The Flowering of the Museum Gardens

The University of Pennsylvania Museum sits on a plot of land that had been reserved by the City of Philadelphia for a public park. At the urging of the University of Pennsylvania, City officials were persuaded to transfer, the land to the University to be developed as a "museum and botanical garden and park, at no expense to the city." The original design of the Museum by Wilson Eyre called for a total of six landscaped courtyards. Although only two were ever completed, two inner courtyards were subsequently created by the construction of the Academic Wing in 1971.

Eyre's plan for the upper courtyard called for a formal, geometric garden, with low, clipped hedges, brick walls, grassy terraces, and symmetrically placed Lombardy poplar, red cedar, and arborvitae (see back cover). Stone benches and urns atop brick pillars echoed this formality. By the 1930s, however, the design had come undone: the trees were gone, ivy crept over the walls obscuring architectural details, and the aquatic plants in the pool had become gigantic. The new lower courtyard welcomed bucolic of school children but remained unplanted. Funds for maintenance of the gardens were scarce and the plantings continued to deteriorate.

In the early 1950s, "disturbed at the condition of the gardens," the Women's Committee came to the rescue. Christine Rosesgarten and landscape architect Fred Peck refurbished the lower courtyard, planting stately oaks and horse chestnuts, hollies, fragrant lindens, yews, and hawthorns in the barren space. The row of ginkgos was installed in 1958, and over the years statuary and architectural elements from the Museum's collections were added.

Nancy Warden was responsible for overseeing the transformation of the upper courtyard, beginning in 1965. Faced with "mostly Privet and weeds," she and University landscape architect George Patton removed most of the boxwood hedges and selected elegant, textured trees and shrubs—magnolia, holly, pine, and yew—to set off the Museum's fine architecture. Blue cedars and junipers, put in later, added a subtle note of color. While still formal, the garden took on a more welcoming aspect, and the varied plantings complemented Eyre's eclectic architecture. In 1976 the courtyard was named after Mrs. Warden in recognition of her efforts.

The gardens continue to evolve. Once the East Wing is built, the lower courtyard will become the primary entrance to the Museum, and the gardens will be relandscaped once more.

The upper courtyard of the Museum shortly after construction, ca. 1899.

Be sure to visit the Museum's Web site: www.upenn.edu/museum

 experiential 41/2

FROM THE ARCHIVES

F rom the Director

The Early Copan Acropolis Program (ECAP) of the University of Pennsylvania Museum has been an extraordinarily successful research endeavor. Under the able leadership of Dr. Robert Sharer, the Shoemaker Professor and Curator-in-charge of the American Section, and David Sedat, the Project's field director, the research effort at this great ancient city in Honduras has already produced significant contributions to the scholarly understanding of Classic Maya civilization. Through meticulous conservation of the excavated objects, ECAP will also help to bolster the magnificence of Copán's new museum and thus support the general goal of increasing tourism and economic development at Copán.

I have had the privilege of visiting Copán twice in recent years. Walking through the several kilometers of tunnels that have been excavated under the Acropolis is a breathtaking experience. The decorations on the walls of earlier structures are often so well preserved that they appear to have just been painted, and the tombs were filled with eye-catching objects of pottery and stone. I should emphasize, however, that ECAP has not only uncovered beautiful buildings and objects, but has also shed important new light on the changing nature of rulership at the beginning of the royal dynasty at Copán in the 5th century AD. The project has gleaned new understandings of the site, orientation, and groupings of the public constructions and residences of the early rulers of Copán. ECAP's findings will also illuminate the key question of the origin of the royal dynasty and its possible connections with Central Mexico.

The research at Copán carries on the proud tradition of Maya studies at the Museum throughout this century. As the analyses of the data collected at Copán continue in the next few years, we certainly can expect to see a number of exciting new insights into ancient Maya civilization emerging from the work of Dr. Sharer and his many ECAP colleagues.

Jeremy A. Sabloff
The Williams Director