

The Shakespeare Garden

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Published 2006

You may have driven countless times by the living time capsule within the hawthorn hedges on Evanston's Northwestern University campus.

This summer, let the Shakespeare Garden take you back in time.

Shakespeare's Garden

The year was 1915 and the newly formed Garden Club of Evanston was searching for a project. The ladies thought they might create a Shakespeare garden containing flowers mentioned in the bard's works.

Not only were Shakespeare gardens popular at the time, especially with the 300th anniversary of the playwright's death approaching, but the project would also show solidarity for Great Britain and other allies embroiled in faraway World War I.

"We were trying to have this peace in some forgotten corner of the world," said Garden Club spokeswoman Ginny Noyes. "It was a recognition of all that was going on in the war-torn world."

Famed landscape architect Jens Jensen designed the garden, although it took the gentle coercion of well-connected club members to get his assistance. At least that's how the legend has passed down through the generations of garden club members, said Shakespeare Garden co-chair Ruth Conner.

Visitors can enter the Shakespeare Garden through the double rows of hawthorn hedges that outline it. Jensen envisioned the hawthorns, which came from seedlings in France, as a symbolic bridge between the prairie and formal garden. Some of the same hawthorns are still flourishing today and helped land the garden on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

Celebrated English garden designer John Brookes visited the spot in 1990 and suggested changes to make it more authentic to his homeland, such as adding antique brick edging to the beds and mixing plantings to create a natural look.

Within the insulating hedges, old-fashioned flowers like golden pansies and purple foxglove spill out of the beds. However, time-honored favorites like roses, clematis, daisies and lilies are also joined by new cultivars, such as a hollyhock whose blossom is a curious black.

"The original concept was to just use flowers that were mentioned in Shakespeare's

poetry," Noyes said.

"But of course, the green and pleasant isle of England encourages many things that don't work in the wild Midwestern landscape," said Noyes. "From the beginning, we realized we can't limit ourselves to that kind of garden."

So each woman leaves her imprint on the Shakespeare Garden. Conner and her co-chair Paula Twilling, for example, have focused on adding ornamental herbs.

"When it was first planted, the experts told the women to experiment," Conner said.

Garden club members volunteer to weed, plant and prune, although they hire crews to do the heavy work. It takes \$10,000 a year to run the Shakespeare Garden, and the club raises money through a biannual housewalk.

"We're never there weeding that somebody doesn't come in and say thank you," Noyes said.

Club president Reed Mitchell Hagee said Northwestern students often stop by, as well, and a few of them have even become garden club members.

"We love it when the students sit and study and listen to the breeze," said Hagee, whose own parents celebrated their wedding in the garden in 1933.

For Conner, the garden's charm lies in its celebrated history.

"I like thinking that women, for 90 years, have been tending the very same space," she said. "They walked the same paths and worked the same soil we're working now."

Earlier Version of the History

The gift of The Garden Club of Evanston to the community is Shakespeare Garden. The Club was founded in 1915 with twenty-five members, and almost immediately the garden was conceived as its project. Club members have lovingly supported it ever since with their knowledge, talent, and travail. The history of the garden blends with the history of the club.

In 1915, sympathies in the United States were with a Great Britain at war. Also, the three-hundredth anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare was approaching, and preparations were being made for its celebration in these two English-speaking countries. It seemed appropriate to create a secluded haven that would show our empathy with the country of Shakespeare, a place suggesting Ann Hathaway's garden in Stratford-on-Avon.

But, alas, a garden cannot be produced without money. So a garden fair was held in May of 1916 in downtown Raymond Park. Growers flocked to the spot with trucks full of pansies and geraniums for consignment sale. Marshall Field's sent flower containers.

Club members, their gardeners, maids, chauffeurs, and relatives lugged in greenhouse plants, bird baths, bird houses, children's toys, sandwiches, salads, and homemade pies. Local establishments delivered hot dogs, buns, and coffee. The Boy Scouts raised the flag, and the mayor made an opening speech. Thus, the color and bustle of a village fair became an official reality, and subsequently an annual event for many years.

For Shakespeare Garden itself, Northwestern University set aside a plot of land near Lake Michigan, north of the end of Garrett Place, measuring seventy by one hundred feet. The formal Tudor garden was designed by the well-known landscape architect Jens Jensen, who was also largely responsible for the outstanding forest preserve system in the Chicago area and for its beloved lakefront parks. Mr. Jensen studied Bacon's essay *Of Gardens* and a list of appropriate flowers that came from the Shakespeare Society in England. Members of the club helped him by researching the pages of the Bard.

Mr. Jensen planned hedges of *Craetagus crugalli*, or hedge hawthorn, to form a double wall around the garden, insuring its hushed privacy and sense of insulation. The outer hedge was eight feet tall, and the inner, six feet. The original hedges still shade the stone walks laid between them. Eight large flowerbeds were set inside these verdant walls. The four outside beds were put together posy-fashion, with such plants as peonies, fleur-de-lis, columbine, and rue. The four inner beds echoed the outer beds. Other flowers planned were aconite, balm, broom, carnation, cockle, cowslip, crow flower, crown imperial lily, daffodil, daisy, sea holly, flax, harebell, larks heel, Madonna lily, mallow, calendula, marjoram, sweet pea, poppy, violet, and wormwood. There were twenty-nine in all. At the west corners were Paul's scarlet hawthorns, or May trees, replaced later by Washington hawthorns.

The first flowers, violas, were planted by members and their daughters. Mr. Jensen had spoken to garden club members about the fact that changes had taken place in the cultivation of flowers since Shakespeare's time. He also pointed out that many English flowers could not stand the rigors of our winters, nor of our springs, with their extremes of climate. Still, he said, plants are able to make wonderful adaptations. He advised the club to get young plants and seeds, to feed them well and nurse them carefully, and to experiment. So the garden became something of a laboratory and learning center. The plantings have been changed somewhat since the garden was designed, but always in keeping with the writings of Shakespeare, and with the dream of the early club members for a true and fragrant English garden, one which Shakespeare could have been describing when he wrote,

"In emerald tufts, flowers purple blue, and white;
Like sapphire, pearl and rich embroidery."

In 1920 the garden was at last complete. As one early member said, it had been "loved into existence." By 1929 enough money had been raised to buy and install the stone bench at the west end, which was carved in a pattern suggested by an Elizabethan embroidery, as well as the fountain at the east end. The bronze and stone memorial attached to the fountain was designed and donated by Hubert Burnham in memory of his mother, an early garden chairman. She was the wife of Chicago architect Daniel

Burnham, who was internationally known. The French-American sculptor Leon Hermant fashioned the bronze plaque that crowns the monument with the face of Shakespeare and quotations from *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Winter's Tale*. The memorial was ceremonially presented to Northwestern University in 1930.

In its ninety-one years of existence, The Garden Club of Evanston has supported other projects, but Shakespeare Garden remains its principal project. After several years of urging by the Evanston Preservation Commission, Shakespeare Garden was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in November, 1988. The garden has continually seen club members toiling with hoes, clippers, trowels, and brooms. In the winters, it has been used by Northwestern students for bird-banding projects. In warmer weather, painting classes have set up their easels there. During the 1920s and 1930s a group of wives of university professors used to meet there informally to take in the charms and fragrances of the differing patterns of blossoms, to keep track of the birds who came to eat the wild strawberries and hawthorn fruit, or to watch geese flying past in formation. A number of years ago, a student who had never heard of the garden happened to wander in. For a heart-stopping moment, she imagined she had actually come across the secret, storybook garden of Frances Hodgson Burnett. Thirty years later, that former student was president of the Garden Club of Evanston.

The garden sees courtings and weddings. Students come to eat their lunches there. At graduation time, they bring their parents for snapshot posing. Gardeners find their way there to learn and to appreciate, and older people come to rest. Ever-changing and yet never-changing, Shakespeare Garden serves as a center for happy comings and goings, as well as for quiet meditations. As Shakespeare himself said, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."