

**ARDENT GARDENERS ASSOCIATION
RECORDS
1951-1998**

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INTRODUCTION

This finding aid describes the records of the Ardent Gardeners Association, 1951-1998. The Ardent Gardeners are a group of African-American, middle-to-upper class women, who first met in 1951 to learn, cultivate, and celebrate their love of gardening. The records in this collection display the affinity for gardening shared by the association's members. The records were donated by association members L. D. Thomas and Mattie S. Johnson. The collection was originally composed of about one cubic foot of records and were for the most part in no particular order.

There are no restrictions on the use of the materials in the collection, and copies of items may be made for individual or scholarly use. Where usage may constitute a copyright infringement, the user is directed to seek the permission of the association.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The materials in this collection cover the years from 1951 to 1998. These records reflect the association's intentions, goals, organization, its founding members, and some of the association's activities. Included in the records are: minutes, correspondence, guest books, yearbooks, news clippings, programs, invitations, reports, lectures, a history, biographies, photographs of their gardening work, and photographs of members past and present, from almost two decades of Ardent Gardener meetings and activities. The materials are arranged alphabetically and by type. The newspaper clippings were copied onto acid free paper, and the originals discarded.

The minute books, which date from 1951 to 1973, include meeting minutes, membership information, and members' dues. The yearbooks date from 1951-1997, and they include the association's constitutions, yearly activities, association hierarchy, and membership directories. The reports include budgets for activities, directions, summaries, speeches, and lectures on atriiums, Holland, orchids, tulips, and yellow trumpets.

ARDENT GARDENERS HISTORY

The Ardent Gardeners Association was begun by Blanche Ennix who wondered if there was interest among African-American women in North and South Nashville in gardens, plants, and flowers, and in flower arranging. She expressed her interest to Ruth McAlpin in starting a gardening group or club. Mrs. McAlpin fully supported the idea, and gathered a circle of friends and gauged their interest. An afternoon meeting was held in the summer of 1951 and from it The Ardent Gardeners Association was established. Ruth McAlpin was the association's first president. The founding members of the association were:

Martha Allen *(d)	Rachel Lindsay
Alberta Bontemps	Henrietta Young *(d)
Hazel Burley	Elizabeth Petway Lowe
Mattie Claiborne *(d)	Ruth McAlpin *(d)
Dolores Crump	Dora McClellan
Carrie Denny	Eva Nash
Henri Dixon	Rhea Tarleton
Blanche Ennix	Arthurine Welsh Taylor
Matty Flowers	Lillian Thomas
Ruth Grant	Thelma Treherne *(d)
Joy Hilliard *(d)	Mary Walker *(d)
Kathleen Lawrence *(d)	(d) = deceased

The association originally held their meetings on Friday evenings. In the beginning, many association members were not skilled gardeners, but Ruth Grant had knowledge, and was motivated by her husband Dr. William H. Grant, a physician and artist, who originally suggested the association's name. The association gained considerable knowledge during the first year. Individual members took on assignments to study the growth, arrangement, and preservation, of plants and flowers. During Winter, the members focused their efforts on flower arrangement. They attended workshops and clinics on flower arrangement, given by designers, certified judges, and knowledgeable experts, "who challenged them to use their imagination to create beauty from the simplest of household items, few flowers, and limited foliage." The members also attended flower shows, flower arranging clinics, and visited gardens. Members were soon able to share their new-found knowledge with citizens in their surrounding neighborhoods and communities.

On July 11, 1952, the first flower show by African-Americans in Nashville for the African-American community was given by the Ardent Gardeners. "This first show featured arrangements, not specimens." The exhibits on display were created using elements from the members' gardens and yards. To test their skills after the gardening show, the association had certified judges judge their exhibits, and the earned ribbons were priceless to them. The association presented "A Holiday House" to the African-American community in Nashville at the two story house of Ruth Grant, which was decorated for the occasion inside and outside with a Christmas theme on December 11, 1955.

As the association grew, it spread further into Nashville and participated in state fairs, “The World’s First Instant Park,” and moved their meeting time to Sunday at 2:00 PM. The holiday house influenced Nashville and florists to begin copying the association's innovation, so much so, that around December 1974, the group presented its last holiday house.

In the late 1970s the association decorated parts of Hubbard Hospital Medical College. The association also established memorial gardens to deceased members Ruth McAlpin and Doris Campbell Busby. In the 1990s the association held luncheons, tours, practiced year-long themes, and gave individual planting tips and lectures.

CONTAINER LIST

Box/Folder/Description

1. 1. Autobiographical sketch Doris Campbell Busby
2. Biographical Sketches
3. Correspondence 1953, 1955, 1994
4. Group History 1951-1995
5. Guest Book (not dated)
6. Guest Book 5-16-1954 First Annual Show
7. Invitations 12-15-68-5-11-1986
8. Lectures 10-6-85 to 1998
9. Minutes 7-20-51 to 4-5-57
10. Minutes 6/1957 to 5-3-63
11. Minutes 10-4-63 to 10-19-1973

Box/Folder/Description

2. 12. Minutes 5/1/92 to 5/6/94
13. News Clippings 1958, 1986
14. Programs 4-29-67 to 4-7-91
15. Reports 12-15-68 to 2-1-98
16. Yearbooks 1951-1960
17. Yearbooks 1960-1967
18. Yearbooks 1967-1971
19. Yearbooks 1987-1997
20. Yearbooks 1971-1989

PHOTOGRAPHS

Box/Folder/Description

3. 1. Small Photographs (3.5 by 3.5)
 1. Yugoslavia 5/84
 2. Holiday House E. Frazier
 3. Garden arrangement
 4. Dolls for Xmas Holiday House
 5. Kitchen Holiday House
 6. Christmas arrangement
 7. Fabrics with flowers at TSU
2. 1. Holiday House E. Frazier
2. Library Holiday House
3. Thomas' Porch 7-4-85
4. Carrie Denny Rose and Vegetable Garden
5. Dr. Grant's Backyard
6. Eliabeth P. Lowe
7. Charter Members J. Payne, Henri Dixon

3.
 1. Henri Dixon, Carrie Denny
 2. Home of L.D. Thomas
 3. Red Rose CT
 4. J. Watkins
 5. Members, Dora McClellan, Rachel Lindsay, Hazel Burley, Patsy Petway, Mattye Johnson
 6. Z. Beck's Home
 7. Mary Walker-Charter Member
4.
 1. Back Patio
 2. Back Patio
 3. Z. Beck at home garden
 4. Garden Club in Dr. Grant's Backyard
 5. Z. Beck Flowers
 6. Holiday House E. Frazier
 7. Bathroom Holiday House
5.
 1. Z. Beck's Xmas Arrangement
 2. Charter Member Alberta Bontemps
 3. Club Members: Miller, Patsy Petway
 4. Members: Isabelle Watkins, Corinne Schultz, Alice Archer, 5-11-86
 5. Doris Busby Memorial Garden
 6. Memorial Garden
 7. Memorial Garden
6.
 1. Doris Campbell Busby Memorial Garden
 2. Backyard Watkins Home
 3. Watkins Home Trees
 4. Memorial Garden
 5. Memorial Garden
 6. Memorial Garden
 7. Ardent Gardeners Plaque
 8. Doris Busby Memorial
 9. David Satcher M.D., Doris Busby
 10. Doris Busby Memorial
7.
 - Group Photographs
 1. First Flower Show 7-11-52
 2. First Flower Show 7-11-52
 3. First Flower Show 7-11-52
 4. Fortieth Year Celebration 1991 Cheekwood