

## Tyler Arboretum

On September 17, 1950, the Eastern Chapter met at Tyler Arboretum in Lima. Members gathered in the parlor of the mansion to hear the history of the place told by Charles G. Whittaker, Superintendent, who conducted the group later on a tour of the house, the old Painter farm buildings including the carriage house, green house, spring house, barn and office, and the site of the original arboretum which Minshall Painter called Eden.

Miss Elizabeth Morley, Secretary, and other members made the following notes of Mr. Whittaker's talk on the history of the arboretum and his comments during the tour.

Mr. Whittaker said that Tyler Arboretum was established as a trust in 1945 under the Will of Mrs. John J. Tyler who died in 1944. It was founded to carry out the wishes of her late husband, a nephew of Minshall and Jacob Painter, founders of the old arboretum which was known as Painter's for many years.

The arboretum proper contains 68 acres with additional tracts making a total of 647 acres on which are several houses including Round Top, built in 1711. This was the home of Jacob Minshall, a son of the pioneer settler Thomas Minshall who had obtained two large tracts of land from William Penn in 1682, in Middletown and Providence.

Jacob having received from his father 500 acres in Middletown, built Round Top on the eastern end of the tract near Ridley Creek and gave the western part to his son, Thomas, who built there in 1739 a two room house which is now the western end of the front part of the mansion. The house was enlarged in 1777 and had other additions and alterations through succeeding years that changed it from a Colonial farm house with second story eaves to the stucco-covered house now called the mansion.

The property came into the possession of Minshall Painter (1801-1873) and Jacob Painter (1814-1876) on the death of their parents Enos and Hannah Minshall Painter, and was held by them during their lifetime, and then by their sister, Ann Painter Tyler, whose son was John J. Tyler. It was he who made the plans which resulted in the establishment of Tyler Arboretum by his widow. Mr. Whittaker said that the original tract now call the arboretum proper was held continuously by Thomas Minshall and his descendants from 1682 to the death of Mr. Tyler in 1930.

The two Painter brothers never married. They carried on the work of a large farm and at the same time studied and wrote. Their library and workshop show their interest in Science, Philosophy, and Literature. Here they wrote pamphlets on a variety of subjects and printed copies of them on a hand-printing press which still stands in their workshop.

Minshall collected and pressed wild flowers and made a herbarium which is still in good condition. His great interest in Botany led him to plan the arboretum. About 1825 he began to plant on the slope south of the house with the help of his brother, Jacob. They obtained from friends and nurserymen specimens of trees and other plants not native to this region and tried to supply the right

conditions for their growth. Minshall kept lists of plants and made notes of some of the work done. These are not complete but have furnished information for maps and charts of the old plantings which were shown by Mr. Whittaker, who said that 129 of the old trees remain and the others are being replaced gradually.

Mr. Whittaker described some of the improvements which have been made since 1946. Masses of poison ivy, honeysuckle, and blackberry vines have been cleared out making room for more interesting plants such as ferns, winter aconite, and snowdrops, which were struggling to live

Ten miles of trails have been laid out to serve as fire lanes and to give access to remote parts of the wooded areas where visitors may enjoy camping or tramping, but no hunting is allowed.

After giving this brief history, Mr. Whittaker led the group through the mansion, pointing out some of the details of house construction in the old part, and giving bits of information about certain pieces of furniture. He said that it was a tradition that there had never been a public sale on the property, consequently the furnishings and some of the farm equipment represent all the styles from the 1600's to the early 1900's. There are four-post beds with rope bottoms, candle stands, chests, highboys, many kinds of chairs, some fine tables, desks, and clocks, as well as Victorian mirrors and black walnut sofas and chairs upholstered with horsehair.

The office building with its old books on many subjects excepting fiction, the collection of minerals, Indian relics, and shells, the two iron vaults, and a set of painted chairs excited much interest. Here, too, were some things which showed varied activities of the Painter brothers: a large telescope, a handmade gyroscope, a plaster head used for studying phrenology, some pieces of chemical apparatus, and a hand printing press with several cases of type and copies of leaflets written and printed by the Painter brothers.

In the great, stone-bank-barn, Mr. Whittaker first showed the ground floor with massive arched doorways facing south, and the stalls for animals, then led the way up a slope to the two upper levels where he showed the threshing floor and the space used for storage of grain and farm equipment, and above it the immense two-story hay-loft. One of the most interesting features here was a four-story ladder leading from the ground-floor to the hay-loft, through openings cut in the floors. The sides were cut from two tall trees and the sturdy rungs are smooth and polished, probably by the hands and feet of farm boys of several generations as they attended to the chore of throwing down the hay.

After visiting the spring house for a refreshing drink of icy water, members of the group strolled through the arboretum which had been planted by the Painter brothers. Here Mr. Whittaker pointed out a Franklin tree (*Franklinia alatamaha*) in full bloom, the famous species brought from Georgia by John Bartram; a willow-oak; a bald cypress; a southern cypress surrounded by its knees and growing in a swamp; an enormous ginkgo tree; a tall and massive cedar of Lebanon; several cryptomerias; several varieties of magnolia; and many large boxwoods and yews.

The tour ended at the Garden for the Blind, a recent addition to the arboretum, which Mr. Whittaker planned after reading of such a garden being maintained in a small English town. The garden

is laid out in several terraces, each faced with a low stone wall and planted with fragrant flowering plants that were chosen for odor or texture of leaves and flowers. All are marked with labels printed in Braille. Guard rails separate the terraces and serve as a guide for the sightless visitors who find pleasure in touching and smelling the leaves and flowers they cannot see.