1st letter from John S. Stokes, Jr., to Jane A. McLaughlin

John S. Stokes

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Ms Jane A. McLaughlin, Parish Historian  
25 Nobska Road  
Box 187  
Woods Hole, MA 02543  

Dear Ms. McLaughlin,

I was delighted on visiting the Garden of Our Lady and St. Joseph's Church last Saturday to see Miss Pyne's centennial tile, and on inquiring about it to learn from Fr. Dalzell of the plans for the St. Joseph's Parish Centennial and of your work as Parish Historian.

Possible Father Dalzell has had an opportunity to put in your hands a binder of article copies and other printed matter I gave him, which I had prepared with the original thought of leaving in the Angelus Tower oratory . . . telling of "Mary's Gardens", a labor of love I and several dedicated partners and associates have been undertaking since 1950, inspired by the St. Joseph's Garden of Our Lady and, especially, by Mrs. Frank R. Lillie's love and vision in founding it in the early 1930's, and of which I believe 1982 may be the sesqui-centennial (or maybe the correct term is "demi-centennial"), as what I believe is the first list of plants in the garden (included in the binder I left with Fr. Dalzell) is dated 1932.

Starting in 1950 my Mary's Gardens founding partner, Edward A. G. McTague, and I undertook an extensive project to learn as much as we could about Mrs. Lillie's founding of the Garden, beginning with a telephone call to Mrs. Lillie in Chicago, followed up with correspondence, and then developing into extended correspondence and visits in 1952, 1953 and 1954 with Mr. Donald E. Hurford of the Falmouth Enterprise; Mr. Wilfred Wheeler, builder of the Tower and planter and maintainer of the Garden; Dr. Alfred Emerson of Chicago, husband of the late Winifred Jelliffe Emerson who did the historical research and documentation of old religious plant names on which the garden planting was to be based, at the suggestion of Mrs. Lillie; Miss Dorothea K. Harrison of Concord, Mass, who was the landscape architect who developed the original planting plan for the Garden and several revisions; Mr. Daniel J. Foley, editor of HORTICULTURE Magazine and horticultural authority; Rev. Thomas J. Stapleton, then Administrator/Pastor of St. Joseph's Church; Mr. Wallace K. Butler of Woods Hole, who designed, installed and maintained an improved clock-mechanism for ringing the bells (and made me privy to such special information as that the plaque by the Tower door has the names of the bells reversed, or I should say the sizes of the bells, as it is the smaller bell which rings first and bears the inscription "I will teach you . . ." which I confirmed by climbing to the top of the Tower and taking photographs).
During that 1952-1954 period we also met with, together with Fr. Stapleton, Mrs. Francis Goffin who lived next to the rectory and across the street from the Garden and shared a number of her recollections about Mrs. Lillie and the Garden; and also Mr. & Mrs. William McNeese of West Falmouth, parishioners who were avid gardeners and interested in the possibility of a committee of parishioners who might participate in caring for the Garden, and in restoring flowers on Mrs. Lillie's lists and the original planting plan which were no longer in the Garden.

As I indicated to Father Dalzell, and also to Miss Pyne, whom I visited on Sunday while picking up some tiles, we will be willing and delighted to prepare photo copies for your historical files and use of the extensive correspondence and notes surrounding these visits . . . which contain a wealth of historical data.

I am not able to enclose these with this letter, as we have over 1,000 pages of notes in our journal and 10 ft. of correspondence files, mostly in chronological order, so that extracting the information will be a major undertaking . . . but a labor of love which we had hoped to get around to shortly in terms of our own historical accounts.

I have just read through the notes and some of the correspondence (for the first time in 25 years), and am reminded of how desirous, or perhaps I should say "passionate", we were during that period to see the Woods Hole Garden of Our Lady restored to a horticulturally viable adaptation of the original planting plan incorporating and focusing on the plants of Mrs. Emerson's research which in rural medieval religious popular traditions bore names and symbolisms recalling Our Lord, our Lady and the Saints.

To help you understand how deeply we felt about this, I will quote here an excerpt from the article, "Lillie Tower", by Rev. James J. Galvin, reprinted in the October, 1946, issue of OUR LADY'S DIGEST from the August, 1946, issue of PERPETUAL HELP Magazine (a complete copy of which I enclose with this letter), through which I first learned of the Flowers of Our Lady and Mary Gardens, and was inspired to undertake the promotion as a life-time work (and it brings tears to my eyes to quote this):

"It was no ordinary garden, though at first glance you might think so . . . It was to cater only to such flowers as bore the name of Mary, or suggested some trait or mystery in our Lady's life.

"Posted on a convenient placard was a list of the flowers the lady (Mrs. Lillie) hoped some day to assemble here between the bell-tower and the stone madonna. Names culled from the merry days when England was Mary's England . . . when all the flowers of the field were named after her! Scanning the list, you suddenly realized that even the flowers you could name were actually parading under false colors . . . It struck you that somewhere between Shakespeare's England and today some shameful thing had happened: that even the flowers should disown the Mother of God to barter their common baptism for a new name.

"Somehow about this little patch of soil there was something of a battle-cry. It was like the launching of some shining new crusade: to win back for our Lady the flowers of the field. For in this garden the flowers were to be known and called by their Christian names. Would you believe it, there is a list of over five hundred flowers named after the Mother of God! So far but a small number were growing here. But it was a beginning. And brightly the lady looked forward to a day when "the right man" would turn up . . . a gardener who would make it the passion of his life to choir our Lady's glories in blossoms, so that with each week a new crop of lady-flowers will open from the mid-weeks of March till the first frost."
While the historical religious names of flowers are a part of our common religious culture and heritage, and are not in some way the "property" of the Woods Hole Mary Garden, we, Edward McTague and I, remained ever profoundly aware of the inspiration we had received from Mrs. Lillie, and in our printed leaflets of 1951, 1952 and 1953 enclosed, for starting a small Mary Garden we included the following:

"Profound inspiration for us two who have founded Mary's Gardens has come of the valiant deed of a gentlewoman, Mrs. Frank R. Lillie, who in the early thirties, established a Garden of Our Lady and built a Bell Tower at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. That garden grows flowers bearing the name of Mary - flowers lovingly named in her honor in old popular tradition."

"The two bells of the tower ring out the Angelus. And they toll the hours. Tolling, we believe, to remind men to live to the greater glory of God, restoring all things in Christ."

In our 1951 leaflet we also enclosed a photo card of the Garden statue and central bed (copy enclosed herewith), of which we said in the leaflet:

"The garden scene which is enclosed is a view of the Garden of Our Lady which Mrs. Lillie made possible by her love and liberality."

However, in these first three years of our work, which brought in about 5,000 inquiries, we received so many "complaints" from people who had visited the Woods Hole Garden but were disappointed in finding only "marigolds and petunias" and no posted list of other flowers with religious names, that in our fourth, 1954, leaflet we deleted the reference to the Garden, since it did not appear that our extensive correspondence and visits to the end of stimulating a Garden restoration were going to meet with immediate success.

In 1961 we had another try at attempting to stimulate a Garden restoration, meeting with Mrs. Lillie's niece, Mrs. A. George Gigger of Woods Hole, who had assumed the responsibility, at the request of the bank serving as trustee for the Fund Mrs. Lillie had established for the Tower and Garden maintenance and repair, for overseeing some much needed repairs to the Tower. Mrs. Gigger had been informed by Mr. Wheeler of our desire to see the Garden restored; had arranged for Mr. Nelson Cahoon, a long time gardener for the summer homes of the Crane family in Woods Hole, to care for the Garden and begin the restoration using a recommended list we had provided; and was most interested in the idea of a restoration. She mentioned, also, that the current Administrator/Pastor of St. Joseph's, Father Lowe seemed to take an interest in the Garden, but that to date there had been no formal or visible participation by the parishioners in the use or maintenance of the Garden. During this visit, we also met with Mr. Wheeler, who because of age and failing health had been forced to give up responsibility for the Garden, and with his nursery foreman, Mr. Joseph Dias, who had taken care of the Garden for Mr. Wheeler for many years . . . both of whom gave us valuable historical information about the Garden of a general nature.

During this period Edward McTague was in very poor health and I was preoccupied with increasing demands on my time by my business and professional career (engineering, manufacturing), so that about all we could do was answer the extensive Mary's Gardens correspondence, and write a few articles . . . and we weren't able to follow up actively with Mrs. Gigger. An occasional quick visit to the Garden while in the area of the Cape (our domicile being in Philadelphia) disclosed, however, that the attempted restoration did not proceed further, and that in the late 60's or early 70's the Garden hit a new low point.
I neglected to mention in the foregoing that at some time during the 1952 - 1954 period, which is not clear from my notes, I had the great good fortune of meeting with Mrs. Lillie and members of her family for tea. She had been extremely feeble, ill and generally withdrawn during this whole time, but used to have her "good days" and on one of them, perhaps through Mr. Wheeler, I received the tea invitation. She largely just smiled and nodded her head, but clearly appreciated my enthusiasm for the Mary Garden. She was not able to answer any of my questions about the specifics of the founding of the Garden, but she did make two beautiful short comments, which I quoted in my February, 1955, article, "Mary Garden Research - A Progress Report", in QUEEN OF THE MISSIONS Magazine, Chicago, in the following paragraph:

"Not the Mary names, but the spirit behind them was the important thing to Mrs. Lillie. She saw that in their origin these names were things of the heart. She realized that before the invention of printing the people of the countryside had no books telling of Mary. 'The flowers were all they had.' In their day the Mary-named plants may have been more potent than any book of theology. Consider the shamrock. And she believed - as our Mary's Gardens experience has borne out - that they can still have such potency today . . . 'especially for the children.'"

I also enclose a copy of this article with this letter, because it speaks specifically about Mrs. Lillie's work, and also about the fortuitous development that by that time Dr. Emerson had located the complete notes of Winifred Jelliffe Emerson's 1952 research into the old religious names of flowers, and had given the whole 500 pages to us with permission to make whatever use of them we saw fit, as long as we kept them "in proper historical perspective."

Also, in 1954 - 1955 I wrote an article published in the May, 1955, issue of QUEEN OF THE MISSIONS, "Cape Cod Shrine Mary Garden", in which I set forth what the Tower and Garden meant to me, and what I understood by that time to have been Mrs. Lillie's fuller inspiration and vision in regard to them. . . . copy also enclosed:

"Mrs. Frank R. Lille, a convert, who gave the shrine as adjunct to St. Joseph's parish church, named the Angelus bells for Mendel and Pasteur - two Catholic pioneers in the study of life - with a special view to the scientists working at the renowned Woods Hole Marine Biological Laboratories across the inlet, - of which her husband was director and president. It was her ardent hope that the shrine would heighten the prayerful sense of the biological work, - seen as a collaboration with God's providence in sustaining life, and as a discovery of the perfection of the eternal Creator as manifested in the diversity and total order of his living creatures.

* * * * *

"Stewardship for a Garden of Our Lady, prayerfully undertaken, contains the 'one thing necessary' . . . not only for gardening, but for all work, no matter how scientific or technical or how highly organized it may be. It holds up the mirror, asking whether our work is undertaken primarily for earthly pleasure, ambition or solicitousness, or, properly, as a means to life eternal.

"To work is to pray; and truly prayerful work leads to and is nourished from the sacraments . . . that ultimately the three - work, prayer and sacraments - may become one in us, rising up as a holocaust to God. May Our Lady in her garden help us thus to sacramentalize earth and its fruits and to supernaturalize governance and labor, that we and all things may be lifted up in Christ."
While Mrs. Lillie's concern, as set forth on the inscriptions on the bells, was that biological scientists would acquire an ever greater, heightened, sense of eternal life as they discovered the secrets of biological life . . . today, her concern speaks more prophetically, to all of us, that we should pray to Our Lady of Life that she encompass with her protective and nurturing mantle all those in laboratories and factories throughout the world, as well as in Woods Hole, who are working with the great biological power of recombinant DNA, "gene-splicing" and genetic engineering generally, and with the materials of biological warfare.

Since we are taught that in prayer we will receive what we ask for, it is most important that that we have suitable images and symbols that give needed focus to our prayerful asking. I submit that the St. Joseph's Angelus Tower and "Our Lady in her Garden", as Mrs. Lillie designated her, provide such an image, symbol and focus for prayers for biological scientists and workers.

Thus, St. Joseph's Church with its hundred years of service as Mother Church for this section of the Cape and for the Islands, is now, through the fifty years of the Angelus Tower and Garden of Our Lady, the Mother Church for biological work . . . and also for the world-wide Mary Garden Movement.

I hope you share my envisioning of this, Ms McLaughlin, and that it will be of value in matrixing not only the past 100 years and also past 50 years of the Parish, but also the years ahead for the Parish, and for the world, as you prepare the Centennial Book.

With respect to the restoration and enlargement of the Garden planting with plants of historical religious symbolism, my view is somewhat different than it was in the 50's and 60's. In addition to a general "unless the Lord build the house, the builders build in vain" viewpoint, I also see from the longer view that the spiritual dynamism for the Mary Garden Movement - and for the religious liberation, sacralization, sacramentalization, transfiguration, renewal and re-creation of nature and our natural environment generally - was generated by the historical fact of the research, the planting plan, the plant list with religious names, and the actual initial planting of the Garden of Our Lady giving concrete substance to Mrs. Lillie's love and vision, and that the restoration of the planting is important as a perfecting of the means and as a fidelity to Mrs. Lillie's legacy, but not indispensable to the movement.

Also, I have come to understand better Father Galvin's words that "brightly the lady (Mrs. Lillie) looked forward to a day when 'the right man' would turn up . . . a gardener who would make it the passion of his life to choir our Lady's glories in blossoms". We have found over and over again through the years that for there to be a Mary Garden there first has to be a Mary-Gardener, in whose "interior life the garden blooms spiritually", as we said in our original 1951 leaflet, that "foliage, buds, blooms will come of God's creatures, the seeds; will come of Him, and the steward's tending, in due season and according to His established order."

In other words, a Mary Garden requires a dedicated, loving gardener or gardeners who will nurture the Garden above and beyond what reasonably can be expected of an employed gardener or landscapist operating on a schedule and limited budget. Those who planted and cared for the Garden of Our Lady at Woods Hole through the years did so by and large with good will and effort, not to mention the heroic proportions of Mr. Wheeler's several complete restorations after hurricane damage. I certainly don't fault them. I fault ourselves for not praying for the providential appearance of a Woods Hole Mary-Gardener of the kind envisaged by Mrs. Lillie and by Father Galvin.

To show you concretely what I mean, I enclose my article, "A Garden Full of Aves", from the May, 1962, issue of THE MARIANIST of Dayton Ohio, which describes the discovery of and lifetime commitment to Mary-Gardening of Mrs. Bonnie Roberson of Hagerman, Idaho, who became the third Mary's Gardens partner with Edward McTague and myself and now conducts the work of the international Mary's Gardens headquarters in Hagerman.
With a view to the Centennial, I have endeavored to keep this letter focused on Woods Hole . . . bringing in the work of Mary's Gardens and the Mary Garden Movement only to the extent necessary to illustrate its origins in Woods Hole and our vision of how the Woods Hole Garden of Our Lady can be restored in fidelity to Mrs. Lillie's founding vision.

In a later letter I will send you comprehensive exhibits illustrating the scope of the Mary Garden Movement, and thus its mirroring of the Woods Hole Garden of Our Lady.

To round out this letter I will enclose the transcripts Mr. Hurford and we made of articles about the Church, Tower and Garden; in case you might not have them all; a copy of the planting plan we received from Miss Harrison; copies of the 1932 and 1937 Garden plant lists prepared by Mrs. Lillie; and xerox copies of the three 8 x 10 garden photos Miss Harrison sent us (which can be photographically copied for reproduction, if you so desire).

In about a week I would hope to be able to have made typed transcripts of my notes on my various Woods Hole visits I mentioned making in 1952, 1953 and 1954, which I will send you together with xerox copies of the extensive correspondence associated with them and with the efforts towards Garden restoration generally.

Following this, I will send you a set of article reprints and other printed materials showing the scope of the Mary Garden Movement.

I hope to reach you by telephone this Friday and to meet with you Saturday or Sunday to deliver this letter and its enclosures in person. Also, I stand ready to assist you in any other way you desire to fill in this historical picture.

Sincerely yours in Our Lady,

John S. Stokes Jr.
for Mary's Gardens

Copies to: Father Dalzell
Miss Pyne
Mrs. Roberson, Hagerman, Idaho

Enclosures:
1) "Lillie Tower" by Father Galvin
2) "Mary's Gardens" by Robert Ostermann
3) "Cape Cod Shrine Mary Garden" by John Stokes
4) "Mary Garden Research - A Progress Report" by John Stokes
5) "Our Lady's Garden" leaflets - 1951, 1952 and 1953
6) "Garden Photo Card"
7) "Our Lady in her Garden" plant lists, 1932 and 1937
8) "Garden of Our Lady Revised Planting Plan, Spring 1935"
9) Three Garden photos
10) "A Garden Full of Aves" by John Stokes
11) Typed copies of Falmouth Enterprise articles

P.S. We discontinued the sale of signs, statues, books etc. fifteen years ago, and now send our only free literature.