

Ontario's Historic Gardens Workshop

At Parkwood National Historic Site - March 31, 2011

Supported by Ontario Ministry of Tourism & Culture and National Historic Site Alliance for Ontario

Summary

The workshop was facilitated by education and interpretation specialist Dr. Christine Castle, and was prefaced with remarks about various tourism initiatives in Ontario, and about visitor/consumer trends relating to heritage and horticulture.

Discussions were organized around, but not limited to, historic gardens as a tourism resource – especially as a collective.

The forty registrants represented a number of communities ranging from Ottawa (Rideau Hall) to Midland (St. Marie among the Hurons) to Hamilton (Dundurn Castle) and many points in between. Participants were invited to introduce themselves and, using a couple of photo images, their site & garden experience and a recent success or failure. This was a great way to get to know our peers and understand the range and breadth of Ontario's historic gardens (which also includes sites that could not attend).

A series of small-group and plenary exercises identified, themed and prioritized discussion points using an engaging consensus format. See the attached chart summarizing discussions.

Participants were asked to express their feelings at the workshop conclusion, using just three words. Almost all were variations of "excited, enthusiastic, inspired" sprinkled with a few versions of "overwhelmed" and "daunted".

It was clear that there is an appetite for further discussion, for eliminating isolation and the "silos" we tend to work in, and for vastly increasing inter-garden discussions through formal and informal means.

There was enthusiasm for creating an organizing body, but no sense yet of mandate or governance model. Short-term strategies included utilizing/ strengthening existing alliances or member organizations, some pooling of resources for spadework and grant writing, working perhaps with:

National Historic Sites Alliance for Ontario
Ontario Museum Association

Ontario Garden Tourism Coalition
Ontario Historical Society
The Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation

The group was unable to identify an immediate next step in terms of forming a steering committee or team to lead further discussions and seek moral and dollar support. Participants were asked to review the discussions with their various boards or departments to consider what kind of commitment they would make and how active a role they would wish to play – and respond by e-mail to Parkwood.

In addition, Parkwood will be undertaking an inventory of gardens at Ontario's National Historic Sites, and will send out questionnaires to those sites.

