syngonium* were beginning to form. The first of the *Begonia* rose forms were being plugged into a tree, living ornaments hanging between the branches. The exhibition hall a hive of activity. A massive tree being worked on simultaneously by a number of lifts and people on the ground all the while the fern floor being filled with even more large trees, sweeping metal structures starting to be fitted around them. By Monday's close, the walk way I was working on was all but finished. *Euphorbia pulcherrima* 'Santa Klaus Red' (Poinsettia) skirted the windows, while a medley of *Kalanchoe* 'Red' and *Euphorbia pulcherrima* 'Christmas Mouse' filled the bed with an edge of Boston Ferns, *Nephrolepis* 'Jesters Crown' lining the walkway. Karl Gercens, the conservatory manager, would make his rounds assessing the work done. He introduced a new term, commercially extinct, and made the argument that it is just as important to preserve these plants that are enjoyed by many as it is to conserve threatened species. *Euphorbia pulcherrima* 'Santa Claus Red' being a

commercially extinct cultivar, no longer available commercially, propagated to massive scale each year by Longwood Gardens.

The week marched on and so did the installation of Botanical Splendour. Walkways were finished and trees neared completion. Work days lasting twelve hours were not uncommon, moving from project to project until too tired to continue in order to finish the job. Wednesday evening arrived, and a handful of us remained working on the fern floor. Christmas trees bathed in warm white light lined the sunken floor, great metal swathes planted with miniature Poinsettias, Dracaena, and Peperomia swept and swung around them leading towards the central focal point of a vast majestic tree in gold and red, wrapped in garlands of dried grasses cut from the meadow. Myself, Tim Jennings the water lily expert of America and Longwood Gardens, and Olivia Wyckoff the conservatory intern swept the floor clear and hosed it down. Cleaning in preparation for the final sign off by the head of horticulture, and the head of Christmas. Ultimately we stood leaning on brooms, watching the group assessing the display before they turned and left. Approval for both the display and for us to leave. The following morning only the centre walk remained to be planted, having been occupied by a tree new for this year. A twenty foot rotating display of dried roses and accompanying delicate ornaments. The students en masse descended onto the walkway, deciphering the plan and allocating the plants, led by senior and junior ProHorts Ben Helde and Caroline Colino. We scurried along the beds, planting Poinsettias and Algaonema, laying out Amaryllis in pots beneath the spinning branches.

And with that, the Christmas installation was finished. The paths were swept clean, the grates uncovered. The only remaining tasks, and our job for the next week, was the total disassembly of the vast hanging baskets of Chrysanthemums, now a distant memory through the fray of Christmas install.





Morgan and I working together



The tallest tree in the conservatory



The fern floor



Poinsettias in beds, trees, and hanging baskets



## 2.2 The Desolation of Winter

Gardens and art are synonymous the world over, but even more so in South East Pennsylvania. Philadelphia is considered America's Garden Capital, with thirty-eight public gardens within thirty miles of the city. The area was also a hub for landscape paintings of the early American republic. While the Hudson River School is the most prominent, it was in part inspired by the Schuylkill River artists Thomas Doughty and Thomas Birch, who displayed their landscape paintings in Philadelphia when it was the nation's first capital. Paintings of the American landscape are a significant part of fine art in America, with its inception in Philadelphia, there is a wealth of artwork to see. Locally to Longwood there is the Brandywine Museum of Art, whose curved windows look out over the Brandywine river. Housed there are a collection of landscape paintings, with a number of the artists trained and educated in the tenets of the Hudson River School. Captivating paintings of landscapes from this corner of America line the walls there, one of which ensnared me most of all. *Pennsylvania Landscape* by Andrew Wyeth. The Wyeths are a family deeply ingrained in the local area, creating art here for 3 generations, but it was Andrew Wyeth's painting of the Pennsylvania landscape that captured me. In the foreground a considerable American Sycamore, *Platanus occindentalis* almost devoid of leaves. Its aged trunk dark but the characteristic patch work of *Platanus* along the branches. The rolling Pennsylvania landscape behind it, bounding from farm house to field to forest on the horizon. The stark countryside beneath the smooth grey-white sky resonated with me, emulating the familiar British winter where I grew up. This desolation is oddly attractive to me. The fallow season, naked stems and barren views is of comfort, and this *Pennsylvania Landscape* drew me out into it and ignited my desire to see it for myself.

At weekends I ventured out. Exploring the trails of the meadow at Longwood, now an expanse of Goldenrod and Joe Pye Weed seed heads. Traveling further to the Natural Lands Preserves, a non-profit organisation protecting and sharing open spaces in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Cold air drawn into my lungs I trod the trails, exploring my American landscape. Finding many an American Sycamore adjacent to the path, Andrew Wyeth's painting always present in my mind. The landscape was bleak, shades of browns, greys, and faltering greens

ever present, but along the woodland edge there were bursts of brilliant colour. Flashes of vibrant red, electric blue, bright white. One of the most considerable difference between England and America I have come to realise, is that of biodiversity. When I arrived there was an orchestral drone of insects and frogs and now in winter there was an abundance of birds. Whilst there isn't a comparable English dawn chorus, the number and the variance of the small birds feels like it exceeds that of our island. At ground level, a red blur darts between the branches, a clear whistle pierces the winter air. Another target of my fascination, the male Northern Cardinal, *Cardinalis cardinalis*. Their feathers so vivid a colour by its very nature, cardinal red light up the desolation of winter. His partner not far away, a lovely buff-brown herself with hints of red on her wings and a strong red bill. High above at the pinnacle of the branches a harsh jeering can be heard. Like hints of a blue sky through the cracks in the clouds, an occasional Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata* can be spotted by their colouring or distinctive silhouette. Skirting the woodland edge where grasses meet tree, jolts of blue shoot from branch to grass to branch. Eastern Bluebirds, *Sialia sialis* in flocks greater than Cardinals or Bluejays, their rusty red breast in strong contrast to their vibrant blue feathers. One of my favourite birds to watch as they perch on the tips of branches, bobbing in the breeze as you pass them by. A solitary grey white bird sits with its feathers roused, watching me warily from a distance. It takes flight, its long white tail following on. My sister's voice fills my head, "Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." The northern Mockingbird, *Mimus polyglottos*, quiet this time for me. Another flock busily stripping seeds from the Goldenrod and other dried and grey plants, the House Finch, *Carpodacus mexicanus*. Pops of watercolour red appear as they hop from stem to stem, dropping in and out of view. In the background I hear the rapid tapping on wood, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, *Melanerpes carolinus* searching out insects in the canopy. It moves on, showing me its zebra-striped back, its bold red crown shining through. On the feeder I've put alongside my porch, Tufted Titmice, *Parus bicolor* frequent in pairs, characterful birds with large eyes, a pointed crown, grey feathers and rusty flanks. Carolina chickadees, *Parus carolinensis* impatiently hop between the different feeders before shooting



away to the safety of a dense shrub nearby. All the while a White-breasted Nuthatch, *Sitta carolinensis* hangs headfirst sampling the seeds I offer.

The Pennsylvanian winter may be reminiscent of the cloudy tupperware-box weather of England, desolate days where there is little growth and even fewer flowers. However I have found solace delving into the abundant wildlife. I have grown a greater appreciation for the birds who frequent the garden, fascinated by the new and beautiful varieties so different to our own. I take a holistic approach to my gardening. I believe a garden is a sum of its parts. The plants being only a small section of the orchestra, accompanied by the bird section, the insect section, and the human section. Together producing a symphony, that taken at face value is enjoyable, but greater beauty lies beneath in the intricacy of parts working together in harmony.



*Pennsylvania Landscape*, Andrew Wyeth 1941

## 2.3 Brandywine Cottage

My time in the conservatory was weighing heavy on me. I was learning a considerable amount and enjoying working with the expert team within. But I missed the fresh air, and as I would come to learn, the sun also. In the early 2000s the glass of the conservatory was replaced with safer, shatterproof glass. It now however blocked UV rays from entering. Whilst there were days I saw the sun light, I was not in fact in it. What did shine through, was again the hospitality of gardeners. Through kind invitation from Rowan Nygard, and generous reference from the Townsends, I was introduced to David Culp. Local designer and author who had designed the Townsends garden that I had visited months earlier.

One Sunday morning, Rowan drove me through the rolling farmland to the north of Longwood towards Downingtown, to Brandywine Cottage, the home of David and his partner Michael. The subject of his books, their efforts, and my respite from bedding changeovers. We all sat before the open wood burner, beautiful illustrations of *Galanthus* and *Helleborus* decorated the walls and furniture, objects of David's cultivation and fascination. I was there to meet David, but also to get my hands back into the cold earth and fresh air into my lungs. We chatted a while about English gardens, David reeling off names of people, nurseries, and gardens from his travels over the pond. We were given instruction and Michael brought in a crate of bulbs, a spread of species Tulips in oranges, yellows, and purples. First we were to tidy and plant the ruin garden, a space by the roadside, a sheltered section of gravel and rocks. Then move to the gravel garden, a space on the driveway filled with self seeders softly knitting driveway and garden together. Before long we were beckoned back into the house, Michael had cooked a beef stew to warm us. We sat around the table freely conversing and laughing, talking of gardens and of plants. David and Michael imparting stories and wisdom, but keenly listening to our less experienced opinions and ideas. Pulling ourselves away from the fire-warmed cottage back to the cold, the last of the bulbs went in under David's strict directive: have fun with it.

After Christmas I returned to Brandywine Cottage, with David's invitation to look at the roses. Eager for another escape from gardening under glass, I jumped at the opportunity. I spent the day with ProHorts Rowan and Elizabeth, showing



them the Sissinghurst method of pruning roses. Together we bent and bowed stems over and around a wall to hopefully create a floriferous layer. Again we ate lunch all together. Chatting through the roses, David taking time to explain the habits of different Hellebores, a group he used to have a keen interest in cultivating and breeding but his focus now shifted to Snowdrops. He told us of his Galanthus Gala, an event in March hosting talks and a plant sale all centred around Galanthophiles. Brandywine Cottage became a retreat for me, an opportunity to slip away from Longwood where I slept, ate, and worked, to play in a garden with David and Michael on hand for guidance and encouragement. I would return again and again but with different gardeners. Mornings would be spent working before we gathered again around the table for lunch in the warmth of the crackling fire. Our shared passion endlessly running conversation to conversation. The kindness and hospitality of gardeners flourishing yet again.



Elizabeth and I tying in a rose at Brandywine Cottage

Brandywine Cottage, January 2023



## 2.4 Winter Wonder

Christmas is the busiest period for Longwood. Days with over ten thousand guests are a regular occurrence, with the season running from just before Thanksgiving to the second week of January. The outdoor light display and the conservatory are the two main attractions, each a magical festive display. The conservatory becomes busy the second the doors open, from ten in the morning it becomes difficult to work from the number of guests enjoying the display. During this period we would start at the crack of dawn, hitting the ground running by assessing the damage to the bedding. Ferns would be broken from smelling the Lilies, Poinsettias snapped from being snagged by a passing stroller, the occasional pest or disease issue blighting a crop. Production would then deliver replacements. Small green vehicles would trundle around the walkways, warmed to prevent the cold from damaging the tender plants as they traveled up from the greenhouses. We would then tip toe and perform wide stretches to reach across the bed to plant the old for new. Monday through Friday we would assess, replace, and tidy all before ten to present the picture perfect view. An unrivalled flower display. Where else in the country, or the world, could one see colour and displays in such exuberance and extravagance, that brings multiple thousands of people daily to see it. Longwood's display is one of a kind, and is down to a fine art completed by an incredibly skilled and talented team of horticulturalists and volunteers.

Time's arrow marches on however, and in a blink it was January. The email directives for the new display change trickled in. A more subdued version of the previous. I had sat in on planning meetings between the conservatory team. A strict schedule of changes had been organised. Plants from this walkway would go to this greenhouse for a day before returning to be planted in that walkway but after it had been emptied on this day. A finely choreographed dance between departments and teams however with less rush than Christmas. The conservatory was only to close for two days yet the project would run for two weeks. Each day another walkway would change over, from Poinsettias and festive hues, to Winter Wonder, yellows and whites, purples and oranges. Having now been there for two months I felt comfortable and confident in this environment. I knew the processes and what was expected. In the first day, Christmas more or less vanished in an

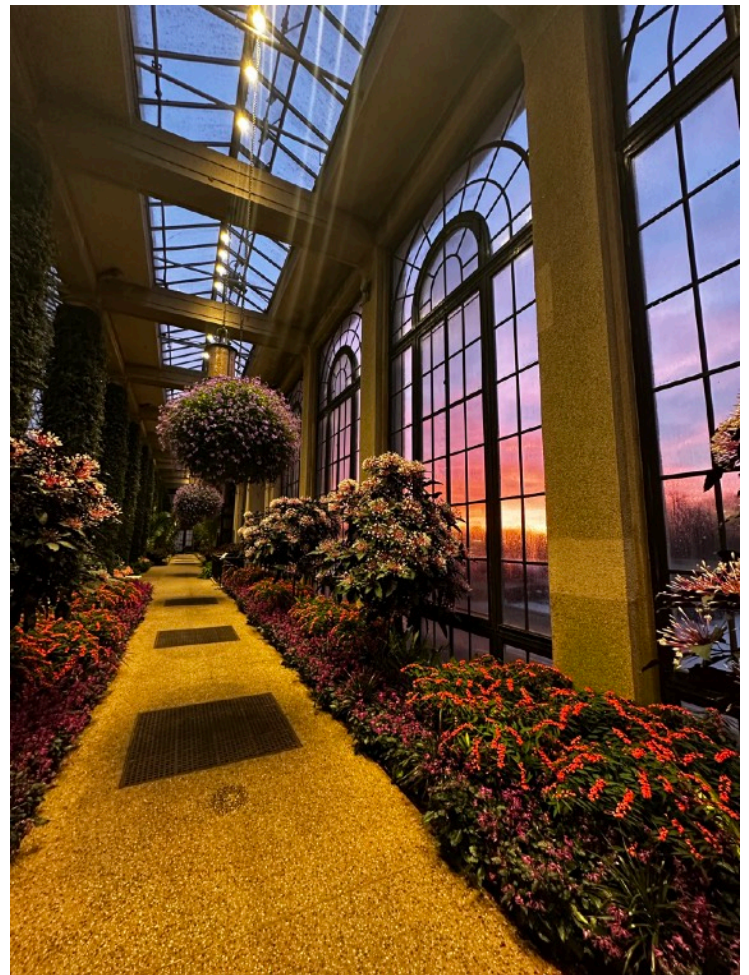
instant. Trees were removed, pushed over, or cut down. Ornaments returned to coded boxes and then into storage. The first walkways changed over once they were cleared of festivity. *Clareodendron schmidtii* became a core plant of the new display, its white flowers hanging in cascades down to the ground. Underplanted with varieties of *Guzmania*, *Kalanchoe*, and *Euphorbia fulgens*. The same genres from Christmas but different varieties to create a whole new display. Each day beckoned a new sunrise and a new display change. Some simply removing one set for another, others calling for considerable change. Closed Tuesdays returned, a hold over from the pandemic where the garden remained shut to the public for larger projects to be completed. A collection of massive small leaved figs were cut down by the arborists to be replaced by towering Fishtail Palms, *Caryota sp* from one of the walkways. Each taking a handful of horticulturalists, and a forklift to move, they made their way to their new permanent home in the East conservatory. Eventually each walkway was changed to a new vibrant display. Again a unique show of flower power unavailable anywhere else in the northern hemisphere at this time of year. With the changeover completed, my time in the conservatory began to tick down. I rotated through each of the horticulturalists there, learning as much as I could before I would be moving onto my next rotation, production.

I didn't know what to expect before starting in the conservatory. I had never worked under glass before, and never in a way like the Main. I had worked with annual bedding in Victoria Park, but nothing remotely to the extent that the conservatory does, and does so well. Prior to leaving London, when I had asked previous fellows about their experiences I had heard that Longwood had expanded what they thought was possible in displays, that it was the Disney Land of horticulture. All of these things ring true, however it was a conversation with a local horticulture and agriculture teacher in a bar that completely changed my opinion. I had been lamenting the changeouts, spinning ferns to faces less trampled, and lack of fresh air in the conservatory to him. In an instant he retorted that I shouldn't complain; fundamentally the Christmas period not only brought in the most guests to the garden throughout the whole year, but to the wider local area as a whole as well. The revenue brought in was not only providing my pay, but providing for Kennett Square also. Money aside, it brought people of all

creeds and cultures together. In a country as politically split as America, people from all walks of life would walk next to each other and enjoy the vibrant displays of lights and flowers. It was and still is so many peoples introduction to horticulture and nature, and that shouldn't be dismissed from my views on bedding. I feel that is what I am taking away most from my time in the conservatory. My opinions and views were challenged near daily, at times I retreated and sheltered in my beliefs that were in contrast to what I was seeing and hearing. But I stopped and I stood, and took stock of what I was actually doing. I look back at it now as a whole, a sum of its parts. How a garden should be viewed.



The conservatory during Winter Wonder, January 2023



One of my final sunrises in the conservatory, January 2023



## 2.5 Hints of Spring

As I write this, the first signs of spring are beginning. The *Galanthus* are starting to push and bloom, Hellebores are poking their buds through the leaf litter, the *Hamamelis* and *Chimonanthus praecox* are flooding their surroundings with their delicate scent. The signs of optimism are there, willing me through the dark and the cold. February is still to come, and then March after that, but the prospects of a new and undiscovered spring are calling to me and it's growing ever louder.

I have rotations through production, research, outdoor landscapes, and land stewardship next. A wealth of opportunity and learning waiting to be realised. Events are booking up quickly, symposiums across the state for all manner of horticultural topics. In a heartbeat the local gardens will be opening again, hurried trips to see the ebb and flow of change in each. The opportunity to travel further still from the kind generosity of the GCA beckons also, the early stages of a trip to my familial roots in South Carolina forming. Messages to southern gardens and conservation groups regularly arriving, and my eyes still looking westward for my time post Longwood.