

BY NATHANIEL T. KENNEY

National Geographic Magazine Staff

THERE is a lovely garden in Baltimore, Maryland, that belongs to everybody. The recorded owner is John W. Sherwood, businessman and philanthropist. The rest of us owners—we number maybe a million—allow Mr. Sherwood to meet the tax bills, seed the lawns, and pay the gardeners.

How did this unusual state of affairs come about?

"Why, I can't really say," said Mr. Sherwood the last time I saw him. "I just never put up a hedge. People wandered in. One fine Sunday in May about 20 years ago I stepped off my back terrace and found myself surrounded by people, hundreds of them.

"Clarence Hammond—he's my head gardener—came up looking anxious and asked if he should try to get them out. I watched a minute, and I didn't see anybody picking flowers or doing anything he shouldn't.

"So I told Hammond, no, everything was just fine. And when the *Sunpapers* reporters came to investigate the traffic jams around Highfield Road way, I told them it was only the people of Baltimore enjoying their garden.

"That's about the way it happened. That's the way it's been ever since."

And so it has, except that over the years the ownership has increased to include people from every State in the Union and many distant lands, thanks to Mr. Sherwood's feeling that anybody who sees and loves the flowers becomes an owner.

The Magic of Flowers

Every May, year after year, Baltimore newspapers publish stories that may end like this:

"Although more than 30,000 people visited Sherwood Gardens on Sunday, not a flower was picked or a twig broken."

This is the magic of flowers. I have seen it at work.

From school buses come excited, shouting children. They rush headlong toward the banked masses of azaleas, daffodils, tulips, and pansies. Suddenly they stop. They fall silent. They draw together. They walk gently to the flowerbeds, and some go to their knees.

At first I thought they were praying, but then I saw they were smelling the flowers.

"For childhood it is as good as prayer," said a quiet voice behind me. A nun stood watching. "God moves in mysterious ways—and God is in all gardens."

Clarence Hammond tells me that 50 years ago the parents and teachers of north Baltimore's small boys used to say the Devil, not God, inhabited this spot.

"There was no garden then," he said, "but a pond where bullfrogs croaked and dragonflies flashed in the sun. The grownups hated this place, for we played hooky to hunt the frogs and came home covered with mud."

Garden Grew of Its Own Accord

A real estate company's dumpcarts filled in Abell's Pond in 1912 and developed the fine residential section now known as Guilford. Mr. Sherwood first bought land on the site in 1925. He patterned his Georgian house after Westover, the Byrd family mansion on the James River in Virginia.* The garden just grew as Mr. Sherwood filled in bare spots in the view from the house (page 702).

From the beginning he used boxwood, magnificent specimens acquired from the neglected gardens of colonial estates in southern Maryland. He planted trees and shrubs, particularly evergreens. It is his continuing frustration that visitors rarely notice the evergreens; without their background the flowers would lose half their effect (page 704).

Sherwood Gardens is a spring garden; except in spring it is a cool and peaceful place of vivid lawn, dark evergreens, and tall rustling trees. Come May, a rainbow explodes.

(Continued on page 709)

* See, in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE: "History Keeps House in Virginia," by Howell Walker, April, 1956, and "Stately Homes of Old Virginia," by Albert W. Atwood, June, 1953.

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Spring in Sherwood Gardens: → Guests Stroll a Flower-banked Lane

Each spring a dazzling display of 100,000 tulips, 10,000 azaleas, 15,000 pansies, and many flowering trees turns this Baltimore, Maryland, estate into a showplace. More than 100,000 persons a year see the show without charge. Dogs usually are barred.

Darwin tulips and *kaempferi* azaleas border this path. Machine-clipped red cedars sway above the blooms at left.

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Staff Photographer Kathleen Revis



Visitors Roam Velvet Lawns Beneath Flowering Trees

This spring, as they have for some 20 years, thousands of sightseers will park their cars bumper to bumper near the seven-acre estate of John W. Sherwood in suburban Guilford and tour the grounds on foot.

Tulips from the Netherlands, azaleas from the Orient and Europe, and Swiss pansies give the gardens an international flavor. Nearly four tons of tulip bulbs are planted in the fall to create different color patterns each spring. Pansies, produced by a Baltimore nursery, are also replaced annually.

Azaleas provide a permanent backdrop; many stand 10 feet high. Dogwood, wisteria, flowering crab apples, and Japanese cherry trees add their beauty.

→ The ivy-clad Georgian mansion fronts Highfield Road. All-white Bride's Garden, at corner of the house, displays snowy tulips, azaleas, and pansies. Dogwood trees at left blossom above pansies.

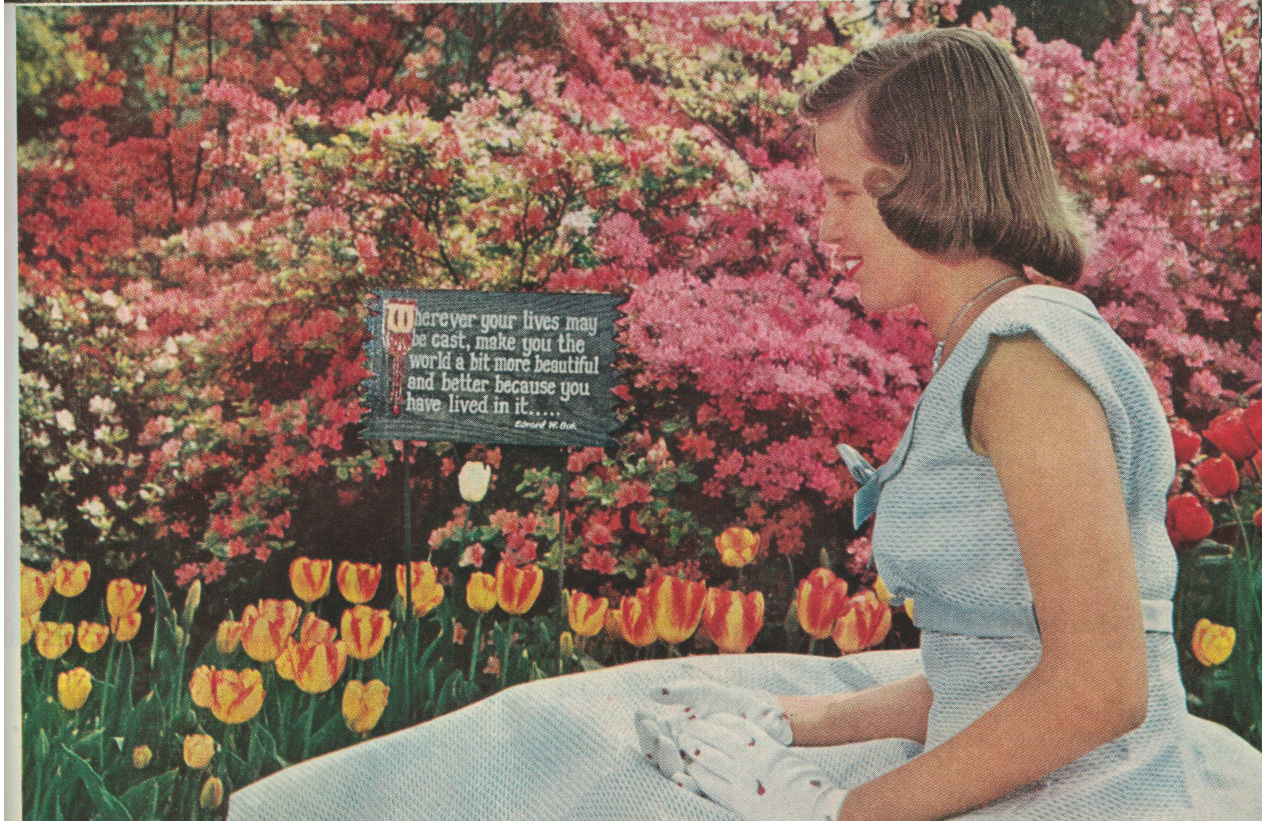
Page 703, lower: Ida Lynn Cummins admires the yellow-red Color Beauty, a Cottage tulip.

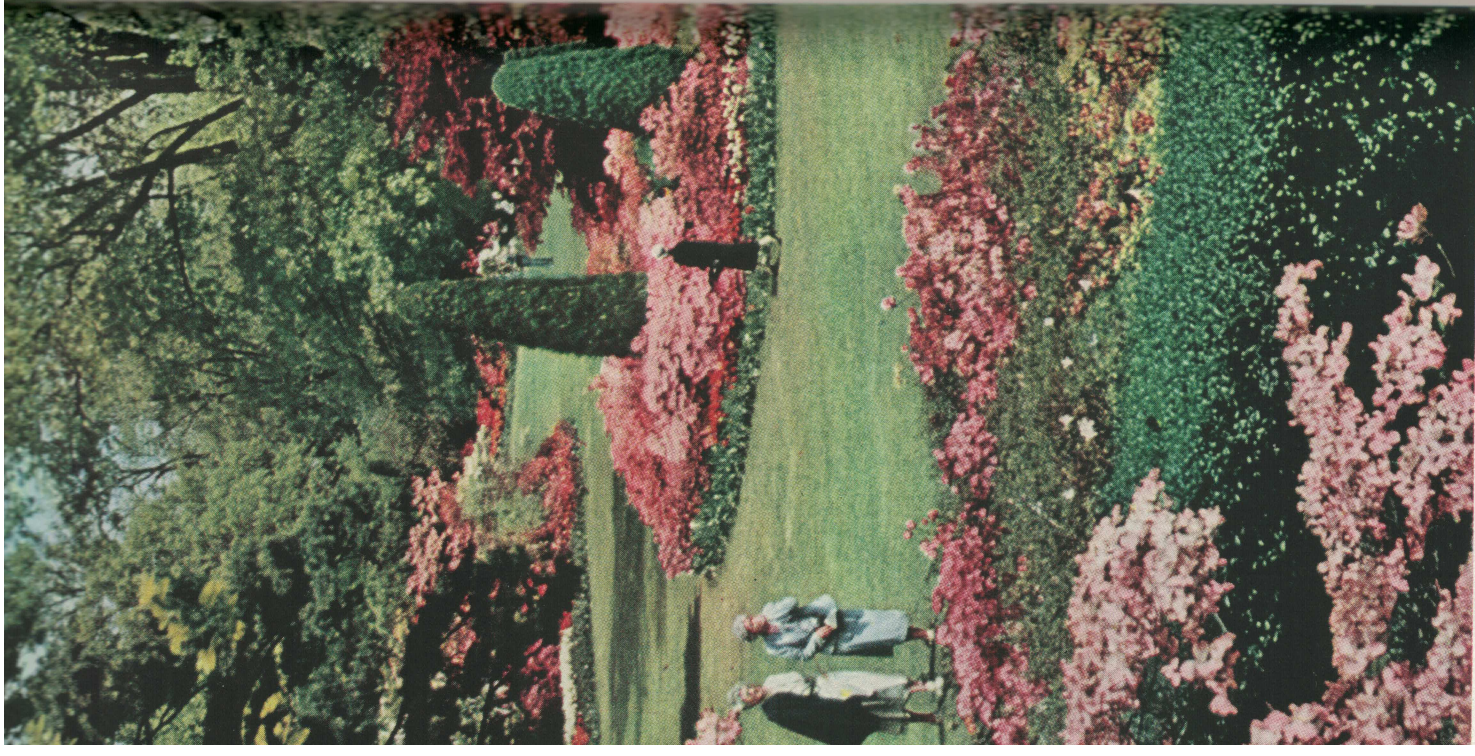
↓ Tulip beds are laid out with studied carelessness. Yellow Belle Jaune blends with white Vesta.

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Kodachromes by Staff Photographers
Brooks Honeycutt (right) and
Volkmar Wentzel

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... **Shaped Cedars Stand Guard Against the Green Background of Spring...** Chinese holly, Swedish juniper, Himalayan pine, Asian cypress, and one of the country's finest collections of old English boxwood

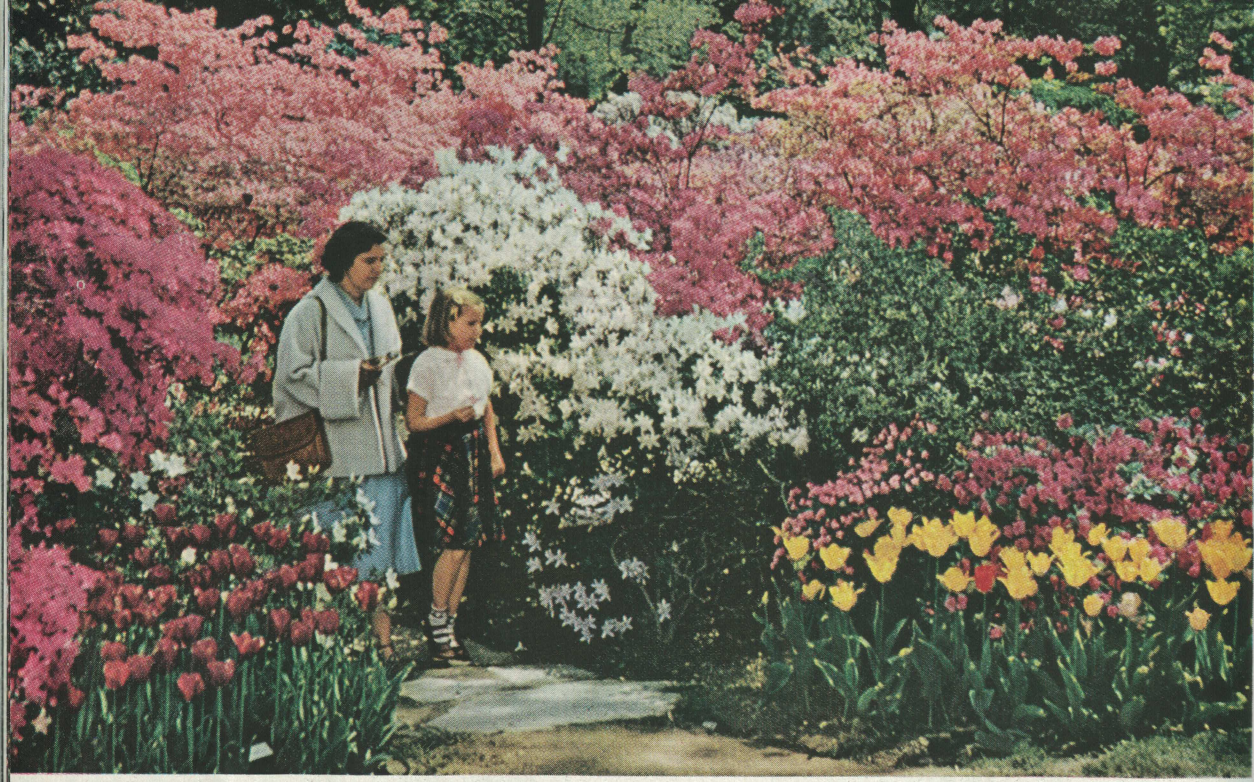


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... **Shaped Cedars Stand Guard Among the Blooms; Shade Trees Tower Above Manicured Lawns** More than 100 oaks, maples, tulip trees, gums, hickories, and other forest giants stud the grounds. The grass carpet, severely trampled during the six-week exhibition season, regains its beauty in two months.

Staff Photographer Joseph P. Blair III





Blooms froth from crab apple and cherry. The painted monkey faces of pansies form gay carpets between islands of dazzling tulips and daffodils. Bees buzz over cascades of wisteria.

This annual miracle comes about through the practice of simple, albeit expensive, rules.

"First," said Andrew Jackson, assistant gardener, "dig up everything two feet deep and replace with good leaf mold and sand."

"Every year," said Clarence, "add a ton of new leaf mold, a ton of ordinary packing-house plant food, some grass seed, and one good spraying."

"Then," said Mr. Sherwood, "order new bulbs from the Netherlands every year."

"Love everything that grows in the garden," Andrew said quietly.

"Amen," said Mr. Sherwood.

Moles, those furrowers of lawns, are unknown, probably because all the digging and walking about ruins their tunnel projects. Gray squirrels abound but rarely dig up tulip bulbs, because they are planted six inches deep. When they do, they take only one bite, which seems to convince them that tulip bulbs are not for squirrels.

"But they're death on crocuses," Clarence said. "I cover the crocus beds with wire netting, or the squirrels would eat them all."

"And dogs! They love to run and race through the flowers. Crackety, crackety, crack—and there's a whole swath of tulips down."

Two Ladies Crash a Party

One might think that near neighbors would view Sherwood Gardens with a certain amount of disfavor; during the six-week flowering season, they may not, by police regulation, park their cars in front of their homes, and often they cannot get out of their driveways, so thick is the traffic.

"One time some of our visitors crashed a lawn party down the street," Andrew told me. "Two nice elderly ladies, they were. They saw all the tables, so they went in and asked if they could buy some sandwiches too."

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← "*Beauty Is Nature's Coin,
Must Not Be Hoarded...*"—Milton

Why were Sherwood Gardens established? "If someone has been made a bit the happier," says owner John W. Sherwood, "or inspired to create a garden, then our purpose has been fulfilled."

Both illustrations show tulips and azaleas.

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Staff Photographer Kathleen Revis

"Well, sir, the host told them just join in, and they had a fine time."

Other neighbors likewise take the period of activity in stride. Mr. Sherwood helps them do so with gifts of flowers from his cutting gardens.

Among the less usual happenings in the garden have been several marriages.

"One part I call the 'Bride's Garden,'" Mr. Sherwood told me (page 702). "All the flowers in it are white. The little sign I put up must have given these couples the idea to be married there."

"I didn't know any of them until they came up and asked me. I said it was a grand idea, and I helped with the arrangements as much as I could."

Garden Inspires Symphony Music

Sherwood's flowers so inspired the composer Franz Bornschein that he wrote "The Earth Sings," a symphonic fantasy later played by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. That was just before World War II.

Some years ago I saw something in Sherwood Gardens that wrenched my heart. A group of children came, but they did not run; they dared not—they were blind. Teachers led the youngsters to the flowers, and they learned to know the blooms by their feel and smell.*

In his long life, Mr. Sherwood has done more than most for his city and State. He has helped solve conservation problems and aided Baltimore's symphony orchestra. He lends his art treasures to museums for all to see. His business gives work to thousands. I think, though, he gets more pleasure from seeing people share his garden than from any other thing.

I asked him what it was about the garden he liked best.

But just then the school buses arrived, and the children poured out. Some, from a part of the city where there is only concrete and asphalt, rolled on the grass. Then the magic began, and the young voices trailed away into stillness. Some of the children knelt to smell the pansies.

I looked at Mr. Sherwood, but he was watching the children. I doubt if he heard my question, but I had my answer, nevertheless.

* For additional information on Sherwood Gardens, see "Maytime in the Heart of Maryland," 10 ills. in color, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE, April, 1941.

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