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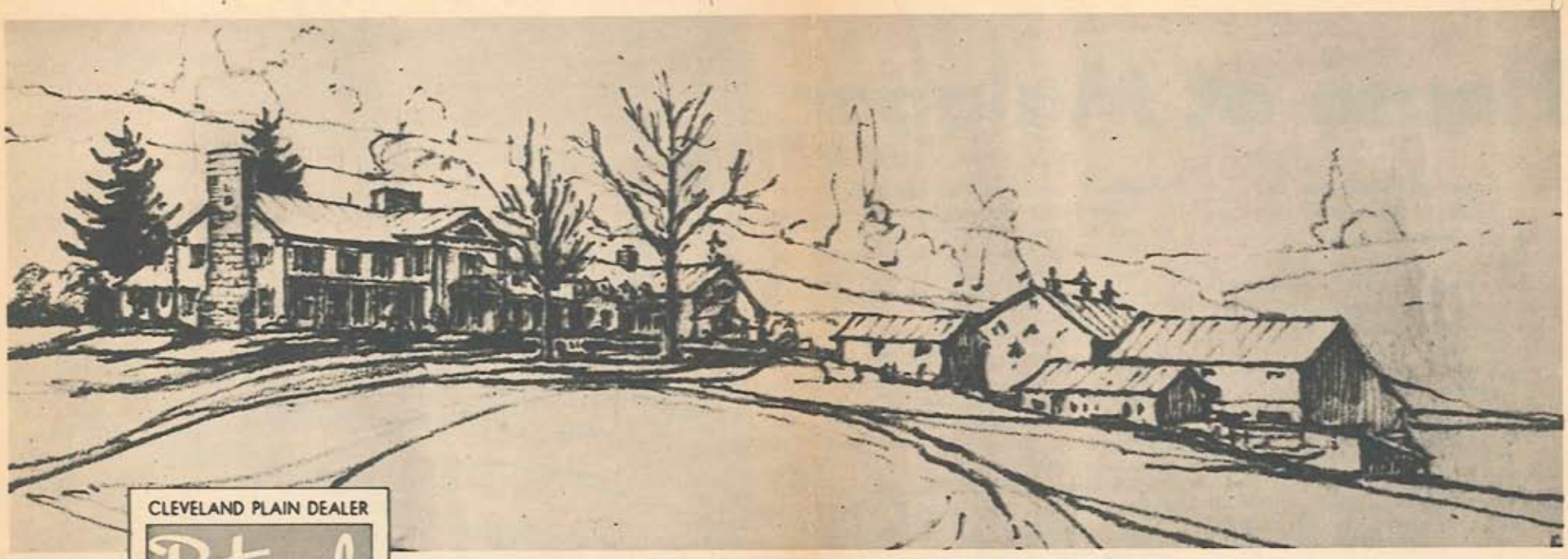

CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER
Pictorial
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MALABAR'S ENTRANCE. This is the only picture ever taken of Architect-author Lamoreux and Louis Bromfield together.

An Architect's Story of Louis Bromfield's

Big House at Malabar

By Louis Andre' Lamoreux

PART I

IT WAS early in the afternoon of Friday the 13th—in January of 1939—that Louis Bromfield dropped into my office, spread his gangling frame in a chair and casually asked me if I'd be interested in remodeling an old farm house.

If I ever had any compunctions about Friday the 13th, I lost them after that day, for while I had little early indications of what was to happen, little did I dream of the experiences, the out and out fun, and the constant and consistently changing series of events that were to follow that first meeting.

After a brief chat in the office, in which Louis outlined his plans and desires in a fast-moving though cursory manner, we drove down to his site in Pleasant Valley, some 11 miles from Mansfield, O.

His site was up Little Mountain Road, a short distance off the Pleasant Valley Road, and was admittedly pretty bleak and almost dismal that January afternoon. However, for one with imagination, and Louis didn't lack in that respect, it had immense possibilities.

The farmhouse on the site was then owned by a Mr. Herring. It was a small building, some 22 feet in depth and 34 in width with a simple gabled roof and the usual lean-to additions in the rear. About all that could be said for it was that it did have good proportions and a nice old native sandstone foundation.

It was close to the barns which were delightfully grouped, and on an elevation that was later to be of great assistance in the complicated additions that were to develop. Little Mountain itself was close behind the Herring house, and its rocks and evergreens furnished an inspiring background.

As we walked about that afternoon in the Ohio slush and mud, Louis outlined in his wandering, yet fully detailed and organized manner, just what he wanted to do. I didn't know him well at that time. He was not easy to follow. He'd go off on tangents, although he always got back to his point. As I listened, the story grew, and he told of his background, his love of the soil, his years abroad, his sudden though planned departure from Senlis, France, and the realization of an ever-present desire to return to the locale of his boyhood and settle down to a life of less stress and strain.

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House at Malabar

(Continued From Page 5)

He talked in generalities about the house he wanted to build. Yet, from my early notes, it is now crystal-clear he knew what he wanted. Those notes enumerated such details as trim, mouldings, architectural styles, much a mixture of Western Reserve, Kentucky Colonial and a smattering of French. Even such items as types and styles of cornice, dados, door mouldings, fireplaces, flooring, future additions and such detailed matters as pediments over hall doors were discussed.

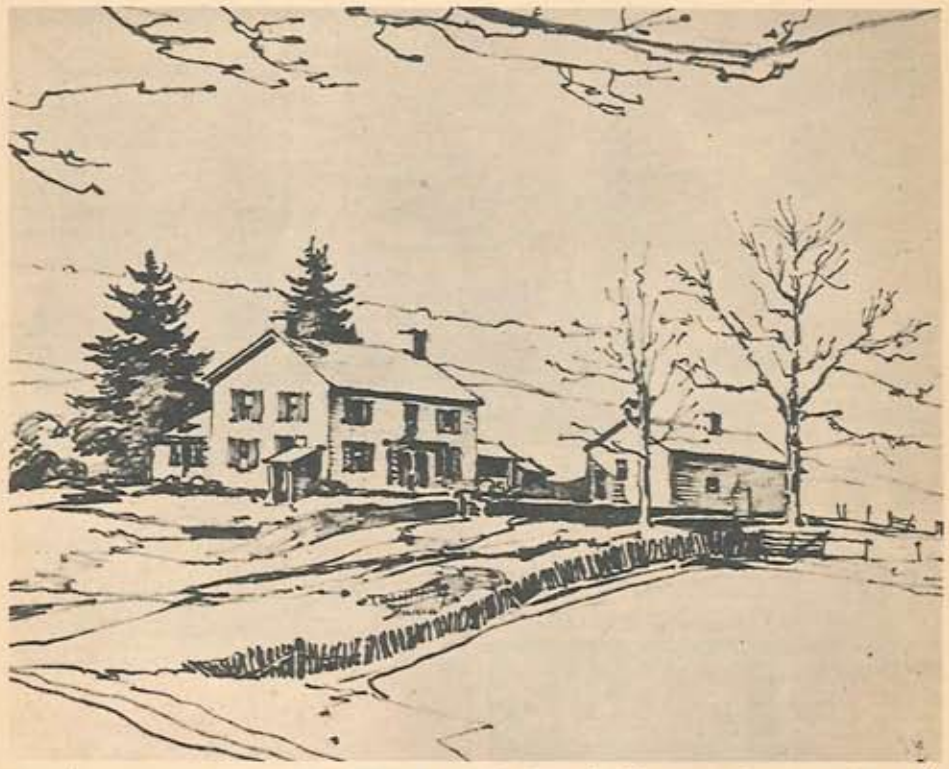
Very early in our chats he gave clear evidence of a minute interest in detail, although he'd refer to himself as almost totally uninformed. I was soon to learn that no detail was too small to cover, that he had a clear picture of what he wanted to accomplish, and that only time, study and much patience as well as leg work would be necessary to fit the loose ends together.

In spite of Louis' meticulous attention to detail he had an utter disregard for material things. They were the epitome of what he did not like, for as he later wrote in his book, "Pleasant Valley," "whether I die in the big house I built, or whether I die in a cottage with only an acre of ground around it, there will at least be no bitterness and no envy, so long as I have a couple of dogs and a garden and that huge stock of adventures and memories."

A trip about the farm was typical of what was to follow. Conversation was animated, to make a gross understatement. The only thing that was consistent was the unpredictable. There were constant references to what was to be done, and in detail "how."

Louis' ever-present companions were Reg and Regina, the original of a long line of boxer dogs. Rex had one outstanding characteristic, aside from his friendliness, drooling and perpetual jumping, and that was an immediate and forceful resentment when you laughed at his facial expressions. He just looked like a nicely hung-over old man. Laugh at him and he'd reach over and grap your arm in his dripping mouth and you immediately changed the subject. Regina was a frail thing then; she'd had no pups, but when they did arrive, and many litters followed, she, as Louis said, "blossomed out into womanhood and became the matriarch of the place."

GEORGE HAWKINS, the irrepressible, with Bromfield and a few of the dogs, mostly boxers, which were treated like members of the family.



HERRING HOUSE which Bromfield wanted retained in reality. The finished work is in five stages or periods of Western Reserve architecture. The central gable, an actually new portion, is of the oldest period, then the two south and north wings are of a later period. Cornices, window and door trim, scale, and detail became more simplified as we planned new additions. The children's wing and the service quarters are of an entirely later period and the west additions at the rear became playful and far less traditional. We felt that as crops might have failed, though a family increased, the unnamed original owner had of necessity simplified the work. We constantly went back, as we went ahead, in design.

Louis was living in Oberlin at that time, and the early preliminary sketches were taken up there for study. Meetings were always with the entire family, Mary Bromfield, George Hawkins, Louis' companion, friend, business manager, raconteur, critic and wit, as well as the three daughters, Anne, Hope and Ellen, and the Scot governess, Nanny White. Everybody pitched in with suggestions, and conversation was animated to the extent of being almost a bedlam.

Louis was far from "cold turkey" in consulting me. He knew of my background in domestic architecture, and also that while I might not have been the most informed individual regarding the Western Reserve period and styles, he knew that I was one of them.

The early sketches had some merit, but in general they served mainly as a means of finding out what was not to be done. Some half-dozen odd layouts were prepared before the real solution started to take shape. The original sketches were inadequate as to size and some 80 or 90 feet were added, until the thing became entirely out of scale, as the frontage was well over 200 feet.

IT MIGHT be well at this point to explain what we were all trying to do. As Louis once wrote in one of his innumerable letters, "What I want is a good unostentatious farmhouse which will be beautiful, authentic and simple."

It ultimately developed that we were trying to do something that had never been done before. We wanted to redesign and rebuild the type of house we felt would have been built by a wealthy, cultured farmer, one who had lived and prospered many decades ago in this section of Ohio. We wanted the house to have every outward appearance of what we felt he would have done. We wanted it to appear as it would have been, a series of remodelings. As I once wrote to Louis, "We are trying to walk in footsteps that were never made."

We pictured the house as having developed and grown through many stages, both in its inception and in its

Probably the most difficult problem Louis presented, and he was unyielding in this respect, was that the original Herring house was to remain in its entirety. This created a most difficult situation. I had spent many hours during the dreary months of the depression with the Ohio office of the Historic American Building Survey, and to my knowledge there just was no existing example of Western Reserve architecture of the scale of the Herring house.

Now scale to the layman is not an easy adjective to describe as applied to architecture, but possibly the reference to the proper scale in their surroundings of the Sphinx and the Pyramids may suffice. On the other hand, a bit of New Mexico or Arizona scenery transplanted to rural Ohio would be definitely out of scale.

About this time, as is often the case with design problems, a "break" came in knowledge that I. T. Frary of The Cleveland Museum of Art had published a book on Early Homes of Ohio. We soon met, and a delightful and extremely profitable association developed. While Mr. Frary's writings and photographs were helpful, and saved much travel, they did not solve the scale problem.

There was just one thing left to do—get in the car and drive—cover the Firelands, the Trails and the byways in search of what we wanted and did not feel existed. Late one afternoon in Kinsman we found it, there in the Peter

THE BIG HOUSE. Panoramic view showing house, barns and part of the grounds.

Allan house, a delightful, delicately scaled bit of Western Reserve architecture.

After that one major hitch, and a basic one, the design problem was relatively simple, at least we thought so, and were to learn otherwise. For there was just no precedent for what we were trying to do. We were creating an assembled house, parts of this and that from several periods, and above all, its entity must be in good scale and taste.

The overall length of the house soon became a problem. The scale of the Herring house was constantly with us, and it was necessary to subordinate the south and north wings, as well as the dining, summer porch and service dependencies.

It was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain detailed decisions from Louis at this time. He was traveling constantly to Hollywood and the East, and while he was considerate and thoughtful, at the same time he was exacting in that he expected progress during the plan stage. When an idea would come to him, he'd call, drop a note from a plane or train, and at least keep me informed of the endless changes or the items that had been unmentioned.

AN early letter from Louis gave some indication of what might be expected in the complexity of the actual building operations. In this note Louis said, "I should like to let the contract separately, that is, contracts for the excavation, construction, wiring, decorating, painting, etc. In this way I can keep a much more accurate check on what I am spending and, considering the fact that I will be on the spot every day and that both of us will have ideas and want to change our minds as we go along, this is the most practical way of working out the problem. It also allows the advantage of a much more elastic budget which, as I told you, plays a great part in the decision of how much we shall spend. We can go into the details later. I feel that this is the only way of working out the problem, as I am determined not to go into debt on the house."

Again, as Louis once wrote, "I want a big farmhouse half way up a hill." He definitely insisted in the early plan stages that mainly stock materials be used, that he change, add and elaborate as the work progressed; adding in another letter that "as I explained to you, a writer's income is a curious thing. You are very rich one moment and poor the next, and there is always the element of a windfall to be considered. It is quite possible that the windfall may occur and in that case we can do all sorts of things that will delight both our hearts."

So, as with many clients who have had little or no experience in building, Louis had many preconceived ideas, both as to materials, their use, sources of labor and even design. He once referred to certain materials as being identified with ostentation, continuing that "such materials are being used where Bromfield materials would serve just as well and cost plenty less. As you know, I am not a gadgeter and do not go in for glass-walled bathrooms, etc."

At another time he wrote, "I feel that authenticity would be gained if the chimneys were built of the local red sandstone of which there is an unlimited quantity already roughly cut on the place. It was always the custom in those times to use the materials at hand. Also, this feeling arises out of my complex against brick. If we can construct the whole house without a brick showing, I will be happy. Brick, in these days, seems to me synonymous with suburbia."

EARLY estimates from the revised preliminary sketches greatly disturbed Mr. "B" (as he was often called.) He even suggested that local farm and "country workmen rather than town ones" be employed, feeling "there would be less likelihood of escaping the cleaning process, which I am aware of already in certain Mansfield circles."

Correspondence during this period when Louis was constantly either in Hollywood or elsewhere was voluminous and detailed. He wrote about "risking being a bore by putting all this on paper instead of telling it to you, first so that we shan't come to any misunderstandings, and secondly, because I am so busy at the moment that if I don't get things down on paper they get lost in the shuffle," and, "I am sorry to be so troublesome, but I have an entirely personal feeling about houses and will be unhappy in a house which doesn't suit me and my family exactly, for I cannot work in the dark nor turn a house over entirely to someone else."

ORIGINAL SKETCH by Bromfield of the sort of house he thought he wanted. It didn't turn out this way.

Louis was to learn that his desire to use mainly stock materials as well as "country workmen" would not lead to the goal he had set. The authenticity we both desired could only be accomplished through research, study, and much out-and-out leg work in visiting existing Western Reserve homes, where full-sized detailed drawings were made of work to be reproduced.

Fortunately the "town workmen" became "country workmen" for they had basically never been anything else. Also, there were enough old-timers in nearby mills who had the knowledge and the know-how to produce the reproductions of authentic details from my many full-sized drawings.

To moralize a bit, that situation no longer exists. In many instances the workmen are gone, the know-how with them, and above all in this age of mediocrity, not even desire is present.

The design and conception of the Big House at Malabar Farm is something that never was done before, and in all probability will never be done again. People just no longer have the patience, the will or the desire, and while the love of antiquity may be debatable, its presence at least demands respect.

Louis was aware of this. He was extremely sensitive, appreciative and understanding. He had a perfectly clear picture of what he wanted to do and how he wanted to do it. In speaking of possible unwillingness of either mechanics or material sources to cooperate in the unusual manner in which the work was to be handled, he wrote: "In case there is any grumbling, you can tell them all to go to hell, and we'll go elsewhere which I would prefer to do in any case. As I told you, I'm fed up with the rumors and the stories that I pick up, and there is too much curiosity and too much of a smell of 'goose plucking' about the whole thing."

Inexperienced as he was with building operations, he did not know that aside from a sex scandal, few things arouse more idle chatter than the personal detailed and intimate ramifications surrounding the design and construction of a home.

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Malabar

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As the constantly revised preliminary plans neared completion, the ultimate goal became clearer, as well as the manner in which it would be accomplished. In a frugal moment Louis wrote, "I am interested in cutting all but the strictly necessary elements to the bone, and acting on the assumption that as we go on we can add to and develop our basic plan rather than to cut it. We can make decisions literally on the spot, while the workmen wait. I would rather, for the present, economize in small things and use that money to give you as free a hand as possible on the artistic side, that is to say in architectural details which must be considered in the original construction."

As the preliminary sketches neared completion story height problems developed. Louis was conscious of his height. He disliked low ceilings especially in living areas, and as this portion of the house was of necessity in what is appropriately termed a dependency portion of the house, it was not possible to elevate ceiling joists. Therefore, as with so much of the design, we did the logical thing—followed the contours of the existing ground, kept the roof and ridge lines down by merely lowering the floors. It is interesting to note that in this day of presumably "new" split-level residences, this relatively "old" home eventually acquired five changes in floor levels. None of these were trick in any sense but were justified by location, usage or existing grade levels.

Well, after several months of plain out-and-out work, though of the most enjoyable kind, the working plans were completed for the time being. As had been Louis' desire, bids were taken on a sub-let basis covering all separate branches of the work and in many instances even separate phases of the usual divisions of a building operation. During the actual completion of these working drawings, Louis just would not approve or disapprove of many details. In fact, he would pay little or no attention to anything that did not appeal to him at that moment.

A typical example of this situation developed when we arrived at a point where the selection of such items as plumbing fixtures, finish hardware, mantels and lighting fixtures was necessary in order that the plans be completed. By that time, as is usually the case, the pressure was on me, so in order to get out from under, I called the necessary supply sources in New York, hopped a plane and met Louis at the Algonquin Hotel. After he had finished his usual double old-fashioned, we chartered a cab and made the rounds, selected the necessary fixtures, fittings and supplies with the exception of the mantels which he eventually purchased from a shop in New Orleans, and returned to the hotel before regrouping at the "21 Club."

That trip was typical of jaunts with him. He was constantly being pestered by hangers-on, he had little privacy, yet he was always patient, courteous and a good listener. The evening at "21" was more of the same. He was always surrounded by vivacious and attractive women. They appeared out of seemingly nowhere, and this time our companions were Eleanor Harris and Millicent Rogers.

During the early course of the evening ar incident developed that I always remember. Louis was ordering and we were surrounded by the usual gang of dog-robbers when suddenly Louis noticed that we had been deserted.

Our retinue of waiters, water boys and incidental chair movers had rushed away to assist another couple who were leaving. Louis just laughed, threw his arms back and remarked, "They must be stinkin' wealthy."

As I had accomplished all that I could in this brief trip, and there was much to be done at home on the board, I shoved off early the next morning and was greeted at my home by a wire from Louis saying, "Where did you go when I turned my back?" That's all a very slight indication of the way things were with Louis, and a great, great deal more with the convivial and ever-present George Hawkins.

While the completed house is probably the most photographed and most published work of its particular kind, its actual plans have never seen printer's ink. In many respects the room arrangement was very unorthodox, yet there was a definite and clear-cut reason for everything that was done. In general, the plan fell into three separate portions, the first-floor bedrooms for Louis and Mary, the flower room off his bedroom, and the library. These rooms were separated from the living room by a central hall and double stairway leading to the second floor as well as to future rooms in the basement. The living room and adjacent dining room extended through the depth of the house, as Louis dictated. When passage through these rooms to the entrance doorway by servants was mentioned to Louis, he settled that in his typical manner, saying, "Servants in our home are members of the family."

The large pantry, kitchen, summer kitchen or large enclosed porch off the pantry and three-car garage completed the first floor, although there were many dependencies added such as flower-filled bay windows at either end of the dining room, porches the width of both library and living room, and additional bay windows and terrace areas as need and funds permitted.

The second floor division of rooms was again somewhat unorthodox. Above Louis' and Mary's bedrooms were two guest rooms, and a large paneled room and office for George Hawkins connected to Louis' combination bedroom, study, farm office and library by a separate stairway. The nature of their work necessitated such an arrangement.

The bedrooms for the three daughters were above the living room and dining room and were available off the central hall and directly connected to one another as well as to their sitting room.

Actual dimensions of rooms are often meaningless and to me quite obnoxious. Louis' own room as he described it was to be "a big rambling room with a lot of light and a lot of big comfortable chairs and sofas on which a tall man could lie on the base of his spine and where you could talk undisturbed for hours with friends about farming or politics or international affairs. I need plenty of space for books and plenty of space for a giant desk and room for five or six dogs. It has to be a complete unit for living a life apart, a big room in which to sleep, to work, to read, and on occasion to rest."

The room had to be a bedroom, a farm office, a study, a workroom, a sitting room. It had to be built for someone who was likely to work at any hour of the day or night. It was eventually built just that way and for those who are numerically minded, aside from the necessary wall space for book cases, bed and furniture, there are eight windows and eight doors, not counting the ninth small double-acting hinged one for the boxers.

In a very general way, that was the original plan of the Big House, as Louis often referred to it.

Following the actual completion of the working plans, a lull occurred. Bids had been taken on phases of the work such as excavation, foundation work and the structural framework of the house itself. Meanwhile, Louis had

"MR. B. HOLDS FORTH" in the living room of Malabar. On sofa at far end are Anne, his eldest daughter; Count Philippe du Mun and Marquis Jean de Suirian. In foreground are "Nanny" White and Mrs. Bromfield. This photo was taken about 10 years ago. Bromfield never lacked for guests.

moved from Oberlin to one of the existing farmhouses at Malabar.

In the early spring of 1939, in one of his lengthy letters, he wrote: "I won't know until July anyway exactly how finances stand, and this is very important in relation to certain plans in connection with the house. I am by no means fixed as yet to the final plan. This is because each day of living down here makes a difference. In other words, as I get used to the place and begin to get 'the feel of it,' a lot of changes come to my mind."

He elaborated further about his desire to make use of stock materials, and to eliminate what he then felt was needless ornamentation, adding, "Please understand that I have no desire to build a cheap house, and none of the suggestions I make need come in that category, but we are a hard-living family and the house is filled with visitors all the time and what I want is a strong, solid, plain house, and above all one that looks and feels as if it was lived in.

"Behind all this are elements which are not economic but rather philosophical. All the pressure in Mansfield (and this does not mean yourself), is toward making me make this a show suburban place, which is exactly what I do not want. In the first place, I hate that kind of place, and in the second, it psychologically sets me apart from my neighbors who are really the people I want to be closest to. Also, I should myself feel uncomfortable in such a house. In spite of opinions to the contrary, I am a farmer and can and do run the tractor and the manure spreader and milk on the hired man's night out.

"I want my children to be brought up that way, something which is very different in a town like Mansfield, together with the pressure which I feel all the time to make me and my life something I do not want it to be. As the house is to be the basis of my existence for the rest of my life, as well as the sum total of my experience up to date (which, if I do say it myself has been a pretty wide one), I see no reason to run ahead and build something I am going to tear apart almost at once because it doesn't suit me. . . .

"It is impossible for me to go ahead with as little detailed knowledge of the project as I have at present at hand. I'm not rich enough, and I should feel a fool if I did go ahead under these circumstances. I want this to be a *farmhouse* in which to live and not a show place.

"Maybe I'm getting to be one of the town eccentrics, but if I am, I do feel I'm not springing any surprise. You remember that the first day I came to your office I told you that I was going to be plenty difficult. I don't feel that I am being difficult, but only that I want to be sure what I am getting before I begin. Please understand that I'm not dissatisfied, but I felt that I should go on record with the reasons why I don't want to be rushed."

Months passed by, but in this lull there was no dullness. Louis was constantly traveling and the house was uppermost and always in his mind. He was getting into mechanical details at this time and regarding his heating system, from New Orleans, he wrote, "This is a house built for an extremely hearty family, a cold sleeping family, and by God they can turn radiators off and on. My life at Malabar Farm will be much nearer to Tobacco Road than Versailles, and it is useless to install lots of gadgets of any description."

That sort of thinking and correspondence continued until the eventual windfall occurred, and the order was issued, "go ahead with the contracts, let's build."

In a very general way the contractural work was as might have been expected, only in much more detail and in a more controllable and broken-down manner. A contract was let for the excavation, then a contract for the foundation and then another for the simple frame shell of the house without any trim, cornice or opening enclosures. Such was the procedure in order that Mr. "B" could see what was going on, and make up his mind as to either accept, reject or alter.

The details of additional contracts are too numerous to enumerate, but it might be of interest to know that there were eventually some 21 separate contracts for the work, each and every one of which was changed from one to 19 times. Such a procedure may sound foolish, expensive and just out-and-out

(Continued on Page 26)

GUIDE to Malabar.

Malabar

(Continued from Page 25)

wasteful, but it was the only manner in which the work could be carried through and allow the fluidity that Louis insisted should exist.

By this time there were close to 60 sheets of drawings, few of which Louis knew in detail. He would just not, or could not give his detailed attention to anything other than that which needed a decision at that moment.

In order to keep an accurate record of all changes, separate order changes were issued each month to each and every contractor. In this manner Louis knew exactly where he stood at the end of every month, for there in black and white was a record of what changes he had made and what credits or additions had been made, and what the balance of the contract was at that moment.

The impression may be acquired that this sub-let and extremely changeable and fluid type of building operation would have been wasteful and expensive. In a sense it was, especially with regard to the retention of the old Herring home. It would have been more economical to destroy that building. In fact, a good fire would have been a blessing. However, while Louis denied its existence, sentiment was a strong factor here and retention of that house was a must. Nevertheless, upon the completion of the entire house, both the remodeling of existing work, the construction of the new and the innumerable additions and revisions of same, it is factually true that the total completed cost of all phases of the project ran 13% below my estimate.

In his book "Pleasant Valley," Louis wrote about telling me, "I would have a tough job in which, at times, I must be willing to become draftsman rather than architect." I silently acquiesced in hearing those words, knowing full well that many a draftsman never becomes an architect, but that when the architect ceases being a draftsman, he no longer exists.

LOUIS' inability or unwillingness to study the drawings resulted in fantastic revisions. At times "sky-hooks" were almost necessary to hold up existing work pending decisions as to what would happen. Rooms were moved almost from one end of the house to another, others combined and others omitted. At one time there was actually nothing left of the old Herring house but the foundation and the roof, and good old George wanted to let it stay that way.

A mechanic once mentioned to me, "Do you know, there are only two rooms in this house where there has not been a change?" I told Louis of this remark in a letter and offered to buy the drinks if anybody could name those two rooms for they just did not exist. Changes had been made in every room.

In fact, so many room changes had been made that when it came to awarding a wiring contract it was necessary to redraw all of the floor plan. Louis had one of his frugal moments that day and insisted in going through the entire house, accompanied by George Hawkins, the contractor and myself. As outlets were pointed out and explained, he'd take out every other one, saying in his inimitable profane way, "Hell, we won't need that," and George stayed behind with the contractor and gestured each back as it was omitted. Louis thought he had saved a lot of money and everybody was happy.

As work progressed it soon developed that Louis' early desire to stay with stock materials would not be followed. He knew what he wanted, he was very discerning in minute detail, and to accomplish the shadow effects, the feeling of or lack of weight, or the scale or texture of trim just could not be accomplished without the use of specially designed trim and details. So, to be bluntly factual and even numerical, it was not unusual to use two or three types of special trim in one room, and in the entire house some 15 or more special cornice moulds were designed, and an equal or more in the design of exterior woodwork.

Many out and out bits of amusing design developed, playful in many respects, such as the detailed doorway leading to the pantry, reflected some 70 odd feet away in a large mirror in the library. The niche over the entrance for the *Ganesch* is a seldom noted bit of detail and rarely even understood. This stone figure brought back from the Malabar district of India was often found over entrances to homes in that country and symbolized an omen of good luck. Oddly enough it is a figure of an elephant, legs crossed and twirling trunk. I, myself, always felt that it was a bit incongruous, a symbol of the Republican Party. Incongruous, in that those of us who knew Louis, knew of his friendship with then Gov. Frank J. Lausche and even Mr. Republican, Senator Robert A. Taft. Well, we felt that deep down inside of him was a frustration in that there was no longer a figure in his own Democratic Party to whom he could turn or write about with respect, or at least in the admiration he felt for Thomas Jefferson.

As detailed work grew it became necessary to design many built-in features, cabinets that had not been shown, and even furniture. Louis' much photographed desk is an example. His requirements were not difficult, although admittedly unusual. He wanted a large semi-circular desk, with lots of drawer space, to sit in the east bay window of his room. It grew into one 10 feet in length and five feet in depth with space in the center for his large chair and bookcases on the room side. The hardware presented a problem. I didn't want to use furniture hardware, nor did he, so I designed some delicately turned walnut knobs for all drawers and doors. They worked out fine, for the boxer dogs immediately started chewing on them, much to Louis' delight.

Louis had a pronounced aversion to anything new, anything that looked "showy" and it didn't take long for those pups to age that desk. Similar effects soon developed with all doors, where with Louis' detailed thinking French lever hardware had been used. It didn't take those boxers long to learn that they could open the doors by getting up on their hind legs and pawing, and many doors have been clawed inches deep into the rails, again to Louis' enjoyment.

Constant requests for detailed changes

were the rule rather than the exception, and many of them were not easily settled at the site, or even in my office. Like any designer, I always took my work home with me. Many times the solution would come to me at odd hours of the night. On one such occasion I could not find my usual scratchpad, and resorted to many sheets of toilet paper and the inevitable soft pencil. As the solution arrived, the waste basket filled along side my bed and sleep returned. Unknown to me, a few days later when Mary, George and Louis had been at our home, Mrs. Lamoreux told Mr. "B" of what she had found in the waste basket. A bit later, in public, Louis reminded Mrs. Lamoreux that, "If and when your husband has some more toilet paper, tell him to redesign—" mentioning a forgotten but troublesome portion of the house.

We were exceptionally fortunate in the selection of contractors and mechanics for the work. In many respects many of the men become almost dedicated in their interest. Credit for this attitude belongs in a great degree to both Louis and George, the former did not hesitate in showing his appreciation, and George was a never-ending source of amusement.

I've been kidded by experts, but George Hawkins was a past master. He was never lost for a word or expression.

(To Be Continued Next Week)

DURING CONSTRUCTION Bromfield was interested in every detail of the work.

An Architect's Story of Louis Bromfield's

Big House at Malabar

By Louis Andre' Lamoreux

THE "GANESCH." (drawing above) is a stone elephant Bromfield brought back from the Malabar district of India. It stands in the niche above the entrance. In India such a figure is considered an omen of good luck.

Last week Mr. Lamoreux told how Louis Bromfield asked him to design "a good unostentatious farmhouse" — with seven bedrooms, five baths and special rooms. Malabar grew into an Ohio showplace. This installment concludes the article.

PART II

Changes, additions and omissions, as the interior took shape, followed in the path of exterior work, and as Louis wrote, "If features on the outside of the Bromfield mansion have been upsetting, wait till the inside is finished. Anyway, life is wonderful."

The house had reached a semblance of organized disunity by this time and was the subject of much local town chatter. People wondered why he had not built a French chateau, "Surely more fitting with his many years in France." Others found the house too close to the barns, "The smell, the noise, I wouldn't like that." Little did they know that other sites had been considered and all discarded, for Louis wanted the house where it is close by to the scenes of activity and readily accessible by those he considered most, his neighbors and help. Others were astounded later on when the furniture arrived, much from the old house in Senlis, France. "What a shame, why didn't he furnish it with all *NEW* things?" Well, we knew all along that the house would not be "understood," and cared less.

As might be expected, and is almost invariably the case in all residential building, as the work neared completion the pressure was applied to "get things done." As Louis wrote from Hollywood, "At any moment we are likely to have a descent of English refugees. Three children and two nurses are definite and there may be three or four more.

Louis' letters from Hollywood were frequent and generally smattered with references to celebrities, places and goings on, but he never seemed happy or contented with his work or life out there, once saying, "It's dull as Hell, compared to the farm."

He was not a man to hold back his appreciation, as when upon his return from a trip to the west coast, and seeing the mere shell of the Big House for the first time, he remarked, "It exceeds my fondest expectations." Again, in closing one letter, he wrote, "I'm afraid it's going to be the kind of house people will come from all over the world to see, damn it!" He lived to see, and I suspect in a sense regret that very thing.

Louis' ability to absorb detail was astounding, as was his patience. Many times during the construction of the house it was necessary for me to root him out from one of his many hideouts where he had gone for seclusion while writing. He'd either go up to the sugar camp in the woods, down to the lower barns, or the old Beck house, trying to get "away from it all."

I recall one typical instance when he was working, as usual with large ruled yellow pad and fountain pen, lavender ink, in what was soon to become the farm library. Good old Nanny White was there. They were in an animated discussion about some family or other domestic problems.

After all, major decisions in almost every respect, no matter how personal or in what field, were made by Louis. I held my fire, waited until Nanny was through, then brought up the matter about which I must have a decision. Louis was as usual courteous, rarely ever abrupt. He looked up from his work, listened intently to the problem, gave an immediate and clear answer, and I went my way, and he his. He had that rare ability to turn on and off an intense and certainly absorbing train of thought, without the slightest show of annoyance.

Louis' public by this time were arriving in droves. Many of them were large-bosomed, pot-bellied gals obviously past middle age. Louis would take them through the house, or down the hillside, telling them the story of the garden as they attempted to physically and men-

THE HOUSE. "I'm afraid it's going to be the kind of a house people will come from all over the world to see, damn it," Bromfield told his architect. People did come from all over to see it.

tally keep up with him. Late one afternoon while he was on such a tour, George and I were sitting up on the terrace above the garden, and as one gal burst forth in belching laughter, George remarked as only he could, "Yip, *nothing* could be that funny." George's remarks about the farm, the life there, and the endless stream of characters who went through will never be forgotten. He or the children, or often Louis or Mary had names for all of the animals, for as George said, "The trouble with the animals on this place is that they all think they are people."

Eventually the "Big House" was completed, at least to the extent of Louis' and George's occupancy, as might be expected, of the service quarters. Then, of course, with their physical presence in the house, the real pressure went on to "get things done," and kiddingly, "these highbinders out of the place."

After these "highbinders" had left, the very first request was for their return. George called one day, as Louis never used the telephone, and wanted a list of all of the mechanics, their wives and children who had anything to do with the work. A party was in the making, and it was a whang-diddler. Tables were set up all over the place, food and drinks were only as Louis could serve them, and unquestionably everybody had a whirl. I was one of the early arrivals, and most definitely the last to be driven away. I was happy beyond description in many respects and sad at the same time for I realized that it was the beginning of the end of a magnificent experience.

After my return from the last war, Louis brought up the possibility of another house. Mary had passed on, and not long afterward George had passed away. A change had come over Louis. He was just not the same. While outwardly he manifested the same interest and vigor, there was something strange and lacking about him. He was less patient, more abrupt and discontented. He never openly expressed dissatisfaction with his manner of living, or of his surroundings, but he no longer seemed content in the Big House.

"MR. B's ROOM" from the outside. Just beyond it is the old Herring house with chimney on the end.

He talked of a small, very contemporary "hideout" up on Mt. Jeez. Not "on" Mt. Jeez, but a part of it, hidden from view, yet exposed to everything. Factually, all he wanted was a large living area, as much glass as possible, a single bedroom and bath and small kitchen facilities, and, of course, an immense fireplace. Also, as might be expected, he desired the unusual and the difficult, for he wanted a stairway to extend up through the flat roof to the deck above. Sketches were drawn and redrawn, but as with the Big House, the windfall never came.

Instead, additions were made to the farmhouse. Three more stalls were added to the garage, walk-in coolers provided and additional storage areas built. Further additions to farm buildings were completed and a roadside stand erected. In regard to all of this work, Louis' attitude had changed. His appreciation, his love of authenticity, his interest and care for every detail was gone. Elements of mediocrity had set in. The reliable mechanics, the contractors, the supply

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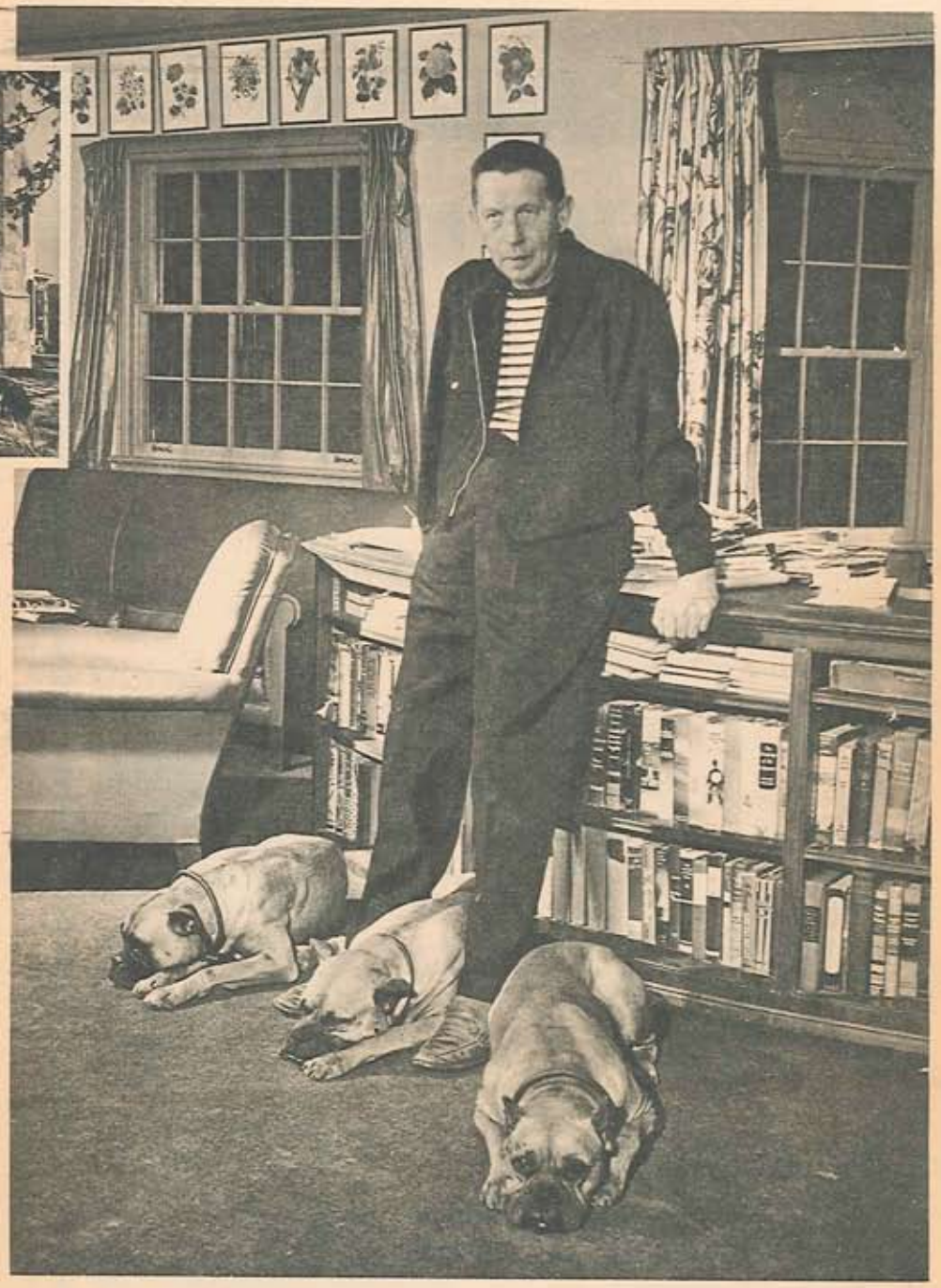
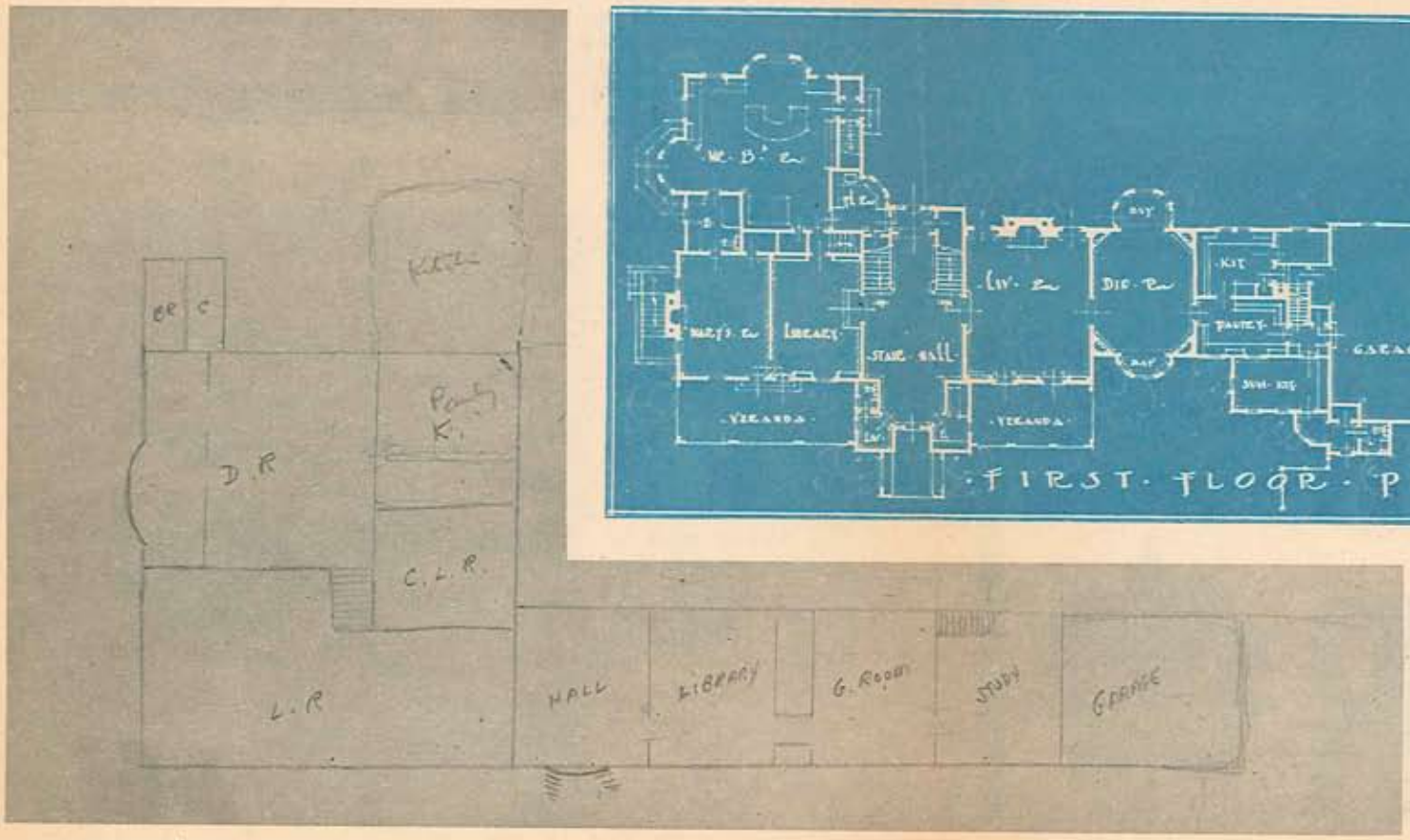
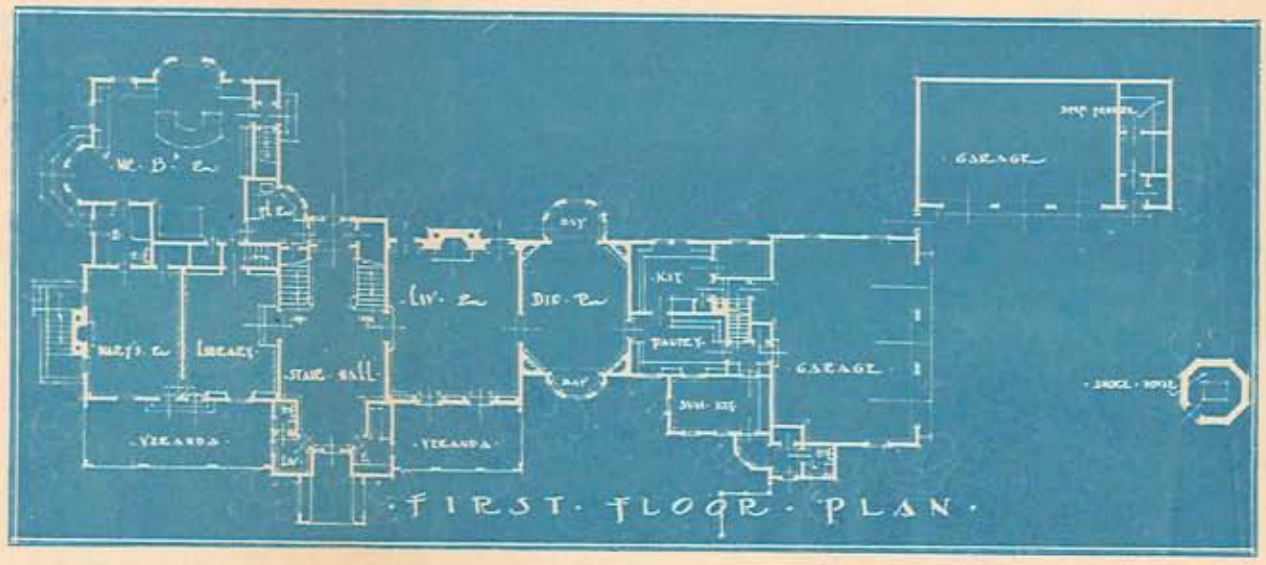


LOUIS BROMFIELD, with ever-present boxers, leans against the monster desk in his study. The dogs "aged" the desk very quickly.





METAMORPHOSIS OF A FLOOR PLAN. The sketch at left by Bromfield represents his first thinking about the first floor arrangement. The blueprint above is Architect Lamoreux's final plan. The shell of the old Herring house is preserved in Mary's room and library at left. There are seven bedrooms and four baths on the second floor.

Malabar

(Continued from Page 35)

sources of established merit were no longer employed. New mechanics, contractors and supply sources of often questionable ability and credit appeared. The previously "to be avoided" townsman type contractor took over and confusion and chaos replaced orderly procedure. Drawings were no longer followed, care and attention to what was once paramount was no longer the rule. Wherein he had originally sought to avoid "the cleaning process" he was now actually asking for it. An almost complete reversal set in and it showed in every dealing.

While the personnel at the farm had always been quite fluid as far as change was concerned, there was now an obvious undercurrent of unrest. Managers were fired, the tenure of replacements was short, and eventually even legal advisors, doctors and accountants felt the ax, and I, myself became the recipient of quite "readable" though unjust criticism. We did not realize it at the time, but Louis was a sick man.

Compensation for the work came at frequent intervals, and at unexpected times and places. Louis, like any intelligent person, knew that the alert, and surely the creative mind functions best when fed. By that, I do not mean flattery in any sense of the word, for from Louis at least such would have been pretense, which to him "was a cardinal sin."

Louis did not by any means limit his expressed appreciation for the design alone of the house. He was generous, outspoken and colorfully blunt in his spoken, as well as written words of kindness to the mechanics on the job.

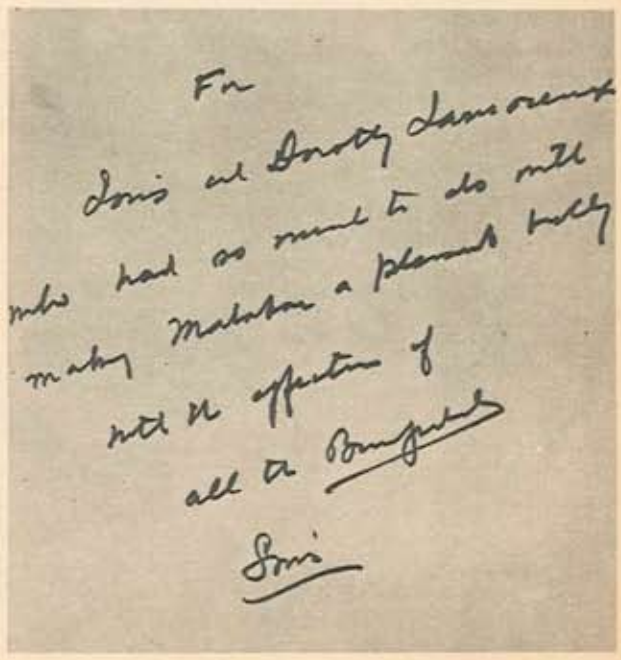
Possibly one of the most gratifying bits of prose that has been written about the house came from our mutual friend, The Reverend Milton G. Nicola, author of "Tinkling Symbols," who, in writing to me said, "It's a very lovely thing you have accomplished. There is a restraint, a lack of four-flush that the industrial lads so like, and yet there is a feeling of confident and rich taste to it. Like a man who is an aristocrat and is perfectly satisfied and doesn't give a damn what the world thinks about it, and yet is not smug."

As this transition in Louis himself became more obvious, a change in the quantity and especially the quality of the visitors at Malabar developed. Johnnie-come-latelys started to successfully ingratiate themselves with Louis, a trait that brought quick, clear and unmistakable rebuff when Mary and especially George were alive. "Camp-followers," had always been around before and during the time the Big House was growing, they were a part of the scene, but their motives were at least obvious, their methods candid, their tenure short, and nobody, not even the boxer dogs were "taken in." It was all part of the change in the place. Certainly Louis was lonesome, he was not well, and in many respects the people who had been closest to him were gone and the best things that he had accomplished were past.

Late in February of last year I received this note from Louis. "Just a line to thank you for your very thoughtful letter. I appreciate it more than I can say." Those words were probably a few of the last he ever wrote for the next day he was taken away from the Big House to the hospital. In a month he had joined Mary and George. No attempt will be made to write an obituary. His love of the soil, of animals and of nature, his books and his many friends in all walks of life and from all over the world attest to that. What more could one man have had, or left?

I drove to nearby Pleasant Valley a few weeks ago, instinctively turned up Little Mountain Road, over the first bridge, up past the split rail fence now hidden with an overgrowth of vines and shrubbery, across the bridge at the dam below the lake, and up the hill to the Big House. Weeds, brambles and almost desolation greeted me. After all, the actor had left the stage and the curtain had not been rung down. A lone boxer, probably a great-great-grandson of Rex and Regina, bounced over to greet me and tried to paw his way into my little car. He seemed lost and alone, yet entirely at ease, dumb in the knowledge that he at least "belonged." I patted his head and drove away, happy for him in the realization that at least he "didn't know."

To me he was the symbol of all that is left of the "Big House."



INSCRIPTION on the flyleaf of "Pleasant Valley" presented by Bromfield to Lamoreux: "For Louis and Dorothy Lamoreux who had so much to do with making Malabar a pleasant valley,With the affection of all the Bromfields. Louis."