

INTRODUCTION

For most of my life I wondered what lay behind the fence covered with vines separating and hiding Montrose from St. Marys Road. When I was a child, my father drove our family in our old Studebaker to Hillsborough as a special treat. We always came into town along that road and I often saw men with picks, mattocks, and swing blades walking along the front edge of the property. They cleared away excess growth on the bank but didn't remove enough for us to see into the grounds.

My parents saw the garden the year the Grahams opened it for Hillsborough's spring tour. They didn't forget a detail. No matter where my husband, Craufurd, and I looked for a house, my father said, we should try to live at Montrose. He spoke of the rich, clay loam soil, the splendid old trees, and Mr. Graham's tomato frames. "With your love of gardening, you should move there." He repeated it again and again. "But it isn't for sale!" I protested.

Nature, especially plants, has always been the core of my life. My earliest and happiest childhood memories include the time when my parents discovered a patch of yellow lady slippers growing wild in Durham County. My parents had been so intent on finding the rare flowers, they weren't aware that we had wandered too close to a moonshine camp until we heard shots and realized that we were the targets. Even lady slippers aren't worth dying for. The first time we found atamasco lilies in a damp field near our house in Durham, a bull chased us all the way to the road. The sight of elegant white flowers tinged with pink growing in soggy soil was worth the heart-thumping run. When we reached the end of our five-hundred-(plus)-mile drives to visit my grandparents in middle Tennessee or south Georgia, we got out of the car and went straight into their gardens. The fact that we had driven for more than thirteen hours, had five or more flat tires, and hadn't eaten a

bite for six hours paled in importance: we didn't wait a minute longer to see the newest plant or flower in bloom.

If you had land, you had a garden. You grew your food. You made the yard beautiful. And you talked about it. My earliest memory of my father has him behind our first house in Durham, North Carolina. He walked up to the house with a basket full of vegetables. I don't remember what they were, but I remember his pride. I must have been less than four years old. My favorite memory of my mother has her terribly excited about something in the garden behind our next house. I jumped from the swing and ran over to see her first blooming lady slipper. I was nearly six. We moved four times before my parents finally built the house they lived in for almost fifty years. For six years before we moved there, we spent every weekend at "the lot," where we pulled up honeysuckle and brambles, began the garden, sowed cover crops to improve the soil, and stuck cuttings of all the old plants they had admired. My father was not shy about asking for cuttings of trees or shrubs or divisions of old bulbs. My parents were teachers, my mother of fourth-grade children, and my father of English literature students at Duke University, but both revitalized themselves daily in their garden.

When I married Craufurd Goodwin in 1958, we moved to an apartment in Windsor, Ontario, where there was no land for a garden. I spent the year as a fine arts librarian but yearned for a plant. Few plants have given me greater pleasure than the garlic clove from the grocery store that I planted in a flower pot. From the moment the beige bulb sent up its first slender green leaf, I tended it and watched its daily transformation. We spent the following summer with Craufurd's mother, to whom I gave my plant and watched in agony as she ate it. Five years later we purchased our first house in Durham, and I had land of my own. I believed it would be my home for the rest of my life and I discovered quickly the beauty and mystery of gardening. I wanted to grow everything, so I studied seed catalogs, joined the

American Horticultural Society, and read all I could find on gardening. I couldn't absorb enough.

In those days I taught piano and harpsichord but never began to practice or to teach until I had walked through my garden. I put my favorite plants — hellebores, snowdrops, and primroses — near the music room window where I watched their progress and enjoyed their flowers when I was confined to the room. Many times I rushed back into the garden when the last student left to see whether the bud showing promise in early afternoon had opened while I was inside. Craufurd and I traveled during those years, often spending summers in England. When I couldn't sleep, I lay in total darkness mentally walking through my garden. I knew each bump in the paths and the location of every plant.

After three years, I ran out of space for the garden of my dreams and we began to look for a home with more land. We quickly narrowed our search to Orange County and waited for an appropriate property to come on the market. I was impatient. I saw my life flying by and I had not yet started my ultimate, my final garden. We spent nearly ten years looking for a property with more land. We examined development houses with five acres and mini-ranches with ten. Most of these had fancy bathrooms and at least one room (the "great" room) with a cathedral ceiling and they were built on gray or copper-red soil. We wanted better land for our garden and a comfortable house close to a town so we waited for a place near Hillsborough, a small, historic town only fourteen miles from Duke University, where Craufurd teaches. In winter we walked on the height of land behind Cameron Park School hoping to get a glimpse of Montrose but all we saw was a bit of gray slate roof. Occasionally we saw cars going up the winding drive, but we couldn't imagine what lay along and at the end of the road until April 1977, when Sandy (Alexander H.) Graham agreed to show us the property. His father, the last of the third generation of Grahams to live here, had died re-

cently and he and his brother, John, needed to make a decision concerning their parents' place.

When Craufurd and I first drove through the gate at the entrance to Montrose that April, spring had barely begun. Young leaves were little more than green fluff on black branches. The house was spacious and bright even though the walls and ceilings in the living room and dining room were covered with green wallpaper embossed with ferns. The music room was lavender, and the kitchen walls covered with large images of bright white magnolias and brilliant red cardinals over a black background. We walked through the garden and saw potatoes emerging from the red-brown soil and fat spears of asparagus in a row south of an arbor overwhelmed by unpruned grapes. We walked through the law office, a six-room building directly behind the main house, and I fell in love. I could teach here and never disrupt the business of the house. When here, I felt as if I were in the midst of the garden. I told the Grahams I wanted to work on this land.

We left convinced that Montrose would be the perfect place for us, but the decision wasn't ours alone. We had to convince John and Sandy that we were the appropriate custodians of their family home. Craufurd has Graham ancestors going back to James Graham, the Marquis of Montrose, and we had his portrait in a little book written by Craufurd's grandmother. We noticed the same portrait on the living room wall at Montrose. This link made a difference, and within three months we came to an understanding with John and Sandy Graham. They agreed to sell us the property. It was the beginning of the greatest adventure of my life.