

COBBLESTONE ERA LANDSCAPING

by Bernard Harkness

After completion of the cobblestone house construction, the first owner faced the same problem that confronts the present owner: what to do with the outside area? This article discusses some of the likely solutions. There was no paucity of materials; good native plants were growing in the adjacent hedgerows and woodlots and the Rochester nurseries were expanding into their greatest era. Advice was available in the farm journals and in some widely-read books.

Garden embellishment with flowering plants and shrubs began in the nineteenth century to be released from the tight formal gardens of the colonial period as the English naturalistic style came into popularity. The chief exponent of the new style was Andrew Jackson Downing. His book, *Landscape Gardening and Rural Architecture*, in the next twelve years from its publication in 1841 sold 9000 copies as recorded in a census report. A visitor from Sweden, Fredrika Bremer, wrote in her impressions of America that Downing's books were to be found everywhere and nobody, whether he be rich or poor, builds a house or lays out a garden without consulting Downing's works. Paraphrasing Miss Bremer one might say that every young couple who sets up housekeeping in a cobblestone era house might well consult Downing to recapture the setting of that period.

Lawn areas were not of the same character or of the importance accorded them in suburban areas today. The lawn mower was invented in England in 1830 but was not widely distributed in this country until some time after the Civil War. Contemporary recommendation was that areas near the house be scythed no less than once a fortnight, but one may well assume that circumstances often prevented so time-consuming a schedule. Sheep often were used to crop the grass. Pasturage adjoining the lawn could be made into a seemingly unbroken stretch of lawn by use of the ha-ha barrier, a three foot or so wall with grass carried to the top edge. From medieval times, beehives have been common features of gardens. Certainly with the emphasis given to orchard crops for household use, the bees were not overlooked in the furnishings of this era.

This period of the building of the cobblestone houses also was the period of expansion of nurseries. Offerings of the Prince Nurseries, Flushing, Long Island (established 1737) in their catalog of 1841 and a 1853 inventory of Ellwanger and Barry nursery stock grown here in Rochester indicate the extent of named varieties of plants available, especially in orchard fruits:

	Prince - 1841	Ellwanger and Barry - 1853
Apples	272	210
Pears	420	502
Cherries	109	101
Plums	156	107
Grapes	116	56
Gooseberries	147	—
Currents	several	19
Raspberries	several	10

In this same year of 1841 the Prince Nursery listed 196 ornamental trees, 273 shrubs, 111 evergreens, 73 vines, 680 roses, 85 culinary herbs and over 800 garden perennials.

A well-accepted authority on gardening in the period from 1806 to 1857, when the last edition of his book appeared, was Bernard M' Mahon with his *The American Gardener's Calender*. His list of 67 kinds of vegetables includes all of the vegetables to be found in a modern seed catalog with the exception of sweet corn. In his herb section there are 28 culinary or sweet herbs to which might be added his list of 42 species cultivated for medicinal purposes.

M' Mahon encouraged what has come to be known as wild-flower gardening with a chapter, 'Collecting Flowering Plants from the Woods, Fields, and Swamps', in which he names 50 native plants suitable to the flower garden and gives advice on their transplanting and care.

Some of these catagories of the early gardens may have an especial appeal to cobblestone homeowners. Despite the period's boom in pears they have not survived at all well, but apples have had sturdier qualities and old varieties are still maintained for more reasons than simply nostalgia. The best collection, undoubtedly, is that of 54 varieties in an orchard maintained in North Grafton, Massachusetts by the Worcester County Horticultural Society. At the Geneva, New York, State Experiment Station, many old apple varieties are grown and by special arrangement with the New York State Fruit Testing Cooperative Association, Geneva, New York, custom propagated plants can be ordered. When the Orringh Stone-Talan Tavern, East Avenue, Rochester, orchard restoration was proposed by the Allen's Creek Garden Club, these apple varieties were recommended to it from the Geneva Station: Black Gilliflower, Esopus Spitzenberg, Fall Pippin, Fameuse, Lady, Northern Spy, Red Astrachan, Roxbury Russet, Tolman Sweet, Tompkins King and Westfield Seek-No-Further.

Interest in the group of plants known as herbs has been so consistent through the centuries that one may be certain they were not left out of the cobblestone period gardens. Herbs for kitchen use were usually grown in the nearest plot to the kitchen door for convenience. Presumably the disorderly spread of rampant mints, lemon balm and creeping thyme were the same problem they are today. But there could have been and can be today neat rows of sage, dill, the savories, the marjorams, caraway and all the rest. Information about herb gardens may be had from files of the Herb Grower Magazine published since 1947 in Falls Village, Connecticut and in The Herbarist, an annual publication of the Herb Society of America since 1935. Their address is Horticultural Hall, 300 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston 15, Massachusetts.

Though the use of ornamental shrubs, garden perennials and annuals for display was only slowly progressing from the estates of the wealthy previous to the time of the cobblestone building, the recorded growth of seedhouses and nurseries in the early years of the nineteenth century indicates the broadening out of gardening for pleasure. As individual homes were embellished with walks, drives, enclosures and garden features as well as colorful plantings, more and more copied the efforts of these pioneers. Whether the seed packets were from the Shaker Colony of New Lebanon, New York, or from some of the newly established commercial seedhouses, such as Grant Thorburn of New Jersey in 1802 to James Vick of Rochester in 1860, flowers began to brighten the home grounds. When Donald Culross Peattie made a selection for a Field Museum Leaflet of authentic pre-nineteenth century garden flowers, he included Grape Hyacinth, Crown Imperial, Tiger Lily, Jonquil, Four O'Clock, Cockscomb, Love Lies Bleeding, Sweet William, Clove Pink, London Pride, Portulaca, Bouncing Bet, Monks-hood, Bleeding Heart, Wallflower, Honesty, Giant Spider Plant, Hen-and-Chickens, Gas Plant, Balsam, Primrose, Garden Heliotrope and Elecampane.

The first tree plantings may have been maple or ash or elm seedlings from the fields. Available from nurseries were such flowering shrubs as lilac and mock-orange and flowering quince. The lilac may have been put at the corner of the house where the fragrance in May could reach the bedroom windows and eventually something choice may have been placed at the front entrance but foundation planting, as such, came later and was indeed necessary to hide the often ugly post-Civil War mansions. When a group of shrubs were to be placed to enclose the lawn area, the precepts of the prevailing naturalistic style of gardening would have no three in a straight line. One group of plants that will seem incongruous to the purist are those introduced from Japan and the interior of China. Such now ubiquitous plants as Japanese Barberry and Japanese Yew were not introduced until 1864 and 1855 respectively. Just about every form of weeping tree, though, was much admired in that period and any specimen of this sort would have been given prominent position on the lawn. Weepers were cultivated of oaks, elm, beech, willow and ash as well as cherry, sophora, laburnum, spruce,

and fir.

Many gardeners interested in roses are turning back to the old roses. Introduction dates have been well documented and it is perfectly easy to grow only those introduced before 1860. This eliminates hybrid teas, polyanthas, many ramblers and some species from the orient. Instead one may indulge freely in Bourbons, Provence or Cabbage roses, Damasks, Moss roses, Ayrshire, Sweetbriars and most native species. The important period for hybrid perpetuals came after 1860. A contemporary author was Samuel Parsons with his book, *The Rose*, issued in 1847. For accurate information on old roses, see Roy E. Shepherd's book, *History of the Rose*, published in 1954. Nurseries offering old roses are Joseph J. Kern, Box 33, Mentor, Ohio; van Barneveld, 5649 Mission Blvd., Ontario, California and Will Tillotson, 802 Brown Valley Road, Watsonville, California.

One plan of the year 1828 is available as reproduced on the back covers of *The Garden Club of America* souvenir booklet of its Rochester meeting in 1941, which may be referred to in the art division of the Rochester Public Library. The grounds of 'Reynella', home of Abelard Reynolds, were at the corner of Reynolds Street and Buffalo Road, now West Main Street, Rochester, New York. The plan indicates the primary importance of the fruit orchards and vegetable plots. In a simple pattern of rectangular units the vegetable garden adjoins the house and lawn area with cherry, plum and apple trees immediately to the rear.

Even in the villages, some sort of enclosure was necessary to keep out the cows and pigs that ran free. When stones were available, they were piled up as barriers, a combination of piled stones with rails across the top was known as the stake-and-rider fence in the Hudson River area where it was often used. Wooden fences were of post and rail construction or the familiar zig-zag rail or worm fence.

Within the grounds, arbors were commonly constructed, the more durable ones with foundations of stone. Over trellises were grown vines to make a shaded retreat. These were planned to secure seclusion or in summerhouse style to overlook the whole farm property. Hedrick records that turf seats were constructed a foot and a half high built in a circle around the base of a tree or set against a wall. Today we would consider this practice prejudicial to the health of a tree but against a stone wall such would be an interesting feature. It was not an era of sun-worshippers, the ladies endeavored to preserve their winter pallor through the summer, hence the preferred seats were under the shaded arbors. In the larger places, outdoor ornaments included large marble vases such as graced the lawn at Downing's Newburgh residence, but it must be remembered that his ardent admirer, Miss Bremer, sometimes found it necessary to reproach Downing with being more exclusive and aristocratic in his beautifying activity than became an honest, downright republican. An antique sundial would not be out of place as a restoration garden feature.

No better single reference source of the period can be named than U. P. Hedrick's "A History of Horticulture in America to 1860". This was published for Dr. Hedrick in 1950 by the Oxford University Press and is the only survey of its kind.