

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens





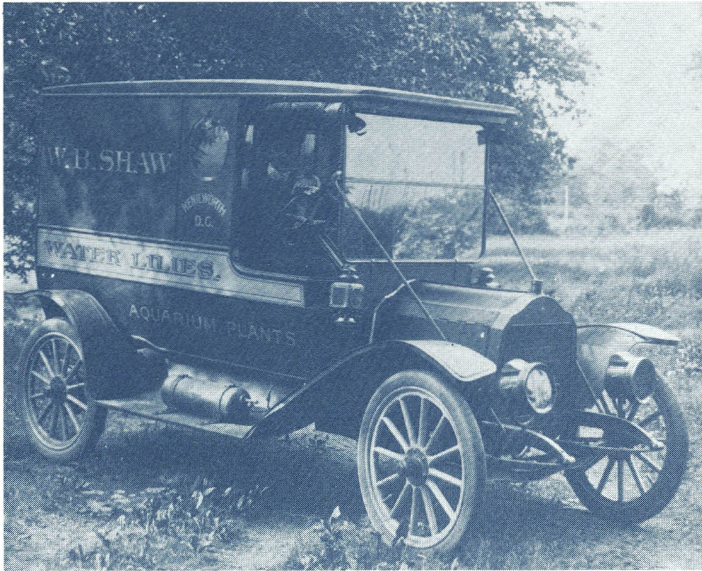
Welcome to the only national park devoted entirely to water-loving plants, a 12-acre sanctuary featuring exotic water lilies. Created on the east bank of the Anacostia River, seven miles upstream from its junction with the Potomac, this mosaic of shallow ponds and dikes, bordered by 44 acres of tidal marsh, forms an island of green amid the busy neighborhoods of Washington's northeast corner.

A Park's Story

After the Civil War Walter B. Shaw, who had lost an arm in Union service, located a job as clerk in the U.S. Treasury Department. Soon he married and bought from his father-in-law 37 acres along the Anacostia in 1880. His

fondness for water lilies led him to plant a few native species from his home state of Maine in an unused ice pond. In time, his hobby became his business and life's work (below) as he dredged more pools, collected exotic plants, developed varieties, and sold both plants and blooms far and wide (right). Shaw, with the help of his daughter, Helen Fowler, created a unique habitat, combining the gleam of





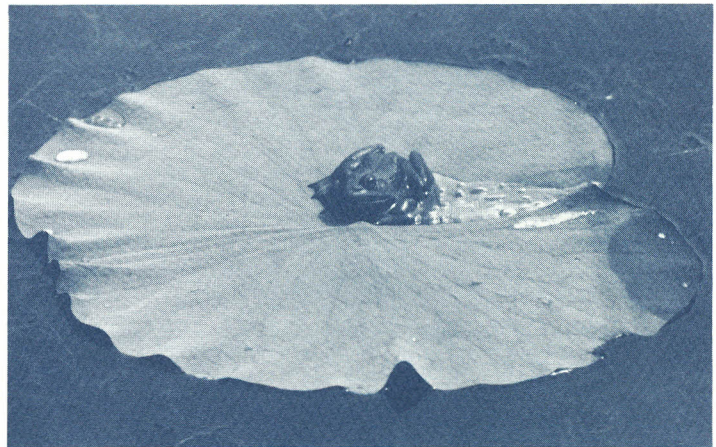
water with the starlike blooms of the lilies. Mrs. Fowler eventually succeeded her father as manager of W. B. Shaw Lily Ponds. She imported lotuses from the Orient, blue lilies of the Nile, and specimens native to South America. Her pastel studies of lilies are displayed at the Visitor Center.

In the 1920s visitors by the thousands came on Sunday mornings to see the waxy flowers as they opened in the summer sun. President Calvin Coolidge and his wife Grace liked to stroll under the willows from pool to pool. Then in the 1930s, the gardens were threatened with destruction. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with a mission to dredge the river and reclaim the marshes, moved to take the land by condemnation. The Interior Department stepped in and purchased the gardens in 1938 for \$15,000 to preserve them for the American people. The National Park Service renamed the gardens Kenilworth for the community that had grown up at the turn of the century on the neighboring farmlands.

River Refuge

High-speed highways have limited the approach and kept the gardens isolated. These acres remain home to a variety of wetland plants and animals: from turtles to snakes, fingernail-sized frogs to bullfrog boomers, as well as insects, mosquito fish, and muskrats. Migratory birds pause to rest here. Ducks paddle along the edges and red-winged blackbirds nest in the thickets. The Christmas bird count of the Audubon Naturalist Society finds some 40 species in the area.

On pool margins cattails and yellow flag iris stand erect, and loosestrife shake out purple-pink petals. Water primrose and lavender water-hyacinth float on the surface while buttonbush and rose mallow root in the moist soil. Park gardeners repair dikes after periodic flooding. The staff also maintains the system of conduits that keep a slow trickle moving into the pools as the tidal river daily flushes the marsh and mud flats along its banks.





Directions: Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens are reached by car from Kenilworth Avenue (I-295) south of its intersection with New York Avenue. Exit at Eastern Avenue and follow signs to the parking lot off Anacostia Avenue where a path leads to the Visitor Center and ponds.

When to visit:

June and July: Hardy water lilies in bloom
 July and August: Tropical beauties at peak
 Open: 7 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. Morning is the best time to see night-bloomers before they close and day-bloomers as they open.

Special features:

- Evening walks with a ranger: Sign up at the Visitor Center, bring flashlight.
- Picnic tables under the trees
- Handicapped: Transportation can be arranged.
- Volunteer program: Ask the ranger.

For information, call 426-6905 or write:

Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens
 1900 Anacostia Drive, S.E.
 Washington, D.C. 20020



Published by Parks and History Association, Washington, D.C. 1986, in cooperation with the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The tax-exempt association distributes publications about parks and monuments in the D.C. region. Profits from the sale of publications at association bookstores help finance park programs.

Photos - courtesy National Park Service

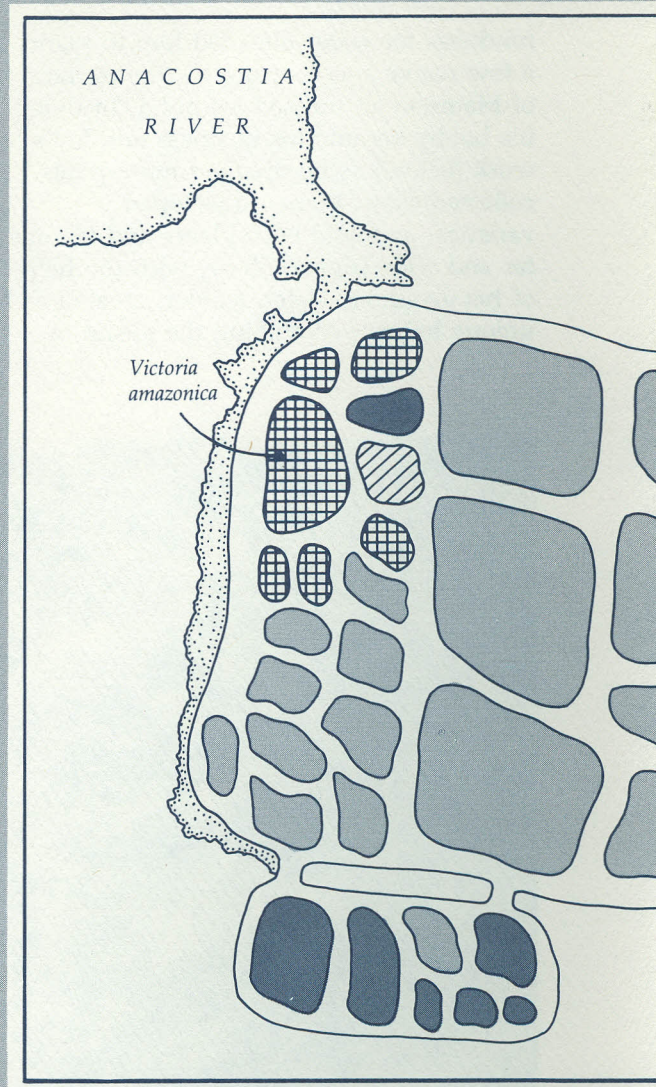
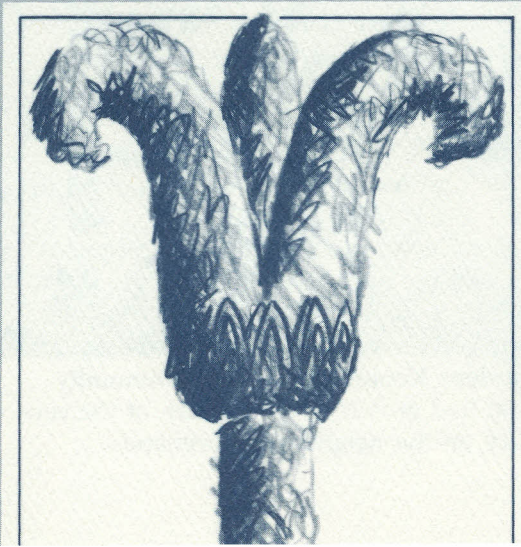
Cover illustration adapted from photo by Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post

About Water Lilies

The water lily family takes its name, *Nymphaea*, from the graceful female spirits of ancient myth who lived in lakes and streams. Many species of lilies live in different parts of the world, varying in form and color, but they are broadly grouped into hardy and tropical. All grow in shallow, slow-moving water, usually from tubers rooted in the mud. Leaves form underwater and grow to reach the surface and the sun. Flowers bloom for 3-14 days, opening and closing with the change of light. The seedpod dips underwater to ripen.

The ponds at Kenilworth harbor many types of hardy lilies recognized by the round pads with smooth edges. Their flowers peak in June and July.

The tender tropical lilies are stored in greenhouses all winter. When the ponds warm up in May, the tubers in containers are moved outdoors. Recognize the tropicals by the serrated or rippled edges of their leaf pads. Their large flowers peak in July and August. Some bloom at night;



many are fragrant. The extraordinary *Victoria amazonica* from South America displays leaves, like platters with up-turned edges, that can extend to six feet.

The lotus, (genus *Nelumbo*) has waxy leaves that rise above the water and shed rain. Its showy flowers drop petals to reveal seedpods that look like shower-heads; its seeds ripen above the water. In

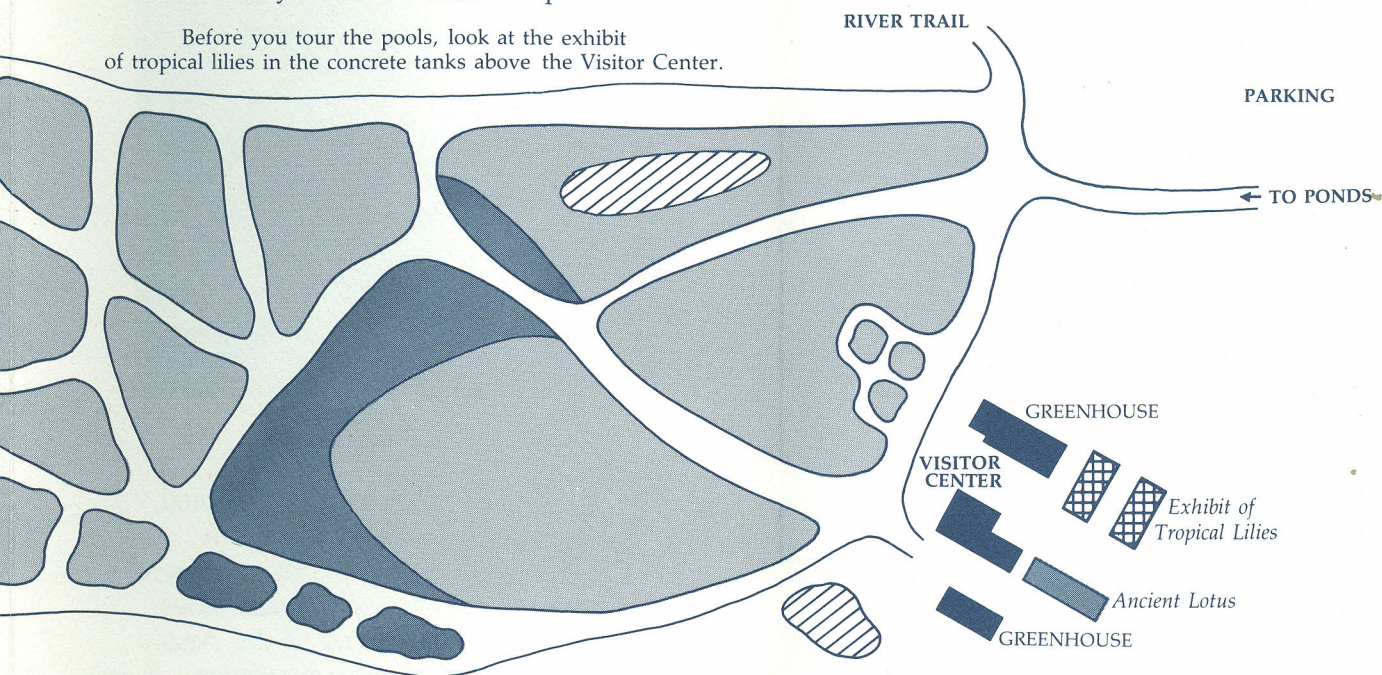
KENILWORTH AQUATIC GARDENS



0 40 80 120
Scale in Feet

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|--|---|
|  Aquatic Plants |  Lotus |
|  Hardy Lilies |  Tropical Lilies |

Before you tour the pools, look at the exhibit of tropical lilies in the concrete tanks above the Visitor Center.



a pool near the Visitor Center cluster the pink-tinged East Indian lotus, descendants of ancient plants whose seeds were recovered in 1951 from a dry Manchurian lakebed. A recent estimate placed their age at 350 to 575 years. National Park Service botanist Horace Wester induced germination of the seeds, believed to be the oldest viable seeds ever found.

Centuries before Christ, eastern religions had made the lotus a sacred symbol. In India Hindus believe Brahma was born from the heart of the flower. The Buddha is often shown seated on a lotus. The beauty of the bloom rising from murky waters gave the Chinese an image for purity; its lovely form figures in the design of Egyptian temple columns (left).