

A History of Our Memorial Garden

This brief history of the Christ Church Memorial Garden is based on material found in the "CCP Memorial Garden" file in the church office and the file kept by Nancy Talley who has been involved with the garden since its inception. Anyone who has additional information is asked to share it with the Memorial Garden Committee.

While the boxwood hedge dates back to the 19th century, the decision to put a memorial garden within the hedge was made 18 years ago by the Rev. Pete Gustin.



On October 20, 1993 the vestry approved a design for the garden that was proposed by Greg Shannon, brother-in-law of Bob Hobbs. Mr. Shannon was at that time a landscape design student at VPI who donated his services. Mr. Hobbs donated the planting as a gift to the parish.

According to Nancy, the circular gravel path with its surrounding concentric rows of planting was to symbolize the cycle of eternal life; the central rocks,

both God and the faith on which the Church is built. Plant material was green and white except for the plumbago, a low blue –flowering groundcover at the base of the rocks.

The garden was completed in November 1994. A report from Nancy to the congregation mentions unspecified gifts toward its completion from Mildred Anderson, Martha and Bill Cook (to the memory of Mr. and Mrs. H. Delmer Robinson), and Shawn Morgan. Mr. Hobbs apparently nursed the plant material through its first year. Walter Robbins donated the bench in the garden as a spot for visitors to meditate. Ruth and Don Tardif donated the stone plaque at the garden entrance that “tells visitors the purpose of the garden”.

Included on Cunningham Chapel Parish stationary, but undated and unsigned, was a “sketch of what the guidelines might look like”. Included among the proposals were that no urns or markers of any kind be permitted. The parish was to provide white linen bags into which the ashes from the crematory container would be transferred for burial. Nancy believes that the ashes of all but one of the deceased were buried in the area surrounding the center stones. The Rodway child is interred in the northeast corner of the garden. There is a commemorative stone to Ruth Birch underneath the boxwood just off the entranceway to the garden. It is presumed that her ashes are buried there.

Pete Gustin wrote a memorandum to the MGC on June 11, 1993 outlining suggestions for a marker that were made during his meeting with Cheryl Groves Willingham and the shop foreman at Groves Monuments. They felt that a freestanding marker would detract from the beauty of the setting. The concrete window on the back wall of the sacristy was felt to be the most appropriate location. The cost of granite, marble and bronze were said to be about equal. However, on-site carving of additional names was anticipated to be quite labor intensive and thus expensive. Additionally, as stone cutting was a dying art, they said, it might be very difficult in future years to find artisans who could carve new names on a mounted stone plaque as the ashes of others were added to the garden. Bronze was thus felt to be the preferable material for the marker. Rows of blank plates, each of which could be removed and replaced simply with a plate bearing the name of the newly deceased, were recommended. Nevertheless, the brass plaque order was never placed when the initial estimate was \$8,000.

In the same 1993 memorandum, Pete mentioned that Ann Dailey was ordering a leather-bound, acid-free book for recording the names, dates, and sites of interments. Nancy has never seen the book. Caroline Roberts,

current Senior Warden, notes that there are many boxes in the church basement. Perhaps it is in one of them. For the time being, however, we are dependent upon a copy of a handwritten list of those who were interred in the memorial garden. They include:

Ruth Baldwin Creamer (June 11, 1993)

Parents of Shawn Morgan:

Lt. Commander LCDR Robert G. Nanney (May, 1995)

Eileen L. Nanney (April, 1999)

Parents of Anita Bowman:

Mary Myrtle Van Blunt (November, 1995)

Dr. William O. Van Blunt (March, 1997)

Parents of Jane Graham:

Note: Jane Harris, whose married name was Graham, says her parents are buried in New York. Thus we are uncertain about the accuracy of this entry:

Son of Alice Rodway:

Jeremiah Thomas Rodway (September 10, 2003)

Friend of Alice Rodway:

Lucille Langlais

The stone to Mrs. Birch is believed to mark the site of her ashes.

Finally, regarding upkeep of the Memorial Garden, the Virginia Boxwood Company (VBC) pruned the boxwood in February 2002. As little of the overgrowth at that time was suitable for decorative use, the parish paid \$625 out of the restricted garden maintenance fund to have the work performed. Thereafter, however, the VBC has maintained the boxwood at no charge as the cuttings can be of used for Christmas wreaths. Recently Nancy Talley confirmed with Naz Ammatucci at the VBC that they will continue to fertilize and spray annually and will prune every three years. The Memorial Garden Committee will seek volunteers to help with other garden maintenance.

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Brown
Jeff Harris