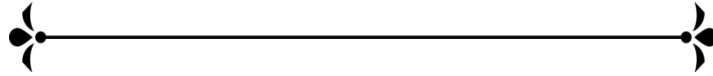


From the Archives

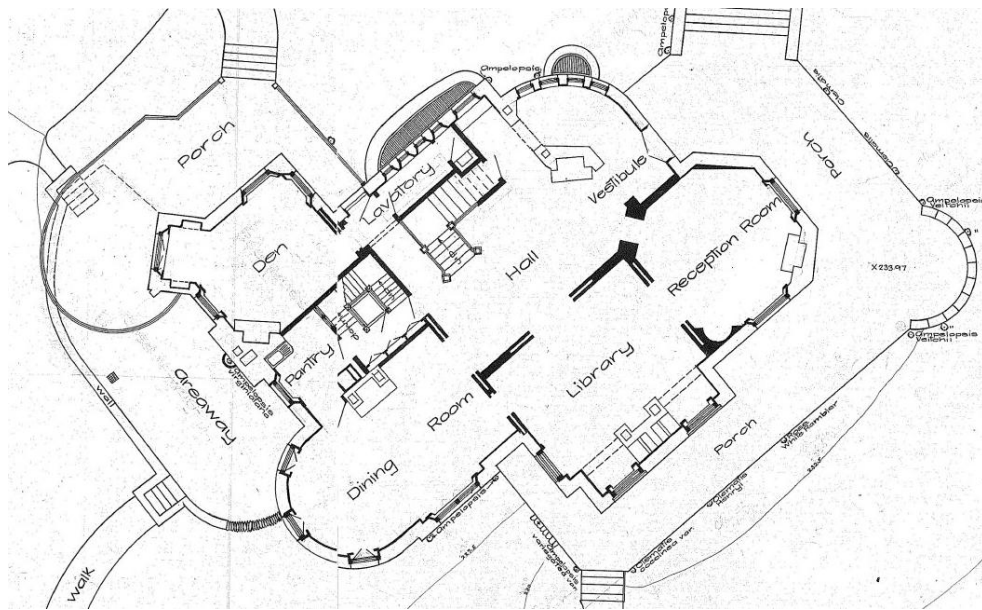
By

Joyce H. Munro, Morris Arboretum Archives Volunteer

A compilation of articles appearing in the *Morris Arboretum Volunteer Newsletter* in 2022



A Map Worth Studying: the Compton Mansion



Detail of Compton Atlas, Pugh & Hubbard, 1909

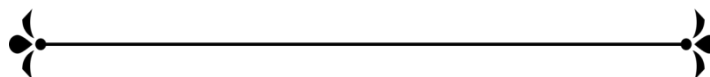
Compton, the castle-esque home built for the Morrises by T. P. Chandler, was famously asymmetrical. It didn't have a singular focal point or precise balance side-to-side. Instead, the structural elements and interior spaces of the mansion were intentionally irregular, for instance, the off-center entrance, round dining room and oblique fireplaces. Chandler's placement of a turret on one corner, a tower on the other and unmatched windows in between certainly made the house interesting to look at. About the only thing that gave the mansion a sense of symmetry were the wrap-around porches.



Compton mansion in late 1930s (Morris Arboretum Archives 2004.1.7)

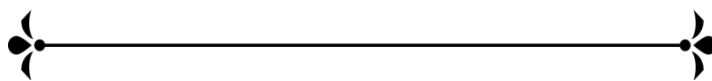
Given the property's steep slopes, the best place to site Compton was on a high plateau near Meadowbrook Lane, which only exaggerated its wonky appearance. Not much about the mansion was designed to blend with the land, especially its immense verticality. It definitely wasn't a cozy retreat like Cedar Grove, their childhood summer home in Harrogate. Yet, for over twenty-five years, Compton was an endearing place to John and Lydia Morris. They furnished its generous rooms with one-of-a-kind treasures bought all over the world and hosted lavish parties for friends and neighbors on the grounds.

The Compton mansion was a bold notion. And so were the grounds. The Morrises had big plans for the unbuilt land, which was as irregular and wonky as the mansion itself. They had a keen sense that the gardens and ponds and follies they constructed would transform the hilly, rough terrain. Through the years they gathered plants from many nations to turn Compton into a one-of-a-kind showpiece. Subtlety was not the Morris's intention when they built their country estate—it was always meant to be shown off, like a trophy.

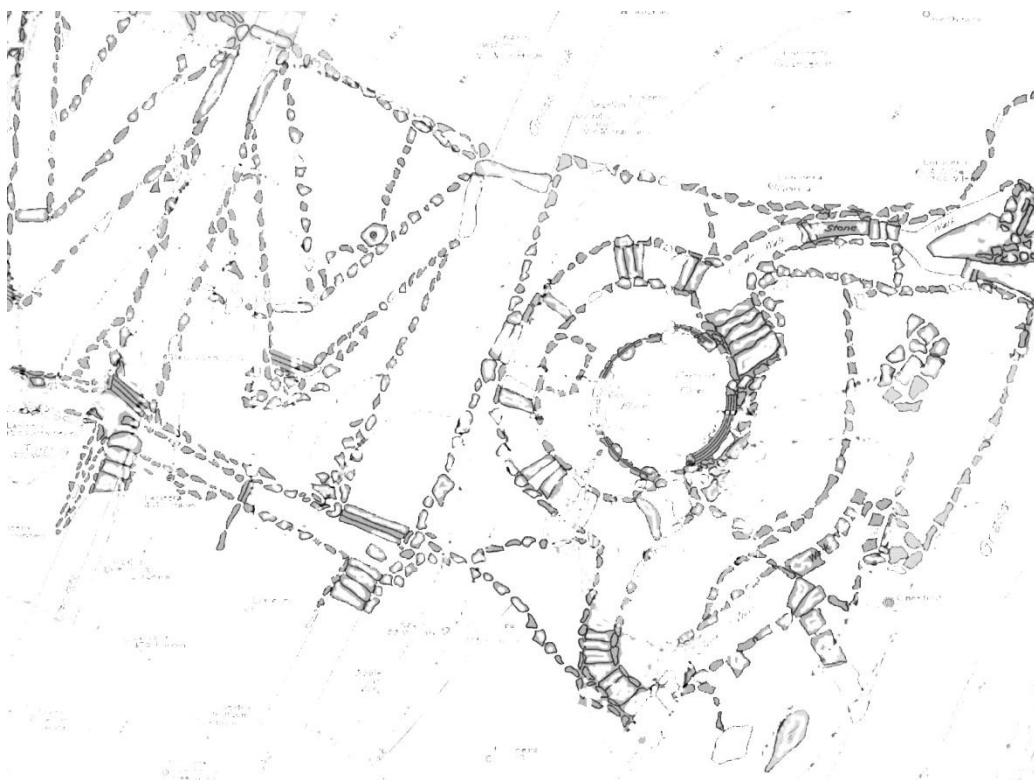


gardener's cottage bears traits of Georgian Revival with understated, well-proportioned features, although one significant feature—an oriel window on the back—is Gothic.

The symmetry of the cottage contrasts with T. P. Chandler's asymmetrical design of the Compton mansion and the carriage house, which begs the question, why didn't the Morrises commission Chandler, who set the architectural style for their country estate?



A Map Worth Studying: the Japanese Overlook Garden



Japanese Overlook Garden, Compton Atlas, Pugh & Hubbard, 1914

Unlike English-style gardens where beds of colorful flowers reign supreme, the Japanese Overlook Garden is all about the rockwork. For construction of a project as complex as the Overlook, John and Lydia Morris knew they needed a Master of the art of setting stones (*ishi wo taten koto*)—and that person was Y. Muto of Tokyo.

The Morrises commissioned Muto in 1912, two years after they purchased the property now called English Park. Muto was familiar with Compton; he had constructed the Hill and Water

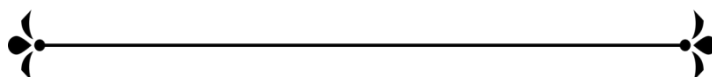
Garden for the Morrises in 1905, so he knew the contour and character of the land. Muto was in high demand and at times his clients had to wait months, even years, for his services. But fortunately for the Morrises, Muto was available—he had just completed an expansive Japanese garden for James and Sallie Dooley in Richmond, Virginia.

Like every garden Muto created, the Overlook was meant to be a contemplative, spiritual place. Along the zigzag pebble path (*sando*) up the slope were symbols to muse, like an *ishi-doro* lantern and a pair of lion-dogs (*komainu*). Chrysanthemums lined the path and over time, the ubiquitous Japanese vine, wisteria, covered the platform railing. Midway to the top was a pool with a stone seat, another feature designed to slow the visitor. At the top of the stone embankment, a round viewing platform offered a pleasant view of English Park.

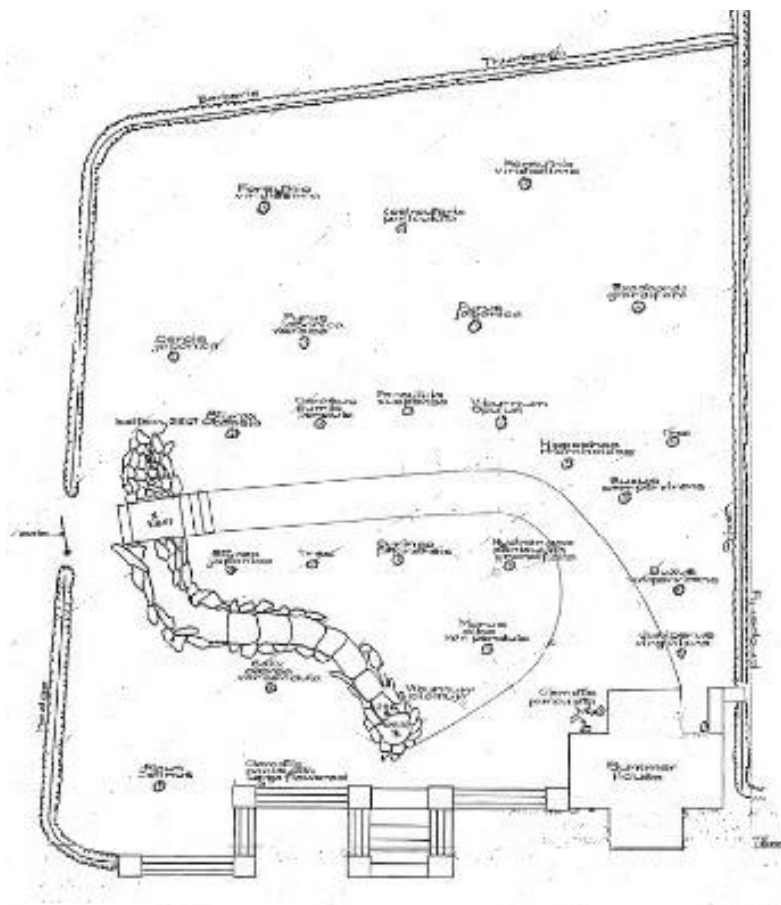
This was not the first overlook garden Muto designed in the U.S. At the Dooley's estate, he created a viewing platform on a massive granite outcropping, accessible by a winding stone stairway. It's called the Rocky Overlook.



Japanese Overlook Garden, c. 1914 (Morris Arboretum Archives 2018.36.23)



A Map Worth Studying: the Orange Balustrade



Orange Balustrade, Compton Atlas, Pugh & Hubbard, 1909

One of the most prominent garden features John and Lydia Morris created at Compton is the Orange Balustrade. It's not surprising that the balustrade was constructed in traditional Italianate style—the Morris siblings had seen some of the world's finest Baroque gardens on their travels. Imagine John exclaiming to Lydia, “When we get back to Philadelphia, let's build something like this!” They had all the essentials: oodles of space, sweeping vistas, a yen for order and a growing collection of Italian garden ornaments.

The Morris' inspiration may have come from touring European gardens but the practical details came from books in their library like *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* by Andrew Jackson Downing. Everyone with an interest in landscaping was reading Downing's books in the 1880s, especially those who had just bought their “country seat” and needed advice on how to meld their highly conspicuous house with the surrounding grounds. From Downing the Morris' learned that a “handsome” balustrade would be the perfect entry to their elaborate patterned flower walk extending all the way down the sunny sloop.

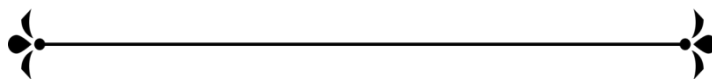
The rustic wooden structure at the right corner of the formal balustrade seems an anomaly—but not to John and Lydia, for it is nearly identical to a Gothic arbor in the garden of their ancestral home, Cedar Grove. Rather than constructing a single arbor at each corner of the balustrade (for

the sake of symmetry), the Morrises grouped four arbors at 90-degree angles, creating a cruciform-shaped “Summer House.” Garden aficionados seeking shade in the Summer House were treated to the heady scent of wisteria, roses and clematis trained on the arbors.

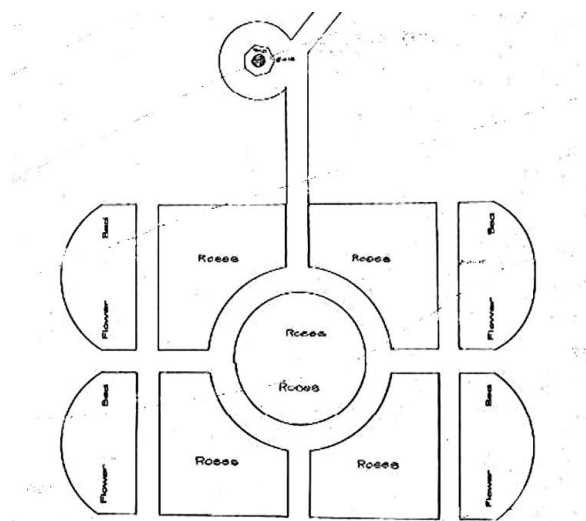
Read about the remarkable Compton-era flower walk [here](#) and view the Cedar Grove arbor [here](#)



Orange Balustrade c. 1902 (Morris Arboretum Archives, 2004.1.373N)

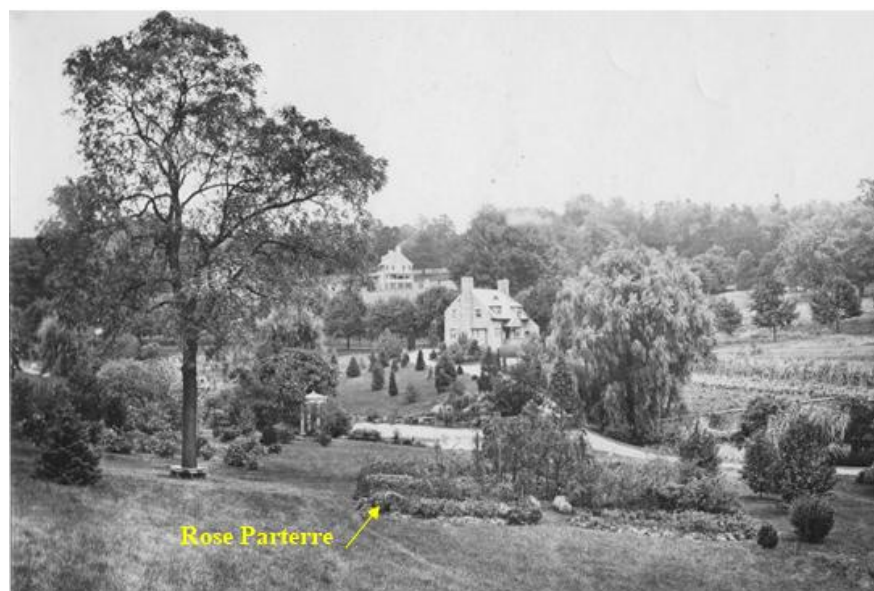


A Map Worth Studying: the Rose Parterre



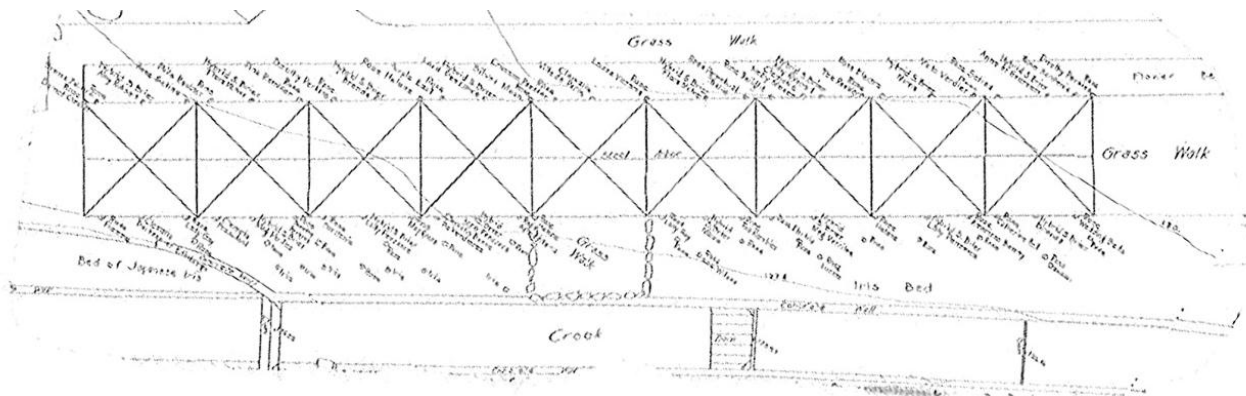
The Rose Parterre, Compton Atlas, Pugh & Hubbard, 1914

It may not come as a surprise that there used to be more than one rose garden at Compton—roses had been significant to the Morris family since the 1730s, perhaps even earlier. In addition to their formal 4-square Rose Garden, John and Lydia created a smaller informal rose parterre near Swan Pond. Its location was marked by a champion walnut tree with wrap-around bench, the perfect seat for admiring old hybrids like the crimson “General Jack” and new ones like the orangey-pink “Mrs. A.R. Waddell.” Sometime after 1914, the Rose Parterre vanished from the landscape. But that didn’t mean roses were limited to the formal garden. Au contraire, there used to be an extraordinary Rose Walk longer than...but that’s another story.



Morris Arboretum Archives 2014.40.43

A Map Worth Studying: the Rose Arbor



Rose Arbor, Compton Atlas, Pugh & Hubbard, 1914

If you've ever strolled through a rose-covered arbor, like the one designed by garden architect Mary Rutherford Jay at her family's estate in Rye, New York, you know what a heady experience it can be. One hundred feet of color and fragrance surround you. Now imagine strolling through an arbor even longer and taller—at Compton.

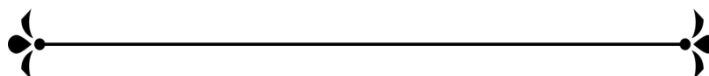
In 1910, the year John and Lydia Morris purchased property for English Park, they commissioned a grand, oversized arbor for a straight section of the East Brook across from the new property. Crafted by the John Baizley Iron Works, their arbor incorporated the signature Morris arch, a defining feature of earlier structures like the Summer House and garden seat at Cedar Grove.

There is no trace of the Compton Rose Arbor today; it was likely demolished around the time the fast-growing Dawn Redwoods, mere seeds in 1952, cast shade over the brook in the 1960s.

As an aside, you may be interested to know that John Baizley was a City Councilmember from South Philly who organized the annual Mummers Parade and served as its Grand Marshall for decades.



Compton Rose Arbor, circa 1928 (Morris Arboretum Archives 2004.1.571)



A Map Worth Studying: the Vine Arbor



Vine Arbor, [Compton Atlas](#), Pugh & Hubbard, 1909

Although orange and purple were not prevailing colors in the Morris's gardens, one planting bed was dedicated to this vivid palette. The site of the garden, a craggy precipice in deep shade within the borders of the Garden Railway, was once in full sun—another opportunity for the Morrisses to install an arbor.

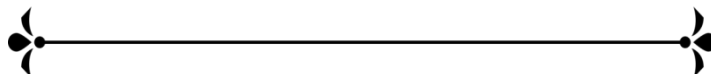
Narrower and shorter than the Rose Arbor on East Brook (featured in the [June](#) newsletter), this arbor had low arches and horizontal slats, the perfect framework for rambling plants.

The Vine Arbor (outlined in red on the map detail) doesn't appear in the Compton atlases, but the plants are listed—wisteria, trumpet vine, Jackmanii clematis, bittersweet, grapes. The result was a floral purple and orange striped canopy visible from the Compton mansion up the slope.

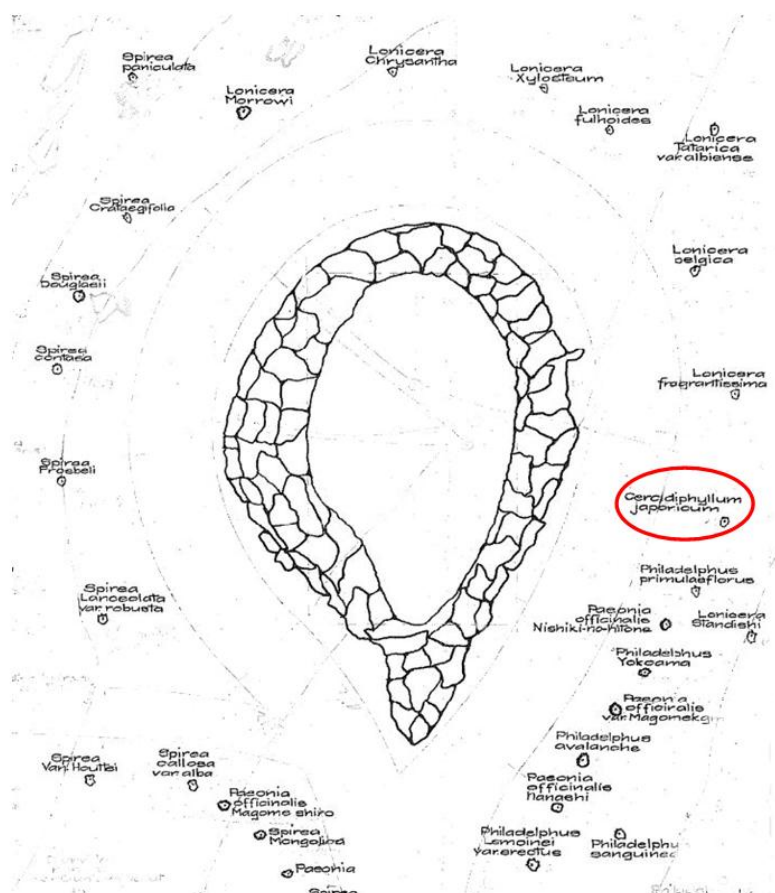


Vine Arbor, circa 1900 (Morris Arboretum Archives [2004.1.42](#))

The vine arbor appears an early 1900s [photo](#) of a man, presumably John Morris, seated on the right side of the arbor and in a 1919 [photo](#) of the gardener's daughter perched on a boulder at the left side (notice the waterfall just below her).



A Map Worth Studying: the Katsura by the Japanese Pond



Japanese Rock Pond, [Compton Atlas](#), Pugh & Hubbard, 1909

A jumble of boulders and rusty pipes is all that remains of this teardrop-shaped pond near the Orange Balustrade. The shrubs ringing the pond are long gone—save one.

As with other Compton gardens, the plants around the Japanese Rock Pond were grouped by families: spirea on the left, mock orange on the right, honeysuckle around the top, peonies at bottom. The sole survivor was an anomaly among the shrubs—a Japanese Katsura tree (marked in red above). And today, it is one of the largest Katsuras in the United States.

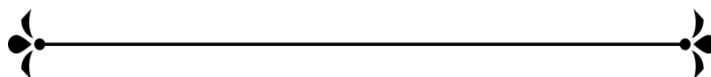
With its multiple trunks and widespread canopy, the Katsura was the perfect choice for dappled shade at water's edge. This tree was already champion size by the time Hurricane Hazel wreaked havoc at the Arboretum in 1954; fortunately, it sustained minimal damage.

This wasn't the only Katsura at Compton, [another](#) was planted before 1909 near the Log Cabin on the bank of East Brook, a good spot, since Katsuras require moist soil and plenty of space for its shallow roots. Several Katsuras, including a weeping cultivar, were planted after 1910. The majestic Katsura, often called “elegant” or “graceful,” is not at risk of extinction in North America or Europe, but it is on the endangered list in China. Because the Katsura is well-

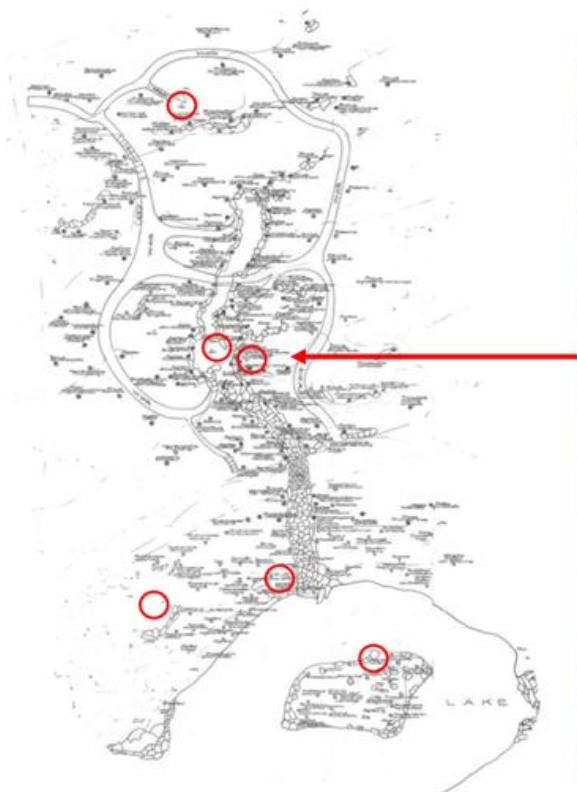
behaved—due in part to its low regeneration rate in the natural habitat—it is categorized as non-invasive throughout the world.



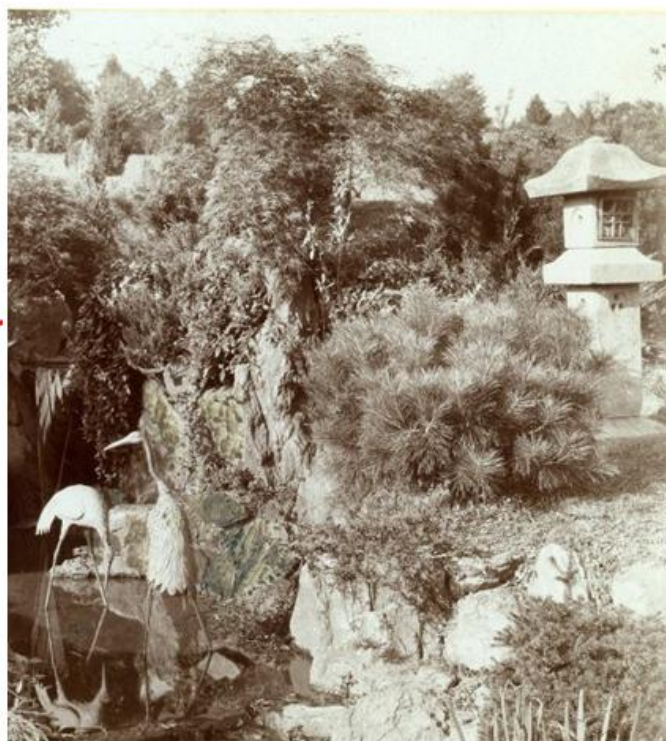
The Rock Pond Katsura, 1955 (*Morris Arboretum Bulletin*)



A Map Worth Studying: the Japanese Hill Garden



Japanese Hill Garden, [Compton Atlas](#), Pugh & Hubbard, 1909



Cranes and lantern at mid-point of Hill Garden

By the turn of the century, just twelve years after John and Lydia Morris established their “country seat,” the estate had gained a reputation for its world-wide collection of trees and shrubs, systematically grouped by families and genera. To call the grounds densely planted would be an understatement. In fact, a reporter for the *Philadelphia Times* wrote the Morris’s collection was so vast that “an effort to enumerate would be extremely impracticable.”

But for density and variety of plants, the Japanese Hill Garden adjacent to Swan Pond can’t be beat. This garden, the largest of Compton’s Japanese gardens, was constructed by Y. Muto of Tokyo when John and Lydia purchased property to expand their estate in the early 1900s.

Muto’s expansive Hill Garden, or *Tsukiyama-niwa*, represented the landscape of his homeland, with miniature mountains of graduated heights, rock-bordered stream and waterfall. Throughout the garden, Muto placed large stones as symbols of historic or religious objects and deities. He laid paths that encircled the landscape and led to traditional Japanese statuary, like a standing Buddha, a 7-foot stone [pagoda](#) and a *Nishinoya ishi-doro* (square stone lantern) perched above a pair of bronze cranes in the pool below. The garden was full of rare ornamental trees and shrubs; chief among them, five varieties of pine including the flat-topped *Tanyosho* and an assortment of Japanese maples, pieris and azaleas.

Although many features of Compton's Hill Garden have been lost over time, fortunately we can view the rockwork, statuary and plantings that once graced this garden in [early photos](#). For additional information about the garden, see the detailed [assessment](#) done in 2006.



Lower section of Japanese Hill Garden under construction c. 1905
(Morris Arboretum Archives 2004.1.265)

