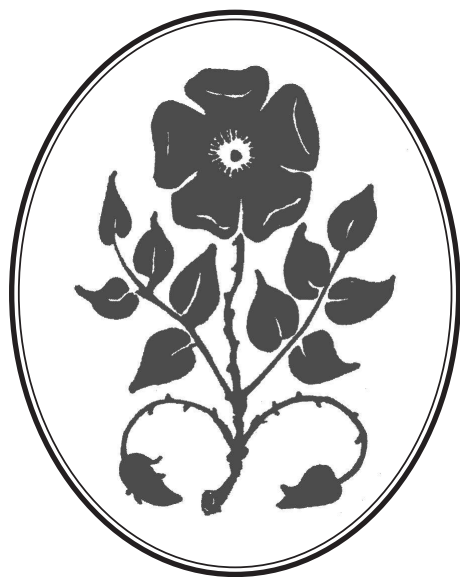


Acton
Garden Club
1934 – 2024

with
90th Anniversary Updates



A Retrospective

Silver Bells and Cockleshells

For many years it was the custom to include some pertinent poem in the printed yearly program of the Club. Also in the early years, each regular meeting was opened with one or more poems about flowers or gardens. It seems appropriate therefore, to include in this little retrospective a part of a poem written, we believe, by Mrs. John Milliken, for the 30th anniversary celebration of the Club's founding:

*'...To that very special day,
When women with inspiration
And information too,
Met to organize this Club
To exchange the truths they knew,
To master techniques in gardening
And to cultivate a pride
In making their home sites places
Where Beauty could abide.*

*In Acton – in 1934 – it was
This Club was given birth
By dedicated women
Who loved to cultivate the Earth.'*

Cover Graphic From:

1937 Program
Yearbook 1985-86
Yearbook 1993-94 (60th Anniversary)

The Acton Garden Club, Inc.
Acton, Massachusetts
Presents

Acton Garden Club
1934 – 2024
with
90th Anniversary Updates

A
Retrospective

By Virginia C. Hahn

Updates By Judy Shuppert and Cathy Fochtman

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Yearbook 1976-77

Preface

This is not a detailed or definitive opus. This is a gentle little history, written in 1994 for the Club's 60th anniversary. Working on it was fascinating and frustrating (as a note of 1972 tells us, several scrapbooks had simply disappeared, too many early clippings could not be identified, and records not dated).

But it was an enjoyable challenge, and I would especially like to thank some people who were very helpful at that time: Betsy Conant and the Acton Historical Society; board members who came to the rescue with dates and proper terminology; and Betty Charter, who generously shared memories one afternoon at her wonderful Fort Pond cottage and, it should be noted, whose husband Frank and son Dean have through the years been so supportive to the work of the Garden Club.



Virginia C Hahn
1994

Dedication

Virginia C. Hahn

9/8/1921 – 4/8/2014

AGC Member – 1986 through 2014

The first issue in 1994 could never have happened but for the efforts of Virginia who first conceived, researched and published this Retrospective.

Note that in this reissue of our history, we have brought the reader up-to-date on the activities and accomplishments of the Club's recent years for our 90th Anniversary.

Judith Shuppert
2024

In the Beginning

The archives contain several brief reports of the first meeting of the Acton Garden Club, but it is perhaps more picturesquely recaptured from the following September 1937 clipping from the local paper: 'In June 1934, 12 [sic] interested lasses met at the home of Mrs. Edwin Hollowell in North Acton and organized the now flourishing Acton Garden Club.' These charter members were:

Mrs. Robert Bond	Mrs. Edwin Hollowell
Mrs. Harold Clapp	Mrs. George Horton
Mrs. Walter Cook	Mrs. O.W. Howe
Mrs. Allen B. Frost	Mrs. Leo Quinn
Miss Lillian Frost (Mrs. Simon Taylor)	
Mrs. J. Gagnon	Mrs. William Tuttle

Eight of these women were still active members at the time of the 10th anniversary and three took part in the 30th celebration. As of 1993, two charter members were still living; Beth Cook, who died in December 1993 at the age of 96 and whose daughter, Phyllis Halladay, has sent on to us many interesting historical records; and Adele Frost, with whom we corresponded several times each year until her death in April, 1997.

Structure of the Club

At the time of its founding, the object of the Club was 'to promote a greater interest in gardening, and to exchange experiences that shall be of mutual benefit to its members.'

At that first meeting, it was decided that there would be just three officers: President, Vice President, and Secretary (the feeling being that there would not be enough money involved to warrant a Treasurer).

It was also voted that there would be two meetings each month during April through September, and one meeting a month from October to March. These would be on the first and third Wednesdays of the month and would be held at members' homes until it was found necessary to have a larger, central meeting place. It was stipulated that there were to be no refreshments; but this rule quickly became

Structure of the Club

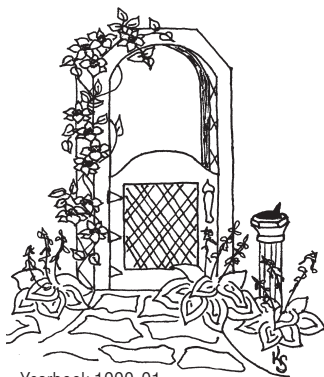
obsolete as hostesses apparently always served tea at these afternoon meetings. The early minutes frequently concluded with reference to the 'dainty refreshments.'

There was great enthusiasm, and these first members forged quickly ahead with the Club's organization. At the second meeting it was realized that finances must be considered. Dues of 50¢ were established as was the 'monthly penny collection' to help defray costs of projects (10¢ in pennies was collected at that meeting). To handle this complexity of money, the duties of a Treasurer were added to those of the Club Secretary. It was also voted that the Secretary should draw up a Constitution and By-Laws. These were presented and accepted at the August 1st meeting.

In addition to the officers already in place, the new By-Laws called for a Treasurer (separate from the Secretary), a Program Chairman and standing committees for Programs, Hostesses, Exhibitions, and Finances. These first By-Laws also decreed that the petunia should be the Club flower. Unfortunately, no reason for this choice can be found in the Club's records.

In May 1935, the By-Laws were amended to provide for an Executive Board of the officers and committee heads to hold special meetings regarding the business of the Club. Also, a newspaper clipping apparently of 1935, reports the creating of the new position of Librarian and Historian.

One of the first acts of the new Executive Board, just a year after the organization of the Club, was to form the Good Cheer committee 'with a member from each precinct.' Through all the years this committee has borne testament to the friendship and caring of Garden Club members, taking note of happy as well as sad events within their immediate families. We note in the Annual Report of 1968 that Good Cheer had sent



Yearbook 1990-91

Structure of the Club

twenty-six cards, seven hankies, and one bouquet to members during that year.

Expenses for this were met originally from the 'penny collection' and later by passing a basket, monthly for many years and then several times a year, until 1990, when *Good Cheer* was finally made a budget item.

The Early Years

From its first meeting, the Garden Club was full of plans and activity, attracting a great deal of interest in the town. By December of 1935, there were 60 members. Obviously larger quarters were needed for meetings. Several were held at the Congregational Church, but in the fall of 1935, the Acton Woman's Club was contacted and agreed to the Garden Club's use of its facilities for eight Thursday meetings a year (the first Thursday after the first Wednesday of each month). For this arrangement, a 'gift' of \$10 was given to the Woman's Club annually. Summer meetings were held in members' gardens or at picnics at nearby spots of gardening interest.

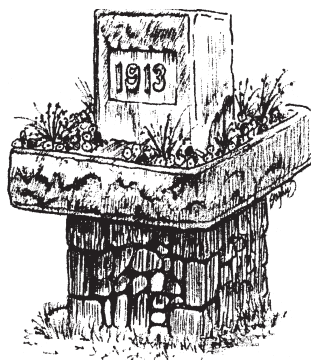
Almost all meetings seem to have been held during the day, usually in the afternoon. Minutes of September 1967 record the decision to start meetings earlier, with tea at 12:30, business at 1:00 and the program at 1:30. The 'tea' was served with a silver tea set which was a gift to the AGC in the early years by Polly Burwaw who was a member from 1940-1983. A newspaper report of 1955, however, announced a Garden Club 'guest night get-together, reviving a custom which the Club carried on in pre-war days.' In 1986, the decision was made to move the monthly meeting from Thursday to Tuesday mornings to accommodate mothers of young children.

The following program for 1936 shows the broad scope of interest and studies of these early years. As with the March program, a number of 'Men's Nights' appear in the records over the years. The subjects would seem to give gentle nudges towards assistance to gardening spouses.

The Early Years

Program – 1936

- February New Flowers for Exhibition. Planning our Garden.
- March Men's Night Lecture.
General Spring Work by John C. Handy
- April Illustrated Lecture on Rock Gardens.
by Miss Margaret I. Jardine, Groton, MA
- May Illustrated Lecture on Continuous Bloom in the Garden.
- June 1st Meeting
Protecting Our Garden During the Dry Weather.
Perennials from Seed.
2nd Meeting
Lecture on Flower Arrangement and Judging Flowers
by Miss Edna Cutter, Dracut, MA.
- July 1st Meeting
Flower Arrangement Contest by Club Members.
2nd Meeting
Wild Flowers and Their Haunts. Speaker – Mr. Will C. Curtis.
- August 1st Meeting
Picnic – Place to be announced.
2nd Meeting
Plans for August Flower Show.
- Sept. 1st Meeting
Division of Perennials and Autumn Care of Biennials.
Plant Exchange by Members.
2nd Meeting
Bulbs the Year Around.
- October Slipping and Propagation of Plants.
Winter Care of Perennials
- November House Plants, Terrariums. Birds
- December Christmas Party.
Aquariums.



Yearbook 1992-93

Program – 1937

- January Indoor Seed Sowing.
Garden Hobbies

Early Membership

According to the Club's first By-Laws, proposals for membership could come from any Club member, be seconded by any member, and candidates elected by a two thirds vote of the membership.

In the '60s and '70s we note that a candidate for membership required two sponsors. After one year of active membership, a Club member was permitted to sponsor one candidate per year. The membership of anyone missing more than six meetings per year was automatically cancelled. However, provision was made for 'leaves of absence' for a year or more. With the payment of \$2, such a member could be reinstated as soon as a vacancy occurred.



Original Hats Competition – 1956

Club records show membership waiting lists into the 1970s. Prospective members on the waiting list were permitted to attend four meetings a year with a payment of 50¢ per meeting. In 1974 this was raised to \$1.

Membership numbers seem to have risen and fallen without much explanation as to reason. In 1957 there was a notice in a *Beacon* article stating that the Garden Club had 'membership openings. The only requisite is a garden.' Minutes of February 1965, however, show 15 new prospective members on the waiting list.

Early Membership

It should be noted that, in its early history, the Garden Club had three male honorary members. The first, Willis Holden, whose farm off Hammond Street included a remarkable wild flower garden, was a life member of the Acton Grange and extremely knowledgeable about gardening. A newspaper clipping of May 3, 1935, reporting on his being made an honorary member of the Garden Club, noted that Mr. Holden was 'keenly interested in the efforts of the ladies and has been of much assistance to them,' and, happily, 'the old gentleman was much pleased with the thoughtfulness of the ladies.'



Yearbook 1980-81

George Greenlaw was made an honorary member in 1971. A past president of the American Rose Society, Mr. Greenlaw moved from Concord to Acton in his later years, and quickly became an active and valued member of the community with close ties to the Garden Club and Suburban Manor which became his home after the death of his daughter. He was an active as well as an honorary member of the Club (the annual report of 1974 refers to him as 'our beloved and only male member') attending meetings, searching out historical information, building bookshelves for Club use, writing poetry, and helping to organize Club volunteer work at Suburban Manor. Following his death on July 27, 1973, the Garden Club established a memorial fund contributing equipment for the greenhouse at

the new High School and providing for the annual contribution of a species plant for the greenhouse in his memory.

Early Membership

Our third honorary male member was Albert R. Jenks, one of the early developers of Acton land and one of its leading and most beloved citizens. He was made an honorary member of the Garden Club in May 1975 in recognition of all he did to make Acton an attractive town in which to live, and for his generosity to the Club.

To this day we have had and welcomed males as regular members who contribute most greatly to our Club.

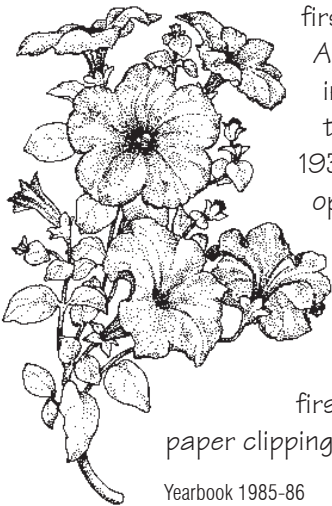
Floats and Flower Shows

In the first By-Laws, only months after the Club's inception, provision was made for an 'Exhibition Chairman.' Thus the stage was set for the Garden Club's long and successful history of exhibiting its floral designs and horticultural talents.

Its first venture was the creation of a float, 'which received much favorable comment,' for the parade of Acton's bi-centennial celebration in the spring of 1935.

This was followed late that summer by a 'very splendid flower show' as the Garden Club participated for the

first time in the annual Acton Agricultural Association Fair; an important civic group in the Acton of those days. A letter of thanks from its president in September 1935, states 'I have heard many express their opinion...the consensus being: the loveliest display of flowers ever staged in Acton.'



In keeping with the professional approach the Club has always shown in preparing for its exhibits, the Club's very first flower show was, according to a newspaper clipping of 1935, preceded by 'a most interesting

Yearbook 1985-86

Floats and Flower Shows

talk by the president of the Concord Garden Club. She was present to cooperate and tell of the experience of her Club in the conduct of a flower show....the information she was able to give this new organization was greatly appreciated...' (and obviously successfully acted upon.)


The Club's second flower show (their first to be done totally on their own) was held in September 1936 on the upper floor of the Woman's Club. The lower rooms were decorated to resemble a garden (photo in our archives) and luncheon, afternoon tea, and coffee were served there. All classes in this show were open to the public, and a special feature of the show was a class for men in both flowers and vegetables. All exhibits were judged by 'the A-B-C method in horticulture and originality.' The local press reported that the ladies 'had worked indefatigably' and 'the most attractive displays were the wonder of the many visitors during the day.'

From subsequent miscellaneous press clippings, it would appear that the Acton Garden Club Flower Show became an annual event for several decades (except during the war years), some years being held twice, both in spring and in fall. These shows were held sometimes at the Woman's Club; but often, according to newspaper reports of the '50s in member's homes, occasionally being spread over two or three homes. Tickets for the May 1953 show were 75¢, children 25¢, with 'Tea' and tax included. The show of 1955, held in 'the new Blanchard

**The
Acton Garden Club**
Presents

A
Standard Flower Show

'Books in Bloom'



Acton Memorial Library
Main Street, Acton

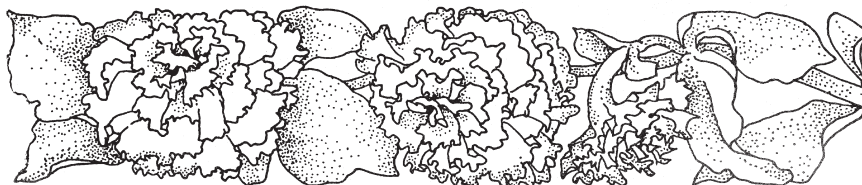
Monday: June 3, 2002 (Noon-9 pm)
and
Tuesday: June 4, 2002 (9 am-7:30 pm)

Floats and Flower Shows

Memorial Auditorium' included displays of garden related products by local merchants.

Since joining the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts in 1946, Acton Garden Club has followed the National Council's standardized guidelines for flower shows. The Federation encourages its member clubs to hold a show at least every few years, and available records would indicate that we have done so, with considerable recognition by way of Federation awards (see yearbooks).

It is also noted that the Flower Shows held for the past 20 years have been free to the public.



Yearbook 1985-86

Through the years, Acton Garden Club members have also exhibited at the Topsfield, Barnstable, Marshfield Fairs; the Central District Flower Show held at Tower Hill Botanic Gardens; and the Newport Flower Show.

The New England Spring Flower Show is another arena where individual members of our Club continued to exhibit in categories of both design and horticulture. In 1973, the Horticulture Committee assembled an exhibit for a bow window. Though the Club's entry took only a third place that year, each of the judges commented on its educational value.

In 1975, the Club again submitted an entry in the bow window class of the Amateur Horticulture Section, this time winning the blue ribbon of first place, as it did again in 1978 for a north window sill. Although, from the records it would appear that these windows have been the only concerted Club entry into the New England Spring

Floats and Flower Shows

Flower Show, it should be noted that in recent years, members of this committee, now known as the Horticulture Study Group, have exhibited in the challenge class.

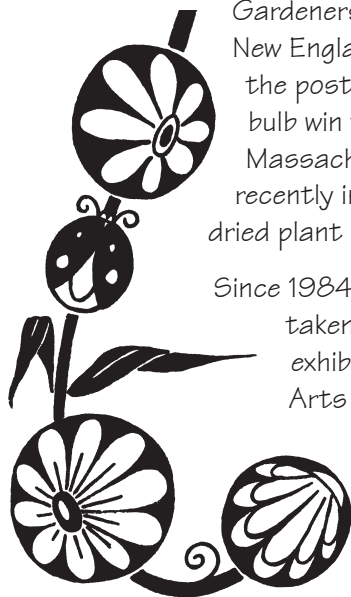
Club members have been involved with the New England Spring Flower Show as General and Staging Chairs of Design Division I and Class Consultants for Design Division II. In 2008, the Acton Garden Club won the club competition for its table design. Individuals have also been successful winning prestigious top awards including the Ruth A. Wallach Award, the Susan Scheel Thomas Novice Award and the Claire Richards Award.

In 2010 the Club won the National Garden Clubs, Inc. flower show award, the Federation's Margaret E. Marsh Flower Show Achievement Award, the Violet E. McClaren Flower Show Schedule Award and the Jane D. Porter State Flower Show Award for 'All About Town' celebrating Acton's 275th Anniversary.

It should also be noted that our Junior Gardeners enthusiastically participated in the New England Spring Flower Show. They entered the poster competition; had a forced paperwhite bulb win the *Green Thumb Award* given by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society; and most recently in 2008, submitted 13 collages made of dried plant material.

Since 1984, Acton Garden Club designers have taken part in the prestigious 'Art in Bloom' exhibit each spring at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

In addition, several members participate in 'Flora in Winter,' a floral design exhibition sponsored in collaboration with the Worcester Art Museum and Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Boylston.



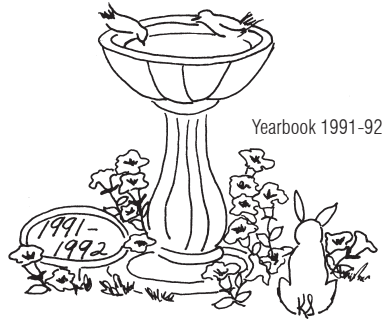
Outreach

In addition to involvement with neighboring garden clubs as well as the townspeople of Acton through programs and flower shows, our Club has reached out often and generously to support other organizations.

During the years of World War II, Acton joined other garden clubs in providing decorations, particularly at holiday times, for hospitals and USO clubs, and a clipping of 1956 mentions Acton Garden Club furnishing flowers for patients at Fort Devens.

Also, when the bombing of London necessitated converting public flower gardens into desperately needed vegetable plots, the Club 'reached out,' this time across the sea to Acton, England, sending 4 packets of onion seeds as a gesture of support and friendship. Our archives contain a letter of gratitude from the Lord Mayor of Acton, England and word that an onion category of their Flower Show had been renamed for our Acton.

In 1973 the Chamber of Commerce relied on Garden Club members to serve as judges in their annual 'Acton Looks Good' contest. In recent years the Club has taken over this responsibility which is now limited to Acton businesses.



For many years Garden Club volunteers provided a weekly donation of either a plant or a live or dried flower arrangement for the Memorial Library. This not only gave pleasure to the library patrons but provided an opportunity to launch both the design and horticultural talents of aspiring Garden Club members.

Unfortunately, increasing work pressures made it impossible for the Library staff to care properly either for these donations or, indeed, for its own permanent plant population. The Library requested

Outreach

that the Club take on responsibility for this maintenance, but it was not deemed feasible and so the Library Flower Committee came to an end.

In 2015, volunteers again provided the Library with a bi-weekly flower arrangement; donating, maintaining and refreshing the arrangement for the front desk, which continues to this day. The Club's relationship with the Library remains close, with our contributions over the years of books to their gardening collection, and floral arrangements which we enjoy providing for their special events. In addition, many of the Club's renowned Flower Shows have been staged in the Library.

Similarly, in 1972 at Emerson Hospital, we joined with other garden clubs in the area, each taking a one-month responsibility to furnish a timely floral arrangement for the front desk, a happy collaboration for almost two decades. Unfortunately, the arrangements, 'victims of the times,' started to disappear and in 1989 Emerson's Head of Volunteer Services, with appreciation and apologies, advised the garden clubs that she could no longer ask them to continue this service.

In recent years our Club has provided arrangements for events of the Council on Aging, the annual 'Tastes of Our Towns' benefit of the Concord Family Services, for a home for 'battered women' in Sudbury, for United Way concerts, for special museum shows such as the *Old Concord Christmas*, the Acton Historical Society's *Hosmer House Christmas Open House*, celebrations at Fruitlands in Harvard, and the exhibition of antique doll houses at the Salisbury Mansion in Worcester.

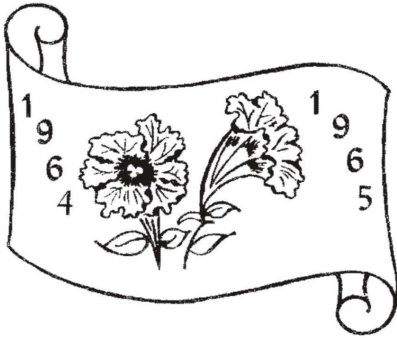


Yearbook 2007-08

Through our benevolence, the Garden Club furnishes passes to the Arnold Arboretum, Garden in the Woods, and the Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Boylston (now known as the New England Botanical Garden at Tower Hill). The Club has also contributed to the Children's Discovery Museums in Acton.

Outreach

This would seem the proper place to speak of two Garden Therapy programs, organizationally grouped with the other 'service' committees under a newly reconstituted Community Services Program.



On the Cover of the 1964-65 Yearbook – AGC 30th Year

The first was Suburban Manor, which from Club records would seem to have started in 1972 with 'doing the flowers' at the local nursing home. In 1976, there is indication of a small group from the Acton Garden Club arranging flowers with residents in the dining room there.

Later, member volunteers worked weekly directly with the residents in teaching and supervising a variety of garden-related projects until our connection with the Manor ended in December 2006.

Minutes of January 1975 report that Garden Club therapy work had begun at Emerson Hospital's psychiatric section, Wheeler III. Here, member volunteers worked directly twice a month with the occupational therapist. The program has been very successful and at the request of the hospital in 2018, was expanded to a weekly session which runs from September through June.

A nearly four-year hiatus occurred in 2020-2023 due to the March 2020 Pandemic, but has been successfully relaunched since November 2023.

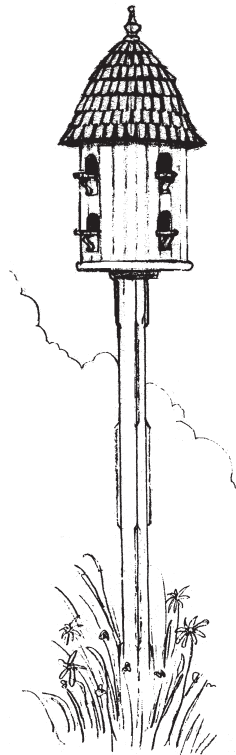
To keep up with the times, the Acton Garden Club website, 'ActonGardenClub.org,' was first established by Domain Registration in 2003 with a public access section and a members' only access section. In 2018, the website had a total redesign.

Environmental Involvement

Although our constitution spoke only of 'promoting a greater interest in gardening,' almost from its beginning, the Garden Club was involved in the environmental concerns of the Acton community. A newspaper clipping of September 1936 was to comment 'this Club not two years old has been one of the outstanding organizations in point of civic achievement in the town.'

The Club's first project along these lines was the landscaping of the 'new High School' (later became part of McCarthy-Towne School which has subsequently been repurposed as housing). Snapshots of 1935 show the school proudly sitting in the midst of barren, rocky terrain. The local paper reported, 'Evergreens are being planted and the rock garden is a thing of beauty at this time. Mountain laurel, rhododendrons and other attractive shrubbery are being placed at advantageous points about the grounds.' In the very same paragraph we read that it was voted to hold a food sale (foods and donors are listed) opposite the library, apparently to pay for the High School landscaping.

On numerous occasions, the Club encouraged and enlisted the help of young people in its work to improve the environment. In the early years it donated cash prizes ranging from 50¢-\$3, to 4-H Club members who achieved 'the best gardens in all the Actons.' Later, following a program where the speaker emphasized the ravages caused by ragweed. The Club offered a \$5 prize to the Girl or Boy Scout who would bring in the largest amount of 'that obnoxious weed' to be destroyed. Records mention that 50,000 plants were destroyed.



Yearbook 1995-96

Environmental Involvement

In conjunction with a period of the Federation's particular focus on roadside beautification, there was a great emphasis in the '50s, and again later in the '70s, on combating litter in the community. A 'Litterbug Chairman' was appointed, work parties were organized, posters were produced, scouts helped to paint the litter baskets which were placed strategically around town, and Garden Club members were authorized to take down and report to the Bureau of Motor Vehicle Registration the license plate numbers of cars from which trash was being thrown.

Another project of delicate but astonishing endeavor was 'Operation Rescue.' In October 1976, when the Briar Brook area of North Acton was about to be bulldozed for development, Garden Club members dug in to save as many *Ladyslippers* as possible, transferring them to the Spring Hill Conservation Area.

Through the years, the Garden Club has worked closely with the Conservation Commission of the town, and was involved in promoting good communication between town boards and conservation groups for effective joint efforts. In the 1970s the Club was instrumental in organizing the building of the floating boardwalk and viewing platform at Will's Hole and worked with the Town on situating new trails, the mapping and clearing of old ones, and in providing signs for the conservation areas. In the mid 1970s, the Garden Club organized and led a series of walks over town conservation areas to acquaint Acton citizens with the beauty and environmental importance of these lands.

For several years starting in 1997 the Club participated in 'Earth Day' activities, initially celebrated at the Acton Arboretum and later at St. Matthew's Church. The Chairs of Conservation/Environmental Concerns also give reports at the general meetings keeping the membership up-to-date on environmental issues.

A generous bequest from Shirley Towle, a longtime member and former President, allows the Club to sponsor a series of lectures featuring horticultural or environmental topics. These lectures were started in 2013, are held approximately every 18-24 months at the

Environmental Involvement

Town Hall (with a remote participation option via Zoom), and are open to the public and free of charge.

In July 2009, the Acton Garden Club recognized the seriousness of Lyme Disease and enlisted the assistance of the Town of Acton to combat it by sponsoring a 400-signature petition which the Club presented as a 'Citizen's Concern' to the Acton Board of Selectmen and Board of Health (BOH).

The BOH directed the Acton Health Department to increase their education to the community about the prevention, identification and treatment of Lyme Disease and other tick-borne illnesses. The Acton Garden Club partnered with the Acton Health Department with the first town-wide presentation, subsequent grant initiatives, and continues to assist with their education efforts today.

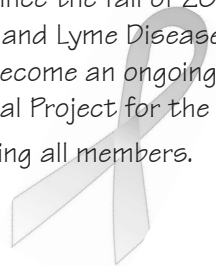
The public interest in the award-winning June 2010 'Living With Wildlife' AGC Standard Flower Show educational exhibit led us to 'taking it on the road' to local events and venues. For our work, the Club received both Massachusetts Federation and National Garden Clubs, Inc. 'Civic' and 'Special Achievement' awards.



'Living With Wildlife'
Display by Sandra Bonzagni and Joan Yatteau

An ongoing campaign includes the wearing of lime green ribbons by all members at our annual Plant Sales, Town functions and during the month of May for Lyme Disease Awareness Month.

Since the fall of 2009, Ticks and Lyme Disease has become an ongoing Special Project for the Club, involving all members.



Beautifying of Public Grounds

A 1935 newspaper article on the Garden Club stating that 'the ultimate object of the Club is to assist in the beautifying of public grounds in the town' was to prove itself again and again over the years.



Yearbook 2012-13
A Timothy Harrigan Memorial
Container in W. Acton

In addition to the Club's work in Acton and West Acton centers, planting was done at Hayward and Main Streets, at Concord Road and 2A, at Strawberry Hill and 2A, the Isaac Davis House, the various schools, and around Town Hall, and the Police and Fire Stations. Kelly's Corner was planted with bulbs and day lilies, and there were plans to join with the Junior Chamber of Commerce in more extensive landscaping there. Gardens were planted at Windsor Green senior housing complex and trees were given to the town at the South Acton Railroad Station and by the tennis courts at Elm Street.

The Timothy Harrigan Memorial Fund replaced the barrels in West Acton with new square containers, which were purchased and placed in the fall of 2011.

These projects seem to have been fairly randomly prompted by individual or group interest, and available records do not show exactly when they either started or finished. Eventually it was realized that for the Club to make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the beautification and environmental improvement of the Town, available funds and energy had to be limited and focused.

Working towards this goal, a special committee was set up and in January 1989 presented to the board a proposal for a reorganized and strengthened Environmental Improvement Program. For this project the Club later received the Federation's *Four Seasons Award* for civic beautification.

Beautifying of Public Grounds

With very slight modification to this program in 1993, all 'service committees' are now under the Community Service Program, supervised by the Vice President and with the same Environmental Improvement Program requirement that active members work in one of the Club's areas of responsibility at least four times each year.



Town Hall Oval - 1984
Gift to the Town for AGC's 50th Anniversary

Historical background on three of our permanent areas of responsibility follows. In addition to these, we now do seasonal plantings and maintenance at the Acton Center trough, the West Acton trough and planters, the Fire and Public Safety Buildings, and the Town Hall Oval which was a gift to the Town in celebration of the Club's 50th Anniversary. A redesign of the Oval by the Club and the installation of the fountain/planter which was originally owned by Mable Jenks (member from 1941-1972), is our gift to the Town in celebration of AGC's 90th Anniversary, the dedication taken place on May 1, 2024.

Separate mention should be made of three areas that have become important parts of our permanent Community Service Program:

Meeting House Hill

This area, bounded by Nagog Hill Road and Main Street, was brought to the Club's attention by the Selectmen in 1963. This site,

Beautifying of Public Grounds

the geographical center of Acton, had been used for the construction of the first meeting house, the establishment of which was one of the conditions of the act of incorporation of the Town of Acton from Concord land in 1735.

In more recent years, the land had been occupied by a village school which was demolished in 1960. In 1963, a stepping stone from the original meeting house was returned to the site, and the Selectmen, promising that the town would furnish loam, labor and seeding for an attractive grassy area around it, asked the Garden Club to place some plantings there.



Investigating the situation, some of the members became excited about the possibilities of developing the area into a park with a special historical significance. Club records of the '60s refer to it as 'the Historical Site,' and indicate that a committee was appointed and the sum of

\$200 of Club funds voted for the project.

Enthusiasm grew rapidly, not only within the Garden Club, but throughout the town. A proposal, submitted by the Club to the Bay State Beautification Program, which was sponsored jointly by Sears Roebuck with the Massachusetts Garden Club Federation, won a first prize of \$200 for 'seed money.' Landscape architect Dorothea Harrison of Concord was commissioned to prepare a plot plan for landscaping the site, and the original work and funds of Garden Club members was augmented by the donations of time and money by many civic groups, community businesses and individuals.

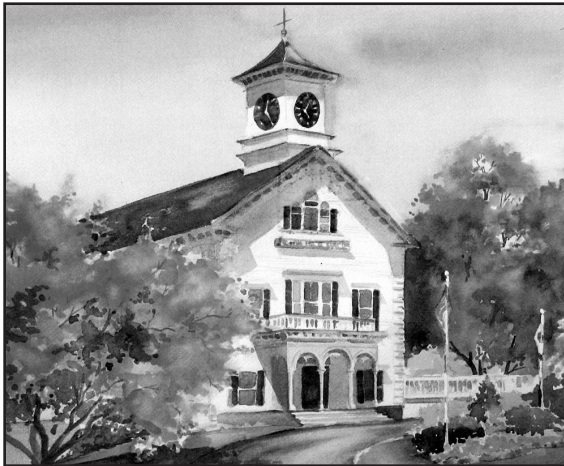
It is interesting to note in Club minutes of June 1965 that in its early years, Meeting House Hill, as it was then coming to be called, was a Clubwide concern. Members were reminded that 'as a Club project, all members of the Club will be expected to give some time during the spring and summer seasons to aid in the success of this park.' Of further interest was the decree that 'the Conservation

Beautifying of Public Grounds

Committee was to take over a small area in the park which will contain wild flowers labeled and preserved for study as well as appreciation.'

The new millennium brought a renewed interest to Meeting House Hill. In 2006, with a grant from the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts, shrubs were installed in the area between the lawn and the wildflowers. Fred Knipple, a generous friend of the Club, donated many unusual rhododendrons and azaleas as well as a *Stewartia* tree and The Jane Olsen Memorial Bench was installed.

In 2008, assisted by a generous gift from the Acton Lions Club of Acton, we were able to install a much needed irrigation system, which was our 75th Anniversary gift to the Town. So now, at this special point in our history, with a concentrated effort to improve the soil and the addition of much more sunshine on the site, the Club looked forward to seeing the rebirth of Meeting House Hill.



Yearbook 2011-12

In 2008, looking ahead to the celebration of our Diamond Jubilee, the Club reconfigured our stewardship of the Meeting House Hill park, setting it up financially into two separate endowments, one now known as *Daffodil Run* and the other the *Wildflower Garden*.

Beautifying of Public Grounds

Mabel Jenks Memorial Rose Garden

On October 26, 1972 Mabel Jenks, a very active and much loved member of both the Garden Club and the Woman's Club, died. Her husband, Albert Jenks, gave the Garden Club funds to establish a garden in her memory on the grounds of the Woman's Club. Mrs. Isadore Smith, a landscape designer from Concord, was engaged to draw up a three-year plan for its development which would include 31 old fashioned roses, an unusual trellis, four rustic benches, and railroad tie steps leading from the house down to the garden.



Yearbook 1985-86

Our Annual Report of 1975 notes that "Several trees were cut to let in the sun and a big project was cleaning out the bushes and poison ivy along the wall. The hardest part of the work was completed and, in 1976 for the creation of the Mabel Jenks Garden, the Club received the Federation's Civic Projects Award IIC for the landscaping of a historic place."

In 2005, with a generous invitation of the Acton Selectmen to the Club to

use the Francis Faulkner meeting room of the Town Hall for our September – June monthly meetings, we are no longer involved with the Woman's Club. The original Jenks funds were then transferred to educational projects.

The Herb Garden of the Acton Arboretum

In 1986, an amended town article specified that conservation land which had been purchased earlier was to be used for the Acton

Beautifying of Public Grounds

Arboretum. In 1989, an invitation was extended to the Garden Club to research and develop a period herb garden in a historical foundation on the site. Garden Club member and landscape designer Sue Whitcomb prepared a design plan for herbs representative of the mid-19th century.

The foundation in which the garden is situated was probably that of the house of John Cragin in 1738, the only home ever built on the land.



The Herb Garden at the Acton Arboretum

Town staff cleared out the foundation to a depth of approximately two feet, restored the stone walls and filled in the raised beds. Planting by Garden Club members began in the fall of 1989. Two years later a flourishing and extensive herb garden was in place. It is maintained by a special committee of the Club's Community Services program. The Garden Club received the Federation's *May Duff Walters Trophy* for Preservation of Beauty in recognition of the development of this garden.

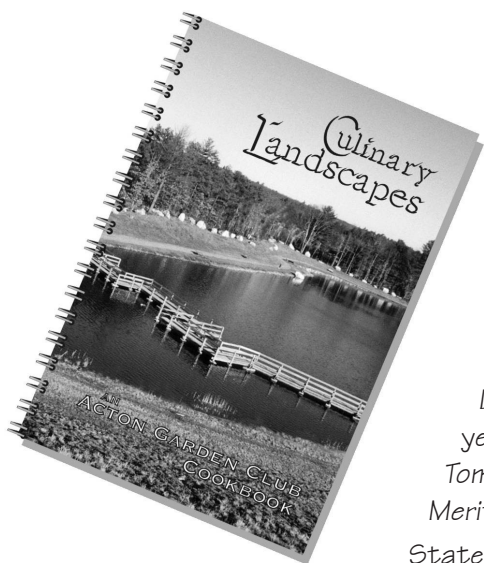
The 2006 Annual Report noted that at West Acton's *Octoberfest* and later at the *Farmers' Market*: the Club had offered

Beautifying of Public Grounds

two daffodil cultivars and later tulip bulbs, to members and customers at 'near-wholesale-cost.' In 2016 it was also stated that 1,700 bulbs were sold.

Also noted in our 2013-14 Annual Report: 'At our September regular meeting we collected \$370 to go toward the purchase of bulbs for the Marathon Daffodil Project, the planting of daffodils along the 26.5 miles of the Boston Marathon route to inspire future runners.'

For several years we have received grants from the *PETALS* project, a collaboration of the National Council of Garden Clubs and Shell Oil, to encourage horticultural beautification and/or environmental conservation. The Club has had a dynamic role in the development of NARA (North Acton Recreation Area and later re-named Nathaniel Allen Recreation Area), Acton's recreation park which opened in September 1999. Members have been involved in its ongoing landscaping and in 2000, Junior Gardeners celebrated Arbor Day by planting a large European Beech tree at the park.



Financial contributions to the implementation of our many projects there in recent years came from a *PETALS* grant; the sale of seedling trees by Club members at Earth Day; and the Club's production and sale of the *Culinary Landscapes* cookbook in the year 2000 which won the *Tommy Donnan Certificate of Merit* from the National Council of State Garden Clubs.

Finances

With the Garden Club's rapidly growing involvement in projects and civic improvement, it was soon evident that the income from the 'penny collections' and modest dues of the earliest years were not going to be enough. But the members were dauntless, and filled with enthusiasm and imagination.

Once a project was approved, they simply set out with verve and hard work to raise the funds to pay for it. Club records as well as newspaper accounts over the years tell of luncheons, teas and bake sales; elaborate house tours and/or garden tours almost always seem to have been accompanied by 'Tea,' sales for plants and baked goods, and boutiques with handmade contributions from all members. Many of these frequent 'money makers' (and there is reference in minutes of the mid '60s to the 'Money Making Chairman') were later expanded and formalized into the fund raising responsibilities of the Ways and Means Committee which was created in 1968.

Within the Club structure, dues of course rose gradually but steadily, and for many years there was a guest fee which had started at 5¢ a meeting, but eventually rose to \$1 before its demise. By 2006 there were 5 categories of membership and dues established:

- Active – \$30 (with a limit of 99)
- Associate – \$40 (member for 15 years)
- Senior Associate – \$35 (70 years or more)
- Leave of Absence – \$30
- Honorary

As mentioned earlier, Good Cheer was self-sustaining and for a while even contributed to the Club's other undertakings. Minutes of February 1969 show that it was voted to donate the Good Cheer collection that month to fight Dutch Elm disease; some time later the contents of the basket were given to the 'Isaac Davis Trail' project.

In our 60th Anniversary year, endowment funds were established for three of our gardens (the Mabel Jenks Rose Garden, Meeting House Hill, and the Herb Garden of the Acton Arboretum) to ensure continued support for their maintenance.

Finances

The Club's Annual Plant Sale, our major fund raiser with total Club participation, provides funds for community service projects, scholarships, grants, and civic beautification for the Town.

Space for Code <input type="radio"/>	Botanical Name Common Name	On Front	This End to be stuck into pot
Space for Price	Color of Flower Height of Plant Full Sun (S), Part Sun/Part Shade (pSh) or Shade (Sh)	On Back	This End to be stuck into pot

Plant Stake that goes with every perennial plant sold - In every yearbook since 2007

The sale was originally held on the grounds of the Library. For several years it had been staged with great success on the Acton Common, then later moved across the street to the Town's 'Red House' property at 468 Main St., where the week preceding the sale, plants are delivered and organized for the sale.



It is noted on the financial history record that in 1985, after years of intensive work, Acton Garden Club received 'not for profit' and incorporated status, and was given tax exemption and liability protection. Thus now, as an incorporated body, three Directors serve with rotating terms to oversee the general health of the Club.

Finances

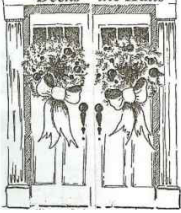
A special fund raiser for 2007-08 was a House Tour of the homes of 7 members which had been decorated for the holidays.

The Acton Garden Club invites you to our

Holiday House Tour

December 11, 2007

Tuesday
10 am – 4 pm



Tickets

Advance - \$20
At the Door - \$25

Start this tour of uniquely decorated homes by receiving a map at the

Acton Town Hall, Room 204, 472 Main St., Acton, MA

For Information and Advance Tickets Call: Janet Richard - 978.263.7975

Starting in 2022, credit cards were accepted for payments through the 'Square' credit card processing system.

The 2022-23 Treasurer's Report stated Receipts for the May 21, 2022 sale were \$19,910, with Expenses of \$4,249.31. The Annual Report stated that there were 1,890 plants received at the Red House and \$1,000 came from a raffle of donated items from Town businesses and Club members.

From the beginning, files and all other Club materials were kept in members' homes. To consolidate all AGC files, etc. in one place, in 2012 the Club started to rent a storage unit (Storage Unit #475A, Acton Main Street Mini Storage, 928 Main Street, Acton). The unit holds historical information dating back to the inception of the Club and files including Incorporation papers, financial records, annual reports, yearbooks, publicity and press books, meeting minutes, Club awards, scrapbooks of projects done over the years and staging materials.

And Always Learning

One of the objectives of the Garden Club is to provide an atmosphere in which to learn – about gardening, about floral design, and about our environment. From the very beginning, rich opportunity for this has been available within the Club through the monthly programs and the Horticulture Study Group. Interesting and very useful ‘Hort Hints’ are presented briefly to the Club members at each monthly meeting and also sent via Email to members. This is an outgrowth of the Horticulture Study Group.



June 2008 Horticulture Study Group Workshop
‘Sand-Casting a Leaf’ at NARA Park

In 1996, the Floral Design Study Group was started under the direction of the newly created position of Director of Floral Concerns (Thelma Shoneman was its first director). This is both a learning and creative group, open to members of all levels of experience and has become a launch pad for future floral designers.

In addition, early records show that even in the mid-1930s, members were taking advantage of the ‘interesting and instructive data’ offered at the Massachusetts State College Experimental Field Station in Waltham with members taking classes for a nominal charge at the Espousal Center in Waltham.

And Always Learning

When Acton Garden Club joined the Federation of Massachusetts Garden Clubs in 1946, enormous resources became available through Federation programs, publications, workshops, specialized schools, and the opportunity for closer association with other garden clubs. The broad scope of the Federation's numerous awards offers many challenges for the development of new Club programs and the satisfying recognition of its work. It should also be noted here that as a result of their studies, numerous AGC members are presently serving the Federation as Flower Show Judges, Landscape Design Consultants, Gardening Study Consultants, and/or Environmental Consultants.

Other opportunities to advance our knowledge in gardening come through our memberships in the Arnold Arboretum, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, the Native Plant Trust and the Worcester Horticultural Society. These all offer classes and on-site resources.

In 2021, Plant Identification Tours (PIT) were first started. A member volunteers his/her garden to tour and others are invited to attend this yard and/or garden and discuss what they see; if they can identify a plant that the owner doesn't know; remark about how beautiful the garden is and just enjoy being together and seeing another person's garden. 'It's been a very successful endeavor, one we plan to continue' was noted in that year's Annual Report.

Through a generous gift from the estate of long time member and past President, Joan Yatteau, the Club started the 'Botanical Label Project' in 2021. Working with the Friends of the Acton Arboretum, 578 signs and tags of various sizes were designed, sorted and installed to identify trees and shrubs throughout the town.



Lady Acton
Goes to 'Holly Days' at Tower Hill

And Always Learning

In addition to learning themselves, almost from the beginning, Club members have been concerned with fostering learning in young people. Earlier mention has been made of encouraging 4-H Club gardeners in their horticultural and environmental efforts. Records of 1938 show that members of the 4-H Garden Club were invited to meet with our Garden Club members several times a year and that we had given assistance in preparing their entries for a children's class in the Club flower show that year. As the local paper reported '...each jolly little face lighted up for they too will have entries in the show next week.'



A perusal of the minutes indicates that it was in November 1970 that having our own Junior Gardeners group was first discussed. It was proposed that initially it be limited to children of Club members, with the possibility of later including non-affiliated youngsters. In recent years our active group of Junior Gardeners comprised grandchildren as well as children of Club members. In addition to promoting a love of gardening and an appreciation of the beauty and value of our natural resources, the children have participated in Club flower shows, in creating arrangements for seniors, in wildflower and tree planting at NARA Park and the New England Spring Flower Shows.

As club members' grandchildren outgrew the Junior Gardeners program, it was ended. However, desire to educate and garden with children continued. The Gardening With Young People program was created for this very purpose. Over time, this committee has reached out to the community and has developed a relationship and programs with the Acton Memorial Library, AB Buddies Program at Acton Boxborough Regional High School, the elementary schools in the district, the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Community Education, among others.

A final note on the Club's encouragement to young people is our scholarship program. Through the years, funds have been given to many deserving individuals, but early records do not show any standardized procedures or qualification for this. In 1964, scholarship

And Always Learning

funds were awarded to an Acton student at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture; another year money went to a pre-med student at McGill; and still another year, a teacher in the Acton schools was the proposed recipient.



Yearbook 2007-08

However, for some years now there have been established criteria for the selection of the recipient of Acton Garden Club's annual scholarship, which in 1990 was raised to the amount of \$1,000. The candidate, an Acton resident with a strong school record and an interest in environmental matters, is sought from either (or both) the Acton-Boxborough Regional High School or the Minuteman Vocational Technical High School. If no suitable candidate is found in any one year, that money must be spent that year in a charitable contribution.

In addition to our annual student scholarship award, the Club has established a grant opportunity for teachers in the Acton-Boxborough Regional Schools or Town employees to provide funds for environmentally related programs. This was established through memorial contributions of the families and friends honoring Janet Bubier and Elinor Miller, active members who died in 1996. Also reflecting Jan's long and close association with the Federation and special interest in miniature displays, a silver bowl was presented to the Federation to be awarded to the club whose standard flower show displays the greatest creative interpretation of a mini or small section.

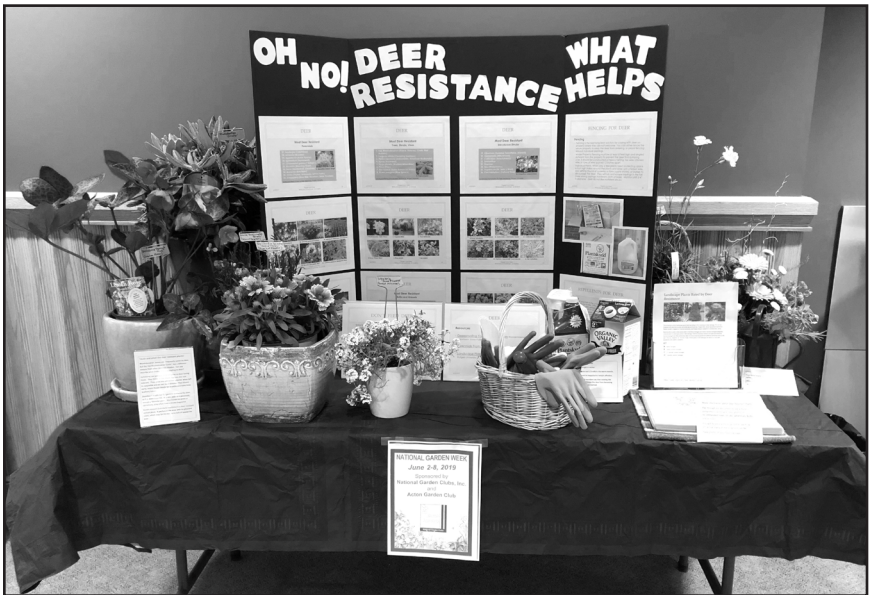
Awards

In addition to the awards that appear above, the Club and many of its members have received many more.

Starting in 2000, the Yearbook received the first of many National Garden Clubs, Inc. and Federation of MA awards. The Yearbooks for 2010-11, 2016-17 and 2018-19 all received the National Garden Clubs, Inc. 1st Place.

It is stated in the 2010-11 Annual Report: 'The president of the GCFM pointed out that in the last ten years, the Acton Garden Club has won more awards than any other club in the Federation.'

The Club and its members has a long history of receiving awards and certificates which include: *The 75th Anniversary Retrospective*, *Publicity and Press Books*, the *School Garden Project*, *AGC Annual Reports and Newsletters*, *Youth Horticulture Education*, the *AGC Website*, *Junior Gardeners*, *AGC members' Service and Design*, *Civic Projects*, *'Waterwise Gardening,' Digital Photo History of the Club Year* and *Members' Special Achievements*.



'Deer Resistance - What Helps'
AGC Display at the Acton Memorial Library - 2019 National Garden Week

The Covid Years, 2020 – 2023

The years 2020 to 2023, the time of the Covid pandemic, encompasses one of the most challenging times in recent recollection. This was a war, not with people but with a VIRUS.

The illness created fear, chaos, anger, and, sadly, millions of lives lost. The Acton Garden Club, like all organizations, was drawn into the chaos, and we looked for ways to manage, to survive, to hang together and not dissolve. The following are excerpts with additional commentary from the Presidents' Letters of the period, as published in the respective yearbooks. These selections capture the impact of these years on the Club as well as the creativity and resiliency of our members.

2020-2021 – The last recollection of normal activity is March 2020, as we were approaching the date of our annual meeting, traditionally a luncheon affair. Concern was raised about the viability of having a luncheon with the virus afflicting so many people so quickly. The decision was made for us when the entire country was ordered into lockdown.

The Garden Club determined to plod on and suddenly 'Zoom' became a noun and a verb, with meetings held 'virtual.' Email communication was critical to maintaining our connectedness. And as situations arose, processes were created to deal with them. Thanks to our Communications Chair, 'Lemons to Lemonade' became our mantra. The successful Plant Sale was virtual, members only, with pickups arranged to avoid personal contact.

President Fran Portante wrote: 'As fall approaches, there is a large unknown factor that leaves us in a continued state of flux. We have planned for the best, as reflected in the 2020-2021 schedule.'

**The Pandemic with all its restrictions, was to last 3 years, something unimaginable as we prepared to enter the 2021-2022 plan year.*

2021-2022 – President Maura Sharp, 2022–2023, wrote: 'Our Club demonstrated creativity and resilience throughout the year by having all meetings on Zoom. We met virtually for board meetings,

The Covid Years, 2020 – 2023

general meetings, and even Floral Design. Thelma Shoneman's grandson directed and produced her design presentations, assisted by Cathy Fochtman.

An added benefit to 'Zooming' was to have speakers from far away, unaffected by distance or weather. And again, our plant sale was virtual, expanded to include friends, neighbors and even relatives.'



Yearbook 2021-22
Screen Capture of AGC Zoom Meeting – June 2021

By 2023, in spite of the resurgence of Covid, and aided by the availability of vaccines that reduced the severity of infections, the Club began its return to normalcy. Meetings were now 'hybrid,' both virtual and in person, as individuals chose which worked best for them.

We held our regular Plant Sale for the first time in two years. The gardens around town had continued to be maintained, planters were dressed up for each season, the work of the Club was in full swing.

We had survived the pandemic, but we weren't the same. We had succeeded in staying intact, and had become stronger. We are resilient, creative, flexible, and ultimately successful.

2012-2013

Acton Garden Club 'To Do' List



REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING
DECEMBER WORKSHOP
HOLIDAY CANDLE BOBECHEES

Oktoberfest

'Flora in Winter'

Plant Sale

Community Services

Civic Beautification

'Art in Bloom'

**'Acton's Looking Good'
Contest**

Work in:

Wildflower Garden

Daffodil Run

Herb Garden

**Annual Meeting
& Luncheon**

**Boston
Flower & Garden Show**

Floral Design Workshop

June High Tea

Holly Days



**Promote Public Awareness
of Ticks and Lyme Disease**

**Emerson Hospital
Garden Therapy**

Horticulture Meeting

**Work at the Red House Garage
Receiving and Pricing Plants**

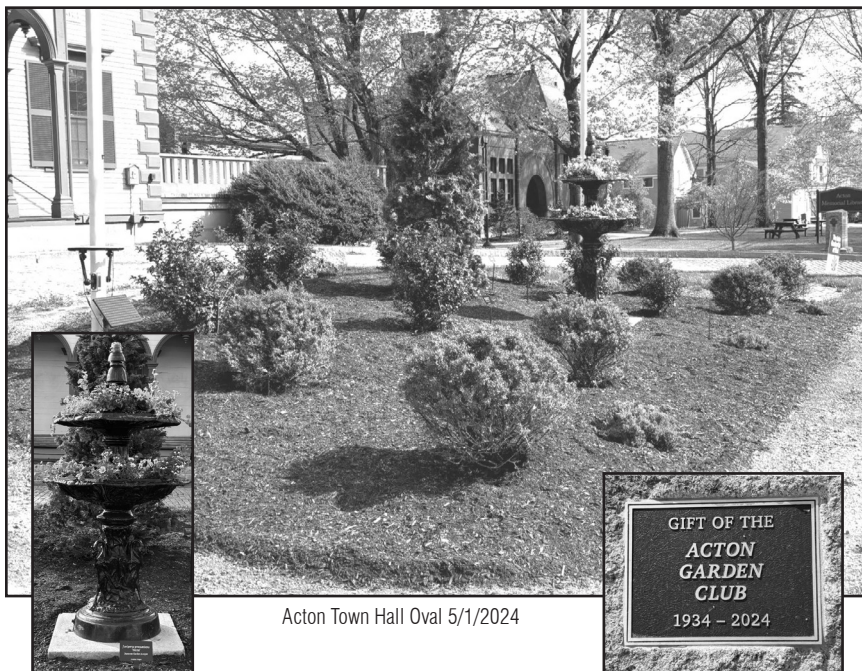
Gardening with Young People

90th Anniversary Celebration Events

May 1, 2024 – Dedication of the Oval Garden at the
Town Hall (AGC's Gift to Acton)
Followed by a Reception

September 17, 2024 – Afternoon Tea at the Acton
Woman's Club

December 5, 2024 – A 'Books in Bloom' Presentation
'Acton Garden Club, A Retrospective'
Reissue with 90th Anniversary Updates



Acton Town Hall Oval 5/1/2024

AND SO WE GO – THROUGH THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Check our World Wide Web Page:
www.ActonGardenClub.org

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www.facebook.com/146801296153643