

# A Portal to the Past

## Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum

### GARDENS: A VICTORIAN PASSION

Gardening became an extremely popular pastime during the Victorian era, passing through a number of styles during this long period. The Victorian gardener's motto might very well have been something like "man's conquest over elements of the natural world." Large country estates and city homes featured formal gardens incorporating expanses of closely clipped lawn. Smaller places and portions of large estates would often incorporate more informal cottage style gardens and open spaces with ground covers requiring less maintenance than grass.

Many, many plants were beloved by the Victorian gardeners. During this era of coloni-

zation in the British Empire, exotic species were highly sought after; and gardeners took great pains with them. Estate owners were proud to brag about the amount of ground they maintained "under glass", where foreign species and hothouse grapes and strawberries grew. Most large homes had attached conservatories which provided a wonderful escape from winter's cold and dreariness in a warm, humid atmosphere, surrounded by gorgeous ferns and flowering plants, a tinkling fountain, and often

cages of exotic birds.

The Wardian case became popular as a parlor decoration at this time. This glass enclosed box, often of fancy design, had its origin in an innovative shipping box for bringing tender plants home by ship from distant countries. A complete atmosphere, created in the case,

protected the plants from drafts and maintained humidity, while allowing plenty of light. Fancy iron and glass Wardian cases held



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### A FOCUS ON EDUCATION

2014 will be a busy year of special educational programs. Once again, the Coventry Vocational Technical High School Fashion and Interior design classes will be visiting Clouds Hill to view Victorian clothing for all occasions and to learn some of the principles of Victorian interior design between

1870 and the turn of the century.

In June, the Victorian Society Newport Summer School will be visiting Clouds Hill under the guidance of Professor Richard Guy Wilson. Professor Wilson brings the school every year, as he considers

the museum one of the most complete Victorian homes left in America. Students from around the world have enjoyed seeing Clouds Hill during this program

During July and August,

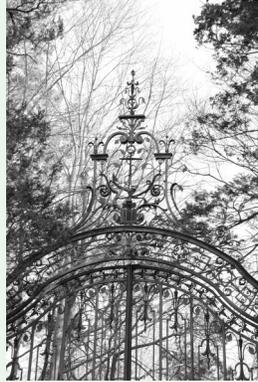
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## Garden continued

many tender plants and graced many Victorian rooms.

Victorians looked to a wide range of shrubs and vines when designing their gardens. Azalea, holly, hydrangea, rose, lilac, forsythia, Andromeda, barberry, quince and peonies were all common to most gardens. Vines included clematis, ivy, wisteria, morning glory and honeysuckle. Commonly planted perennials and annuals included delphinium, aster, alyssum, chrysanthemums, tulip, pansy, violets, lavender, daylily, hosta and yarrow.

The Victorian garden was not complete without paths, fencing, and ornamentation. In the formal garden, paths were usually of fine gravel kept carefully raked and edged with either iron banding or slates. Paths were sometimes laid of asphalt - easier to maintain, but less elegant than gravel (which required constant raking, weeding, and leveling by the gardeners). Paths in the formal garden were usually laid out in straight lines with beds on either side edged by trimmed boxwood or lavender. The informal cottage garden could have curving paths, wandering into distant vistas. Paths of close clipped sod could be very elegant - but, again, very time consuming and difficult



to maintain.

Wrought iron fencing was most popular during the Victorian era because of the ornate design that could be incorporated. Most properties were fenced whether they were city dwellings or large estates. Wrought iron fencing was common in the city to allow light and air into smaller garden areas. Perimeter fencing on large estates was usually stone walls or wooden fences. The front of any large estate was an opportunity to show the skills of the stone masons in constructing ornate walls and entrance gates. Brick walls in city locations afforded privacy where needed.

Garden fencing of wrought iron, brick or stone, and wood helped to create vistas, form garden rooms, as well as keeping undesirables out of the garden. Walls could offer support for ivy and other vines. Either iron or wooden trellises and arbors supported vining plants and roses providing cool spots in which to sit and enjoy the garden.

Ornamentation of the garden would include urns, statues, sculptures, gazing balls, bird baths, sundials, and seating. Benches were ornate constructions of wood or cast iron. Gazebos, pavilions, and follies were usually found as grand focal points in more formal gardens and added plenty of Victorian

elegance to the landscape. Seats were generally placed at the end of a garden walk or wherever a view opened up. Marble, stone and cast concrete statues and planters provided focal points for viewing. Less formal homes sported window boxes filled with flowers. The huge porches of the typical country home were hung with gaily striped awnings, adding to the vibrant effect of the surrounding gardens; and comfortable upholstered wicker furniture on porch and lawn offered inviting resting spots.

Chinese art and objects were popular during the Victorian era. Planters with painted scenes from the Far East, pottery garden stools, and garden pools filled with goldfish were typical Oriental influences on the Victorian garden. The formal garden was an inspiration from the great gardens of France, with beds of bedding plants laid out in fancy designs edged in trimmed boxwood; and garden vistas emphasized by rows of columnar trees, sculpted shrubs, or pleached lindens or beech.

In design, the country estate was laid out on rather grandiose terms. Approach to the house was important, and the layout of the drives reflected this. Whether a straight drive in from the street offered you time to admire the effect of the house, or a curving drive revealed a sudden glimpse of the abode, the driveway

## WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY . . .

"Quite A lovely exhibit...  
Thank you! (wedding  
gown display)

Joan Foley  
Warwick, RI

"Visiting has been a  
delightful experience - I  
look forward to return-  
ing!"

Mary Ann Landry  
No. Providence, RI

"We loved it here! Thank  
you so much!"

Aniela and Mathew  
Burke  
Medway, Mass.

## G a r d e n c o n t i n u e d

was an important part of the landscape. Gardens surrounded the house; and the outbuildings were hidden by hedges or high walls - or were designed to fit into and enhance the landscape. Beyond the immediate gardens, the rural aspect was enforced with rolling fields and clumps of trees.

All of this design and aspects of the Victorian garden required constant maintenance. Lawns were mowed and rolled by hand or by horse drawn equipment. The horses were outfitted with leather "lawn boots" fitted over their shoes to prevent digging up the lawns. (There is one on display in the Carriage museum at Clouds Hill). Gardeners were expected to grow hundreds of bedding plants to fill the many garden beds and planters, as well as maintaining the existing perennials. In addition, a large

cutting garden was maintained; and gardeners would daily pick flowers for arrangements for the house. The ladies of the house were provided with fresh flowers to pin on their outfits when they left the estate. Gardeners were also expected to come inside the house to assist with any heavy cleaning chores, as well as yearly changing of storm and screen windows and doors. The awnings were installed and removed seasonally by the gardeners.

This required a large staff working outside the house, and does not take into consideration farm workers for the farming aspects of all large country estates. During World War II, Anne C. Allen Holst wrote in her diary: "I do not see how I can get along (at Clouds Hill) without at least 4 men outside." She managed with her husband and two teenage boys

from the neighborhood. The Russell estate in Warwick (what is now Goddard Memorial State Park) had over 50 people employed outside the house.

The ladies and gentlemen living on the large estates took great interest in their gardens and farms. Gentlemen experimented in grafting to produce such specimens as the Camperdown Elm; and proudly showed off their greenhouses with strawberries, grapes and other fruits and vegetables available out of season. Fruit trees were trained to grow against flat walls, producing earlier fruit than normal. Ladies picked and arranged flowers from the gardens, drew and painted plants from nature, and produced wonderful flower embroidered objects. It was truly a time of exalting Nature.

## F R O M   T H E   K I T C H E N

Spring is here, and with it all the wonderful fresh foods we can find growing in our yards. The following recipes are from the 1887 Edition of *THE WHITE HOUSE COOK BOOK*.

**ASPARAGUS WITH EGGS:** Boil a bunch of asparagus twenty minutes; cut off the tender tops and lay them in a deep pie plate, buttering, salting and peppering well. Beat up four eggs, the yolks and whites separately, to a stiff froth; add two tablespoonfuls of milk or cream, a tablespoonful of warm butter, pepper and salt to taste. Pour evenly over the asparagus mixture. Bake eight minutes, or until the eggs are set. Very good!

**GREENS:** About a peck of greens are enough for a mess for a family of six, such as dandelions, cowslips, burdock, chicory and other greens. All greens should be carefully examined, the tough ones thrown out, then be thoroughly washed through several waters until they are entirely free from sand. The

addition of a handful of salt to each pan of water used in washing the greens will free them from insects and worms, especially if, after the last watering, they are allowed to stand in salted water for a half hour or longer. When ready to boil the greens, put them into a large pot half full of boiling water, with a handful of salt, and boil them steadily until the stalks are tender; this will be in from five to twenty minutes, according to the maturity of the greens. As soon as they are tender, drain them in a colander, chop them a little and return them to the fire long enough to season them with salt, pepper and butter; vinegar may be added if it is liked; the greens should be served as soon as they are hot. All kinds of greens can be cooked in this manner.

**RHUBARB PIE:** Two methods of making rhubarb pie are offered, with the first regarded as superior to the second method:

1. Cut the large stalks off where the leaves commence, strip off the outside skin, then cut the stalks in pieces half an inch long; line a pie dish with pastry... put a layer of rhubarb nearly an inch deep; to a quart bowl of cut rhubarb put a large teacupful of sugar; strew it over with a saltspoonful of salt and a little nutmeg grated; shake over a little flour; cover with a rich pie crust, cut a slit in the center, trim off the edge with a sharp knife and bake in a quick (375-400 degree) oven until the pie loosens from the dish...

2. Skin the stalks, cut them into small pieces, wash, and put them in a stew pan with no more water than adheres to them; when cooked, mash them fine, and put in a small piece of butter; when cool, sweeten to taste; if liked, add a little lemon peel, cinnamon or nutmeg; line your plate (pie pan) with thin crust, put in the filling, cover with crust and bake in a quick oven; sift sugar over it when served.

## INSIDE SCOOP

**Visitors**

During the last quarter, Clouds Hill has welcomed visitors from four towns in Connecticut, two towns in Massachusetts and thirteen Rhode Island towns.

**Coming Events - May through September**

May kicks off a busy summer schedule with the exhibit: A HOUSEHOLD OF WOMEN. This is a tribute to the females who have owned or worked at Clouds Hill over four generations. The exhibit details the activities of the unusual women, socially and professionally - from mountain climbing, flying, fire fighting, scouting and Red Cross work to conservation law enforcement, the women broke the gender barriers. Equally important were the roles of the female staff in keeping a large house in order. The exhibit will be on display from May 7<sup>th</sup> to May 21<sup>st</sup>, with special openings on Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM and Sunday, May 18<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. In conjunction with the opening on the 18<sup>th</sup>, there will be a tea on the porch at 2:00 PM. Looking for a different Mother's Day present? The tea and a tour of the exhibit would be a perfect gift. The tea is \$30 per person, including the tour of the exhibit; and

must be reserved in advance. For more info, go on our website for a reservation form.

June is GARDEN MONTH, with the gardens open for touring on Sunday, June 15<sup>th</sup> from 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM, and displays of gardening tools, books and floral china on the porch. Important plants and trees are labeled, and docents are available in the garden. On Sunday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, at 2:00 PM, the annual GARDENS IN BLOOM TEA will be held on the porch. Come early and stroll the gardens; enjoy a catered tea on the expansive porch. Reservations should be made early; and the form is on our website.

Our second lecture will be held on Sunday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, at 12:30 PM, at the museum. Titled THE LATE VICTORIAN ESTATE GARDENS AND LANDSCAPES IN AMERICA, it will be given by museum curator, Anne D. Holst. For more information, check our website.

This year, July and August will be SUMMER RESORT months. On Sunday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, at 2:00 PM, there will be a SUMMER RESORT WEAR OF THE 20s, 30s AND 40s FASHION

SHOW AND TEA. Enjoy your meal on the shady porch while models display everything from beach wear to evening attire from the 1920s,30s and 40s - the wardrobe of Anne Crawford Allen. Included are day and evening dresses, bathing suits, playsuits, western wear, tennis clothes, riding attire, travel clothes, and city dresses. Like the other teas, reservations are necessary

Following the fashion show, the clothing will be on display from July 15<sup>th</sup> through August 17<sup>th</sup> as part of any house tour.

August 24<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM is the date of our most popular tea - the VICTORIAN FASHION SHOW TEA. Guests will be entertained during the catered tea by a fashion show of the clothing worn by a Victorian family from dawn to dark. Everything from night-clothes to evening wear, including hunting, tennis, riding, golfing, visiting, shopping and business attire is shown.

If you missed it last year, be sure to attend our HARVEST DINNER on Saturday, September 20<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 PM. A major fund raiser for the museum, the dinner is held under a tent on the south lawn in conjunction with the September exhibit, HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE. It is a tribute to EATING LOCAL, with as much of the dinner as possible sourced locally. Tom's Market Catering does a stellar job; a visit to the agriculture exhibit is included, and a fun evening results. If you would like to receive an invitation, please contact us by e-mail at [office@cloudshill.org](mailto:office@cloudshill.org) or telephone at 401-884-9490. We would love to see you here!

The HISTORY OF AGRICULTURE exhibit is on display from September 14<sup>th</sup> through the 23<sup>rd</sup>, with special openings on the 14<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM and the 21<sup>st</sup> from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. Plans are in the works for an exhibit of ANTIQUE FARM TRUCKS on the 21<sup>st</sup> from 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

Plan to take advantage of these interesting exhibits and activities at Clouds Hill over the next few months. We look forward to welcoming you to Clouds Hill.



**E d u c a t i o n**  
c o n t i n u e d

Clouds Hill will be home to a six week job training program sponsored by West Bay Community Action. Last year, the museum participated for three weeks in the program; and this year the entire six weeks will focus around the museum. Participants learn to write resumes, interview for jobs, develop banking skills, visit local colleges, and then focus on potential job fields. This year, the emphasis will be on the food industry, museum jobs, and gardening and landscaping. Among the speakers will be Karen Barbera, a garden designer and private gardener; Theresa Douglas, Clouds Hill docent and restaurant manager; a representative of the Rhode Island Tree Council; and museum curator, Anne Holst. Students will have the opportunity to obtain their Safe-Serve certificate for food handling. Under the direction of museum director, Wayne Cabral, they will receive training in lawn care, greenhouse management, and garden design and maintenance. Approximately 20 students are expected, four days a week.

It is also planned to have a number of visits to the museum during the summer by enrollees in the Pilgrim High School Special Needs Summer Program. Students visited this spring; and it was so successful that we were asked to participate in the summer program.

**A S P E C I A L T H A N K Y O U !**

We are very pleased to announce that Kathryn Cavanaugh, Consultant in Historic Preservation, submitted the application for National Register nomination with the R.I. Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission in March.

On behalf of the Clouds Hill Board of Directors and visitors, we would like to say

Three favorite perennials from the original flower beds of Clouds Hill can be found blooming every spring. Old fashioned brown iris, Iris germanica, have been transplanted into many of the current flower beds from their original home in front of the house. These are smaller in flower than today's huge bearded iris, but their brown falls, darker beards, and cream centers are exquisite, and they are very hardy.

The white flag iris has



Brown Iris

also been transplanted from its original location on the south lawn, to other beds. This is a small bearded iris, white with yellow beards.

Finally, scattered among the grass on the lawns and under some of the shrubs grow the tiny white violets from Helen Slater Reed's garden. They are no more than two or three inches tall and have an exquisite scent. Unfortunately, they are travelers, moving around the property, and not to be confined to a flower bed.

**W H A T ' S I T ?**

Visit our website, [www.cloudshill.org](http://www.cloudshill.org), for the answer.



**F R O M T H E**  
**C O L L E C T I O N S**

The Statuary Collection



A marble statue of one of the Vestal Virgins formerly in the garden.

**Thank You** to everyone that subsidized the cost of this project.

We will keep you up-to-date on the status of the filing and, ultimately, the outcome of the Review Board.

Again, **Thank You All** - we could not have done this without your support!

VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
WWW.CLOUDSHILL.ORG



**Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum**

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**Your business tag line here.**

Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation operating a historic Victorian home as a museum for the public.

The house is an important part of the history of the City of Warwick and the State of Rhode Island. It was built in 1872 by William Smith Slater for his daughter, Elizabeth Ives Slater, on her marriage to Alfred Augustus Reed, Jr. It has remained in the same family since it was built, passing from female to female until reaching the current owner. The lineage of the family can be traced to several notable figures.

In addition to the architecture and interior of the house, other collections include textiles, porcelain, carriages, and much more. The property on which the house sits has been referred to as the West Bay arboretum.

Donations to Clouds Hill are deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Clouds Hill Victorian House Museum  
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Postage

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