

*“What’s in a Name?”
or “Is This the
First Garden Club?”*



ANNETTE LAMOND

AN UNUSUAL THING HAPPENED in a pastoral corner of Cambridge in January 1889: A passion flower bloomed, profusely according to legend, at Havenhurst, the Coolidge Hill home of Mrs. John Lord Hayes. The Hayes family was known for its love of gardening,¹ and Mrs. Hayes for her particular success with houseplants, of which she had many. Even so, the passion flower’s many blossoms—sixty that winter, according to a report some twenty years later by one of Mrs. Hayes’s daughters—caused much interest among the family’s visitors. Their questions regarding its cultivation gave Miss Carrie Hayes, the youngest of three daughters, the idea of forming a club.

Known for her enthusiasm, Miss Hayes consulted with other plant- and garden-loving friends, and on the twenty-eighth of the month a club was founded by some twenty ladies of varying ages. On that day, a name—the Floricultural Society—was selected, by-laws drafted, dues established, officers elected, garden periodical subscriptions selected, and a schedule of bimonthly meetings set, decisions duly recorded in a volume of minutes that now resides in the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute.

The organization, which was renamed the Plant Club at its second meeting, thrived from its beginning in that auspiciously mild winter. It soon became known for educational lectures, some by local professors, some by its own learned members. The members also enjoyed informal discussions

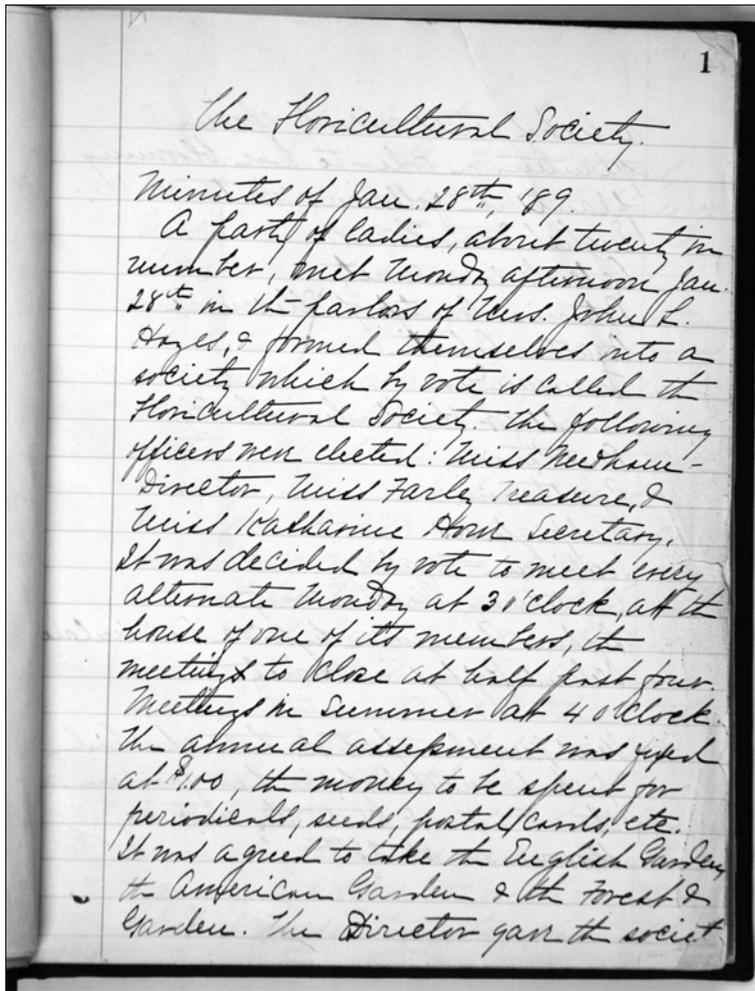


Susan “Susie” Hayes with her brother (William Allen Hayes) at Havenhurst on Coolidge Hill, ca. 1920. (*Records of the Cambridge Plant Club & Garden Club*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

on a variety of subjects: Did professional gardening require too much physical effort for women? Could flowers have a moral influence on prisoners? The topic of favorite plants came up often and in detail. Another feature of meetings was the trading of helpful horticultural hints, including recipes for fertilizers, planting tips, soil preparation, the care of particular plants, propagation methods, and treatments for pests. Members often brought plants and flowers to show and share, and they enjoyed visiting one another’s gardens.

By the turn of the century, the club had developed an interest in garden design. In 1904 Mrs. Sarah Warner Brooks, a member who supported herself as a garden “manager” and writer, published a book at the age of eighty-three: *A Garden with House Attached*. In 1907 a lecture by the landscape horticulturist Warren H. Manning showed—with the assistance of lantern slides—“how the most hopelessly unattractive house may be much improved” by planting the right kind of trees to ensure an air of seclusion.

The members’ passion for plants led them to be early conservationists. The club’s records show that the ladies soon began to talk about the preservation of wildflowers, and in 1900 all members enrolled their names in the Society for the Protection of Native Plants, a predecessor of the New England



First page of the minutes of the Cambridge Plant Club's first meeting, January 28, 1889. (Records of the Cambridge Plant Club & Garden Club, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University)

Wild Flower Preservation Society, founded some twenty years later. In 1904 Professor George Lincoln Goodale, director of the Harvard Botanic Garden, gave a lecture, "The New Science of Oecology: The Relation of Plants to Their Environment." (The minutes for the meeting helpfully note, "Oecology is a word so new that it is not yet in the dictionary.") Issues ranged from concerns about ash barrels (the subject of a club symposium in 1912) to opposition to highway projects that threatened the city's last remaining urban wilds in the 1950s and the sycamores along Memorial Drive in the 1960s.



Medal presented by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1931 to the Cambridge Plant Club in recognition of being “the first of its kind.” (*Records of the Cambridge Plant Club & Garden Club, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University*)

Gradually, the club added civic planting to its portfolio of interests. In 1917 it undertook its first planting projects: adding beds of bulbs to brighten “the otherwise gloomy surroundings of the playground” at the Margaret Fuller House in East Cambridge, as well as children’s “war gardens” in a nearby field. In the 1920s it turned its energy to Cambridge Common, which had lost many trees when it was used as a site for military barracks during World War I. First, trees were planted; then, a twenty-year project designed to screen parked cars with a shrubby border followed.

The Plant Club voted to join the Massachusetts Federation of Garden Clubs just after the organization was formed in 1928. Contacts with like-minded people in other clubs proved a stimulus to civic projects, as did the friendly competition of flower shows. Membership in the federation also seems to have encouraged some measure of political expression. For example, members joined the opposition to the building of filling stations on scenic highways. Although the necessity of gas stations came to be accepted, one area of concern—a campaign for billboard controls—was a rallying issue for years.

In 1931 the club was proud to receive a medal from the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in recognition of its status as the oldest garden club in the country. However, in 1939—the year in which the club marked its fiftieth anniversary—an unsettling event occurred. The national organization of state

garden-club federations conferred the title upon another group, one three years younger. The competing club had waged an aggressive campaign, conducted over several years, to discredit the Cambridge organization, but no one had informed the Cambridge women that the honor, the distinction of being the first, required defense. This paper, more than six decades later, documents the facts of the case. It is offered as both a tribute to the founding members of the Plant Club and proof that theirs was the first women's garden club in the United States.

OCTOBER 1928

"There seems to be some question as to the first garden club ever formed in this country." So begins an item entitled "Garden Club Beginnings," just four paragraphs running alongside advertisements for specimen evergreens, rare cacti, and late-blooming peonies on a back page of the October 1 edition of *Horticulture*.²

At the time, *Horticulture* was a semimonthly publication of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. Although the casual tone of its indirect query was perhaps calculated to avoid controversy, no one could have predicted how contentious the debate would prove to be. The article did not indicate why the issue of identifying the first garden club had been raised, but it is likely that the founders of the state garden-club federations then springing up across the country became interested as they drafted charters for the new organizations.³

The magazine piece was sensitive to the possibility that a club's name might be an issue. Noting the "general impression" that The Garden Club of Philadelphia, founded in 1904, was the first,⁴ given its leading role in the garden-club movement, the feature revealed that a similar organization, the Minnesota Garden Flower Society, had also been founded the same year. Although the Minnesota group may have been called a "flower society," *Horticulture* observed that it was "to all intents and purposes a garden club."

Horticulture thus allowed that the words *garden club* (capital G, capital C) need not be included in a club's name for it to be so recognized, and it acknowledged the difficulty of naming a new club, especially a group based on a novel concept. The magazine noted that even the Garden Club of America (GCA), founded in 1913, went through a period of indecision concerning a name.

DECEMBER 1928

The December 1 edition of *Horticulture* features a letter, "The Oldest Garden Club," from Miss Fanny Elizabeth Corne, a charter member of the Cambridge Plant Club:

Dear Sir –

In the October 1 issue of *Horticulture*, it is stated that the Garden Club of Philadelphia, formed in 1904, and a similar organization formed in Minneapolis, Minn., in the same year were probably the first garden clubs ever formed in this country. The Cambridge (Mass.) Plant Club, however, antedates these clubs by fully 15 years, since it was started in January, 1889, and is not only still in existence, but is in a very flourishing condition. Several of the original members are still interested and active. Since meetings are held at the homes of different members, a social half hour concluding each, membership is limited to 40, usually with a waiting list. The Plant Club is affiliated with the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts.

The idea of forming a club was original with the late Miss Caroline Hayes, and was suggested by the numerous inquiries she received concerning the method used in cultivating a passion flower blooming in her mother's sitting-room. With a few friends and neighbors, a club was formed which met periodically [every two weeks for a number of years, then monthly], at first only to exchange opinions and experiences related to house plants. But interest soon extended to all growing green things since different members had their specialties—flower gardens, vegetable gardens, trees, ferns and rock gardens. Lectures by Harvard professors and others interested in horticulture were arranged, while occasional excursions were made to neighboring estates. Friends in neighboring towns, hearing of our novel association, liked the idea so well that they started similar clubs of their own.

Fanny Elizabeth Corne

Charter Member

There is no indication in the Plant Club's archives of how *Horticulture's* historical inquiry came to the attention of the club, but Miss Corne was an avid horticulturist, so presumably she saw the article in the normal course of perusing the periodical. She was also a writer interested in travel and botanical subjects. From 1924 through 1927, for example, she contributed eleven articles to *American Fern Journal*: "Ferns—Facts and Fancies about Them" (in eight parts) and "A Caribbean Cruise and Some Jamaican Wayside Ferns" (in three parts).

Fanny Corne was eighty-one years old when she replied to *Horticulture's* inquiry. Although her letter gave a good overview of the club, one statement later clouded its claim to be the oldest: her recollection that the group met "at first only to exchange opinions and experience relative to house plants." The

statement was inaccurate, and an advocate for a rival claimant later seized on it. In fact, a copy of the letter is in the archives of that rival club.

If only Miss Corne had first reviewed the club's minutes! If she had, she could have stated in most definite terms that the charter members' wide-ranging, learned, and lively interest in gardens, not just in plants, was clear from its very first meetings. Miss Corne might have written:

The minutes of the first meeting of the new club, held on January 28, 1889, indicate that there was much discussion about a club name. It was voted to call it the Floricultural Club. Two weeks later at the second meeting, however, it was voted to change the name. Some ladies thought that Floricultural Club sounded too grand, as if the group sought to emulate the Massachusetts Horticultural Society—one of the Commonwealth's leading civic organizations, already sixty years old. Mrs. Hayes—whose passion flower inspired the founding of the club—suggested “The Plant Club,” and that name was adopted. Why the Plant Club? After all, it was winter, and all had house plants. And as gardeners in a northerly climate, our thoughts in late January were focused on starting seeds and nurturing plants indoors—most of which would take their places outdoors in the garden just a few months later.

Still, allowances made for climate, why not “The Garden Club”? We know that the women who attended that meeting did have gardens and were known for working in them. But “garden club” was not suggested because there was already a club in Cambridge with *garden* and *club* in its name—the Garden Street Club! In fact, the horticulturally gifted Miss Almira Needham, first president of the Plant Club, lived on the corner of Garden and Shepard streets, and was presumably a member of that club, too. In fact, at the Plant Club meeting of December 1, 1890, the members voted to postpone their next meeting by one week so as not to interfere with the meeting of the other group. Did the Garden Street Club have an interest in gardens? Possibly, given its location. (Garden Street was the route from Cambridge Common to the famed Harvard Botanic Garden.) But interest in that club waned, and it did not survive.

Had it not been for the Garden Street Club, the Plant Club might well have been named the Garden Club, and there would have been no basis for dispute.

And, had Miss Corne reviewed the minutes of the nineteen meetings held during the club's first year, she might also have written:

Following the selection of a name at the club's first meeting, the ladies immediately got down to gardening business. An annual assessment was voted, and it was agreed to spend a portion of that assessment on periodicals, including *The English Garden*, *The American Garden*, and *Garden and Forest*. Lists of seeds were drawn up, including "hardy" varieties. With organizational matters complete, one young member named Jane Newell reported on snowdrops blooming in her garden since January 18! Another had roses that bloomed through the winter! The season was mild that year with little snow, so thoughts of gardening came early—a factor that likely contributed to the enthusiasm for forming a club in the dead of winter, and to members' being able to traverse the streets of Cambridge for meetings.

At the second meeting, the club voted to invest ten dollars on seeds, an amount that went very far in that category in 1889—so far that members subsequently spent hours sorting their seed orders. At the third meeting, the topic was soil; the minutes include a wealth of information and advice that began with "the desirability of having a compost heap in a retired corner of your yard where you accumulate dead leaves, grass, and all other vegetable matter." Over the club's first year, the members studied and discussed all manner of plants: shrubs, trees, wildflowers, roses, ferns, begonias, bulbs (spring, summer, and for forcing), vines, annuals, house plants (especially those offering winter bloom), and various perennials (poppies, lilies, hellebores, chrysanthemums, asters and more, usually referred to by Latin name). Also discussed were fertilizers, the insects that infect plants, and an abundance of horticultural tips. Some discussions were led by members who read their own papers; others were initiated by reading articles from gardening periodicals to which the club subscribed.

In the spring, hostesses of meetings began to open their gardens following the afternoon's official program. (The minutes refer to the members' pleasure in "going over" a garden on these occasions.) Members also brought specimens from their gardens to show, and at the first meeting in May, offerings were bounteous—gloxinias, bunches of forsythia and *Pyrus japonica* (now known as Japanese Quince), sprays of Japanese Crab, a bucket of yellow and red *Polyanthus* and cowslips.⁵ As the season proceeded, members brought cut flowers for display.

Sharing, too, was a hallmark of the meetings. At a gathering in June, members adjourned to Mrs. Chauncy Smith's garden, where she generously shared "an unusually fine display of pansies" with her guests, in addition to giving out bulbs of hardy oxalis. In July Miss Carrie Hayes offered twenty plants of *Anthericum vittatum variegatum* to any member who wanted one.⁶



Undated photograph of
Mrs. Edwin King
Lumpkin, née Mary
“Mamie” Bryan.
(*Hargett Rare Book and
Manuscript Library/Uni-
versity of Georgia
Libraries*)

In December 1889, near the close of the club’s first year, a meeting was devoted to the subject of gardening, during which members listened to an excerpt from a report of the Woman’s Division of the German Academic Association. The minutes record that “the German gardeners opposed the movement on the grounds that gardening required too much physical effort of women, and that the business was already overcrowded.” It was noted that an English paper had criticized the opposition in Germany to women gardeners, with the argument that “they did not expect women to be educated to dig, but there were many parts of gardening which they could enjoy and make profitable.” Following a discussion of the role of women as garden workers, the club secretary recorded, “The rest of the meeting was passed in talking of the pleasures of gardening.”

No one who reads through the minutes of the first year of the Plant Club—twenty-four handwritten pages—could conclude that it was anything but a garden club, though a formidably learned one to be sure. And word of it spread. The minutes for November 11, 1889, refer to an article in the *Boston Advertiser* describing the group, while two months later the annual

report for the club's first year records that two other "plant clubs" had been founded in other towns—a fact reported with satisfaction.

When the representatives of the Ladies' Garden Club of Athens, Georgia, rose to claim that their club—founded in 1892—was the first, they argued that the name Plant Club implied a group with narrow botanical interests, not a garden club. In reply, the Cambridge ladies might well have sent them copies of the Plant Club minutes of 1889, 1890, and 1891. Indeed, by February 3, 1892—the date of the Athenian club's first gathering—the Cambridge group had already held sixty "garden club" meetings.

FEBRUARY 1929

A prominently placed article in *Horticulture's* February 15, 1929, issue informs readers that several clubs have claimed precedence in point of age over those in Philadelphia and Minneapolis. No mention is made of the Cambridge club or any of the other "several" clubs but one—the Ladies' Garden Club of Athens, Georgia. *Horticulture* cites the authority of Mrs. E. K. Lumpkin, a woman possessed of a famed Georgia political name, who happened to be a charter member of the Ladies' Garden Club and a president emeritus.⁷ According to the article, the club was the idea of Dr. E. D. Newton,⁸ a philanthropist in Athens and a man of varied achievements, who "consulted several prominent women of the city and then formed a garden club, the first regularly organized and authenticated one of its kind in the South, so far as can be ascertained."⁹ Another Athenian distinction was the promulgation of club rules "governing the members" and "for judges to follow in awarding premiums." The rules [drafted by Mr. P. J. Berckmans of "national fame" in 1894] were sent to friends in other cities and "resulted in almost every town of any size in the state having a garden club."¹⁰

Although the *Horticulture* article did not quote Mrs. Lumpkin directly, it reads as if the magazine's editors relied closely on her communication. In addition to her distinction as a gardener (she had "perhaps the finest collection of iris in the South"), Mrs. Lumpkin clearly knew how to write a successful club press release. Whereas Miss Corne's letter had focused on the Plant Club's horticultural interests, Mrs. Lumpkin established that the Athenian club was a force in the larger community. Beyond flower shows (thirty since the founding of the club), it was busy in other areas. Its activities had included war work (raising money for wool used by the "Gray Knitters" as well as for a liberty bond), planting trees and shrubs in cooperation with city authorities, working in the schools, petitioning to restrict the use of billboards, and encouraging the preservation of native trees, especially the holly and dogwood. It also played an active role in establishing the state federation of garden clubs in June 1928.

Mrs. Lumpkin made an impressive case for the Ladies' Garden Club. But a Plant Club partisan would immediately observe that the founding date of the Athenian club followed the Cantabrigian one by three years. Moreover, the idea that led to the founding of the Georgia club was a man's. In fact, *Horticulture's* account—based on Mrs. Lumpkin's communication—states that Mr. Newton “founded” the club. In contrast, the women who formed the Cambridge club had the idea themselves. Further, once they determined to create a club, they wrote the by-laws and established their own organizational structure. They did not seek the assistance of an outside authority in the matter of governance.

Another irony: despite the Ladies' Garden Club's name, the importance of judging rules to the Athens club suggests that it was initially more of a plant society—based on growing plants for prizes—than a garden club in the modern sense of the term. Indeed, the 1929 *Horticulture* article omitted the fact that members discussed plant cuttings and experimented with plants at their bimonthly meetings. According to coverage in the *Athens Banner* in the spring of 1892, the Athenian club's first “flower show” was more of an agricultural fair featuring prizes for well-grown vegetables.¹¹ Premium lists from subsequent flower shows in the 1890s also included prizes for “pot plants” or houseplants. (In Athens as in Cambridge, begonias were a favorite.)

The Cambridge Plant Club made no reply to *Horticulture's* feature. Why the silence? Perhaps because, despite the title—“Is This the Oldest Garden Club?”—the article referred to the Athens club as the first “of its kind in the South” and did not call it the oldest in the country. The archives of the Cambridge Plant Club do not reveal whether any member saw the piece. It is not in the club's archives, nor is there any reference to it in the club's minutes or other files. Nevertheless, it is unlikely to have escaped the notice of the Cambridge gardeners, as the next item suggests.

NOVEMBER 1931

The November 1 issue of *Horticulture* features an article on the Cambridge Plant Club, “Forty Years of Garden Club Work.” It reports that the Massachusetts Horticultural Society has just awarded a medal to the Cambridge Plant Club “in recognition of the distinction which it can boast of being the oldest garden club in America.”¹²

Much has been written about the origin of the garden club movement but there is no record of any such organization having been formed previous to 1889, which was the year in which the Cambridge Plant Club came into existence. This club has carried on its various activities with unabated enthusiasm through all the subsequent years and is function-

ing actively at the present time. It is a member of the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts and has exhibited at the Centennial Exhibition of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. [In 1929, the club won a first prize for its exhibit—a reproduction of a flower window in the home of Mrs. Elmer H. Bright of 165 Brattle Street.] Several members of the original group are still taking part in the work of the club.

This organization was considered a novelty when it was formed and a number of similar clubs were started in neighboring cities soon after. They, however, lasted for only a short time. The first meeting of the Cambridge Plant Club was held on January 20 [sic], 1889, at the home of Mrs. John Hayes with about 20 persons present. The purpose of the club was stated to be the exchange of experiences and a discussion of the best methods of cultivating house and garden plants. The name of the club was suggested by Mrs. Hayes. In 1929 the club celebrated its fortieth anniversary with several of the original members present.

Like Miss Corne, the *Horticulture* article describes the club's original focus narrowly, in terms of plant cultivation—another lost opportunity to describe the true breadth of the club's interests at the time it was founded. The article went on to recognize the Ladies' Garden Club of Athens as the second oldest club in the country, followed by the Minnesota Garden Flower Society and the Garden Club of Philadelphia, both founded in 1904. The article also contained a note about names: "This organization [the Minnesota Garden Flower Society], in spite of its name, was a garden club in the commonly accepted sense and is still alive, with a membership of 400 and with much excellent work to its credit."

JUNE 1932

The National Council of State Garden Club Federations meets in Boston for its fourth annual meeting.¹³ At the opening session, following welcoming addresses by the presidents of the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts and the National Council, Miss Fanny Elizabeth Corne is introduced to the delegates as a charter member of the Cambridge Plant Club, "the oldest garden club in America." Later in the week, members of the Plant Club entertain the meeting delegates in Cambridge.

Miss Corne's introduction to the National Council was reported in the June 15 issue of *Horticulture*.¹⁴ The delegates' subsequent visit to Cambridge—a tour of the Longfellow House followed by tea "served in the garden of the charming old Colonial home, known as Larchwood, of Mrs. Henry D. Tudor"—was described in the Council's July *Bulletin*, which noted that the

Plant Club had been awarded a medal for “being the oldest garden club in this country.”¹⁵

MARCH 1936

Mrs. M. R. Redwine, president of the Ladies (now without the apostrophe) Garden Club, writes to the president of the National Council of State Garden Clubs, asking the organization to publish a history of the Athens club in its bulletin. She suggests that the publication’s readers would find it interesting to know something of her club. Further, she argues that it would be “only correct” for the national organization to recognize that the Ladies Garden Club was “the first garden club in America.”

March 9, 1936

My dear Mrs. Scruggs,

As president of the Ladies Garden Club of Athens, Georgia, I am asking you if you will give us space in the next issue of the bulletin for a brief history of our club. Since the Ladies Garden Club is undoubtedly the parent club of the garden club movement, we feel that it will be of interest to the entire membership to know something of its interesting organization. We feel, also, that it is only correct that the Garden Club, as an organization, should give recognition to the fact the Ladies Garden Club of Athens, Georgia, is the first garden club in America—that it has existed since 1891, and that it is to-day, and has always been a GARDEN CLUB, organized for the same purposes and maintaining the same ideals that the members of the National Council maintain in the good year 1936.

We feel that a distinction should be made between a plant study club or horticultural study club and a garden club, as the term is defined in our organization. There have been numerous horticultural and plant study clubs in our own and in other communities, many of them existing prior to the year in which the Ladies Garden Club came into existence. Some of them are still flourishing in their original state; others, with the passing years, have felt the more human spirit of the real garden club and have accordingly grown away from their original purpose of organization and have become bona fide garden clubs. This does not imply, however, that they were bona fide garden clubs at the time of organization, and they cannot therefore claim to have been such when they organized.

Please bear in mind, dear Mrs. Scruggs, that the Ladies Garden Club was not a haphazard organization. It did not come into being by mere chance, nor was it the outgrowth of any other organization. It was

organized as a GARDEN CLUB, under the name of the Ladies Garden Club, with constitution and by-laws setting forth its purposes. As early as the year 1892, this club was giving a flower show, the rules and standards for which would be acceptable for judging any flower show of today. These rules for exhibiting and judging were drawn up for the Ladies Garden Club by the well known horticulturalist [sic], P. J. Berckmans, Sr., of Augusta, Georgia. Copies of some of these old schedules are still in existence to-day.

Have you—has anybody heard of a bona fide garden club prior to the year 1891? Have you—has anybody heard of a GARDEN CLUB FLOWER SHOW prior to the year 1892? I daresay not. Those twelve women who organized the Ladies Garden Club of Athens, Georgia, were pioneers in their own right. They gave to their community and to the nation something new and something worth while, and, as time revealed, something of vital and lasting worth. It is naturally a matter of pride to us, and we feel that it is pardonable that we of the Ladies Garden Club should seek recognition for so valiant a contribution. We also feel that it will be a matter of equal pride, as well as a gracious gesture, for the National Council of State Garden Clubs to accord such recognition.

We shall be grateful indeed to you for any assistance that you may give us, either by giving us space in the bulletin, or through personal effort. Many of us, including myself, are the daughters of the charter members of the Ladies Garden Club, and one of the original members is still an active member, so you may be assured of more than perfunctory thanks.

With very best wishes, and the assurance of our loyalty,

I am

Sincerely

Mrs. M. R. Redwine

President of the Ladies Garden Club

Athens, Ga.

Thus began the Athens club's campaign for national recognition. Would that Mrs. Scruggs of the National Council had asked the Cambridge Plant Club to comment on Mrs. Redwine's letter. The Cantabrigians could have addressed the letter's questionable propositions—for example, the assertion that some plant or horticultural study clubs, feeling the "more human spirit of the real garden club," had grown away from their "original purpose." Certainly this statement did not apply to them. If Mrs. Redwine was referring to other clubs, what were their names and what was her evidence?¹⁶

Mrs. Redwine's letter also contained misleading statements that the Cantabrigians were not in a position to correct. For example, a reader might well infer that the rules and standards for judging a flower show were developed for the Athens club's first show; they were actually developed two years later.

A more important matter concerns the original constitution and by-laws of the garden club in Georgia, which faced a serious problem in making the claim to be the oldest in America: namely, it had no official records earlier than 1913. A fire had destroyed the home of a longtime club secretary, and with it, the minutes book containing the club's by-laws. Although Mrs. Redwine had referred to the group's "constitution and by-laws setting forth its purposes," they were long gone, their words a matter of conjecture.¹⁷

APRIL 1936

The southern club's campaign for recognition has immediate positive results close to home. In early April, the Garden Club of Georgia—the state federation—passes a resolution at its annual convention to establish a "national shrine" in Athens as a memorial to what they say has been "long considered the first garden club of America." It further resolves to make "every effort" to have the National Council of State Garden Clubs officially declare such status at its annual convention later in the month. Despite the Georgia federation's endorsement, the ladies of Athens continue to recognize the Cambridge club as a rival claimant to be vanquished. Preparing for the annual meeting of the National Council, the Athenians attack the northern club by name:

The difference in a garden club and a horticultural study club, according to two eminent national authorities on garden club matters, makes the Athens club the first garden club, organized under the name of garden club and functioning in the modern sense of the term, the first such club in America.

While there is another older than the Athens club, the Cambridge Plant Club, organized in January 1889, it seems that some of the garden club authorities consider this distinguished club more on the order of a horticultural study club than a garden club in its original organization.

One reads these paragraphs and wonders, Who were the "eminent national authorities" consulted by the Athens ladies? What was the basis of their opinion that the Plant Club was "more on the order of a horticultural study club than a garden club" when it was founded?

Beyond theorizing about the origins of the Cambridge club, the ladies of Athens began an effort to fill in the lost history of their club's beginnings, gleaning information from articles in the *Athens Banner* and making certified copies of a number of 1892 articles. Similarly, affidavits from charter members were taken. Mrs. Lumpkin had died in 1932, but her husband, Judge E. K. Lumpkin, gave a witnessed statement. Another statement was made by one of Mrs. Lumpkin's daughters, Louise Lumpkin Upson, who had been present "assisting" her mother at the formal organizational meeting of the club in December 1891. Although Mrs. Upson's recollection was not witnessed, she closed by declaring in an underscored hand, "I know these facts to be true."

MAY 1936

The *Athens Banner-Herald* publishes a letter from three members of the Ladies Garden Club (including two nieces of Dr. Newton's) who wish "the recorded facts concerning the organization" of their club to "be known by the public":

1. That the Lady's Garden Club was organized in the Seney-Stovall Chapel Feb. 3rd, 1892.
2. That its name when it was organized was the Lady's Garden Club of Clarke County. If there has been any change in its name it was made since its organization.
3. That the idea of organizing this Garden Club originated entirely with Dr. Edwin D. Newton, and he is entitled to the credit for it, and he gave it its name, viz: 'The Lady's Garden Club of Clarke County.'

They also cite the *Athens Banner* of February 9, 1892, as verification of the club's organizational meeting six days earlier. The article's headline:

THE LADIES MEET

And Perfect the Organization of Their Garden Club

TWO SPLENDID LECTURES

Delivered by Drs. Lane and Davis

Officers of the Club—The Work They Propose To Do

The authors of the letter note that these "facts, and many other interesting ones, about this Garden club" are on record in the clerk's office of the Superior Court, Clarke County, Georgia.

Indeed, the article is interesting; judging from it, vegetable gardening was to be the primary focus of the Ladies' Garden Club. At the February 3 meeting, Dr. Newton, serving as the club's spokesman, described the purpose of the new organization and introduced the speakers. First, Dr. Lane spoke about the evolution of garden vegetables and fruit; then, Dr. Davis addressed the topic of insects as both friends and enemies. Following "the class in botany," Dr. Newton explained that the Ladies' Garden Club—being an auxiliary to the Farmers' Club—was entitled to all the privileges and advantages of the experiment station and the state department of agriculture.¹⁸

Documents in the club's archives at the University of Georgia also make interesting reading. In "Some Facts about the Ladies Garden Club," Mrs. Redwine offered more facts—and some speculation—on the club's early history. Indeed, she quibbled a bit with two of the points in the letter to the *Banner-Herald* quoted above. On the matter of the club's creation, she sifted again through articles, announcements, gossip columns, and reports in the *Athens Banner* from December 1891 through 1892 to divine a founding date. Although she conceded that the exact day of the club's organization was "a matter of conjecture," she maintained that the date must have been before the *Banner's* February 2 announcement of the first open meeting because the newspaper stated that the club "has been organized." She inferred that the founding date may have been as early as the mid-December 1891 meeting in Mrs. Lumpkin's parlor.

With regard to the role of Dr. Newton in founding the club, Mrs. Redwine acknowledged his "ingenious" mind but suggested that he may have had the idea for "an enlarged organization" after a small garden club had already been established. (The archival record offers no evidence of an earlier club.) Also, in her recitation of "facts," Mrs. Redwine omitted the one about Dr. Newton suggesting the new club's name.¹⁹ Although she gave him credit for his "intense interest in horticulture," she made much more of his sister, Mrs. Cobb, the club's first president, whom she called "one of Athens' best gardeners [a great distinction in those days of horticultural experiments]...a person of dignity, poise and ability...a good looking woman with a keen intellect and a ready wit...a member of one of Athens' old established families, the wife of a prominent lawyer, and...quite capable of presiding over any organization with ease and charm." Mrs. Lumpkin, chairman of the first executive board, "to whose untiring zeal and interest the club owes its life to-day," was also lauded for laboring "to preserve the organization."

Mrs. Redwine was on a campaign; the earlier the founding date, the better. It was preferable, too, to minimize the role of the man who founded the club and elevate the contributions of the founding women.

AUGUST 1936

In August 1936, Mrs. Redwine submits a nine-page, legal-sized notarized brief in support of the Ladies Garden Club's claim to be "America's first Garden Club."²⁰ Again, she opens with an attack on the Cambridge club—though an indirect one. Her argument ("the members of the Ladies Garden Club feel that a distinction should be made between a plant study club or an amateur horticultural society and a GARDEN CLUB") proceeds almost verbatim from her earlier letter to the president of the National Council of State Garden Clubs. Again, she refers to horticultural groups that had felt "the more human spirit of the real GARDEN CLUB" and altered their course. Still, she asserts, these groups cannot "claim to have made any definite original contribution to the Garden Club movement." Following this dismissal, she then provides a definition of a true garden club:

A GARDEN CLUB as the name implies, concerns itself with practical gardening, as well as horticultural study, which it embraces; with home and civic beautification; with correct display of the fruits of the garden; with the encouragement of gardening and garden activities within and beyond the club's own circle; and with educating the public and raising the standards of horticulture in the community by means of correctly staged flower shows.

"It is in this latter category," Mrs. Redwine continues, "that the Ladies Garden Club belongs, and it is in this field that it was a pioneer. The Ladies Garden Club, be it known, was not a haphazard organization, nor did it come into existence by mere chance. It was organized as a GARDEN CLUB and was so named; its purposes were clearly set forth from the beginning." She goes on to describe how the group functioned as a garden club "*within the first year of its existence*" [emphasis in original]. She cites programs (those lectures on vegetables, fruit, and insects held on February 3, 1892); the procurement of horticultural bulletins; the ordering and distribution of seed; the sharing of cuttings, plants, and home-grown seed; member experiments and reports; and the reports of the club's "civic usefulness" in the Athens newspaper. According to Mrs. Redwine's historical reporting, discussions of flowers and vegetables were a feature of meetings, and members worked for improvement in various lines of plants—strawberries (for the club's president, Mrs. Cobb) and roses (for the chairman of the first executive board, Mrs. Lumpkin).

Mrs. Redwine attributes a high level of self-consciousness to the founders of the club. She states that they "knew clearly that they had created a new and unique organization." On this point, she cites Mr. P. J. Berckmans

Sr., who formulated the club's rules for exhibiting and judging. Recalling his words some forty years after the fact, she reports that he "*stated at the time* [emphasis in original] that this was the only organization of the kind in existence, so far as he knew." She continues, "Mr. Berkman[sic], being a horticulturalist [sic] of national and international repute, was well conversant with the situation at the time, and his testimony may therefore be given much weight."

Mrs. Redwine's submission stresses the importance of the club's public flower shows, the first held in May 1892. She notes with pride, "These shows were held with the same precision of exhibiting and judging that governs the flower shows of to-day."

Only five pages into the petition to the National Council does Mrs. Redwine mention the fire that destroyed the club's early records and the recent effort to "reconstruct" its by-laws from affidavits of charter members and articles in the *Athens Banner*. She cites the issue of March 22, 1892, regarding the club's mission:

The object of this club is two-fold. The ladies wish to exchange ideas and information regarding the best practical methods for treating seeds and plants. Also to make thorough investigation as to the best places to purchase their garden and flower supplies, and the purity and freshness of seeds and plants, and to this end reports will be kept, and submitted to the club from time to time.

The National Council did not send a copy of this brief to the Cambridge Plant Club for a reply. If it had, an advocate for the Cantabrigian gardeners could have responded as follows:

First, regarding the charge that the Plant Club was not a garden club from the beginning, on what authority did Mrs. Redwine describe horticultural and plant study clubs as being "numerous" before 1891? Further, where was the evidence that any other garden club existed in Athens before the founding of the Ladies Garden Club? Similarly, regarding her statement that some clubs "are still functioning" in their original state while others "have...grown away" from their original intent, what was her evidence? Did she canvas plant study clubs around the country? Did she review the objectives stated in their by-laws? Did she peruse their minutes to determine that meetings had stayed the same or changed over the decades? Finally, on what basis did she determine that plant study clubs had not made "any definite original contribution to the Garden Club movement"?

Second, regarding the objective of the Ladies Garden Club, there is a discrepancy between Mrs. Redwine's ideal standard and the one actually attributed to her club in the *Athens Banner* of March 22, 1892. As the reader will note, the *Banner's* statement places the focus on exchanging information to promote better plant cultivation. According to the *Banner*, in early 1892, the Ladies' Garden Club was seeking members interested in learning "to grow anything from a carrot to a chrysanthemum." Although the affidavits and statements collected some forty years later from charter members of the club include the words *garden* and *gardening*, the contemporaneous newspaper accounts do not, except narrowly in reference to vegetable gardens. Like the founders of the Plant Club, the women of the Ladies' Garden Club were interested in growing plants well. Gardening, circa 1890, was very much a matter of growing plants from seeds and cuttings.

The Cambridge club would also have raised a question concerning the statement that Mrs. Redwine attributed to Mr. Berckmans around the time of the club's founding, that the Ladies' Garden Club was "the only organization of the kind in existence, *so far as he knew*" [emphasis added]. Yes, perhaps he uttered these words. But could even the most knowledgeable horticulturist of the 1890s be so confident of developments beyond his home territory of north Georgia? The age of easy communication was still far in the future. Indeed, in 1892, the founding of *Horticulture* magazine was twelve years away.

In fact, evidence in the archives of the Ladies' Garden Club indicates that Mr. Berckmans did say something worth quoting about the new club, which Mrs. Redwine likely read but did not report accurately. A "little sketch" of the organization, written by Mrs. E. K. Lumpkin in 1895 for the premium list distributed at the club's fourth annual chrysanthemum show, begins with a reference to the eminent horticulturist: "Our next door neighbor and friend, Mr. P. J. Berckman's [*sic*] of Augusta, Ga., tells me that *so far as his observation extends*, this is the only organization of its kind in the State, and probably in the South..." [emphasis added].²¹ So, Mr. Berckmans's statement was not general, but qualified. Perhaps he did know of the existence of a certain northern plant club.

Finally, the Cambridge ladies would have applauded the public flower shows of the Ladies' Garden Club—with rules and regulations that anticipated modern ones—as a major innovation showing great civic spirit. But they might have asked, Is holding an annual flower show a requirement of garden club status?

For Athenians, the horticultural sharing of flower shows is natural, encouraged by their southerly climate. Spring comes early to Georgia. Azaleas bloom in March, and camellias are not greenhouse plants. The growing season is long. And in 1892, Athens was still in touch with its agricultural roots. The city's Farmers' Club was a prominent civic organization, and the Ladies' Garden Club was conceived, according to the *Athens Banner*, as an auxiliary of the group. According to newspaper accounts of the garden club's first flower show, the event seems to have been as much about "best" vegetables—with prizes awarded for tomatoes, cabbages, corn, Irish potatoes, celery, lettuce, and strawberries—as it was about flowers.

By 1892 Cambridge's pastoral age was receding into memory. Since the mid-1800s, developers had been filling plots of open land with houses. Waves of immigrants had settled in Cambridge. The cityscape was changing, and suburbs were spreading beyond the city's borders. Though an amateur flower show could be a major civic event in Athens, such was not the case in Cambridge. Still, was the Plant Club less of a garden club than its southern sister?

OCTOBER 1936

A committee of the National Council of State Garden Clubs appointed to decide which garden club was the first in the country reports its findings to its executive board at a meeting in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia. The findings: The first garden club was organized in 1884 in Eufaula, Alabama, but soon after changed its work to that of a civic organization; the second was the Plant Club of Cambridge, Massachusetts, organized in 1889 and still active in garden club work; the third was the Ladies' Garden Club of Athens, Georgia, organized in 1891 and also still active.

It was surely disappointing news for the Ladies Garden Club after the effort that had gone into its appeal for recognition. Unaware that the question was under investigation, the Plant Club had put up no defense, yet it had prevailed. Why did the National Council judge the Plant Club to be the earlier one? The council's records are unavailable, so the answer is a matter of conjecture. But some of the executives of the council in 1936 likely recalled having been entertained by the Plant Club at their national convention in Boston four years earlier. Moreover, Mrs. Thomas Motley Jr., of Milton, the first president of the National Council, had also been a founding light in the establishment of the Massachusetts Federation of Garden Clubs and would have known members of the Plant Club. She may well have spoken up on behalf of the Cambridge club.

NOVEMBER 1936

The November 1 issue of *Horticulture* revisits the controversy with a lead article: “Again—The First Garden Club.” It reports that a special committee of the National Council of State Garden Clubs has been investigating this question: “For several years an effort has been made to determine which was the first garden club to be established in this country. Claims for this honor have been made by various organizations in different states.” Noting that the Cambridge Plant Club was generally believed to be the oldest in continuous existence, the article reports a surprise concerning another club not far from Cambridge—the Lexington (Massachusetts) Field and Garden Club, continuously active since 1876 (electing officers, holding meetings, and open to men and women).²² Not only was the Lexington club founded earlier, it was also the first to hold a flower show—with prizes and certificates—in the fall of 1881.

Clearly a garden club by purpose—“the care and protection of trees and shrubs in the public places of Lexington, the improvement of the town by planting of additional trees and ornamental plants and the cultivation of taste in arboriculture and horticulture”—the Lexington club’s claim on the title of first garden club seems indisputable. It is surprising that the ladies of the Cambridge Plant Club did not know of the nearby club. After all, Lexington Center is less than ten miles from Harvard Square, but towns were more insular in those days. In any case, the existence of the Lexington Field and Garden Club now known, the Plant Club could only claim to be the first women’s garden club, not the oldest.

Why didn’t the National Council’s special committee revise its report and recognize the Lexington group? A hint to the answer may be found in a May 1963 letter from Susan B. Goodale of the Cambridge Plant Club to the editor of *Horticulture*. Goodale notes that the Lexington Field and Garden Club was founded in 1876 but apparently was not considered to have “continually” fulfilled its function because some years’ minutes of meetings had been lost, though the group had an unbroken line of presidents. The *Horticulture* article made no reference to this gap, nor does any information in the Plant Club’s archives shed light on it. A trip to the Lexington Public Library, repository of the Lexington club’s archives, showed the following: There are some years without minutes (1898–1902, 1910–1919, and 1927), but the club has continuous financial records since 1876 as well as a continuous line of presidents.

Indeed, one may ask whether the Ladies Garden Club itself had “continually” fulfilled its function as a garden club. Given the loss of its early records, the question cannot be definitively answered. The group’s archives, housed at the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University

of Georgia in Athens, include fourteen boxes, but most of the material is from the last thirty years. Minutes begin only in 1913, correspondence files in the 1930s. The earliest items are newspaper write-ups dated 1891–1892. The only other documents from the 1890s are “premium lists” from 1894 to 1912 and a scrapbook dated 1897–1933 (the only piece of information in the scrapbook from the 1890s concerns the cost of flowers).

Based on archival records, the Ladies Garden Club would seem to be short on proof that it functioned continually during its first two decades. Why disallow the claim of the Lexington Field and Garden Club on the basis of gaps in its minutes when the Athens club has no minutes from its first twenty-one years? In contrast, the Cambridge Plant Club has minutes going back to its first meeting as well as a wealth of companion material—papers, journals, scrapbooks, photographs—accumulated thereafter.

1939

The National Council of State Garden Clubs officially recognizes the Ladies Garden Club in Athens as the first such organization in America. With this recognition, the Georgia state garden club federation—the Garden Club of Georgia—begins a fund to create a living memorial to the twelve founders of the Athens club.

The Cambridge Plant Club is not informed that the National Council had reopened an inquiry into the question of the first garden club. Nor is it told of the council’s changed opinion.

SEPTEMBER 1940

Senior members of the Cambridge Plant Club are jolted at the end of the summer by a lead article in the September 1 edition of *Horticulture*: “Athens, Georgia, Claims the Country’s First Garden Club.” The news: The National Council of State Garden Clubs determined in 1939 that the Ladies Garden Club was “the first group organized in the United States for the sole purpose of forming a garden club.” Further, a six-thousand-dollar garden, “a masterpiece in design and content,” is reported to be nearing completion in Athens as a living memorial to the club’s charter members, sponsored by the clubs of the Georgia state garden federation and the University of Georgia.²³ The article provides a lengthy description of this garden, actually a series of four gardens, around an antebellum smokehouse transformed into a museum and haven for garden club members and a laboratory for the university’s landscape students.

One can imagine the shocked silence in Cambridge as the Plant Club members read this news—a judgment made without any request for informa-



HORTICULTURE

Better Gardens Make Better Homes

HORTICULTURAL NEWS-LETTER

A \$6000 garden, a masterpiece in design and content, is rapidly nearing completion in Athens, Ga., where it will stand as a living memorial to the 12 charter members of the Ladies' Garden Club of that city, the first group organized in the United States for the sole purpose of forming a garden club. In December 1891 these women assembled to collaborate their efforts in gardening and exactly 48 years later, 1939, the National Council of Garden Clubs recognized their efforts.

For four years the Garden Club of Georgia which is composed of 215 clubs throughout the state has been perfecting plans for the series of four gardens which will form the memorial. Under the direction of the landscape architecture department of the University of Georgia, co-sponsor of the project, the memorial has reached the laying out of the gardens around a museum and trophy room made from an ante-bellum smokehouse.

Carved into the white wooden panel above the doorway are the words "Garden Club of Georgia" flanked by small white Doric columns and espaliered jasmine. On the pale lemon-colored walls inside hangs an oil painting of the twelve founders who will look down in the future on countless garden schools, receptions and flower shows made possible by their initiative. A bay window has been draped and cushioned by a club in Augusta. Colonial furniture has been donated by members of pioneer Athens families.

The trophy room opens into a courtyard garden of cut stone and brick shaded by an aged oak and surrounded by an old-fashioned pierced brick wall. Later, white azaleas will stand out against the yellow jasmynes and clematis vines are

being trained over the walls which are enhanced by three hanging gates of Williamsburg green.

A bay window looks out on the opposite side at an old-fashioned boxwood garden. Four flower beds radiate from a central sundial and in each is to be a Georgia product outlined with boxwood. An Atlanta club has already supplied the 2000 boxwoods. Against the white gravel in these beds a conventionalized Cherokee rose, a watermelon, a peach and a cotton boll will stand out effectively.

Old brick is used for all the walks as well as a circular path separating the four central beds from the outer ones which will be filled with pinks, asters, narcissi and lilies. Two mimosa trees in the outside corners and a surrounding white picket fence will close off this area from the terrace garden. An espaliered pear tree and a white camellia, trained fan shape, will decorate the north and south walls of the trophy house.

The terrace garden with its gravel surface shaded by flowering dogwoods is intended as an outdoor classroom, for the entire project will be not only a haven for garden club members and their guests but also a laboratory for the university's landscape students. The university will assume responsibility for the garden's protection and upkeep after its completion.

The lower garden will be devoted to perennials and is the most ambitious part of the development. Here will be two six by 100-foot beds surrounded by a white picket fence and fed by underground irrigation. The choicest Spring and Fall flowering perennials will be used and at the end of the plot will be a pool with a stone coping.

The remaining portion of the land will be used for a col-

Athens, Georgia, Claims the Country's First Garden Club

This garden in front of the new museum of the Garden Club of Georgia is in the process of making. A sundial is to be surrounded by four beds, each featuring a Georgia product done in boxwood—a watermelon, a peach, a cotton boll and a Cherokee rose.



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Lead article in Horticulture, September 1, 1940, claiming the Ladies' Garden Club of Athens, Georgia, as the country's first garden club. The photograph shows a view of the garden planted by the Georgia state garden club federation in honor of the Ladies Garden Club's twelve charter members. (*Records of the Cambridge Plant Club & Garden Club, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University*)

tion from them, a trial in absentia. Also stunning: The six-thousand-dollar memorial garden, which no doubt produced a twinge of jealousy, described in glorious detail. Two photographs accompanied the text, one of the garden, the other—the pièce de résistance—an oil painting depicting the founders of the Ladies' Garden Club at their first meeting in Mrs. Lumpkin's parlor. The painting of the imagined scene was displayed inside the garden club museum "on a pale lemon-colored wall."²⁴

On September 4, stunned though she may have been, Miss Corne writes to Lois Lilley Howe, president of the Plant Club and a noted architect:²⁵

17 Hilliard Street

Sept 4

Dear Miss Howe

As I have unsuccessfully tried several times to get you on the telephone I conclude that you are still away, and so am writing—hoping that you will be able to read my crayon scrawl—Have you yet seen *Horticulture* for Sept 1 with its interesting article about a wonderful garden being built by the Garden Club of Athens Georgia and *claiming again* in large first page letters to be the "Country's First Garden Club."—We have had trouble with this Club before—perhaps because we are not *called a garden club*, they won't believe figures, and were reported to have said that we were "only a *sewing club*, any way"—They have naturally been disappointed to learn of an older club but would you not think that they would be too proud to claim an honor which belongs to others and now hundreds who read *Horticulture* will believe it—Won't you please write to Mr. Farrington [editor of *Horticulture*] and ask him to try and correct this. It was chiefly through his kind interest in us that ten years ago the Mass. Horticultural Society "after *careful investigation*" bestowed a silver medal on the Cambridge Plant Club for being "The *first* Club of its kind in the Country." He can surely not have forgotten....I will try to write a few lines as a Charter Member—but writing has become a punishment rather than a pleasure since my eyes have misbehaved. An early Athens Club member may even have copied us—as did others, having heard through friends in Cambridge, one in Germantown, Pa. and another one in a little town in Maine were started before many months passed—But whether they continued or not I do not know—Perhaps Mrs. Moore our other Charter Member would write too—The more the better—I enjoyed your call so much—and this wonderful iris came out beautifully the next day. I had never seen anything like them. I went to Rockport for a few weeks and it did me good—though I can't walk very far yet. I would not care if only I could see to read and write but it is a

cataract you know—and without an operation—about the advisability of which the doctor is not decided, I will never be better. I am sorry to inflict such a letter upon you but it is the best I can do at present—Hoping that you have had a pleasant summer and that you can do something about this Athens club's claim.

Very sincerely,
Fanny E. Corne

Miss Corne's letter is a bit difficult to read in spots (all underscoring is in the original) but is still amazingly clear for a woman of ninety-three. Despite her problems with her eyesight, her interest in horticulture remained strong. In January 1940, for example, she contributed questions to an "Information Please" program hosted by the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts for some 350 garden club members in Horticultural Hall. The questions, "fired right and left in quick succession," sometimes "baffled" a panel of experts, including the directors of the Arnold Arboretum and the Harvard Botanic Garden. According to an account in the *Herald*, Miss Corne was one of seven members of federated garden clubs whose questions stumped the experts, for which achievement they were awarded packages of seeds.

Miss Howe received Miss Corne's letter at the Phillbrook Farm Inn in Shelburne, New Hampshire—a small town at the northern end of Mount Washington Valley—where she was vacationing. On September 10, she sent a letter to Mr. E. I. Farrington, whose acquaintance with members of the Plant Club went back at least as far as the 1920s.

September 10, 1940
Dear Mr. Farrington:

Why does the Athens Georgia Garden Club claim to be the oldest garden club in America?

The Cambridge Plant Club has the medal awarded to it for that honorable position by the Horticultural Society.

Could you not make a statement—quite pointedly—to this effect in the next number of "Horticulture"? I should have written before but failed to see my September number in this summer period of flitting.

The Cambridge Plant Club had its fiftieth anniversary in January 1939—an account of this was given in "Horticulture." It is well-known & active & has taken prizes at various of the shows. Being far from home, I can look up no dates but they could easily be found.

Please straighten this out for us.

Yours very sincerely,
Lois Lilley Howe
President of the Cambridge Plant Club

Mr. Farrington's reply, dated September 16, shows his surprise:

Dear Mrs. Howe:

I found your letter on my return from vacation and well understand the way you feel about the claim made by the Garden Club of Athens, Georgia.

I will, of course, publish something setting forth the position of your organization. I am rather surprised that the National Council did not investigate this matter more fully before recognizing the claim of the Athens club.

Very truly yours,
E. I. Farrington
Editor

OCTOBER 1940

A letter from Fanny Elizabeth Corne appears in the October 15 edition of *Horticulture* under the title "Cambridge Plant Club's Protest."

Dear Editor,

Horticulture for September 1 has an interesting article about a wonderful garden being created by the Garden Club of Athens, Ga. The article, however, reiterates the mistaken claim of the Athens club that it is the oldest club of its kind in the country.

About ten years ago, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, after careful investigation, bestowed upon the Cambridge (Mass.) Plant Club a silver medal in recognition of its being the first club of its kind in the United States.

This club held its first meeting, which I attended, in January, 1889. About this date there can be no mistake. The Athens club, according to its own statement, was not organized until nearly three years later in December, 1891. These dates speak for themselves. We celebrated our 50th anniversary about 20 months ago. It will be 15 months before the Athens group can celebrate its own.

The Athens club will deservedly receive much honor and renown for the beautiful garden it is creating, but the honor of being the oldest club of its kind in America still belongs to the Cambridge Plant Club.

Fanny Elizabeth Corne

A Charter Member of the Cambridge Plant Club

Although Miss Corne's letter is gracious in referring to the Athens club's memorial garden, a tone of impatience comes through. Why don't the ladies of Athens simply recognize that the Cambridge Plant Club is a garden club and that it predates theirs?

FEBRUARY 1941

A dueling correspondence in *Horticulture* continues as Nina Scudder of the Ladies Garden Club replies to Miss Corne in the magazine of February 1. Miss Scudder's missive uses Miss Corne's own words against her:

Dear Editor,

Horticulture's October 15 issue contains a letter from a charter member of the Cambridge (Mass.) Plant Club which protests the statement that the Ladies' Garden Club of Athens, Ga., is the oldest club of its kind in the country. That the Cambridge Plant Club is an older organization is understood but a distinction exists between a plant club and a garden club. Founded in 1891, the Ladies' Garden Club has had an uninterrupted record. Some of the early rules for flower shows and judging drawn by P.J.A. Berckmans form a pattern for those of the present time. It is also fitting at this season to recall the club's first chrysanthemum show held in 1892. Furthermore, the National Council of State Garden Clubs of America passed a resolution which awarded the honor of being the first garden club in the country to the Ladies' Garden Club. As Fannie [*sic*] Elizabeth Corne states, the Cambridge Plant Club is the first of its kind in the United States but it must be remembered that the Ladies' Garden Club is the first and oldest garden club in America.

Nina Scudder

Athens, Ga.

One can only imagine how the ladies of the Plant Club received Miss Scudder's communication. A high level of irritation, if not distress, is reflected in a letter from Miss Corne to Miss Howe. Reconsidering how to argue the case, the nonagenarian charter member asks Miss Howe and Mrs. J. Lowell Moore

(another charter member) to reply to Nina Scudder.²⁶ (Miss Howe and Mrs. Moore, at ages 76 and 83, respectively, were a bit younger than Miss Corne.)

Feb 11

Dear Miss Howe,

I have been reading Nina Scudder's letter over again, and do hope that both you and Mrs. Moore have or surely will reply. She is so smugly satisfied with herself and so inconsequential. She has to concede that we are the older "organization" but "a difference exists between a plant club and a garden club"—perhaps so, but we don't happen to be a plant club—but *the* one and only Plant Club—so named for reasons of our own before any other club of its kind existed any where in the United States, the country or even in Europe. In so far as we ever heard, and my sister and I lived abroad many years—You know—She says they were organized in 1891 [and] have an unbroken record ever since. [What a pity that Miss Corne did not know about the Athenian club's missing records!] We have an unbroken record since January 1889—Three years earlier—Yet they are the oldest club of its kind in the country—a bit mixed up isn't she? One can't help being rather sorry for them, having been led to believe by the Federation of Garden Clubs [National Council of State Garden Club Federations] that they were the first—Yet when the Federation met in Boston it was taken for granted that we of course were the Mother Club—Mrs. Moore and I as Charter Members were invited to their banquet with seats of honor at the 1st table...I had to rise and make my little bow. The Plant Club has been too modest—On receiving our medal 8 or 9 years ago if some one had only written a note at once to Horticulture proclaiming the honor done us then this trouble would have been prevented—Why did no one think of doing so!! There is another matter I want to write you about but have inflicted enough of my hieroglyphics upon you for this time. I can only follow what I am doing by using a strong magnifier and following a thin gray line—

Very sincerely yours,
Fanny E. Corne

Although Mrs. Moore did not rise to the defense of the Plant Club's claim,²⁷ the archives do include rebuttal notes in the hand of Miss Howe. Her points are as follows:

The Ladies Garden Club of Athens, Georgia, still considers itself the oldest garden club & we must allow it to be the oldest club to be called a Garden Club.

The Cambridge Plant Club was founded in 1889 before anyone had thought of a garden club. [Like Miss Scudder, Miss Howe overlooks the Lexington Field and Garden Club and the club in Eufaula, Alabama.]

Its most important members were three ladies who had notable gardens [Miss Howe refers to Mrs. Hayes and her daughters] in which they worked themselves. One of them suggested that it should be called the Floricultural Club. Could this [be] more suggestive of a garden club[?]

And if the Athens Club is the oldest, what is the Cambridge Club going to do with the medal given to it in 1931 as the oldest garden club? It has been for many years a member of the Garden Club Fed of Massch & thru that of the Nat Fed has entered flower shows and taken prizes as a Garden Club.

The archives also contain notes for a draft letter to Arno H. Nerhring, executive secretary of the Massachusetts Horticulture Society. Undated and unsigned, it is in the hand of Miss Howe.

Dear Mr. Nerhring,

What is the definition of a Garden Club?

Does it exist merely on its name or by its role?

In 1889, a group of plant and flower lovers met at a friend's house to admire her blossoming passion flower. All having gardens, they decided to form a club to enable them to talk over experiments & successes in their gardens.

This organization has continued to the present day. They had much discussion as to its name, one suggestion being "The Floricultural Club." The Cambridge Plant Club—that was its final decision.

It is a member of the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts and as such has exhibited in 15 Flower Shows, received prizes and moreover the Massch Hort Society has awarded it a medal as the oldest Garden Club in America—in spite of this claim of the Athens Garden Club of Georgia that it cannot be a garden club because it is a Plant Club.

May we suggest that the Athens Club might call itself the oldest so-called Garden Club?

Miss Howe might have added, Can a person engaged in the study and cultivation of plants remain aloof from gardening? Even if one's first love was a houseplant, isn't it natural for that love to spill out of doors to gardens and the surrounding landscape? Clearly, Miss Howe was exasperated that the matter of which club was the first *garden* club was turning on semantics—namely, the breadth of interpretation that might be allowed the word *plant*. Miss Scudder of Athens held fast to the argument that the Plant Club began as a plant society—a group with narrow botanical interests, not a garden club. Had they wanted to play with words, the Cambridge side might have contended that the name Plant Club suggests a broader range of interests than does the name Garden Club.

APRIL 1941

Miss Corne still awaits a reply in *Horticulture*. She writes again to Miss Howe.

Dear Miss Howe,

As yet I have seen no answer to “Nina Scudder’s” snippy note in *Horticulture* from Feb 1st. So as I think it a pity to have the readers of *Horticulture* in doubt as to which club is really the older one, and as also I know that the name Plant Club does puzzle people, I have written an answer myself which I include. Please use it as you think best, as “Fanny Elizabeth Corne Charter Member” like the last letter. I thought that you might prefer to have some one else write—or sign this one—I have such difficulty with writing that I had our student type it for me—and he has made mistakes I think—but you will understand.

Very Sincerely,
Fanny E. Corne
April 20

A letter from Miss Corne to the editor of *Horticulture* is set forth below. It was not published. Did the editor choose not to publish it, or did Miss Corne decide not to send it? [This question cannot be answered. The magazine does not have old correspondence files relating to articles. Another possible repository of old correspondence is the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, though an archivist who looked for files in the spring of 2004 found none.]

Dear Mr. Editor,

The Cambridge Plant Club hoped that the Athens Ladies Garden Club, when confronted with the authentic dates of the founding of the two clubs, would yield to the inevitable and allow that we started nearly three years before them. But Nina Scudder in *Horticulture* for February first, while conceding the undeniable fact, asserts that there exists a distinction between “a plant club and a garden club.” But we are not a plant club (if any such exists). At a time when there were no other such clubs in existence, it made no difference what we chose to call ourselves. The idea of these clubs was original with us—a sudden inspiration of the founder, Miss Caroline S. Hayes....

We could indeed sympathize with the Athenians for their disappointment, aggravated as it must have been by the singularly unfortunate oversight on the part of the Federation, and the consequent mistaken resolution on the part of the Council. But we did not start three years before them in order to aggravate them, as they seem to think, judging from the tone of their letters; that was Fate pure and simple—and nothing that they or we can say or do can alter the fact that The Cambridge Plant Club is the pioneer Garden Club of America.

Under a column entitled “Readers’ Questions Answered,” the April 15, 1941 edition of *Horticulture* includes the following item:

Which is the oldest garden club in America?

After careful consideration the committee of the National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc., came to the conclusion that the Ladies Garden Club of Athens, Ga., is the first club, so far as can be ascertained, to have been organized under the name of a garden club and to have continuously fulfilled its functions as a garden club to the present time. Also, after careful consideration the Cambridge (Mass.) Plant Club which is still older was determined to be the first club still existent to be organized for amateur plant study.

Miss Corne and Miss Howe’s appeals were thus summarily dismissed. The Plant Club had in effect lost before the highest court in the land—the National Council of State Garden Clubs. Worse still, the Cambridge ladies had not known when the trial was being conducted. Not knowing that the matter was under review, the Plant Club did not represent itself before the council—an unfortunate omission because they could have made an

irrefutable case. In contrast, the Ladies Garden Club had a strong, well-connected advocate in its state federation, the Garden Club of Georgia.

Nevertheless, the war in Europe placed the dispute in perspective. Indeed, a letter from an English garden club in the April 15 *Horticulture* made concern over a title seem a vanity.

Appeal from an English Garden Club

Dear Editor—

As you are aware, we island dwellers are now faced with a time when, for our health and very existence, we must depend largely on home-produced food. All of us who cannot fight are digging for our lives, and in the game we are playing “Spades are Trumps.”

At some seasons of the year we have a glut of fruit and vegetables which, unless we can preserve them quickly, must be wasted. The most satisfactory way of preservation is by canning but so far we have not been able to purchase over here a fool-proof machine. The only safe one is made in your country.

It has struck me that as all keen gardeners are brothers at heart, some of this family on your side of the Atlantic may be willing to stretch out their hands to their brethren over here and suggest some plan by which we can obtain the canners and steam pressure boilers of which we are in such urgent need.

A friend sends me copies of *Horticulture* twice a month and I feel a word in your paper will call public attention to the matter and do a lot to help us in doing what we mean to do—WIN THE WAR.

Yours faithfully

Mrs. Alan Gardner

Surrey Ladies' Gardening Club

Worplesdon, Surrey, England

In 1942 the Plant Club began a Seeds for England project, which continued through 1950. Miss Howe's presidential papers contain a file of poignant thank-you letters that report successes with these seeds as well as wartime life in England.

DECEMBER 1943

Miss Corne—aged ninety-six years, four months, and twenty-nine days—dies.

MAY 1945

Presiding at a meeting on May 7, Miss Howe notes that “possibly some of the newer club members [are] unaware of the distinction of the Cambridge Plant Club as the oldest in America,” showing the silver medal presented in 1931 by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, with the dates 1889–1931 inscribed on it and the legend “First of its kind in America.”

Miss Howe makes no mention of the controversy with the Ladies Garden Club.

JULY 1945

Jane Newell Moore—aged eighty-eight years, one month, and three days—dies.

Mrs. Moore’s obituary reports that she had been a charter member of the Plant Club of Cambridge, “the oldest garden club in the nation.”

JANUARY 1948

At a meeting on January 5, Miss Howe brings to the attention of members an article in *Horticulture* that describes a club in Athens, Georgia, as “the first garden club organized in the United States.”²⁸ The author of the item, Dorothy G. Jarnagin of Athens, provides this informative tidbit: “Back in those days [1891] when ‘women’s place was in the home,’ gardening was perhaps not so fashionable as it is now but was looked upon more as a part of the business of homemaking. Those early members met for the purpose of swapping plants and information.”

The minutes for the meeting record that Miss Howe would send *Horticulture* a photograph of the medal given to the Plant Club by the Massachusetts Horticulture Society to commemorate its status as the “first of its kind.” Did Miss Howe ever send the photograph? Why didn’t she tell the club about the earlier articles? The archives do not provide an answer. It is at this time, however, that Miss Howe begins to research her history of the Cambridge Plant Club.

JANUARY 1949

The Plant Club celebrates its sixtieth birthday with a program prepared by members, including a “brief informative and witty history” of the club by Lois Lilley Howe. Following Miss Howe’s reading is a charade in three scenes, the first of which represents two ladies of Athens, Georgia, in January 1892. The skit offers a theory that one of those ladies had traveled north and attend-



Photograph taken at a party marking the sixtieth anniversary of the Cambridge Plant Club, January 1949. Lois Lilley Howe (club president, 1938–47) is seated in the first row, fourth from the left, flanked by two senior members of the club: Mrs. L. Eugene Emerson (club president, 1926–38) and Mrs. Edward S. King (author of an article in vol. 31 of the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Historical Society*). Mrs. Thorvald S. Ross (club president, 1947–1950) is kneeling at the right front. (*Records of the Cambridge Plant Club & Garden Club, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University*)

ed a meeting of the Plant Club, started on account of “a little old potted plant of Passion Flower.” Her incredulous friend cries, “What do you mean!—a May Pop—that little old weed that grows in our fields?” And the traveler replies, “May Pop to us”—“*Passiflora*” to them!²⁹

Although the skit was based on the hypothesis that an Athenian lady had journeyed to Cambridge, it was a member of the Plant Club—its president, Mrs. Nathaniel Southgate Shaler—who traveled to Georgia with her husband, the eminent Harvard geologist, during the winter of 1891–1892. Is it possible that she gave Dr. Newton the idea of a garden club for ladies?³⁰

The same month as the Plant Club's sixtieth anniversary celebration, an article in *House & Garden* features the garden at the University of Georgia honoring the Ladies Garden Club. It describes the plan for a parterre—an ornamental arrangement of flowerbeds—in the eighteenth-century manner as one of the gardens celebrating the founding of the first garden club in America.

MARCH 1949

The *Christian Science Monitor* of March 19, 1949, features an article, "Garden Club in Cambridge Oldest in U.S." Did the ladies of Athens see it?

1950

The Ladies Garden Club presents a historical marker at the Founders' Memorial Garden, S. Lumpkin and Bocock streets, University of Georgia North Campus, Athens. The text is as follows:

1891

FIRST GARDEN CLUB

FOUNDERS' MEMORIAL GARDEN WHICH
COMMEMORATES THE FOUNDERS OF AMERICA'S FIRST
GARDEN CLUB, THE LADIES GARDEN CLUB
ORGANIZED IN 1891, ATHENS, GEORGIA.

THIS GARDEN WAS DEVELOPED ON UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA CAMPUS BY UNIVERSITY'S LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE DEPARTMENT AND
THE GARDEN CLUB OF GEORGIA.

PRESENTED BY LADIES GARDEN CLUB.

1950

MAY 1953

Lois Lilley Howe, then eighty-nine, reads her paper "History of the Plant Club" to the Cambridge Historical Society on May 28. The report of the Society's council for the year refers to this paper and four companion essays on the club's civic projects as "The Story of the Oldest Garden Club in the United States and Its Service to Cambridge."

Miss Howe's account of the Plant Club's sixty years of history—the first meeting, the development of traditions, notable members, broad interests, and civic projects—makes no reference to the painful correspondence con-

cerning the “oldest” garden club. Still, it cannot be mere coincidence that her essay manages to report Plant Club activities in all the areas described as interests of the Ladies’ Garden Club in the 1929 *Horticulture* feature article: war work, flower shows, civic planting, opposition to billboards, preservation of native plants, and the club’s role in the founding of the state garden club federation.

Miss Howe’s essay does not explicitly claim the title of first garden club in the country for the Plant Club, but she creates the impression that it is. She makes clear through well-chosen details that the club was a garden club in the fullest sense of the term from the beginning. Writing the paper must have been satisfying, making a case for the club and laying the ground for an appeal by a future club historian.

MAY 1954

On May 1, the National Council of State Garden Clubs presents a garden sculpture to the Founders’ Garden at the University of Georgia in recognition of the Ladies Garden Club. A bronze plaque on the base of statue bears the inscription:

A TRIBUTE
FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF STATE GARDEN CLUBS
ON ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY
APRIL, 1954
PRESENTED TO
THE FOUNDERS GARDEN
ATHENS, GEORGIA
“FOR EVERY GOOD THING HAS A BEGINNING
– AND THE BEGINNING WAS HERE”

MAY 1963

The Letters to the Editor section of this month’s *Horticulture* (by now a monthly periodical) includes a communication, “Which Came First?” from Susan B. Goodale, a member of the Cambridge Plant Club.

Dear Editor –

The National Federation of Garden Clubs annual meeting in Athens, Ga., in April was of special interest because (quotes its magazine, “National Gardener”), the garden club of Athens, Ga., (founded Decem-

ber 1891) was “the first club to have been organized under the name of garden club, and to have continually fulfilled its function as a garden club up to the present time.” We, in Massachusetts, also find it interesting to remember that the garden club movement started in this state with the founding of at least two clubs before that date. The Lexington Field and Garden Club was founded in 1876. Although perhaps it cannot be called “continually” fulfilling its function as a few minutes of meetings are lost, it has an unbroken line of presidents. The Cambridge Plant Club, founded January 1889, was never organized “under the name of garden club” but has continually fulfilled the function of one since its beginning. In 1931, this club was awarded a Silver Medal by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society as the “first club of its kind in America.”

Susan B. Goodale
Cambridge, Mass.

Mrs. Goodale, who joined the Plant Club in the 1930s, served as president from 1956 to 1959.³¹ In preparation for the club’s seventy-fifth anniversary, she reviewed the club’s file on the dispute with the Ladies Garden Club—her notes on the matter are in the archives—and offered the salvo printed above.

JUNE 1964

Lois Lilley Howe dies, twelve days short of her one hundredth birthday.

1968

The Ladies Garden Club is recognized with a Georgia Historical Commission marker on the front lawn of the house where the club’s first meeting was held. The text of the sign reads:

AMERICA’S FIRST GARDEN CLUB

In 1891 at this site, the Ladies Garden Club was founded by twelve Athens ladies in the home of Mrs. E. K. Lumpkin. Mrs. Lamar Cobb was the first president. Beginning as a small neighborhood group, the club extended membership to all Athens ladies interested in gardening in 1892.

In the spring of 1892, the group presented its first flower and vegetable exhibition. By 1894 a set of standards, similar to those of today, had been drawn up to make the shows as professional as possible.

In 1936 [sic] the National Council of State Garden Clubs recognized the Ladies Garden Club as America's first garden club.

Did the ladies of Athens see Mrs. Goodale's letter and respond by applying to the Georgia Historical Commission for permission to install a plaque?

AUGUST 2002

The dispute between the two clubs has long been forgotten in Cambridge. Indeed, members of the Cambridge Plant & Garden Club, who regularly refer to the Plant Club as the oldest in the country, are quite unaware of the Ladies Garden Club. Then, in August 2002, *The Garden Club of America Bulletin* publishes an excerpt from an address by Ann S. Frierson, president of the GCA and a member of the Junior Ladies' Garden Club of Athens, Georgia.³² Her speech refers to the founders of the oldest garden club in America—the Ladies Garden Club—and the garden that memorializes them:

In mid-January I was walking through the University of Georgia campus and wandered through the Founders Memorial Garden. This garden is dedicated to the members of the Ladies Garden Club, who, in 1891, formed the first garden club in America....I noticed for the first time that there was a plaque on a statue in the garden, and I walked over. It read: "For every good thing there is a beginning, and the beginning was here."

Certainly an innocent mistake, the Cambridge club's historian assumes. Preparing to write a letter that will (gently) inform Mrs. Frierson that the Cambridge Plant Club was an older garden club than the Ladies Garden Club, the historian reviews her club's archives at the Schlesinger Library and finds a thin file labeled "Material re: Age of club, 1929–1963."³³

Since the summer of 2002, I, as that historian, have combed through the issues of *Horticulture* magazine from the 1930s and 1940s (at the Boston Public Library), the archives of the Cambridge Plant Club and other organizations to which members of the Plant Club belonged (at the Schlesinger Library), the papers of Lois Lilley Howe and her architecture firm (at MIT),³⁴ material held by the Hargrett Rare Book Library (the repository of the archives of the Ladies' Garden Club and information related to Dr. Edwin Dorset Newton, central figure in the founding of the Athens club), the archives of the Lexington Field and Garden Club, a collection of personal papers held by the grandsons of Mrs. J. Lowell Moore (née Jane Hancox Newell, a charter member of the Cambridge Plant Club), and assorted historical and biographical sources of information on the town of Athens, Georgia,

prominent Athenians of the 1890s, and distinguished Cantabrigians of the period as well.

All this material provides a fuller picture of the dispute. In laying out the facts, I hope to give the reader a sense of two unique women's clubs, both ahead of their time. Does either one deserve the title of the first garden club in America? In fact, the Lexington Field and Garden Club—still an impressive and active club—was indisputably the first. But as far as the first *women's* garden club is concerned, the Ladies Garden Club may have been the first to have been organized under the name, but the Cambridge Plant Club was a garden club for nearly three years before Dr. Newton began to promote the idea in Georgia.

A debate turning on the breadth of definition allowed the word *plant vis-à-vis garden* has its ironies. The name “garden club” belies the range of interests that members of garden clubs pursue—from horticulture and garden design to civic planting, plant conservation, and landscape preservation. Few people who are not members of a garden club—or related to a member of one—appreciate how much good garden club members do. In that spirit, let the ladies of Athens, Georgia, put aside their misconceptions concerning the Plant Club. Similarly, let the ladies of Cambridge, Massachusetts, recognize the innovation of the Athenian flower shows. Let both clubs salute the Lexington Field and Garden Club. And let the National Garden Clubs—the umbrella association of state garden club federations—give proper recognition to the two oldest continuous garden clubs in the country: The Lexington Field and Garden Club and the Cambridge Plant Club.

AFTERWORD

OCTOBER 2005

In September 2005, just as the Society's centennial book was going through the final editing process, I made a chance discovery of the records of a women's garden club older than either the Cambridge Plant Club or the Ladies' Garden Club. Ironically, on a research trail full of small ironies, this discovery was made close to home. Thanks to the Cambridge Historical Society's Summer 2005 newsletter, I had learned about the newly processed papers of Sara Thorp Bull (1850–1911). This was an intriguing item to me, because Mrs. Bull was a charter member of the Plant Club, known in club history for her hospitality (she was the first hostess to offer club members a cup of tea after a meeting).³⁵

Excited at the possibility of finding new material on the early years of the Plant Club, I made an appointment with the Society's archivist, Mark Vassar, to review the Bull papers in the Brinkler Library. When I arrived, I told

Mark a bit about the “first garden club” controversy. He pointed to a shelf on the other side of the room and mentioned the Society’s collection of the Garden Street *Garden Club’s* records. Imagine a moment of silence as I absorbed this information. Turn back for a moment, dear reader, to the entry for December 1928. You will be reminded that the minutes of a Plant Club meeting on December 1, 1890, contain a reference to an intriguingly named club—the Garden Street Club—and the information that the Plant Club’s next meeting would be postponed “so as not to interfere with the meeting” of the other club. Presumably the postponement was necessary because Miss Almira Needham, director of the Plant Club, who lived at 47 Garden Street, was a member of the Garden Street Club as well.

The archives of the Plant Club provide no further information about the other club, except for a passing reference in a fortieth anniversary paper—written by none other than Miss Corne—that its members’ interest had apparently waned. Throughout the course of my research, I had wondered, Was the Garden Street Club a social club for people who lived in the Garden Street neighborhood? Were its members connected with the Harvard Botanic Garden, bordered by Garden and Linnaean streets? Was the existence of a neighborhood club named the Garden Street Club, even if not a garden club, the reason the name Garden Club had not been chosen—or even mentioned—when the founders of the Plant Club were considering names?

The purpose of the Garden Street Club had seemed maddeningly unknowable, so I offered my speculations in a tentative way. Still, the existence of the other club would seem on its face to explain why The Plant Club had not been named The Garden Club. How gratifying to learn by chance, more than a year after finishing my paper, that my suppositions were correct. Indeed, the Garden Street Club was not a neighborhood social club, but an actual garden club—whose full name turned out to be the Garden Street Garden Club. And, yes, Miss Needham of the Plant Club was also a member of the older garden club—a charter member recommended by none other than Mrs. Asa Gray.

Why was the Garden Street Garden Club forgotten? There is no record of when the club’s archives were given to the Cambridge Historical Society, or by whom (though one likely candidate is Mrs. Swan, a member of both clubs as well as of the historical society). Until the Cambridge Public Library on Broadway was closed for renovation, the collection of the Garden Street Garden Club was held in what had become the inaccessible recesses of the library’s Cambridge Room, and no one was aware of it. Early in 2005, the Society retrieved the collection and processed it that spring.

Not only was the Garden Street Garden Club a garden club, its records—five bound volumes of minutes from 1879 to 1895, with inserts for annual

reports dated 1896 and 1897—are a treasure. The first meeting of the club was on March 24, 1879, at the home of Mrs. Marcou of 42 Garden Street.³⁶ Membership was small (only eleven ladies were at the first meeting), but the club elected a president and a secretary. Subscription for membership was one dollar. Meetings were on Monday afternoons at four (a potential for conflict with the Plant Club's meetings, also on Monday afternoons). The minutes of the club include tips, facts, and personal stories about gardening, chronicle field trips to local green houses and gardens, and record the sharing of plants and flowers at meetings and various exhibitions. They note that at the first meeting, Asa Gray kindly offered the club *The Gardener's Monthly*.³⁷ Also recorded was the date of the first crocus at the Botanical Garden (March 16, 1879), and this maxim from Miss Howe: "No seeds so good as your own seeds." And at the club's meeting (its 329th) on October 26, 1891, members offered appreciations of Miss Needham, who had passed away since the last meeting.³⁸ Meetings continued to be recorded through 1895, and annual reports for two more years, but the archives give no information as to why the club disbanded.

Where do things stand in 2005 on the issue of which is the oldest women's garden club in the country? For over seventy-five years, Cantabrigians have supported the claim of the Cambridge Plant Club and Athenians, that of the Ladies' Garden Club. The unearthing of the records of the Garden Street Garden Club reveals the surprising news that neither was first. The Garden Street Garden Club, founded in 1879, was first by a substantial margin—nine years, ten months, and four days, to be precise. The Plant Club must accept second-place status and a qualification on its title, granted by the Massachusetts Horticulture Society, as "the first of its kind."

At the same time, the new knowledge of the existence of the Garden Street Garden Club clarifies the Plant Club's choice of name; the word *plant* in the younger club's name cannot be taken as a descriptor suggesting a limited focus. The Garden Street club aside, the records of the Plant Club, which document the breadth of the club's garden interests, are indisputable on this point. The evidence is both ample and clear: The Ladies' Garden Club, which has no official club records before 1913, must acknowledge not just one, but two, Cambridge clubs as earlier women's garden clubs.

ENDNOTES

1. The Hayes family—father, mother, two unmarried sons and three unmarried daughters—settled in Cambridge in the late 1860s. They were reportedly so outspoken and frank that at first their more reserved neighbors misunderstood them—perhaps because they had lived more in the world than most Cantabrigians.

Born in 1812, the Honorable John L. Hayes had a remarkably varied life in business and politics, even for a Dartmouth graduate and Harvard-trained lawyer. As a young man, he organized the Katahdin ironworks in Maine, then served as a counsel for the Canadian government in

Washington, D.C., negotiating reciprocity treaties. Stirred by the nation's debate on slavery, he called for the first convention of Independent Democrats. Later, he organized and served as secretary of the Mexican, Rio Grande, and Pacific Railway Company (obtaining a charter from the Mexican government that authorized the construction of a railroad across Mexico). In 1860 Dartmouth College honored him with an LL.D degree. From 1861 to 1865, he was chief clerk of the U.S. Patent Office, and in later years, until his death in 1887, he served as secretary of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers.

John Hayes was also a student of natural history. He collected and mounted a complete cabinet of birds, made a herbarium of flora, and studied geology in both the library and the field. He became a member of the Boston Society of Natural History in 1845 and was also connected with other scientific associations in the United States and Europe. His writings, devoted mainly to legal, political, and scientific subjects, included over sixty titles, among them, "The Iron Mines of Nova Scotia," "Jackson's Vindication as the Discoverer of Anaesthetics," "Reminiscences of the Free-Soil Movement in New Hampshire," "The Hudson Bay Question," "The Protective Question Abroad and at Home," "Sheep Industry in the South," and many articles and pamphlets on wool production. A paper on glaciers that he presented in 1843 was regarded as an important contribution to the history of glacial phenomena in relation to geology.

The Hayeses drew friends easily into their family circle. The three Hayes sisters in particular were noted for their devotion to home and family, loyalty to friends, and love of gardening. Indeed, the whole family was fond of gardening and did much of the work on their several Cambridge acres themselves. The two sons were lawyers like their father, but before and after office hours during the growing season, they worked in the family garden. The sisters also did their share. In the summer, visitors were apt to be met at the door with the request to "please walk 'round to the garden, the ladies are there," and rarely did a guest leave without a gift of flowers or fruit.

2. Founded in 1904, *Horticulture* is the country's oldest gardening magazine. Started as a weekly trade journal for florists and estate and greenhouse gardeners, it was purchased by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society in 1923 and turned into a publication for members. In the late 1970s, new editors began to transform the magazine into a national publication. Since 1981 it has had a series of owners (including *The New Yorker* and White Flower Farm). Despite these changes, *Horticulture* remains a serious magazine for people interested in plants and gardens.

3. In 1924 the Massachusetts Horticultural Society (MHS) called a meeting to encourage the commonwealth's garden clubs to form an affiliation. The Plant Club sent two senior members—Miss Peabody and Mrs. Drinkwater—as delegates. For three years, the resulting group was a "very loose" organization. Then, in March 1927, twenty-seven garden club presidents from various corners of the Bay State gathered at the MHS's annual spring flower show to discuss a more formal federation. This time the Plant Club was represented by Jane Newell Moore, a charter member of the club and its immediate past president. A committee was formed to recommend by-laws, and the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts was established later in the year.

The Plant Club was not a charter member of the federation; some members were cautious about accepting the new idea. But the hesitation was short-lived, and the club voted to join the organization in November 1928—a decision that was a stimulus to civic projects, horticulture, conservation, and the friendly competition of flower shows.

4. According to *Horticulture*, the Garden Club of Philadelphia had often been cited as the first garden club, likely because of the important role it had played in the garden club movement. Such was the encouragement of the club's first president, Mrs. Stuart Patterson, that she came to be known as the "beloved 'mother of garden clubs.'" In fact, it was Mrs. Patterson who, in 1913, proposed a national organization of garden clubs—an idea that led to the founding of the Garden Club of America (GCA). So important was Mrs. Patterson that the GCA's founders elected her honorary president before they had even settled on a name for the organization.

5. The Polyanthus and the cowslip are hardy perennials, both members of the Primula family.

6. *Anthericum* is a genus of bulbous perennial plants in the Lily family. Species have rhizomatous or tuberous roots as well as long narrow leaves and branched stems of starry white flowers. Not many are grown in cultivation. Was Miss Hayes's offering a rare plant? Possibly. But some *Anthericum* species of old are now included in the genus *Chlorophytum*—notably, the spider plant, a very familiar and popular houseplant.

7. Born Mary “Mamie” Bryan Thomas in 1857, Mrs. Edwin King Lumpkin married into an eminent Georgia family that traced its roots back to the arrival of one Jacob Lumpkin in Virginia around 1670. Her husband’s grandfather was Joseph Henry Lumpkin, the first chief justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia and a founder of the University of Georgia’s School of Law. A granduncle was Wilson Lumpkin, who served in both Georgia state houses, then as governor, a U.S. representative, and a senator. He was honored by the naming of Lumpkin Street in Athens and Lumpkin County in North Georgia. Atlanta was briefly named Marthasville for his daughter, Martha Atalanta, until her goddess-inspired middle name (minus an a) was chosen for the honor (another example of the difficulty of naming a new entity); the renaming seems appropriate, for the town was the terminus of the Western and Atlantic Railroad, of which her father was then president.

Mrs. Lumpkin’s father-in-law, William Wilburforce Lumpkin, was a scholarly man, a lawyer, planter, and teacher (for several years a professor of English at the University of Georgia). Her mother-in-law, née Maria Louisa King, was a member of a prominent Alabama family. Her husband, Edwin King Lumpkin, received a degree in civil engineering from the University of Georgia in 1873, but the law was his vocation, and he came to be known as “one of the most able lawyers in the state of Georgia.” Mrs. Lumpkin’s own fame was guaranteed when, in December 1891, she invited eleven ladies to her antebellum home to organize a garden club.

8. Edwin Dorset Newton (1835–1917)—a person who can be Googled more than 170 years after his birth—still figures in the chronicles of Athens, his native city. A physician, he was also an avid horticulturist and began to promote the idea of a ladies’ garden club in 1891.

A personal recollection of Dr. Newton is included in a history of the University of Georgia, written by Thomas “Tom” Walter Reed, the university registrar for many years. Upon his retirement in 1945, Reed began a history of his alma mater. As luck would have it, he came to know Dr. Newton (University of Georgia, Class of 1856) just before the Ladies’ Garden Club was founded. In his entry on the Class of 1856, Reed notes that as a young man, he enjoyed “the intimate friendship” of Newton, and perhaps the doctor’s portion is longer than some others as a result. According to Reed, Newton studied medicine after graduating from the university, served in the War Between the States as a surgeon in the Confederate Army, and later “manifested great interest in the horticultural and agricultural development of Georgia.”

Says Reed, “On one fact my memory is quite clear....In the fall of [1891], Dr. Newton was very much interested in having a Garden Club organized among the ladies of Athens.” Apparently, he talked about such a movement until he got his sisters and other ladies interested. He even suggested the name, the Ladies’ Garden Club of Athens. His sister, Mrs. Lamar Cobb, became the first president. Another sister, Mrs. H. H. Carlton, was also a member.

Reed’s description of Dr. Newton’s role in founding the Ladies’ Garden Club is supported by the reminiscence of Mrs. Florida C. Orr, a charter member, published in the *Athens Banner-Herald* in February 1920: “The Garden Club idea was born in the heart of the late Dr. Edwin D. Newton. From his knowledge as a physician, he observed that women stayed indoors too constantly; that to freshen and invigorate the mind, rest tired nerves and create a real, worthwhile interest, women should be out of doors more. So, he talked his idea over with his sisters, Mrs. Lamar Cobb and Mrs. H. H. Carlton Sr. They cordially entered into his thought and in the pioneer days of the Garden Club nobody did more for the actual working out of the idea than these two charming ladies.”

Whether Dr. Newton was present at the club’s organizational meeting at Mrs. Lumpkin’s home in December 1891 is not indicated in the record. However, he was the spokesman at the meeting in February 1892, when the club was opened to all interested ladies of Athens.

As vice president of the Georgia State Horticultural Society for the Eighth Congressional District of Georgia, Dr. Newton subsequently organized ladies’ garden clubs in other cities. His efforts in promoting garden clubs were assisted, too, by the daughters of the founding members as they married and moved to other states and wrote home for information about organizing a garden club and staging flower and vegetable shows.

As Reed portrays him, Dr. Newton was certainly a man of enthusiasm: “Back in the early nineties he was a contributor to the *Athens Banner*, of which newspaper this writer was then editor. If one of Dr. Newton’s manuscripts were shown me today at a distance of twenty feet, I could identify it. He used more capital letters than any man whose writings have come before my eyes. About ever[y] other word was underscored, not once but twice and sometimes three times.”

In 1981, the Ladies’ Garden Club (now with the apostrophe again) honored the memory of Dr. Newton with a donation of \$1,000 to provide for the perpetual care of his burial plot in Oconee Hill Cemetery.

9. How did Dr. Newton happen upon the idea of a ladies' garden club? By some chance, might he have heard of the Cambridge Plant Club? After all, the Cambridge club reportedly received some attention in the press during its first two years. And it is possible that Dr. Newton actually made the acquaintance of a member of the Cambridge Plant Club in 1891. The minutes of a Plant Club meeting held on February 29, 1892, note that the president, Mrs. Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, spoke about Spanish moss and shared samples collected on a visit to Georgia. Although her itinerary is not reported, one may speculate: Did she and her husband, the Harvard geologist Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, visit Athens? Did they meet Dr. Newton? Did she speak of her club? Given his varied interests and affiliation with the *Athens Banner*, Dr. Newton would have been likely to seek out a distinguished visiting scientist. (Coincidentally, both Professor and Mrs. Shaler were Southerners by birth and manner.)

What might have taken the Shalers to Georgia? It is interesting to note that in February 1891, the state's new geological bureau had received some unfortunate publicity. In its wake, the editors of the *Athens Banner* called on the geological bureau, which it described as being in a state of "innocuous desuetude," to make progress in documenting Georgia's mineral resources. The editors (Dr. Newton was one) noted that Georgia possessed "more variety of soil, more diversity of mineral ores and richer deposits of precious metals than any State east of the Mississippi river," and urged that the "people of Georgia are anxiously awaiting some good results of the geological department." The Georgia geological bureau might well have called Nathaniel Shaler for advice. He was an eminent geology professor, the author of several textbooks, and had devoted nearly a decade to mapping and documenting the geologic resources of Kentucky, his home state. In addition, he regularly contributed articles to popular journals such as *Scribner's Magazine* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, so his name would likely have occurred to people in Georgia's geology bureau.

Speculation about the Shalers aside, an item in the *Athens Banner* of June 7, 1892, establishes that another member of the Harvard faculty—one with close ties to the Cambridge Plant Club—was in communication with a University of Georgia professor in the early 1890s. An article on a proposed summer school reports that Professor J. P. Campbell had been told by Harvard's professor of botany of the good results at his summer program in Cambridge. The Harvard man was Professor George Goodale, who would have been well known to the ladies of the Plant Club. Not only was he a Cambridge neighbor (on Sparks Street), but Jane Newell, one of the charter members, had also taken his summer course. Through Miss Newell, Professor Goodale knew of the Plant Club early on; the minutes record that he lent illustrations for a paper presented to the group by Miss Newell in March 1890. The next year he sent the club a letter on the plants of Australia and the botanic garden at Adelaide and a paper entitled "Some of the Possibilities of Economic Botany," and in succeeding years he spoke to the club on various subjects. Perhaps Dr. Newton learned of the northern club through the Goodale connection.

10. P. J. Berckmans was a pioneering horticulturist in Georgia. Some of his papers, including the manuscript of an orchard handbook, are in the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia. In her 1920 article in the *Athens Banner-Herald*, Mrs. Orr referred to Mr. P. J. Berckmans as the longtime and "beloved" president of the state horticultural society, who also "gave the Garden Club the benefit of his sympathy and advice."

11. One of the prizes (a "premium, handsome Jardiniere [*sic*] for finest decorative plant") at a subsequent flower show in November 1894 was donated by Mr. A. H. Hews & Co. of North Cambridge, Massachusetts.

12. An entry for November 2, 1931, in a club member's notebook records that Mr. E. I. Farrington, editor of *Horticulture*, had sent advance word of the medal. The minutes for the meeting on the same day report the honor was given in recognition of "our being the oldest garden club in the United States."

13. The National Council of State Garden Club Federations was formed in May 1929 by representatives of thirteen state federations. (The organization's name has been shortened twice—to National Council of State Garden Clubs in 1935 and to National Garden Clubs, Inc. [NGC] in 2001.) The first president was Mrs. Thomas Motley Jr., who had been a leader in the formation of the Massachusetts federation. She was determined that the collective energy of garden clubs should make a difference. Regarding the Massachusetts federation, she said: "We will show those men on Beacon Hill that we are more than a social club." By 1931 the national organization included seventeen state federations, representing 1,000 individual clubs and a membership

of 50,000. Sixty-five years later, the NGC is the largest volunteer organization of its kind in the world, representing over 7,000 garden clubs (with more than 220,000 members) in each state plus the District of Columbia, as well as nearly 500 affiliate (national and international) clubs.

14. A clipping from *Horticulture's* report on the fourth annual meeting of the National Council of State Garden Club Federations was saved in a scrapbook kept by Plant Club member Katharine L. Storer.

15. The *Bulletin* article was preserved in the club's minute book, entry dated June 10, 1932. The personal notebook of Miss Christine Farley, a charter member of the Plant Club, provides a further description of the delegates' visit to Cambridge: "It was a lovely day, just warm enough to enjoy being out in the garden, where Roses were blooming—many varieties—& the ladies seemed most happy to see such a lovely place, where hospitality took the form of a long table spread on the lawn with refreshment for the travellers. C.P.C.'s had a Badge to wear for the 1st time in its history of forty odd yrs—a pleasant memory for us all to share & remember."

16. There is no evidence in the archives of the Ladies' Garden Club to support Mrs. Redwine's assertions.

17. The loss of the records has also led to differing opinions on the club's founding date, which is variously given as December 1891, January 1892, or February 1892 (depending on which meeting date is accepted as the starting point). See "Is This the Oldest Garden Club?" *Horticulture*, February 15, 1929; "The Ladies' Garden Club will hold an interesting meeting next Wednesday," *Athens Banner*, February 2, 1892; and "The Ladies Meet and Perfect the Organization of Their Garden Club," *Athens Banner*, February 9, 1892.

The confusion regarding the founding date was compounded by a *New York Herald Tribune* article in March 1934, which incorrectly cited January 1891 as the birth month of the club. This error made its way into later newspaper articles and the club's own publications. It has been perpetuated most recently in *Fulfilling the Dream: The Story of the National Garden Clubs, Inc., 1929-2004*, by Mary Leffler Cochran.

18. The resolution of the Farmers' Club, reported in the *Banner* on January 26, 1892, gives further insight into Dr. Newton's goal in the founding of the Ladies' Garden Club:

"Whereas, the garden as well as the farm can be utilized in raising food products for the wants of the people of our State, promoting thereby true home economy and commercial independence for the same, Be it resolved, that we beg the earnest co-operation of the fair women of Georgia in the organization of Garden Club[s] (as auxiliary clubs to the Farmers' Clubs)...not only on the farms...but in each village, each town and amongst the suburban residents of our cities....Resolved, that the Ladies' Garden Club be granted every privilege enjoyed by the Farmers' Club of Georgia, and receive all the literature published by above mentioned departments [the state agricultural commission and the experiment station] relative to the culture of the kitchen garden, the flower garden and the orchard."

Further, an editorial in the February 2, 1892, *Banner*, which announced the public meeting of the Ladies' Garden Club, made clear that the call to women "interested in the matter of gardening" referred to growing fruit and vegetables: "The Ladies' Garden Clubs all over Georgia will do much towards solving the question of home supplies being raised on the farm, and the Ladies' Garden Club of Clarke County will accomplish much good if its members take a proper interest in it. It has been said that a large garden and a good cow will furnish a living to a family of five members if properly attended to. The movement started in Athens at the last meeting of the Agricultural Society organizing these clubs is sure to result in great benefit."

The article in the same issue notes that it had been suggested that the "movement" be advanced by "a hand-book for the children of all of our female colleges and public schools of Georgia, said hand-book containing the botanical names of each food and plant of the vegetable garden, its nativity, its migrations, methods of culture and commercial value."

19. After the Ladies' Garden Club was formed, Dr. Newton continued to take an active interest, "keeping in touch with its affairs, sending material for lectures, obtaining seeds, insecticides, and so forth for the members' use."

20. Many of club's charter members were the sisters, daughters, or wives of lawyers. Whether such extensive legal connections still characterized the club in 1936 is not certain, but a tone of lawyerly advocacy is apparent in the documents prepared for submission to the National Council of State Garden Clubs.

21. The archives of the Ladies' Garden Club include two copies of Mrs. Lumpkin's description, one from 1895 and the other from 1897. Both cite Mr. Berckmans's belief that the club was "the only organization of its kind in the State, and probably in the South." The latter one is in a scrapbook presented to the club in 1930 by the charter member herself. It is not likely that Mrs. Redwine would have failed to read these documents as she prepared her submission to the National Council of Garden Clubs.

22. The idea that led to the founding of the Lexington Field and Garden Club grew out of the town's preparations for celebrating the centennial of the American Revolution. As the town readied itself for important visitors, including President Ulysses S. Grant, some residents noted the need for attention to Lexington's civic spaces, particularly to a shabby area by the train station. A continuing result of those preparations was a garden club that has been a vital part of the town for 130 years.

It is interesting to note that the founders of the Lexington Field and Garden Club had no difficulty in establishing their goals and by-laws. However, the choice of a name was more difficult. The minutes of the meeting on May 17, 1876, leave a space in the first article of the by-laws after "This Association shall be called." "Lexington Field and Garden Club" was inserted—in a different hand—after a decision was made on May 30.

The inclusion of the word *field* in the name reflects the interest that gardeners then had in "botanizing" expeditions. *Horticulture* reported that the club's records showed that many excursions were made to different points "where living plants and especially ferns were sought, identified and discussed." For example, in June 1881, 130 people went on a field trip to Greenfield, New Hampshire, in special railcars. Laurel excursions were an annual flower-gathering event for several years.

Even rock gardens were studied by members of the Lexington club as far back as 1876. One of the early records reads: "Some inquiries were made, and a discussion was had, relative to the growth of lichens on rocks and the construction of artificial rock works." So ahead of its time was the club that, in 1881, it held a flower show. According to the records of this event, it was "voted that the secretary be instructed to call a meeting to discuss the desirability and feasibility of having a floral exhibition in the Fall, with certificates and prizes."

Finally, acknowledging the club's claim to garden club status, *Horticulture* concluded: "Considerable attention was given to botanical subjects, specimens which had been collected being examined and reported upon. It is true that attention was also given to geological formations and to kindred matters, but apparently the interest of the members lay especially in matters pertaining to plants."

23. The \$6,000 that created the Memorial Garden in 1939 translates into nearly \$90,000 in 2006 dollars. An index gauged to the costs of plant material and stonework would likely produce a still higher figure. Consider the scope of the garden (summarized from *Horticulture*): Central was a courtyard of cut stone and brick shaded by an aged oak and surrounded by an old-fashioned pierced brick wall, white azaleas against yellow jasmine and clematis vines being trained on the walls, an old-fashioned boxwood garden with four flowerbeds radiating from a central sundial. In each central bed, a Georgia agricultural product (Cherokee rose, watermelon, peach and a cotton boll) was outlined with boxwood (2,000 boxwood plants to be donated by another garden club). A brick circular path separated the central beds from the outer ones, which featured pinks, asters, narcissi and lilies. Two mimosa trees in the outside corners and surrounding white picket fence were planned to close off this area from the terrace garden. An espaliered pear tree and a white camellia, trained in fan shapes, would decorate the north and south walls of the museum's trophy room. The terrace garden with a gravel surface shaded by flowering dogwoods was intended as an outdoor classroom. The lower garden would be devoted to perennials—the most ambitious part of the development, with two 6-by-100-foot beds filled with choice spring and fall perennials, surrounded by a white picket fence and fed by underground irrigation. Other plans: At the end of the plot would be a pool with a stone coping. The remaining portion of the land would be used for a collection of wildflowers, all properly labeled, planted beneath mature oak trees and around small native trees and shrubs.

24. This painting was done by Calvert Smith, a New York artist, who claimed to have southern roots. Specializing in pictures for publications as well as paintings that recreated historical events, Smith contacted the Ladies' Garden Club in 1932 after seeing a reference to its age in a newspaper article. He exhorted the club to gather the facts relating to its origin and expressed an interest in making a painting that would depict its founders.

25. At the time of this crisis, Lois Lilley Howe, age 74, a senior member of the Plant Club, was recognized in the world beyond Cambridge as a distinguished architect. Still active in the field, her career had already spanned five decades. An 1890 graduate of an MIT architecture program, Miss Howe received early recognition with a second-place prize of \$500 in a nationwide design competition open to women architects for a “Woman’s Building” at the Chicago Columbian Exposition—an enormously important cultural event celebrating the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s voyage to the New World. Her first commission to design a house followed in 1894. By 1900 Miss Howe had established her own firm, and thirteen years later she formed a partnership with another MIT-trained woman. The firm was eventually joined by a third woman, also with an MIT degree. The firm—Howe, Manning and Almy—was one of the most successful women’s architecture firms of the time, specializing in domestic architecture (especially in “renovising,” a term the women coined), though they also designed commercial spaces, professional clubs, and public housing. The partners closed the firm in 1937, but Miss Howe continued to practice architecture until the end of her life. In addition to writing articles and a book about her work, she was active in many architectural and arts organizations and was one of the first women admitted to the Boston Society of Architects. In 1931 she was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, the first woman so honored.

Miss Howe was also active in Cambridge life. A lifelong Cantabrigian, she was treasurer of the Old Cambridge Shakespeare Association, vice president of the Cambridge Historical Society (for which she wrote at least ten essays), and a member of the Cambridge Social Dramatic Club and various Unitarian clubs. She joined the Cambridge Plant Club in 1933 and became president in 1938, a position she held until 1947. She was old enough to have been a charter member, albeit a young one, but in 1889 Miss Howe was otherwise engaged, embarking on her pioneering career in architecture. If any woman could set straight the record concerning which garden club was the first, surely it was Miss Howe.

26. Mrs. J. Lowell Moore (née Jane Hancox Newell) was born into a family of teachers, writers, and ministers. In 1857, the year of her birth, her father (“second scholar” of his Harvard class) had been minister of the First Parish Church in Cambridge—one of the most historic churches in America—for twenty-seven years. His line of Newells traced its origin in America to one Andrew Newell, who arrived in Charlestown around 1630. Miss Newell’s mother, Frances Boott Wells, was also a Bostonian, though the Bootts had arrived in America later than the Newells. Her maternal grandfather, William Wells, was born in England, but came to America as a boy in 1793 and finished his education (with high honors) at Harvard. A literary man, he became a partner in a publishing company and bookshop in Boston. After a fire destroyed the bookshop, he purchased (with the assistance of friends) a Tory mansion on Brattle Street (the Ruggles-Fayerweather House) and opened a boys’ school known for its English discipline and its pupils, including James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes. This house, with its large gardens, was a “paradise” to Miss Newell as a girl.

A friend who came to know Miss Newell in 1878 described the family as “very world conscious.” Besides Mr. Newell, who was interested in everything, the eldest brother was a great reader who became a noted American folklorist. Another brother, Robert, became a lawyer after serving with the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in the Civil War (Robert’s letters are in the Boston Public Library). A third brother, Kirke, became a businessman in Philadelphia. Visiting the dinner table at the Newells’ was to discover “what good family conversation” could be like. All loved to talk. Young Jane was a poet, both writing and memorizing poems easily. Nature was one of her inspirations—she loved rowing on the Charles and wandering in the fields that still surrounded Old Cambridge in the 1860s. In her twenties, she studied Italian on a European trip and translated the sonnets of Michelangelo.

The youngest child of older parents (her mother was forty-two when she was born, her father fifty-three), Jane had a heavy portion of sorrows early in her life. As a young girl, she was affected by her two brothers’ service in the Civil War and then, in 1870, by the family’s grief—especially her mother’s—over the deaths of two sisters that occurred four months apart. Newell’s teenage years and early twenties were much given to the care of her elderly father, mother, and aunts. One of her brothers would also die young—at 36—in 1883.

Despite her family responsibilities, Jane was a member of the Basket Club, a group of ladies who did sewing for the sick, and she worked enthusiastically with the underprivileged at a social center in Boston. She is said to have found many of these people more interesting than acquaintances in her own social circle.

As busy as she was, Miss Newell pursued further coursework after her studies at the Berkeley Street School. A remembrance written by her future sister-in-law describes Jane's interest in a summer class at the Harvard Botanic Garden, where the two young women worked under the supervision of Professor Goodale, examining specimens as well as plants in the six-acre garden. Jane later studied botany, chemistry, and mineralogy at MIT, from which she received a degree in 1882. Subsequently, she wrote three books on botany: *Outlines of Lessons in Botany, Part I: From Seed to Leaf* (1888), *A Reader in Botany, Selected and adapted from well-known authors*, and *Outlines of Lessons in Botany: For the use of teachers or mothers studying with their children* (1893) As a member of the Plant Club, she shared her learning. Her name appears regularly in the minutes, and in 1898–99 she gave a series of five talks, "The Purpose of the Flower," which demonstrate the depth of her knowledge, the seriousness of purpose of the club, and its members' willingness to be "informed."

For Newell, 1895 was a momentous year. At the age of thirty-seven she married James Lowell Moore, the brother of a longtime friend. One year later Mrs. Moore gave birth to a son, and six years later, to a second son. For a time the Moores lived on a dairy farm in Wayland, but the education of their sons brought them back to Cambridge. Despite her varied interests, including women's suffrage and later the League of Women Voters, the Cambridge Plant Club was dear to her. On trips to California she pressed flowers to share with the club. When she could not attend a meeting, she sent a postcard to be read in her absence. From 1921 through 1926, she served as president. When Mrs. Moore and her husband returned to Cambridge, they lived in a smaller house and garden than the ones she had known as a girl, but they also had a house with a beautiful seaside garden on Cape Elizabeth, Maine, photographs of which she shared with the club. In later life, Mrs. Moore shared her memories of the Cambridge of her girlhood in papers for the Cambridge Historical Society and the Plant Club. ["Flower Memories" was written for the fiftieth anniversary of the Plant Club. A profile of her mother included in Julia Baynard Pickard Bailey's "The Distaff Side of the Ministerial Succession in the First Parish Church in Cambridge" (1933) and "The Fayerweather House" (1939) were both written for the historical society.]

Although Mrs. Moore was the corresponding secretary of the Plant Club at the time of the controversy with the Ladies' Garden Club, there is no record of her thoughts on the matter. Letters in the possession of two of her grandsons indicate that, in the 1930s and early 1940s, she was writing about interests other than gardening, such as telepathy, the conception of man as a microcosm embodying the macrocosm, manifestations of the divine, and whether the universe was shrinking or expanding. Indeed, in April 1942, she sent a treatise, "Mind and Spirit," to Gustaf Stromberg at the Mount Wilson Observatory after reading his book *The Soul of the Universe*. An earlier letter (1938) to Edwin Hubble explained that she had been thinking of the universe since she began to study the "new theories of matter and energy" fifteen years earlier. An Easter letter to her grandchildren during this time suggests that her scientific interest in the universe sprang from her love of nature: "Here is Easter and the spring festival, the flowers are springing and the birds are coming and it is easy to believe that life is beautiful and eternal." Mrs. Moore's may not have engaged in the debate with the Ladies' Garden Club, but her obituary in July 1945 states that she was a charter member of the Plant Club, "the oldest garden club in the nation."

The Newell-Moore spirit of inquiry continues. One of Mrs. Moore's grandchildren is the prolific author Robin Moore, whose books include *The Green Berets*, *The Devil to Pay*, *The French Connection*, *The Happy Hooker* (with Xaviera Hollander), *The Accidental Pope* (with Ray Flynn), and *Task Force Dagger: The Hunt for Bin Laden* (with J. K. Idema and Chris Thompson).

27. The club's archives do contain a note written by Mrs. Moore to Miss Howe in February 1941, but it concerns new members and arrangements for a club speaker. In her note, Mrs. Moore indicates that she did not have her usual energy, and she resigned from the club in the spring of the year. As a charter member, it was fitting that the last meeting she attended was one she arranged. Her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Robert L. Moore, invited the Plant Club to her house and garden at 26 Elm Street in Concord on May 26. The minutes read: "We first inspected the unusual Chinese garden in the rear of the estate and sat awhile in the tea-house while Mrs. Moore [the younger] told how it came into being. Then we gathered in the large Studio and held the business meeting." It is recorded that Mrs. Moore's resignation was accepted with regret.

28. The *Horticulture* article in question, "A Floral Menagerie," appeared in the January issue. It featured a one-woman flower show by the president of the Ladies Garden' Club that was

“unique for its originality and represented an achievement in horticultural research...a floral menagerie,” for which she assembled seventy-nine specimens of plants whose names contain the name of an animal—such as catnip, dogwood, and tiger lily, to name only a few of the more familiar—each tagged with a card bearing its botanical name, the family to which it belonged, and many of its common names.

29. The Plant Club adopted the passion flower (genus *Passiflora*) as its symbol in 1912. Most species of the passion flower are tender evergreen tropical vines native to South America. An exception found in the southern part of the United States, the *Passiflora incarnata* (commonly known as the May Pop) is deciduous and can survive winter freezes.

30. For more on this possibility, see endnote number 9.

31. Susan B. Goodale was a granddaughter-in-law of George Lincoln Goodale, the Harvard professor whose summer school program was a subject of interest to Professor Campbell of the University of Georgia in the early 1890s. Professor Goodale spoke to the club a number of times in its early decades. Some of his topics: “Principles Which Underlie Improvements in Native Plants” in 1892, “The Water-Hyacinth Menace” in 1899, and “The New Science of Oecology—The Relation of Plants to Their Environment” in 1904. As head of the Harvard Botanic Garden, Professor Goodale, was responsible for Harvard’s purchase of the Blaschka glass flowers.

32. In 1940, four members of the Ladies’ Garden Club founded the Junior Ladies’ Garden Club, a club with the same ideals as the senior club but with a smaller membership that could meet in members’ homes.

33 The Plant Club file on the dispute contains four letters addressed to Lois Lilley Howe, some notes and a draft letter in Miss Howe’s hand, and the notes of Susan B. Goodale. In addition, the archives include seven issues of *Horticulture* magazine: December 1, 1928, containing “The Oldest Garden Club,” Letter from Fanny Elizabeth Corne, 546; November 1, 1931, containing “Forty Years of Garden Club Work,” 462 [including the excerpt, “The Massachusetts Horticultural Society has just awarded a medal to the Cambridge Plant Club of Cambridge, Mass., in recognition of the distinction which it can boast of being the oldest garden club in America.”]; November 1, 1936, containing “Again—The First Garden Club,” 424 [a profile of the Lexington Field and Garden Club]; September 1, 1940, containing “Athens, Georgia, Claims the Country’s First Garden Club,” 1-2; April 15, 1941, containing “Readers’ Questions Answered: Which Is the Oldest Garden Club in America?” 191; January 1948, containing “A Floral Menagerie,” 16 [a feature on a one-woman flower show by the president of the Ladies Garden Club of Athens, Georgia]; May 1963, containing “Which Came First?” Letter to the Editor from Susan B. Goodale, 249.

34. The Howe, Manning and Almy files (including personal papers) at MIT are divided among the Institute Archives, various department libraries, and the MIT Museum (personal photographs).

35. Sara Bull was perhaps better known to the larger world as the beautiful second wife of famed Norwegian violinist Ole Bull and later as a follower of Swami Vivekananda, who introduced the Vedanta movement to this country in the 1890s.

36. Mrs. Marcou’s husband was Jules Marcou (1824–1898), a French-American geologist and paleontologist who assisted Louis Agassiz in founding Harvard’s Museum of Comparative Zoology.

37. Considered the most important American botanist of the nineteenth century, Asa Gray (1810–1888) devoted a lifetime to identifying and cataloguing the flora of North America. *His Manual of the Botany of the Northern United States* went through numerous editions and remains a standard. (A correspondent of Charles Darwin, Gray also provided information for the development of Darwin’s theory in Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*.) Professor Gray built a major herbarium (now the Gray Herbarium) at Harvard and is credited with founding the college’s botany department. The minutes of the Garden Street Garden Club refer to him frequently, describing plants and specimens that he offered to club members through his wife (“Dr. Gray expressed a wish that the ladies would perpetuate some of these in their gardens”). He seems to have joined the ladies when meetings were held at the Grays’ home, offering facts and tips on gardening as well as books and journals. In the ninth annual report of the club, the secretary expresses the women’s feelings of deep loss occasioned by the death of Dr. Gray.

38. The minutes for the meeting describe Almira Needham as a kind and generous woman with an extraordinary gift for growing things: “Her house in winter and her garden in summer were literally crowded with flowers whose luxuriant growth filled us all with wonder and admiration. She had a desire that all should share in the great delight of her life....She scattered her flowers far and wide with liberal hands.”