



A Hidden Jewel

Off the beaten path in Falmouth, Spohr Gardens delights visitors year-round.

THE PLANTINGS THAT FLOURISH IN SPOHR GARDENS' six meandering acres proclaim each season's arrival with unrestrained brilliance. In the spring, thousands of daffodil bulbs blossom in lustrous shades of yellow, white, and gold. More than 34 varieties open their trumpets and spread their petals on the banks of Oyster Pond, like tiny arms giving praise to the sun. Underneath blankets of summer sunshine, hosta, azalea, rhododendron, and daylilies brandish glorious hues. Fall brings forth a burst of bright asters, and vibrant holly berries brighten the muted white of Cape Cod's winter landscape.

BY DONNA V. SCAGLIONE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAN CUTRONA



"All things patiently wait their turn," Charles D. Spohr told the *Falmouth Enterprise* in 1989. "That's a real garden!"

Found off the beaten path on a dead-end road in Falmouth's Quissett section, Spohr Gardens is probably less well-known than Nobska Light, Coonamessett Pond, or any of the other usual Falmouth tourist destinations. But that's precisely why Spohr Gardens, which Charles created with his wife, Margaret K. Spohr, nearly 60 years ago, is such a joy to explore: the gardens offer a refreshing dose of solitude and serenity all year-round.

The Spohrs led full lives before moving to Cape Cod in the early 1950s. A New Jersey native, Spohr was an engineer who worked on the Panama Canal. Also a World War II veteran, he was a company commander in the Battle of Normandy, where he was charged with removing German tanks. He injured his left elbow and several ribs when a 20-millimeter shell hit him. According to the *Times Past*, a newsletter published in 1997 by the Falmouth Historical Society, he was decorated with a Purple Heart and Silver and Bronze stars, retiring in 1947 as a captain. Margaret Spohr, a Detroit, Michigan, native, had been a lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps during World War II. The pair met when Charles was a patient at the Mayo Clinic, where Margaret

was a nurse, according to Mike Kadis, caretaker of the gardens since 1980. Charles knew the Cape, having vacationed around Centerville's Craigville Beach as a boy.

The Spohrs purchased a home on Fells Road in Falmouth in 1951. Over the years, the couple purchased adjacent pieces of land, including an acre of property across the road. As their property expanded, Margaret began mapping out a garden. She put the details of each section to paper; the layout hasn't changed since. "She is as responsible for this garden as I am," Charles told the *Enterprise*. "We'd spend the winter studying all the plant catalogs together and then order as much as we could."

Charles was not very good at standing still, Kadis says. "Whatever he did, he wanted to make sure he did it right. He was always up early, and he was always doing something." The former engineer designed the irrigation system of the property, and gave it a nautical accent with a collection of anchors. Massive anchors, including one said to be from the *HMS Bounty*, lay along the pond's banks, gleaming in the sun. Worn cobblestones from the streets of New Bedford also line the garden's paths, and smooth, gray millstones, another item Charles collected, decorate the property. According to the *Enterprise*, Charles gathered his collection by

researching mills in the town records, and he even designed a hoist for moving the stones. Large bells, including one from a church in Dedham, can be found on the grounds, as well as small headstones marking the graves of the Spohrs' beloved dogs.

Charles died in 1997, and Margaret died in 2001 after a long illness. The couple left behind the Spohr Gardens Charitable Trust, which stipulates the property be maintained as a public garden open daily, dawn to dusk, with free admission. Today, Spohr Gardens is a magnet and a haven for photographers, artists, nature lovers, and bird watchers. It is not unusual to see *plein air* painters working along the paths in good weather, or lovers saying "I do" on the dock in Oyster Pond.

"In the turmoil of our world today, it's nice to have a place that's peaceful," says Hila Lyman, a master gardener

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and chairwoman of the board of trustees of the Charitable Trust of Spohr Gardens. The Friends organization was started in 2004 as a way to raise additional money for garden maintenance. While the trust was supposed to be enough for that purpose, another stipulation paid for round-the-clock care of an ailing Margaret, who lived four years longer than Charles. The Friends raise money as well as awareness of Spohr Gardens by holding annual Daffodil Days and a plant sale, scheduled this year for April 25 and May 2 as well as running a direct mail campaign each fall. Income is also derived from the rental of the Spohr's home.

Lyman says there is a fine line between turning the property into formal gardens, which the Friends don't want to do, and keeping the woodland gardens accessible to all. "We want to make sure the gardens are cared for and beautiful, but still have that natural woodland feel," she says. Or as Charles Spohr would have said, gardens often grow best when left to flourish as nature intended. 🌱

For more on Spohr Gardens, call 508-548-0623, or visit www.spohrgardens.org.

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