



A History of Ballard Greenhouse and the Garden and Conservation Trust

Ridgefield, Connecticut



Established in 1967, the Garden and Conservation Trust raises funds for repairs and improvements needed to operate Ballard Greenhouse, a Lord & Burnham greenhouse built at the turn of the 20th century. The Trust also sponsors a greenhouse director who assists members of Caudatowa and Ridgefield Garden Clubs grow plants for their annual plant sale, a Ridgefield tradition since 1959. Proceeds from the sale fund projects for Ridgefield and the surrounding area. The Trust consists of members from both garden clubs.



The Graeloe Estate

Ballard Greenhouse was built on the summer estate of L. Horatio and Anna Biglow who purchased the Main Street property in Ridgefield, Connecticut in 1889. The Biglows named the estate Graeloe, the name still visible on one of the gateway pillars along Main Street. They eventually developed the property into a 14-acre country estate with beautiful gardens and stately trees. Today's bandstand at Ballard Park stands where the house once did.

After the Biglows died, their daughter, Elizabeth Biglow Ballard, acquired the estate and used it as her family's summer residence for the next 40+ years until she died in 1964.

In this circa-1918 photograph, Anna Biglow is seated at Graeloe with her daughter Elizabeth and Elizabeth's three children. After Elizabeth died, her two daughters offered the use of Ballard Greenhouse to Ridgefield Garden Club for gardening and conservation programs to benefit Ridgefield and surrounding area communities.





Early History of Ballard Greenhouse

Elizabeth Biglow Ballard added slate and tile benches in the greenhouse in 1929 as well as an attached service building with a potting shed. She was a longtime leader in Ridgefield Garden Club and hosted many club, area and national meetings in her gardens. Photographs of her gardens are archived at the Smithsonian Archives of American Gardens. Upon her death in 1964, Elizabeth bequeathed 5 acres of her 14-acre property to the Town of Ridgefield for a public park, stipulating that the house be torn down. The park is now Ridgefield's beloved Ballard Park.

The greenhouse was not part of Elizabeth's bequest. In 1965, her daughters offered use of the greenhouse to Ridgefield Garden Club for gardening and conservation programs to benefit the community. Ridgefield was experiencing unprecedented growth at the time, with the population more than doubling between 1960 and 1970. The Ballard sisters wanted the club to help focus the community on the importance of growing plants, shrubs and trees, and the need to conserve the natural environment in a time of development and growth. The club readily accepted the offer and asked Caudatowa Garden Club of its interest in a joint venture; Caudatowa accepted. The other garden club in Ridgefield at the time, the Ridgefield Horticultural Society, chose to participate on an advisory basis only.

Ridgefield News

Elizabeth Nowotarski, Tel. 438-3158



INSPECTING PLANTS to be sold by the Ridgefield and Caudatowa Garden Clubs on May 22 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Community Center are, left to right, Mrs. Donald Hawkins, Caudatowa plant sale chairman; Mrs. Robert Bissell, greenhouse chairman for the Ridgefield club; Mrs. Richard Jackson of Caudatowa; Mrs. John W. Scott, chairman of the Caudatowa plant sale committee, and Mrs. Walter Poor of the Ridgefield club. (Photo by Elizabeth Nowotarski)

The Clubs Begin Using Ballard Greenhouse in 1965

As soon as the Ballard daughters - Elizabeth Ballard Doubleday, a longtime member of Ridgefield Garden Club, and her sister, Anna Ballard Cerf - made the greenhouse available to the clubs in early-1965, the clubs began to grow plants for their seventh annual May plant sale.

The greenhouse had gone unused since before World War II and required a new heating system to run efficiently in the winter, glass replacement, hot and cold running water, and electrical wiring. In April, 1965, the clubs held the first of many fundraisers over the years in support of the greenhouse.

For the next nearly two years, the greenhouse was run entirely by volunteers. But it became apparent to the clubs that they needed a full-time director regularly on the premises to accomplish the many possibilities they envisioned for the greenhouse. Ann Crammond, a member of both garden clubs, was hired as the first greenhouse director in January, 1967. She was initially paid from a joint bank account set up with funds from both clubs.

APRIL 29, 1965

Silent Auction Raises \$470 For Greenhouse

Four hundred and seventy dollars was raised at a silent auction on Tuesday, April 27 at the Ridgefield Community Center to help maintain the Ballard Greenhouse. The auction, which was open to the public, was sponsored by the Ridgefield and Caudatowa Garden Clubs, and included articles donated by members of the two clubs. Refreshments





Alice Poor



Nancy Jessup



Mary Luke



Carolyn Meyers

The Garden and Conservation Trust is Established in 1967

Since both Caudatowa and Ridgefield Garden Clubs were already contributing significant sums to equip the greenhouse as a community resource, it became evident that another source of funds was needed to pay a greenhouse director. The Garden and Conservation Trust was established to not only pay the director, but also to dispense funds in other ways to promote conservation, gardening and horticultural practices in the community. The first members of the Trust were Alice Poor, Nancy Jessup and Mary Luke, all members of Ridgefield Garden Club. Carolyn Meyers of Caudatowa Garden Club joined the Trust in 1968, becoming the fourth trustee in 1970. Since then, the Trust has been comprised of members from both clubs, with the chair position alternating between the clubs every few years. There have been 15 Trust chairmen since 1970.



Dolly Wittman



Mary Luke



Valerie Casey



Carolyn Meyers



Yrene-Burr Dayton



Paddy Hoyt



Hope Swenson



Terry Fiorentino



Carol Stoddard



Muriel Pedersen



Judy Breekland



Linda Swainson



Mary Swett



Geraldine Cooper



Carolyn Foster

Greenhouse Directors



Ann Crammond



Paddy Hoyt



Valerie Casey



Terry Keller



Lori Wunner



Sue Bondurant



Annette St. Pierre



Penny McLaren



Joyce Bucciarelli



Andrea Reffler



Marie Hale

For many years the greenhouse director worked in the greenhouse several hours a day, Monday through Friday, from September through June, leading volunteer garden club members in propagating and tending plants; teaching workshops at the greenhouse as well as at schools and elsewhere in the community; leading tours and demonstrations at the greenhouse for schoolchildren, scouts, senior citizens and other groups; answering horticulture-related questions from area residents; writing articles for the

local newspaper; and paying bills and handling other bookkeeping activities. Since 1998, the director has worked from early February through mid-May, focusing primarily on the annual plant sale. The first four greenhouse directors were members of either or both Ridgefield and Caudatowa Garden Clubs. Ann Crammond was a member of both clubs. Paddy Hoyt, Val Casey and Terry Keller were members of Caudatowa Garden Club. Beginning with Lori Wunner's employment in 1977, greenhouse directors have not been members of either garden club. Greenhouse directors were employees of the Trust until 2005 when the job changed to contractor status.



Working with Club Members

Since 1967, greenhouse directors have worked closely with garden club plant sale and greenhouse committees to plan gardening and conservation activities at the greenhouse that serve residents of Ridgefield and surrounding communities. The greenhouse also provides a unique opportunity for garden club members themselves to learn more about plant propagation and good greenhouse practices from a professional.



First Greenhouse Plant Sale - 1971

By late-1970, the Trust had installed a storage garage to support greenhouse activities, built a split rail fence, and improved the driveway to the greenhouse. In 1971, the clubs moved their annual May plant sale to Ballard Greenhouse. Their twelve prior annual plant sales had been held either on the grounds at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church or on the lawn at the Ridgefield Community Center.



Carolyn Meyers, a 50+ year member of the Trust and a past chairman, is at the right with Yrene-Burr Dayton, another past chairman of the Trust. On the left are Dolly Wittman, Vera Neligan and Muriel Pedersen. Dolly and Muriel were also past chairmen of the Trust.



Annual May Plant Sale

The annual May plant sale that moved to Ballard Greenhouse in 1971 has been a Ridgefield tradition for people of all ages since 1959.

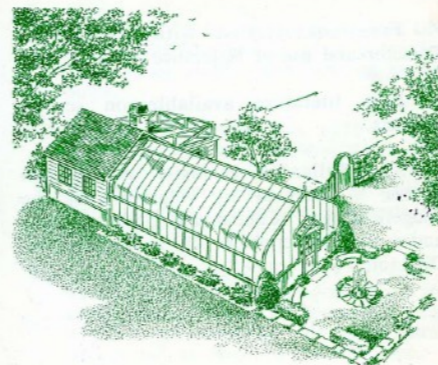
In 1974 the clubs enlarged the sale, taking over nearly all of Ballard Park. In addition to the always popular plants grown in the greenhouse and those donated from club members' gardens, the sale also included food, music, entertainment, local and area nurseries and other vendors. In 1991 the clubs moved the plant sale back to the grounds of Ballard Greenhouse and increased it to a two-day sale. Proceeds from the sale are split between the two clubs to fund civic beautification and improvement programs.





The
**BALLARD GREENHOUSE
 &
 GARDEN CENTER**

36 Gilbert St., Ridgefield, CT. 06877



Greenhouse Workshops

Over the past fifty years, hundreds of workshops and lectures on gardening, conservation, and horticultural techniques have been held at the greenhouse and elsewhere for people of all ages. Other offerings have included classroom, scout and senior citizen visits; garden therapy programs; a reference library; personal consultation on plant problems; and soil testing. From 1979-1990, the greenhouse operated as "The Ballard Greenhouse & Garden Center", the sign still hanging at the Gilbert Street entrance to the greenhouse.



Greenhouse Improvements and Repairs

The Trust pays for the significant expenses associated with maintaining and improving this antique greenhouse; its attached service building with potting shed, office, and restroom; cold frames; and detached garage. Following are examples of Trust expenditures over the past 50+ years: glass replacement, glazing and caulking; new heating, electrical, and misting/venting systems; a storage garage; an office and restroom; a generator and its enclosure; sump pumps; new flooring in the garage, office and potting shed; new roofs on the garage and service building; removal of the in-ground oil tank and installation of new oil tanks; new doors in the greenhouse, service building and garage; replacing cold frame covers and installing wiring; and repairing the driveway. Unfortunately, the Trust has also needed to pay for repairs due to vandalism, including particularly significant glass breakage in 1979, 2005 and 2019.

The trust also pays for significant ongoing maintenance of the greenhouse such as regular painting of all the buildings, inside and out.

Over the years, the Trust has also invested in innovative greenhouse technology. For example, in 1979 the Trust installed solar panels on the greenhouse, not only to experiment with passive solarization in the greenhouse, but also for use as a community education and conservation project. The panels were removed in 1983.



A Fundraiser
for Ballard Greenhouse

Cocktail Buffet
Sunday, September 20, 1998
Five p.m.

Helen & Dick Henshaw's
31 East Ridge Road
Waccabuc, NY 10597

Suggested donation: \$50 a person
All contributions tax deductible
RSVP by September 13th

Checks may be mailed to:
Maureen Kiernan
15 Ascot Way
Ridgefield, CT 06877



Sources of Funds

The Trust relies solely on donations and grants to support the greenhouse. The garden clubs and their members are always generous in times of need. The Ballard daughters supported the Trust during their lifetimes, as did other "angels" who regularly sent unsolicited checks. When needed, the Trust has applied for grants and has held fundraisers including dinners, raffles, auctions, fashion shows, winter plant sales, and Holiday boutiques.



Looking Ahead

The work of the Garden and Conservation Trust has enabled members of Caudatowa and Ridgefield Garden Clubs to use this historic greenhouse as a community gardening and conservation center for more than 50 years. We look forward to many more years of this partnership and the benefits it provides to Ridgefield and surrounding communities. Examples of the clubs' ongoing civic projects funded by their work in Ballard Greenhouse include: planting and maintaining Ballard Gardens, the Veterans Memorial Garden at Lounsbury House, Main Street, and other community spaces including schools, town offices, parks, triangles, and museums; planting pollinator pathways; providing scholarships to Ridgefield High School seniors; and leading garden therapy, junior gardener, senior citizen, and scout gardening programs.





More information

A more detailed history of the Garden and Conservation Trust and Ballard Greenhouse is available. It includes lists of Trust members and greenhouse workshops over the years, as well as more information about the Ballards and the first members of the Trust. Contact Terry McManus at tamcman1@gmail.com for a copy of the detailed history.



Acknowledgements

The history of the Garden and Conservation Trust and Ballard Greenhouse was prepared from materials in Trust, Caudatowa Garden Club and Ridgefield Garden Club archives. A special thank you to Paddy Hoyt and Carolyn Meyers who donated their Trust files to the archives, as well as to the following who provided additional information and assistance: Judy Breekland; Shane Casey; Torrey Cooke; Carolyn Foster; Lawrence Hoyt, Jr.; Kristen Hoyt; Maureen Koehl, Town Historian for the Town of Lewisboro, New York; Christine Lodewick; Edith Meffley; Jack Sanders; Betsy Reid and the Ridgefield Historical Society; Stephen Sinon, Archivist, New York Botanical Garden; Sarah Slavin; Mary Swett; Anne Tracy; and Meredith Ward.

