

HISTORICAL INFORMATION ON THE LOS ALAMOS MEMORIAL ROSE GARDEN



The Los Alamos Memorial Rose Garden is the oldest public garden in Los Alamos and the oldest public rose garden in New Mexico. It is located on the corner of Fuller Lodge, originally the famous Los Alamos Boy's Ranch School, and is next to the Los Alamos County Historical Museum. These grounds and buildings were appropriated during World War II by the Federal Government for the Manhattan Project.(1)

While Los Alamos was under Federal control there was no cemetery. As a result, the garden originally represented the desire of the community to build a living memorial to loved ones who had died in Los Alamos, but could not be buried here.(1)

In the early 1950's, the Los Alamos Garden Club Members incorporated flowers and rose bushes into existing flower beds in the Community Center. The Community Center was the town's business district.(2 & 3)

In 1956, the Zia Parks Department gave the Los Alamos Garden Club a garden plot in the Community Center where the present roundabout is. The club turned the plot into a rose garden. The first roses contributed by the club were six Floribunda China Roses called "China Doll".(4)

In 1957, with the slogan "Our Community Cares", the Los Alamos Garden Club announced that proceeds from its annual plant sale would be used to buy roses for the Community Center Rose Garden. The club purchased 50 rose bushes to add to the 6 which were planted the year before to start the Los Alamos Rose Garden. The preparation and planting of the beds were under the supervision of Carl A. Freeman, superintendent of the Zia Parks Department. The landscaping design, with the plots separated by the grass paths and outlined with natural logs, against a background of perennials and annuals, was the work of John Martinez. Lucas Reynolds assisted with the maintenance. Members of the Garden Club took turns to keep the dead blossoms picked. Besides providing a beauty spot for the heart of Los Alamos, the garden acted as an experimental

plot, in which residents and visitors could observe the color and performance of individual varieties of roses under peculiar climate conditions imposed by the Los Alamos altitude.(5) The rose garden was quickly outgrowing this area as residents began donating roses in memory of loved ones.(6) At that time, the Los Alamos Garden Club enlisted professional landscape architect and Los Alamos Garden Club Member, Lila Gardner, to begin designs for the present Memorial Rose Garden. Gardner's original 1957 design included a very large Ranch School Apricot Tree. (This Apricot Tree had to be removed after extensive storm damage during the late 1960's).(2)

In 1958, grounds near the famous Los Alamos Boy's Ranch School were appropriated from the Atomic Energy Commission by the Los Alamos Garden Club Members and one of the first rose bushes planted in the Memorial Rose Garden was donated by the Garden Club for the mother of Janet Lewis. Lewis was a member of the Garden Club.(7)

In 1959, a redwood arbor, known as the garden house, was added. This redwood arbor was a focusing point in the garden and marked the entrance to the Los Alamos Garden Club Memorial Rose Garden. Another arbor was also added (to be know as the Lanter Memorial Arbor). A small test plot of 20 plants, was added. These test roses were observed and recorded by the Los Alamos Chapter of the American Rose Society. The 20 test plants and the 46 memorial rose bushes bloomed from June until September. During this time, Norma Lanter was chairmen of the Rose Garden Project and was assisted by Lila Gardner and Helen Miller. Club members helped with the pruning and grooming of the roses while the Zia Parks Department handled the watering and mulching.(8)

While general development of the garden was financed by the Los Alamos Garden Club, in 1960, the Garden Club received two cash grants from the Sears Foundation through the New Mexico Garden Club, Inc. The grants were based on a worthy public project for landscape improvement.(7)

In 1961 with the Sears grants and with donated help from the Garden Club Members (and

their husbands), many projects were made possible. A stand was donated as a memorial to Enrico Fermi and placed under the redwood arbor. On this stand there was a chart listing rose bushes numbered for easy location. Each bush was identified by the name of the person for whom it had been donated. This stand was one of the first decorative structures in the garden. There no longer is a chart but the stand still remains, and a plaque now rests on it that tells the history of the Memorial Rose Garden. Added that same year was a birdbath. The birdbath was donated by Garden Club Member, Mrs. Ernest Lang, in memory of her husband, Ernest Lang Sr. A sundial was contributed by Mary Strickfadden in memory of her husband, William Strickfadden. The base for the sundial was donated by the Lion's Club. Both the sundial and the birdbath were executed by Nambe Mills under the direction of the Garden Club Members.(7)

To improve the rose beds, three truck loads of sand were added along with seven yards of manure and two bales of peat moss.(7)

The garden was accepted, in 1963, by The All American Rose Selections Inc., as a public test garden and was one of three in New Mexico. The other gardens were in Roswell and Hobbs. Roses that were tested were the 1962 winners, Christian Dior, Golden Slippers, Jon S. Armstrong and King's Ransom. Also tested were Duet, Pink Parfait, Fire King, Garden Party and Saraband. Five other new varieties were planted for testing for the originators. In June of 1963, 150 rose bushes of many varieties bloomed. Also during 1963, as a community project, the Cliff Dwellers Garden Club assisted the Los Alamos Garden Club in the care of the garden.(7)

In 1968, there were 450 rose bushes in the Memorial Rose Garden.(6) Total care of the garden was the responsibility of the Los Alamos Garden Club until 1968 when the Los Alamos County assumed some of the maintenance.(7)

In 1973, a Rose Garden Committee of the Los Alamos Garden Club advised refurbishment of the garden, installation of concrete borders and black border chains by the Los Alamos County.(7)

During the severe winter of 1973, there was extensive damage to the rose garden and in the spring of 1974, 145 rose bushes were replaced.(7)

By 1985, there were over 500 rose bushes in the Memorial Rose Garden and due to the lack of space, the Garden Club no longer accepted donations for new rose bushes. Profits from the Garden Club's fund-raising projects were used to finance replacements.(7)

The Lanter Arbor Memorial was dedicated in 1987 to long time Garden Club Member, Norma Lanter and her husband, Robert Lanter. A plaque was added to the arbor at this time.(2)

In 1999, during Los Alamos' 50th. anniversary year, a metal "Table Fountain with Rock" by Hans Van de Bovenkamp, was purchased by the Garden Club with matching funds from the Art in Public Places Board. This beautiful fountain was placed in the Rose Garden as a gift to Los Alamos County.(1)

In 2001, two Peace hybrid rose bushes were planted by Garden Club Member, Janet Clayton. The donation for these bushes was made by former New Mexico Garden Club, Inc. President, Elaine McIlroy, to honor the fire survivors of the 2000 Cerro Grande Fire. Garden Club Members, Linda Hoffman and Jill Forman, who lost their homes during the Cerro Grande Fire, chose the Peace rose bushes. A donation for this project was also made by Linda Hoffman.(9)

In 2002 the Los Alamos Garden Club began again to accept donations for rose bushes. In May, 15 rose bushes were planted by Master Gardner, Lee Builta, and two Garden Club Members, Nina Hecker and Irene Aikin. 13 rose bushes were donated by Sally Hoffman, Liz Laemmle, Mr. and Mrs. Don Usner, Helen Deaden, Susan Trujillo and Olivia Newfield in memory of Jeremy Gorlitz, Arthur Usner and Benigna Chavez. Nina Hecker donated an Oregold Hybrid Rose Bush in memory of her mother in law, Maria Mayerhofer. A National Velvet Hybrid Rose Bush was donated by Irene Aikin in memory of her son, Scott Aikin.(9)

In June, 2002, a Princesse de Monaco Hybrid Rose Bush was donated by the Los Alamos Garden Club in memory of Garden Club Charter Member, Norma Lanter.(9)

The Los Alamos County built a cement Historical Walkway in the fall of 2002. The walkway borders 2 sides of the Rose Garden. The chain link fence and the black border decorative chain were removed at this time. Path lighting was also installed along the walkway. As in the 1950's, the redwood arbor serves as an entrance to the Memorial Rose Garden.(9)

In 2003, a major project was undertaken. The Garden Club requested the Los Alamos County Parks Department to remove all the Juniper Bushes from the garden. They also removed the trees and growth from section 10 and section 19. In May, 41 rose bushes were planted in these sections including two rose bushes donated by the Garden Club in memory of Garden Club Members, Nina Marsh and Dottie Buettner. Both arbors were replaced by the County Parks Department. Also new benches under the west arbor were installed by the County Parks Department and Dura Mulch was delivered for Club Members to spread on the garden.(9)

In June, 2003 the Los Alamos Garden Club invited members and former club members to a reception to celebrate National Garden Week and to see the new rose bushes. Lila Gardner, former Club Member and the one who designed the Rose Garden was present for the celebration. Rose expert and Master Gardener, Lee Builta and Irene Aikin, Los Alamos Garden Club Chairperson for the Memorial Rose Garden, were honored for the hundreds of hours they have spent working in the garden.(10)

In July, 2003, local businessman, Tom Netuschil, donated and delivered a large landscaping rock for the rose garden.(11)

In the spring of 2004, the County Parks Department installed a \$5,000 irrigation system. Dick McIntyre and his staff also reinstalled the "Table Fountain With Rock" which had been removed for repairs.(9)

In May 2004, 23 rose bushes were donated to the rose garden including 3 rose bushes from the Eash Family in memory of Dave Eash, husband of long time Club Member, Lee Eash.(9)

The County Parks Department installed pavers in the three entrances to the Rose Garden in

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September, 2004. Also, in September, Irene Aikin gave the White Rock Girl Scout Troop #123 a tour of the rose garden.(9)

In March, 2005, the County Parks Department replaced the boards on the memorial bench. At the request of the Garden Club, the County Parks Department removed the overgrown Rudisa Rose Bushes in section 8.

In May, the Garden Club Members planted 32 rose bushes, including a rose bush for Mary Rosen, honorary member of the Los Alamos Garden Club.(9)

During the spring and summer, garden club members applied a new product "Deer Away" to the rose bushes. This product seems to help with the long standing problem of deer feeding on the rose bushes. Mary Jeanne Nilsson (who worked on the Rose Garden 40 years ago and who is a honorary member of the Garden Club) said that "this year was the nicest the garden has ever looked".(9)

In October, 2005, while roses were still in bloom, Irene Aikin gave the White Rock Brownie Troop #02 a tour of the rose garden.

In March 2006, the arbors were refinished and "The Rose Garden" sign was installed by the County Parks Department. The staff said that this sign had been in the warehouse. In checking with long time members, no one seemed to remember this sign.

In May, 2006, 5 rose bushes were planted. One was donated by the Garden Club in memory of Lila Gardner who designed the Memorial Rose Garden. Again, the County furnished Dura Mulch for the Club Members to put on the garden.(9)

In June, 2006, a reception was held in the Rose Garden in honor of National Garden Week.(9)

In mid-May of 2007, Club Members, Kathy Hirons and Irene Aikin planted 4 roses bushes. Six Club Members and three spouses help spread Dura Mulch.

On May 22, 2007, Club President, Jane Sherwood and Irene Aikin attended the Los Alamos Council Meeting where Jane gave a presentation about the installation of the Blue Star Memorial By

Way Marker.(9)

Phillip Kigour, husband of Los Alamos Garden Club Member, Midge Kigour installed the Veteran's Blue Star Byway Historical Marker in the Rose Garden in late May. The Garden Club donated this marker to honor the servicemen and women who have served in the past, currently serving or will serve in the Armed Forces. Dedication of this marker was held in the Los Alamos Memorial Rose Garden at the Garden Club 60th. Anniversary Celebration which also was to celebrated National Garden Week. This was held on June 6th. the anniversary of D-Day.(9)

Due to high winds, a large tree fell in the Rose Garden on January 30, 2008. The Rose Garden sustained damage to the large climber that covered the west arbor.

In May 2008, 9 roses were planted of which 2 were donated by the Club in memory of Mary Deal, who club members said like to work in the Rose Garden, and Margie Scheiber, who was one of the founding members of the Los Alamos Garden Club.(9)

In 2009, 3 rose bushes were planted and the County Parks Department replaced the 4th. pump in the "Table Fountain With Rock". Three pumps have had to be replaced as they burned out, and this last pump was "taken" sometime in the early spring.

On July 6, 2009 the rose bushes sustained damage from a severe hailstorm.

Between 2001 and 2009, 133 rose bushes have been added to the Rose Garden.

Over the years many rose bushes have been planted and many have been replaced.

Extensive records are kept of those who donated rose bushes in memory or in honor of family or friends, the names of the rose bushes, and where they are planted. These records are stored at the Los Alamos Historical Society archives located in Fuller Lodge.(9)

Each spring, the Garden Club, along with the County Extension Department, sponsors a rose pruning workshop and the public is invited to learn about planting and caring for roses in Los Alamos and White Rock. Lee Builta teaches this workshop.

Today, the Los Alamos Garden Club continues to accepts donations for the Memorial Rose

Garden. The Garden Club still provides guidance and care of the Memorial Rose Garden with the help of Los Alamos Master Gardener, Lee Buita. Some maintenance help is still provided by the Los Alamos Parks Department.

The Memorial Rose Garden is much more than a memorial, it is a place of beauty and inspiration to residents and visitors alike. Weddings, receptions, concerts, craft fairs and other community events take place in and around the garden. It is a vital and growing feature of Los Alamos and a source of pride for the community.(1)

- (1) The Los Alamos Garden Club 2001-2002 Booklet
- (2) Lila Gardner - former Los Alamos Garden Club Member
- (3) Mary Jean Nilsson - former Los Alamos Garden Club Member
- (4) The June 7, 1956 Zia News
- (5) Article donated by Alice Mann - former Los Alamos Garden Club Member
- (6) Archives - 1984-1985 Article - History of the Garden
- (7) Archives - Los Alamos Garden Club Minutes
- (8) The May 7, 1959 LASL News
- (9) Memorial Rose Garden Notes
- (10) The June 5, 2003 Monitor
- (11) The July 23, 2003 Monitor

This report was compiled in February, 2003, by Irene Aikin of the Los Alamos Garden Club with the help of the Los Alamos Garden Club Members and former Garden Club Members, Lila Gardner, Mary Jean Nilsson and Alice Mann.

This report was update in July, 2009 by Irene Aikin of the Los Alamos Garden Club