

HERITAGE AND TRADITION

The Joseph Wood Krutch Cactus Garden

One of the University of Arizona's outdoor gems is the Joseph Wood Krutch Cactus Garden. It is actually a small part of what was once a large cactus garden that had its beginnings on the west side of Old Main. In 1929, it was relocated to the east side.

During the 1930s and until the construction of the Memorial Student Union in 1950, what we know today as the UA Mall was a cactus garden that stretched from Old Main to Cherry Avenue.

By 1967, according to UA historian Phyllis Ball, "all that remained of the university's famous cactus garden was the small oval island in the Mall at Highland Avenue, in front of the Administration Building. To the desert plants which had been there from the beginning were added some survivors from the Mall's eastern end when that area was grassed over, and later some fine specimens of boojum trees and a bench or two."

On May 2, 1980, a dedication was held naming the site the Joseph Wood Krutch Cactus Garden, in honor of the writer and naturalist.

In recent times, many students and alumni weren't even aware of the garden or its significance. That is, until the idea was floated to relocate the garden back to the west side of Old Main as a part of the Alumni Plaza project to enhance the area in front of the Administration Building. The possibility of moving the garden generated an enormous outpouring of sentiment from alumni, students, and staff members. In a matter of days, the Joseph Wood Krutch Cactus Garden was one of the UA's best known and most discussed landmarks.

After hearing from hundreds of people and learning that a move could harm the three surviving boojum trees, and considering the garden's



This postcard from the early 1900s shows the original location of the cactus garden, on the west side of Old Main.

The setting sun framed by the historic boojum trees in the cactus garden. Notice the birds perched in the uppermost branches of the boojum.

Photos by Jay Rochlin

historical significance, the UA Alumni Association directed its design firm to enhance and incorporate the cactus garden into the Alumni Plaza plan.

To celebrate the Joseph Wood Krutch Cactus Garden, we thought we would share part of an article that was written by Jan G. Petranek, who was this publication's editor at the time, some words from Joseph Wood Krutch himself, and excerpts from just a few messages we received from members of our Wildcat Family about how much the garden means to them today.

— Jay Rochlin

Notes from Friends

I have loved the writings of Joseph Wood Krutch. He made me understand what it means to live in the Sonoran Desert, and his insights and stories about it changed my attitude toward the place from one of resentment and resignation to acceptance and love.

— Janice E. Bowers

I recall spending many hours sitting in this garden while studying or eating lunch when I was an undergraduate.

— Phyllis Webster

The historic Joseph Wood Krutch Garden is emblematic of the Sonoran Desert. The University of Arizona is the Sonoran Desert university. The desert's influence is felt not only in the biological and physical sciences, but in the social sciences, in our literature, and in our ways of seeing the world. The boojums, leguminous trees, and cactuses in this historic garden have watched countless students, faculty, staff, and administrators pass through the university, to be shaped by their interactions with each other and by the land.

This historic garden is much more than the sum of its parts. The mature leguminous trees provide microhabitats that nurse and protect the cactuses. The boojums stand together, a fragile northern outpost of the species. Wildlife depends on the fruits and seeds produced by the garden.

This garden is historic. This garden is unique. This garden was a central part of the University of Arizona long before any of us arrived.

— Cindy Salo

For many years, the Krutch Garden has been a source of joy and wonder.

— Jill Bechtold

Words of Joseph Wood Krutch

(from his 1954 book, *The Voice of the Desert*)

Here in the West, as in the country at large, a war more or less concealed under the guise of a "conflict of interests" rages between the "practical" conservationist and the defenders of the national parks and other public lands; between cattlemen and lumberers on the one hand, and the "sentimentalists" on the other. The pressure to allow the hunter, the rancher, or the woodcutter to invade the public domain is constant and the plea is always that we should "use" what is assumed to be useless unless it is adding to material welfare. But unless somebody teaches love, there can be no ultimate protection to what is lusted after. Without some "love of nature" for itself there is no possibility of solving "the problem of conservation."

A Voice of the Desert

(from the summer 1980 issue of *Arizona Alumnus*)

by Jan G. Petranek

In late spring, a small desert garden on the University of Arizona Mall was dedicated in honor of Joseph Wood Krutch, the American author and naturalist. His widow, Marcelle, attended the dedication.

Krutch occupied a considerable place in American letters when he left New York City to come to Tucson in 1950. He had been a drama professor at Columbia University, a drama critic, and a confidant of playwright Eugene O'Neill. He had written biographies of Henry David Thoreau and Samuel Johnson, and a book of philosophy, *The Modern Temper*.

Once in Arizona, Krutch became a respected naturalist. He wrote, among other books, *The Voice of the Desert* and *Grand Canyon: Today and All Its Yesterdays*.

On the day of the dedication, the Krutch Garden was in bloom. Bees fumbled for their footing on the flowers of the prickly pear cacti. Small lizards scampered in the dirt.

Joseph Wood Krutch spoke in many voices.

His was a voice of reason and calm in a world shattered by the experience of two world wars.

His was a voice that insisted on the dignity of man.

In his later years, Krutch was a voice that spoke eloquently in defense of nature. His books mocked man for valuing only what was "useful" in nature and urged a higher ideal — coexistence with the natural world.

It is for his desert books that we in Arizona best remember Joseph Wood Krutch.

With characteristic simplicity, he referred to the Sonoran Desert as "my desert."

He described, in almost loving terms, the interrelationships that occur between desert plants and animals.

