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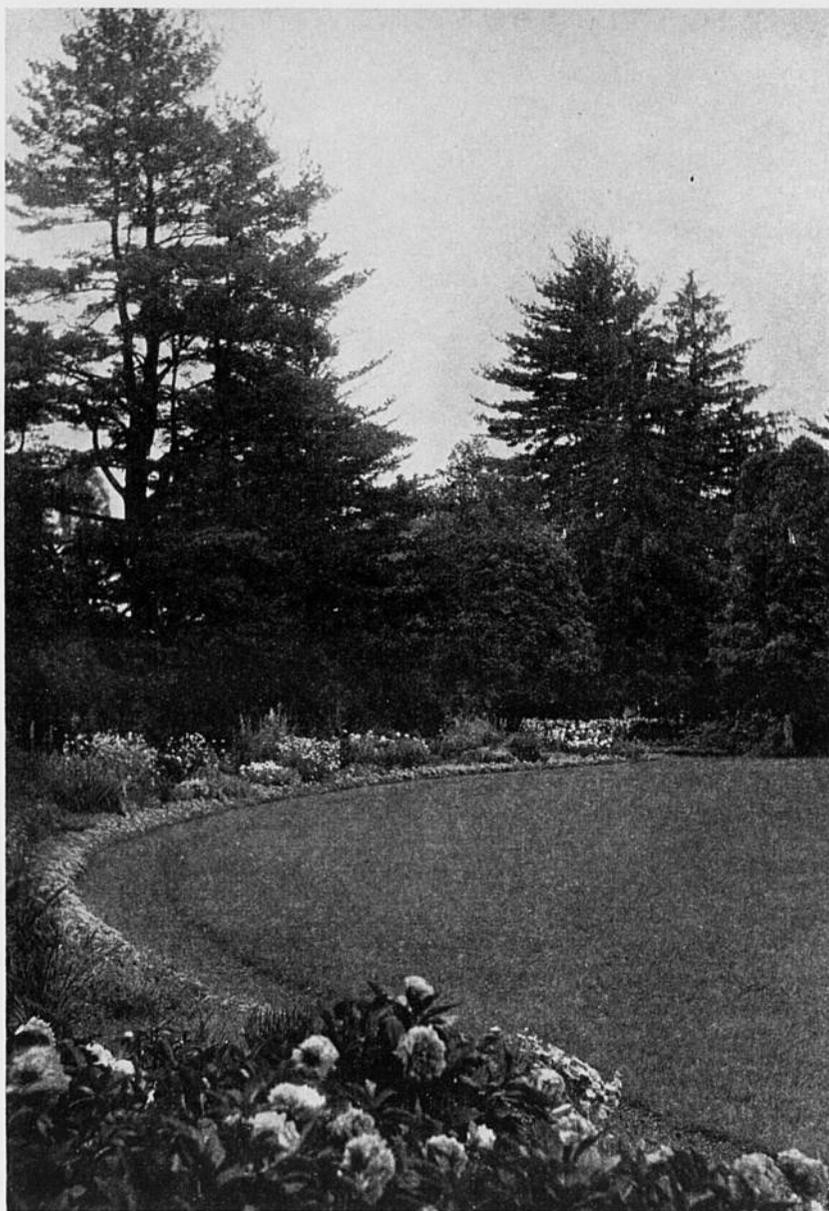
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MAUDE McCLAVE BROWN—*who offers poetical advice to other authoresses graduated from Vassar in 1912.*



THE CIRCLE IN JUNE

# VASSAR QUARTERLY

VOL. XVI

No. 1

## THE GROUNDS AT VASSAR

By HENRY E. DOWNER

VASSAR is fortunate in its splendid location. We see today how wisely the Founder chose when he preferred the spaciousness of the country site to a more restricted area near the river. As the growing college needed more elbow room it was fairly easy to acquire more land at moderate cost, and expansion has undoubtedly taken place far beyond Matthew Vassar's fondest dreams.

My acquaintance with the Vassar campus began just ten years ago. In this decade that part of the property given over to ornamental planting has been greatly extended as new buildings have been erected, while at the same time a good deal of renovating work has been done on the older sections of the campus. We seem to be ever striving to catch up with new work, which effectively precludes routine monotony and adds to the interest of life.

The very first time I walked along the main drive and looked about I felt quite at home. The lay-out of the place, with the spacious lawn areas and fine trees, impressed me at once

with a very familiar English atmosphere. Even the most casual visitors are compelled to admire the fine tree growth surrounding the original campus area, together with the numerous good groupings and fine individual specimens of coniferous and deciduous trees. The extensive use of evergreens in the first plantings gives the place a well furnished appearance throughout the entire year, which is especially appreciated in the long dormant period between October and April.

Unfortunately, as we think today, most of the evergreens are Norway Spruces, concerning which more is known now than in the sixties when they were so generally planted in the eastern states. Each year sees several of these Spruces dropping out of the picture as they complete their period of life. Fortunately, the longer lived native White Pine, one of the most handsome among trees, was generally scattered throughout the original planting, and so the evergreen effect for which Vassar is noted will not be entirely lost. The beautiful snow pictures we sometimes enjoy (?) are



A GLIMPSE OF KENDRICK

now and again very destructive, particularly to the Pines. As these lines are written we are sadly cleaning up truckloads of beautiful branches and dressing bad wounds following the wettest and worst snow I have seen here.

A marked change was made along the Raymond Avenue line with the removal of the big *Arbor-Vitae* hedge a few years ago, due to infirmities beyond repair. Replacement is always more or less of a problem, but in recent years a number of Red and White Pines, Hemlocks, Douglas and White Firs have been planted. In the last two, of similar habit of growth to the Norway Spruce but with expectation of longer life, several groups of alumnae are represented.

Perhaps because of the rich forest growth with which this country was blessed, in the development of which man had nothing to do, the prevailing idea regarding trees planted for ornament seemed to be that they could very well be left entirely to the care of Mother Nature. Time has shown however that trees moved out of their natural conditions have very definite requirements which must receive periodic attention if they are to grow in health and beauty.

Ten years ago the Vassar trees were making a strong appeal for help. Their appearance was marred by much dead wood, while their health was being seriously affected by the ravages of insect pests and lack of food. Drastic cases call for drastic

remedies, so every available man was armed with saw and pruning hook and set to work trimming out dead and interfering branches. Later on a power sprayer was brought into play to complete the clean-up.

I feel sure that all those returning to college after the spring vacation of 1921 will be able to recall the odorous atmosphere which pervaded the place for a day or two. A powerful fertilizer promised for delivery on the *first* day of vacation arrived on the *last*. There was no alternative to spreading it around and any qualms of conscience were quieted by the thought that the unpleasantness for the community would not be fatal, while the benefit to the trees would be of lasting value. Having been cleansed and fed, the trees soon showed their appreciation by taking on a new lease of life, and so long as the present wise policy of appropriating a certain sum for definite work on the trees each year is maintained, so will they continue to flourish and enhance the beauty of the campus.

From the earliest days of the college the Athletic Circle with its surrounding flower beds seems to have been the heart of the campus. With the growth of the Arbor-Vitae screen and the outer circle of evergreen trees, conditions were gradually changed for the occupants of the flower beds. Those on the south half were doubly handicapped, having not only most of the sunshine cut off but also having to compete for sustenance with mature trees and shrubs on both sides. Then, too, there are fashions in flower gardening as in other things, and the

1921 style was far different from that of the early days of the Floral Society. In keeping with the spirit of the modern age the prevailing style for several years has been informal. Having been given to understand at the outset of my term that a change was in order, things began to happen after frost had laid the flowers low in early October. The twenty beds on the north half were merged into one border six hundred and fifty feet long and fourteen feet wide, with a path on both sides. Here, with an ideal background of established flowering shrubs and evergreen trees, hardy plants and bulbs were arranged to give a succession of flowers from Snowdrops to Chrysanthemums. Annuals are freely used as fillers to succeed the Daffodils and May-flowering Tulips and give welcome variety to the fall display.

The south half presented a somewhat different problem on account of shade and interfering tree roots. Some big old shrubs close to the Arbor-Vitae screen were removed and in their places a double row of the Flame Azalea was planted. Against the evergreen background their brilliant coloring, ranging from pale yellow to orange scarlet, shows off to advantage in early June, and for the past seven or eight years has given delight to visitors at Commencement time. Daffodils and Squills have been freely strewn amongst them to brighten things up in early spring, and in September this spot is featured with a fine display of Japanese Anemones. This often miffy plant finds conditions here very much to its



DOUGLAS FIRS, TO REPLACE NORWAY SPRUCES

liking and behaves accordingly. The centre rows of beds have been retained in their original form. Numerous plants have been tried, but only a few can be depended upon to flower well and put on a presentable appearance throughout the entire season. Economy of upkeep is the watchword, and annual replacement is reduced to the minimum.

On the sheltered slope off the Pine walk south of the science buildings lies the Shakespeare Garden within a beautiful Hemlock enclosure. Visitors often come to it with a feeling of surprise, one of the charms of a garden, and enjoy its atmosphere of quiet peace and seclusion from the bustle of the main campus. I under-

stand it was laid out about 1916 through the joint efforts of students of Botany and of Shakespeare, and I have a picture showing that the work was actually done by the students themselves. It has since been remodelled along the lines of an Old English Flower Garden, featuring the old-fashioned flowers as much as possible. The question is often asked if it contains only plants mentioned by Shakespeare, but as a matter of fact only a few of these are hardy in this particular location.

The new Skinner Hall of Music is rapidly taking shape on the slope across the brook, and when connection is established with the campus an opportunity will be offered to tame

another rough area and create the proper setting for such a handsome building.

Through the generosity of the late Mrs. Paul E. Zehe and her classmates of 1875, it has been possible to start a small arboretum. Besides the numerous American trees and shrubs that should be better known and appreciated in landscape planting, a great many beautiful woody plants from Asia have been introduced in recent years that have been proved to thrive in this climate. Thanks to the work of the Arnold Arboretum, under the jurisdiction of Harvard, the general interest in trees and shrubs has greatly increased in recent years, and several colleges in different parts of the country are now establishing sizable collections. There are several places about the grounds where the possibility of a building's being erected is very remote. Some of these are so situated as to allow of a collection of related groups of small trees and shrubs to be placed for intimate study as well as decorative effect. The lower slope of Sunset Hill for example has been given over to Flowering Crabs to take the place of the fast disappearing old apple trees higher up. Some twenty-five varieties are now getting established there, which in a few more years will give a grand display of colorful flowers in the spring and attractive looking fruit in the fall.

By the generosity of Mrs. George A. Graham of Englewood, N. J., a start has been made to plant the ground between the trees with various kinds of Narcissus. Future stu-

dents of the English poets, as they stroll in this part of the grounds, will better appreciate Wordsworth's "Daffodils" as they gaze upon—

"A host of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the  
breeze."

On the slope south of Vassar Lake a collection of Japanese Flowering Cherries is coming along. The first specimen was given by Mrs. H. S. Reynolds of Poughkeepsie, after a visit to Washington at Cherry-blossom time. Crossing directly from the Main Gate to the lake, paths lead through a mixed planting of native trees and shrubs, a special gift from Mrs. Zehe. For a week or two in May, looking from the front door of Main one's attention is caught by the glory of a specimen Flowering Dogwood perfectly framed by the arch of Taylor Hall, while a little later the beautiful Mountain Laurel comes prominently into the picture.

Due to building expansion in the neighboring territory, the water supply for the lake is rapidly diminishing, making at certain times of the year rather unpleasant conditions. It is quite possible that before many more years have passed it will be found necessary to have only the stream trickling through, and the present lake area grassed and planted. This winter the ancient Willows overhanging the highway had to be removed, as they were in a sad state of decay and a menace to traffic. However, we have secured direct descendants by means of cuttings, and

in a year or so young trees will be available for planting somewhere near the original station.

On the slope between the old gas tank and the Observatory, a collection of some eighty varieties of Lilacs has been recently planted, with Iris varieties occupying the spaces between them. This combination should make a spring picture of great beauty as viewed from Cushing Hall, which occupies the ground formerly used for tennis courts. To the east of the Pine walk from this point, in the middle of what was Farmer Wing's asparagus field just a few years ago, stands the imposing Blodgett Hall of Euthenics, with the Nursery School building close by. Considerable shifting of soil had to be done over this entire area to tie things in properly,

and as a matter of fact this preliminary operation is not yet completed. Some planting in the front area was done last year, and already the bareness has been relieved, but much remains to be done on the lower side before a pleasing furnished effect is accomplished.

Swinging back to the end of Sunset Lake we find Rhododendrons making themselves at home along the stream bank at the head of the Glen, and it is planned to get other representatives of this interesting family established in this locality before long. The Glen itself, with very little more work since the dead trees have been removed, offers wonderful possibilities as a sanctuary for birds and wild flowers.

Mention must be made of recent



IN THE SHAKESPEARE GARDEN

plantings about the Chapel. Specimen White Pines, English Beeches and Japanese Yews, the gift of Mrs. William R. Thompson, '77, have taken away the bald appearance on the west side. On the east side a group of young Beeches given by Mrs. Catharine Suydam Clark, '90, are replacing rapidly a group of Spruces.

The newest development is the construction of a nine-hole golf course over the rolling ground of the old Wing Farm. It is the practice these days to do considerable planting of trees and shrubs on golf courses, and the contour of the college course offers fine opportunities along this line. Groups of Pines

planted on Sunset Hill eight or nine years ago, with simply the idea in mind of replacing the older trees as they dropped out, are just fitting nicely into this new scheme. There are several good locations about the course well suited for evergreen and other plantings. This would not only add interest to the game, but also serve to frame fine views of the surrounding country and generally beautify the landscape in the direction of Sunrise Hill. We all appreciate the good influence of attractive surroundings in every-day life, and while much has been done on the Vassar campus the possibilities for furthering this ideal are by no means exhausted.

