THE SITE

THE OUTBUILDINGS

Introduction

James Pinchot owned over a thousand acres of land which comprised the Grey Towers estate. Because of the complexity of the acquisition of the various parcels of land, through inheritance or through his own purchase, a complete title search has been deemed beyond the scope of this preliminary report. Little is known about the history of the occupancy of the use of the land before the mid 1880s, though it is clear that a farm was located in the immediate vicinity of the new house prior to its construction.

In James Pinchot's memorandum of work to be done at Grey Towers for winter 1888/spring 1889, there are references to "the farm house," the "old stable," "fill up the hole where it stood," the "old barn," and the "new road." These indications are interspersed with his instructions regarding site work, planting, and maintenance of the new house. In an early photograph of the west facade of the house taken from the hillside above, a farmhouse and some other frame structures can be seen in the distance to the south. Noted in a 1937 inventory of the buildings of Gifford Pinchot that were then insured were the Beek Farm dwelling and barn, the Quick Farm dwelling and barn, a framebuilding known as the "Farm House," and various ancillary farm outbuildings such as sheds, milkhouses, chicken houses, etc. It is likely that tenant farmers were then occupying farm structures that pre-dated Grey Towers' construction.

While additional research is necessary to unravel the early history of the site, at this point it is important to realize that the estate was not created anew from previously unoccupied land. The brief summaries of outbuildings that follow focus on those built after 1885 for which historical information could be obtained. The two major outbuildings under consideration in this report, the Barf Box and the Letter Box, both constructed during the 1920s, will be discussed in a subsequent section of this report.
The Carriage House

Location: Southwest of the main residence.

Original Description: Large, two story structure; masonry construction on first floor, frame on second. Slate, gable style roof; second story loggia; characteristic stonework, stone quoins around windows.

History: The original architectural style of the carriage house would indicate that it was built around 1890, when most of the outbuildings constructed by James Pinchot were erected. When the father's estate was divided, the boundary line between Parcel B, which went to Amos, and Parcel C, which went to Gifford, passed directly through the building, thus bisecting it into equal north and south sections. In the 1920s, the first floor of Gifford's section of the building was converted into a garage, while the second floor was later made into an apartment for Gifford Pinchot's employee, Morris E. Gregg, and his family. On October 21, 1937, a fire destroyed all frame portions of Gifford's building, leaving only the lower stone walls. A smokeproof wall that separated the two sections of the building saved Amos' part from destruction. Financial loss was estimated at $50,000, including the four cars within the garage and the entire contents of the apartment. Although the firm of Delano and Aldrich of New York City was retained in connection with the reconstruction of the garage, it remained in ruins for many years before its removal by the Forest Service in 1963/64. The building that exists today is a remodeled version of Amos' south section of the old carriage house.

The Stable

Location: Northwest of main residence.

Description: Large, frame barn, L-shaped in plan, gabled roof. Sheathed with weathered, unpainted clapboards.

History: A February, 1886 letter from James Pinchot to his wife reported on the progress of the house's construction and also mentioned:

Willie's plans for the stable are now finished and I shall put them in the hands of the carpenters at once—Early in the season I hope to have the stable and Gardner's house under way to be finished before autumn.

A reference in the next line to "Willie and Alice" being at the house would seem to indicate that the man responsible for the plans for this building was William Phelps Eno, Mrs. Pinchot's younger brother. Daughter Nettie's concern over the fact that the unfinished stable would inhibit her riding that summer probably prompted her father to complete the building as quickly as possible.
The Gatehouse

Location: At east entrance to property, old Route 6.

Description: One and one-half story stone structure faced with concrete, with slate covered, high hipped roof. Characteristic staggered, stone quoins, seven triangular dormers.

History: According to Henry McCarty’s recollection, the building was constructed in 1902 and 1903. This statement is supported by the fact that the July, 1904 contract for Foresters’ Hall, on Broad Street in Milford, makes several references to certain specifications, such as roofing details, on the gatehouse. (See note 22.) From this information, it seems logical to infer that E. S. Wolfe was Pinchot’s builder for both the gatehouse and Foresters’ Hall. It is equally probable that, because of stylistic similarities, the design for the gatehouse came from the office of Hunt and Hunt.

Ice House

Location: To immediate north of main residence, opposite service wing.

Original Description: Small, square, one story stone structure, built into the bank of a slope, with hipped roof and dormer.

History: The ice house was built in 1886 by David Cole, coincident with the completion of the main house. The building was more than doubled in size by a matching addition to its west side at a later unknown date.

Springhouse

Location: West side of garden wall.

Description: Small, square one story building with hipped roof and tail, corbelled brick chimney. Very similar to the original ice house.

History: The springhouse was constructed after the stone walls of the square, rose garden were build, presumably circa 1890. In later years, the building was known as the pump house.

The Garden Cottage

Location: Southwest of the main residence, near the southwest corner of the walled garden.

Description: Two story stone structure, second story faced with concrete, simulating stucco. Slate, gable roof. Apsidal addition on north end of building. Predominance of French Renaissance style decorative elements, such as second story tourelle and elaborate pediment of dormer.

History: Included in section on Yale School of Forestry. See note 21.

Squash Court Building

Location: Northwest of main residence, present site of parking lot.

Description: Stone building with frame roof.

History: According to Mrs. Amos Pinchot, the squash court building was constructed in the early 1900s by her husband, but was later converted into a laundry. At the time of the Forest Service’s acquisition of the property, the building had been used as a maid’s quarters. It was removed sometime during 1963, when its site was used in the construction of a visitors’ parking lot.
James Pinchot's obituary mentioned the man's "love of gardening" and stated that in 1875, he had retired from business "to devote the balance of his days to forestry and horticulture." The landscaping of his Grey Towers estate was one of his chief interests in the years during and after the completion of the house.

After young Gifford's visit to the building site in April 1886, he enthusiastically wrote to his mother of the construction progress and mentioned the following concerning the site.

There are already enough trees on the place to take away any feeling of bleakness that might have made itself felt without them. . . . The garden is being made, Papa has had over a hundred trees planted & among other things 200 rose bushes, including twenty varieties. We shall have some of our own vegetables in the summer this first season.

The creation of flower and vegetable gardens was thus one of James Pinchot's first priorities in the early years of his improvements to the site, and "the Gardner's house" was one of the first outbuildings undertaken. The 1888/1889 memo refers to previous plans for the garden, including horticultural instructions to his workmen as "plough side hill for grapes," "plant three cherry trees in front of farm house," "examine young apple trees in April," and "haul stones from young orchard." Charles Killie, who apparently worked as the estate's gardener in 1890, wrote to his employer in April of that year to request certain varieties of seeds and to report on the progress of the rose bushes and "Abrevolier." He also mentioned that work was about to commence on "the grape vine yard" and the seeding of the lawn. The following day, Mainie Armstrong wrote to James Pinchot about a proposed trip to the Newburgh, New York, area to look at prospective grape vines. From early photographs of the Garden Cottage (also known as Foresters' Cottage) and of the carriage house, it appears that the grapes were placed on a stepped terrace to the west of these two outbuildings. That same spring of 1890, another orchard was planted on the top of the hill to the west of the house. James Pinchot had traveled from New York to supervise the planting, but was obliged to return due to an unexpected late snowfall. All of these activities are indications of the elder Pinchot's informal attempts to alleviate the bareness of the land immediately surrounding the house, a condition which is evident from the early photographs taken after the building's completion. Because of Milford's early history as a lumber center, it is probable that much of the site has been subjected to clearcut lumbering, the land then being burned to clear brush in preparation for farming.

In April, 1893, Pinchot wrote to his old friend, Frederick Law Olmsted, the country's foremost landscape architect, who was renowned for his plans for New York's Central Park, the grounds of the U.S. Capitol, and the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He invited him to come to Milford for a day that month and stated that he needed "professional advice as to planting and laying out the grounds and roads at my place." The repeat of this same request in other letters to Olmsted during the next two years would tend to suggest that the landscape architect never found the time to favor his friend with a visit to Grey Towers. However, in 1906, his son, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., was involved in the design of a family cemetery plot on the site. Whether or not any other professional landscape architects assisted James Pinchot in his improvement of the grounds remains unknown at this time.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY LANDSCAPE HISTORY

It is likely that almost all the major features of the present landscape setting of Grey Towers postdate 1914, the year Gifford and Cornelia Pinchot were married. Just as the house was remodeled and modernized to suit the younger Pinchot's extremely active political and social lifestyle, so the landscape was extended and rationalized to contemporary standards of taste and comfort. Unfortunately, the scope of research for this preliminary report could not include an investigation of documentary evidence for the various twentieth-century landscape features at Grey Towers. However, scanning of account books and bills for the decade between 1918 and 1928 make clear that during their initial years at Grey Towers, Gifford and Cornelia Pinchot spent large sums on landscape development including plant materials, walks, walls, and garden buildings. Existing drawings confirm that this activity continued into the 1930s. It may be speculated that some of the major landscape modifications at Grey Towers were undertaken by the Pinchots as make-work projects for out-of-work Milford residents during the Depression.

A stylized domestic landscape as pretentious as that at Grey Towers may be divided into three very closely related parts: the natural setting of the estate including its aspect, topography, natural vegetative cover, etc.; the park — by which is meant the

Figure 52. In an 1886 letter to his mother, Gifford Pinchot mentioned the two hundred rose bushes that his father had already planted, well before the completion of the house. The foreground of this early photograph gives a good view of the roses of the walled garden. From the Hunt Collection, A.I.A. Library, Washington, D.C.

Figure 53. Grey Towers from the southwest, circa 1910. Note the development of the landscape as compared to that seen in Figure 21.
man-made setting of the house including the siting and approach; and the home precinct, which includes landscape features immediately adjacent to and functionally supportive of the main house.

James Pinchot was primarily responsible for the natural setting of the estate. He chose the site, initiated reforestation and began development of the landscape. The park, although begun by James Pinchot, is today probably very different from what he knew. The greater part of the present planting of the park can be attributed to Gifford and Cornelia Pinchot. They, at one time, had a staff of seven gardeners and are known to have planted and moved mature trees. The large masses of single species of trees and the overplanting of trees in the vicinity of the house do not conform to late-nineteenth-century landscape taste. The present drive to the house also would be unlikely in a late-nineteenth-century landscape. The outline of the former, more gentle, approach designed to gradually reveal the house is still visible on the east lawn. The present efficient drive very likely dates from shortly after the introduction of automobile transport to the estate.

However, it is the home precinct that today would be least recognizable to the builder of Grey Towers. This area has been altered, particularly to the north and east of the house. Here Cornelia Pinchot created a series of outdoor landscape spaces that, but for their consistency of materials, might be considered alien to the house. The style of these features is one that developed in England in the late-nineteenth century and became an American rage during the early twentieth century. The style, which developed in reaction to formal gardens (as represented at Grey Towers by the Rose Garden), was characterized by strong architectural forms softened by extensive vegetation including shrubbery, vines and herbaceous material. Definite compartmentalization of outdoor space is a hallmark of this style and is very evident at Grey Towers. The fact that the transition between outdoor spaces is not always successful in the Grey Towers gardens gives rise to the theory that the landscape was planned and executed at different periods and probably by different designers.

Following is a brief summary of the major landscape features added to the home precinct of Grey Towers during the first half of the twentieth century.

THE MOSAIC TERRACE

This outdoor space immediately adjacent to Room 107, the dining room, is undated but stylistically conforms to Cornelia Pinchot's taste with its marine motifs. It may be contemporary with her enlargement of the dining room before 1922. The tanks for aquatic plants are in keeping with early twentieth-century landscape practices.

THE EAST LAWN

The features on the East Lawn including the informal allee (now partially obscured) and the semi-circular arrangements of yew are again meant to dramatize and draw the eye to and from the prospect of the house. The lawn is probably the result of many years of work, but could not possibly predate the realignment of the entrance drive.

THE AMPHITHEATER

The function of this enormous outdoor space is undoubtedly linked with the political activity of both of the younger Pinchots. It perhaps is an enlargement of an earlier family theater on the same spot.
THE WALK
Leading to the Bait Box from the Letter Box is a double walk divided by a shallow canal. The walk is now planted with yew. However, it is likely that it was once lined on the west side with a herbaceous border. The massive retaining wall of the swimming pool was probably also screened with plant materials. The design of the walk is probably contemporary with the Bait Box.

THE SWIMMING POOL
This raised pool is enclosed on three sides by a pergola of stone piers and wooden trellis work. On the west side is a gazebo or summer house. The pool area repeats the materials of other features in the area, though its design is much more linear. For safety reasons, the pool itself has been filled in. Its construction date is not yet established.

THE FINGER BOWL
This unique outdoor dining table is in the form of a raised pool surrounded by a flat ledge of sufficient width to accommodate a place setting. Chairs were pulled up to the pool and food was passed on platters floated on the water. Surrounding the Finger Bowl is a very large double-walled pergola with a complicated, almost baroque, plan of intersecting apses and semi-circles. The pergola is roofed with a wooden trellis to carry vines. Although the exact date of the Finger Bowl and Pergola are not yet established, it is likely that they were an early development, as they were originally illuminated by candlelight and only later electrified.

THE ENTRANCE DRIVE
The Entrance Drive has been discussed earlier in this report. According to Mrs. Amos Pinchot, the present drive dates from 1919 and was built when the Grey Towers property was divided between her husband and Gifford Pinchot.

THE EAST TERRACE AND MOAT
This terrace was established to dramatize the prospect from the house. The wall below it also dramatizes the view of the house from the present approach drive. By visually heightening the house from below, the design echoes Richard Morris Hunt's original intention of a taller foundation for the building. The "moat" is a clever play on the chateau style of the house. Construction dates for these features have not yet been established.
Figure 58. Looking toward the "Finger Bowl," winter 1978.

Figure 59. The "Finger Bowl," located north of the main house, circa 1963. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

Figure 60. The "Moat" figures prominently in this view of the east facade of Grey Towers. Constructed around 1940 by Corinna and Gifford Pinchot as part of the overall landscaping development of the site, the moat added to the romantic conception of the chateau image. From the Gifford Pinchot Papers.
NOTES


19. For a statement upon the importance of the fieldwork at Grey Towers in the education of the forester, see: Emmanuel Friz, Teacher, Editor, and Forestry Consultant. An Interview conducted by Elwood R. Mauder and Amelia R. Fry (Santa Cruz and Berkeley, Ca.: Forest History Society and Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1977), pp. 20-24.

20. A group of snapshots taken in 1903 by an unidentified student of the Yale Forestry School provides much information of the early years of the summer session at Grey Towers and the outbuildings that then existed on the site. All photos were numbered and brief identifications were pencilled on the back of each. GP Papers, Series 13, cont. 2976, folder 1.

21. Information on the building’s date of original construction and major addition were taken from the October, 1924 interview with Henry McCarty in GP Papers, Series 13, cont. 2993. The predominance of its Renaissance detailing and its stylistic similarity to other structures designed at Grey Towers by Hunt would point to its design by the architect, though no documentation has yet been found to document this conclusion. When James Pinchot’s estate was divided, “Parcel B,” a twenty-one acre tract that included this building, was given to Ams Pinchot. For a draft of a survey of this tract done in December, 1920, see GP Papers, Confidential File, cont. 3015.

22. A copy of the contractual agreement made in July, 1904 between James W. Pinchot, owner, and E. S. Wolfe, builder, is among the files of the Pike County Historical Society. This twelve-page document is a complete record of the building’s specifications. The historical society also owns a stereopticon view of the west block of Broad Street before Foresters’ Hall’s construction (which shows C.D. Pinchot’s store and the existing post office) as well as one of the building soon after its completion. Two preliminary sketches of Hunt and Hunt’s floor plans for Foresters’ Hall, which date to December, 1903, can be found in the Hunt collection at the American Institute of Architects’ Library in Washington, Box 16 of the catalogued documents.


24. Telegram from Mrs. Cornelia Pinchot to GP, August 20, 1926. GP Papers, Series 4, cont. 263. As a provision of the acceptance of the original 1900 endowment, Yale was obligated to carry on a summer school on the estate for a period of twenty-one years, which ended in 1926.


Figure 77. The Letter Box, circa 1963. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

OUTBUILDINGS

The Letter Box

During the late 1920s, a small masonry structure was built for Gifford Pinchot, on the hillside to the northeast of the main residence. The building became known as "The Letter Box," since it served as the headquarters of the staff who answered the governor's mail. Other political activities, such as the planning of campaigns and the interviewing of constituents, were centered in this outbuilding, thus isolating the office functions from the main residence. Following the government's acquisition of the property in 1963, the building was remodelled to serve as the Conservation Institute's publication office. At this time, the basement was extensively renovated to accommodate restroom facilities. In recent years, the main floor's space has been used as an exhibition area of historic displays relating to Grey Towers.

Exterior Description

This one-story building with full basement is rectangular in plan (18' x 30'). The walls of coursed rubble stone, gray in color, have roughly dressed stone quoins at the four corners. A belt course of stone similar to the quoins accents the main facade's parapet, which is capped by a roughly dressed bluestone coping. The gable roof was originally covered with copper, but is now covered with a built-up asphalt roof (circa 1963-64). The most prominent feature of the facade is a niche-like entranceway, from which a semi-circular pediment of cast-concrete projects. Two fluted Corinthian columns support the plain entablature, while two pilasters flank the entranceway. The porch floor is a monolithic, circular bluestone slab (8'6" diameter). The heavily varnished right-panel door is a replacement, installed circa 1963-64. The gable ends, or side elevations, are identical in fenestration, each having a large window opening that is surmounted by a flat stone arch, with stone quoins, and a bluestone sill. The windows contain their original 15/16 double-hung sash. Below each window is a small, rectangular basement window, reglazed circa 1963-64. The roof is drained by four scuppers that penetrate the stone parapet and empty into decorative copper leader heads and pipes. The rear elevation has two large windows which contain their original 9/16 sash. Below are two openings: the one to the south dates from 1963-64, while the other is original. Both contain hollow metal doors circa 1963-64.

Figure 78. The Letter Box interior, 1978.
The Bait Box

The “Bait Box” is a small masonry and frame structure built on a hillside to the north of the main residence. It was constructed during the early 1920s as a childhood playhouse for Gifford B. Pinchot, born in 1915. The name “Bait Box” reflects the family’s interest in fishing. The basement of the building was at one time used as a blacksmith shop. Much of the original interior fabric of this building was replaced in the early 1960s renovations.

Exterior Description

The Bait Box comprises two distinct structures: a wood frame structure rectangular in plan (17’ x 27’), one story high with partial basement, and an elaborate “memoristic” stone facade with an octagonal forecourt. The facade is laid up in coursed rubble stone that rises to a stone parapet with a rough dressed stone coping. The most prominent feature of the front elevation is the entry bay consisting of nail-studded double entry doors and a carved, granite corniced architrave. Flanking this opening are two cast-concrete spiral columns with composite capitals in style, not unlike those Comelia Pinchot added to the dining room. Set into the granite lintel above the door are the words: “The Bait Box” cast in bronze. Above the entry is a broken pediment, with dressed stone coping, in which a carved stone cartouche, emblazoned with two intertwined dolphins, is set. The entrance is flanked by diagonally projecting bays, each having two windows that are surmounted by splayed flat stone arches. The forecourt walls are laid up in coursed rubble to match the facade, although they may be of a slightly later date. The east and west walls contain elliptical openings framed in rough cut stone. The forecourt entrance is flanked by two arched openings: the one to the east had a gate, now missing, while the one to the west has been closed with poured concrete to form a niche for a classical statue. The main portion of the building’s structure is wood frame, covered with 4½” clapboards, set on a poured concrete foundation. The frame structure that projects from the rear basement level dates from 1964, while the porch with the decorative wrought-iron railing is original (although all wood members were replaced circa 1963-64). The hipped roof, originally of copper, is now covered with a built-up asphalt roof dating from 1963-64.
Interior Description

BASEMENT
The south section is an unexcavated crawl space. A wood storage shed was removed circa 1963-64. During the remodeling (ca. 1963-64) the concrete floor was patched, a wood frame extension was added to the north, the window in the east wall was blocked up, and a new hollow metal door was installed in the existing door opening. A new galvanized, hot-air furnace and duct work were also installed.
The present interior finishes date from the 1963-64 renovation, although they duplicate the original appearance. The most important change made was the removal of several built-in shell units located around the periphery of the room.

FIRST FLOOR
Floor
Laminated oak parquet, 9" x 9" (ca. 1963-64).

Ceiling
Metal lath and rough troweled plaster.
Six false ceiling beams, 8' x 8', rough finish (original fabric).

Walls
Metal lath and plaster, white sand paint (ca. 1963-64).

Cornice
Same as false beams (original fabric).

Baseboard
Plain varnished oak 7½" base with applied 1" oak moulding (ca. 1963-64).

Doors
#1011. Exterior double oak door, four paneled, varnished. Metal butt hinges on each leaf (ca. 1963-64—duplicate original).
The wrought-iron panel, massive iron ring knocker, and iron door nails are all from original door.
Molded wood trim 3½" wide (original fabric).
#1023. Two oak doors with louvered panels, plain oak trim 4½" wide, brass butt hinges, brass latches (ca. 1963-64).
#1024. Double door, eight lights each leaf, plain oak trim, brass butt hinges and latch (ca. 1963-64—Duplicate original).

Windows
South wall, four eight-light, pine-frame casements, brass butt hinges and latches, plain oak trim (ca. 1963-64—duplicate original).
North wall, projecting bay with two twelve-light, pine casement sash, one double sixteen-light casement, flanked by two eight-light single casements, all with plain oak trim (ca. 1966—duplicate original). The brass closing hardware is reused from the original windows.

Heating
Five baseboard-mounted hot-air registers, one small floor register. "Honeywell" thermostat on the north wall (ca. 1963-64).

Lighting
Six-light incandescent chandelier (ca. 1963-64).
Two pressed tin hanging lanterns and brackets (old) made for candles but now electrified.

Figure 79. The Bait Box after the remodeling, circa 1964. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

Figure 80. The Bait Box during the remodeling, circa 1964. From the collection of the Pinchot Institute.

Figure 81. The fireplace located in the Bait Box, 1978.

Equipment
Fireplace on west wall. Sunken hearth pit of 2" thick bluestone slab. Firebrick lining. 4½" bluestone surround. 6" stone mantel shelf resting on projecting stone brackets (rebuilt ca. 1963-64).