

McFarland Rose Garden Update

May 2023

Grace Church has been working with Historic City Gardens to restore the J. Horace McFarland Rose Garden. While there are big dreams to restore the garden to national prominence – McFarland was the founder and first President of the National Rose Society and developed his own hybrid “McFarland” rose – the focus has been to trim and deal with possible disease and root rot.

Historic City Gardens is a non-profit organization that works with historically significant gardens in Harrisburg and Philadelphia. The administrator for the gardens is Ms. Faye Deckter of Harrisburg. She has chosen The McFarland Garden as one of her projects for this year and into the future. She has agreed to seek grant funding to renovate the garden, brick wall and sidewalks, ironwork, church entrance and additional areas for planting. While several grant applications were not initially approved or are pending, this spring she oversaw the trimming of the roses. According to McFarland himself, roses in Harrisburg should be trimmed when the forsythia bloom.

Care was taken to have the canes thinned so no canes crossed or rubbed another. Significant volume of dead or diseased canes were removed. Nubs from previous improper trimmings were removed and the roses were trimmed at a relative 36” height. The roses were suffering from root rot and it was recommended to remove the previously placed weed control material that seemed to hold too much moisture. New compost and dehydrated manure were added to the top layer of soil and new hardwood mulch added.

The 29 existing rose bushes were tagged so that each bush can be monitored and recorded regarding its health and possible disease. This information will be used to identify the various varieties of roses that are planted in the garden. It is believed that two of the plants are original McFarland roses.

Plans are now being developed to remove the current weed infected sod area in the garden and resod or replant with new grass. The yard and the garden have

suffered as a result of not having a knowledgeable caretaker and due to both dog and human urine damage. Unfortunately, the garden provides some level of privacy for the homeless to use as a restroom causing damage to the plants and grass.

To date, Ms. Deckter has secured donations from Lowes and Lower Paxton Township to provide the bulk of the materials for the garden. Grants are pending and new applications will be submitted for additional restoration work including soil analysis, disease identification and remediation, and additional masonry and ironwork restoration.

Grace Church is indebted to Ms. Deckter for her vision and leadership as she begins this lengthy process of restoration. It is expected that she and her volunteers will continue to weed, water and maintain the garden as they work to restore it to health and prominence in Harrisburg.

Grace Church is thankful to have been the steward of the McFarland Rose Garden that was established near Polyclinic Hospital in 1938 and was removed in 1974 when the hospital expanded and the garden was removed for the parking lot.





Former pastor Rev. Dr. Sheridan Bell was instrumental in having the garden plants, ironwork, and original signage and sundial moved to Grace United Methodist Church where McFarland was a member. The new garden was dedicated at Grace Church on June 9, 1974. The picture to the right is unfortunately the best view of the garden in 1974 or shortly thereafter.

According to the church history written for the 1940 remodeling of the church sanctuary, as a young boy at the Locust Street Methodist Episcopal Church, McFarland gave the first \$50 to build Grace Church. He was also a member of the renovation committee at the age of 81.

If you are interested in working with Ms. Deckter and the volunteers from Historic City Gardens to maintain the garden, please contact Wayne Bender, who has been coordinating the work with Historic City Gardens. If you would like to contribute funds toward the maintenance and the resodding of the yard area, also be in touch with Wayne.



J. Horace McFarland: September 29, 1858 - October 2, 1948

At the age of six, J. Horace McFarland moved to Harrisburg from Juniata County, PA with his family. His father George had a printing business and later a nursery. At nineteen, J. Horace became the owner of printing business then named Mount Pleasant Press. With his interest in horticulture, the business began selling seed catalogues but soon became a premier horticultural publishing company.

By 1900, J. Horace McFarland joined the City Beautiful movement in Harrisburg that was headed by Mira Lloyd Dock. Together they got support for community gardens including rose gardens that Mr. McFarland personally developed near the Polyclinic Hospital.

Realizing the negative health impacts of living in a growing city with sewage issues, unpaved streets, and dense urban life, the need for gardens and parks was obvious to Mr. McFarland. Locally, the new planned community called Bellevue Park included large yards and gardens. His work and publishing on City Beautiful issues received national attention, and by 1904, he became the first president of the American Civic Association, a position he held for 20 years. His vital interest and work for preserving America's natural beauty and developing environmental policy led to the preservation of Niagara Falls and development of the National Park Service.

While extremely active at Grace Church, Mr. McFarland also served as chairman of the State Art Commission for Pennsylvania and was vice-president of the National Municipal League. In 1935 he was appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt to serve on the National Park Trust Boards.

He died in 1948 at his Breeze Hill home and gardens. He and his wife Lydia are buried in Harrisburg Cemetery.