

NEW ENGLAND Antiques JOURNAL

Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, September 2018

The Lunar Men,

Pioneers of the Industrial Revolution

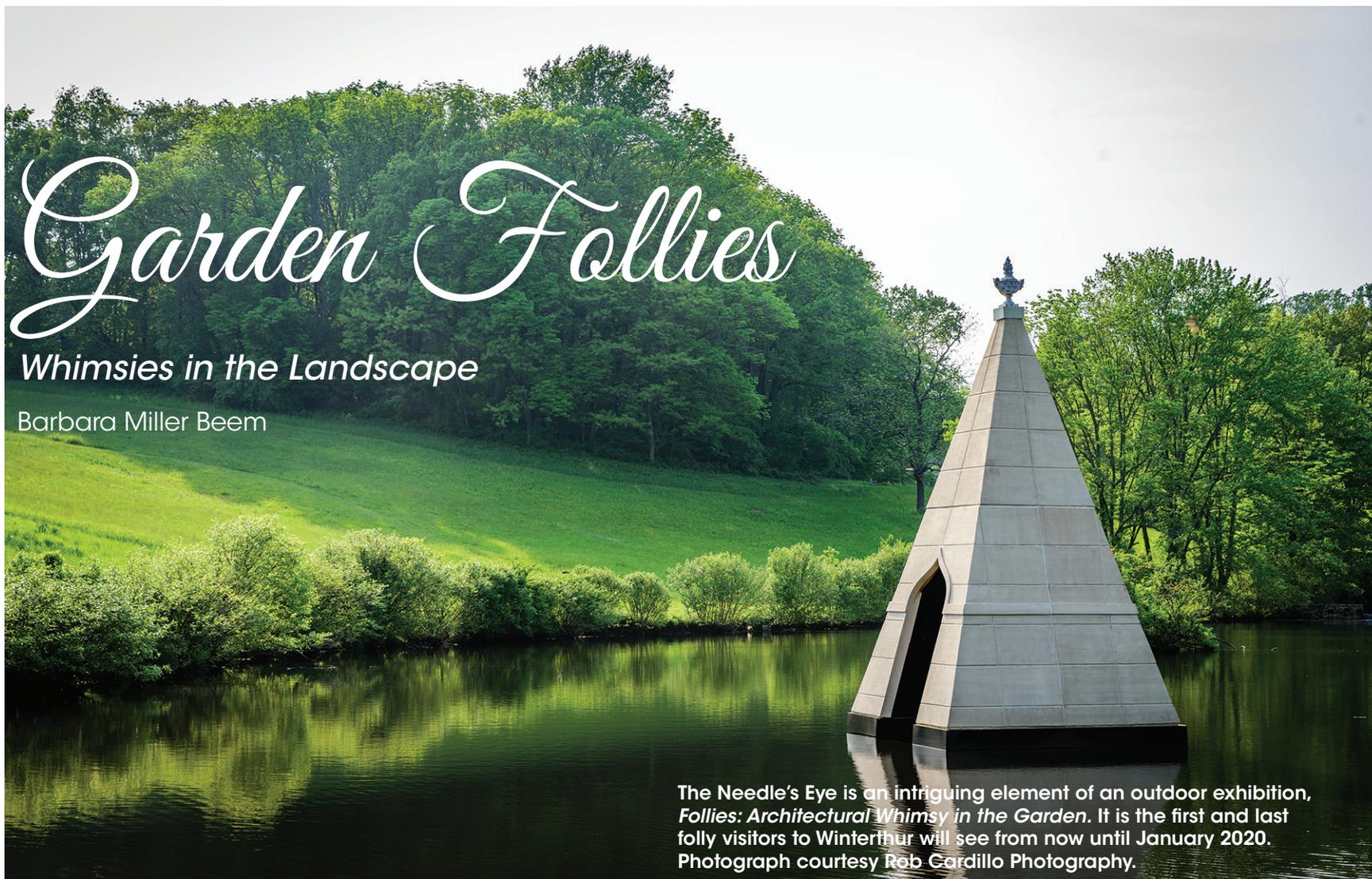


Whimsies in the Garden • Casanova at Large

Garden Follies

Whimsies in the Landscape

Barbara Miller Beem



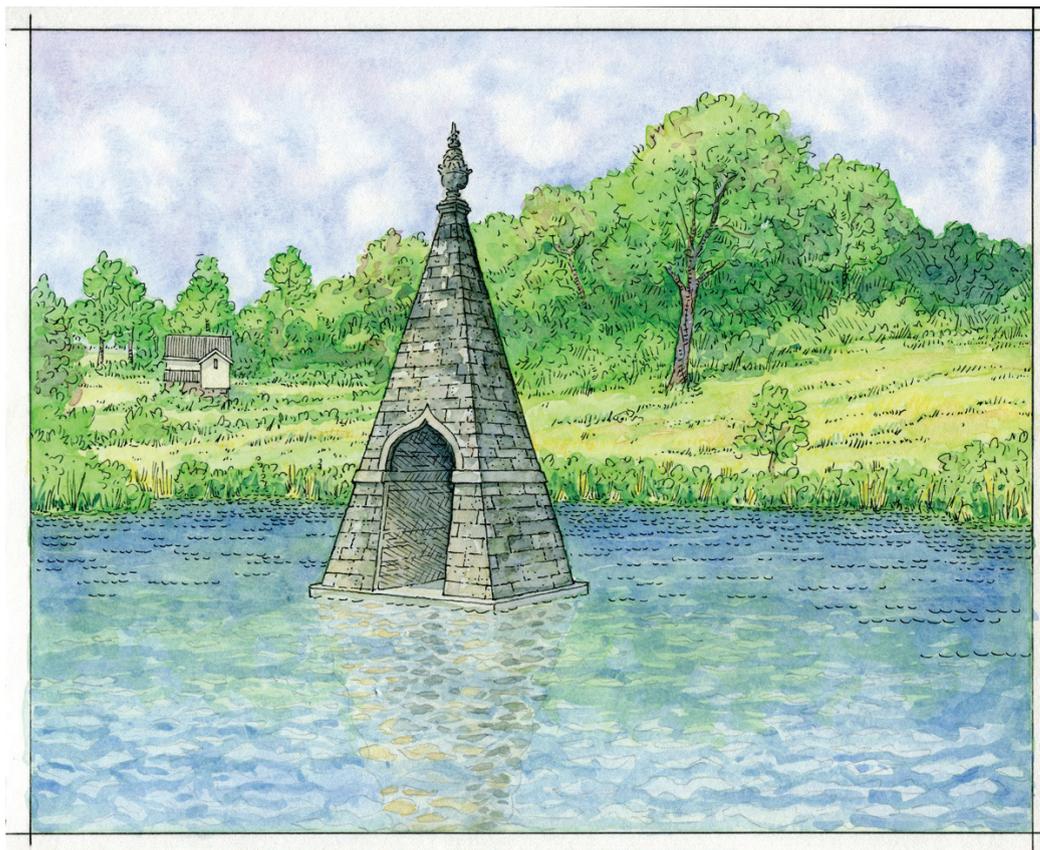
The Needle's Eye is an intriguing element of an outdoor exhibition, *Follies: Architectural Whimsy in the Garden*. It is the first and last folly visitors to Winterthur will see from now until January 2020. Photograph courtesy Rob Cardillo Photography.

All watercolors by Eric Leland; Photo credits as noted

The fog settles over the pond, giving the Needle's Eye an otherworldly look. Even though the Peony Garden is no longer in bloom, the Latimeria Summerhouse is beautiful in any season. And wait, isn't that a pair of hippocampi soaring overhead? I'm seeing the Follies.

As the first ever outdoor exhibition at Winterthur, *Follies: Architectural Whimsy in the Garden* showcases not only the meticulously planted and maintained grounds of the Wilmington, Delaware, museum, but also focuses on little buildings meant to amuse and delight visitors to the gardens. From now until January 5, 2020, *Follies* provides an opportunity to experience the splendor of Winterthur beyond the walls of Henry Francis du Pont's 175-room historic home, thereby fulfilling his stated wish that "the gardens and grounds will of themselves be a country place museum."

And indeed they are. Visitors may enjoy them on a leisurely walk or view them from the garden tram while on a magical mystery tour of the sumptuous Brandywine Valley landscape. Dotted around the landscape are 13 fantastical follies, six of which du Pont himself oversaw. These six historical examples are supplemented by seven structures made expressly for the exhibition and installed within the past year. From Classical and Asian-inspired temple-like features to quiet retreats with a woody feel, the follies at



Winterthur are made of materials that include brick and mortar, wood, fabric, and stone.

To the delight of Carol Long, curator of the Winterthur Garden, this exhibition not only opens up a new world to Winterthur guests, but it also introduces many to a new word. Long explained that a “folly” is a “broad umbrella term for structures in the garden,” and is a term more frequently used in Britain than the States. Often nostalgic in nature, follies are evocative of a time and place when an afternoon’s pleasure was an outdoor stroll. Not merely decorative or a show of wealth, follies, she continued, offer both a focal point and a destination, providing garden guests a reason to linger and view a favorite place in a different way. Ideally, “I want to go there” is

the response follies elicit from those enjoying the outdoors.

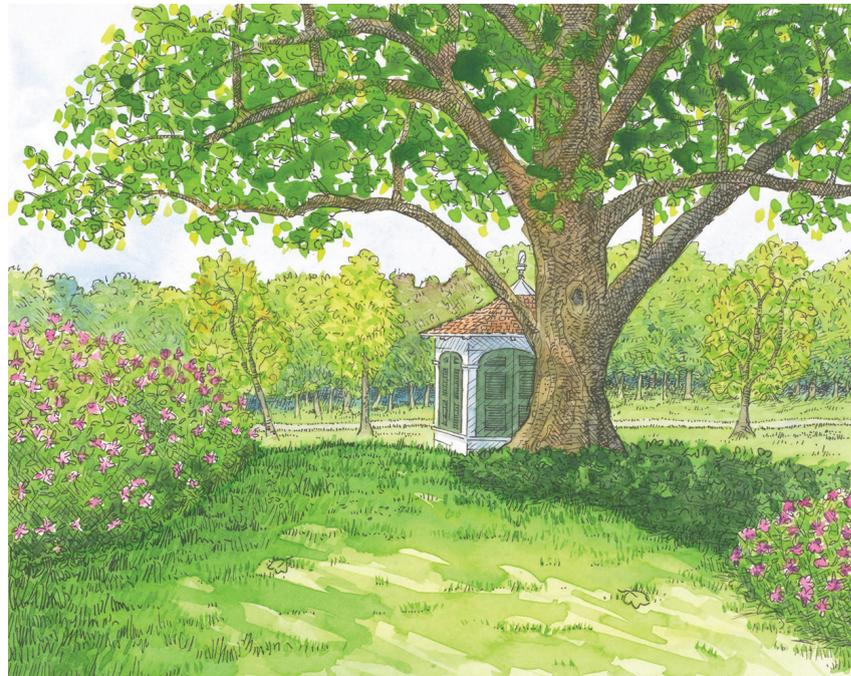
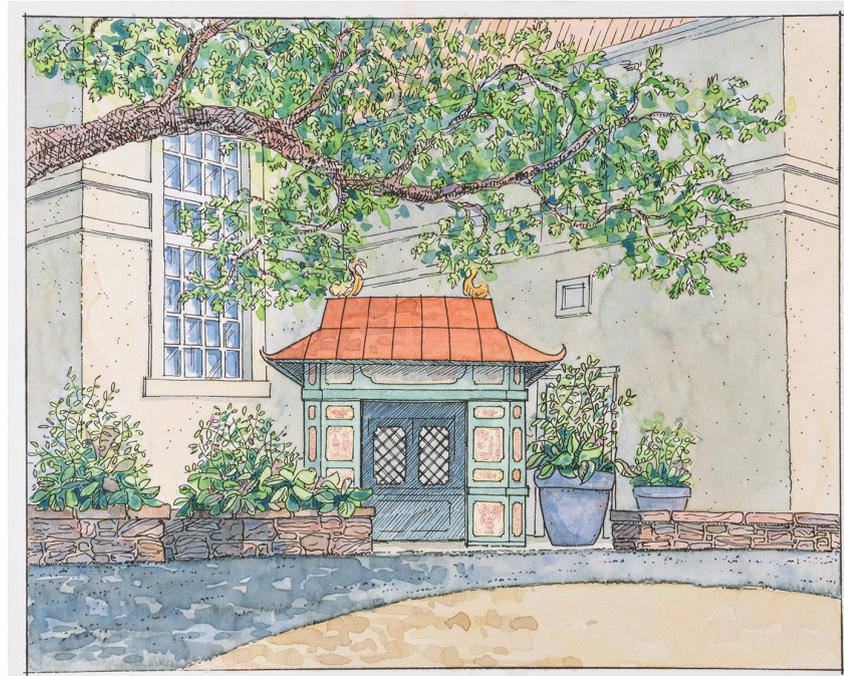
That this idyllic garden exhibition recalls a romantic lifestyle of the leisure class is no accident: The inspiration for *Follies* at Winterthur was 2014’s *Costumes of Downton Abbey*. Questionnaires answered by those who attended that immensely popular exhibition overwhelmingly indicated they would be interested in returning to the estate to enjoy its gardens. This was not lost on Winterthur’s garden and estate director, Chris Strand, a fan of the television series and one of the *Downton* curators. What followed, according to Long, was a two-and-a-half year “gestation period” during which decisions were made about how best to incorporate a garden exhibition with

the telling of the du Pont story. Overseas visits provided inspiration; local artisans provided the practical support needed to ultimately make the envisioned follies a reality.

With April 1, 2018 chosen as the opening date, the exhibition began to take shape in June 2017, when construction began on seven follies; one of them took only six weeks to build.

New follies

Today, and for the next year and a half, the first thing visitors to Winterthur will see while traversing the long driveway is a folly. And that folly will be etched in their memories – it is also the last thing they will see as they depart the 1,000-acre estate, essentially Henry Francis’



Chinese Pavilion: The wallpaper from the Chinese Parlor, a favorite of visitors to the house, inspired the façade of the Chinese Pavilion. Photograph courtesy Rob Cardillo Photography.

Bristol Summerhouse: For Henry Francis du Pont, the garden was a place to celebrate the natural beauty of idyllic country life. The Bristol Summerhouse, with its subtle attention to detail, is a perfect example of his impeccable eye. Photograph courtesy Bob Leitch.

canvas of rolling hills, streams, meadows, and forests for expressing his romantic vision of nature's beauty. The Needle's Eye seems to float in a pond that might be otherwise overlooked. The stage is set.

A bit off the beaten track is the Neoclassical Folly, constructed in a style that Long likens to a "little black dress" because "it goes with everything." Illustrating the point is the fact that the structure stands in the midst of a meadow of goldenrod, an informal planting that moves with the wind, an interesting juxtaposition, in Long's mind. Another newly constructed folly, the Gothic Tower, is "a nod to history" and a time when towers, sham castles, and fake ruins were intended to lend an air of importance to

European gardens in the 1700s and 1800s.

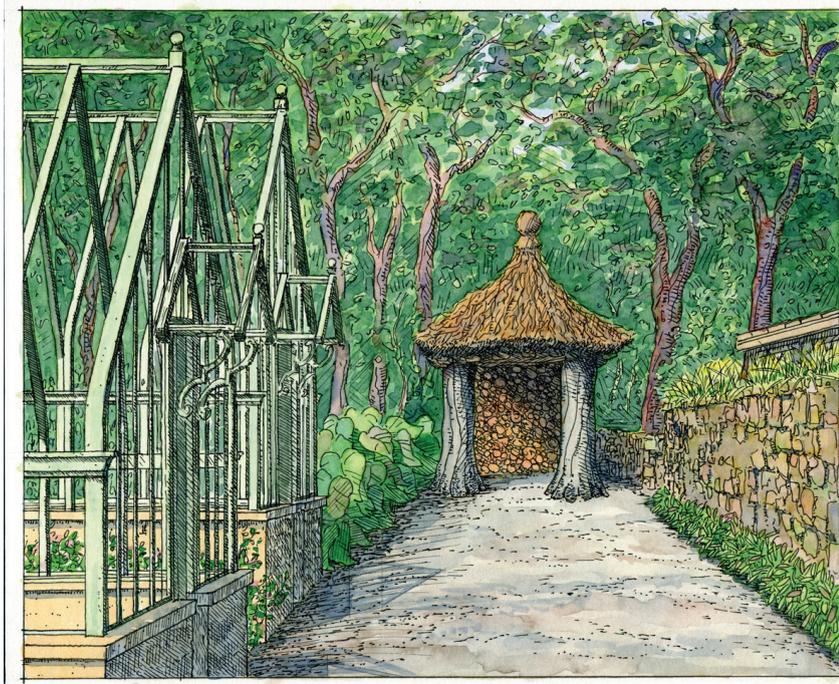
Inspired by the *porte cochère* of Winterthur's historic train station, the Mirrored Folly in the Pinetum, "streamlined and modern," seems to be covered with mirrored fish scales. This folly "reflects the mood of the garden," Long said; it also reflects downward clouds in a way that the structure itself seems to be floating in the sky.

Truly exotic is the Ottoman Tent. And inspired by the hand-painted *trompe l'oeil* decoration of Chinese House at Stowe Landscape Garden in Buckinghamshire, the Chinese Pavilion has an "indoor-outdoor feel," thanks to the photographic replication of wallpaper in Winterthur's Chinese Parlor. And yes, those cast finials are indeed hippocampi.

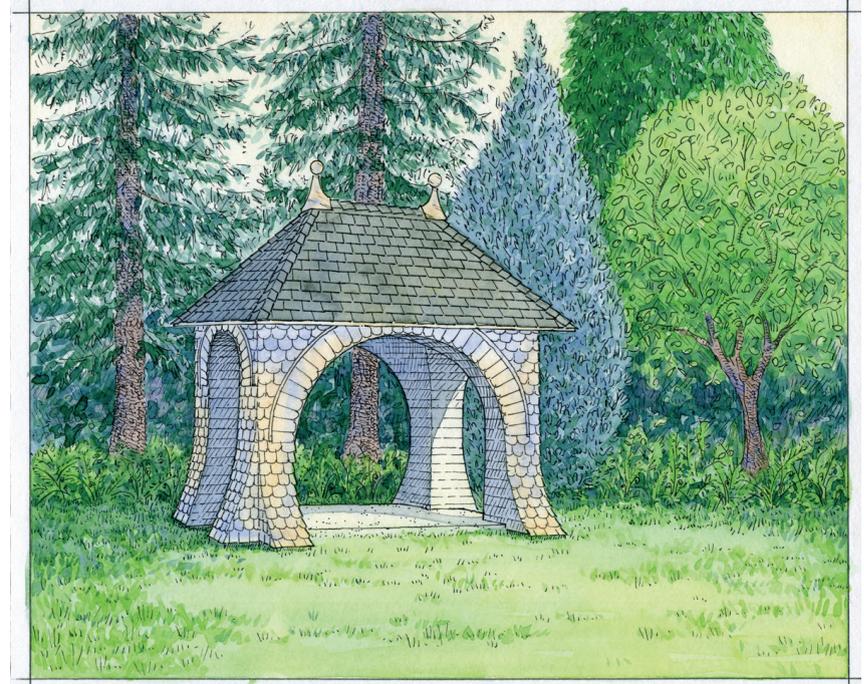
But Long's favorite among the new follies is the Green Folly, constructed from two beechwood trees harvested on the grounds with stacked wooden sides and a thatched roof. The inspiration for the folly that Long refers to as "my baby" is one at Highgrove House and Gardens, the official residence of Prince Charles in England.

Historic follies

Just as du Pont decorated the indoor museum with architectural bits and pieces salvaged from other historic buildings, he did the same with the historic follies in the Winterthur Garden. The 1960s Brick Lookout is topped with the tin roof and cast-iron eagle



Built from two beechwood trees harvested from the property, the Green Folly provides a verdant retreat. Photograph courtesy Rob Cardillo Photography.



The Mirrored Folly has a contemporary feel as its fish scale-like surface reflects the garden's mood. Photograph courtesy Bob Leitch.

that once decorated an earlier shed, which, in turn, might have been used to store trash cans.

The Latimeria Summerhouse, a pagoda-topped gazebo, was saved from destruction by du Pont from Latimeria, a historic property in Wilmington, and installed in the Peony Garden in 1929. From the same house are the Umbrella Seat and Pagoda Gate, which welcome guests as they traverse from the visitor center to the garden. In a similar way, du Pont relocated the façade of a historic house from New Castle, Delaware, to his home in the 1960s. In addition to its decorative value, the 1750 House, as it is called, has long served a practical function, as it screens from view machinery necessary to the maintenance of the estate.

Then there is the Bristol Summerhouse, located atop Sycamore Hill. Long said that during recent maintenance work on the folly's roof, she came to appreciate the folly's fine details, including five-sided pillars; because of gentle breezes and sweeping views, it is the curator's

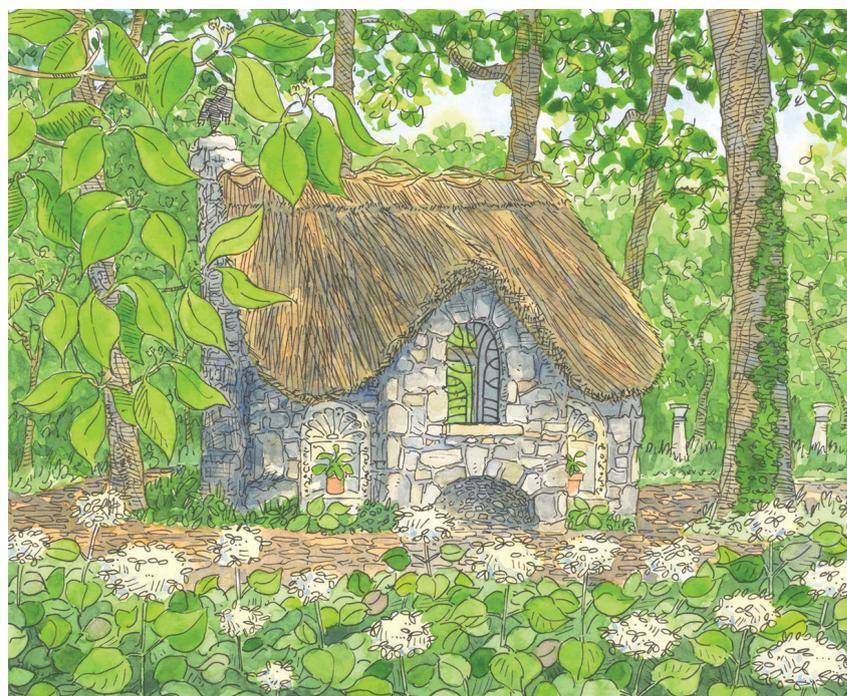
favorite historic folly.

And finally, the Faerie Cottage, built in part from iron and stone elements from earlier gardens, is the jewel in the crown of the magic area known as the "Enchanted Woods," a favorite spot for children and "a folly garden in itself."

End note

Repeat visits throughout the year are encouraged: Seasonal variations in the garden ensure ever-changing experiences. After the exhibition, the seven new follies will be removed, returning the garden to its appearance consistent with du Pont's tenancy. The future of the seven new follies, which were built to be mobile, remains uncertain, however. Long said that they might be loaned to another museum or perhaps even sold at auction.

Winterthur is located on route 52, six miles west of Wilmington, Delaware. For more information, call (800) 448-3883 or go to www.winterthur.org.



A permanent folly of the Winterthur Garden, the Faerie Cottage Folly charms young and old alike. Photograph courtesy Rob Cardillo Photography.



Helen Howard

~ Painter ~

Visit my website at www.helenhoward.net

email: hhowardartist@gmail.com



540 Neptune Ave. #5 | Longboat Key, FL 34228 | 860-465-6747 | 941-383-1790

YES! NEAJ'S DIGITAL AS WELL!

SIGN UP

Antiques NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL **DIGITAL**

Just send your email address and name, with the subject line "Digital" to NEAJdigital@gmail.com, or visit www.antiquesjournal.com