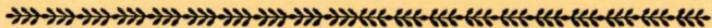




Gardens of the Colonists

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
THE INTERIOR, HAROLD L. ICKES, *Secretary*
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, NEWTON B. DRURY, *Director*



A portion of the colonial herb and vegetable garden at George Washington Birthplace National Monument in Westmoreland County, Va. The memorial mansion is seen in the background.

Gardens Of The Colonists¹

By V. R. Ludgate, *Landscape Architect, National Park Service*

MOST aspects of America's colonial development classify themselves naturally in accordance with a scheme which observes the performance of the immutable laws of environment and national ancestry. So it is with her historic gardens. From the New England Puritans in the north to the Spaniards in the far south there may be seen an inevitable diversity of expression evolved from opposed influences. From the severely enclosed Puritan gardens, through the neat trimness of the plots of the painstaking New York and Pennsylvania Dutch, to the spacious areas of the tobacco planters of Virginia, and ending in the south with the careless style of the Spaniards, the influences of environment and heritage are manifested.

Unlike the New England Puritans who came to America to avoid persecution and to establish settlements where they might conduct their religious life without intervention, the Virginia settlers were tradesmen, farmers, skilled artisans, and, in many cases, persons of means who came in search of adventure. Contrary to a popular belief, all of them were not dandies and gallants whose only skill concerned the use of fighting implements, and, despite hardships to which they naturally were unaccustomed, within a short time of their arrival "a garden was laid off, and the seeds of fruits and vegetables not indigenous to the country" were planted. Unfortunately few records were made of the names of these fruits and vegetables.

Tobacco was one of the first crops planted, and its cultivation is one of the primary influences in the development of the widely separated estates so typical even now of Virginia. Because these

¹From *The Regional Review* (National Park Service, Region One, Richmond, Va.), Vol. II, No. 1, January 1939, pp. 17-22.



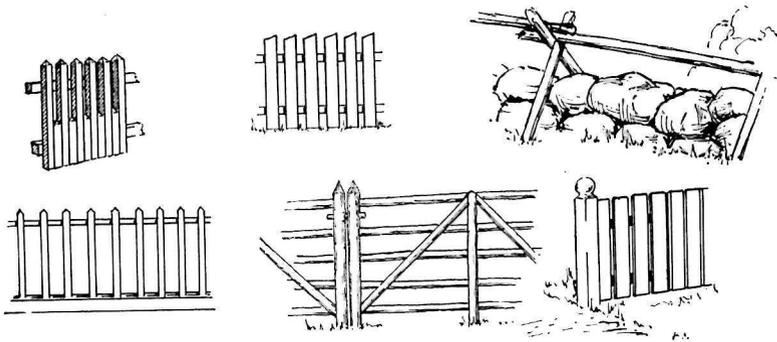
Another view of the garden at George Washington Birthplace National Monument.

estates were established so far apart that communication with other sections was difficult, each naturally tended to become a tiny unit sufficient unto itself and responsible for raising and producing all the materials necessary for the well-being of its inhabitants. The plantations were enlarged continually in order to embrace the rich new soil necessary for the growth of tobacco, and the ultimate result was the formation of a series of tiny kingdoms, which, with the later importation of slaves, became increasingly self-sustaining. The planters provided also for their own herbs and "simples" which, in the absence of doctors, were so necessary in case of illness or injury. Other crops were raised, of course, and the logical route for distribution of these, after they were gathered, was by water—the cheapest and most accessible artery of commerce.

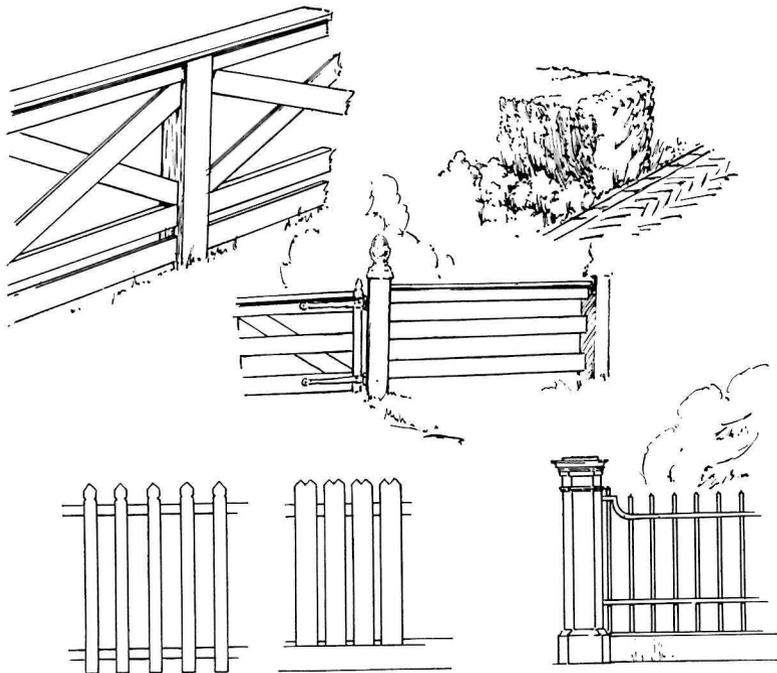
Instructions to Governor Berkeley in 1641 provided that every colonist holding 100 acres of land should establish a garden and orchard carefully protected by a fence, ditch, or hedge. Governor Berkeley himself had 1,500 apple, peach, apricot, quince, and other fruit trees which must have been so protected. This safeguard was undoubtedly, in the majority of cases, the "rail fence" so typical of Virginia, which could be taken down and moved. A description of one of these fences, as given by Thomas Anburey in 1689, is interesting. He wrote:

The fences and enclosures in this province are different from the others, for those to the northward are made either of stone or rails let into posts, about a foot asunder; here they are composed of what is termed *fence rail* which are made out of trees cut or sawed into lengths of about 12 feet, that are mould or split into rails 4" to 6" diameter.

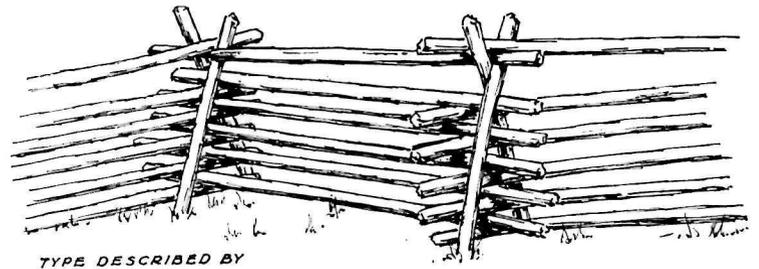
When they form an enclosure, these rails are laid so that they cross each other obliquely at each end, and are laid zig-zag to the amount of 10 or 11 rails in height. Then stakes are put against each corner, double across, with the lower ends drove a



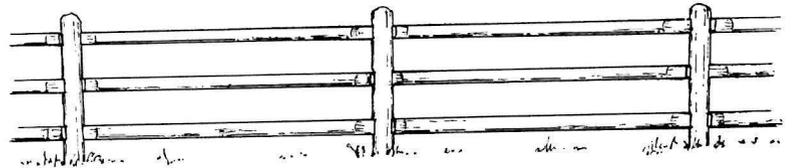
SOME LATER TYPES OF ENCLOSURES



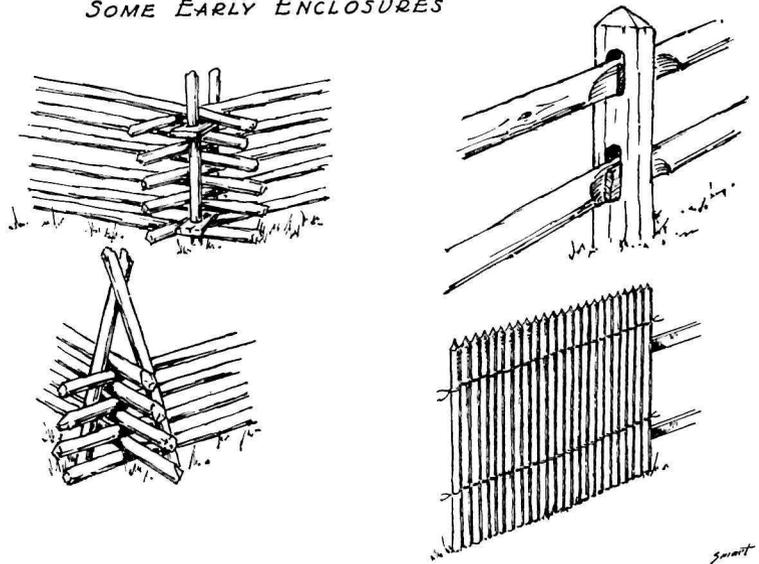
Smart



TYPE DESCRIBED BY THOMAS ANBUREY.



SOME EARLY ENCLOSURES



Smart



The Wick farm in Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N. J., has been restored as nearly as possible to conditions which prevailed during the Revolutionary Period. Above may be seen a corner of the garden near the restored dwelling.

little into the ground, and about these stakes is placed a rail of double the size of the others, which is termed the rider, which, in a manner, locks up the whole and keeps the fence firm and steady.

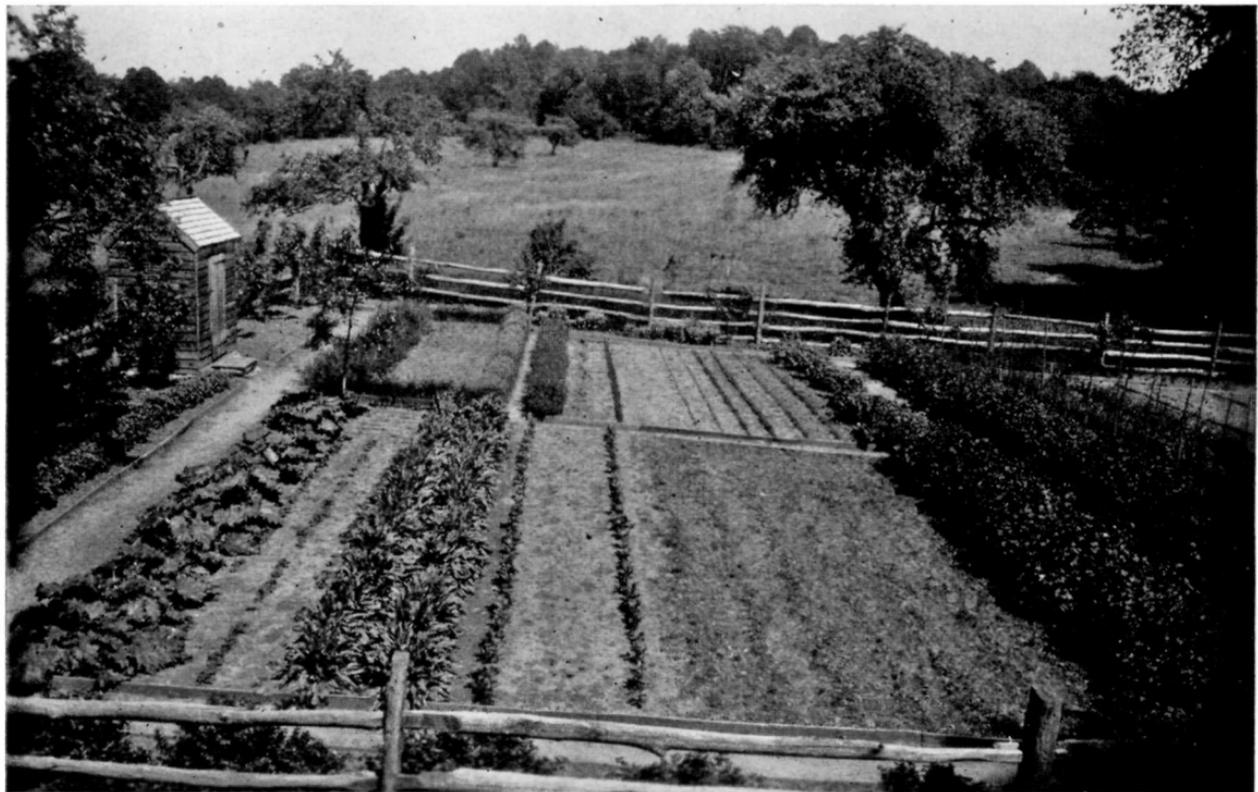
These enclosures are generally 7' to 8' high, they are not very strong, but convenient, as they can be removed to any other place; from a mode of constructing these enclosures in zig-zag form, the New Englanders have a saying, when a man is in liquor, he is making *Virginia fences*.

Other forms of enclosures mentioned in early literature are the hedgerow and the paling, which was undoubtedly the forerunner of the picket fence. These pales were sharp-pointed stakes driven into the ground, set close enough together to bar even the smallest animal, and fastened top and bottom to a horizontal stay. It was this type of fence which surrounded the gardens and orchards in the vicinity of the house, with the idea, perhaps, that they were a refinement over the crudities of the rail fence, ditch, or hedgerow.

Colonel Fitzhugh, in letters written during the latter part of the seventeenth century, mentions his garden particularly as being "pailed in." Unquestionably no old garden was without its enclosure, and "so instinctive was the impulse to set apart, that inside the main defence which shut out the rest of the world, secondary divisions were again divided, and these in turn outlined. Thus from the palisade and rail fence down to the fragrant, stubby little edging of sheared thyme or lavender, there is a well-defined line of descent."²

The first gardens of the settlers were undoubtedly crude affairs, serving the severely utilitarian purpose of supplying the master of the plantation with a variety of vegetables for his tables as well as medicines in the form of herbs for his use against disease. An

²Grace Tabor, *Old-Fashioned Gardening, A History and a Reconstruction*. Robert M. McBride & Co., 1925. pp. 183-184.



The restored garden in Morrystown National Historical Park contains vegetables, herbs, and flowers typical of colonial days.

act in 1624 was established requiring the settlers to plant gardens as a provision against famine. And now, what did some of the colonial gardens contain?

Parkinson's *Paradise*, published in England in 1629, which probably exerted an influence on our early gardens, gives us an indication of some of the more practical uses of plant materials, with instructions in garden planning:

Lavendula.—Lavender is little used in inward physic, but outwardly the oyle for cold and benumbed parts, and is almost wholly spent with us, for to perfume linen, apparel, gloves, leather, etc., and the dyed flowers to comfort and dry the moisture of a cold brain.

Basil.—The physical properties are to procure a cheerful and merry heart, whereunto the seed is chiefly used in powder.

Marjoram.—To ease pains, and put into Antidotes, as a remedy against the poison of venomous beasts.

Thyme.—Oyle used in pils for the head and stomach. It is also much used for toothache.

Hyssop.—In pectoral medicines, to cut phlegm. For cuts and wounds. Diseases of the spleen.

Pennyroyal.—Good for lungs, to comfort the stomach and stay vomiting, in baths to comfort the sinews.

Sage.—Gargles and mouth washes.

Mint.—Applied with salt is a good help for the biting of a mad dogg.

Tansy.—For weak reins and kidneys. For worms in children.

Burnet.—Put a few leaves in a cup with Claret . . . is accounted to make the heart merry. Also used in vulnerary drinks and to stay fluxes and bleedings. In contagious and pestilential agues.

Your knots or beds being prepared fitly, as before is declared, you may place and order your roots therein thus: Either many roots of one kind set together in a round or cluster, or long

ways cross a bed one by another, whereby the beauty of many flowers of one kind being together, may make a fair show well pleasing to many; or else you may plant one or two in a place dispersedly over the whole knot, as your store will suffice you or your knot permit! Or you may also mingle those in their planting many divers sorts together, that they may give the more glorious show when they are in flower.

Another early book, Randolph's *Treatise on Gardening*, recommends the following materials for the vegetable garden: Artichokes, asparagus, kidney beans, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, parsley, cucumber, currants (red and white), chamomile, celandine (annual), ground ivy, *bedera turestris*, horseradish, honeysuckles, hyssop, lavender, lettuce, marjoram, althea-marsh mallow, mint, melon (cantaloupe), mullein, parsnips, peas, raspberry, rosemary (*rosmarinus*), and strawberry (in beds with alleys 2 feet wide).

In spite of Beverley's remark made as late as 1705, "They haven't many fine gardens in that country fit to bear the name of gardens," the influence of the mother country ultimately proved itself in the magnificent garden developments of the Virginia colonial capital at Williamsburg, which have been restored so ably as a living memorial to our pioneers.

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