

Famous Trees of the District and Nearby



L'Enfant Cedars.

Minnie L. Briggs

"L'Enfant Cedars"

(This is the first of a series of etchings and accompanying articles by Minnie L. Briggs on the beauty and historic association of famous old trees in the Washington area. Others will follow in the Rotogravure Section of The Sunday Star.)

GREEN HILL, the lovely old estate of Dudley Diggs, still dreams in the sun on a high hill near Bladensburg, Md., overlooking the National Capital. In its old-fashioned garden, at the foot of the high boxwood walk, stands a circle of old cedars that have bent with the winds for more than a century. These aged trees surround the tomb of one of young America's most ardent friends, Maj. Charles Pierre L'Enfant. And so they recall the heart-stirring early days of the building of the City of Washington.

Coming to America from his native France with Lafayette in 1777, the young military engineer, L'Enfant, served the cause of the American Revolution with an enthusiasm and brilliance that caused Gen. Washington to make him chief of engineers with the rank of major. After the war, Washington selected him to draw plans for the new "Federal city." This task he entered upon with all the idealism and enthusiasm of his temperament, planning a beautiful city of sweeping avenues and parks which the unfolding years have seen Washington become in its basic adherence to the L'Enfant plan.

But L'Enfant, creator of the plan, was not to know the pride and satisfaction of taking part even in the beginning of its realization. Fearful that it might be threatened by the greed of land speculators, he refused an official request that he publish his plans in connection with

a sale of lots. For this course of insubordination, George Washington felt that he had no choice but to dismiss L'Enfant, which he did, in 1792.

His fortune soon gone, L'Enfant became a pathetic—but still proud—figure on the streets of the growing city. "When his bell crowned hat and sweeping hat became shabby, the dog at his heels seemed to be the only creature that loved him." In his time of need he received from Dudley Diggs this generous message: "It would give us great pleasure if you would take residence here. We give you a hearty welcome to Green Hill."

And so in Green Hill's beautiful old manor house, known as "Chillum Castle," L'Enfant spent the remaining days of his life. Here he laid out a garden patterned after his design for the city of Washington, traces of which are still to be seen. And here he died on June 4, 1825.

Around L'Enfant's grave in the family burial plot at Green Hill, Dudley Diggs reverently planted a circle of cedar trees. There his body lay until 1909, when it was moved to Arlington, to rest on a slope that looks across the Potomac to the city of his dreams. On his tomb is engraved his design for the city whose development his spirit still guides.

It was on an early April day that I went to sketch the L'Enfant Cedars at lovely Green Hill, where still stands the grand old manor house. In the ancient garden mocking birds and song sparrows sang from the glistening boxwood as they did in the old days. Chants of the Catholic Fathers came from the manor house, for it is owned today by the Resurrection Fathers.

There stood the circle of ancient cedars, sighing in the soft spring winds and throwing long shadows across the green hill. In the center of the trees the empty tomb is covered by a bronze plate on which is engraved:

"Major Charles Pierre L'Enfant
Who Planned the City of Washington
Died 1825, Green Hill, Chillum Manor."



AUTUMN HUNT