

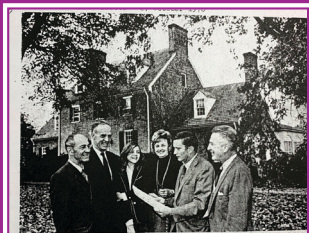
Green Spring Gardens Marks a Milestone Anniversary



It's been 50 years since Michael and Belinda Straight said farewell to historic Green Spring and gave the home, its outbuildings and 18 acres to Fairfax County for preservation as a natural and historical resource for the community. Their generous gift marked the end of nearly 200 years of private ownership and the beginning of its transformation into the present-day Green Spring Gardens, which includes the historic house, a horticulture center and 22 themed demonstration gardens.



"The land has become in Michael's words, 'a thriving center for all who love gardening and revere our past,'" said Green Spring Historian Debbie Waugh.



Michael W. Straight, second from left; Dr. Belinda Straight, third from left; owners of historic Green Spring Farm in Fairfax County; and daughter, center, present deed of the property to County Board Chairman Willis Houtzager, second from right, and County Park Authority Chairman Norton Edg, right. State Sen. Oran L. Nixon, who negotiated arrangements for the gift, with the presentation, left.

The park's story is as rich and colorful as the gardens for which it is known. The historic house was constructed by patriot John Moss in 1784, the year after the Revolutionary War ended and the year before the gentleman farmer became a Fairfax County Court Justice. It remained in his family for nearly 60 years. Another longtime owner, Fountain Beattie, ran a dairy farm, orchard and legal still here from 1878 to 1911, while he and his wife, Annie, raised their 11 children. By the time Minnie Whitesell bought the property in 1931, it was in shambles.

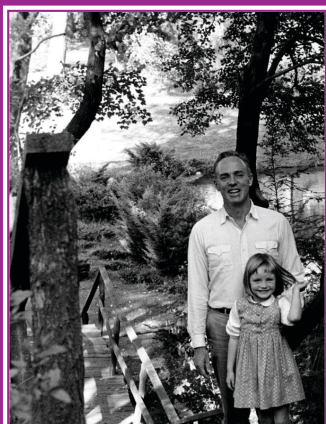
"She was a widow in her 60s, and she was advised to tear it down," Waugh said. "She decided to restore the house instead, and she lived here with two of her children for more than a decade. She was the first owner to install plumbing."



Green Spring's last private owners, Michael and Belinda Straight, were young newlyweds in 1942 when they bought the 32-acre estate for \$32,500. He was descended from the prominent Whitney family, and she was the daughter of an English businessman. The nature lovers wanted to own a home in the Washington, D.C. countryside, and they were sold on Green Spring's rustic charm almost from the moment they saw it.

"We looked at it and that same night we decided absolutely," Belinda recalled in a 2002 interview with a Green Spring historian. "It was so lovely...something to fall in love with, so we did."

Within months of moving in, the well-connected power couple commissioned two American design masters to transform the property where they would raise their five children and entertain many prominent guests in their 24 years here. They hired Mount Vernon's acclaimed restoration architect, Walter Macomber, to enlarge and renovate the house. At the same time, trailblazing landscape designer Beatrix Farrand created both formal and informal garden spaces, including a simple garden "room" behind the house – a spacious lawn enclosed by a crescent of boxwood. Their enduring designs ultimately led to Green Spring Gardens' present-day status on both the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places.



In 1966, Michael, an editor, author and deputy chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and Belinda, a psychiatrist and civil rights activist, decided it was time to move. They bought another historic home in Georgetown from Jacqueline Kennedy, a family friend, and deeded Green Spring to the Park Authority in 1970.

Today, the Straights' legacy attracts hundreds of thousands of park lovers who visit Green Spring Gardens each year. It has become a gold mine of information and inspiration for the home gardener over the past 50 years, and its bucolic setting still offers newcomers "something to fall in love with," just as it did the Straights so many years ago.

The Green Spring historic house offers year-round lectures and garden tours, often accompanied by a traditional afternoon English tea. Programs are listed in the gardening and history sections.

