



## Friends of John Jay Homestead Inc.

### Newsletter

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## The Jays' Farm in Bedford: Through the Generations

By Nancy Dexter

Seven generations of John Jay's family have owned the Homestead's land in Bedford, starting with John Jay's maternal grandfather, Jacobus Van Cortlandt, who began purchasing land in Westchester County in 1703. He accumulated about 5,200 acres, and leased it to tenant farmers.

In 1738, Jacobus Van Cortlandt's daughter, Mary, and her husband, Peter Jay, inherited about 1,300 acres from her father. In turn, John Jay inherited 287 acres of land following his father, Peter's, death in 1785, followed by another 316 acres from his aunt, Anne Van Cortlandt Chambers, in 1787. At this time, Jay began creating a commercial farm on his 600+ acre property.

From 1799 to 1801, Jay remodeled the farm manager's house as a retirement home for himself and his family, and built the Carriage Barn, Coachman's House and Brick Cottage. In 1801, Jay moved his family to the property. Fruit orchards were added, and many stone fences were built. After Sarah Jay's death in 1802, their daughter, Nancy, ran the house and maintained the floral garden, saying it offered "restorative powers," while their son, William, after reaching adulthood, oversaw tree maintenance and helped his father manage the farm.

After Jay's death in 1829, William Jay inherited the property with his wife, Augusta, and produced flowers, vegetables, fruits and dairy products for the NYC market. In 1833, a greenhouse was built to grow flowers and vegetables. Nancy Jay and her widowed sister, Maria Jay Banyer, moved from Bedford to New York City, where they created their own gardens, while Augusta and her daughters managed the ornamental beds here.

Following William Jay's death in 1858, his son John Jay II inherited the property, spending summers there with his wife, Eleanor Kingsland Field Jay. The estate was an elegant country farm; fruits, flowers, vegetables and dairy products were supplied to NYC markets by railroad. The greenhouse was enlarged, and a grapery, forcing house, cold frames, six hotbeds, and a mushroom cellar were created.

In 1894, William Jay II, a colonel in the Civil War and a founder and first president of the Coaching Club, inherited the farm, spending summers there with his wife, Lucie Oelrichs Jay. During their period of ownership, the property included a tennis court "atop the hill over the Jay House," a children's garden in front of the schoolhouse, and a rose garden (see photo).

The last generation of Jays to own 'Bedford Farm', from 1915 to 1953, was Eleanor Jay Iselin and her husband, Arthur. Eleanor's improvements included a new greenhouse (1918) and a root cellar (1920). The Iselin Wing (1924-1926) was added to the main house, with a formal garden terrace for which Robert L. Fowler, Jr. designed the plantings. The Iselins continued to produce food for the NYC and local market, with eggs providing the most income.



Eleanor "Weeny" Iselin in a rose bed in the lower garden, c. 1914.

Eleanor reminisced about the formal gardens of her childhood. "The Bedford roses seemed never to have any of the pests which today make rose growing so difficult. I can't remember that they were ever sprayed or fussed over...they bloomed and were picked and gave very little trouble to anyone, and much joy to many people..." A favorite game she played with her cousin, Geoffrey Schieffelin, was "the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The setting...was perfect."

Following Eleanor's death in 1958, Westchester County purchased the house, gardens, and about 30 acres of land from the Jay family, eventually transferring it to New

York State. In 1968, New York State bought a 28-acre portion of the Jay farm from Arvid and Alice Taube, which allowed the farm and Jay house to be preserved and interpreted as one property.

Progress was gradually made in restoring the gardens. In 1974, the Terrace Garden was replanted by the Rusticus Garden Club, from plans by landscape architect Alice Rechnagel Ireys. In 1979, historic landscape architect, Thomas Ciampa, designed the renewal of the "Sundial Garden," completed by the Bedford Garden Club. The next project was the Herb Garden, designed in 1992 by garden writer and lecturer Page Dickey. The N.Y. Unit of the Herb Society of America has maintained this garden since its inception.

In 1999, the Friends' Landscape & Garden Committee was created, headed by Elizabeth Palmer Mossman. Potting Sheds were rebuilt in 2000, and the lower garden fountain was repaired, as directed by Trustee Anne H. Polk. The North Court Garden, which enhances the handicapped entrance to the Jay house, was completed in 2000 by the Hopp Ground Garden Club.

In 2001, the site's four garden clubs were honored at "Trade Roots," an event held at the Homestead by the Garden Club of America. During the ceremony, their work was called "a monumental and impressive collective volunteer effort on all fronts." The Lilac Hedge was also restored in 2001, in honor of Margaret Mayo-Smith and her family.

In 2008, the Terrace Garden was again renewed by the Rusticus Garden Club, to a design by Friends' Landscape Chair, Katherine Moreau. This work was followed by a renewal of the Sundial Garden in 2009, to a design by Varner Redmon of the Bedford Garden Club, which included garden beds and pathways. The latest addition is the new Community Teaching Garden, installed in 2010 in the glass house foundation south of the Potting Sheds, maintained by InterGenerate and volunteers. (See page 3 for details.)

Information for this article was excerpted from the *Historic Landscape Report and Preservation Plan*, developed in 1989 by M. Christine Klim Doell & Gerald Allan Doell.

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**OUR MISSION**

*The Mission of Friends of John Jay Homestead, Inc., a non-profit, educational corporation founded in 1977, is to increase public appreciation and awareness of the history of our nation, our region and John Jay's many contributions as a founding father of our country; to encourage use of John Jay Homestead State Historic Site for both educational and recreational purposes; and to supplement the work of New York State by providing funding and volunteer assistance for the preservation, restoration and interpretation of the site, which dates from 1787.*

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# Letter from President and Executive Director

What an amazing group of members, friends, supporters and partners you are! This beautiful house and farm give us an unparalleled chance to tell the country's history in a concrete way that books just can't compete with, and we couldn't do it without your help and guidance.



*Friends' Executive Director Wendy Ross and Friends' President Melissa Vail.*

Let's start with the landscape. We're all used to appreciating it as open space and beautiful gardens. Now Nancy Dexter's charming front-page article helps us see who lived here through the years and how they developed and depended on the farm and gardens. And from that we get a sense of their public and private lives, the issues they engaged with, and how the country changed around them. It takes a tremendous amount of work to take care of all our different landscape areas – three formal flower gardens, herb garden, vegetable garden, lilac hedge, outbuildings and ice pond, and all the spaces that connect them – and we're glad that we had the chance to honor our indispensable partners and volunteers at "In the Garden" on June 11.

Then, inside the house. You've told us that we needed to do a better job telling the stories of women, and we're proud that soon we'll be able to do that. Nancy Jay's bedroom is nearly complete, and will help us bring to life that particular woman and the people she met, of different callings, social groups and races, and ways of being women in the 19th century. You've also asked to know more about the servants and slaves who lived and worked with the Jays. With the Summer Kitchen, we'll be able to share what we know: look for Benoit, Abbe, Caesar, Clarinda and Zilpha, among others. We also look forward to new scholarship in the field giving more dimension to the lives of people who didn't leave much primary record themselves.

Now, programs and activities. This year's Scholars Lectures and Goodhue Lecture continued to showcase the Homestead as a place to examine the "essential questions" of our history, and our attendance broke records. It will be hard to outdo the excitement and quality of those events, but we'll try. Our school programs grew in range, geographic reach and quality, and we attracted a higher percentage than ever to the site with our Mayo-Smith Bus Fund. We're grateful to Teaching the Hudson Valley, for leveraging last year's curriculum project into this year's expanded group of school partners. And here's a compliment to our thoughtful lecture audiences: we were told that we have a reputation in the scholars community for being an especially interesting and welcoming place to speak!

Carriage Barn. After a long and frustrating period, the next step is for the Department of Transportation to issue our "Authorization to Proceed." Then the (still complicated and no doubt still frustrating) process of advertising, bidding and building can begin. Please watch our website for progress, and please know that we are trying to move each step along as fast as we can.

Finances – the elephant in the room. At this writing, we are relieved that the New York State budget crisis seems to be resolved, and that our small site is guaranteed funding for the next year. But just because the immediate crisis is over doesn't mean that our situation isn't still serious and that next year won't be difficult too. We are being tough about our costs, and we are working to incorporate all the best in public-private partnerships into our relationship with New York State.

We are excited about all we can do at this site, and are determined that this next year will be as dynamic as this past one. Thank you for everything you have done and everything you will do. Visit the website. Follow us on Facebook. Come to the Homestead!

# Site Manager's Letter

By Heather Iannucci, Site Manager

Dear Friends,

This summer we are putting the finishing touches on three terrific projects that will be realized this autumn: the Summer Kitchen; the rehabilitation and refurbishing of Nancy Jay's bedroom; and our third Back Parlor Exhibit, *Slavery, Anti-Slavery and Five Generations of Jays*.

The Summer Kitchen will be opening later this year as a new, stand-alone, area of interpretation that will focus on the "back story" of the house. The space will highlight the lives of the servants and slaves who contributed to the operation of the house and farm. Thanks to two separate \$5,000 grants (from General Atlantic Corporation and the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area) this lower-level room will be furnished with reproduction furniture pieces and kitchenware, which will allow visitors to immerse themselves into the experience by touching and interacting with the space and objects. Vignettes about such household chores as cooking, candle making, and weekly laundry and accompanying interpretive panels will round out the educational program. Members of the public will be able to visit the space during regularly scheduled hours. We will also hold educational programs and workshops in the room.

After almost two years of work, Nancy Jay's bedroom will be reopening at a gala luncheon on November 3rd. The space has been completely transformed with custom millwork, textiles, prints, and decorative arts from a dreary, rustic 1790s appearance to an elegant, feminine 1820s room, fitting for the woman of the house.

Finally, in December we will be opening the latest Back Parlor Exhibit. The new exhibit will examine five generations of the Jay family's involvement in slavery and the anti-slavery movement, from Augustus Jay's involvement in the slave trade to John Jay II's legal defense of runaway slaves and kidnapped people of color. The exhibit will also highlight many documents from the John Jay Homestead archives.

It is of the utmost importance for us to find new and innovative ways to continue to engage the public; these three new interpretive endeavors will provide new points of entry or reentry for visitors to the Homestead. All three of these projects have received significant funding and support from Friends of John Jay Homestead. Thank you.



Lucy Waletzky, MD, Site Manager Heather Iannucci and Assemblyman Bob Castelli chat at the "In the Garden" party.

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## New Community Teaching Garden at Homestead

By Nancy Dexter

In late 2009, following the Bedford Environmental Summit, John Jay Homestead Site Manager, Heather Iannucci, formed a committee to research the establishment of a community garden here at the Homestead. The idea flourished and this spring the Community Teaching Garden has been established in the glass house foundation south of the Potting Sheds.

InterGenerate, founded in January 2009 by Peggy Clarke and Roseann Rutherford, is the organization responsible for managing the garden. "We had a vision of building intentional community through sustainable agriculture and our shared desire for food security," Ms. Clarke said. "We encourage local resourcing, which allows us to enter relationships with our neighbors and live gently on Earth." In Summer 2009, InterGenerate launched their first intergenerational garden camp at Bedford Audubon, and in spring 2010, they opened the 16-plot garden at the Homestead, as well as a 90-plot community



Crops are already flourishing in the garden.

garden at Marsh Sanctuary. "We are planning more gardens for next year," said Ms. Clarke.

A "Veg-Out!" garden tour took place at the Homestead on Wednesday, July 14, which featured tours of the Community Teaching Garden, as well as a Farmer's Market and tours of several private gardens. Vegetables grown in the garden include Swiss chard, kale, broccoli, zucchini, several different lettuces, several varieties of peppers and many herbs. At the time of the "Veg-Out!" tour, even more vegetables and herbs were in bloom.

The Community Teaching Garden was designed by Friends' Trustee and Landscape Committee Chair, Kathy Moreau, and constructed by Friends' Trustee Tom Lee and Brendan Maloof.

If you are interested in participating in the Community Teaching Garden, or for more information, visit [www.intergenerateny.org](http://www.intergenerateny.org); or [www.johnjayhomestead.org](http://www.johnjayhomestead.org).