

\$6,000,000 Country Place

George W. Vanderbilt's Thirty Thousand Acres Estate—It Is Approaching Completion After Six Years of Work—The House, the Gardens, and the Drives—The Biltmore Forest—Mr. Vanderbilt's Nearest Neighbor.

High up among the pine and oak-clad mountain ranges of the Blue Ridge in western North Carolina is the greatest country seat in all America. It is named "Biltmore," and the vast domain of 30,000 acres comprises the "Biltmore estate." The owner of this immense estate is George W. Vanderbilt, who has made the place his pride, his hobby and his ambition.

It is four or five years since Mr. Vanderbilt began buying tract after tract of wastes and forests in this "Land of the Sky," as the region around Asheville has long been known. Quietly but quickly this land that farm was bought, and before the natives knew the name of the real purchaser, between 6,000 and 7,000 acres had been acquired at reasonable figures. When Mr. Vanderbilt's name became associated with the purchases, the prices advanced at least 100 per cent. Mountain land that previously went begging for a few dollars per acre jumped up to \$250, and some of it could not be bought for \$500 an acre.

The mountain site and thousands of acres having been acquired, the most elaborate plans and preparations were made for the transformation of the rough and rugged hills into a scene of great grandeur and beauty, and for the building of one of the most splendid and sumptuous piles of architecture to be found anywhere in the United States. The work of improving and beautifying the estate was put into the hands of the most competent and experienced men. The architect, the landscape gardener, and the forester particularly received "free swing" to carry out their ideas and plans on a larger scale than ever before attempted in this country.

Some idea of the extent of these operations may be had from the fact that during the past three years 200 men have been steadily engaged in bringing the grounds to the perfection desired by the landscape gardener, Fred Law Olmstead, who laid out most of Central Park and the grounds of the World's Fair at Chicago, and that from 100 to 150 stone cutters, masons and carpenters have been at work on the stately structure according to the plans of the architect, Richard M. Hunt. Then there have been the forestry operations under the direction of George Pinchot, the brick and tile factory, and other industries, which have given employment to more than 100 men.

ALREADY COST \$4,000,000. It is easy to see how the expenditures have run into the millions. No accurate figures can be obtained, but it is estimated that Biltmore estate has already cost its owner \$4,000,000. It will take, perhaps, \$2,000,000 more to carry out the plans of the landscape gardener of the architect and the owner.

The imposing mansion is rapidly approaching completion, although it will not be ready for occupancy before next year. Mr. Vanderbilt expects to spend the next Christmas holidays here, however, a score of carvers and stone cutters are still at work on the outside of the building, while the cabinet makers and interior decorators are beautifying the rooms inside. But the house finished there will still remain much to do to render the place finished and complete.

THE PLACE GUARDED. To visit Biltmore estate and inspect the residence it is necessary to procure a permit, for the place is guarded on every side.

The Vanderbilt mansion is about two miles from the station. My visit to the estate was just after a heavy rainfall, and the red clay roads elsewhere were in a frightful condition. But the roads on the estate were as smooth and hard as the drives in Central Park.

The house stands, as I have said, on a mountain peak, which has been cut down and leveled until it is not much higher than the surrounding ground. This gives a park of about 1,000 acres, in which a bowling green and tennis court are most conspicuous features. The green is about 1,000 feet long and 250 feet wide. It is surrounded by a beautifully carved balustrade. Every one who visits Biltmore is sure to speak of the tennis court. It is said to cost \$30,000. The greater part of the expense consisted in building a huge retaining wall to sustain the court. This wall is eighteen feet thick and forty feet high.

The house is constructed mainly of Indiana granite, but, of course, immense quantities of brick were used, and near Biltmore station brick works were established. There was a good red clay at hand, suitable for first-class brick and tile. These will be used mostly for the surrounding buildings, stables, etc. Three brick and tile kilns were erected, each with a capacity of 50,000 a day. The brick machines turned out bricks at the rate of 60,000 a day. Besides these about 2,000 or 3,000 flower pots were made a day. As the manufacture made more than was used, the surplus was sold to outside parties.

To carry the material for the different buildings a railroad from Biltmore station to the site of the mansion, a distance of three miles, was built. This cost about \$30,000. The workmen went back and forth every day on the cars. When the buildings are completed, the railroad will be torn up, the track and bridges removed, and the grounds put in proper order.

The foundations of Biltmore were laid broad and deep. This was particularly necessary, since the site was a sloping mountain side. The walls will last as long as the mountain itself. They are the same as the mountain itself, about eighteen feet thick and forty feet high. And how much do you think the foundations cost? You might guess three times and then not come within \$100,000 of the real figure. If you start at the price for the foundation was set for \$400,000. No such sum of money was ever before expended for the foundations of a private house.

If you go down into the cellar you will see how much foundations there is below. The place is a network of underground passage ways. The reason for so many subterranean alleysways cannot be stated, because those engaged on the building refuse to furnish any information.

The principal apartments are in front, at each end of which rise the towers, three stories high. There are perhaps a dozen rooms in the house. If you start at each end of the building and try to reach the other end you will get lost. At any rate that was my experience.

THE CHIEF APARTMENTS. It is not easy to describe the principal apartments in detail, as they are in an unfinished state. The great hall or ballroom is one of the finest in the United States. It is 60 feet high and 100 feet long. There are three immense fireplaces at each end. The walls are now being decorated with white and the sides are the most elaborate paintings and the finest marbles

and onyx. An organ costing \$30,000 will be placed in a suitable place made for it.

Many of the smaller rooms in the great house are practically finished. They give some idea of the magnificence and luxury which the completed house will present. Even without the hangings and furnishings the rooms are superb. Think what they will be when adorned with beautiful paintings, fine statuary, and rare armor and bric-a-brac.

VAST GARDENS AND NURSERIES. All about the house in the grounds there is ample proof of costly and tasteful work. The flower gardens are especially fine. Many of these are sunk below the general level, and when the sun is out bright and strong, the blaze of color is like reflections from many-hued mirrors. The total area covered by the gardens, greenhouses and nurseries cannot be far from 75 acres. They are not at all finished, and the owner intends to keep enlarging them as his collection of plants and trees and shrubs grows larger and larger. Already the conservatories are filled with rare and beautiful plants, including especially rare orchids and roses.

The nursery is said to contain more kinds of trees and shrubs than there are in the botanical gardens at Kew, near London. North Carolina is rich in the number of native trees, and the climate is as well suited to the growth of a large variety of trees and shrubs as of that in any state in the union.

In order to have fine gardens and grounds it was necessary to have the strongest and best soil. Immense quantities of rich soil were brought from the valleys and river bottoms miles away. Carload after carload was dumped into the grounds and made into garden spots. One man employed on the estate told me that the amount of dirt brought over the railroad would make another mountain.

The stables are now about finished, and are as fine as any in the country. Mr. Vanderbilt is fond of blooded stock, and no doubt the stalls and barns will delight the lover of long pedigrees and blue blood. Then there are the deer park of 3,000 acres and the well-stocked trout streams. The forests will afford shelter for game, and the partridge shooting, now good, will be better as the years go by.

All the drives about Biltmore Park are varied and picturesque. The "Arboretum drive," when completed, will be as fine as any in Central Park. This road, five miles in length, runs through the most cultivated and charming portions of the estate. On either side for 100 feet it will be lined by shrubs and plants.

No account of the Biltmore estate would be complete without some reference to the forestry operations. The Biltmore forest is the first piece of woodland in the United States to be subjected to a scientific scheme of management. The effect of this treatment is very marked. No one can travel through the estate without noticing the fine condition of the trees.

In a recent conversation Gifford Pinchot, the consulting forester, said: "From a pecuniary point of view, the improvements have paid for themselves. The entire expense of clearing, the forest has been more than made up by the money received from the sale of the wood for fuel, for lumber, etc. Many improvements remain to be carried out before it is on a working basis. These will take years—not less than ten at the lowest estimate. Thus, there are more than 1,500 acres lying waste. This land, situated mostly on the top of hills, must be planted with the right kind of trees and made presentable."

Under Mr. Pinchot's direction the Biltmore forest has been divided into "compartments" of about 42 acres each. There are 92 compartments, and these are united into "blocks." There are four blocks, and each block is created by itself, as if it were a separate forest.

Hundreds of views have been taken for the owner and for the eye of the architect and the landscape gardener. From these pictures they can tell or see what is going on day by day, week by week, without taking the time and trouble of visiting the place.

THE HOUSE THAT VANDERBILT CANNOT BUY. A little old house that is of almost as much interest to visitors as the big mansion itself is "the house that Vanderbilt can't buy." Yes, that's a fact. Right in the midst of the 30,000-acre estate is a rude cabin and nine acres of land. It is, perhaps, less than one mile from the mansion, and on one of the main roads.

The owner of this property has obstinately refused to sell to Vanderbilt. What makes the matter worse, he is colored. It is said that the old darkey has been offered as high as \$1,000 per acre for the nine acres. There is no way of shutting him in, as he has the right of way over the road.

On my way back I stopped to see this independent colored man. As I drew up to the small white house at the end of the road, and called out, a black woman appeared at the door, while two active pickaninnies bobbed up from behind. "Does Josh Moore live here?" I inquired.

"Yes, sah," she replied, and in response to another question, she went to the rear of the house, and in a short time Josh appeared. We soon fell into conversation, and I found him friendly and ready to talk.

When I said to him, "Of course Mr. Vanderbilt objects to you as a neighbor," he replied, "Well, I don't 'fret to Mistah Vanderbilt as a neighbor."

"I reckon I've sah, wen I git mah price, sah!" At just what price he would sell Josh shrewdly refused to say.

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House Building Past and Present

(See this column next week for "The Monotony of Duplication—Italian Illustrated.")

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Whenever a house that has stood for many years is finally demolished there are many cries that our forefathers built better than we. It is undoubtedly a fact that there was greater honesty of construction in the old days than at present, and that the materials used were generally better. The mortar in the old buildings is so hard that it seems almost a part of the stone or brick; it was not made with a plentitude of sand and a modicum of cement, and so it has never crumbled under wet weather, as does the modern mixture. The old bricks were better burned, and seemed more flinty than porous; the beams were hewn out of the heart of the tree, and were not slender joists sawed like planks—the hewn beams having twice the length of life that sawed timber has, the axe leaving a glaze on the surface of the wood, closing the pores. Iron played little part in the old buildings, structural iron work being a late application, but wherever metal was used at all it was of the best. Plumbing and gas fixtures were honestly cast and finished, and fitted by hand, and not stamped out by machinery. There were wide halls, easy stairs, generous fireplaces, and solid, substantial woodwork.

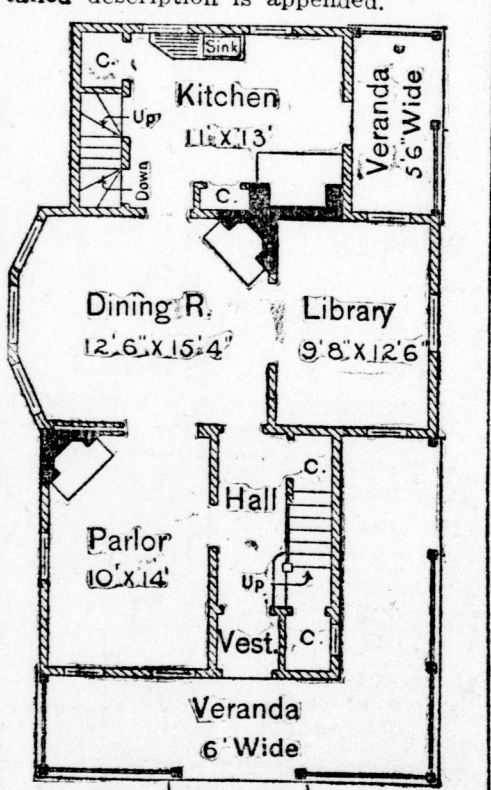


These were undoubted advantages in the old style, and many of them might well have been retained; still, there is no just cause for continually decrying modern building. It is true that the man of the present now builds his house for himself, taking little thought as to whether it will serve his children and his children's children. The conditions of modern life prevent the exercise of great foresight for one's descendants in this regard. The diverse interests of business make society largely migratory, and owing to the rapid growth of our cities there is a constant shifting of population. So it would be worse than useless to build a house in any city with the expectation that it would be occupied by three or four generations of the builder; and it is the general and wide recognition of this fact that prevents the erection of such solid and enduring structures as our forefathers used to build. We can afford to sacrifice something to the expediency in detail, in cost and construction.

The essential matter of all receives far more attention now than ever before—that is, sanitary condition. Solidity of masonry and joinery cannot take the place of sealed drains, perfect ventilation, good lighting and heating. In the old days every builder was left to his own devices, with conscience as his sole monitor—now the man rigid laws prescribe the things that are essential for health and safety, and leave the builder perfect freedom only to gratify his aesthetic tastes.

Holding our tenure as we do, with no privilege of entail to posterity, the American's attachment to locality is not a conspicuous trait, for there is not a people on the face of the earth boasting higher civilization and intelligence who are such a roving race.

The writer does not make the statement in a fault-finding way, but to show that in the erection of buildings utility is our chief object, and to this tendency we can trace the popularity of the modern low cost houses, and would refer to the design illustrating this article as a type. A somewhat detailed description is appended.



Width throughout dining-room and library, 25 feet 8 inches; depth, including veranda, 45 feet 10 inches. Height of stories: Cellar, 7 feet; first story, 9 feet 6 inches; second story, 9 feet.

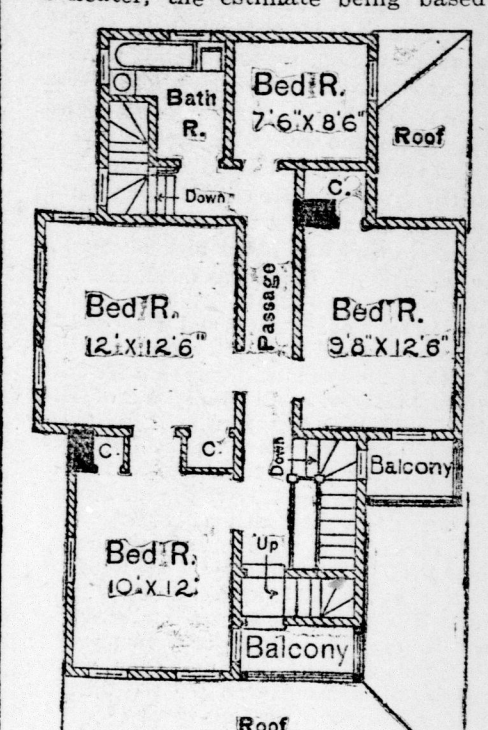
Exterior materials: Foundations, stone to grade and brick above grade; first story clapboards; second story and roof, shingles; gables, panels and shingles; floors of balconies covered with heavy canvas.

Interior finish: Three coats plaster, hard, white finish; soft wood flooring and trim; main staircase ash; picture moldings in principal rooms and hall, first story; kitchen and bathroom wainscoting. All interior woodwork grain filled and finished with hard oil varnish.

Colors: All clapboards and spindle work of balconies, fawn; trim, including window and door casings, cornices, bands, veranda posts, rail, etc., Tuscan yellow; outside doors, blinds, sashes, styles and rails of panels, dark green; brickwork painted dark red. Shingling on side walls and gables stained sienna; roof shingles stained dark brown.

The principal rooms, their sizes, closets, etc., are shown by floor plans. Cellar under whole house with inside and outside entrances and concrete floor. Attic floored for storage purposes; open fire places in parlor and dining-room. Brick-set range in kitchen; folding and sliding doors between dining-room and library and parlor and dining-room.

Bathroom with complete plumbing, ample veranda and closet room. Stationary washbuds could be introduced in kitchen, or a separate laundry planned in cellar. Double doors may be introduced connecting parlor and hall. Servant's room may be finished in attic. Open fireplaces could be planned in library. The veranda space may be increased or diminished without affecting the artistic appearance of the design. This house may be built as described for \$2,700, not including mantels, range and heater, the estimate being based



on New York prices for materials and labor, though in many sections of the country the cost should be much less. This is a thoroughly modern house in all that the term states it as to healthfulness, perfect sanitary condition and that it is not calculated to last for a hundred or two years is no drawback to those who admire the plan, as the economy in arrangement of rooms and general idea brings it within a limit of cost that is not alarming to even the most conservative builder. The Co-operative Building Plan Association, architects, 108 Fulton street, New York City.

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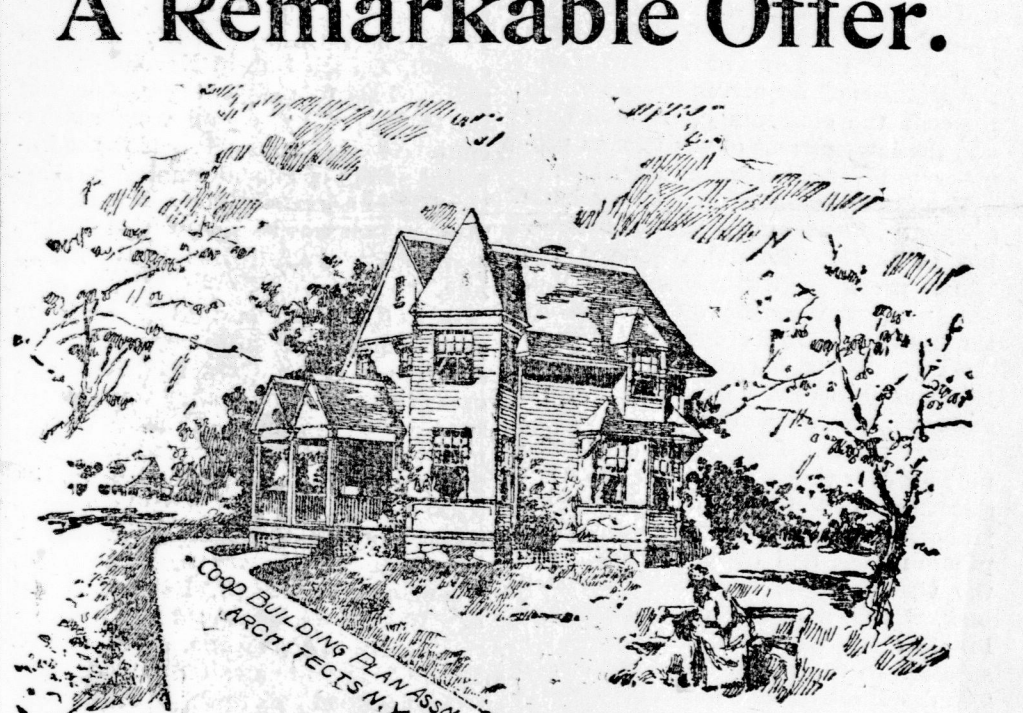
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