

Spokane's Lost Garden Discovered Along Seventh Avenue: The Corbin and Moore-Turner Heritage Garden Project

By 1911, Spokane was a bustling town of nearly 138,000 people and growing rapidly. The mining, timber and railroad industries had helped rebuild the city from a devastating fire in 1889. And in those days, many of Spokane's early tycoons and public figures lived within blocks of the city's main street in the stylish west Seventh Avenue neighborhood.

Until recently, much of what this lower South Hill neighborhood looked like remained a mystery, forgotten over time and mentioned only occasionally by our grandparents. However, remnants of these grand turn-of-the-century buildings and homes such as Marycliff School, Lewis and Clark High School and the D. C. Corbin House provided clues to a once flourishing neighborhood.



Two years ago, Spokane Parks and Recreation Department staff at the Corbin Art Center discovered something quite remarkable along Seventh Avenue. Adjacent to the D.C. Corbin House in Pioneer Park staff uncovered **the previous existence of two adjoining exquisitely landscaped gardens belonging to Washington pioneers Daniel C. Corbin and Frank Rockwood Moore (above).** The Moore residence was later purchased by Senator George Turner, who improved and enhanced the garden area.

The Garden Story

The story of these two country gardens began around 1889 when Spokane architect Kirtland Cutter designed and built an elaborate Tudor Revival-style home on property south of Seventh Avenue for businessman Frank Rockwood Moore. At the time, Moore was the first president of Washington Water Power. Noted as one of Spokane's most spectacular homes, it reportedly cost \$30,000 to \$40,000 to build. Newspaper accounts of the day verify that Moore requested the steep hillside between Seventh Avenue and Cliff Drive be "blasted and graded" to develop a garden behind his home. Photographs of the property taken in 1891 show the wooded hillside behind the Moore home graded into six horizontal rock-walled terraced gardens. At closer look, the pictures reveal several outbuildings including a barn and water tower. As Spokane's second "Age of Elegance" home built along Seventh Avenue, the Moore estate was described as "one of the handsomest residences and gardens in the Northwest". The wood, stucco and granite 2 ½-story home had 13 rooms with interiors of wood paneling and a carved central staircase. F. Rockwood Moore died in 1895.

In 1896, George and Bertha Turner purchased the Moore property, and during the next 17 years, continued to transform the hillside into a magnificent garden filled with hundreds of imported plants and elaborate features. Turner was a successful lawyer and U.S. senator who helped draft the Washington State constitution. After coming to Spokane, he was appointed to a United States

Counsel in The Hague, which oversaw arbitration of northeast fisheries between America and Great Britain. The Turners were friends with President Teddy Roosevelt, and during his visit to Spokane in 1903, Roosevelt broke away from a cheering throng to sip punch with them at their home.

A year after the Turners moved to Seventh Avenue, prominent Inland Northwest railroad entrepreneur Daniel Chase Corbin commissioned Kirtland Cutter to design and build his brick-and-frame Georgian Revival home (now the Spokane Parks and Recreation Departments Corbin Art Center) to the east of the Moore estate. When the Corbin home was complete, it featured a three-quarter wrap-around veranda, shuttered windows and a Palladian gable dormer in a hipped roof. Eventually the Corbin estate would contain five landscaped acres overlooking the city with grounds gently slopping north to Seventh Avenue. It was round this time that the Turners selected Portland, Oregon landscape architect Hugh Bryan to redesign and enlarge the original Moore garden.

Under Bryan's watchful eye, the Turner's 6.5 acres surrounding these two homes were eventually transformed into an elaborate system of pathways, rock staircases, basalt landscaped features including a 70-foot-long cement pond, waterfall, two pergolas, a hexagonal-roofed teahouse supported by wood columns, a mushroom house, water lily reflecting pond, hipped-roof conservatory and at least two greenhouses, a basalt castle overlook with wood footbridge, and numerous trees, shrubs, perennial flower beds and rose garden.

In 1918, Daniel Corbin died leaving his house to his second wife, Anna L. Corbin. In 1932, at the age of 81, Judge Turner passed away. Later that year, following the foreclosure of their home on Seventh Avenue, Bertha Turner moved into the home of her niece. A year after Mrs. Turner's death in 1939, the Kirtland Cutter-designed home, located on the current Pioneer Park lower parking lot, was razed to save taxes. In 1945, the Spokane Park Board purchased the former Moore-Turner property and the D.C. Corbin House and property to form Pioneer Park. The once-beautiful gardens were forgotten.

The Gardens Today

Today only a handful of the Turner trees and shrubs have survived. Among those is a circa-1911 Linden tree beside the remains of one of the original basalt staircases. Native growth fills the hillside where the gardens once bloomed. Old perennial beds sprout brush and trees and, remarkably, each spring some bulbs bloom. Remains of garden walls stand covered with moss and debris. The oval cement pond measuring 70 feet long, 24 feet wide and 8 feet deep rests in the ground as if waiting to be used again. Several round basalt columns, which supported the pond's pergola, lie on the ground next to the pond as if toppled in a strong wind. To the east of the pond, a circle of basalt stones marks the spot where Mrs. Turner had her teahouse. On the property's southwest corner, a square basalt column still stands as a reminder of days gone by. Nearby is the foundation of a building used to grow mushrooms. On the Corbin property rests a basalt-rock outline of the castle overlook, while the southern slope has reclaimed itself as a natural wilderness area. Recently, part of the wooden grand-staircase railing was discovered embedded in a basalt outcropping. Though the garden was forgotten, clues to its one majestic existence remain on the hillside, waiting...

In 1998, after hearing stories of an elaborate garden which once existed behind the D.C. Corbin House and walking the hillside looking for clues, Lynn Mandyke, director of the Corbin Art Center, formed a taskforce to research and evaluate the possibility of restoring the lost Corbin and Moore-Turner Gardens. Discovered in the Washington State University archives were dozens of historic garden photographs donated 60 years ago by Bertha Turner. This pictorial history documents a piece of Spokane's early history and a site worthy of restoration as the City's first historic heritage garden.

During 1999, the taskforce worked with the Spokane Preservation Advocates on a cleanup of the Moore-Turner garden site. A public Open House was held in the D.C. Corbin House and featuring tours of the garden site, an exhibit of historic garden photos and unveiling of the preliminary Master Plan for restoration. A Corbin & Turner Heritage Garden charter membership group was formed to acquaint the community with the project. Grassroots, a new garden club, was formed to support the restoration process. And finally, the Corbin and Turner Heritage Garden Project was listed on the Spokane Register of Historic Places and the National Registers as a cultural landscape. Recently, an archeological and site survey was completed and the community is busy finalizing the garden's master plan. Once infrastructure such as irrigation and pathways are in place, phased restoration will begin in the three main garden areas:

- The original Corbin Garden which is comprised of a basalt castle overlook, wooden footbridge, rose and perennial gardens, and a kitchen garden containing herbs and other plantings that characterized a self-sustaining household garden common the turn of the century.
- The original Moore-Turner Garden, which was an extensive garden of pathways, staircases, basalt landscape features including a large cement pond, waterfall, pergola, teahouse, water lily pond, rose garden, terraced perennial gardens, greenhouses, conservatory and numerous trees and shrubs, and rose arbor.
- The Natural Woodland area that has established itself and matured over the past century which forms the backdrop for both the Corbin and Turner Garden areas. This area needs some rehabilitation and reestablishment of native plant materials and dirt pathways.

Meeting historic standards is extremely important for interpretation of the property. It is intended that this project will be a significant historic preservation project and educational tool for school and community groups, garden clubs, and visitors to the site.

The garden site, Pioneer Park, is owned by the Spokane Parks and Recreation Department. If you would like to become involved in the restoration effort by donating time, construction materials, money, memories of the garden site or photographs, or would like more information on the project including becoming a project charter member, contact Marion Severud, Spokane Parks and Recreation Department, 625-6297.