



## Marian Cruger Coffin 1876-1951



Hedge framing the Caretaker's House at Bayberry Land is typical of Coffin's designs. Photography by Marylou Stewart.

Marian Cruger Coffin (1876-1951) was a pioneer in the field of landscape architecture. One of the first women to receive professional training in the discipline, she received a degree in landscape architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1904. After graduating, she opened her own office in New York, since none of the established firms would hire a woman in a senior position. She achieved professional recognition in 1906 when she was accepted as a Junior Member of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), and again in 1918, when she was made a Fellow of the ASLA. Coffin was a practicing landscape architect until her death, her career having spanned 53 years.



Construction of the Terraced Italianate garden at Bayberry Land. Courtesy of The Winterthur Library Archives.

Marian's father died when she was seven, leaving Marian and her mother dependent on family and friends to survive. Fortunately, Mrs. Coffin, the former Alice Church, was well connected on both fronts. Her siblings provided housing for Marian and her mother until they moved to Boston so that Marian could pursue a degree in landscape architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Mrs. Coffin's best friend was married to Colonel Henry A. du Pont, so it was only natural that Marian spent many hours with the du Pont children, Louise and Henry. Her lifelong friendship with Henry Francis du Pont began when the two were children but fully developed as they shared student years in Boston, where du Pont was studying horticulture at Harvard and Marian was at MIT. In 1926, when du Pont inherited Winterthur, the family's Delaware estate, he turned to his friend for design help. This friendship led to other commissions, including the du Pont estates Mount Cuba and Gibraltar, and the University of Delaware. These and her other social connections brought her many wealthy clients, and Marian Coffin became one of the country's preeminent landscape designers, specializing in large private estates. Many of these were on Long Island.



Terraced Italianate garden at Bayberry Land. Courtesy of The Winterthur Library Archives.

Marian Coffin was known for designing her client's entire properties. She concerned herself with every detail of the landscape, from drives, paths, woodlands, walkways, and formal gardens to creating views and backgrounds. She also concerned herself with her client, stating in one article that she first established what the client wanted in a landscape, and then designed it to be in scale with the house and grounds yet still within the means and tastes of the owner.



Marion Coffin at her Rhode Island home. Courtesy of The Winterthur Library Archives, No. P14913



Tritoma Walk, Bayberry Land. Courtesy of The Winterthur Library Archives, No. P174.51