

January 9, 1937

Dearest Mil and also Rob:

The whole Blaksley Garden situation has settled itself in a way which perhaps neither you nor I anticipated or exactly hoped for, but it may be a wiser solution when all the different elements are taken into consideration.

When I first saw Gen. Lassiter he kindly asked me to come that very day to a committee meeting to talk over Garden problems. As you remember, I thought it wisest not to intrude myself into the committee as it seemed to me that you and I had agreed that my relation to the Garden was to be more or less informal, and that you should have my impressions passed on to you.

It was quite clear that Gen. Lassiter was completely bewildered about the whole technical side of the Botanic Garden work and badly needed a prop on which to lean for advice. We met at the Garden and had an interesting and informing talk about the whole situation and the possible future and design of the Garden. He again suggested my coming to a committee meeting and again it seemed to me wiser not to accept an appointment which implied monthly attendance and regular visits to the Garden. I also tried to make it clear to him that I was merely acting as reporter for you.

It seemed likely that I should hear from you as to what your impression was with regard to the general situation and I had rather thought and hoped you and I might think there was a possibility of my being useful and giving occasional professional advice as to the general Garden design and schemes. Gen. Lassiter and Mr. van Rensselaer both got the impression however that I was holding back through unwillingness to take on an obligation whereas the situation was exactly the opposite, as I was trying to leave them and you free to make a decision without being committed to me.

On the day on which Mr. van Rensselaer and I chose the olive trees for Casa Dorinda at the Garden we talked about the possibility of certain changes in design and tentative positions for groups and so on. Various suggestions were made to him in which he seemed interested and which were more or less typical of work done by any consulting landscape gardener. On the same day Mr. Lockwood de Forest came to Casa Dorinda to answer a question asked him about the proper method of fertilizing the Casa oak trees. He and I also talked about the Blaksley Garden and we agreed that it had great possibilities of usefulness and we spoke of design, methods of raising money and generally discussed the whole problem in a professional and impersonal way.

On the way back from a journey to San Francisco I stopped last Wednesday at Santa Barbara to place the olive trees at Casa Dorinda and found a letter from Gen. Lassiter awaiting me saying that he had heard from Mr. Van Rensselaer of the talk of the previous week as to design and general matters and that he and Mr. van Rensselaer had understood that I was not available as consultant and they had therefore invited Mr. Lockwood de Forest to become consulting landscape architect of the Garden and he had accepted the appointment. It was clear that Gen. Lassiter feeling the need of advice, thinking me completely unavailable, had turned to a local and enthusiastic professional. Gen. Lassiter suggested in his letter that I come that day to a committee meeting to discuss the general policy of the Garden; but Mr. de Forest is now official advisor and it therefore would have been discourteous to him had I accepted. Gen. Lassiter was telephonically talked to and his polite invitation to the committee meeting declined and he was congratulated on having been successful in getting a local and experienced professional to take charge of the Garden's future. Mr. van Rensselaer was also spoken to and a telephonic conversation with Mr. de Forest indicated that he had already been appointed at the time he and I were discussing the Garden situation but he very politely had not told me of his official connection with Blaksley nor did he seem to resent the suggestions made. Naturally if I had known he had already taken charge I should have kept silent.

The solution from the point of view of the Garden is not exactly what you and I had thought it might be, and although a little disappointed, as I hope you will be, at the result of the talks, perhaps it is wise to have Mr. de Forest act as consultant rather than a more distant and possibly less constantly available person. Mr. de Forest has good sense, real love of California local plant material, and will I think be honestly interested in the Garden and its future. The whole situation has been a puzzling one. Gen. Lassiter's despair in being confronted by a problem entirely strange to him and his training and natural desire to accomplish something quickly have perhaps brought about a situation which might have worked out more slowly in another fashion; but as things are it does not seem as though I could be professionally connected with the Garden as advisor in any sort of way. The impression left upon the three individuals concerned -- Gen. Lassiter, Mr. van Rensselaer and Mr. de Forest -- has been one of entire contentment on my part with the present situation and no one but you and I need ever know that there were other plans in mind which have not worked out quite as we thought they might.

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