



Herstory

For many women, one's personal history can be traced through years of personal gardening, horticultural and floral moments. *Herstory* isn't told by dates of battles, lists of invasions or lengths of wars, but in gathered stems, handfuls of seeds, gallons of water, flowers harvested, gardens imagined and made real and in community enhancements. And in *herstory*, the only "crimes" on behalf of humanity are counted in the number of moments stolen from "work" so as to undertake sweet labor.

Did you once gladly pin on a corsage you didn't like because you loved the giver? Was there an occasion you received a dozen roses? One rose? Been the recipient of a dandelion given you by a proud toddler? Maybe you have been the *giver* of a plant cutting to "keep things going?" To keep the world turning? Have you idled time on a blanket where the grass was fresh and love was sweet? Given careful thought to plantings to set off the front of the house or to create a retreat in the back? How many times did you choose flowers for a birthday party, a wedding, a funeral, a homecoming, a picnic, a Christmas table? Have you pored over books to satisfy an intellectual urge to understand better the botany of a plant or stayed up late reading a garden "plot?"

Did the illustrious women whose names appear on the roster of those who founded Akron Garden Club in 1924 engage in such prosaic retreats from the demands of their days? How could they have, given the constraints on their time? Surely Mrs. Barber, Hower, Firestone, Knight, Litchfield, Schumacher, Seiberling and all the others on the list of 42 women (and six husbands) who founded the club had to be thinking big in terms of large plans and grand contributions. How else to explain the legacy that they set into motion for their community and for members of Akron Garden Club who followed them? How else to appreciate the ramifications of their focus on three essential phases of education: horticulture, conservation and all aspects of gardening? Their creed was very similar to our club's current mission statement, *to stimulate the knowledge and love of gardening and protect the quality of the environment.*

These women's horticultural *herstories* became *public* stories told through fundraising and community enhancements. The first of these began shortly after the organization's formation, with the development and planting of a city park in 1926; a 50-foot morale-building Christmas tree in the Glendale triangle in the Depression year of 1931; the planting of Tallmadge Parkway in 1939; planting of a garden at the Akron Art Institute in 1951; creation of the wildflower-filled Dell at Stan Hywet; the Akron Expressway Project; and on and on as Akron Garden Club made tangible the members' interests in horticulture, conservation and gardening. This impressive *herstory* has evolved in the 21st century into scholarships for horticultural studies, wildflower rescues, the removal of invasive species, legislative environmentalism, conservation projects and the restoration, maintenance and enhancement of the English Garden at Stan Hywet, the club's signature project.



The English Garden we safeguard was created in 1929 by the renowned Ellen Biddle Shipman. It is only fitting that, today, Akron Garden Club's activities are closely aligned with Stan Hywet — it was there the organization first met on November 3, 1924. In the past 25 years, the club has donated some \$250,000 for the English Garden and Stan Hywet grounds, and we continue to be very actively supportive in hands-on gardening there.

We can only conclude that the intelligent, diligent women of 1924 who founded Akron Garden Club set their sights high for themselves and their community. They formed a *herstory* that the current club members can be very proud to inherit, safeguard and grow. And one hopes — believes — that those 42 female founders' personal *herstories* included not only steady, extraordinary community accomplishments and intellectual contribution, but included a dandelion in a jar as well, an unexpected dewdrop blessing on the forehead, a spontaneous arrangement of flowers from their own gardens and some joyous, hands-in-the-soil labor upon occasion.

By Sally Domm, Akron Garden Club member since 2002