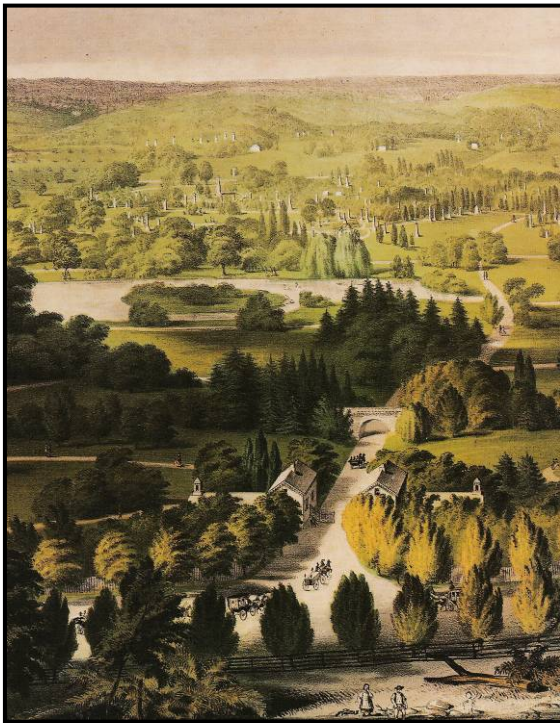


History of The Arboretum



One annual report bragged that a collection of trees from the four quarters of the world make Spring Grove a valuable “field for the study of the botanist. So rare and great is the variety that the visitor with little knowledge of this branch of science is unaware of the wealth of the cemetery.” (Cincinnati Horticultural Society annual report)

Driving through the gates of Spring Grove’s main entrance visitors are struck with the rich historic setting of the massive iron gates, the limestone construction of the Historic Office building on the right and the Norman Chapel on the left. What might not be as obvious is the rich horticulture history from which the grounds of Spring Grove evolved. The Cincinnati Men’s Horticulture Society recognized the need for a new



The early arboretum at Spring Grove Cemetery

cemetery outside the city, but they also brought their own interest in horticulture to the design and improvements of the grounds, including the selection of an appropriate site.

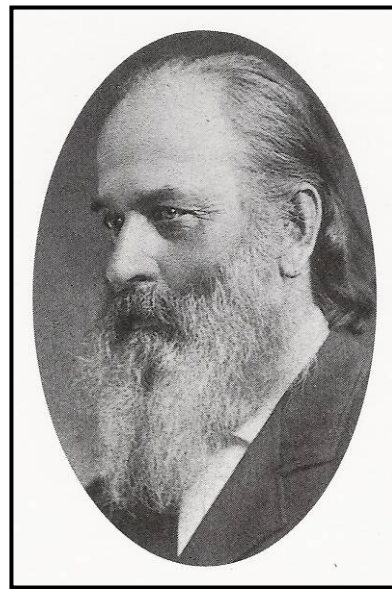
The founders sought topographically diverse grounds where they could apply picturesque aesthetics as described by such authors as Bryant and Wordsworth. To design such a landscape, proper site choice was crucial. Robert Buchanan (first president of the Cincinnati Horticulture Society) insisted on terrain with wet lands that could “easily be converted into ponds,” appropriate for cultivation of aquatic plants and conducive to creation of a romantic landscape in the English fashion. He insisted on a site with “gentle elevation ... interspersed with ravines that afford a charming variety and render it susceptible of being highly embellished.” Hilly areas

would be forested with indigenous trees. The horticulturists sought dampness for planting rhododendrons, azaleas, and cypress magnolia that like humid soil and decayed vegetable matter for their nourishment. Many beautiful situations on the hills

surrounding Cincinnati proved unfit because the soil had substrata of clay that would retain water.

From the start, the cemetery grounds were used as an arboretum for the study of plants. Annual reports of the Cincinnati Horticultural Society carefully recorded diverse, new tree varieties set out in Spring Grove, how they thrived and behaved. The horticulturists experimented to see if certain trees were fit for urban streets, hoping to encourage nurserymen to vary and increase their stocks for such uses. They actively suggested trees to add to the collection, and all fed off each others' knowledge and expertise in an actively collaborative enterprise. By 1850, the horticulturists listed 4,300 ornamental plant varieties and a stock of 11,300 nursery plants, many of which were donated.

The structure of Adolph Strauch's ideal naturalistic landscape design grew from its plants, not just the layout of the sinuous avenues and lakes on diverse terrain. Strauch furthered the horticulturists' efforts to diversify Spring Grove's collection. From 1855 to 1865, he planted over 200 tree varieties, grouping families and carefully choosing sites so that "the beauty of form, color, and size shall be most effective." He created backdrops or frames of foliage for major monuments and loosely sculpted masses of greenery that alternated spaces of light and shade that would "delight the casual observer." In 1856, he set out a cucumber tree, an ornamental variety from the American South, known to thrive in Cincinnati's climate. He introduced azaleas and laurel. He imported dwarf pines from Silesia for planting along the periphery of the grounds. In 1861, he ordered foreign



Adolph Strauch



Magnolias at Spring Grove

maples - a compact, globular tree- that was allowed to spread to specimen form in open spaces. In 1865, Paris, Kentucky, sent 400 holly trees to "ornament" Spring Grove. In 1870, Strauch and Probasco ordered diverse vines, shrubs, and trees from England; in 1876, magnolias from Memphis; in 1878, a thousand red pines and many spruce.

Strauch and the horticulturists made Spring Grove an arboretum arranged in an artistic fashion which created interesting landscape pictures. There were evergreens "from the most remote regions of the Himalayan, Caucasian, and Rocky Mountains." Tree origins ranged from the "Alps to the Allegheny Mountains." Strauch imported the Chinese ailanthus, the European alder,

the Canadian poplar, the Persian lilac, the Norway Spruce, Corsican and Scotch pines, French and German tamarisk, and many species never before grown in North America. The Oriental spruces he ordered were among the first in the United States. By the 1860's Spring Grove had a more diverse collection of trees than any other landscape in the nation, except New York's Central Park.

Strauch further increased the diversity of species with "many handsome specimens from ... Japan intermingled with those from the ... Pyrenees. The cypress and magnolia from the Lower Mississippi flourish with the hemlock and white pine from the ice-bound banks of the St. Lawrence River. The Pacific states as well as the shores of the Mediterranean have also furnished their quota toward the sylvan adornments of Spring Grove."

The diversification of the tree collection maximized displays of seasonal color. Visitors praised the "brilliant colors" of sugar and scarlet maples, tulip trees, sour and sweetgum, and sassafras and the pleasing contrast of the golden birch against evergreens' dark foliage. Experimental planting of varietal pines never before grown in such a climate provided color in winter months.

A major part of the grounds was set aside by Strauch as a "haunt of nature untouched." This small forest preserve (The Woodland) still remains free of burials and monuments, retaining its ravines and steep hillsides. From 1878 to 1880, workers completed Woodland Avenue "leading through a deep ravine in a dense forest of chiefly beech and oak for more than a mile," predicted to "form one of the most picturesque and delightful drives any where to be found." Visiting the forest would be beneficial, Strauch wrote in 1869:

"There is a certain poetic enchantment... powerfully felt by the beholder... among shady groves of ancient trees, whose trunks are encircled by the garland of eternity, the ivy, and where tuneful birds enliven the stillness of secret solitude."



Woodland Road

By 1880, Spring Grove's directors took pride in the close, continuing relationship of the Cincinnati Horticultural Society and the Cemetery, both broadly defining horticulture to include "landscape gardening, ... and the care of the most tender exotics from every part of the habitable globe." Spring Grove's President Buchanan declared that "Horticulture is the finer art of Agriculture."

Growth of the Arboretum

Spring Grove Arboretum's rich horticulture tradition continued throughout the twentieth century. During Arthur Espy's tenure as president, the nursery land was increased to fifteen acres for tree and shrub propagation. These nurseries and a large new greenhouse with state-of-the-art heating and humidification equipment engaged in constant horticultural experimentation, exchanging trees and shrubs with other institutional nurseries, especially those of urban park boards, carrying on a tradition begun by Cemetery founders and continued by Strauch.

Clifford R. Runyan became Spring Grove's third Superintendent in 1926 and served in the post for thirty years. Runyan received the first degree awarded in landscape architecture from Ohio University Agriculture College in 1915. With special interest in



Willow Lake seasonal flower border

ornamental plantings, Runyan enlarged the number and size of flower borders and beds. He introduced more flowers into the landscape than Strauch would have allowed and more diverse than Salway (his predecessor), could get, particularly tree peonies, orchids, iris, and daffodils.

Superintendent S. Clyde

Gordon (became Superintendent in 1955) and his successor Samuel A. Stueve deliberately carried on horticultural traditions in developing Spring Grove's extensive arboretum. Recognizing the importance of its trees, the Cemetery hired Thomas L. Smith to supplement the expertise of Edwin A. Friedhoff who became the Horticulturist in 1964 and was promoted to Superintendent in 1972. Smith had worked four summers at "The Grove" while studying forest science and doing post-graduate research at Yale University on the effects of air pollutants on tree growth rates. He led Spring Grove into the new urban forestry movement.

In 1974, the Cemetery hosted the annual meeting of the Ohio Association of Arboretums; approved the labeling of trees, shrubs, and ornamental grasses; and planned long-range education programs focused on the arboretum. In 1987, in recognition of the Cemetery's active involvement in forestry, nursery, and horticultural activities, the Board of Trustees formally adopted the name "Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum."

Spring Grove remains an arboretum with over 1,200 species, 1,000 labeled for study. Twentieth-century management developed an extensive collection of flowering trees, shrubs, and perennials, periodically importing new species.



Spring Grove Dogwood

One popular yew, *Taxus media* 'Runyani', is named after a former Superintendent. Spring Grove received a patent for its *Cornus florida* 'Groflor' in 1993 and the Spring Grove arborvitae was named *Thuja plicata* 'Grovplic'. The Cemetery continues to work with national and international organizations and serves as a national laboratory where universities, nurseries and growers bring new plants and seeds to test.

Excerpts from: Spring Grove: Celebrating 150 Years written by Blanche M. G. Linden, 1995.

(Revised 8/24/07 arl)