

More on Gardens, Gardeners, and Estates of Greenwich...

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As summer draws to a close, let us linger awhile longer on the interviews in our collection highlighting the joys of the season:

The first interview under review is "Starting the Garden Center," narrated by Jane Duff for the Greenwich Library Oral History Project in March, 1976.

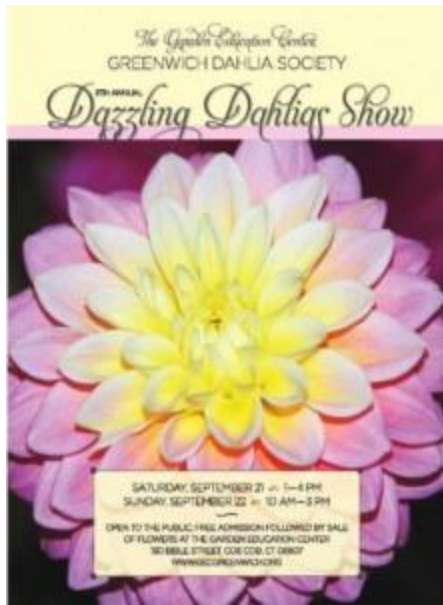


The Garden Education Center of Greenwich

In 1956 Ms. Duff conceived the idea of starting a garden educational center in Greenwich to bring together the garden clubs as one united group. Their goal would be to provide educational experiences for people not already adept in gardening—as a way to foster knowledge. She also knew where this center should be located, at the Montgomery Pinetum Park, the land coming to the town of Greenwich in 1953 with the death of Colonel Robert Montgomery.

After making the rounds, selling her idea, Ms. Duff garnered enough support to see her idea become a reality. The Garden Education Center of Greenwich was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in June, 1957. Today the garden center's mission, to promote "horticulture conservation and the arts through education programs, outreach activities and special events," is a living testimony to one woman's vision and commitment.

Currently, on the garden center's website, this poster is prominently displayed.



And that brings us to the next interview, “Growing up in Cos Cob: Dahlias,” (July, 2003) narrated by Anthony M. Marzullo, a prizewinning grower of dahlias. Mr. Marzullo grew up in the midst of the family greenhouse and florist business, begun in the 1920s. Then, after serving in the United States Army, he graduated from Alfred State College, majoring in agronomy. He worked for American Cyanamid at first, moving later to Union Carbide, where he retired at age sixty-five. In retirement, he turned to his passion, raising dahlias, double A giants, attaining a growth of ten to twelve inches around. Last year Mr. Marzullo took top honors at the Greenwich Dahlia Society’s “Dazzling Dahlia Show.” One wonders what will be the result this year. Finally, we turn to an early interview describing life on one of the historical estates of Greenwich, the Topping estate, entitled, “Back Country Estates,” narrated by George P. Bennett in February and May of 1975.



Dunnellen Hall

The mansion was originally designed in 1916 for the wealthy businessman and American Can magnate, Daniel Grey Reid, as a gift for his daughter, Rhea, and her husband, Henry J. Topping. The mansion was completed in 1918, the entire estate

covering over two hundred acres. Mr. Bennett, who lived on the property with his family, was first employed there in the 1920s to take care of the machinery on the property.

He describes the servant's quarters (there were twenty-three employees in the house) as including a butler's pantry, a large safe for the silver, a large kitchen, a dining room for the help, a butcher box, and a laundry –all on the ground floor. In addition to the large mansion, called Dunnellen Hall, there was a garage for up to eight cars, two apartments for chauffeurs, a gardener and several helpers to oversee the trees, gardens, vegetables, and the greenhouse. The property included a farm with horse stalls, a dairy barn, and a dairyman's cottage. There was a herd of Guernsey cows and horses for riding and for carriages. The estate housed seven families living on the farm. Mr. Bennett is much more comfortable describing the ground floor area reserved for the help and the outside operations of the estate than he is in describing the owner's quarters—except to say the Toppings had what must have been the first king-size bed, capable of sleeping “at least ten.”

The Toppings owned the property until 1950, having raised a family including three sons, one of whom was part owner of the New York Yankees and another who was a famous playboy, having married several actresses among his many wives. But perhaps the most notorious owner of Dunnellon Hall in the years to come was Leona Helmsley, hotelier and convicted tax evader.

And now we say good-bye to summer, 2013.