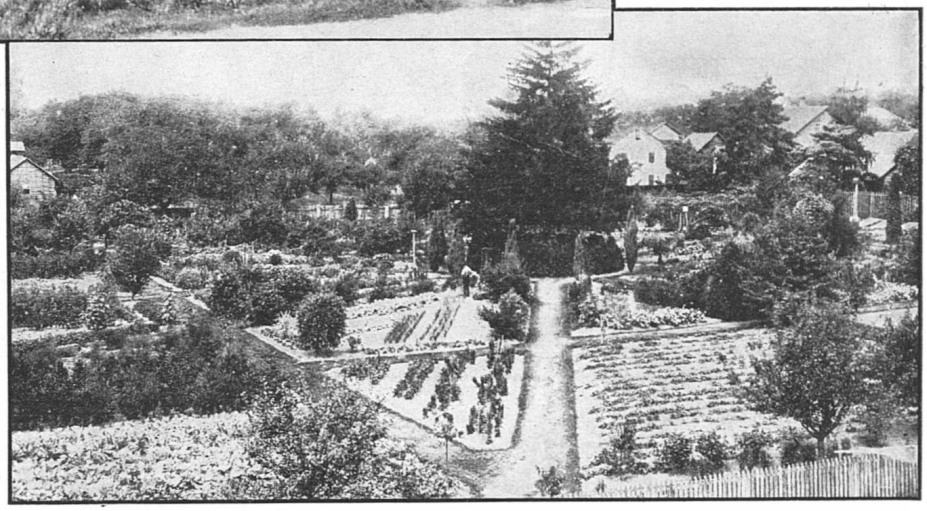
Zoar Restores Its Century-Old Gardens: The actual recreating work is ... Canterbury, Beulah Better Homes and Gardens; May 1931; 9, 9; Women's Magazine Archive pg. 17

Above: A view of the Zoar Gardens, which have been restored after thirty years of neglect and despoilation

ZOAR, with fine civic spirit, is doing its share toward making a more beautiful America

Below: The original Zoar Gardens, as they appeared from 1820 to 1898



Zoar Restores Its Century-Old Gardens

The actual recreating work is being done by the people themselves, as in the old days

Beulah Canterbury

HISTORY is repeating itself in the quaint, old village of Zoar, Ohio. Where, a century ago, German Separatists planted their nation-famed community gardens to be the center of their village life, three acres of flowers and shrubs are again growing in a colorful glory of bloom, after thirty years of neglect and despoilation.

Once again, as in the days when the prosperous communist village was in its prime, city and townspeople, tourists and travelers, are lured from the bustle and race of the main highway by the beauty of the recreated gardens and the recaptured charm of the winding lanes that wander between houses whose walls are covered with flowering vines, sheets of lovely color that clamber to the roof tops. The residents of Zoar, for the most part descendants of those original Zoarites who came across an ocean to found their ideal of community life, have again banded together. Their purpose is the restoration of the old community gardens in the center of the town and the preservation of the quaint individuality of their village.

Built in 1817, the Hermitage is another picturesque relic of the quaint old Zoar life that is being kept in its original state

THEY also plan to maintain an historical museum of the experiment of their ancestors, one of the most interesting experiments in government ever attempted in America. For the old Zoarites, in 1817, brought a communistic plan into operation on the banks of the Tuscarawas River in Ohio, a century before Russia tried it.

In January last year, under the leadership of Mayor Paul Richter, the villagers formed the Zoar Historical Society, Incorporated. Their first step was the acquisition of the site of the old Zoar Gardens, which, in the distribution of the community lands at the breaking up of the communist government in 1898, was taken over by a man who plowed up the flowers and put the [*Continued on page 72*

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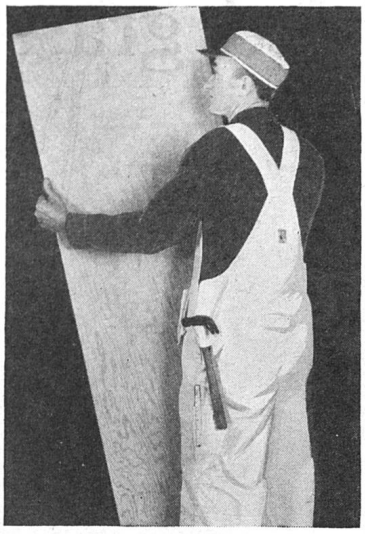

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Zoar Restores Its Century-Old Gardens

[*Continued from page 17*]

land out in vegetables. For the last ten years these three acres centering the village were grown up in weeds.

LAST year in the early spring the county surveyor, aided by an old photograph and by memories of the nephew of the first head gardener of the old Zoar Gardens, drew plans and marked out the garden on the exact lines of the old one.

The pattern of that ancient community garden was drawn from a copy of a supposedly apocryphal drawing of the garden of the New Jerusalem by the pious Zoarites. In the center grew a Norway Spruce typifying the tree of life. Under its fragrant boughs was a bower of arborvitae, so trimmed as to form a sort of tree cabin, a favorite retreat of the Zoar youths and maidens. Radiating from this bower like the spokes of a wheel were twelve grass walks, the walks of the Apostles, each marked by a clipped Irish Juniper. Between the walks were the flowers and shrubs.

In the 1930 re-creation of the garden, the plowing, spading, planting, and cultivation were done on the community plan, as in the old days. Each evening after the daily work was over, residents of the town and outlying farms would gather at the three-acre garden spot. With plows, spades, hoes, and rakes, they came and worked till dark. Often in the warm spring evenings they continued their labors by the light of torches placed on the century-old stone fence posts.

FROM the new spruce planted in the center of the garden, walks radiating to the four corners and ending at the village streets that surround it were leveled by the men and sown to grass by the children. The women, under the direction of Mayor Richter and Albert Beuter, the old gardener's nephew, sowed mignonette and dwarf morning-glories as border plants for the massed beds of marigolds, blue laceflower, Sweet Alyssum, cockscomb, petunias, cosmos, zinnias, and cornflowers, which made up the colorful garden the first year.

At the corner of the garden on the Main Street side the men rebuilt the old drinking fountain summerhouse, roofing it with the heavy, red, trough-shape tiles whose manufacture was once a thriving industry in the old community. The water for the fountain, deliciously cold and crystal clear, was piped from the springs in the hills back of Zoar a century ago in hand-wrought pipes. During the drouth of the first summer, for their restored garden, the men, women, and children formed bucket brigades each evening from the fountain to the garden beds that their flowers might not wither and die.

THO the original Zoar Gardens were planted in perennials and shrubs, the new gardens were planted almost entirely in annuals that a showing might be made the first year. Members plan, however, to plant perennials as fast as their funds permit. In the few months of its existence the Society has had many gifts of shrubs and perennials sent and brought to the gardens. As the news of the village beautification spread, gardeners came from far and wide to see the gardens and to bring plants that they themselves had grown from slips bought fifty years or more ago from the original Zoar nurseries.

A greenhouse, to be built on the site of the original Zoar nurseries, is another development of the village-beautification group that they may propagate their own plants for their gardens.

AS MORE and more people were attracted to the restoration activities, the Zoar Historical Society grew until it now has 450 members. From all parts of the United States descendants of members of the old communal village who had left Zoar years ago, and people from all walks of life—artists, writers, students of sociology and economics, horticulturists, town and city folks who, in search of peace and beauty, used to vacation in the hospitable 84-room Zoar Hostelry—have become members, eager to have their share in re-creating and maintaining the beauty and charm of the village.

The Society has also leased the King's House, as the stately home of the original leader of the Zoarites is called. Members are petitioning for state aid in making and maintaining it as an historical museum. This spacious brick mansion, with its cupola, two-story, white-column porch reached by a pair of wide stone steps, and, villalike, set in a huge garden of its own, rises above the modest four-square homes of the other Zoarites to the south of the community gardens.

ANOTHER picturesque relic of the old Zoar life that is being kept in repair in its original state is the Hermitage, which is used for a hunting and fishing lodge by a local men's club. Tho built in 1817 and occupied first by one of the original settlers, it was for years the home of Alexander Gunn, financier and marshall of the District of Columbia under President Cleveland. Tiring of public life and cities, Gunn was drawn to Zoar by its quaint Old World atmosphere and the peaceful, contented life of its citizens. There he lived by himself in the flower-covered cottage with its terraced garden and summerhouse, where at long intervals he entertained Gottwald, the artist, President and Mrs. McKinley, and many other notables. When Gunn died in Europe his last request was that he be buried alone on a hilltop overlooking Zoar, "where there is always peace."

With the community idea of beautification encouraged by the mayor and Historical Society, the citizens made individual efforts to embellish their own homes and gardens with flowers. The result of one season's planning and systematic work was revolutionizing. From the weed-centered, forgotten, run-down ordinary village of 1929, Zoar blossomed last summer into a veritable flower garden. Tearoom signs and real-estate prices went up and For Sale signs came down. "Motoring to Zoar" became the thing to do.

"COME," Zoar seems to call. "Come, drop your restless driving on and on. Stop with me for an hour or a day or a lifetime. Partake of my charm, walk in my gardens and along my winding lanes. Possess yourself of the quaint beauty instilled by the pleasant beginnings of my founders that their descendants are re-creating for you."

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