

## Park in Bloom

By Susan Mulchahey Chase

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When the Board of Park Commissioners began to turn newly acquired acres into parks, the commission chose primarily trees and shrubs. In the 1890s, for example, they planted evergreens, pin oaks, sweet gum, and Norway maples in Brandywine Park. Records show purchases of large numbers of trees and shrubs, but often do not indicate where the specimens were planted. Minutes of one 1899 commission meeting recorded acquisition of 630 trees and shrubs, for which the Board paid a remarkable \$54.45. The specimens included willow, myrtle, sycamore, viburnum, laurel, and holly.

Although the commission bought plants for Brandywine and Rockford parks in the 20th century, by 1910 most of the planting was done and donations met any incidental needs. In 1914, the commissioners allowed the Delaware Equal Suffrage Association to plant a tree to mark their resolve that women be granted the right to vote. In the late 1950s, the Wilmington High School Alumni Association donated a pink dogwood tree that was planted near the zoo. In 1962, Park Commission member Ruth Vogel gave 150 dogwood trees and 100 flowering crab trees, some of which were planted in North Brandywine Park. Interestingly, at the end of the 1980s, when Rodney Square was undergoing renovations, park workers transplanted three magnolia trees from the square to a site west of the Van Buren Street Bridge in North Brandywine Park. There had been a tree at each of Rodney Square's corners, but one was in such poor condition that it was abandoned and, of the three that went to the park, two survive.

Eventually, greater concentrations of color came to the parks. In the 1930s, the park commissioners collaborated with private donors to create two blooming gardens in Brandywine Park, Josephine Gardens surrounding the Josephine Fountain and the Jasper Crane Rose Garden. In 1929, local attorney, J. Ernest Smith, donated 114 Japanese flowering cherry trees to go into

North Brandywine Park. In 1933, Smith gave the Josephine Fountain in the midst of the trees, a memorial to his wife, Josephine Tatnall Smith. In the mid-1930s, the trees were so popular that the Wilmington Fountain Society paid to have the area lighted temporarily so that visitors could enjoy the showy spring display even as dusk fell.

Funding from the Public Works Administration (PWA), a New Deal agency, made the Jasper Crane Rose Garden possible. The PWA paid for labor, the city supplied materials, and DuPont vice president Jasper Crane gave the initial 670 rose plants. Established in 1933 and 1934, the garden's collection grew over the next twenty years until, in the 1950s, it was recognized as a public rose garden of national significance. By the late 1990s, neglect and lack of irrigation had left it in shabby condition. In 2000, the Friends of Wilmington Parks restored the garden with donated plants from Conard-Pyle and Jackson and Perkins. Now supplied with an underground irrigation system, the garden has 450 new roses.

Smaller gardens also brightened the parks. In 1929, the Wilmington Fountain Society moved a granite horse fountain from 15th and Market streets to "the old quarry hole" along South Park Drive west of Van Buren Street. When the fountain was in place and connected to water, the Board of Park Commissioners turned the quarry walls into a rock garden. Donors in the 1920s planted iris beds in both Brandywine and Rockford parks and created a chrysanthemum garden in Brandywine Park. In 1952, Mrs. Irenée du Pont donated 800 iris for two 26-foot long beds along the path leading to the Josephine Fountain and she also gave sufficient irises for similar beds flanking the path to the Todd Memorial. At the end of the 1930s, the Board of Park Commissioners allowed women living near Brandywine Park to plant above the Monkey Hill retaining wall and five decades later other park neighbors, Kevin and Amy Coogan, added to the horticultural stock.

In 1992, they planted 250 daffodils on Monkey Hill and, over the years, the plants have multiplied into a bright yellow spring display.

In 1994, after returning from a Sister Cities trip to Watford, England, Wilmington members of the group planted a garden commemorating the link between Watford and Wilmington. As the number of Sister Cities links increased, so did the number of flowerbeds ornamenting the north end of the Van Buren Street Bridge. There are now five

small gardens, each planted in colors of the national flags of the countries represented. For Watford, England, plants with red, white, and blue flowers replicate the colors of England's flag and nearby blue and yellow blossoms represent the colors of the Swedish flag, marking Wilmington's ties to Kalmar, Sweden. The other gardens similarly honor ties to Fulda, Germany; Osogbo, Nigeria; and Olevano sul Tusciano, Italy. Wilmingtonians are clearly fortunate to have such great natural riches so close at hand.