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The Arboretum is active on Facebook and Instagram! For the latest information on projects and events, "Like" our Facebook page, Arboretum. For fun photo updates, follow our Instagram account, @actonarb. Tag @actonarburt in so that we can like your photos, and maybe even include them in the next newsletter!

BECOME A MEMBER

Friends of the Acton Arboretum, Inc.
P.O. Box 2607
Acton, MA 01720

What's Happening

Don’t forget to renew your membership! Your membership is valid through:

Thank you!

Our Mission

To raise and donate funds, materials, and services to the Town of Acton for the development and maintenance of the Arboretum, to educate the community about the unique environmental, horticultural, and historical qualities of the Arboretum property, about the process of plant and field succession, and, in an era of decreasing public funds and natural resources, about conservation, effective horticultural practice and generally to do all things permitted to non-profit organizations under the provisions of Chapter 186 of the General Laws of Massachusetts and Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as from time to time they are amended.

Friends of the Acton Arboretum

Current Projects

The Friends of the Acton Arboretum are always considering new projects to improve accessibility, safety, and sustainability. These undertakings are in various stages of completion; detailed below are the most significant changes:

- Fern Boardwalk:
  - In August, Fred's Construction completed the new fern boardwalk between the Understory Study and the Wildflower Trail. The new boardwalk is made of pressure-treated pine and is expected to last 20-30 years. It was built upon the same footprint as the previous structure, but with a reduced grade to comply with ADA guidelines of less than 1/3\  pitch, making it wheelchair accessible.

- Understory Study:
  - The Understory Study is a new garden abutting the fern boardwalk. Last year, we cleared the area of several black walnut trees (Juglans nigra), which were deposing tannin into the soil and decreasing the natural biodiversity around them. Replacing them are a number of understory trees such as sweetbay magnolia (Magnolia virginiana), black tupelo (Nyssa sylvatica), Persimmon (Diospyros virginiana), and Japanese maple (Acer palmatum), as well as woody shrubs such as Osmunda cinnamomea and Viburnum opulus. We are planning to plant pink beech (Fagus crenata) and a silverbell tree (Halesia carolina) as well. Our vision for this space is a horticultural collection that celebrates the aesthetic and environmental values of understory plants—for those not exceeding 5-10 feet—by selecting trees and shrubs that are colorful, pleasant to look at, and beneficial to the natural habitat.

- Rain Garden/Beavermeadow Basin:
  - This area adjacent to the parking lot is responsible for filtering contaminants from stormwater runoff, making it possible to percolate slowly downward and recharge the groundwater. After digging a four-foot pit, volunteers spread several layers of rock: coarse gravel, then course sand, and lastly a mixture of compost and loam. Volunteers then planted shrubs and grasses specially suited to filtering out toxins, filling in the surrounding ground with mulch. Rain garden plants include dwarf fetterbells (Buckley’s fritillary), red twig dogwood (Cornus sericea), various sedges, and Monroe grass. Tim Timlin, Natural Resources Director, designed a stone footbridge crossing the garden, which was installed by the Acton Natural Resources Department. Luke Phillips, an Eagle Scout, raised $500 to put toward materials for the rain garden and spent many hours volunteering on the site with other members of Boy Scout troop 1. Mr. North of Acton also generously donated $500 towards the purchase of plants. Volunteers from the Groton School as well as regular Tuesday and Thursday volunteers are also largely responsible for the completion of this project.

- Rock Garden:
  - Construction of the Rock Garden is currently underway on the Rock Garden between the main lawn and the stone reading circle. This garden will be situated on pre-existing bedrock ledge and will include a variety of alpine plants and low-growing perennials. Lenten Landscaping excavated soil from the site to reveal the ledge, and the Acton Fire Department power-washed the rocks to clean them further. The Acton Natural Resources Department is in the process of building a stone patio at the base and has already installed stone steps and a stone bench for visitation. In the spring, Lenten Landscaping will be planting special growing medium—a mixture of soil and gravel—for the rock garden plants to grow in. The North American Rock Garden Society is planning to donate plants to the Arboretum for this project, possibly including Himalayan wheat flour (Siberia longifolia), woodlytum spadel (Siberia ferox), and sundrops (Gentiana p.)

- New Kiosk & New Arbor
  - We are still fundraising for a new kiosk by the parking lot and a new arbor by the Butterfly Garden to replace the old one, which collapsed last March. These new structures will be made out of cedar.

Top: Fern Fern boardwalk.
Bottom: Before & after of the butterfly garden.
A Brief History of the Arboretum

To commemorate the Arboretum’s 50th anniversary, the Friends of the Acton Arboretum president, Cathy Hatfield, rolled up her sleeves and went through Acton Town Records dating from 1976 to the present to compile a cohesive history of our beloved conservation land. Published below is a detailed version of the story, told by the experts, for all the curious and key players. We hope to inspire you to update an uncharted history of the Acton Arboretum to celebrate the past to ensure a better future for those who wish to learn more about this wonderful piece of ground the Acton Arboretum and town are able to enjoy today.

In 1976, the Acton citizens voted at Town Meeting to purchase a 36.5-acre parcel of land in the center of Acton for conservation purposes for a total of $15,800. An additional 19 acres were purchased in 1979, and the collective area became known as the Acton Center Park. It was not until Town Meeting in 1986 that Acton residents John J. W. Whitney and Bertram Comeau proposed that the Acton Center Park be rechristened as an arboretum. The article was approved, and the Acton Arboretum was born!

Following the 1986 vote, the town got to work. Former Arnold Arboretum director and Acton resident Dr. Richard Howard orchestrated a donation of 150 trees from the Arnold Arboretum to the Acton Arboretum. In 1987, town crews hired at $200 per day cut 100 dead and declining trees by Taylor Road, creating the lanes, and developing trails. Among many volunteers at this time was resident Sandy Bayne, who offered her invaluable landscape design expertise. Current Natural Resources Director, Tim Tidman, began working as a Conservation Administrator in this year as well.

The Swede and Hedger Gardens were planted by volunteers in 1988. In 1993, the town embarked on what would become a priority in the Arborleum’s Master Plan, efforts to create certain trails more handicapped accessible. Acton resident Judy Dempsey helped the creation of the Hoxie House in 1995, and this year, resident Belle Cheese helped develop the Butterfly Garden, and the town won the “Acton Looks Good Award” from the Chamber of Commerce. 1993 saw the accessible trail grew by 1,000 feet thanks to a $5,000 grant from the William F. Whetstone Trust, ending in the Wildflower Loop. Originally called the Whetstone Trail, it is known as the Wildflower Loop today.

Friends of the Acton Arboretum board of Rural Girl Scouts, designed and planted the native in 1994. The Whetstone Trail, the cornerstone of the conservation land, extends into 1995, the Roxborough Arboretum Garden was dedicated. Resident Fred Keppel would also dedicate the Roxborough Arboretum’s first custom-built arbor near River Road. Sponsored by the Acton-Boxborough hosted an outdoor sculpture exhibit in 1997-1998. At the exhibit and was eventually purchased as a permanent part of the museum installation. A second environment in 1997, the town acquired another 12 acres to the core greenway land near Wood Lane. In 1997, the town applied for an outdoor sculpture exhibit. In 2000, the town purchased a 10-acre surrounding area near Wood Lane. The Wildflower Garden, founded by the Cheese Garden, was named in its memory in 2000. The Conservation Commission was established in 1999.

Through the Arboretum continued to be an official plan for its future development, prompting residents Belle Cheese and Marie Wyrowal to assemble a Master Plan Committee in 1998, drafting the first document in 2000. Over the years, the Master Plan continues to evolve, though the overall concept remains the same: “Plant life and natural resources are vital, and as an educational tool, an Arboretum can enhance and teach, and ultimately achieve this task as well as our beautiful surroundings. By using…existing concepts on the site, visitors will be able to better understand the theory of ‘Right Plants, Right Place’” (Master Plan, Section 1, page 5). In 2000, the Arboretum was awarded the Gold Leaf Award from the International Society of Arboreta.

In 2000, Mary and John Comeau donated 12 acres of red maple swamp foresting Minot Lane to the town for the Arboretum, with volunteers working to curtail invasive species, such as garlic mustard, has been a continuing volunteer effort over the years, thanks to residents like Bruce Carley and Jon Snyder-Gran. In 2003, the Friends of the Arboretum accepted the first self-guided tour of the Arboretum, with a map of the largely accessible Upper grounds. This was followed in 2007 by a self-guided tour of the “Back 40,” including the acres of trails that go through the bog. The Fragrance Garden, including the Lilac Garden dedicated to the memory of resident Dean Chester’s father, was installed in 2008, but additions continued into 2015. In 2010, the town installed over 100 feet of paved trails to offer erosion, an effort that continues today. The Friends and Arboretum Conservation Trust worked together to creating a plan off of Wood Lane, and the following year, a conservation easement was signed by the Land Trust. The recommendation in 2015. In 2015, the Wood Lane Meadow was planted by the Sun Pond and, the Adopt-a-Garden project was initiated, focusing on new volunteers of all ages.

The history of the Arboretum is still being written! 2015 and 2016 have been as entertaining as ever as town employees and volunteers have worked together to maintain our existing gardens and create new ones, such as the Understory Study and the Rain Garden. From its inception to the present, the Arboretum has been blessed by dedicated volunteers and town workers, including Roy Stearns, ARBIAJH president, and residents of all ages and levels of gardening experience. More than 30 years of painting down roots in our community.

For more information about our gardens and trails, please visit www.actonarboretum.org.

The Back 40 and Upper Grounds maps are available for download under the “Tools/Maps” tab.

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An Interview with Sue Whitcomb

Anyone who enjoys strolling through the Arboretum’s many gardens in the spring and summer has undoubtedly seen Sue Whitcomb, slipped or travois in hand, tending to the plants she has helped select and maintain for the Arboretum for almost three decades. A tireless volunteer and endorser of horticultural knowledge, Sue answered a few questions for us about what the Arboretum has meant to her over the years.

Q: What is your role in regards to gardening and horticulture?

A: I have been a gardener for most of my life and was given my own garden to plant and plant at age five. Over the years, I am committed to take care of our garden and eventually care for our garden. I have worked at Lexington Gardens, Bancroft’s Garden Center, and Arrowhead Nursery before starting my own horticultural business.

Q: How, when, and why did you first decide to volunteer at the Arboretum?

A: My first introduction to the Arboretum was when the committee asked me to design the herb garden. I also worked with Judy Dren- hey in the Hoxie House for years, and assisted Sue Bouverie with selecting plants for the Wildflower Garden. Later, I was asked to take care of the plants and to help the Arboretum’s volunteer workers. We have a great group of volunteers, and my hope is that we can continue to take care of the increased maintenance in the future.

Q: What is your favorite project that you have helped work on at the Arboretum?

A: Do you have a favorite tree or plant that you helped introduce to the Arboretum?

A: I have particularly enjoyed the Rain Garden and the planning and preparing of the Rock Garden, which we are still in the process of creating. I am very fond of all the gardens (Glycine g.), and down seed (Osmunda regalis), as well as the seven-sun flower (Ophiopogon japonicus) putting down roots in our community and it is very pleasurable to interface with such an enthusiastic group!

Want to volunteer at the Arboretum? Please contact Bethina Ables, Natural Resources Assistant, at bables@acton-ma.gov. Workdays are held during the spring, summer, and fall on Thursdays from 9:00-12:00 and Tuesdays from 2:30-5:00. All experience levels and abilities are welcome.

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An Interview with Sue Whitcomb

Sue accords a short of high school volunteer land at last spreading out for the near Sun Pond. Thank you, Sue!

Recap: The Arboretum’s 30th Birthday

On the afternoon of September 18th, we celebrated the Acton Arborleum’s 30th year as our favorite conservation land! The celebration was held on the Arboretum’s main lawn, where the public was invited to eat cake, sign a giant card, and participate in a raffle. Raffle prizes included various plants—such as a blueberry blueberry shrub (Viburnum opulus) and eastern prickly pear (Opuntia bau- niifera)—a handmade quilt, and a basket of gardening supplies. Thanks to all of our wonderful volunteers and participants, we managed to make a profit of $48 in raffle ticket sales! All of those earnings will go towards our purchase of a new order arbor for the Butterfly Garden to replace the structure that collapsed last spring.

Happy birthday, Acton Arboretum!