



GRAYCLIFF

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

The Frank Lloyd Wright designed Graycliff was built by Darwin Martin in 1926 as a summer home for his wife Isabelle. Elements of the cliff and its unique Tichenor limestone were built into the organically designed home, set on a bluff overlooking Lake Erie. In addition to FLW's landscape sketch, extensive landscaping designed by Ellen Biddle Shipman in 1931, provided outdoor living areas sheltered by layered native shrubs, harvest gardens, flower picking borders, and a large orchard.

A few years after Mrs. Martin's death in 1945, the property was bought by the Piarist Fathers where they ran a boarding school for refuge boys. In 1997, the property was put up for sale, and the Graycliff Conservancy was formed to save the property from being torn down for development. In 1999, the conservancy, backed by the Baird Foundation, was able to purchase the 8.5 acres, and began an ambitious restoration project to restore the house and landscape to its former glory.

Landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman was engaged to design extensive gardens in concert with Wrights' sweeping plan. The 8.5 acre parcel was divided into two sections with a stone wall dividing the 2.5 acre home grounds from the gardens, orchard and fields. Described by Margaret Foster, the Martin's grandchild, as "A place of dappled sunlight, abundant flowers, refreshing breezes, and general well being," Graycliff provided a place of happiness and recreation to the family from 1928- 1943.

The Landscape consisted of sunken garden beds close to the house that were planted with massed annuals, native shrub and tree bordered croquet lawns, a heat hut courtyard where the children played, and abundant vegetable and flower gardens- both ornamental and picking flowers. Past the picking gardens was a large orchard with an agricultural Skinner irrigation system, then wildflowers with mown pathways out to the road. Knowing Darwin's love for trees, John Larkin gifted to him many trees, some of which were planted in a grove on the south side of the property. These made up a Pine grove giving you the feel of the Adirondacks, a frequent vacation spot for Isabelle and family.

A letter from Martin to Wright, 1931, "We are enjoying Graycliff and living mostly off the garden," shows how serious their gardening was.

ExperienceGraycliff.org

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