

Petite Plaisance Conservation Fund Newsletter

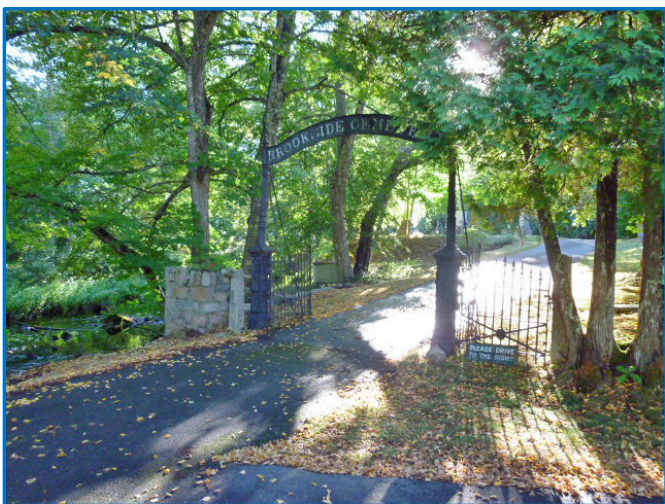
December 2024

Unprecedented Rainfall

At Petite Plaisance, we work hard to keep things as they were when Marguerite Yourcenar last left the house in 1987. The challenge is less daunting inside the house than it is in the garden or at the cemetery plot, which our staff carefully tends. We are not immune to the effects of climate change, and nature often has its own ideas about how a garden should evolve. One winter storm knocked down two spruces in the wood garden, and they, in turn, collided with another, smaller tree on the way down. The ground was so saturated by the historic rainfall that the trees were upended in the high winds. Thanks to the generosity of donors, we had the emergency funds to pay for the cleanup.



We were also able to replace a twin birch at the gravesite of Marguerite Yourcenar and Grace Frick at Brookside Cemetery in Somesville. The lovely site overlooking Somes Pond had great



meaning for the two women. The distinctive iron-gated entrance to the cemetery was just yards away from "Hysom's Cabin," the small log house that they rented for three summers in the 1940s. Grace and Marguerite landscaped their burial plot with ferns, bunchberry, and mosses. After Grace's death in November 1979, Madame Yourcenar made additions to the site. On the day after Christmas that year, she sent a check for \$10,000 to the Brookside Cemetery Society "as a memorial to Grace Frick," requesting that two linden trees near Somes Brook be replaced the following spring. Those lindens still stand. She also requested that

twin birches, a tree species both women were fond of, be planted on the edge of their plot. The birches have failed several times over the years, but we cheered when A. C. Parsons found and planted a lovely twin birch in its traditional spot in the fall.

Projects

Uprooted trees were not the only thing we were focused on in the spring; our highly dependable painting crew arrived in mid-May and transformed the interior of the veranda overlooking the wildflower meadow. They returned in the fall to finish the dormer on the north side and do some trim work. The painters have been making their way around the house and will return in 2025 to complete the four-year project. We also had the gutters removed, cleaned, and rehung, with the addition of leaf guards. Hopefully, they can better handle the ever more concentrated downpours that seem to be a feature of our changing climate.

In addition to projects, we were able to assume a more substantial portion of Petite Plaisance's annual maintenance costs. We are hoping to take over the lawn care and gardening expense on a permanent basis, and we are deeply grateful for the support that made that possible in 2024!

Photo Album Project

With the digital scanning of the first set of Marguerite Yourcenar's photograph albums now complete, we look forward to posting these unique artifacts, compiled, labeled, and often annotated by the author, in an online location where they may be viewed by scholars and admirers the world over in 2025.

President's Message

Petite Plaisance welcomed visitors from twenty countries, including Serbia and Myanmar, this year. We are often amazed by how far some of our guests travel to get a glimpse of the world in which Marguerite Yourcenar lived and worked. Even after we are

closed up tight for the winter, literary pilgrims come to the island to visit places that were important to the author, such as the cabin in Somesville or Mount Cadillac, from whose summit she saw many a sunrise and many a star-studded sky. We don't know exactly how many people visit the gravesite in the offseason, but each year we find offerings—feathers, shells, polished stones, flowers, poems, and little trinkets from faraway places—that are carefully



placed on the gravestones of the two women. We never know what we'll find at Brookside Cemetery, but we know those simple tributes were left by someone whose life was touched by Marguerite Yourcenar's writings.

~ Jayne Persson

Many thanks to all our generous donors!