GEORGESON
BOTANICAL GARDEN

UAF
UNIVERSITY OF
ALASKA
FAIRBANKS

University of Alaska Fairbanks
School of Natural Resources and Extension

SNRE
SCHOOL OF NATURAL RESOURCES
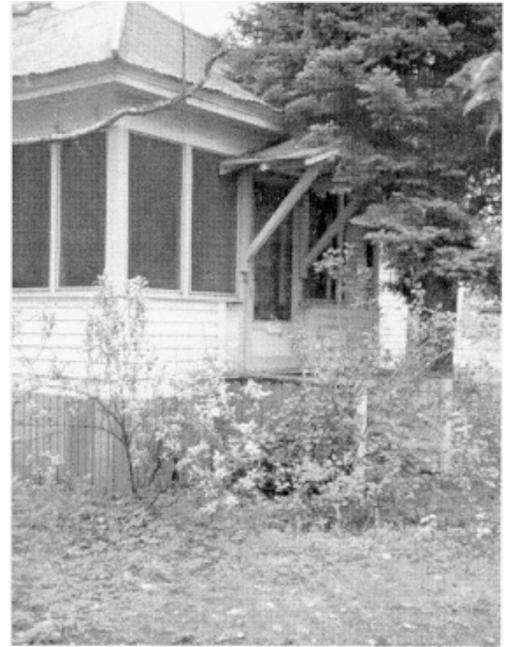AND EXTENSION

Searching for Old Roots
by
Pat Holloway and Ginger Gauss

   With much fanfare, the old F.E. Company houses on Illinois Street near downtown Fairbanks were renovated in 1997 into a bed and breakfast establishment. The roofs have been fixed, lots of interior renovations have taken place, a new coat of paint adorns the houses, and a paved parking lot sits on the north edge of the property. Two years ago, Ginger Gauss and I toured the grounds around these houses to see if we could find remnants of old landscaping. Perhaps the new owners would be interested in reconstructing a historical landscape to fit the new/old houses if we could determine what plants were still there today.
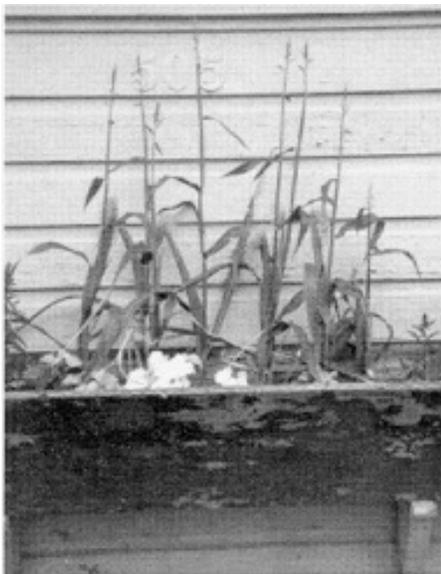
   For the most part, we found lots of native plants, some of which were intentionally planted. Some could have blown in or been carried by birds as the houses sat neglected. We found a few remnants of cultivated plants. Quite possibly, as occupants moved, they dug up and relocated their prized lilies to new neighborhoods. Our next project is to interview previous occupants to learn what was grown in the small greenhouses near the houses and see if any photographs exist with enough detail to make plants identifiable.

   Most houses had white spruce (*Picea glauca*) or Alaska birch (*Betula papyrifera*) around them. A few European birdcherries (*Prunus padus*) were located along the fence at the rear of the property along with Siberian pea (*Caragana arborescens*).

   Near the front doorsteps of one house was a native silverberry (*Elaeagnus commutata*) that had since sent suckers spreading into the lawn on two sides of the house. Near the silverberry was a large, scraggly highbush cranberry (*Viburnum edule*) .

Silverberry on left and highbush cranberry nearest the steps

   The front yard had little grass but was covered with wild strawberries (*Fragaria virginiana*), patches of pussytoes (*Antennaria*), and goldenrod (*Solidago multradiata*). All probably grew in the area even before the houses were built. Planted along the foundation of the house was bedstraw, (*Galium boreale*) mixed with wi1d strawberries and silverberry suckers.

Miniature sweet corn growing in a window box at the caretaker's house

Few domestic flowers occurred on the property except in the caretaker's house. Some scrawny delphiniums were found in the grassy areas along with a harebell (*Campanula* sp.). Remnants of a raised bed vegetable garden were visible near one of the houses, but the only non-native plant was a yellow-flowered alfalfa.

A rundown home greenhouse with saplings pushing through the roof

The small wooden greenhouses were full of trash, dirt and very healthy saplings. The greenhouses appeared well used and were equipped with lights and heat. Planted around the foundation of one house was false spiraea (*Sorbaria sorbifolia*), and like the silverberry, it had suckered around the foundation. North of the houses along a fence we found wild roses (*Rosa acicularis*), soapberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*) and more silverbcrry. Wild irises (*Iris setosa*), wild celery (*Cnidium cnidifolium*), white fireweed (*Epilobium angustifolium*), strawberry blite (*Chenopodium capitatum*) and Siberian aster (*Aster sibiricus*) completed the list of wildflowers growing near the houses.

False spiraea, Sorbaria sorbifolia

We would be interested in hearing from any of our readers who might know about the garden flowers, shrubs and trees grown in and around these houses years ago. Call us and share your stories and photographs to add some bits and pieces to the grand gardening history of Fairbanks (phone 474-7222).

Birch trees, the mainstay of home landscaping, then and now

For more information from the Georgeson Botanical Garden and the School of Natural Resources and Extension visit:

www.uaf.eu/snras/gbg
www.uaf.edu/snras
www.snras.blogspot.com