

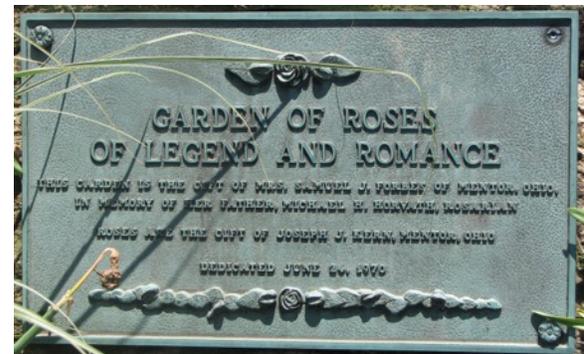
Rose Legends and Romance

come alive in Wooster, OH
by David McKibben, PRS Consulting Rosarian and Webmaster

Roses have always induced images of romance and adventure in both poets and ordinary people and many old garden varieties are steeped in history and legend: roses like *York and Lancaster* or *Souvenir de la Malmaison*. The former the symbol of the Tudor Kings of England who came to rule after the War of the Roses and the latter being named for the estate of the Napoleon's wife, the Empress Josephine, instrumental in introducing many of the world's roses to Europe.

Local rose lovers need not travel far to discover what a garden devoted to preserving rose history and story would resemble with only a short ride west from Allegheny County to Wooster, OH answering that question. What you will find when you get there is a 2.7 acre collection of about 1500 rose bushes representing over 500 varieties. This repository of rose history is part of the larger Secret Arboretum at the Ohio State University Wooster Campus and appropriately named the Garden of Roses of Legend and Romance.

The rose garden was the gift of Mrs. Samuel Forbes in memory of her father, Micael H. Horvath, and established in 1970. The original garden design of William Strong and Thomas Hill, landscape architects from Cleveland, has been maintained with clearly marked sections featuring hybrid perpetuals, tea roses, old polyanthas, Kordesiiis, hybrid Foetidias, hybrid Spinosissimas, hybrid Moyesiis, gallicas, semi-climbing hybrid musks, centiflorias, albas, eglanterias, rugosa shrubs, newer shrub roses, mosses, damascenas, modern climbing roses, and a few *David Austin English* roses. Just reading the list of rose classifications found in this garden conjures the vision of a museum full of rose history that you cannot only see and touch, but also smell. The fragrance of these roses is what every person expects when stooping to sniff a rose bloom but is missing in most of our modern roses.



David Austin in his book *"Old Roses"* attributes the admiration humans have for roses to a different innate character of the rose making them more unique than other garden plants; there is a certain charm and humanity not found in say a geranium or petunia. Perhaps it is the informality of the old garden rose bloom and the rampant, almost wild—but not quite—growth habit characteristics, traits that may also be used to describe humans. All throughout history the rose above all plants has been the symbol of human emotion especially love and beauty. Over the centuries the hand of man has molded the rose through breeding to the lofty and delicate condition of many roses today but viewing these roses of the past brings the history of rose development boldly to life. It is this long accumulated rose history on display that produces a visual array

illustrating the foundation of the rose, along with the stories of man's history associated with many specimens all adding to the pleasure of the tour.

Timing a visit to the garden is critical for your enjoyment of what the garden has to offer. Too early or too late in spring and there is little in bloom: most old garden roses bloom once a season although many do repeat but not to the spectacular level of the spring flush. The roses are in their prime usually during the first two weeks of June and during that period Ohio State sponsors a Rose Day when there are experts to offer advice and tours of the garden. On the day we were there only about a quarter of the bushes were in bloom although it was the official Rose Day Open House, this most likely related to our recent harsh winter and late spring. Many of the bushes had suffered severe dieback although only a very few seemed beyond recovery; but still there were many roses in bloom one usually only sees in books. Roses such as La France (the first hybrid tea), Old Red Moss, Cesonia (a *damascena*), Madam Hardy (*centifolia*, *damask*) with the classic green eye; Sarah van Fleet (*hybrid rugosa* and parent of the popular New Dawn), Pink van Grootendorst (*hybrid rugosa*), the Bishop (*gallica*); and Queen of the Musks. These names may be the most striking but we saw hundreds more, some in bloom but most only in bud.



Madam Hardy with the green eye

The sense of history is almost palpable in this garden. Names like Empress Josephine, Stanwell Perpetual and Souvenir of Malmaison, Harrison's Yellow, all mentioned in rose history and seen rarely in community and private rose garden; but while browsing the beds you may see a huge specimen such as *Father Hugo's Rose* or a small *La France* jumping up to give the real "Oh My" effect to your visit. These roses are almost never grown in modern gardens.



The Bishop (*centifolia*) old garden rose

Old roses have a unique sense of charm, perhaps the same aura as a fine antique. There is permanence to these specimens that the rose grower will not experience when growing or admiring modern roses. Modern shrubs may last for decades or longer in a well tended garden but hybrid teas rarely survive more than ten years without some diminution of their performance as opposed to old garden roses that seem to thrive in old age; they become more majestic and impressive as the bush acquires what in the antique world would be called a patina—a character that sets the plant apart from the garden newcomers. This is the charm of the Wooster garden. There is a feeling of being in the presence of the ancestors of the rose, a retrospect into the development of the Queen of the garden.

