

Royal Botanical Gardens Secures Documentary Heritage of Hamilton's Grand 1928 Landscape Design Competition

HAMILTON ON, October 10, 2019 – Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG), announced today that thanks to a partnership with the family of visionary landscape architect Carl Borgstrom and their colleagues, a group of historically-significant 90-year-old drawings central to RBG's founding have been located and protected.

Carl Arvid Borgstrom (1886 - 1951) was a prominent Canadian landscape architect. He was involved in creating parks for Niagara Parks Commission, the landscape of the Brampton Golf and Country Club, Lorne Park in Mississauga, the landscaping at Sunnyside Pavilion on Lakeshore Boulevard in Toronto. He also developed the original landscaping plan for the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW), creating a beautiful boulevard instead of a utilitarian roadway. He also contributed spectacular landscape designs for numerous private residences.

In 1928 his company Wilson, Bunnell and Borstrom, Ltd. placed first in a nation-wide competition to design the North Western Entrance to the City of Hamilton, on the Burlington Heights. A total of twelve design companies bid on the project, which was to create large gardens, parks, and numerous civic amenities along Highway 2 or York Boulevard. One of the key challenges a 5.5 acre, 35 foot-deep former gravel pit. While other designers envisioned an amphitheater, lily pond, or other uses there, only Borgstrom proposed a large rock garden on the site. As the winners, Borgstrom and his colleagues were awarded the contract to build the gardens, including the Rock Garden, which opened to the public in 1932. Borgstrom maintained a close working relationship with Thomas Baker McQuesten, RBG's Founder, and in 1942 McQuesten named Carl Borgstrom the principal designer for Royal Botanical Gardens.

Drawings have survived from six of the twelve entries to the competition, in various archives. Royal Botanical Gardens holds the largest group, representing four of the design companies. The fate of most of the original Wilson, Bunnell and Borstrom drawings from the 1928 competition remained a mystery until recently, when Carl Borgstrom's family found they were being cared for by a couple in Alton, Ontario, along with many other drawings from Borgstrom's professional practice. With the cooperation of the family the Borgstrom collection has been secured.

Most of the drawings will be deposited in the archives of the University of Guelph, which has numerous holdings of Canadian landscape architects. Under an agreement with the family, drawings directly relevant to RBG's history will be added to RBG's own archives. This addition means that RBG now holds most of the known drawings from all three finalists in the 1928 competition.

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