

## THE OAKS.

Mrs. Roberts Woods Bliss, June 24, 25, 1922.

The Oaks offers opportunities for development on so many different lines that it is difficult to know which to emphasize most strongly in the beginning. For purposes of convenience, therefore, the various sections will be discussed in their relation to the house and its approaches, beginning with the entrance on R Street and the border plantations and the house and its immediate surroundings and leaving the development of the ravines and brook to be spoken of under another heading.

It would seem as though the whole street front section of the place should be treated from the point of view of some of the large, ample, old, half-city, half country houses, which one associates with certain districts in England and France and to a certain extent in our own south. The house is not quite a country house, nor is it in the least a town building. Its proportions are so harmonious and its horizontal and vertical lines so strong and well considered that it imposes a treatment as carefully thought out in the planting. The whole feeling of the entrance front of the house should be one to be gained through easy flowing lines, dark masses of foliage, considered quite as much from the point of view of winter effect as summer space and quietness. It would seem as though no, so-called, ornamental planting should be attempted and that the forms and textures should be all that are needed to give the feeling of dignity and simplicity which the lines of the building themselves demand.

While in no way should the planting on R Street look as though it were intended to close out people's view of the place, it should in effect do this, but by giving them interesting and pretty plants to look at, with occasional calculated glimpses of the place, arranged so that they will not rake the windows and gardens, the passersby will not feel crudely excluded and yet additional privacy will be secured for the owners of The Oaks.

On a separate sheet a tentative list is given of the plants to be used for the R Street border plantation. The evergreens, ~~whether~~ <sup>being</sup> coniferous or broad-leaved, ~~being~~ <sup>should be</sup> used as the backbone of the plantation, the north outline of which should be irregular and worked out to suit the needs of screening heavily where more screening is needed and lighter where there is already a good mass of protection. Against this main planting should be added a few single flowering trees or a group of shrubs here or there, bearing in mind, however, that the interruption of the evergreen border by too many so-called incidents of planting will tend to take away from its dignity without giving enough variety to make it worth while.



Probably the heaviest mass of large plants will be required on the line between the front door and the street running south from the west entrance.

As a protective fence along the south front, it is suggested to try and keep the present stone retaining wall if it can be made to last and adapting an iron fence to its top which could be used in modified design along the whole south front, taking, for instance, the good eighteenth century model of the dart picket or halberd picket. The design for these might be determined later as it may be a possible convenience to the border planting to be able to do this, ~~particularly~~ from the R Street front, and a permanent fence might be troublesome to deal with. However, the permanent fence might be essential if thefts of plants are likely. No planting should be countenanced which in any way would distract ones attention from the simple and beautiful lines of the grades and the magnificent oak trees which surround the house. It is, therefore, suggested that the planting of this south front of the house be in a sense as permanent, and, if one may so say, impersonal, as possible, leaving the more delicate arrangements to serve as attractive objects for the walks and paths which will some day be worked out on the north slopes.

A screen of fairly large evergreens, box yews, or holly, will have to be used on the southwest corner of the house in order to hide the service entrance from the front. The exact position of these different plantations is difficult to determine academically, and the most important groups should be placed on the ground as alterations of grade, root space and exact angle of vision should be the controlling factors, rather than their exact position upon a planting plan.

For the south front of the house, a pair of large Buxus suffruticosa, approximately four to five feet high and if possible about six to eight feet in diameter, will probably be the best plants to use for the spaces on either side of the front steps, placing the center of the plant <sup>opposite</sup> the space between the pairs of windows. This will allow plenty of light to come in to the basement windows and yet will partially mask them. A splash of Hedra helix dentata (the large-leaved English ivy) should be planted on both east and west wings; On the east wing between the east library windows and on the west wing west of the pantry window. Another plant of ivy of the palmata variety (a small-leaved sort) will give a different texture and yet an evergreen effect if set out on the wall west of the west dining room window. A white jasmine might look well on the angle east of the east salon window. Underneath the west library window and near the pantry window a group of flat and fat dwarf English yew (Taxus baccata var. repandens) will make a round-headed and dark-colored group somewhat balancing the larger round-headed group which the two large box plants will make on either



side of the main entrance.

It is possible that clipped wall shrubs might add to the appearance of the front of the house, but the writer feels that the proportions are so good that little should be done until after experiment has been made as to exactly where the accents are needed.

As the service road is likely to be brought in from the side street and approaching the house at an angle of approximately forty-five degrees, it will be by its position fairly well screened from the front and only an occasional tree or shrub will be needed to hide it completely.

The north front of the house with its vista, cedar edged, may be developed in so many different attractive ways that it is difficult not to be distracted. Clearly a long pool would be beautiful in spring and autumn. The only question is whether it would have the same charm in winter and if the pool could be kept full in winter or whether it would mean a studied decoration for an empty concrete tank. Obviously, however, a large white maple tree is required on the east side of the vista to balance the large tulip tree on the northwest angle. There is also a possibility that a plant of *Magnolia grandiflora* (the evergreen Magnolia) would be well-placed at the inner angles of the vista where they would be seen in winter even if the western one was hidden by the horse chestnut in summer. As the north court of the house is extremely successful in its proportion and design, the planting should also be carefully studied so that it shall balance and the small irregularities in design concealed by planting. For instance, the runway on the west side of the court might well be hidden by a square ivy covered railing simulating a hedge and on the east side of the court a real hedge could be planted of approximately the same dimension and in front of both the real and imaginary hedge separate plants could be set at regular spaces. A gain, the treatment of the wall on the north of the house should be carefully studied as here the writer is convinced that the clipped evergreen thorn, or other rough, bushy wall-shrub such as are used in England, largely evergreen in character, would give good shadow and pleasant interruption to the surface of the brick without spoiling the proportions of the building.

No definite suggestion is made with regard to the planting under the north gallery as it is felt that this is one of the most important pieces of planting to be done, requiring both delicacy and solidity of treatment and where exactly the right material should be used to get a continuous effect without coarseness or monotony. It is possible that a combination of Japanese Andromedas and *Abelia* might be used.



On the northeast corner of the house two magnificent oak trees inclosed by the low brick wall inevitably suggest the making of a green garden which would in a sense be a part of the rooms looking out on it. The east wall of the library is the hardest part of the planting of this scheme. A heavy mass of evergreen foliage is required in the southwest angle. This may be obtained in one of two or three ways, either by planting a temporary large cedar tree which shall be taken out later when the wall covering develops, or by planting and patiently waiting for a wall covering of heavy texture such as the large-leaved ivy or the evergreen magnolia pinned to the wall as it is so often grown in England, or another evergreen wall-shrub of heavy foliage which should be kept clipped. The main carpet of the green garden should be, in the writer's opinion, a small-leaved plant with evergreen foliage, such as the periwinkle (*Vinca minor*), using both its blue and white varieties. The main, central plot had probably better be of one plant, or possibly interrupted, if there is danger of monotony, by one or two evergreen Azaleas or Andromedas. The borders should, however, be somewhat varied and plants of coarser leaf could be used, such as *Pachysandra*, *Hypericum*, *Berberis*, *repens* etc. Groups of small bulbs might be planted among the vinca or other ground cover in order to give early flower and on the east side of the garden shade-loving plants, such as some of the evergreen ferns and early spring flowering varieties, could be used in combination with Christmas roses, *Tiarella* (foam flower), *Galax*, *Shortia* and *Vancouveria*. There should not be much planting on the brick wall, and whatever is used should be very fine in leaf, as every effort should be made to exaggerate the already large scale of the oak, by making the surrounding plants very fine and delicate in foliage and growth. The use of too much *Evonymus* is not advised as it will make rather a bristly ground cover. It may be useful in certain spots where just this effect is required on the house or garden wall.

The exact solution for the steps from the east windows of the music room must be arrived at before a decision can be reached as to the planting of this section. The terrace which was spoken of may work out conveniently as the present steps seem to make an awkward pocket approach from the back of the corridor leading to the Orangery. The north side of the Orangery will naturally be flagged as it will be a pleasant place to sit on hot sunny mornings. It is, therefore, doubtful whether it will be possible to continue the border of evergreen ferns along the Orangery wall. This would, however, be attractive if they would not be too much damaged by the wear and tear of chairs and tables being pushed against them. The south side of the Orangery, with its great Magnolia, should be planted with some evergreen ground cover, such as the hybrid *St. John's Wort* (*hypericum Moserianum*) with snow drops and an early iris planted through it. Probably



the list of plants already suggested for the Orangery can materially be added to after thinking and seeing what is used for the same purpose abroad. Certainly two more names should be added, the blue *Solanum capensis* and the orange-colored *streptosolen Jamesori*. The materials to be used in the Orangery will have to be renewed and replaced from time to time when they are out of bloom or unattractive, and in order that a succession of plants may be kept in good condition it will be necessary to construct quite a large so-called pit in which these plants can be wintered and kept in the approximate temperature which will be used for the Orangery. Standard wisterias will also be attractive to force and an occasional climbing rose in a tub or early daphne or cherry will make a pleasant change without entailing much trouble or expense. The pit to be constructed should be not smaller in floor area than the Orangery itself, and, if possible, it should be larger in order to allow space for replenishment, as much of its usefulness will be as an overflow from the Orangery and its reservoir. As it is unlikely that all of the plants for the Orangery can be obtained at short notice, it will probably be time enough to start the pit next autumn or winter. In the meantime, Gray might look for the plants needed and report as to what he finds and in what condition. A duplicate list of the Orangery list is sent in order that Gray may have the list of materials wanted.

The planting around the tennis court should be carefully studied. It is not quite clear whether it had better be in the main deciduous or evergreen in character. As it will not be conspicuously in view from the house, at any rate at present, it may be advisable to make the main part of it deciduous, using the heavy stone walls as backgrounds for fine climbers such as roses, clematis, jasmine etc., and keeping the plantations to the varieties of spring and autumn flowering and fruiting plants.

The east front of the house really presents the hardest problem at present as the grading must be restudied before it can be made a satisfactory platform for the house. The various suggestions as for shortening up the terraces in different directions were made verbally and can hardly be more crystalized until studied immediately on the plan. The more the problem is considered, however, the more it seems clear that the rose garden must be practically flat in appearance and that a large stone wall on its west side, if properly designed, would make a considerable part of its charm. The wall and steps, while not in any way ambitious or pretentious in scheme, could be a vital part of the plan and if made of fairly large rough stone, perhaps buttressed as many of the old stone walls are and simple in parapet, whether of iron, or stone, or hedged, ~~it~~ would hardly give the dressed-up appearance so repellent in many modern gardens.

The lower herbaceous garden should, in the writers mind, be



a very much less prim design than the rose garden, with considerable masses of perennials, none of them large in size, but giving a sort of general friendly mixture of color and form and entirely different in type from the upper level. A list of some of the different flowers suggested for the herbaceous garden is also enclosed and tentative suggestions for some of the groupings.

The pool below the herbaceous garden, with its grassy seats and slopes, may be made an unusual frame for an out-of-doors picture. It is so entirely romantic in type that all sorts of plants of the weeping-willowish variety will be appropriate, but as so much of its treatment must be a subject for later study any suggestions with regard to its future development are withheld for the present.

The whole scheme for the north slopes of the property should properly be studied from the ground itself rather than from any plan, as the contours and expressions of the ground will control the plantations more strongly than any other feature. The brook certainly could be widened and dammed up at various points and used as a mirror in which to reflect large plants of azaleas and iris, or overhanging dark masses of hemlock, with water-loving plants growing on their still surface, and walks arranged on the different levels so that the plantations could be seen from above as well as from their own level. It is hoped that one ravine could be given over to a mass of azaleas, another to a plantation of Magnolias and crabs, and that a walk be arranged of the different varieties of lilac following the east boundary and in general making the old fashioned "circle walk" which was so usually a part of every eighteenth century design. It is also hoped that a part of the grounds could be developed as a "Wilderness" where hollies, yews, ivies and spring flowering Magnolias and winter flowering shrubs would make an attractive walk to be followed in winter. Another part of the grounds should have a primrose garden, possibly surrounded by a nut walk. A large mass of forsythia planted on one of the hillsides and in combination with the blue Lung wort and daffodils will be attractive at its own moment, and in the writer's mind the development of the north part of the place should be on the lines of a series of interesting plantations, each thought out for a certain season, and easily reached by a good walk and yet not conspicuously in view when it was not at its best.

Obviously the place for the big kitchen garden is in the area between the present gardener's house and the east terrace. The survey shows it to be the only approximately level part of the ground and there is no reason why it should not be worked attractively into the scheme of walks leading from the house around the boundaries. The cutting garden should be thought out as a part of this scheme and espaliered and cordon, small fruit and large, should be planted on either side of the walks and also on the hillsides



sloping down from the terraces to the garden. This would seem to tie the whole scheme of house, terrace and green garden, swimming pool and kitchen garden, into a unit.

Two suggestions are made for consideration. The first, that an oak rift paling be used on Lover's Lane in combination with the present retaining wall where the wall is needed. The paling could be spaced so that intervals would show glimpses of the place without making it a part of the public highway.

These notes should not be considered as more than suggestions and jottings, the result of only a few hours acquaintance with the Oaks and are subject to alteration and change of mind on the owners and designers part.

*The orangey - garden - planting lists  
follow to morrow -*

*R.F.*



Mrs. Bliss, - June 25, 1922.

Plants for R. Street Plantation Border.

Magnolia foetida (grandiflora)  
Ilex aquifolium, English Holly,  
" opaca American "  
Buxus arborescens, Box, tall,  
Cedrus Libani, Cedar of Lebanon,  
Taxus baccata, English Yew,  
" cuspidata, Japanese "  
Tsuga caroliniana, Hemlock C  
" Stueboldii " Jap.  
" Canadensis, " Northern  
Magnolia conspicua, Magnolia, white,  
" glauca, Swamp "  
Kalmia latifolia, Mt. Laurel,  
Rhododendron, only white and pale pink,  
use sparingly.  
Cotoneasters in variety, Leucotræ,  
Gaultheria Shallon  
Crataegus pyracantha,  
Osmanthus iliacifolia,  
Berberis aquifolium, &c.

Plants for Orangery.

Nerium Oleander  
Myrtus communis  
Rhychospermum  
Lemon Verbena  
Azalea - single,  
Camellia, single,  
Oranges in variety,  
Hibiscus,  
Pomegranate,  
Humea elegans,  
Portugal laurel,  
Acacias in var.  
White crape murtle,  
Pittosporum,  
Rose Lamarque & Marechal Niel,  
Amaryllis,  
Lilies in Tubs.

BEATRIX FARRAND  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT  
BAR HARBOR, MAINE