

December, 1933, was an exciting time in all county Engineers' offices probably. In little Rockland County, New York, the strangely placed triangle tucked in against the northern boundary of New Jersey by pressure of the great bays of the lower Hudson on the east, and the massif of Ramapo and Highland ranges on the north-west, things come about usually with slow dignity and theyears bring few changes in places or persons. Our officials more often than not serve thirty years, and our Court House is rather like a pleasant club.

But these markedly different years had affected us more than we knew and at last realization of the helplessness of over five thousand of our population of about sixty thousand had to be faced. The citizens, formerly so self-reliant and modestly prosperous--we have had very few really wealthy people among us at any time--a large proportion of them being descendents of the Dutch and Huguenot first settlers, living in the old red sandstone farm houses of the 18th Century, or in almost equally interesting "period" houses of succeeding generations, were feeling the effects of the collapse of County industries and it was bewildering to us all.

By December, however, the Civil Works Bureau had been formed and it became possible to register for work relief, and "projects" were the new necessities as well as luxuries of the moment. One could register with the Temporary Emergency Relief Bureau and receive a card which was a politely worded introduction to the boss of a "project".

Some of our officials were stunned and thought only of the future taxes, others realized that the taxes would be there in spite of anything Rockland County could do, and busied themselves devising useful projects.

Our most comprehensive project was initiated by our fine County Engineer, Mr. Calvin Tomkins Allison, and during the most terrible winter

experienced here in eighty-five years, kept a very large number of men and women from suffering as they might have done without it. The project in all its branches was designed "to put all County property in first class condition".

Now I had long busied myself with roadside beautification, and had but recently been appointed to work as landscape consultant in Mr. Allison's office. So matters pertaining to landscape design were referred to me, and on one of the coldest of days I was taken out behind the Court House to look over a jumble of unrelated acres and told to "make a Park of this".

Our Court House, built in 1929 to replace a picturesque but unsafe old brick building of 1827, has an impressive lime-stone facade with broad lawns and fine old trees inherited from the earlier days and faces on the main street of a tiny hamlet named hopefully in 1777 "New City" when the County Seat was moved there from Tappan in the southern end of the County. Viewed from sides and rear where the contiguous brick jail is attached to it by a low brick passage, all monumentality vanishes and it looks like a poorly designed factory. All the grading done at the time of building had increased this confused appearance and several hitherto unconnected parcels of land acquired at the north, west and south of the older site seemed more difficult to deal with through having been cut off from the front lawn levels by thoughtless heaping upon them of the sub-soil materials excavated for the new buildings, and by the erection of a twenty-five foot retaining wall for the passage-road to a parking space behind the jail for its employees. This wall has no merits in itself as far as looks go, and merely cuts off the view of what had, before degilement with

filth and rubbish, been a pretty little stream valley, with meadows and woods beyond. Furthermore, expediency, unadvised by any artist, had created a vast desert in the larger part of the land across the stream in the form of a four-acre space of roughly leveled fill used for giving tests for automobile licenses. So the outlook from the whole rear of the building in which many of the most important offices are, was as bad as the rear of the building itself! Burdocks and all the other handsome but truculent growths that take advantage of neglect made climbing about over the place difficult, and very soon came snow upon snow, but I put on high boots, well oiled, and began a series of trappings with tape-line and camera and notebook.

In connection with the repainting of the interior of the Court House, three men were put to work gathering tins and bottles not already frozen to the soil and this was preliminary to many weeks devoted to the removal of the debris of the fifty years during which the village of New City had discarded all of its unwanted objects in various parts of these lands. We had almost an historic collection of old brass beds and oil stoves; our beer bottles would have traced pre-prohibition styles, and for two weeks we labored on a rusted steam-shovel, named grandiloquently "Bucyrus," with an acetylene torch before the haughty junk man would consent to take it away - and then we had to bury the huge boiler!

Some of the fine young engineers from the C.W.A. list were appointed to make for me the contour map which allowed me to design to a very fine scale. My ideas crystalized very quickly under the excitement of the very serious difficulties apparent in the terrain. When I tried in the office to find out how much I would be allowed to spend everyone was vague. It was all so new. Our office, thirty years under one head had its habits of work, and all the new ramifications and red tape lines were hard to understand. One did not even know exactly what questions

to ask, or of whom to ask them.

There were our own five Supervisors, nine men separately, terrifying when seated solemnly around a table. There was a grand French Captain who headed the C.W.A. Bureau and was an engineer and had constructed more institutions than I can remember to name. He found most of the men given to him as aides by political leaders an amateur crew and generally made independent decisions on the merits of individual cases. He saw what was in my plans from the first and when I knew how to ask for help I got it from him. But the experiences of a creative artists' life do not teach one how to work for a group of masters, and the difficulties for me of remembering all the forms for requisitions, of waiting for bids on things that I could buy for half what the bidders would demand have remained difficulties to this day! Mr. Allison said, "Plan everything just as you think it should be and we'll get it done downey."

When I got it clear in my head what I could do with the spaces I made the first set of drawings and a report for the Supervisors and they voted me \$500 and then soon after \$476 of this had to go into surfacing the great parking space and I was back where I began, with labour but no materials.

Meanwhile I had driven over sixteen thousand miles on road surveys, studying our County for its possibilities, interesting people in the whole idea of conserving and enhancing the very great beauty of our little section of the lovely Hudson Valley, writing dozens of letters about the ^{what} Park and the better roadside work might add to our treasures, and it continued to snow and to be below zero, and my three men were glad that burning dead trees and rubbish was part of their work.

Captain Raymond

March 1st came and I suggested to the Supervisors that perhaps I deserved a salary of some kind. This proved to be something of a shock. A Landscape Consultant was a queer fish anyway, but one that cost anything was almost another of those who rob the poor taxpayer! After a month I was put on a "contigent" list at \$100 a month; no expense account, no secretarial help and not much notice taken of my recommendations outside of our own office.

With April 1st, C.W.A. became T.E.R.A. and my Park Project was one that was approved by the New York office. I suddenly found myself out on the bare plateau which I designed to make into a formal garden facing a group of men of all ages and degrees of intelligence but of absolutely one mind in their resentment at having to be bossed by a woman!

They were men of all trades except the gardeners; an electrician, a butcher, a marble-setter, several brickyard men, a chauffeur, a plumber, a statistician even! They all handed me their cards in sullen silence. Being a shy person with anyone who does not come half way toward me, I was, that first icy morning, absolutely terrified, and wondered what on earth had ever led me into doing this thing! We did not even have tools to start something with. I got out my first plans and they did not seem to care to look at the. They were going to hate the job whatever it was.

I got into my little car and went down to the local hardware store and came back with the rumble full of picks and shovels and axes. Wheelbarrows, thought needed at once, were beyond my pocketbook - eventually we got two out of a dump and borrowed two old ones from the Town Road Superintendent.

Almost the first swing of pick started things going better. A man said "Look! Money!" and the sluggish troop fairly jumped to his side. He had turned up three quarters stuck together with frost. The rubbish and red dirt flew and men pounced again and again and held up more quarters and half dollars generally in clumps of frozen earth. Everyone glowed and even I was taken in to the warmer atmosphere, woman though I was! A great deal of dirt was moved - though with no attention to its proper destination - and the morning went and only thirty-three odd dollars were found, but the job was off to a really good start that Fate had contrived. Never since have I been made to feel an outsider and the five and a half months during which we have worked together have welded us into an excellent working squad.

In July a real gardener and a young surveyor who liked gardening were given to me, and about the middle of August I got two bricklayers, and I have since acquired a scenic painter, so my men now total twenty-one, counting the four painters who work, it seems for all eternity, painting the bars in the jail. Of course no man works more than three days, and some only two so that my force amounts to about ten men. Three of the twenty-one are about equal to one good man, but the others are all doing their best to help me produce a Park for our County and the growing pride in the work now that we have something to show for it is heartening. They have all come to be willing to confess a love of flowers, and bring me specimens to identify or tell me with pride of some plant at home that is distinguishing itself by bloom or rarity. They bring their wives and children on Sundays, and their friends, less fortunate in getting assigned to jobs come and spend the days with us.

From the first, being obliged to go here and there throughout the County to speak in justification of spending money on "mere landscaping" at a time like this - for there were violent attacks upon the project

by the more conservative taxpayers - I had been fired with zeal for all the uses that I saw we might incorporate into our Park. We are surrounded by the great superb State Parks - Bear Mountain, Harriman and the Palisades Interstate Parks - but they are parks for New York City people in hordes, and excepting in winter Rockland County people rarely go into them. Large as they are, they always seem crowded. Here in our own five acres I saw we could have in miniature more what a private garden lover looks for in a garden. Something in which every feature was the result of careful thought, a sense of privacy, a homeliness, and all the educational features of arboretum, botanical garden and wild flower preserve, as well as pleasant landscaped picnic grounds, centers for the garden club meetings, and resting places for the out of work villagers and the Court House employees in the immediate vicinity.

I had early listed my possibilities. First, make it sound and decided in design and have it help to pull the unrelated parts of the Court House together into something more pleasing from the rear and sides; (a difficult task as yet not realized!). Make it horticulturally instructive through the fineness of varieties in their classes. Trees, both all our natives and such aliens as would harmonize with them, shrubs of distinction, perennials of the best, annuals in their handsome richness of colour and mass, bulbs and tubers, rock plants used properly, a bog treated generously with interplantings among its own treasures, the wooded banks of the stream encouraged to produce more and more wild-flowers, and all numbered and indexed and records kept in our little garden house for those seeking accurate information. Then make a County nursery in the half acre of meadow beside the big parking space, so that we will have supplies for road planting in the future. Use the little winding stream of which we have about fifteen hundred feet, ten to fifteen feet wide, in every way to reveal its beauties. Its shores are lined

County Court House Park at New City, Rockland County, New York

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with spice-bush and witch hazel, elderberry and osier, viburnums and virgin's bower, great royal ferns, ironweed, Joe Pye and now the asters and hundreds of other things. All these have come out thickly since the tons of refuse were removed from the banks. I have nestled tables and seats of stone handled in the largest way wherever a lovely vista of water or copse was best seen. We have every kind of bird the section harbours, and we are making them happier with a bird feeding station that will be cared for by the New City school children during the winter. These children have from the first been made into a loyal band of lovers of the Park. They appreciate the better wading places and the pools for boat sailing and the fire places for potato roasting and they have policed the picnic grove and picked off thousands of tent caterpillar egg masses as well as nests, and kept things neat, and they are greatly interested in the little open air theatre we are making for them.

It also came to my mind that though the County was founded by the Dutch and though the original Dutch settlers are almost to a man still represented here by direct descendants, there is no County Memorial to them. So I planned the formal part of my garden as a "Dutch Garden" and spent every possible evening running in to New York libraries to refresh my knowledge of Dutch gardening, studying especially the use of brick in Holland, in the hope of introducing here an interest in more free designing with brick. Our County had had one of the greatest brick-producing industries in the Country for over a hundred years yet we never had developed any interesting technique for the use of this splendid material. So I designed all my steps and pavements, "zomerhaus" and gazebo, and a wall along the eastern and southern sides of the formal part of the garden, as well as the wail walls of the sunken centre of it, in patterns of distinct interest. In one panel of the wall I am going to set all I can find of

the stamped bricks carrying the marks of the fifty odd yards that formerly made Haverstraw brick, in memory of a lost industry that had meant livelihood to a quarter of our population.

The blue-print made in December still fairly represents the general design of the Dutch Garden. I found that working with untrained men, drawings were not much use. They could not understand them. So I draw on the ground with stakes, and I lay bricks in place with my hands, and I indicate the placing of every rock and plant, so that between 7:30A.M. and 4P.M. I am as active as it is possible to be. When tools are dropped and the trek towards the cars is begun I too sigh with weariness. But my day still lasts on. I have to visit people to look at offerings for the park, write letters or attend conferences in one of the several offices that control our work, work ahead a little on what is to be done tomorrow, make out requisitions for material, or some of the many reports, before I can retire to a domesticity that also has its duties.

Sometimes the adventure seems threatened with ship-wreck, when politics, in which I take as little part as most artists, put fear into the hearts of the men who can vote it out, and my men bring me rumours of a "shut-down" and we all go sadly for a day or two. For all my men have heavy burdens and there is nothing in sight to take the place of this work-relief at present. Most have not only children, but the failing elders of their family to look after; two have lost wives since we began work and all themselves show the effects of the long time it is since they have had food up to their former standards of living. They have taught me a great deal about our Country that I never knew before. There is the grim John, with a nose like the older Morgan, who has been a tea-totaller all his life and who thought the worst of me at first, but who now helps me over a bad place with shy kindness; the id quick little "Gokey" whose name should be Gauthier if Haverstraw had cared for origins.

He digs perfect ditches like beautifully lined brown boxes with such level bottoms that our footings must all be immortally steady. There is "Jus" with had choked on a corner of his head, and a D'Artagnan nose, a Savoyard humorist who respects no person. There is the steady quiet Swede who seems to be moving his big frame slowly but whose mind's concentration on his stones has produced all our much-admired stone work. The matter-of-fact bricklayers who were never before set at such intricate tasks and I have ready for them each day, but who have come to like it. The important safety inspector who whips out his iodine for every thorn-stab, and feels so responsible for us all. There is one-our youngest - who longs for a farm for his two little boys to grow up on. There is a German, the only one inclined to make speeches, and an Italian who plods almost without words. There is the colored man who asked me if I knew that if you ate the heart of a turtle "you'd be so evil that you wouldn't have fear of anything" - he'd tried but couldn't bring himself to do it. We'll all miss each other when the final shut-down comes!

They have grown ever freer with suggestions and advice about each piece of work since those far behind spring days when I timidly showed them what we were setting out to do, and I like to believe that they will miss the varied interest of this job when fate takes them back to the jobs they want.

There is no doubt in the minds of the regular visitors to the Park that it is a desirable project. During the month of July, when I kept a census of them, 1034 persons ate lunches there. These were sometimes in groups that represented clubs - The Young Men's Democratic Club, the Welfare Workers of Rockland and their guests, the Methodist Church Guild. The 4-H Clubs, the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, and regularly every two weeks, the T.E.R.A. office help. There would be evening and Sunday parties too, which I did not count. One Sunday I took some of my own neighbors

over there for a picnic and found every table and seat and fireplace in use by family parties.

We have had splendid presents of trees and shrubs and plant material of all kinds, from the thirty year old Norway maples that begin to shade the hot parking space and which we moved with the County derrick and trailer in a May marked for me by sleepless nights- not a man working for me had ever moved a tree before! Four thousand iris of named varieties make the wood-edge border of a long winding walk: spruces and dogwoods, fine Veitch junipers forty years old; lillies; twelve thousand narcissus bulbs in twelve named varieties, rock plants, water plants, wildlings from all parts- all sorts of lovely things have clothed our surfaces as fast as we could get them ready.

Now in 1937 how much of my larger plan is realized? The project is working under W.P.A. only 46 hours a month, and during these winter months only my three bricklayers and their helpers are kept on. I have ventured far beyond my original plans in pattern and detail and when it is too cold to lay bricks we cut them for the intricate mosaics of our terrace floors and the finish is in sight. Our Tea-house is awaiting the Ludovici-Celadon tiles for its roof which have still to be voted us by our sponsors. 610 feet of very varied wall work is finished and the water and rock gardens were already rich in bloom last fall. Now that I am a seasoned gang boss I am more patient with the set-up that so often keeps us marking time without materials. I get desperate and go out and buy what cement my little car will carry and get behind with the grocer, but the work goes on. Men who sit in offices and argue that our project is not worth supporting have never taken the trouble to walk out and look at it. "We would have been sacrificed long ago if the support of the Garden Clubs, Conservation Association and other out door interests was not so obviously behind us.

Ahead of me personally when the construction work is all done is the more difficult work of keeping the Garden alive and active in the uses to which it can be put in the life of the Community. I must get a Horticultural Society organized and continue to foster the love of beauty

through the schools, Parent-Teacher organizations etc. This last Autumn I offered a course in all branches of scientific horticulture in the Junior College that supplements our best High School. I have ten very hard working students. We use the Garden for all laboratory work, doing our grafting and Mendelian plant breeding there as well as all the processes of growing things well, each student having a plot that is part of the Nursery space I early reserved there.

Building a Public Park is only the beginning. The end is for the future.