

How Mather garden grew

THE MUSES OF GWINN: Art and Nature in a Garden Designed by Warren H. Manning, Charles A. Platt and Ellen Biddle Shipman. By Robin S. Karson. Abrams/Sagapress, 204 pp., \$39.95.

By ROBERT E. HARRIST JR.

In this handsomely illustrated book, Robin S. Karson tells the story of the gardens at Gwinn, the estate of William Gwinn Mather (1857-1951) five miles east of downtown Cleveland on the shore of Lake Erie.

When Mather, president of the Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Co., began planning his estate in 1906, he initiated a long and fruitful collaboration with two strong-minded designers whose aesthetic principles were not easily reconciled.

The architect Charles Adams Platt (1861-1933), designer of the Hanna Building in Cleveland, was a classicist whose work was strongly influenced by the villas and formal gardens he had studied in Italy. Warren Henry Manning (1860-1938), a landscape planner and horticulturist, favored informal designs and a distinctly American aesthetic. His other projects in Cleveland included work at Lake View Cemetery, the Cleveland Museum of Art and the estates of many private clients.

With patience and tact, Mather coaxed from these men some of



The cover of "The Muses of Gwinn," which describes how two noted designers joined forces to create an estate that one visitor called a fairyland.

the best work of their careers. Platt was assigned the responsibility of designing Mather's mansion, sited dramatically above the lake, the layout of a formal garden west of the house and other architectural details. Manning supervised plantings on the estate and designed a 21-acre wild garden across Lake Shore Ave.

There, along winding paths, grew banks of rhododendrons, mountain laurel and maidenhair fern, as well as Japanese honey-

suckle, Grecian silk vine and blue marsh violets, creating an environment that one visitor remembered as "a fairyland."

Mather also employed the garden designer Ellen Biddle Shipman (1869-1950), whose most extensive work at Gwinn was carried out in the 1930s, when the formal garden was replanted with irises, peonies, lilies, gladioluses, dahlias and many other varieties. Shipman's plan for one area of about 450 square feet called for more than 600 plants.

Through the generosity of Mather's family, Gwinn is now maintained for use by nonprofit organizations.

Karson, also the author of a study of the landscape architect Fletcher Steele, writes with clarity and grace. In addition to the photographs of Mather's estate that she includes in "The Muses of Gwinn," sketches and architectural drawings help the reader visualize the gardens. Karson also quotes extensively from the voluminous correspondence of Mather and his collaborators.

Few gardeners will work on so grand a scale, but the imagination, passion and attention to detail that guided the owner and designers of Gwinn will inspire even those who cultivate no more than a single flower bed or window box.

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