

# Maplelawn

A historic garden  
in Canada's Capital

*Studied, preserved and  
rejuvenated by volunteers*



529 Richmond Road, Ottawa

PHOTO: P.A. RICHER



PHOTO: CITY OF OTTAWA ARCHIVES

## *A historic garden in the Capital*

In the 19th century, there were many fine houses in Ontario, but few of them were graced with walled gardens, and even fewer still have survived. The walled garden at Maplelawn is not only a rare example, it is also exceptionally well preserved.

In 1989, Maplelawn was designated a national historic site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada because of "...the quality of the house, but more particularly because its gardens are the best preserved of the few known surviving examples of early 19th century walled gardens in Canada...." As an ensemble, the house and remaining walled garden provide a clear record of the way European architectural and landscape ideals were transplanted to Canada.

Located on Richmond Road (which opened in 1818) in Ottawa, Maplelawn was established in 1831 by William Thomson, a Scottish immigrant. Maplelawn was successively owned by three families: the Thomsons, the Coles and the Rochesters (related by marriage to the Coles). All were leading families in the community who participated in its political, agricultural and business life. The three families also had a special interest in the garden, and expended considerable effort to keep it well cultivated and in luxuriant flower.

## *A Spectacular Garden*

Almost from the beginning, and well into the 1980s, Maplelawn Garden was the glory of the neighbourhood. Buses passing by on Richmond Road slowed down to allow passengers to look over the wall at the profusion of flowers, shrubs, vines and trees.

The garden has a four-square plan of flower beds, with an oval bed at the centre. Late 19th century photographs show that there were once fruit trees, shrubs and leafy arbours in the garden, with tender fruits and vegetables placed at the centre of the beds, and peonies, oriental poppies and other ornamentals planted around the edges.



PHOTO: P.A. RICHER

In 1936, the Rochesters hired R. Warren Oliver, a horticulturist at the Central Experimental Farm, to renew the garden. The fruit and vegetable gardens were turned to lawn, but the general plan of the garden, with its ornamental borders, was retained.

The walled garden is a rectangular space of about one acre (4,047 m<sup>2</sup>), enclosed on three sides by rough-dressed limestone walls. Within the garden, the classical symmetry of layout, as well as the spacing, colour orchestration and varieties of plants, provide beauty, fragrance, repose and seclusion.

## *Preserving the Capital's Heritage*

In the early 1950s, the Federal District Commission (which became the National Capital Commission in 1959) acquired Maplelawn in order to preserve this important national historic property. Frances Rochester continued to reside at the estate until 1989.

The garden was receiving only basic maintenance until 1993, when a volunteer group known as **The Friends of the Maplelawn Garden** was formed. The volunteers entered into an agreement with the National Capital Commission (NCC) to study, preserve and rejuvenate the walled garden, making use of the extensive palette of perennials, such as the old peonies for which the garden was once famous, still thriving within its walls.

One of the few historical documents available to help with the rehabilitation of the garden is the detailed plan prepared by R. Warren Oliver in 1936. The three beds adjacent to the north, east and south walls are planted to conform with Oliver's suggested layout and planting list. Design guidelines provided by the NCC are applied to the remaining beds based on Oliver's plan, oral histories and archaeological reports.



PHOTO: N.E.M. SMITH



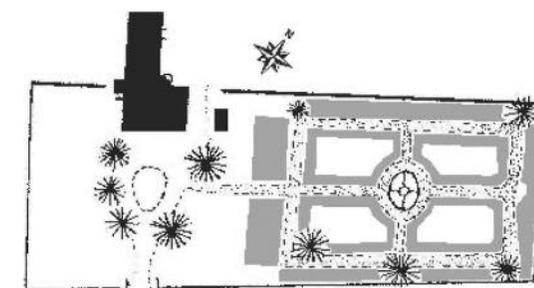
PHOTO: N.E.M. SMITH

*Maplelawn is located at  
529 Richmond Road (at Broadview) in Ottawa  
(on-street parking nearby).*

[www.maplelawn.ca](http://www.maplelawn.ca)

**Interested in volunteering?**  
Contact the NCC Volunteer Centre  
613-239-5373  
[www.canadascapital.gc.ca/volunteers](http://www.canadascapital.gc.ca/volunteers)

*Access to the site is free. Contributions to assist  
The Friends of the Maplelawn Garden are welcome.*



Richmond

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