

ALLISON GARDEN

When Susan and Ritch Allison bought the former Coker property, they knew they had acquired a historic treasure. Built in 1908 by noted botanist and University of North Carolina professor, William C. Coker, the prairie-style home and grounds are surrounded with many unusual trees, shrubs and flowers that he planted. In the early 1980's, Dr. Woodrow Burns and his wife Mary Jane, a longtime Chapel Hill Garden Club member, took over the property and began to restore the home and gardens to Dr. Coker's original vision.

In 2021, the Allison's purchased the property and began extensive restorations to the architectural elements of the home and gardens.

"We think of ourselves as caretakers, not owners," Susan Allison said, adding that a preservation easement now permanently protects historic aspects of the home.

The gardens include several very old trees, four millstones used to grind grain when the property was a working farm and a rebuilt arbor that was once the prototype for one erected in the UNC Arboretum. Throughout their endeavor, the Allisons have worked hard to restore the property to Dr Coker's original horticultural vision.

Today one approaches the home under the shade of a 150-year-old oak tree. It towers above a lawn stretching in front of the house and sweeping around to a series of gardens. Near the pathway stands a long-lived Lebanese cedar, and farther on, a cluster of camellias originally planted by Dr. Coker. An immense hemlock tree, once felled by disease, has been refashioned into tables and benches that dot the gardens. A hand-dug, 65 ft deep well, original to the Coker farm, is close to the patio.

Nearby is a massive boulder outcropping with the largest one reputed to have healing properties and dedicated to Louise Coker.

Other smaller gardens include a rain and pollinator garden, once part of the original Coker design, an experimental garden of flowers and vegetables and a new rock garden full of native plants.

When visiting this garden look for:

- White Oak – *Quercus alba*
- Mock Orange – *Philadelphus*
- Live Oak – *Quercus virginiana*
- *Lebanese Cedar – *Cedrus libani*

SUMMARY

When Susan and Ritch Allison bought the former Coker property, they knew they possessed a historic treasure. Built in 1908 by noted botanist and University of North Carolina professor, William C. Coker, the home and grounds feature a variety of unusual trees, shrubs and flowers. Included are several very old trees, including a 150-year-old oak tree, four millstones used to grind grain when the property was a working farm, and a rebuilt arbor that was once the prototype for the one erected in the UNC Arboretum. Throughout their endeavor, the Allison's have worked hard to restore the gardens to Dr. Coker's original horticultural vision.