



The Denkmann-Hauberg Gardens  
A Pictorial History  
of a  
Jens Jensen Landscape  
1300 24th St, Rock Island, IL  
*By Linda Anderson*



*Advocates for Historic Preservation*



Wrapping the curving hillside at 1300 24<sup>th</sup> Street, the Denkmann-Hauberg estate, home of John H. and Suzanne (Denkmann) Hauberg, overlooks the city of Rock Island, Illinois.

It was Susanne Christine Denkmann, youngest daughter of Frederick Carl A. Denkmann and Catherine Bloedel Denkmann who commissioned the home. Her father had formed a partnership in 1860 with his brother-in-law, Frederick Weyerhaeuser, in a lumber business that had prospered and the family became quite wealthy. Miss Denkmann attended Wellesley and Radcliffe colleges as well as the National Kindergarten College in Chicago. When she returned to Rock Island, she took an active role in the community, helping to establish and manage both the local YWCA and West End Settlement. She also took a very active role in the design and building of her home.

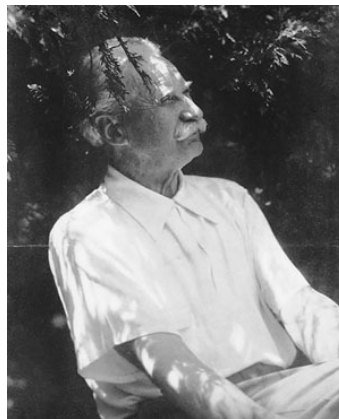
Prairie School architect Robert C. Spencer Jr., a contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright, was hired. He designed a house where medieval half-timbering was incorporated into a geometric non-historical rectilinear structure. Possibly the largest home ever designed by Spencer, it marks an important milestone in the outward spread of early modern architecture from its Midwestern center in Chicago.



*The Denkmann-Hauberg Home from the West, as seen from the bottom of the hillside.*

Miss Denkmann's house was filled with tulips. Tulips in various shapes and sizes, from a few inches to several feet, appear in leaded window inserts, carved paneling, urns, organ screens, lights, fireplace mantels and sculptured ceilings. When it was finished in 1911, just in time for Miss Denkmann's marriage to John Henry Hauberg, even the rugs and much of the furniture featured a tulip design. In 1914, beautiful pictures of their home, its furnishings, carriage house, greenhouse and gardens were featured in the magazine *The Western Architect*.

At the time the house was finished, the hillside it overlooked was a large open meadow. To enhance the Prairie Style, Miss Denkmann retained landscape architect Jens Jensen to complete the estate. Mr. Jensen was born in Denmark and came to this country in 1884 at the age of 24. He worked in Florida; Decorah, Iowa; and Chicago, Illinois. As his design talents became apparent, he began to work on both public and private landscapes. Jensen believed it was important for people to maintain a connection with the natural heritage of their region. To achieve this, his designs emphasized native plantings in a natural setting. (See Jens Jensen biography on page 16.)



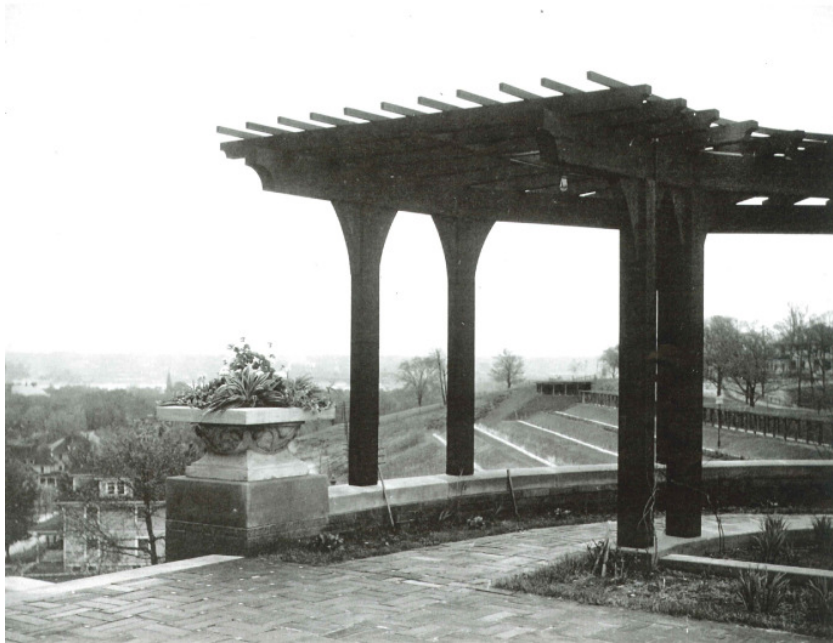
*Jens Jensen*

The landscape Jensen designed for the Denkmann-Hauberg Estate is in three sections: Terraced gardens, an open meadow, and a woodland forest. If you use this booklet to guide your tour of these areas today, you will see in pictures the gardens as they were created. Look for hints of design features that remain and envision the gardens restored to a portion of their original glory.

*To begin a walking tour, start at the front of the house and walk along the front façade to the right of the entrance.*

From the north end of the house, the walled terrace provided an expansive view of the gardens to the north and west. A curved pergola covered the brick walk around a planting bed. Large decorative cast concrete urns mark the entrances.

*Walk past the terrace and, as the driving path makes a curve, take the sidewalk heading north and proceed as far as the walk is easily passable. This is the path to the terraced gardens.*



*Top: The view from the side walled terrace patio facing north, as originally designed .  
Bottom: The view from the side walled terrace today.*



## *The Terraced Gardens*

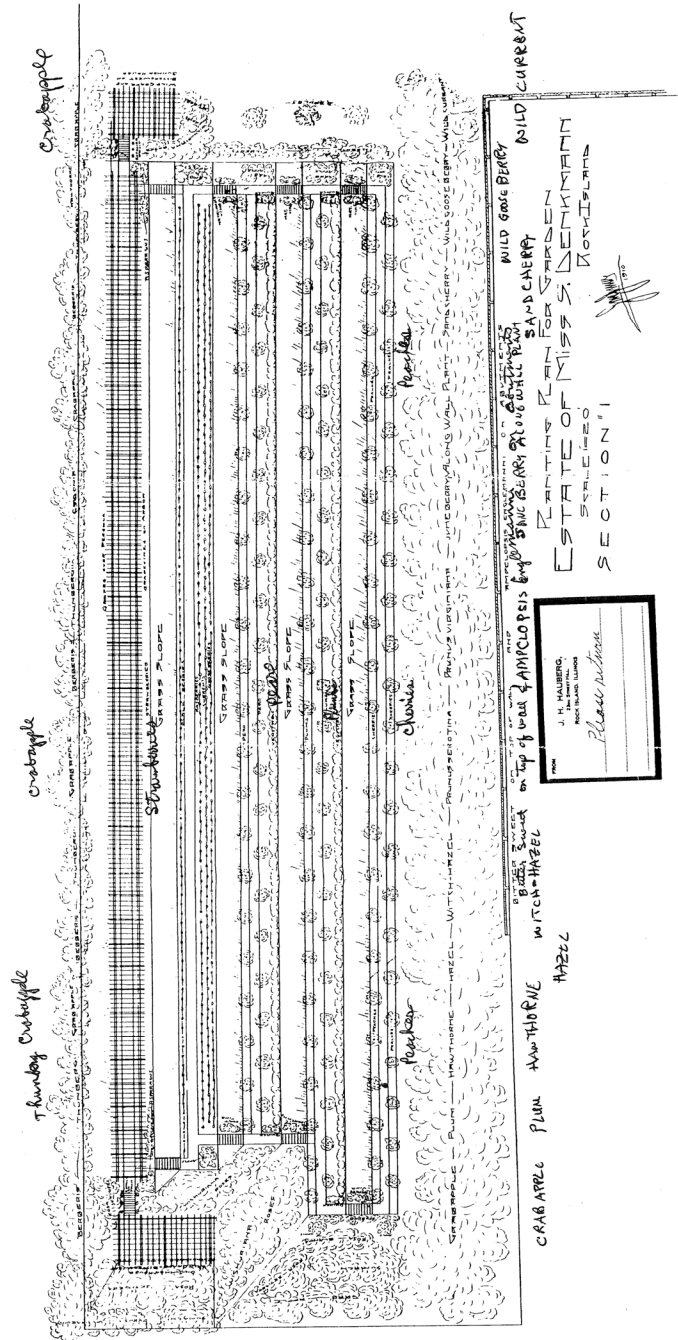


*View of the terraced gardens during construction*

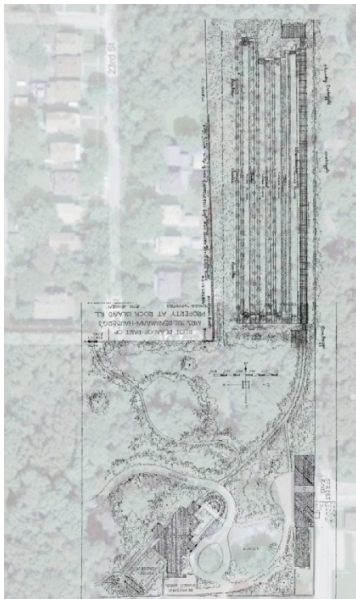
The hand labor that went into sculpting the terraced gardens is amazing. Men working with teams of horses cleared the land, formed four long terraces and then built a concrete retaining wall at the base of the hill. Four sets of concrete steps were built at the north and south ends of the terraces. Before and after pictures tell the story of the transformation.

Although the path is no longer easily passable, imagine walking north along the ridge. To your left you would find the concrete steps that would take you down through the terraces. Looking at the original pictures, imagine the terraced garden as described in Jens Jensen's planting plan from 1910. The original signed plan is on display in the Hauberg home.

Jens Jensen's plan recommended trees such as crabapple, plum, hawthorn and witch hazel be planted above the north half of the cement wall supporting the tiered garden. Low growing bushes of sand cherry, wild gooseberry and wild currant would be planted near the south steps. Grassy slopes between the four tiers of plantings would provide protection against soil erosion and create a colorful picture-frame effect to display the peaches, cherries and plums growing on each side of white gravel paths that ran the length of each terrace.



Jen Jensen's original planting plan for the terraces.



*The picture of the garden plan superimposed over a current picture of the area gives an idea of the vast size of the terraces, nearly a city block in length.*

Several varieties of roses decorated the north hillside around a summer house. An impressive grape arbor extended the entire length of the top terrace. Middle terraces were planted with strawberries, blackberries and raspberries with asparagus beds on either end. Bittersweet vines meandered along the top of the cement wall at the base of the hillside.



*View of the finished terrace garden,*





*A massive grape arbor that extended the entire length of the top terrace*

*All three sets of steps along the northern edge of the terraces as they still exist today.*





*Ladies enjoying a summer day in the terraced gardens.*

*Ladies enjoying a stroll through the gardens.*





## *An Open Meadow*

*As you retrace your steps toward the driving path, look to your right for an open view of the hillside.*

The central section of the landscape is known as the meadow. Jensen's designs often included a large meadow surrounded or edged by forest. Grand open areas provided space for large gatherings, a place to enjoy the warmth of sunlight, a place for an unobstructed view of the stars and the night sky. Early landscape drawings appear to show a border along the south side of the meadow and indeed there are remnants of a line of brick edging that run along the south side of the meadow.

*The meadow as it looks today, complete with wildflowers and deer.*



*Continue to retrace your steps back to the driving path.*

## *A Woodland Forest*

The third section of the landscape is the woodland. Pictures of the landscape in progress again show the amount of work that went into creating a woodland from what appears to be a bare pasture. A winding roadway was sculpted into the hillside. A small stream channeling natural springs meanders down the hillside, providing natural drainage and forming a series of three ponds. Trees were selected and planted in such a way that, over time, the hillside would look like a natural Midwestern woodland.



*View of the bridge and one of the three original ponds.*

*Turn right and follow the driving path down the hillside to the original entrance to the estate.*

Heading down the drive, notice the pink colored bricks peeking through the asphalt as well as the pattern of the bricks as the drive bends. The woodland has matured over time, but some of Jensen's original trees remain. Look for white birch, white pine, oak, yellow poplar, wild cherry, linden and Canadian hemlock.



*Views of the driving path today.*

Mid way down the hillside, the Jensen designed bridge appears. The bridge was constructed over a ravine. As you walk across the bridge, imagine the sound of running water rippling down the ravine, creating a waterfall and filling the ponds that were covered with water lilies and stocked with trout.



*View of the driving path and bridge today.*



At the bottom of the hillside the drive ends at what was once the main entrance to the estate. Two pillars (one now missing) marked with the initial "H" (rather than "D") flanked the entrance, welcoming visitors in their carriages and early motor vehicles.



*The remaining Hauberg Pillar as seen at the foot of the driving path, on the corner of 12th Avenue and 22nd Street.*

*Turn around and walk back up the original driveway leading to the Denkmann-Hauberg home.*

The early photo to the right shows John Hauberg returning home from a camping trip with a group of young men. Notice that in the picture the drive does not appear to be covered in brick and there is a gutter system visible along the sides of the drive. Although the drive was covered in asphalt in the 1970s, there are a few remnants of the gutter system remaining that may be seen by the careful observer.

Heading back up the drive the impressive nature of this long formal entrance drive is apparent. Look for stands of hawthorns chosen for their horizontal branching. About half way up the drive, just past the bridge, look to the right for remnants of stone steps that headed up to the back of the house. In the same area, to the left stands an original light pole with a finish that resembles the bark of a tree. It is easy to miss, as it appears to be made of logs. Look closely, however, and you will see it is actually made of metal. Was this the only light pole along the drive, placed here to light the steps? Or is it the only light pole still remaining?



As you continue up the driving path, notice how the woodland has matured over time and now contains a mix of older and younger specimens. Experience the effect of light filtering through the trees. Notice the play of light and shadow. Hear the rustling of the leaves, the sounds of insects and songs of birds.

Approaching the top of the hill and making the final curve to your right, you will have experienced Jens Jensen's vision of wandering through a forest and then suddenly emerging into a clearing that is full of light, life and dramatic architecture.

The Denkmann-Hauberg landscape you have just experienced is a perfect example of the Jens Jensen philosophy of landscape architecture. Here in this landscape he combined the elements of sky, sun, clouds, wind, water, native flowers, shrubs, trees, and organic structures to create a living landscape that was and is beautiful, understandable and on-going.



## **Jens Jensen (1860—1961)**

Jens Jensen was born in Denmark in 1860 and immigrated to America in 1884. He worked as a day laborer in Florida for a short time and then moved to Decorah, Iowa, where he is credited with developing the campus plan for Luther College. While in Iowa he fell in love with the Midwest landscape, a landscape that would influence his work for the rest of his life.

A job as a gardener for the West Chicago Park District took Jens Jensen to Chicago. He was soon promoted to foreman and, when a garden area planted in exotic flowers (as was the custom of the time) withered and died, Jensen traveled to the surrounding prairie and gathered native wildflowers. He transplanted these wildflowers into a garden space in Union Park establishing what became known as the American Garden. By 1905 Jensen was the general superintendent and chief landscape architect for the West Park System in Chicago. His design work for the city can be seen in Humboldt Park, Douglas Park, and Columbus Park.

One of the earliest environmental activists, Jensen founded the Friends of Our Native Landscape, an organization that was instrumental in preserving important natural areas throughout the Midwest. He was a driving force in establishing the Cook County Forest Preserve District, the Illinois State Park system and the Indiana Dunes State Park and National Seashore.

In 1920, Jensen left the park district to establish his own design firm in Ravinia, Illinois. His client list was impressive, including Henry and Edsel Ford, Frederick Pabst, the Armour and Florsheim families, as well as many other American industrialists. He also designed parks in Racine and Madison, Wisconsin; Dubuque, Iowa; and Springfield, Illinois. In 1935, at the age of 75, he retired from his Chicago business and founded The Clearing on 128 wooded acres on Wisconsin's Door County Peninsula. The Clearing still operates each summer as "an adult school of discovery in the arts, nature, and the humanities."

Jens Jensen is known as the father of Prairie Style landscape design in the same way that Frank Lloyd Wright holds this title in the world of architecture. Jensen was fascinated by the vast prairie landscape: its changing colors and swaying movements. He took hundreds of photos from broad sweeping landscapes to a wild flower's smallest detail. He used the sky, the wind, the movement of water and even the seasons, along with native plants, to develop landscapes that were beautiful, understandable and on-going.





Jensen understood that landscapes, unlike other forms of art, will mature...even die and regenerate. It has been suggested that this understanding of the natural progression of the designed landscape is his greatest strength. Jens Jensen believed that our surroundings affect the way we think and live. He identified unique landscape characteristics in all parts of the country and he believed that understanding one's own regional ecology was "fundamental to all clear thinking". He valued the sunrise and sunsets and

often incorporated a clearing in his landscape just for the purpose of viewing these daily occurrences. Included in many of his designs, the council ring, a low circular wall or grouping of stones evoking both his native Viking past and Native America egalitarianism. A group sitting on these stones would be gathered in a continuous circle. There would be no head of the table, no hierarchy, but a simple affirmation that all members of the community are important. Just as each element of a landscape design has its own very important role to play.

Jens Jensen died at his home, The Clearing, on October 1, 1951, at the age of 91.

*Jens Jensen...*

*In his own words from **Siftings** by Jens Jensen published in 1939*

*"Landscaping is a composition of life that unfolds a mysterious beauty from time to time until mature age...Compare a growing tree with a monument of stone or mortar which is definitely shaped, never to change. The tree's whole structure and its promise for the tomorrows are not surpassed on this earth. In passing, the fallen giant soon develops new beauty by feeding new growth, which extends its life into the far off future."*

*"It was evening in the garden. The veil of the approaching night had softened the sharp outlines of flowers and trees...In the free and unrestrained life of this garden a wood thrush sounded his last note, a reminder of early evening. Fire-flies, like electric flashes from a mysterious world, fleeting about everywhere, becoming more noticeable as the deep shadows of the surrounding woodlands emerged from the darkness of night."*



*Thanks to all who contributed to this booklet, especially:*

*Jean Dasso and Mike Hammer who traveled to the Sterling Morton Library at Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois where they were allowed to borrow glass slides that were used to produce many of the historic photographs included in the booklet.*

Sources of additional information on Jens Jensen and his work:

Grese, Robert E. *Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992

Jensen, Jens *Siftings*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, [1939] 1990

The Clearing Folk School, 12171 Garrett Bay Road, Ellison Bay, WI.  
[www.theclearing.org](http://www.theclearing.org)

Jens Jensen Legacy Project. [www.jensjensen.org](http://www.jensjensen.org)

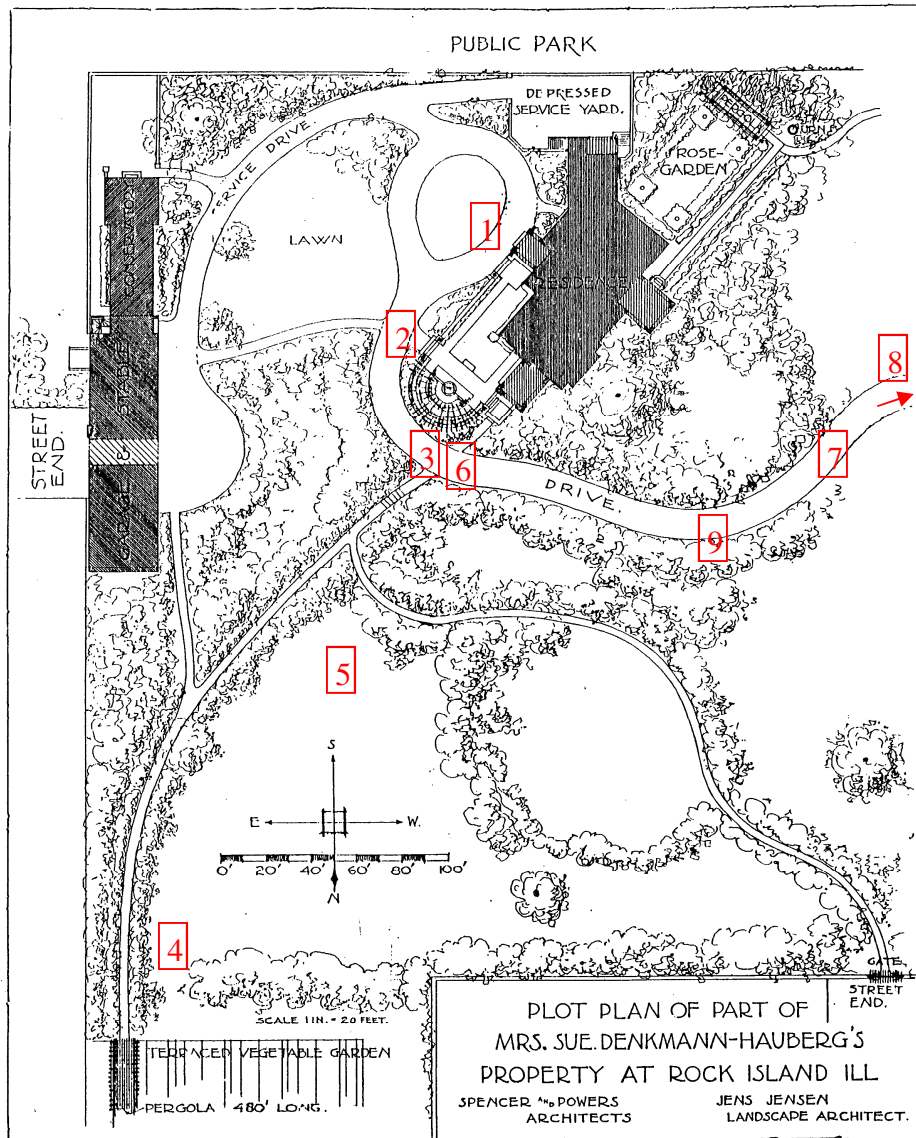
Edsel & Eleanor Ford House, 1100 Lakeshore Rd, Grosse Pointe Shores, MI. [www.fordhouse.org](http://www.fordhouse.org). Explore the estate with a downloadable iTouch tour.

Danish Immigrant Museum, 2212 Washington St, Elk Horn, Iowa. [www.danishmuseum.org](http://www.danishmuseum.org). Home of a traveling exhibit, *Jens Jensen: Celebrating the Native Prairie* and the Jens Jensen Prairie Landscape Park



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**Key**

- |                                  |                           |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Tour Starts Here               | 5 Open Meadow             |
| 2 Walled Terrace                 | 6 Driving Path            |
| 3 Right Turn to Terraced Gardens | 7 Bridge                  |
| 4 Terraced Gardens               | 8 Route to Hauberg Pillar |
|                                  | 9 Original Light Pole     |



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