

THE ELMS

Restoration of the Sunken Garden & Its Environs

Preservation Society of Newport County, Rhode Island

Project Data

Date: 1998 to 2001

Size: 7.5 acres

Context: Historic Newport,
Rhode Island

Completion Date: 2001

Goal & Objectives

Restore the sunken garden

- Identify the garden's historical integrity
- Establish preservation recommendations and techniques to restore the garden for the centennial in August 2001

Awards

- **2001 Annual Preservation Award** by the Newport Historical Society
- **2002 Preservation Merit Award in Landscape Preservation** by Preserve Rhode Island



Circa 1920s (PSNC)



Fall 1998 - Prior to restoration

Project Description:

The Elms is a masterpiece of Classical Revival landscape design from the early 20th century. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Julius Berwind built the main house (1899-1901) at The Elms in the mid-18th century French style. The landscape plan was executed between 1907 and circa 1920 with a collaborative effort between the architect Horace Trumbauer and the Berwind's gardener Bruce Butterson. The French landscape designer Jacques Greber is credited with advising on the parterre design in the sunken garden. Through a series of interlocking terraces, pathways, and allees, the gardens of The Elms were unified with the main house to achieve a harmonious balance between architecture and green landscape. The result was a combination of the Victorian tradition of picturesque parkland with the formal parterres, sculpted greenery, and fountains of Italian Renaissance and French Baroque gardens.

The restoration of the Sunken Garden at The Elms began after extensive and scholarly research was undertaken and a detailed site assessment was completed. As a result, a complete set of construction drawings were prepared to restore this National Historic Landmark by EDC Principal Thomas Elmore while with another firm. Mr. Elmore established Elmore Design Collaborative, Inc. and oversaw the garden's restoration, which was completed in time for the 2001 centennial celebration.

Today, The Elms and its landscape are a rare example of how architects and garden designers used historic traditions to create a new American garden style at the dawn of the 20th century. The restoration of the gardens at The Elms helps to fulfill the Preservation Society's mission to preserve Newport's historic sites and educate students and the general public in an important chapter of American landscape history.



September 2001 – Restoration complete