

Episode 30

Legacy

GARDENS OF TEMPLE SQUARE

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NATHAN WRIGHT: One of the most remarkable aspects of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is its unique history. Throughout the world great stories from faithful Church members have only added to that history. This program shares some of these incredible stories of faith, perseverance, hope, and inspiration. You are listening to Legacy. I am your host, Nathan Wright.

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MATT HENDERSON: I'm Matt Henderson, filling in for Nathan Wright. Temple Square in Salt Lake City is one of the country's top tourist attractions and anyone who has visited this ten-acre square has been impressed by the beauty of the gardens in the summer or its Christmas displays in the winter. With me in the studio today to talk about Temple Square and its gardens are Peter Lassig and Esther Truett Hendrickson. Welcome.

GUESTS: Thank you. Glad to be here.

MATT HENDERSON: Let's start off by just having each of you introduce yourself. Briefly tell us about your background and especially you, Peter, what you did with Temple Square. So let's start with you.

PETER LASSIG: I'm Peter Lassig and I have the great honor and privilege of serving at the Gardens at Temple Square for about 45 years. Thirty-three of those years were as the supervisor of the grounds.

MATT HENDERSON: Forty-five years.

PETER LASSIG: Yea.

MATT HENDERSON: Well. Esther.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: I'm Esther Truett Hendrickson and I started at Temple Square at age 19. Peter hired me as the first woman to ever work on the grounds, and I pulled weeds at the Beehive House. And then went to Utah State and got a bachelor's; at University of Connecticut I got a masters in landscape history; and then came and worked full-time for a number of years.

MATT HENDERSON: So a masters degree in landscape history. Tell me briefly what that, what that entails.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDERICKSON: Well, a lot of people think it's, that you go to, like, a Church historic site and tell them what kind of tree to plant or what kind of fence—and it is that as well; but it is also documenting changes in the landscape that occur now, that occur all the

time, and to know what things in the past have been, like, in the past, even; the ancient past.

MATT HENDERSON: So could you tell us a little bit about the Salt Lake Valley? What it was like early on?

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: When the Saints came?

MATT HENDERSON: Yea.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDERICKSON: Well in 1847 when the Saints came into the Valley it was, they, there are accounts of they had to be on top of their horses and they had to sort of, sort of rise up in the saddle to see over the tall grass. There is talk of just one tree in the Valley and that was a juniper that was sort of off in the distance. We know that that area's about Six South and...

PETER LASSIG: Uh...

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: Six East and Third South...

PETER LASSIG: Third South.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: Six East and Third South.

MATT HENDERSON: I remember seeing that monument there.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: And, but that's actually not the place; it's actually the florist that's across the street from that monument; that's where the tree was. It was a, there were lots of creeks and streams that came out of the canyons and they were lined with poplars so there were lots of trees in the Valley.

MATT HENDERSON: So, let's move into the Temple Square. Now 45 years, what year was that that you started working?

PETER LASSIG: Let me see. I started in '56.

MATT HENDERSON: In '56. And you worked, who was the supervisor of the grounds then?

PETER LASSIG: A grand, noble man named Irvin T. Nelson.

MATT HENDERSON: Irvin T. Nelson. Now, if I remember right he designed for other temples. Did he do the London Temple?

PETER LASSIG: Yes. He was very active in a, in a lot of theaters. If it concerned gardens he was the man. He, I think he started by organizing; he was a tremendous organizer. And I think it was right after the Depression when he started making, making an impact on the Church gardens. He, he started with various chapels and organized a beautification program for the various chapels. He went all over the state, improving the gardens at various chapels and then I think he got his break at—oh, what is that place?—the Winter Quarters; he got his break at the Winter Quarters when—well, actually, before then, he graduated...

MATT HENDERSON: From Weber State, wasn't it?

PETER LASSIG: What?

MATT HENDERSON: Did he graduate from Weber State?

PETER LASSIG: Yea.

MATT HENDERSON: Yea.

PETER LASSIG: Good for you. He graduated from Weber State a valedictorian. And at the time he gave his valedictory address, when it was finished the president at Weber State which was David O. McKay, who later became the President of the Church, leaned over to someone and said “That was a wonderful talk. I wonder if he wrote that himself?”

MATT HENDERSON: [LAUGHING] That’s funny.

PETER LASSIG: So that was a measure of how Brother Nelson began to develop the respect and a rapport with David O. McKay, and they worked together on many projects. I remember when I was on board in ’56 shortly after I was hired, he was sent by President McKay to go to the Swiss Temple and supervise the landscaping there. He, he conceived the landscape and then he also supervised. He was just wonderful at supervising. Later on he was sent to the London Temple and he designed and supervised the landscaping there. And then he went to the New Zealand Temple and so forth. St. George Temple also received his, his touch. He was just a, was a very inspirational experience for me to work with him. And my father told me when I was getting to know Brother Nelson, he said, “You pay attention to that man. He’s worth more than a college education.”

MATT HENDERSON: Wow.

PETER LASSIG: And I, it sure turned out to be true. When I meet him in Heaven, I’d like to talk over a few things with him because he really gave me a wonderful boost intellectually and spiritually. Just a marvelous man.

MATT HENDERSON: Now, looking at photos of Temple Square, I’m not certain but it looks to me like the layout of Temple Square Gardens changed in the late ‘40s, early ‘50s, something like that....

PETER LASSIG: That’s true: In 1944 he took over.

MATT HENDERSON: Oh, and he’s the one that changed the whole, kind of, layout?

PETER LASSIG: Yes. And Brother Knowland who was the gardener before him supervised by walking around in a nice stiffly starched white shirt, and Brother Nelson during this entire time is beautifying temples and Church historic site. And Brother Knowland had a heart attack and died. And President McKay just turned it over to Brother Nelson right there and that started his life’s work.

MATT HENDERSON: When I walk through Temple Square—now, I’m no gardener but can certainly appreciate it—one thing that I notice is I look at the shadows from the trees coming down on the pavement and I look at the flower beds and they kind of have the same feel, that same pattern....

PETER LASSIG: You really have done your homework. Esther and I conceived of the idea of producing Technicolor, blotched shadows across the flower beds that were in the Center Mall there that replicated in color what you can see in black and white with the blotchy shadows and the, and the arrangements were done to support, not take over, the view provided by the historic buildings.

MATT HENDERSON: So let's talk about that. How do you create a flower bed? Let's talk about a flower bed. How do you create a flower bed that has that look to it?

PETER LASSIG: That's an interesting question. I think that the way that we create our flower beds is simply look at the shadows and blotchy pieces of sunlight, the shards of sunlight that's displayed across the garden; we look at them with squinty eyes. When you squint your eyes you—I got this from Brother Nelson, who got it from the English when he was in London during the London Temple. You squint your eyes so you can hardly see and that allows you to see only the most important issues; the basic structural organization of the space can be visualized that way. And having picked up the feeling of the blotching, the black and white blotchiness of the shadows as they moved across the garden through the day, it was a simple matter to once having tuned into that. The Japanese gardeners do this also, many great landscapers have developed the idea of squinting to rule out the superfluous so that we can see only the important. And having done that, you tune into the spirit of the place, or what some people call the *genus loci*. Is that how you pronounce that?

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: Correct.

PETER LASSIG: The *genus loci*: the spirit of the place. We started there and then as we had opportunity to relandscape because of construction or excavation or something like that, we would squint and tune in to the spirit of the place, the *genus loci*, before we began to create the new garden. It was depending on the character that already existed in the place. The character around the Salt Lake Temple was of majesty and somber elegance; the character of the Mormon Tabernacle was Brigham Young pragmatic aluminum roofs.

MATT HENDERSON: Right.

PETER LASSIG: And the character of the Assembly Hall was this charming bit of English architecture that was kind of, what, Victorian? Would you call that Victorian?

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: It's, it's kind of modified Gothic.

PETER LASSIG: Okay. I like that: modified Gothic. However it wasn't Gothic-Gothic; it was cheerful Gothic [LAUGHING].

MATT HENDERSON: Cheerful Gothic! [LAUGHING]

PETER LASSIG: It, it had no malice; it was a quality of innocence that was there. And yet over at the Beehive House, that was kind of like a patchwork quilt that would be done by English Saints. It was an English garden—well, actually, Esther would know more about it—but some of my pictures that I looked at when we tried to decide how to landscape that were fairly shocking: It was swept earth and bushes.

MATT HENDERSON: Really.

PETER LASSIG: Well, with all those kids running around and not very much garden, it was just [LAUGHING] swept earth. You could never clean it because it was just dirt; and you had the bushes....

MATT HENDERSON: Well, now with the Lion House area, you've got all those wedding parties in there.

PETER LASSIG: Yes.

MATT HENDERSON: So how do you keep a garden looking nice with all those hundreds of people every week?

PETER LASSIG: Well, that was a strategy that was born of work that had been done in golfing landscape. Golfing landscape had a technique where they would use a foot or so of sand for the putting green.

MATT HENDERSON: Because it's got so much traffic on it?

PETER LASSIG: Takes a lot of traffic in the sand, and has natural aeration pockets, and the water drains through the sand quite well. And as the water drains through the sand it pulls in oxygen as it vacates the surface.

MATT HENDERSON: So is that what's under the lawn there?

PETER LASSIG: That's what's under the Tea Garden lawn in the back of the wedding area. That was a hilarious thing that caused me some consternation because we couldn't get the people off the lawn, and I felt like we were directing the activities of a herd of cattle who were destroying the lawn. So I decided to take out all of the grass and take out all of the soil that supported the grass and replace it with a foot of sand. And then I had an executive call me and say, "Peter, get that sand out of there." And I said to him....

MATT HENDERSON: Now, is he a gardener?

PETER LASSIG: No.

MATT HENDERSON: Okay. Just an executive.

PETER LASSIG: He was an executive over the Lion House. I said, "You wash dishes and I'll pick up cigarette butts."

MATT HENDERSON: [LAUGHING]

PETER LASSIG: And I shortly got a call from a little higher authority that was quite frightening. He asked me what I was doing, and I said I was doing my job. And he said, "Well, I think you better just change that and just take out the sand." And I said, "Your job is to hire and fire. You hire somebody to take care of the Gardens. You fire them if it doesn't work." And [LAUGHING] there was a quiet moment on the phone and he said, "Well, we'll be watching you. If you can't produce a lawn there, we may have to release you with appreciation before you want to go."

MATT HENDERSON: And you went on several more years so apparently it worked.

PETER LASSIG: I went on some twenty, thirty years.

MATT HENDERSON: [LAUGHING] I want to come back to something you mentioned. You mentioned the Japanese. And the spirit of, what was it? The spirit of...

PETER LASSIG: The *genus loci*. The spirit of the place.

MATT HENDERSON: Is that—I don't know how to pronounce it—feng shui? Is that the same kind of principle?

PETER LASSIG: It's Chinese. It is feng shui and I had a marvelous blessing. I was called on a mission to Japan, and part of the process of serving a mission is to be interviewed by the various authorities that come through. And I was being interviewed at the end of my mission by, or near the end of my mission, by Gordon B. Hinckley, who was an Assistant to the Twelve. And I pointed out to him that I had been faithfully paying attention to mission work and had never photographed a Japanese garden; had never spent any time looking at Japanese gardens; and I felt that they would be a great opportunity for me at the end of my mission to not go home yet but to spend some time studying Japanese floral design and Japanese garden design. And he said that he would have to get permission from the First Presidency. Well I had worked on Temple Square two or three years before I went on my mission so the brethren knew who I was and, surprise, surprise: Brother Hinckley wrote back and said, 'The First Presidency have approved your request to stay and study.' And so I, at the end of my mission I moved out of my mission quarters and found some separate quarters so that I wouldn't interfere with the mission work. I studied Ikebana which is the raising of flowers, and toured all the famous gardens of Kyoto. There was a wonderful man named Sato who, he was my age, and he accompanied me. And it was a great opportunity to study Japanese gardens. And I found that I could apply the peninsula and base type of philosophy of Japanese stone arrangements, I could just as well do that with flowers. And so we did it and then trained the players, the workers, the employees, plus the various housewives who decided to come in and help us. We trained them in February—we called it the February Design Course. And it was very important because when I first went on to Temple Square in 1972 as the supervisor, only one person did the design...

MATT HENDERSON: Really.

PETER LASSIG: ...and that was the supervisor. And I felt that when the work for very long because we were about to expand. We expanded from 22,000 flowers planted in spring and in fall to 165,000 flowers...

MATT HENDERSON: Wow.

PETER LASSIG: ...a seven-fold increase and without adding staff, paid staff. It was through these marvelous volunteer women who succeeded and did well in the design course. And if they succeeded in the design course, then they were given a specific area for them to design and to execute and to weed.

MATT HENDERSON: I'll bet you a lot of people are wondering right now, "How do I learn to do gardens like that in Temple Square?" Now you had these design classes. You're going to have some people that just by nature can do it; they're just right off the bat, they're creative, they have an eye for design. But are there those who struggle with it?

PETER LASSIG: There are those...

MATT HENDERSON: ...And if they do struggle can they learn?

PETER LASSIG: There are those who struggle. And I remember Helmut was a perfect example. He was an employee, a wonderful German bricklayer. And his thought processes were one brick on another. And that also included putting one lollipop on the right side and one lollipop on the left side and...

MATT HENDERSON: Very symmetrical.

PETER LASSIG: Very symmetrical. I called them "duck pins and bowling balls" across the front of the house.

MATT HENDERSON: [LAUGHING]

PETER LASSIG: And, so the question is, "Can these people learn?" And I, without exception, people can learn. It's, it's in their DNA. People respond to loveliness. And...go ahead.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: Helmut had a fabulous breakthrough one day, and we all stood and wept. Because it was kind of a miracle, and he, he knew he had gotten it.

PETER LASSIG: It's true.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: And so I've seen it time and time again; even people who just come through Temple Square have an "ah-ha" experience.

PETER LASSIG: That's so true.

MATT HENDERSON: Would you tell us a little about his breakthrough.

PETER LASSIG: Well, the breakthrough was common for anyone who stayed long enough. I remember Esther that took the design course. Even though she was with a master's degree, she wanted to submit herself to a design course as anybody else. One of the things I learned in design at Utah State University was that you had to speak rather honestly about the quality of the design. And so as not to hurt people's feelings, we decided to put the names of various flowers in a hat. On the first day of design course, have people pull a name out of the hat. It could be rosemary; it could be thyme; parsley; sage; it could be roses; violets; anything. And then they were to sign their works with that name so that no one knew that name except them.

MATT HENDERSON: Wow.

PETER LASSIG: So then you would critique their work. I remember we had a marvelous designer named Rose Ann Peterson. She came in; she was a professional artist and really knew her stuff; and I remember evaluating her first assignment: I looked at it from this angle and from

that angle and the next angle and the next angle, and overhead rotated it back and forth; and I said “This person ought to be teaching this class, not me.”

MATT HENDERSON: [LAUGHING] Really?

PETER LASSIG: And in the case of quality work, they would have to sign the flower name that we gave them. But also if it was particularly good work, we wanted everybody else in the class to know who was doing good work. So I said “Who did this?” And she raised her hand. And, and then we asked her to help critique the work of other people as the class went on. Well, poor Helmut took the class for three or five years; always putting one brick on another and one lollipop to the right and one lollipop to the left. And he, he, it was like drowning. It was like watching him drown; he couldn’t get onto it. But eventually he surrendered himself to the *genus loci* of the assignment and did a spectacular job. So I said, “This is spectacular. Who did this?” And poor Helmut turned bright red and with tears in his eyes raised his hand.

MATT HENDERSON: Wow.

PETER LASSIG: And we knew he had crossed the divide, and from that time on we could give him important assignments and trust that he would produce a landscape design that would follow the character of the patterns that we wanted. The character of the patterns we were looking for was designs that called attention to the Creator, not the designer.

MATT HENDERSON: Hmm. That’s a nice way to look at it. You talked about looking at things from different angles.

PETER LASSIG: Well, gardens are like walk-through sculpture.

MATT HENDERSON: Yea.

PETER LASSIG: And because they are walk-through sculpture you have an experience going this way through the composition, or you have an experience of turning around and going that way.

MATT HENDERSON: So how do you go about...let’s take one space in Temple Square. How do you go about planting that so that it looks good from either side, no matter where you’re standing it, looks good? How do you go about doing that?

PETER LASSIG: You create it while you’re walking and you, what you do is you take the controlling elements: a dominant color or a dominant form or a dominant texture; and those controlling elements, we’ve found in most successful gardens, added up to about 10 to 20 percent of the total mass. And you always estimated your flowers by how many square feet you had; that’s easy to do. If I had a 100 square feet, I automatically know I’m going to plant 200 plants, or two plants per square foot. And I automatically know that out of that 100, 200 plants, I know that 10 to 20 percent, which is 20 to 40 plants, will be these dominant plants; outstanding color; or something like that.

MATT HENDERSON: Hmm.

PETER LASSIG: We call that the skeleton. And then the connecting forms were also 10 to 20 percent, and we call that tendon. And then the fill-in was 60 to 40 percent, depending on how much skeleton and how much tendon you put down. The rest would be 40 to 60 percent flesh. Skeleton, tendon, flesh which was produced, the idea was produced by a great Bajas painter, Paul Clay. And he conceived of the idea that all design could be reduced to skeleton, tendon, flesh. And so that answers your question: "How did you go about doing it?" We created skeletons that could be viewed beautifully from left side or the right side or front or back or overhead...

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: To even a floor of a building

PETER LASSIG: A floor of a building. We have a number of tall buildings. People have a right to expect beautiful gardens no matter how you look at them.

MATT HENDERSON: So the next question comes: You've planted skeleton, tendon, flesh, say, first of April. Some of those flowers are dying out by the middle of May; and so if your skeleton's dying out in the middle of May but the others are still going, how do you keep those flower beds going and looking full and...?

PETER LASSIG: It's interesting. I think the most important thing to remember is that neighboring plants that are healthy are perfectly willing to occupy the vacancy left by a sick plant.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: Which is why we don't spell out LDS in our flower beds because then the gaps, the missing plants always show. But when you plant skeleton, tendon, flesh it just blends in and recovers.

MATT HENDERSON: Like a pest, a pest could kill one plant and doesn't affect the others.

PETER LASSIG: You're right on target.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: Which is why you want biodiversity. The more plants, the more species, the bigger success you're going to have.

PETER LASSIG: We're sitting at a table that is probably four-by-six feet. And that four-by-six table would be filled with about 30 varieties of plants.

MATT HENDERSON: Wow.

PETER LASSIG: If you were the devil's advocate and say "Well, Peter, how can you put 30 to 60 plants in a small space like this table?" And the way you do it is by choosing unifying qualities. Unifying...let's say you do it all in red but we do it in 30 to 60 types of red flowers. So the unifying factor is....

MATT HENDERSON: ...is red.

PETER LASSIG: ...is red or a common form or common texture. But the diversity allows us, give us the opportunity to lay out a flower bed that can tolerate losses. And those losses, you know, at Temple Square have come from dogs running through the flowers; tobacco bud worm going through and destroying 20 percent of the flowers; and the plants that were left would fill in those vacancies just fine; thank you very much.

MATT HENDERSON: Wow. That's interesting. You know, I walk around and look at these flower bed and these arrangements and so on. Over by, between the Old Administration Building and the Church Office Building, there is a—I don't know what you would call it—there's an area there that structurally it's very symmetrical.

PETER LASSIG: Yes.

MATT HENDERSON: But the flower arrangements in there are not.

PETER LASSIG: Oh you're so observant. You have a good observation. That's right. We call that the Administration Parterre, which is like a French decoration in an open space. The parterre had some complications—talking about the *genus loci*. We have a tall building on the east side of the garden, no, a four-story building on the east side of that garden...

MATT HENDERSON: Very classic building with columns, the ionic ...

PETER LASSIG: Yes, that's the Administration Building. And then the old Hotel Utah was about ten stories high, so twice as tall. And the play of those solid shadows through the day as the sun rotated through the sky added up to a, we would photograph, we would take somebody who was diligent and say, "Bob, we'd like you to go spend 12 hours working for us this coming Saturday. Would you be willing to do that?" "Yes." "All I want you to do is photograph straight down from this building every hour on the hour so we have, end up with 12 photographs that identify the shadow patterns for that hour. And then we would take those shadow patterns and draw them on transparent paper to come up with a composite sun-shade study. And from the composite sun-shade study we suddenly found out why petunias would not grow in the one side and why begonias would grow in the other side. The petunias only got, let me see, five hours of sunlight in the entire day. After that we realized after five hours of sunlight we could plant begonias and impatiens but we couldn't plant petunias. So shadow studies were part of searching for the *genus loci* of the place.

MATT HENDERSON: Which is something people at home should do. You don't think about watching all day...

PETER LASSIG: It's true.

MATT HENDERSON: ...and see where the shadows are, where the sun is.

PETER LASSIG: You could do it like Gertrude Jekyll, the great English gardener. She would say something like, "If it doesn't perform, 'hoike' it out and put something else in there." But the problem is that a huge scale, when you've got 165,000 flowers planted, you can't "hoike" out even a half of them

MATT HENDERSON: Yea.

PETER LASSIG: ...to replace them.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: So to begin with you do something called sacrifice planting.

PETER LASSIG: Exactly.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: And side by side you plant something that takes two hours of sun, five hours of sun, eight hours of sun and let them decide.

MATT HENDERSON: Hmm.

PETER LASSIG: It's true.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: And then you save...

MATT HENDERSON: Let them fight it out.

PETER LASSIG: It's true.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: ...you save your manpower because that is the greatest cost in a garden: not the flowers but the manpower to pull the weeds.

PETER LASSIG: We actually found out that the manpower added up to 75 percent of the cost of the Garden. And the lawn mower and the sprinkler systems and the cultivation, that only cost, even though you once every ten years spend money for a \$20,000 lawn mower, it would pay for itself anyway, because manpower is the most expensive part of the Garden. It's expensive: the flowers are expensive, buying the flowers; buying the seed; planting the seed; and getting lawn mowers and getting automatic sprinkler systems; hugely expensive. But they all together only add up to 25 percent of the cost of the Garden. The manpower is 75 percent of the cost of the Garden, just like Esther said.

MATT HENDERSON: So you have to be willing to experiment and explore and let things fail and...

PETER LASSIG: Yes.

MATT HENDERSON: ...I'm thinking it's, was it Plato who said, "In order to create beauty...

PETER LASSIG: "In order to create beauty, you must be willing to explore chaos."

MATT HENDERSON: Right. That's what it is. Chaos can be a very frightening place for someone like Helmut.

PETER LASSIG: Well, chaos can be a frightening experience for executives who are my supervisor.

MATT HENDERSON: Because they see the Gardens when they're done.

PETER LASSIG: They also see the chaos that I go through to create it.

MATT HENDERSON: [LAUGHING] Let's talk a little bit about some of the older plants or trees or things that are on Temple Square.

PETER LASSIG: Sure.

MATT HENDERSON: I understand--I hope it's still there—I understand there's a rose that actually came from Nauvoo...

PETER LASSIG: Esther?

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: There was. The story is—it has pretty good provenance—it came from Nauvoo in a hand cart in a tea pot and was planted on Temple Square. And in 1981 when they were going to redo the Assembly Hall and tear out that garden, Peter took me over there and pointed to that rose and said, “We need to move this.” So I took it and planted it at the Beehive House. And it’s still there. It’s a little tiny chinensis rose.

MATT HENDERSON: It’s a red one, if I remember.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: It’s nothing that would knock your socks off, but it’s a very sweet story. And they, they redid the cobbled wall a couple of years ago and I went down there and the rose was gone. And it had been potted up and stuck in the back alley so I took some cuttings and I have them at home growing in my garden in case it ever disappears from Church grounds.

PETER LASSIG: I remember the history of that rose. It was actually given to Brother Nelson by a sweet little old lady with the story, and he faithfully planted and preserved the rose until Esther could save it.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: I do want to insert one thing about Irvin T. Nelson. He also did the grounds at the Washington DC Temple. But my favorite garden that he did was the Orson Hyde Garden on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. I’ve been there several times and every time I go it’s in a, it’s in a state of ruin greater than the time before. And which shows how great that garden is, because even in a state of ruin it’s a beautiful place.

PETER LASSIG: And we always say, Eero Saarinen the great Finnish architect who designed the St. Louis Arch, said you can always tell the quality of any designed structural element by seeing it in ruins: If it’s beautiful in ruins it’s well done. I apply that to my father-in-law when he was going through dementia and as he went through dementia I looked at him one day sitting there as noble as he ever was and I thought he looks classic even in ruins; he looks classic.

MATT HENDERSON: Wow. That’s a nice thought. You talked about the rose coming from Nauvoo in a tea pot. I understand there was a tree there that came in a purse.

PETER LASSIG: Yes.

MATT HENDERSON: Talk about that.

PETER LASSIG: The tree came in a purse of Mrs. Petty and the Petty family went to the Holy Land...

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: In 1949.

PETER LASSIG: ...in 1949. They acquired two seedlings of Cedars of Lebanon. One was planted at the Petty house and the other one was planted on Temple Square in its current position. But in its current position it was next four feet away from a house that had been built to receive visitors as they came through a little gate there and showed their recommends. And one terrible winter the ice slid off the roof and broke the tree in half. And today, if you go there closely and look closely you’ll see the decapitated part; looks just like a sled. And a side branch was trained to take over as the leader. And now the tree is

beautiful and noble. It was once threatened by construction. And as I looked at the contractor and the architect bent on cutting the tree down, I promised to go to the Salt Lake Tribune newspaper and get them to photograph the little old ladies laying in front of the bulldozers with me. I can't believe how gutsy I was!

MATT HENDERSON: [LAUGHING]

PETER LASSIG: Needless to say we were able to save the tree.

MATT HENDERSON: Wow. Let's talk about some of the other trees that are on the Square there. By the Temple there's a tree—I don't know if they call it "The Wedding Tree"—but it's where brides often have their picture taken.

PETER LASSIG: Yes. The Wedding Tree is a *lonicera korolkowii*: the *korolkowii* honeysuckle. And it was spotted by my wife as we were driving along Ninth East. And they were growing together next to an old adobe house. And she said...

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: A matched pair of them.

PETER LASSIG: A matched pair. And she said, "Peter, stop the car. Back up." And I looked at those two trees and I thought, "That would look beautiful next to the Salt Lake Temple." So I called Brother Nelson, and we drove up there, and I said, "Look at this." He said, "How will I ever move them?" They were full grown. And I said, "I could move them if you can get permission to plant them." And so we went into the Church records to find out who lived there, and the Uptograff family lived there. And the Uptograff family was active, were active Latter-day Saints. He was serving in the bishopric. And when we found out he was serving in the bishopric we knew those trees were ours. And then I took three years to prepare them for transplanting, which would involve root printing; and at the end of three years we were able to use cranes to lift them out of their original pioneer planting site, put them on a big truck, and haul them down to Temple Square. It took two cranes to place them in place: one crane on the outside of the wall that picked it up and moved it across to the other side of the wall; then the other crane picked it up and moved it into place. And a lot of people had themselves pictures taken next to that tree. While the tornado destroyed the tree on the east, but the tree on the west still exists.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: But the tree on the east has crowns sprouted up and it is, it is getting bigger and bigger. The reason those trees are so fabulous there is because the gray granite of the Temple and these trees have gray green leaves and pink blooms and this wonderful gnarled...

PETER LASSIG: Dusty pink blooms.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: ...trunks that are kind of remind people of olive trees. And I've heard some of the tour guides call them olives before. And just at Conference time in the "Deseret News" they had a picture of those trees and called them locusts. So everybody still is kind of confused. They are honeysuckles but they are spectacular.

PETER LASSIG: Honeysuckle bushes.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: Honeysuckle bushes.

MATT HENDERSON: They're not really trees.

PETER LASSIG: They grew from pioneer times and just kept on growing and kept on thickening.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: They're multitrunks so they're very beautiful.

MATT HENDERSON: I understand that the watering of Temple Square, does that all come from City Creek?

PETER LASSIG: It does. The water for Temple Square comes through a four-inch main that comes from City Creek. It's not metered. And what happened was that the City wanted to take over the water that was coming from City Creek. And City Creek was owned by Brigham Young and hence was owned by the Church. When I was hired in '56, Henry Cagy in 1956 celebrated his 44th anniversary of working for Temple Square, and he told me that City Creek used to run down the center of North Temple, and that he, Henry Cagy, would dip a bucket into the stream and go over and water the trees that were along the street. And when the opportunity came for them, for us to put a pipe into City Creek, they, we made an arrangement with the Church through formal letters of intent that the Church would yield to the City all rights to the water in City Creek if the City would yield to the Church unmetered water for Temple Square. And to this day Temple Square is watered with water that comes from a pipe that's not metered.

MATT HENDERSON: I remember hearing a story of, there's a great lawn between the Tabernacle and the North Visitors Center...

PETER LASSIG: Yes.

MATT HENDERSON: ...and the North Visitors Center has the doors on the south side that they never use and stairs coming down...

PETER LASSIG: Yes.

MATT HENDERSON: ...onto the lawn.

PETER LASSIG: Yes.

MATT HENDERSON: Now I understand there have been some battles over the years to put a sidewalk from the Tabernacle over to those stairs.

PETER LASSIG: Did you say battles?

MATT HENDERSON: Oh. Yea.

PETER LASSIG: Oh, that was so funny. George Cannon, the Church architect who was responsible for the design of the North Visitors Center took me aside one day. He was aged in his 90s and he knew me and he took me up to look at that beautiful set of stairs that steps down to the lawn. And he said, "Peter, those steps that step down to the lawn are poetic expressions that come to us from Venice and just as stairs that go down from the Plaza to the water were never meant to be bridged by pavement out over the water, it is, we never intended to have pavement to go over to those steps." And so several times I was faced with

somebody in authority wanting to put pavement there. I remember the first time it happened. I knew that they were going to put the pavement across there and destroy the simplicity of that lawn. And I put the name of that lawn on the prayer roll in the Salt Lake Temple, that it would be preserved. And they decided that they, they caught on to what Brother Young was saying, that the steps were never meant to be connected to a pavement; it would destroy the elegant simplicity of that green space on the lawn. A decade later with a new set of management the question came up again: "Let's put a sidewalk across there." So once again I put its name on the prayer roll of the Salt Lake Temple. And a witness to that event watched the brethren deal with the business of the Church. Brother Hinckley was voice for the brethren, and he said, "Next, we have a request: put pavement across the lawn over to the North Visitors Center Plaza. Let's see. We already considered that. Next." [LAUGHING]

MATT HENDERSON: [LAUGHING] That was it.

PETER LASSIG: [LAUGHING] That was, it was safe. President Hinckley remembered that...

MATT HENDERSON: From ten years earlier.

PETER LASSIG: ...from ten years before that had been debated. He said, "We already considered that. Next." [LAUGHING]

MATT HENDERSON: What are some of your favorite, let's take each of you. What are some of your favorite things on Temple Square: favorite plants; favorite trees; favorite areas?

PETER LASSIG: Well, I would have to say my favorite was the Cedar of Lebanon because I was willing to sacrifice my employment. And another thing that, the, I guess the other favorite thing is that we saved a significant number of trees on the south side of the Temple. There are some large chestnuts that are decorated with lights. There are some large elms that run across, run along the west end of that thing. And the architect had drawn a plan that would remove those trees and put out a fine and noble plaza. And I knew that those trees were doomed unless I did something. And I conceived the idea of protecting that lawn because we wanted to be able to have access to the south side of the Temple in the case it caught on fire. And so when all of my management had gone home for the weekend, I arranged to have the Salt Lake City Fire Department bring their giant fire truck with its three-wheel on the back wheels, drive onto Temple Square at seven in the morning, Saturday morning, when almost nobody was there. And they drove across the lawn up to the south side of the Temple and extended the ladder from the truck over to the second floor of, and we took pictures of it driving across the lawn and took pictures of it extending the ladder over to the south side of the Salt Lake Temple, south windows there. And then we had Risk Management write a letter to the architect asking us not to change the lawn there so that we could rescue people from the Temple if it caught on fire. And to save those mighty trees in one fell swoop was a sense of joy for me; a feeling of accomplishment. The other thing that was a sense of joy was to get the idea of having a design class so that more than one person; we ended up with 50 people designing the flower beds but think that 50 like-minded people could produce arrangements that call attention to the Creator, not the designer, was a source of great satisfaction. And Esther worked with me for 20 years with that design class. We just had a wonderful time.

MATT HENDERSON: Esther, what are some of your favorite things?

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: Well, some spaces that still move me are, starting on Temple Square, the South Mall, the Center Mall that runs down the center of Temple Square. The South Mall; the elm trees that enclose it make it like a cathedral; and the dapple shade and the yew hedges that surround it. It's one of the great urban spaces in the USA, and it's, it's very underrated. As you look to the north, it is terminated, well, it's on either side is the Temple and the Tabernacle, two of our great buildings, and as you go off to the vista, it is terminated by the Conference Center. And the south vista used to be terminated by a bookstore at Crossroads Plaza. And now that they have torn that down, and I'm excited to see if they're going to open up that vista to the south, to the sky. Another space that still thrills me is the space between the Administration Building and the Lion House. It's a very tight corridor and on the one side are the uncadence of the Greek columns; and on the other side is the cadence of the dormers and the doors of the Lion House; and it's a wonderful space. The other space that I love is, sometimes I drive up State Street just to drive under the Eagle Gate Monument because there you have a real sense of space and a real sense of place.

MATT HENDERSON: There's a cobblestone wall...

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: The cobblestone wall, the view to the Capitol, but you drive under that arch and you feel like you've come to Salt Lake. I don't know if very, very, I'm sure a lot of people don't know that a couple of years ago South Temple was named one of the ten greatest streets in the U.S. along with the Magnificent Mile in Chicago, Canyon Road in Santa Fe. But one of the things that make South Temple great is the avenues grid is smaller blocks than the ten-acre grid to the south so...

MATT HENDERSON: Oh, right.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: ...that's interesting. The trees, the architecture, Temple Square, Eagle Gate, it terminates on the east at the University of Utah and at the south at the Union Pacific Railroad, and it's a fabulous street.

MATT HENDERSON: It is.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: And the other, according to Peter talked about, was the Administration Parterre. And back in '83 when the Hotel Utah was redone to become the Joseph Smith Building, that garden was torn up to build parking construction underneath. And Peter and I met with the architects F. F. HARE—fabulous men; and I'm particularly thinking of Joe Reuben and they showed us a plan for a stone plaza with the benches that were going to replace that garden. And Peter and I gulped and we...

PETER LASSIG: Let me interject one thing here. That garden was created by Hare and Hare Landscape Architects out of Kansas City, and it was a true classic that was first championed by George Cannon Young.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: So we did a presentation. This was a time that it was, that we used history to, to win.

PETER LASSIG: Esther was the voice. She really saved the place.

ESTHER TRUETT HENDRICKSON: ...and I told them about the history of plazas and how they had, how they had come out of Italy; out of the Medieval times; it was a place to meet and shop; and that the plazas that had been built in the 1960s and 1970s had essentially become a home for the homeless. And what we really had to have there was a garden for people to walk through on their way to someplace else, and that was, and they were open and they gave us back our garden with some modifications.

PETER LASSIG: And Esther had the courage to face them.

MATT HENDERSON: Great. It is a beautiful spot.

PETER LASSIG: Yea.

MATT HENDERSON: Any last thoughts you want to share about your work or Temple Square?

[BEGIN MUSIC]

PETER LASSIG: Well, I think that for both of us the fact that the place is holy ground never escaped us while we were working there.

MATT HENDERSON: Thank you. We've been visiting today with Peter Lassig and Esther Truett Hendrickson, discussion the history of the Gardens of Temple Square. I'm Matt Henderson.

[END MUSIC]