

Harriet Hollister Spencer Collection

Arranged and Described by Cheri Crist
SUNY University at Buffalo
July 2007

Schuyler C. Townson Library
Rochester Museum and Science Center
657 East Avenue
Rochester, New York 14607

For an appointment, contact:

Lea Kemp
585-271-4552 ext.315
Lea_Kemp@rmsc.org

Monday-Friday 9:30-4:30

Custodial History:

This collection of papers was donated to the Rochester Museum and Science Center by Mr. Thomas G. Spencer in June 1970. Other papers relating to the Hollister family and Harriet Hollister Spencer are held by the University of Rochester's Rare Books and Special Collections.

Conditions Governing Access and Use:

There are no known restrictions on the use of this collection.

Size: .5 cubic feet

Collection Scope and Content Note:

This collection contains papers dating from 1909-1984 relating to Harriet Hollister Spencer's horticultural work, with special emphasis on her creation of the Rochester Museum and Science Center's Garden of Fragrance. Included in the collection are descriptions of Mrs. Spencer's home garden in the Bulletin of the Garden Club of America; a press release for the annual Garden of Fragrance garden party; newspaper articles pertaining to Mrs. Spencer's horticultural activities; the original 1958 Garden of Fragrance guidebook; and Mrs. Spencer's handwritten notes. Of particular interest is a Mrs. Spencer's original schematic for the layout of the garden, as well as correspondence relating to the design of the garden.

Because of the collection's small size, each series has been assigned its own folder. Each item within the series is designated by number. There is also a vertical file on Mrs. Spencer in the library holdings.

- Series 1 Garden of Fragrance
- Series 2 Mrs. Spencer's Garden
- Series 3 Writings
- Series 4 Miscellaneous Personal
- Series 5 Photographs

Biographical Sketch

Born March 1, 1887, along with twin sister Elizabeth, Harriet Hollister was a noted horticulturalist and civic leader who made a number of important civic contributions to Rochester. Married to businessman Thomas G. Spencer, Mrs. Spencer was a highly regarded expert on horticulture and a noted rosarian. She was a charter member of the Rochester Garden Club, a member of the Rochester Rose Society and the Nantucket Garden Club, and was an advisor to the Garden Committee for the Landmark Society. In 1959, she was awarded the Jane Righter Rose Medal from the Garden Club of America. Her work included serving on the Monroe County Victory Garden Committee—for which she developed a demonstration garden that offered instruction on vegetable growing—as well as writing a victory garden broadcast, "Pointers for Victory Gardeners," for the Fulton Lewis program. Mrs. Spencer also gave radio talks for the Monroe Garden Committee, designed and planted an herb and kitchen garden at George Eastman's birthplace in 1954, was awarded the Green Thumb award from the *Garden Gate* radio program, and was a strong advocate for the protection of Rochester's old trees and the preservation of Ellwanger & Barry's original arboretum.

Mrs. Spencer's own box garden at 1005 East Avenue included a Tudor garden of four knots and garnered mention in the Garden Locator of the Garden Club of America (1953, 1956). Known as "The History of the Rose," the garden featured boxwood hedges in intricate, maze-like patterns, 80 varieties of herbs, and a historical rose collection.

The idea for a Garden of Fragrance sprang from a 1952 lecture given by Mrs. Spencer on "Herbs from a Tudor Garden" at the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences (later the Rochester Museum and Science Center). The Museum Association acquired 6.4 additional acres of land, which allowed enough space for the creation of an herb and rose garden. The development of the garden began in 1955. New Jersey nursery Bobbink & Atkins donated 220 rose bushes, and a variety of herbs and china and bourbon roses came from Mrs. Spencer's own propagating beds. The Garden of Fragrance was dedicated on June 18, 1958. For her work with "many social service groups, and, particularly, for her contributions to the knowledge of rose history, herb lore, landscaping design and various phases of horticulture," Mrs. Spencer was named a Fellow of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences in 1958.

A noted expert on glass, silver, and lace, Mrs. Spencer was guest curator for the Memorial Art Gallery's exhibition on early American blown glass, Old English China, and all periods of lace. In addition, she served as Chairwoman of the Period Rooms 1725-1825 and the 1950 Period Exhibit; Chairman of Honor of 1934; Chairman of the House of 1834 for the 1934 Rochester Centennial Exhibit; Chairperson of the Episcopal section/Advisor on Protestant section of an exhibition of church art; and served on the board of the gallery's Women's Council.

Mrs. Spencer took a special interest in nursing and nursing education, serving on the Board of Supervisors of the Genesee Hospital as well as its Nursing School Board, for which she served as president for six years. She was also on the boards of the Rochester Hillside Children's Center; the Rochester Blind Association; Lewis Street Settlement; and was a founding member of the Landmark Society of Western New York, serving on its board of trustees until her death. At her request, Mrs. Spencer's family gave a sizable portion of land to the state for the creation of a park. The Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area is situated on 679 acres between Honeoye and Canadice lakes in Dansville, NY. In 2001, Harriet Hollister Spencer was nominated for the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Biographical Sources:

Chamberlain, R. B. (1958, June 18). Garden of Fragrance creator: Her museum plot is gem. *Rochester Times-Union*, 38.

Harriet H. Spencer dies; Rose expert, civic leader. (1962, August 28). *Rochester Times-Union*, 25-26.

Keiper, E. (1963, May 24). Old nursery arboretum goes to university. *Rochester Times Union*, 2C.

Series Descriptions:**Series Number:** 1**Series Title:** Garden of Fragrance**Series Dates:** 1956-1972**Scope and Content Note:**

This series contains correspondence, writings, press releases, and other items related to the development, maintenance, and events associated with the Rochester Museum and Science Center's Garden of Fragrance.

Container/Folder List:

1. Typewritten manuscript for "A Garden of Pleasure--For Fragrance and Flavor" by Harriet Hollister Spencer with author's notes. Published in *Museum Service*, June 1958, Volume 31, Issue 6, 92-93. (photocopy incl.)
2. *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle* article, "Rose Garden Help Wanted," requesting volunteers to help tend the rose garden at the Rochester Museum. n.d.
3. Article in *The Herb Grower Magazine* (Volume XXV, Number 2, 1972), "Rochester's Garden of Fragrance" by Philip B. Wickes.
4. Pamphlet, "A Baker's Dozen of Herbs for the Sunny Window," by Edward T. Boardman, Assistant Director and Curator of Biology. Reprinted from *Museum Service* (June 1962). 3 copies.
5. Correspondence regarding the development of the Garden of Fragrance: From Bobbink White to Mrs. Spencer (May 14, 1956); from Peter Salmon of the Industrial Home for the Blind to E. T. Boardman (September 5, 1957); from Mrs. Howard W. Franke of the Association for the Blind of Rochester to Boardman regarding Braille labels (September 12, 1957); from Boardman to Peter Salmon regarding Braille labels (September 13, 1957); from Boardman to Mrs. Spencer about her sketch for the Garden of Fragrance (October 15, 1957); typewritten schematic for "Garden By Mrs. Thomas G. Spencer" by Harriet Hollister Spencer. n.d; from Mable S. Smith, editor, *Museum Service*, to Mrs. Spencer regarding the return of her manuscript. n.d.
6. Spiral-bound Garden of Fragrance booklet in Braille. n.d.
7. Press release for Garden of Fragrance event for June 17 from the Women's Council of the Rochester Museum and Science Center. Describes activities to take place at the event. 2 copies. n.d.
8. Handwritten drafts of Mrs. Spencer's museum rose labels with notes. Arranged by period. Some notes ripped in half. n.d.
9. Agenda, Garden of Fragrance annual event, June 17, 1970. List of program activities for "Herbs for Gardens and Gourmets" theme.

Series Number: 2

Series Title: Mrs. Spencer's Garden

Series Dates: 1941-1959

Scope and Content Note:

This series contains items relating to Mrs. Spencer's garden at 1005 East Avenue.

Container/Folder List:

1. De Sylva, E. (n.d.) Geranium expert praises East Avenue garden. *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*.
2. Mrs. Spencer's copy of the Annual Meeting book of the Garden Club of America in Rochester, May 1941. Includes a description of Mrs. Spencer's home garden and handwritten note inserted in pages.
3. Handwritten description of her garden, written by Mrs. Spencer. An excerpt was published in the *Annual Meeting book of the Garden Club of America*. n.d.
4. *Bulletin of the Garden Club of America*, July 1941, No. 16. Includes short description of Mrs. Spencer's home garden (pp. 27-28) and handwritten notes inserted in pages.
5. Mrs. Spencer's handwritten description of her Tudor garden. "The Tudor Garden That Holds the Roses." Marked "No. 1." n.d.
6. Handwritten draft labels for rose bushes. "Tudor Garden Labels. 1958."

Series Number: 3

Series Title: Writings

Series Dates: 1939-1958

Scope and Content Note:

This series contains Mrs. Spencer's writings, including handwritten and typewritten manuscripts for "Where Our Ancient Roses Came From," handwritten notes on various types of roses, and a booklet that she wrote about the women who ran the Genesee Hospital.

Container/Folder List:

1. Typewritten manuscript with author's notes for "Where Our Ancient Roses Came From" by Harriet Hollister Spencer, 1958, and notes for preparation of same.
- 2a-e. Handwritten notes for "Where Our Ancient Roses Came From" by Harriet Hollister Spencer with placement notes from the author. n.d.
3. One-sheet "Newly Developed Vegetable Garden Techniques," presented by Mrs. Spencer, Chairman of the Horticultural Committee, to the Rochester Garden Club at the Horticultural Meeting. Includes a list of vegetable varieties chosen by Mrs. Spencer based

on extensive trials in demonstration gardens and chosen for “productivity, flavor, resistance to disease, suitability to climate and horticultural merit.” n.d.

4. Booklet. “Lady Supervisors.” History of female supervisors in the founding of the Rochester Homeopathic Hospital (later the Genesee Hospital) by Harriet Hollister Spencer. 1939. 30 pages.
5. Mrs. Spencer’s handwritten notes describing the moment in 1939 she first saw *Rosa centifolia* at Honeoye Lake and was inspired to study and cultivate roses. Marked “Honeoye. No. 2.” n.d.
6. Mrs. Spencer’s handwritten notes about the *gallica* roses, with references to the ones in her Tudor Garden. Marked “Gallica. No. 5.” n.d.
7. Mrs. Spencer’s handwritten notes on the *alba* roses. Marked “R. alba. No. 6.” n.d.
8. Mrs. Spencer’s handwritten notes about the *damascena* roses. Marked “Damascena. No. 7.” n.d.
9. Mrs. Spencer’s handwritten notes about the *centifolia* roses. Marked “Centifolia & Sports. No. 8.” n.d.
10. Mrs. Spencer’s handwritten notes on her civic and horticultural accomplishments: the writing of “Where Our Ancient Roses Came From”; notes on her own Tudor garden and her History of the Rose; her work on the Monroe County Victory Garden Committee; her development of the Garden of Fragrance and the garden at George Eastman’s Birthplace; her work for the Landmark Society, the Memorial Art Gallery, and the Genesee Hospital. n.d.

Series Number: 4

Series Title: Miscellaneous Personal

Series Dates: 1909-1984

Scope and Content Note:

This series contains personal correspondence and other items pertaining to Mrs. Thomas Spencer, as well as public garden brochures and what appear to be handwritten rose labels. Of particular interest are the citation booklet for her appointment as a Fellow of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Science and a memo to Mr. Spencer regarding the Harriet Hollister Spencer Memorial State Recreation Area.

Container/Folder List:

1. Reply card with Miss Harriet Hollister listed as Bible study teacher. October 29, 1909.
2. Citation booklet of Harriet Hollister Spencer’s appointment as Fellow of Rochester Museum of Arts & Sciences, 1958. Program booklet for convocation of museum fellows. May 14, 1958.
3. Thank-you note to Mrs. Spencer from Gladys Holton. n.d.

4. Typewritten memo dated June 15, 1970, from W. Stephen Thomas to Mr. Thomas G. Spencer.
5. Handwritten rose labels. n.d.
6. Handwritten rose labels. n.d.
7. Pamphlet, Mary E. Slifer Memorial Garden, Rochester Museum & Science Center; Invitation to the dedication of the Wilfrid M. Kearns Garden, Rochester Museum & Science Center, April 28, 1984.

Series Number: 5

Series Title: Photographs

Series Dates: 1924-1959

Scope and Content Notes:

This series contains a portrait of Mrs. Spencer with her husband, Thomas G. Spencer, color photographs of Mrs. Spencer's roses, and other miscellaneous photographs.

Container/Folder List:

1. Black and white portrait of Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Spencer. c. 1945
2. Black and white photo of 324 Plymouth Avenue South. c. 1924
3. Color photographs with labels: Urn with ancient roses cultivated and arranged by Mrs. Spencer (1954); Episcopal altar arranged by Mrs. Spencer for church art exhibition at the Memorial Art Gallery (2 copies). n.d. Two labels with no corresponding photos: Tudor Knot Garden of Mrs. Thomas G. Spencer at 1105 East Avenue; A view of the Tudor Garden when planting was young (in Mrs. Spencer's handwriting). n.d.
4. Color photo of the Harriet Hollister Spencer Memorial State Recreation Area taken by Thomas G. Spencer. n.d.
5. 28 3½" x 2½" color photographs of old roses in Mrs. Spencer's garden at 1005 East Avenue. June 17-23, 1959. Photographer: Alfred I. Hess, past president of the Rochester Rose Society.