

# Her Line Is Climbing Family Trees

By PAQUITA FINE

Mrs. Memory Aldridge Lester, who describes herself as "a born city slicker and social butterfly," is scarcely the type you would expect to find jumping ditches and roaming over a deserted, weed- and vine-infested backwoods farm in search of old family cemeteries. Yet, this is exactly what she does, and it doesn't matter if it's blazing hot, freezing cold, or raining. Dressed in boots and raincoat, and armed with an umbrella, a forked stick (for snakes), a notepad and a pencil, she has been discovered more than once down on her hands and knees digging away at a partially buried old tombstone, or seated cross-legged on a folded newspaper as she copies down the barely decipherable inscription on a crudely engraved stone for information needed to complete a family bloodline in her genealogical research for southern archives and family historians.

Known widely as an expert genealogist and the author of seven volumes of genealogical research which she sells to state archives, and libraries from Massachusetts to California, she gathers her material from old cemeteries, family Bibles that date back to 1711, Civil War letters, court records and even an old 1755 tax list of Orange County; correspondence with other genealogists is also fruitful.

"Tracking down a family line is like working on a gigantic and fascinating crossword or jigsaw puzzle," she said. "When I suddenly uncover some bit of information that makes dozens of other pieces of information fall into place, I get so excited I can't sleep. I send wires and make telephone calls like mad."

There is a purpose in Mrs. Lester's "madness." Since many court records were burned or lost during the Civil War, her research often provides missing links of information for historians, and it has even been known to benefit heirs seeking to establish their rights to estates.

"It's really not so difficult to trace a family once you get a lead," she said. "One of the secrets you have to know is that in the old days the first male

child was always named for the father and the first daughter for the mother. So if you come across this name any place and get a date to set the generation, it can lead you forward or backward."

Like many others who took up genealogy as a hobby, Mrs. Lester became interested in this field when she decided to trace down her own family tree. This interest was intensified after she joined the DAR.

Her grandfather Aldridge, who lived to be 98 and had known all four of his own grandparents, was a storehouse of information. Their question-and-answer contest began when he was 79 and continued, with a lot of "dad-blames," until his death.

"Climbing one's own family tree can be both fun and embarrassing, depending on the limb you're investigating," she said. "For instance, there was my beligerent great-grandfather who ran afoul of the law for street fighting in Tennessee." She also knows one high and mighty family who boasts proudly of an ancestor who they aren't aware was hailed into court more than once on charges of illegitimate parent-hood.

Farmers, Negroes, and even rural traveling salesmen have given Mrs. Lester help in tracing down leads on various family lines. It was a traveling salesman who told her about the old Turrentine family cemetery in Orange County. "It's way out in the country, south of Rousemont," she said, "and it goes back to the first settlers. It was all grown up in trees and weeds, but I cleaned it out and found crude rocks with names that were divided in the oldest manner — probably by some blacksmith since there weren't many stone cutters around then—and dates that went back to 1717. From stones like these, you can get ages and know what to work on since this gives you a generation."

From this lead, Mrs. Lester helped trace the family to A. D. Turrentine, Durham golf champion, and the late Dr. Sam B. Turrentine, former president of Greensboro College and a trustee of Duke University.

Mrs. Lester believes curiosity is reason enough to want a family line traced—but more important, since individuals make history, records of individuals are important to history. This is the valuable by-product of digging up information on one's forebears.

A native of Trinity, Alabama, she discovered that eight of her ancestors lived in North Carolina 200 years ago, Memory Aldridge was the daughter of a Methodist minister who moved every four years to a new parish, "usually in the middle of a school year," she recalled.

She met her future husband, Robert MacDonald Lester, when she was 12 and he was almost 16. "It was at a picnic, and he was wearing his first pair of long trousers," she said. "We didn't like each other at all, but later, when I was going to Athens College and he was going to Vanderbilt University we rode the same train often, and things were different."

At Athens College, Memory Aldridge played tennis and varsity basketball, and ran relays on the track team. She was business manager of the yearbook, editor of the college newspaper, president of the George Elliott Literary Society, and member of the glee club and the dramatic society. Later, she attended the University of Alabama, where she was a member of Kappa Delta sorority. She received her AB degree and graduated cum laude in a class of over 100, which was predominantly male.

In 1915 she married Robert Lester, who was then principal of the high school in Covington, Tenn. It was in Covington that Mrs. Lester taught history and organized girls' athletics. She coached a basketball team that was a champion in West Tennessee for two years.



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While her husband was in service in World War I, Mrs. Lester took a position with the YWCA at the hostess house at Camp Wheeler, Macon, Ga. Because of her excellent work, she was promoted to a more responsible job as assistant director at Camp Morrison, Norfolk, Va.

After the war, the Lesters resumed civilian life at Covington, Tenn., where Dr. Lester became superintendent of schools. Their son, Robert Jr., was born during this period.

In 1921 the Lesters moved to New York where Dr. Lester was to work on his Ph.D. in English at Columbia University. He was a member of the English faculty there until he joined the Carnegie Corporation, where he remained until his retirement a few years ago. While the Lesters were in New York, Mrs. Lester took graduate work. She was subsequently librarian of the graduate English library at Columbia, and after some years she was also in charge of the classics library. With a staff of four, she held this position for 10 years.

During World War II she worked in the Memorial Hospital, the Navy League, the United Seaman's Service and the Officers club, for which she received certificates of merit at the close of the war. A more recent honor was her inclusion in Who's Who last year.

In 1949 she was offered the position of associate editor of a new magazine, "The Southerner." As a roving editor she did a top-notch job in public relations. She wrote articles on Southern lore and others on modern aspects of living in Dixie, articles which she describes as "a sort of civilian Ernie Pyle travelogue."

At the present time Mrs. Lester is interested in securing a portrait of the Earl of Hillsborough, (of the family of Hills Hills), for whom the town of Hillsboro was named. As chairman of the Hillsborough Historical Society, Mrs. Lester feels that the securing of such a portrait is a fitting project for Orange County in celebration of the N. C. Tercentenary. "The new courthouse would be the place where the portrait could be seen by sightseers of historical Hillsboro and fill the blank wall behind the judge's bench," she said. "There are precedents for the hanging of a portrait in a courthouse when the building was named for the man; consequently there will be no danger of adding other portraits to the walls."

Mrs. Lester has turned a hobby — tracing family lines — into a valuable service for many communities and states. She is an acknowledged expert in the field by heads of state archives.



LA SERTOMANS — New officers of the Chapel Hill La Sertoma Club were installed at a joint meeting with the Tar Heel Sertoma Club last Tuesday. From left are Louise Council, presi-

dent; Mildred Colville, treasurer; Margaret Haskell, secretary; and Helen Jones, first vice president. Jane Houck, second vice president, was absent when the picture was made.

## Lilacs Like Deep, Rich Soil

By M. E. GARDNER

A lady just called about her lilac plants. She told me that they were strong plants when set and that she used peat and sand mixed with her red clay soil when they were planted. Now she says that they are old enough to bloom but only one rather weak bloom has appeared.

Lilacs prefer a deep rich soil and one that is not too acid. I suggested that she have her soil tested and use enough lime to raise the pH to about 6.5 or 7.0. Also, that she fertilize the plants with a good general purpose fertilizer such as an 8-8-8.

Generally speaking, lilacs seem to grow better in the upper Piedmont and mountains than in the lower Piedmont and eastern Carolina. They do especially well in "limestone country."

Another lady was worried about a nice azalea (Indica) plant which was not growing as it should. I stopped by to see this plant. It was healthy enough but was rather flat-topped as the

terminal shoots were not elongating as they should.

After examining the plant I decided that it had been planted too deep. In addition, it was heavily mulched with leaves. This did not pose much of a problem because the plant was easily raised a little with a round pointed shovel and a little extra care.

Azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, blueberries and other plants in this group are comparatively shallow rooted and will not tolerate deep planting. If the plants are bailed and burlapped the top of the ball should be set even with the soil line and then mulched. The same is true for container grown plants. Pine straw is better than leaves or peat because water penetrates more easily. I have given advice on this many times but the question keeps popping up.

This is Japanese beetle time and you should eliminate them as soon as they appear. The beetles are shiny brown and green with 12 white spots. They are about one-half inch long. They spend

about 10 months as grubs in the soil. Then they go through a short resting, pupal stage, and emerge as adult beetles. They attack more than 200 plants and will cause severe damage unless controlled.

Spray any plants infested with the beetles with Sevin. This material is effective and safe.

The other method of control is to treat your lawn with Chlordane in the spring. This material will kill the grubs which feed on the grass roots. It will also control other soil insects including ants and white grubs.

## Summer Chorus Sings Tuesday

The University of North Carolina Summer Session Chorus will present its first concert of the summer Tuesday evening at 8 in Hill Hall auditorium. The chorus is under the direction of Charles Horton, who is on a leave of absence as Head of the Department of Music of Campbell College.

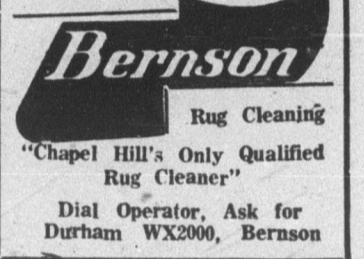
The major work on this program will be Schubert's "Meriam's Song of Triumph," with Nelle Kemp as guest soloist. Mrs. Kemp has done outstanding work with opera and oratorio groups on both the west and east coasts. She was for a time a singer with the nationally known Grass Roots Opera Company.

Other works will include Bach's "Cantata 118: O Jesu Christ," "Pater Noster" and "Ave Maria" by Igor Stravinsky, "Let Down the Bars, O Death," and "The Coolin'" by Samuel Barber, and a setting of Walt Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" by Norman Lockwood. Accompanist for the chorus is Robert Steelman of Kinston.

This concert is being sponsored by the Music Department's Tuesday Evening Series and is free to the public.

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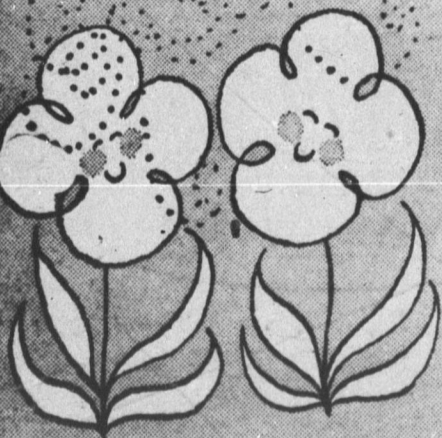
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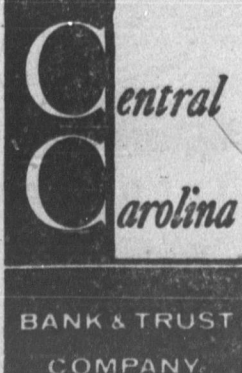


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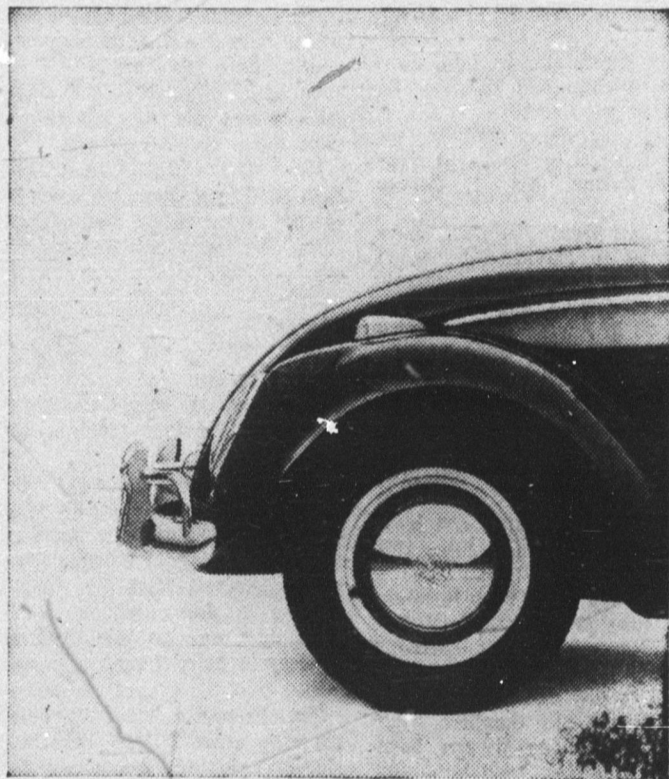
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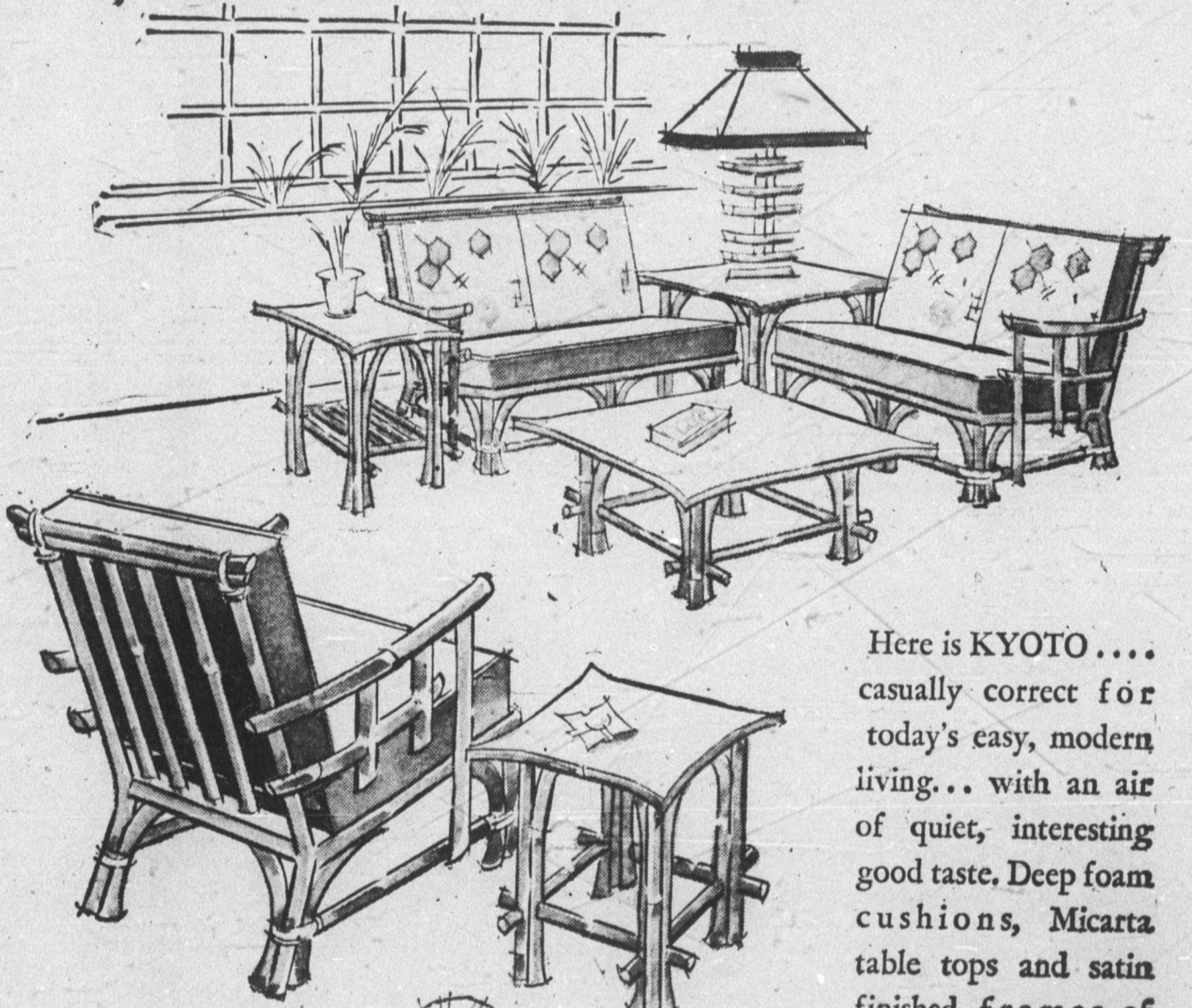
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