

Heritage NEWS

MARCH 2006

The English Garden



General Meeting

Wednesday,
March 22, 2006
at 7:30 p.m.

Ladies' Literary Club
218 N. Washington Street
Ypsilanti

Please join us on Wednesday evening, March 22, 7:30, at the Ladies' Literary Club, 218 North Washington. Four Ypsilanti Anglophiles, Judy Williston, Elaine Found, and Jane and Denis Schmiedeke are going to tell us about their May 2005 trip through the West Country of England.

A variety of garden forms will be presented from the broad landscape of the British countryside down to the intimate environment of the middle class family in urban and rural village settings. The focus will be on garden style rather than floral components other than what specific plants contribute to define style in terms of structure, color, form, pattern, and texture.

Selections will be made from the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Wiltshire, Dorset, and Berkshire and will stress the broader considerations of design in English Gardens, leaving the detail of floral identification for the knowledgeable eye to find.

The British have been the consummate gardeners of the western world ever since the Romans brought the first rose to Britannia in the first century. In their occupation of the misty isles, the governing Romans built elaborate villas in the rolling landscape, left nearly bare from the last ice age, to set an example of domicile embellishment with flora ever since.

photos by Denis Schmiedeke

CONSIDERED IN SPRING TIME

British countryside gardens:

Mompesson House garden (large photo) Hampton Court Palace Garden (small photo).

My Old Kentucky Home



photo by Wes Newkirk

Last year an article appeared in the February issue of *Early American Life* about Betty and Wes Newkirk and the 1812 Kentucky home they painstakingly restored over fifteen years.

Wes and Betty are the parents of long-time YHF member and home-tour chief guide Nancie Loppnow. The story of the Newkirks and their wonderful house helps explain the commitment to historic preservation that Nancie herself has always displayed.

The story of the house:

Sometime between 1796 and 1810 James Coleman began building his brick late Georgian house on the Oddville Pike just outside of Cynthiana, Kentucky. Coleman was a land speculator, lawyer, and surveyor as well as a farmer. By the mid-1820s Coleman had become ill and started selling his assets. He sold the farmstead he named Poplar Springs to Kentucky Governor Joseph Desha in 1827; Coleman died the following summer. The farmstead became a flourishing plantation operated by Desha's son, Lucius, and thirty-three slaves. Lucius Desha renamed the Kentucky plantation The Oaks. It is no surprise that the Deshas supported the South during the Civil War.

In 1880, Lucius signed the property over to his daughter Frances who had married Hugh Duffy, a judge

and former speaker of the Kentucky House of Representatives. Frances and Hugh had a son and five daughters. The daughters, who never married, managed The Oaks. Over the years, the health of the spinsters declined. Eventually the home's belongings were auctioned to raise money for the sur-

living daughters to afford a nursing home. The land was subdivided and sold and the house sat vacant until Nancie's parents learned it was for sale. What the Newkirks had discovered was a house that had been owned by only two families over a period of 180 years!



photo by Early American Life magazine

Above: The once grand, dilapidated house as it sat vacant.

Below: The 1812 Coleman-Desha House today, a prime example of Georgian architecture.



photo by Wes Newkirk

Betty scrapes old paint on the exterior brick by hand.

Betty and Wes had been searching for twenty-five years for the right old house to buy and restore. They found The Oaks while on a Sunday drive. The Oaks was just what they had been looking for—it was the right vintage and style. Unfortunately, the place was not for sale at that time. When the house finally went on the market, in 1987, it had sat vacant for at least two years. Although the house had not been vandalized, it had suffered demolition by neglect. The foundation, brickwork, roof, plumbing,

electricity, heating, water supply, walls, ceilings, and floors all needed major work.

Cynthiana, Kentucky is east of I-75 between Cincinnati and Lexington, Kentucky, not very far from the Newkirk's home in the southern Ohio town of Hamilton. While restoring the house, Wes and Betty led a double life, traveling back and forth between Hamilton and Cynthiana.

The house became a family project. Daughter Susan and her family came from the Philadelphia area and daughter Nancie and her family traveled from Ypsilanti for extended weekends and vacations. In September 1988 Nancie's parents held an open house for their friends. The family remembers plaster tumbling onto guests. According to Nancie, the restoration wasn't the type that followed a set of plans. A project would be planned and completed before planning started for the next project.

An interior designer friend based much of the decoration on Betty's research. Betty knew what she wanted and what she liked, and she was very knowledgeable about the style of the

house and what type of restoration was required. Wes was with her every step of the way, doing whatever needed to be done. They fulfilled their civic obligations in Hamilton on weekends and focused on the Kentucky restoration during the week. Wes lived in a nearby motel and Betty drove down to Kentucky on some weekdays to work on the house.

Eventually the restoration took its toll on Betty. Her health began to deteriorate until she could no longer make the trip to Cynthiana. She now stayed in Hamilton, with her books and magazines, drawing up plans. The family continually updated her. These updates brought the family together and allowed her to visualize the progress on her beloved house.

Betty died in May 2002 and seven months later the family celebrated its first Christmas in the Coleman-Desha house. "We always celebrate Christmas as a family," says Nancie, "and we all wanted to celebrate this one in the house to honor Mother. We knew it wouldn't be perfect—not the way Mother would have done it—but we could feel her spirit there with us in the house, and it was wonderful."



The home's interior.



photos by Early American Life magazine

The story of the Newkirks and the house:



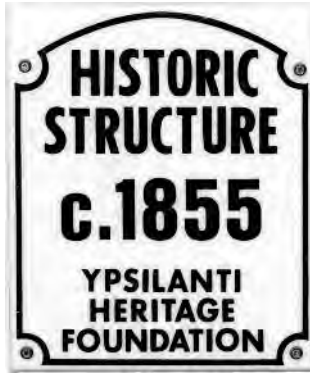
Meetings are held at the Ladies' Literary Club, 218 N. Washington Street, Ypsilanti at 7:30 p.m. The public is welcome.

2005/2006 SCHEDULE

24 MAY Annual Awards Banquet

If you would like to nominate a building for a Historic Marker designation send (before April 1) a very brief description of the building and its address to:

Don Randazzo
Chair, YHF Marker Committee
6101 Hitchingham Road
Ypsilanti, MI 48197
e-mail: drandazzo@provide.net



Yes! I would like to support preservation and become a member of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation.

Please check the appropriate box and return with your check to:

Joe Mattimoe, YHF Treasurer
301 N. Grove, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

- Students & Seniors \$5
- Individual \$10
- Family \$15
- Contributing \$25
- Supporting \$50
- Sustaining \$100
- Lifetime \$1,000

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

e-mail _____

Have you visited the YHF website lately? There are new features you may find interesting • www.yhf.org
Heritage News is the newsletter of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation. It is published five times a year: September, November, January, March and May, and distributed, free of charge, to the membership by mail, and made available to the public at City Hall, Farmers' Market and various business locations in the three business districts in the City.

See you at the general meeting - Wednesday, March 22, 2006, 7:30 pm

- Hank Prebys, President
- Joe Mattimoe, Treasurer
- Jan Arps-Prundeanu
- Pattie Harrington
- Brett Lenart
- Bill Nickels
- Bonnie Penet
- Don Randazzo
- Jane Schmiedeke
- Paul Schreiber
- Penny Schreiber
- Andrea Weber

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The Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation
Heritage News
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