

# Kosciuszko's Spur to experience the past, present and protect the future of Providence

Objectives for the Kosciuska Healing Garden by Carol Gargan:

To maintain a tradition experienced in my childhood and witnessed in the villages and cemeteries of Lithuania and West Point in my grandmother's yard in my mother's yard and the riverbank garden - to make where you are beautiful- Margaret and her neighbors did not ask for money when they beautified their ash and dirt riverbank. Their levee protected them from the river. A river, that for most of their lives flowed past them, carrying mine waste and raw sewage. A river that threatened their homes with flooding. There were no fish, not even frogs, only the foul smell of raw sewage which still flows. Due to worsening political and economic conditions agrarian Lithuanians had come to Scranton to mine the coal that fueled the Industrial Revolution. It was that same coal and revolution that destroyed the Lackawanna and other great American rivers. The same voracious need for an economically controlled combustible fuel source continues to consume our rivers and our lives. We need to recognize the value of economies based on the care full sustainable production of food and fuel. We need to realize we can no longer afford nonrenewable fuel. We need water - unpolluted water and renewable sources of fuel. Through the decades long efforts of Bernard McGurl and the Lackawanna River Corridor Association (LRCA) and its affiliate the Lackawanna Valley Conservancy (LVC) much has been done to renew the river. More needs to be done. The work and design for this garden is post modern, post industrial and post materialistic. It has been done without campaigns for money and without bulldozers for earthmoving. Respect has been paid to the known history of this site so that that history can teach. The story of the river and its inhabitants -present and missing, the stories of the plants and trees that grew and grow along its edges. The art and meaning are derived from the understanding and experience of what was, is and needs to be here in order for us to survive in a healthy relationship with our environment and each other. Those relationships have become polluted - this garden represents the dream of healing. The history and level of vandalism that takes place at the site has been taken into account in the effort to design a place that may inspire someone not to vandalize - rather to care for one's self by healing the river, the environment, and each other. It is the intention of the healing garden to function in part as a site to summon the return of the shad and eel to the river, to summon the return of care for a natural sustainable environment. The shad and eel were emblematic of a healthy river, they were the food that sustained Native Americans and early colonials - the eel arriving in preparation for the long winter and the shad arriving to renew life in the spring. The garden is a prayer for their return - and ours back to caring for the garden.



Kosciuszko's Garden at West Point





Margaret in front of her dawn roses 1995  
grown from Carol's mother's rose



Some of Margaret's roses and shrubs

## Trees and Plants

Ancient: horsetail; ferns (coal)

Native American: elderberry; native plum; mulberry; arrowwood, witch hazel, birch, coltsfoot,  
oswego tea, crab apple, willow, switch grass

Ancient Lithuanian: elderberry, pear, rue

Victorian White Garden: akebia, climbing hydrangea, hosta, mock orange

LRCA: arrowwood, rhododendron, mountain laurel

Lithuanian American: Dawn Rose, Seven Sisters Rose, lilac, Rose of Sharon,  
forsythia, spirea



Snakeroot

{Information| |Description=*Eupatorium rugosum*: Flower-umbels |  
Source=Own photo, taken in Jutland. |Date=Aug 2006. |Author=[Sten  
Porse](#) |Permission={{self2|GFDL|cc-by-sa-2.5,2.0,1.0}} |  
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U.S. Geological Survey photo/public domain

## *Toy Story*, Tom Hanks and Abraham Lincoln

In the movie *Toy Story*, when Jessie the Cowgirl first meets Woody the Cowboy she exclaims: “Sweet mother of Abraham Lincoln!” Tom Hanks, the actor who played the voice of Woody is a distant relative of Nancy Hanks, Abraham Lincoln’s mother. These characters from very different time eras are all connected.

They are connected by the indigenous snakeroot plant.

Snakeroot received its early American name because the rhizomes were believed to cure snakebite. A belief no longer held. However, it can be as poisonous and lethal as a snakebite and was for Abraham Lincoln’s mother Nancy who died from the toxicity of the plant. She died of milk fever when Lincoln was nine years old.

Milk fever is the result of drinking milk from cows who have foraged on snakeroot. Nancy Hank’s cousin, Dennis Hanks and his wife Sarah, and several other residents of Little Pigeon Creek died in October of 1818.

Horses, sheep and cattle can still be poisoned by snakeroot today. Pastures where the animals graze must always be free of this plant.