

DIG THIS by Peg Tillery (for 5-16-07) Heronswood Final Farewell © 2007

If you want one last visit to our Heronswood attend the Garden Conservancy Open Day there on Saturday July 21 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The press had a chance on Wednesday May 9 to tour what's left of Heronswood and to meet with George Ball of Burpee. Ball pulled out all the stops to welcome us and champion the work the Garden Conservancy undertakes throughout the United States to treasure and preserve historical and beloved gardens. It was a delight to meet the conservancy's Laura Mumaw Palmer, Deputy Director for Administration and also Director of the Open Days Program.

Ball referred several times to Heronswood Nursery but the nursery he was referring to was mostly the "relocated" Heronswood Nursery in Pennsylvania. Ball did stress that Burpee is proud of our Heronswood for the research they've been doing there and for what it was once. He said, "The Kingston Heronswood property is only for sale to someone who will preserve the garden and always has been." He could not guarantee, however that the buyer, once the owner, would keep Heronswood as a garden or available to the public. Ball also said, "I've even considered purchasing Kingston Heronswood myself, as a retreat home." Only time will reveal the final outcome.

Ball said he had explored the possibility of building an upscale housing development around the Heronswood display gardens where people who owned the homes could enjoy and treasure the gardens in perpetuity. He talked with the County and was told it was not even remotely possible.

Ball has turned down the Pacific Northwest Horticultural Conservancy (PNHC) offer to purchase the Kingston Heronswood property because they were one million dollars apart. The PNHC made their final offer to Ball about a month ago with a May deadline. It was the fourth time they'd presented an offer to him and not been able to close the deal. The PNHC press release states, "As a non-profit, PNHC takes seriously its duty to donors to make sound and responsible financial decisions, and will not put the organization in fiscal jeopardy by committing itself to an unsupportable expenditure." The PNHC annual Board meeting is in early June and they will "consider options and discuss future directions."

Ball also said one of the reasons that our Heronswood Nursery was closed was because "there are only about 1000 customers" in our growing region and the plants that are now all on the east coast are now being perfected to be available "to a more extensive market and consumer."

I went to the meeting wanting to really dislike Ball. But I must admit in all honesty I couldn't dislike him just the actions taken by him and Burpee in closing our Heronswood. Ball was personable and often charming. His enterprise provides funding to the Garden Conservancy and he has his own personal non-profit out of New York that generously funds many worthwhile horticulture and other projects throughout the United States. Ball

is also a writer and in visiting with him I sensed that is his true forte and passion. You can find his blog online by googling George Ball.

The Heronswood we all knew and loved still has striking beauty in places but seems (to me) hollow in its remains. There are still hints of what once was, but what's left is not our Heronswood. I'd definitely recommend attending the Garden Conservancy's Heronswood Open Day on July 21 for one last look. Say goodbye and begin healing from the loss.

In memory of our Heronswood join the Garden Conservancy for a mere \$35 per year to help preserve other gardens throughout the United States.