"Garden Furniture From Earliest Times, Marble Has Been the Favorite Material for Beautifying Formal Gardens"

In *Through the Ages Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 3
July 1926, pp. 22-29

This article, which begins on the next page,
is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.
http://quarriesandbeyond.org/

Peggy B. Perazzo
Email: pbperazzo@comcast.net
November 2013

GARDEN FURNITURE

From Earliest Times, Marble Has Been the Favorite Material for Beautifying Formal Gardens

THE art of gardening is undoubtedly one of the oldest of human occupations. The ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans, as well as the Chinese and Japanese, were well versed in garden-craft. The hanging gardens of Babylon, for instance, were so elaborate as to be ranked one of the seven wonders of the world. They consisted of twenty plateaus rising one above the other and resting on walls 22 feet thick; each plateau was planted with trees or other vegetation and was watered artificially. Water, indeed, always played an important part in the plans of practically all these old-time landscape treatments.

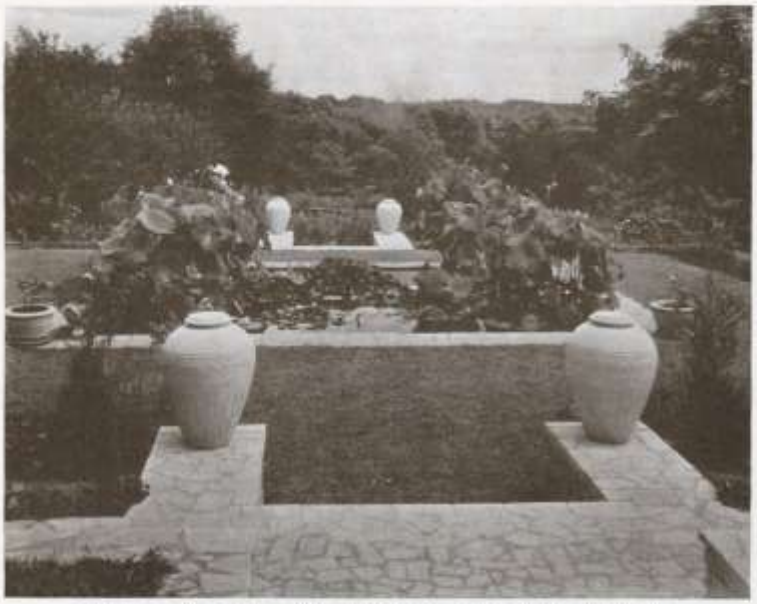
Sculpture and masonry entered into the formation of the Egyptian gardens, and the water was obtained from the Nile. They grew fruit mostly, and they were enclosed by walls and thick hedges to protect the crops. The Greeks, on the other hand, preferred fine expanses of well-kept grass, with occasional fruit trees and beds of flowers, mostly roses, lilies and narcissi. Marble walks, statues, temples and shrines, gleaming white beneath the brilliant sun, were customary.

The earliest Romans planted vineyards

and orchards of apples, pears, figs and mulberries—and always an abundance of roses. From descriptions in the letters of Pliny and Cicero, many of these ancient gardens included extensive domains, terraced, graded, embanked, adorned with every kind of edifice and device for ornament and rest, beautified with fountains and many varieties of trees, vines and shrubs. They were extremely formal, and it is evident, as Hamlin points out in "European and Japanese Gardens," that "the ancients regarded nature as a servant, not a mistress, and indulged little sentiment for nature in the abstract. The same is largely true of the Renaissance gardeners. They did not seek to counterfeit the meadows and forests, the hills and vales of wild nature or to bring trees and shrubs and topography into any semblance of the picturesque and accidental combinations of a natural landscape. Their gardens, and pre-eminently those of Italy, were each designed as a decorative setting to the palace or villa, or as pleasure grounds in which what was most pleasing was the human element—the evidence of design, symmetry, order,

The illustration on this and the opposite page shows a Lily Pool and its treatment in the garden of the Jewett residence, Pasadena, California. Georgia marble was used for the border, statuary, steps and elsewhere.

"This illustration on this and the opposite page shows a Lily Pool and its treatment in the garden of the Jewett residence, Pasadena, California. Georgia marble Was used for the border, statuary, steps and elsewhere."



Lily Pool in the garden of Mr. J. B. Jones, at Knoxville, Tennessee
The urns and flagstones in the walks and borders
are of Tennessee marble.

balance, contrast, ornament; not the aspect of natural growth, but the evidence of nature subdued to human control."

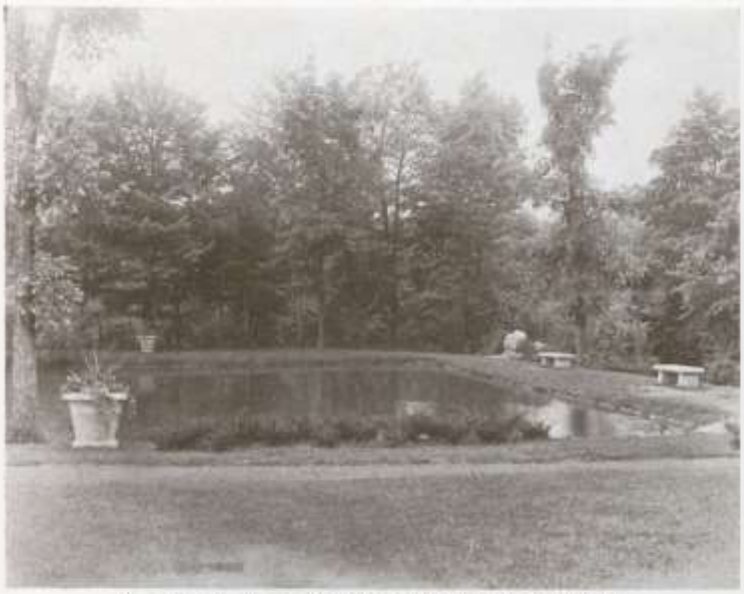
Gardening as an art of luxury received but scant attention during the Dark Ages; the monks of the Middle Ages, however, developed the art to a position of importance, and during the Renaissance its practice was carried on as a recognized accompaniment of its sister art, architecture. Bacon, during the time of Elizabeth, wrote that "without it, buildings and palaces are but gross handworks; and a man shall ever see that when ages grow to civility and elegance, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely."

One of the first books on gardening was "De-Yconomia de Housbrandia," by Walter de Henley, written in the sixteenth century; many other books followed shortly by authors in many lands. In most of these works considerable attention was given to the matter of garden structures, such as summer houses, arbors, pergolas, bridges and furniture. A great difference of opinion is discernible concerning the use of marble for such purposes. Modern writers on gardening almost invariably devote a considerable amount of attention to this subject, and it is interesting to note that the tendency is toward a more extensive use of this material.

This is, after all, only a reversion to early

View of the Lily Pool in the Jewett residence at Pasadena, as
seen from the porch of the house.

(top photo) "Lily Pool in the garden of Mr. J. B. Jones, at Knoxville, Tennessee. The urns and flagstones in the walks and borders are of Tennessee Marble." *(bottom photo)* "View of the Lily Pool in the Jewett residence at Pasadena, as seen from the porch of the house."

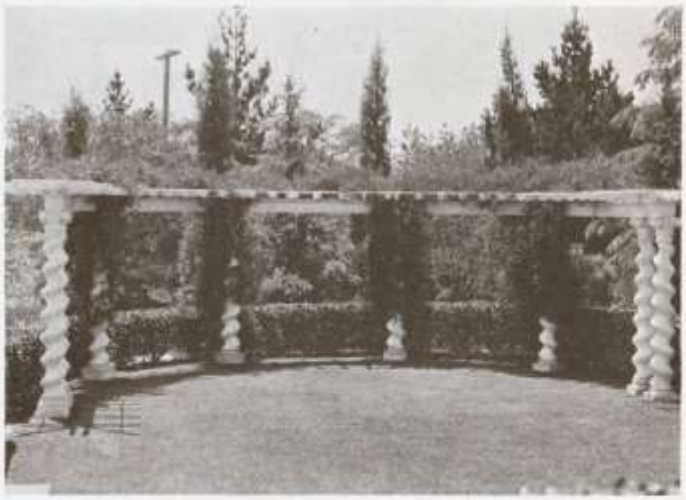


A pool in the Thomas R. Proctor Park at Utica, New York. The garden furniture here is of Vermont marble.

During the seventeenth century, Evelyn visited Italy, and later wrote of the gardens which he visited. He describes whole courtyards given over to displays of marble fountains, with statues costing enormous sums, vases and urns of prodigious size and exquisite workmanship. Horace Walpole, describing some of the older Italian gardens, remarked in his book, "On Modern Gardening," that "Seats of marble, arbors and summer houses terminated every visto."

customs. Vast sums were spent in ancient Rome and Greece on buildings and decorations in marble for the garden. Varro's garden at Casinium contained, among other objects, a large aviary, open-air temples and bridges. During the Augustan Age, marble statues and foundations were introduced in abundance; and among the wonders of Pliny's famous Tusculan Gardens were summer houses in dazzling marble, alcoves, and seats, near which bubbled tiny fountains. Urns and statues of the same material were much used by the celebrated Cardinal d'Este. At Frascati, Naples and Florence the great villas vied with each other in the sumptuous magnificence of their garden decorations.

France under Louis XIV displayed, next to Italy, the greatest preference for garden embellishments of marble. At the Tuileries, Versailles, Trianon and St. Cloud were gardens designed by



The circular arbor behind the pool on the Jewett residence at Pasadena, California.

(top photo) "A pool in the Thomas R. Proctor Park at Utica, New York. The garden furniture here is of Vermont marble." *(bottom photo)* "The circular arbor behind the pool on the Jewett residence at Pasadena, California"

Detail of the handsome carved bowl on the lawn of the Jewett residence, at Pasadena, California. The marble is from Georgia.

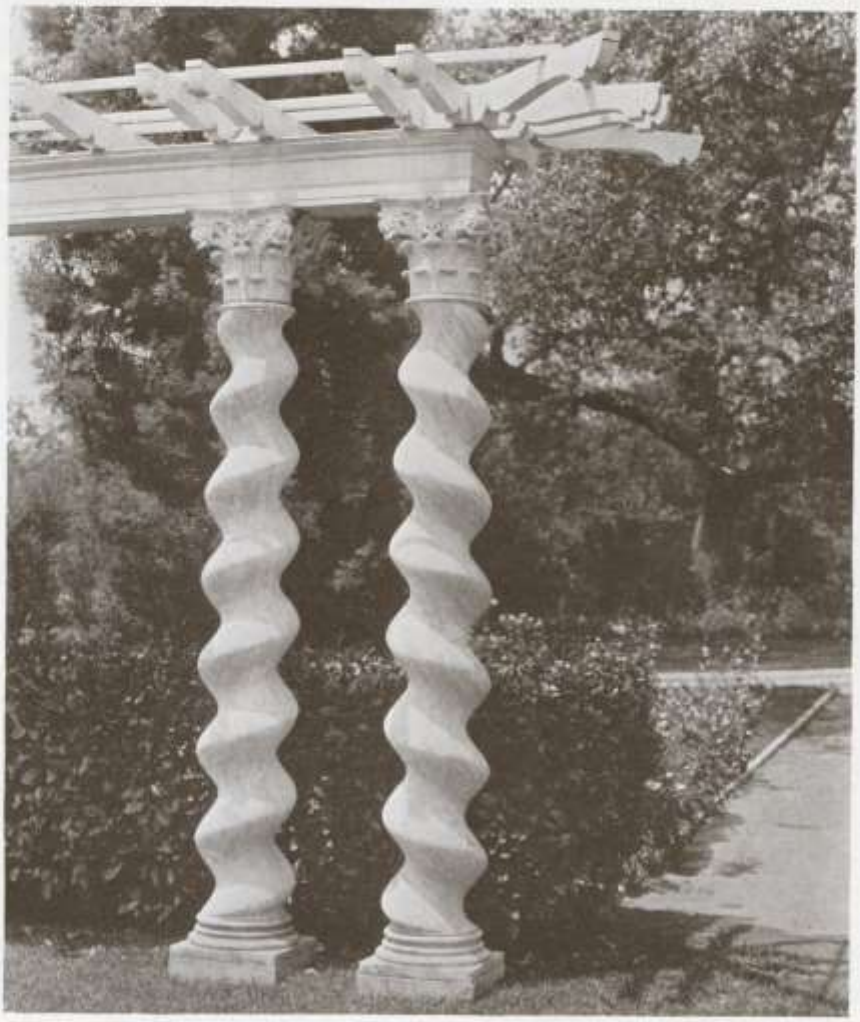
Le Notre containing fountains with remarkable carvings, statues and therms, benches, balustrades and walks, practically all of them of marble. Later, when the English style of garden came in, many of these structures were removed.

In England the climate is naturally unsuited to the extensive use of marble for garden furniture, since, no matter how appropriate in summer, these objects are apt to be out of keeping with the winter landscape. In spite of this, however, even the English writers were forced to admire the marble fountains and summer houses in the gardens at Hatfield during Elizabeth's reign.

In the greater part of America, where a large part of each year is comparatively mild, marble furniture is delightful for architectural effects and comparatively inexpensive. These pieces need not be elaborate nor

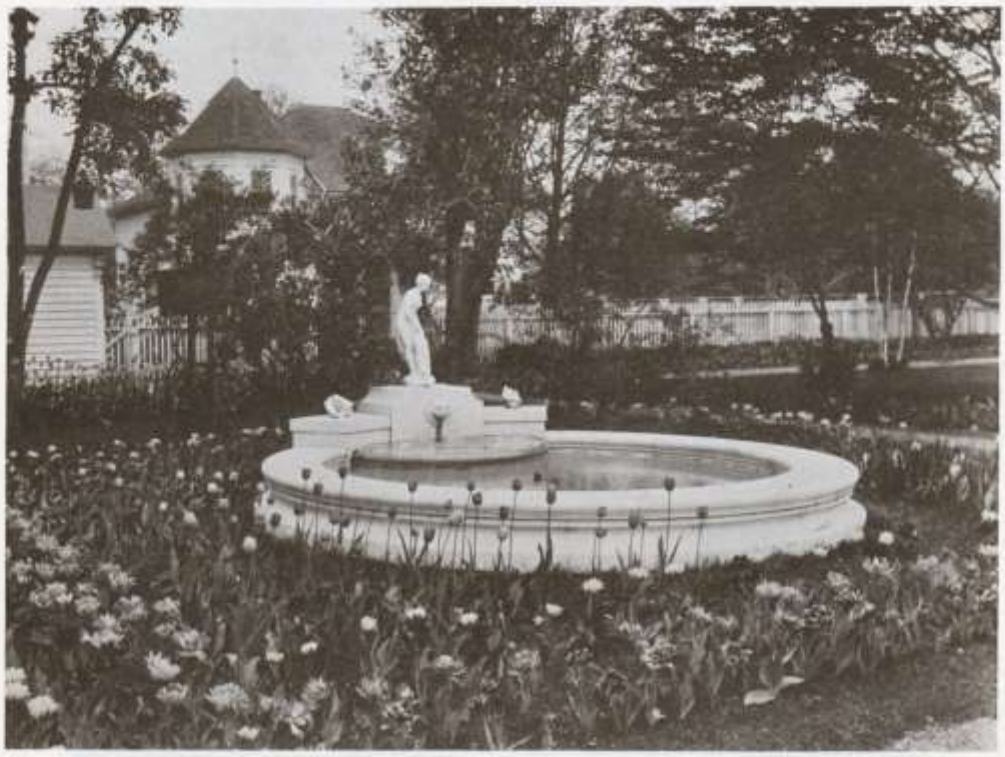
"Detail of the handsome carved bowl on the lawn of the Jewett residence, at Pasadena, California. The marble is from Georgia."

need their use be limited to large or pretentious gardens. A sundial, a bench, a bird bath, a graceful urn, a walk of irregularly shaped slabs—any one of these can frequently be employed with much success in a small garden or on a small strip of lawn. It is not altogether necessary, moreover, that these objects, in order to justify their use, be strictly useful. It is enough, ordinarily, that they be beautiful, provided they are not incongruous. It would be highly improper, for example, to place a marble seat where it would obviously not offer the slightest inducement for a halt and rest; or a bridge on dry land that spans nothing but an imaginary stream; but to refuse to admit to one's garden a charming marble sundial, for instance, on the highly practical ground that it was not as accurate a timekeeper as one's watch, would be the height of folly.



Two of the unusual marble columns that support the superstructure of the circular arbor shown at the bottom of page 25.

"Two of the unusual marble columns that support the superstructure of the circular Arbor shown at the bottom of page 25."



A fountain of Alabama marble at "Kiel Kill Kare," Milford, Pennsylvania.

Mr. F. A. Waugh expresses this same thought most aptly, in his "Landscape Gardening," as follows:

"The introduction of stairways, balustrades, urns, fountains and statues in a much frequented garden, supposing the articles to be in themselves pleasing, must always be a satisfaction to the human habitués. The eye delights in them all. So that when we have quite laid aside the attempt to deceive the senses into a feeling of rural solitude, and are working along professedly artificial lines, nothing gives greater pleasure than well-executed and well-disposed architectural and sculpturesque features. This proposition needs no argument or explanation. It is self-evident, but none the less pregnant for its obviousness."

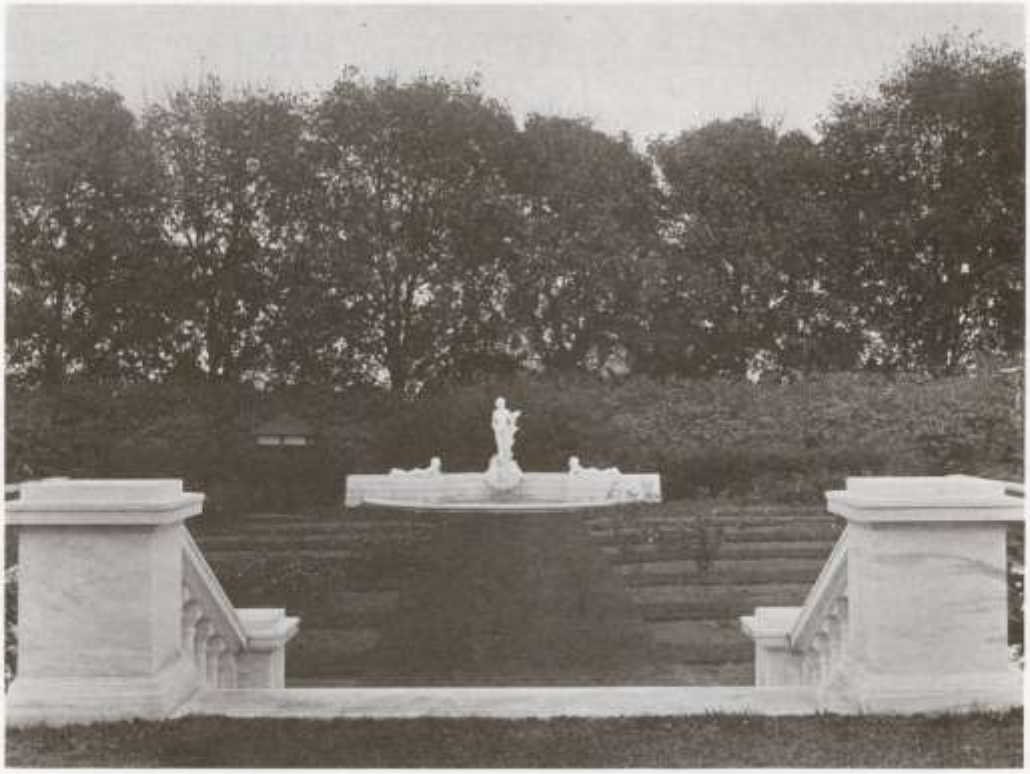
"We should furnish our gardens with the same discerning taste that a well-dressed woman chooses her clothes," claims Minga Pope Duryea in her book, *Gardens In and About Town*. A pergola, for instance, is not suitable for any garden. It may be used as a shelter in the rear of a town or suburban garden, but its authentic use is to provide a passage between two parts of the garden or two buildings. Consequently it is better to have a garden shelter especially designed for your problem rather than to rely on the more commonplace designs of pergolas.

The same principles that apply to the arrangement of house furniture apply to the open-air treatment. "The actual objects in arrangement are the same," writes a recognized authority on these matters, Mrs. Francis King, in her book, *The Little Garden*. "Why do we set indoors a couch or settee,

"A fountain of Alabama marble at 'Kiel Kill Kare.' Milford, Pennsylvania."

or out of doors a seat or bench, there and not here? Because of some advantage to be gained there, and not here, in the way of a pretty vista from a given position, a good light for reading, a certain seclusion conducive to quiet, or to intimate talk. Whatever the bit of furniture may be, in either house or garden, if its placing for use is absolutely right, it falls into the picture and adds charm and distinction to its surroundings. 'All's fair that's fit.'

"I have just seen a lovely Southern house, a house whose white-pillared portico and rose-colored brick have as a foil a whole blue-green mountain behind them. Here, across a walk from the steps to this portico, is a shallow marble basin for birds, a tiny marble faun piping on one edge. This carries the white of the pillars and steps farther into the foreground of green lawn and trees, and is successful because it is suitable, quite apart from its being in itself a useful and charming object. A basin set against the wall may form an excellent quiet decorative accessory of the introduction of water into the little garden. It may be entirely unobtrusive in line or in garlanding of vines; yet it adds a living interest to a shaded spot; it gives the pleasure of the sound of running water that is refreshing on warm days and also serves as a good terminal feature for a garden walk or vista."



Sunken Garden on an estate at Fairfield, Connecticut. Mountain White Danby marble, from Vermont, was used.

"Sunken Garden on an estate at Fairfield, Connecticut. Mountain White Danby marble, from Vermont, was used."