

# 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 Greystone and retired there in 1879. He extended the property's acreage and built greenhouses to cultivate rare and exotic plants. Samuel Untermeyer acquired the property in 1899, further expanding it to more than 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 garden. Bosworth had just completed the Rockefeller gardens at Kykuit in Pocantico Hills, a few miles north on the Hudson.

The gardens, supplied by 60 greenhouses and maintained by 60 gardeners, were a source of great pride for Untermeyer, an avid horticulturist. In its enormity, it is compared nationally with George Vanderbilt's Biltmore estate in Asheville, North Carolina.

Wanting to share his paradise, Untermeyer opened the estate to the public once a week. Memorably, 30,000 visitors came to the garden 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 ambitious 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

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 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 100,000 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.undermyergardens.org](http://www.undermyergardens.org) or mailed to Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy at 945 North Broadway, Yonkers, NY 10701.

### Visitor Information

**Hours:** Open daily at 9:00 am  
Last entry one half-hour before closing, which varies seasonally:  
May 1-Aug 31 7:00 pm  
Sep 1-Nov 5 6:00 pm  
Nov 6-Mar 11 4:00 pm  
Mar 12-Apr 30 6:00 pm

**Closed:** New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas

**Tours:** Public tours are given Sundays April through October

**Programs:** Visit our website for information on education programs, concerts, and private tours

**Address:** 945 North Broadway, Yonkers, NY 10701

**Phone:** 914-613-4502

**Website:** [www.undermyergardens.org](http://www.undermyergardens.org)

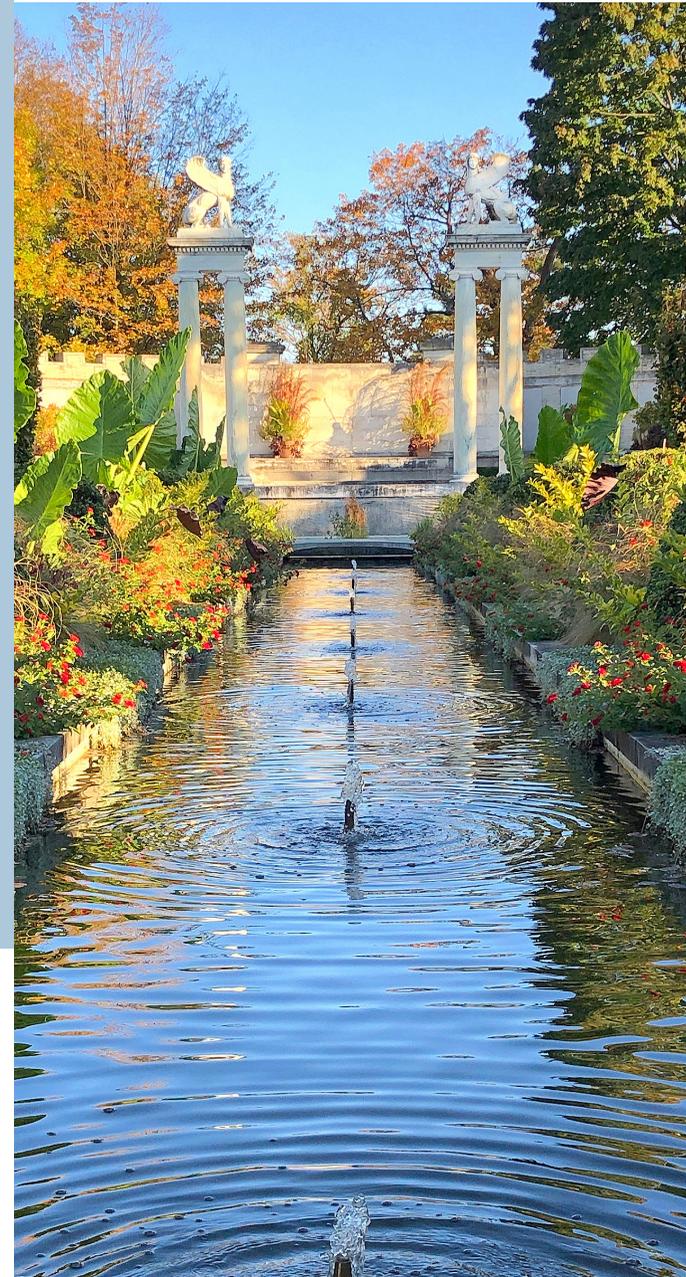
Photographs by John Jacono, Jessica Norman

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## UNTERMYER PARK AND GARDENS A Visitor's Map & Guide



Welcome to Eden on the Hudson, the historic garden where international cultures—both modern and ancient—meet. Although partially overgrown and nearly lost to time, these gardens were once called "America's Most Spectacular Garden." The Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy, in partnership with the City of Yonkers, is restoring these unique and magnificent gardens to their former glory for the enjoyment of the public.

## 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 the public 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 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 in 1940.

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 in the amphitheater by such artists as Isadora Duncan. Minnie Untermeyer was an ardent suffragette, and Samuel Untermeyer was a prominent male suffragist.

The richly illustrated book *Forgotten No More: The Restoration of Untermeyer Gardens* chronicles the garden's progress and may be purchased at [www.undermyergardens.org](http://www.undermyergardens.org).



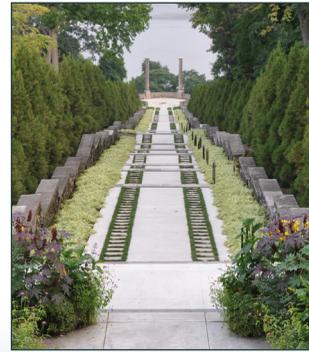
# Self-Guided Tour

- 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.  
**Horticultural features:** Aquatics (*June-Sep*); Canal borders: bulbs (*April-May*), mixed annuals (*June-Oct*); Hydrangea Borders (*June-Oct*); Lilacs (*May*); container plantings (*June-Sep*); Historic trees: Blue Atlas Cedar, Japanese Maples, Katsuras, Weeping Beeches  
*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. At the bottom, two monolithic ancient Roman columns in cipollino marble frame the view.  
**Horticultural features:** Japanese Forest Grass (*May-Oct*); Japanese Cedars; a historic Kentucky Coffee Tree (one of the largest in New York); container plantings (*June-Sep*)
- 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 are visible today—the rest of these extensive gardens have been built over or lie in total ruin.
- 4. Ornamental Vegetable Garden and Orchard**—With its restored pergola and parterre layout, vegetables and fruit trees are planted in a formal configuration with an eye to aesthetic beauty. The garden is tended by student interns from Yonkers public high schools.
- 5. Rhododendron Walk**—A densely planted Rhododendron Walk (*May-June*), with a colorful

1. Walled Garden



2. The Vista



10. Rock and Stream Garden



9. Temple of Love



6. Ruin Garden



- 6. Ruin Garden**—The roofless Gate House at the intersection of the Old Croton Aqueduct and the Carriage Trail is now a Ruin Garden with a grotto. Graffiti inside the walls of the Gate House was intentionally preserved as an artifact from a troubled time in its history. Below it are two distinctive sculptures of a lion and a unicorn. Nearby are architectural stone fragments that vandals tumbled down the hill.
- 7. Woodland Trail**—A wood-chipped trail heading southeast from the bottom of the Vista leads gradually uphill, where one fork crosses the Carriage Trail toward a spectacular rock folly, the Temple of Love, and the other leads down to the Switchback Fountain. Another trail sweeps around the southern portion of the woodland.
- 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. 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 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.  
**Horticultural Features:** Aquatics (*June-Oct*); Butterfly-friendly Beds (*May-Oct*); Cherry Bowl (*April-May*); Daffodil Hill (*April-May*)
- 10. Rock and Stream Garden**—To the north, a delightful watercourse flows over rocks and under stone bridges, terminating in the basin below the Temple of Love, creating a lovely symbiosis between the two gardens.  
**Horticultural Features:** Various woody plants with an eclectic mix of perennials (*April-Oct*); Serbian Spruce, Dawn Redwood, Blue Fir, and columnar yellow Juniper act as living sculpture (*all year*); rock and prairie plants spill down along the stream (*April-Oct*).