

The Tale of the Tarrant County Rose Society

By Larry Wiley

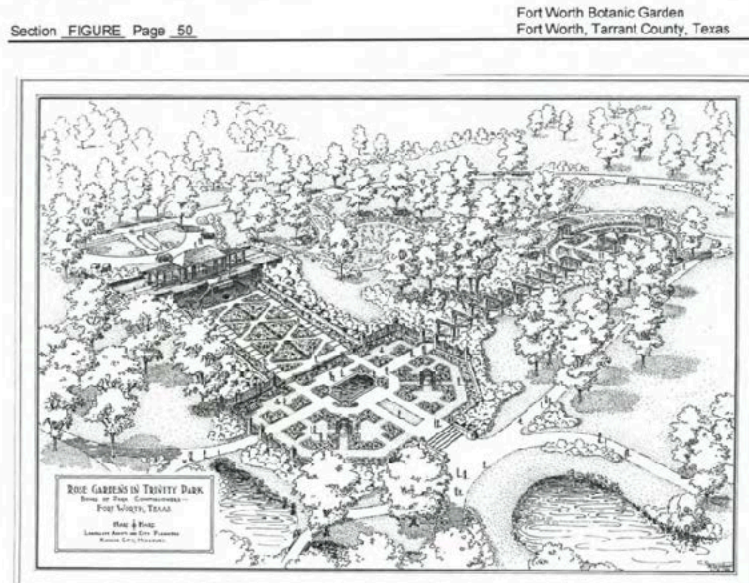


FIGURE 2: "Rose Gardens in Trinity [Rock Springs] Park." Drawn by D. D. Obert, June 2, 1933. *Hare and Hare Collection* (KC206-27.0062). *Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri-Kansas City.*

The Background: Two months ago while researching an article for the Rose Prose, I ran across a mention of the Tarrant County Rose Society and its involvement in the establishment in the early 1930s of the rose gardens in what would later become the Fort Worth Botanic Garden. I had been unaware of this society's existence, so I started doing further research. Jim McCarty mentioned that he had seen references to it in the library of the FWBG, so he and I enlisted the help of its director, Henry Painter. We were unable to find the volume that Jim had alluded to, but Henry generously sent me a copy of the application to the National Park Services in support of the garden's selection on the National Register of Historic Places, which contains a great deal of information about the Tarrant County Rose Society. With the valuable information in that application and from Ft. Worth Star-Telegram articles I was able to view from the 1930-40 period, I was able to put together a fascinating account of its brief history.

(Bibliographic notations in [] are from the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form prepared by Susan Allen Kline for the FWBG, The Fort Worth Garden Club, Inc.; Texas Garden Clubs, Inc.; and Garden Club Council of Fort Worth, June 2008).

J. Horace McFarland (1859-1948) became president of the American Rose Society in 1930. He was also founding president of what is called today the American Planning and Civic Association. During his time at the ARS, he was able to combine his interest in growing and promoting roses with his interest in public infrastructure improvements. While he was president, throughout the 1930s, the American Rose Annual reported on the status of public rose gardens across the country. Like in Ft. Worth, most public gardens throughout the nation were constructed with the assistance of federal relief programs. In the case of the Ft. Worth rose garden, there were overlapping relief programs of Hoover's administration and Roosevelt's New Deal. [Sec. 8, p. 22.]

The Ft. Worth park system developed slowly. City Park, south of W. 7th was established in 1892. It wasn't until 1908 that interested citizens pushed for a city park authority to be established. In 1909, the mayor appointed three men to serve on the Ft. Worth Park Board. About this time, the experienced landscape architect, George Edward Kessler, was hired. Under Kessler, City Park became Trinity Park and additional acreages was purchased to create Forest Park and Sycamore Park in East Fort Worth.

After Kessler's death in 1923, the Park Board in Ft. Worth commissioned the respected landscape architects, Hare and Hare of Kansas City, to update the city's master plan for parks. What resulted was the purchase in 1912 of the property west of Trinity Park that would become Rock Springs Park.

Actual improvements to the property didn't begin until 1929. In 1930, Hare produced a plan for further development of Rock Springs that included a formal rose garden and long vista through the trees, connecting it to the Trinity River to the East.

In the April 3, 1932, edition of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram in an article about the proposed Municipal Rose Garden, it

states: "The Tarrant County Rose Society, which is a local branch of the American Rose Society, was organized primarily to make possible this municipal garden, which is to continue a permanent interest of the society after its east completion." What is puzzling with this timeline is a statement in the application [Sec. 8, p. 19]: "As early as 1928, the (Park Board) authorized Hare to develop a topographical survey for an area to be used as an arboretum and municipal rose garden, the latter of which had been of keen interest to the Tarrant County Rose Society since 1926." That's the only reference I could find to the Society's existence before about 1930.

The founding officers of the rose society, Mrs. Ireland Hampton and Mrs. E. C. Cobb—had good credentials in establishing public gardens, as they were credited with the establishment of the Arlington Rose Garden in Meadowbrook Park in East Arlington in 1931. In 1932, that garden contained approximately 1,500 roses, most of them gifts from growers for all parts of the U. S. All this notwithstanding, it is obvious that the establishment of a municipal rose garden in Ft. Worth became the Society's primary goal after 1932.

The Tarrant County Rose Society was very active in the initial conception and construction phases of Fort Worth's Municipal Rose Garden. Originally, the organization considered raising money for the garden's construction through appeals but hesitated to do so because of the depression. Shortly after the nearby Arlington (Texas) Municipal Rose Garden received a \$1,000 award from Woman's Home Companion's Municipal Rose Garden Competition, Mr. Jewel P. Lightfoot, the chairman of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation's Relief Committee (RFC) in Tarrant County, "offered to the society the RFC labor for the Rose Garden." Mr. Lightfoot, himself a rose enthusiast, was the husband of the society's secretary. Many assumed that Mrs. Lightfoot was influential in her husband's decision to off the use of relive labor in the construction of the garden. Whatever the case, it was apparent that directly or indirectly, the Tarrant County Rose Society played a large role in finally the the Rose Garden off the drawing board and into reality. [Sec. 8 p. 22-23]

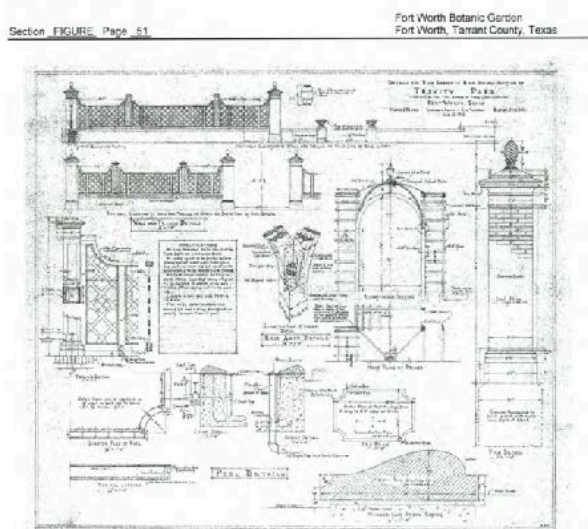


FIGURE 3: "Details for Rose Garden in Trinity [Rock Springs] Park." January 27, 1932. Hare and Hare Collection (RC.206-27.0052), Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

When the rose gardens were proposed, it was thought that it might take 10 to 20 years to complete the project. With the use of the federal relief workers, the job was completed within nine months! It was estimated that the cost of materials such as gravel, lumber, drain tile, water pipe, cement, and stone—as well as the realignment of the road—cost: \$685!

Initially, the Rose Society was assigned a plot of land for its use, but the society wanted a bigger role in establishing the rose garden. The oval bed where the roses are now planted was originally planned by the landscape architects (Hare and Hare of Kansas City) as annual and perennial gardens. The TCRS let it be known that the plans be changed to make that area another rose garden. Hare wrote that he has no problem with that change. Also, the preliminary plans called for white-washed brick columns, but the Rose Society wanted stone columns. Hare responded that he found the stone in Ft. Worth to be “unsatisfactory,” but if the Park Board conceded to the suggestions of the Rose Society, “we believe the columns, together with the cast stone caps and base, should be slightly redesigned so as to take care of the less finished appearance of the stone.” [Sec 8, p. 24]

The Rose Society also wanted a formal arrangement for the rose garden, including paved paths and formal rose beds. Hare responded that he felt that, with the terrain as it was, it would be difficult to achieve that. It should be noted that the original vista continued from the shelter house at the top of the rose ramp, all the way to the Trinity River. University Drive was build through the park later.] Hare did concede that he saw no harm in using “less formal types of bush roses” along the edge of the woods on each side of the vista, but that climbing roses or polyanthas wouldn’t work on the vista, but would in the oval garden. He wrote, “The proportions of this approach seem to be satisfactory in plan. In checking the area of rose beds in the two gardens, we find there is room for 7,000 roses, figured at an average spacing of one and one half feet. This doesn’t provide for any roses along the path between the two gardens, or on the proposed formal approach for the River Drive.” [Sec 8, p. 24]

Creating the vista required cutting down some trees. Later Hare wrote, “It was such an interesting setting. But I can still hear the protests when we cut down the trees to provide that vista from the rose garden down to the University Drive. I was about ready to leave town then for good.” [Sec 8, p. 25]

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Fort Worth Botanic Garden
Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas

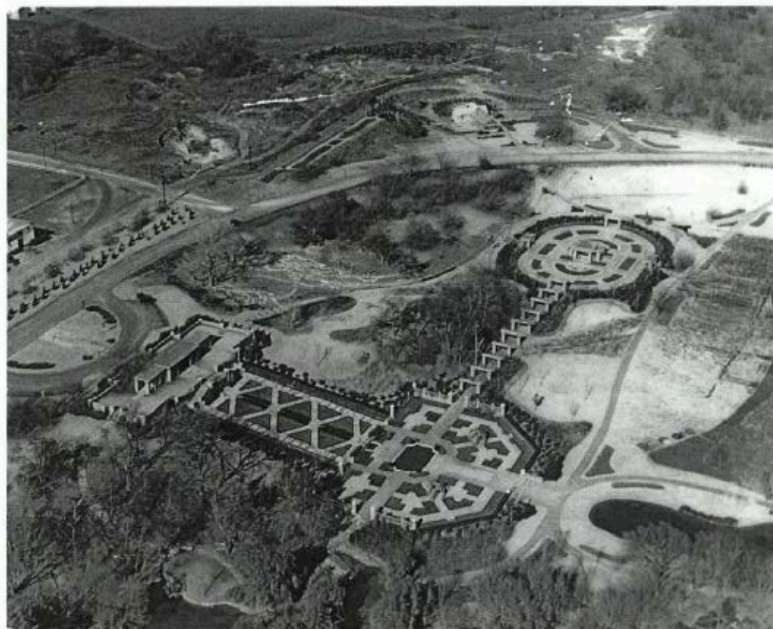


PHOTO 9: “The Fort Worth Botanic Garden from the air.” Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.



PHOTO 4: "Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The colonnade and rose garden before construction." Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.

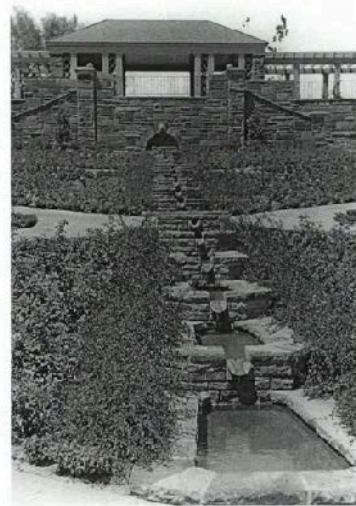


PHOTO 1: "Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The Cascade. This detail of the rose work shows how carefully the small spillways were cut. All curbing was done by hand." Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.

The arboretum and Rose Garden (bushes not yet planted, it is noted) were dedicated on October 5, 1933. The festivities included the Masonic Band, The Ft. Worth Symphony Orchestra and other musicians. Among the dignitaries present was J. Horace McFarland, invited in his role as president of the ARS, who gave the dedicatory address. He told the audience, "You can have this garden as your garden if you care to make it yours. Don't stand off and say 'they,' but help plant and develop it and say 'we.'" [Sec 8, p. 27.]

But all was not well in the relationship between the city and the Tarrant County Rose Society. Before the dedication, the president of the society, Mrs. Hampton, wrote a letter to the Park Board expressing concerns that the Rose Society wanted a larger role in the selection, placement, and overall supervision of the rose gardens. They also wanted the Park Board to hire a qualified rosarian and provide 24-hour security so that the plants would not be stolen. They also didn't like the plans to plant lodense bushes [a type of ligustrum] around the roses, since they "could potentially spread fungus to the roses and would prevent proper air circulation around the plants." (Sec. 8, p. 28]

Although two of the five members of the Park Board...agreed that the planting of the lodense bushes was a "Horticultural Error," the Park Board would not change Hare's design and in fact, had already planted the bushes. The Rose Society was told that it could withdraw from involvement with the Rose Garden and concentrate on supplying plants for outlying areas of the garden. On January 1, 1934, Mrs. Hampton responded to the ultimatum with a six-page letter outlining everything the Society believed the board and Mr Hare were doing incorrectly regarding the Rose Garden. The letter concluded that the "Society deeply regrets to advise you that it can proceed no further toward providing rose plants for the Garden." The Park Board required the list of pledged roses from the organization. The Society refused to hand over the list and threatened to create a separate rose garden.

The spat was even covered in a local newspaper, which called it the "War of the Roses." [The specific paper was not named in this source, and I was unable to find such an article in the Ft. Worth Star Telegram archives.]

The conflict continued on January 15 when the Rose Society sent another letter to the Park Board accusing them of breaching the agreement between the two bodies. It would not back down from its original position, finding that the offending lodense bushes would ruin the opportunity to produce “a garden in which roses might grown with a perfection which would give the garden a Nation-side reputation.” [Sec. 8, p. 28] In addition, the Society proposed that a public referendum be held so that the public could decided which plan should be followed, the Society’s or the Board’s.

The Park Board flatly responded that it would take over the planting and maintenance of the Rose Garden. On January 18, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram...reported that Arlington had offered space in its municipal rose garden to the Society. With that, the controversy seems to have disappeared from public discourse and the Tarrant County Rose Society’s official association with its long sought-after municipal rose garden ended. [Sec. 8, p. 29]

I found regular articles in the Star-Telegram from 1932 to 1937 about meetings, garden tours, rose shows, and other events sponsored by the Tarrant County Rose Society. They even had a weekly radio program for a while. However, the last mention I found of the Rose Society was an article on October 10, 1937, which states that the Tarrant County Rose Society “will open its season” with a program presented by Mrs. Will F. Lake, director of the Fort Worth Garden Center. No other articles exist about the Society after that, leading to my conclusion that the Society disbanded at some point around that time.

All this leads me to appreciate even more the close relationship the Ft. Worth Rose Society has with the Ft. Worth Botanic Garden. As a side note, I found it interesting that rose growers today face the same problems they did in 1932 -- fungus caused by poor air circulation.

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Fort Worth Botanic Garden
Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas



PHOTO 2: “Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The terrace wall immediately after completion.” Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.

Here is a link to the full application for the Rose Garden creation: <https://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/survey/highway/Ft%20Worth%20Botanic%20Garden%20Ft%20Worth.pdf>



PHOTO 9: "The Fort Worth Botanic Garden from the air." Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.



PHOTO 5: "Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The men who worked on the project during the Relief Program" Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.



PHOTO 6: "Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The rock work in the cactus garden during construction." Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.

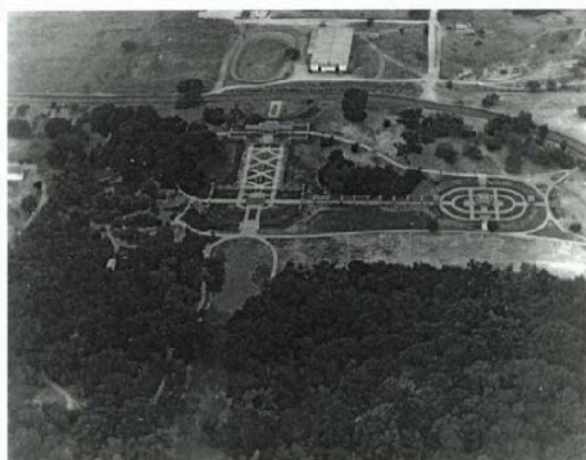


PHOTO 7: "Fort Worth Botanic Garden. An early view of the Rose Gardens taken during the summer of 1934, immediately after the gardens were planted." Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.



PHOTO 8: "Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The main entrance to the Rose Gardens is seen from above the building to the west of the development." Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.

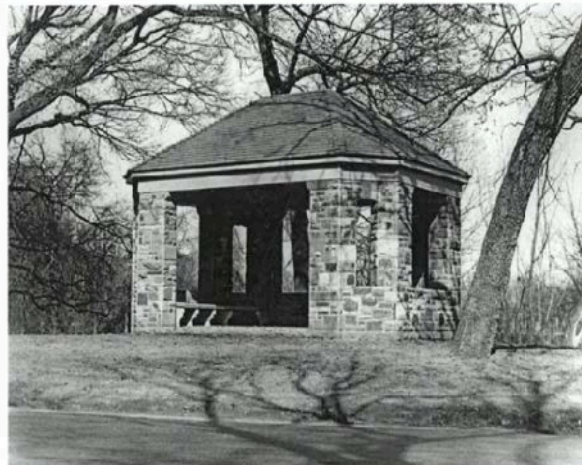


PHOTO 3: "Fort Worth Botanic Garden. The shelter at the end of the Vista." Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.



PHOTO 10: "Festoons of roses in the Oval garden." Captioned photograph from Fort Worth Botanic Garden Scrapbook, MDLL.



PHOTO 11: "The four freedoms. The blessings of peace are more dear than ever to Americans. Today they are keenly aware of how fortunate they are to be living in a peaceful democratic land. This group is spending a quiet hour in the Botanical Gardens, at Fort Worth, Texas." Captioned photograph by Alfred T. Palmer, c. 1941. Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC (LC-USE6-D-001390). Digital image accessed on June 26, 2008, at: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b00827>.