

Eastern Star Memorial Rose Garden

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Memorial Rose Garden

Each plant in reverent memory placed
To make a sweetly perfumed bower
Love planted a garden of roses
To share with all who seek a quiet hour
Where, at close of day, in purple dusk
A chorus may be heard
In tangled fern and leafy trees
In liquid notes, the song of birds.
Where, like a tall cathedral spire,
A snow-white trellis lifts above
A bank of fragrant scarlet gems-
God's messengers of love.
Where small shy things dart in and out
Or shyly, on cushioned feet, come stealing
Where, in meekness, trees bow down
As though in prayer kneeling.
Where the muted whisper of the wind
Falls hushed on hold sod
Where each may come to search his heart
And be alone with God.

Smithville, Missouri, a small town in the Midwest, (population 900) was settled in 1824 by the Smith brothers who established a mill at the fork of Little Platte River. Because of this location, in a valley with rocky ledges and high hills on all sides, with swamps and overflow land at its base, it does not possess natural beauty. The town has long been known for its fine people, their hospitality and genial ways. But its general appearance has made little improvement. Lovely homes and stately churches, fine schools and an outstanding hospital were built but Smithville was still without a park and no beautification project was ever attempted. Old Timers said that after one drink from the muddy water of Little Platte River, one was satisfied and content to settle down for life.

World War II came and the local service board displayed the names of 200 boys from this vicinity who, during the period of their service, were to visit the four corners of the world. They served their country with honor. During their absence they learned to appreciate their home town and the things for which it stood and their foremost desire was to return to drink the muddy water of Little Platte River and lead happy, peaceful lives.

Following VJ Day, members of the Order of Eastern Star desired to honor servicemen, especially our 15 Gold Star Boys, with a memorial which would serve as a permanent tribute to their courage and sacrifice and at the same time, add a long needed touch of beauty to our little town.

Eastern Star members were active during the war years, entertaining servicemen's wives, sponsoring Red Cross work, rolling bandages, soliciting funds and preparing programs for hospitalized veterans. For our personal contributions to the Blood Bank, we received a Certificate of Award from the National Red Cross Chapter. In 1944 the State Chapter equipped 24 ward cars for overseas mercy trains and in 1945 established GI educational loan service in Missouri and to both of these projects we made generous contributions. By the end of the war our organization was practically without funds.

After much careful forethought, the project selected was a Memorial Rose Garden and Park. We were well aware that members of the armed forces had access to the world's most beautiful gardens and whatever project we could accomplish could in no way compare with the magnificence of the Royal Garden, Kew, England, the Versailles Garden in Paris, the

Garden of Mother, Queen of Holland of the Hague and countless others. But they earnestly believed that a garden, a living memorial, would best continue to express appreciation and price in their heroic service.

The selection of the site was of prime importance. Besides serving as a monument to the memory of the dead, we wanted this memorial to provide a place of quietude where relatives and friends of hospital patients could pass long and anxious hours of waiting, and last, but by no means least, we sought a spot of beauty to be enjoyed by everyone. So, the site selected must be in walking distance of town, be large enough for both the garden and picnic grounds and it must be within our means. A committee was appointed to select the location.

We combed the town in search of the ideal site but we met with discouragement at every turn. If a suitable site was centrally located, either it was not for sale or the purchase price was prohibitive. At last we realized we would be forced to select a less desirable location within our financial reach and we would have to develop it the hard way, but the "sweat of our brows."

In 1936 a new highway was built alongside our town. It is the policy of the Missouri Highway Commission to by-pass towns located on main highways. A spur, connecting this new road to Smithville, joined the main thoroughfare at the outskirts of town, leaving a triangular plot of ground containing about 1 1/2 acres, in which no one was really interested.

In making the fill for the highway, dirt was taken from this plot and the Lowland fell heir to all the water which rushed down from the three sloping banks after every rain. Frequently, when spring rains came, the devastating flood waters of the river would spread out over the highway and pour into this neglected area. When, at last, the water subsided, leaving much accumulated debris, rank weeds, vines and trees formed a tangled mass of undergrowth in the marshy swamp.

When the committee for the selection of a site suggested the organization buy this "frog pond," members were first shocked, then skeptical but so united in their singleness of purpose they were willing to tackle what appeared a hopeless task.

The community rallied to our assistance. Some came partly through curiosity, some in order to say, "I told you so," when we failed but most of them helped because they, too, wanted a part in this worthy project of improving and beautifying Smithville.

Our site, the aforementioned triangle, had roads on two sides. The base of the triangle was high and possessed a level area about 50 feet wide, excepting a 20 foot hillock similar to a sand dune. This high ground sloped to the apex of the triangle which was approximately 7 feet lower than the roadways. Here the trees and underbrush were so dense, houses and buildings were not visible on the opposite side. These both proved to be to our advantage because the underbrush had concealed the actual size of the plot and from the many trees, we carefully selected the ones that would add the most beauty and shade to our park.

Our first task was to clear the brush and cut the unwanted trees. For the sum of \$20, a local man cleared and burned the brushwood and sawed into firewood the logs suitable for our future picnic oven. For the first time we were able to really see our ground. There was twice as much as we had envisioned. We began to see possibilities.

We would use the high ground for our rose garden, increasing the width by leveling the hillock of dirt. We arranged with the city maintenance men to dump into the lowland the excess dirt excavated from local jobs. Here we would make our park with picnic tables, benches and ovens. We planned to beautify the banks with low spreading junipers and cover the slopes with creeping rock garden flowers.

By placing the roses on high ground we silenced half of the opposition to our "frog pond" because the entire town would be under water before it reached our garden.

Much of the most difficult and expensive part of the preparation of the ground was donated by Special Road District of Clay County. The district furnished bulldozers, excavators and graders and the workmen to operate them. This work required three days. Large, ungainly trees were uprooted and pushed out. The electric light company arranged for the moving of light poles.

Having bought the plot in February, we had to wait for the frozen ground to thaw before excavations could begin. Along with the thaw came spring rains, Work could no longer be delayed for the first rose order had already arrived and the workmen could spare us only this particular time. So the ground was prepared when it was too wet. After using 10 ton graders and bulldozers on our clay soil, it was level but it was also as hard as rock.

Smithville is in Clay County, which acquired its name from the soil and the dirt in our garden was certainly the stickiest when wet and the hardest when dry, if all the land in the county and definitely not conducive to rose growth. Some of the

more skeptical suggested we send the soil to the State Agriculture Department to see if it would grow anything. We knew there was only one thing to do and that was to remove the clay and substitute good, rich soil.

We presented our garden design plan to the high school geometry class. The students measured and staked out the beds that we had planned.

With pick and shovel 2 husky workmen dug the beds 3 feet deep and removed the red clay, laying a 6 inch layer of crushed tile for drainage, 18 inches of manure and finishing with an 16 inch layer of black loam from the banks of Little Platte River.

The preparation of the beds brought many laughs. Our rose manual said, "roses prefer dry feet and for this purpose crushed tile is best." Several ladies scoured the town gathering broken or cast-off drain pipe tile. With a rake they retrieved many pieces from under lumber bins at the local lumber yard. With hammers and plenty of action, they broke them into small bits. So, our roses certainly couldn't complain about their wet feet as each bed was filled with hand-crushed, hand-picked drain tiles.

We borrowed a truck and with our two dependable helpers, placed a layer of cow manure in the beds, following with black loam, and the beds were ready for roses. Rather, the roses were not only ready but waiting for the beds. Arriving early, they had been bedded down in trenches. Getting the ground in shape and beds ready had taken time and it had definitely been the wettest spring in history. The day they were all planted, we felt a great sense of accomplishment for our efforts were beginning to show results.

Now we thought we could relax and rest our aching muscles as our troubles were over but truly they were just beginning. With the first heavy rains we became mildly alarmed but with each fresh downpour our dejection increased because we knew the roses would rot before they could take root.

The rain coming in torrents washed away our newly planted grass seed. But with bulldog tenacity, and another outlay of cash for more dollar a pound grass seed, we reseeded three times until at last the seeds secured a footing.

Our worst fears were confirmed when only about half of our roses showed signs of leafing out. As if this wasn't trouble enough, a severe case of mildew attacked the remaining roses. It was at this time that most of the doubting Thomas' came to look at the garden and this added to our humiliation.

Many of the roses had been paid for by donors, and variety of rose specified. We had hoped to have the garden open to visitors on Memorial Day. As the day approached, we were determined to justify the public's faith in our project. We accomplished this by replacing the dead plants with 75 blooming, potted roses. This cost us \$85.00 but saved our face and restored the garden's self respect.

Since our garden was first of all, a memorial to our Gold Star Boys, our design was planned around a central bed of 15 Peace roses. This rose was chosen not only because of its exquisite beauty but because the work "Peace" symbolizes that for which those honored, fought. We carried out a patriotic color scheme by using a low border of blue ageratum, followed by a circle of red flora-bunda with the Peace roses forming the center. These flowers were donated by the Eastern Star.

This bed was flanked by 2 rectangular beds, each containing 12 red roses, dedicated by parents or friends of these boys. Two beds, each 30 feet long by 6 feet wide and 2 beds 50 feet long by 4 feet wide, square design. These beds are planted with the finest varieties of various colored roses available in this part of the country. Beside each is placed a plant marker holding indestructible 2x4 aluminum card bearing the name of the rose, name of person for whom it is given, and the name of the donor.

Our entrance is a trellis embellished with a large star, the insignia of our Order. It is covered with Blaze ramblers and guarded by tall evergreens and low spreaders.

In order to secure privacy from the highway, a trellis 30 feet long and 8 feet high was planted with Paul's Scarlet and Flash roses. The apex of the triangle is marked by a planting of 3 spreading junipers. The steep bank back of the long trellis was planted with deep purple iris. One bank was planted with a variety of choice mixed iris. The park was seeded with blue grass. A large picnic table and benches were built.

The upkeep and care of the garden was divided among the members with several persons accepting responsibility for each bed. We have been aided in this work by the Senior Girl Scouts, an organization which we sponsor.

When, on May 28, 1948, our 5 Peace roses entered in class 57, a class for All American Roses, won first place at the

National Rose Show in Kansas City, our pride knew no bounds.

The garden was formally dedicated July 10, 1948, with an appropriate program of music and dramatization. The future of the garden was depicted by small children dressed in colorful flower costumes. The past was dramatized by women in old fashioned costumes, telling stories of the old roses which had been preserved by our pioneers. Soon a new bed of these old fashioned roses will be added to our garden. A marker, containing a brief history of its existence, will be placed beside each rose.

We hope eventually to place here to the grist stone originally used in the old Smith mill. Thus our garden will be preserving, for posterity, the landmarks of our past.

In our landscaping, we have attempted to keep the design simple and natural, using local shrubs and flora.

The people of Smithville showed their approval and appreciation of our project by purchasing many roses. The cost to the donor for each rose is \$2. This includes the price of the marker. The rose is guaranteed for 2 years.

The garden is being developed and maintained by the collection and sale of old newspapers and magazines. We are assisted in this work by both the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts who gather them and assist us in bundling them for sale in Kansas City at the Industrial Paper Mart.

The price agreed upon for the garden site was \$200.00, which could be paid in \$50.00 installments and time extended over a 3 year period. The transaction was made March 1, 1947. The deed was registered and note guaranteeing the remaining amount endorsed by three members. A second payment was made on September 11, 1947. This amount was realized from a carnival which we sponsored. On March 8, 1948, the week before Easter, a bake sale netted another \$50 payment. We cleared \$50 from the proceeds of a musical program by a group of girls from Oklahoma College for Women in Chickasha, Oklahoma. The guest soloist with this group was one of the local girls and with this final payment in Sept., 1948, the land was really our property.

The entire community takes pride in our garden which speaks not only of the courage of our boys but of the splendid cooperation [sic] of our townspeople.

Our financial statement lists our actual expenditure of cash, which would have been much larger except for neighborly help given by people of the community. Their eagerness to help by donating their time and energy in the development of the garden has been a labor of love, its value impossible to estimate.

Our garden is visited daily by many people. We have received many letters, some from distant states, requesting information on the plan and development of our project.

Our town has no greenhouse. Whenever there is a special celebration we present table bouquets or corsages of our choicest blooms. We always present flowers, with our sympathy, to bereaved families. One of the greatest joys derived from the garden is the pleasure we bring our hospital patients and community shut-ins through the profusion of beautiful roses we take them regularly. Recently we purchased two dozen cut glass bud vases which are left at the hospital so that we always have suitable containers without disturbing the busy nurses.

We feel that one of the greatest contributions of the project to the community is the wise investment for this generation to provide a lovely garden that our youth may develop a sympathetic reaction to the constructive, the good and the beautiful. The garden is available at all times for them to gather and enjoy the roses. Since environment helps from our life patterns, a pattern of beauty will help develop aesthetic tastes for those things that have higher spiritual values.

The girls are taught how to select suitable locations for rose gardens to use insecticides, fungicides, fertilizers and mulches, to prune and disbud, to identify and appreciate good plants, to make corsages and to prepare arrangements for the home.

Our purpose in working with Senior Girl Scouts is to teach future gardeners and homemakers the pleasures, proper care and use of roses, thus enriching the lives, bringing peace, health and happiness to future citizens of this community.

And so, with joy, we dedicate our garden that we may "leave some simple mark behind to keep our having lived in mind."