

A Tour of the House

Dr. Coker chose the perfect architectural style for his home. The Prairie Style is horizontal, with wide overhanging eaves, and hugs the land and embraces the outside. As you stand at the entrance to our home, notice how the front porch side entrances are on an axis (south and north) with the Arbor Walk (south) and The Rocks (north). The long casement windows let the outside into the house. With four porches on both floors and patios surrounding the house, the house becomes a part of the land and the land a part of the house.

Inside the house the feel is more Arts and Crafts/Mission. As you stand in the gracious towering entry hall with its turned staircase, notice the quarter-sawn fumed oak panelling. The light fixtures in the hall, living room and library are original to the house. In the Living Room note the stone fireplace, coffered ceiling and double-hung doors that open the room to the outside.

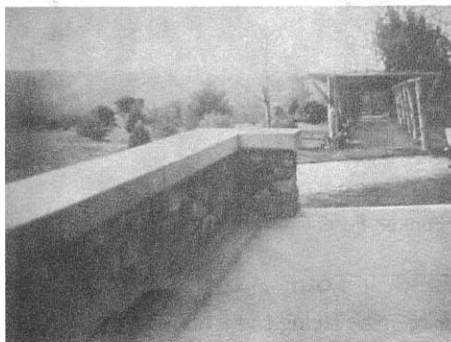
The Morning Room was once Dr. Coker's plant propagation room. It is a bright, sunny east-facing exposure with an outside porch entrance. The Dining Room is more formal in feel. The built-in leaded and bevelled glass china cabinet, the plate-rail height of the paneling, and the bank of casement windows framing the back garden are special features to notice.

The Kitchen is the space where we made radical changes. Originally it included several back hallways, two pantries and a back porch.

We gutted the area and repeated architectural features (the coffered ceilings). The built-in china cupboard was a part of the original kitchen, and we repeated the design pattern of the cabinetry throughout the kitchen. Notice the back stairway. The kitchen flows out the double-hung doors onto the back patio and calls you outside into the garden.

It has been our pleasure to live in this home and be its caretakers for a while. We are reminded of Winston Churchill's words: "We shape our dwellings and then our dwellings shape us." That has certainly been our experience here at The Rocks.

Mary Jane and Wood Burns, April 2003



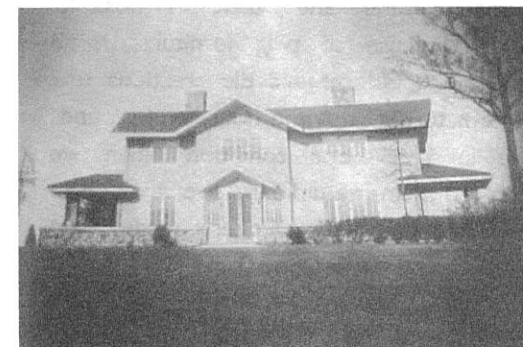
Special thanks and gratitude to Kristy Lee, Jeff Coke and crew, Chip Callaway, Minta Bell, Toby Savage, Walker Brown, Sparrow and Sons, Todd Dickinson and crew, Caroline Siverson and crew, Leoma Harrington Page, Louise Parrish, Edward Rokosz, Rhian Jacques, and Logan Kendall. You know what you did and we wouldn't be where we are now without your help and support. This has been a massive GROUP EFFORT with this GREAT creative TEAM of folks in there with us.

The Rocks

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Dr. W.C. Coker, UNC Professor of Botany, built his home in 1908 and named it **The Rocks** for the rock outcropping located on the south side of the property. The architecture is a blend of Missions/Arts and Crafts and Prairie styles. Originally the home was surrounded by 125 acres on which Dr. Coker farmed, cultivated and experimented with the endless varieties of trees and plants that interested him. William Lanier Hunt, a Coker student and another well-known botanist, recalled that Dr. Coker used The Rocks as a living laboratory for his students.

In 1935, Dr. Coker was 62 when he married Louise Venable, the daughter of the former President of the University of North Carolina. She was an avid gardener and they worked together to enhance The Rocks until his death in 1953. Louise Venable Coker lived in the home until she died in 1983.



Coker House, 1923

We purchased The Rocks in 1985 and began the long process of restoring, rehabilitating, and adding our own touches to the house and surrounding 2.79 acres. We received the Chapel Hill Preservation Society Award for Excellence in Preservation and Rehabilitation, and the Chapel Hill Appearance Community Award for Excellence in Restoration and Preservation. We shared the Jean and Pearson Stewart Award with the North Carolina Botanical Garden for our collaborative work in developing and maintaining the Louise Venable Coker Park located on North Street in the rock outcropping section of the property.

It has been our intent to leave things as intact as possible, so it is our hope that you will not be able to see the changes but will view The Rocks as an old and lovely property that has simply been well-maintained. We put protective covenants on the property, assuring that it will remain preserved.

In reclaiming, restoring and recreating the garden we tried (and are still trying) to develop the property in keeping with the Mission/Arts and Crafts and Prairie style home. We have kept things as simple, informal, natural, and rustic as possible. Notice the use of twig furniture, stone planters and old ceramic tile creations that imitate nature. Since the house and grounds were in very poor condition when we purchased them, we did extensive research to learn what was in Dr. Coker's garden, and added trees, shrubs and bulbs that either replicated what was there or were appropriate to the 1908 garden. In planning how we would develop the property, we

wanted to use the "good bones" of the magnificent trees on the property, but give the garden more shape, definition and structure. We developed "garden rooms," but the emphasis is on a property that is naturalistic and simple.



Sunken Perennial Garden, 1933

A Walking Tour of the Gardens

Start your tour by facing the front of the house and taking note of two "gifts" from Dr. Coker: the magnificent white oak in the left/front of the house that he personally "pruned" and shaped and the stand of wisteria to the right/front of the house that "volunteered." Dr. Coker cultivated the wisteria stand and referred to it as "my bouquet." Also notice the magnificent and stately Cedar of Lebanon on the north side of the front lawn. The sculpture by Virginia Bullman is A Gathering of Women: Hattie, Emma, and Pearl.

Continue your tour by walking down the Arbor Walk on the north side of the house (on an axis with the front porches). This arbor walk once held a structure identical to the pergola at the Coker Arboretum at UNC. The stones in this walkway were given to the Cokers by William L. Hunt.

At the end of the walk, look to the left and visit the Camelia Room. To the right is the Vegetable Garden, the Four-Square Rose Garden, the Garden House and the Sunken Perennial Garden that is to the right of the garden house.

Proceed across the drive to the back of the house and note the rock garden and live oak to the left as you go up the steps to the back patio.

From the back patio proceed to your left (east) past the beech tree and down the path and through the Woodland Wildflower Walk until you reach the path that takes you to your right (west) to the 1/3 acre section of the garden dedicated to Louise Venable Coker and called The Louise Venable Coker Park. The NC Botanical Garden is responsible for the care and maintenance of this segment of the garden. We have collaborated closely in both the development and upkeep of this lovely rock outcropping area on our property.

Follow the path through the rock outcropping area (the North Street or south edge of the property). This is the area that provided Dr. Coker with his name for the property—The Rocks. Walk back across the lawn and up the drive to the front of the house. Take note of how beautifully Dr. Coker sited the house. We look across our front lawn to the west at glorious sunsets!



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
AT
CHAPEL HILL

University Property Office

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
134 E. Franklin St. (165A)
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

27 August 1985

Mrs. W. Woodrow Burns
604 E. Franklin Street
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514

Dear Mrs. Burns:

I am afraid that I was not able to find any drawings or plans of the Coker House and its grounds in the Southern Historical Collection. Mike Martin, the University Archivist, told me that he had gone through Dr. Coker's papers looking for material on the house when the University first acquired the property, and found nothing. The Southern's records show that the bulk of the Coker Papers came in 1956, after Dr. Coker's death, and in 1960 when his papers were transferred from the Botany Department. My guess would be that if any drawings exist, Mrs. Gardiner or Mrs. Fox would know about them.

However, I did find approximately one hundred black and white photographs of the exterior of the house and of the grounds. These had all been withdrawn from the papers and put into a separate picture file, which explains why all those withdrawal slips were interfiled in the papers. If you go to the Southern, request the W. C. Coker Papers, #3220, Picture File folders 13 and 14, you can examine the photographs. I would suggest taking a plat map of the grounds so you can get some idea of where the original landscape features were located. Judging from the photographs, the grounds were originally much more lavishly laid out. Also, in the Chapel Hill Historical Society Papers, #4205, Coker House folder, there are four exterior photographs.

Enclosed is a list of plants in the yard in November of 1935. This may be of some help. Also enclosed is the information which you asked Rusty to send.

If I can be of further help, please feel free to call on me.

Sincerely,

Marshall Bullock

Marshall Bullock
History Museum Specialist

Laura J. Henderson

SEP 19 1984



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

AT

CHAPEL HILL

Physical Plant

September 17, 1984

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Physical Plant 168 A
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514

MEMORANDUM

TO: Grace Wagoner
University Property Officer

FROM: Tom Sudderth
Landscape Supervisor


SUBJECT: Plant Inventory of the Coker Property

Attached is an inventory of most of the larger trees and shrubbery which are located on the W. C. Coker property. The diameters of the trees and spreads of the shrubbery were estimated visually. Locations of the growing stock have been indicated on the plat and have been numbered from 1 through 102.


The areas which have been designated as "existing vegetation" are portions of the site which are overgrown with the following vegetation: poison ivy, honeysuckle, milkweed, poke berry, wisteria, English ivy, briars, Virginia creeper and many more other plants to a lesser extent.


Many of the plants on the attached list are quite old, are in poor condition, and are in dire need of attention. The entire Coker property will require an untold number of man-hours to bring it up to University standards.

The plat has the following symbols for the growing stock:

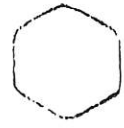
Trees: 1-6" 

7-12" 


13-20" 

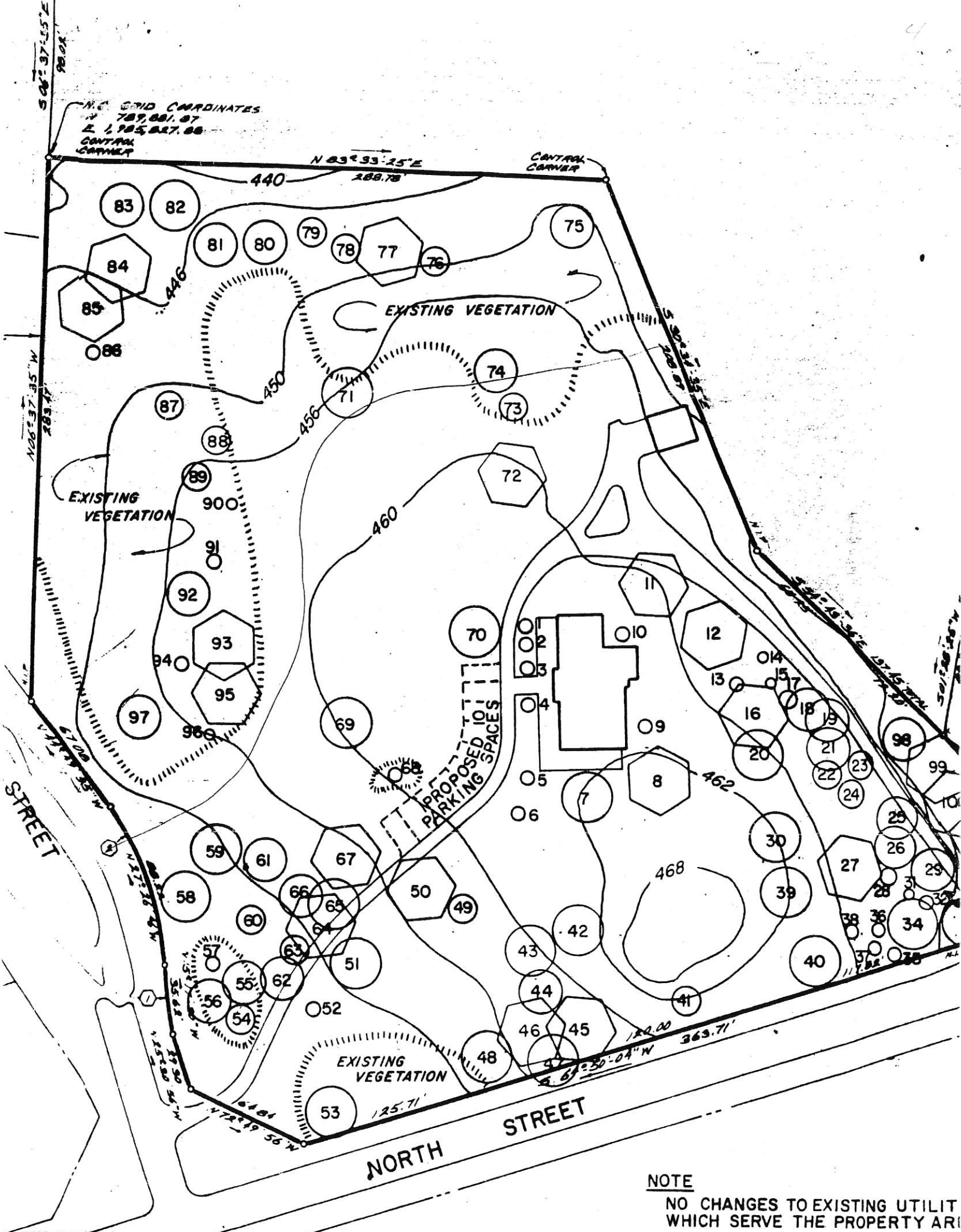
21-30" 

30+" 

multi-
stemmed
(MS) 

Shrubbery:

All plants will use the following symbol: 



N.E. GRID COORDINATES
N 789,881.87
E 1,985,827.88
CENTRAL CORNER

N 83° 33' 25" E
288.78

CENTRAL CORNER

EXISTING VEGETATION

EXISTING VEGETATION

PROPOSED 101
PARKING SPACES

EXISTING VEGETATION

NORTH STREET

NOTE
NO CHANGES TO EXISTING UTILIT
WHICH SERVE THE PROPERTY ARE

| | SYMBOL NUMBER | SIZE | PLANT NAME |
|------------|------------------|------|----------------------|
| Shrubbery: | 1 | 12' | Chamaecyparis, sp. |
| | 2 | 5' | Japanese holly |
| | 3 | 10' | Yew, spp. |
| | 4 | 15' | Yew, spp. |
| | 5 | 30' | Wisteria (hedge) |
| | 6 | MS | American boxwood |
| | 9 | 25' | Osmanthus, sp. |
| | 10 | 20' | Osmanthus, sp. |
| | 13 | 4' | Azalea, spp. |
| | 68 | MS | Quince |
| Trees: | 7 | 30+ | White oak |
| | 8 | MS | Magnolia, sp. |
| | 11 | MS | Cherry, sp. |
| | 12 | MS | Live oak |
| | 14 | 6" | Dogwood |
| | 15 | 6" | Cherry, sp. |
| | 16 | MS | Cherry, sp. |
| | 17 | 12" | Pecan |
| | 18 | 25" | White Pine |
| | 19 | 25" | White Pine |
| | 20 | 30+ | Beech |
| | 21 | 22" | Cherry, sp. |
| | 22 | 14" | Elm |
| | 23 | 15" | Virginia pine |
| | 24 | 20" | Virginia pine (dead) |
| | 25 | 25" | White pine |

| <u>SYMBOL NUMBER</u> | <u>SIZE</u> | <u>PLANT NAME</u> |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| 26 | 21" | White pine |
| 27 | MS | Crape Myrtle |
| 28 | 8" | American holly |
| 29 | 25" | White pine |
| 30 | 30+ | Beech |
| 31 | 5" | American holly |
| 32 | 7" | Red maple |
| 33 | 30+ | Willow oak |
| 34 | 30+ | White oak |
| 35 | 7" | Red cedar |
| 36 | 9" | American holly |
| 37 | 8" | American holly |
| 38 | 10" | American holly |
| 39 | 30+ | Willow oak |
| 40 | 30+ | White oak |
| 41 | 15" | Willow oak |
| 42 | 30+ | White oak |
| 43 | 30+ | White oak |
| 44 | 25" | Eastern hemlock |
| 45 | MS | Eastern hemlock |
| 46 | MS | Eastern hemlock |
| 47 | 30+ | White oak |
| 48 | 30+ | White oak |
| 49 | 15" | Red cedar |
| 50 | MS | Eastern hemlock |
| 51 | 30+ | Post oak |
| 52 | 10" | Mountain cedar <i>Wormy spruce</i> |

SYMBOL
NUMBER

SIZE

PLANT
NAME

| | | |
|----|-----|-------------------------------------|
| 54 | 14" | Red cedar |
| 55 | 28" | Yellow poplar |
| 56 | 28" | Hickory, sp. (dead) |
| 57 | 11" | Red cedar |
| 58 | 30+ | White oak (dead) |
| 59 | 30+ | White oak |
| 60 | 14" | Red cedar |
| 61 | 30+ | Southern red oak |
| 62 | 21" | Hickory |
| 63 | 13" | Eastern hemlock |
| 64 | MS | Eastern hemlock |
| 65 | 30+ | Southern red oak |
| 66 | 23" | White pine |
| 67 | MS | Cherry laurel |
| 69 | 30+ | Pecan |
| 70 | 30+ | White oak |
| 71 | 30+ | Deodara cedar |
| 72 | MS | Chamaecyparis, sp. |
| 73 | 20" | Chamaecyparis, sp. |
| 74 | 22" | Norway spruce (<i>Orin. Spr.</i>) |
| 75 | 28" | Deodara cedar |

| | | |
|----|-----|----------------------|
| 76 | 20" | Orinetal spruce, sp. |
|----|-----|----------------------|

| | | |
|----|----|-----------------------|
| 77 | MS | Tisswood (silverbell) |
|----|----|-----------------------|

| | | |
|----|-----|------------------------|
| 78 | 18" | ✓ Oriental spruce, sp. |
|----|-----|------------------------|

| | | |
|----|-----|--------------------|
| 79 | 18" | Crimson king maple |
|----|-----|--------------------|

| | | |
|------|-----|------------------------|
| ✗ 80 | 22" | Oriental spruce, sp. ✗ |
|------|-----|------------------------|

| | | |
|------|-----|------------------------|
| ✗ 81 | 22" | Oriental spruce, sp. ✗ |
|------|-----|------------------------|

SYMBOL
NUMBER

SIZE

PLANT
NAME

| | | |
|-----|-----|-----------------|
| 83 | 28" | White pine |
| 84 | MS | Eastern hemlock |
| 85 | MS | Red maple |
| 86 | 12" | Eastern hemlock |
| 87 | 15" | Royal paulownia |
| 88 | 16" | Virginia pine |
| 89 | 15" | American holly |
| 90 | 6" | Dogwood |
| 91 | 10" | Dogwood |
| 92 | 22" | Black locust |
| 93 | MS | Eastern hemlock |
| 94 | 12" | Persimmon |
| 95 | MS | Dogwood |
| 96 | 6" | Dogwood |
| 97 | 22" | Willow oak |
| 98 | 22" | Cucumber tree |
| 99 | MS | Chaste tree |
| 100 | MS | Chaste tree |
| 101 | MS | Black locust |
| 102 | 8" | Ju Jube |

THE LEGACY AND STEWARDSHIP OF THE ROCKS (609 North Street, Chapel Hill, NC)

Goal - Emphasize Dr. Coker's legacy to the university and to the community and the importance of his home in maintaining this legacy.

Forgive me for stating the obvious...but...it is an absolutely beautiful spring day in Chapel Hill. And what better way to spend the afternoon than in the beautiful gardens of the Coker/Burns estate. I would like to thank our hosts, **Woodrow Burns, Jr. and Catharine Gilliam Burns**, for this opportunity to tell you a little about the history of this place we call **THE ROCKS** and the **legacy that will transfer with the title**.

William Chambers Coker (1872-1953)

It all started with the botanist who gave his name to one of University's biology buildings, a pinetum and an arboretum. **William Chambers Coker** was born in Hartsville, South Carolina on October 24, 1872. His father was Major James Lide Coker, a civil war veteran and an educational reformer who helped found the South Carolina public school system and the Coker College for Women in Hartsville. His mother was Susan Armstrong Stout.

William received his undergraduate education at the University of South Carolina and his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in 1901. In 1902 he came to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as an associate professor of botany.

Like many origin stories there are often multiple versions and the Coker Arboretum is no exception. One story goes that in 1903 University President Francis Venable asked Coker to do what he could to beautify a 5.5 acre area of boggy, livestock-grazing meadow east of campus. Another origin story credits former University President Kemp Plummer Battle (of Battle Park fame). Regardless of who gets the credit, with the appropriation of \$10 and the help of one gardener Coker set to work and today we have the Coker Arboretum...a Haven in the Heart of the Chapel Hill.

By 1908, Coker was a full professor and chairman of the newly established Botany Department. By that time he had founded the UNC Herbarium, pooling faculty research collections and their students' dried plant specimens. Today, with close to 800,000 specimens, the UNC Herbarium is the largest herbarium and epicenter of plant biodiversity research in the Southeastern United States.

Aside on student: Just recently, freshman student and Felton Intern, Dan Meyers, presented to the Mid-Atlantic States Mycology Conference his work on the herbarium's fungal collection including 167 Fungal Type Specimens attributed to Coker. Type Specimen - Specimen to which the name of a species is permanently associated. Give example.

Coker's research interests were far-ranging. His Ph.D. concerned seed formation in Bald cypress. He was also interested in the woody flora of the Southeast, not only in an academic sense, but also for purposes of landscape design. But Coker's first love was mycology (the study of fungi) and he gained national and international fame in this arena. The bulk of his publications (137 in his fifty-one year career at UNC!) are devoted to the fungi.

UNC's campus benefited tremendously from Coker's landscaping skills as he served for thirty years on the Building and Grounds committee or as he like to call it the Grounds and Buildings committee. Coker knew and I think you will all agree that **Great Universities have great landscapes.**

I could go on and on about William Chambers contributions to science, the University and the community but I think it is best captured in **Essays on William Chambers Coker, Passionate Botanist** written by his niece Mary Coker Joslin in 2003 in celebration of the centennial anniversary of the Coker Arboretum. The Foreword was written by the late William C. Friday, President Emeritus of the University of North Carolina. Read excerpt.

Preserving Coker's Legacy

In 1906, Coker purchased 60 acres of land just north of the village of Chapel Hill. The most striking feature of the landscape was a large outcrop of granitic boulders. On a hill behind the boulders he built this prairie style house and called it "The Rocks". Like any good botanist, he then proceeded to plant the surrounding land with gardens featuring both NC native plants and exotic trees.

Which reminds me...does everyone know how to tell the difference between a horticulturist and a botanist?

A horticulturist says this is a good spot, I think I'll find a plant for it.

A botanist says - This is a good plant, I think I'll find a spot for it.

Point out some of the landscape features: American holly - Dr. James Peacock and Florence Peacock care for an area of the original garden that includes a tall hedge of American holly (*Ilex opaca*), which Coker collected from the wild over 90 years ago to determine if they were male or female.

Upon Coker's death in **1954** the house conveyed to Louise Venable Coker, yes... daughter of Francis Venable Coker (the President who asked Coker to do something about that pasture). Louise remained at the estate until her passing in 1983 and the property was subdivided into several home sites. Louise left the **The Rocks** to the University.

In 1986, Woodrow Burns purchased the property with his wife, the late Mary Jane Burns. At that time, both the house and gardens had been neglected for some time. Wood and Mary Jane gave their time, treasure and talent to restore the home and gardens to their former glory. The glory that surrounds us today is due to the continued work of Woodrow and Catharine Gilliam Burns.

The legacy of W.C. Coker and the history of the North Carolina Botanical Garden are intertwined and inseparable. Much like the magnificent white oak behind us the Garden has many branches that can trace their origin to Wm. C. Coker's legacy, the Coker Arboretum, Battle Park, the UNC Herbarium, the Coker Pinetum, The Rocks. The roots of this tree are broad and deep. Wm. C. Coker was the taproot from which it all started.

Wood and Catharine - As you start this next chapter of your life, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Garden, the University, the town of Chapel Hill, and the community for the wonderful care and love you have given to the Rocks as stewards of this legacy.

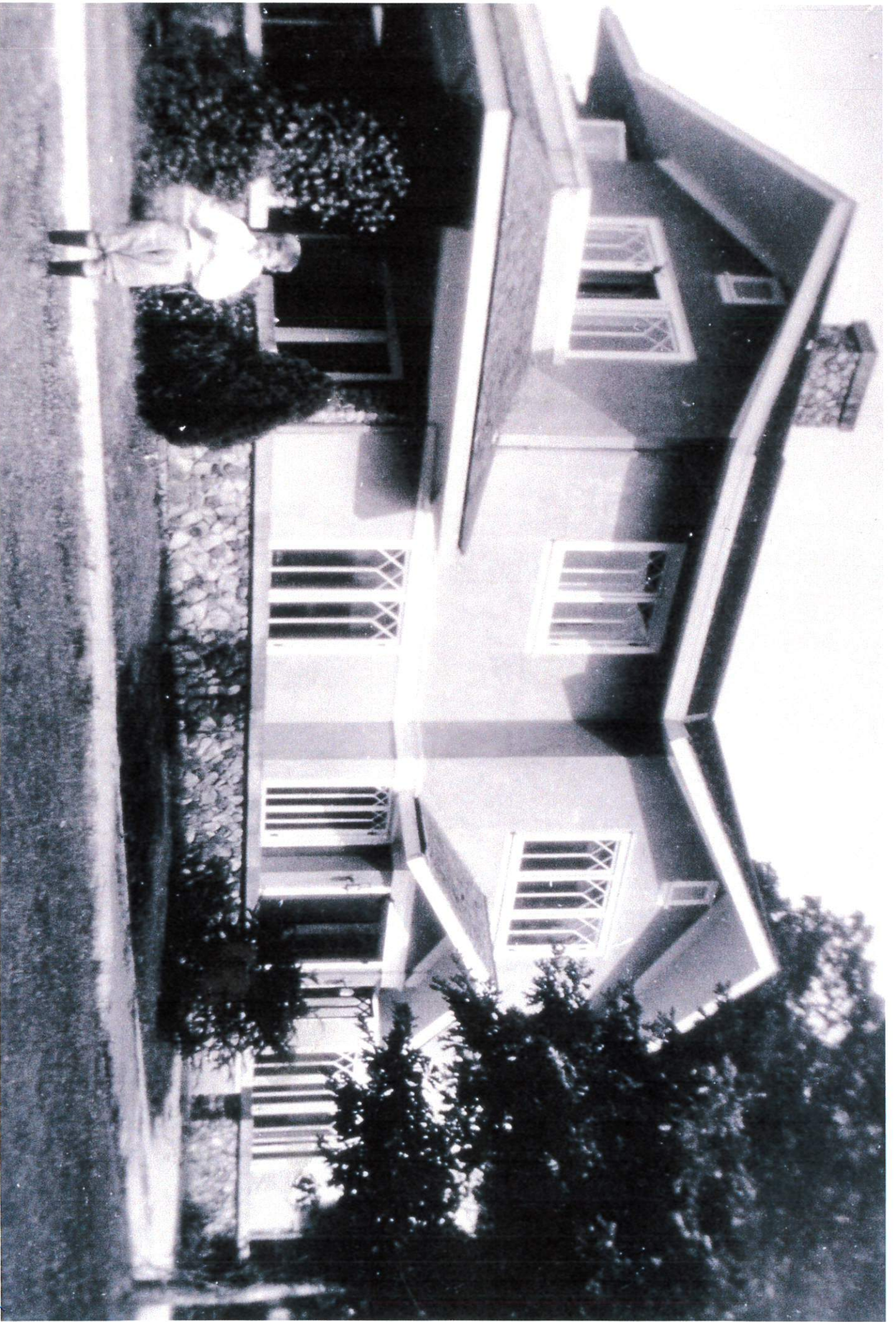
Damon Waitt
Director, North Carolina Botanical Garden
April 19, 2018 at The Rocks



COCKER FARM 1920

FRONT VIEW, COKER HOUSE
1908





COKER HOUSE, WESTVIEW
1922 - WHITE OAK



WEST VIEW 2003



COKER FARM, PASTURE
1922



ARBOR, 1920



ARBOR, 1920



March, 2003



MRS LOKER'S COITING GARDEN, 1995

Durham Herald

DURHAM, N. C., SUNDAY, MAY 10, 1942

Corresponde



Mrs. Coker And Her Iris Bed

(Portrait: Bayard

Mrs. Coker, above, chairman of the Chapel Hill Garden Club flower show, which will be held at Lenoir dining hall, University of North Carolina Campus the afternoon and evening of May 12, is cutting iris from the border on the long drives of the Coker estate. Proceeds from the show will be used for entertainment of the naval

MRS COKER'S CUTTING GARDEN

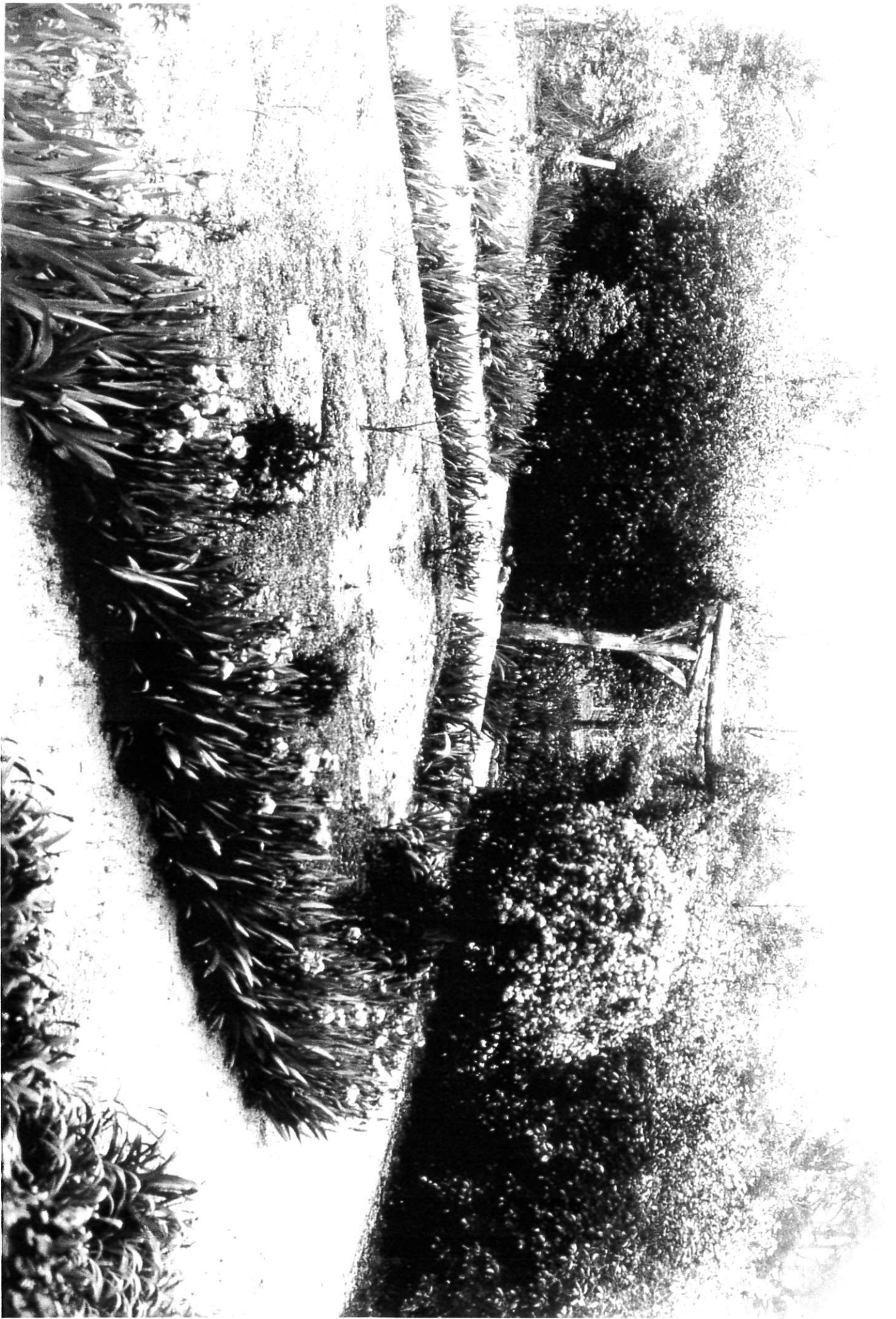
1943

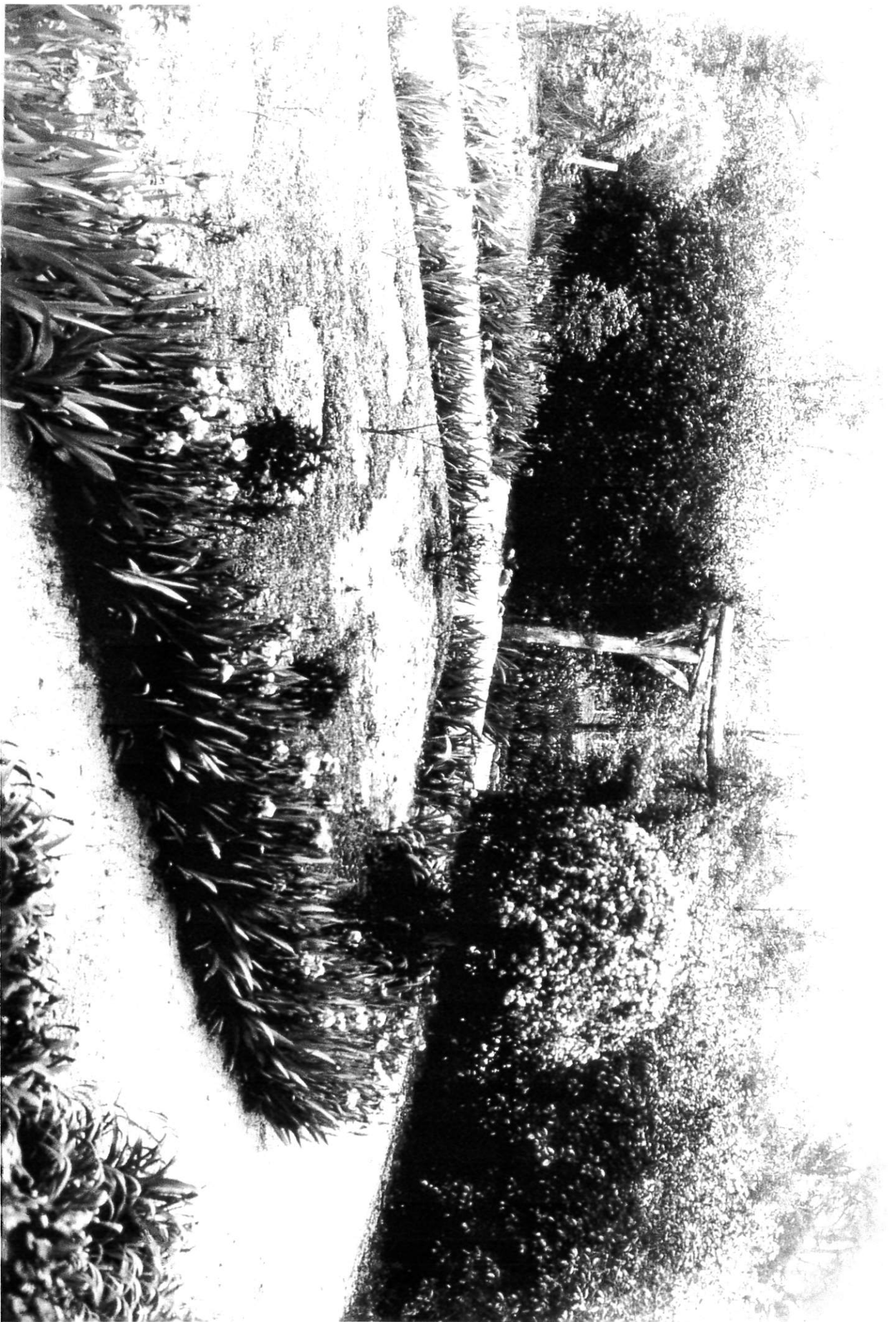
EAST NEW COVER HOUSE
1920-22



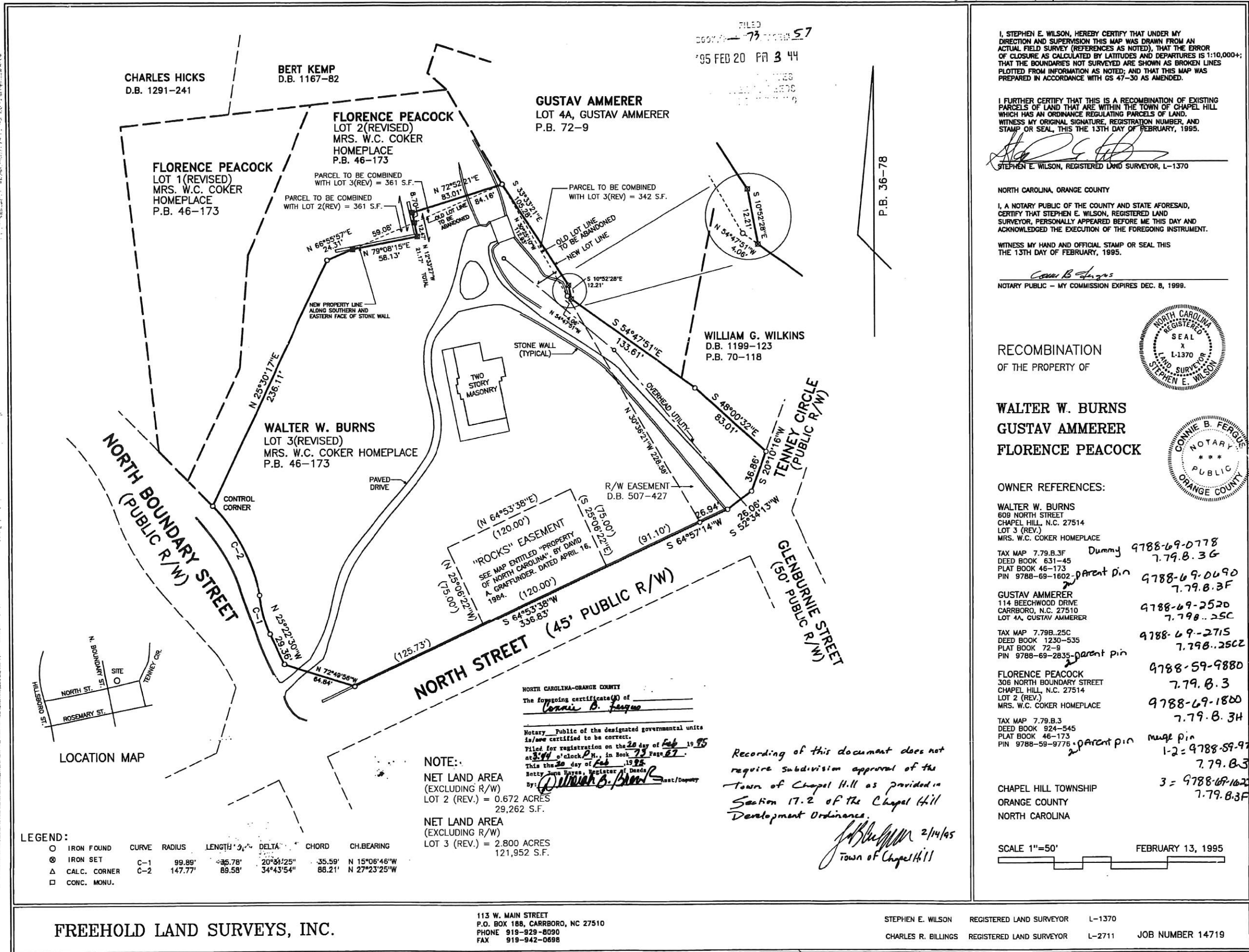


LOWER SLINKEN GARDEN
N 1822









I, STEPHEN E. WILSON, HEREBY CERTIFY THAT UNDER MY DIRECTION AND SUPERVISION THIS MAP WAS DRAWN FROM AN ACTUAL FIELD SURVEY (REFERENCES AS NOTED), THAT THE ERROR OF CLOSURE AS CALCULATED BY LATITUDES AND DEPARTURES IS 1:10,000+; THAT THE BOUNDARIES NOT SURVEYED ARE SHOWN AS BROKEN LINES PLOTTED FROM INFORMATION AS NOTED; AND THAT THIS MAP WAS PREPARED IN ACCORDANCE WITH GS 47-30 AS AMENDED.

I FURTHER CERTIFY THAT THIS IS A RECOMBINATION OF EXISTING PARCELS OF LAND THAT ARE WITHIN THE TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL WHICH HAS AN ORDINANCE REGULATING PARCELS OF LAND. WITNESS MY ORIGINAL SIGNATURE, REGISTRATION NUMBER, AND STAMP OR SEAL, THIS THE 13TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 1995.

Stephen E. Wilson
STEPHEN E. WILSON, REGISTERED LAND SURVEYOR, L-1370

NORTH CAROLINA, ORANGE COUNTY

I, A NOTARY PUBLIC OF THE COUNTY AND STATE AFORESAID, CERTIFY THAT STEPHEN E. WILSON, REGISTERED LAND SURVEYOR, PERSONALLY APPEARED BEFORE ME THIS DAY AND ACKNOWLEDGED THE EXECUTION OF THE FOREGOING INSTRUMENT.

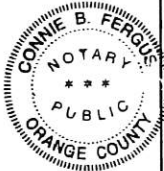
WITNESS MY HAND AND OFFICIAL STAMP OR SEAL THIS THE 13TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 1995.

Connie B. Ferguson
NOTARY PUBLIC - MY COMMISSION EXPIRES DEC. 8, 1998.



RECOMBINATION
OF THE PROPERTY OF

WALTER W. BURNS
GUSTAV AMMERER
FLORENCE PEACOCK



OWNER REFERENCES:

WALTER W. BURNS
609 NORTH STREET
CHAPEL HILL, N.C. 27514
LOT 3 (REV.)
MRS. W.C. COKER HOMEPLACE

TAX MAP 7.79.B.3F
DEED BOOK 631-45
PLAT BOOK 46-173
PIN 9788-69-1602-Parent Pin

GUSTAV AMMERER
114 BEECHWOOD DRIVE
CARRBORO, N.C. 27510
LOT 4A, GUSTAV AMMERER

TAX MAP 7.79B.25C
DEED BOOK 1230-535
PLAT BOOK 72-9
PIN 9788-69-2835-Parent Pin

FLORENCE PEACOCK
306 NORTH BOUNDARY STREET
CHAPEL HILL, N.C. 27514
LOT 2 (REV.)
MRS. W.C. COKER HOMEPLACE

TAX MAP 7.79.B.3
DEED BOOK 924-545
PLAT BOOK 46-173
PIN 9788-58-9776-Parent Pin

CHapel Hill Township
ORANGE COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA

1-2 = 9788-69-0778
7.79.B.3G
9788-69-0490
7.79.B.3F
9788-69-2520
7.79B.25C
9788-69-2715
7.79B.25C2
9788-59-9880
7.79.B.3
9788-69-1800
7.79.B.3H
1-2 = 9788-59-9778
7.79.B.3
3 = 9788-69-1602
7.79.B.3F

SCALE 1"=50' FEBRUARY 13, 1995