

Celebrating 100 Years of Growing 1915-2015

A History of the Garden Club of Amherst

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A History of the Garden Club of Amherst, Massachusetts, 1915 - 1965

Fifty years ago, on August 27, 1915, Mrs. William J. Newlin invited five friends to meet at her Amherst home. At that meeting the Garden Club of Amherst was born. A working interest in one's garden was, and still is, the prerequisite for membership.

Mrs. Newlin was the Club's first president and Mrs. Ray Stannard Baker its first secretary. Mrs. L.D. Hills and Mrs. John Dickinson made up the first program committee. The other original members were Mrs. John Tyler and Mrs. D. N. Skillings.

The group met weekly at first, as often as possible in the garden of the hostess, on a date chosen by the hostess, and with a program planned by the hostess. Refreshments were not obligatory, but were usually elaborate and delicious. After a few weeks the group invited ten additional gardeners to join it.

The Club's first fund-raising project was a cafeteria luncheon given at Mrs. Newlin's home, to which fifty-five friends were invited. As a result there was \$15.20 in the new treasury.

Meeting once a week soon proved too often, and in 1916 the members voted to meet once a month from October through May. At that time, too, it was decided that the Club's usefulness should reach beyond its membership, and many projects were started. Plans for home gardens were made into a small book that

was distributed locally, plant exchanges and sales were begun, garden books were given to the town library, and a garden survey of Amherst was made to help stimulate public interest in home gardens.

The Club's first program follows: in October the subject was "Garden design"; in November, "Lawns and lawn mowers"; in December, "New ideas for the Christmas tree"; in January, "Garden books and catalogues"; in February, "Growing common flowers to perfection"; in March, "Planting and care of evergreen trees and shrubs"; in April, "The hardy border"; and in May "Ferns."

During the First World War the group met irregularly. However, it sponsored and inspected home gardens grown by children, and on July 10, 1917 gave an elaborate party on the common that, with the addition of a substantial gift, netted \$350 for the benefit of the Red Cross.

Mrs. Newlin, the Club's founder, died in 1918. A resolution passed by the Club stated, "Her enthusiasm overflowed upon us all. Her abounding patience, helpfulness, and unflagging zeal were always a great and never-failing source of inspiration to every member of our Club." We have it on good authority that the time she spent with the group was not entirely appreciated by Mr. Newlin, who was a man of many interests, and that later, when there was a second Mrs. Newlin, she was asked to promise she wouldn't ask his help in her garden.

As a result of the first recorded meeting with the Amherst Selectmen in 1921, and with the help of the Civic Section of the Woman's Club, cards were sent to all householders asking them to clean up their property, particularly the land bordering on the highway. Amherst was divided into sections and each section assigned to Club members for inspection. Also, at that time, the Club called attention to the unsightly appearance of the common.

In 1926 with a gift of \$500 from Mrs. John Tyler, \$600 appropriated by the town, and \$100 raised by the Garden Club, Sweetser Park was graded and planted from plans made by Professor Walter Harrison of the Massachusetts Agricultural College (now the University of Massachusetts).

In 1928 the Club joined the State Federation of Garden Clubs. On May 23, 1934, the Federation held its first meeting in Amherst. The invitation was issued by Mr. Hugh Baker, President of the Massachusetts Agricultural College.

In 1936, with the help of the Garden Section of the Woman's Club, an elaborate flower festival was held at the Lord Jeffery Inn. Plants, flowers, flower arrangements, and tea table arrangements were on display. Fortune telling, card games, street dancing, and many other activities were enjoyed.

Beginning in the early fifties the Club has seven times entered contests with neighboring garden clubs at the Western Massachusetts Flower Show in West Springfield. The Amherst Club received the Grand Prize twice, as well as a silver bowl, two blue ribbons, a red, and a yellow ribbon. Several blue ribbons were also won by individual Club members for flower arrangements at the Western Massachusetts Flower Shows at the Tri-County Fairs in Northampton and at local grange fairs.

Ever since 1942, when Garden Club Hospital Service was begun, the Amherst group has contributed its full share of work, for the first few years at Westover Field and, since 1947, at Leeds Hospital in Northampton.

During the Second World War, Club members spent many hours at Westover Field planting and caring for vegetable and flower gardens and making flower arrangements for the patients. It was reported that vegetable seeds sent overseas by the Federation (and to which the Garden Club of Amherst generously contributed) produced four billion tons of food for our allies. When the war ended, a "Certificate of distinguished excellence in war service" was received.

Despite the distance from Boston, the Garden Club of Amherst has been active in Federation affairs. Several members have been Federation directors. Mrs. Floyd Thompson and Mrs. Paul Weathers served on the state nomination committee. In 1946, Mrs. Henry Green was regional vice-president and Mrs. Winthrop Dakin was chairman of the State Living Memorials Committee. This committee became the Massachusetts section of the Blue Star Memorial Highway Committee. The first public presentation of the Blue Star Memorial Highway was made at the home of Mrs. Henry Green in Petersham. The articles of incorporation were drawn up by Mr. Winthrop Dakin, and Mrs. Dakin served on that board for several

years. She later became Massachusetts Awards Chairman. During her term of office it was her pleasant duty to present a state award to Mrs. Civille Pray, a valued member of our Club, for outstanding work with Girl Scouts. After Mrs. Pray's death one of her scouts wrote:

“No ordinary creature, she. She touched and loved
The friendly out-of-doors wherein she trod.
Upon the pulse of nature one hand stayed.
The other hand, I think, was held by God.”

In June 1948 the Club, again with the help of the Garden Section of the Woman's Club, was hostess for the midwestern regional meeting of the Massachusetts Federation. After that meeting a letter was received from Mrs. Rand, who was at that time President of the Massachusetts Federation. She wrote, “Never have I attended a meeting where the program was carried out more efficiently, or where the guests were treated as graciously, and I want you to know I'm proud of you all”.

In fifty years there have been many changes in ideas, in manners and customs. One of our members, elected to membership during the forties, arrived at her first Garden Club meeting at ten o'clock in the morning, dressed (so she thought) appropriately for garden work in shirt waist, skirt, sweater, and flat-heeled shoes. Much to her amazement, she found all the other Club members in their best dresses, with hats on their heads and gloves on their hands.

In 1950 the Club adopted a new constitution, and in 1955 the majority preference system of voting for new members was adopted.

Each May since 1951 the Garden Club has held a plant sale on the Amherst common. The sale has grown in size and quality each year and has become a town institution. Since 1960 two thirds of the proceeds from the sale has been used to maintain and to beautify the Eighteenth Century Garden on the ground of the Amherst Historical Society's Strong House. Two redwood benches have been added to the garden—one in memory of Mrs. George Churchill, a dedicated Garden Club member and its president for many years, the other in memory of Mrs. Civille Pray, whose one-time Scout also wrote:

“We felt the warmth and radiance of her spell
As she unlocked the doors to nature's realm
And taught of things she cared for and knew well.”

In 1952 the Club took as its horticultural project for the year the recording of the many rare and historically famous trees of Amherst. As a result of this survey by Club members, a book, TREES OF AMHERST, was published in 1959. The book brought our Club state and national awards. The committee which deserves most of the credit for this accomplishment was composed of Mrs. Ralph France, whose dream it was, Mrs. Paul Weathers, Mrs. Herbert Cowan, and Mrs. Marshall Lanphear.

The Club has further shown its interest in our town's trees by planting five trees on the grounds of the High School and, some years ago, several trees on Memorial Drive.

During the past year, at the request of the Town Manager and under the supervision of the town's Civic Advisory Committee, the Club has made a survey of roadside trees. The Club will, from time to time, report to the Town Manager concerning trees that should be trimmed or removed, vistas that should be opened, and locations for planting new trees.

In 1964, at the instigation of the Garden Club, a project for community beautification was begun. The Town Manager, the town's Conservation Committee (of which a Garden Club member is secretary), and three of our Garden Club members now form the Village Improvement Association, whose function is to improve and to beautify the downtown area of Amherst.

Perhaps the characteristic most responsible for the long life and vigor of the Garden Club of Amherst has been the ability and willingness of its members to take responsibility.

Fifty years have passed, and the Garden Club of Amherst is still young at heart and flourishing. We are working together for the common good, and hope we have contributed toward making our town a better and more beautiful place in which to live.

Prepared by Grace Davis Harrington

(Mrs. James B.)
August 25, 1965

Seventy-Fifth Year of the Garden Club of Amherst, Massachusetts

A Short History of the Club: 1966 -1990

In the last 25 years, our membership has increased from 25 to 31. Some members had to leave us for other commitments; some have moved to other parts of the country, notably Martha Livingston, Kay Schoenberger, and Ruth Cox; and some to our sorrow have died, Sally Wagner, Hazel Lanphear, and Mary Maki. We have, however, gained many new members who have youth, knowledge, and enthusiasm to keep our Club's goals of beautification of the town of Amherst, conservation of our Valley, aid to our schools and libraries, and scholarships to worthy students. It has been our policy to use members' skills and knowledge for our monthly programs wherever possible instead of outside speakers.

We express our gratitude for the leadership of some of our outstanding members:

- Hazel Lanphear and her husband Marshall for their horticultural knowledge and generous supply of unusual plants for our Plant Sale;
- Janet Dakin and her husband Winthrop for their commitment to conservation, and his legal advice. (They founded the Kestrel Trust, which helped acquire 110 acres for Lawrence Swamp, and the Podick, Mill River, Amethyst Brook, and Plum Brook Conservation Areas);
- Sally Wagner and her husband Bob, for establishing a nursery in their garden to grow plants for the Plant Sale, which grew so large and successfully that the Club presented them with extra loam, and in 1985 presented Sally with a "Golden Trowel" for exceptional dedication as a gardener and a long-time Treasurer of the Club;
- Mary Maki for chairing the re-editing of the "Trees of Amherst." She worked with Teddy Grady, our skillful photographer, to finish the book and promote its sale;
- Carol Cornish for her always amusing and informative horticultural reports, including regular notices of the Japanese beetle counts annually conducted by her husband Geoffrey. She kept a tree nursery for the Plant Sale, and gave trees she raised from seeds or seedlings to any members who had room for them. She has recorded in photographs the hostess and speaker at each meeting, and has a slide show at the Annual Meeting which everyone looks forward to.
- Cheryl Wilson, a Master Gardener and columnist for the Amherst *Bulletin* for her articles on seasonal reminders and interviews with gardeners from all over the Valley who are specialists in many varieties of plants and ways of raising them. She has also shared her knowledge, giving programs at our club meetings.
- Georgene Bramlage, another horticultural journalist whose articles appear regularly in the Hampshire *Gazette* and who has presented a number of informative and enjoyable programs at our meetings.

Other Master Gardener members who have contributed programs and advice are Hope Davis, Susanne Gavin, June George, Ellen Goodwin, Rose Quinton, and Anne Hondrogen.

Accomplishments, Awards and Donations

Plant Sale

In 1966, the Plant Sale grossed \$321.40. In 1990, it was \$5,616. A lot of work and accomplishment there!

Eighteenth Century Garden

The garden behind the Strong House is our primary project. Elaine Barker and Hope Davis oversee the maintenance funded by the proceeds of our annual Plant Sale. The garden costs an average of \$800 a year. It has been restored by new planting, new boards, and new fences. An annual work bee by members complements the professionals we hire to do the heavy and seasonal maintenance.

Trees of Amherst

In 1970 we began thinking of redoing the *Trees of Amherst* book with Hazel Lanphear and Mary Maki in charge. Great progress was made by 1972, and the book was published in 1975, a long labor of love and knowledge. It is worth all the effort. It cost \$15,000 to publish, which was repaid to Hamilton Newell, the printer, by 1979 with sales of the book and profits from the Plant Sale. Mr. Newell was always very helpful, supportive, and patient. In 1975 Mary Maki received a Special Achievement Award for the book from the Massachusetts Garden Federation.

Loki Blair Memorial Garden

Although it has not been the policy of the Club to memorialize its members, family and friends of Loki Blair asked us to design and establish a garden in her memory which was located at the Bangs Center in 1974. It was very beautiful, with pink dogwoods, azaleas, pink tulips, rhododendrons, and geraniums. Also trilliums from Sally Wagner's garden that, alas, were stolen. In 1989 it had to be moved because of the expansion of the Bangs Center. The garden is now reestablished in the courtyard of the Munson Memorial Library in South Amherst. Unfortunately, the pink dogwoods were too large to be transplanted. Contributions defraying the cost of the move were made by Loki's two daughters.

Another memorial is a book fund at the Jones Library in memory of Sally and Bob Wagner. We gave \$350, and friends and family have now increased the fund to \$8,000 as of now.

Civic Beautification and Donations

In 1961, we voted \$2,000 to the Town to improve the Common. They didn't spend it, and in 1983, we took it back. It is now earmarked for landscaping the new addition to the Jones Library.

In 1976, we had adopted Patsy Bischoff's plans for re-landscaping the present Jones Library. Shrubs and bulbs were planted and we received an award from the Massachusetts Garden Federation for our efforts. We are all going to be well memorialized!

In 1982, we gave \$750 to the Town nursery for street trees. In 1985, the Town received an award as "Tree City of America."

In 1984, with the approval of the Design Review Board and the Historical Society, we purchased ten large concrete planters for \$1500 for the Upper Common on the west side of South Pleasant Street. They cost over \$1,100 per year to maintain with summer flowers and vines, chrysanthemums in the fall, and greens in the winter.

Our donations seem endless. After the 18th Century Garden, our largest goes to the Kestrel Trust, over \$1,500. Others are to the Berkshire Garden Center, the Arnold Arboretum, the Nature Conservancy, the New England Wildflower Society, the Arcadia Wildlife Preserve, and a new Friendship Garden of one and a half acres at the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C.

In 1968, we gave \$300 to the Mill River Conservation Area for new steps and railings.

In 1972, we gave \$150 for a three-year treatment of the Grayson Elm.

In 1980, Ruth Boicourt reported her husband Alfred had fertilized the ailing Katsura tree in front of Grace Church for under \$20, as against \$200 charged by Frost and Higgins.

We have given Tree books to the seven elementary schools and to the Junior and Senior High Schools, and \$100 to each to buy garden books.

Since 1984, we have given \$100 annually to Amherst, Pelham and Leverett libraries for garden books.

In 1990, we established an interest-bearing account of \$3,000. The \$200 annual interest will be awarded to a University of Massachusetts student from one of the four Western Massachusetts counties (Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire) by the College of Food and Natural Resources. The scholarship will be merit-based and given in the second semester of the student's junior year.

Our largest donation this year was \$5,000 to landscape the new Police Station. It has been gratefully received by Chief Donald Maia.

In 1969, we received a gift from the Skillings family of a path from Red Gate Lane to the Junior High School. Janet Dakin, Peggy Craig, Martha Livingston, and Sally Wagner plotted the path, weeded, and enriched it with laurel plants provided by the Club.

In 1975, we received tax-free status from the Internal Revenue Service.

In 1990, we were advised to have insurance coverage for our monthly meetings, and a special rider for the Plant Sale. We are now covered until March 27, 1991 by Blair, Cutting and Smith until a yearly rate can be established.

Our Seventy-Fifth Anniversary

Following a club decision to have a dinner to honor ourselves and our long-suffering supportive husbands, a committee was appointed. Committee members Win Thorne, Laurie Clark, JoAnn Brown, Peggy Craig, Carol Cornish, and Jane Lane held many meetings with an assortment of members and decided on the menu.

Red and white aperitif wines
Liver paté and appetizer bread
Assorted cheeses and crackers
Mixed salad greens with grapefruit and orange sections
Poppy seed dressing
Glazed baked ham
Rum glazed yams and apples
Orange-cranberry sauce
Dijon style mustard
Boneless chicken breasts in sour cream and mushroom sauce
Steamed white rice
Green peas with pearl onions and slivered almonds
Assorted pickles and relishes
Rolls and butter
Cheese cake
Coffee and tea

The Feast will take place at 5:30 p.m. at the South Congregational Church. We are sure we will all enjoy ourselves immensely, even the dishwashers.

As we approach our next 25 years, the energies of our present officers Susanne Gavin, President; JoAnn Brown and Laurie Clark, Vice Presidents; Phyllis Hastings, Secretary; and Win Thorne, Treasurer will keep us a vibrant and interesting Club to belong to.

Respectfully submitted,
Betty Elder and Peggy Craig

A History of the Garden Club of Amherst from 1991 to 2015

In 2015 the Garden Club of Amherst celebrated one hundred years of existence. At the centennial public lecture by garden expert Roger Swain in June, Barbara Hoadley recalled her days as a member since joining in 1973. “Only women belonged to the Club then, and meetings were always at members’ houses with a silver tea service, linen tablecloths, and china tea cups. Dress was more formal, a nice suit or dress, no slacks or jeans.”

By 1991 (1990 was the 75th anniversary) that custom was changing. We now often meet in public libraries or the quarters of other local organizations. We remain a private club; in 1991 there were 31 members and now there are 42, including honorary and associate members. Though we no longer use silver tea services, a committee led by Anne Aune still provides delicious home-made refreshments.

The 75th Anniversary of the Garden Club in 1990 resulted in two important changes. First, we established a scholarship to be awarded annually to a horticulture student at UMass. Also, due to the great success of the anniversary dinner, to which husbands were invited, an annual potluck dinner with spouses has been held every year, usually at the home of Susie Lowenstein-Kitchell.

In most ways the Garden Club keeps to its original purpose—to help one another with our gardens, indoor and outdoor, and to help the town be an attractive place. We share our experiences with gardening, enjoy lectures on all sorts of topics, and occasionally take trips to visit other public or private gardens. We manage the Eighteenth Century Garden, next to the Amherst Historical Society. The prize-winning “Trees in Amherst” book, written by Club members in the 1970s, is now supplemented by colorful, prize-winning “Trees in Amherst: Three Walking Tours” brochures. Norma Hallock chaired the Tree Committee and Karen Chrisman designed the brochures.

Members plant and care for the flowers and greens in pots on the Town Common, and recently the town’s Business Improvement District has helped with the watering in summer.

The annual sale of plants from members’ gardens, held regularly since 1951, continues to take place in May on the Common. Years ago plants were potted in cottage cheese containers and labeled with popsicle sticks. Now they are in large professional pots with labels, generated by a special machine, that provide proper Latin botanical names and cultural information. All members still participate as much as they are able.

The increasing success of the plant sale each year means the Garden Club can make more generous contributions to the organizations it supports. The annual scholarship for a student at the University of Massachusetts is \$1,000. The Jones Library, its branches, and its Friends receive money from the Club, as do neighboring public libraries in member’s towns, and several environmental groups. These include the Kestrel Trust, the Hitchcock Center for the Environment, Nasami Farm of the New England Wildflower Association, and Durfee Conservatory and the Waugh Arboretum at UMass.

The Club continues arranging trips to other gardens. Some are in conjunction with the Western Massachusetts Master Gardener Association, including one to Strawberry Banke in New Hampshire and a trip to England in 2014. Half of current Garden Club members are trained Master Gardeners. Other sites have included personal and public gardens around New England, such as Long Hill, North Hill, Naumkeag, Hollister House, and Tower Hill Botanic Garden, and the High Line and Wave Hill in New York City.

In 2008, men were invited to join the Garden Club. Men had always been speakers and helpers, and in 1997 the minutes record a meeting about the plant sale at which Jo Ann Brown—perhaps jokingly—asked, “Why don’t we invite men?” In 2006, members began discussing the admission of men, and a letter from Kathleen M. Thomas, then president of the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts, pointed out that our non-profit organization could not discriminate. She also noted, “Men will in fact change the

atmosphere of the club and much of the petty nonsense may be put to a stop.” She mentioned a few Massachusetts clubs that already included men. The first two men, Chris Hurn and Bernie Rubinstein, joined in 2008. Everyone has been pleased with the change.

A new practice at meetings, the Horticultural Minute, began in 2007. These Hort Minutes consist of very brief presentations on interesting horticultural facts. The facts are often accompanied by a plant or insect.

When Amherst citizens began looking ahead to 2009 and the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the town’s official founding, members of the Garden Club offered to help with a massive planting of daffodils around the town. Denise Gagnon helped lead this project, and the Club held a special fall plant sale to raise funds. Ten thousand bulbs of ‘Goblet,’ ‘Thalia,’ and ‘Camelot,’ were planted. The celebration took place in early May, and, thanks to all the bulb planting in the fall of 2008, the arrays of blooms around town were spectacular. The Garden Club continues to support the daffodil plantings which now number 50,000 bulbs.

Another public garden project took place in Groff Park. Members made a garden plan and planted two sugar maples in 2008. In 2009 members spread mulch and planted leucothoe. However, a problem with extremely invasive weeds brought an end to this project.

Still another public project, initiated by Nancy D’Amato, was to plant a year-round garden surrounding the North Amherst Library. In the center of the front garden beds is a welcoming bench. Many fellow Club members help maintain the garden, and the Club now provides some financial support.

In 2012 members decided that a new logo would be beneficial to our Club’s public image. Rather than developing a totally new identifying mark we modernized an existing logo.

On the changing technology front, all but one of our members now communicate by email. After several false starts the Club is now on track to have a real website, which we hope will go live in 2016.

Keeping up the Eighteenth Century Garden on the grounds of the Amherst Historical Society’s Strong House continues. The Club pays for a gardener, but each spring our members turn out to replant flowers, weed, and edge. A path with an archway connects this garden with the beautiful year-round Kinsey garden on the grounds of the Jones Library. Carol Pope, who joined the Garden Club in 1996, designed this garden in memory of her husband, David Kinsey.

In this centennial year of the Garden Club, 2015, our president is Meredith Michaels. Members of the 100th Anniversary committee—Sherry Wilson (chair), Karen Chrisman, Leslie Fisette, Patricia Holland, and Ruth Owen Jones—combed through papers and photographs at the Jones Library to compile our history. Sherry Wilson also interviewed long-time members Susanne Gavin, Hope Davis, Elaine Barker, Wendy Larson, and Lynn Reynolds, and included her own recollections. In January 2016 the Jones Library will display the results in its atrium on large posters designed by Karen Chrisman. Poster topics are “Founding, Early History and Members,” “History and Members,” “Tree Books, Walks, and Projects,” “The Plant Sale,” “The Eighteenth Century Garden,” and “Civic Projects, Beautification, and Relationships.”

Besides the June lecture by Roger Swain at the Yiddish Book Center, and the opening of eight members’ gardens for the Amherst Historical Society garden tour, the celebration of the Garden Club’s centennial includes three October 2015 events: a dinner and an award from the Amherst Chamber of Commerce complete with a video starring former president Susie Lowenstein-Kitchell, a gala dinner for Club members and guests at the Top of the Campus restaurant at the University of Massachusetts, and a public presentation about the Club by Patricia Holland and Elaine Barker at the Amherst Historical Society.

In their remembrances, long-time members cited the camaraderie of fellow members, working together, and learning from each other as the largest benefit of Club membership. As Barbara Hoadley said in June, “The Garden Club of Amherst is moving forward with all of its endeavors, and I am sure it will be around for 100 years more—beautifying, serving, and trying to conserve and educate the area.”

Patricia Holland and Sherry Wilson

Anne Aune
Bruce Aune
Elaine Barker
Jo Ann Brown
*Anne Cann
Karen Chrisman
Jaana Cutson
Nancy D'Amato
Hope Davis
Paola Di Stefano
Lexi Dewey
Leslie Fisette
Denise Gagnon
Susanne Gavin
Cynthia George
*Ann Grose
Norma Hallock
**Phyllis Hastings
Janice Higgins
Barbara Hoadley
Patricia Holland
Carolyn Holstein
Chris Hurn
Miriam Jenkins
Ruth Owen Jones
Ellen Kosmer
Mary Knightly
Wendy Larson
Susan Lowenstein-Kitchell
Meredith Michaels
Carol Pope
Charles Parham
*Bernie Rubinstein
Mina Safizadeh
Susan Sheldon
Beverly Swihart
Kathleen Teagno
Jackie Tuthill
Evelyn Villa

*Fran Wall
Sherry Wilson
Dawn Winkler-Snow