

A History in One Thousand Programs (More or Less): *The Cambridge Plant Club, 1889–1965*

For the 135th anniversary of the founding of the Plant Club – a history of the Plant Club, forthcoming.

Introduction

This volume is a history of the Cambridge Plant Club from 1889 to 1964, filtered through its programs.¹ It is also a women's history – beginning in a time when streets were gaslit and trolleys horse-drawn, and ending in the first decades of the atomic age. This story is particular in its garden club focus and place, even as it speaks of the wider world. That wider world was transformed between the end points of this history, but the club's records give a sense of the pace of change as it was experienced in Cambridge, meeting to meeting, year to year.

The Plant Club was founded by 20 women, whose interest in growing plants well – indoors and out – brought them together during an extraordinarily mild winter. They were of Old Cambridge,² but they were not a homogeneous group. They ranged in age; the youngest was 24, while the oldest were over 70. They differed in financial means; some lived in mansions on the city's best streets; others rented rooms in more modest houses – writing and teaching for needed income. They also varied in marital status; some were the wives of well-known men, but half were unmarried, and several were widows. A few were Cantabrigians by birth; but for over half, Cambridge was an adopted home. Of the latter, most hailed from New England, but others came from more distant places, the two farthest being Kentucky and Wisconsin. Some had traveled a good deal, including to Europe; others had seen less of the world. Except for the youngest, their educations had not extended to formal college course work; this is not to say that they were not learned and informed. Many devoted themselves to good works, especially on behalf of the poor. But as the needs of the time were great, the options were numerous, and so they gave their time to different organizations.³ Some of them favored women's suffrage; others did not. A number were the wives or daughters of ministers, though religious affiliations varied. Yet, for all the differences, members quickly came to share a sense of fulfillment and pride in the singular new club, and it bonded them.

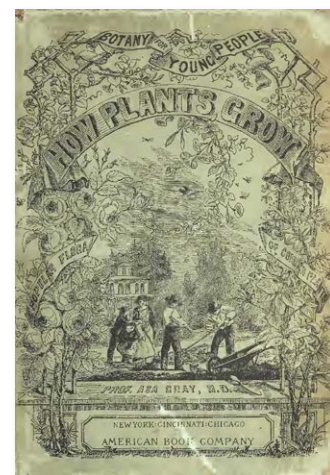
To read the minute books is to be impressed with how steadily the club held to its purpose. The love of plants that brought the founders together never flagged. Indeed, it was continually renewed from within, by programs featuring speakers, both

members and outside experts, who shared their individual passions, whether for advancing botanical science, improving horticultural practice, creating gardens and parks, or advocating for conservation causes. Programs were the glue that bound the members as well as the source of the inspiration to do good by planting – the inheritance of today's Cambridge Plant & Garden Club.⁴

Cambridge at the Time of the Founding of the Plant Club

In the 1880s, just before the Plant Club's story begins, botany was at the forefront of science, and Harvard had a preeminent place in that science, at least in the United States. Consult a list of fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences – a large percentage were botanists, and many of them were or had been associated with Harvard. These men – they were all men – were neighbors of the Plant Club's founders. First among those botanists was Asa Gray, the great empiricist and correspondent of Charles Darwin. Gray could be visited in his famed herbarium or greeted while strolling through the Harvard Botanic Garden. Old Cambridge was a place where botany was in the air.

However, botanical awareness was not unique to Cambridge. As a school subject, botany was a particularly accessible science to laypeople. Indeed, the study of botany was encouraged to cultivate the powers of observation in children.⁵ New botany guides and textbooks were prominent on publishers' lists. Moreover, botanical subjects, particularly plant curiosities, were a staple in newspapers and magazines, so basic plant knowledge was widespread.



Asa Gray's *Botany for Young People: How Plants Grow*. First published in 1858 with some 500 engravings, Gray's text provided an introduction to structural botany for generations of children, including some who went on to join the Plant Club.

Thanks also to Dr. Gray's popular *Manual of Botany* (five editions were published during his lifetime), amateurs could contribute alongside the experts – observing and collecting in the fields and marshes, which in those days were not far from home. Moreover, cities, pressed by immigration, were growing, and so there was also the feeling that collecting botanical specimens was an important act of preservation, or at least of scientific documentation, of a vanishing world. The collections of Harvard's Gray Herbarium testify to this impulse; the herbarium is rich in material donated by amateurs who botanized from the early-1800s into the 1900s.⁶ The art of botanical collecting has been largely forgotten today, but in the nineteenth century, the collecting and sharing of botanical specimens was widely enjoyed.⁷



Harvard Herbarium specimen, *Asclepias incarnata* subsp. *pulchra* (Ehrh. ex Willd.) Woodson (Swamp Milkweed), collected in 1888 by Louise Merritt Stabler. A member of the first graduating class of Barnard College (1893), Miss Stabler joined the Plant Club after her marriage to George H. Parker, a pioneer in experimental zoology at Harvard. She seems to have been the first club member to use both her maiden and married names.

As for horticulture, it was a time when gardeners grew plants from seed, nursed them in cold frames, and cared for them with great method. Though Cambridge had its commercial greenhouses,⁸ the easy availability of plant care products was far in the future. Plant collections required maintenance based on vigilance, and serious gardeners traded in tips: Water plants with warm water; give them liquid manure; and apply soot tea, on schedules prescribed by type of plant. As for the insects which preyed on plants, it was war, fought with hot pepper and all manner of preparations.⁹ With such attention, plants could be maintained for years.

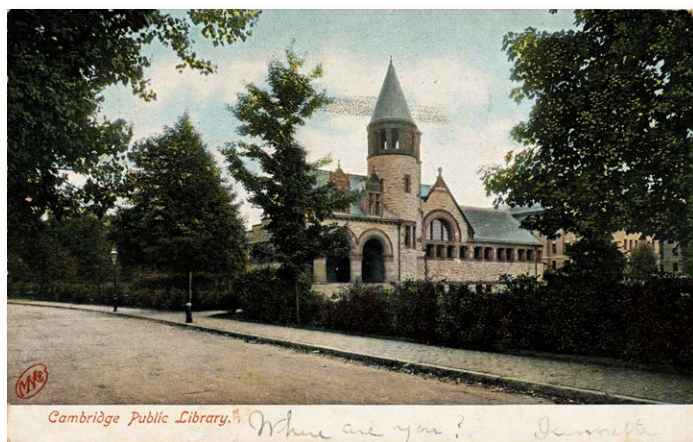
The arrival of the spring growing season was so heralded in sentimental newspaper poetry that it would be reasonable to suppose that Cantabrigians of the time concentrated their gardening efforts in the warmer months. This was not the case. Considerable effort was taken to ensure that flowering plants would be enjoyed indoors in the cold months, even to the extent of digging lilac bushes from frozen sod in December, and tending them indoors, until they bloomed in February. In fact,

the subject of forcing lilacs is described in a book by an early member of the Plant Club.¹⁰ It's hard to imagine doing the same today when out-of-season blooms are flown to us from far-flung corners of the globe, at astonishingly low prices and "fair-trade" at that.

Beyond fields and gardens, a new sense of the city's importance was emerging in Cambridge. Harvard's place in the world was rising under the educational reforms of President Charles Eliot. Associated with the College's growing stature was something of a building boom in the 1880s, a filling-in of the acreage between existing mansions with commodious new houses on the streets radiating from Harvard Square. Thanks to the generosity of Frederick Rindge, who had been a college classmate of William Russell, the city's charismatic young mayor, Cambridge added impressive new civic buildings – the City Hall and Public Library both opened in 1888. (Russell went on to serve as the Commonwealth's governor.¹¹) As for the landscape, the Mount Auburn Cemetery, founded four decades earlier, was an established tourist destination. And the Olmsted firm, which was creating new parks, campuses, and estates across the country, would soon be working on Cambridge projects at Fresh Pond and Magazine Beach. Improvement plans for the banks of the Charles River were also on the horizon. In the heart of the Brattle Street neighborhood, young Charles Eliot was working on a landscape commission for the Longfellow Memorial Park – one that was supported by hundreds of donors, including school children.

At the same time, Cambridge was becoming more connected to Boston, and ease of traveling between the two would soon be improved by new bridges and a rail line. It is amusing to read in Samuel Atkins Eliot's *A History of Cambridge, 1630–1913* that at the time of the Plant Club's founding "[m]any of the leading merchants and professional men of Boston make their homes in Cambridge where their families can enjoy access to sunlight and fresh air, to green lawns and gardens, where the schools are admirably conducted, where health conditions are the best of any city in the state, where there are no saloons and where the libraries and parks and the various activities of the University provide unusual facilities for education, recreation and social enjoyment."¹²

Across the river in Boston, the Emerald Necklace was taking shape, anchored by the Arnold Arboretum. Within a decade, the Metropolitan Park Commission would be established to assemble a landscape-preserving system of parks and parkways to connect the region's hills, ponds, rivers, and beaches. Also on



The Cambridge Public Library, built 1888, undated postcard. One of the Plant Club's first civic acts was to donate its collection of horticultural periodicals to the Library in 1897.

the horizon for the Commonwealth, a group of private citizens would soon found an organization that was the first of its kind – The Trustees of Public Reservations – as a steward of properties of great natural beauty.¹³

This is a very brief description of the state of things in Cambridge at the dawn of 1889 – the year of the Plant Club's founding. Indeed, the year opened dramatically with a total eclipse of the sun on the first day of January. Though the eclipse was not visible in Cambridge, it seemed to herald a quickening pace of expansion and innovation. New products – punch-card tabulating machines, phonographs, jukeboxes, an electrical transmission line (14 miles), and a carbonated beverage (called Coca-Cola) were introduced during the year; a new president (Benjamin Harrison) was inaugurated; four new states (North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Washington) were admitted to the Union, and the Oklahoma Territory was opened to settlers. In March, the Eiffel Tower, the entrance gate to the Exposition Universelle, became the tallest structure in the world – by an impressive 430 feet. At the end of the year, the daring journalist Nellie Bly set out to break Jules Verne's fictional record of 80 days around the world – her success was especially satisfying to women. At the end of a century of great artistic ferment, the pace was not slowing, but quickening. Tolstoy published another great work, Ibsen and Strindberg were at the height of their powers, as were Tchaikovsky, Van Gogh, and so many others. Audiences were no longer shocked by the new, but embraced it. This is not to say that all was right with the world in 1889; the year had its share of tragedy and turmoil, and these, too, added to the sense of gathering change.



The home of Sara Thorp Bull, one of the original members of the Plant Club, c. 1890. Mrs. Bull's house – at 168 Brattle Street – was built in 1888, and is notable in Plant Club history as the place where, in 1890, the ladies first enjoyed tea after a meeting.

A Club Is Born

The story of the *founding* of the Plant Club is familiar to members of the Cambridge Plant & Garden Club; it has been written about, and told and retold, at every important club anniversary. From weather records, we also know that serendipity was involved: The winter of 1888–89 was unseasonably warm from December through March¹⁴ – there were no snowstorms to discourage walking and visiting.¹⁵ Snowdrops appeared in mid-January, and in a pastoral corner of Cambridge, a passion flower was blooming at Havenhurst, the Coolidge Hill home of Mrs. John Lord Hayes. The Hayes family was known for its



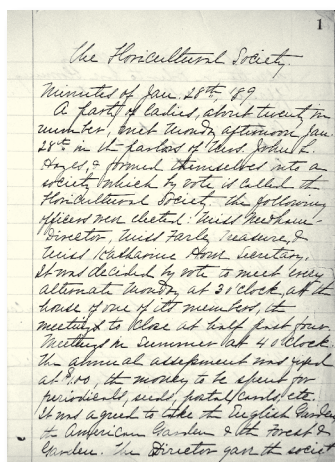
Havenhurst, the home of the Hayes Family, where the first meeting of the Plant Club was held on January 28, 1889 (photographed in January 2000). Once sited on a landscaped 10-acre parcel, Havenhurst was originally numbered on Mt. Auburn Street opposite Elmwood, but is now 10 Coolidge Hill Road.

love of gardening, and Mrs. Hayes for her particular success with houseplants, of which she had many. Even so, the passion flower's many blossoms – 60 that winter, if a report made two decades later is to be believed¹⁶ – caused some excitement among the family's visitors. Their questions regarding its cultivation gave Miss Carrie Hayes, the youngest of the three Hayes daughters, the idea of forming a club based on shared interest in plants.

Miss Hayes accordingly consulted with other plant- and garden-loving friends, and on January 28, 1889, twenty women gathered at Havenhurst to found a club with the purpose of exchanging horticultural knowledge.¹⁷ Thanks to the club's first secretary, Miss Katharine Howe, the organizational details are a matter of record. The founders chose a name, the Floricultural Society, presumably in homage to the blossoming passion flower. They also drafted bylaws, which included a limit on membership so that meetings could be held in members' homes.¹⁸ Dues of \$1 were established¹⁹ with the moneys to be spent for postals, seeds, and periodicals – *The English Garden*, *The American Garden*, and the Arnold Arboretum's new *Garden and Forest: A Journal of Horticulture, Landscape Art, and Forestry*. Officers were selected. Meetings were to be held on Mondays at three o'clock (four o'clock in summer) on a bimonthly schedule.

Two weeks later, at the club's second meeting, some members expressed concern with the club's name. Was the Floricultural Society name too restrictive? Too grand? Did it suggest a desire to emulate the work and influence of the august Massachusetts Horticultural Society founded in 1829?²⁰ Or of the somewhat younger Torrey Botanical Club, whose bulletin had promoted the study of plant life by both amateurs and professionals since 1870.²¹

But what other name might serve? The garden club movement was more than a decade in the future, so the name "Garden Club" did not suggest itself above any other moniker. In fact, Cambridge already had a *Garden Street Garden Club*, which also met on Mondays. Founded on



Plant Club record book, Volume I, page 1. Originally the Floricultural Society, the simpler Plant Club moniker was adopted at the club's second meeting on February 11, 1889.



The Harvard Botanic Garden in a photograph dated July 13, 1904 (J. Horace McFarland Collection at the Smithsonian Institution). Established in 1807, the garden became one of the city's beauty spots. In 1948, the garden gave way to a post-World War II university housing project.

March 24, 1879, its members – Mrs. Asa Gray was one – lived in close proximity to the Harvard Botanic Garden.²² But the members of the Floricultural Society came from various Cambridge streets, not one particular neighborhood, so a name such as the *Havenhurst Neighbors Garden Club* would not fit. And the simple name "Garden Club" might create confusion with the Garden Street Garden Club, particularly as there was a degree of membership overlap between the two. The debate was resolved in favor of the simpler name, "Plant Club," and it stuck.

The Club's Programs

Yet one thing is missing from the records of the Plant Club's founding meeting. There is no reference to organizing either a program of lectures by outside experts or dues allocated for speaker fees. As noted above, the founding minutes specify that the club's dues were intended for garden magazine subscriptions, postage, and the purchase of seeds and bulbs, with no mention of speakers. Why no provision for speakers? After all, it was a time when educational lectures on special topics were a prominent feature of life in Old Cambridge – the number of items in the *Cambridge Tribune* and the city's other papers attest to the regularity and popularity of lectures.

Why no provision for programs by outside lecturers? The answer is, the club had its own experts, who maintained houseplants and gardens with great method, who collected herbarium-worthy specimens, who read the various botanical journals, and some who taught botany and published botanical papers. Several members had attended the Harvard Botanic Garden summer school and one member was a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Charles Darwin's work fascinated the members. And even members who had not studied botany were regular readers of periodicals, such as *The Gardeners' Monthly and Horticulturist*,²³ with features on estate landscapes, "seasonable hints," new or rare plants, and maintenance questions. The group was very well informed.

The program pages of this book will introduce some of these "experts," but one deserves special mention here – Miss Almira Needham, who was named the club's director at the first meeting. To read the club's records is to see that it was a matter of course that Miss Needham would be chosen as the "director"²⁴ of the new club. Not only was she a true plantswoman, she also had experience in *garden* club matters. She was one of the founding members of the Garden Street Garden Club.²⁵ And, at age 62, Miss Needham was one of the senior members of the Plant Club. She was a kind and generous woman, and she possessed an extraordinary gift for growing things.

Without delay, Miss Needham created a program structure that provided the foundation for the club's development. She prepared papers; she brought plants and specimens to show; she shared articles – all of which encouraged other members to do the same. In the club's second year, she introduced the club's first outside expert speaker – Walter Deane, noted Cambridge naturalist. Mr. Deane, who spoke on native ferns, was hardly an outsider – he was a neighbor and his mother-in-law was a member. But his talk was a first, and gradually, the number of outside speakers increased, and settled into a pattern of alternating guest and member speakers.

Sadly, the club's premier in-house speaker, Miss Needham, died during the club's third year – in September 1891, after the summer recess. In the record book, Miss Needham is remembered with these words: "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." In her two and a half years as the club's leader, she led most of the club's

programs. After her death, members grieved for their beloved plant-loving leader, but she had set the programmatic course for the club's future.

Over the years, the Plant Club welcomed hundreds of speakers, who addressed a kaleidoscope of subjects – horticulture, botanical science and field exploration, garden design, conservation, civic concerns. The programs provided instruction, entertainment, and took the club on armchair journeys, near and far. They kept the members informed on the latest, both horticultural and botanical. For example, in 1904, when Professor George Goodale spoke on "The New Science of Oecology," the club secretary noted the word "oecology" was so new that it was not yet in the dictionary. And programs also stirred them to advocacy for native plants, parks, and the benefit of gardening for all, especially children.

The club heard many eminent speakers – some at the beginning of distinguished careers, others at midpoints, and some in much-honored maturity. More than a few of their names will be known to readers. Other speakers, who devoted themselves to specialty subjects that did not reach the general press, will be unfamiliar. It is a particular pleasure to introduce these speakers, especially the women. They inspired the club long ago, and their seriousness of purpose remains an inspiration.

Researching speakers proved highly enjoyable and opened doors to historical events that were new to me, or that I knew in headline form, but not in any detail. For example, a *Miss Eastwood* spoke at three meetings in early 1909. She was named without fanfare – the members of the Plant Club audience clearly knew her, but her name was not known to me. Who was Miss Eastwood? An internet search quickly revealed that *Alice* Eastwood (1859–1953) was a celebrity – the curator of the California Academy of Science, the only woman member of the San Francisco Cross Country Club, the most famous woman botanist of the time, not the least because of her heroic actions to save herbarium specimens from the upper story of the California Academy building during the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and the devastating fires that followed. While the Academy was being rebuilt, the Harvard botanical community was fortunate that Miss Eastwood came east to spend a period of time at the Gray Herbarium. (She also paid visits to the New York Botanical Garden, the British Museum, and Kew Garden in England.)

Feature on Miss Cummings

Born in Cambridge, Emma Cummings adopted Brookline as her hometown, and explored it with as much curiosity as she did botanically curious destinations such as the Great Dismal Swamp²⁸ in the coastal plains of Virginia and North Carolina, or Hawaii.²⁹ Like many other botanists, she was also an expert ornithologist, elected to associate membership in the American Ornithological Union in 1903. Her book *Baby Pathfinder to the Birds*, with co-author Harriet E. Richards, published the next year, was much praised. She faithfully attended A.O.U. meetings for nearly four decades, the last being one month before her death. (Miss Cummings died of a heart attack suffered on a botanical trip.) The obituary writer in *The Auk*, the A.O.U.'s journal, described Miss Cummings as representative of "the highest type" of lady member, serving as a mainstay of the Union by holding membership over a long period of time, attending meetings, extending its influence by securing new members and aiding in every possible way in the work of the organization.

Along with her travels, Miss Cummings found time to be a leader in the civic affairs of Brookline. She contributed a

to *Brookline: The History of a Favored Town* (1897). In 1900, she published *Trees in Brookline* with Frances C. Prince – another Plant Club speaker. (Their tree map is in the Norman B. Leventhal Map Collection at the Boston Public Library.) Nearly four decades later Miss Cummings wrote *Brookline Trees*, which was published by the town's Tree Planting Committee. In a leafy neighborhood off Brookline's Heath Street, there is a stone inscribed "In Memory of Emma G. Cummings, A Member of the Tree Planting Committee 1902–1939." In researching this memorial monument, I learned that Emma Cummings was the first woman elected to the Committee – her election (in July 1901) made possible under a special amendment enacted by the state legislature in 1900 to a law previously prohibited women from holding town elective office except as a member of the school committee or an overseer of the poor. Miss Cummings was an expert on many subjects that interested the members of the Plant Club, but there was something else that undoubtedly stirred them: She was an unmarried woman who had broken free of societal constraints and lived out in the world.

Was Miss Eastwood welcomed to Harvard as a visiting professor? No, she was not. Although her field experience and long list of research publications placed her at the top of the profession, she was designated a "Temporary Employee." A temporary employee who went on to be honored by all the various botanical, dendrological, and horticultural societies, as well as by the naming of 17 species and two genera, including the *Eastwoodia elegans*, which fittingly included only one species, a sunflower. Also named in her honor were a redwood grove, a hiking trail and campsite, and the Eastwood Hall of Botany at the California Academy of Science.

Not all of the women who spoke to the Plant Club were as easily profiled by internet searching as Alice Eastwood. But with persistence, I was able to fill in background detail on many of them. Another exceptional woman – one *Miss Cummings* – turned out to be Emma G. Cummings (1856–1940), tree expert, who traveled extensively with conservationist Harriet E. Freeman,²⁶ a woman whose friend list was a "who's who" of the New England elite. Together, the two women continued Asa Gray's quest for the rare perennial *Shortia galacifolia*.²⁷ Along the way, they advocated for the creation of national parks in the eastern United States.

A *Miss Clark* in the record book turned out to be Cora Huidekoper Clarke, a botanist and entomologist, whose talk "Waste Land Wandering" on a February day in 1905, introduced the club to the many varieties of grasses and sedge in railroad yards, deserted lots, and barren seashore stretches. Another speaker, popular with the club, was Miss Cummings's friend, Miss Frances Prince, a tree expert, botanical collector, and world traveler. She gave the club vivid accounts of plant life seen on "tramps" through the environs of not only of Boston, but also New Zealand, the Samoa, Fiji, and Hawaii, as well as of the Rockies and Selkirks. The club also appreciated Miss Mary Day, legendary librarian of the Gray Herbarium, who gave a talk entitled, "Some Old Botanists Beginning with Adam and Eve" in 1904.

These early women speakers had come of age when very few girls went to college. Most were educated at home and in private academies; some continued their studies in art schools. Nevertheless, they were formidably learned. A number taught school. One – Miss Emma Harris, the daughter of a Harvard College Librarian – was entrepreneurial and at the age of 23 began a successful Cambridge school, which she led for 40 years.³⁰ As the pages of the Plant Club's minutes reveal, some could have

taught college botany. Today they would likely be professors and researchers. But in the 1890s and early 1900s, most existed on the periphery of the academic world, living retired lives in modest accommodations, their speaking engagements and private tutoring providing supplements to small incomes. One member, a widow, gave parlor lectures on English poetry. Those who held jobs, like the Gray Herbarium's indispensable Miss Day, worked for the lowest of wages.

As time went on, more of the women speakers had had the advantage of college educations, especially from Smith and Radcliffe. Still, others did not; they were propelled by passionate interests. Though many of the outside speakers were unmarried women or widows, some had husbands and sometimes large families, but managed to pursue their interests. *Mrs. L. Anderson* – Esther Wheeler Anderson – was one. She ran a market farm near Five Corners in Concord that she had inherited as a young woman, engaged in photography, botany, and a passion for local history, while raising children and later serving as a storybook “Over the River and Through the Wood” grandmother. Then there was *Mrs. Hollis Webster* – Helen Noyes Webster, a well-known expert on herbs and wild plants and a popular speaker, who had a large family as well as many animals. A few of the speakers were women of social position and comfortable means, whose love of gardens led them to be conservation advocates.

These are background snippets of a few of the women who spoke to the Plant Club as outside experts. Many talks were given by the club's own members. Their stories are just as impressive. One of the first member speakers was a charter member – Miss Elizabeth L. Bond, the daughter of a Harvard professor and the granddaughter of two others. Although she was orphaned at age 12, she had absorbed a familial curiosity about the natural world and a gift for sharing it. Miss Bond spoke to the Plant Club 15 times between 1892 and 1895. Some of her lecture topics were technical, but she held her audience in appreciative attention. Some decades later, another favorite member speaker, Mrs. J. Willard Helburn (née Margaret Mason), was an expert flower arranger. My research revealed that she was also a mountain climber, who had summited all of the 14,000-foot peaks in the Alps, some of them while pregnant.

Then there was Mrs. Richard B. Hobart, Jr. (née Janet January Elliott), who spoke about the plants of China; the club secretary described her as “having lived there for some years.” Lived there!!! As “quartermaster” on a nine-month National Geographic expedition, she crossed the desert region of

Mongolia by camel, visited remote lamaseries in Tibet, and journeyed down the Yellow River by yak-skin raft! Braving bandits, witnessing the impact of the opium trade, and experiencing the general rigors of travel in remote places, she collected botanical specimens, took photographs (around a thousand), and kept journals along the way. Her role in the expedition went largely unacknowledged. Her then-husband, Frederick R. Wulsin, was the expedition leader; when they returned to the States, he received the credit for the enterprise. That is, until recently, when Mrs. Hobart's daughter from a second marriage, used a trove of archival material in Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology to produce a book that finally told her mother's story.³¹

Of course, men spoke to the club, and they are profiled here, too. Landscape architects, such as Warren Manning and Fletcher Steele, were welcomed. Eminent plantsmen from the Arnold Arboretum, beginning with Charles S. Sargent. Keepers of great estates. Ornithologists and naturalists. Farmers. Specialists in particular plants – hollies, daffodils, and roses, for example. Soil specialists with the State Agricultural Extensive Service. Travelers. Some were the husbands of club members, and in few cases, sons. (Several daughters of club members were speakers, too.)

For some of the men, I have included information about the mothers and wives who influenced them and facilitated their work. In one case, the Arnold Arboretum's genius plantsman John George Jack told the Plant Club that his grandfather had been his great inspiration in the garden. He neglected to mention his famous mother! She was Annie Hayr Jack (1839–1912), who had emigrated from England to upper New York State at the age of 13, starred as a student at the female seminary in Troy, and qualified as a teacher before the age of 16. Marriage to a Scottish-Canadian fruit farmer took her to a farm on the Châteauguay River in Quebec, which she helped manage, while finding time to raise 11 children and writing a longtime horticulture column in the *Rural New Yorker*, entitled “A Woman's Acre.” All that, along with a steady output of short stories and poems. Upon her marriage, Mrs. Jack had requested that she be allowed one acre to plant as she pleased – that acre was reportedly described by the singular botanist-horticulturist Liberty Hyde Bailey,³² as “one of the most original gardens I know.” Giving some new recognition to a woman of great energy, like Annie Jack, was one of the pleasures of this research project.

Expert versus amateur speakers? The Plant Club enjoyed both, but the exuberance of the amateur could give special delight. For example, one self-described amateur, Mr. Choate of Framingham, began his talk by saying that it would take him many months to tell what he did not know about gardening, but to tell what he did know would be his pleasure to do in a very short time. Then the records provide three plus pages of advice, followed by many questions, and finally a rising vote of thanks.

Not all meetings featured a single speaker. Some centered around presentations coordinated by several members who spoke on an assigned topic. The sharing at these meetings could be particularly rousing, or in the words of one secretary about a meeting on bulbs, “full of life and interest.” The reading of articles was a feature of many meetings in the club’s first decades. Members’ enjoyment of readings suggests the dramatic art of the readers and the attentive power of the listeners. And every year, a meeting in May or June was reserved for “going over” a member’s garden. What speaker could compete with the beauty of a garden in spring bloom? For many years, the first meeting of the fall was a roll call of summer experiences – reports of bounty, experiments, and curiosities. Mid-winter plant exhibitions reminded that spring was around the corner. As Frances Hodgson Burnett observed long ago in *The Secret Garden*, “As long as you have a garden you have a future and as long as you have a future you are alive.”

The Secret of the Plant Club’s Longevity and a Dedication

Whatever the subject, whoever the speaker, the conversations over the teacups at the end of a meeting stamped a program, adding to its memorability. Reading the Plant Club minutes decades after they were written, I could still feel the exuberance of speakers and appreciative members, meeting after meeting, reverberating over the post-talk teas. Most of the club secretaries had a favorite closing phrase. Mrs. Strong, who served in the position from 1896–98, was wont to say, “The meeting then became informal over the teacups.” Her phrase stayed with me as I weighed the question of how the Plant Club survived – and thrived – over so many years.

The continued existence of a volunteer association or club is never foreordained – interests change, other activities compete for time, life events intervene, people age. But last and thrive the Plant Club did. Of course, many factors played roles. Dedicated presidents. Witty secretaries. Charismatic worker members, who

radiated enthusiasm and rallied others. Members of different ages, working together. The satisfaction and pride that follows from civic work well done. Generous hospitality. Appreciation and friendship. And programs – speakers! The passion that they shared in talking about their work continually energized and re-energized the club.

As I worked on this book, I came to realize that the unsung heroines of this Plant Club history were the secretaries, whose reports artfully recapped the interest and the pleasure of meetings. Occasionally, a meeting was so memorable that members specified that minutes be re-read at the next gathering. As for the rare occasions when a meeting was less than scintillating, the secretaries captured those moments, too. Or a secretary could introduce a welcome a humorous note to lift accounts that would otherwise have been entirely serious. An example from 1896: After listening to the reading of a distressing article on scale, the secretary added a wry parenthetical comment: “The secretary questions whether the gardener’s life will be worth living if more insect pests are to be introduced with the trees sent from nurseries.” Meeting after meeting, the reading of witty minutes led to continued conversation and further study, as well as to the motivation for civic projects.³³

Beyond speakers and programs, club business was discussed at most meetings. The minutes thus also provide a portrait of the club’s overall *modus operandi* – the nomination and welcoming of new members, resignations of a few (not every new member was captivated by the club), designation of honorary members, remembrances of members, selection of officers, the work of committees, development of interests in civic projects and charitable causes. The changes of president and other officers are particular inflection points – as with other clubs, the recruitment of presidents could be challenging. Finally, over time, the minutes are a window on the establishment and evolution of traditions – garden visits in Cambridge and beyond, sharing of plants, helpful articles and books, and comparison of post-summer experience reports, and as noted above, hospitality.

Reading the club’s minutes, one cannot help but feel that the position of club recording secretary was as important, even more important, than that of the club president. To this point: in 1895, a year of leadership crisis, the recording secretary was “inattentive” – by her own description. She left few words in the club’s record book (only empty spaces for untitled and largely undated, lectures). Her term was one of existential crisis and the club nearly died. But this sole, almost unrecorded year was

the exception. Most secretaries served several years, two served very long terms and were beloved! Of note, only one of the Plant Club's scribes – Katharine “K” Ladd Storey Storer – went on to serve as president.

This book is dedicated to the secretaries of the Plant Club!

*Secretaries of the Plant Club**

Miss Katharine Howe, 1889–90
 Miss Amy Goodwin, 1890–94
 Miss M.L. Kelly, 1894
 Miss A.G. Kelly, 1895
 Mrs. Margaretta Neave Strong, 1896–98
 Mrs. Caroline V. Durant, 1899–1901
 Mrs. Frances W. von Jagemann, 1901–05
 Mrs. Caroline V. Durant, 1905–06
 Mrs. Henry C. Sibley, 1906–10
 Mrs. Margaret B. Wright, 1910–11
 Mrs. Julia E. Drinkwater, 1911–27
 Miss Lucy Davis, 1927–28
 Mrs. Katharine Ladd Storey Storer, 1928–40
 Mrs. Maude Batchelder Vosburgh, 1940–1943
 Mrs. Mary B. Smith, 1943–46
 Mrs. Jessie C. Eastham, 1946–50
 Miss Margaret T. Emery, 1950–53
 Mrs. Gladys May, 1953–55
 Miss Penelope Barker Noyes, 1955
 Mrs. Janet Elliott Hobart, 1956
 Mrs. Ruth Hanford Munn

And to the future of the Cambridge Plant & Garden Club.

Annette LaMond
 January 2024

The preparation of this list of speakers and search for information about these men and women and their times has made the preparation of this book a pleasure and expanded my knowledge of the Plant Club and of Cambridge. In some cases, what I learned was quite personal. I discovered accomplishments, but also difficulties and heartaches that speakers had endured, that perhaps intensified their passions for plants; in other cases, I possessed “advance” knowledge of sorrows that would befall them or their families in the future. Biography has a melancholy side. But sadness aside, the records of the Plant Club contain so much to celebrate. One speaker wrote a book entitled “Stepping Back to Look Forward.” That sentiment captures my feelings about the time that I’ve spent with the archives of the Cambridge Plant Club.

Endnotes

- 1 Founded in 1889, the Cambridge Plant Club was the second women's garden club in the United States. The first was also a Cambridge club – the Garden Street Garden Club, organized in 1879, by neighbors of the Harvard Botanic Garden. However, the early club was small, and by the mid-1890s, it ceased to meet. The records of the Garden Street Garden Club are held by the Cambridge Historical Society: those of the Plant Club at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University. For more on the organization of early garden clubs, see Annette LaMond, “Is This the First Garden Club?” or “What’s in a Name?” in *A City’s Life and Times: Cambridge in the Twentieth Century*, published by the Cambridge Historical Society, 2007.
- 2 A term first used in 1880, “Old Cambridge” referred to the area surrounding the original settlement of 1630.
- 3 The names of the Plant Club's early members can be found in the reports of the city's “neighborhood” houses, as well as its hospital, schools, churches, and children's home.
- 4 In 1965, the Plant Club merged with the Cambridge Garden Club, a sister club founded in 1938. The merger was born of a desire to undertake larger projects than either club could tackle alone.
- 5 See Eliza Ann Youmans, *The First Book of Botany: Designed to Cultivate the Observing Powers of Children*, 1873.
- 6 A recent exhibition at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut – “Pressed for Time: Botanical Collecting as Genteel Pastime or Scientific Pursuit?” – traced the era of collecting from 1820, when it became a popular outdoor activity for both professionals and amateurs, to the 1900s. Amateurs, including gentlemen, women and even children, were respected as peers and colleagues by academics, published articles in the same journals, exchanging specimens. The museum has a collection of herbarium sheets by Plant Club member, Mrs. George Howard Parker (née Louise Merritt Stabler) (1868–1954), who began collecting as a girl in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. (A member of the first graduating class of Barnard College, Mrs. Parker joined the Plant Club in the early 1900s.) Another notable Cambridge collector connected to the Plant Club was Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911), who left four notebooks (compiled from 1841–1859 on plants found in Brookline and Cambridge and excursions elsewhere) to the Gray Herbarium Library. Higginson's second wife (née Mary Potter Thacher) (1844–1941) was a club member as was one of her sisters, Anne Barrett Thacher (1849–1917). And Mrs. Higginson and Miss Thacher's brother-in-law, Walter Deane – the Plant Club's first outside speaker – was one of the greatest collectors of the time, amateur or academic.
- 7 Advertisements for herbarium paper in botanical and country journals are an indicator of the popularity of specimen collecting.
- 8 During the mid-1800s, one of the most prominent growers in Cambridge was Hovey & Co. Founded as a seed store and nursery in 1834, the firm's nursery operation eventually grew to 40 acres located between Cambridge and Kirkland Streets. Famed for his camellias, Charles M. Hovey (1810–1885) also gave his name to a strawberry, and edited a gardening journal showcasing American fruit. He exhibited with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, serving a term as president, and was a champion of open spaces and public parks where city

*The list is incomplete due to the loss of records, 1958 – 1965.

- people might enjoy the pleasures of the country – the sight of green trees and the smell of fresh turf as a respite from the turmoil of trade. Sadly, Hovey & Co.'s acreage was subdivided in the 1890s; only the street names – Hovey, Camelia, Magnolia, and Myrtle – speak of the once venerable establishment. See B. June Hutchison, "A Taste for Horticulture," *Arnoldia*, Vol. 40, No. 1, Jan./Feb. 1980, pp. 31–48.
- Commercial greenhouses were also located on Davenport Street and Massachusetts Avenue at Whittemore Avenue and Magoun Street located near the railroad tracks in North Cambridge.
- 9 According to the Plant Club minutes for October 5, 1891, a member gave this recipe for the "destruction of scale upon plants" that she had tried with great success: one teaspoonful of kerosene, two tablespoonfuls of milk and one quart of water. On June 7, 1911, after a bad pest season – "the worst known" – there was talk of baking the earth to kill cutworms. Kerosene and wood ash were recommended.
 - 10 Mrs. Sarah Warner Brooks, *A Garden with House Attached*, published in 1904, pp. 29–30.
 - 11 William Russell served as mayor from 1885–1889. His wife (née Margaret Manning Swan) joined the Plant Club in 1890. She would likely have been a charter member of the club, but at the time of the club's first meeting, she was preparing for a trip to Washington, D.C., where she and her husband were guests at a cabinet dinner attended by President Grover Cleveland (*Cambridge Chronicle*, February 2, 1889). Russell lost the gubernatorial campaign that year. But after stumping throughout the Commonwealth, he succeeded the following year. Russell served three years; the creation of the Metropolitan Park Commission was a major part of Russell's legacy.
 - 12 One of the professional men cited by Samuel Eliot was Mr. Chauncey Smith, the husband of a founding Plant Club member. Regarding the absence of saloons, the voters of Cambridge adopted prohibition in 1886.
 - 13 Decades on, the organization's name was shortened to The Trustees of Reservations. Recently, it was shortened again – to The Trustees.
 - 14 Cambridge weather records available from NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information. Also, "The Snowless Winter," *Cambridge Chronicle*, Vol. 44, No. 2245, 2 March 1889. One consequence of the snowless winter, the Cambridge's mostly unpaved streets were exceptionally dusty by April.

The records of the club to the extent that they include notes on the weather (blizzards, drenching rain) and dates of peak bloom for particular plants are of anecdotal interest in regard to climate change.
 - 15 The astrological aspects of the club's founding date were also highly favorable. On January 28, the sun was in forward-looking Aquarius. A new moon was forming – beneficial for the new organization, and sun and moon were in an auspicious aspect to Jupiter, the planet of good fortune. Moreover, Jupiter was transiting Sagittarius where it is exalted, i.e., where its beneficence is most naturally expressed.
 - 16 Was the number of passionflower blossoms increased in memory? Or perhaps the number was greater? We cannot know. However, reading through the records of the Plant Club's first years, one cannot fail to be impressed by the care and the method with which its members tended their plants.
 - 17 It was a time when Cantabrigians were forming clubs based on mutual hobbies and civic concerns. Some others: Cambridge Social Union (1870), founded to promote social and intellectual improvement, Cambridgeport Cycle Club (1887); Cambridge Social Dramatic Club (1891), stepping in to replace the defunct Cambridge Dramatic Club; Cantabrigia Club (1892), a women's club whose purpose was to provide educational opportunities as well as to be of service to others; Old Cambridge Photographic Club (1893); Cambridge Walking Club (1894); Cambridge Political Equity Association (1896) focused on suffrage for women and African Americans; Cambridge Skating Club (1897); and Cambridge Historical Society (1905).
 - 18 There was no mention of a club with a headquarters, e.g., based on the model of the New England Women's Club that had been founded by Julia Ward Howe in 1869. That club had immediately secured a headquarters in Boston with the purpose of attracting members interested in educational lectures and social enjoyment. It was one of several such clubs founded after the Civil War, as women became more independent, active in reform groups and interested in self-development. Miss Esther Tiffany, an early member of the Plant Club, was on the founding board of directors of the New England Women's Club.

Cambridge did have its own educationally-focused club – the Cambridge Social Union founded in the 1870s. In early 1889 as the Plant Club was springing to life, the Union acquired the antique William Brattle House on Brattle Street and the adjacent lot. Not only did the Brattle House become the organization's new home, the Union also commissioned local architectural firm, Longfellow, Alden & Harlow, to design a hall next door to provide space for a library and for literary, musical, and dramatic entertainments. Opened in January 1890, the Brattle Hall is occasionally mentioned in the Plant Club minutes, and at least one special meeting was held there. In the late 1930s, the Cambridge Social Union was reconstituted as the Cambridge Center for Adult Education.
 - 19 Using an inflation calculator, the 2022 equivalent of the \$1 dues in 1889 is about \$30.
 - 20 The Massachusetts Horticultural Society, founded in 1829, was established to promote horticulture innovation, broadly defined, and disseminate educational information. From its beginning, the Society's exhibitions had been a forum for introducing new plants and flowers, sponsoring professorships and plant exploration, and influencing civic gardens, notably Boston's Public Garden and an estate known as "Sweet Auburn," which became the Mount Auburn Cemetery.
 - 21 The Torrey Botanical Club, the oldest botanical society in America, began in the 1860s, formalized in 1870. Named for an inspiring Columbia College professor, John Torrey, the club took shape as botanists, students and naturalists began meeting to discuss their findings. The group began publishing a bulletin in 1870, incorporating the next year. A number of Cambridge-based botanists, including at least one Plant Club member, published items in the Torrey Botanical Club's bulletin. This bulletin – the oldest botanical journal in the Americas, is still published with the goal of disseminating scientific knowledge about plant biology, not horticulture.
 - 22 The Garden Street Garden Club was founded on March 24, 1879, a decade before the Plant Club. Its 12 charter members – several were wives of Harvard professors, including Jane Gray (Mrs. Asa) – lived in close proximity to the Harvard Botanic Garden. The focus was on exchanging information about gardening. The club made occasional excursions to local greenhouses and gardens and also held exhibitions of plants and

- flowers. As would be true of the Plant Club, meetings were held on Mondays at 4 pm.
- 23 This very attractive journal, published from 1859–1888, was edited by an extraordinary gardener, nurseryman and botanist named Thomas Meehan. The son of a gardener, educated at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Meehan was Pennsylvania's state botanist, formerly gardener at the Bartram Botanic Gardens. Meehan subsequently published *Meehan's Monthly*, from 1891 to 1901, the year of his death.
 - 24 The name "director" was changed to "president" in 1890, though the term director persisted in the records for another year or two.
 - 25 The Garden Street Garden Club did not have a speakers' program. However, when the meetings were held at the Mrs. Gray's home, Asa Gray typically appeared, offering planting advice and also recommending readings in books and journals, e.g., *The Gardener's Monthly*. Dr. Gray also sent samples, via Mrs. Gray, of plants that he encouraged the ladies to "perpetuate" in their gardens.
 - 26 Over many years, Harriet E. Freeman, a woman who has been taken out of the shadows in a recent book by Sara Day. (*Coded Letters, Concealed Love: The Larger Lives of Harriet Freeman and Edward Everett Hale*, Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2013) Sara Day recently revealed that Miss Freeman had a decades-long secret relationship with the very public author and Unitarian minister, the Reverend Edward Everett Hale (1822–1909), a married man with a wife who bore him nine children. Miss Freeman, a naturalist 25 years Hale's junior, re-energized his appetite for life and work in later middle age.
 - 27 Asa Gray first saw the rare *Shortia galacifolia* (also known as Oconee Bells or Acony Bell) as an unnamed dyed specimen at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. Collected by the plant explorer André Michaux, Gray named the specimen, and devoted considerable effort to looking for it in the wild over the next decades. He made four expeditions to the Appalachian area in North Carolina where it had been found, none successful in finding the rare specimen.
 - 28 Miss Cummings visited the the Dismal Swamp the year before she spoke to the Plant Club. See Harriet Freeman and Emma G. Cummings, "Dismal Swamp and How to Go There," *The Chautauquan*. Volume 33, April–September 1901, pp. 516–118. *The Chautauquan* described itself as a "magazine for self-education." For more on Miss Cummings's travels to the Southeast, see her talk to the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, entitled "Characteristics of Some Southern Trees." Though the main aim of Miss Cummings's trip was to see "that most interesting of all American flowers," *Shortia galacifolia*. She also provided a perceptive report on the state of southern trees" (*Nebraska State Journal*, March 1, 1903, p. 4.).
 - 29 On March 30, 1922, Miss Cummings gave a talk on the Hawaiian Islands, which she had recently visited, to the Brookline Historical Society of which she was a member. In a first for the group, she used a stereopticon to accompany her talk with pictures. "The room was filled and it was a most entertaining evening." *Proceedings of the Brookline Historical Society*, 1923.
 - 30 "School Days: Emma Forbes Harris," posted on the Cambridge Historical Commission website, August 15, 2019.
 - 31 Mabel Hobart Cabot, *Vanished Kingdoms: A Woman Explorer in Tibet, China, and Mongolia 1921–1925*, New York: Aperture, 2003.
 - 32 The publications of Cornell professor, Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858–1954), were favorite reading of the Plant Club, regularly in early meetings. Some members of the club may have known Bailey when he was at Harvard early in his career. His biography is fascinating. I wish that his name was included on the Plant Club speakers list!
 - 33 Mrs. Edward S. King (née Kate Irene Colson), a 40-year-member, in 60th anniversary essay, noted that one recording secretary [Mrs. Margaret B. Wright] "made the reading of the 'Minutes of the Last Meeting' a literary event which one would not willingly miss," and "often enhanced the quality of the program reported."