

A decorative border consisting of a repeating pattern of bookshelves filled with books, framing the central text.

Russell Gardens
Golden Anniversary

1931 - 1981

The Origins of
The Village of Russell Gardens
and
The Russell Gardens Association

Prior to the organization of the Russell Gardens Inc. land sales idea in 1925, there were only two other organized areas on the Great Neck peninsula: Kensington, dating from 1909, and Great Neck Estates. In 1924, the former Allen farm was sold off at auction and became the unincorporated Allenwood Road area. In 1925, an even choicer piece of property was auctioned off and became Great Neck Manor, which soon turned into virtually a slum. The founders of Russell Gardens set out to plan a community of homes, and in spite of setbacks due to business recessions and wars, it turned out as you see it today. Our developers bucked the trend of the "Roaring Twenties" of uncontrolled exploitation of land and showed the way to other areas of the peninsula such as Grenwolde, Kennilworth, Belgrave Square (now part of Thomaston), and University Gardens. All of these early developments depended upon individual builders following guidelines and restrictions that resulted in lovely communities. Later mass-built groups of homes built by a single developer, seldom turned out as well.

"In the Fall of 1924, Richard Kehoe, the chief real estate dealer of the time in Nassau County (a real old-timer; his telephone number in 1924 was Great Neck 1!) told me that Capt. Russell's property other than his home, was for sale...Out of these conversations came 'Russell Gardens, Inc.' "

Captain Frederick Russell was 71 years old in 1924 when he was approached by Richard Kehoe and induced to sell 90 acres of his pasture land for \$300,000.00 to Mr. Frank Knighton and Mr. Ralph McPhee (author of the above quote) the moving spirits of Russell Gardens, Inc. Captain Russell looked exactly like George Bernard Shaw and even wore tweeds like the latter. The Russell house, which stood until the late 1950's approximately where Leonard's Caterers now stands, was a brown-shingled and turreted Victorian mansion. When the Russell Woods development and Leonard's were built, a fortuitous fire demolished most of the house.

Captain Russell was born in Brooklyn in 1853. His father, Captain Arthur Russell, was the head of a transportation company in the harbor of New York. Captain Frederick Russell earned his papers as captain of one of the harbor tugboats, but he decided to try to earn more money as an independent businessman. He organized the Newtown Towing Company which became very large and successful. In 1902, the Captain was a resident and leading citizen of Flushing which had just been made part of Greater New York. City officials told him that he would have to put a concrete floor in the barn where he kept his horses. Apparently no one ever got away with telling Captain Russell to do anything. He happened to know Milton LeCluse, brother of the well known Justice Egbert LeCluse of Great Neck, who persuaded him to look around Great Neck. Intending to buy 10 or 12 acres, he ended up buying a whole 80 acre farm

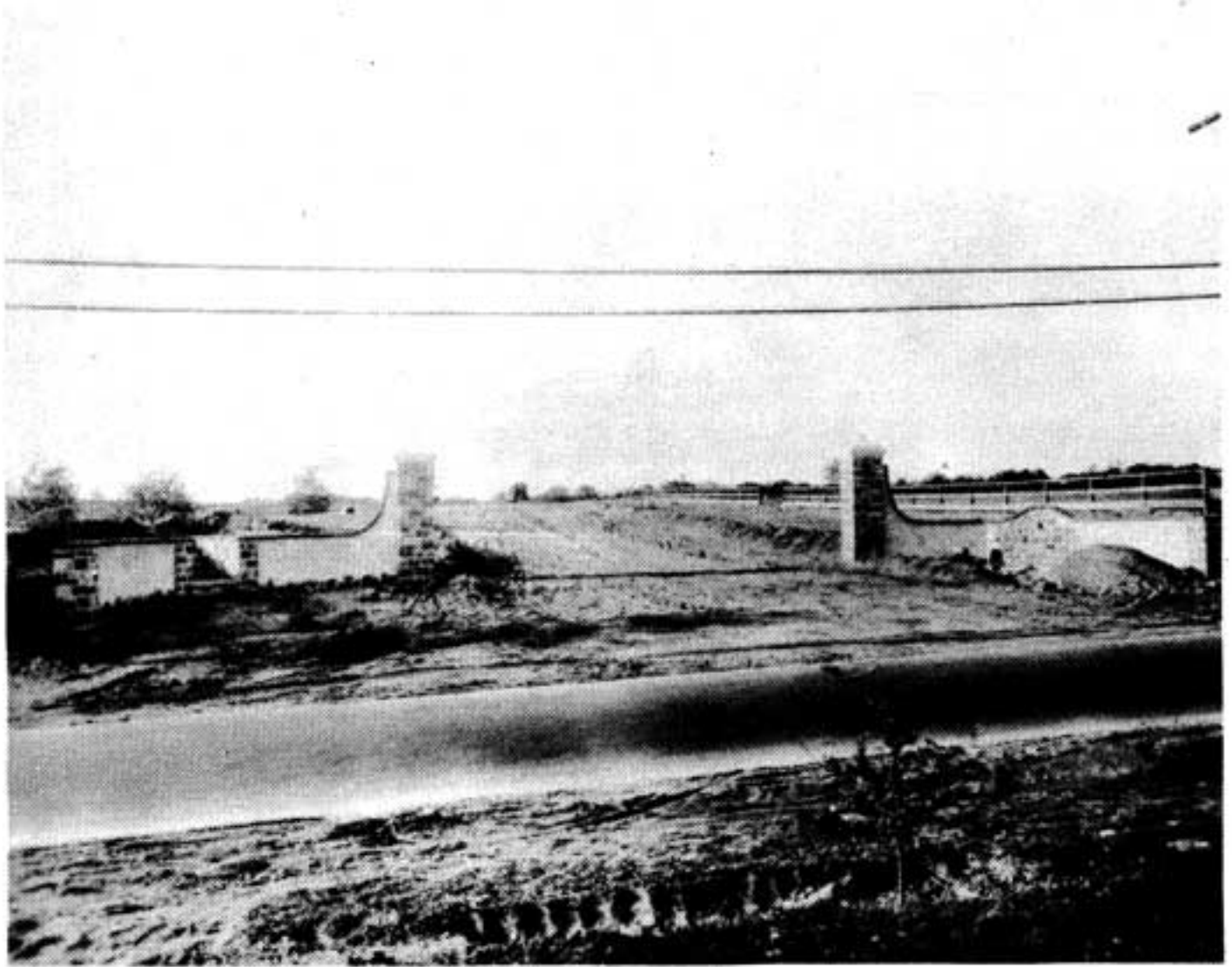
which at one time had belonged to the Schenck family. He built his new home on a knoll, overlooking a colonial farmhouse and lake that were in the area of Leonard's adjacent parking lot. Captain Russell paid \$500.00 an acre for his choice property in 1903 and got very little use out of most of it. He did develop very lovely gardens in the area immediately around his house, but it is not surprising that he sold off the pasture land when he switched from driving horses to driving a 'high powered car'. He lived to be 92 years old spending his summers in Great Neck and his winters in Bermuda.

Russell Gardens was planned as a community of single family homes except that the frontage on Middle Neck Road was originally zoned for 'business'-two story structures with apartments over stores. The Northern Boulevard frontage was similarly loosely zoned for 'business' and its subsequent development owes everything to a succession of vigilant Russell Gardens committeemen. It was not until 1935, in the middle of the great Depression, that Jack Russell, son of the Captain, began to build the apartment houses that face Middle Neck Road. A compromise had been worked out to eliminate the stores but add one story to the buildings. The slope of the land makes both the Melbourne and Russell apartment buildings look like four stories high on the downhill side. Jack Russell ran out of money quickly and did not own any of the original three buildings, including the Lancaster building. When the apartment houses were built, Russell Gardens lost the ornamental 'gates' on Middle Neck Road that were similar to those still on the entrances from Northern Boulevard.

The developers of Russell Gardens were super-salesmen. They actually paid a lot of money for the original plans of the development and if they had had an unlimited amount of money, most of their dreams would have been fulfilled. Knighton and Mc Phee et al., took a horse pasture and put in roads, trees, and sidewalks. The roads were originally only half as wide as they are today. The trees that lined the roads were from 12-15 feet high and there were no curbs to go with the sidewalks.

The developers engaged the renowned firm of Mann & MacNeile, Town Planners, to lay out a coherent plan. The concept that they evolved was that of an English Village with most of the homes being in the Tudor style. The apartment house which they planned for the center of the Village was also to have been in the Tudor style. Naturally to fit in with the predominant architecture, English names were selected for the streets. Russell Gardens was developed before University Gardens across Northern Boulevard, so the names of Wensley Drive and Merrivale Road were applied to their extensions through the neighboring community. When Russell Gardens was developed, the lot numbers on the survey maps ran in consecutive order, but this did not mean that the addresses corresponded. Some properties were larger than others and contained

more lots. In any event, how some houses got their numbers is a simple but true story...The first house built on Melbourne Road was given the number 11 by its builder, a Mr. Matthews. He also built the two houses next to his and numbered them 15 and 17. When, three years later, another builder put up a house on the large plot on the other side of Matthew's he gave it the number of 1. Thus we lack 3, 5, 7, 9 and 13, on the odd numbered side of the block. We lack numbers 2 and 8 on the even numbered side of the same block for similar reasons-all of which has confused generations of mailmen and delivery men.



The newly made ornamental gates on Merrivale Road leading into Russell Gardens from North Hempstead Turnpike. Note fence of Polo field on East side of Merrivale and the treeless land. The Park is in the right background.

When the land that became Russell Gardens was purchased, it contained a full-size practice polo field surrounded by a sturdy white fence. It stood on the east side of Merrivale Road and was bounded by Melbourne Road and Northern Boulevard. The fence only lasted a year or two, but the level, sandy, open area was ideal for games of all sorts. In about 1929 a house was built on Melbourne Road that took away one corner of the field but was hardly noticed. The polo field played a big part in all community observances. On 4th of July and Labor Day, it was the site of foot races and obstacle races for the children in the early afternoon, and then became the scene of father-son baseball games. Originally, home

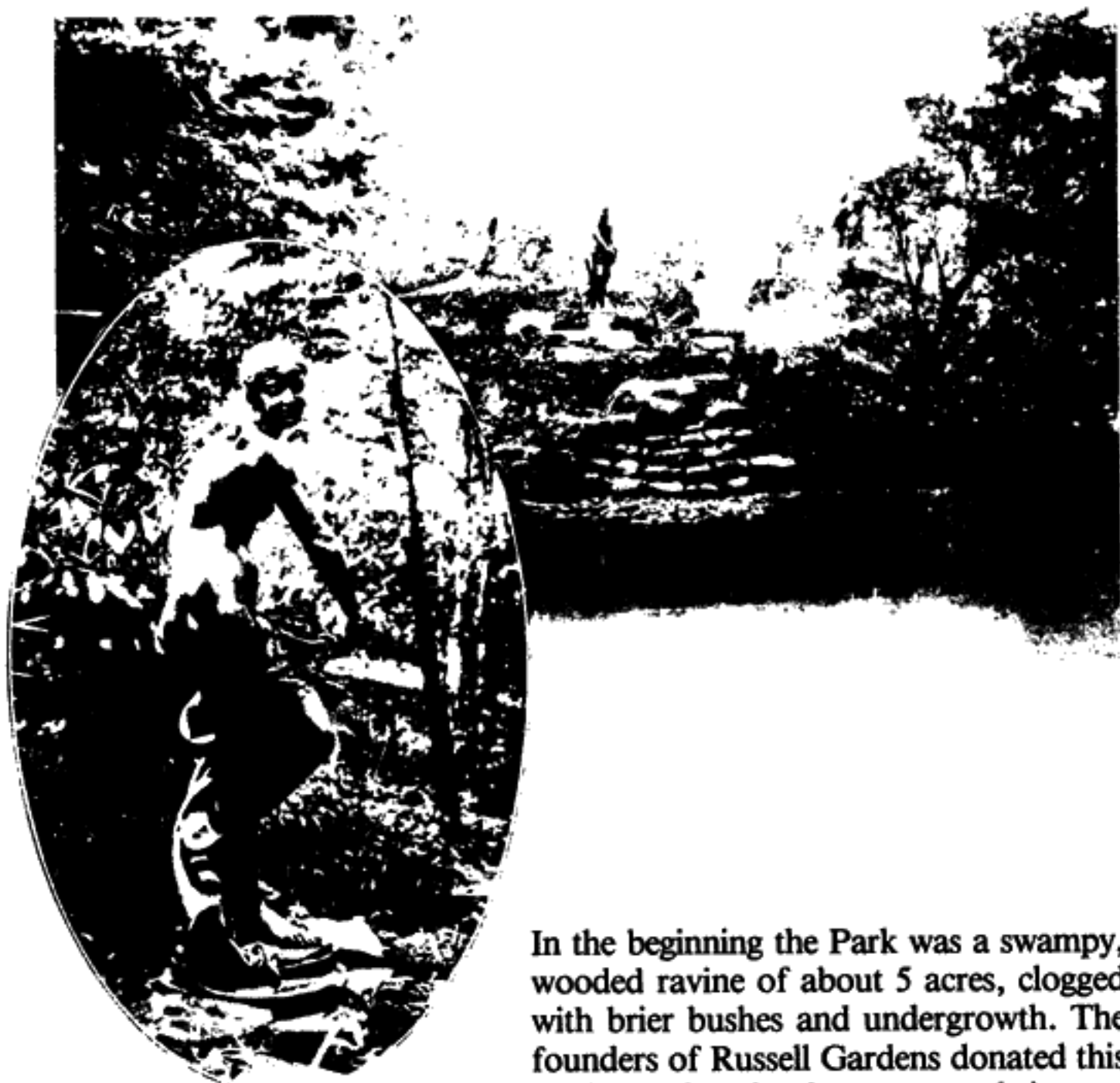
plate was in the middle of the field backing on Melbourne Road, but later a regular backstop was built on the corner of Melbourne and Merrivale Roads. Residents chose to forget that the land was for sale and had never been designated to remain an open area. They continued to use the area and disregarded progressive encroachments, always referring to it as 'The Polo Field'. The last of the level area faced on Northern Boulevard and vanished some twenty years ago.



Publicity picture for Russell Gardens shows men dressed for polo on the Russell Gardens field. The man, second from the left is Glenn Fontaine, a member of the board and an early resident on Linford Road.

Looking at Russell Gardens today, it is hard to envision it when it began. Then one could see from side to side and, had the wooded ravine we call 'The Park' not always been there, one could have seen from Middle Neck Road to Tain Drive. This was pasture land, and the only tree that could be climbed, outside the Park, was an old apple tree that stood on the property on the south corner of Darley and Melbourne Roads. Along Middle Neck Road there were the remnants of a row of locust trees, a few of which still survive in Lake Success. On Northern Boulevard, near Wensley Drive there were some scrub trees, and the tennis courts were built in a clump of birch trees. The saplings that became our present magnificent trees along our streets were almost too small to be noticed. The developers also added many pine trees, but these were

seedlings that were not noticed for twenty years or so. Only a couple of the builders put up more than one house at a time in Russell Gardens before 1929, and afterward, through the Depression, the area grew very slowly. Melbourne, Darley and Dunster Roads east of the Park were more built up than those west of the Park. Large open areas remained until after World War II.



*J. B. Germain's "Printemps"
overlooking the lily pond
in the park*

In the beginning the Park was a swampy, wooded ravine of about 5 acres, clogged with brier bushes and undergrowth. The founders of Russell Gardens donated this land to the development and it was gradually cleared. Natural log bridges were built over the stream, a goldfish pond was created, paths were graded and marked. It became quite a lovely Park. The Bronze statue, entitled 'Spring', cost the developers only \$3,500, although it is the work of the well-known sculptor, Germain.

The developers unfortunately were always running short of money. They issued all sorts of stock to finance their plans. In May 1928, Russell Gardens Inc., sold Eddie Cantor, the entertainer, for a now unknown sum of money, a plot of land of 500 feet fronting on Wensley Drive from the corner of Melbourne Road, and going back 125 feet into the woods.

The covenant of sale was rather unusual. It specified that the land might not be built upon and was to remain part of the park into the far distant future. In December 1943, the RGA bought the land back from the Cantors' for \$5,000. At no time did the Cantors live in the Village. They rented a house in University Gardens while building a magnificent home on Lakeville Road that they occupied briefly. The house was completed during the '29 crash, in which Eddie went 'broke'. It later was torn down so the unencumbered land could be sold.

The developers' original plans called for tennis courts and at least one swimming pool 60 by 40 feet of fieldstone imbedded in concrete. By the end of the summer of 1926, there were two tennis courts, but they had been hastily made by throwing a layer of clay over a base of clinker-ash from coal and the backstops were chicken-wire. There was no pool, though there were two ornamental ponds, built with fieldstone imbedded in concrete, incorporated into the stream. The first pool opened in 1927 and was 60 by 20 feet and of the most elementary 'fill and draw' type.



The original Russell Gardens, Inc. sales office which became the first Village Hall stood where 304 Melbourne Road stands now. It had to be torn down due to termite damage and the new office on Tain Drive was built in an exchange of properties.

It was someone's idea of a rustic setting. It had no fence around it, and only a narrow border of yellow gravel, and not even a bench to sit on. Bill Wheeler, eldest of the five Wheeler children from 219 Melbourne Road, was hired as the lifeguard. Since there was no filter system and no one had thought to provide a foot bath, it generally only took two or three

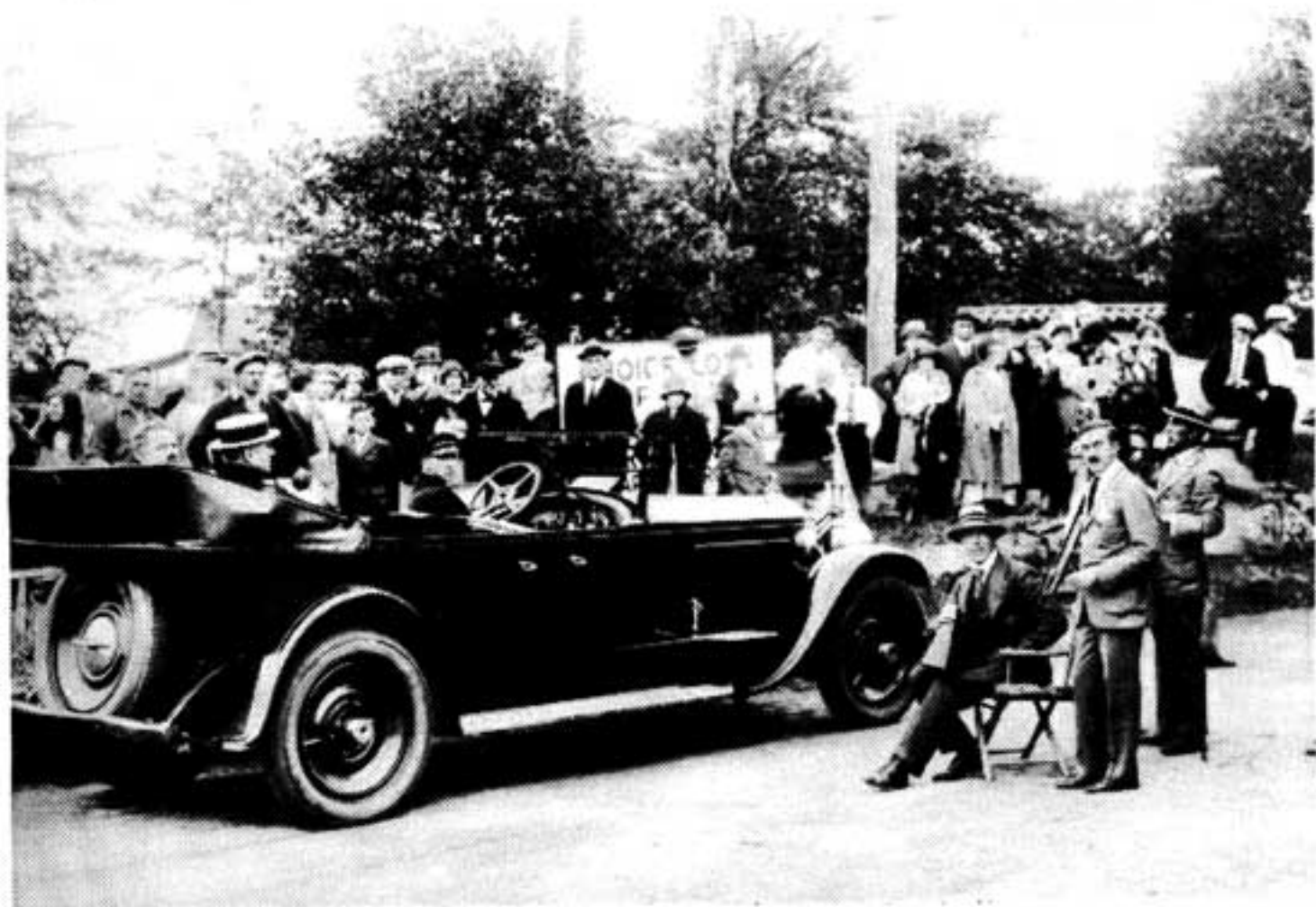
days before one couldn't see the bottom at the shallow end. Each week, on Thursdays, the pool was closed, the water drained, and the whole interior hand-scrubbed with wire brushes. Freshly refilled, the pool sometimes opened on Thursday evenings, if we were in the midst of a heat wave. The water was dirty again before it warmed up enough to enjoy more than a quick dip.

The entire population of Great Neck was only some 13,000 in 1930, and when our pool opened, all the kids in town who did not wish to swim in the Sound at the town beach at the foot of Steamboat Road regularly came and threatened to outnumber the residents.

In 1928, some improvements were made. A storm fence was erected to help the lifeguard control those who sought admittance and to reduce night 'skinny dipping'. A wooden walkway was built over the gravel to reduce the dirt carried into the water, and a shower and foot bath were added, and a bench to sit on at each end of the enclosure. The next year, the structure containing the bathrooms and the storage room was built, but it was outside the fence. This pool lasted over thirty years with no further improvements except that the enclosure was almost continuously enlarged and the size of the wooden deck increased to accommodate the chaises and chairs of our expanding population. When our 'new' pool was built in 1961 the old pool did not vanish. The planners very cleverly used the deep end of the old to house the filter system of the new pool, and converted the shallow end into our present kiddy pool. We were finally rid of the old wooden deck with its termite problems and splinters. The new pool cost \$45,000 in 1961. What if we had to build one today? The pool was extensively renovated and repiped in 1978.

The original two tennis courts had been hastily built in 1926 with a wooden grandstand that stood approximately where the center court is now. The two courts were at right angles to each other and approximately half of one of the originals, now covered with grass, can still be seen outside the fence that encloses the present three courts.

Mr. Dudley Saunders, a non-tennis-playing Engineer resident, supervised the building of our present courts in 1930. They were built with at least three layers of rock underneath the clay, carefully graded from the center outward, and finally enclosed with a proper storm fence through which balls would not fit. On weekends, the new courts were crowded from early morning until late afternoon. You didn't have to sign in, but most games were 'doubles' and for only one set at a time. Two regular tournaments were held each summer, one final round on the Fourth of July and the other on Labor Day. It took several weeks to play each tournament. On the basis of tournament play, each person who entered was assigned a place in the draw, seeded, so that the best players never met in the early rounds. The Association awarded silver-plated cups to the winners, all of them inscribed 'R.G.' and the year.



Publicity picture to publicize Russell Gardens shows W.C. Fields, the man with the mustache and no hat during the filming of "Sally of the Sawdust" in 1925. The famed director, D.W. Griffith, is seated in his director's chair with Frank Knighton who arranged for the picture standing behind him.

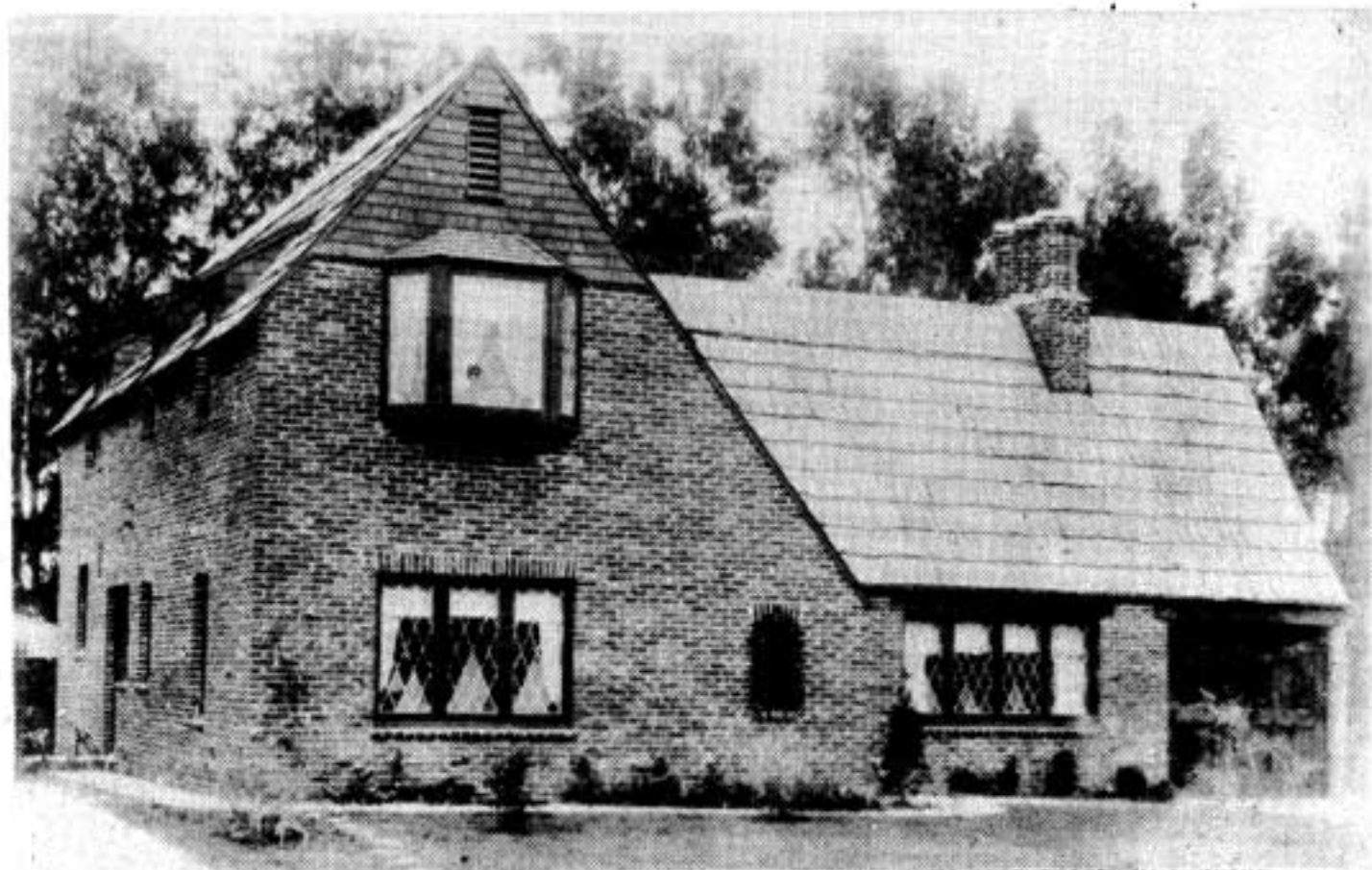
At the time of its founding, Russell Gardens was considered an expensive place to live, and the developers used modern methods to publicize it. They induced W.C. Fields, the actor, and D.W. Giffith, the director, to pose sitting in a touring car 'on location at Russell Gardens Village in Great Neck'. Some three years later, Fields rented the Tudor house on the corner of Dunster and Melbourne Roads. On Sunday mornings in the summer, he would venture out on the lawn and swing at knitted practice golf balls. Since he only rented the house, he didn't care about the grass. On occasion he might be seen driving an open touring car and shouting at his fox terrier dog. He never participated in Russell Garden affairs nor did he ever use the pool or tennis courts, and when the Schutter family bought the house in 1929-30, he moved away to parts unknown.

A number of other stage and screen stars have also lived in the Village, including, in the late twenties and the thirties, Douglas Dumbrille, Frederick March and his wife Florence Eldridge, and Dennis King. Dumbrille had known Dennis King in England, followed him to America, and then to Russell Gardens.

Frederick March was best known as a leading man in the movies; his actress wife, Florence, was better known on the stage. They lived here in the thirties, on Clent Road, and March frequently walked to the station, oblivious to the stares of those who recognized him.

Dennis King lived here some twenty years and was a friendly, charming man who won many RGA tennis championships and even tried to play in the father-son baseball game on July 4th. He failed at the latter sport because he swung underhanded as they do in cricket, which he'd played in England. King starred in musical comedies, became a matinee idol on Broadway in the Vagabond King, and played it in the movies too. His beautiful wife had been on stage in England before their marriage. She made King buy their house here outright because she feared the long layoffs that most actors experience, but he was always in demand and was still performing when he died some ten years ago. He moved to Brookville in the late forties.

The first house in the Village was built for Mary Brennan, a school teacher, at #5 Dunster Road. It is now owned by another teacher, Linda Brecher, and her husband Alan. Most of the early houses were widely spaced with vacant lots on three sides. Early attempts at growing lawns were plagued with weed seeds blown from nearby fields and with networks of tunnels inhabited by moles, a variety of burrowing rodent that one seldom sees today. The open fields had to be kept mowed because the high, dry grass was a real fire hazard, and this was done with a horse-drawn mower. The cut grass was raked up with a horse-drawn rake and probably found its way to neighboring stables.



This house, at 5 Dunster Road, was the first residence completed in Russell Gardens. It was built by Russgard Builders, a subsidiary of Russell Gardens, Inc. in either late 1925 or early 1926 for Miss Mary Brennan, a schoolteacher.

There were three stables nearby: the big Belgian work horses rented by Russell Gardens came from a stable on Grace property that stood where the Great Neck shopping Mall is, another was on what became Great Neck Road, and the third on what remained of Captain Russell's proper-

ty, where Russell Woods Road is now. In those days there was a bridle path through the Park on the Wensley Drive side that was used by riders who hired horses from the stables near Great Neck Road. People rode through Russell Gardens, across the boulevard and through a portion of University Gardens, exited by Merrivale Road onto Lakeville Road and thus to the Lakeville Inn area and on into the Whitney Woods. When Russell Woods was built, the last stable disappeared and our residents no longer had their lawns trampled by occasional stray horses.



The Russell Gardens Association was formed in 1927 to oversee and finance the use of the recreational facilities: the park, swimming pool and tennis courts. With the advent of the Depression of 1929, the original developers lost control, and it became evident that a new central authority was necessary. The law which authorized areas of the Town of North Hempstead to become incorporated villages required two things; a certain population and a certain assessed valuation of its properties. Russell Gardens qualified on both counts and became a village in 1931.



Publicity picture to advertise the "Herald Tribune House" at 219 Melbourne Road in the fall of 1926. Captain Russell is the bearded man to the left of the doorway and Frank Knighton stands fourth from the right.

One of the first big problems faced by our residents was gaining admission to the Great Neck School District, and shortly after that, to being in-

cluded in the Great Neck Park District. We went along with the formation of the Belgrave Sewer District and in 1929 had our sewers installed before we were authorized to hook into the lines. The Trustees started fighting zoning battles and local nuisances as soon as the village came into being in 1931. One of the first places to feel their wrath was Mulner's Tavern, an establishment that occupied the building now housing Peter Luger's Steak House. Until the last plot on Northern Boulevard was built on in 1979, a succession of vigilant Restrictions Committees of the Russell Gardens Association saw to it that the commercial buildings that went up had no rear windows, were screened by shrubbery and brick walls, were fairly uniform in height, and had large on-site parking areas.

As a fitting conclusion to this brief history, what follows are some sketchy recollections by our Village Historian, William S. Grauer, whose family was the fourth to move here in 1926.

We moved to Russell Gardens from Manhattan, from a location where trucks rolled 24 hours a day in and out of a cut where the Eighth Avenue Subway was being built. Our first night in our new home was memorable. We couldn't sleep because the 'silence' was deafening. Crickets sang and chirped, owls hooted, a cat meowed, and an occasional vehicle passed on Middle Neck Road. Our house was surrounded by open fields, and the grass was pretty high because it was mid-summer.

When we first moved in, we had electricity, of course, but my mother opted for an icebox rather than a new-fangled refrigerator. We were lucky that the nearest ice house was only three blocks away, so if we ran short we could go there to get an extra piece of ice. We also got shavings for the ice cream churn. We bought a refrigerator within a couple of years, but the old icebox was our spare basement refrigerator for a long time.

The developers had cleared the underbrush in the woods, put in a few wooden benches, cut through a winding path on the hillside on each side of the stream and marked them with large rocks. There was also a pond with goldfish in it that helped to drain some swamp water. Most of the low ground was thick with Skunk Cabbage, a noxious plant, and a few Lillies-of-the-Valley. Frogs abounded and there were turtles. The ponds built in the stream were usually not filled with water because they silted in so fast with sand that the workmen always had to spend time digging them out. So, they left the plugs out of the small dams and just let the water run through. The banks of the stream between the ponds were also lined with concrete inbedded with fieldstones. The whole area was always

referred to as 'The Park'; never as 'The Woods'. The big adventure as a child was to follow the stream to and through the pipe that carried it under the Long Island Railroad tracks. The pipe was very slippery with moss and tricky.

When the greater part of Russell Gardens was vacant land, the developers, and later the Village, had to see to it that the field grass was mowed during the summer. This was done with a horse-drawn mower. The high grass was a hazard to the houses because of the fire danger. The fire companies of those days had specially equipped trucks for grass fires.

In the fall, we picnicked in the woods, building fires to cook bacon and roast potatoes. We obtained water from a natural underground spring, later obliterated, that was on the slope in the woods just below where Linford Road meets Wensley Drive.

A continuing source of fun was playing in and around the skeletons of new houses as they were being built. We climbed to the roofs and jumped from upper floors into sand piles. We appropriated to our own uses lumber of all sorts, and nails of all sizes. Bricks, pieces of slate and even cement blocks were carted off. We never thought of it as stealing, just heaven-sent booty. Pieces of wood lathe were most prized because they had so many uses. My mother always needed stakes for flowers and vegetables and she never questioned where they came from.

With the winter came ice-skating on the ponds in the Park and on the Lake on the Russell Estate. When it snowed, we headed for the Clent Road hill down from Wensley. It was always the last one plowed, by design, and in the early years there were no houses on it. We also sledged between the trees in the Park down the steeper slopes, and tried barrel-stave skis.

The Russell Gardens Association was organized in 1927 and my mother, Hattie, was elected the Secretary, a post that the by-laws specified as for one year, but which she was asked to keep for nearly thirteen. Some time in 1930, my mother, under orders from the Association Board, directed her son, me, to go over to the Town of North Hempstead Courthouse in Manhasset to add up certain figures. It was necessary to find out if Russell Gardens then possessed sufficient population and had enough assessed valuation of properties to qualify to apply to the State of New York for a new government as an Incorporated Village. My borrowed adding machine told us that we qualified on both counts. We applied to become a Village, and on September 23, 1931, we were officially incorporated.



Scene in
Russell Gardens
Woodland Park

It is generally conceded that we have had one of the best run, least contentious Village governments for the last 50 years. I would like to be here for our Diamond Jubilee!

The Incorporated Village of Russell Gardens encompasses 248 single family homes, 3 apartment houses, 1 co-operative apartment building and several commercial buildings and stores. Our Village has been incorporated since 1931, and is governed by an elected Mayor and 4 Trustees, who serve without pay. The Village is responsible for street lighting, trash collection, snow removal, street cleaning and maintenance and the enactment and enforcement of Village Codes and Ordinances. Our Village government is supported in the main, by Village property taxes. The Village retains an attorney and an accountant, and employs a Village Clerk, a Deputy Clerk, a 3-man Maintenance Crew and a Building Inspector - whose job it is to see that all plans comply with the Village Building Code. He also makes sure that all construction is checked before a Certificate of Occupancy is issued. Even though we are now virtually built up to our limit, the Building Inspector protects our values by supervising alterations. Plans for alterations are first studied by the Russell Gardens Association, and if approved by the Board of Directors, are then forwarded to the Building Inspector, who reports his findings to the Village Trustees.

Russell Gardens is the last of the incorporated villages on the peninsula to have instituted a Village Court. We have an elected Village Justice, an appointed Acting Justice, and employ a Prosecutor and a Court Clerk. The Village Justice Court was established in Russell Gardens in October 1981, in order to enforce our Village Code and Traffic Regulations.

The Russell Gardens Association, Inc., is a Not-For-Profit corporation which was formed to operate the facilities it owns - Pool, Park and Tennis Courts. It is fully responsible for all maintenance and improvements to these facilities. The funds for these activities are derived exclusively from membership dues which come from owners of single family homes who are eligible to join. It is governed by an 11 member Board of Directors who are elected for one year terms and who serve without remuneration. The Association's annual meeting is held each March. An attorney and an accountant are retained and a Secretary-treasurer is the only paid employee of the Association.

One of the Association's most important functions is to monitor, through its Restrictions Committee, the construction of new buildings and the exterior alterations of existing ones. This protects all the residents, and maintains the high standards of our Village.

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Village Board of Trustees and Justices of the Village Court 1. to r. Eugene Gilenson, Deputy Mayor Alice Fishman, Mayor Rosario O. Negri, Acting Justice Donald Victor, Justice Arthur Kurtz, Joyce Cohn, Dr. Herbert Platt. Swearing-in ceremony in the fall of 1981.



Board of Directors of Russell Gardens Association - 1982. L. to R., seated - Secretary, Suzanne Blume; Betsy Gilbert; President, Dr. William S. Grauer; Sy Rotkowitz; Jane Salzberg; Attorney, Harvey Eysman; Standing - Fred Pomerantz; 2nd Vice President, Donald Victor; George Harkavy; Steven Kirshner; Matthew Bloomfield. Not present: 1st Vice President, Herbert Tartak; Ahron Haspel.

The table, dating from 1925, was in the original Village office.

Recollections of Ralph W. McPhee
(one of the original developers of Russell Gardens)

This is written forty or more years after the events, but I will try to make it as factual as memory permits.

In the Fall of 1924, Richard Kehoe, the chief real estate dealer of the time in Nassau County (a real old-timer; his telephone number in 1924 was Great Neck 1!) told me that Capt. Russell's property other than his home, was for sale . . . It seems that Dick Kehoe had talked to Frank Knighton too. Out of these conversations came Russell Gardens, Inc.

Within a very short time, a company was formed, with a full Board of Directors, and with enough cash on hand to go through with a deal with Capt. Russell. Mann & MacNeile, well-known architects and landscape artists laid out the property in its present form and included two items which were never completed; one was a big apartment house to be built later, on the triangular plot made by Clent, Carlton & Wensley, as they are now on the map. The other was a magnificent clock to be placed on a beautiful gateway at Middle Neck Road and Darley Road.

The streets, sidewalks and gutters were laid at once, and the now-beautiful trees were planted under the supervision of J.J. Levison, Master Forester, and one of the best known tree-man of the time.

In addition to the approximately 90 acres purchased from Capt. Russell, we bought another 60 acres from the Urban Development Co., adjoining the Russell property on the west, and running down to what was then known as Eastmoreland.

The first lot sold in Russell Gardens was to Mary Brennan, a school-teacher, for whom we built a brick house, on either Lot 11 or 12 on Dunster Road. The lot cost her \$5000, and the house \$15,000.

We spent \$3500 for a statue "Spring" (Sculptor unknown), which we placed, surrounded by thousands of violet plants, on the slope just west of the brook, and perhaps 400' from Melbourne Road. The statue was one of four named for the seasons. This statue originally had a butterfly on the left shoulder. Somebody, perhaps a drunken entomologist, having never seen a butterfly of that particular species before, broke off the butterfly.

The president of Russgard Builders, builders of many of the homes, was Col. Roger Black, a West Pointer, and son of the Commander of the "Maine", blown up in Havana in 1897, and the principal cause of the Spanish-American War.

The present park was a jungled brook when we took over. It took us two weeks with about eight men to cut out the briers, wild grape and useless small trees.

In 1925, I read that the State Forestry Service was offering anybody who would agree to plant them, 10,000 pine trees. In view of the fact that Russell Gardens in 1924 resembled the Sahara in its lack of trees, I jumped at the chance.

The "trees" came - all 10,000 of them, in a box about 30" x 30". They were about 1½" high. And if anyone in Russell Gardens today boasts of a pine tree, it was probably one of these.

What we built up from the remains of an old orchard and a couple of farms, is surely a monument to be proud of, though probably not a soul presently living in Russell Gardens even knows of our existence.

I'm glad of the opportunity of sending you this information, and am sorry I haven't more.

Sincerely,



from July 26, 1965 letter to the Russell Gardens Association