

In the heart of
East Grand Rapids, five
purposefully planned sites await
new homes inspired by a family's legacy.
Their story begins here.

Wilcox Gardens
once upon a time

BY LISA M. JENSEN



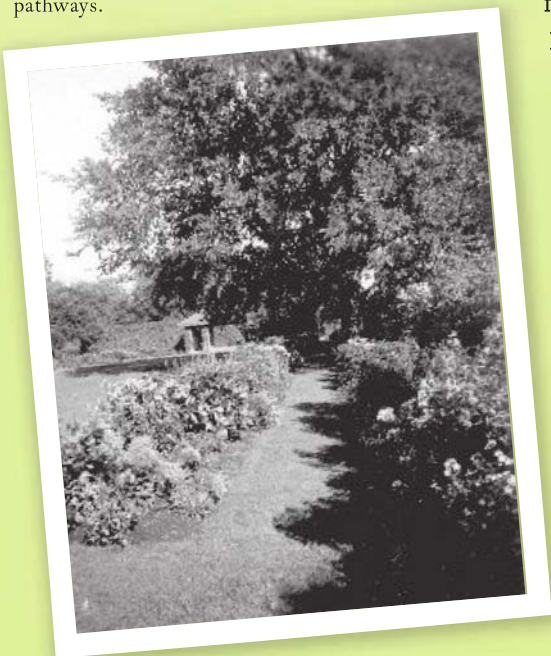
*Introducing Part One of Wilcox Gardens,
a Grand Rapids Magazine Design Home presentation.*

Hollyhocks and Forget-Me-Nots,

hostas and daylilies: Perennials planted with forethought and care take root in a garden and return year after year – sometimes over decades – to bring it new color, and life. To help a perennial thrive, gardeners often divide its root system. Then the original plant can be replanted, and shared.



Frederick and Caroline Wilcox's son Raymond, who became a landscape architect, designed the family estate's fragrant formal gardens and pathways.



And the garden – revitalized by new blooms – grows.

Though a small city, East Grand Rapids is a progressive, dynamic community. Homes here in myriad architectural styles are well-kept; neighborhood sidewalks bustle with joggers and dog-walkers. And while young professionals and empty-nesters are among them, families drawn to East GR for its acclaimed school system particularly

revel in its homespun charms, from festive parades and gas-light shops to ice-cream stops and strolls around the city's crown jewel: Reeds Lake.

Once upon a time, of course, there was only the lake. But water doesn't stay secret for long.

By the 1870s, Reeds Lake had become a popular spot for picnics, boating and swimming. City dwellers from Grand Rapids flocked to its serene and scenic shores, traveling by foot, stagecoach or horse and buggy. By 1879, a lakeside pavilion even emerged on the west shore, where beach-

goers sat back to enjoy a play or orchestra performance.

But there was no bustling neighborhood. Beyond the beaches, there was only forest and farmland. And though trends of the day indicated the burgeoning City of Grand Rapids would branch westward, a young attorney from Adrian who began finding his fortune in real estate and loans predicted his best investment was eastward.

So in 1888 – while Grand Rapids City Hall was being completed – Frederick Wilcox purchased a tranquil tract of 30-plus acres near Reeds Lake from dairy farmer John Apsey.

And, together with his beautiful new bride, Caroline, Frederick built a home.

Setting Roots

Inspired by European architecture, the Wilcox manor at 1940 Lake Drive was crafted. Palladium windows, balustrade balconies and a grand interior with maids' rooms and a ballroom attested to the young Wilcox couple's social prominence; they were also generous philanthropists, well-liked for their dedication to youth education and green space preservation.

But Frederick and Caroline's greatest joy came from family.



Wilcox family members often gathered in their shared community house (at left) and its courtyard, while living in European-inspired homes (center). Below, Sanford Wilcox with daughters Barbara and Rosemary pose in the family's formal gardens.

While electric lights and telephones began appearing in homes, the couple became the enamored parents of five children – Raymond, Louise, Sanford, Robert and Marian.

As the children grew, so, too, did the family's community: The Village of East Grand Rapids, incorporated in 1891, appointed Frederick president from 1892-93. Eventually, to be closer to his office downtown (now McKay Tower), Frederick commissioned a distinctive Dutch Revival home at 15 College, where the family moved. Their Lake Drive estate became a summer retreat.

It was here, in 1912, that Frederick's heart failed at age 55. Left to manage his business affairs and raise their family alone, Caroline gifted the Wilcoxes' downtown home to the YWCA, and returned to reside with her children at their quiet Lake Drive manor.

It was also here that a yearning to keep them close became the seed for something quite special.

Planting A Garden

With much forethought, Caroline divided up the family's East Grand Rapids property, reserving for each adult child a five-acre





The Wilcox family hosted countless parties and gatherings in their courtyard throughout the Roaring '20s and beyond.



an indoor pool, squash court, greenhouse, six carriage stalls and an apartment in which the family's laundress lived.

Concrete stone pathways ran from the Wilcox homes to this shared recreation center and its courtyard. Here, countless parties and gatherings were hosted during the Roaring '20s and beyond. Son Raymond, who became a landscape architect, designed equally shared green space and fragrant formal gardens through which Caroline's grandchildren also soon ran.

A beloved civic worker, philanthropist, mother and grandmother, Caroline Hill Wilcox died in 1947 at age 81, in her home. Eventually, over time, the other Wilcox family members also passed away or moved on; the last to leave in 1990 was Fred Perkins, son of Frederick and Caroline's youngest daughter, Marian.

But the roots of their legacy remain. And with forethought that paralleled Caroline's own, the unique land left behind has been, again, nurtured into something special.

To learn more about distinctive properties now available at Wilcox Gardens, visit grmag.com/wilcox.

parcel and funds to build a home of their own. While architects were dispatched to Europe to seek out Dutch, Spanish and Italian designs, Caroline also commissioned the building of a community house to be shared by everyone.

Between 1924 and 1928, four new homes – one on Lake Drive, and three on San Lu Rae, a new street named for three of the Wilcox siblings – were built along with the family's home "base." This unique structure – reinvented in 2010 as the Grand Rapids Symphony Showhouse – then housed

LOCATED WITHIN immediate proximity to schools, shopping and recreation, Wilcox Gardens will offer the rare opportunity to build within the land-locked community of East Grand Rapids. This site-condominium development will be a combination of existing and new single-family homes. Visbeen Associates, Architects, in conjunction with Jeffery Roberts Homes, has developed several design concepts for these exceptional historic home sites. Don't miss this opportunity to build in one of America's most livable communities. To inquire about available lots in Wilcox Gardens please contact Katie Karczewski at (616) 575-0119.



JEFFERY ROBERTS HOMES INC



Look for Part Two of Wilcox Gardens in the July issue of Grand Rapids Magazine.