The Garden Club of Amherst Celebrates 100 years of Growing

Founding, Early History and Members

On August 27, 1915 Margaret Smolik invited 6 friends to form a garden club. The other original members were Emma Dakin, Elizabeth Tyler, Jessie Baker, Alice Waugh, Carrie Dickinson, and Susan Skillings. Although this tiny group had grown to 38 members by 1940, with inset of Grayson Elm, 1910; and now has over 100 members, the club still meets in private homes and has a limit on membership so they can still be held in private residences. The history of the Garden Club of Amherst is deeply entwined with that of the town.

In 1915, Mrs. Newlin, who was a local entrepreneur, was a member of the Garden Club. She invited six friends to form a garden club, and the club met weekly at first, as often as possible in the garden of the hostess, on a date chosen by the hostess. Elizabeth Tyler, a trained florist and lecturer on birds and flowers, attended the first meetings. Emma Dakin, who was a trained horticulturist, lived at the Emily House and imparted much of her expertise to the members. She was also elected to be the club president. She taught classes, raised the seedlings to sell at the annual plant sale or to give to members who had room for them. Her always amusing horticultural reports included notices of the katsura tree at Grace Church and raised the seedlings to sell at the annual plant sale or to give to members who had room for them.

In 1959, it won an award from the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts as well as from the Garden Club of America. Frankie France (member 1950-1961) of Shays Street, spearheaded the first “Trees of Amherst” book in 1959. It won an award from the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts as well as from the Garden Club of America.

In 1963, Margret Newlin was elected as the first female president. She was a native of Amherst and had grown up in the town. She was a trained horticulturist and helped the members to plant and care for the garden. She was also a writer and published several articles about her work. She was a member of the Garden Club for 20 years and was the first female president.

In 1965, the club became an official Garden Club and was welcomed its first male member, Chris Hurn. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Garden Club of Amherst has grown from 7 members in 1915 to 38 active members today. In 2008, the club began a scholarship program to help support students in horticulture and related fields.

For 100 years, members of the Garden Club of Amherst have provided beauty for the town, educated the public, and enjoyed gardening together. The organization has flourished as a result of the dedication and hard work of its members.

For the history of the 1st 10 years of the GCA, see 1928.

When the Garden Club was nationalized, they had the idea of creating a national organization. The Garden Club of America was formed in 1925, and the Garden Club of Amherst joined in 1944.

Since the Garden Club of America was formed, there have been six presidents and 25 members in the club. The Garden Club of Amherst has been a part of the Garden Club of America since 1944.

One of the Club’s most accomplished members was Ethel Parke, who was the first female president of the town. She was a trained horticulturist and helped the members to plant and care for the garden. She was also a writer and published several articles about her work. She was a member of the Garden Club for 20 years and was the first female president.

In 1959, the Garden Club of Amherst published the “Trees of Amherst” book, which was a major contribution to the town’s horticulture. The book won an award from the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts as well as from the Garden Club of America.

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