

The History of Untermeyer Gardens

In 1862, the Yonkers industrialist John T. Waring purchased land along the Hudson River and built a granite mansion he called Greystone. Samuel J. Tilden, the retired governor of New York State and failed presidential candidate, bought the property and retired there in 1879. He extended its acreage and built greenhouses to cultivate rare and exotic plants. Samuel Untermeyer acquired Greystone in 1899, further expanding it to around 150 acres. He sought to build “the finest garden in the world” on its steep slopes.

In 1916 Untermeyer commissioned the Beaux-Arts architect William Welles Bosworth to design the gardens. Bosworth had just completed the Rockefeller gardens at Kykuit in Pocantico Hills, a few miles north on the Hudson.

Greystone’s gardens, supplied by 60 greenhouses and maintained by 60 gardeners, were a source of great pride for Untermeyer, an avid horticulturist. In their enormity, they are compared nationally with George Vanderbilt’s Biltmore estate in Asheville, North Carolina.

To share his paradise, Untermeyer opened the estate to the public once a week. Memorably, 30,000 visitors came to the gardens on a single day in October 1939. Untermeyer wanted Greystone to become a state park after his death, to be preserved for the enjoyment of the public. Unfortunately, his gardens were too costly for New York State or Westchester County to maintain. Ultimately, a portion of the property was given to the City of Yonkers in 1946 as a city park. The mansion was demolished in 1948.

The gardens today comprise about 43 acres. The Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy was founded in 2011 to reclaim their lost splendor.

A Garden for the World

Samuel Untermeyer has left us a garden that truly reflects the diversity of our world.

Multicultural in design, it alludes to gardens in Persia, India, Pakistan, Spain, and Italy and evokes the wonders of the ancient world. It operates on the highest level in terms of aesthetics, garden history, architectural history, American history, and even spiritual meaning. The theme of the Garden of Eden, a concept shared by Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, resonates throughout as a symbol of peace among different cultures.

The figure of Samuel Untermeyer reinforces this reading, for he was a courageous reformer who not only created an extraordinary oasis of beauty just a few miles from New York City but sought to share it with the public in his lifetime and beyond. Untermeyer Park and Gardens now welcomes 70,000 visitors a year and is one of the only great public gardens in America that is free to the public.

The Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy, a nonprofit organization, is dedicated to the revitalization and stewardship of Samuel Untermeyer’s extraordinary gardens, now a City of Yonkers municipal park. Although much has been accomplished, much work remains ahead, and your support is deeply appreciated. Please consider making a donation today to help our gardens grow.

Donations may be made securely online at www.untermeyergardens.org or mailed to Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy at 945 North Broadway, Yonkers, NY 10701.

Visitor Information

Hours: Daily, 7:00 AM – one hour before sunset
Closed: New Year’s Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Lincoln’s Birthday, Washington’s Birthday, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.
Tours: Public tours are given regularly, and group tours may be scheduled; see our website for details.
Website: www.untermeyergardens.org
Telephone: 914-613-4502

The Gardens are located at 945 North Broadway, Yonkers, NY 10701, just south of St. John’s Riverside Hospital. Limited parking is onsite; additional street parking can be found on North Broadway. Visit our website, www.untermeyergardens.org, for further information.

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Photographs by Jessica Norman

UNTERMEYER PARK AND GARDENS A Visitor’s Map & Guide



Welcome to Eden on the Hudson, the historic gardens where international cultures—both modern and ancient—meet. These gardens were once called “America’s Most Spectacular Garden” but were nearly lost to time after decades of decline. The Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy, in partnership with the City of Yonkers, is restoring these unique and magnificent gardens to their former glory.

Samuel Untermeyer

Samuel Untermeyer (1858-1940) was born into a German-Jewish immigrant family in Lynchburg, Virginia. In 1868 he and his siblings moved with his widowed mother to New York City, where he graduated from City College and Columbia University’s law school. A brilliant student, he became one of the most successful lawyers in America. He married Minnie Carl (d. 1924), a Christian, in 1883.

His early wealth and success were complemented by activism on behalf of human rights in his later life. He offered counsel on many high-profile cases, notably as lead prosecutor on the trust-busting Pujo Committee, which directly inspired the establishment of the Federal Reserve, as attorney for the case against Henry Ford on charges of anti-Semitism, and as defense for the five-cent New York City subway fare.

Untermeyer was at the forefront of the U.S. opposition to Nazism and was called “Hitler’s Bitterest Foe” by the international press. He financed and led the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, which sought a nationwide boycott of German goods and opposition to Nazi propaganda. He remained an extremely visible—and at times lonely—critic of Hitler until his death.

His wife, Minnie Untermeyer, was a remarkable patron of the arts. In 1909 she helped transform the New York Philharmonic with the introduction of Gustav Mahler as conductor. President of the Poetry Society of America, she hosted poetry readings at their Greystone estate, as well as music and dance performances by such artists as Isadora Duncan. Minnie Untermeyer was an ardent suffragette, and Samuel Untermeyer was a prominent suffragist.



945 North Broadway, Yonkers, NY 10701
www.untermeyergardens.org

Self-Guided Tour

- 1. Walled Garden**—Based on the Garden of Eden as described in the Book of Genesis, the Walled Garden is the finest Persian garden in the Western Hemisphere. The crisscrossing canals symbolize the four rivers of Paradise, and the four land quadrants represent the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. The crenellated walls and corner towers, or “summer houses,” are traditional in Persian and Indian designs. The north-south axis terminates at an amphitheater flanked by two sphinxes sculpted by Paul Manship and set on cipollino marble columns, based on a similar feature in the Boboli Gardens in Florence, Italy. To the west, the Temple of the Sky stands above the once-grand Persian pool and lower terrace. Mosaic work is showcased throughout the Walled Garden and refers to designs at Tiryns and ancient Roman villas. *(Wheelchair accessible)*
- 2. The Vista**—An inconspicuous doorway in the north loggia of the Walled Garden’s lower terrace opens to a breathtaking staircase leading down toward the Hudson River. Its view and proportions were modeled after those of the Villa d’Este, a Renaissance garden on the shores of Lake Como in Italy.
- 3. Garden Remnants**—To the north, the Vista was originally bordered by six Color Gardens; a Rose and Dahlia Garden was situated at their western base. Only the bottom two Color Gardens and remnants of a pergola and staircase at the Rose and Dahlia Garden are visible today—the rest of these extensive gardens have been built over or lie in total ruin.
- 4. Vista Overlook**—Two monolithic ancient Roman columns in cipollino marble frame the view from the stone terrace at the foot of the Vista steps. Brought to America by the famed architect Stanford White, they are the tallest monolithic columns in the Western Hemisphere.
- 5. Rhododendron Walk**—A Rhododendron Walk will be installed in the summer of 2019, enhancing the approach to the gardens from the Gate House entrance and recalling the famous rhododendron collection that formed part of the original gardens.

1. Walled Garden



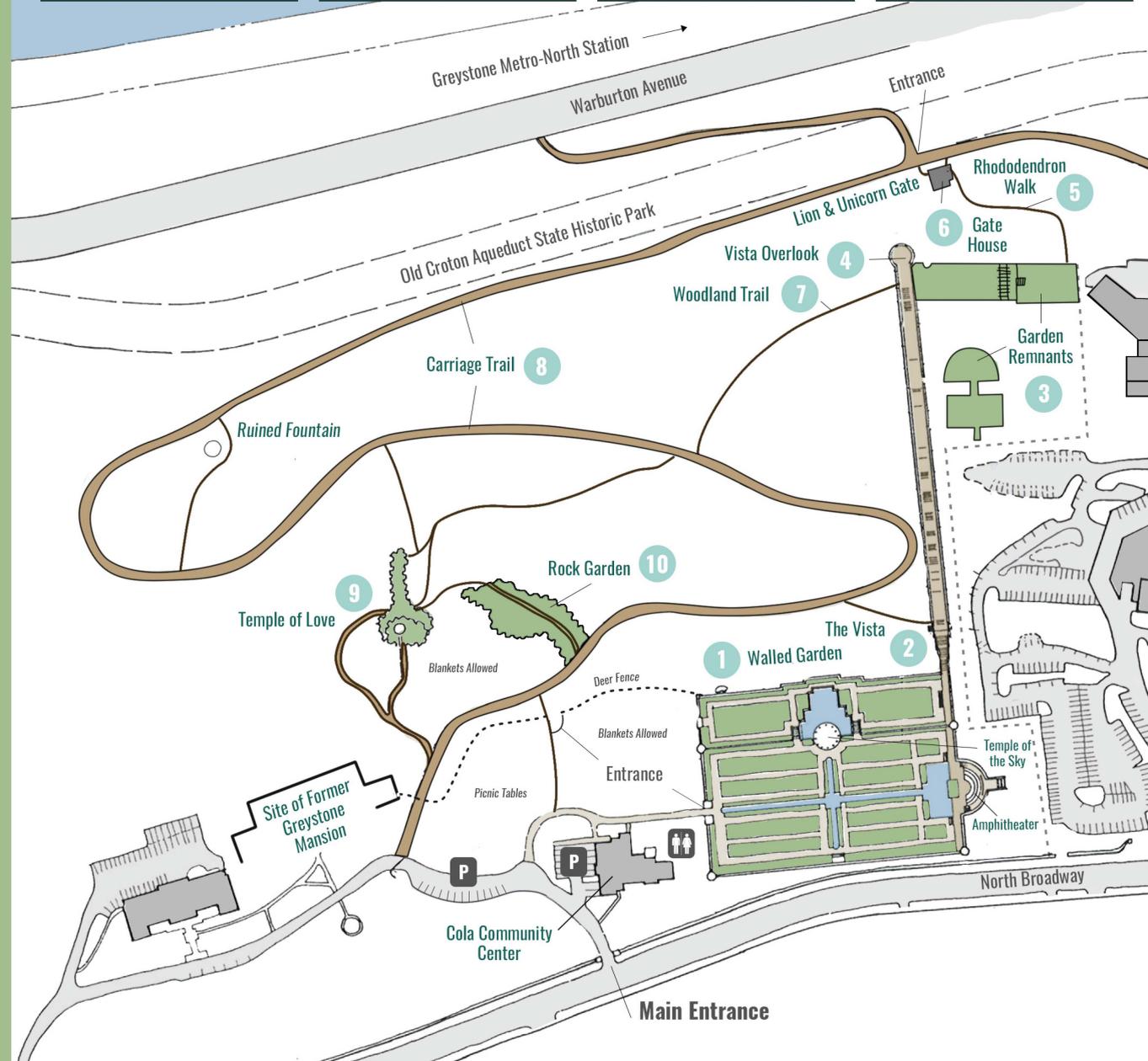
2. The Vista



4. Vista Overlook



9. Temple of Love



- 6. Gate House**—The Gate House at the intersection of the Old Croton Aqueduct and the Carriage Trail has been stabilized, and a new Ruin Garden and grotto have been planted. Below it are two distinctive sculptures of a lion and a unicorn. Graffiti inside the walls of the Gate House was intentionally preserved to recall a troubled time in its history.
- 7. Woodland Trail**—A wood-chipped trail heading southeast from the bottom of the Vista leads gradually uphill, crossing the Carriage Trail toward a spectacular rock folly, the Temple of Love.
- 8. Carriage Trail**—The mile-long Carriage Trail intersects the Old Croton Aqueduct and Warburton Avenue and provides a less formal but rewarding approach to the gardens. Along its length, it wends past crumbling retaining walls and the ruins of a large circular fountain. At its upper terminus near the Temple of Love, through the trees to the south, one can see the old retaining walls of the terrace that supported the original Greystone mansion.
- 9. Temple of Love**—This stunning cantilevered aerie provides a glorious view of the Hudson River and the Palisades and is the centerpiece of an extensive series of rock gardens. Waterfalls cascade through the rocks to the pool below, and the whole structure is elaborately planted. A narrow staircase of rock leads to the top of the Temple.
- 10. Rock Garden**—The Rock Garden is at the north of the Temple of Love. An intimate watercourse with small pools, falls, and bridges, it will be planted with a diverse palette of colorful, sun-loving, drought-tolerant plants.