

The Friends
of the Topiary Park
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Street, Columbus,
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Topiary Park History

The Topiary Garden is located on the original site of the Ohio School for the Deaf. The school was located here from the 1890's until 1953. The school was unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1981. Once comprised of many buildings, only one of the school buildings remains today on the west side of the park. The rubble and debris of the burned buildings was spread over the site and covered with only a few inches of topsoil; and was left as a not very attractive park.



The Painting - Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grand Jatte

The French post impressionist painter, Georges Seurat, invented the technique of pointillism, the use of tiny dots of color to create light. In 1887, he completed the painting, *Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grand Jatte*. This famous painting shows people gathered at leisure in a park on an island in the River Seine, in Paris, France. The large painting – 7 feet by 10 feet – now hangs in The Art Institute of Chicago. It is considered a benchmark in Western art history.



The Painting Reinterpreted

It was the vision of Columbus native, James Mason, to reinterpret Seurat's painting in topiary. Mr. Mason is a professional sculptor, and retired instructor at the Cultural Arts Center. He saw the topiary scene as a da - da pun - a landscape of a painting of a landscape – a case of nature mimicking art. In 1988, Jim Barney, former director of Columbus Recreation and Parks Department, was searching for unique ideas to celebrate the 1992 Quincentenary. Elaine Mason, Arts Coordinator for Recreation and Parks, shared the topiary idea with Mr. Barney and the Topiary Garden in Deaf School Park was created.



As You Tour the Garden

Begin your tour at the top of the small hill located near the topiary. This is the same view Seurat would have painted from. There is a relief of the painting on an easel. You will notice the topiary is done in exaggerated perspective – this creates depth. The figures in the front are twelve feet tall – much larger than the figures at the far end of the pond. The pond represents the River Seine. The topiary figures are comprised of several varieties of *Taxus*, commonly known as yews. The armatures, or frames, that support the figures, are made of 5/8 inch bronze, set in eighteen inches of concrete. The figures are trimmed and tied each June after their main flush of growth. They are also trimmed through the summer to maintain their appearance. The beautiful gardens filled with perennials and annuals are planted and maintained by volunteers of the Friends of the Topiary Park.



In Conclusion

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Topiary Garden. It is a unique experience that has been shared with many people from around the world. In addition to the articles in almost every major magazine and newspaper, the garden has won several prestigious awards. In 2003, it was named to the Smithsonian's Archive of American Gardens. It was featured in a special topiary exhibit in Paris and a BBC2 film featuring the Park was completed in April, 2005.

Please visit the Visitor Center located in the Gatehouse, all sales proceeds and donations benefit the Topiary Garden.