

LOCUST GROVE

By Katherine Lapsley Sproul

What type of landscaping is suitable to frame the picture of a very old house? It is in answer to this question that following article has been written.

Locust Grove, in the valley of Virginia near Staunton, is a Place of many traditions, and has been the home of my husband's family for five generations. The Present dwelling, the second one on the property, was built in 1800. In the year 1863 it took on its present form, with the addition of a wing towards the west and an ell in the back which is the northern side. The west wing is still called "the new room", and the second story of the ell, is the "ell loft". This simple type of architecture seems almost indigenous to the mountain-regions of Virginia, as you see hundreds like it in the Shenandoah Valley.

Each succeeding generation has, in some way. put its mark on the home, and I am enclosing a picture taken sixty years ago, that you may see from what we have grown.

The beautiful blue grass lawn with a front of 200 yards, and a depth of 100 yards was shaded by giant trees. There was a preponderance of locusts but also Sugar maple and ash spruce, horse-chestnut and mahogany or coffee trees. Many of these remain, one locust stump, about 30 feet high, is held upright by an old wisteria vine, that has grown into a tree.

This fore-ground seemed to us to need no improvement.. The flower garden of my predecessor on the west side of the "yard, still showed in outline through the grass - a pretty bit of "carpet bedding", two hearts in the center, enclosed by semicircular beds at each end. We did not attempt to rebuild the garden tho' we found the original drawing in an old account books that would have required skillful and constant care, which we could not at that time command.. Instead, throughout the years, our aim has been to provide

The house about which the story centers is haunted. What old home that has sheltered five generations of children, and whose halls have echoed to the laughter of their happy voices, and the clatter of their dancing feet, has not taken on its own peculiar characteristics, as surely as time has stained its shingles a soft gray and tinted with green its tall brick chimneys? But the spirit that pervades it is such a gay and loving spirit; it twines its fingers about your heart strings before you are aware, and those who enter its door are never quite satisfied until they return.

To tell the story of all those years would be too long, and since things in the country have been revolutionized in the last ten years, one telling would not suffice. We do not stand still and watch the money grow, as some folks seem to think. This farm whose rolling acres have grown wheat and corn a hundred years has been largely turned to pasture land and orchard, so that with the use of the tractor and all its modern accompaniments the work of one man and his son is sufficient, except at harvest time. Since a bushel of wheat does not pay a profit on the fertilizer and labor that it takes to make it, and corn to more valuable on the foot than in the crib, most of the large farmers in our Valley depend on fattening cattle, sheep and hogs. If this were not

possible, our dividends would indeed be all of an ethereal nature. This farm has always been managed with the improvement of the land in view and has repaid the owner for this intelligent treatment.

In the year 1924, \$11,000.00 worth of products were sold off the farm of 300 acres.... Another year the first two cuttings of alfalfa were sold for \$100.00 per acre, leaving the third cutting, which was equally as heavy as the other two, to be fed on the place.

Our apples sell for from \$3.00 to \$5.00 a barrel, and it takes from \$2.00 to \$3.00, from the pruning and spraying in the spring to the loading on the car in October, to produce a barrel. Our city friends pay five cents a piece for these apples and count them a luxury; but we have them the year around in rich abundance, A few barrels are usually put in storage to keep for our May and June supply before the Early Harvest and Yellow-Transparent ripen in July.

We raise only enough corn to fatten our hogs and feed our cattle, but the Smoke-House is never empty. Pure Jersey cream and fresh butter are among our common luxuries. Those whose unhappy lot lies in those congested wasp nests of the modern apartment house, have many so-called luxuries impossible to us, but the country housewife sincerely pities those who depend on the tender mercy of the corner grocer for the necessities of life.

I need not carry on the comparison, but I cannot refrain a protest against those well-meaning philanthropist who spend their and some energy in their efforts to uplift and enlighten the rural communities, airing our short-comings and pitying our cramped environment. Our salvation lies within ourselves; we have at hand every resource for a full and joyous life. Automobiles and radios have opened up a wider vision, and a greater freedom of movement, but they have by no means made us less contented with our lot.

The present owner of this farm, a great-grandson of the original grantee, started farming thirty-five years ago, with a heavy debt on his land. It has taken years of hard work and sacrifice to keep our heads above water; but the results are worth all the cost. We are almost clear of debt; the farm and home have quadrupled in value; and we have had years of joyous, healthy living thrown in. Our six children have a heritage we could never have bequeathed them in a city home. The boys have an ideal of duty, of the value of work well done a love of nature and of nature's God, impossible to have gained elsewhere than in the freedom of the country. Our eldest daughter, working in a far-away city, writes me:

"Mother, I did not realize until I saw how other people live, the blessedness of our life at home, and all I want is to earn enough money to come back there and stay."

Had we been willing to scale a little closer on the things that meant the joy of life to us perhaps the debt that has hung like a cloud in the background of our lives might have been wiped out? But the sacred laws of hospitality have never been slighted; the old home has always been a gathering place of the Clan, and the wayfarer and those who needed a rest have always found a ready welcome. These things have added to our daily dividends far more than money could buy.

Since we have been free from the care of little children, we have more time-to devote to our thoroughbred Wyandottes, and they have repaid us in many luxuries, as well as made a

constant table supply. Chickens, after all, are as interesting to work with as people, and often as intelligent. I make an exception in the case of one old pet hen who insists on laying her egg on the high mantel shelf of the old Cabin. Her consternation is as fresh as the daily disaster; but at any rate her motives are high, Which is more than can be said of some people.

Our garden through all the years has been a source of comfort and delight, and your magazine has been our inspiration and also a cause of despair. But your true gardener is ever an optimist, and of late years the photographs of those "landscaped gardens" of the plutocrats and "interior decorated rooms" of the California millionaire do not phase us. We have our ideal and our dream of the garden that shall be; -- and it is a growing joy to watch it materialize year by year.

The house itself has been an absorbing problem of never failing interest both to us and to our friends. How to co-ordinate, and bring to at least two levels its many wings and ells, to make its extra hallways and porches, its hidden stairways and cupboards meet the requirements of modern life, - has taxed the ingenuity of several architects. Each succeeding owner has twisted the old house to meet his or her fancy, but a merciful Providence has preserved intact the original old English type.

Six years ago we laid our desecrating hands on it and tore down the old brick kitchen, which for seventy-five years had been the scene of many an absorbing household drama. It cost us \$2500.00 to do away with this interesting relic of slavery and to replace it with a modern kitchen with two pantries. It was 20 x 25 feet and lay five steps down from the dining room, forming with a loft of course, above for drying vegetables, etc., a wing with its separate porch. The old hearth now forms our back door step, and while we think regretfully of that wonderful fireplace, we do not regret the darkness or the coldness of the old kitchen, when we step into the spic and spanness of the new. Here the family often foregathers on winter afternoons, when mother is cook, for it is always flooded with sunshine.

Of course, there are no little darkies now to run to the spring house for a fresh pat of butter, or to bring a bucket of cool water up the long path from the spring, and the water has been pumped for years by the ram up to the new dairy back of the kitchen.

Two old buildings in the rear of the dwelling house have remained untouched since the days before the War: One is an old vine-covered cabin, which forms a charming back ground to all my garden pictures when covered with its gaudy bloom; the other must needs be explained to every visitor. It is very tall, and as our western storms have given it a rakish slant, we call it the Tower of Pisa. It is really the smoke-house, and when I said it was full, I meant it held enough old hams and strips of sweet bacon for four ordinary families.

During the War the meat was secreted by Grand-mother in "the new-room loft" above my guest chamber, if you please, and the greasy spots its drippings made can never quite be hidden on our ceilings.

Going down the front walk we pass ever an interesting stone, which now serves as a stop at the front gate. It is 4 x 6 feet and served originally to cover the spring which bubbles clear and cold from a depth of six feet, and is known as the headwaters of the James.

The water from the spring flows close by the most interesting building now standing on the place. The old building, the original log cabin, was torn down and has long since been consumed an stove wood, but the old stone house below the spring will stand. for many a year a witness to the sturdiness of our ancestors. Its walls are two and one-half feet thick, pierced at intervals with small loop-holes for muskets. At present it is the smithy and work-shop of the farmer; but in days past the memory of any now living it was the old still house. The great distance from the markets of Richmond and Lynchburg forced all the Valley farmers to turn their rye and corn to whiskey and the product has long been noted far beyond the limits of our State.

Sometimes in the deep quiet of the summer midnight, I can hear the creaking of their ghostly harness and can almost see those dusky forms rolling sacks up a plank to the long low wagons, for they always started on those trips hours before daylight. But let the ghost wagons once get out on the highway, and it in soon split into thin air by the muffled rush of the boot-leggers cars, which a few years ago made our lonely road a regular route to West Virginia and Ohio.

What must these wraiths think of the gait we moderns move? Gone are the days of elegant leisure in this household. These old walls shelter a variable beehive in the busy season, and there are no drones. Even baby sister has her share and helps little brother feed the chickens or carry water to the harvesters in the field.

But it is the happiest life of all for a child and the one which will most early develop individuality, as well as practical ability. The child who has not ridden home on a load of hay, swung on a hickory limb, or licked the cream dipper in the fragrant coolness of the spring house, has missed half his rightful heritage.

It would be difficult to describe the house within; each room has its name and story. It has plenty of "period" furniture, but I would not like to be asked to classify it, as it ranges from the solid oak of the oak of first settlers to the mahogany and rose-wood of the days before the War. Yet some way, in spite of the fact, that a decorator has never touched it the Place does not look like a collection of antiques, but a real home, a place where real people have lived a real life, full of interests of the finest kind; the life that leaves its impress on all it touches. That life, I will ever contend, can only be fully realized in the country home.

Should some unkind fate force us to cast our lot again in a city, none of its boasted advantages could ever repay us for all we had lost. It is true I spend many weary hours at my kitchen sink; but I look directly out through the green or flowery aisles of the orchard so up to the blue sky where my eyes can always paint cloud pictures as I work. If I sit by my window sewing, I can watch the housekeeping of the birds, nesting in the same immemorial locust trees where their ancestors chose their mates. Or my eyes can revel in a pastoral landscape a Corot would have loved to paint, where the sheep lie scattered on hills of tender green. No where else

can one take part in that intense drama of the seasons and this close touch with nature, even in her rougher moods, makes real men and women who will yet save our race.

Should I be called to other scenes, nothing could ever make up to me the things I would lose, the ecstasy of dawn on a spring morning, the bees droning in mid-afternoon over my flower borders, or the moonlight playing on the little fountain under my window, where innumerable white flowers pour their fragrance on the summer night. Life to me would be at best a dreary waste in any other spot than this, where dividends in rich content are poured out freely every day.

Katherine L. Sproul.