

PETERS HILL

LONG ago when Professor Sargent was studying and determining the thorns, Peters Hill was the horticultural zoo in which the various species were assembled. An old airplane view of the hilltop, when the crataegus were young, reminds one of an old-fashioned country pincushion with pins neatly arranged in radiating lines: not a pin out of place. The thorns prospered on the hill, in spite of poor soil and lack of water—in fact they flourished so well that after twenty or more years their young seedlings sprang up among the parents and the older trees grew until they touched and their branches wove into each other. While they were in bloom and in fruit the hillsides were a beautiful sight, but the young thorns came up with such vigour that the whole area became a jungle. It was difficult to decide on a fresh start but a decision was urgent, as the trees were not only interwoven but the thickets below them were grave fire hazards. The die was cast, and most of the old trees were uprooted, leaving the hill bald and bare, with myriads of seedling thorns sprouting everywhere. A thorough cleaning thus became necessary, and the slopes looked even more defaced and tortured when strips of grass were sown in order to try and get rid of the invading shrub-lets which made a part of the fire hazard. Old friends of Peters Hill have shown their interest in the work of restoration done in the last year; the whole space is now being restudied and planting will begin before long. Work has started to change an overgrown and tangled slope to what may again be a typical and attractive New England upland.

In former days there were many sorts of thorns assembled in the hillside pincushion plantation and of these a considerable number were so nearly alike in horticultural value that they could wisely be discarded in a re-arrangement. The conspicuously different species will be kept in the new planting so that the layered branches of the thorns of the cockspur type will show their beauty and characteristics, and others will display their several differences of growth, time of flowering or size, colour and time of fruiting. They will be more widely separated than in the past and consequently will show their varied beauties.

The plan in the middle pages of this bulletin will show the lines on which the replanting is being considered. Like all plantations, its outlines, in order to blend with slopes and natural features will—like timetables—be subject to change without notice. The idea underlying the new treatment of the hillsides is to adapt the plantation and walk lines to the hill contours and fit them to the steep slopes. There are occasional shelves on the hill where walks can be placed with little alteration in the natural grades, therefore the plantations will follow these walks or occasionally stand free in the open.

Peters Hill is typical of many denuded and thin-soiled New England knolls, but the view from it surpasses many others, with a distant prospect of the City of Boston as well as a wide sweep of country, while the foreground is full of the

colour and interest of the main body of the Arboretum. The very top is destined to be kept for an open view with radiating vistas. The summit will be reached by grass walks, following the contours of the hill and rising by easy grades. The circumference road will remain unaltered, but opposite the Bussey Street entrance an inviting breadth of grass will lead gradually to diverging walks between the new plantations of thorns and crabapples.

There have been many new species of crabapples discovered, and still more *Malus* hybrids produced since the early days on Peters Hill. The finest of the old crabapples will be carefully preserved and the newer sorts and hybrids added to the old plantation, as plants, like people, need to have the younger generation grow up around them. The *Malus* plantation will be considerably enlarged, especially at the north and east sides of the road surrounding and climbing around the hillside. There is room for nearly double the number of crabapples of former years, and on the lower level near the railroad tracks an open space will give room for a collection of poplars, hybrids and species, which should thrive in the situation and should beneficently veil some of the railroad activities and groups of small houses beyond the lines.

Access to the plantations was not easy in the old design, as slopes were steep and brambles and vicious young thorns caught the investigator, literally by the coat-tail. The new walks will be concealed between plantations, so that, as at the start, the general aspect of the slope will show a series of groups of allied and harmonious members of the rose family.

The chief *Malus* and *Crataegus* plantations will face the visitor coming in from the Arboretum across Bussey Street and will cover the ground below the road, enlarging the present *Malus* group to the eastward and climbing up more than half the height of the hill. It is intended to have these plantations fairly narrow so that students and visitors will have easy access to both sides of any group. As the walks wind spirally around the hill, gaining height as they progress, the character of planting will change. For example, on the east side of the hill an old wood road follows a natural shelf above a moist hollow, in which alders and other plants flourish which crave more dampness than the rest of the hill can provide.

A fine grove of native trees, predominantly oaks, climbs up one side of the hill nearly to the very top. It is hardly necessary to say these will not be disturbed, because a loop of the upper walk will traverse the grove and give variety to the picture unfolded before the visitor. On coming out of the grove the bare top of the hill will show visitors the wide prospect of Arboretum, suburban settlements and a distant view of the tall buildings of Boston.

This hill top is like many hundred others in New England, dome shaped, nearly bare of vegetation and desperately poor in soil. Therefore the new plantations must take all these considerations into account, and no plants should be set out which are incapable of fighting their own battles against wind, cold and

SOUTH STREET

Poplars and young Flowering Crabs

Old Thorn Plantation

Old Flowering Crab Plantation

Old Deciduous Trees

NEW FLOWERING CRABS

CHESTNUT COLLECTION

BUSSEY STREET

SERVICE AREA

Old Thorns

THORNS

JACK

PINES

VESTA THORNS

Grass

LOW JUNIPERS

MUGO

Old Conifers

PINES

Spruces

WALTER STREET

WALTER STREET

GATE

100

100

E AND

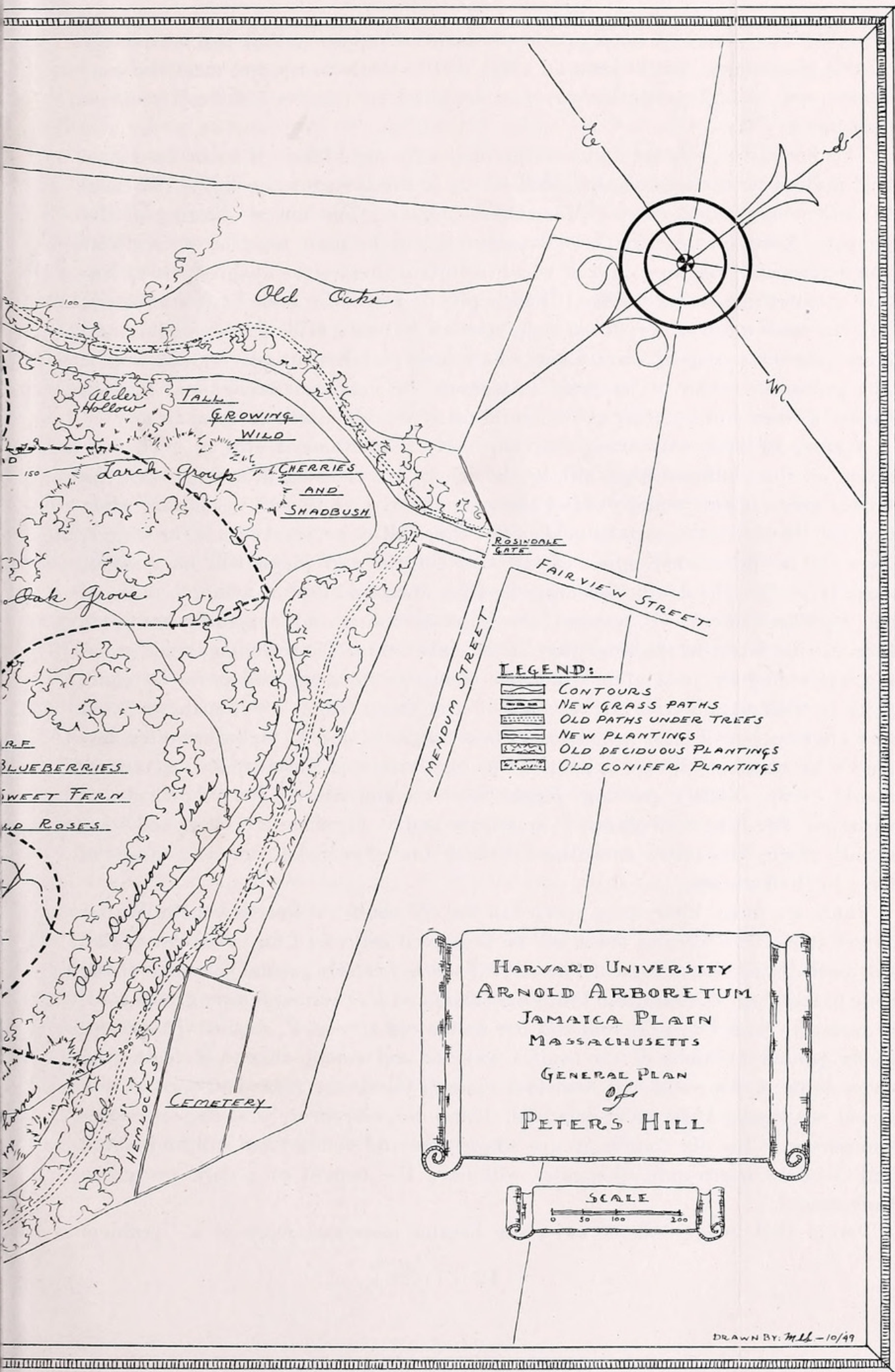
PINE

NEW HY

E

MATE

VISTA



drought. There may be no plants in the planters repertory that can completely fill this programme, but at least an effort will be made to try and meet the conditions, and thus demonstrate to some visitors how to solve a difficult problem near home.

This fiercely windswept and uncompromisingly dry hillside is to be used as a trial ground for the most vigorous and sturdy of the low growing shrubs that help to clothe many a picturesque Massachusetts slope. The lowest growing of the junipers, found in deserted inland pastures, will be used together with dwarf blueberries and wild roses, all of which maintain themselves unaided where Nature plants them on bare hills. If man's planting of these same little shrubs can be even moderately successful at first, later on Nature will help in spreading and increasing the swaths of brave plants which form patterns on many barren slopes. The persistent colour of junipers throughout the year, the scarlet and maroon flames of roses and blueberries remain in many memories of autumnal beauty.

A group of larches surviving from the early plantations is still in good condition on the southeast high hill levels. These are pleasing in spring when the tender green of the young needles shows brilliantly, and again in autumn when the deciduous needles turn to gold before they fall in preparation for the winter. Near the larches a small grove of tall tree cherries and plums will be planted, since types like the double flowering English Mazzard (*Prunus avium* fl. pl.) and the American Cherry (*P. serotina*) are large in stature and demand more space than can be found in the older part of the Arboretum. There are many tall growing forms of cherry and plum which are attractive in spring and as full of character in their winter structure as some of the thorn tribe. The Japanese forest tree cherries like *Prunus serrulata*, *Prunus Sargentii*, and *P. incisa* are often forgotten by planters who are hypnotized by the reiterated nurserymen's advertisements of the smaller growing, larger flowered and shorter lived horticultural varieties. The American plums, *P. americana* and *P. nigra* are attractive and their clouds of tiny flowers on their thorny black branches make them the fairest of trees in their season.

There are many interesting species in the old conifer collection on the Walter Street side of the hill and these will be preserved and cared for. For some reason this cold dry northern slope of Peters Hill seems friendly ground for some of the cone bearers and the Japanese *Pinus densiflora* and *P. Thunbergii* have grown well, in company with *Picea Glehnii* and our native red spruce, *P. rubens*. This seems likely ground for some of the conifer hybrids and among them and feathering them down to the paths and roadsides some of the dwarf pines and spruces will be set out among their taller relatives. There are, moreover, advantageous coves and curves in the old conifer groups where new and young trees will be planted and the new thorns and crabapples will have the benefit of a dark evergreen background.

Peters Hill in the difficult war years became more and more of a "problem

child" consequently a change of treatment and arboricultural reform seemed necessary. All reforms are uncomfortable and while in process they seem more like destruction than construction, but before long the plantations planned for the hillsides should at least give promise for the future, and as time passes the new crabapples, thorns, cherries, plums and conifers will bring a renewal of beauty to the slopes. The hard conditions imposed by the situation demand the use of plant material resistant to wind, cold, heat and drought and when these become established they should show future students and visitors what may be used on many a like situation.

It is a long walk from the arid slopes of Peters Hill to the low lying ground near the Administration Building, but in fancy it can quickly be traversed and the plantation of deciduous rhododendrons appraised in the new position chosen for them. Most of them will appreciate the moister situation than the one on which they have fought and held their own on Bussey Hill. The past dry summer has been hard on newly planted shrubs, especially those which like azaleas like to feel there is moisture nearby if they need it for refreshment after a hot summer day. Much care has been given the new groups of ericaceous plants and although a few of the less vigorous have perished, the long sweep of azaleas has weathered the crisis better than could have been expected. The first crucial summer is past and soon the filling of gaps can proceed as there can be no family more varied than the members of the heath family; each with distinction of growth and elegance of bearing. All have a peculiar beauty, whether those covering the ground like bearberries (*Arctostaphylos Uva ursi*) and the heathers, or of medium height like the Chinese azalea, or of tree-like form like the *Manzanitas* (*Arctostaphylos Manzanita*) of the Siskiyous with their glowing red stems and glossy deep evergreen leaves. The neatness of their leafage, the dark shades of the persistent leaved sorts, and the magnificent autumnal colour of many of the deciduous kinds make them welcome in any garden or planting where the soil is free of lime and light enough to be to their liking. The line of azaleas and their friends, companions, and allies should in a comparatively short time give interest and beauty to the graceful curves of the Meadow Road.

The last two or three years have been difficult for everyone at the Arboretum and for visitors as well: many old trees and shrubs have had to be taken out in order to save and give space to their neighbours. Heavy pruning, temporarily defacing in some instances, has been necessary, but the crest of the hill of rehabilitation has been surmounted and in the years ahead the confusion and the difficulties will be forgotten and the patience of visitors and persistence of workers will be rewarded. The rehabilitation of Peters Hill has been made possible through the interest of a friend of the Arboretum.

BEATRIX FARRAND



Farrand, Beatrix. 1949. "Peters Hill." *Arnoldia* 9(9), 38-43.

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