

The Duval family's mansion

by Louise Sheppard

"Women have the nesting instinct—and the more tinsel we can weave in, the better we like it," said Virginia Duval, surveying with satisfaction a series of delicate Japanese panels which had just been installed in the drawing room of her 18th century farmhouse.

"Women—God bless 'em!" said her husband, Paul, obviously admiring both his wife and her tastes in decorating.

Paul and Virginia, in rearing their five children who are now all in their twenties, have tried out quite a few nests. All of them were in suburbia: contemporary homes with manicured lawns, perfect settings for a busy social life, children's activities and community involvements.

But five years ago Paul showed Virginia a farm that he was considering buying in northern Lancaster County. The deserted stone farmhouse, built in the 1700's, was in deplorable condition. But it had a serene solidity that sparked the Duval imagination. And its setting, secluded at the end of a long farm lane, and overlooking a lovely little lake, offered a park-like area for family use.

The decision was made to become country folk, and the Duval life style changed considerably.

Now Paul rises at six in the morning to feed the cattle in his barn, a herd of graceful young heifers which serves as replacement stock for Paul's farmer neighbor who also cultivates the 70 acres of the Duval farm.

After the cattle are fed, Paul and Virginia usually take a brisk, early morning walk of several miles in their rural neighborhood.

Their days are spent much as before: Paul goes to his Lancaster real estate office, Virginia spends much time as a volunteer, sitting on the Board of St. Joseph Hospital, Visiting Nurse Home Care Association and Birthright.

Their recreation now centers around their farmhouse. Besides enjoying the harvest from their full vegetable garden, the Duvals experiment with "found" fruits on the property, like wineberries from across the lake and pears from the old trees in their yard. In the winter months, they spend a lot of time watching the many varieties of ducks who find sanctuary on the ice-free pond.

"We were always 'new house' people," says Virginia. "But an old house is a living, breathing thing. Its long life and its human history can consume you totally." And she proceeds to tell an amusing story about their farm that was recounted in Ellis & Evans' History of Lancaster County.

It seems that in the mid 1700's a certain Ludwig Lindemuth, who owned the adjoining farm, and whose spring now provides the water for the Duval lake, decided to divert this water supply and he spent a long time hand-digging a trench through solid rock in order to achieve this end.

Waiting until the trench was almost completed, the then owner of the Duval farm appealed to the local government, requesting that Lindemuth be restrained from attempting to "steal" his water. The legal

decision that natural waterways may not be tampered with saved the course of the stream - and provided a landmark decision on which subsequent water rights cases were based.

Lindemuth's ditch, much overgrown, is still visible from the Duvals' deck, a monument to Lindemuth's long-ago folly.

Even though Paul and Virginia are fascinated by their farm's history, and have restored and decorated the early stone section of their home in proper 18th century style, they have felt free to remodel a more recent frame portion of the property in a very modern manner.

Wide expanses of glass, open stairwells, Breuer chairs, an Oriental dinner table, a glass enclosed lanai with a magnificent view of the lake and the surrounding countryside dominate the less formal areas of the home and reflect the family's inclination for relaxed comfort.

"A farmhouse is for the people who live in it," says Virginia. "And we live in it our way. Future owners will, no doubt, adapt the house to their needs, as we have done."

"We feel lucky to have found this house," she adds. "It is so perfectly placed to enjoy the beauty of Lancaster County. It makes us feel good to have been able to save it for another family's use in the future."



Airy stair, Oriental furnishings combined with original stone wall



Paul Duval feeds heifers.



Three of the five Duval children visit the farm. Left to right are Betsy, Paul, Tricia, Virginia, Paul H.