

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Robert Allerton Park



MONTICELLO, ILLINOIS



On October 14, 1946, Robert Allerton gave to the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois part of his homestead, *The Farms*, near Monticello in Piatt County, Illinois, to be used by the University as an educational and research center, as a forest and a wild-life and plant-life reserve, as an example of landscape architecture, and as a public park. The portion known as the *Woodland Property*, approximately 1,500 acres in extent, has been named *Robert Allerton Park*.

At the same time, Mr. Allerton designated almost 250 acres just north of the Park area for the Illinois 4-H Memorial Camp. This is being developed and maintained by the University for 4-H Club and related educational programs.

A third area, consisting of 3,775 acres of land in eight different farms lying north of the Sangamon River, was provided with the stipulation that its income be used to maintain and develop the Park.

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In the heart of the rolling black-soiled woodlands of the Sangamon Valley, Robert Allerton fashioned one of the most beautiful estates in the Middle West. Here, through the ministry of architecture, sculpture, and landscape design, he illustrated how art and nature may be blended for the delight and edification of man. Here he created a series of gardens, formal and informal, each a splendid example of garden craft. Embellished with statuary and ornaments acquired in his travels abroad, these gardens form exciting episodes in a walk about the place and delights for garden designers and students of landscape art.

Mr. Allerton is a staunch friend of the native Illinois landscape. His gardens, whether based upon foreign inspiration or not, never appear inappropriate. Native floral materials are used, and such Illinois trees as elm and hackberry form perfect backgrounds for the vigorous statuary of Rodin and Bourdelle. Rightfully the fringe of the estate along the rambling Sangamon is left in primeval condition.

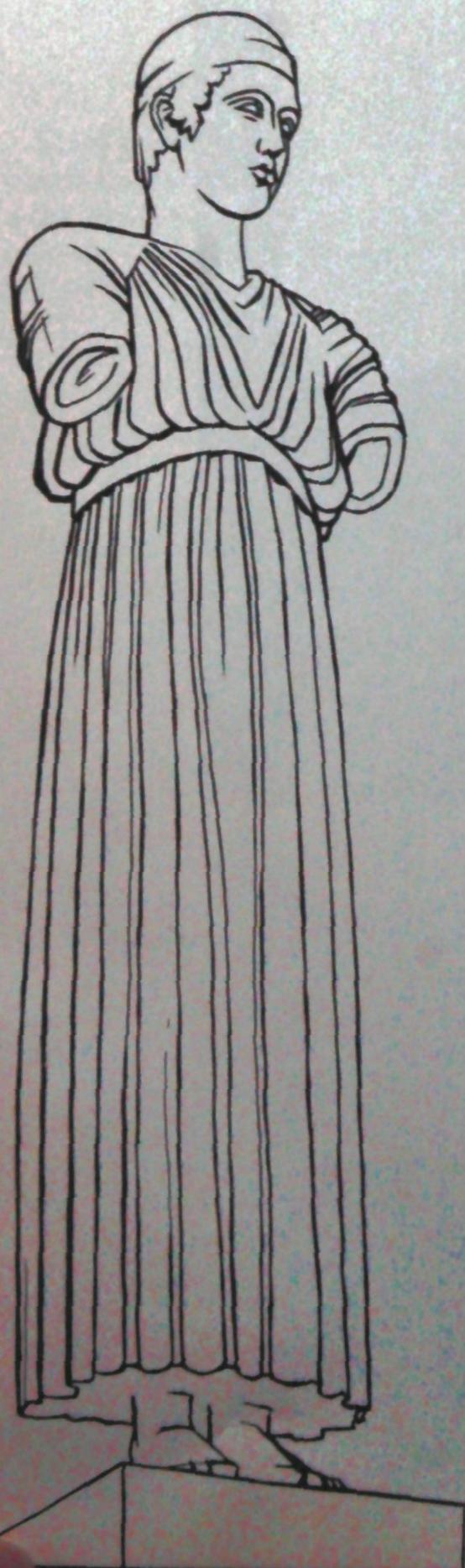


Marking the entrance from the Monticello road are brick pillars surmounted by 17th century Italian stone figures of Diana, goddess of the hunt, and her companion, an epebe.

The avenue of impressive Norway spruces on the public road continues north to the Sangamon River bridge (right) constructed in 1915. One of the transmitters of the University's radio station is located a short distance to the east of this road.

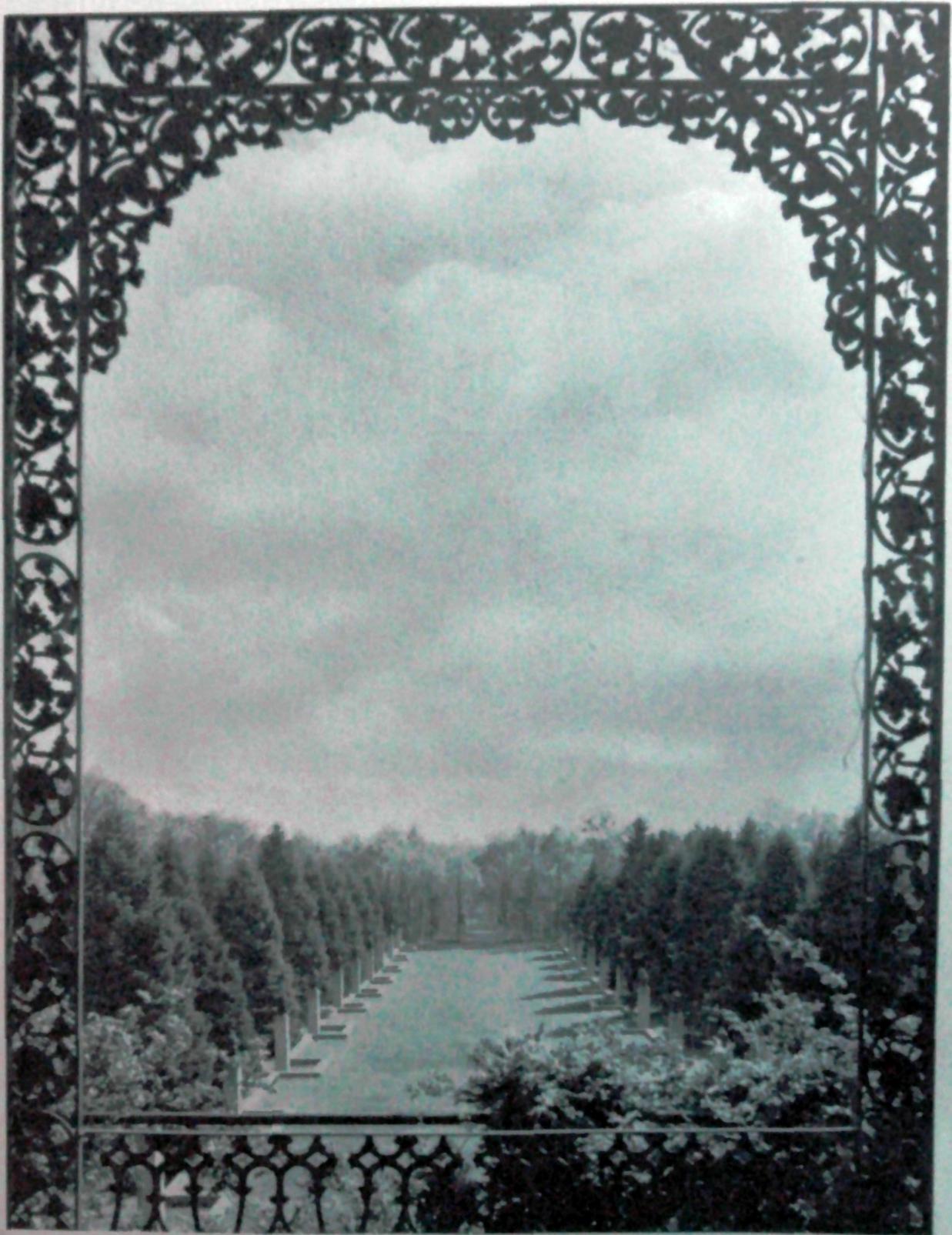
An entrance leading to the west affords access to many miles of trails and woodland roads included in the south portion of the Park and to the *Lost Garden*.





The north portion of the Park is entered through the gateway seen above, reached either by the road from Monticello or from highway 47. Adorning each of the gate pillars are Bedford limestone copies of the well-known and much admired statue of the "Charioteer of Delphi."

This work, done in bronze by an unknown sculptor, dates back to approximately 470 B.C., and probably commemorates the skill and ability of a king of Cyrene, in ancient Greece. The original, now in the museum at Delphi, is a fragment of a group in which the central figure is standing erect and relaxed in a chariot, the reins in his outstretched arms, about to receive the laurel wreath as a reward for a triumphant victory.



The *Garden of the Fu Dogs* is one of the choicest creations to be found anywhere in the Park both because of the interest created by the eleven pairs of brilliantly colored blue Chinese dogs and because of the skill that has been used in its construction.

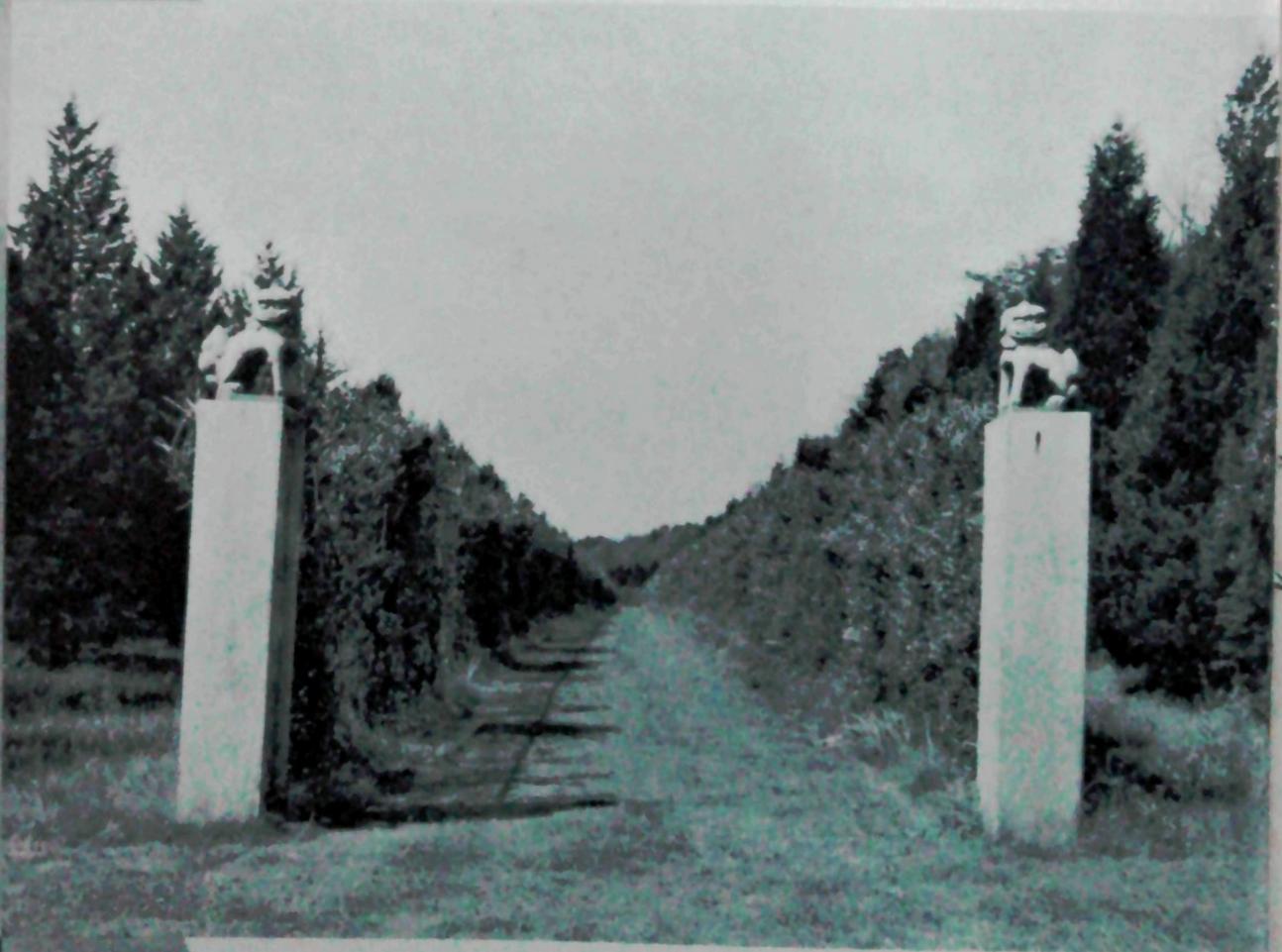
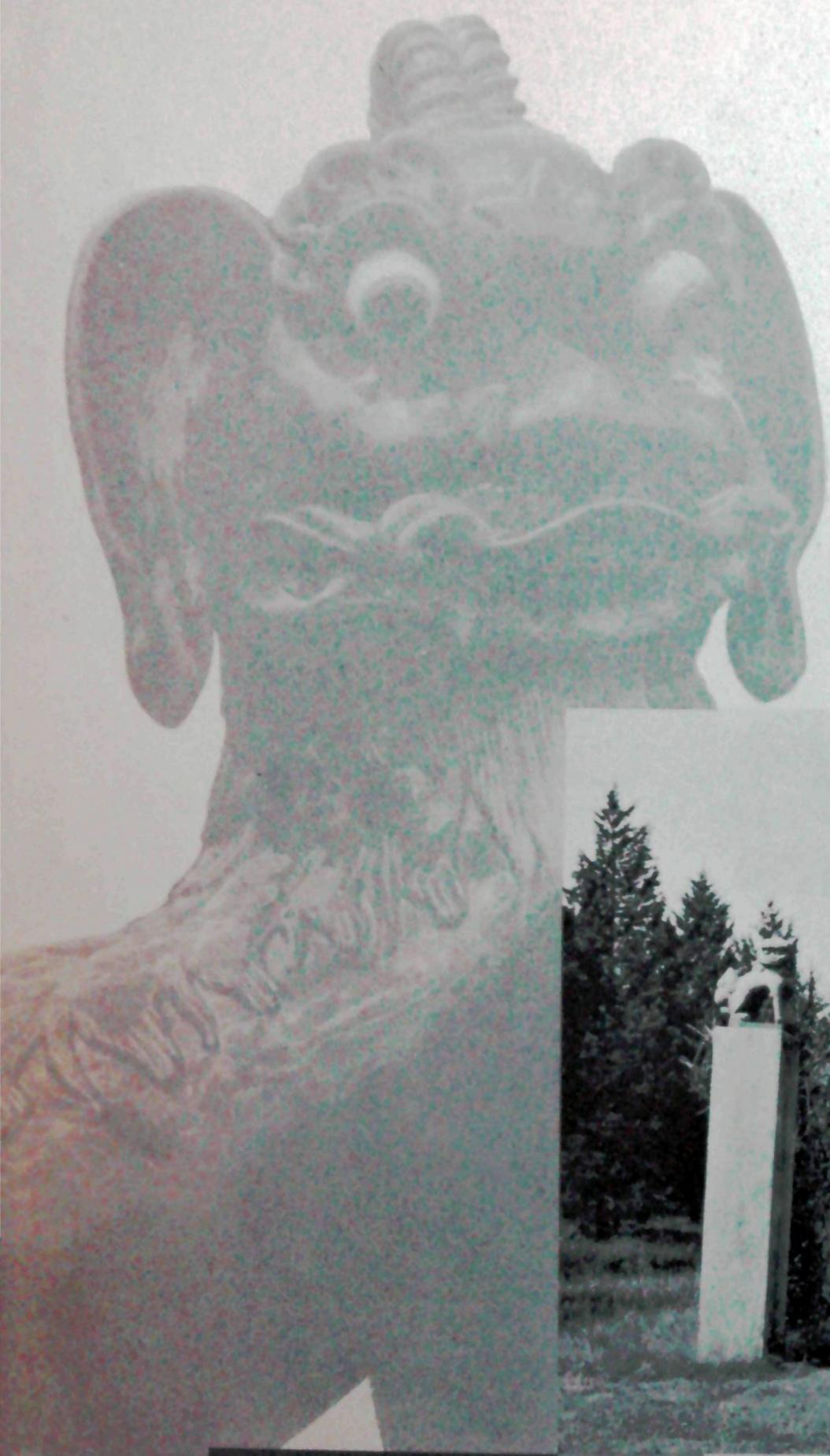
The *House of the Gold Buddhas* contains especially beautiful ornamental cast iron, brought here from New Orleans. Dating back to the early 19th century, it was very likely made in France and imported by the early settlers in Louisiana.

A broad footpath at the south end of the garden passes the hidden *Goldfish Pond* and leads easily to the Sangamon and the river path going west past *Allerton House* as far as the "Sun Singer."



In the garden house are located two gold Siamese Buddhas brought from Bangkok (left and right below) and a stone statue from Cambodia (Indo-China) of the Brahmin god Hari-Hara (center) who combines in one person the characteristics of Vishnu, the preserver of life, and Shiva, the life-destroying force.





The approach to the *Garden of the Fu Dogs* from the west is through an avenue of wisteria and other flowering vines which blossom almost continuously from May until late summer. The entrance to this avenue from the garden is guarded by a pair of stone Fu Dogs from Korea.

The Fu Dog is actually a highly stylized and formal representation of a lion, originally symbolizing the Lord Buddha's position as a king. These are commonly used on the domestic altars in Chinese homes of the Buddhist faith. In earlier days they were made of bronze, but about the time of the American Revolution porcelain became the favorite material.

Although the Dogs at first seem to be much alike, a closer inspection reveals many small but important differences. This is in part because the Chinese do not like to make identical pieces. They value variety as highly as Westerners value identity.

The view from the upper level of the summer house amply repays those who climb the hidden iron steps which circle to the tower.



The adroit landscaping close to *Allerton House* is an example of the skillful blending of the formal and informal which characterizes the development of the whole Park area. In 1909, the lake in front of the house was created by damming a small, natural waterway and dredging its channel to a depth of thirty feet with tapering sides. Fed by two never-failing springs, it serves as a reflecting pool for the house and is circled by paths which lead toward the woodland areas or furnish entrances into the formal gardens extending to the west.

The plan is easy-going and pleasantly full of surprises; rather a group of scenes with ingenious connections than a single spectacle. There is no extravaganza, no world's fair with a fountain on axis. What is found here one must look for; and get out of the car to find.





In 1896 Robert Allerton took up residence on the farm in Piatt County which his father had given him at birth. He lived at first in a three-room wooden house across the lake from the building which became his home and is now known as *Allerton House*.

Two years later he decided to build a permanent home, but before doing so he went to Europe with John Borie, eastern architect, and spent the winter studying houses and landscape architecture. They returned in the spring with plans for *Allerton House* and with some of the basic furnishings already purchased.

Work was started on June 13, 1899, and the house was occupied, although not completely finished, in 1900. In the next two years, the *Brick Garden* was developed and the *Gate House*, the greenhouses, and the stables were constructed. The roadside Osage orange hedge also was planted then.





The courtyard entrance to *Allerton House* is seen at the left. Typical of many English country houses, the entrance is placed on the side rather than at the front, to afford greater privacy and to preserve unbroken the views reserved for esthetic enjoyment. Also by this simple method callers may come and go without disturbing those using the main portion of the house. A direct entrance to the dining room is located on the left side of this court.

The view above, a favorite scene, shows *Allerton House* reflected in the lake. The house faces southwest, giving it the advantage of the afternoon sun without the disadvantage of direct late afternoon sunlight streaming in the windows. Below is the terrace outside the library and the southeastern façade.

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS





Pictured below is the *Gate House* and seen at the right is the *House in the Woods*; both are used by the University as residences for those attending conferences and other meetings at the Allerton extension center.

The *Gate House*, designed by John Borie and built in 1902 as a residence for the head gardener, stands at what was originally the entrance to the private grounds from the public road. Later this road was discontinued as a public thoroughfare, after an exchange of land.

The *House in the Woods*, built in 1915, was constructed of hollow tile and gray stucco to demonstrate that houses could be built in this part of the country using materials other than wood, at no greater expense. Framed in a clump of evergreens across from the lake which is the center of the 4-H Memorial Camp, it is one of the most attractive sites in the Park.

Especially entertaining are the old English lead garden figures placed on each side of the gravel entrance path.





The three residences in *Robert Allerton Park* are used almost constantly by the University of Illinois for conferences, seminars, short courses, and other meetings. Several thousand persons use the houses each year for these purposes and the various gatherings held in them number almost two hundred.

To make such use possible, the houses have been remodeled to some extent and refurnished almost completely. As now equipped, they provide overnight lodging for sixty persons, dining space for 150, and a number of large and small conference rooms.

Under some circumstances these facilities are available for use by state-wide, regional, or national groups for conferences of an educational nature at times when they are not required for University purposes. Inquiries as to dates available should be addressed to the Director of Robert Allerton Park, Monticello, Illinois.

To make possible the privacy needed by groups assembled for conferences, the houses are not ordinarily open to visitors to the Park.





Gorgeous flowers, both wild and cultivated, are found in many spots throughout the Park. One of the loveliest showings is the *Peony Garden* (above), seen at its best in late May or early June.

At the right is a photograph of the "Girl with the Scarf," a statue in concrete by Lili Auer of Chicago, completed in 1942. It was shown in an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago later that year and there purchased by Mr. Allerton for display in the *Brick Garden*. Attractive and graceful, it is an appealing specimen of contemporary art, located in a setting remarkable for its warm simplicity.





Richard Kuöhl's two bronze maidens seem to reach up into the sky to make sure they will be seen on their tall pedestals between the elms. They add a new device to the many arrangements for sculpture which give the gardens distinction. They have a whole terrace and a small grove to themselves and well deserve it. One of the pair is shown alone. The setting in which they are located is illustrated at the bottom of page 9.

On the way up from the lake the pair of stone figures forming a sort of gateway to the garden walk could easily be missed, so well do they blend into the natural scene. These are not great pieces like some of the other figures but they show a fine example of outdoor sculpture. They represent primitive men arising from the land, pushing the earth up with them. The English artist, Glyn Warren Philpot, did them during a summer spent at the Park as Mr. Allerton's guest.





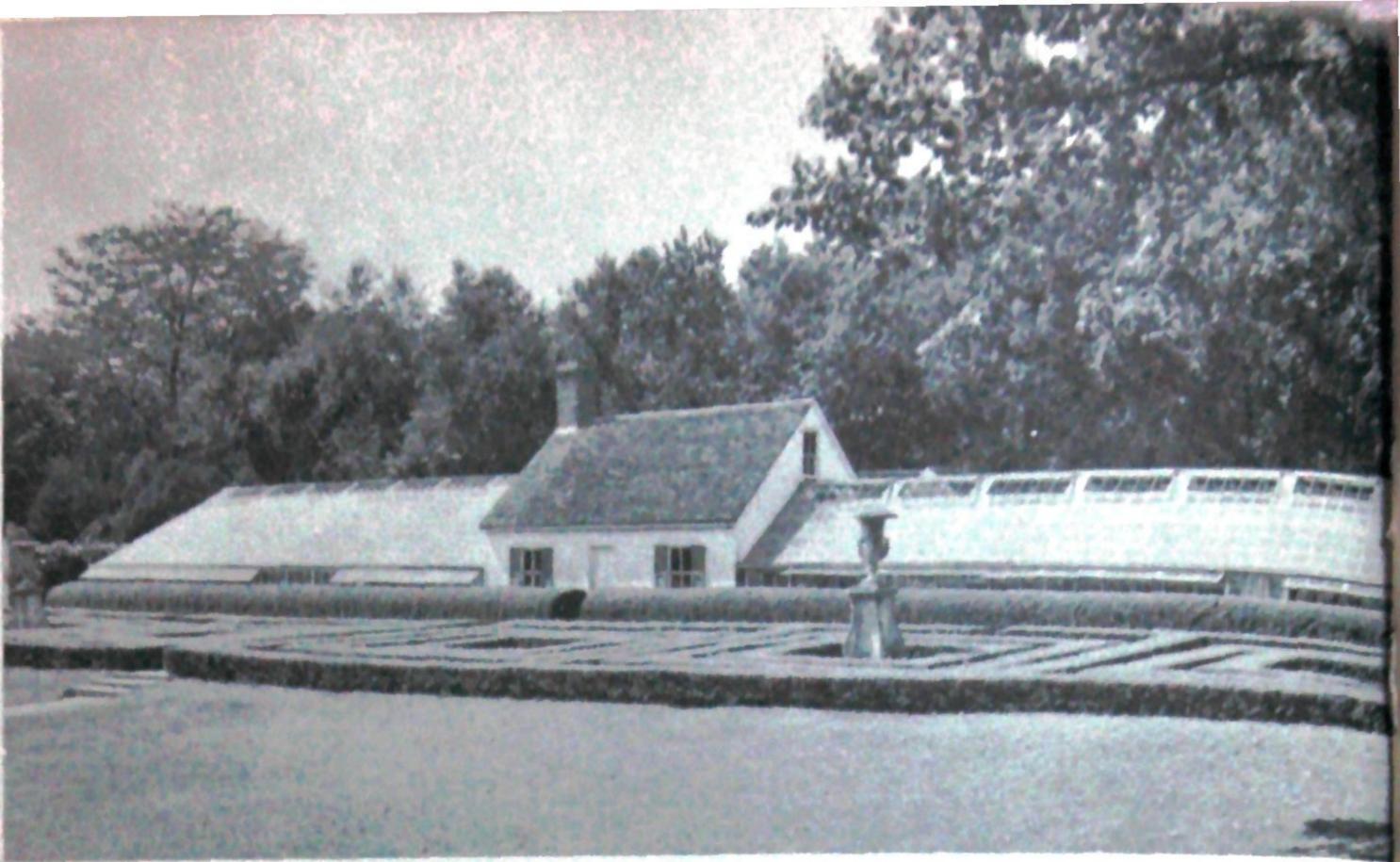


Farther along, the great "Adam" by Rodin rises dramatically in its setting of clipped arbor vitae. This figure, more correctly called "The Creation of Man," was displayed for the first time in 1881 and was sharply criticized by many who felt that Rodin had been crude to the point of irreverence in his treatment of the creation story.

But not all opinion was adverse. D. S. McCall, writing in the *Saturday Review* for September 29, 1900, said: "It will bear long examination from one point after another, to note how this shape, so highly endowed with expressive life, plays also a rhythmical music among its parts, and that this is one secret of its life. It might seem impossible that a head, a torso, two arms, two legs, elements so few, should recombine in so many patterns, all simple, all subtle and surprising, all enforcing that one slow dragging upward gesture of the awakening man. From in front, the shape is almost rectangular, the head droops so flat upon the shoulder, with its profile in the slightest relief upon the plane of the chest, while the arms hang in heavy parallel. From other points of view the forms, so simply enclosed in this, set up new correspondences, and you would think the whole had been designed for each new angle of vision."

An original bronze casting was bought by Mr. Allerton from the Rodin Estate and presented to the Art Institute of Chicago in 1924. The figure in the Park is a stone copy of the original.





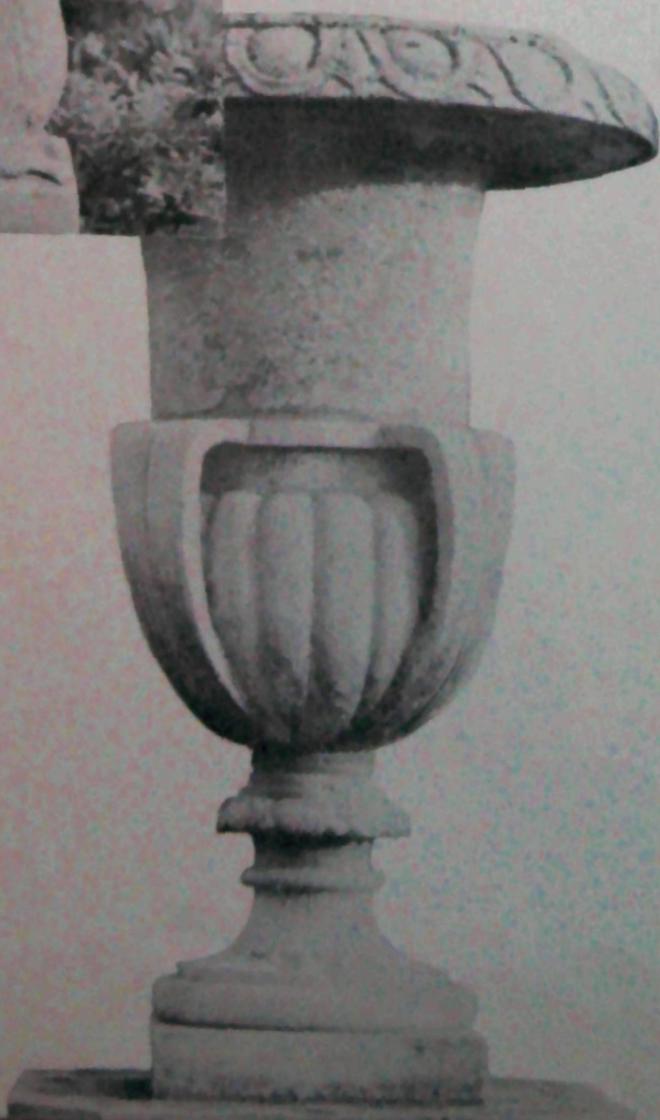
Seen above are the Park greenhouses, long, low, and resting comfortably in a garden of clipped privet, which is set out formally in long rows and large squares and kept tidily clipped at all times. Although used mainly for giving plants a pre-season start, the greenhouses occasionally offer a brilliant display of their own, such as the chrysanthemums, which are at their best in October.

The path to the greenhouses leads from the *Spring Garden*, at the northwest end of the lake. In this area there is a succession of bloom from the time when the first spring crocus appears until the fall-flowering crocus. The southeast side of the garden is heavily planted with crocus, narcissus, grape hyacinth, and wild flowers, including violets, spring-beauty, wild hyacinth, and dogtooth violets.

Near the spring a substantial planting of lily-of-the-valley interspersed with rushes and delicate blue-flowered forget-me-nots add much to the garden's beauty.

A picnic area is found around the outer edge of the *Spring Garden* close to the meadow and convenient to drinking water and toilet facilities.

The little shepherdess and her dog ornament a small glen near the *Gate House* and greet passers-by using the motor road to *Allerton House*.



The fascinating white stone fish shown on this page are used as center ornaments in the *Maze Garden*. Brought from China, they were originally fountain pieces in a prince's garden in Peiping.

Copies made here are placed in the *Sunken Garden*, where they decorate the ends of the marble benches.





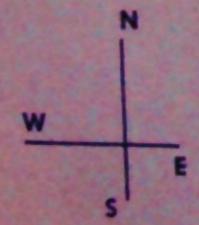
THE SUN SINGER THE CENTAUR THE SUNKEN GARDEN ADAM



GARDEN OF THE FU DOGS THE GATEHOUSE ALLERTON HOUSE THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS



THE LOST GARDEN ENTRANCE DRIVE

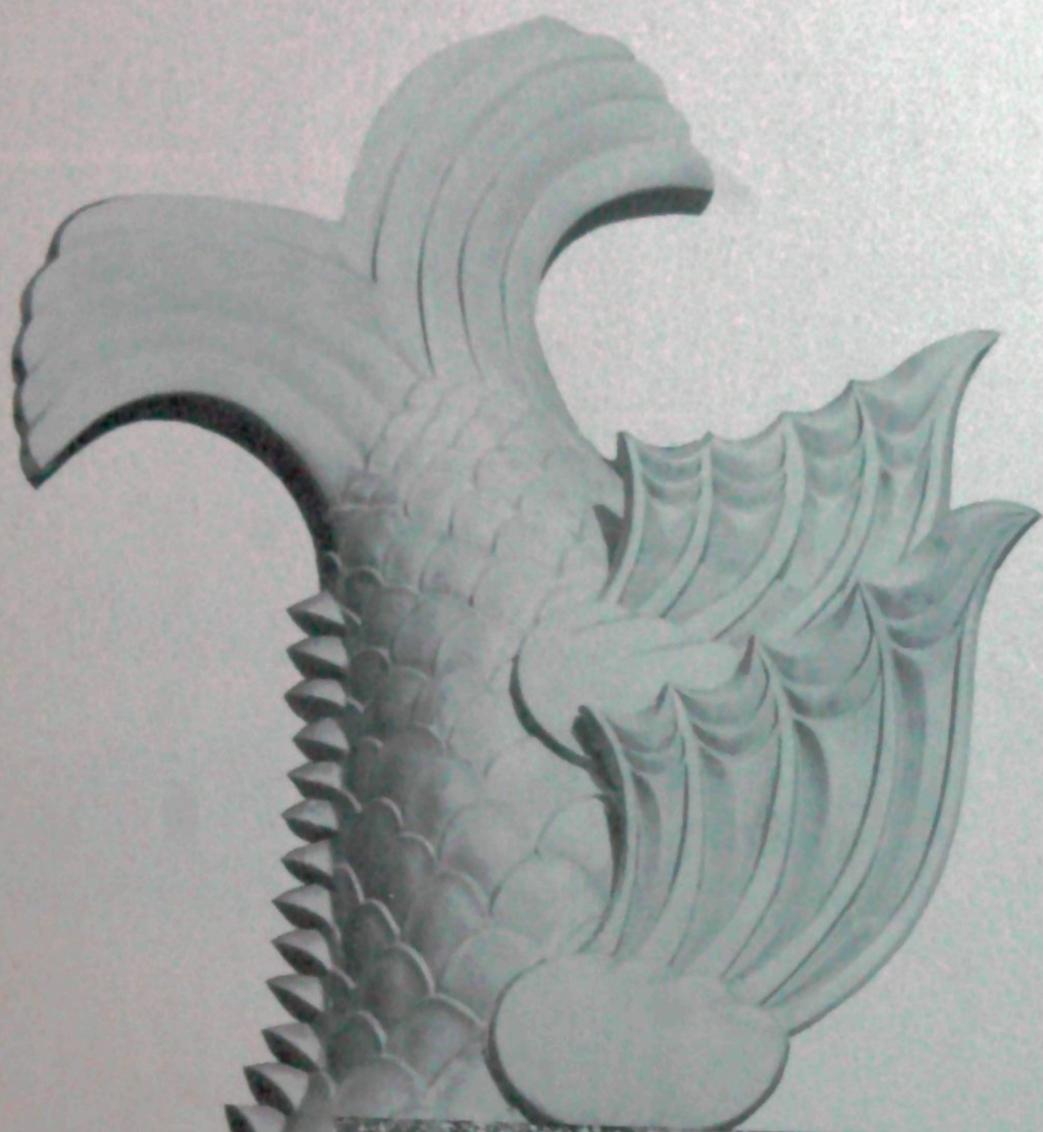


**ROAD AND TRAIL GUIDE
ROBERT ALLERTON PARK**

- Paved roads
- Woodland roads
- Hiking trails
- Scale

Prepared from surveys made by students in the Civil Engineering Department, College of Engineering, University of Illinois





The *Maze Garden* is seen to best advantage only by those who climb the hidden steps to the walk along the top of the wall which encloses it. The design is ancient Chinese and is repeated on each side of the central pathway. More than 3,000 running feet of privet hedge is required to create the scene. Here are displayed the splendid white fish illustrated and described on page 19.

The trained fruit trees on the walls of this erstwhile vegetable garden are a surprise to many. The treatment is a carry-over from Northern Europe where warmth is needed to ripen the fruit. Here it is mostly a garden fancy. The trees are dwarf varieties — they are kept pruned to maintain whatever shape is desired and are partly supported by wires.





The *Sunken Garden*, a gigantic amphitheater of concrete with a floor of emerald turf, is a superb finale in the series of garden episodes which owes its splendid appearance to John Gregg, who also designed settings for the "Death of the Last Centaur" and the "Sun Singer," both located further along the woodland trail to the west.

Originally laid out in 1915, it was reconstructed in 1932, and in its present form exhibits a Balinese influence. Here, as in other parts of the Park, the design was thought out with an eye to making the grounds look well-groomed with the least amount of labor. That the arrangement works well is demonstrated by the very small force of men needed for gardening. Much of the work is done with motor mowers and clippers.

The impressive gold fish seen on the tall pillars at the garden entrances (and illustrated in detail on the opposite page) were acquired in Japan where they originally served as roof ornaments at the palace in Nagoya.



The "Death of the Last Centaur" is one of the most imposing and astonishing figures created by Antoine Bourdelle who intended it to symbolize the death of paganism. Holding his strong hand on the lyre, the Centaur exhausts himself; he falls injured and tumbles to the ground. The night which is closing in takes possession of his neck, his limbs; he is twisted and tortured. He yields; his head bends back under the heavy burden of suffering; his forthcoming death benumbs him little by little. Now he pulls the last chords from the lyre; his song is no longer heard. He is superb in pride and despair.



At the forest crosswalks, west of the *Sunken Garden*, the sun lights a tiny glade where Bourdelle's superb bronze is placed in a setting of great oaks where, in autumn, falling leaves take part in the magnificent allegory.

Seen to best advantage from the river path below, it must nevertheless be viewed from all four approaches and even from above before it is revealed completely.

Bourdelle, a pupil and friend of Rodin, created this monumental work at his studio in Paris in 1914. The figure seen at the Park was purchased from the sculptor in 1929, the year of his death, and was cast from the original plaster mold.

The setting for it was designed by John Gregg.





The wealth of evergreens all through the plantations needs explaining in this country of prairie grasses and leafy trees with few native conifers but cedars. No doubt the little extra humidity of the air and adequate protection from winds are responsible for the Park's success with evergreens which is greater than that of the upland areas nearby. Here are to be found several forms of the arbor vitae or trees of life, as well as several species of pine, spruce, and fir, large in size and well clothed. Exotic flora is used with discretion, carefully selected and boldly massed, as if to support the greatness of the gardens rather than to stand as individual decorations. The charm lies in breadth of general effect and in bold contrasts. Much is accomplished with simplest materials such as privets and honeysuckle vines.

The lovely fantasy of these formalized gardens set so unconcernedly into the natural beauty of the Sangamon River Valley is a charming creation of clipped plantings, sheer walls without balustrades, a few very lovely great sculptures in idyllic glades and meads. In any beautiful light it seems to be not from central Illinois but from a page in a story book — a dream.

From his early youth it was Robert Allerton's dream, and as it stands now it is the product of his imagination. Land developed in this way is becoming rare. These woods and gardens are a gentleman's estate, now maintained by the University as an outdoor museum piece where people may see a sample of landscape architecture of rare elegance.





The last of the great sculptures, and by far the largest statue, is reached after a ritualistic walk through more woodland turns, up a hill and out into an immense open meadow dotted with wild herbs and encircled by a distant forest rim. Coming suddenly on the "Sun Singer," standing with outstretched arms on his high platform in the center of the meadow, one is unable to grasp his immensity. He belongs like the eagle to the open sky and dwells in the blue atmosphere exulted and measureless. It is worth the walk up the steps of the platform to look at the huge singing figure against the moving sky. Seen from this angle, the colossal statue has no apparent weight, a great achievement of the sculptor.





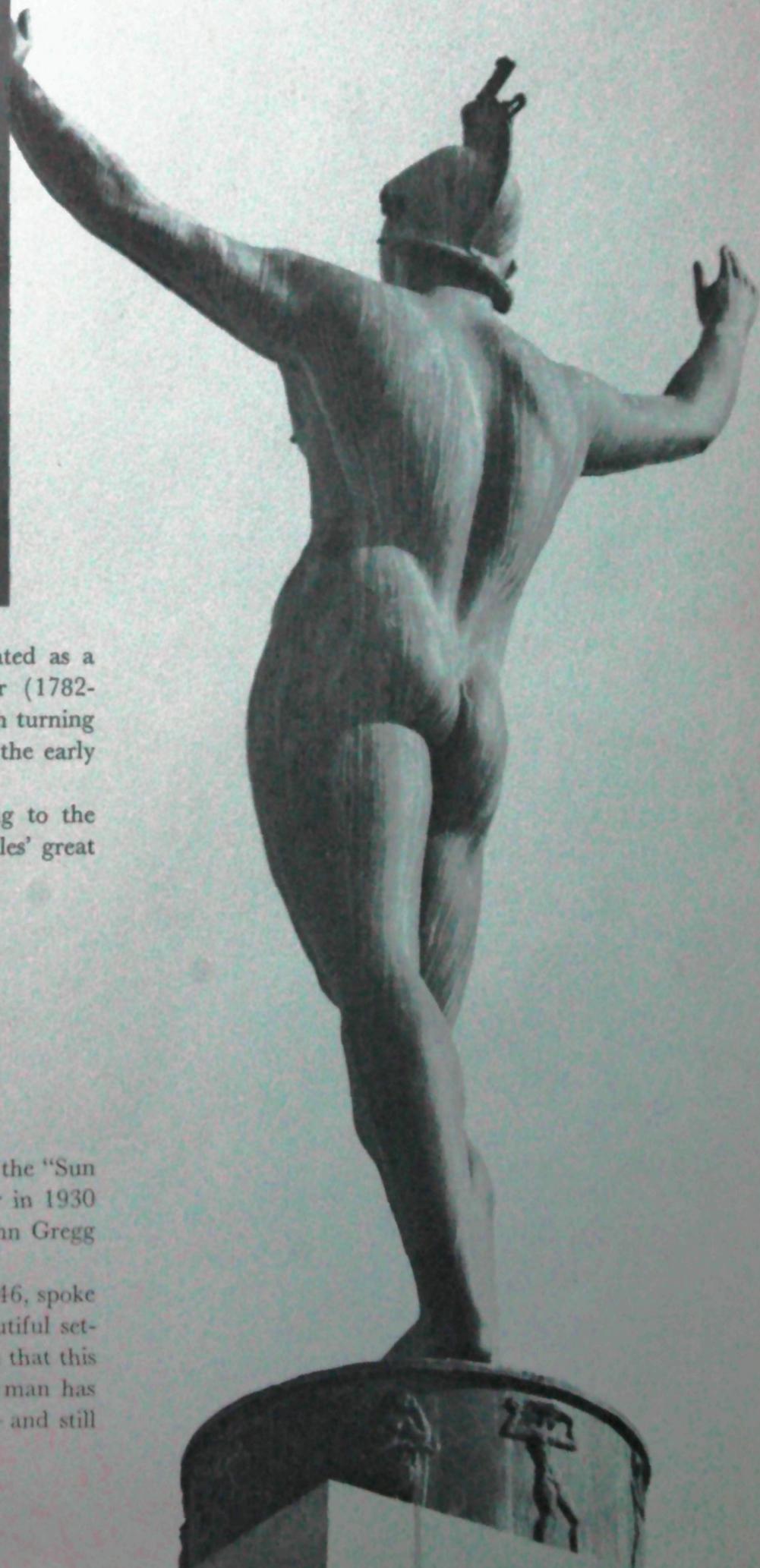
The "Sun Singer" by Carl Milles was created as a memorial to the Swedish poet Esaias Tegner (1782-1846), a patriotic poet and writer influential in turning attention to the riches of the Norse sagas and the early literature of Scandinavia.

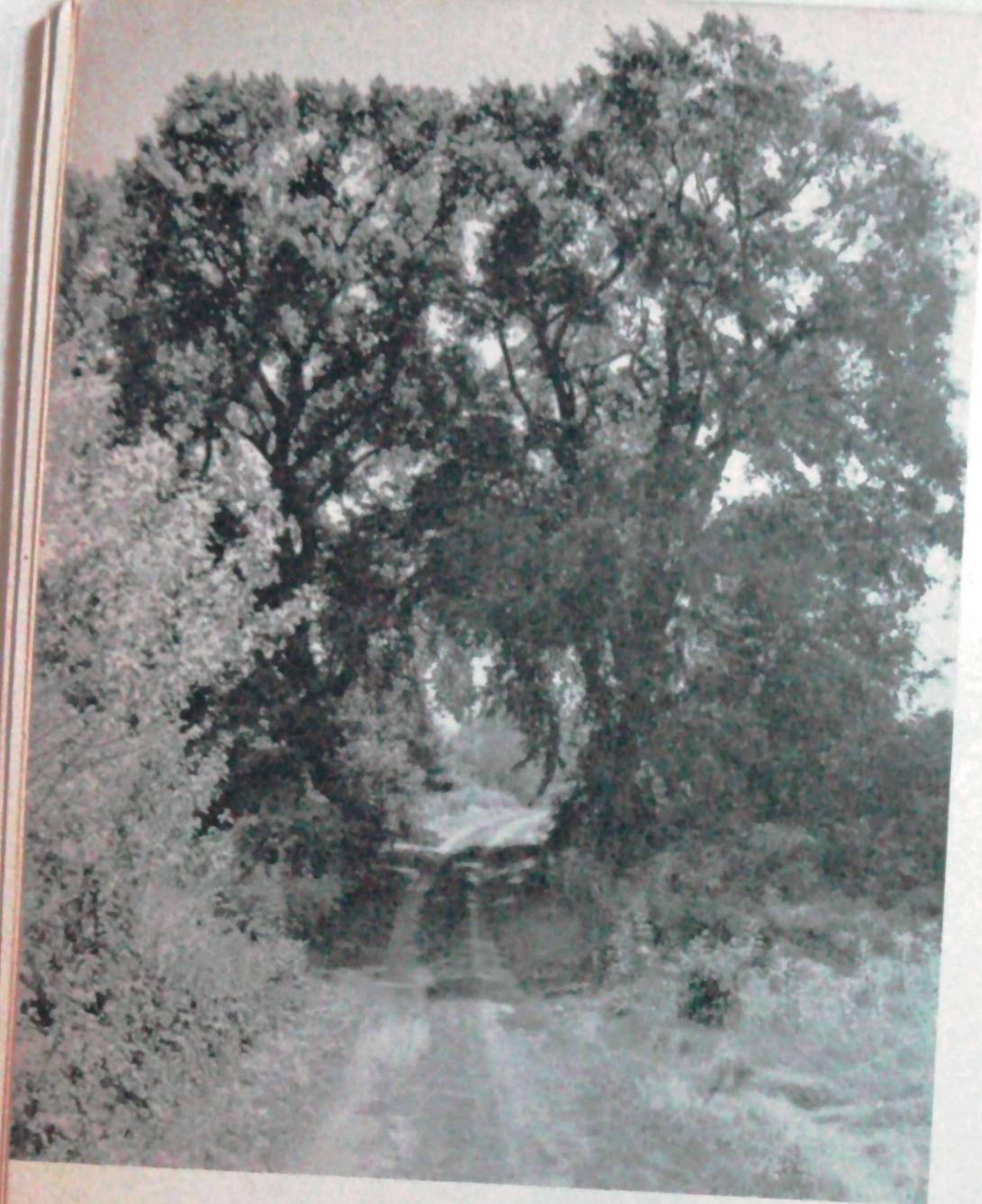
The opening lines of Esaias Tegner's "Song to the Sun" illustrate the inspiration behind Carl Milles' great work:

I will sing unto thee,
 O thou radiant sun,
 High aloft on thy throne
 In the deep, azure night,
 With the worlds left and right
 As thy vassals. Below
 In thy glance they may glow;
 But their light thou must be.

Erected in Stockholm in 1926, the replica of the "Sun Singer" was purchased there from the sculptor in 1930 and placed in the Park setting designed by John Gregg in 1932.

Carl Milles, writing to Robert Allerton in 1946, spoke of the setting as "magnificent — the most beautiful setting I have ever seen." He continued: "I hope that this bronze will stay there in that way till the last man has gone — when earth is as dead as the moon — and still this is there."





There are many miles of riverside and highland trails through natural woodland. Contained within the Park limits are nearly a thousand acres of wooded and uncultivated areas, maintained by the University as a plant and wild-life sanctuary.

The *Garden Tower* (seen right), southwest of the "Sun Singer" and hidden by a fringe of trees, is a beautiful, little-known edifice which provides a convenient elevation for a view over the wooded Sangamon Valley to the west.

No significant garden construction occurred later than 1938 when the tower was completed.





Because hunting and trapping are prohibited in the Park, small animals abound and it has become a paradise for bird-watchers. Camera enthusiasts find unlimited opportunities for pictures of every sort, season by season.

The wood roads are intended principally for hikers but can be used for one-way automobile traffic in dry weather. Low speed is advisable at all times.

Visitors to the south Park are urged to confine themselves as much as possible to the roads, trails, gardens, and picnic areas, to avoid disturbing the animal and plant life.

The Sangamon winds peacefully through the middle of the Park. On the north bank a shady water-level trail follows it west to the old swimming hole and picnic area near the "Sun Singer."





Hidden far at the western end of the south Park is the *Lost Garden*. The pavilion, designed by John Gregg, was constructed in 1932. Not easily located, the garden is that much more of a treat for those resourceful enough to find it.

Plantings of eastern red cedar are interspersed with perennials, bearded iris, yucca, sedum, tulips, and wild larkspur.

Facing the open court, in a niche in the pavilion, is found a copy, in fine Carrera marble, of the statue of Venus, made in 1812 by the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova.



Thirteen amusing and entertaining garden figures line the paths in the *Lost Garden*. Cut in England, from soft stone, they are representations of Chinese or oriental musicians, each playing a different instrument. In most cases the features are more Anglo-Saxon than Oriental, betraying the influence of the English stonecutters.





From the air, the *Lost Garden* is seen in the midst of the encroaching forest which in a hundred years will vastly enhance the Park's present glory and make it difficult for anyone to believe that this land was once timbered-off for farming.

Greeting those who come upon the garden by the wood road is a lead statue of a Faun playing a musical instrument called the Scabellum. The original, in marble and known as "The Marble Faun," is in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy.

Let it not be said that art in monumental sculpture cannot serve humble purposes. If *Robert Allerton Park* has a meaning, it must be that landscape is handsomely served by great sculpture, and further, that even the world's great masterpieces are elevated to a superior eminence by the fine art of spatial design in the landscape. Here the insistence on realization of form beyond mere decoration becomes startling evidence of the meaning of formal beauty. Here is the obvious achievement of placing landscape architecture among the great arts of design.





Visitors who wander off the gravel paths are often rewarded by sudden glimpses of statues hiding shyly in unexpected places. Typical of these is "The Three Graces" (above), a copy of a marble group by Germain Pilon, now in the Louvre, Paris. Originally it was placed in the Church of the Celestines in the same city, where it supported a bronze urn by Dominico Florentino, containing the heart of King Henry II.

The Park is not equipped as a playground or sports area but visitors are welcome to take advantage of picnic tables which have been set about in the central portion or to use the many groves in outlying portions which make natural picnic areas.

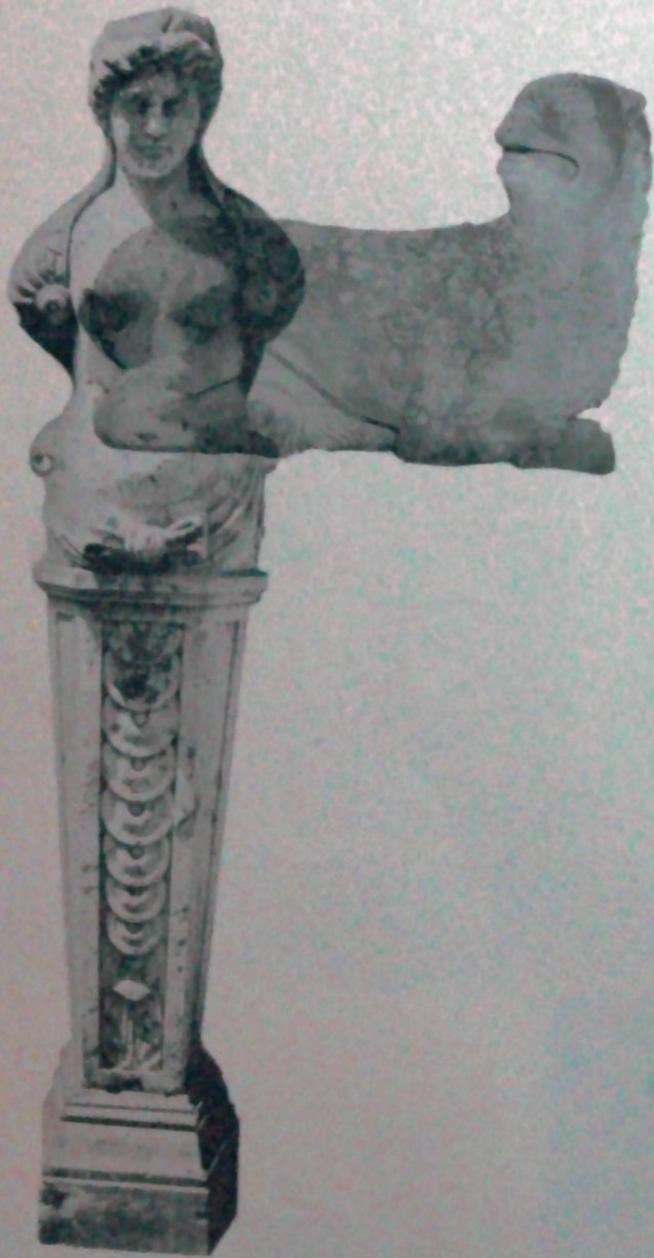
In each of the past three years an average of approximately 50,000 visitors have enjoyed the Park, and the care and respect they have shown for the grounds has been a source of much gratification to the University.

Waste receptacles are located at convenient points throughout the most traveled areas and visitors are urged to continue the kind of thoughtful cleanliness which has kept the Park so attractive at all times.

Naturally, the flowers and plants are for all to enjoy and should not, therefore, be picked or disturbed in any way.

Guests using the north Park area are requested to leave their automobiles in the large parking lot near the main gate.





Visitors to the Park soon discover that it is not possible to catch its mood fully in a single visit, and it soon becomes obvious that a person cannot even cover all the ground in one trip. Great differences are seen as the seasons change, and even through a day variations in the light from dawn to sunset produce remarkable effects.

Those who can are urged to come frequently, to revisit favorite spots and to explore new sections for the rewards they contain.

Travel by twos and threes is the most enjoyable method of going about, and the only satisfactory way of seeing the Park at its best is to walk.



