

CLUB HISTORY

Brief History

The West Newbury Garden Club was organized in 1936 in the depths of the depression. The Club's first President, Mrs. Frank Gowen, served one year. The Club's earliest meetings took place at members' homes. The formalities of hats, gloves, and starched tablecloths prevailed, as did daytime meetings and a wait list for new members. The original membership enjoyed easy access to abundant natural materials, so home decoration workshops were popular, as were programs featuring flower arranging and speakers from local nurseries.

The club served as a way of connecting socially, especially for newcomers to the community. Current club membership includes daughters of previous club members as well as long-standing and cherished friendships of 30 years or more. The Club's social connections and contributions continue to extend into the community in the form of activities, initiatives and care-taking of public garden areas. More about these appear below.

In 1953, the Club joined the Northern District of the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts, which by association made them a member of the National Garden Clubs, Inc. The Federation provides horticultural education for club members, promotes information exchange among its member clubs, and supports club organization and leadership. Mary Conly, President from 1972-1975, is credited with establishing a strong relationship with the Federation and its on-going programs. She went on to become a Northern District Director. In 1976 the Club applied for and received 501C (4) status.

Today's WNGC offers many of the same opportunities and benefits to its members and to the community as in the past – speakers, workshops, exchanges with fellow gardeners, community activities, and the promotion of all things horticultural. But in other respects, it has changed. Its monthly meetings take place in the Annex of the 1910 Building. Meets are informal and held in the evening. Membership is open to anyone who wants to join, and includes members from adjoining towns. One thing hasn't changed – friendly members of various ages continue to enjoy each other and to improve their gardening skills thanks to their WNGC membership.

For more details over the decades, please continue.

Our Early History, prepared by Mary M. Conley, March 10, 1986

On March 25, 1930, several West Newbury women, interested in forming a garden club, met at the home of Mrs. Nelson R. Foss. Mrs. Frank Gowen was elected President and Miss Alice L. Elwell became Secretary-Treasurer. Meetings were held monthly in the homes of members, rules of parliamentary law were followed, and annual dues were fifty cents. The purpose of the club was to serve and beautify the community, and also to share the joy of gardening with others. Excellent lectures were given on gardening, flowers, birds and related garden subjects. Flower shows were held, field trips were taken, and chartered bus trips made to the Spring Flower Show in Boston. Clare Richards taught members the art of floral design. Mrs. Fred L. Adams, a charter member, chaired the first Junior Gardeners with 15 flower and vegetable gardens under cultivation.

In the fifties, the WNGC decorated the U.S. Naval Hospital in Chelsea during July, August and the holiday seasons. Members decorated the GAR Memorial Library every week and an Herb Garden was started at the Hills House, home of the WN Historical Society, which is still maintained. An herb book as selected, and a chapter reviewed every month by different members to prepare for designing, planting and caring for the

garden. In 1954 a standard flower show was in the Town Hall and Cherry Hill Nurseries transformed the stage into a woody scene with trees, shrubs, flowers and an old weathered grey shed.

Horticulture was stressed in the sixties and at meetings, papers were read on trees and shrubs. Trees were featured in 1960, shrubs in 1961, ferns in 1962, flowering plants in 1963, and coniferous trees in 1964. On March 2, 1961, the 25th anniversary of the Club, Mrs. Frank Gowan, the club's first President and Miss Alice L. Elwell, Secretary-Treasurer, were warmly welcomed. In 1967, another flower show was held and the Club received the Bay State Award from the Federation. The Herb Garden was an important feature of the of the Historical Society's tour. An herb luncheon was held and for many years, this was to become a custom with the annual meeting. Herb recipes were exchanged and attractive herbal designs graced the tables. The sesquicentennial celebration in 1969 involved a workshop at Town Hall demonstrating the making of evergreen wreaths and floral designs. Flower arrangements decorated all the open houses.

The Club's achievements continued into the 1970s, including the Christmas Tree on the Training Field and in conjunction with the WN Woman's Club, decorating the Square and West Newbury's public buildings. The Club continued to receive awards: 2nd prize for a woodland scene at the 1973 NE Spring Flower Show; citation from Sears for the foundation planting at the Pentucket Regional Middle School; 2nd prize for a Japanese garden at the 1974 NE Spring Flower Show; and the Sears Award (3rd prize) for the beautification of the triangle (later called Ferry Lane Park) with the planting of 100 tulips; another Bay State Award for the Club's Standard Flower Show; a Northern District Environmental Improvement Award for Ferry Lane Park, and an Award for Merit for the Club's slides of the Hill's House Herb Garden.

The Club's 40th Anniversary was celebrated with a Boutique and Tea at the home of the President, Mrs. Carlos Dew. At that time, this history of the club was prepared by Mary M. Conley.

The Last 40 Years

The Merrimack River Watershed Council benefited from the Club's support during the 1980s. Boat trips on the Merrimack River sponsored by garden clubs in the Merrimack Valley raised money to donate to the Watershed Council. As a result, a Land Trust Award (\$100) from the National Council was presented to Mary M. Conley as Land Trust Chairman for the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts. At the same time, the Club had three members serving on the Federation's Board: Charlotte Connor, Energy Awareness; Mary M. Conley, Land Trust; and Clare Richardson, Morning of Design. Also, in 1981 the Margaret Bent Patterson Award was presented to five Merrimack Valley Garden Clubs for working together on a standard flower show.

Changes occurred during the 1990s. The requirement to be accepted into the club was abolished, which opened the membership to more individuals from the community. Plant sales were held in the Spring and the club started funding a scholarship for students in the Pentucket Regional School District.

Since 2000, the Club has continued to be involved in community affairs. The Club maintains community gardens throughout West Newbury, the Plant Sale raises thousands of dollars annually to fund the scholarship, holiday decorations adorn the town's public buildings, and members march in the West Newbury Memorial Day Parade. In 2018 to celebrate the town's bicentennial, members of the club held a demonstration workshop for the community on flower arranging, caring for hydrangeas and a tutorial for the novice gardener. Other club members designed the flower arrangements for the Bicentennial Ball.

The Club's interests have changed over the years to embrace environmental concerns such as eradicating invasives and incorporating native plants into the landscape. Nancy Pau and Carol Decker, club members and

founders of West Newbury Wild and Native, are actively educating club members and the community on the value of native plants in the environment. The topic has been well received.

The Club has an open door policy and welcomes all.

About Our Flower

The Peony, Rooted in West Newbury History

Peonies belong to the crowfoot family Ranunculaceae.

Most varieties in America come from the Eastern Hemisphere, Southern Europe, or China. Peonies have been around for centuries. During the Ottoman Empire they were listed as representing shyness in the language of flowers.

George Thurlow began cultivating fruit trees in 1832. Two generations later, the Thurlows focused on peonies during the 1900s. Hundreds of varieties were grown and sold to large estates across the county. Even then, new varieties sold for \$20-\$40. As many as 20 pages of the company's catalog was devoted to peonies. In 1922 the most popular introduction was "Helen", names for Helen Thurlow. The peony trade soon became the foundation from which the existing Cherry Hill Nursery buildings, land and stock sprang.

During the 1950's the business introduced landscaping services and participated in national design competitions with award winning results. When admiring a peony, take a moment to reflect on its well - established West Newbury roots.

Although Cherry Hill Nurseries closed in 2000, Thurlow peonies can be found in the Club's Ferry Land Park Garden.

Information taken from an article "The Evolution of West Newbury's Cherry Hill Nurseries", the West Newbury News, July 26, 1990, p. 11