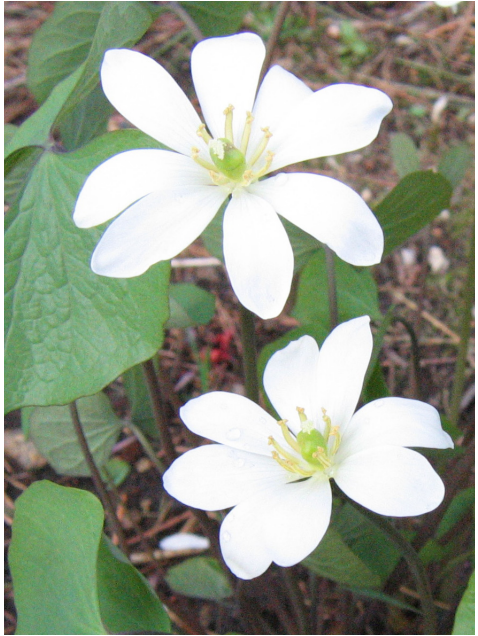


The Garden Club of Amherst Celebrates 100 years of Growing

Founding, Early History and Members



On August 27, 1915 Margret Newlin invited six friends to form a garden club. The other original members were Emma Dakin, Elizabeth Tyler, Jessie Baker, Alice Maud Hills, Carrie Dickinson, and Susan Skillings. Although Mrs. Newlin died three years later, her friends carried on the club, some of them continuing as members for as long as 30 years. A working interest in one's garden was and still is a prerequisite for membership. The history of the Garden Club of Amherst is deeply entwined with that of the town.



Above left: John and Elizabeth Tyler; left: Emma Dakin; above and below: Emma Dakin's garden



Emma Dakin's garden on South Pleasant Street was inherited by her son, Alfred Hazard Dakin, and was a showplace for many years. Emma was a member from 1915 to 1943. Janet Dakin, who married Emma's other son, Winthrop, founded the Kestrel Trust and the Dakin Animal Shelter, and was a prominent Garden Club member from 1942 to 1994.

Jessie Baker married Ray Stannard Baker, biographer of Woodrow Wilson, who wrote fiction under the name of David Grayson. The grand tree known as the "Grayson Elm," in front of their Sunset Avenue house, featured in his fiction. It was one of only two trees on the property when they arrived in 1910; they planted everything else. The tree still stands partly because the Garden Club allocated funds in the 1950s and again in the 1970s to combat the dread Dutch elm disease. Jessie Baker was a member until her death in 1949.



Below left: the Grayson Elm on Sunset Avenue, Fall, 2014; below: Jesse and Ray Baker's garden, 1940, with inset of Grayson Elm, 1910; bottom: home of Carrie and John Dickinson, 1937



Here is just a sampling of the many accomplished women who have enjoyed the friendships, work, learning, and sharing of the Garden Club of Amherst over the past 100 years.

Mabelle Churchill (member 1916-1946) lived at The Dell on Spring Street, now the home of Five Colleges, Inc. She left many garden books to the Jones Library.

Ethel Parke (member 1919-1960) lived in the Emily Dickinson Homestead on Main Street.

Ella Pray (member 1924-1956) "was noted as a naturalist and lecturer on birds and flowers throughout New England," according to an article shortly before her death. "She scattered seeds on the snow and in two years had adult plants and blossoms." She studied soil needs and habitat and grew 14 varieties of native ferns.

Alice Waugh (member 1919-1947) was a trained biologist and a noted lecturer. Her husband founded the Department of Landscape Architecture at UMass.

Hazel Lamphear (member 1942-1987) and her husband Marshall shared their horticultural knowledge. She brought interesting plant material to meetings and supplied unusual plants for the plant sale.

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 Clubs of America.

Mary Maki (member 1959-1990) edited the revised "Trees in Amherst" book, published in 1975, a mammoth undertaking for which the club won a state award. Mary was an accomplished Ikebana arranger and taught a class for club members.

Carol Cornish (member 1961-2002) of Fiddlers Green in South Amherst, every year collected seeds of the katsura tree at Grace Church and raised the seedlings to sell at the annual plant sale or to give to any members who had room for them. Her always amusing horticultural reports included notices of her husband's Japanese beetle counts.



Left: Mabelle Churchill; below: Ethel Parke at the Emily Dickinson Homestead



Sally Wagner (member 1962-1987) created a nursery in her vegetable garden to nurture plants for the plant sale. This was so successful that the club presented her with extra loan, and in 1985, presented Sally with a "Golden Trowel" for her exceptional dedication.

Peg Gage (member 1974-2010) and Eleanor Singleton, (1960-2000), longtime members, founded "Round the World Women, a town program that helps orient wives and children of foreign graduate students.

Georgene Bramlage (member 1981-2011) wrote the garden column for the *Amherst Bulletin* and then the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* during the 1980s and presented several interesting programs. She taught at Holyoke Community College.

The Garden Club has grown from 7 members in 1915 to 38 active members today. In 2008, the club welcomed its first male member, Chris Hum, who has since been joined by several other men. Over the past 100 years, 155 people have been members.

Above: Carol Cornish's doorway, 1963; right: Gretchen Allen (l) with Sally Wagner, 1974; below: Elaine Barker (l) with Janet Dakin, 1974; below right: Churchill's home in The Dell



For 100 years, members of the Garden Club of Amherst have provided beauty for the town, educated the public, and enjoyed gardening together.

From the history of the first 50 years, in 1965:

"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 house, to which fifty-five friends were invited. As a result there was \$15.20 in the new treasury."

"We have it on good authority that the time Mrs. Newlin 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."

"In fifty years there have been many changes in ideas, in manners and customs. One of the 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."

From the history of the next 25 years, in 1990:

"In the last 25 years, our membership has increased from 25 to 31. Some members had to leave us for other communities; some have moved to other parts of the country. 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."

Long gone are the days of white gloves and fancy hats, except for the flowery hats that indicate sellers at the plant sale. Today's gardeners are far more likely to wear mud boots and sweatshirts as they dig, divide, and pot plants, and work to beautify the town and steward the environment. 2015 members come from Amherst, Belchertown, Florence, Hadley, Leverett, Montague, Pelham, and Shutesbury, and for some time have included men. Membership is limited so that some meetings can still be held in private homes. Presentation topics by members and outside speakers range from attracting native pollinators to managing invasive plants, from pruning techniques to designing flower borders. Many methods have changed over the years, even as many of the same topics remain relevant.

Below: minutes of the first meeting, 1915; below right: treasurer's report, 1937

