

The Lesser-Known Side of Wharton

Posted on July 23, 2014 by [crtriantos](#) in [2014](#), [Edith Wharton](#), [events](#), [history](#), [summer season](#), [The Mount](#), [World War I](#)

Most often associated with literary fame, Edith Wharton was a complex, intellectually motivated woman whose passions led to many other remarkable achievements: interior design, gardening, and—perhaps most astoundingly—her unwavering dedication to helping refugee children, wounded soldiers, and struggling families in France during World War I.

Wharton helped establish three hostels for refugees, delivered supplies to the front lines, and created a Paris “workroom” that employed 90 women in need of family income. She wrote about her efforts in a 1915 [piece for the *New York Times*](#). “There is hardly a form of human misery that has not come our way and wrung our hearts with the longing to do more and give more,” she wrote.



On Thursday, July 31, Dr. Alan Price will deliver [a lecture](#) at The Mount centered on three important American war charities in France, and the dress of their three extraordinary leaders: Edith Wharton, Nina Duryea, and Isabel Lathrop.

A Wharton scholar and humanities researcher, Dr. Price has chosen to highlight the incredible civilian response to one of Europe’s greatest tragedies by focusing on American volunteers in France. “I can’t look at the war directly; it’s too horrible,” he said. More than 20,000 American women served in charity and war relief organizations overseas, including at least two with ties to Berkshire County: Edith Wharton, who spent a decade at The Mount in Lenox, and Nina Duryea, who lived in Stockbridge from 1920–1952.

The lecture, entitled “What They Wore to War: Dressing American Relief Workers in the Great War,” stems from Price’s book, *The End of the Age of Innocence: Edith Wharton and the First World War*, and marks the beginning of The Mount’s four-year acknowledgement of this significant anniversary.

For more highlights of Wharton’s war work, visit the exhibit *Edith Wharton and the First World War*, open at The Mount through October 31. Dr. Price consulted on the project, which details four of the busiest and most taxing years of Wharton’s life. Also, [here’s a short online piece](#) written in 2011 by Molly Guinness about Wharton’s time in Paris, much of it darkened by the dire circumstances of war.

“The war was a terrible event. If we don’t learn from ‘the guns of August,’ we are doomed to repeat it,” Price cautioned.

Join us for the lecture, which will begin at 4 pm next Thursday. Tickets—\$10 for Mount members, \$12 for the general public—are still available and can be [purchased online](#).

New “Backstairs” tour premieres at The Mount!

Posted on December 2, 2013 by [crtriantos](#) in [2013](#), [Backstairs tour](#), [Blog](#), [Edith Wharton](#), [history](#), [The Mount](#), [visitors](#), [winter](#)

Edith and Teddy Wharton weren't the only people who lived at The Mount from 1902–1911. At any given time when the Whartons were in residence, 15–20 servants staffed the house and property—all of them with unique circumstances and stories.

We're eager to tell those stories, which is why we just launched a new “Backstairs” tour that reveals details about the lives of servants who lived and worked at The Mount a century ago. On Saturday, we welcomed about 35 people on each of two one-hour tours. Visitors seemed quite engaged, and we were very pleased with how everything went. (If you took a tour, we welcome your comments!) Derek Gentile [wrote about the tour](#) in today's Berkshire Eagle.

And, if you missed the tours last weekend, here's good news: we're offering four more “Backstairs” tours this month. Make plans now to join us on at **12 pm or 2 pm this Saturday, December 7**, or at **12 pm or 2 pm on Saturday, December 14**. The main house will be open on those days from **11 am to 3 pm**, offering a warm winter haven, festive holiday cheer, and intriguing Gilded Age history!



Alfred White, the Whartons' longtime butler

The intersection of literature and gardening

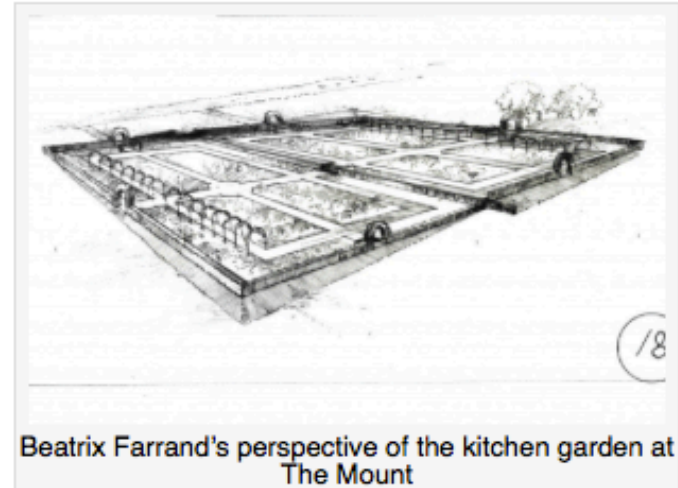
Posted on May 16, 2014 by [crtriantos](#) in [2014](#), [The Mount](#)

Yesterday's *New York Times* review of the New York Botanical Garden's "Groundbreakers: Great American Gardens and the Women Who Designed Them" exhibition calls to our attention important Gilded Age themes that played a dominant role in literature and design created during that time. "Is it only a biographical curiosity," asks critic Edward Rothstein, "that [Beatrix] Farrand was a niece of Edith Wharton's?"

In addition to her landscape work for the Rockfellers featured in the exhibit, Beatrix Ferrand worked closely with Wharton on the kitchen gardens and the entrance drive to the house at The Mount. As an avid gardener and authoritarian on European landscape design, Wharton herself took the lead on the rest of the property. The results were spectacular then, as they are today in their fully restored glory.

"I was amazed at the success of my [efforts]," wrote Wharton to Morton Fullerton in 1911. "Decidedly, I'm a better landscape gardener than novelist, and this place, every line of which is my own work, far surpasses *The House of Mirth*."

Whether you've seen the "Groundbreakers" exhibit or not, we invite you to visit The Mount to experience one of the best living examples of early 20th century landscape gardening. Guided garden tours begin Memorial Day weekend. Materials are available for visitors who wish to take self-guided tours at any time during normal daily operating hours (10 am to 5 pm through October 31, except on **early closing days**).



Beatrix Farrand's perspective of the kitchen garden at The Mount



The Mount's Formal Garden today

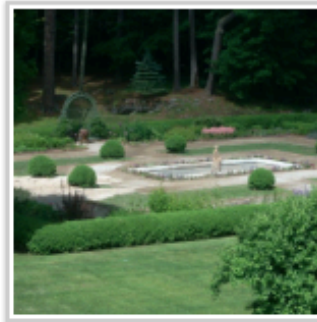
After the rain, the rainbow

Posted on July 1, 2014 by [crtriantos](#) in [2014](#), [The Mount](#), [Uncategorized](#)

As many of you know, last Thursday's sunrise came with a devastating revelation: the night's torrential downpour had wreaked havoc on our prized French flower gardens as well as parts of the road and pathways on the property. At some point during the night, the entire garden had been submerged; by morning, much of it was covered by about 20 tons of road and pathway debris.

We gasped, took deep breaths, rolled up our sleeves, and got straight to work. We closed the property on Thursday so our entire team could address the major problem at hand. Determined to keep things running as smoothly and normally as possible, we renewed our commitment to our weekend events—including Sunday's widely anticipated annual free Family Garden Party—and opened the doors to the public again on Friday morning.

We carefully assessed the damage and made a plan: we engaged Ben Webster, whose crew worked with us a decade ago to complete the original \$2 million garden restoration, and secured the assistance of Laura Walton, The Mount's official gardener. We're working on getting a final estimate for the repairs (and preventative measures to ensure this will never happen again), and we will announce it as soon as possible.



Once we started digging and rescuing any plants we could, we were heartened by the belief that many of the perennials, despite being buried alive, will likely survive. We counted our blessings in other ways, too: only about half of the garden was affected. We know it could have been much worse.

But here is what was *really* heartening: the outpouring of support we received from people near and far. The word spread quickly, and it wasn't long before the emails and calls came pouring in. It was a shower of a different and very welcome kind: a long, steady stream of people offering hands-on assistance, financial help, and general good wishes. Over 700 people flocked to the property for the Family Garden Party on Sunday—record-breaking attendance for the four-year-old community-oriented event!

This is exactly what keeps us going every day: knowing so many people care about this beautiful historic property, and care about what we do to advance cultural programming and honor the multi-faceted legacy of Edith Wharton. Thank you for supporting The Mount through thick and thin. We welcome any financial gifts you are able to make to help with these extensive repairs, and thank you—as always—for reaching out to remind us that, with the help of friends, anything is possible.

SPINNING YARN AND WEAVING MAGIC: STORYTELLING COMES TO THE BERKSHIRES!



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Who doesn't love a good story? There's something about a taut, tempting yarn. It twists your perspective, and, when done well, can magically transport you to a different time and place.

Sure, a captivating story can burst from the pages of a book or be broadcast from a recording. But perhaps the best story-sharing experience is one between live humans, where words are accompanied by expressions and gestures and nuances of voice that imbue the narrative with broader, deeper dimensions.

We're not the only ones who think so. In recent years, storytelling as entertainment has exploded in popularity. There's a [science behind it](#), after all. And who doesn't agree with [Ira Glass's way of thinking](#)?

Catapulted to the public sphere by The Moth, storytelling events now headline weekend arts and cultural listings in major cities across the US.

And in certain rural parts, too: We're delighted this fall to introduce several storytelling events to western Massachusetts! The first one—this Friday evening, **September 5**—features polished performers from Boston-based [massmouth, inc.](#), who will come to The Mount to share their sparkling, true-life tales of traveling, temptation, and tribes. The show will be hosted by massmouth executive director Norah Dooley, who will also perform one of the eight-minute monologues. It promises to be a great evening. We'll have drinks and nosh for sale; the doors will open at 7:30 for the 8 pm show. Tickets are \$15, but here's the thing: We're rewarding our blog readers with a special discount price! [Click here](#) and use the promotional code "storytelling" for \$10 tickets instead. Sound good?

While you're at it, get tickets too for the [next storytelling event](#) on **October 18**, this one in partnership with Speak Up, a storytelling group based in Hartford, CT. That Saturday night, five skilled storytellers will regale the audience with love-and-marriage-themed tales. Bring a romantic partner, a friend, or simply yourself to hear stories of love lost, love found, and love finally understood. Tickets are \$15.

If you can imagine yourself onstage, sign up now for the [storytelling workshop](#) at The Mount that will be hosted by 12-time Moth StorySLAM champion Matthew Dicks on Sunday, **October 19** from 9 am to 1 pm. It'll be inspiring, educational, and exceptionally fun, and—believe us—you won't want to miss the chance to take part!



Massmouth executive director, and host/performer Norah Dooley

Posted on September 3, 2014 by [crtriantos](#) in [2014](#), [events](#), [Lenox](#), [popular culture](#), [The Mount](#), [writers](#)

Spotlight: Julie Quain, volunteer extraordinaire

Posted on May 28, 2014 by crtriantos in 2014, The Mount, Uncategorized

Julie Quain has been a loyal, hardworking volunteer at The Mount for the past seven years. We value her and her contributions tremendously, just as we value all of the people who donate their time and skills so generously throughout the year! We took a few moments to ask Julie about her personal connection to The Mount, and why she continues to dedicate her spare hours and boundless energy. Here's what she said:



Julie Quain (right) helps Nicole Knapp with Community Day 2013 preparations

Q: How did you become familiar with The Mount?

A: Ah, the not-so-unusual answer: I was an English major in college, was familiar with Edith Wharton's writings, and was intrigued by being able to visit The Mount.

I also attended the Monday Lecture series when I was up in Lenox on my vacations. My mother then started to volunteer, helping with the tea after the lectures. Once I was able to be up in Lenox for the summers, I started to help with the teas, as well. I've also volunteered for WordFest [a literary celebration] and for Community Day.

Q: What was your most memorable volunteer experience?

A: I think "meeting and greeting" people from all over the country--and sometimes the world--is what makes volunteering at The Mount so interesting! Being able to chat briefly with some of the authors who present at the Lecture series is wonderful. Last year, I transported one of the WordFest authors from Hudson to Lenox, and being able to talk with him about The Mount and The Berkshires (he had not been up in the area before) was one of the more memorable times.

Q: Why do you volunteer at The Mount?

A: Because it's an amazing place to spend time! Knowing that it's the *actual* place where one of America's great authors lived, being able to walk on the same paths that she walked, is inspiring. Besides, it's a beautiful place and it's fun!

Q: And... Why should *others* volunteer for The Mount?

A: This is an easy question --because of the staff! They are all friendly and they make it an easy place to volunteer. And all the work and programs that are done by The Mount are important, and they maintain a level of fun intellectualism!

Thank you, Julie, for sharing your thoughts and compliments. We're grateful for all you and the other volunteers do to help us advance our mission!

If you're interested in volunteering at The Mount, [click here](#) for more information. We welcome any and all inquiries!

10 reasons to get married at The Mount

Posted on February 14, 2014 by [crtriantos](#) in [2014](#), [events](#), [The Mount](#), [weddings](#) { [Edit](#) }

1. You and your guests have exclusive use of the gorgeous 49-acre property for the entire evening.
2. Ross Jolly and Grace Leathrum, our wedding specialists, are hands-on throughout the entire planning process.
3. We can introduce you to some of the best caterers and wedding photographers in New England.
4. By renting the property, you'll be supporting a National Historic Landmark and its public programming.
5. You also have access to The Mount's historic (1902) Stables for rehearsal dinners and after-parties.
6. You can bring your dog. Edith would be happy to have him.
7. There will be a docent on site during your wedding to give you and your guests a tour of the home and exhibits.
8. Whether you're under the stonework pergola, next to the French flower garden, or lounging on a chaise in Edith Wharton's boudoir, there is no shortage of beautiful photo opportunities.
9. The Mount bookstore can provide you with something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.
10. We have three acres of formal gardens with exquisite, brightly colored flowers for use as your wedding backdrop.



Photo by Sabine Volmer von Falken

We're booking now for the 2015 season, but the weekends are going fast. To discuss your wedding possibilities, email weddings@edithwharton.org or call Ross Jolly now at 413-551-5120.

Edith Wharton, as viewed by Wendy Wasserstein

Posted on October 24, 2013 by [crtriantos](#) in 2013, Blog, The Mount

We were delighted to read [this recent post on Reader's Almanac](#), the official blog of the Library of America, reproducing an Edith Wharton-themed speech Wendy Wasserstein delivered in 2002.

Wasserstein was an admirer of Wharton, whose work she called "rich... and deep..." She praised Wharton's honesty, and likened her more to Chekov than to Jane Austen, to whom she is often compared:

"As I began writing plays, Edith Wharton's knowledge of a New York dinner party seemed to me like Chekhov's knowledge of afternoons at a Russian dacha, and who came to sit and have tea and how things changed regarding love and marriages, all beginning with those smaller moments."

Wasserstein died of lymphoma in 2007 at the age of 55– much too soon. But we are glad to share today this remembrance of two very remarkable women.



Wendy Wasserstein

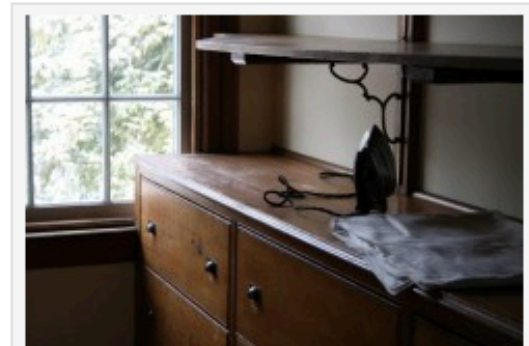
What's new at The Mount in 2014?

Posted on March 23, 2014 by [crtriantos](#) in [2014](#), [Backstairs tour](#), [Edith Wharton](#), [exhibits](#), [history](#), [summer season](#), [The Mount](#), [visitors](#)

Behind the scenes at The Mount, our work is never done. We've got perpetually long to-do lists (year-round, in fact!) that keep our days fresh and interesting: historical research, exhibit preparation, events and tour planning, fundraising, property improvements... and, happily, much more.

We get particularly excited every year about now, when we're preparing new programs and materials for the summer season. And we've got some great projects to debut this year!

First, we've created a **new tour**—one that focuses on the servants of The Mount. Inspired in part by public fascination with *Downton Abbey*, whose creator Julian Fellowes has cited Wharton as a major literary influence, the "Backstairs at The Mount" tour will highlight the roles, relationships, living conditions, and working expectations of the 20 servants who staffed the house and property each summer while the Whartons were in residence. Like other Berkshire-based households during the Gilded Age, The Mount relied on the Whartons' permanent staff as well as local residents for cooking, cleaning, driving, gardening, and other daily tasks. Visitors on the Backstairs tour will hear some of their stories. The tour will officially launch in May. Tour times and prices will be posted on the website in the coming weeks.



The laundry room at The Mount

Second, we've got a **new exhibit** that ties in with the new tour: the Kitchen Stories exhibit, designed to give visitors a glimpse into the inner workings of an early 20th-century "Berkshire cottage" kitchen. Thanks to local collectors, it's got everything—including the kitchen sink!

Third, we're presenting to the public for the first time **two important collections**. "A Fine Hand," which will be displayed in the library, includes more than 40 sketches created by Edith Wharton. "Edith: Images of a Lifetime" is a video compilation of more than 50 images depicting Edith from her girlhood to her twilight years.



A sketch by Edith Wharton

Fourth...Well, you'll just have to wait and see! Our programming this year is more robust than ever, and there are plenty of exciting things coming down the proverbial pike. So stay tuned! And mark your calendars for this year's opening day: **May 3**.

WINTER BLUES, WELCOMED



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The winter blues have captured the imaginations of at least two curators in New England in the last year, inviting a fresh look at some of the region's museum artifacts. Last February, The Museum of Fine Art in Boston opened *New Blue and White*, an exploration of cobalt pigment in art in art and fashion. And this winter, the Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University has used the same vibrant hue as inspiration for its **new exhibition** *Blue: Color and Concept*, currently open and running through April 19. Curator Nancy Kuhl has used the cultural history of the color blue in 19th and 20th-century arts and letters as a lens to explore the library's vast collections.

We at The Mount are particularly excited about the Beineke's dynamic approach to their collection because Edith Wharton's 1915 driving permit is featured alongside amusement park blueprints, Langston Hughes' blue enamel cigarette case, and entomological butterfly illustrations. In addition to its many blue historic and literary objects, the Beineke holds a significant collection of Wharton's papers and manuscripts such as Wharton's passport, driver's license, and personal photographs. The exhibit might also have included a letter written on Wharton's preferred pale blue stationary or a Parisian *petit bleu* with which she maintained lifelong relationships spanning the globe. Just as with art and rare manuscripts, blue might also be a useful lens through which to view Edith Wharton.



(Our thanks to [Tweetspeak Poetry](#) and author [Jennie Fields](#) for two of the above images.)