

Margherita Tarr:

Her work as an Extension Landscape Architect

1939 - 1969

by

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Margherita Tarr
(1903 - 1990)
Extension Landscape Specialist

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INTRODUCTION

Remembered as a landscape architect with forceful and unyielding views, Margherita Tarr served the citizens of Iowa as an Extension specialist and faculty member for thirty years. From 1939 to 1969 Tarr traveled throughout Iowa, lecturing and giving demonstrations on landscape design. Although she practiced professionally before arriving at Iowa State, her major contributions to the field grew out of her association with Iowa State. Tarr contributed to landscape architecture in many ways: she brought landscape theory and practice to thousands of Iowans, she helped establish the direction of Iowa State's landscape architecture program, and she served as a then-rare professional female role model for three decades of students. Additionally, by virtue of her forty-three-year career, she helped give credence to the belief that women could succeed in the field of landscape architecture.

During her career Tarr gained a reputation for being an outstanding landscape architect, and through her work influenced landscape design throughout Iowa. Tarr traveled to at least one-third of Iowa's counties each year to give seminars and lectures on landscape design, and in the process became known as an expert in the field. She is remembered as a leader in this regard, and in her honor the Iowa Federation of State Garden Clubs, Inc. continues to grant an annual award for excellence in landscape design.¹ One of Tarr's colleagues, Professor Robert Dyas, credits her with pioneering new standards in the landscape architecture profession, primarily in the arena of home grounds design. In support of this Dyas recounted seeing her influence on the layout and design of farmsteads and homes as he drove across the Iowa countryside.²

Two major factors influenced Tarr's contributions to landscape architecture. Extension specialists could not compete with the business world at-large, which restricted Tarr from engaging in private practice. Because of this, the probability that Tarr took on outside work while at Iowa State is slim, and there is no evidence to indicate that she did. As a result, most of her contributions fell in the arena of public service. The distribution of work within Extension also played a role in shaping the

realms in which she developed her expertise. While she received the same amount of work as her male colleagues, most of her assignments coincided closely with arenas acceptable for women of her day; such work focused on home grounds design and Tarr often worked with women's community groups, garden clubs and 4-H girl's groups. Though she did work with Iowans on farmstead layout, schoolyard design, and community development, her greatest influence was in the area of home grounds development.³

Much of Tarr's work as an Extension specialist paralleled the work of other female landscape architects of the middle 1900's. These women commonly found work in residential-scale home and garden design or in private estate gardens, though some completed work in public spaces such as public schools, banks and courthouses.⁴ While the work of Tarr and other female landscape architects was similar, the context in which she completed her work was different. During Tarr's time women rarely held the position of Extension landscape specialist and professor, and no other women in the United States held such a position for as long as Tarr (thirty years).

Few sources provide details on the number of practicing female landscape architects in the mid-1900's, but available information suggests that women contributed to many aspects of the field. George Yarwood notes in his 1972 history of women in the profession that women advanced landscape architecture standards in professional practice, education and public service. Yarwood also indicates many women have been associated with schools of landscape architecture. These women contributed to educational programs in many ways, holding positions as teachers, writers and librarians. Other women provided financial support to schools nationwide. Of the twenty-one women he lists, at least twelve taught or held administrative positions in landscape architecture programs in the United States. It appears some women held part-time (instructor) positions, and others full-time, but Yarwood supplied no information on the details of their appointments.⁵

Yarwood's 1973 article notes Margherita Tarr as one of two women in the United States that had worked as landscape specialists for the Cooperative Extension Service.⁶ The other woman credited

with work as a full-time Extension landscape specialist was Dorothea Harrison; she worked for the University of Massachusetts during World War II. Harrison's stint lasted four and a half years, during which she spent most of her time working with fruit growers and victory gardeners.⁷ Like most female landscape architects in the middle 1900's, Harrison worked primarily in private practice.⁸

As an Extension specialist and professor, Tarr compiled a list of accomplishments atypical for women in landscape architecture of her time. In her work with Extension Tarr published bulletins, wrote essays, broadcast radio and television shows, and gave lectures on landscape design. Tarr is credited with at least twenty-seven extension publications (three co-authored), and nine published articles (two co-authored) carry her name. These writings covered a wide range of topics, including instruction on landscape design, perception and education. Her speaking engagements included numerous presentations for local garden clubs and other community groups, several radio and television spots in which she gave instruction on landscape design, and at least one speech for a national convention of the National Council of State Garden Clubs.

Studying the career of Margherita Tarr sheds light on two areas of academic research: the study of women in landscape architecture, and the role of landscape architecture specialists in Iowa from 1939 to 1969. Although various studies have investigated the role of women in landscape architecture, most have focused on famous women in the field. The work of landscape specialists, similarly, has received little attention. Landscape Extension specialists have been contributing members to many Cooperative Extension programs since the early 1900's, yet documentation on their achievements is scarce. Documenting Tarr's career builds on these bodies of research, and it highlights the contributions she made to the profession.

Several sources revealed the contributions Tarr made to landscape architecture. Extension Annual Reports dating from 1939 to 1952 provided the bulk of information on her day-to-day activities. Annual reports after 1952 were not available for study, but the Plan of Work reports Tarr filed from 1953

to 1969 helped fill this gap. Newspaper articles, personal and professional writings by Tarr, slides, original files, and interviews with some of her colleagues comprised the remainder of sources from which her contributions were gleaned.

Margherita Tarr's position as an Extension specialist provided her with excellent opportunities to showcase her talents. Tarr believed everyone could design efficient and aesthetic surroundings,⁹ and during her career she taught thousands of Iowans the principles of landscape architecture. The enduring success of the landscape design school of the National Council of State Garden Clubs is a tribute to her leadership, and the legacy she left the students of landscape architecture continues in their work. By touching the lives of so many, her contributions to landscape architecture went beyond the boundaries of any particular designed landscape she may have influenced.

Notes

¹"Plan Award to Honor Miss Tarr," Des Moines Sunday Register, 14 April 1963, 33.

²"Tarr Remembered for Excellence," Iowa Stater, August 1991, 4.

³Ibid.

⁴Daniel W. Krall, "Early Women Designers and Their Work in Public Places," in Proceedings for Landscapes and Gardens: Women Who Made a Difference. 1987, 6.

⁵George Arthur Yarwood, "History of Women in Landscape Architecture" in Women in Landscape Architecture, ASLA Bulletin, 1973, 3.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Donna Palmer, "An Overview of the Trends, Eras and Values of Landscape Architecture in America from 1910 to the Present with an Emphasis on the Contributions of Women to the Profession" (Master's thesis, North Carolina State University, 1976), 139.

⁸George Arthur Yarwood, "History of Women in Landscape Architecture" in Women in Landscape Architecture, ASLA Bulletin, 1973, 5.

⁹Margherita Tarr, "Since '26" in Horizons: A Resume of Departmental News XIII, no. 3 (1939): 10.

CHAPTER 1

FOUNDATIONS OF TARR'S CAREER

When Margherita Tarr began practicing landscape architecture in 1926, she entered a profession formally established a mere twenty-seven years earlier. In part, the profession grew from horticulture and gardening, so the acceptance of women in this field does not seem unusual. In the early 1900's many women engaged in small-yard design and gardening; some women stretched the boundaries and also worked in country estate and community design. Yet, due to the age of the profession and the time of its inception, few women pursued such endeavors at a professional level. At a time when most women working in the landscape design field did not attain professional status, Tarr successfully built a career as a landscape architect. She worked thirty years of her forty-three-year career with the Iowa State Extension Service, and it is in this arena she enjoyed most of her success. The foundation on which she built her career as an Extension landscape specialist can be traced to her close family ties, her sound education and the broad range of work experience she brought to Iowa State.

Margherita Tarr grew up along the ^{shores} coast of Lake Superior in Duluth, Minnesota, in a small, close family that believed strongly in education. Margherita was born on December 30, 1903 to Sarah Emma Argo Tarr and Sammy Weinberg Tarr, the first of three children in this family.¹ Her sister, Regina, born in 1905, became one of Margherita's closest lifelong friends. Richard, five years younger than Margherita, also maintained close contact with her over the years. Little is known about Margherita's childhood years, though friends say she contracted polio at a young age, setting her back in school.² Consequently, she attended elementary and high school in the same grade as Regina, and in 1922 both graduated from Duluth Central High School. In the fall of the same year Margherita and Regina left home to pursue their college degrees at Iowa State. Though their choices of study differed (Margherita studied landscape architecture and Regina chose secondary education), they often socialized together and remained close friends throughout their college years.³

Friends and colleagues of Margherita believe her father probably had the most influence on her personal and professional decisions.⁴ Sammy Tarr graduated from Iowa State College with an engineering degree in 1898, and pursued work at the Oliver Mining Company in Duluth, Minnesota, eventually achieving the rank of chief in the mechanical engineering department.⁵ His education and work experience provided Margherita with a strong model to follow in her own pursuit of a professional career, and her aptitude for the engineering aspects of landscape design mirrored his own skills. While Sammy Tarr financially supported Margherita through college, her decision to study landscape architecture did not meet with his favor, and he discouraged her pursuit of this degree. Why he felt this way is not known, though Margherita's friends speculate he felt many barriers existed for women in landscape design. Despite her father's reservations about her choice of study, Margherita arrived on the Iowa State College campus in the fall of 1922 and began taking classes that led to a bachelor of science degree in landscape architecture.⁶

Sammy Tarr's concerns about Margherita's choice of study were not unfounded. While most colleges in the United States were admitting women by the late 1890's, few professional schools accepted women. Most women earning their college degrees at this time were studying education, making Tarr's pursuit of a degree in landscape architecture very unusual.⁷ Furthermore, few schools had coursework leading to the degree of landscape architecture, and fewer yet allowed women into these classes.

Fein's 1972 work, A Study of the Profession of Landscape Architecture, lists eleven schools in the United States that offered landscape architecture courses in the early 1920's, only six of which opened their doors to women. All six schools were land grant institutions, and included Iowa State College, Ohio State, Pennsylvania State, the University of Illinois, Kansas State and the University of Massachusetts.⁸ In addition to land grant schools, private schools were also forming to provide women education in landscape architecture, among them the Cambridge School and the Lowenthorpe School, both located in the Boston metropolitan area.⁹

While educational opportunities for women in landscape architecture were not commonplace when Tarr began her schooling, progress was being made. The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) took a leadership role in establishing competent educational training for men and women in the early 1920's. ASLA sponsored two national conferences on instruction in landscape architecture to address educational standards: in 1921 the conference dealt with curriculum, courses and staffing issues, and the 1922 conference resulted in a resolution urging co-educational schools to give equal encouragement to men and women in the programs.¹⁰

Iowa State College had landscape architecture classes on the books as early as the 1871, but did not offer a full curriculum in this area until 1914.¹¹ In 1922, the Iowa State graduated its first class in landscape architecture. Tarr graduated in 1926, placing her in the fourth class to complete this program, and one of seven people to have earned a degree in landscape architecture from this institution. Interestingly, the number of women graduates at this time outnumbered men four to three.¹² This not only illustrates Iowa State's acceptance of women into their program, but it also reinforced the belief women could successfully complete curriculum requirements.

At the time Tarr arrived at Iowa State College, landscape architects were experiencing a shift in the focus of their profession. After World War I wartime projects of memorial building and site-planning for wartime housing decreased, forcing landscape architects to find work in other areas. Many designers returned to their prewar work of designing large country estates, roadside developments and park design.¹³ Design professionals were also becoming involved in national and state park design. Throughout the United States national park personnel were recording an increase in visitors (due to a surge in automobile use and a growing interest in recreation), and concern was quickly developing about potential environmental impacts of this increased visitation. In turn, this led to a demand for more local recreational areas, and landscape architects found work in planning and designing state parks nationwide.¹⁴

In the 1920's Tarr also witnessed the strengthening of landscape architecture as a profession. More landscape architects were joining the ASLA, creating a network of professionals that could influence the direction of the field. With this newly established network, landscape architects began setting professional standards, and made prominent strides in establishing policy. In 1920 the Official Statement of Professional Practice was drafted, in 1924 Methods of Charges and Recommended Minimum Charges appeared, and in 1927 the Code of Professional Conduct became policy.¹⁵ Educational institutions were also contributing to the foundation of the profession. Many land grant institutions were launching Landscape Architecture Extension programs, much like Iowa State College had done in 1915.¹⁶ Extension outreach spilled into other areas as well: schools specializing in landscape design were providing support for the start of garden clubs.¹⁷

How much Tarr knew about landscape architecture when she entered college is not known, but she did arrive intent on getting a degree in this field. Her interest in the arts, the out-of-doors and plants probably influenced her choice of study, interests she would hold throughout her career.¹⁸ Tarr participated in many campus activities while at Iowa State, extending her education well beyond the classroom. She earned a spot on many athletic teams, including field hockey, soccer, basketball, and swimming. These endeavors earned her membership in Iowa State's Women's "A" Fraternity, an honor organization for women receiving a varsity letter. Other organizations she belonged to included Omega Phi, Theta Sigma Phi, the Ag Council and the Vistonian Club (the landscape architecture club), and she put her writing skills to use as a reporter for the "Student" and the "Bomb." Tarr also acted in the Junior Class Play, May Fetes and the Veisha Night Shows.¹⁹ In reviewing the number of activities Tarr participated in outside the landscape design realm, it is evident she took advantage of opportunities rare for women of her day. These pursuits helped her build a variety of useful skills and establish lifelong friendships.

After receiving her degree in May of 1926, Tarr continued her formal education by attending the Foundation for Architecture and Landscape Architecture in Lake Forest, Illinois. Some of her work from this summer included preparing drawings depicting gardens in the Chicago area; this gave Tarr experience with graphic techniques and exposure to a wide range of garden design typical of her day. Years later, in the summer of 1940, she attended Columbia University in New York; little information exists about her studies in landscape design at this institution.²⁰

In the fall of 1926, Tarr secured her first design job in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She was employed by Charles Ramsdell, but worked with him for only a few weeks (it is not known why she left this employ). During this time she drafted and rendered several plans, constructed a clay model of a private golf course green and made grading suggestions for an apartment complex. After completing this work she accepted a job with Morell and Nichols, also in Minneapolis. At this firm Tarr worked on the Armour Memorial Cemetery Plan, but an emergency appendectomy forced her to resign shortly before Christmas, sending her home to stay with her parent's in Duluth while recuperating.²¹

Margherita recovered quickly from her appendix operation and found work at the City of Duluth Park Department in January of 1927. She gained some park design experience while in Duluth by helping plan the Memorial Park in Duluth and Fairmount Park Zoo. Other assignments included standard tree planting plans for the city, and the rendering of the design project "Point of Rocks" by Harry L. Staves (a landscape architect with the department). Years later, in an address to Iowa State students, Tarr gave a detailed description of these renderings. Evidently the display of her drawings in a leading bank window helped stop the destruction of the Point of Rocks in Duluth, a one hundred-foot high rock promontory in the center of town. The salvation of the rocks halted plans to use them for breakwater and fill to increase the size of Lake Shore Park, a victory Tarr carried with her for many years. While she felt positive about her work in Duluth, Margherita left after one month to work with Phelps Wyman in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.²²

It is unknown why Tarr decided to leave Duluth after such a short time, though Wyman's reputation as a leader in landscape design probably influenced her decision. Wyman's career spanned fifty years, from 1897 to 1947; he contributed to the growth of the profession in country estate and park design, city planning, and provided leadership in the development of the ASLA in the North Central States.²³ Tarr worked with Wyman on several planning and development projects, and from this experience she gleaned a great amount of practical experience. Tarr attributed her fundamental understanding of planning and design to the work she completed for Wyman, experience she would build on throughout her career.²⁴

Tarr's work with Wyman spanned a broad range of landscape design projects. Her work included planning and zoning, estate design, resort development, park design and institutional grounds design. Specifically, Tarr completed zoning and city plans for Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, park plans for Ashland, Wisconsin and a resort design at Picayune, Mississippi. She also developed planting plans for large estates throughout the Midwest, with most assignments in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois. Tarr gained a great amount of experience in public space design while working with Wyman, completing designs for the court house grounds at Wausau, Wisconsin, and general layout plans for playgrounds and playfields throughout southern Wisconsin. Many projects were located quite a distance from Milwaukee; this limited Tarr's opportunities to supervise implementation of her plans, which bothered her considerably. She cited this as the reason for leaving the firm in 1930, and she moved to work for Edmund J. Phelps in Wayzata, Minnesota.²⁵

Tarr brought strong skills in the rudimentary aspects of landscape architecture to her work in Minnesota. While employed by Phelps she completed planting plans, ordered all plant materials and supervised most of the planting. She also worked on plans for the Japanese Embassy grounds in Washington, D.C., and on the preliminary plans for the United States' Embassy grounds in Berlin, Germany, Lima, Peru and Montevideo, Uruguay. Tarr's writings show she enjoyed this time, especially

her work on international projects, but by July of 1932 the economic realities of the Depression forced a cut in staffing. After only two years working for Phelps, Tarr returned Duluth to live with her parents.²⁶

Many in private practice felt the impact of the depression during the 1930's, and private enterprise practically ceased all hire of landscape architects.²⁷ In 1933, Albert Taylor reviewed the impact of the 1929 stock market crash, and outlined the following trends for the profession of landscape architecture:

The inclination to be conservative with expenditures, born from the experience of this depression, will carry through a long generation to come and must directly affect the possible income from the limited groups to whom the landscape architect looked for the major portion of his financial support.

The general inclination to indulge in lavish expenditures on extensive private estate developments may be a thing of the past, even though their owners should happen to possess the necessary funds with which to make these improvements.

The profession of landscape architecture is the first to be affected by any adverse economic condition and will be the last to recover through restored economic prosperity, because "unjustified" expenditures were the first to be eliminated from the family budget of expenses, and economic stability must be adequately assured before any inclination will prompt expenditures for further "luxury" improvements.

A great class of potential clients for the landscape architect has been removed by the discharge of older and higher salaried employees, the majority of whom will not be restored to their former positions of employment and income, and therefore must concentrate on creating only the income necessary to support themselves and their families in their advancing years.

The average income of the prospective client has been and may continue to be greatly reduced, with the result that proportionately smaller expenditures will be made for landscape developments.

A more practical era is developing because of the more business-like point of view, with the result that more business-like methods must be adopted by the landscape architect in order to create sufficient sources of adequate income for professional landscape work.

Growing non-professional competition makes it increasingly difficult for the landscape architect, with an average type of practice, to convince clients that they need his professional services in the way in which he must now dispose of his services to his clientele and be compensated for these services.

The tendency of park organizations to create self-sufficient groups to handle design is eliminating an opportunity for the private office to render any except professional consulting services.

The expense for maintenance on the unusually large estate will be very much reduced by the average owner of the future.

With the tendency to lessen the number of working hours in the landscape architect's office, the opportunity for increased income in the landscape profession in general will be very much reduced.

It is possible that the new economic conditions may require a reduction in the expense and time devoted to the preparation of finished plans, with the result that more of the actual plan work must be undertaken directly on the grounds.

A general reduction in working hours will provide more leisure time for the public and will increase the opportunities for recreation and park areas.

The practice of the average landscape architect will become more intensive, and competition will be more keen among a larger group of well-qualified landscape architects.²⁸

Before the stock-market crash of 1929 designers had relied heavily on large-scale residential design projects, but with the onset of the Depression the availability of such projects declined. While the economic crisis forced some landscape designers to close shop, many found other kinds of work. Some landscape architects shifted from traditional residential design efforts to regional and city planning ventures, while others found work supported by local, state and federal funds generated by the New Deal.²⁹

Public works projects created by the New Deal gave landscape architects an unprecedented amount of work, and pulled the profession through the economic crisis of the early 1930's. At a time when many Americans searched for work, landscape architects enjoyed the greatest era of full-time employment the profession had ever known.³⁰ This influx of work did not last long, however. In 1935 funds for public works projects dropped, forcing landscape designers to return to more traditional work.³¹

While many in the profession turned to public practice to survive these tough economic times, Tarr persevered on the private front in Duluth. Projects must have been scarce, but Margherita managed

to find work in the landscape field on a freelance basis. She completed several jobs in and around Duluth, including the development of the Miller Memorial Hospital grounds. Tarr also worked part-time for the Duluth Parks Department, and in the fall of 1933 Edmund Phelps hired Tarr to complete several small jobs in Minneapolis. It was at this time Margherita made the move to open a private firm with John Harlow in Duluth.³²

It is not known why Tarr and Harlow joined forces and opened a private office in the middle of challenging economic times. Interestingly, while many offices were closing their doors because of economic hardship, Tarr's firm enjoyed a reasonable amount of success. The firm Harlow and Tarr, Landscape Architects, specialized in small landscape design, completing most work in the realm of garden, residential and cemetery lot design. Harlow and Tarr also completed the planning for a memorial monument outside Soudan, Minnesota, and the summer cottage grounds at Solon Springs, Wisconsin. Despite the firm's apparent success, after only three years Harlow and Tarr closed. Tarr's writings indicate she had accepted full-time employment with the City of Duluth Park Department before the firm's closure in 1936, which was probably in response to a tightening job market. Though the cause of the firm's failure is not known, in all likelihood the Depression forced Harlow and Tarr to close shop and obtain work elsewhere.³³

Tarr's responsibilities at the Duluth Park Department ranged from supervising park planning and design to coordinating work with other landscape architects from the National Park Service. The Works Projects Administration (WPA) provided financial support for much of this work, thereby dictating the kinds of projects undertaken. WPA work in recreational design dominated Tarr's work load, and included planning for parks, athletic fields, path systems, and drawing construction details for retaining walls and steps. At other times she implemented the plans of others, and supervised the grading, seeding, sodding and planting phases of the project. Tarr considered this work in Duluth extremely valuable because she gained considerable general design and supervisory experience.³⁴

After three years of working for the City of Duluth, Tarr made her final major career change: she accepted the position of landscape specialist for the Iowa State Cooperative Extension Service. After Margherita Tarr arrived at Iowa State in 1939 she reflected on her experience in private practice. In an address to the students she communicated her love for landscape architecture; she called her work fascinating and reviewed her experience in great detail. In describing her professional background, Tarr cited both economic and personal reasons for changes in her career, and indicated most of her career choices stemmed from a desire to explore more of her chosen field. She recognized the value of this varied experience as she began in her new position as an Extension specialist at Iowa State, and excitedly noted the opportunities for educating the people of Iowa on landscape design. When asked by the editor of the student newsletter Horizons if ". . . there was a place for women in landscape architecture," Tarr responded "My answer is most certainly, Yes," and went on to say there were as many opportunities for women as for men. She further encouraged women to work in the field, noting that she was always paid at a rate ". . . as well or better than women with equal training and experience in the other professions."³⁵ Tarr ended her address to the students with "Need I say more? What do you think I think of my chosen profession? Does it not speak for itself?"³⁶ With this positive attitude Margherita Tarr began her thirty-year career at Iowa State as an Extension specialist.

Notes

¹Margherita Tarr, Iowa State University Faculty Personnel Information, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1965.

²Margaret Sabatke of Sun City, Arizona, phone interview by author, 9 March 1993, transcript.

³Ibid.

⁴Burl Parks of Belle Vista, Arkansas, phone interview by author, 16 August 1992, transcript.

⁵Margherita Tarr, Iowa State University Faculty Personnel Information, 1965, Iowa State University Archives, Parks Library, Ames, Iowa.

⁶Margaret Sabatke of Sun City, Arizona, phone interview by author, 9 March 1993, transcript.

⁷Lois W. Banner, Women in Modern America: A Brief History (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, Publishers, 1984), 5.

⁸Albert Fein, A Study of the Profession of Landscape Architecture (American Society of Landscape Architecture Foundation, 1972), 2.58 - 2.109.

⁹George Arthur Yarwood, "History of Women in Landscape Architecture" in Women in Landscape Architecture, ASLA Bulletin, 1973, 3.

¹⁰Donna Palmer, "An Overview of the Trends, Eras and Values of Landscape Architecture in America from 1910 to the Present with an Emphasis on the Contributions of Women to the Profession" (Master's thesis, North Carolina State University, 1976), 24.

¹¹Albert Fein, A Study of the Profession of Landscape Architecture (Washington DC: American Society of Landscape Architecture Foundation, 1972), 2.68.

¹²Iowa State University alumni records, 1922-1975, Iowa State University Alumni Office, Ames, Iowa.

¹³Donna Palmer, "An Overview of the Trends, Eras and Values of Landscape Architecture in America from 1910 to the Present with an Emphasis on the Contributions of Women to the Profession" (Master's thesis, North Carolina State University, 1976), 21.

¹⁴Ibid., 24.

¹⁵Pond Bremer, "Fifty Years in Retrospect" Landscape Architecture 40 2 (January, 1950): 64.

¹⁶John R. Fitzsimmons, "Historic Sketch of Landscape Architecture Extension 1914-1939," p.1, Iowa State University Archives, Parks Library, Ames, Iowa.

¹⁷Donna Palmer, "An Overview of the Trends, Eras and Values of Landscape Architecture in America from 1910 to the Present with an Emphasis on the Contributions of Women to the Profession" (Master's thesis, North Carolina State University, 1976), 25.

¹⁸Burl Parks of Belle Vista, Arkansas, phone interview by author, 16 August 1992, transcript.

¹⁹Review of Student Bombs, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1923-1927.

²⁰Margherita Tarr, Iowa State University Faculty Personnel Information, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1965.

²¹Margherita Tarr, "Since '26" in Horizons: A Resume of Departmental News XIII, no. 3 (1939): 9.

²²Ibid.

²³"Minute on Phelps Wyman" Landscape Architecture 38 3 (April 1948): 110.

²⁴Margherita Tarr, "Since '26" in Horizons: A Resume of Departmental News XIII, no. 3 (1939): 10.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Pond Bremer, "Fifty Years in Retrospect" Landscape Architecture 40 2 (January, 1950): 65.

²⁸Albert D. Taylor, "Landscape Architecture Today" Landscape Architecture 23 2 (January 1933): 91-92.

²⁹Fitzsimmons, John R. "Historic Sketch of Landscape Architecture Extension, Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 1914-1939." (October 1940): 25.

³⁰Norman T. Newton, "100 Years of Landscape Architecture" Landscape Architecture 54 4 (July 1964): 263.

³¹Ibid.

³²Margherita Tarr, "Since '26" in Horizons: A Resume of Departmental News XIII, no. 3 (1939): 10.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 11.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 9, 12.

CHAPTER 2

TARR'S EARLY YEARS IN EXTENSION - PRE WWII

When Margherita Tarr arrived at Iowa State College in 1939, employment for landscape architects in both the private and public sectors was beginning to stabilize. During the Depression of the 1930's work in large-scale residential design declined drastically, forcing landscape architects to find work elsewhere.¹ For a few years they found this employment in public works projects supported by New Deal funding. When the funding decreased in the mid-1930's many landscape architects returned to more traditional landscape projects in the field. Despite this fluctuation in funding, a broad spectrum of work in public practice had opened for landscape designers, providing them a wider range of long-term employment opportunities.²

Extension landscape architects experienced similar shifts in their work. Until the 1930's, landscape extension specialists had primarily focused on farmstead development and landscape design of home grounds, but from 1933 until 1939 CCC, WPA and PWA projects took precedent. After 1935, when New Deal funding decreased, landscape specialists returned to work on farmstead and home beautification projects.³ Although their work changed considerably during this time landscape specialists enjoyed job security: as the economy fluctuated they adjusted their workload to meet the demands of the day.

Tarr joined a program with a twenty-five-year history of serving the public. The first known requests for help with landscape design issues came in 1913. Farmers began asking the Iowa State Cooperative Extension for advice on the layout and beautification of their new farmsteads, and horticulture specialists were called on to help. The number of requests for direction in layout and design increased steadily during that year, and in 1914 Iowa State hired a landscape architect to more efficiently counsel Iowans on planning and design. After several years of receiving requests for information on farmstead and home grounds' beautification, landscape specialists reported Iowans were interested in

subject matter closely associated with landscape design. Of these related interests, civic improvement and small-scale gardening topped the list. In 1924, the State of Iowa also showed interest in the services rendered by the landscape specialist. In addition to their regular duties, the landscape specialist began to provide the Iowa State Conservation Commission with plans for state parks throughout Iowa.⁴

The 1930's brought increased interest in Landscape Extension services. With only one landscape specialist on staff the growing demand could not be met, leading to the creation of two more specialist positions.⁵ While the increase in staff helped, until the late 1930's Landscape Architecture Extension experienced considerable changeover in personnel. Most specialists only served two years before moving on, which often left the department with only one staff to cover the work of three. In the first twenty-four years of the department's existence thirteen different landscape architects had worked for the Extension Service.⁶

John R. Fitzsimmons, Tarr's supervisor, stands out as a notable exception to the high turnover. When Tarr was hired in 1939 Fitzsimmons had already logged fifteen years of service in Landscape Extension, and would serve another eleven before moving on. Fitzsimmons served as both an extension specialist and professor of landscape architecture during these years, and, given his longstanding position in the department, probably was instrumental in hiring Margherita Tarr. Soon after Tarr joined the Iowa State Cooperative Extension Service, Herbert Lenz also accepted a job in this department. Of these specialists only Fitzsimmons was on a full-time (12 month) appointment; both Tarr and Lenz were part-time specialists, serving nine months of the year.⁷ Tarr, Fitzsimmons and Lenz served together until the middle of World War II, and, while only one specialist worked full-time during these years, during Tarr's career the Iowans would not enjoy the benefits of having three specialists on staff.

When Cooperative Extension hired Tarr, landscape specialists were predicting an increased need for their assistance. Several trends supported this prediction. The state's economy, while it had suffered tremendously during the Depression years, was recovering, and Iowans were making improvements

around their homes. The effects of an expanding population base were also being felt. Since 1910 a permanent program of rural land use for Iowa had been established, and small industries associated with agricultural production prospered in many communities. During this time the rapid improvement of transportation routes throughout Iowa had effected the size and permanency of many communities; while some flourished, others collapsed. Also, development that took place during the early 1900's needed rehabilitation, and the siting of new buildings on these landscapes required in-depth planning. With such change taking place in Iowa it is not surprising that landscape specialists felt their services would be in great demand.⁸

While the work of specialists covered a wide range of projects, the mission of Landscape Extension depended on the realization of two major objectives. The first objective of all landscape specialists was to educate the public on the fundamentals of landscape architecture. These fundamentals, if understood, would provide citizens with the tools to plan and design their surroundings, resulting in a healthier, more beautiful landscape. With the fundamentals successfully passed along, the second objective of Landscape Extension came to the forefront: to maintain the " . . . effectively enlightened group to guide all physical developments, both public and private, to meet their efficient use and at the same time create or retain their greatest possible beauty." ⁹ With these objectives in mind, landscape specialists worked at building a program that served the needs of the Iowa public.

As Tarr and her colleagues brought their message about landscape design to the public, they confronted long-held misunderstandings about landscape architecture. Few citizens understood what landscape beautification entailed. Of the Iowans that did express an interest in the subject, many held the narrow belief that beautification of the landscape rarely extended beyond the planting of trees, shrubs and flowers. An enlightened few viewed landscape architecture as an art that utilized key aspects of many fields, including horticulture, engineering and architecture. Fewer yet understood landscape beautification as an art of striking a balance between land use and beautification. While the public

showed interest in landscape design, the specialists spent a considerable amount of time addressing misconceptions about the field, a battle Tarr would wage throughout her career.¹⁰

The public's ignorance about landscape design caused the specialists great concern in the late 1930's and early 1940's. Tarr and her colleagues viewed the typical Iowan as "... easily-manipulated, unknowing and gullible ..." and feared the growing presence of "... the false short-cutter, the blind rubber stamp designer and the itinerant commission salesman ... high-pressure material salesmen, pseudo-specialists from the great group of out-of-work numbers of all sorts of professions, trades and cults, and the ambitious one-line-perfected amateur ..." ¹¹ Landscape specialists felt it was their duty to protect the public from these people, and used Extension programs to accomplish this task. Specialists believed educating the public on the guiding principles of landscape architecture was the answer to this growing problem.

In 1939 Fitzsimmons drafted a historic sketch of Landscape Architecture Extension, prompting a review of the services rendered by this department. Primarily, Fitzsimmons was concerned about the number of citizens receiving service, and he was looking for ways to reach more of Iowans. Recommendations stemming from this study called for changes in two areas: the use of county agents in reaching the public, and the methods used to transfer information at meetings and demonstrations.¹²

Though county agents had always provided referrals to landscape specialists for the public, this had usually been the limit of their working relationship. After providing the referrals, the county agent returned to other duties, and landscape specialists taught the Iowans about landscape design. Generally, the county agents referred specific families to landscape specialists, and the specialists then worked with each family on redesigning their home grounds. Once the yard layout and design were completed, the specialist often held public demonstrations to show neighboring Iowans how to carry out and maintain the landscape plans. Landscape specialists found this approach cumbersome and minimally productive. Specialists were spending a tremendous amount of time completing the basic design plans, and very few

citizens learned how to plan and design their home grounds. The amount of information transferred using this approach was very limited, as was the number of Iowans reached. At best, the only people truly benefitting from this service were the ones for whom the plans were made, and most only learned how to implement a design on a specific site.¹³

In an effort to maximize their efforts, Tarr and her colleagues began working closely with county agents to reach the general public. County agents had close ties with people within their districts, and understood landscaping and planning needs. They were also able to identify groups that would likely have an interest in the subject matter, and could help identify key individuals providing leadership in guiding the physical development in various communities. The county agents provided landscape specialists with names of community leaders and groups needing information on landscape design, and then helped specialists organize demonstrations and leadership training schools. The organization of public demonstrations and use of the leadership training school method moved landscape specialists away from drafting individual plans, and enabled them to reach larger groups of people. Though this approach did not eliminate the need for landscape specialists to draft individual plans, the case-by-case approach no longer constituted the main vein of their work.¹⁴ The help of the county agents in this process was invaluable, and the eventual success of the demonstrations and training schools can be traced to the coordination between agents and specialists.

The use of leadership training schools, while not used by landscape specialists until the late 1930's, was not new to the Cooperative Extension Service. In 1920 Home Economics Extension specialists began using this method, and by the 1930's they were experiencing a tremendous amount of success using this technique. While the women of Home Economics Extension had established a successful program using the leadership training schools, their male counterparts in the Agricultural Division (under which landscape architecture fell) did not begin to implement this program until the 1930's. Often cited as the reason for not using this program was the limited time farm men had for

learning how to be local leaders, and the amount of specialized knowledge needed to instruct others in farming techniques. In a study conducted by Extension in 1931, the study committee criticized specialists not using the local leader method, and noted other state Extension Services used this approach in their agricultural divisions.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that with Margherita Tarr's arrival landscape specialists began using this method extensively in all areas of their service. Tarr worked closely with home economic specialists, and probably was instrumental in bringing the leadership training school method to Landscape Architecture Extension.

With enhanced communication between county agents and landscape specialists established, landscape specialists worked on the techniques they used to transfer information at public demonstrations and in leadership schools. Specialists not only wanted to broaden the lay public's understanding of the full range of landscape design, they also wanted the public to be able to complete design work themselves. With this in mind the landscape specialists adopted a teaching approach that educated Iowans on the guiding principles of the field, and gave them firsthand experience in landscape design. To accomplish this, landscape specialists established a program in which Iowans learned about the various aspects of landscape architecture by developing a plan for a specific site. This, they hoped would result in a more knowledgeable group of citizens who could lead the planning, designing and administration of physical developments in their communities.¹⁶

In 1939 when Tarr arrived to work for Landscape Extension, specialists in this area were not preparing for the great possibility the United States' involvement in a world war. Instead of readying for this event, the established landscape program determined Tarr's workload. In Landscape Extension, work generally fell into four categories: farmstead planning, home grounds' improvement, civic planning and rural school grounds' design. While Tarr became proficient in all four areas, primary she was responsible for certain subject areas, and Extension expected her to build her expertise within these realms.¹⁷ The head of Landscape Extension, John Fitzsimmons, divided work among his landscape

specialists. Not surprisingly, he assigned Tarr work closely associated with a woman's realm. Most of her assignments were in the areas of home grounds' improvement, garden club activities, women's projects and girls' 4-H endeavors.¹⁸ Records from 1940 show Tarr working in many subject areas, with 69 percent of her time spent on home grounds' improvement work. Not all of her work was closely associated with the women's realm. Tarr's other work included farmstead development (13 percent of her time), rural school grounds (7 percent) and civic planning (4 percent).¹⁹

As Tarr worked within the realm of home grounds' beautification she implemented Landscape Extension's new approach. With the help of county agents Tarr identified groups interested in home grounds' development, surveyed their interests and, depending on their requests, developed a program to suit their needs. Within a month of her arrival Tarr was lecturing and giving demonstrations on the art and science of home grounds' beautification in leadership training schools, short courses and demonstration meetings.²⁰ It was from this experience Tarr refined her ability to communicate with landscape architecture principles in a variety of settings, and to both large and small groups of people.

Of the different kinds of meetings Tarr led, the leadership training schools held for the 4-H girls proved to be one of her most successful endeavors. Tarr offered leadership training in a one-day seminar format, and in the course covered the basic principles of landscape design. After attending the seminar the newly trained leaders presented landscape design lessons to their local groups. This method proved to very effective.

Through the leadership training method Tarr reached more people than she could possibly hope to teach on her own. In her first three months with Iowa State Extension she held forty-five leadership meetings for 4-H girls with an attendance of 740. In turn, these leaders held meetings of their own and taught 150 others, bringing the total of Iowans reached to 890.²¹ The results of the specialists' training schools increased quickly. In 1940 Tarr held eighty-two leadership meetings with an attendance of 1,378. Records do not show how many of these leaders held meetings, but the actual number of people

reached probably jumped considerably from the year before. Tarr's colleagues also held 4-H leadership training seminars in home grounds' development, and records do show the total number of people reached by all landscape specialists that year. Landscape specialists broke records of previous years in 1940: they held 133 training seminars and educated 2,496 leaders. In turn, these leaders held 423 follow-up meetings, educating an additional 3,920 Iowans.²²

At the one-day home grounds' improvement leadership training schools Tarr covered a wide range of theory and design. While much of the day centered on the design of a selected site, she also gave slide-illustrated lectures on beauty, landscape planning, site design, construction techniques and the maintenance of rural and urban home grounds. Under Tarr's watchful eye the students then worked through the entire design process on the chosen site. It was through this process the seminar attendees learned about the guiding principles of landscape architecture.²³

Tarr regarded the landscaping of home grounds as a serious matter, and leadership training schools did not appeal to individuals with a passive interest in the topic. As a landscape architect she felt very strongly about caring for the natural environment, often lecturing her students on their moral duty to care for their natural surroundings. Though much of her audience was of high school age, Tarr believed they could influence environmental attitudes within their communities, and more important, she felt 4-H members had a civic duty to adopt this role. To ensure the 4-H girls understood the importance of this civic responsibility, Tarr insisted that her students develop a sound understanding of landscape architecture, and ran her seminars strictly; records show that Tarr enforced an all-day attendance rule at these seminars.²⁴

To begin the landscape design seminar, Tarr lectured her students on the beauty found in the Iowa's natural landscape. Over the course of her career Tarr wrote several articles about Iowa's beautiful lands, indicating she was very interested in this topic. She illustrated her talk with many slides of Iowa's countryside, showing ". . . great fields of green or yellow corn with farmsteads and groups of trees in the

distance . . .", Iowa's wooded and cultivated rolling hills, the bluffs and plains of the Midwestern landscape, and highlights caused by the daily fluctuations of sun, shadow and moisture. Tarr also taught her students how to observe seasonal differences in the landscape, and encouraged her them to look for beauty in spring flowering, fall colored plants and snow-covered evergreen windbreaks.²⁵

Beginning this seminar with a lecture on beauty seemed a bit off the mark for many 4-H girls. Most students believed landscape design only entailed the planting of a few trees and flowers around the yard. Tarr, however, insisted that the seminar attendees gain a broad-based understanding of beauty before embarking on landscape design, and she never continued without ensuring the students had a thorough introduction on observing and appreciating the beauty of both rural and urban landscapes. Once the students gained an understanding of beauty in the landscape, they often reported a new-found sense of pride in their communities. Tarr hoped this pride would inspire 4-H leaders to protect Iowa's natural environment.²⁶

Protecting and enhancing the natural environment had always been basic tenets of landscape architects. In the 1930's a few articles in professional journals appeared, outlining new programs for protecting the natural environment. Authors called for the adoption of an ecological approach in landscape architecture, and underscored the need to consider using native plantings in design. While not many articles appeared again until the 1950's, landscape architects were employing these ideals.²⁷ Two well-known practitioners of the day, Frank Waugh and Jens Jensen, used native plantings extensively in their work, emphasizing the need for a regional approach in all landscape design.²⁸ Jensen's work had a tremendous effect on Tarr's ideological convictions, which spilled into her lecture on Iowa's beauty. As she stressed the need to protect Iowa's natural heritage, Tarr illustrated her talk with pictures of native plant associations found throughout the state.²⁹ These illustrations helped form the foundation for developing an appreciation for a native aesthetic in landscape design.

After 4-H leaders had an understanding of how to find beauty in Iowa's natural environment, Tarr addressed the issue of landscapes in specific environments. In the next lesson Tarr reviewed the home grounds' environment and the beauty could be found there. She used slides and drawings of professional work from offices in Iowa to illustrate beautiful landscapes on a smaller scale, giving students exposure to state-of-the-art landscape designs while they learned. Tarr covered a wide range of material in this session, emphasizing that the built environment also had much to offer in terms of beauty and in enhancing the larger landscape. Tarr's students evaluated many examples of walkways, steps, fences, trees and shrubs in this lesson. Through this process the 4-H girls learned how to identify and appreciate beauty in both the natural and built environment.³⁰

While observing beautiful details in both the natural and built environment was important, the evaluation of good landscape design was another matter. Tarr emphatically believed that only well-designed, efficient home grounds were beautiful, and taught her students accordingly. Tarr brought professional drawings in for students to examine as an introduction to the landscape design unit. She guided them through examples of designed rural and urban home grounds, emphasizing the use of space, plant materials and circulation. These professional drawings provided many examples of well-designed yards of the day, and gave the students a wide array of ideas for their own designs.³¹

In the landscape design unit Tarr helped the students learn how to design by building up their skill level through several small lessons. The first exercise covered in this unit was site inventory, which consisted of base map construction and record taking. This step allowed the student designers to gain a sound understanding of the landscape they were about to change. With the help of gridded paper and detailed instruction, the students quickly completed inventory maps of the selected site. The inventory consisted of the layout of the grounds, plant materials, buildings, circulation and constructed elements. Tarr felt very strongly about the accurate completion of this exercise because the 4-H girls would

eventually use the maps to determine the layout of their designs, and these maps would also serve as a record of the original site.³²

With the site inventory phase completed, Tarr took her students through a series of lectures about basic design. The lectures covered basic concepts of design, including unity, repetition, transition and balance. Primarily, Tarr communicated the ideas through slide lectures and chalk talks, but she also gave the students handouts with notes and illustrations to help ensure their understanding of the concepts. The concepts provided a foundation for the study of spatial organization in the home grounds' environment, and for the eventual development of a landscape plan.³³

Tarr spent a considerable amount of time with her students on the spatial organization of the home grounds. She was very definitive about the separation and use of spaces in and around the home, and depicted the spaces by showing drawings that portrayed the home grounds' environment segmented into three distinct areas: front, side and rear yards. The drawing shown in Figure one is the illustration Tarr used to teach her students about spaces around the home.

Every space in the yard served a different purpose. The front yard, Tarr instructed, served as the setting for the house, and provided a visual greeting to the public at-large. In Tarr's eyes, a warm and inviting front yard was only possible if the use of the space was strictly controlled: she insisted the front yard be void of work and play activities. Tarr had similarly strong views about the use of rear and side yards. These yards were reserved for the public approach to the home, and served as space for recreation and outdoor living. The rear yard could also be used for work space, such as the garage, drying yard, vegetable gardens and orchards.³⁴

After Tarr covered home grounds' spatial organization, she guided her students through a conceptual design exercise. While information is not available showing the results of the conceptual plan phase, Tarr's writings describe her general approach. First, before the actual designing began, the 4-H girls took some time to review the site inventory drawings they had completed earlier.³⁵ Unfortunately,

it is not known how Tarr instructed her students in using the site inventory to guide them in developing the conceptual plan. At some level, Tarr must have directed the students in analyzing the site inventory, or the exercise would have served no purpose in the design phase. The drawing shown in Figure two is an illustration Tarr used to teach site inventory and analysis of the home grounds' environment.

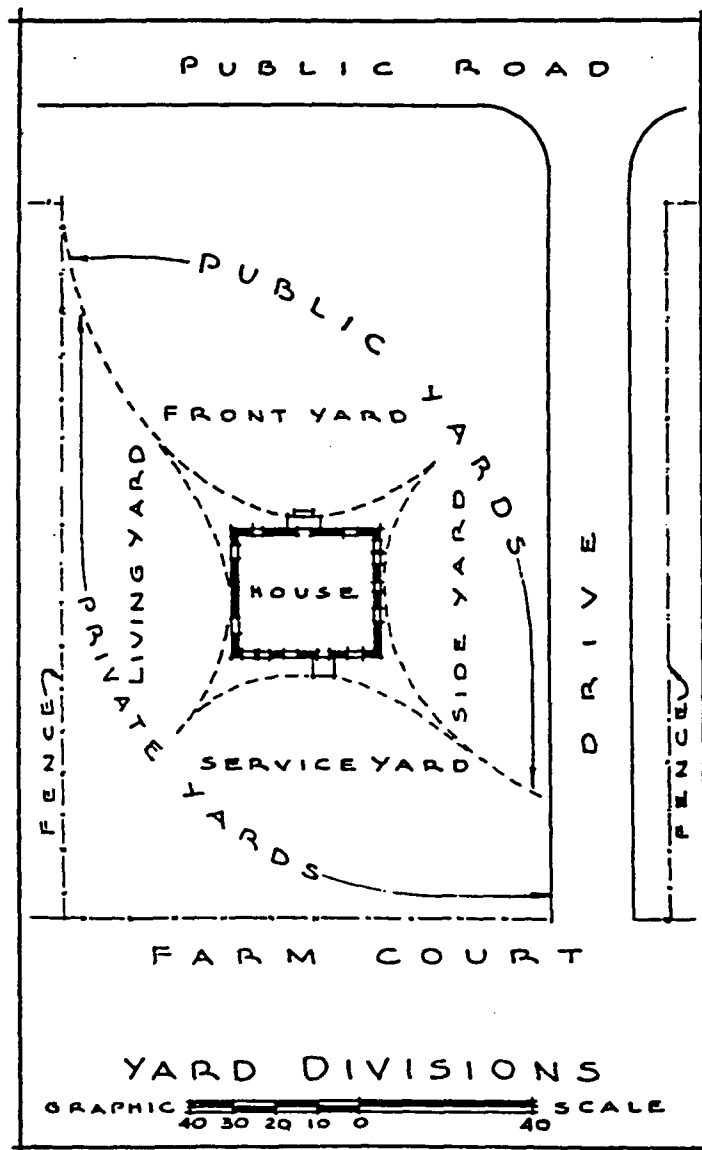


Figure 1. Illustration used in "Our Home Grounds" to depict different yard divisions around the home.³⁶

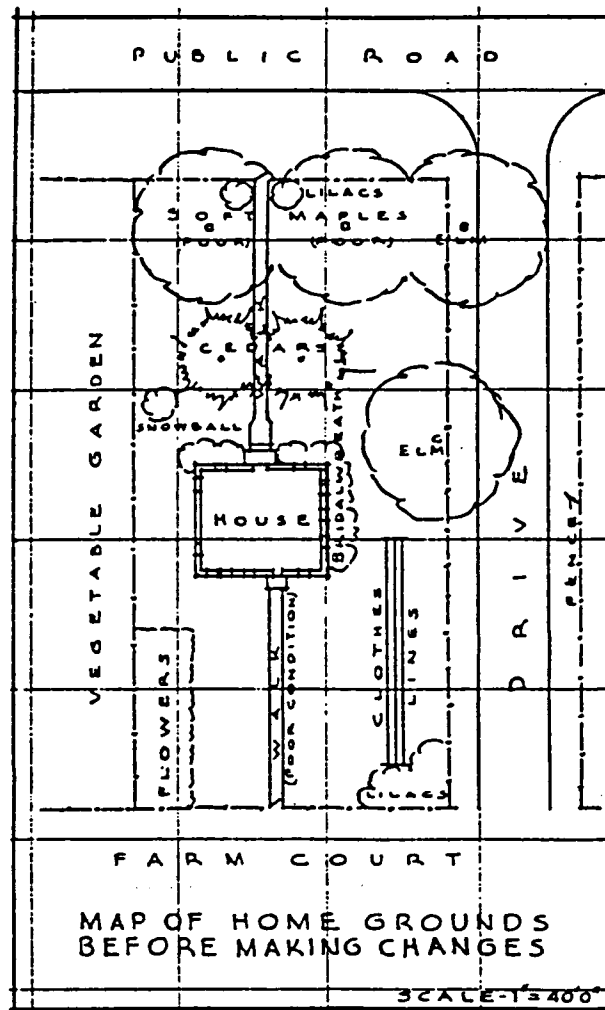


Figure 2. Illustration used in "Our Home Grounds" to show a site inventory and analysis of the home grounds.³⁷

While there are few notes depicting the condition of site elements on the drawing in Figure two, the analysis is minimal. Tarr may have taken the students through a rigorous site analysis phase reviewing the good and bad features found in the yard (based on spatial organization, plant material and views), though no evidence exists to support this. If this was the extent of Tarr's analysis, the students had to rely heavily on the direction Tarr gave in the final plan phase of the design exercise.

The conceptual phase of the design project gave students the chance to generate different ideas about the layout and design of the home grounds. Tarr recommended that every family member be a part of the designing process and suggested they ". . . make a sketch or two . . ." to get some good ideas for the final plan.³⁸ The students probably combined the sketch ideas with their understanding of spatial organization to develop the conceptual plan, which included the general placement of walkways, yard spaces and plant materials. It was on the final plan they provided a detailed drawing depicting plant choice and placement, yard elements, important viewsheds and a description of yard spaces.

To complete the final plan, Tarr's students received specific instructions on the design of different yard spaces. Her directions provided students with guidelines to follow in making final design decisions, leaving little room for anything outside what Tarr considered acceptable yard design. Her writings often listed guidelines for front yard layout and design. The following sample from her publications illustrates the direction she gave in these matters:

Our house is set back about 100 feet from the road. This makes a nice front yard. There are three things we want in it:

A grassed area---This open foreground of well kept green lawn will serve as a setting for the house.

Shade trees---We'll plant a few well placed trees to frame views looking toward and out from the house.

A few shrubs---We'll carefully select and place a few shrubs about the house foundation to make it look better. They will improve it because they will serve as a transition between the vertical lines of the house and the horizontal lines of the ground.

The lawn, trees, shrubs and vines will make our house seem to belong in its location. If we can find a good place for a flag pole near a shrub border planting, we may get one.³⁹

Tarr also gave the 4-H girls specific directions about the layout and design of side yards. In the public side yard, for example, convenient parking spaces were provided for guests, as well as a direct walkway to the house. Tarr instructed her students to keep this yard free of fences, unless stock needed to be kept out. In that event, she directed them to design for ". . . an open wire fence with unpainted metal posts and with no vines or other plants growing along it."⁴⁰

Tarr regarded the rear yard to be a very important part of the home grounds' environment, and gave detailed explanations for her design rationale in this area. This lawn needed to be convenient, and include all service areas; service buildings, play lawns, fences and gates would be found here.⁴¹ More important, the users of this environment needed to be considered. The following segment from her publications provides an example of her consideration for family members that would be using the rear yard:

From our kitchen windows we can see the entrance drive and the farm court. When the men are away or in the fields, the women are in charge. They want to see what's going on without stopping their work. We'll try to locate the buildings, clothes lines and plantings so this will always be possible.⁴²

Though this passage is short, this excerpt provides us with the first detailed account of user-driven design found in Tarr's writings. In subsequent years Tarr's presentations on the design and layout of all environments would evolve to include this kind of discussion, and her students would begin to fully understand the design process.

Tarr's approach to landscape design, as shown in the above passages, closely followed trends in the field at-large. The most dominant connection between Tarr's work and practice is seen in the manifestation of *modernist ideals* in her design approach. Tarr emphasized the need for structuring the yard layout efficiently, clearly following a basic tenet of modernism, *form follows function*. Her instruction on dividing the yard into sections, on emphasizing design choices that resulted in easily managed landscapes and on locating elements for the user's benefit follow this guideline. Tarr's instruction also included the stripping of most color from the front yard, which simplified the yard's appearance, and kept the viewer's eye on the "most important element" found in the yard: the house.

Before the layout and design of the final plan was complete, Tarr taught her students about the use of plants in landscape architecture. First, Tarr guided her students in a review of the existing and proposed layout of the home grounds. These studies often revealed views from inside the house or areas of the yard that displayed beautiful panoramas of the Iowa countryside, bad views of ugly buildings,

areas in need of protection from winter winds or the hot summer sun, or existing planting that could use some sprucing up. Tarr lectured the students on the use of trees for shade, to frame or screen views, as backdrops for other plants, and their usefulness in mass planting to protect the grounds from wind or snow. She then showed the students how to place plants, accentuate views, protect certain areas of the yard and visually improve existing conditions; this discussion included detailed suggestions on the use of shrubs and trees to hide foundations, for borders and for screens, and on the use of vines on buildings, lattices, fences, arbors and slopes.⁴³

Tarr believed the great visual appeal of landscape design was found in the variety of forms, textures, scents and colors the plant pallet offered. She provided students with a broad overview on the many kinds of trees, shrubs and vines available for landscape design, and reviewed the proper choice of plants. These decisions, Tarr said, were to be based on hardiness, height, shape, and foliage texture of the trees, shrubs and vines.⁴⁴

Like the other plants used in landscape design, Tarr felt strongly about the selection and placement of flowers. Through slide talks she educated her students about the wide range of perennial, annual and biennial flowers available and included instruction on the design of gardens based on the sequence of bloom, mass effects and attractive color combinations of the flowers. Tarr insisted that flowers, as beautiful as they were, had no place in the front yard as they would detract from the house itself, flowers had their place in borders and small gardens in the rear and side yards.⁴⁵

To complete the general plan, Tarr worked with the 4-H girls in choosing plant material for their landscape design. True to the long-held philosophy of the Iowa State Landscape Architecture Department, she advocated the use of a variety of native plant materials in design, and encouraged the selection of long-lived hardy trees, shrubs and vines. In addition to native plants, exotic plants were acceptable, though they needed to take great care in the selection of these species. She encouraged her

students to select only those plants that could survive in Iowa's harsh environment, and to be alert to the dangers of the invasive properties of many exotic species.⁴⁶

Tarr's insistence on the use of native plants was not unheard of during this time. Authors in leading journals of the day encouraged the use of native plantings in design work and encouraged all to plan carefully for each plant's physical needs. The writers insisted that native plant materials be used in design, and further encouraged the designer be aware of the different demands and needs of rural and urban environments.⁴⁷

In Tarr's final lecture in the design phase she gave direction on the placement of special garden features in the yard. She showed examples of water elements like formal and naturalistic pools, wall and jet fountains, brooks and water-garden plant materials. Her discussion also included information about built features, including outdoor fireplaces, porches, terraces and shelters. Tarr finished the show with a review of other special features such as sun dials, bird baths, pergolas and arbors, fences and gates, bird houses, shelters and feeding stations.⁴⁸

Tarr's writings and instructions, while succinct, left little room for design exploration for the students. Her detailed approach to defining spatial organization of the yard, and explicit direction in the placement of plant material efforts limited their options, which probably resulted in the generation of home grounds' designs with similar layout and design. The final plan illustration she used in her instruction (Figure three) depicts this pattern.

Tarr viewed the design of one's home grounds' environment as a long-term commitment for the designer, and attendance at one of her seminars did not end with the design of the project site. She believed students needed to experience to different places to learn how to design, and to stretch their imaginations as often as possible. Tarr encouraged the 4-H girls to visit landscape developments in their counties, to learn about plant materials on trips to local parks and nature preserves, and to read garden, art and landscape architecture publications at the library. She further suggested they take imaginary trips

through landscape paintings, etchings and photographs to strengthen their ability to think and design in three dimensions.⁴⁹

Tarr also believed the job of designing the home grounds' environment did not end when a plan was drafted, but that it was an ongoing task. The duty of every designer, Tarr said, encompassed more

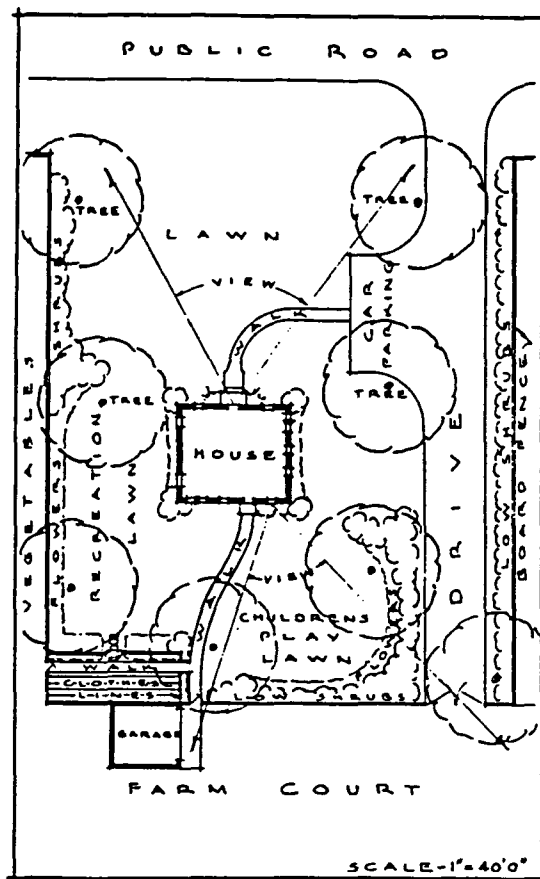


Figure 3. Illustration used in "Our Home Grounds" to depict the design of home and farm grounds.⁵⁰

than a commitment to the designing process; a designer was also responsible for maintenance of the yard. Maintaining an efficient and useful yard included several tasks, depending on the season. Yard care was not simply a matter of raking leaves and picking up litter. It entailed a wide array of jobs for the designer, including the preparation of landscaping plans, the construction birdhouses and the starting

of plants for spring planting. Each season of the year brought new tasks for the home grounds' designer, and Tarr's explicit instructions left no student wondering about what needed to be done.

Each autumn yard cleanup was a major undertaking in the home grounds. While Tarr encouraged efficiency in completing the tasks associated with yard maintenance, during this time of the year she also directed designers to prepare a measured drawing of existing conditions. Completion of this task, along with taking photographs of the home grounds, would fully prepare the designer for actual design work. For those that had already carried out design work on their home grounds Tarr encouraged participation in county-fair and achievement day landscape exhibits. She also urged her students to collect seeds, to plant or transplant peonies, to plant spring-flowering bulbs, and to construct walks or paths their plan outlined. With winter fast-approaching, Tarr also gave directions on protecting winter-sensitive plants.⁵¹

Not surprisingly, Tarr saw winter as a time of preparation for home grounds' designers. Completion of a general landscape and planting plan for the home grounds was the major task during this season, though several smaller tasks were also in need of attention. Tarr reminded students to plan for spring planting by ordering catalogs, plants and seeds, and that trees and shrubs also needed pruning during this season. She encouraged her students to construct garden features during the long winter months, and provided 4-H girls with detailed handouts on the proper construction of bird feeding stations, bird houses and garden benches.⁵²

Spring and summer brought better weather for outdoor activity, and Tarr outlined a tremendous amount of work to be done during these seasons. This included most of the yard layout, preparation of plant beds, and planting. As the summer progressed, a great amount of time was reserved for weeding, insect control and general plant maintenance. In good weather Tarr encouraged the home grounds' keeper to record design progress in notebooks and in photographs.⁵³

Tarr's leadership training seminars for 4-H girls ended with the unit on yard maintenance. After an intense day of learning about home grounds' improvement, Tarr's students took with them a vast array of information, including an understanding about landscape beauty, civic responsibility, yard layout and design, and the year-long responsibilities that come with being a designer. Armed with new information on home grounds' beautification, the 4-H leaders set up meetings with their respective groups to teach others about this process. By working with 4-H groups, Tarr and her colleagues established contacts in about one-third of Iowa's counties each year, and, over the years, successfully reach thousands of young Iowan's.⁵⁴

In addition to her work with 4-H girls, Tarr spent considerable time instructing women's garden club members on home grounds' improvement. She generally helped the garden clubs coordinate one or two-day short courses, however, instead of the leadership training schools; this approach gave members the opportunity to build educational credit within their national organization to qualify as contest judges. Much of the material Tarr covered in the short courses was the same as in the leadership training seminars, though she also lectured garden club members on the duties of qualified judges for yard and garden designs contests.⁵⁵

Tarr was particularly adamant about the civic responsibility of garden club members in protecting Iowa's natural environment. She insisted they accept responsibility for educating their neighbors, various youth groups and school children on the principles of conservation and good landscape design.⁵⁶ While fewer Iowans attended short courses than leadership training schools, Tarr still reached many people. In 1940, Tarr directed twenty-one short courses with an attendance of 677,⁵⁷ and in the following year 814 garden club members attended 22 short course meetings. Unlike the leadership training seminars, those attending short courses did not teach others on how to design. Instead, they would lecture at various schools, community meetings and youth events about the need to

understand the basics of good design. Garden club members also distributed a considerable amount of information by way of news letter publications, garden club magazines and pamphlets.⁵⁸

In the early 1940's Landscape Extension specialists projected an increased demand for their services, especially in the area of home grounds' improvement.⁵⁹ The continuing growth of garden clubs in Iowa was a primary reason for this predicted need. Between 1930 and 1940 the number of garden club members in Iowa increased by twofold, and by 1940 the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. boasted a membership of 4,285. This club continued growing until the early 1970's, when their membership peaked around 6,000.⁶⁰ Additionally, many youth groups showed an increased interest in this subject matter, including 4-H and future farmer organizations.⁶¹

Information on Tarr's work in other subject areas during her first few years with Landscape Extension is sketchy. While it is known she completed some work in civic planning and rural school yard development, no documentation exists depicting her approach to the subject matter. Occasionally she led farmstead development seminars, though other landscape specialists covered the bulk of this work. When Tarr assumed responsibility for Landscape Extension in 1952 she spent considerably more time in this arena (a full description of her approach to farmstead development is found in chapter 5 of this document). In all probability, Tarr actively participated in developing Extension publications, and gave radio talks during these years, though no writings describe her contributions to these activities.

In the late 1930's many departments within Iowa State's Cooperative Extension Service began to prepare wartime programming as they anticipated the United State's involvement in World War II. Landscape Extension records, however, do not show any preparation for this event until after war was declared. Tarr maintained her schedule of work in home grounds' development, civic planning, rural grounds development and farmstead design well-into December of 1941, when landscape specialists suspended all existing programs. Landscape specialists spent the first months of 1942 restructuring their workloads and developing wartime programs to address Iowa's needs. While they quickly established a

new direction in the department, the transition from peacetime to wartime programming in Landscape

Extension was very sudden, resulting in the loss of production in the first few months of 1942.⁶²

Notes

¹Fitzsimmons, John R., "Historic Sketch of Landscape Architecture Extension, Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 1914-1939," Paper written for the Iowa State Cooperative Extension Service, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1940, 25.

²Donna Palmer, "An Overview of the Trends, Eras and Values of Landscape Architecture in America from 1910 to the Present with an Emphasis on the Contributions of Women to the Profession" (Master's thesis, North Carolina State University, 1976), 46.

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⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 3-4.

⁷Ibid., 3.

⁸Ibid., 18-19.

⁹Ibid., 1.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 19.

¹²Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1939, 16.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., 21.

¹⁵Dorothy Schwieder, 75 Years of Service: Cooperative Extension in Iowa. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993), 46-47.

¹⁶Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1939, 21.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, November 1, 1939 - October 31, 1940, 6.

²⁰Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1939, 16.

²¹Ibid., 19.

²²Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, November 1, 1939 - October 31, 1940, 9, 20.

²³Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1939, 16.

²⁴Margherita Tarr, Home Grounds Improvement: Landscaping for Use and Beauty LA-90 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, August, 1941), 1.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Donna Palmer, "An Overview of the Trends, Eras and Values of Landscape Architecture from 1910 to the Present with an Emphasis on the Contributions of Women to the Profession" (Master's thesis, North Carolina State University, 1976, 49.

²⁸William H. Tishler, American Landscape Architecture: Designers and Places (Washington D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1989), 78-81, 11-101.

²⁹Margherita Tarr, Home Grounds Improvement: Landscaping for Use and Beauty LA-90 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, August, 1941), 1.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 3.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 4.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Margherita Tarr, Our Home Grounds LA-136 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1948), 9.

³⁷Ibid., 3.

³⁸Ibid., 7.

³⁹Ibid., 8.

⁴⁰Ibid., 13.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 21.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Elsa Rehmman, "An Ecological Approach," Landscape Architecture 23, 4 (July 1933): 242-245.

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⁴⁸Margherita Tarr, Our Home Grounds LA-136 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1948), 6.

⁴⁹Margherita Tarr, Home Grounds Improvement: Landscaping for Use and Beauty LA-90 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, August, 1941), 7.

⁵⁰Ibid., 10.

⁵¹Ibid., 1.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 2.

⁵⁴Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, November 1, 1939 - October 31, 1940, 6.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Margherita Tarr, Home Grounds Improvement: Landscaping for Use and Beauty LA-90 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, August, 1941), 1.

⁵⁷Landscape Architecture Extension Service Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, November 1, 1939 - October 31, 1940, 3.

⁵⁸Landscape Architecture Extension Service Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1940 - September 30, 1941, 3.

⁵⁹Annual Report (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1940), 19.

⁶⁰"Annual Report of the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa." in Transactions of the Iowa State Horticultural Society (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1940): 278.

⁶¹Annual Report (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1940), 19.

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CHAPTER 3

THE WWII YEARS 1941 - 1944

With the onset of World War II, landscape specialists faced many new challenges. Primarily, these challenges grew from the call to America's farmers to increase the production and preservation of food. This call placed tremendous pressure on Iowans to engage in all-out agricultural production throughout the war years, and effectively altered the work of Landscape Extension. While landscape specialists made an effort to maintain their regular programs during this time, their resources and help were needed elsewhere. During the first few months of 1942 landscape specialists canceled most of their regular programs and adopted four new programs to support the war effort: the Emergency Farm Labor program, Victory Garden Campaign, Fire Prevention Campaign and postwar project planning for the Iowa Conservation Commission. Because they had not planned for this change, it took a few months to change their service. Once the programs were implemented, the time and energy landscape specialists put into new programming quickly outweighed that of regular programming, which would prove to be the case until the war's end.¹

The support landscape specialists gave to the war effort paralleled that of their colleagues throughout Cooperative Extension. By 1942 all programs not directly contributing to this effort were set aside, and specialists focused their energies on educating farmers in techniques that increased food production. As successful as this effort proved to be, the value of the work Extension specialists engaged in during the war years extended beyond a well-fed nation. Either directly or indirectly specialists reiterated the national defense theme in all Extension programs, and encouraged everyone to be a part of this effort. Participation in such programming, specialists believed, boosted the morale of Iowans during a difficult time.²

While Landscape Extension supplemented their workload with four new programs in support of the war effort, Tarr's primary area of support fell in the arena of gardening: the Victory Garden

Campaign. Because food production was not her area of expertise, Tarr collaborated with other Extension specialists on this project. Specialists from horticulture and home economics provided the most useful information, and Tarr worked alongside them in organizing and presenting leadership training schools on victory gardening. Extension's involvement in the Victory Garden Campaign resulted in the education of thousands of Iowans on small-scale gardening and food preservation.³ In 1942 Specialists organized sixty-one leadership seminars in thirty-six counties, directly reaching 3,872 Iowans. These leaders, in turn, distributed this information to families within four square miles of their homes.⁴ By 1943 Tarr and her colleagues successfully expanded this program, holding 202 meetings and reaching every county in Iowa. In all, specialists estimated they reached 8,000 citizens in 1943.⁵

While Extension specialists provided much-needed professional assistance to this movement, the National Council of State Garden Clubs had already kicked off the Victory Garden Campaign in 1941. The president of this organization called all amateur gardeners in the United States to ". . . make ours the best fed Nation on earth,"⁶ inspiring garden club members (and many others) across the nation to become active participants in the campaign. As a result, hundreds of Iowa families in both rural and urban areas started victory gardens. Extension specialists estimated at least 85 percent of Iowa families had victory gardens in 1943, which covered nearly 150,000 acres.⁷ While the movement cannot boast yields comparable to large-scale agriculture production, an 85 percent involvement rate represents Iowa's extraordinary involvement in this war effort.

At the peak of the Victory Garden Campaign in 1944, the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. proudly tallied their accomplishments. Of their garden club members, 152 had victory gardens on their property, and in 1944 they canned a total of 624,000 quarts of garden produce.⁸ In 1945 they increased this yield to 680,000 quarts. With a combined total of 1,204,000 quarts of fruits and vegetables canned during 1944 and 1945, the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. declared this grassroots movement a success.⁹

Tarr and her colleagues, while in full support of the war effort, expressed great concern about the potential impact of war programs on Iowa's environment. Primarily, landscape specialists feared Iowans would turn over beautiful lawns, home grounds and parks for use in food production, even if these spaces had little value as gardens or fields. Driven by this worry specialists tried to balance the cries for increased food production with the need to become educated in proper site selection techniques. This education, they felt, centered on an understanding of basic landscape architectural principles, and it is in this vein that landscape specialists fought to maintain regular program offerings.¹⁰

Tarr's writings illustrate the conflict she saw with the war effort and Iowa's natural environment. During the war years Tarr wrote a monthly column for the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. news letter called "Add to Iowa's Charms," and in this column she stressed the need for every citizen to take the responsibility for protecting Iowa's landscape, especially during the war.¹¹ Though only a few articles she wrote during this time can be found, her feelings and beliefs shine through in the work undertaken by the women of these garden clubs. Tarr's influence on the thoughts and beliefs of garden club members is evident in the speeches and writings of these women.

Garden club members had a long history of calling for the protection of Iowa's natural environment, and World War II only served to amplify garden club members' concerns. Ada Swalwell, a leader in Iowa's garden club movement, gave inspirational talks at meetings and conferences to gain support in saving Iowa's countryside. As chair of the Federated Garden Clubs Of Iowa Roadside Committee, Swalwell was called upon to speak at the Fifth Roadside and Shade Tree Conference in October of 1941; her words embodied the thoughts and feelings of many as she called for Iowans to address the growing problem of ". . . the unnecessary butchery of beautiful and valuable shade trees along the highways . . ." ¹² Swalwell feared chaos would ensue with the war, and that many of the best shade trees in Iowa would go for defense work, exasperating an already critical problem. In her talk she warned conference attendees that "The lumber trees of waring [sic] nations have fallen for the war lords.

If war should come to America's shores you may be sure the trees will fall here too; park trees, timber trees, recreational forest trees, roadside trees and lawn trees will all go if the struggle for world supremacy lasts long enough."¹³

To counter the destruction of Iowa's valuable tree resource, Swalwell encouraged everyone to plant thousands of native trees, and to inspire others to join in this movement. The garden club effort extended beyond the act of planting trees to include the planning of tree planting programs and work with individuals within community, county and state organizations.¹⁴ While this push to plant trees was inspired by World War II, Swalwell recognized the opportunity to lay a foundation for future work. With the future in mind she called for the launching of planting programs in the public schools, thereby instilling a sense of ownership for the natural environment in Iowa's school children. Furthermore, Swalwell insisted that this responsibility not be passed on to classroom teachers. She insisted garden club members provide volunteer support in establishing and maintaining this program.¹⁵ Under her leadership garden clubs also lobbied for emergency relief work along Iowa's roadsides, with an emphatic plea that this work be carried out intelligently to preserve, and not destroy, the natural beauty adjacent to Iowa's highways. Additionally, Swalwell called for the beautification of town approaches, highway triangles and the establishment of wayside parks.¹⁶ Swalwell spoke with such conviction, and her concerns paralleled Tarr's writings and feelings so closely, it could very well have been Tarr herself speaking at the conference.

In all likelihood Tarr had quite a bit of contact with Ada Swalwell, and it is evident Tarr influenced her work. Like Tarr, Swalwell encouraged others to see what Iowa's landscape had to offer, and reminded them of every citizen's civic duty in preserving this beauty. Swalwell's words mirrored Tarr's feelings on the subject of beauty, and she could not have been clearer as she told conference attendees "The beautiful scenery of Iowa belongs to every one of you. It is a part of the heritage that has been so lavishly given to you because you are a citizen of this state. And it is not only your right as a

citizen, but your duty and responsibility to hand down to future citizens that which you have had, used and enjoyed. You, the citizens of Iowa, can give no greater service to your communities and your state than to protect and perpetuate the scenic beauty around you."¹⁷

In the midst of meeting wartime demands, Tarr and her coworkers found landscape architecture's reputation plagued by long-time misunderstandings. Many Iowans still believed landscape design merely entailed the planting of a few trees, shrubs or flowers to beautify yards, and during a time of national crisis the public viewed the contributions of landscape architecture as superfluous. Landscape specialists feared two possible effects of this misunderstanding: the immediate deterioration of Iowa's natural environment and the future standing of landscape architecture as an independent department in Iowa State's Cooperative Extension Program.¹⁸

Landscape specialists scrambled to demonstrate the need for landscape architectural theory, principles and techniques in Iowa's bid to support the war effort. While primary responsibility for directing large-scale food production fell in other arenas, Tarr and her colleagues argued to Extension administration that landscape architecture contributed heavily to the maintenance of wartime food production efforts. They insisted the proper design of farmsteads, transportation routes and communities ensured smooth agricultural operations, an absolute necessity during times of high-yield production. The specialists also outlined the practical aspects of applying the landscape architecture techniques to the systematic planning of both present and postwar needs, and encouraged Iowans to plan for the future.¹⁹ Finally, landscape specialists maintained that following a systematic planning and logical problem solving approach boosted good morale, not only for those on the home front, but also for the armed forces overseas.²⁰

Tarr carried these arguments into her work with women's groups, garden clubs and youth groups. While she had always contended that only well-designed, efficiently maintained home grounds were beautiful, she added to her lecture the importance of caring for these landscapes to boost morale

both at home and abroad.²¹ Tarr brought war issues to the forefront to help citizens see the connection between the war overseas and landscape design in Iowa. She reflected on those stationed elsewhere, and contended that they think first of their families and homes, visualizing idealistically about their homes. Tarr stressed the civic duty of everyone on the home front to keep their homes attractive and orderly to ensure a pleasant environment for returning service personnel. This work also enabled families to send "cheering pictures" of the home place to those in battle, and provided a morale-building job for home folks, especially those younger members who are left at home.²²

Though many citizens saw landscape design as an extraneous activity during the war years, not all Iowans balked at improving their home grounds. A survey conducted by the Extension Service in the early 1940's showed most citizens spent most of their leisure time in or around their home. Interestingly, 64.6 percent of the respondents (male and female alike) indicated they regularly cared for their home grounds during recreational time. Of this group, 57.5 percent enjoyed while 71.2 percent reported they regularly participated in vegetable gardening. While the survey indicated men and women showed equal interest in landscape design and related projects, age played a factor in determining the amount of time and energy invested in these activities. Eighty percent of young Iowans between the ages of eleven and fourteen that responded to the survey participated in gardening and yard work. This group was followed closely by citizens aged forty-five to sixty-four with a 75 percent interest rate; 55 percent of young adults, aged twenty to twenty-four, reported spending much of their leisure time on landscape design or related activities.²³

The belief that gardening and related activities provided essential moral and psychological support during wartime extended well beyond Iowa's borders. F.A. Mercer, editor of Gardens and Gardening of London, often wrote about the effects of gardens during trying times. He contended that the garden provided an emotional release, a counterpoint necessary to paths normally taken in life, and offered a restful stop to those that passed by. For this reason he encouraged small gardeners to continue

with their art and to understand how great their contributions were to the amenity of the country as a whole.²⁴ His viewpoint on the necessity of gardens, every citizen's civic responsibility to contribute to the war effort, and his consideration for the natural environment directly paralleled the stand Tarr and her colleagues took in Iowa. In 1940 he offered these thoughts that embodied ^{the} spirit of many during this time:

Flowers will have a very big job to perform in the coming days, in comforting those who are in trouble of mind, body or spirit -- A beautiful garden in the days before us is almost a duty. Its message of cheer extends far beyond its borders, and encourages those who pass by it -- Though we must all see to it that we grow the maximum food possible, our plans should be prepared with discretion. If I may add another suggestion, do not rush off and cut down established trees without long consideration before hand. It will take generations to replace them."²⁵

During a time when much travel was curtailed due to the war, Margherita still managed to vacation in other countries. In 1942 she enjoyed a sightseeing trip to Mexico, and returned excited about her findings. On a stop in Pueblo, Tarr was delighted to find a sign in the Central Public Square that read "The culture of a community is indicated by the way it keeps its gardens." She reported to garden club members across Iowa that the citizens of Pueblo, Mexico put this saying into practice by keeping their home grounds and public squares neat, clean and attractive. This, Tarr exclaimed, should serve as inspiration to every Iowa town. She urged garden club members to find the inherent charm of their communities, and petitioned every garden club to set as its goal during the next year to strive for better planned and maintained home grounds.²⁶

Regular programming for home grounds' improvement, farmstead development and civic projects suffered tremendous decline during the war years. While a farm labor shortage and high food production demands contributed to this drop, the Extension program was primarily restricted due to the drain of additional wartime programs and limited travel funds. Specialists struggled to balance new demands alongside regular programs, but the heavy load proved too difficult to handle. In hopes of maintaining some continuity, landscape specialists gave approximately eight radio talks each year, held

some leadership training schools and spent office time preparing material for the field. Tarr and her colleagues found 1943 the most challenging of the war years in balancing their workloads, yet despite a 90% cancellation rate for regular programs, specialists managed to hold fifty regular program meetings. At these gatherings they reached 1,605 people.²⁷

In addition to loaded schedules, early in 1943 Landscape Extension experienced the war directly when two of its specialists were pulled for wartime work. On the first of February Herbert Lenz left ~~for~~ *for* Wichita, Kansas to work in an airplane factory. Later in the month the Emergency Farm Labor Program of the Extension Service drafted Fitzsimmons to serve as an assistant supervisor. Tarr carried full responsibility of Landscape Architecture Extension for five months until she received her own orders. On July first the Cooperative Extension Service assigned Tarr full-time work with the Iowa State Conservation Commission. She worked on postwar projects with this group for only a few months, until September thirtieth. Tarr picked up her full work load as an Extension landscape architect after her service with the Conservation Commission. She worked as the only specialist in this area of Extension until the end of the war.²⁸

Throughout the war, Tarr and her colleagues consistently urged community leaders to plan for postwar needs. Landscape specialists helped Iowa towns set up action committees to learn about and prepare for community planning, and as the war came to an end these concerns came to the forefront. Citizens and specialists alike raised many issues in need of address at this time, including agricultural land planning, conservation, the siting of recreational and educational facilities, urban development, the farm labor shortage, industrial possibilities and housing.²⁹ Landscape architecture alone could not handle the broad range of problems associated with these concerns, so the specialists worked with professionals in other fields. Joint committees comprised of specialists from landscape architecture, home economics and horticulture worked closely with community action committees to plan for postwar project developments.³⁰

The outlook for Landscape Extension programs improved near the end of the war. In the last few months of 1944 specialists received more requests with help in planning and design than in the previous year, which encouraged the landscape specialists to prepare for forthcoming work. This increased interest in landscape service did not surprise the specialists; in 1943 they had predicted rapid liquidation of farm debts due to the high agricultural production prices, and they had also noted the great accumulation of farmer funds in war bonds and cash. After long-term neglect of homes and communities Iowans faced the chore of reconditioning home grounds, farmsteads and public centers, and the improved economy helped them afford these improvements. With this in mind, during the last year of the war Tarr reviewed the status of program offerings from Landscape Extension and prepared materials to meet upcoming needs. Because the other specialists were still assigned to wartime work she worked on this alone.³¹

Tarr's contributions to Landscape Extension during the war years, while at times difficult to discern from her colleagues', are found in many areas. Her influence came through in the work completed by garden clubs throughout Iowa, including the produce canned from the victory gardens, the push for home grounds improvement and her ongoing crusade to protect and enhance Iowa's natural environment. While burdened with the work of special programs Tarr continued to write and lecture on the need to recognize landscape architecture's vital role in community development, and she encouraged others to plan for the future at every turn. With her colleagues pulled for wartime work she accepted full responsibility for the Landscape Architecture Extension programs, and in the process she gained hands-on experience in civic improvement. She also worked closely with other professionals to create a foundation for present and future planning and design of Iowa's communities. The experience she gained from this work would prove valuable in post-war years when the need for urban and suburban planning grew with increasing population, changing agricultural needs and community growth.

Notes

¹Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1942 - September 30, 1943, 2.

²Dorothy Schwieder, 75 Years of Service: Cooperative Extension in Iowa. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993), 99, 102.

³Annual Report (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1943), 9.

⁴Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1941 - September 30, 1942, 5.

⁵Annual Report (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1943), 10.

⁶A. Brewer, "Gardens For Defense," Iowa Gardens (Des Moines: Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, 1941), 3.

⁷Annual Report (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1943), 11.

⁸Ibid.

⁹L. Grove, "Victory Garden Report," Iowa Gardens (Des Moines: Federate Garden Clubs of Iowa, 1945), 35-36.

¹⁰Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1941 - September 30, 1942, 22.

¹¹Margherita Tarr, "Add to Iowa's Charms," News Letter Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. (December 1942), 1.

¹²Ada Swalwell, "The Citizen's Part in a Shade Tree Planting Campaign," Fifth Roadside and Shade Tree Conference Proceedings (February 1941), 13.

¹³Ibid., 37.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 39

¹⁶Ibid., 43.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Annual Report (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1941), 3.

¹⁹Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1941 - September 30, 1942, 21.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴F. A. Mercer, Editorial Comment, Gardens and Gardening (1939) in Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1941 - September 30, 1942, 21.

²⁵Ibid., 22.

²⁶Margherita Tarr, "Add to Iowa's Charms," News Letter Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. (1942), 1.

²⁷Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1942 - September 30, 1943, 1.

²⁸Ibid., 2.

²⁹Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1941 - September 30, 1942, 23.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1942 - September 30, 1943, 7.

CHAPTER 4

POST WAR YEARS 1945 - 1960

Landscape specialists were anxious to return to a more uniform schedule following World War II, but many obstacles stood in their way. The immediate postwar economy encouraged Iowans to make improvements in their surroundings, and specialists began receiving many requests for help. In the midst of increasing requests, however, Landscape Extension had a limited workforce, a problem that would plague the department for the remainder of Tarr's career.¹ Iowans were also facing very different problems than before and during the war. The postwar economic boom lasted only a few years, and by the early 1950's Iowans faced economic decline; this fluctuation in the economy resulted in inflated costs of building materials, labor charges and high income taxes.² Iowa's population was also on the rise, and continued to shift from rural environments to urban centers.³ The transition from wartime to peacetime, while full of hope, offered many new challenges for the landscape specialists.

The first challenge landscape specialists faced in postwar Iowa was meeting increasing demands with a declining workforce. Herbert Lenz did not return to Extension work after the war, a position that was never again filled. Also, John Fitzsimmons' continued his work with the Farm Labor Program, limiting the work he could complete for Landscape Extension. Postwar requests for high yield food production required Fitzsimmons' attention through 1946, and between 1944 and 1945 he worked for less than two months on Landscape Extension programming. In 1946 he contributed four months of his time to landscape projects.⁴ During these years Tarr carried an extra load within the department, and her position increased from nine months a year to a full-year post.

When Tarr accepted the full-time position with Landscape Extension in 1945, she also assumed a leadership role in the management of the workload. While Tarr could not meet all field requests during this time, she did complete most the administrative tasks. In 1947 when Fitzsimmons returned as a full-time landscape specialist, he again assumed his position as head landscape architect. His return did not

diminish Tarr's role within the department, however. Her position remained a full-time post, and she continued to participate in administrative matters. Until Fitzsimmons retired from Extension work in 1952, they shared the administrative workload equally.⁵

The loss of Lenz's position and Fitzsimmons' work time in the postwar years heavily restricted the services rendered by Landscape Extension. Specialists were witnessing an increased enthusiasm for landscape services throughout the state, but with a reduction in staffing, the increased demand could not be met, and many requests were not answered. Not surprisingly, the primary area of neglect fell in Fitzsimmons' area of expertise: farmstead development. Records show 90 percent of Iowa's counties requested help in this area in 1945, but Fitzsimmons simply could not meet the demand. From December 1944 through September 1945 he visited sixteen counties in Iowa and lectured to 752 people on the subject of farmstead development,⁶ significantly less than from 1940 to 1941 when he met with 5,302 citizens.⁷ This constituted an 85 percent drop in service from pre to postwar years. The drop was short-lived, however, and within a year the number of Iowans Fitzsimmons reached increased considerably. Though he only worked a few months in 1946, during this time he taught 8,099 Iowans about farmstead development.⁸

In reviewing Tarr's postwar schedule there is no indication she was pulled to cover Fitzsimmons' workload in farmstead development. Instead, Tarr continued to work within the realm of home grounds' improvement, and with the benefit of working full-time, the number of Iowans she reached increased significantly. Her annual report shows a total of 3,180 Iowans received direction in home grounds' improvement from 1944 to 1945,⁹ an increase of 779 people from the 1940 to 1941 work year.¹⁰ The number of citizens Tarr instructed in home grounds' design not only continued to increase, it increased by the thousands. From 1945 to 1946 Tarr reached a total of 7,862 Iowans,¹¹ and from 1948 to 1949 this number grew to 12,084.¹²

While Tarr was successful at reaching many people during these years, she was also making strides in other areas of service. After settling into her regular routine of sponsoring leadership schools after the war, Tarr looked for other opportunities to reach the public at large. One avenue she explored was radio broadcasting. Tarr had given a few radio talks on home grounds' planning before the war, and in the postwar years she began using this technique regularly. By 1946 Tarr was broadcasting talks every month, and within a year she was delivering talks every other week.

Many of Tarr's radio talks focused on basic planning and design processes in landscape architecture. During the Homemakers' Half-Hour on WOI she gave several talks, including "Planning for the Home Grounds Improvement," "Deciding the Final Plan," "Selecting Shrubs and Vines," and "Selecting Flowers for Continuous Bloom." The subject matter of these programs closely followed the material Tarr used at her home grounds' design training seminars. Copies of the radio talks were available to the public, but Tarr encouraged everyone to attend leadership training schools or short courses to gain a more in-depth understanding of the subject matter. The radio talks, while fairly general in scope, addressed major concerns of landowners readying for land beautification measures.

Following World War II a recurring theme in Tarr's radio talks was that of rediscovering Iowa's landscape. In her first postwar series, "Discovering Iowa," Tarr acquainted Iowans with the many natural resources in their state, and urged everyone to visit places of natural beauty. Tarr suggested to Iowans they take special trips to their state and local parks, and, while there, to appreciate these resources. Visits to these parks also gave Iowans the chance to observe good examples of proper landscaping practices, and would give them ideas for design in their own yards. Tarr also encouraged Iowans to rediscover their home grounds, and invited them to recognize how important these spaces were to daily living.¹³

Along with her radio talks, Tarr was busy working on other ways to reach her community groups. This is most apparent in her work with the 4-H girls. Tarr gave special slide lectures on Iowa's

natural resources for these groups, and spent extra time guiding nature hikes for them. She also wrote a column for their news letter, in which she communicated her philosophy of landscape design, and the various techniques used in the designing and maintaining home grounds.

Tarr's wrote the 4-H news letter column "Mary 4-H Discovers" from the viewpoint of a 4-H girl. Through this character Tarr shared a wide range of information with the 4-H members, from basic landscape design and planting techniques to the appreciation of landscapes, both at home and far away. The most unusual columns she wrote provided glimpses of far away lands. To accomplish this, Tarr shared with 4-H girls letters from her own friends working overseas in the war effort.¹⁴ Many of these letters contained descriptions of landscapes, as illustrated in the following passage:

They write us most often of foreign hospitality; of the neatness of the English countryside with its hedge rows and cottage gardens; of the green Irish fields separated neatly by low field-stone walls; of the beauty of the neat flower and vegetable gardens in France.¹⁵

Not only did these letters provide 4-H girls with descriptions of landscapes from overseas, this information reinforced Tarr's concepts of beauty. Repeated references to "neat" landscapes mirrored Tarr's belief that only well-maintained, organized grounds were beautiful, and passing this information on to 4-H members as a letter opened another avenue for Tarr to get her message across. While reinforcing concepts of beauty was important, with these letters Tarr also educated 4-H girls on the impacts of World War II, and in the process showed them the importance of caring for the landscape. From the South Pacific came a report from George, an Army Lieutenant with the Army Engineers:

We followed assault troops into this place. I've never seen such a chaotic mess! It was my job to make it livable again. In two months we've done just that and it was an interesting and exciting business! Whether it will make me any better as a landscape is yet to be seen.¹⁶

Tarr usually followed up her columns on far away landscapes with writings about Iowa's environment. In doing so, Tarr showed 4-H members how to appreciate their surroundings by learning about other places. She communicated this message by reflecting on her own appreciation for Iowa's

countryside after she read the letters. Tarr wrote of how she saw, as if for the first time, beauty in perfectly kept lawns, farmstead windbreaks and the trees dotting the horizon. She also included suggestions on cleaning up the environment, and hoped that her friends would come home to see Iowa's beautiful landscape.¹⁷

With this column Tarr brought the war home in many ways. One person she often wrote about in her column was Jean, an army nurse in Assam, India. Jean's letters told of plants and flowers she was discovering in India, which entertained 4-H girls over the course of a few years. Unfortunately, Jean died in a plane crash during her service time in India, and Tarr was forced to share the news with 4-Hers. As sad as this news was, Tarr took advantage of the opportunity to instruct the 4-H members in the art of building a flower border in her memory:

HOW TO IMMORTALIZE A FRIEND

Jean, our army nurse friend in Assam, India, was killed over there in a plane crash. We have wanted to immortalize her sacrifice and memory in our lives.

To guide us we are remembering that a memorial must bring to mind the person or persons for whom it is being planted or built. And so we have been thinking of what brings Jean most into our lives. It would be happy laughter, flowers and gold or bronze. Jean had very dark hair, snappy brown eyes and dark olive skin, so she often wore gold and green. Daffodils and pansies were her favorite flowers. She often said, "Pansies are for thoughts."

Dedicate Flower Border

Mother and I have decided to dedicate a small section of our perennial border to Jean. Jean's garden will be near the gate leading to the vegetable garden. For a background we're planting an Eca Rose. It has fine, shiny green leaves and sulphur yellow single roses. In front of it we're going to plant King Alfred daffodils, Moonlight Cottage tulips, Yellow Day Lilies, Coeopsis and a border of bronze pansies.

Letter Mentions 4-H Girls

The last letter we had from Jean she said, "I wish I would write a real message for the Iowa 4-H girls, but now that I'm in on the secret that you are telling the girls some of the things I write in my letters, they are no longer spontaneous for I feel self conscious about what I write." Then later she said, "Never has life been so serene for me though I am living in the midst of confusion. I love making my work here at the hospital, making life easier and happier for these injured boys of Merrill's Marauders."¹⁸

The benefit of this article was twofold: it reviewed basic design principles and provided young Iowans with a way in which they could deal with the impact of war in a tangible way. Interestingly, this column is the only evidence of Tarr using a theme to direct landscape design. Building a design around a theme (in this case a memorial flower border) was a common approach in landscape architecture. Her other writings taught designers to follow site and user needs as guiding tenets in design, however, and did not contain the thematic approach to landscape design.

By 1948 Tarr and Fitzsimmons had stabilized service in regular landscape programming. Although they continued to reach more Iowans each year, they felt the need to reassess the direction of their programming. To gain an understanding of current needs Tarr surveyed Iowans about their interests in landscape services. Results showed both farm and town families were anxious to improve their surroundings, and the large number of ornamental plantings in the spring of 1948 supported these findings. While many of these families had attended home grounds' improvement seminars, the survey revealed requests for more specific information on the technological aspects of implementing their designs. Specifically, Iowans asked for help in finding a greater selection of long-lived, low maintenance plants, and direction on constructing built elements in the landscape.¹⁹

The results of this survey prompted change in Landscape Extension. Records show Landscape specialists sent an immediate request to the Horticulture Department for help in identifying a wider plant pallet for design use. They also recommended further research on low-growing hardy evergreens, shrubs and vines for use throughout Iowa. These requests were honored, and within a few years a new plant list publication was available for distribution. Landscape specialists responded to requests for technological advice on design implementation by rewriting publications. Traditionally, Landscape Extension pamphlets were written in a narrative style. To communicate more effectively, Tarr rewrote the pamphlets, and included more graphics and lists of information. The Landscape specialists also worked

at adding new pamphlets to the publication list, especially on the construction of landscape elements: retaining walls, picnic tables and fireplaces.²⁰

Landscape specialists credit their survey with highlighting the need to help plan for community development. Many small towns and cities were growing, and specialists feared without proper guidance the development would overrun remaining tracts of Iowa's countryside. To counter this Tarr encouraged city councils to set up planning and zoning commissions, and during the 1950's she allowed more time in her schedule for community development. She worked closely with community groups to build a general understanding of planning and zoning needs, stressing the need for everyone to plan ahead.²¹ While the results of Tarr's work were not realized immediately, her early contacts aided in setting the foundation for her community development work throughout the decade, and into the 1960's.

Within her first eleven years with Iowa State Tarr witnessed considerable change in Landscape Extension, and the 1950's brought more of the same. The decade began with the loss of landscape specialist John Fitzsimmons. In September of 1950, after twenty-six years with Landscape Extension, Fitzsimmons left to serve in Iowa State's Department of Landscape Architecture. Extension continued to support two landscape specialist positions, and hired Robert Scannell to fill Fitzsimmons' post. This would turn out to be a short term appointment, however, and by the end of 1951 Scannell had moved on to other work. Landscape Extension never replaced this position.

When Fitzsimmons left Extension, Tarr assumed full responsibility for administration of the Landscape Extension program. Though staffing fluctuated during the first few years of the transition period, all records indicate the shift was smooth. Contributing to the ease of transfer was the close association between the Department of Landscape Architecture and Landscape Extension. Professors within the department had always played a supportive role in the work of landscape specialists, and with Fitzsimmons' working full-time in Landscape Architecture these ties were maintained, and perhaps even strengthened. While Tarr was the only permanent Landscape Specialist on staff during much of this

decade, she was not alone in her work. Professors from the Department of Landscape Architecture ensured the success of Landscape Extension by helping her write Extension publications, by lecturing to various community groups on planting design, and by leading training seminars in farmstead development. The Department of Landscape Architecture employed four professors at this time, including the department chair. Given the number of areas in which they offered their support, all were probably contributing to Landscape Extension.²²

Though Tarr was receiving support in her work, she was solely responsible for assuring the maintenance of traditional program offerings in Landscape Extension. Most of this programming fell in home grounds' improvement, farmstead development and civic planning. Tarr adjusted her schedule to meet demands, and she was able to work with Iowans in each programming area. Though little is known about the number of people she reached during this time, the numbers probably dropped. Tarr often complained in her annual reports to Extension administration that the workload was overwhelming, and each year she requested the additional staff to adequately meet the growing needs of Iowans. Her request was not honored until the mid-1960's. Records do not show why Extension only supported one specialist position at this time.²³

The greatest change in Tarr's schedule was the time she scheduled to work in the areas Fitzsimmons had usually filled. The bulk of this work fell in the arena of farmstead development, an area of service she had given seminars in before. Interestingly, Tarr's approach to this material did not differ from Fitzsimmons', and in the ensuing years she never changed her techniques or the information transferred at the seminars. Her famous speeches on Iowa's beauty did not find their way into her presentations, which is surprising as she felt so strongly about developing a sound base with this information. This decision not to include this was probably influenced by the people in attendance at farmstead development programs: farm men. Their interests centered on farmstead layout, and less on

home grounds' beautification, though this was also part of the program. This program was well established, and Tarr followed in the tradition set by her colleagues.

While Tarr structured the farmstead development training seminars much like her other Extension seminars, the material she covered differed considerably. She delivered most information through lectures and demonstrations on selected sites, and scheduled the seminar around a one-day format. Compared to the extensive lectures and material covered in Tarr's home grounds development training seminars, however, the information Tarr presented at farmstead seminars was succinct. The reasons for this difference are not known, though the kind of information she was delivering, and the farm men probably did not feel they could spend much time away from their field work.

In the course of the day Tarr covered two main topics at these seminars: farmstead layout and yard beautification. Unlike her instruction in home grounds improvement, Tarr did not give talks on Iowa's beauty, in-depth site inventory and analysis techniques and the importance of maintaining the grounds. While these lectures were not a part of the seminar, she stressed the need to plan for necessary changes, and the importance of developing a base map from which to work. The bulk of material Tarr passed along at this seminar addressed the functional aspects of farmstead layout and design, with explicit instruction on typical layout types for farmsteads in Iowa.

Tarr introduced the farmstead seminar with a lecture on the basic farmyard structure, and the ideal farm layout. Most farms in Iowa, she explained, reserved six to eight acres for the farmyard itself, and typically included the house and its grounds, an orchard, vegetable gardens and a windbreak. The outbuildings associated with the farm were considered part of the farmstead, and often dictated the arrangement of the property. Structures on the site included livestock buildings, feeding floors, corncribs, laying houses, machine sheds and garages.

Tarr's key message in this portion of the seminar centered on the arrangement of these structures around the farm court. As Tarr showed the group four examples of farmstead layouts (Figure four), she

reviewed the three major objectives that determined the layout for different property types. One goal in farmstead design, Tarr instructed, was to develop a convenient, efficient environment. A low maintenance farmyard was also important, as was the design of an attractive yard. If these three goals were met, she said, the farmstead layout would be a source of pride for the family.²⁴

Farmstead layout, while designed to meet user needs, was driven in large part by environmental conditions. The layout of the farmstead depended primarily on the direction the farm court faced. While all arrangements centered on a farm court, the prevailing winds dictated the placement of individual buildings. Unpleasant farmyard odors were to be directed away from the house, so the house was located apart and in front of the farm court buildings. Depending on the direction the farm court faced, the house was placed either upwind or out of direct line with the prevailing winds. The placement of silos was also determined by the wind factor: they were located on the south or east side of the barn so they would benefit from the protection from northwest winds. In all cases, the windbreak was located north and west of the farmstead, and stood about 100 feet from the buildings and drive. Such placement protected the farm court from harsh winter winds. Another environmental consideration in the placement of buildings was the drainage of the site. Good drainage was very important, and building placement was chosen so surface water drained away from the house, farm and court buildings.²⁵

Tarr gave detailed instruction on the placement of the major farmstead elements. The driving factor in determining exact placement was based primarily on functional aspects, with little emphasis on aesthetics. Convenient movement in and around the farmstead was very important, and determined the size of the farm court and orientation of the structures. For example, she directed designers to locate the farm buildings around a court that was about 15,000 square feet in size, with a minimum dimension of 100 feet on a side. The barn itself, Tarr directed, should be located with its length north and south on the far side of the court opposite the house, and on the center line with the entrance drive. This would provide convenient access to the building. Placement of the corn crib was also very important. Tarr

instructed seminar attendees to place it with the driveway through it so the trucks could be filled without opening and closing gates.²⁶

While decisions on the layout of farmsteads were generally guided by functional needs, aesthetics were also considered. The length of the windbreak on the west-facing farm court, for example, was shortened to keep the view to the house (the greeting area) open. Also, whenever possible, a good farm building was at the end of the entrance drive so the visitor could enjoy an attractive view when driving onto the farm grounds.²⁷

Little information is available on the yard beautification portion of Tarr's seminar. Tarr provided them with a plan for the development of farm home grounds (Figure five), but there is no indication she expounded on the material. Given her expertise in this area, she probably gave some basic instruction on grounds beautification, and instructed them in the choice and placement of plant materials. The focus of the seminar was farmstead development, however, and the beautification of the immediate yard was in all likelihood considered a secondary matter. While farm men comprised the main audience at these meetings, farm women also attended, and these women were probably there to glean information on yard beautification. Although Tarr would spend seventeen years of her career directing Landscape Extension work, and completing projects on farmstead development, there is no indication her instruction in this area ever changed.

Tarr's increased responsibilities in Landscape Extension did not deter her from exploring mass media techniques to reach more Iowans. After Fitzsimmons left, Tarr continued her work in radio broadcasting, giving short segments on home grounds' beautification and farmstead layout. In one talk, Tarr moved into the realm of architecture as she discussed how to rebuild the farmhouse after a fire. Her instruction in this area stayed within the realm of layout of the first floor, and she related the spaces inside the house with the outdoor yard segments. The kitchen and workroom areas, for example, should

be toward the back of the house, and aligned with the work spaces outside. The living room area, on the other hand, was an extension of the front yard greeting area, so needed to be located accordingly (Figure six). Tarr average about twenty-two talks a year throughout the decade, and felt this outreach program was enormously successful.

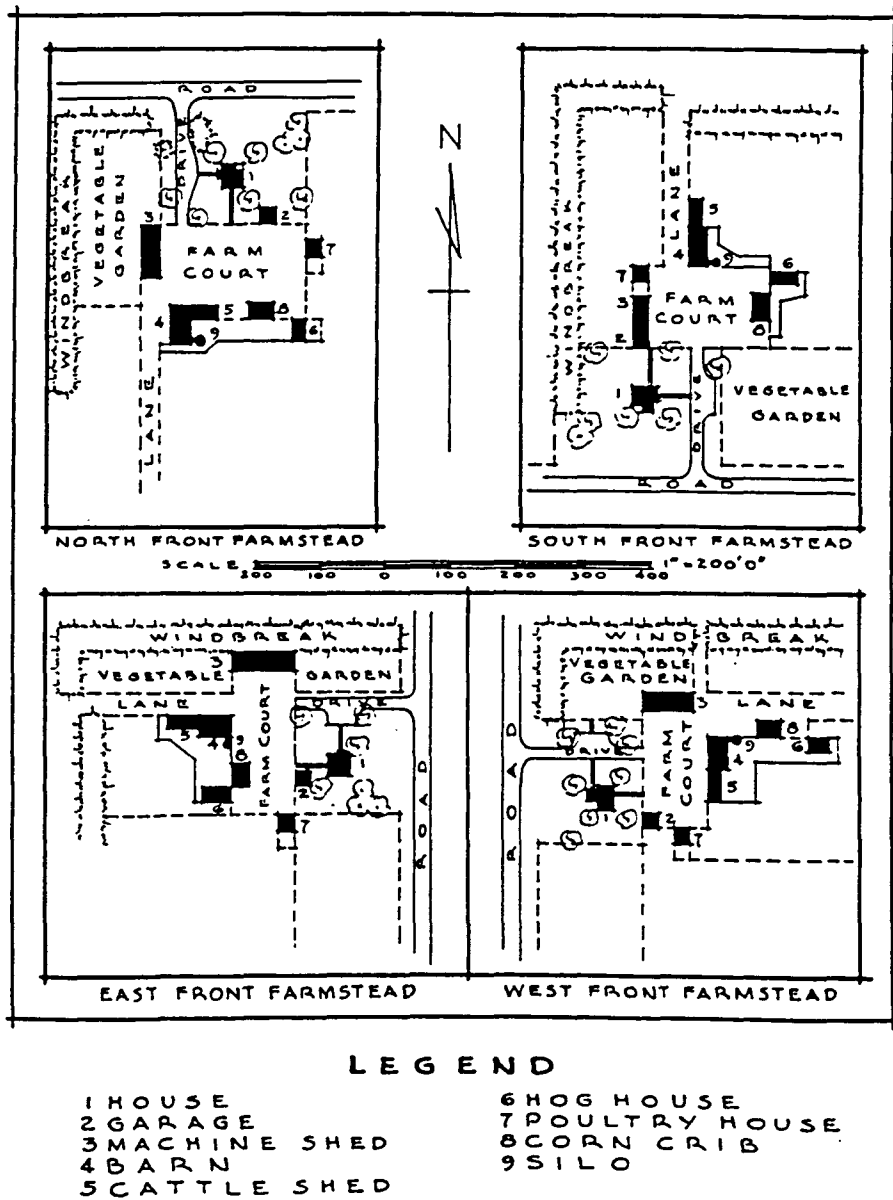


Figure 4. Farmstead Layout Types.²⁸

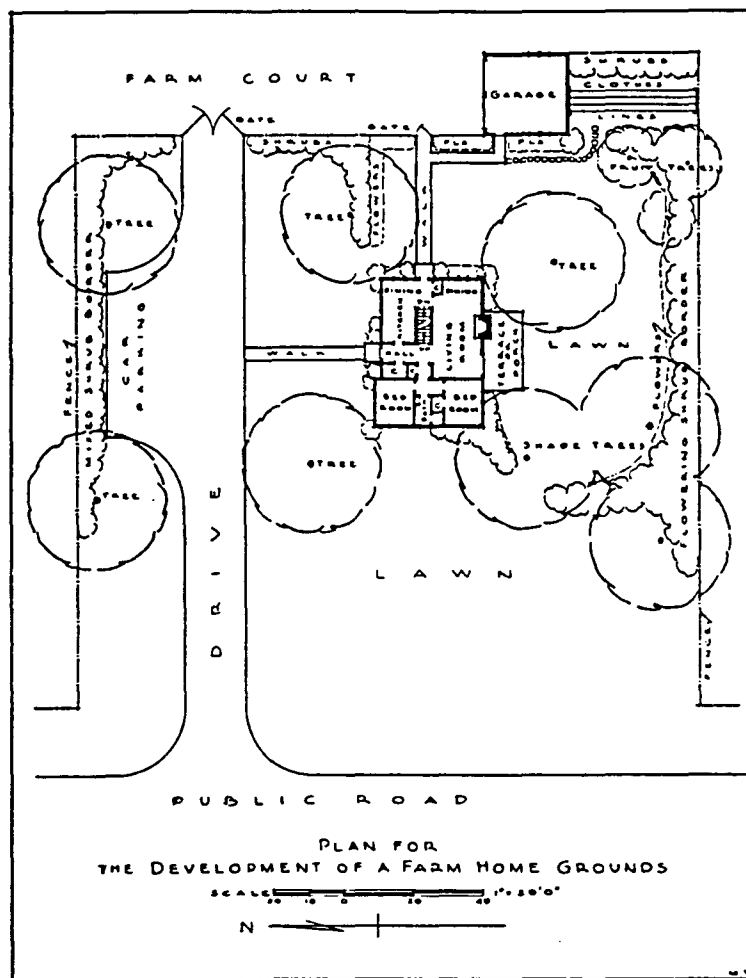


Figure 5. Plan for the Development of a Farm Home Grounds.²⁹

In the 1950's Tarr began exploring the medium of television to instruct Iowans on home grounds' beautification. Records show Tarr was presenting about four television clips a year during this decade. Only one negative reel remains from her clips, but without sound it tells little about her instruction using this media. The existing portion of the reel shows Tarr walking around a ranch-style home, talking and pointing to the plants in the front yard.³⁰ These shows probably followed the Extension publications she was writing during this time, in particular her "Your Yard Series" that discussed the layout and design of home grounds.

In the "Your Yard Series" Tarr divided the task of designing and caring for the home grounds environment into several steps. The style of the bulletins she published was very different from the material she distributed just after World War II. The titles of these publications show Tarr was trying to increase the public's understanding of landscape architecture by categorizing the material into segments. Some bulletins in this series included "Your Dooryard is Your Canvas," "Your Yard: Just Right Plantings" and "Your Yard: Its Greeting and Work and Play Areas." The information provided in these pamphlets, while presented in a new way, was the same information she had been lecturing on for years. The only additional material Tarr added during this time was found in "Your Yard Its Ups and Downs and Ins and Outs." This publication covered drainage details and outlined appropriate slopes for the yard.³¹

Tarr's work in civic development began to take hold in the middle 1950's. As Iowans began to understand the need to plan for change, Tarr received invitations to tour various cities and suggest improvements. She was pleased with these invitations, and on these tours praised the community leaders for taking the initiative in looking at their city. Tarr made suggestions as she toured town, and included advice on plant materials and their care, and the need for getting children involved in community projects.³²

On a tour of Spirit Lake, Iowa, Tarr talked with the community group about the layout and care of the city center. While she liked the centralized arrangement of the shopping area, she was more impressed with the care of the area. True to her beliefs about beautiful landscapes Tarr praised city leaders for the neat appearance of the boulevard, and explained a well-mown boulevard was just as attractive as those planted with shrubs and flowers. Tarr took this opportunity to talk with the city leaders about problems often associated with cities. Though Spirit Lake was well kept, her concerns for the town included potential cluttering of the city entrance (with billboards and signs) and unkempt streets. While she did not spend much time on the subject, she encouraged community leaders to keep

their streets clean and to plan for the future. Part of this planning, she added, included encouraging children to take pride in the appearance of their city street, instilling in them a commitment to their communities.³³

Tarr expanded her service to the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. in the 1950's. She had always worked closely with the garden clubs directing home grounds' short courses, lecturing at meetings and writing for the news letter, but in the early 1950's their needs increased. Garden club membership had grown considerably since Tarr's arrival at Iowa State: in 1940 memberships totaled 4,285, and in 1955 it had risen to 5,965. In the 1950's the National Council of State Garden Clubs (the umbrella organization to which Iowa's garden clubs belonged) recognized the need for structured landscape design instruction within its organization, so in 1959 they formally developed the Landscape Design Study Courses. Tarr aided in organizing and administering the study courses for the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc., and was a leading figure in this program until her retirement in 1969.³⁴

The Landscape Design Study Courses were established to educate garden club members about landscape design. Four courses comprised this sequence, and included an overview of history, planting design, and the maintenance of the grounds. The courses were structured as lectures, with readings, and required the active participation of attendees. To receive credit toward National Council certificates, participants had to pass an examination at the end of each course, and after the members received credit for each course, they received accreditation as a landscape design critic. This accreditation allowed their participation in the judging of landscape designs, an activity they were often involved with at the state and national level. While the study courses were useful for establishing landscape critics, the garden club members recognized other opportunities in receiving this education. As garden club members, they felt strongly about their civic duty, and saw the courses as a way to provide knowledgeable guidance in their communities. The National Council claimed the landscape design critics could be found across the

nation serving on community planning boards, park commissions, and other grounds committees. Tarr was very supportive of these results.³⁵

The postwar years in Landscape Extension brought change and growth to the program. After Landscape specialists stabilized the programming in the late 1940's, they explored other ways to reach more Iowans, and adapted programs accordingly. Tarr's responsibilities grew quickly when Fitzsimmons left in 1950, and she quickly established a routine that enabled her to meet the many needs of Iowans. While Tarr continued to work on updating Landscape services, the basic structure of the program did not change during this time, and no new programs were added.

The 1950's were challenging and successful years for Tarr. She assumed full responsibility for Landscape Extension, and was successful in providing guidance in administrative and programming matters. Tarr saw growth in the technology available to disseminate information, an increased interest in landscape design issues from the public, and new initiatives from the garden clubs to accept leadership positions within their communities. Though she was frustrated with the lack of support in attaining more landscape specialists from Extension administration, this growth had to be satisfying to Tarr as she looked to her future work in Landscape Extension. With the public at large expressing a growing concern over environmental issues, the coming decade promised many new challenges for Tarr as she struggled to meet the changing needs of Iowans.

Notes

¹Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1944 - September 30, 1945, 9.

²Bremer Pond, "Fifty Years in Retrospect," Landscape Architecture (1950): 66.

³Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1944 - September 30, 1945, 9.

⁴Ibid.

Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1945- September 30, 1946, i.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 3.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1944- September 30, 1945, 3.

¹⁰Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1940- September 30, 1941, 3.

¹¹Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1944- September 30, 1945, 3.

¹²Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1948- September 30, 1949, 8.

¹³Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1944 - September 30, 1945, 10.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Margherita Tarr, "Mary 4-H Discovers" in Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1944 - September 30, 1945, appendix.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Plan of Work Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics State of Iowa (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1949), 133.

²⁰Ibid., 134.

²¹Ibid., 24.

²²Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1949 - September 30, 1950, i.

Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1950 - September 30, 1951, i.

²³Plan of Work Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics State of Iowa (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1953), C-70.

²⁴Extension Landscape Architecture Staff, Farmstead Layout Types, Pamphlet 149. Agricultural Extension Service Iowa State College. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1949), 1.

²⁵John Fitzsimmons, et al., "Farmstead Planning and Development," in Midwest Farm Handbook (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1955), 322.

²⁶Ibid., 322-325.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Extension Landscape Architecture Staff, Farmstead Layout Types, Pamphlet 149. Agricultural Extension Service Iowa State College. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1949), 2.

²⁹John Fitzsimmons, et al., "Farmstead Planning and Development," in Midwest Farm Handbook (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1955), 324.

³⁰Landscape Architecture Department Annual Report, Archives, Parks Library, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, October 1, 1951 - September 30, 1952, 8.

³¹Margherita Tarr, Your Yard: Its "Ups and Downs" and "Ins and Outs," LA-185. Agricultural Extension Service Iowa State College. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, October, 1957), 2.

³²"Miss Tarr Suggests Improvements for City," The Beacon, 18 September 1952.

³³Margherita Tarr, "Landscape," News Letter Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. (February, 1942), 1.

³⁴"Annual Report of the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa," in Transactions of the Iowa State Horticultural Society (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1940): 278.

³⁵E. Crosby, Fifty Years of Service, (St. Louis: National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc., 1979), 65.

CHAPTER 5

SHIFTING EMPHASIS 1960 - 1969

During the decade of the 1960's Margherita Tarr, like her colleagues at large, witnessed considerable change in the field of landscape architecture. This change paralleled, and was no doubt influenced by, paramount issues people of the United States were facing: social unrest and growth of the environmental movement. Landscape architects were being challenged to recognize user needs in design, especially in the urban context. Practitioners and academics alike criticized traditional design approaches, and called for the integration of user opinion in the design process. Alongside this movement, articles recognizing cultural bias in the design of different landscapes began appearing in professional landscape journals, generating considerable discussion in the public and private sectors.¹

Landscape architects were also responding to the growing concern about the environment. Citizens were alarmed by the increasing loss of valuable natural resources, and the health threat to all from improper waste disposal. Landscape designers began researching methods of resource inventory and analysis, land reclamation and natural resource management. The findings of this research offered practitioners ample material with which they could explore alternative design approaches, and provided much needed documentation on methods to follow in protecting and enhancing the natural resource base.²

Tarr's work in Landscape Extension reflected these national trends. In the 1960's, the majority of writing Tarr completed centered on urban issues and environmental concerns, and Tarr restructured her schedule to accommodate new programming that addressed urban issues. Early in the 1960's she set aside time for project design in urban spaces, and in her writings she recognized the importance of planning for growth in the urban setting. Tarr's writings also outlined her belief in following a strong conservation ethic. Professor Robert Dyas, one of her colleagues in the late 1960's, thought highly of Tarr's commitment to teaching Iowans about this ethic. He recalled many conversations with Tarr about

the need to use native plants in landscape design, and was impressed by her great concern for the environment. Tarr, Dyas said, aligned herself with Jens Jensen's philosophy on the use of native plants and his regional approach to design. Tarr also held Rachel Carson's environmental ethic in high regard.³

While the issues facing the American public in the 1960's probably influenced Tarr's concern about urban design issues, Iowa's changing population also factored into her decision to increase the time she spent working in urban areas. The 1960 census showed, for the first time, most of Iowa's population living in urban centers. Of the 2,757,537 people living in Iowa in 1960, 53 percent registered in urban areas (places populated with at least 2,500 Iowans), leaving 47 percent living in the rural sector.⁴ Though Tarr believed in the necessity of urban centers to ensure the survival of Iowa's economy, she was troubled by the impact the shifting and growing population could have on the landscape. Topping her list of concerns was the effect of expanding transportation systems, suburban and urban sprawl, and industrial growth.⁵ With this in mind, Tarr reviewed the services available from her department and began adjusting program offerings to address the needs of Iowa's expanding urban areas.

One of Tarr's main concerns throughout the 1960's was meeting the changing needs of urban citizens. While she maintained the traditional Landscape Extension programming of the 1940's and 1950's, the emphasis Tarr placed on civic development increased significantly in 1960. Evidence of this shift is found in the 1960 Plan of Work report Tarr filed with Cooperative Extension. Records show Tarr set aside 20 percent of her time in 1960 to address urban needs. Although Tarr had occasionally allotted a similar amount of time for urban work during the 1950's, she had not consistently provided support in this area. Tarr maintained this level of commitment throughout the decade. Though 20 percent is a small amount of time compared to the 80 percent reserved for other programming, the time Tarr reserved for work on urban issues in 1960 represented a fourfold increase compared to similar work in 1959.⁶

During the extra time she budgeted for urban issues, Tarr directed much of her energy toward the creation and implementation of new programs. These programs included planning and zoning training seminars and the design of public spaces. Tarr lectured to various community groups on the impact of urban growth, especially in unplanned areas. She also lobbied many community groups to take responsibility in dealing with the consequences of Iowa's increasing population.⁷

Tarr expressed great concern about the lack of public awareness on environmental issues, and felt that everyone would benefit from an education in landscape design. Her writings highlight her belief that Iowans needed a sound understanding of landscape architectural principles if they were to be effective in protecting their landscape, and she criticized the lack of environmental planning and development instruction in Iowa's public schools. She called for the educators of Iowa's youth to prepare future generations to be active, responsible citizens; in her lectures she urged school administrators to include landscape design philosophy in high school curriculums. The following passage from Tarr's writings illustrates her strong belief in the need for educating Iowa's youth:

No matter where a person lives in the future, on the farm or in the city, or what he does, the basic philosophy and principles of the profession of Landscape Architecture, once learned will always serve as a guide and beacon whenever that person has an opportunity in any way to change his environment. And his life will be richer for it.⁸

Tarr fervently maintained educating young citizens about landscape architecture would benefit all Iowans. She believed nearly everyone was responsible for changes taking place in their communities, and for this reason was insistent each citizen needed a solid understanding of landscape architecture. The public at-large had the power to make landscape and environmental changes in many ways. Citizens voting for public officials and on public improvements had the power to affect change, as did those serving on boards or belonging to influential organizations. At the very least, Tarr recognized landowners' power in affecting the environment when they made changes in the spaces around their homes.⁹

As Tarr worked on addressing urban needs, she called for the cooperation of all county agents to help her in this campaign. Her request did not require a great deal of work from her colleagues; county agents only needed to understand holistic planning, and be willing to guide citizens engaged in civic projects toward professional services. Tarr also spent time educating county agents on the basics of holistic planning. Her main concern was that the agents understood that every development, and every part of each development, was part of a larger landscape. Tarr further asked Extension personnel to be on the lookout for community projects being developed without consideration for the whole environment, no matter how small or insignificant the project seemed. Primarily, Tarr was concerned with the many cities, towns and counties that were not adequately planning for future development, especially in towns where landowners allowed the division of their land into small lots.¹⁰

Tarr received help from Extension administration in implementing her new urban programs. Over the years Tarr had consistently asked for more staff to meet the increasingly complex needs of Iowans, and in the 1960's, her requests were honored. Burl Parks, a community and regional planner, joined the Landscape Extension program in 1964. Parks supported Tarr in every aspect of Landscape Extension work, but he spent the bulk of his time (70 percent) working on community planning and zoning issues. Tarr was not a city planner, so the addition of Parks to the staff provided relief for her in subject areas in which she had little formal education. As Parks worked on community planning issues, Tarr was freed up to educate citizens on the areas in which her expertise fell: the design of residential and public grounds.¹¹ Though adding Parks to the Landscape Extension program helped Tarr provide expanded service to Iowa's public, the assistance Parks' provided only lasted two years; in 1967 Burl Parks left Landscape Extension to build the Community and Regional Planning arm of the Extension Service.¹²

While Parks carried the major load in community planning and zoning, Tarr often helped him in his efforts. Iowa was undergoing many changes, and she felt strongly that during periods of change great

opportunities existed to direct future development. After receiving a call for help, Parks and Tarr worked closely with community groups ^{to} develop a plan appropriate for their area. Development of the plan depended on many issues. The first step in this process was to identify the history of the region, and to review projected needs within the community. Proposed developments in the area were also considered. With this information the landscape specialists were able to educate citizens on planning for future growth. Tarr and Parks wanted, more than anything else, to affect orderly community growth. To this end they educated the public on planning and zoning ordinance development, taught them how to read utility and land ownership maps, and instructed them on proper landuse decision making. While details of this instruction do not exist, in all likelihood the specialists guided the citizens in the proper selection of sites for all kinds of development, including projects in both private and public space planning and design.¹³

As Burl Parks reflected on his time as an Extension specialist, it was obvious he had a great deal of respect for Tarr's accomplishments in the Landscape Extension program. He remembers Tarr as extremely demanding not only of her own work, but also of the public engaged in design projects. Two incidents remain with Parks that illustrate the high expectations Tarr brought to her professional endeavors. One incident Parks remembered was when he was helping Tarr judge a home grounds design for the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. He noted that Tarr, true to her perfectionist nature, meticulously followed all the rules and regulations set forth in the contest, and judged contestants harshly. At one residence, she closely measured plantings along site lines from the house and out buildings, and took off points for the slightest deviation from the proposed plan. Parks suggested to Tarr that they overlook a small placement error (of about one foot) of a tree in the side yard; Tarr would not consider any such thing, and the score remained as she had first judged. While Parks admitted this was a minor incident, he insisted she brought this level of perfection to all of her work, and expected Iowans to do the same.¹⁴

Later, Parks filled in for Tarr on a home grounds' improvement training session for a garden club. After the meeting a garden club members approached him and asked if it was appropriate to put flowers in her front yard. Parks responded that he felt it would be fine as long as she kept them in the shrub borders, and as long as they were not too conspicuous. The woman, Parks said, enthusiastically exclaimed "Oh Mr. Parks you're wonderful -- Rita won't let us plant flowers in the front yard!" Parks' description of Tarr's work with Iowa's citizens portrays her as a colleague of undying conviction and love for her work:

Miss Tarr's strengths lie with her forceful, unyielding diligence in the application of landscape design principles. Rita had few if any weaknesses. She was adamant regarding too much color in the front yard area, and was sometimes caustic with citizens in this regard. Miss Tarr could not be classified as the average person. Rita was effervescent, outgoing and dedicated. She loved life, travel and I.S.U. She was a dear friend and colleague, completely trustworthy and could be classed as a person of integrity and an asset to our way of life.¹⁵

Outside of her own writings, Parks' writings about Tarr provides one of the few insights available on her approach to Landscape Extension work. When Tarr retired from Extension, Burl Parks drafted some cartoons depicting Tarr in her work. The drawing shown in Figure six, while obviously an extreme characterization, depicts Tarr's "sometimes caustic" treatment of the general public. Parks gave Tarr a packet of these sketches and said she saw great humor in them. While she took her work very seriously, it is evident by this exchange she had a positive working relationship with Parks.

Tarr's work to improve civic planning and design in the 1960's included the strengthening of Landscape Extension support materials. Records show Tarr worked at updating slide sets to reflect a more thorough plant pallet for use in design. The additions included sections on the use and selection of large trees, ornamental trees and shrubs. She updated pamphlets and programs to reflect the style and language of the time, and made plans for creating new publications addressing the planning and design of public spaces. Tarr also proposed the printing of new publications on the design of playgrounds,

cemeteries, court house squares, church grounds, school yards, hospital grounds and libraries.¹⁶ Tarr outlined her goals for completing this work annually, and while examples of updated pamphlets can be found in Extension literature, no other material exists suggesting she was successful in completing her proposed publications.

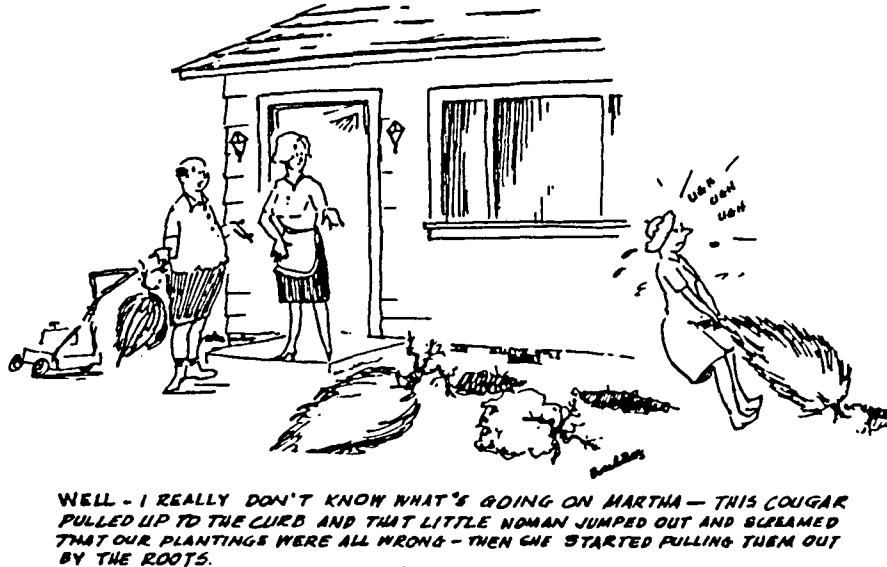


Figure 6. Cartoon sketch depicting Margherita Tarr in her work as an Extension landscape specialist.¹⁷

Figure 6. Cartoon sketch depicting Margherita Tarr in her work as an Extension landscape specialist.¹⁷

Tarr's beliefs about the development of public grounds were similar to her views on the beautification of home grounds. In both cases she declared only organized and properly cared for grounds were beautiful, and warned that disorganized grounds would effect the look and beauty of the entire community. In designing public spaces, as in home grounds, Tarr stressed the need to plan for the intended use of the space before implementing change. She instructed community groups to set goals for the site. The primary goal for all sites, Tarr said, was the creation "... of an attractive environment for the users." She also directed the design of public projects to be "... parklike and inviting ...," with open grassed areas and groups of trees to provide summer shade and "... delightful shadow patterns in

the winter. . ." Tarr believed a "parklike" atmosphere could be achieved if the designer was selective in the choice and placement of plant materials.¹⁸

While Tarr's basic views on public space design coincided closely with her beliefs on home grounds' development, differences can be found in her design approach. The most evident difference lies in Tarr's emphasis on the functional aspects of the layout and design of public grounds. To achieve successful design on public grounds, Tarr emphasized the need for adequate parking, convenient access for the delivery of goods and short, efficient walkways; falling close behind these issues was the long-term maintenance of the grounds. Tarr also advised the use of few walks and drives, and urged designers to never encompass a building with a drive, as this would encourage teenagers to use it as a shortcut or circular speedway.¹⁹

Tarr considered the choice and placement of plant materials in public spaces to be an important issue. From a maintenance standpoint, choosing appropriate plants could ease the amount of time and energy expended in grounds' upkeep. Tarr encouraged designers to use long-lived hardy trees in these spaces, and pressed Iowans to use native plantings. She instructed designers to place plants carefully, creating large, easy to mow, uncluttered lawn areas. The maintenance of these spaces, she insisted, fell in the hands of the public.²⁰

Tarr gave special instruction in the layout and design of some public spaces. Hospital grounds, for example, required designers to pay close attention to circulation and access issues. Tarr instructed designers to consider parking lot design carefully; planning for an adequate number of parking spaces, she said, would help eliminate unnecessary use of the emergency entrance.²¹ The design of court house grounds also received special attention from Tarr. As with other public spaces, she emphasized the need to design these spaces so everyone felt comfortable and welcome in the area.²² One of the few articles written by Tarr and her colleagues in the 1960's describes her approach to the design of court house grounds, and is a good example of the direction she gave in the design of public spaces:

Court house grounds and squares should also be developed with an eye toward the health and well-being of all residents of the community. Don't clutter the squares and courts with miscellaneous memorial trees or statuary or recreational features that will serve only a few. Use ingenuity in the design of each area by following the dictates of the topography and other existing conditions and the needs and interests of the people of the community.²³

Tarr also gave separate instruction on the planning and design of church and school environments. Safety and efficiency dictated many design and planning decisions on church and school grounds. Specifically, Tarr instructed designers to plan for service drives and access carefully to avoid conflicts with recreational spaces. She reminded designers that plantings were very important in these spaces, and encouraged the planting of trees both singly and in groups to provide shade for the buildings, play areas and parking lots. Planning for adequate recreational space was especially important on school grounds, and Tarr advised reserving space for recreational endeavors close to each classroom. She also instructed designers to plan for large open spaces for group activities on school grounds.²⁴

Distribution of information about the planning and design of public and private spaces was often accomplished through the publication of Extension pamphlets. Over the years, Tarr refined these publications to communicate information more effectively. During the 1940's and 1950's, these publications outlined specific guidelines on landscape design, and left Iowans with little leeway in designing their environment. As Tarr reworked the publications, a softer approach began to appear. While the pamphlets still contained some step-by-step instruction, Tarr began communicating the design process in a series of questions. The fixed rule of "landscapes are only beautiful if organized and well maintained" gave way to questions like "what pleases us and why?" and "what is beautiful and why?"²⁵ This approach not only allowed the designers' personal preference to be part of the design process, and it provided them with a more advanced understanding of landscape architecture. By asking and answering a set of questions, designers set their own set of goals and criteria. These goals and criteria, in turn, guided them in making planning and design decisions.

In addition to framing the design process in the context of questions, Tarr began instructing Iowans on the importance of considering the aspect of time in landscape design. The impact of time on landscapes, Tarr lectured, was most readily seen in the plant materials. Tarr encouraged Iowans to take advantage of the changes plant materials undergo on a daily and seasonal basis. An understanding of how time effected plants enabled designers to fully plan for plant needs, and allowed the designers the opportunity to plan interesting spaces full of contrasting textures, colors, shapes and sizes.²⁶

Tarr also considered the passage of time important when designing for the movement of people through the landscape. Her instruction in this area directed the designer to consider the speed at which people move through the landscape. The slower the movement, she lectured, the more opportunities people would have to enjoy spaces, fine textures, aromas and microclimates. Designing for people on foot, therefore, required that care be taken in the placement of plants to enhance the users experience with pleasant views, smells and protected spaces. Those traveling by car at several miles an hour, on the other hand, would not have the same experience. Instead, they would appreciate the effects of mass plantings along the roadway that framed beautiful countryside views.²⁷

While the majority of Tarr's time working on urban design projects was spent directing training seminars, she continued to give talks on the beauty of Iowa's countryside. Over the course of her career the subject matter of this lecture changed. In the 1960's Tarr's concern about urban issues and environmental degradation became the focus of her talks.

Tarr used her talk "Toward a More Beautiful Iowa" to campaign for a more sensitive approach to landscape design. She was very critical of the increased urbanization in Iowa, and lectured Iowa's citizens on the need to understand the limits of the land. Primarily, Tarr was troubled by the lack of planning efforts in many Iowa communities. She blamed poor planning for continued urban sprawl, and urged Iowans to take notice before all of Iowa's beautiful countryside was lost. For inspiration Tarr encouraged Iowans to observe the example set by past generations; Iowa's pioneer settlers, she said,

understood how to develop the land, increase its productivity and protect the natural environment. She reminded Iowans how these early settlers were guided by climate, topography, soils and plants when they built communities, and she asked present-day Iowans to do the same.²⁸

One of Tarr's greatest concerns was the rapid expansion of transportation systems throughout Iowa. Tarr recognized the necessity for highways and paved backroads, but she linked the increasing number of developed roads with unplanned community sprawl. She criticized political dealings resulting in this phenomena, and held public officials accountable for the associated degradation of Iowa's environment. Her writings illustrate the passionate views she held on this matter:

Responsible opinion finds it unobjectionable to spend tens of billions of dollars to build new highways to bring automobiles into our towns and cities while it is outraged at the proposal that there should be free, tax supported parking areas and garages to receive the cars "dumped" in the center of our towns and cities. Nor does responsible opinion find it objectionable to subsidize the movement of people and goods by motor, plane or barge -- none of which could move a mile without stupendous public expenditures on highways, airports, rivers. Yet, the same opinion haggles at the idea of subsidy to railroads. The centers of our communities are being throttled by such paradoxes. City streets are drowning in tides of traffic while mass transportation systems are almost disappearing. Interurban and trolley systems have been junked piecemeal, with no effort at rehabilitation. At the same time that there has been this bankruptcy of private enterprise there has been the expenditure of billions of dollars of public funds pumped into highway schemes that have steadily worsened traffic conditions in urban centers.²⁹

While Tarr expressed great concern about Iowa's lack of political leadership, she was also troubled about the public's misunderstandings about transportation routes. Without a sound understanding of vehicular and pedestrian transport systems, the successful planning and design of urban centers would be impossible. Tarr estimated that billions of dollars were spent on transportation without regard for the difference between roads and streets, resulting in the endless waste of suburbs, which "yielded an impression of chaos and ugliness." Tarr feared the landscape was becoming lost beneath "a tide of moving, stalled and parked motor vehicles"; like many of her contemporaries she was upset with gas filled, noisy and hazardous streets, and complained the result was one of the most inhumane landscapes in the world.³⁰

Tarr reserved part of her beauty talk to educate Iowans on transportation systems. She approached this discussion from a landscape planning and design viewpoint, stressing the need to recognize the difference between roads and streets. The difference, Tarr explained, came to light when one considered the use of the paved surface. Quite simply, roads were for moving people and goods, and streets were places where people lived. Once this was understood, the designer could adequately plan for the expansion of some roads, and the maintenance of streets. While roads could be widened to accommodate the transport of goods and higher rates of speed, streets could not. Streets needed to be designed for pedestrian use, at a small enough scale for the comfort of the users. Tarr believed if the difference between roads and streets were kept in mind, beautiful streets in Iowa would soon be the norm.³¹

Despite her strong reservations about urban centers, Tarr did not want them dismantled. She viewed cities as centers of society, and supported the role they played in keeping Iowa competitive in the marketplace. Furthermore, from a cultural standpoint, Tarr viewed agricultural production and city construction in the same light. The regeneration of agriculture, Tarr said, was culturally an urban task: through the work of human beings, the landscape was restricted to a better, higher, more worthy state. While this may seem in conflict with her concern about environmental degradation, Tarr's conservation ethic supported her viewpoint. The conservation of resources, after all, was for the benefit of humankind, and Iowa's beautiful countryside was essentially a managed landscape with pockets of natural areas. Urban centers provided a necessary link between Iowa's farm produce and the national marketplace, so Iowa could no more survive the subdivision of its urban centers ". . . than would the human brain survive distribution across the nervous system."³²

The destruction of Iowa's environment was not limited to the loss of Iowa's agricultural countryside and natural habitat. Tarr complained the accumulation of clutter in the landscape was creating unequaled visual blight across Iowa. This, she said, was the result of confusion. Iowans were

feeling overwhelmed by the many choices in front of them, and by their inability to maintain a neat and orderly landscape. Topping Tarr's list of offenses were collections of gaudy billboards and signs, plastic flowers, miscellaneous planters, flag poles, ornamental lights, gazing globes and decorative figures. She also noted more cars and yard equipment were being left on lawns across Iowa, contributing to cluttered viewsheds. These problems, Tarr lectured, could be solved if everyone took care of their environment, and approached landscape design in an orderly manner.³³

In addition to individual efforts, Tarr encouraged the formation of community councils to lead Iowa toward a healthy, uncluttered landscape. She recommended the councils consist of a diverse array of people, including representatives from both youth and adult organizations, and men's and women's groups. Each council, Tarr explained, would function as a liaison between the public and governmental officials at the city, council and state levels. She also saw community councils securing financial and political support from the community for landscape improvements, and consulting with professionals on behalf of local citizens when planning for community changes.³⁴

Tarr's calls for help from community groups were, more often than not, directed toward the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. She charged them with the responsibility of taking leadership in ridding Iowa's towns and countrysides of clutter, and warned them the beauty may be ". . . under the guise of modernizing or beautifying or face lifting." Her lectures reminded them of "responsible opinion folks" because these people were ". . . tricky in their methods to continue the destruction of communities," and they needed to be watched. Tarr further requested garden club members' help in improving traffic and parking problems throughout Iowa to ensure a positive experience for the pedestrian.³⁵

Tarr's work in the 1960's was not limited to the realm of urban design. She was, in fact, responsible for the maintenance of all programming within Landscape Extension, and spent the bulk of her time in other areas. She continued her work in home grounds' improvement, farmstead development

and special projects with the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc., and she regularly gave radio talks and television spots to reach Iowa's public. The information she delivered in these subject areas, however, did not change significantly during this decade. Though these areas demanded much of Tarr's time, her interests seemed to be pulled more toward urban design and environmental issues. Tarr's lectures and writings during her last years of service were almost exclusively focused on these topics, indicating the direction she felt Landscape Extension was moving, as did the many changes she made in civic development and urban design programming.

No records exist showing the number of people Tarr reached in the areas of civic development and urban design in the 1960's, so it is difficult to assess the success of her efforts. Information on her work as an associate professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture is also scarce. While her main appointment was with Landscape Extension, she did teach. Often, colleagues say, her teaching involved an ongoing Extension project, which brought students into contact with the outside world.³⁶ Details on her approach to teaching college-level classes, however, are not available. Given her experience teaching large community groups the fundamentals of landscape design, it is likely she used similar techniques in the classroom.

Although Tarr gained a reputation for setting high standards in landscape design, she was well liked and highly respected by both the public and her colleagues. Her colleagues held high regard for her commitment to the landscape architecture program, the Extension Service and the Iowa public, and she was recognized throughout Iowa as the leading expert on home grounds development. Tarr's commitment to her work did not go without recognition. In 1963, the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. formally acknowledged Tarr's contributions by establishing an award in her honor. The Rita Tarr Award for Landscape Design is given annually for excellence in home grounds' design.

After thirty years of service with Landscape Extension, Tarr retired to Sun City, Arizona. She maintained contact with her colleagues, but there is no indication she ever returned to visit. Tarr traveled

worldwide in her retirement years, and mailed postcards to the department from stops along the way. While she made a clean break from Iowa State in 1969, Tarr's legacy lived on, and her contributions continue to influence the direction of landscape design. This influence is most readily seen in the commitment of the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. to their Landscape Design School, and in their efforts to provide leadership to Iowans in the proper care and use of Iowa's countryside.

Notes

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CONCLUSION

Margherita Tarr served as an Iowa State Extension specialist for three decades. During her career she taught thousands of Iowans how to beautify their yards, to plan for inevitable change in their communities and about the need to save Iowa's natural environment. She brought to Iowa's citizens, young and old, the belief that they could plan and design beautiful landscapes, and guided them in realizing their potential. Although Tarr faced many challenges during her thirty years with Extension, she never lost her commitment to teach every citizen the value of Iowa's countryside and the vital role they played in saving and enhancing this beautiful land.

Over the years Tarr's work in Cooperative Extension spanned many facets of landscape architecture practice. When she was first hired, she directed much of her energy toward home grounds' development, and the community groups she worked with were largely women's groups and youth organizations. In the early years she also taught Iowans about farmstead development, community planning and the design of public grounds, but the other landscape specialists covered most of this work. By the late 1940's Tarr's workload shifted to include more work in all areas, and in 1950 she accepted full responsibility for the management of Landscape Extension. For the remaining eighteen years of her career, Tarr was solely responsible for the administration of landscape programming.

Like her colleagues, Tarr used traditional techniques in her work. She taught Iowans about the many aspects of landscape planning and design through leadership training seminars, publications in news letters and lectures to community groups throughout Iowa. The most unusual work Tarr engaged in during her career was radio and television work. Tarr gave many radio talks as a landscape specialist, and completed at least three television spots on the beautification of home grounds. While the number of people she reached through her radio and television programs cannot be tallied, she considered her work in this area very successful, and Tarr's annual reports show the public enthusiastically received these broadcasts.¹

Unlike many women engaged in landscape design in the middle 1900's, Tarr spent most of her career in public practice. Consequently, Tarr's contributions to the field of landscape architecture primarily fall within the realm of public work, and the results of her service need to be recognized within this context. Her success in teaching countless numbers of Iowans about landscape architecture as a landscape specialist and professor (while worthy of praise) did not end with a tally of how many citizens she reached. Her impact in the landscape design realm extended to the subject matter she refined and expanded on throughout her career.

Tarr's published and program material exemplifies her contributions to landscape architecture. These writings reflect Tarr's approach to her work, and how it changed throughout her career. From her first years with Extension it was obvious the interest of Iowa's public manifested itself in her work. This began with the adoption of special programming during World War II (victory gardening), a shift toward urban issues in the 1950's and 1960's, and the increased emphasis on environmental issues in the 1960's. While she changed the direction of her work in response to needs of Iowans, she held onto her conviction that an understanding of landscape architecture principles, and the application of such, was necessary to ensure the growth and maintenance of healthy communities throughout Iowa. In the midst of misunderstandings about her field, Tarr fought to preserve Extension's offerings in landscape planning and design for the sake of Iowa's future. In the end she proved to be advanced the quality of life for many Iowans and the state of the landscape architecture.

Tarr's writings also illustrate the connection between her philosophy and the resultant patterns found in the Iowa landscape. Throughout her career, the influence of the modernist movement is apparent in her emphasis on a functional approach to design. The layout and design of landscapes were beautiful, in her eyes, if they were clean and efficient. She carried this belief across all scales and into all types of design, including urban development, home grounds' beautification, farmstead development, and Iowa's countryside. While the modernist influence is evident in her work, Tarr did not build her design

philosophy around this movement. Her philosophy was an interesting blend reflecting her education and experience, and was based on a foundation built around two basic tenets: a sensitivity to the regional influence in design and a conviction to protect the natural environment.

Tarr's talks and writing about the beauty found in the Iowa landscape stand out as one of her major, and one of her most unusual, contributions to Iowa State Extension and Iowa's public. While the structure and content of her work often seemed to mirror that of her colleagues, Tarr's exploration of the beauty topic, and her work with Iowa's public in recognizing their beautiful surroundings, was uniquely her own. With the exception of her work in farmstead development, Tarr integrated lectures on the beauty of Iowa's landscape into all of her training seminars. Her perception of this beauty was grounded in her regional ethic and conservation stand. Native plants, natural areas and wisely-used land for the growth of Iowa's crops all fell into her definition of beauty, if they were not blighted by disorderliness and clutter. As Tarr traveled throughout the state, she helped Iowans identify the unique beauty in their area, and helped them find pride in their surroundings. In doing this, she boosted everyone's morale, and encouraged them to play an active role in maintaining the health and beauty of their communities. The results of her work included a well-educated public on the subject of beauty, and active citizens proudly working in the best interest of their towns and communities.

Tarr's commitment to Landscape Extension was outstanding. This is evidenced by her long career, her ability and willingness to assume responsibility for all aspects of her work, and in her dedication to adapting programs to meet the needs of Iowa's public. She spent many hours evaluating and updating the services rendered by Landscape Extension, and consistently represented the public's interest to Cooperative Extension. Though it was unusual for a woman to hold the position of Extension specialist and professor, there is no outward indication her work was hampered by this. All records show she was very successful in her work, and met or exceeded the goals and objectives set forth by Extension administration.

While Tarr was engaged in a wide range of work during her thirty-year career with Landscape Extension, she is best-known for her accomplishments in home grounds beautification. Tarr gained a reputation for having very definitive views on the arrangement of yard spaces, the selection of trees and shrubs, and the placement of flowers in the landscape, and her instructions left her students with little room for doubt about home grounds design. The influence Tarr had due to her instruction in home grounds design, colleagues say, was extensive. They claimed her style could be seen in the pattern of yard layouts across Iowa.² In recognition of her leadership in this area in 1963 the Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa, Inc. honored Tarr by establishing an annual award for outstanding home grounds design.³

In 1969, when Tarr retired, her ties with Iowa State did not end. After moving to Sun City, Arizona to live with her sister Regina, Tarr continued in her role as "Ambassador to Foreign Lands" for the Department of Landscape Architecture. She spent her final years traveling worldwide with her sister, and often sent postcards to her Iowa friends detailing their latest adventures. Tarr also did quite a bit of reading during her retirement, and was notorious for sending articles of interest to former colleagues and friends. These mailings continued until shortly before her death on April 14, 1990. Tarr died at her home in Sun City, Arizona, and was buried in Duluth, Minnesota.⁴

Tarr remembered her time in Iowa fondly, and, true to her belief in education, she willed a considerable amount of money to Iowa State University. These funds established two perpetual endowment funds in memory of her parents. Each year a promising incoming graduate student in the Department of Landscape Architecture receives the Argo Scholarship, established in honor of her mother, Sarah Emma Argo Tarr. The Tarr Scholarship, established in her father's name, is given by the College of Engineering, and provides funds for undergraduates to further their education in this field.⁵

Tarr was a perfectionist by nature, set exceptionally high standards in her work, and truly believed the answers to Iowa's problems lay in following the principles of landscape architecture. Though she gained a reputation for being demanding of (and often caustic with) Iowa's citizens, her

leadership style did not seem to deter Iowans from engaging in landscape design; instead, she enjoyed the respect of both her colleagues and Iowa's public. Tarr's gift to landscape architecture was, and continues to be, found in the education of others about landscape architecture. Though the full extent of her contributions may never be understood, she brought to Iowa State, Landscape Extension and the field of landscape architecture an unsurpassed commitment to the betterment of her surroundings through the applications of her chosen field.

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