

A Brief History of The Tacoma Garden Club

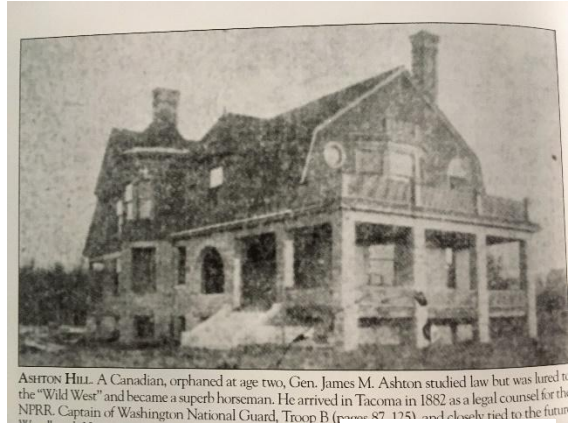
1925-2025



Mrs. James Ashton

“We have a garden atop a hill (known as Ashton Hill) which for many years was presided over, loved, coaxed and scolded by a mistress [Mrs. James Ashton (Frances)] who was a true gardener and from this gardener went the call which assembled twenty-two kindred souls on March 24, 1925.”

And so, The Tacoma Garden Club (TGC) was organized. By the next week the Tacoma Garden Club had 64 paid



ASHTON HILL. A Canadian, orphaned at age two, Gen. James M. Ashton studied law but was lured to the "Wild West" and became a superb horseman. He arrived in Tacoma in 1882 as a legal counsel for the N.P.R.R., Captain of Washington National Guard, Troop B (1898-1907) and later tried to the future

Ashton Hill

members and a set of officers, with Mrs. Ashton being elected president.

In April 1928, The Tacoma Garden Club was admitted into The Garden Club of America (GCA).

True to the mission of both the GCA and TGC, members began at once to work on conservation and the beautification of civic spaces. Early projects included: contributing to saving stands of timber; preparing a city ordinance protesting cutting of trees in parking strips, which the Tacoma City Council accepted; decorating downtown Tacoma with “living Christmas trees”; and in 1928 to commemorate the memory of those who fought in World War I, planting a Boulevard of Remembrance with red oaks (*Quercus rubra*) and shrubs for several miles from north of the Nisqually River through Camp Lewis. In 2016 signs were installed along I-5 marking the northern and southern boundaries of these original plantings. A commemorative plaque, bench, and red oaks were installed by TGC at the Fort Lewis Museum in 2017.



Planting the Boulevard of Remembrance in 1928



Above are Major James G. Newbould, Mrs. Robert L. Peck, Mrs. Corcoran, Mrs. Maria Sturtevant, Mrs. T. A. Peterson, Mrs. Laura Brown, Mrs. W. W. Bowman, Mrs. James M. Ashton, Gen. Michael G. Lenthall, and Mrs. Gen. Robert Alexander, who took part in commencing the boulevard yesterday when the first tree of Remembrance boulevard was planted. In the lower picture Gen. Lenthall is turning the first shovel of earth for the planting.



Commemorative Plaque

From their strong beginning, the ladies of the TGC worked hard to fulfill the “more beauty” concept. They developed excellent educational meetings and offered a variety of interesting programs, held in the homes of members. Study groups in the areas of flower arranging and horticulture formed. A flower show in April of 1926 was the first of many, with the Club holding flower shows or exhibitions in both the spring and the fall for many decades thereafter.



The most recent TGC flower show, ‘Driven by Design’, was held in May 2023 at LeMay – America’s Car Museum.

It included exhibits in conservation/education, floral design, horticulture, botanical arts, and photography.



Over the years Tacoma Garden Club has participated in numerous projects throughout the greater Tacoma community and beyond. We entered flower-decorated floats in the annual Daffodil Parade; planted bulbs, roses, and trees throughout Pierce County and at the University of Washington Arboretum; and decorated local military medical facilities during the holidays. More recently, we provided a portion of the landscaping for the Commencement Bay waterfront Chinese Reconciliation Park. In 2008 the TGC Community Projects Program was restructured to fund, on an annual basis, small grant requests from a wide variety of local non-profit organizations, schools, and facilities.



In 1963, TGC’s collaboration with Parks Tacoma resulted in the establishment of the Northwest Native Plant Garden, the Club’s main project for over 60 years. Covering several acres in Parks Tacoma’s Point Defiance Park, the garden encourages an appreciation of Pacific Coast native plants and displays how they can be used in gardens. Club members donate more than

2,000 hours of volunteer time each year tending the garden in conjunction with Parks Tacoma.



TGC crew working at the Native Plant Garden

Other Club projects at Point Defiance Park have included planting birch trees near the duck pond in 1961 and planting a floral clock at the park entrance in 1962.



In 2005 Tacoma Garden Club was a founding force (providing key leadership, volunteers, and financial support) with Parks Tacoma in creating the Point Defiance Flower and Garden Show. The first PDFGS was held in 2006. The mission of the show was to provide a variety of educational opportunities for the public and to help raise money for park equipment and the refurbishment of the Japanese Garden.



PDFGS Display Garden

Our community endeavors have resulted in TGC being a Garden Club of America’s Founders’ Fund Finalist four times – 1966(NW Native Plant Garden), 1985(Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden), 2002(NW Native Plant Garden), and 2007(Ebenezer’s Heritage Garden at Pt. Defiance Park). The Club was nominated for a City of Destiny Award in 2009 and in 2010 we were awarded the National Public Relations Award by The Garden Club of America.

The Tacoma Garden Club continues to promote gardening in our community through education and action in the areas of horticulture, conservation, sustainability, floral arts, photography and civic improvement.