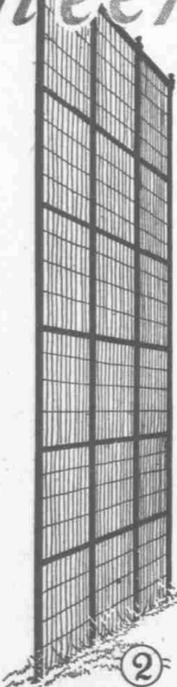
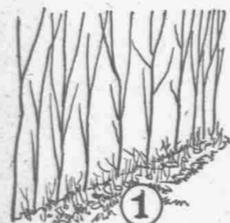


Hetty Green's Millions in "Spite Fence" Squabble

How Mrs. Sylvia Green Wilks' Dog Jack Innocently Started a Neighborly Row Which Has Raised Some Curious Points for the Courts to Decide

The Scraggly Hedge on the Boundary Line That Separates the Neighboring Estates of Mrs. Wilks and Mr. Price.



WHEN Hetty Green, the richest woman in America, died recently she left a large bundle of her millions to her daughter, Mrs. Sylvia Green Wilks.

The daughter bought a very delightful and extensive country place at Greenwich, just outside of New York. Mrs. Sylvia Green Wilks's husband, Matthew Wilks, is a great-grandson of the old John Jacob Astor.

So to the Green multi-millions was added somewhat of the social prestige of the Astors, and thus the Greenwich estate, Alta Crest, became one of the show places of the neighborhood. Of course, the Wilks had neighbors. In a neighborly way some of them called, found the Wilks not at home, left cards, waited hopefully—but their neighborly advances were not reciprocated.

The Wilks's neighbors could not see where they were getting any advantage out of such distinguished neighbors as the Hetty Green millions and the Astor prestige. The Wilks never did anything for them; they were not in a frame of mind to do anything for the Wilks.

And this was the rather unneighborly atmosphere around the Alta Crest estate when a good-natured dog innocently precipitated a lively squabble which is now in the courts and involves some interesting and rather fine questions.

Mrs. Sylvia Green Wilks may not care much for Mr. L. B. Price, her nearest neighbor, but she does care a great deal for her brown collie dog Jack. Mrs. Wilks is not inclined to spend even a nickel to please neighbor Price, but she will gladly spend several thousands for the comfort and safety of Jack.

Jack, the collie, is a pet of no small consequence on the Alta Crest estate. Jack, being a very broad-minded dog, has kindly feelings for his neighbors, and often scampered across the lawn and over to the neighbors' back doors, where a bone in neighbor Price's garbage can smelt just as good as anything on the big estate of the dog's owner.

This promiscuous habit of Jack was discontinued by the Wilks household. Shriek cries of "Come here, Jack!" pursued the dog whenever he wandered over to the neighbors. And then something happened—a hydrophobia scare ran through the town and reports were spread of dogs being shot.

That settled the Wilks in a determination to do something which they had often thought about. They would build a fence. And while they were doing it they would build a good one—about twelve feet high. A fence like that would keep Jack from wandering off to the neighbors.

Now, the Wilks and the Prices, though near neighbors, are not at all on intimate terms. Mrs. Wilks did not consult Mr. Price about the big fence she decided to build on their boundary line. But Mr. Price heard of it and sent his neighbor of Alta Crest notification that if she built such fence or any fence on the boundary of their respective lawns she would be violating his rights and he "would take steps accordingly."

Which, to use the novelist's phrase, gave pause to Mrs. Wilks. For a time she dropped the subject, but conferences with the contractor for fences were resumed. Mr. Price heard of them. Again he served notice by a letter written upon the stationery of the mercantile firm of which he is the head. He reminded her that to build a fence upon the border between their estates would be illegal. There was silence and seeming inactivity upon Alta Crest.

But last month the vigilant Mr. Price relaxed his vigilance. He decided that in his capacity of neighbor of Hetty Green's daughter, as in other capacities that involved alertness, he was entitled to a vacation. While he was in the South something happened. Mrs. Wilks's apprehensions about the safety of her pet Jack coincided in intensity with Mr. Price's departure.

While he was away there was unusual activity at the Alta Crest. The fence that had been under discussion for a year was now under way. Mr. Price, at Hot Springs, Va., received this telegram:

"Mrs. Wilks is building the threatened fence. Men were at work."

Mr. Price dispatched a telegram with

The 9 to 12-Foot Iron Mesh Fence That Mrs. Wilks Started to Build When Neighbor Price Stopped Her. So She Started Again Quietly to Put Up a 3-Foot Fence.

The 3-Foot Iron Fence Which Mrs. Wilks Put Up in Such Speed That It Was Established Before the Sheriff Got Around with Neighbor Price's Court Injunction Forbidding It.

"rush" marked in the corner. It was addressed to Walter B. Anderson, attorney-at-law, Greenwich, Conn.:

"Enjoin Mrs. Wilks. Stop that fence." Nevertheless, to Mr. Price's deep chagrin, when he returned he faced, or, rather, he backed, a fence between his own vegetable garden at the rear of the house and Mrs. Wilks's sloping acres. Mr. Price cast one glance at that fence and wrought suit for \$50,000 damages. The suit will be tried in Bridgeport, Conn., very shortly. Then and there Mrs. Wilks and her neighbor will have it out about that fence.

The Superior Court will be called upon to determine the rights of the owners of



Photograph of the Hedge and the 3-Foot Iron Fence Mrs. Wilks Has Erected on Her Side of the Boundary. The Photograph Shows the Private Driveway to the Wilks' Place and a Little of the Back of the Price House.

the restricted and valuable property that surrounds Greenwich to fencing in themselves and fencing out their neighbors. The legal questions turn upon the pivot of a clause in the deeds of that property, thus:

"Nor shall any owner of property herein described erect or maintain any division fences other than hedges of reasonable height between the premises hereby conveyed and adjoining lots."

Of crystalline clearness, it seems. It would appear upon first reading that Mrs. Wilks had committed a breach of the law of contracts. Yet Mrs. Wilks smilingly makes her defense. "I have put up a fence," she says, "but it is entirely on my own property and three feet from the line.



Mrs. Matthew Wilks, Daughter of the Late Hetty Green. Her Husband, Mr. Wilks, is a Great Grandson of the First John Jacob Astor.

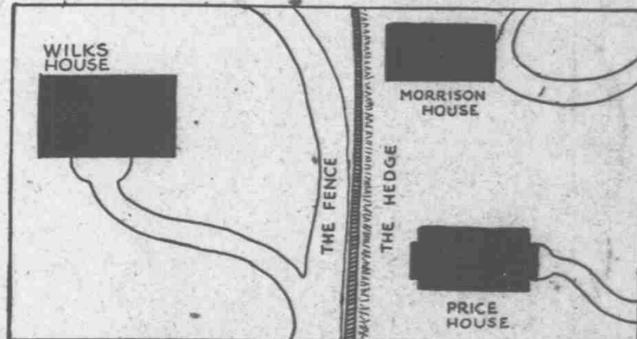


Diagram Showing the Wilks Country Home "Alta Crest" and the Nearest Neighbors and the Location of the Disputed Fence.



Alta Crest, the Wilks Suburban Home.



The Residence of Mr. L. B. Price, Who Is Fighting the Fence in the Courts.

I may build what I like short of a boot or shoe factory on my own grounds."

And upon this point it is expected will revolve many of the arguments and much of the eloquence of Mr. Price's attorney when the matter comes up in court. The seemingly conclusive clause is followed by another:

"It is hereby intended to make care as to the use of said plots referred to herein reciprocal and for the benefit of the respective owners and their respective heirs and administrators."

This is susceptible of wide and full and elastic construction. "The care as to the use of such plots shall be reciprocal and for the benefit of the prospective owners and their heirs and administrators." The fence which Mrs. Wilks has built is a simple and tenuous enough affair of interlaced wire. It has none of the barbs which destroy cattle on the western ranges. True, it is not as pleasing to look upon as the uninterrupted slopes of Alta Crest. And should Mrs. Wilks be moved to plant vines to grow up and over the fence they might throw a shadow upon and so hinder the full growth of Mr. Price's vegetable garden.

Mrs. Wilks will argue, on the other hand, that her dog, Jack, is of inestimable value to her, as dogs go. Mrs. Wilks says that dogs have been mysteriously shot in the neighborhood. True two of the dogs had been accounted mad, but she thought some of the killings has been ruthless. She was "naming no names," but she wanted to keep Jack at home. He is young and frolicsome and might jump a mere low fence, especially if there was the lure of cats. Therefore she believed that she was quite within her rights as a property holder to protect her dog.

The neighbors of the Wilks are taking sides in the matter.

"She had no right to put up a fence on the boundary line," says one faction.

"It isn't on the boundary line," says the other.

"But the spirit of the lease is to obstruct no view," the debate continues. "Nonsense," says a young matron in the neighborhood. "I don't care for the view of Mrs. Wilks's kitchen. I would like to plant her out. But I waited, hoping she would plant us out. She is so very rich I was willing to accord her the privilege. But if she doesn't next Fall I will."

And so goes the discussion endlessly, or, at least, until the case is tried in Bridgeport.

Mr. L. B. Price, who stood upon his rights as nominated in the deed, is a vigorous Westerner. Not so rich as Hetty Green's daughter, yet he is more than content in seven figures. He came from Missouri, where he is the head of a large mercantile establishment, or chain of establishments, and built a country mansion on the slope

of the hill. He built for his generation and for generations to come.

And he did not want the shadow of intruding fences cast upon his lawn, his garden nor his plans.

He had heard rumors that Mrs. Wilks was not an over-considerate neighbor. "It is customary when a hedge is upon the boundary line for country neighbors to share the trouble and expense of keeping the hedge neatly clipped. But, he had been informed, Mrs. Wilks not only was not interested in doing this, but she had a portion of the dividing hedge cut down."

"She is a determined woman," was his direct Western conclusion, "and she needs a determined hand to deal with her."

Mr. Price tried the determined hand. Each time there were rumors that she had engaged a contractor to build a high fence on the side of her estate which bordered upon the Price estate and that of their neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. John Morrison, he sent a "stiff" letter to the mistress of Alta Crest. Thereupon, though there was no reply to his communications, the preparations for the fencing ceased.

Content with the situation, satisfied with life in general, Mr. Price started on his vacation. Into his happy seclusion came as a serpent into Eden the telegram from his secretary announcing that the fence was going up.

Mr. Price's lawyer went to court and secured a temporary injunction. He gave the paper to Sheriff George Jones, who motored at top speed to Alta Crest. The Sheriff sprang from the automobile. He faced a group of men at work upon a wire fence that stretched the length of one side of Alta Crest.

"You mustn't put up that fence," he commanded, waving the injunction. "But it is put up," answered the contractor.

"Then you mustn't make it any higher. I thought it was to have been ten feet high."

"This is only three."

"Anyway, stop where you are," he was commanded.

"All right." The contractor issued his orders. "We'll have to stop boys." They packed the tools into kits and slung them over their shoulders and started down the road. The sheriff waited until they were out of sight. While he watched he became conscious that he himself was being watched. For from behind a shade at the big brown house at Alta Crest a pair of observant eyes were surely peeping.

It is a question in the country which is victorious. Mrs. Wilks has her fence. Jack, deterred by the wire fence, stays at home. Mr. Price's collie—yes, he has one—stays at home. Once they were wont to meet and to fight. It would seem that quiet would reign. But there is the question of individual and property holders' rights to be considered by the Superior Court at Bridgeport.