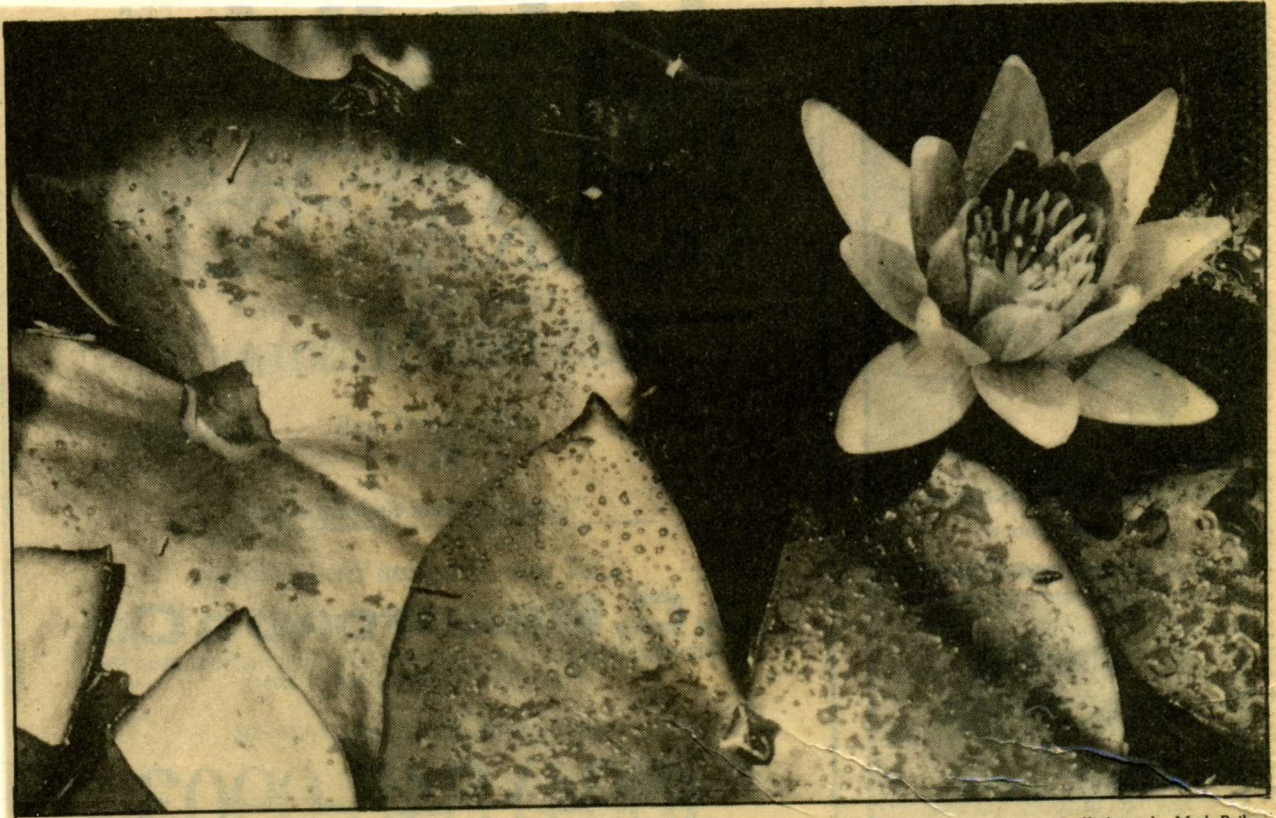


Anne Spencer's garden spot has regained much of its charm after years of neglect



Staff photos by Mark Bailey

Water drops clinging to the leaves are small pleasures for visitors to garden
Garden once provided those moments for Lynchburg poet Anne Spencer

City poet's garden returned to prime

By GWEN FARISS
Staff Writer

The trees have been thinned, the weeds chopped, the shrubs trimmed. What was recently a tangled mass is now a picture of a more distant past.

Last June, the Hillside Garden Club voted unanimously to restore the garden of poet Anne Spencer and to recapture the spirit of yesterday.

Mrs. Spencer's home at 1313 Pierce St. has been a historical landmark since 1977. When Jane White, a private landscaper, saw the garden last year, "I thought it was one of the most charming spots I'd ever seen," she said. "You could tell it had been loved."

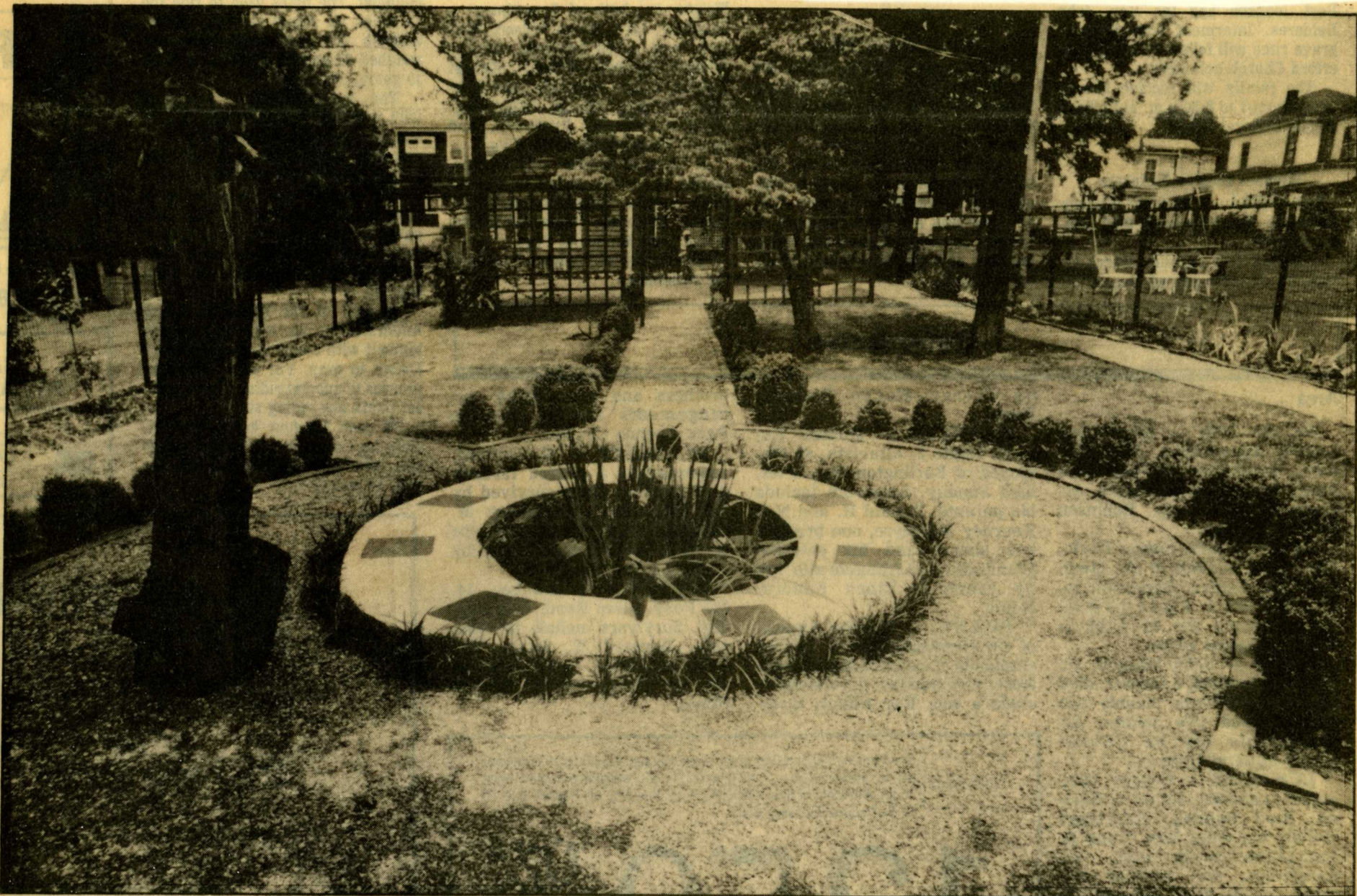
Mrs. Spencer didn't have formal training in landscaping, but she did have an instinctive knowledge for her pastime, Mrs. White said. "A professional couldn't have done it any prettier or sweeter. She knew what she was doing."

Mrs. Spencer's son, Chauncey, remembers his mother's garden. "It was something special."

"Every part of it represents her soul. Mother was a soul of nature. She was a free spirit."

"She spent all of her time in the garden," he said.

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She sat, read, worked and entertained there "the moment she came from the library." A nationally recognized poet, Mrs. Spencer was a librarian at Dunbar High School for 23 years.

Spencer said his mother spent about six hours a day in the garden. "I'd see my parents with lanterns planting flowers at 1, 2 o'clock. They'd drive miles and miles to find a certain plant that she wanted.

"Inclement weather didn't make any difference to her at all. She loved to work in the rain. We'd try to stop her. She'd explain — The soil is soft. It's fertile for the plant now."

Her dedication persisted throughout her 95-year lifespan. But her death in 1975 signaled uncontrollable growth. Hedges became uneven, grass turned into six-foot blades, and the roses were obscured.

Mrs. White, realizing the potential of the overgrown greenery, set out to revitalize the plot that Spencer had tended for years. With the Hillside club's support, plans were drawn, money was raised and work began.

The restoration cost \$20,000, which came from the group treasury, individual contributions, and business donations of lumber and plants. The group used old pictures to determine the plants and design of the earlier garden.

Now, 30 rose plants grow just outside the Spencer house. A bed of nasturtium rises from the ground in front of a smaller garden house, Edankraal, named for

her husband Edward, herself and the African word meaning place. Trumpetvine climbs the corner of the building.

At least 16 varieties of flowers grow along a fence, which has also been renovated. Dwarf English boxwood shrubs line the pathway from Edankraal to a ground pool where goldfish swim, water sprays, and water lilies, water iris and pickeral grow.

Brick edging follows the graveled walkways and three birdhouses tower in the sky.

"I feel we have been as authentic as we could possibly be," White said. "There were remnants of the plants," Mrs. White said. "Many of the plants in the garden are plants that originally were here. It is exciting to see her own roses blooming again.

"The main difference is the garden now is easy to work in. The roses are in one place, the flowers are in one place. It is much more visible."

Next week, groups are scheduled to visit the garden for the first time since its completion. Last year, more than 5,000 visitors toured the house.

Spencer said he conducts about three tours each day. Anyone who wishes to see the house and garden must call 846-0517 to make an appointment.

"I enjoy that I'm a part of it," he said. Spencer has been active in the planning, moving and digging of the area. "I've spent more time (in the garden) since restoring it than ever before."

"It is breathtaking," he said. "She (Anne Spencer) would be elated."