



Volunteer Prudence Chalker and horticulture supervisor Joe Luebke trim boxwood to reduce disease and promote growth by allowing sunlight inside the bush.



PHOTO BY DONOVAN MARKS



PHOTO BY BROOKS PHOTOGRAPHERS

GARDENERS & BY KATHRYN MCKAY GROOMERS

*The Cathedral's
outdoor sanctuaries
and their keepers*

Staff and volunteers plan, plant, pray, preserve, and promote the Bishop's Garden and Olmsted Woods, sanctuaries so magnificent that they invite comparison to the Cathedral itself.

It wasn't always so sublime. In the early 1900s the Bishop's Garden really was *the* bishop's garden, complete with a vegetable patch and linens flapping on clotheslines, reveals Ray Mims, superintendent of horticulture and grounds.

Fortunately the first bishop of Washington, Henry Yates Satterlee, engaged Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., in planning the grounds of the Cathedral, called the Close. Olmsted's relationship with the Cathedral lasted from 1907 through 1928. He wrote of "the great charm of approaching the Cathedral through and up a wooded hillside, leaving the city far behind and below,

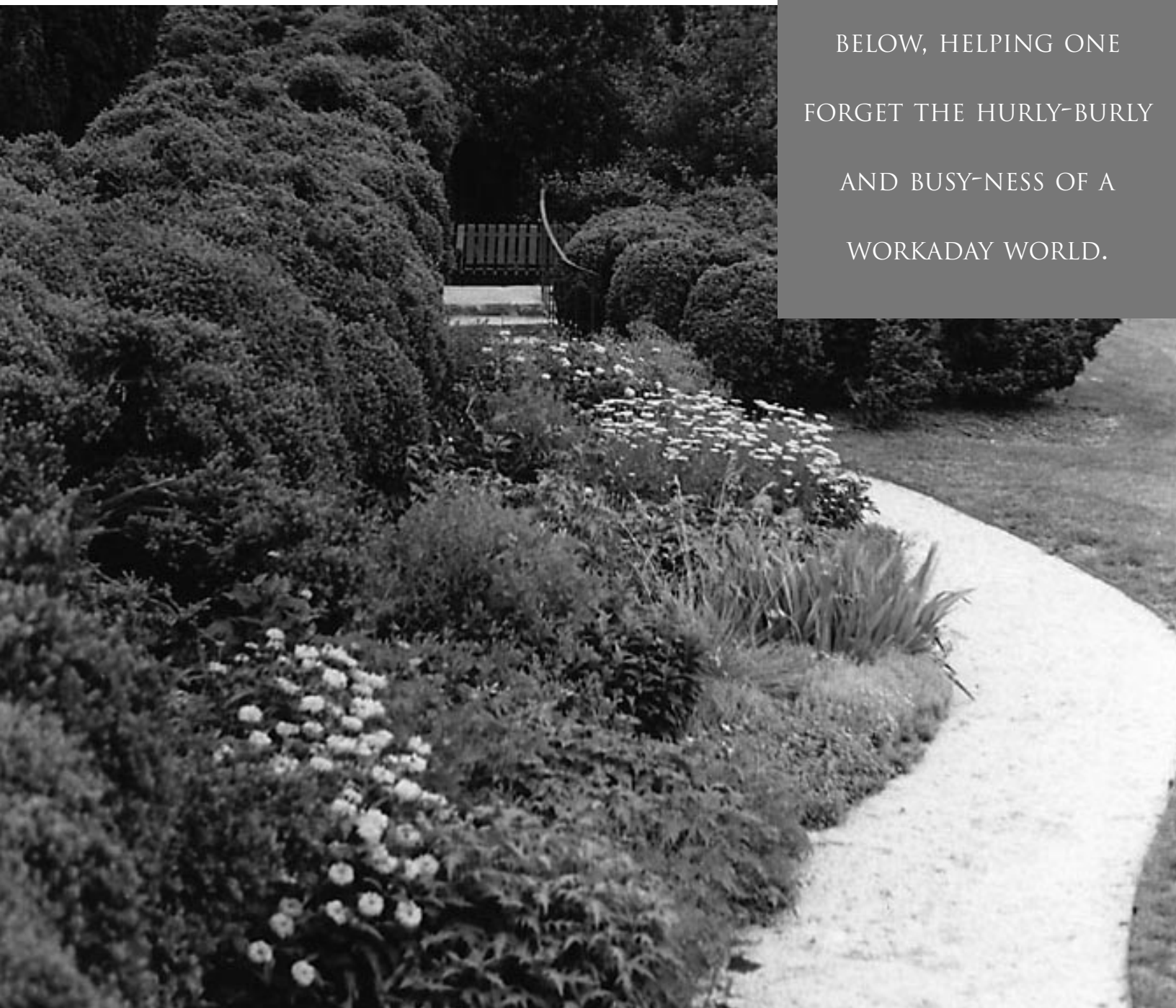
helping one forget the hurly-burly and busy-ness of a work-a-day world... The great sweeping branches of the trees seem to brush off the dust of the city so that one at last reaches the Cathedral cleansed in mind and spirit."

Sharing Olmsted's ambition, Florence Brown Bratenahl, a gifted landscape designer and the wife of the first dean, formed All Hallows Guild in 1916 to provide for "the care and beautification of the Cathedral Close." Drawing upon Olmsted's plans, Bratenahl desired a "garden for the ages."

Today Mims's staff of seventeen horticulturists and gardeners care for the



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HORTICULTURE

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The shadow house or gazebo in the Bishop's Garden has ties to Nellie Custis and Grover Cleveland and affords a restful location to admire the flowers and the Cathedral's central tower.

Close: fifty-nine acres of land around the Cathedral, including gardens and fields for three schools and the College of Preachers. But it's the three-acre Bishop's Garden and five-acre Olmsted Woods that bring out volunteers and visitors. As Mims says, "This is our labor of love."

THE SECRET GARDEN

Still, not everyone has heard about the beautiful gardens and woodland. Horticulture supervisor Joe Luebke says, "I'm still amazed that some people don't know we're here. As I work in the Bishop's Garden, I hear people walking along South Road, saying in hushed tones, 'Oh my, there's a garden down there. Can we go in?'" Luebke surprises people when he answers from behind the stone wall, "Yes, you can."

Strolling through the garden, visitors delight in the "rooms" of plants and sculptures that pay homage to ancient world history and even our presidents.

In the Hortulus (or Little Garden) grow herbs that Abbott Walahfrid Strabo mentioned in his ninth-century diary "Hortulus." A ninth-century baptismal font from the abbey of St. Julie stands in the center. In the Rose Garden, the Wayside Cross, a treasure from either ancient Gaul or the west coast of Britain, bears a Latin inscription that translates to read, "Our soul is humbled even into the dust."

Stones in the Roman arch and along the walks and steps came from a quarry owned by George Washington. Wedge-shaped bricks in the floor of the garden's Shadow House came from Nellie Custis's kitchen, and stones in the walls were

taken from a house owned by Grover Cleveland. Ivy in the garden was transplanted from Thomas Jefferson's estate, Monticello.

Suzanne Miller, a member of All Hallows Guild, cultivated an interest in the history of the garden after ploughing through historical documents at the Cathedral and the Library of Congress. "We have roots here," she says. Her next quest will take her to the Olmsted museum in Brookline, Massachusetts, which houses more than two hundred drawings of the Close. "I want to untangle the mysteries of some of the designs in the garden. Were they created by Olmsted or Mrs. Bratenahl?" she wonders. "Mrs. Bratenahl was a strong woman. During the 1920s it wasn't unusual for well-educated, wealthy women to study landscape design."



PHOTO BY DONOVAN MARKS

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Joe Luebke explains the care of the roses in the Bishop's Garden to two interns.

Luebke has spent most of his twelve years at the Cathedral outdoors. He recalls his first boss, a Scotsman, pointing out that there was no reason to go inside the Cathedral. But on one memorable occasion he pursued a bit of nature into the building. Along with other members of the grounds crew, electricians, and security staff, he saw that “a squirrel was spinning around on the marble in the Cathedral. The poor little thing climbed up on the wrought iron railing in the Resurrection Chapel; one of us swiped at it with a broom and it landed on the shoes of a German tourist, who was quite astonished. But then the squirrel ran right down the center aisle and out the front doors of the Cathedral.”

Most of Luebke’s pest control involves insects. “We take a kinder, gentler approach to pests. Now we look at their life cycles and how much damage they can inflict. Then, if needed, we spray them with chemicals, or even horticultural oil or soaps.”

It’s not only insects that bother Luebke, who spots things others might not notice. “Sometimes I get jaded. I see boxwoods discolored and I worry. I see weeds, trash, and mulch kicked around.” However, he adds, “The raw enthusiasm of our volunteers reminds me that this truly is a beautiful place.”

Indeed, when asked about her volunteer duties, Prudence Chalker replies with characteristic cheer, “We do what we’re told. We weed, we prune, and we deadhead.”

In the fall, Chalker and others planted thousands of bulbs. “We spend a lot of

time on our knees. It’s not exactly like praying but it’s good support,” she says. “I think many people find solace in gardening, especially after September 11. It’s a privilege to be here.”

A WOODED WONDERLAND

“We’re maintaining the spirit of Olmsted’s ideas and design,” says Dede Petri of All Hallows Guild’s Olmsted Woods Restoration committee. Petri and her committee divided the project into three phases. The first phase, now complete, was the creation of Pilgrim Way, a meandering stone path through the woods that offers fresh glimpses of the Cathedral and grounds at every turn. “Looking up into the trees in the winter is like looking at the beams and buttresses. I see a natural counterpart of the Cathedral,” says Petri.

The second phase involves stabilizing the ravine and controlling water to encourage the growth of native plants. “The water runoff from the Cathedral constitutes nearly 670,000 cubic feet of water each year, enough to fill the Cathedral to a depth of eight feet,” says Anne Elsbree, committee member. To fight the effects of the water, the committee is developing measures that will slowly release water into the ground, recharging the soil. “Otherwise the topsoil eventually becomes silt and runs into the Chesapeake Bay,” explains Elsbree. While the committee works with water management experts, gardeners and volunteers pull up invasive exotic plants and replace them with native wildflowers, plants, and trees. “We’re experiencing a rebirth,” says Elsbree.

SHARING GARDENS AND WOODS: A LABOR OF LOVE

The third and final phase of the plan is revitalizing the amphitheater. But staff and volunteers aren’t waiting until the project’s completion to share the fruits of their labor. Woodland ecologist Elizabeth Brewster brings people to the same places where she wandered as a child. “As soon as I was old enough to cross Wisconsin Avenue by myself, I was here,” says Brewster, who lives three blocks from the Cathedral in the home where she grew up.

When Brewster brings children through the woods, she focuses on “gee-whiz” factors. “I show them how jewel weeds disperse seeds. Brush against this plant and the seeds fly five feet,” she demonstrates. Brewster also points out the pokeweed. “Kids love these dark purple berries that stain your clothes. They also like to see the snags, dead trees with the tops cut off, because they attract woodpeckers and salamanders. That’s probably because more insects colonize in dead trees.” Whether her audience consists of children or adults, Brewster says, “I want people to understand how our ecological system works and how we’re restoring the woods.”

Mary Louise Thompson has been giving tours of the Bishop’s Garden for nine years.

“One morning I complained to one of my working-mother daughters about ‘having’ to get to the garden by 8:15 on Monday morning for a meeting. She said, ‘Tough job, Mom.’” But the early hours do not deter Thompson or her fellow volunteers. “We love the companionship of people who love gardens,” she says. “I lead many tours for church groups, garden clubs, and plant enthusiasts, but I’ll never forget the little boy who whispered to me, ‘You know, I hear the angels singing in this garden.’” ❖