The Plant Doctor's LANDSCAPE TIPS

By David L. Roberts, Ph.D., *Senior Academic Specialist, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University*

HOLIDAY RAMBLINGS TWO

INTRODUCTION

In years past, I have occasionally presented personal views and historical perspectives about my family and my history in the December issue of *The Landsculptor®*. These experiences have shaped and influenced my life, just as many of you have had similar perspectives that have shaped yours.

A HOUSE DIVIDED

I am a fan of history (Photo 1), and I firmly believe in the saying, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." That quote or something similar is often attributed to Sir Winston Churchill but should more likely be granted to George Santanya. Many well-known people have used it. We know the author of another famous quote, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," delivered by Abraham Lincoln in a speech in 1858 before the outbreak of the American Civil War and in reference to the issue of Slavery. Lincoln was to be the first representative to run for President of the United States under the newly formed Republican Party platform, which largely held that slavery was wrong and should be abolished . . . at least in the final analysis. Interestingly, the then "Democratic Party" was not nearly as strongly "antislavery" as the Republican Party. And many Christians of the period (as some still believe today) believed that slavery was God's will according to some biblical scriptures such as, "Slaves shall obey their Masters", etc. As we know, this division in beliefs and values led to the American Civil War, in which approximately 620,000 Americans died . . . out of a population of approximately 31 million (including about 4 million slaves, but excluding "Native Americans") of the period.

Photo 1: The USS Constitution, here in Boston Harbor, is the oldest commissioned American warship, having been built and launched in 1797 in order for this young nation to have some military capability, if the need arose. This ship, classed as a Frigate, was of such a unique, advanced and large design that contemporary frigates from other nations couldn't compete with it . . . plus this ship could out-sail larger, more powerful ships from other nations to return and fight another day. It earned the nickname "Old Ironsides" because our enemies' cannon balls would bounce off the solid American Oak planking. Because I used to draw this ship as a youngster, it has a special significance to me. (Photo taken by the author in 2012)

Reading about this mid 1800s conflict, I cannot think of a time that has divided our country more. There have been events that have led to internal conflict, such as the Vietnam War, Labor Unrest, Race Riots and so forth. However, I am very concerned about the present period . . . even though people are not dying in huge numbers due to this "house divided." Today, claims of "Fake News" and exhibitions of anger, insults, political incorrectness and divisiveness seem to be the manner of the day. Some of the hallmarks of our great nation are freedom of speech, freedom of the press, education and science . . . to name just a few. Most of these freedoms and other attributes that have helped this country excel are now coming under attack. So during this Holiday Season, it might be good advice to tone down our strong opinions at family get-togethers. After all, while winning an argument might seem to be a preferred goal (Why can't my stupid Uncle understand the facts?!?), family harmony is undoubtedly more important.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MY FAMILY

At this time of year, I invariably engender sentimental feelings about my family and our history. My family's origins can be traced to Radnor, Wales, from where they emigrated to the U.S. in the early 1800s, eventually forming a community with other Welch emigrants known as Radnor, Ohio. They tended to be God-fearing and hard workers. Farming was their vocation, which apparently became rather prosperous for them (Photos 2 & 3). My mother (Photo 4) graduated from college in 1937, not a common achievement in those days for women. My mom and my Aunt (who also graduated from college) believed very

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strongly in education and urged their children to success in advanced education beyond high school. While my parents and relatives were devout Christians, usually attending church every Sunday, they didn't prescribe as some do today that religion and science and education can't coexist.

Photo 2: Emery Roberts, my grandfather, is shown here as a young man with his new bicycle, probably in the early to mid-1880s. For those who are interested, the bicycle is still in the family and is an American Star 'Pony', a very pricey ($75-100) mode of transportation in its day compared to other large-wheeled bikes. Note that the large wheel is in the rear (not in the front as were most high wheeled bikes of the period); the bike is not pedaled but pumped (treadled), exhibiting such safety features as coasting capabilities and easier access. When designed in the early 1880s, the bike was ridden down the steps of the Nation's Capital to demonstrate its stability.

In fact, I never heard such derision towards science, education and universities in their generation as we hear today in ours.

Photo 3: My grandfather and grandmother (right) also had one of the earliest automobiles in the community; note wooden-spoke wheels on this early model roadster.

Photo 4: My mother, Ruth Elizabeth 'Betty' Warren as a young woman and college graduate.

My mother and father grew up in the farming community and carried on those traditions . . . except my mother became a teacher and my aunt became an administrator at a university (whose name will be omitted here to avoid disharmony and divisiveness). As I have often proclaimed, my parents' generation saw the greatest

Photo 5: My dad in his younger years had "graduated" from initially farming with his dad with horses to a newfangled invention known as a tractor. Photo was probably taken in the late 1930s.

Photo 6: This "new" tractor purchased for the family farm was built in the 1940s, within a decade or so of the one in Photo 5. It boasted new features such as electric start, lights and a generator to charge the battery!

Photo 7: My dad worked on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad for a number of years to supplement his farm income. The C&O built these sister lake ferries, the 'Spartan' and 'Badger', which were launched in 1952 to haul railroad cars and automobiles across Lake Michigan between Michigan and Wisconsin. The Spartan and Badger were the largest ferries to ever ply the Great Lakes. The Badger, with its current cargo ranging from sightseers, motorcycles, automobiles, semi-tractor trailers and large wind turbine blades, still operates during the summer months between Ludington, MI and Manitowoc, WI.

technological changes of any generation (Photos 5, 6, 7 & 8), even when compared to the most recent generations. They saw the development of many inventions we take for granted today: electricity and light bulbs, aircraft, great ships, radio and television, nuclear power (and bombs), space travel to the moon and elsewhere, the computer and smart phones, among a few. Even though we are still making technological advances, I don't think future generations will ever witness the magnitude of changes that The Greatest Generation experienced.

As related in past miscellaneous ramblings, my parents and their generation grew up during the Great Depression and participated in World War II. I also lived through The Great Depression and World War II (even though I wasn't born yet) because my parents continued to live out those memorable events until the end of their days. My parents always lived as though they were poor . . . pinching every penny in case hard times returned. They always made sure they were economically responsible by not purchasing things they didn't need. Invariably, if they bought a new car, truck, tractor or farm implement, they would pay cash. At this time of year, I often recall my childhood and the sparse but very special Christmas presents I received compared to today's "spoiled" (?) youngsters. Unfortunately, my birthday falls two days after Christmas; I swear that as a child I heard more than once,

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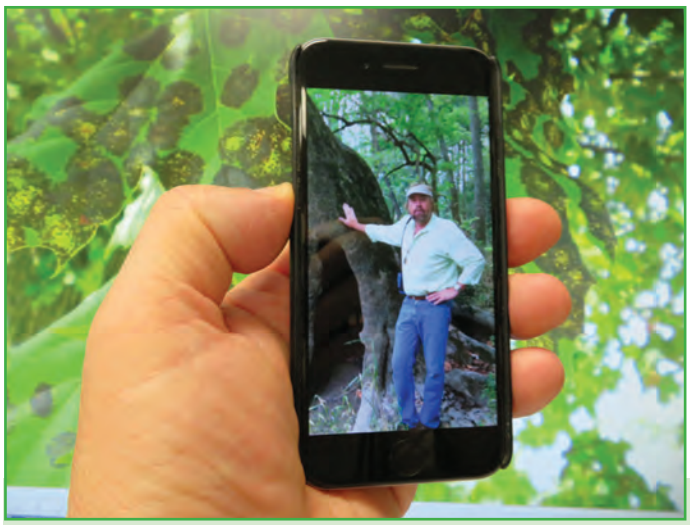

Photo 8: While living through the development of electricity, aircraft and even the invention of nuclear power (and bombs), my parents' generation probably experienced the greatest technological changes of any generation . . . even when compared to today's millennial generation. I'll never forget the look of amazement on my dad's and mom's faces when they could see their son profiled in a smartphone.

Photo 9: Most children want a horse when growing up. Because my dad started farming with horses, he hated their ornery manner and would not allow them on the farm after tractors replaced them. Hence, I had to improvise by substituting my pet pig for a horse. This photo of me, probably taken in the late 1950s, was found in my Uncle Bob's possessions when he passed several years ago at 102 years of age.

Photo 10: Apparently, I tried to make up for not having a horse by riding a Harley "Hog" in my later years.

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"he got enough for Christmas." That's probably why I'm such an accumulator of worldly possessions today (Photos 9 & 10). As with many families, my parents sacrificed to help put me through college in their effort to hopefully provide the next generation with a better standard of living than theirs. Other than love, their gift of providing a college education to me was probably the greatest gift of all.

THE PLANT INDUSTRY

It dawned on me this past summer (2017) that I have been at Michigan State University for 40 years. Even though I've had a career with more turmoil than the average scientist, I still feel richly rewarded and thankful for this great industry and citizens I serve. In my job, every day is a new day, and every day is a new challenge. There is never a dull moment! While my primary duties might be described as generating knowledge and extending that knowledge to you (Photo 11), I also learn so much from all of you. I am so thankful for all of the wonderful interactions with all of you . . . whom I essentially regard as my extended family. Happy Holidays to all of you . . . and looking forward to 2018!

The author, MSU and MGIA do not endorse any particular products. If using pesticides, be sure to read and follow label directions.

Photo 11: At heart, I'm nothing more than a glorified Tree Hugger. Thanks to all of you for a wonderful journey!