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OFFICE OF ZONING
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

January 25, 2000

Dear Neil,

At the suggestion of my brothers, Arthur Lehman Loeb and John L. Loeb jr. I am writing to express my concern at the proposal of Harvard University to build an underground library beneath the North Vista of the garden at Dumbarton Oaks.

I believe that you and I have met only once or twice, but I know that you were a great friend of my father John Loeb. I should mention that for many years I have now been a resident of Washington, DC. As you know, our father believed firmly in the importance of higher education and of the role that insitutions such as Harvard play in preserving the best in our culture, a conviction he effectively demonstrated in the considerable donations he made to Harvard University.

Dumbarton Oaks is a part of our valued national heritage, an example of the best in our culture, and must be respected. But it is the gardens and not the scholarly collections, for which it is known and loved.

As a long time resident of Washington I realize how much Dumbarton Oaks means to anyone living here who values gardens. It is one of Washington's treasures. One has only to see the busloads of tourists who come to visit to appreciate how much it is valued. How far sighted it was of Mrs Bliss to want to share her cherished garden with others by writing it into her will that the garden should be open daily to the public.

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Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.16555
EXHIBIT NO.40



I fully understand the need to expand and improve the facilities for the collections and the Fellows, but not at the expense of the garden. To build beneath the North Vista is a very hazardous undertaking and poses a threat to the very heart of the garden. Despite what the architects may say they can give no **guarantees** that the garden will not be dug up time and again for repairs to the roof or for other reasons. Underground buildings are notorious for high maintenance. It is unrealistic to believe that once the building is there everything will be replaced perfectly and never be touched again.

The reason given for this expansion is to provide more space for the library and collections and to improve facilities for the Fellows. I do not deny the need to expand. But I believe, as do many others I have talked to, that the proposed facility is in the wrong location, particularly since there is an alternative site off S Street behind the Fellows Building which is a large open and neglected space within the property holdings of Dumbarton Oaks.

When asked why this site was not considered, the answer is that there must be contiguity between the scholars and their sources and that a campus arrangement is unacceptable. Who wouldn't prefer to walk through a garden to consult their sources in an above ground library with natural light.

I also believe that it is ironic that an institution that was established in part for the study of garden scholarship and as a repository of Mrs. Bliss's unique collection of rare horticultural and historic garden books should be involved in the possible destruction of one the country's finest gardens.



Finally, Mrs Bliss when she handed over Dumbarton Oaks to the stewardship of Harvard believed that it would be the trustworthy guardian of her beloved garden. How would she regard the needs and interests of scholarly research as overiding and posing such a serious threat to her garden ? I think she would regard it as a betrayal of her trust.

I do hope, Neil, that you will review very carefully all alternative options, before embarking on this misguided proposal.

I would very much liketo talk to you personally about this. Could we make a telephone date to speak? I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Ann Loeb Bronfman