



THE OLD GARDENS OF PENNSYLVANIA

VI.—THE WOODLANDS, FORMER COUNTRY SEAT OF WILLIAM HAMILTON

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IT IS regrettable that in the growth of our large American cities so little attention has been given to the preservation of places of horticultural and botanical interest. With the death of the persons interested in their preservation and the associations connected with them, such places have been allowed at first to suffer from neglect and later to be absolutely destroyed by the growth of the city countryward. Of such regrettable change The Woodlands is a conspicuous example and the history of this American seat of the Hamiltons has a rather tragic interest for both the antiquarian and the horticulturist.

Andrew Hamilton, the first, purchased from Stephen Jackson a considerable piece of land in Blockley township along the Schuylkill River extending west to Nanganesy (or Mill) Creek. On his death, the property passed to Andrew Hamilton second, who died six years afterward, devising The Woodlands to William Hamilton.

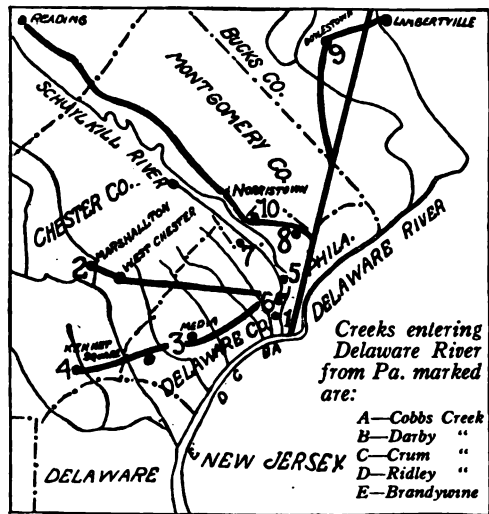
This William tore down the comfortable house which stood on the land and (some time before the American Revolution) built an impressive mansion which skilfully blended three different orders of architecture; viz: the Doric, the Ionic, and the Tuscan. The south portico, supported by six stately columns, commands a fine view of the lower reaches of the Schuylkill River, and in the early days before the building of the numerous factories which now disfigure the river front, the outlook must have been particularly pleasing. The grounds in 1830 had been reduced to about ten acres, and at that date were noted for a great variety of indigenous and exotic trees and plants. A winding walk leads through the shrubberies and copses. Nanganesy (or Mill) Creek was then shaded by fine forest trees and its banks were relieved by out-cropping masses of picturesque rock. Above the stream, near the old stable still remaining, stood the greenhouses, which measured one hundred and forty feet and contained about ten thousand plants.

Griswold speaks of The Woodlands as "a very charming spot," and says: "Mr. William Hamilton, who built the house and decorated the grounds, was a man of great taste in such matters, and embellished his beautiful mansion with such paintings and works of art as were obtainable in those days. His table was the frequent resort of artists and *bon vivants*. On graduating in 1762 at the Academy of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania) he gave a fête to his college friends, among whom were young men afterward celebrated, as Judge Yeates, Judge Peters, Mr. Dickinson Sergeant, the Reverend Doctor Andrews, Bishop White and others. The present mansion was not erected, so for their entertainment, he built a temporary building decorated with elegance and artistic effect, so that it claimed the admiration of all the invited guests."

His taste in matters pertaining to gardening and horticulture were well known through the colonies and, later, the United States. His interest in such matters is revealed in letters written to his private secretary.* To quote in part from a letter dated St. James Street, London, Sept., 30th, 1785:

"Having observed with attention the nature, variety

*Benjamin Hayes Smith, 1785-1806, grandfather of Benj. H. Smith, the author of a brochure, "Some Letters from William Hamilton of The Woodlands to his Private Secretary." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Jan., Apr., and July, 1905.



The figures in the map indicate the locations of the gardens and their sequence in the series

and extent of the plantations of shrubs, trees, & fruits and consequently admired them, I shall (if God grants me a safe return to my own country), endeavour to make it smile in the same useful & beautiful manner. To take time by the forelock, every preparation should immediately be made by Mr. Thomson who is on the spot, and I have no doubt you will assist him to the utmost of your power. The first thing to be set about is a good nursery for trees, shrubs, flowers, fruits, &c. of every kind. I do desire therefore that seeds in large quantities may be directly sown of the white flowering Locust, the sweet or aromatic Birch, the Chestnut Oak, Horsechestnuts, Chincapins, Judas trees, Dogwoods, Hallesia, Kalmias, Rhododendron, Magnolias, winterberries, arrow wood, Broom, annonas, shrub St. Johnswort &c.; of crabs, quinces, plums & a quantity thin shell'd almonds, & such others as may occur to you for Beauty or use. I desire also that a large quantity may be collected & put into a nursery of handsome small plants of Elm, Lime, Locust, sweet Birch, white pine, ash leaved maple, sugar maple, aspen poplar, Zantoxylon or tooth ache tree, magnolia, arrow wood, nine Bark, cephalanthus or dwarf Buttonwood, Azalea, Kalmia, Rhododendron, Hallesia, Judas tree, Dogwood, Broom, winterberry, clethra, mezerion, morelloes, black Hearts, crabs, quinces (for stocks), raspberries, currants white & red, & as many as possible of Jasmine & Honeysuckles (Jasmines may be had in plenty at Mr. Ross's place & at Woodford & Honeysuckles may be had in great quantities at Mrs. Lawrence's near Frankford & of Dr. Joseph Redman). Too many of these cannot be propagated. I would likewise have cuttings put into the ground of ye striped althea, Lombardy poplar (if alive) all the kinds of Grapes that have throve of those I sent, chickasaw plum, winter Haws, Jasmines, Honeysuckles, of that kind of Dogwood that grows in the Border on the south side of the kitchen garden on the other side of the valley (which was propagated by cuttings from the only tree which I ever came across & grows on the point just within the creeks mouth at high water mark & may be easily discovered when in Bloom by its corymbose flowers), of paradise apples, red & white currants (particularly the latter) the common raspberry & the twice bearing if it succeeded. Nor should a plantation be neglected of the different hardy perennial plants such as Yucca cornflag (Gladiolus) lilie, white narcissus (double & single) pinks, double sweet william, Lycnidea [Manulea tomentosa of South Africa], french Honeysuckle, Foxglove, Lily of the Valley (from Bush Hill), Paeonies, Columbines, Hollyhocks, polyanthos, Jonquils (from Bush Hill) Hyacinths etc. I before expressed a desire to have the Double oleander & double myrtle increased as much as possible by cuttings & I would have you in the spring when the azaleas are

in flower take particular pains in marking the different kinds & the orchis roots (in the valley) in such manner as they can be transplanted according to growth & color." And again he writes: "I have great satisfaction in your information respecting the Illinois nut plant [pecan] & winter Haw. I am afraid to suppose that the Bald Cypress has stood it out, for it appear'd a year ago at its last gasp. The Apherously pines [Pinus cembra] should be particularly attended to. For another plant cannot be obtained in England. Those I sent come from the Alps. Altho hardy in respect to cold they may be injured by vermin, poultry, &c. &c."

ENOUGH has already been quoted to show why the collections of plants at The Woodlands soon became celebrated. They were in 1802 visited by the French botanist, François André Michaux (1770-1855), who wrote: "the absence of Mr. W. Hamilton deprived me of the pleasure of seeing him; notwithstanding I went into his magnificent garden, situated upon the borders of the Schuylkill, about four miles from Philadelphia. His collection of exotics is immense, and remarkable, for plants from New Holland, all the trees and shrubs of the United States, at least those that would stand the winter at Philadelphia; in short, it would be impossible to find a more agreeable situation than the residence of Mr. W. Hamilton."

Frederick Pursh, author (1814) of "Flora Americae Septentrionalis, or, a Systematic Arrangement and Description of the Plants of North America," lived at The Woodlands from 1802 to 1805. He writes: "Not far from the latter place (the botanic garden of Messrs. John and William Bartram) are also the extensive gardens of William Hamilton, Esq.,

called The Woodlands, which I found not only rich in plants from all parts of the world, but particularly so in rare and new American species. Philadelphia being a central situation, and extremely well calculated for the cultivation of plants from all the other parts of North America, I found this collection particularly valuable for furnishing me with a general knowledge of the plants of that country, preparatory to more extensive travels into the interiors for the discovery of new and unknown subjects. Mr. John Lyon (of whom I shall have an opportunity to speak hereafter), who had the management of these gardens, was then about to give them up: having the offer of being appointed his successor, I embraced it, and accordingly in 1802 I entered upon the situation. During my stay in this place, which was until 1805, I received and collected plants from all parts of North America; and when Michaux's 'Flora Boreali-Americana' appeared, which was during that time, I was not only in possession of most of his plants but had then a considerable number not described by him." In 1805 Pursh, under the patronage of Dr. Benjamin S. Barton, Professor of Botany in the University of Pennsylvania, set out on his ever memorable explorations.

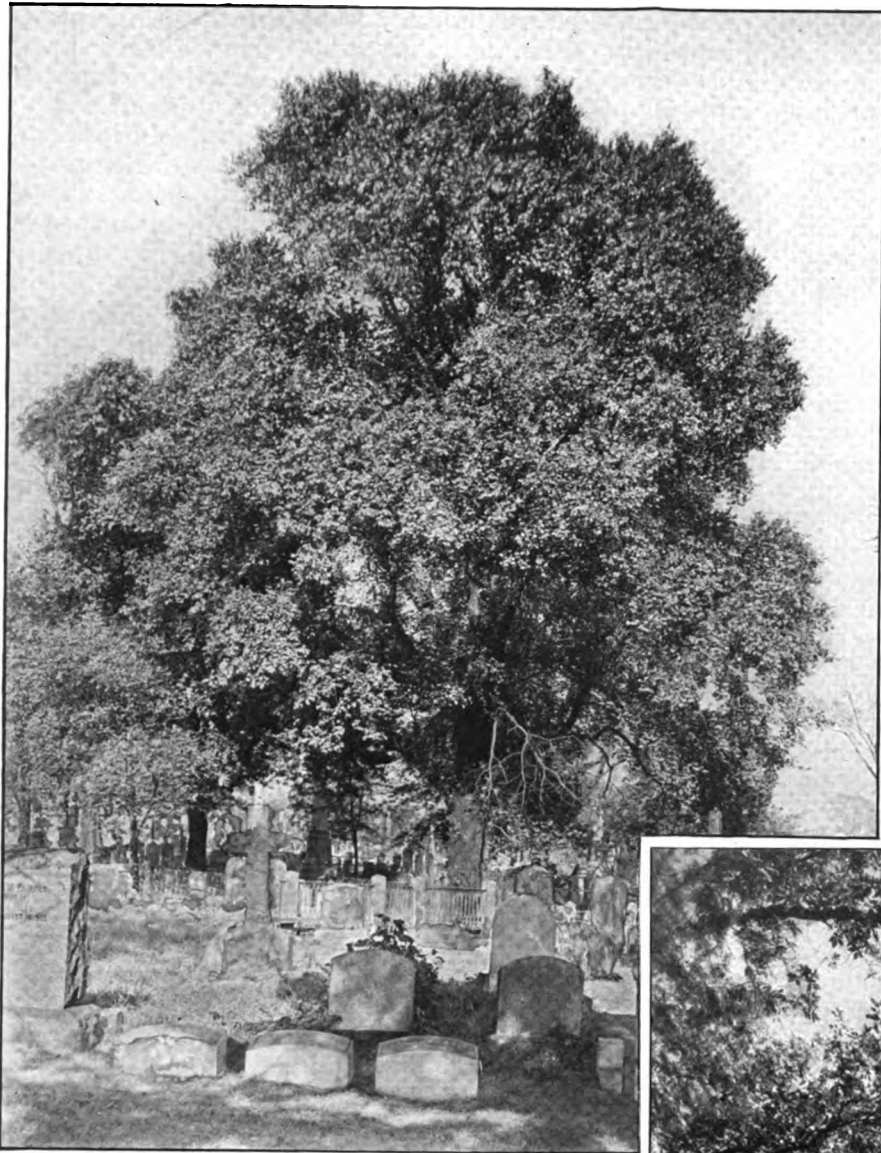
William Hamilton died at The Woodlands on June 5, 1813, aged sixty-eight years, and was interred in the family burying-ground at Bush Hill. His nephew, also William Hamilton, succeeded to the estate, where he died on July 21, 1821, aged fifty-five years.

The account of the Hamilton estate by the writer of 1830, previously mentioned, brings us down to April 13, 1840, when the estate was sold to a number of citizens (incorporated as "The Woodlands Cemetery Company of Philadelphia"), and the beautiful demesne of the Hamiltons became one of the



THE WILLIAM HAMILTON HOUSE AT WOODLANDS

Antedating the Revolution, this charming old mansion, built by the hospitable Hamilton, wears its age with a dignity which makes the visitor regret that its doors no longer stand invitingly open



ENGLISH ELM

An old tree which has survived the transformation of The Woodlands from an ancient country seat to its present sad uses

principal cemeteries of Philadelphia. The use of the land for burial purposes has resulted in the destruction of most of the trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants grown by the first William Hamilton. Only a remnant remained, when the writer, as a student of botany in the near-by University of Pennsylvania, for the first time explored The Woodlands in 1888. The noteworthy trees of the old garden then standing, but which have since disappeared were White Pines, a large spreading Beech, and a fine *Magnolia grandiflora*. Two large Ginkgo trees (*Ginkgo biloba*) planted in 1784, are still standing (1921) and still in vigorous health. The largest, about 75 ft. tall, measures 7 ft. 7 in. in circumference. The other, nearest the house, measures 6 ft. 6 in. in circumference, three feet from the ground. Both trees are staminate and come into flower about April 28th or May 30th, and synchronously with them a female tree three miles away near Overbrook is ready to receive the pollen which may be accidentally blown from the male trees in The Woodlands. Under date of June 10th, 1919, Prof. C. S. Sargent of the Arnold Arboretum writes: "It is probable that the first Ginkgo tree in this country was one planted at Woodlands, and we are curious to know if this original plant which is mentioned in your Bota-

nists of Philadelphia, is still standing. If it is living would it be possible to get the trunk circumference at three feet from the ground and its approximate height? This tree if living is certainly one of the most interesting of exotic trees which have been planted in the United States."*

Near the Ginkgo trees is a Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) with a stem circumference of 1 ft. 5 in. A short distance away are two large English Elms (*Ulmus campestris*). One of them is 10 ft. 1 in. in circumference, the other is 10 ft. 3 in. around. An English Maple (*Acer campestre*) with numerous sprouts from its base and roots, and in vigorous health notwithstanding the clouds of smoke from the near-by railroads and manufacturing plants, is 6 ft. 9 in. in circumference. Here also are found descendants of the first *Ailanthus* tree planted in America by William Hamilton in 1784. There are also several other noteworthy trees, tabulated as follows: Buckeye (*Aesculus flava*) 5 ft. 3 in. in circumference; Catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*) 8 ft., 9 in.; Honey Locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) 9 ft.; Mossy-cup Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) 10 ft. 3 in.

The cemetery still has a piece of woodland adjoining the University Botanical Garden and a

*Compare statement as to the Ginkgo tree in Bartram Garden, 9 ft. 3 in. circumference. (GARDEN MAGAZINE, Oct. 1920, page 80.)

LARGE TULIP TREE (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)

This venerable giant, fifteen feet in circumference, lingers in the valley at The Woodlands, rather pathetically reminiscent of gayer and more glorious days



HAMILTON WALK, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

By this walk, planted with memorial trees of many beautiful species, is the name of William Hamilton made a living thing in the minds of succeeding generations at the university of which he, too, was once a part

11 ft. in circumference. They are about 50 ft. tall. Two young sprout trees have appeared between the second and third, which are already 10 ft. tall and promise to become lusty specimens.

When Pine Street from 39th Street to 34th Street, West Philadelphia, was taken from the city plan, it was converted into a beautiful, tree-lined walk on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania, and named Hamilton Walk in memory of William Hamilton, the entrance to whose estate, The Woodlands, is at 39th Street. The borders are planted with Blue Flags; Rhododendrons; Lombardy Poplar; *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*; a specimen of the rare *Franklinia* (*Gordonia pubescens*); and some twenty-eight memorial trees, named for past and present trustees, provosts, and distinguished alumni of the University. The trees, thus dedicated to the memory of university men, include Black Oaks, White Oaks, Red Oaks, Tulip Trees, Sugar Maples, American Elms, Catalpas, and Weeping Willows.*

In Hamilton Walk, is found a fitting memorial to William Hamilton, for it commemorates in the green, growing things he loved his great service to early American botany and horticulture. The memorial gate of the "Class of '73" at the head of Hamilton Walk is a suitable companion to the dignified granite arch which spans the entrance to The Woodlands Cemetery, only a few paces to the westward of the entrance to the campus of the University of Pennsylvania, the alma mater of William Hamilton, Class of 1762.

*Consult Nitzsche, George E.: "University of Pennsylvania, its History, Traditions, Buildings and Memorials;" 7th edition, 1918, 105-107

HAMILTON MEMORIAL GATE

Impressiveness is lent by this formal entrance which makes the walk a distinct feature of the campus

number of trees along the driveways near the entrance are worth mention, such as the Princess Tree (*Paulownia imperialis*); Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*); Purple Beech (*Fagus sylvatica purpurea*); Box Elder (*Negundo aceroides*); Persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*); and attached to the old mansion, the yellow Jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*). Outside of the remarkable Ginkgos, the rarest and largest trees of "The Woodlands," are four remaining specimens of *Zelkova crenata*, native of the Caucasus regions. This species was originally planted in two rows forming an avenue of approach to the house. The single remaining tree of the west row near the stable was alive on June 24th, 1916, but is now dead. It measures 14 ft. 8 in. in circumference. In the eastern row, all of the three trees are now dead. These trees measure respectively 12 ft. 6 in.; 12 ft.; and