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5th 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,

This letter will supplement my four previous letters by enclosing materials which I hope will serve to give you a sense of the concrete reality of the Mary Garden Movement we were inspired to generate throughout the United States and many foreign countries from learning of Mrs. Lillie's Woods Hole Garden of Our Lady through Father Calvin's article, "Lillie Tower".

So far I have given you all the historical information and exhibits I could readily muster as to our inspiration and beginnings; our endeavor to see the Woods Hole Garden restored according to Mrs. Lillie's original concept and to vastly expand the means to make this feasible; the historical and theological basis for the Flowers of Our Lady symbolisms and our vision of how they can have rich meaning for people today; and the further insights all this has given us to the deeper meaning of the Angelus Tower and Garden of Our Lady.

Now I am providing eighty pages available in our files of excerpted "testimonials" from some five hundred letters received from 1951 to 1954, which show how numbers of people responded to the Mary Garden idea and were inspired to take concrete action on it. (We dropped this summary in 1955 in favor of more pressing priorities, as we felt we by that time had abundant evidence corroborating our original vision as to the benefits of this work . . . but some day we hope to bring these excerpts up through the years.) Just leafing through them will, I think, give reality for you to the real substance of this movement stemming from the inspiration of the "Mother Garden" in Woods Hole. This, for us, is the heart of Mary's Gardens.

And to give a little visualization to these testimonials, I am interspersing them with color xeroxes from twelve of the many, many slide photos people have sent us:

1) Tiny front yard ivy Mary Garden with a single tulip.
2) Back yard Mary Garden
3) Pool Mary Garden
2. Grotto Mary Garden  
5) Hospital Mary Garden  
6) Convent School Mary Garden  
7) Turnpike Wayside Mary Garden  
8) Monastery Aquatic Mary Garden  
9) Cathedral Mary Garden  
10) Bonnie Roberson’s 30' x 60' Mary Garden - Spring  
11) " " - Summer  
12) " " - Fall  

I enclose the three photos of Mrs. Roberson’s Mary Garden (described in my article, "A Garden Full of Aves" enclosed in my first letter, of July 15th) first of all because it is probably one of the most horticulturally and devotionally magnificent Mary Gardens of all times, and secondly because it demonstrates the beautiful changes in over-all appearance through the seasons of a horticulturally diverse and rich Mary Garden. As I have indicated before, Mrs. Roberson combines in her person the skill and experience of a nationally recognized gardener and nurseryman with a deep Catholic flower and garden devotion to Our Lady. With the inroads of illness and the years she has now had to give up this outdoor Garden, but is continuing her work with indoor dish Mary Gardens, which she pioneered, and now, this year, with the first Mary’s Solar Greenhouse . . . in addition to preserving and freezing a whole year’s supply of fruits and vegetables for herself and her husband from her husband’s garden and from the fruit and vegetable sections of the greenhouse.

As Mrs. Roberson said to me in a recent letter, "We owe the Woods Hole Garden of Our Lady a great deal of love"; and from this viewpoint I ask you to keep in mind that all these people whose testimonials I have excerpted, and who have sent us photos of their Mary Gardens, along with the many thousands of others whose requests for information and orders for seeds we have filled . . . all of these have learned that the inspiration for the present-day Mary Garden Movement originated with Mrs. Lillie and St. Joseph’s Garden of Our Lady.

And at their distance from Woods Hole, all these Mary Gardens are presenting to their gardeners and visitors, just as the Woods Hole Garden is, summons and means to the prayer, devotion, meditation, asceticism and mysticism needed — supplementing the Mass, Sacraments, Liturgy of the Hours and Sacramentals — for the spiritual strength and power to live the Peace of Christ according to the Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount.

Once again let me thank you, Fr. Dalzell and Miss Pyne for your willingness to be recipients of all this historical information from our Mary’s Gardens files. The exercise of pulling it all together has been most rewarding to me, and your incentive, through the Centennial and Jubilee, has resulted in my accomplishing something I have wanted to do for years.

All that remains now is to assemble the principle press articles which have appeared about our work through the years, which I will enrich with some file materials relative to some of the major cooperative projects we have undertaken: parishes, high schools, universities, editors, shrines, artists, liturgical week exhibits, flower shows, horticulturalists, radio and TV programs etc. . . . so that you will see our efforts towards restoration of the Woods Hole Garden of Our Lady are just one of many facets of our work, although one of very special meaning and love.

Once again, I hope that these extensive compilations of historical materials I am sending you, Fr. Dalzell and Miss Pyne will end up in some sort of "permanent" historical archives of the Parish and Woods Hole community.

Sincerely yours in Our Lady,  

John S. Stokes Jr.

Copies to : Fr. Dalzell, Miss Pyne, Mrs. Roberson