

G. MARCH 19, 1967

## JOE CREASON'S KENTUCKY

# The Garden of Hope Needs Faith, Charity

MONDAY NIGHT at 7, a meeting at Covington's City Hall well may determine if there's any hope left for the unique Garden of Hope.

The meeting will explore the possibility of raising the money—from public or private sources—needed, first, to keep the Garden of Hope from being destroyed by vandals, and then to restore it to its once-lofty status as a major Northern Kentucky tourist attraction.

It's entirely fitting that this meeting should be held on the Monday before Easter, because the main feature of the Garden of Hope is a reproduction of the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem.

The once carefully landscaped two-acre plot is perched atop a high hill that provides a panorama of Covington, the Ohio River and Cincinnati. The plot also contains a carpenter shop with tools of the type used in Christ's time, and a small chapel modeled after a Spanish mission.

## Pastor Started Project

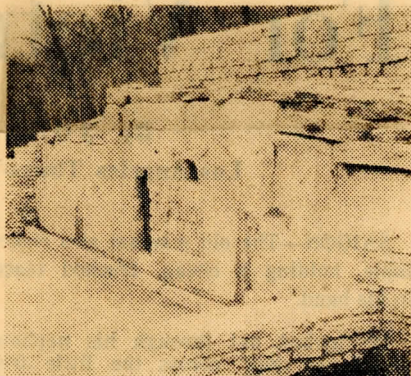
The Garden, crisscrossed with walkways, was the result of work by the late Rev. Morris H. Coers, pastor of Covington's Immanuel Baptist Church. A well-known radio and television preacher, the Rev. Mr. Coers was inspired to undertake the Garden in 1958 after a visit to the Holy Land.

Money to start the work was raised from his radio and TV audience, with the church mortgaging its property to guarantee the remainder of the cost. The hilltop land was acquired, and upward of \$250,000 eventually was invested in the project.

The tomb itself was designed to have the same acoustics as the one in Jerusalem—for realistic effect—and has been the setting for many Easter sunrise services.

The grounds were planted in flowering shrubs, and the Garden became a showplace in the area. The chapel was the site of many weddings.

The Rev. Mr. Coers died before the Garden was dedicated, and before it was paid for. His widow continued to maintain it for some time, but this became too burdensome, and it was abandoned.



The tomb in the Garden of Hope, Covington, shown in 1958. Now debts and vandalism prevail.

However, the meeting Monday night offers a flickering ray of hope for the Garden of Hope. Joseph A. Koo, a retired contractor, has formed a committee to attempt to save the Garden. On the committee are State Reps. Gus Sheehan and Phil King, Covington Police Judge W. B. O'Neal, Magistrate Clarence McKee, and Jack H. Keen.

If some plan doesn't emerge from Monday's meeting, it soon may be too late to salvage one of Kentucky's truly inspirational attractions.

## *Debts and Vandalism*

In time, the church, wanting to get rid of the debt it had assumed, took over the property, but it has no use except that for which it was built—a quiet place for meditation for people of all faiths, or no faith. The church was unable to maintain the Garden, and so it was left to the elements and the vandals.

Today the church still owes \$55,000, and is paying that debt off at \$300 a month. And since Immanuel Baptist is an old, downtown church with a dwindling membership, the debt slowly is breaking its back financially.

Moreover, vandals are tearing the Garden apart. Every window in the chapel has been broken, concrete benches destroyed, shrubs dug up. Damage in the last six months alone is estimated at \$8,000.

Efforts have been made to have the Kentucky Department of Parks take over the Garden. Although former Parks Commissioner Robert Bell stamped the Garden as unique and something that should be saved, he doubted his department could intercede because of possible objections to using state funds for what basically is a religious attraction.

(The state-park system includes Old Mulkey Meeting House, a pioneer Baptist church near Tompkinsville.)

## *A Ray of Hope*

Faced with this dilemma, the church has offered to dispose of the Garden property to any responsible group that will take it over.

That's where the situation stands now.