St. Cloud's Munsinger and Clemens Gardens: A Public Legacy

Ann Marie Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/hist_etds

Recommended Citation
https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/hist_etds/9

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of History at theRepository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Culminating Projects in History by an authorized administrator of theRepository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact rswezelbaum@stcloudstate.edu.
ST. CLOUD'S MUNSINGER AND CLEMENS GARDENS:
A PUBLIC LEGACY

by

Ann Marie Johnson

B.A., St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota, 1991

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of
St. Cloud State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

St. Cloud, Minnesota
August, 1998
This thesis submitted by Ann Marie Johnson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at St. Cloud State University is hereby approved by the final evaluation committee.
ST. CLOUD’S MUNSINGER AND CLEMENS GARDENS:
A PUBLIC LEGACY

Ann Marie Johnson

This thesis describes the history and evolution of the Munsinger and Clemens Gardens, municipal gardens located in southeast St. Cloud along the east bank of the Mississippi River. During the early 1930s, Munsinger Garden was established under the direction of the city’s first park superintendent, Joseph Munsinger. Approximately half a century later, the Clemens Gardens were developed as a result of the inspiration of St. Cloud’s present nursery supervisor, David Morreim, and the patronage of William Clemens, a local entrepreneur. Since their inception, the Munsinger and Clemens Gardens, two seemingly disparate gardens that are linked by site, design, and spirit, have evolved to become one of the finest municipal gardens in the nation.

St. Cloud’s Munsinger and Clemens Gardens have become an important part of the city’s heritage. In the same way that pyramids provide data on ancient Egypt and gothic cathedrals disclose information on the Middle Ages, gardens reveal insights about the cultures in which they were created and maintained. As gardens are considered one of the highest representations of civilization and culture, St. Cloud’s gardens represent both the fine arts of horticulture and garden design as well as the community’s interest in civic beautification and the dedication and horticultural skills of their creators. The history of the Munsinger and Clemens Gardens provides a cultural record of the values and beliefs of its community and reflects the trends in American garden design during the twentieth century.

August 1998
Month Year

Approved by Research Committee:

Donovan L. Hofsommer
Chairperson
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge those who have assisted me in this endeavor. I would like to express particular thanks to David Morreim, Julie Dierkhising, Larry Haws, and Prentiss Foster of the St. Cloud Parks Department; John Decker and Lorie Fischer of the Stearns County Historical Society; the Clemens family; Robert W. Becker; Mary, Diane, and the Dean’s Office of Science and Engineering at St. Cloud State University; and Donovan L. Hofsommer, William T. Morgan, and Alton C. Wolfer.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| LIST OF FIGURES | vi |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |

## Chapter

| I. A GARDEN HISTORY | 3 |
| II. ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA | 13 |
| III. MUNSINGER GARDENS: A HISTORY OF THE SITE | 21 |
| IV. MUNSINGER GARDENS: BIRTH OF A PUBLIC GARDEN | 27 |
| V. MUNSINGER GARDENS: COLD WAR GARDENS AND MAINTENANCE | 46 |
| VI. MUNSINGER GARDENS: GARDEN RENAISSANCE | 52 |
| VII. CLEMENS GARDENS: A HISTORY OF THE SITE | 65 |
| VIII. CLEMENS GARDENS: FORMAL GARDEN | 69 |
| IX. CLEMENS GARDENS: VIRGINIA CLEMENS ROSE GARDEN | 73 |
| X. CLEMENS GARDENS: REST AREA GARDEN | 84 |
| XI. CLEMENS GARDENS: WHITE GARDEN | 88 |
| XII. CLEMENS GARDENS: PERENNIAL GARDEN | 93 |
| XIII. CLEMENS GARDENS: TREILLAGE GARDEN | 97 |

CONCLUSION | 103 |
REFERENCES | 106 |
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design for the gardens at Villa Lante in Bagnata, Italy by Vignola (1507-73)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting of the palace and gardens of Versailles by Patel</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancelot &quot;Capability&quot; Brown's (1776-83) design for the gardens at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Park in New York City by John Bachmann</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map of St. Cloud, Minnesota in 1856</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central (Barden) Park</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empire Park</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hester Park</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal card</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line drawing of the H. J. Andersen Saw Mill in St. Cloud, Minnesota</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan for Riverside Park by Phelps Wyman, a Minneapolis Landscape Architect</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line drawing of Munsinger Gardens by K. C. Olson</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant Joseph Munsinger</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munsinger Garden's Lily Pool</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munsinger Garden's Rock Garden</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munsinger Gardens' Log Cabin</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern end of Munsinger Gardens</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munsinger Gardens</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcard of Munsinger Park</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granite troughs in Munsinger Gardens</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21. Munsinger Garden with Gazebo by Bela S. Petheo ........................................ 61
22. Munsinger Gardens’ Lily Pool .................................................................. 62
23. Munsinger Gardens .................................................................................. 63
24. Path in Munsinger Gardens ..................................................................... 64
25. St. Cloud Times map of Clemens and Munsinger Gardens ...................... 68
26. German-made postcard showing the home of Earl D. and Fritz Cross .......... 68
27. Clemens Formal Garden ........................................................................... 72
28. Virginia Clemens Rose Garden .................................................................. 80
29. Stanley Park, an “Italian garden” by Thomas H. Mawson, in Blackpool, England ........................................................................................................ 81
30. A theoretical garden city proposed by Ebeneezer Howard for Letchworth, England ........................................................................................................ 81
31. Janney Crane Fountain ............................................................................. 82
32. Botanical Gardens Settee .......................................................................... 83
33. Clemens Rest Area Garden viewed from the South ................................. 87
34. Clemens White Garden ............................................................................ 91
35. White Garden at Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, England ............................ 92
36. Clemens Perennial Garden viewed from the Treillage Garden .................. 95
37. Clemens Perennial Garden fountain ......................................................... 96
38. View of the Clemens Treillage Garden from the southeast corner ............ 100
39. The Clemens Gardens .............................................................................. 101
40. Hillside Garden ......................................................................................... 102
INTRODUCTION

Garden: a piece of ground for the cultivation of herbs, plants, fruits, flowers, or vegetables; a rich, well-cultivated spot or tract of country; a place for public enjoyment.¹

For centuries, garden designers have shaped, molded, and coerced nature into living works of art for human pleasure. Throughout the history of civilization, the vast majority of pleasure gardens have been the special privilege of the powerful and wealthy. In America, it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century, with the establishment of Central Park in New York City, that the idea of "parks for people" took root and grew. The development of public space during the twentieth century has played a key role in the transformation of the American landscape and has cultivated the establishment of public gardens across the nation.

A Midwestern public garden that is receiving increasing national recognition is the Munsinger and Clemens Gardens located in St. Cloud, Minnesota. These gardens, though unusual for their size and quality in a small Midwestern city, reflect the rich horticultural tradition that forms an important element of America's cultural heritage. St. Cloud's Munsinger and Clemens Gardens mirror the national pattern of public garden development in twentieth-century America through their blend of European and American design, their reflection of the values and beliefs of their community, and their debt to civic-spirited individuals under whose care they have blossomed and flourished.

St. Cloud's Munsinger and Clemens Gardens are located along the Mississippi River in the residential neighborhood of southeast St. Cloud. The gardens began during the 1930s when a small flower park was developed under the direction of St. Cloud's first full-time park superintendent, Joseph Munsinger. Half a century later, the Clemens Gardens were established on land adjacent to the original garden through the inspiration of St. Cloud's present nursery supervisor, David Morreim, and the

patronage of William Clemens, a local entrepreneur. While each garden features a different aspect of America's horticultural heritage, the two seemingly disparate sites are subtly linked to form a rich blend of garden designs. Both follow the American gardening tradition of combining European ideas with the local landscape to create public open spaces that serve both as places of leisure and relaxation and as sources of inspiration and delight.

In the same way that pyramids provide data on ancient Egypt and gothic cathedrals disclose information on the Middle Ages, gardens reveal insights about the cultures in which they were created and are maintained. While serving primarily as a source of beauty, a public garden also functions as a cultural record reflecting the values and beliefs of its community. St. Cloud's Munsinger and Clemens Gardens reflect the American ideals of democracy, culture, and American pastoralism that have been apparent in the city since its existence.

St. Cloud's Munsinger and Clemens Gardens are gaining national recognition as one of the finest municipal gardens in the nation. This recognition, which acknowledges the gardens as a masterpiece of design and horticulture and as an art form reflecting the culture in which it was created and is maintained, is the direct result of the skill and dedication of the individuals under whose care the gardens have flourished and the generosity and support of citizens whose civic spirit has provided for their existence. As suggested by Graham Stuart Thomas, head of England's National Trust, "...all great gardens have been made by an individual or a succession of individuals."

\[2\] Graham Stuart Thomas, Great Gardens of Britain (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979), 23.
Chapter I

A GARDEN HISTORY

The earth as we know it began as a largely vegetated landscape. In the beginning, humans had to learn how to adapt themselves to this landscape as a condition of their survival.\(^1\) With the creation of tools less than two million years ago, humanity began to shape the environment to suit its needs.\(^2\) Though gardens are a recent development in the history of the world, they serve as reminders that human existence depends on plants and the delicate balance of the earth's ecosystem.\(^3\) The earliest gardens, which served as displays of power and wealth, reflected human efforts to control the environment. The relatively recent development of public gardens suggests humanity's intrinsic need to maintain contact with the earth's original pastoral landscape. According to garden historian John Dixon Hunt, "A garden is the most sophisticated expression of a society's relationship with space and nature."\(^4\)

The Munsinger and Clemens Gardens of St. Cloud, Minnesota, belong to an ancient horticultural tradition. As with pleasure gardens of the past, they are prized possessions created by society as places of beauty and leisure. For centuries, gardens have been valued components of civilization. According to American gardening expert Glenn Ray, "The garden has long been perceived as the highest, most perfect form of all art creations..."\(^5\)

---


\(^4\) Jellicoe, 3.

Most of the world’s major civilizations have formed gardens. Until the last few centuries, the use of these spaces was limited to the ruling class. The gardens of the early civilizations of the Near East, for example, were created to provide settings for royal conversation and relaxation. Early gardens, such as Nebuchadnezzar’s Hanging Gardens of Babylon (6th century B.C.) and Shah Abbas I’s City of Gardens at Isfahan, were constructed primarily to serve as oases of shade and water and were viewed as an earthly Paradise. As recorded by the Athenian general and historian, Xenophon (c.434 B.C.-c.355 B.C.), in his account of Cyrus the Great, king of Persia (?-529 B.C.), "The Persian king is zealously cared for, so that he may find gardens wherever he goes. Their name is Paradise, and they are full of all things fair and good that the earth can bring forth." The legendary Hanging Gardens are believed to have been a terraced area of fountains and trees that Nebuchadnezzar built as a love token for his homesick Persian wife.

During the Middle Ages, gardens became walled enclosures for the cultivation of food and flowers. Walled gardens gave their owners a sense of privacy and security, reflecting the inward-looking philosophy of the medieval world. By the Renaissance, when society’s focus became more outward and worldly, rigidly-ordered gardens were created based on the imperial gardens of ancient Rome. The ancient Romans had been the first to combine horticulture with the arts of sculpture and architecture to create structured landscapes based strictly on geometry. Renaissance gardens emphasized form rather than flowers in order to serve as a means of stimulating the mind. A classic example of a Renaissance garden is Vignola’s Villa Lante (1566) at Bagnaia in Italy (Figure 1). The combination of evergreens and sculpture in an ordered landscape was intended to provide a mental exercise in geometry.

In the seventeenth century, France became the center of garden design. Following the fashionable Baroque taste for a sense of theater and spectacle, huge landscapes were developed to serve as appropriate settings for the fetes and festivals of the French kings. Louis XIV’s gardens at the Palace of Versailles, an

---

6Jellicoe, 27.
8Ibid., 28.
9Jellicoe, 155.
area covering several square miles, were designed by the leading landscape architect, Andre Le Notre (1613-1700), to symbolize the French monarch's divine right as king (Figure 2).10

Garden styles often reflect the philosophy of their creators. The English landscape style, which dominated eighteenth century garden design, celebrated what leading English intellectuals viewed as the aesthetic and moral power of nature. This style, with its emphasis on sweeping designs and the pastoral landscape of England's countryside, reflected the view that all nature is a garden. Lancelot "Capability" Brown's design for the gardens at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England, is characteristic of this period (Figure 3). His placement of simple, rounded forms in a serene setting had influence throughout the world, inspiring the royal gardens of Catherine the Great, empress of Russia (1762-96), and the public and private gardens of the New World.11

America has a rich horticultural heritage. Beginning with the early Americans, plants were grown as an important source of food and medicine. This practice continued with the arrival of colonists from Europe and England. As the nation became established and the colonists were able to look beyond their immediate needs, gardens began to be developed for beauty and pleasure.

America's garden history reflects a variety of garden types and styles. Early American gardens were orderly and geometric, reflecting the colonists' desire to control the unknown; to tame the vast, wild landscape that was their new home.12 From the beginning, American garden design drew its inspiration from Europe, particularly England. The gardens of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, for example, were inspired by English, French and Italian gardens. The flower gardens that Jefferson established at Monticello, his hilltop estate in Charlottesville, Virginia, were based on the English landscape garden style. The winding paths and large expanses of green provided Jefferson with a quiet retreat from public life. Washington and Jefferson were prominent political and cultural leaders who were

---

10Ibid., 179.
11Perrall, 269.
12Ogden Tanner, Gardening America: Regional and Historical Influences in the Contemporary Garden (New York: Penquin Books, 1990), 11.
important to early gardening in the United States. They are considered two of the nation's first great gardeners.\(^{13}\)

As America grew and the interest in floriculture continued to flourish, demand for the availability of suitable plant material increased. This demand, combined with recent advances in technology, led to a proliferation of nurseries, gardening journals, and horticultural societies. In Minnesota, for example, the first commercial nursery was established in 1851, when the state was still a territory, by Rufus Upton of St. Anthony. The first journal on gardening, Lyman Ford's *Minnesota Farmer and Gardener*, had appeared by 1858, the year Minnesota became the thirty-second state to join the Union. Minnesota's first horticultural societies were organized in St. Anthony and St. Paul in 1861. These were influential in promoting gardening across the state.\(^{14}\)

The establishment of public gardens and parks in America began during the middle of the nineteenth century. As garden historian Walter Punch suggests, this was the beginning of the "Great Age of American park-making."\(^{15}\) The idea of public green spaces coincided with the formation of the conservation movement and the development of national parks and wilderness preserves. These developments were the result of efforts by concerned citizens to protect large unspoiled areas of the national landscape. By the last half of the nineteenth century, in response to widespread industrialization and urbanization, American cities and towns began developing formal plans for parks and gardens. The increase in poverty and "urban blight" instigated a series of Victorian reforms that included park-making as a means of maintaining the mental and physical health of the nation. America's first landscape gardener, Andrew Jackson Downing, felt that parks had a moral value. He believed that public parks and gardens "...civilize and refine the national character, foster the love of rural beauty, and increase the knowledge of and taste for rare and beautiful trees and plants...."\(^{16}\) Downing advocated an English landscape style that


\(^{15}\) Punch, 31.

emphasized taking advantage of the natural benefits of each site. His designs were based on curves and irregular forms in an effort to "produce" natural beauty.\textsuperscript{17}

Before public gardens became standard features of the urban scene, cemeteries provided greenspaces for pleasure and relaxation. One of the earliest public open spaces in America was the commons or town square. As this was often a small, barren, rutted space more suited for military drills and business transactions than for recreation; cemeteries, with their large open spaces and peaceful natural landscapes, are considered the precursor to public parks and gardens.\textsuperscript{18} The idea of "garden cemeteries" began in 1831 with the establishment of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Mount Auburn Cemetery, whose design is based on the English landscape style, was developed through the cooperation of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and the site's former owners. Its beauty and success led to the development of other large cemeteries throughout the nation.\textsuperscript{19} Oakland Cemetery in St. Paul, designed in 1853 by Horace William Shaler Cleveland, and Oakwood Cemetery in Rochester, designed in the 1870s by Colonel George Healy, are two of the many large cemeteries that were established in Minnesota.

The public parks movement in America got its official start in 1852 when the New York legislature instituted the first park act allowing for the creation of Central Park in New York City.\textsuperscript{20} Central Park was developed to provide city residents, particularly the poor and the working class, with a large scenic area for relaxation and communion with nature (Figure 4). The park was to be the antithesis of the city and was to serve as a place where citizens could find refuge from the daily stress of urban life. The main goal of Central Park, as conceived by its creators, was to permanently afford "A means to certain kinds of REFRESHMENT OF THE MIND AND NERVES which most city dwellers greatly need and which they are known to derive in large measure from the enjoyment of suitable scenery."\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} Andrew Jackson Downing, \textit{Cottage Residences, Rural Architecture and Landscape Gardening} (New York: Century House, 1967), 68.


\textsuperscript{20} Pynch, 34.

\textsuperscript{21} Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., \textit{Forty Years of Landscape Architecture: Central Park} (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1928; reprint, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1973), 188.
The main designer and developer of Central Park was Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903). Olmsted, who is considered by many to be the founder of the nation's public parks movement and its first professional landscape architect, felt that gardening was the most democratic of all art forms. During his career as a landscape architect, Olmsted sought to help civilize cities by creating public spaces that provided urban residents with a place to fill what he saw as a universal physical and psychological need for direct contact with nature.22 The "Greensward" design that he created for the park with fellow landscape architect Calvert Vaux, relied heavily on the graceful curves and generous spaces of the English landscape movement. Their design heralded the future Victorian trend for using public green areas as instruments of social reform. Olmsted also designed Prospect Park in Brooklyn (1866), The Parkway in Boston (1880), and the landscape for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893).

The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was the first organized urban beautification program in the nation. Though held to honor the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America, the Exposition served as a celebration of recent advances in science and technology. Also known as the Chicago World's Fair, the Exposition coincided with a surge of interest in civic beautification and inspired the City Beautiful Movement. This movement promoted civic beautification in America as a worthy civic cause.23

While the origins of modern American botanical gardens can be traced to Olmsted's design for the Chicago World's Fair, the first public botanical garden had been established in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1859 by Henry Shaw. The Missouri Botanical Garden, though featuring the first Japanese garden built in America, was inspired by the gardens of Chatsworth in Devonshire, England.24 Public botanical gardens were established as places of beauty, conservation, and education. Professor William J. Beal of Michigan State University in East Lansing, for example, founded the W. J. Beal Botanical Garden in 1873 for the purpose of training his horticultural students in the observation of native plant life. One of his students, Liberty Hyde Bailey, is known today as the father of American horticulture.25

23 Martin, 14.
24 Ibid., 19.
25 Martin, 63.
Many Minnesota communities showed interest in aesthetically improving their surroundings by embracing the philosophy of the City Beautiful Movement. Civic groups, such as the Improvement Club of Lake City and the Civic League of Red Wing, emerged across the state with the intention of beautifying the urban landscape in an attempt to boost the economy and foster civic pride. Many major urban centers, including Minneapolis and St. Paul, hired park supervisors to preserve green space for the benefit of city residents. Both Theodore Wirth, superintendent of Minneapolis parks (1906-1933), and Frederick Nussbaumer, superintendent of St. Paul parks (1889-1922), created park systems that provided city residents with large open spaces for the enjoyment of nature's beauty. The Minneapolis and St. Paul park systems were based on the City Beautiful Movement. Planned by Horace William Shaler Cleveland, who pioneered the profession of landscape architecture in the Upper Midwest, the parks were designed to provide "breathing spaces" for the refreshment of weary citizens. Cleveland believed in utilizing the unique character of a site and advocated the preservation of the scenic riverbanks and bluffs along the Mississippi River.

By the early twentieth century, public gardens in Minnesota were considered integral to community life and had come to be recognized for their intrinsic value. In 1907, for example, the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary had been established by a botany teacher from Maine on twenty-two acres of land in Minneapolis. This garden, which is the oldest public wildflower garden in the United States, was developed to preserve Minnesota's wildflowers and plants and was specifically located within the city for the benefit of urban residents. Minnesota is, also, the home to the second oldest public rose garden in the United States. Named Lyndale Park Rose Garden, it was designed by Theodore Wirth and is located near Lake Harriet in Minneapolis. In the small town of Hitterdal, a flower garden known as "The Flower Park" was established during the early twentieth century by Richard and William Herring.

26 Price, 45.
28 Price, 70.
29 Ibid., 21.
dry goods merchants from England. Referred to during the 1930s as the “Castle Gardens,” its design was based on the English gardens that the brothers had visited during their childhood.\textsuperscript{30}
Figure 1. Design for the gardens at Villa Lante in Bagnaia, Italy by Vignola (1507-73). 1566. Reprinted from Jellicoe, The Landscape of Man, 160.

Figure 2. Painting of the palace and gardens of Versailles by Patel. c.1668. Landscape and gardens designed by Andre Le Notre (1613-1700) after 1661. Reprinted from Jellicoe, The Landscape of Man, 186.
Figure 3. Lancelot "Capability" Brown's (1776-83) design for the gardens at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England. 1764. Reprinted from Jellicoe, The Landscape of Man, 244.

Figure 4. Central Park in New York City by John Bachmann. 1863. Reprinted from Chadwick, The Park and the Town, 198-199.
Chapter II

ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA

The Central Minnesota community of St. Cloud, Minnesota, is fortunate to be the site of one of the most beautiful public gardens in the Upper Midwest, the Munsinger and Clemens Gardens. Throughout its history, the city of St. Cloud has demonstrated an interest in culture and civic beautification as a means of promoting the city’s growth and as a vehicle for improving the quality of life for its citizens. As an editorial from the June 4, 1931, issue of the St. Cloud Daily Times and Daily Journal-Press states, “Anything that beautifies a city and makes it more attractive is a profitable investment because it brings in fine people.”

St. Cloud is located near the center of Minnesota at the intersection of three counties: Benton, Sherburne, and Stearns. Though described as having a variable climate and moderate topography, Minnesota’s short hot summers and long cold winters make gardening a challenge. Minnesota is fortunate to have an abundance of natural resources, including some of the world’s richest soils and its fourth longest river, the Mississippi. St. Cloud is located on a narrow band of broadleaf deciduous forest that serves as a divider between the evergreen forests of the northeast and the prairie grasslands of the southwest. This deciduous forest extends as far east as the Atlantic Coast.

Prior to the arrival of white settlers, the area now known as central Minnesota was inhabited by the Dakota and Ojibway. In 1783, following the close of the American Revolution, the terms of the Treaty of Paris ceded the land between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River to the newly formed United States. By 1805, the Mississippi River near present-day St. Cloud had been tentatively explored during an official government expedition led by Lieutenant Zebulon Pike. Pike is credited with naming the Beaver Islands.

---

group of islands located in the Mississippi River south of the Munsinger and Clemens Gardens. White settlement in central Minnesota began in 1853 after the Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota (1851-52) "officially" opened the land. As rivers were important to transportation, the earliest settlements in Minnesota were often located along the banks of the Mississippi River.

St. Cloud initially began as three independent villages (Figure 5). Middle Town, the first village to be established, was founded in 1853 when John Lyman Wilson purchased 320 acres from Ole Bergeson, a "Norwegian squatter," for one hundred dollars. Middle Town was situated between the two ravines that originally connected Lake George to the Mississippi River. It was populated mainly by German Catholics. Upper Town was also established in 1853. It was founded by General Sylvanus B. Lowry of Tennessee and was located above the northern ravine. Upper Town, which Lowry named Acadia, was populated mainly by wealthy and educated Southerners. Lower Town, also known as St. Cloud City, was located below the southern ravine and was established by George Fuller Brott of New York. The population of Lower Town consisted mainly of Yankee merchants. In March of 1856, two years before Minnesota became a state, the three villages were incorporated into one town and named St. Cloud. Local legend suggests that St. Cloud was named by John Lyman Wilson who was reading about Napoleon Bonaparte and his summer residence in St. Cloud, France, when the new town was being formed.

While St. Cloud began as a small river town, it has grown to become the leading commercial and industrial area of central Minnesota. Some of the industries that were important to the early development of St. Cloud include fur, flour, lumber, and granite. One of the most important periods of early economic growth to the city came during the 1880s. According to local historian, John J. Dominik, this was partly due to the success of the granite industry and the Burbank Company, a transportation business that served Canada's Hudson Bay Company. The city's economy also benefited from the devastation caused by the tornado of April 14, 1886. This tornado virtually destroyed the neighboring community of Sauk Rapids, the leading economic center of the area up until that time.

---

3 Ibid., 12-13.
4 Ibid., 12.
St. Cloud’s rapid growth and stability allowed its citizens to give early expression to their cultural desires. According to Frank Lloyd Wright, a leading twentieth century American architect, culture is the “soul of civilization.” By 1865, St. Cloud was described by Oliver Hudson Kelly, the future founder of the National Grange Movement in Minnesota, as unexpectedly sophisticated and cultured for a community that was “so far West.” St. Cloud’s early interest in culture is reflected in the rapid establishment of cultural institutions. St. Cloud’s first Library Association, for example, was organized in 1865. By April of 1883, the St. Cloud Public Library had been established. St. Cloud’s first newspaper, the Minnesota Advertiser, began in January of 1857. While unsuccessful, other newspapers were soon formed, including the St. Cloud Union. The St. Cloud Union began in July of 1861 and was the predecessor of today’s St. Cloud Daily Times. One year after its incorporation, St. Cloud’s first school, the private Everett school, was established in Lower Town. By 1869, the Third State Normal School, now known as St. Cloud State University, got its start in the Stearns House Hotel. St. Cloud also expressed an interest in the “high ideals” of civility and culture in its architecture. In the mid-1860s, the city’s rapid growth and the desire for social prominence that could be discerned in its more wealthy citizens, led to the beginning of brick home construction. The fashionable mansions that were built on the city’s south side during the late nineteenth century led to St. Cloud’s being named “…one of the handsomest residence cities in the U.S.A.”

St. Cloud’s strong interest in art and culture led to an early recognition of the “…priceless heritage of public park land.” From the time of its inception, public parks and gardens have been considered vital to the city’s health and prosperity. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, parks and gardens across the nation were viewed as civic necessities that encouraged loyalty and good citizenship.

---

7 Dominik, St. Cloud, 27.
8 Dominik, Three Towns Into One City, 120.
9 Dominik, St. Cloud, 87.
10 Ibid., 85.
11 Dominik, Three Towns Into One City, 97.
12 Stearns County Historical Society (SCHS) Subject Files: Parks and Recreation; St. Cloud - Parks and Recreation; “History of St. Cloud Parks,” c.1948, 4.
13 SCHS, St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department, Annual Reports (Non-Inclusive), 1959-1966; 935/C-3E-7; 1963 Park and Recreation Department Annual Report, 24.
Following the philosophies of Downing and Olmsted, the city has worked to incorporate areas of public green space into the fabric of the city.

St. Cloud's park system began in 1855 with the acquisition of 2.12 acres of land in the center of the city. This land had been reserved for use as an ornamental park when the city was first plotted. Originally named Central Park, Barden Park's early design included a fountain and a lily pond (Figure 6). The lily pond was later converted into a wading pool. (Barden Park's bandshell, constructed of seam-faced granite, is currently the focus of restoration efforts by a neighborhood preservation organization.) The second acquisition to the city's park system came in 1880 when 1.19 acres were acquired in downtown St. Cloud. Located between Fourth and Fifth Avenues North, Empire Park was developed as a neighborhood park and is believed to have been named for James J. Hill, the "Empire Builder," whose Great Northern Railroad line ran north of the park property (Figure 7). Empire Park has the distinction of hosting brief stops by national leaders, including former Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft.

Many of St. Cloud's parks were named for citizens who devoted time and energy to improving the city's park system. Eastman Park, for example, was named for Alvah Eastman, a newspaper man who served for many years as president of the park board. Seberger Park was named for Peter J. Seberger who was the mayor of St. Cloud during the early twentieth century. While mayor, Seberger made concerted efforts to acquire new park land and promote the city's park system.

In 1912, in response to the needs of its rapidly expanding park system, the City of St. Cloud established a parks board. Since its inception, the focus of the parks department has been to provide the citizens of St. Cloud with recreation and public space. Strong emphasis has been placed on affording all citizens with equal opportunity for playground and park facilities. At the September 26, 1921, meeting of the park board, a resolution was unanimously adopted stating the department's goals: "WHEREAS, the

---

14 SCHS Subject Files: Parks and Recreation; St. Cloud – Parks and Recreation; "History of Our City Parks," 13.  
16 SCHS Subject Files: Parks and Recreation; St. Cloud – Park and Rec. Dept.; 7.  
19 SCHS Subject Files: Art, Art WPA; 10.
public parks of the city are for the benefit, pleasure and recreation of all the people, and not for the profit of a few...20

In an effort to preserve the scenic beauty of the Mississippi River, the city developed four parks along the river: Empire, Hester, Wilson, and Riverside. Hester Park, which was the first park in St. Cloud to be named after a woman, was acquired in 1910 when Lieutenant Governor Charles A. Gilman donated over twelve acres to the city for use as a park (Figure 8). Located on the northern end of the city next to the St. Cloud Hospital, Hester Park originally included a rock garden and a swimming beach along the Mississippi River.21 In 1921, the city purchased thirty acres of land in northern St. Cloud. This area, which had formerly served as the upper landing for river traffic, was quickly developed into a municipal park. The park was originally known as North Riverside Park, but was renamed Wilson Park in 1932 to honor Joseph Patrick Wilson, the brother of St. Cloud’s founder, John Lyman Wilson.22 The largest acquisition of park land occurred between 1910 and 1920 when over fifty-two acres of land along the river were acquired in south St. Cloud. This area, which became known as Riverside Park, was developed to provide a large open space for recreation. By 1930, when Munsinger Gardens was created, St. Cloud had acquired one hundred and thirty acres of land for public use.23

According to an article in the Centennial addition of the St. Cloud Daily Times, St. Cloud’s park system has expanded and flourished since its inception.24 The Parks Department has continued to focus its efforts on providing adequate public space and recreational facilities for St. Cloud residents. As St. Cloud has grown, the amount of available land for park use has diminished and the Parks Department has found it necessary to focus increasing attention on finding open land to adequately serve the needs of the growing population. As former park superintendent Phil H. Nierengarten stated in a 1968 interview, “Today’s population and the diminishing amount of well located park sites combine to demand that deliberate effort be made to realize fully the aesthetic and economic values of the city’s natural beauty.”25

20 SCHS, St. Cloud Park Department, St. Cloud, MN, Records 1918-74; 135/C-1B-2; 1.
21 “History of Our City Parks,” 16.
22 Ibid., 24-25.
23 “Park System Expands.”
24 Ibid.
Figure 5. St. Cloud, Minnesota in 1856. Reprinted from Gove. St. Cloud Centennial Souvenir Album.
Figure 6. Central (Barden) Park. 1910. Courtesy of the Stearns County Historical Society (SCSH).

Figure 7. Empire Park. Courtesy of SCHS.
Figure 8. Hester Park. c.1930. Courtesy of SCHS.
Chapter III

MUNSINGER GARDENS: A HISTORY OF THE SITE

St. Cloud’s Munsinger and Clemens Gardens are included in an extensive municipal park system that currently comprises 728 acres. The gardens are located within Riverside Park, 55.72 acres of scenic parkland adjacent to the Mississippi River in south St. Cloud. The first garden to be developed was Munsinger Gardens, which is located on the east bank of the Mississippi River on a former flood plain. Munsinger Gardens' physical boundaries are the Mississippi River, Michigan Avenue and the University Bridge, Riverside Drive, and Thirteenth Street Southeast.

The land on which Munsinger Gardens is located is a level to gently rolling outwash plain. The terraces that compose the land on which Riverside Park and the Munsinger and Clemens Gardens are situated were formed after the Ice Age when an ice-dam blocked the river near the area that is presently the Twin Cities. This caused glacial meltwater and debris to choke the river and fill its valley with sand and gravel.\(^1\)

Prior to its development as a garden, the lower terrace that now serves as Munsinger Gardens was an open area of prairie vegetation with a few shrubs and small trees (Figure 9). The soil found in both Munsinger and Clemens Gardens is classified as an Estherville-Hubbard combination. Hubbard soils are usually located closest to the river and are black to dark gray in color. They are excessively drained and composed of a sandy loam underlain with loose sand. Estherville soils are usually located further inland

and are black in color. They are somewhat excessively drained and are also composed of a sandy loam. Both soils are considered suitable for general agriculture.¹

The area that now comprises Munsinger Gardens was formerly the site of the H. J. Andersen sawmill (Figure 10).² The low bank along this portion of the river made the location ideal for a mill as the Mississippi River was used for the transportation of logs. The first sawmill in Minnesota was built in the 1820s at the Falls of St. Anthony. Its purpose was to produce the lumber needed to construct Fort Snelling. By 1890, the city of Minneapolis had become recognized as the world's top lumber market, making logging Minnesota's second industry.³ H. J. Andersen's sawmill was completed in the fall of 1889 and production began in mid-May of the following year. In an effort to encourage St. Cloud's growing prosperity, the city made a gift of land and $10,000 to the company in the hope of ensuring its success.⁴ A July 30, 1890 article in the St. Cloud Times suggests that Andersen's sawmill was believed to be the best mill north of Minneapolis.⁵ On August 7, 1890, it was struck by lightning and destroyed by fire. Although quickly rebuilt, it was again destroyed by fire almost exactly seven years later on August 8, 1897. At that time, the mill was known as the St. Cloud Lumber Company and was owned by the Foley Brothers and A. Guthrie of St. Paul. As the company was in litigation, the mill had not been operational for two years. After the 1897 fire, the mill was not rebuilt and the site remained abandoned until the development of Riverside Park in the early twentieth century.⁶

In 1910, the city began acquiring land in the area around the former mill with the intention of creating a scenic park along the Mississippi River. The early twentieth century was a period of heightened national interest in conservation. In 1916, the National Park Service was created by Congress for the specific purpose of conserving America's natural landscape. The Mississippi River has always been one of St. Cloud's most precious natural resources. While Minnesota is known for an abundance of lakes and

---

¹ United States Federal Highway Administration Preliminary 4(f) Document for Tenth Street South St. Cloud, Minnesota, Sherburne County/United States Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration and Minnesota Department of Transportation and City of St. Cloud; St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Department of Transportation, 1977.
⁵ Ibid.
streams, most communities located along Minnesota’s rivers have historically neglected to regard rivers as important scenic assets. The idea for a park along the river in St. Cloud emerged after demands for a “scenic highway” connecting the Tenth Street Bridge with the reformatory road drew the attention of local residents to the natural beauty of the riverbank. St. Cloud residents felt that a park at this location would be an immediate asset to the city. “It will be St. Cloud’s best advertising card. It will bring many people to the city to enjoy it, and it will spread the fame of St. Cloud as the most beautiful of cities far and wide, and will be one of the factors that will decide hundreds of people to make the Granite City their permanent home.”

The land for Riverside Park, which was originally known as East-side Park, was acquired through the foresight and generosity of Mayor Peter J. Seberger and several St. Cloud residents. Land was obtained through several means: by donation, through purchase at a reduced price, or by exchange for city property at other locations. The largest acquisitions were made between 1912 and 1914 when Seberger was mayor.

In November of 1915, a contest was held to name St. Cloud’s newest park. As it was to be a “people’s park,” the city wanted citizens to be involved in selecting an appropriate name. A prize of five dollars was offered by the St. Cloud Daily Journal-Press to the citizen whose suggestion was chosen by a committee of city leaders. On November 16, 1915, a name was selected and the park became known as “Riverside Park.”

Riverside Park, with its abundance of trees and large expanses of greenspace, fit Frederick Law Olmsted’s vision for parks as “great roaming grounds” that provide moral and physical benefits for all citizens. The design for Riverside Park incorporates recreational space and scenic vistas in a natural setting. According to Phelps Wyman, a Minneapolis landscape architect who created a working design for

---

8 Uel Blank, “Community Beauty and the Tourism Connection,” Minnesota Horticulturist 110 (June/July 1982), 181.
10 Ibid.
11 Stearns County Historical Society Subject Files: Parks and Recreation; St. Cloud - Parks and Recreation; “History of Our Parks,” 17.
14 S. B. Sutton, ed., Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted’s Writings on City Landscapes (Alpine Press Inc., 1971), 156.
the park in 1917 (Figure 11), the desire to create parks has been in direct response to a physical and psychological need for open areas and contact with nature, a need that becomes more pronounced in the confined spaces of urban life. Wyman’s plan classified the site as a large landscape park designed for the express purpose of providing residents with a place to enjoy nature. "...(T)he general appearance should be that of a place far from civilization and notable for its rugged wildness."15

Prior to the appointment of a paid Superintendent of Parks, members of the park board took responsibility for the care and maintenance of individual city parks. Riverside Park was supervised by Dr. Albert G. Guy, a local optometrist who was interested in horticulture.16 One of the earliest developments to Riverside Park was the planting of trees. In 1926, the Weehetonga Campfire Girls planted a grove of Scotch and Norway pines that had been raised by Dr. Guy in the center of what is now the Munsinger Gardens. Helen Bensen, a St. Cloud resident and former Weehetonga Campfire Girl, recalled the trees as being "small and spindly."17 While only thirty-five percent of the state can currently be classified as a forested area, seventy percent of Minnesota was originally covered with trees.18 As the Minnesota state tree is the Norway (red) pine and both Scotch and Norway pines were highly valued for their timber, these trees are reminders of the importance of lumber to the history of St. Cloud.

16 "History of Our Parks," 18.
17 Helen Bensen, former Munsinger Garden volunteer, interview, 4 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
Normal Campus, from East Side, St. Cloud, Minn.

Figure 9. Postal card. Courtesy of Robert W. Becker, *emeritus* Professor of Political Science, St. Cloud State University.

Figure 11. Plan for Riverside Park by Phelps Wyman, a Minneapolis Landscape Architect. Reprinted from "For The Home Builder," 2.
MUNSINGER GARDENS: BIRTH OF A PUBLIC GARDEN

The development of Munsinger Gardens began in the early 1930s, less than eighty years after St. Cloud had become a town. From its inception, Munsinger Gardens has been valued by city residents as St. Cloud’s special flower park. As with other public flower gardens found across the nation, the establishment of Munsinger Gardens is the direct result of a combination of factors: the maturity and prosperity of the city of St. Cloud; the rising national interest in flower gardens; the inspiration of the city’s first official Superintendent of Parks, Joseph Munsinger; and the development of the American public landscape during the Depression. The resulting garden, whose design is a blend of American ideals and European culture with the local landscape, expresses the spirit and beliefs of the St. Cloud community (Figure 12).

By the 1930s, when Munsinger Gardens was first developed, St. Cloud had grown to become the main commercial and industrial center of central Minnesota. St. Cloud’s reputation as a leader in the retail industry began in the early twentieth century. By 1927, for example, G. Robert Herberger had opened the first Herberger’s department store in downtown St. Cloud. According to William P. Moline, a local journalist, the company flourished during the Depression, quickly expanding to several locations across the Upper Midwest. Central Minnesota’s reputation as a national leader in optical lens manufacturing also began during this period. In 1936, Clair Lantz, the founder of today’s Lantz Lenses, Inc., began manufacturing optical lenses in the basement of his St. Cloud home.

---

2 Ibid., 148.
The city's economic growth, combined with the rising national interest in flower gardens, encouraged the increased acquisition of park land and the formation of local flower clubs. In 1928, the St. Cloud Flower and Garden Club was organized by local businessmen. By 1936, a Junior Garden Club also had formed. As early twentieth century gardens were valued for both their physical and moral benefits, they were typically established next to or in public spaces that were devoted to recreation. A 1930 article in the *Minnesota Horticulturist*, the journal of the Minnesota Horticultural Society, stated that gardens lead to the aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional development of a state and its citizens. According to Frederick P. Moersch M.D., a doctor of neurology at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, during the first half of the twentieth century, gardens could be used to reduce stress as they promoted the development of what he termed a "philosophy of tranquility."4

One of the key factors in the development of Munsinger Gardens was the St. Cloud City Council's 1930 appointment of Joseph Munsinger as the city's first full-time paid Superintendent of Parks. Joseph Munsinger was born on January 1, 1876, in Ontario, Canada. In 1878, he moved with his family to St. Cloud where his parents established a well-digging and plumbing business, owned a saloon and boarding house near the Mathew Hall lumber company, and operated a "halfway house" on the west side of the city.5 Prior to his appointment as Superintendent of Parks, Munsinger worked in the plumbing and heating business and was a lieutenant in the city's fire department (Figure 13).6 By 1924, Munsinger was actively involved in St. Cloud's park system, serving as a member of the park board, the city weed inspector, and, in the late 1940s, the chief plumbing inspector.7

According to Joseph Munsinger's youngest son, John D. Munsinger, St. Cloud had thirteen "rundown" parks when his father became park superintendent. By the time of his father's death in 1946, these sites had been improved and the city had acquired land for fifteen additional parks.8 Besides the development of what is known today as Munsinger Gardens, major improvements were implemented to

---

3 "Flower and Garden Club Continues to Blossom," *escape* 3 (1984), 84-85.
4 Frederick P. Moersch M.D., "Health and Contentment in Gardening," *Minnesota Horticulturist* 7 (May 1943), 75-76.
7 Stearns County Historical Society (SCHS); St. Cloud Park Department, St. Cloud, MN, Records, 1918-74; 135/C-1B-2.
8 Munsinger.
Wilson Park, Seberger Park, Hester Park, and Williams Gardens. An editorial in the city newspaper described Munsinger's work with St. Cloud's parks system as a "labor of love."9 "He has dreamed dreams of beautiful parks for many years and now the dreams are taking shape, giving St. Cloud a park development unequalled in any city its size in the northwest."10

According to garden historian, Susan Davis Price, in her text Minnesota Gardens: An Illustrated History, the two most important factors in improving and developing St. Cloud's parks were Superintendent of Parks Joseph Munsinger and the Works Progress Administration (WPA).11 As the St. Cloud Parks Department had a limited budget, much like other parks departments across the nation, the development of Munsinger Gardens did not officially begin until the establishment of the work programs created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal Administration. These programs provided St. Cloud and other cities across the nation with federally-funded labor for public works projects. The WPA workers who were instrumental in the development of Munsinger Gardens were mainly unemployed farmers and granite workers.12 According to historian T. H. Walker, the Depression was "...one of the great social upheavals of modern history."13 Though the Depression was a time of unemployment, economic problems, and social turmoil for the entire United States, the New Deal period witnessed the development of the American public landscape, a development whose intent was to create places of enduring value for the benefit of all citizens. As stated by President Roosevelt, "We are definitely in an era of building — the building of great public projects for the benefit of the public and with the definite object of building human happiness."14

President Roosevelt's New Deal work programs were intended to provide federal relief to large numbers of unemployed workers for a short period of time.15 Most of the labor used to construct Munsinger Gardens was provided by the WPA. The WPA was put into effect in 1935 when Congress

15 Watkins, 124.
passed the Emergency Relief Administration Act (ERA). The program ran eight years, ending on June 30, 1943, and employed eight and one-half million Americans. In 1935, WPA workers in St. Cloud received forty-eight dollars a month for one hundred and thirty hours of work. WPA workers were required to be males who had no dependents and were between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five. Work periods lasted up to eighteen months with three-month intervals required between each eighteen month period. In 1938, there were 68,000 WPA workers in the state of Minnesota.

Largely due to the efforts of the WPA, there was a substantial increase during the 1930s in the number of public gardens in America. The Norfolk Botanical Garden, for example, began in 1938 when WPA workers planted four thousand azaleas on public land in Norfolk, Virginia. Today, this garden covers 155 acres and is known for its extensive collection of azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, and roses. In Minnesota during the Depression, public gardens were established in all sections of the state. The Olcott Park Greenhouse in Virginia, Minnesota, for example, was built during the Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Besides serving as an indoor public garden, the greenhouse also provides the plant material for public flower beds located throughout the city.

The Depression affected different areas of the nation at different levels. According to John J. Dominik in his text St. Cloud: The Triplet City, St. Cloud “weathered” the Depression well because of its strong community spirit and because it was not directly tied to the national economy. Though St. Cloud experienced the economic stress and rise in unemployment that affected the entire nation, the general consensus of its citizens was that St. Cloud was not as badly affected as other areas of the country. In 1938, St. Cloud was described by WPA-sponsored writers as a town of “...wide clean streets, modern

16 SCHS Subject Files: Depression – WPA, Letter from E. L. Stolte, St. Paul, Minnesota, to Miss Ella Finger, 30 December 1942.
19 Brochure, Norfolk Botanical Garden, Norfolk, Virginia.
21 Dominik, St. Cloud, 75.
shops, and business blocks, tree-lined avenues of attractive homes interspersed with schools and churches - a prosperous, thriving little city whose residents obviously harbor a strong civic pride."23

The availability of free labor through federal relief programs instigated a period of increased civic beautification in St. Cloud. Prior to the Depression, the majority of Park Department funds had been used to acquire new public land. During the 1930s, the city took advantage of the labor available through the WPA, the CCC, and the NYA (National Youth Administration) to implement various public projects throughout the city. Projects ranged from the trimming of trees to the construction of a concrete combination dam and bridge at Whitney Park in 1938.24 WPA workers also constructed low walls of seam-faced granite throughout the city. Many of these were built to mark street ends and to serve as guard walls along Riverside Drive. According to Larry Haws, St. Cloud's present Superintendent of Parks and Recreation, the city currently has almost five thousand feet of granite walls, two thousand of which are located in city parks.25 In 1939, a 1,100 foot granite wall was built along the Mississippi River north of the Tenth Street Bridge.26 As predicted by a 1933 editorial in the St. Cloud Daily Times and Daily Journal-Press, the labor provided by the work programs of Roosevelt’s New Deal Administration was a “direct benefit of the depression.”27

As local materials were commonly used in WPA projects, the cost of these projects to the city was low. The average contribution of the city to any given project was twenty-five percent.28 In 1934, for example, the city of St. Cloud spent only $33,948 out of the $376,138 that was invested in public works that year. The city covered the cost of materials and a portion of the supervisory wages, while the federal government funded the labor.29

Munsinger Gardens is one of forty-eight parks constructed in Minnesota by the WPA. According to a February 3, 1934, article in the St. Cloud Daily Times and Daily Journal-Press, federal labor was used.

---

24 SCHS Subject Files: Parks and Recreation, St. Cloud – Parks and Recreation; “History of Our Parks.”
28 Letter from E. L. Stolte, 1.
to create the initial flower beds and to begin the construction of pools in the section of Riverside Park that was to become Munsinger Gardens. This section was referred to as “Riverside Nursery” or “nursery site.”

Using crews employed through the New Deal Administration, Joseph Munsinger and the St. Cloud Parks Department created a garden that fulfilled the goal the federal government had outlined for WPA artists. These artists were instructed to celebrate the American scene and broaden the nation’s cultural consciousness by making “... contributions of permanent cultural value to communities.”

When Joseph Munsinger became the Superintendent of Parks for the city of St. Cloud, the site of the future garden remained undeveloped, featuring only a few small trees and shrubs and the remains of the H. J. Andersen sawmill. The first official record of a desire to develop a portion of Riverside Park as a garden came when the park board considered moving the log cabin located in the southern section of the park to a new location north of the Michigan Avenue “highway” and west of the property owned by St. Cloud resident, Earl D. Cross. This site was to become Munsinger Gardens. The board wanted to use the cabin, which is the oldest extent building in the city, as the center of “... a flower garden of the old fashioned variety.”

A committee was established consisting of Joseph Munsinger, park board member George Friedrich, and Commissioner Nat B. Fish, to consider the removal of the building and to work on a plan for the beautification of the area. The park board minutes for April 19, 1933, record the approval of a “picture of this improvement” prepared by Miss Elizabeth Gurney, a member of the faculty at the St. Cloud Teacher’s College. Because of the building’s fragility, the decision was made by the park board to leave the log cabin at its location, but to continue with plans for the development of a garden. These plans included the construction of a rock garden and lily pool.

Work that was completed on the “nursery site” during the New Deal era included the building of two pools, a large rock garden with steps, and the construction of several flower beds. Over the entire

---

31 SCHS Subject Files: Art; Art WPA; Renee M. DeRosier, “Reflections of the Depression: Minnesota WPA Art.”
32 St. Cloud Park Department, 17.
33 Ibid., 20.
34 Ibid., 28.
Riverside Park site, one hundred elms and one hundred and fifty evergreens were planted, four thousand feet of paths were built, and over one thousand yards of clay and black dirt were added to level the area.35

Credit for the conception and design of a public flower garden along the Mississippi River in Riverside Park has traditionally gone to Superintendent of Parks Joseph Munsinger.36 According to his son, John, “He somehow got the idea in his head; thought there should be flowers and paths.” While Joseph Munsinger did not have any formal training in garden design or horticulture, he did have the one quality that is usually considered essential to the making of a good gardener: he loved flowers. Munsinger had his own flower garden on a section of land west of St. Cloud. John remembered that his father grew “acres” of gladioli and worked on developing new strains.37 According to David Morreim, St. Cloud’s present nursery supervisor, Joseph Munsinger began the tradition of the garden’s foremen operating their own nursery.38

Joseph Munsinger’s design for the “nursery site” was both vernacular and romantic, combining European and American concepts with the central Minnesota landscape. Ideas from Munsinger’s design were also used for other St. Cloud gardens that were developed during the 1930s, including Hester Park and Williams Gardens. Munsinger’s plan for these gardens fit the “pseudo-romantic” style that was prevalent in American landscape design during the first half of the twentieth century.39 The blend of American Regional and Government Rustic styles with traditional European garden design reflected the noble simplicity, charm, and folklore that was prevalent in American society during the 1930s.40 As Munsinger’s design was based on a romantic concept of European ideas filtered through the American pastoral ideal, it reflected the conservatism of the nation during the Depression era.41

37 Munsinger.
40 Wayne Franklin and Michael Steiner, editors, Mapping American Culture (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 192-93.
According to American historian Phoebe Cutler in her text *The Public Landscape of the New Deal*, Depression-era landscapes, particularly parks and gardens, revealed the national character and celebrated the American scene. The regional style that was prevalent during this period was a direct reflection of what Cutler described as a growing national self-awareness. Early twentieth century gardening in America focused on a regional style, in which each site was defined by the climate, history, culture, and ideals of its area. American Regionalism was promoted by several prominent American artists including Jens Jensen, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Grant Wood. Grant Wood’s *American Gothic* (1930) provided a good example of American Regionalism in its depiction of what appears to be a straightforward glimpse of Midwestern life. Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin East in Wisconsin reflected the Midwestern Prairie School Style of architecture which promoted regionalism and “self-identification” with the landscape. In the development of public parks and gardens during the early twentieth century, leading American landscape architects, such as Jens Jensen, advocated the use of native plants and trees as a means of providing unity between a garden and its site.

During the New Deal era, public gardens received more attention than at any other time in the history of the United States. Most of the public landscapes created during the Depression focused on nature, requiring the use of indigenous materials. The effort of government designers to save money by using whatever local materials they could find, often referred to as “design-by-wit,” helped to create the Government Rustic Style that characterized Depression-era landscapes. Indigenous materials were used during the Depression because they were cheap and available and because they suited the romantic ideals of the era. Two of the reasons behind the development of this style were the relatively inexpensive cost of such building materials and the basic construction methods of the time.

Examples of Government Rustic landscapes are found throughout Minnesota. A good example is Horace William Shaler Cleveland’s design for the Minneapolis Parkway System, which focused on the Mississippi River. Architecture of Depression-era public landscapes also followed the Government Rustic

---

42 Ibid., 63.
45 Cutler, 63.
Style. In Gooseberry Falls State Park, for example, the tourist center, guard walls, and stairs leading to the base of the falls were constructed in 1933 using native stone.47 Joseph Munsinger’s design for Munsinger Gardens incorporated elements of this style. Native stone, for example, was used extensively throughout the gardens.

John Munsinger has argued that his father’s design ideas came mainly from his knowledge of German public gardens and, in fact, part of the inspiration for Munsinger’s design may have come from his German heritage.48 Municipal parks in Germany during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were public recreation grounds whose designs typically incorporated plants, trees, and fountains. Based on English landscape gardens, many of these sites had formerly served as royal hunting grounds and pleasure gardens.49 David Morreim has suggested that the German inspiration in Munsinger’s design may have come from the European concept of “folksparks,” a concept which emphasized the importance of walking to the health of German citizens.50

The main development of Munsinger Gardens began in 1934 with the building of the rock garden and pools. While the pits for the pools had been dug in 1933, construction was not completed until 1935. Lily pools were popular garden features during the 1930s. Early twentieth century garden writers stressed the importance of harmonizing pools with their surroundings by relating the size and shape to the garden’s design.51 The Government Rustic style lily pool in Munsinger Gardens was built using rocks from old river beds near Popple Creek (Figure 14).52 The shape of the pool, with its irregular outline, fit the naturalistic setting of the garden and for most of its existence, water lilies have been featured in the pool. Water lilies, like roses, are traditional American garden plants, though they have the appearance of an exotic flower, once they are established, they are easy to grow.53

40 Ibid.
42 Munsinger.
44 Ibid.
Munsinger Gardens’ rock garden was formed using dirt that had been excavated from the lily pool (Figure 15). Like lily pools, rock gardens were popular features of early twentieth century American gardens. During the 1930s, the nation experienced a mild rock garden “craze.”

Garden enthusiast Louise Beebe Wilder (1878–1938) in her 1928 article “Pleasures and Problems of a Rock Garden,” described the essential points of rock garden construction. According to Wilder, rock gardens should be situated to take full advantage of sun and air and should be built with a single type of stone. “The chief end of a rock garden, it should be understood, is not the stones. Their mission is simply to provide safe and comfortable quarters for a wide variety of plants.”

Munsinger Gardens’ rock garden added visual height to the area and provided a vantage point from which to view the rest of the site. Three paths of granite slabs were incorporated into the design to allow multiple access for visitors and maintenance workers and to provide visual relief from the floral display.

Two architectural features of the garden provided good examples of Munsinger’s use of the Government Rustic—a wishing well and log cabin (Figure 16). The wishing well was located north of the lily pool and the log cabin was located west of the rock garden. The log cabin was originally one of several tourist cabins that had been constructed in the southern portion of Riverside Park. In 1933, these cabins were moved to various locations throughout the city for use as warming houses during Civilian Works Administration (CWA) projects. The cabin in Munsinger Gardens was moved to its present location during the site’s initial development. It served as the WPA timekeeper’s cabin.

Many Depression-era parks and gardens focused on a pioneer theme, often incorporating log cabins into their design. The longing for an ideal past which was prevalent during the Depression led to the creation of parks and gardens that were intended to serve as “…living pictures of the great past.”

Munsinger Gardens extensive use of local rock and granite served to enhance the regional spirit of the garden. Native to St. Cloud, granite proved ideally suited for use in the city’s parks and gardens. A special path of square granite pavers, a material originally used on St. Cloud streets, was constructed on the

56 “City Park Improvements,” 3.
57 Cutler, 75-76.
west side of the cabin. Granite was also used to form the paths surrounding the rock garden and the log cabin.

The granite industry has long been important to the economic development of St. Cloud. As early as 1868, St. Cloud’s first successful granite company, the Breen and Young Granite Company, began operation on the site of the present Reformatory. In 1918, the importance of the industry to the area led the St. Cloud Commercial Club to adopt the slogan “The Busy, Gritty, Granite City” for St. Cloud. Decline of the granite industry during the depressed 1930s helped to make the material a relatively inexpensive resource when Munsinger Gardens was first established and all the granite in the garden was acquired from within a ten mile radius of the site. Recently, new slab granite has been purchased from Mihelich Jones Monument Works of St. Joseph, Minnesota.

By the fall of 1935, two and one-half acres of the “nursery site” were filled with flower beds. Munsinger’s design for the flower beds was a vernacular blend of natural and geometric shapes. Unlike the naturalistic layout that later encompassed the entire site, many of the original flower beds were rectangular. Most of these beds were located outside the central portion of the garden, the area surrounding the rock garden and lily pool. Munsinger also designed several special beds shaped to form diamonds, stars, and hearts (Figure 17). One of the two heart-shaped beds that were included in the early design remains even now at its original location near a northern entrance to the garden.

Since the late 1940s, the majority of flowers used at Munsinger Gardens have been grown on-site in the garden’s greenhouse. The earliest indication of the desire for a city greenhouse came in the fall of 1933 when a conservatory was proposed for the south end of Eastman Park. By 1934, Joseph Munsinger had requested approval from the city council for the construction of a greenhouse at the nursery site. The first greenhouse, a gabled glass-sided structure, was built in 1938.

---

59 Dave Peters, “’Granite City’ carves heritage in native rock,” St. Cloud Times, 1 July 1976, 13A.  
64 “City Park Improvements,” 3.  
65 David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 19 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
The lavish floral display that quickly became established at the garden reflected Munsinger's love of flowers. As suggested by Helen S. Wheeler, a former horticulturist who grew up in St. Cloud and worked in the garden during the summer of 1938, Munsinger was a "capable gardener." As early as 1935, the newly developed garden had been recognized for its beautiful and verdant plantings. The site was described by one local journalist as "...the real flower garden of Central Minnesota. None of the parks in the big cities out-rival it in beauty, with its background of pines and evergreens, and the Father of Waters."°

Munsinger filled the garden beds with a mix of annuals and perennials. Before the growth of trees created a deep shade over a large portion of the site, most of the garden received a substantial amount of sunshine allowing for a variety of plant shapes and colors. Joseph Munsinger was particularly fond of bulbs. He directed the planting of thousands of daffodils throughout Riverside Park and, in 1935, he planted 1,200 tulips at the Nursery Site. While not as strong a craze as the Tulipomania of seventeenth-century Europe, tulips have remained favorite American garden plants since the nineteenth century. In the 1930s and 1940s, the St. Cloud newspaper published photographs of "Tulip Time" and "Iris Time," informing its readers of the garden’s bulb displays.

The end of the Depression closed an era that witnessed the development of numerous public parks and gardens across the United States. While progress on Munsinger Gardens slowed, St. Cloud’s park board continued to work within its means to improve the city’s environment. The city’s understanding of the value of providing citizens with public spaces was reflected in the formation of post-war plans during the early 1940s for the future development of the city’s parks and gardens. Plans for Munsinger Gardens focused on new flower beds and the development of a picnic area along the river bank. City leaders recognized the unique asset they had in the garden. The value of maintaining Munsinger Gardens as the only one of its kind was acknowledged by the park board in a 1944 report: "This garden fills a real need for those people who enjoy flowers, and is unique in nature... It is felt that duplication of this type of

67 "$37,659 Spent in Park Work For St. Cloud During Season," 2.
garden in other parts of the city would injure the value of this garden to the citizens and their friends.

The extension of this type of garden to other parts of the city is therefore not recommended.\textsuperscript{70}

At the March 30, 1938, meeting of the park board, board member George A. McQueen moved that the "...rock garden park on the east bank of the Mississippi River, just north of the Tenth Street Bridge, be named Munsinger Park in honor of Joseph Peter Munsinger, Park Superintendent."\textsuperscript{71} This motion was unanimously adopted and the gardens became known as Munsinger Park. On July 25, 1946, Joseph Munsinger died of pneumonia and heart complications. According to John Munsinger, his father's death was the result of a cold he had contracted while inspecting city trees during a spring drizzle.\textsuperscript{72} In the obituary published on the front page of the St. Cloud Daily Times, Munsinger was named as the father of St. Cloud's park system and is credited with the development of St. Cloud's parks into treasured beauty spots for the city.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{70} SCHS; St. Cloud Park Board Records, St. Cloud, MN, 1944-1950, Correspondence, reports & printed matter; 526/C-1H-6; "1944 Report of Park Board Committee Re: Utilization of Parks of St. Cloud, Minnesota."

\textsuperscript{71} St. Cloud Park Department.

\textsuperscript{72} Munsinger.

\textsuperscript{73} "J. P. Munsinger, Father of Park System, Is Dead."
Figure 13. Lieutenant Joseph Munsinger. Courtesy of St. Cloud Parks Department.
Figure 15. Munsinger Garden’s Rock Garden. c. 1935. Courtesy of SCHS.
Figure 16. Munsinger Gardens' Log Cabin. By Bob McCoy.
Chapter V

MUNSINGER GARDENS: COLD WAR GARDENS AND MAINTENANCE

During the period from World War II to the 1970s, most American public flower gardens either shrunk or disappeared. This was the result of a declining national interest in flower gardens. While most gardens that were established during the 1930s have vanished, St. Cloud is fortunate that Munsinger Gardens is one of the few that has survived.¹ Though existing on a limited budget, Munsinger Gardens continued through the efforts of its caretakers and the support of the St. Cloud community.

Munsinger Park first became known as Munsinger Gardens during the early 1940s. At that time, the garden was the responsibility of Joseph Krakowski, a retired Polish farmer. He was followed by Al Bauer, who began working at the garden in 1958, and John E. Dubbin, who became the garden’s foreman in 1972. When John Dubbin retired in 1983, David T. Morreim became the city’s Nursery Supervisor. The position of Superintendent of Parks was held by Phil Nierengarten from the time of Joseph Munsinger’s death until 1975 when Larry Haws was appointed Superintendent of Parks and Recreation for the city of St. Cloud.²

Riverside Park and Munsinger Gardens are classified as a “metropolitan park,” which is defined as a large public space located within a thirty-minute drive of any portion of its city. Metropolitan parks function primarily to provide city residents with recreational opportunities not suited to smaller local parks.³ During the twentieth century, with the continued growth of urban areas and the increased amount of leisure time, there was a growing demand for municipal space that provided public recreational

³ Central Minnesota Historical Center General Collections; S-1917; Park Land Priorities, August 1972.
opportunities. By the middle of the century, St. Cloud’s newly combined Park and Recreation Department, which had originated during the early 1900s as separate entities, had adopted the slogan “The City of Friendly Play.” Although emphasis was placed on recreation, there was a continuing recognition of the need for beauty. As the 1962 Park and Recreation Department Annual Report states, “For the community to strive, there must be interest shown for both more and beautiful parks as well as recreation.”

Requiring continuous maintenance, the appearance of gardens are a direct reflection of their importance to those under whose care they are financed and maintained. As the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte so eloquently stated, “Where flowers are allowed to degenerate, man cannot exist.” The staff at Munsinger Gardens historically has spent most of its time on maintenance activities, grooming the floral displays that begin around the first of May and continue until the end of September. Another responsibility of the staff at Munsinger Gardens has been the maintenance of the lily pool. Without its own filtration system, the pool has required weekly cleaning. Though city water is used to refill the pool after its cleaning, the lily pool is connected to the natural spring-fed pool by a drainage ditch which allows it to be constantly supplied with fresh water.

In her article “Paradise Close at Hand,” garden author Margaret Haapoja stated that vandalism is inevitable in public places. While vandalism has been minor at Munsinger Gardens, specific incidents have occasionally added an element of mystery to the garden’s history (Figure 18). According to John Dubbin, the first flowers planted each spring often would disappear overnight without a trace. Vandalism of public floral areas throughout the city has, ironically, served to support Munsinger Gardens’ existence. In 1973, for example, the park board received a request to consider establishing a rose garden at Whitney Memorial Park. In response to this request, the board stated that the city already had a large flower garden, Munsinger Gardens, and that this garden was continuously added to as flower beds throughout the city.

---

4 Stearns County Historical Society (SCHS) Subject Files: Parks and Recreation; St. Cloud – Parks and Recreation; “History of Our Parks,” 60.
5 SCHS; St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department, Annual Reports (Non-Inclusive), 1959-66; 935/C-3E-7; 1962 Annual Report, 23.
7 SCHS Subject Files: Natural Resources, Geology, Geography; Nature-St. Cloud Climatological Data.
8 Julie Dierkhising, Munsinger Garden Horticulturist, interview, 24 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
were removed due to destruction from vandalism. For security reasons, the board felt that the city needed to concentrate its floral display in one area.11

The ducks, geese, and peacocks that form one of the main attractions at Munsinger Gardens have been an established feature for almost two decades.12 While duck and goose droppings are a nuisance for the park staff, “feeding the fowl” quickly became a popular activity at the garden. In the early 1970s, when John Dubbin started as garden foreman, there were very few waterfowl at the site. After the park staff began providing food, ducks and geese started frequenting the area.13 “Droppings maintenance” performed by park staff has typically consisted of an annual spring “sweep” and an occasional sprinkling of lime to act as a neutralizer.14 Visitors have been encouraged to feed the waterfowl in an adjacent area north of the gardens.

Perhaps the most fascinating feature at Munsinger Gardens has been the peacocks. Though they have the appearance of an exotic bird, according to Roger A. Ethen, a member of the garden staff, caring for them is much like caring for a domestic bird.15 The first peacocks were purchased in the 1970s to serve as enhancements to the garden.16 However, according to Superintendent Larry Haws, the peacocks have been the “watch-dogs” of the garden. As Haws stated, “If you go there in the evening in the dark and you wake them up, they make quite a racket.”17

Peacocks are not the only domestic animals known to the garden. Joseph Munsinger and his son, John, raised “fancy” pigeons and kept them in a dovecote at the greenhouse during the summer.18 Dovécoites were traditional fixtures of the English gardens that had influenced Munsinger’s design. In the 1970s, Munsinger Gardens acquired a pair of Bantam chickens and, in 1981, a pair of swans.19 The most recent additions to the gardens’ domestic animal population are cats. The first cat to officially join the park

---

11 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes, 4 Volumes, July 9, 1954 – February 3, 1998; Volume 2, 15.
12 Dubbin.
13 Ibid.
15 Roger A. Ethen, gardener for St. Cloud Parks and Recreation Department, interview, 4 March 1998.
16 Dubbin.
staff was a large male cat named Bruce. He came to the garden around 1980. Since the early 1990s, two cats, Katie and her daughter, Jimi, have been part of the Munsinger Gardens work crew.20

While the focus was on maintenance rather than expansion between World War II and the early 1980s, plans for changes and developments to Munsinger Gardens continued to be proposed. In 1954, for example, the St. Cloud Flower and Garden Club requested space along Riverside Drive near Munsinger Gardens for a wild flower garden. Also, the Tri-County Boat Club wanted to build a boat landing and parking area immediately north of the gardens in Riverside Park.21 While these requests were not granted, other improvements were implemented. Paths were tarred and repaired, curbs were constructed along Riverside Drive, and water pipes were laid for an irrigation system. The development of Munsinger Garden's natural spring-fed pool was not completed until the early 1950s. Plans had been formulated in April 1950 for repair and improvements to the pool. However, because of the high cost, these plans were not implemented until August 1951.22

Since their inception, Munsinger Gardens has been regarded as St. Cloud’s special flower park. Even during the middle of the twentieth century, when interest in flower gardens was low, Munsinger Gardens was admired for its floral beauty (Figure 19). “From early spring until late fall the gardens are bright and colorful with trees and shrubs, flowering annuals and perennials, iris, tulips, lilies and dahlias.”23 In 1968, a long-range plan was adopted by the city of St. Cloud to preserve and improve the beauty of the city and the Mississippi River.24 This plan, combined with the focus on environmentalism, foreshadowed a renewed interest in civic beautification that occurred in America beginning in the 1970s.

20 Amy Becker, “Cats play key role in protecting Munsinger,” St. Cloud Daily Times, 14 February 1995, 7A.
21 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes: Volume 1, 3 and 149.
22 SCHS; St. Cloud Park Department, St. Cloud, MN, Records 1918-1974; 135/C-1B-2.
23 “History of Our City Parks,” 18.
24 Ibid., 36.
Figure 19. Postcard of Munsinger Park. 1940s. Courtesy of Robert W. Becker.
Chapter VI

MUNSINGER GARDENS: GARDEN RENAISSANCE

Recent developments to Munsinger Gardens have maintained its historical significance while enhancing its beauty and enriching the blend of European and American design with the local landscape. As with the initial establishment of the gardens, these developments have been the result of a combination of factors, including the growth of the city, the renewed national interest in flower gardens, the dedication of park staff, and the strong support of the community.

St. Cloud has grown to become the leading urban center of its region. By 1970, the city was listed as one of the five fastest growing metropolitan areas in the state. Besides functioning as a leader in trade and industry, St. Cloud has also become the educational and cultural center of the region. The growth and stability of the city has encouraged the continued support of St. Cloud's parks and gardens resulting in improvements to the city's park system, including its main flower park, Munsinger Gardens.

According to garden historian Ogden Tanner, America has recently experienced a garden craze bigger than the enormously popular Victory Gardens of World War II. This craze has supported the proliferation of garden journals and magazines, mail-order and retail nurseries, and formal garden tours. The American “Gardening Renaissance,” which began during the 1970s, instigated an increase in public and private gardens across the nation. In 1985, a Gallup Poll for the National Gardening Association listed gardening as the top outdoor leisure activity. Also, in 1993, the Archives of American Gardens

---

3 Ogden Tanner, Gardening America: Regional and Historical Influences in the Contemporary Garden (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 9.
opened to the public at the Smithsonian Institution’s Office of Horticulture in Washington D.C. The recent developments to Munsinger Gardens have reflected this growing trend. The current national interest in flower gardens is partly the result of a rising interest in environmentalism and heritage preservation. These movements have sought to preserve America’s natural beauty and history—historically one of the main goals at Munsinger Gardens.

Munsinger Gardens has been a mix of tradition and beauty. The emphasis on retaining historical aspects of the garden has reflected the community’s belief in the importance of the past. The star- and heart-shaped beds and the granite horse troughs west of the Interpretive Center have remained from the garden’s inception (Figure 20). The granite troughs, which had been moved to their present location by 1916, were originally located on Germain Street in downtown St. Cloud. Evidence of the importance of tradition also has been reflected in the annual planting of red salvia in the rock garden. The year that rose-colored geraniums were used, strong public protest encouraged the garden staff to resume planting red salvia the following year. Munsinger Gardens also has featured plants that are original to the site, such as hosta Plantaginea grandiflora white, double orange daylily, polygonum hybrid smartweed, golden glow, and gas plant. Furthermore, the community’s interest in history has led to private financial support for the garden. For example, the ring of eight bronze oxen heads, which originally encircled the fountain in the lily pool, was restored through the benevolence of Mrs. Ann M. Quinlivan, a St. Cloud resident. The renovated ring was installed in the spring of 1998.

Though not original to the garden, the wrought iron entrance gate and fencing installed at a southern entrance to the garden has historical significance to the city of St. Cloud. The gate and fence were hand-constructed by St. Cloud resident, Joseph Kamer, in 1916. In 1997, they were donated to Munsinger Gardens by Kamer’s daughter, Marie who had come to Minnesota in 1913 on the Orphan Train and was

---

6 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department, Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes, 4 Volumes, July 9, 1954 – February 3, 1998; I, 57.
8 David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 19 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
adopted by Joseph and Thekla Kamer. The intricate design of the ironwork, filling its frame in a Victorian sense of “horror vacui,” or fear of open space, reflects the advancements in technology that had been achieved by the early twentieth century.

When David Morreim began as Nursery Supervisor, Munsinger Gardens had not expanded beyond its original boundaries. The flower beds were contained within a roughly rectangular area bordered by a greenhouse on the south, the Mississippi River on the west, the natural spring-fed pool on the north, and Riverside Drive on the east. Roger Ethen believes that when he began working for the St. Cloud Parks Department in 1984, the garden was much simpler than it is today. Despite limited funds, developments were implemented that have added to the garden’s beauty while retaining its sense of history.

While Munsinger Gardens sense of rootedness in the past has allowed it to appear mysteriously timeless, it has nevertheless constantly evolved. Gardens, by their very nature, are subject to continuous growth and transformation. As suggested by Andrew Jackson Downing, this ephemeral quality has reflected a constant change and restless spirit that long has been considered part of the American national character. As gardens deal in four dimensions, with time an additional factor, the time of day, age of plants, and particular season all have an effect on a garden’s appearance. According to Henry F. Dupont, a late nineteenth century American industrialist, “A beautiful garden I think of as a work of art, but unlike a painting or book – a garden grows – always changes.

Many developments have been implemented at Munsinger Gardens since the mid-1980s. Paths have been widened for easier accessibility and new flower beds have been installed and old ones expanded. Four crescent beds were added along Riverside Drive in the late 1980s and the half-moon bed around the main garden sign was enlarged to a full circle in 1997. In the same year, the garden’s flower beds were extended as far north as Thirteenth Street where a rectangular bed was established in front of the WPA granite wall at the west end of the street on Riverside Drive.

11 Roger A. Ethen, gardener for St. Cloud Parks and Recreation Department, interview, 4 March 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
12 Andrew Jackson Downing, Cottage Residences, Rural Architecture and Landscape Gardening (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1921), vi.
Elsewhere, several improvements have been made along the Mississippi riverbank, including the installation of ornamental lighting and memorial granite benches. The large boulders along the riverbank were added during the late 1980s to replace a deteriorating granite retaining wall that had been built by the WPA during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{15} The riverbank, with its granite boulders and low-lying trees, has become a natural play area for children and adults. As recreation has been an essential factor in the development of the city’s public space, this open area has reflected the Park and Recreation Department’s continuing goal of providing citizens with ample opportunities for both active and passive recreation.

In the fall of 1989, a new gazebo was built for the garden by students from the St. Cloud Technical College (Figure 21). While most of the $20,000 needed for the project came from private donations, $5,000 was received from a state grant offered through Celebrate Minnesota 1990.\textsuperscript{16} The new gazebo has an open, polygonal structure, which is a design that has been traditionally favored for American garden “summer houses.”\textsuperscript{17}

In 1993, a cement retaining wall was added to the lily pool (Figure 22). This wall was constructed to eliminate the problem of rocks and dirt falling into the pool. Window box-style planters were added at the top of the wall to emphasize the outline of the pool and to prevent children from using the area as a play space.\textsuperscript{18} As is typical with informal pools, the plants in the surrounding beds have been an integral component of the lily pool’s design, helping to obscure its edge and to blend the pool with its naturalistic surroundings.

Unlike the lily pool, the natural spring-fed pool has presented a challenge to the garden staff. Constructed for safety and protection, the cement retaining wall and chainlink fence surrounding the pool have detracted from the natural woodland area in which it is located. In an effort to bring color and light to the area, the garden staff added flower boxes to the pool’s edge.\textsuperscript{19}

In 1986, a new greenhouse was built at Munsinger Gardens. One of the special features of Munsinger Gardens is that virtually all of its plant material is grown on-site. Until recently, most

\textsuperscript{15} Larry W. Haws, Superintendent of Park and Recreation, interview, 20 January 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
\textsuperscript{18} Monica Erion, “Roses are in, weddings out at Clemens Gardens,” \textit{St. Cloud Times}, 28 July 1996, p. 6B.
municipalities across the nation had greenhouses or conservatories that were used to cultivate the plants needed for public green spaces. According to David Morreim, the vast majority of parks departments the size of St. Cloud’s no longer grow their own plants. Each year, the staff at Munsinger Gardens has cultivated approximately 100,000 bedding plants that have been used in the garden and at various public locations throughout the city.

While improvements were made and the garden expanded, the naturalistic planting style was retained. With the establishment of the Clemens Gardens during the last decade, supervision of Munsinger Gardens has become the responsibility of David Morreim’s assistant, Julie Dierkhising, who began working at the gardens in 1986. Since May of 1996, she has supervised the park staff and planned the garden’s flower beds. Dierkhising’s plans for the beds typically incorporate a traditional mix of annuals and perennials, following Joseph Munsinger’s original design for the garden (Figure 23). Though Dierkhising likes to experiment with plants not suited to central Minnesota’s climate, she is gradually replacing the garden’s older inferior perennials with newer disease-resistant varieties. The variety of plants found in Munsinger Gardens is surprising considering the amount of shade in the area. As one of the main goals at Munsinger Gardens has been to provide an extended floral display, a mix of annuals and perennials has been employed to create a continuous bloom of color. The incorporation of annuals is typical for shade gardens as they provide “summer interest.”

Recently, Munsinger Gardens’ flower beds have been filled annually with approximately 80,000 plants, most of which are suited to cool, moist growing conditions. For example, the garden has featured eighty different varieties of hosta, making it one of the largest collections in central Minnesota. Hostas are hardy, low-maintenance plants that are valued for both their flowers and their foliage. The Virginia Creeper, an American Ivy that covers the trellis by the Interpretive Center, has been another horticultural feature of the garden. It has been particularly valued for its leaves, which become a brilliant crimson in the

19 Dierkhising.
21 Dierkhising.
22 Taylor, 408.
fall. Impatiens and begonias also have been used generously in areas of deep shade since their bright colors lighten dark spaces.\textsuperscript{24}

The current design of Munsinger Gardens has followed the romantic ideas first established by Joseph Munsinger during the 1930s. With the growth of trees and the expansion of the central informal flower beds, however, the naturalistic elements of his design were emphasized. The garden’s present design was based on a combination of the English Landscape Style of the eighteenth century and the American Rustic Style of the Depression-era. Munsinger Gardens, which celebrates the American belief in the beauty of simplicity and an intimate connection with nature, has been described by David Morreim as natural, informal, and “down-home.”\textsuperscript{25} The garden’s curving forms, rustic architecture, and abundance of trees have connected it with the naturalistic design tradition that has been prevalent in American public gardens since the creation of Central Park, the nation’s first public greenspace.\textsuperscript{26}

The English Landscape Style of the eighteenth century has had the strongest influence on American public gardens.\textsuperscript{27} With the evolution of Munsinger Gardens, this influence has become more pronounced. Munsinger Gardens’ design has reflected Andrew Jackson Downing’s interpretation of the “Beautiful,” a style of landscape gardening that was first theorized by the eighteenth century English gardener, Capability Brown. According to Downing, “The BEAUTIFUL in Landscape gardening is produced by outlines whose curves are flowing and gradual, surfaces of softness, and growth of richness and luxuriance.”\textsuperscript{28} The central focus on nature in English Landscape gardens has required the informality of curving lines, meandering paths, and the softening of edges with plants. The gentle rhythm expressed in Munsinger Gardens’ design has had the quality of a mural that unfolds as it is experienced. While each feature of the garden has stood on its own, all have been incorporated into a cohesive whole that blends American concepts with English design elements.

Curves have been essential elements in informal designs. Since line can have the strongest influence on a garden, as it sets the mood and directs attention to focal points, the meandering curved lines

\textsuperscript{24} Flower Gardens (Stillwater, Minnesota: Linden Hills Press, 1991), 39.
\textsuperscript{25} Morreim, 9 January 1998.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 10.
of Munsinger Gardens have provided a sense of mystery and encouraged exploration. Munsinger’s paths have formed a network of routes around the garden’s focal points, reflecting the gentle energy and continuous movement of the nearby Mississippi River (Figure 24).

All of the paths in Munsinger Gardens have led to the Mississippi River, the site’s main natural feature. Following the basic precept of the English Landscape Style, that of forms echoing nature, the garden’s flower bordered serpentine paths have harmonized the site with the natural form of the river. The flower beds along the paths have been simplest on the west and more abundant on the east. This has provided a visual connection with the natural form of the Mississippi and the lavish floral display of the Clemens Gardens.

Another example of Munsinger Gardens’ incorporation of forms echoing nature has been a low rock retaining wall west of the Interpretive Center. This wall, whose shape has echoed the river’s edge, was built in 1987 to help separate the floral area from the river area. The cascade of low plants over the rocks, which mimics the flow of water, is characteristic of informal gardens. The “physical accessibility” of plants has been part of the garden’s special beauty and has added the dimension of touch to the garden experience.

According to Larry Haws, “...the change that is probably the most significant over the years is that the one-time small landscaping trees now encompass the park. Munsinger is probably known for its canopied forest as well as its flowers.” The Scotch and Norway Pines that were planted in 1926 now compose a mature pine forest that has played an essential role in providing the garden with its special American identity. This pine forest has grown to over sixty feet in height and has covered the area with high shade. The cathedral-like setting created by the green canopy and slim red trunks suggests the sanctity of space that has been integral to the American pastoral ideal.

Munsinger Gardens has retained its role as the city’s public flower garden largely due to the support of the St. Cloud community and the financial creativity of the Parks Department. St. Cloud’s Park and Recreation Department has been nationally recognized for its innovative fund-raising and volunteer

---

29 Ibid.
30 Dierkhsing.
31 Haws.
32 Falbo, 93.
programs. A total of 8.5 million has been acquired through fund-raisers and approximately 2,000 citizens have volunteered each year.\textsuperscript{33} The department’s “Adopt-A-Park” program has provided families, businesses, and neighborhood or civic groups with the opportunity to aid in the improvement and development of area parks. This program has helped the city to maintain its park system and has given participants a sense of pride and ownership in the community.\textsuperscript{34}

Funding for the care and maintenance of Munsinger Gardens has come from a variety of sources. Major support has been provided by the St. Cloud Granite Rotary Club which adopted the garden in 1992 as its primary community project. Formed in 1925 by a group of local businessmen and professionals, the club’s main goal has been to serve the community. The renovation of the former WPA timekeeper’s cabin—housing a small gift shop and information station for both Munsinger and Clemens Gardens—was sponsored by the club.\textsuperscript{35}

Another innovative source of funding was Munsinger Gardens’ fall plant sale, the first of which was held in 1990. The purpose of the plant sale was to reduce the amount of surplus plants and to generate funds for special projects. The sale was an immediate success as approximately one thousand visitors attended the first event and $5,500 was earned in revenue.\textsuperscript{36} Proceeds from the first sale funded the reinforcement of the rock wall around the lily pool while proceeds from the 1991 and 1992 sales went towards the purchase of ornamental cast iron urns and benches.\textsuperscript{37} Since the Munsinger Gardens plant sale became a social event for the city, it reflected the paradox of public gardens which have served as places for both solitude and socialization.\textsuperscript{38} Starting in the spring of 1998, the surplus plants from the greenhouse have been sold at the Munsinger Gardens gift shop and from a small cart located in front of the Clemens Gardens restroom building.

Items that were offered for sale at the fall plant sale ranged from dried flowers and house plants to T-shirts and posters. The posters depict scenes of Munsinger and Clemens Gardens and were prints of

\textsuperscript{33} Haws.
\textsuperscript{34} Kristine Donatelle, “Adoptive volunteers keep St. Cloud’s parks in full bloom,” St. Cloud Times, 26 May 1997, 1A.
\textsuperscript{35} Stearns County Historical Society Subject Files: Parks and Recreation, Munsinger Gardens; Jennifer Hargrace, “Munsinger Gardens,” 1996.
\textsuperscript{36} John DuBois, “Munsinger Gardens’ fund grows greener with sale,” St. Cloud Times, 5 September 1990, 1B.
paintings done by Bela S. Petheo, a St. John’s University art professor from Budapest, Hungary. Petheo is a noted Midwestern artist whose scenes of the gardens reflect his love of light and color and his belief that humanity lives in an “earthly Paradise.”39 The Mediterranean flavor in Petheo’s work reflects his travels in Greece and Rome.40

Since its inception, Munsinger Gardens has been a popular spot for special events, particularly for weddings and formal photography. Prior to the construction of a Special Events Area, the rock garden and gazebo were the most popular locations. In 1995, a special Munsinger Gardens fundraiser generated $80,000 for the development of a special events area.41 Overwhelming support attests to the importance of the garden to the community. Composed of a brick and granite terrace and walkway surrounded by an evergreen arborvitae hedge, the Munsinger Gardens’ Special Events Area was created to “better serve special event activities” and to decongest on-street parking.42

One year before the construction of the Special Events Area, a formal special events policy was developed by the Park Department. This policy has required individuals or groups to obtain a permit in order to use the garden for special events. Proceeds have supplemented the Munsinger Gift Account and have been used to fund special projects in the garden.43

---

38 Punch, 160.
40 Jessie Stensland, “Rotary presents painting to mayor,” St. Cloud Times, 11 January 1995, 1B.
41 Kristine Donatelle, “City sells clothes, bricks for Munsinger Gardens,” St. Cloud Times, 12 April 1995, 3A.
42 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Munsinger and Clemens Gardens Master Plan.
43 Dierkhising.
Figure 20. Granite troughs in Munsinger Gardens. 1985. Courtesy of SCHS.

Figure 21. Munsinger Garden with Gazebo by Bela S. Petheo, 1994. Oil on canvas, 24" x 30". Property of Granite City Rotary Club.
Figure 22. Munsinger Gardens' Lily Pool. c.1990.
Figure 24. Path in Munsinger Gardens.
Chapter VII

CLEMENS GARDENS: A HISTORY OF THE SITE

The development of the Clemens Gardens began in the mid-1980s, approximately half a century after the initial establishment of Munsinger Gardens (Figure 25). Like Munsinger Gardens, the Clemens Gardens has become a valued asset to the City of St. Cloud. Though significantly younger, it quickly attained the depth of beauty and sense of permanence that has permeated the older garden. As stated by Joe Eck, a noted American garden designer, “...any garden that is really beautiful must seem as if it has always been and must always be just as it is.”

The Munsinger and Clemens Gardens have many key aspects that are prevalent in American public gardens. Their varying blends of formal and informal design have reflected the endlessly rich and fascinating character of urban America. While the Clemens Gardens was initially developed as an extension of Munsinger Gardens, its emphasis on the formal elements of European landscape design allowed it to emerge as a distinct garden. The geometric framework used throughout the garden has expressed the American ideals of beauty, order, and culture and has revealed the American desire for "ordered urbanism." The lavish display of horticulture set in an elegant formal design adds a “touch of grandeur” to St. Cloud, reflecting the city’s prosperity and stability as well as the American adaptation of European ideas to the local landscape. While the existence of the Clemens Gardens is largely due to the patronage of its neighbors, William E. and Virginia Rose Clemens, it is also the result of a renewed interest in flower gardens and formal garden design and the inspiration, dedication, and skill of David Morreim and the park staff.

2 Witold Rybczynski, City Life (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 129.
3 Ibid.
The Clemens Gardens consists of a series of six formal gardens located in the northern portion of Riverside Park on the upper terrace of the Mississippi River basin. The garden's boundaries are Kilian Boulevard, Michigan Avenue, Riverside Drive, and Thirteenth Street. Two private residences are also located on the site, one at the corner of Riverside Drive and Thirteenth Street and the other near Michigan Avenue along Kilian Boulevard.

Between 1910 and 1920, a significant portion of what is now the Clemens Gardens was donated to the city by Earl D. and Fritz Cross. Mr. and Mrs. Cross, who lived at 1517-7th Avenue South (Kilian Boulevard), donated the land to become part of Riverside Park (Figure 26). Earl Cross was a prominent St. Cloud citizen who served as the Secretary and Treasurer of the Journal-Press Company. Prior to becoming city park land, the area was the site of a gravel pit. While the soil at this location was classified as fair to poor, it was considered good for sand and gravel and was suitable for the establishment of commercial gravel pits.

After becoming city park property, various plans were formulated for the area's development into a public greenspace. As early as 1932, Superintendent of Parks, Joseph Munsinger, had expressed an interest in improving the site. The following year, the St. Cloud park board discussed the possibility of constructing tennis courts on the property. The first development came in 1941 after the park board approved a recommendation to the city commission that improvements needed to be made to the appearance of the "sand pit" west of Kilian Boulevard. By August of that year, the land had been leveled and grass and trees were planted. A few years later, there was another push to develop the site. In 1944, a park board committee report on the utilization of St. Cloud parks stated that, "...it should be actively included in the city's park system and developed into a neighborhood park." In order to aesthetically improve the site, the report suggested the planting of grass, trees, and shrubs and the establishment of paths and benches. Three areas were to be retained as "...open vistas where small children games and adult recreation such as croquet and tether-ball can be carried out...." Plans were also discussed during the

---

5 Stearns County Historical Society (SCHS) Subject Files: Natural Resources, Geology, Geography; Natural Resources, Geology & Geography of Stearns Co.
6 SCHS; St. Cloud Park Department, St. Cloud, MN, Records, 1918-1974; 135/C-1B-2; 23.
7 Ibid., 96-97.
8 SCHS; St. Cloud Park Board Records, St. Cloud, MN, 1944-1950; 526/C-1H-6; 6.
middle of the twentieth century for the establishment of a memorial park dedicated to the veterans of World War II.⁹

Prior to becoming a public garden, the site was developed by the city into a neighborhood park. This park featured an open grassy area for summer recreation and a hockey and skating rink for winter recreation. A neighborhood park has been defined by St. Cloud's Park Department as a public area that is five to fifteen acres in size, serves city residents who live within a half mile radius, is accessible on at least three sides, and provides a wide range of activities for all ages.¹⁰

⁹ SCHS; St. Cloud Park Department.
¹⁰ Central Minnesota Historical Center; Park Land Priorities; S-1917; August 1972.
Figure 25. *St. Cloud Times* map of Clemens and Munsinger Gardens. 28 July 1996.

Tenth Street Dam, St. Cloud, Minn.

Figure 26. German-made postcard showing the home of Earl D. and Fritz Cross. Pre-1910. Courtesy of Robert W. Becker.
Chapter VIII

Clemens Gardens: Formal Garden

In 1985, reminiscent of Munsinger’s use of the WPA, David Morreim and the park staff decided to take advantage of labor available through the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) to begin developing a garden “up the hill” from Munsinger Gardens.¹ According to Morreim, who was largely responsible for the garden’s inception and design, this garden was established with a few sod cutters, some wheelbarrows, one pick-up truck, and lots of strength and determination.² Using hand shovels, workers removed the sod and approximately eighteen inches of soil from the sections that were intended to become flower beds. The original soil was replaced with a custom-mixed blend of peat, black dirt, and sand that was purchased from Traeger’s in Foley, Minnesota.³ The basic structure of the garden was a circle set in a large square (Figure 27). A portion of the original soil was used to form the base of a mound that was established in the circle. The majority of flowers used in the garden have been annuals, including geraniums and chrysanthemums both of which have become traditional American garden plants. First introduced to American gardens from China, chrysanthemums had become as popular as the rose by the late nineteenth century.⁴

The development of a public flower garden on a site formerly devoted to active recreation mirrored the rising national interest in flower gardens. Since public gardens can be used as indicators of a community’s health and progress, they have reflected the development and prosperity of the nation.⁵

¹ David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 9 January 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
² Ibid.
³ David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 19 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
⁵ Richard V. Francaviglia, Main Street Revisited: Time, Space, and Image Building in Small-Town America (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 1.
The Clemens Gardens’ structured geometric framework suggested the stability that St. Cloud had attained by the late twentieth century. In 1994, for example, St. Cloud was listed as the fastest-growing community in the state of Minnesota. As formal garden designs have been prevalent in the American landscape throughout the nation’s history, they have reflected a desire to create order out of chaos and a need to bring structure to what has come to be viewed by many as an increasingly chaotic world.

Establishment of the Formal Garden initiated the development of what became a series of six gardens. The Formal Garden’s design, which was influenced by its site, formed the basis for the future Clemens Gardens. Since formal designs typically require a level area, the flat and relatively treeless terrain has allowed David Morreim and the park staff to develop a series of formal gardens that have displayed the wide variety of plants that can be grown in full-sun conditions in central Minnesota. Borrowed from late eighteenth century England, the theory of harmonizing the design of a garden to “the genius of the place” has been popular in America since the late nineteenth century. The first mention of this concept can be found in the Fifth Book of the Aeneid by Virgil (70-19 B.C.), a classic Roman poet.

The geometric structure of the Clemens Gardens has related its design to the grid pattern that was used to divide much of St. Cloud and the nation. Quickly becoming the preferred form for town planning, the grid symbolized the American ideals of democracy and progress. Though it was used by many as a quick and easy means of exploiting the land, the organized grid was intended to provide equal opportunity for land ownership.

According to American garden historian Walter Punch, the design of gardens in the United States has typically involved borrowing, adaptation, and invention. Following this tradition, David Morreim adapted elements of English and European garden designs to the landscape of central Minnesota and created a series of formal gardens that have celebrated the St. Cloud community.

---

7 Punch, 105.
10 Harold Carter, An Introduction to Urban Historical Geography (Baltimore, Maryland: Edward Arnold, 1983), 37.
11 Punch, vii.
classic design was partly influenced by the Italian gardens of the Renaissance which were created to display an idealized, well-ordered universe. In Renaissance gardens, the square symbolized the earth and its elements and the circle symbolized the heavens. As the garden has reflected what Morreim has described as a European Continental Style, which blends informal plantings with a formal structure, the garden has displayed a sense of Old World charm and beauty.

The English cottage garden style used to design the flower beds has been popular in America since the early twentieth century. William Robinson, a prominent late nineteenth century English garden designer whose ideas had influence in America well into the 1930s, advocated using natural and informal plantings with drifts of perennials and the abundant use of vines. The layers of color and texture in the Clemens Gardens flower beds have provided a continuous season of bloom, fulfilling one of the main goals for the garden.

Figure 27. Clemens Formal Garden, c.1995.
Chapter IX

CLEMENS GARDENS: VIRGINIA CLEMENS ROSE GARDEN

The origins of the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden began in 1988 when the privately-owned lot on the corner of Thirteenth Street and Kilian Boulevard was offered for sale. Concerned that their view of Riverside Park and the Mississippi River might be blocked by a new home or a convenience store, William and Virginia Clemens, who live directly across the street at 1300 Kilian Boulevard, purchased the lot and donated it to the City of St. Cloud to develop as it saw fit. 1 One of the dreams of David Morreim and the Munsinger Gardens staff had been to establish a “regular” rose garden. As seventy rose bushes had recently been planted in crescent beds along Riverside Drive across from Munsinger Gardens and the new lot had the conditions considered necessary for successful rose growing, the decision was made to develop the site as a rose garden. Construction of the garden began in 1989 (Figure 28). 2

Rose gardens have been a popular choice for public gardens in America during the twentieth century. A few of the public rose gardens established in Minnesota include the Veterans Memorial Rose Garden in St. Paul, the Lyndale Park Rose Garden in Minneapolis, and the Wilson Rose Garden at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Curiously, St. Cloud’s new rose garden was not the first to have been planned for the city. In March of 1938, the St. Cloud park board had announced its intention of developing a large rose garden at the southern end of Eastman Park. While remaining undeveloped, it was to have

---

1 David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 9 January 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
included an ornamental iron fence and one thousand tea roses, eighty-eight climbing roses, and four tree roses.³

While HRA crews were used in the initial development of the rose garden and partial funding came from HRA Community Development grants, the Clemens Gardens have mainly been funded by William and Virginia Clemens. The Clemens active financial participation began after Dorraine Umerski of the Granite City Rose Society, a group which had helped to fund the purchase of the original rose bushes, wrote to the Clemens requesting financial support for the purchase of additional roses. Following that request, Mr. Clemens personally called David Morreim and asked for a meeting with the park staff. At this meeting, Mr. Clemens offered to finance the salary for a full-time rose grower and to pay for any expenses incurred during the garden’s construction. During the first year, he paid for the purchase of new roses and donated approximately $6,000 toward the development of the garden.⁴ David Morreim recalled being initially uncomfortable when requesting funds from Clemens. As he stated, “It was kind of like talking to Santa Claus. You did not know how much you should ask for.”⁵

According to William Robinson, gardens are important art forms that need to “…enlist the interest of public-spirited men in many communities so that endowments to carry on the necessary work will become one of the pleasures of the rich….”⁶ The funding of a public garden reflected the Clemens’ civic spirit and their desire to share with the community, qualities which they credit having learned from their parents. William Clemens remembered his father, Pierre, telling him, “William, whatever you do, give back to the community. If they’re good to you, that’s your first obligation.”⁷

William Clemens was born in Fargo, North Dakota, on November 20, 1920. After having moved to Minnesota to attend St. John’s University, he met his future wife, Virginia Weitzel, who was working at

Fandel’s Department store in St. Cloud. Virginia was originally from Melrose, Minnesota. On May 29, 1943, William and Virginia were married. They had four children: Barbara, Mary Sue, Robin, and John.\(^8\)

Generous financial support by the Clemens for this garden was possible due to the success of the family business. In 1952, William Clemens founded Bankers Systems, Inc which initially sold printed material to small financial institutions in Minnesota.\(^9\) The company rapidly grew to become one of St. Cloud’s leading industries, and currently sells forms and promotional materials to financial industries across the United States.\(^10\) In 1995, Bankers Systems was sold to Marathon Fund Limited Partnership II, a Minneapolis-based investment firm. Though he founded a nationally-known corporation, William Clemens, as David Morreim has suggested, will probably be remembered best for his patronage of the Clemens Gardens.\(^11\)

Since 1993, the Clemens have annually contributed one-half million dollars towards the development of the gardens and the salaries of the garden staff.\(^12\) In 1990, enthused by their success, William and Virginia Clemens established an endowment of one million dollars for the continual care and maintenance of the gardens. This endowment has been administered through the Central Community Foundation, which was established in 1985 “...to attract and administer charitable funds for the benefit of the residents of Central Minnesota.”\(^13\) As the gardens expanded, a second million dollars was added to the endowment. The Clemens contribution of over four million dollars is the largest private donation made in Minnesota to a city parks department.\(^14\) The Clemens intend to personally fund the garden’s development through 1999 after which it will be financially supported by the endowment.\(^15\) In 1991, the St. Cloud City Council voted to rename the section of Riverside Park between Riverside Drive and Kilian Boulevard the Clemens Gardens in honor of William and Virginia Clemens.\(^16\)

\(^8\) Kris Bergquist, “The Rose,” St. Cloud Times, 5 December 1993, 1B and 3-9B.
\(^9\) Mary Sue Potter, daughter of William and Virginia Clemens, telephone interview, 5 May 1998, St. Joseph, Minnesota.
\(^10\) Bergquist, 8B.
\(^12\) Morreim, 9 January 1998.
\(^13\) Stearns County Historical Society (SCHS) Subject Files: Clubs and Organizations; Cent. Minn. Community Foundation; 1997 Annual Report.
\(^14\) Falbo, 95.
\(^15\) Ibid.
At the July 20, 1989, meeting of the park and recreation board, a motion was approved to submit a recommendation to the St. Cloud City Council that the rose garden be named for Virginia Clemens.\footnote{St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes, 4 Volumes. July 9, 1954 – February 3, 1998; Volume 4, 14.} Virginia Clemens, incidentally, is known for her love of flowers, people, and "beautiful things."\footnote{Morreim, 19 February 1998.} Virginia Clemens has muscular sclerosis, a condition that was first diagnosed in 1958 after the birth of her youngest child, John. Though she has required continuous medical care and has often been unable to leave her home, friends and family have described Virginia as warm and vivacious with a positive spirit that makes her a pleasure to be around.\footnote{Bergquist, 8B.} In her article, “The Rose,” St. Cloud Times journalist Kris Bergquist described Virginia Clemens as like a rose, a delicate flower that “…doesn’t look tough enough to survive a winter, but every spring it blooms and becomes the beauty of the garden.”\footnote{Bergquist, 9B.}

The Virginia Clemens Rose Garden was constructed as a raised rectangle supported by local stone. The design of the garden, a series of concentric circles, was based on the classic wheel design that can be found in many formal gardens (Figure 29). The influence of this design has extended as far as the urban plans of the early twentieth century civic beautification movement (Figure 30).

The rose, which is the national flower of the United States, is believed to have been one of the first ornamental plants to be cultivated.\footnote{Ogden Tanner, Gardening America: Regional and Historical Influences in the Contemporary Garden (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 85.} Named "Queen of Flowers" by the ancient Greeks, today there are over 15,000 different varieties.\footnote{Tanner, 86.} The Virginia Clemens Rose Garden has featured 1,100 different varieties of tea, floribunda, shrub, and tree roses. A special rose that originated in this garden is the Virginia Clemens rose, a light pink floribunda that was discovered as a sport in 1991. A sport is a branch, shoot, or cane formed on a rose bush that differs enough from that bush to be classified as a mutation.\footnote{“Experience the Gardens,” St. Cloud Times, 19 April 1995.}

Most roses are considered difficult to grow and require special attention. Fortunately, the site of the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden has provided ideal conditions for the cultivation of roses. These
conditions include full sun, good air circulation, and a well-drained soil that is high in organic matter.24 Roses are particularly difficult to grow in Minnesota because of the state’s cold winters. In 1992, when Steven Gessell became the Head Rose Grower, he introduced the Minnesota Tip Method for overwintering roses. This method, which requires tipping and burying the plants in the fall and gradually uncovering and replanting them in the spring, has resulted in a high survival rate for the Clemens Gardens roses. Gessell also began adding several new roses to the collection, including the hardy shrubs that have served as garden hedges.25 Bushes that have proven susceptible to disease or poor in flower production have been replaced. Because the intense heat of the sun at the site has shortened the length of blooms, Gessell has looked for heat tolerant as well as disease resistant varieties when selecting new plants.26

Following the advice of William Robinson and other eminent horticulturists, the roses in the garden have been generously spaced and interplanted with annuals. Purple argeratum, silver dusty miller, white sweet alyssum, and bright blue lobelia have provided a softly-colored frame that has enhanced the beauty of the roses. Reminiscent of a medieval enclosure, a crenellated evergreen hedge of arborvitae “Techney” has formed an evergreen backdrop on the northern and western edges of the garden. This hedge has also served to block the adjacent house and street from view.

The selection of red brick for the paths in the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden and the future Clemens Gardens was appropriately suited to the formality of the design. As suggested by Morreim, the red bricks have added an aristocratic air and a sense of refinement to the atmosphere of the garden.27 During St. Cloud’s early history, red brick was a preferred building material for wealthy residents and, thus, has symbolized culture and refinement for the citizens of St. Cloud. The basket-weave pattern, which is formed by groups of two bricks placed at right angles, was traditionally used in the English cottage gardens that had an influence on the entire site. All of the bricks used in the Virginia Clemens Garden and the Clemens Gardens have come from the St. Cloud Gran-A-Stone Company which sells brick, building

25 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes; Volume 4, 67.
stone, and fireplace materials to commercial and residential construction contractors throughout the Upper Midwest.28

The Clemens Garden’s extensive use of cast iron began in the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden when a fountain and three benches were purchased from the Robinson Iron Company of Alabama City, Alabama. Founded in 1946, Robinson Iron is internationally known for its quality reproductions of cast iron. Approximately $400,000 has been spent on cast iron for the Clemens Gardens. According to the Robinson Iron Company, Munsinger and Clemens Gardens combined have acquired more cast iron features than any other public garden in the Midwest.29

As with red brick, iron has been considered a classic garden element that “glorifies the urban scene.”30 During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as advances in technology made them more affordable and accessible, cast iron became an increasingly popular feature for American gardens.31 As decorative ironwork has become a symbol for the city, it ironically has served as a reminder of the urban life from which public gardens have been created to serve as retreats.

In 1991, a three-tiered Janney Crane fountain from the Robinson Iron Company replaced the pyramidal juniper tree that originally served as the rose garden’s focal point (Figure 31). The three-ton, seven-foot six-inch tall cast iron fountain is a replica of a pre-Civil War fountain found in the Deep South.32 Water has historically been an essential element in gardens. Originally designed to clear insects from the surface of water, fountains did not become ornamental until the Renaissance. As flowing water adds the dimensions of sound and movement to a garden, it helps to create a refreshing atmosphere that “...delights the eye and soothes the soul.”33

Located at the western end of the rose garden in a half-circle seating area known as an exedra, are three cast iron benches framed by an ornamental screen (Figure 32). The benches are Botanical Gardens Settees from the Robinson Iron Company. These are exact replicas of the benches originally designed for

---

28 SCHS Subject Files: Industry – Granite; Industries – St. Cloud Granite.
29 Monica Erion, “Roses are in, weddings out at Clemens Gardens,” St. Cloud Times, 28 July 1996, 6B.
30 Tanner, 87.
32 “Fountain graces Clemens garden,” St. Cloud Times, 14 May 1991, 1B.
33 Tanner, 88.
the Shaw Botanical Gardens in St. Louis, Missouri, the oldest public garden in the United States.\textsuperscript{34} The benches in the Clemens Gardens were intended to function as sculptural elements as well as places to sit. As suggested by an anonymous poet, “a garden without benches is like a theater without seats.”\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Morreim, 9 January 1998.
Figure 29. Stanley Park, an "Italian garden" by Thomas H. Mawson, in Blackpool, England. 1922. Reprinted from Chadwick, 234.

Figure 30. A theoretical garden city proposed by Ebenezer Howard for Letchworth, England. 1902. Reprinted from Stanley Buder, Visionaries and Planners.
Figure 31. Janney Crane Fountain.
Courtesy of Robinson Iron Company
Figure 32. Botanical Gardens Settee.
Courtesy of Robinson Iron Company.
Chapter X

CLEMENS GARDENS: REST AREA GARDEN

In 1992, as the number of visitors to Munsinger and Clemens Gardens increased, concerns about parking, vandalism, and public restroom facilities led to the development of a Master Plan. Created by a professional landscape architect, the Master Plan was formulated to "...provide direction for all future development."1 Though adapted and revised as the gardens were developed, many of the improvements to the gardens were based on the Master Plan. These improvements included the establishment of clear entrance points at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Kilian Boulevard and at Riverside Drive and Thirteenth Street; the identification and definition of the park edge; the strengthening of the link, both physically and aesthetically, between the upper and lower gardens; the development of the upper garden to include new gardens, a restroom, a seating area, and a drop-off site; the creation of a buffer between the gardens and the two homes abutting park property; the clear marking of street parking; and the development of entrance or identification signs, informational maps, and parking directions.2 The importance of the Mississippi River to both gardens was reflected in the provisions for views of the river and the incorporation of "water features" to the Clemens Gardens.3

Coinciding with the formation of a Master Plan, a series of four designs were created for the Clemens Gardens. The first two designs were the "River Concept," which was to be a linear formal garden, and the "Flower Concept," which was to incorporate an informal garden with curvilinear paths and a seating area. These designs were eventually combined with public input to create a third design, known as the "New River Concept." The final "Illustrative Master Plan," which was based on the three previous designs, led to formation of the remaining Clemens Gardens. Features of this design included the

---
1 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Munsinger and Clemens Gardens Master Plan, 1.
2 Ibid., 3.
3 Ibid., 2.
establishment of a small orchard on the upper terrace, low-growing evergreens and flowers on the Kilian Boulevard median, and a formal walkway linking the rose garden to the other Clemens Gardens.4

The first garden to be developed after the formation of the Master Plan was the Rest Area Garden (Figure 33). The original design for this garden called for construction of a restroom building near the western edge of the upper terrace and formation of a grass mound surrounded by paths and tree groves on the east side of the building. Diagonal paths were to be established in order to provide circulation routes and to connect the Formal Garden and the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden.5 In February of 1992, Mr. Clemens had presented a proposal to the park and recreation board for the design and construction of restroom facilities near the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden. Included with this proposal, Mr. Clemens indicated that he would fund the entire project and would provide for maintenance of the building.6

As changes to public areas can affect an entire community, there was controversy regarding the development of the Clemens Gardens. Indeed, controversy over developments in St. Cloud parks was not new. During the 1960s and 1970s, for example, plans for the addition of a wading pool and parking lot to Riverside Park had created concerns regarding safety and the preservation of nature.7 With the proposal for a restroom building, neighbors living near to the Clemens Gardens were concerned about losing their view of the river and some citizens feared that a building might attract criminal activity. Following public hearings, modifications were made to the original plan which reduced the size of the restroom building and moved its location closer to the hill’s edge. Built by Schoenberg Construction Company during the summer and fall of 1992, the restroom was constructed of split-face reinforced concrete with a roof of hand-split cedar shakes supported by cedar brackets.8 In response to concerns regarding security, a private company was contracted to make periodic checks on the gardens and security was provided for evenings and weekends.9

In 1993, the Rest Area Garden’s flower beds and red brick paths were established and a seating plaza and trellis were constructed near the restroom building. The Rest Area Garden’s flower beds featured

---

4 Ibid., 4+.
5 Ibid., 5-6.
6 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes, 4 Volumes, July 9, 1954 – February 3, 1998; IV, 93.
7 Stearns County Historical Society Subject Files: Parks and Recreation; St. Cloud – Parks and Recreation.
8 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes; IV, 104-105.
annuals whose blossoms display the soft pastels that are Mrs. Clemens favorite colors. Plants with deeper colored blooms have been established in flower beds below the cedar trellis, the only area in the Clemens Gardens that has allowed for the cultivation of shade plants. The cedar trellis was constructed primarily to provide privacy and to serve as a screen for the western side of the building. Trellises have been used since at least as early as the First Century B.C. when they were prominent features in the gardens of upper-class patrician homes in Pompeii, Italy.

The cast-iron gate located on the Rest Area Garden’s eastern boundary was installed in October of 1994. This gate is eight-feet in height with five-foot side sections, weights 3000 to 4000 pounds, and cost $45,000. Intended to serve as the grand entrance to the Clemens Gardens, the original plan called for the fence to extend the entire length of the garden and to incorporate seven entrances. The palisade style of the design, suggesting medieval enclosures and military fortifications, was intentionally kept light and open so that the garden could be glimpsed through the ironwork. Gates, of course, can act as transitions between the interior space of a garden and its surrounding environment. Reflecting the democratic spirit of the St. Cloud community, the gates at Munsinger and Clemens Gardens’ have remained open during the garden season.

---

9 David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 19 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
12 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes; IV, 111.
Chapter XI

CLEMENS GARDENS: WHITE GARDEN

In 1993, David Morreim designed an herb garden for the narrow rectangular plot south of the Formal Garden. After discovering that Mrs. Clemens was not particularly fond of herbs, a new plan was developed for a white garden that would incorporate cast iron ornamentation with a mixture of annuals, perennials, and shrubs. Based on the famous White Garden at Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, England, the Clemens White Garden is the only known public garden in the state of Minnesota to have focused its design on the color white (Figure 34).

The White Garden at Sissinghurst Castle was created in the late 1940s by the English writer, Vita Sackville-West, and her husband, Sir Harold Nicolson (Figure 35). The development of the grounds at Sissinghurst Castle began during the 1930s, shortly after the Nicolson’s had purchased the property. As the castle was on the direct flight path of German war planes headed for London, the establishment of the White Garden’s flower beds was postponed until after the end of World War II. Vita Sackville-West’s plans for the castle grounds were influenced by the work of Gertrude Jekyll. Jekyll was a late nineteenth century English garden expert who advocated the development of small cottage gardens that were overflowing with flowers. One of the first garden designers to form single-color gardens, Jekyll promoted the theory that monochromatic color schemes provide a sense of harmony when a wide variety of shapes,

---


88
sizes, and textures are used. Jekyll’s naturalistic style was inspired by the work of French Impressionist painters, whose attempts to capture a fleeting moment relied on an expressive use of color.4

In September of 1994, and through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Clemens, David Morreim traveled to England and Europe where he visited Sissinghurst Castle and several other famous gardens including that of the French Impressionist painter Claude Monet, in Giverny, France. After spending a week at Sissinghurst Castle, Morreim returned to St. Cloud with new ideas, many of which were incorporated into the Clemens White Garden. Among them were creating an outdoor room by enclosing the garden with an evergreen hedge, establishing urns and finials as the garden’s focal points and decorative accents, and labeling a select group of the garden’s plants with their common and botanical names.5

While the White Garden has served as a transitional space between the vibrant color displays of the Formal Garden and the Perennial Garden, the central focus of the design was to display the wide range of white flowers that can be grown in central Minnesota.6 White, which is created by the total reflection of all color producing light rays, has symbolized truth, purity, and innocence. Enhanced by the silver-green foliage of accent plants, the abundance of crisp white flowers has created a strong visual impact since the garden’s inception. Considered a versatile color, silver has traditionally been used to provide a foil to all-white color schemes.7 Because of the reflective quality of white flowers in moonlight, white gardens have often been referred to as “moon gardens.”8 The luminous glow of the Clemens White Garden on moonlit nights has added a special “otherworldly” quality to the entire site.9

The arborvitae “Techney” hedge that was used to form the White Garden’s boundaries has served both practical and decorative purposes. Originally constructed for security, hedges were established in gardens to provide a barrier against wild animals and human enemies. Reflecting the definition of “gart,” the Old High German root for “garden” which means enclosure or safe place, the hedges in the Clemens

---

5 “The White Garden.”
6 Ibid.
8 Fell, 92.
9 David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 19 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
Gardens have served as reminders of the human need for enclosure and security. In America, the growth of "gated communities," housing developments that are fenced and secured, has suggested a desire for protection from what many view as an increasingly hostile and violent world. In the Clemens Gardens, hedges were established partly to function as windbreaks, protecting the plants from the sometimes harsh winds of the site's large open space, and partly to serve as solid evergreen backdrops that add to the crispness of the garden's formal design. Andrew Jackson Downing, who favored the use of arborvitae for hedges, described them as "...one of the most superb hedges, without the least care in trimming; the foliage growing thickly down to the very ground; and being evergreen, the hedge remains clothed the whole year." In relation to size, the White Garden has acquired more decorative accents than any of the other Clemens Gardens. Cast iron finials and urns, for example, were used to mark both entrances to the garden and four large planters were placed at its outer corners to serve as anchors. Container plantings were first recorded in classical Greece and Rome. During the Festival of Adonis, a Greek youth who was killed by a wild boar, potted plants were used to symbolize impermanence. The cast iron bowers located at the east and west ends of the White Garden were installed in August of 1994. These bowers were specially designed for the White Garden by the Robinson Iron Company and were intended to serve as both shelters and decorative features. While garden bowers primarily function as places for rest and contemplation, they have also served as supports for vines. Rose-covered arbors have been a traditional feature of English cottage gardens as they add fragrance and romance. The rose that has been established on the White Garden's bower is the same variety that has been grown in the White Garden at Sissinghurst Castle since 1950.

11 Lecture by William T. Morgan, Professor of American Studies, American Studies 550: Urban Heritage, St. Cloud State University, Spring Quarter 1997.
14 Fell, 101.
15 "The White Garden."
Figure 34. Clemens White Garden. c.1995.
Chapter XII

Clemens Gardens: Perennial Garden

The Clemens Perennial Garden was established in 1995 in the section immediately south of the White Garden and adjacent to the terrace (Figure 36). Prior to its development, Mr. Clemens commissioned a large fountain from the Robinson Iron Company to serve as the garden’s focal point. This fountain was an exact replica of a Civil War fountain located in front of the Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery, Alabama (Figure 37). Installed in April of 1995, the fountain is twelve feet in height and has a twelve-foot concrete basin with an ornamental iron rim. Based on the Formal Garden, Morreim’s design for the Perennial Garden was composed of a central circular focal point surrounded by four flower-bordered rectangular sections that were separated by red brick paths. Reflecting American ingenuity, Morreim adapted the formal design of the garden to its site. In order to maintain the strong axis that was to connect the six separate gardens and to use the available space to its fullest advantage, the sections adjacent to Kilian Boulevard were designed to be significantly smaller than those near the hill.

Following the advice of William Robinson, who considered flowers the heart and soul of any garden, the Clemens Perennial Garden has focused on the lavish display of perennials that are suited to central Minnesota. While the layout of the garden retained the formal structure of the other Clemens Gardens, the design of its flower beds was the most informal and naturalistic. The drifts of color, billowing forms, and extension of plants onto the garden’s paths directly reflected the English Cottage Garden style.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, English Gardens typically incorporated large perennial borders

---

1 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department: Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes, 4 Volumes, July 9, 1954 – February 3, 1998; IV, 11.
composed of loose informal plantings.\(^3\) The English Cottage Garden style, which first became popular during the last half of the nineteenth century, used carefully selected perennials to provide a lavish display of color.\(^4\) The subtle blend of color, texture, flower, and foliage that is central to English Cottage gardens formed the basis of Morreim's design for the Clemens Perennial Garden.\(^5\)

The establishment of a garden dedicated to perennials has reflected the current emphasis in American gardens on the use of native plants.\(^6\) In order to celebrate America's natural heritage while protecting the fragility of the environment, the Perennial Garden has focused on hardy Midwestern plants such as yarrow, purple coneflower, and black-eyed Susan. Since many are native prairie plants, the garden has served as a reminder of the vast prairies of Minnesota's past.\(^7\)

Another special feature of the Perennial Garden is the topiary accents which were established in each corner of the garden. Topiary is used in gardens as a focal point and as a foil for the freer form of plants. As plants considered suitable for topiary need to be dense and slow growing, their presence suggests a sense of permanence and stability in a garden. The art of topiary can be traced to ancient Rome where trees and shrubs were first cut for ornamental purposes. In the garden of the ancient Roman writer, Pliny, for example, evergreen plants were used to form the letters in the names of Pliny and his gardener.\(^8\)

---

\(^5\) David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 19 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
\(^8\) Penelope Hobhouse, A Book of Gardening (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986), 36.
Figure 36. Perennial Garden viewed from the Treillage Garden. August 1997.
Figure 37. Clemens Perennial Garden fountain, c. 1995.
Chapter XIII

CLEMENS GARDENS: TREILLAGE GARDEN

The final garden to be developed for the Clemens Gardens was the Treillage Garden. Construction began in 1996 with the installation of a large cast-iron treillage and four independent flower beds (Figure 38). Two years later, in April of 1998, a large fountain featuring a Grecian woman with an urn was installed beneath the dome of the treillage.1 Defined as a lightweight structure of posts and rails, a treillage functions as a support for vines, espaliers, and wall trees.2 The cast-iron treillage that serves as the garden’s main feature was designed and constructed by the Robinson Iron Company. Modeled after an arbor located at Easton Lodge in England, the treillage is one hundred and four-feet in length with a twenty-foot central dome. Because its construction involved extensive engineering, the Clemens sent David Morreim and contractor Gerry Schoenberg of the Schoenberg Construction Company to the Robinson Iron foundry in Alabama to inspect the treillage and to make any necessary changes prior to its shipment.3

Suiting the formality of the Clemens Gardens, the classic design of the treillage incorporated intersecting barrel vaults, a large central dome, narrow columns with cantilevered Corinthian capitals, and walls with arched windows that frame views of the garden. Reflecting an American belief in the sacredness of space, the design for the treillage resembles the cruciform crossplans of Italian Renaissance churches.4 The impression of grand and magnificent space that is created by the treillage suggests the

---

1 David T. Morreim, Nursery Supervisor, interview, 19 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.
interior of such famous Italian Renaissance churches as St. Peter’s in Rome (1546-64) and Sto. Spirito in Florence (1446-late 15th century).

The Treillage Garden’s flower beds were developed as four single-color beds of red, blue/purple, yellow, and pink. The juxtaposition of primary colors in this garden created a strong visual contrast that has intensified the varying hues. The incorporation of grey tones into the planting scheme provided a neutral backdrop that also served to strengthen the intensity of the colors. The inspiration for the design came from the success of the White Garden and from Morreim’s visits to single-color gardens in England and Europe. At the Hidcote Manor Gardens in England, for example, a red border forms an essential element of the garden’s design. Also, during the middle of the twentieth century, monochrome flower beds of red or white were incorporated into Munsinger Gardens’ floral display.

The Treillage Garden’s focus on the display of color has reflected the work of the French Impressionist painter Claude Monet, whose garden Morreim visited in 1994. Monet, who considered the earth a living canvas, referred to his garden as his greatest masterpiece. In an effort to create moods or impressions in his garden art, Monet planted zones of blue in the east and red in the west to coincide with the colors of the rising and the setting of the sun. As the color layout in the Clemens Treillage Garden placed yellow in the east and red in the west, its design was also related to the cycle of the day.

Flower beds of the Treillage Garden are formed around a central key-shaped greenspace whose curved outline mirrors the dome and vaults on the treillage. In formal gardens, lawns are considered integral to the success of the entire garden. Louis XIV’s gardens at Versailles, for example, were filled with carpets of green known as “tapis verts.” Also, in English cottage gardens, grass was used to provide a contrast of shape and color to the abundant floral displays.

Installed in 1997, the balustrade that extends along the northern edge of the Treillage Garden was modeled after an 1890s balustrade located at the Philadelphia Water Works in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Below the balustrade, a red brick stairway was constructed to connect the upper and lower terraces and to

---

9. Thomas, 84.
function as a sculptural accent for the gardens. According to David Morreim, the view of the Clemens Gardens from the top of these steps is as impressive as any of the grand vistas found at many of the more formal gardens in England. As Morreim stated, "that to me rivals anything in the great gardens of Britain" (Figure 39).  

Two lots on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Kilian Boulevard, formerly owned by St. Cloud resident Walter Kirchoff, were purchased in 1992 by Mr. Clemens in order to expand the gardens and to provide for signage. In 1975, lots had been available to the city for purchase at a reduced price, but the park board chose not to buy the property because it felt the lots would not be of much use to the city unless those to the immediate north were also available. A large cutflower garden is currently located on the site.

Adjacent to the western edge of the Clemens Gardens is the Hillside Garden. Developed in 1992 as a woodland garden, this area has been used as a transitional space between Munsinger and Clemens Gardens (Figure 40). Large areas of the hill were devoted to shrubs and a hosta glade was developed along the long path that parallels Riverside Drive and mirrors the course of the Mississippi River. On the northern end of the slope, large beds of shrub rose, daylily, and iris were established to provide privacy for the neighboring home at the corner of Riverside Drive and Thirteenth Street. Immediately to the south, a series of crescent beds were formed to take advantage of the afternoon sun and to provide a colorful connection between the two gardens.

---

11 Ibid.
12 St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department; Park and Recreation Board Meeting Minutes, 4 Volumes, July 9, 1954 – February 3, 1998; 107.
13 Ibid., 67-78.
Figure 38. View of the Clemens Treillage Garden from the southeast corner. c.1997.
Courtesy of the St. Cloud Convention and Visitors Bureau.
Figure 39. The Clemens Gardens. c.1997.
Figure 40. Hillside Garden. August 1997.
CONCLUSION

In an effort to enhance the beauty of the gardens and to strengthen their role as a place of tranquility and delight, the St. Cloud Parks Department has continued to develop ideas for future improvements to Munsinger and Clemens Gardens. A major goal is to build new gutter-connected greenhouses and to move the greenhouses and other service buildings to an open area south of the University bridge.¹ A goal for Munsinger Gardens is renovation of the spring-fed pool, which would involve removing the chainlink fence surrounding the pool and replacing it with a more natural enclosure.²

Known as “The Gardens 2000,” the focus for the Clemens Gardens since its inception has been on completing the first phase of development by the year 2000.³ Remaining improvements to this garden include the addition of a twenty-four foot fountain to the Formal Garden and development of a historical area between the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden and the Rest Area Garden. According to Mary Sue Potter, daughter of William and Virginia Clemens, the construction of a historical area will be the final development to the garden.⁴ Tentative plans for this area include installation of granite historical markers and memorial busts of the garden’s patrons, William and Virginia Clemens. The Parks Department would like to eventually acquire the lot and home at 1517 Kilian Boulevard. As it is adjacent to the Treillage Garden and visible from Michigan Avenue, the garden staff would like to develop this Queen Anne-style home as a Visitor’s Center for both gardens.⁵

¹ St. Cloud Parks and Recreation; Munsinger and Clemens Gardens Master Plans.
⁴ Mary Sue Potter, daughter of William and Virginia Clemens, telephone interview, 5 May 1998.
⁵ Morreim, 9 January 1998.
According to Larry W. Haws, Superintendent of Parks and Recreation for the city of St. Cloud, the main challenge for the future will be to stabilize funding for the gardens.\(^6\) Financing for both gardens will be combined in the year 2000 but currently, ninety percent of Munsinger Garden’s financial support comes from the City and all funding for development of the Clemens Gardens comes from the Clemens family.\(^7\) Superintendent Haws anticipates that future funds for the maintenance of the gardens will derive from a variety of sources. In addition to continued City funding and the Clemens endowment, the gardens are expected to receive support from the sale of plants, the use of the Special Events Area, and the Adopt-A-Park program.

St. Cloud’s Munsinger and Clemens Gardens have become a major public landmark and have made manifold contributions of permanent cultural value to the city. According to Helen S. Wheeler, as the gardens have given display to a wide variety of plants suited to central Minnesota, they have been simultaneously an excellent horticultural tool and have done “...a tremendous amount of good to the whole area.”\(^8\) The gardens have also served to improve the quality of life for St. Cloud residents and for visitors to the gardens. As Doris Stone suggested in her text, *The Great Public Gardens of the Eastern United States*, “Plants, with their quiet beauty, help to keep us sane in a mad, violent, materialistic world.”\(^9\)

While the gardens have celebrated the community and its ideals, they have also provided essential public open spaces in which visitors can relax and become refreshed. As the August 1972 St. Cloud Metropolitan Area Planning Commission’s report on Park Land Priorities suggested, the active development of a park system improves the quality of life for city residents by providing relief from the stress of urban life, fostering a greater sense of community identity, and increasing the understanding of the need to preserve the area’s natural resources.\(^10\) According to Spiro Kostoff, an American landscape architect, greenspaces in urban settings provide residents with a “precious link” to the natural world. “As far as we may go with our manmade environment of tightly-packed skyscrapers, elaborate skyway systems,


\(^{8}\) Helen S. Wheeler, former Munsinger Gardens volunteer, telephone interview, 12 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.

and climate-controlled environments, we still have a desire to be connected to the earth, to Mother Nature, to green and growing plants that are essential to life.”

Munsinger and Clemens Gardens have also provided an economic benefit to the community by encouraging tourism. For example, the gardens are visited annually by an estimated 300,000 people, many of whom are from outside the city. Jay Vachal, the Executive Director of the St. Cloud Visitor’s Bureau, cited the gardens as the biggest attraction for the St. Cloud area. In fact, the 1998 Visitors Guide to St. Cloud and Central Lakes Area in Minnesota refers to the gardens as one of the state’s largest garden attractions, bringing in visitors from all over the world.

As suggested by Frederick Law Olmsted, the highest form of art is that which is made for the public and can be enjoyed by all. St. Cloud’s Munsinger and Clemens Gardens are free and open to the public. Because a city’s commitment to public open space reflects its level of commitment to city residents, the high quality and continued development of these gardens reflects St. Cloud’s dedication to enhancing the urban environment for the benefit of the entire community.

St. Cloud’s Munsinger and Clemens Gardens have become a beautiful public legacy and have served as a fixture of community life and a source of civic pride. The combination of public support through federal and local programs, the trust fund established by William E. and Virginia Rose Clemens, and the dedication of park staff suggests that the gardens will continue to be cared for and will provide future generations with a beautiful setting in which to refresh the mind and soothe the soul. As Susan Davis Price has stated in Minnesota Gardens, the Munsinger and Clemens Gardens are a “...gem among Minnesota’s public gardens.”

---

10 Central Minnesota Historical Center; S-1917; 1972 St. Cloud Metropolitan Area Planning Commission.
11 Spiro Kostof, videocassette.
13 Falbo, 92.
14 Sutton, S. B., ed, Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted’s Writings on City Landscapes (Alpine Press Inc., 1971), 204.
REFERENCES

Books


Cleveland, (Horace) W. S. *A FewHints on Landscape Gardening in the West*. Chicago: Janson McClurg and Co., 1871.


ARTICLES

**Minnesota Horticulturist**


Bass, Paul G. “Building the Lily Pool.” 60 (April 1932): 75-76.


-------------.


--------.


--------.


“Gardens to Visit Around the Upper Midwest.” 118 (March 1990): 30-34.


--------.


--------.


Moersch M.D., Frederick P. “Health and Contentment in Gardening.” 7 (May 1943): 75-76.


--------.


Newspaper Articles


"Barden Park Tops Group’s Meeting: South Side Activists to Discuss Restoration at Annual Gathering." St. Cloud Times, 18 April 1997, 3A.


"City Park Department Helps Beautify City." St. Cloud Daily Times, 6 August 1951, 4.

"City Park To Be Left As Is.” St. Cloud Daily Times, 4 January 1972, 5.


“City Spends $36,000 for 2 New Parks.” *St. Cloud Daily Times*, 16 September 1997, 3A.


“Consider neighbors in park expansion plan.” *St. Cloud Times*, 21 May 1992, 10A.


“Council Sets Munsinger’s Wedding Rates.” *St. Cloud Daily Times*, 10 January 1995, 3A.

“Council Shift OKs Empire Park Sale.” *St. Cloud Daily Times*, 24 September 1968, 1+

Donatelle, Kristine. “Adoptive volunteers keep St. Cloud’s parks in full bloom.” *St. Cloud Times*, 26 May 1997, 1A.


--------. “City explores preservation of parkland.” *St. Cloud Times*, 28 April 1996, 3A.

--------. “City sells clothes, bricks for Munsinger Gardens.” *St. Cloud Times*, 12 April 1995, 3A.

--------. “Munsinger foundation won’t get city funds yet.” *St. Cloud Times*, 7 February 1995, 3A.

--------. Survey finds interest in $6 million park improvement plan.” *St. Cloud Times*, 9 July 1997, 3A.

--------. “Wedding bells ring early for new year.” *St. Cloud Times*, 28 December 1995, 3A.

Drazenovich, Dana. “Success precedes Munsinger plant sale.” *St. Cloud Times*, 13 September 1995, 1B.


--------. “Munsinger Gardens’ fund grows greener with sale.” *St. Cloud Times*, 5 September 1990, 1B.

--------. “New gazebo rising with volunteers at Munsinger Gardens.” *St. Cloud Daily Times*, 20 November 1989, 1C.


Erion, Monica. “Roses are in, weddings out at Clemens Gardens.” St. Cloud Times, 28 July 1996, 6B.


Johnson, Kendra E. “Munsinger sale draws thousands.” St. Cloud Times, 14 September 1997, 3A.


Larson, Tom. “Park may limit weddings.” St. Cloud Times, 19 September 1991, 1A.


“Park Board Recommends Park Land Sale to HRA.” St. Cloud Daily Times, 10 September 1968, 3.


“Park History.” St. Cloud Daily Times, 16 May 1946, 12.


“Park planning survey takes off.” St. Cloud Times, 9 May 1997, 6A.


“Pierz Park Sale OK’d For Hospital Parking.” St. Cloud Daily Times, 4 September 1968, 1.

Pike, Carole. “It’s time to chop and shop.” St. Cloud Times, 12 September 1997, 8A.


"Planners Study Bid to Vacate North Park Site." St. Cloud Daily Times, 26 February 1964, 3.


"Proposals to preserve gardens are reasonable." St. Cloud Times, 13 December 1994, 9A.


"Riverside Park Funds are Halted." St. Cloud Daily Times, 22 October 1971, 1.


"Rose gardens would be boon to city." St. Cloud Times, 8 June 1992, 9A.

"Rule Key to 2-Bond Vote?" St. Cloud Daily Times, 21 June 1965, 1.


Seymour, Rita. "Gardens offer relaxing refuge from worries." St. Cloud Times, 3 July 1994, 1B.


Stensland, Jessie. “Rotary presents painting to mayor.” St. Cloud Times, 11 January 1995, 1B.


Tonsali, Sonseehary. “Award acknowledges expertise of Munsinger Garden supervisor.” St. Cloud Times, 29 July 1994, 3A.


“Volunteers to Plant 1,500 Trees.” St. Cloud Times, 18 April 1997, 3A.


General Articles


“The Debt of America to Andrew Jackson Downing.” Garden and Forest 8 (29 May 1895): 211.


"What is a Park?" Nation 118 (14 May 1924): 550.

Stearns County Historical Society

Subject Files:
Natural Resources, Geology, Geography:
   Nature-St. Cloud Climatological Data
   Natural Resources, Geology & Geography of Stearns Co.

Parks and Recreation:
   Park Department Annual Report
   St. Cloud - Parks and Recreation
   St. Cloud - Recreation
   St. Cloud - Park & Rec. Dept.
   Parks - St. Cloud Clemens Gardens
   Munsinger Gardens
   Riverside Park

Transportation:
   Trans. - Water Mississippi River

Industry - Granite:
   Granite - General (2 Files)
   Industries - St. Cloud Granite

Industry - Logging & Lumbering:
   Logging Industry
   St. Cloud H. J. Andersen Sawmill
   Lumber Companies

Photographers:
   Guy, Colie
   Hall, Myron

Buildings & Structures:
   Bridges 10th street bridge St. Cloud, MN
   Tenth Street Bridge 2 lane/4 lane controversy
   St. Cloud 10th St. Dam
   Dams 10th Street - St. Cl.

Clubs and Organizations:
   Cent. Minn. Community Foundation
   Rotary
   Rotary Club St. Cloud
   St. Cloud Flower & Garden Club

Depression:
   Depression
   Depression Agriculture
   Civilian Conservation Corps
   Relief Work Administration
   Public Works Administration (P.W.A.)
   Depression - WPA

Art:
   Art WPA

Art: People in, Artists:
   Petheo, Bela
Industry:

St. Cl. Ind. Gran-A-Stone
St. Cloud History:
East St. Cloud

Biographies:

Clemens, William
Munsinger, Joseph P.
Munsinger, William Henry
Morreim, David
Guy, Albert
Guy, Colie

Photographs:

Park, East Side, Munsinger Park
Utilities, St. Cloud Dams, 10th St. Bridge

Archives:


St. Cloud Park Board Records. St. Cloud, MN, 1944-1950; Correspondence, reports & printed matter. 526/C-1H-6.

St. Cloud Park Department, St. Cloud, MN. Records, 1918-1974. 135/C-1B-2.

Maps & Architectural Plans:

Parks (February 1918). G 4144 S2 1918 G52.
Parks and Parkways (1918). G 4144 S2 G52.
Plat Books (counties)

Central Minnesota Historical Center


Physical Accomplishments: Minnesota Works Progress Administration; c.1939.

St. Cloud Metropolitan Area Planning Commission Park Land Priorities; August 1972.

St. Cloud Metropolitan Area Transportation and Planning Study; April 1972 and August 1972.

St. Cloud Park and Recreation Department

Maps and Plans

Munsinger and Clemens Gardens Master Plans

INTERVIEWS

Bensen, Helen, former Munsinger Garden volunteer, telephone interview, 4 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Dierkhising, Julie, Munsinger Garden Horticulturist, interview, 24 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Dubbin, John E., retired Munsinger Garden Foreman, interview, 26 February 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Ethen, Roger A., gardener for St. Cloud Parks and Recreation Department, interview, 4 March 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.


Potter, Mary Sue, daughter of William and Virginia Clemens, telephone interview, 5 May 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.

Thielman, Robert J., interview, 4 March 1998, St. Cloud, Minnesota.