

The Way We Were

The Sunken Gardens

LOREEN JEROME

In 1927 the City of Hamilton secured 400 acres of exceptional Westdale land, consisting of ravine lands and adjacent water lots in Cootes Paradise, in lieu of debts owed by the land-development company McKittrick Properties. The land was then passed on to Hamilton's Board of Parks Management. A 50-acre site situated near this land was a strong incentive in attracting McMaster University to Hamilton from Toronto in 1930. The Board of Parks Management offered to use some of their newly acquired land to create a public park to enhance the northwest entrance to the city and McMaster University.

Under the direction of Thomas McQuesten, a member of the Board of Parks Management and founder of the Royal Botanical Gardens, the famous "sunken gardens" were created. Massive evergreens surrounded the front of the campus and the sunken gardens. The gardens at the entrance to McMaster University were large and formal. The central feature was a reflecting pool with lily pads and large goldfish. There were concrete shelters, steps with balustrades, and formal plantings of flowers throughout. Numerous benches allowed visitors to view the reflecting pool and surround-



Photo credit: John Morris, Courtesy of Special Collections, Hamilton Public Library

band and I had our wedding pictures taken there 36 years ago this July.

In the early 1960s McMaster University bought approximately 98 acres of the park and other nearby property from the Royal Botanical Gardens to develop the east side of the campus. Major controversy arose over the planned blocking of King Street West, the demolition of homes, and the elimination of the sunken gardens to

make way for building the McMaster University Health Sciences Centre. In the end, city council voted for the project.

Do you have any fond memories of

the sunken gardens? Did you ever take a stroll or attend a function there? If so, please call me at 905-525-7386. We would love to hear from you.

Sources for this article include the RBG newsletter *Pappus*, *The Hamilton Spectator*, May 12, 1927, and Cultural Landmarks of Hamilton-Wentworth's website:

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/wentworth>

“Massive evergreens surrounded the front of the campus and the sunken gardens.”

ing beauty. People strolled through the gardens at a leisurely pace, admiring the flowers and taking photographs for future memories. It was a favourite place for wedding photos—my hus-