

Sweet Auburn

The Newsletter of the Friends of Mount Auburn

Winter 1989

Mount Auburn: A Living Entity

All landscape managers must periodically make changes in maintenance operations to keep ahead of inflation. Mount Auburn, America's oldest garden cemetery, is no exception, even though the policies established over 100 years ago have created substantial endowment funds. Management has had to make constant adjustments, and while some may not seem significant in themselves, combined, they represent radical changes.

In the 1830's maintenance was limited to clearing land and establishing roadways. Gradually, the hilly forested land and low-lying fields and swamps became a landscape of ornamental trees and shrubs, native and imported, and intensively cultivated family plots, which the owners began turning over to the care of the Cemetery's staff after the 1860's. By the end of the 19th century, nearly 200 men were employed. By the 1950's, the labor force had been pared to 100 through the use of power equipment. During the last twenty years, the combined seasonal and permanent staff has been further reduced to 55, yet Mount Auburn is still a showplace. How has this been accomplished?

One major policy change has been to modify the formal garden to an informal landscape. The formerly tight, ordered precision has softened to a natural appearance. While not careless or uncontrolled, the new look is much more practical for maintenance purposes since it utilizes more economic horticultural practices.

Lawns, for example, no longer receive the "golf-course treatment," producing a scalped, manicured appearance reminiscent of the years of formal gardens. In contrast, a more functional turf has been created by raising the height of cut, using rotary mowers, shortening the cutting cycle and using a fall fertilization program. The result is a healthier turf capable of bearing today's increased traffic.

Furthermore, the old-fashioned, stiff-looking shrubbery of the formal garden has disappeared with the introduction of new pruning techniques. Today, instead of fourteen men shearing ornamental shrubs with electric shears, five people cover the same work in less time by using hand pruners to open up and reduce the size of overgrown shrubbery. The new techniques rejuvenate older plantings, thus saving on costly replacements as well as on labor.

Another change from formal to informal has been the creation of a new hedge design in the latest sales areas. Instead of single-species, one-level typical cemetery hedges in an artificial straight line like a wall, the new hedges are constructed in clumps with plant material of various sizes and mixed varieties, both deciduous and evergreen, for a more natural appearance. This effect is not only less costly to purchase and maintain but also supplies year-round variety in color, blossoms and leaf texture.

Long range planning was very important in providing a smooth transition from a formal to an informal landscape at Mount Auburn. Such planning will continue to be critical if our high maintenance standards are to withstand the pressures of future inflation. However, careful planning is also essential to regular annual maintenance programs.

For instance, the objective of a continued evolution of canopy trees is

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Asa Garden, ca. 1910

Stereopticon slide: MAC Archives

achieved through a long range maintenance and renewal program, designed to retain a healthy, multi-aged collection of mixed species (currently 3,635 trees.) Based on annual supervisory inspections, we select trees for treatment by an outside arborist firm on a five year cycle. Other work priorities change according to annual weather conditions. During a summer drought, the grass department normally cuts back on mowing operations. This available labor is then switched to long range priorities that will increase future mowing efficiency and, in the following instance, safety.

When management discovered that mowing operators were lifting their mowers over the granite curbs at the edge of many lots while the engines were still running, the creation of grass ramps beside the curbing became the top priority. The mower operators can now run their machines up over the curb and onto the lot without losing any time or fingers. Other regrading projects have been developed for inaccessi-

ble areas where it was difficult to drive lawn vehicles safely, producing greater efficiency in mowing, grounds cleaning and leaf removal.

Other adjustments have been made in our annual work schedule by changing to smaller-sized plant materials, often grown in our greenhouse. The ease of handling this smaller material has allowed us to reduce the labor force once required for transplanting larger specimen plants that were intended for an immediate effect. The result has been a greater amount of annual plantings and the introduction of new varieties which would have been more difficult and expensive to transplant at larger sizes. As a result, over 1800 young trees have been planted, ready to replace the present stand of trees as needed.

Today, we are continuing to transplant thousands of small nursery plants to steep slopes and other high maintenance areas. Not only is this plant material available for future transplanting, it has also reduced the labor previously required on these

hard-to-mow areas. In this fashion, many new plants are being introduced to the grounds, such as dwarf evergreens, unusual shrub varieties and low-maintenance perennials. All of the new plant substitutions are less difficult to maintain than the original turf.

In conclusion, management must keep an open mind and use common sense in evaluating the horticultural operations at Mount Auburn. While inflation caused the initial scrutiny of our operations, the result of our "adapt and thrive philosophy" has created a more pleasing informal garden as well as a more efficient maintenance program. We must continue to adapt in order to keep a proper balance between available financial resources and the dreams of our founders of creating a permanent landscape of exceptional beauty. Mount Auburn is indeed a living entity.

Roger S. Kindred, Assistant Superintendent, based on an article originally published in the April 1982 issue of Cemetery Management.



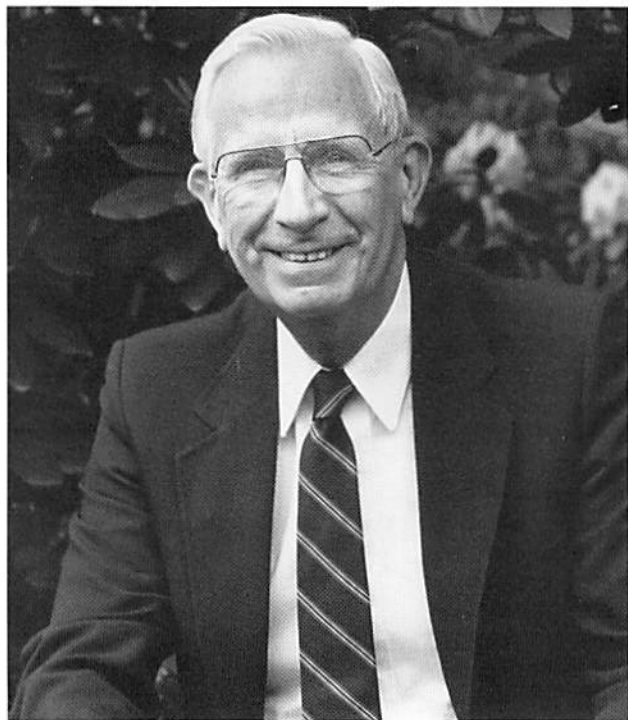
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Photo by Peter Southwick

Asa Gray Garden, ca. 1950 (left) and in 1988 (right)

Treasurer Newell W. (Penny) Penniman, Jr. Retires After 24 Years



Photograph by Peter Southwick

On July 29, 1988, Newell Penniman bade farewell to his colleagues and began a well-deserved retirement at his home in Hamilton. During his twenty-four years of service at Mount Auburn, Penny saw many changes in the operation of the Cemetery's office. When he arrived in November 1964, many records and detailed statistics were kept by hand. Over the years, many of these operations were phased out or replaced by improved systems. "All checks were hand signed by the Treasurer and countersigned by the President," Penny recalls. "The Remington Rand accounting machine was ten years old and barely adequate. It was located in the basement because of the noise it made." The physical appearance of the office has changed as well. "When I first came," Penny recounts, "the office was very dark with dark file cabinets and a dark tile floor."

With Penny's retirement, the positions of President and Treasurer have been combined. Bill Clendaniel, who now fills both jobs, comments: "When I first came to Mount Auburn in March, Penny was an enormous help to me in learning about the financial operations of the Cemetery. He knew where everything was and left meticulous records. He also left me with an invaluable right arm—Louise LaPointe, Mount Auburn's Bookkeeper. With her help I'm confident that we can carry on Penny's good work. We all wish him and his wife Theresa the very best in the years ahead." Penny will continue to be available as a consultant to Mount Auburn, which will ensure a smooth transition.

More Congratulations . . .

to Stephen P. Keller, gardening crew employee, and his wife Jeanette. They celebrated the birth of their son, Daniel J., on September 10, 1988.

to Jean L. Rosenberg, Friends Membership and Program Director, and her husband Peter Southwick. They celebrated the birth of their first child, Natalie Barbara, on September 13, 1988.

50 Years Ago

On Wednesday, September 21, 1938, the most powerful and destructive tropical storm ever to hit New England swept through the Northeast at wind speeds of over 200 m.p.h. Over 800 trees were lost at Mount Auburn, including the largest Beech in New England. These destroyed specimens, many of them rare or experimental plantings, were carefully replaced, and, fifty years later, Mount Auburn's horticultural beauty and diversity has been restored.



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A Cooperative Effort: Mount Auburn Cemetery and Perkins School for the Blind

Since 1981, Mount Auburn has been involved in a unique training program. Originally funded by the federal government under "Project Advance," this special work/study program teaches social and job skills to students from the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Massachusetts. It is now supported by Perkins School's "Innovative Programs: Deaf-Blind Prevocational Grant."

Sandy Boris-Berkowitz, vocational education teacher at Perkins, and Barbara Smith, project director for "Project Advance," approached our staff in 1981 regarding work/study opportunities for visually and hearing impaired students. Mount Auburn Cemetery was a likely organization because it has a greenhouse, as the Perkins School does, and it is located close to Perkins. The goal of the project from the start, Sandy notes, has been to place students in a job where "they would develop specific skills and work habits, work in a social environment and have a valuable experience." Assistant Superintendent Roger Kindred, Superintendent Duncan Munro and Greenhouse Manager Robin Sutherland saw potential for a vocational training program by placing students to work in Mount Auburn Cemetery's Greenhouse.

Since 1981, over 12 students have been through this program, in which students 16 years or older work twice a week at the Greenhouse from September through May, and after three months of work, receive compensation for their services. Mount Auburn is proud to be one of the oldest placements for the Perkins' program.

One of the reasons this experience has been successful for Perkins students is the dedication of Greenhouse Manager Robin Sutherland. From the beginning, Robin took a personal interest in the program and attended beginning and intermediate classes in sign language at Perkins. She says that she "wanted to communicate more on a social level" with the students and that she "learned more sign language from the students than in the classes." Robin notes

that even though sign language is not a requirement for employers, other Mount Auburn Greenhouse employees, such as Maureen Golden, have also enrolled in sign language classes to increase their ability to communicate with students. To facilitate communication, everyone working at the Cemetery has a name sign, and according to Robin, the staff "looks forward to the students coming to work at Mount Auburn."

Based on her close experience with the students, Robin has observed them "develop a rhythm to their work, competitiveness (with each other) and increased speed" at various tasks. "They are productive," she adds, and "they are very conscientious." Students have assisted the Greenhouse staff with the holiday decorating tasks of wiring pine cones and preparing log baskets, and they are solely responsible for filling all of the 15,000 peat pots needed for the spring planting.

Diane Cutrona was one of the first students to work at Mount Auburn in 1981, and she continued her training for two years. She began by filling pots with soil and transporting trays to and from the Greenhouse. Later, she potted English ivy cuttings, wired Christmas decorations, potted bulbs for forcing for Easter, took care of seedlings, and even worked outside with the staff changing the Cemetery's formal flower beds. Robin remembers Diane as being "very social, independent, quick, wanting to communicate and learn about growing plants, and enjoying the physical work." Diane recalls that she especially "liked working outside in the Cemetery with the flowers," and she particularly enjoyed "the cooperative effort of working with the Greenhouse staff."

Jamie Laird came to us a year later and recalls enjoying "the smell of flowers, especially the herbs." She enjoyed working at the Greenhouse because it "kept me busy, I met many nice people and it made me feel good." Jamie admitted that she missed her work at Mount Auburn too. Although Robin acknowledges that Diane and Jamie were special because they accomplished more skilled work than other students, all the Perkins' students "take pride in their work, show great patience and care about doing a good job." It is no wonder, then, that the staff ask Robin, "when are the students coming back?" Due to their foresight, Sandy Boris-Berkowitz, Barbara Smith and other concerned staff members at Perkins have provided

invaluable work and social experiences for Perkins' students and Mount Auburn's employees.

In 1982, 1986 and 1988, Perkins presented Mount Auburn with Certificates of Appreciation "for its continued cooperation in the training and employing of visually and hearing impaired students from the Perkins School for the Blind." We look forward to continuing this beneficial education program.

Jean Rosenberg,
Membership Director

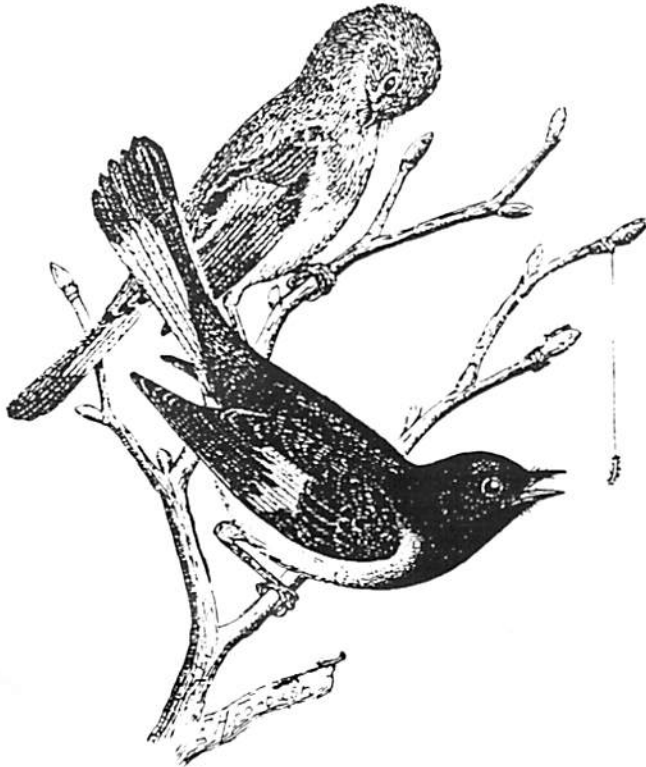


(Left to right) Perkins teacher Christa Gicklbom, students Natalie Luwald and Stacey Rutledge

Photo by Peter Southwick

A Special Appeal

Hundreds of species of birds visit Mount Auburn annually because it is protected open space. But where do these birds go in the winter? Are their winter homes protected? The sad answer is that they are not. Central America, where many Massachusetts birds spend the winter, is subject to tremendous development pressures, very similar to those we are experiencing here.



Efforts are underway, however, to protect these winter homes. The small country of Belize, formerly British Honduras, which is about the size of New Hampshire, is the winter home for many of our birds, such as the Wood Thrush, the Redstart, the Magnolia Warbler and the Gray Catbird, and help is on the way. The Massachusetts Audubon Society, together with several other environmental groups and the government of Belize, has begun the "Programme for Belize," to inventory natural resources, educate people about their value and acquire and hold in trust thousands of acres of forest. Already, 42,000 acres have been donated by Coca-Cola Foods.

Money is urgently needed to fund all this exciting activity, including the final purchase of an additional 110,000 acres. If you'd like to help, send a tax deductible contribution to Programme for Belize, Massachusetts Audubon Society, South Great Road, Lincoln, MA 01773. You'll be helping the birds and Mount Auburn.

An Invitation to Join The Friends of Mount Auburn

Please enroll me as a member of the Friends of Mount Auburn.

- Senior Citizens/Students \$10
- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Contributor \$50

In addition to my membership dues, I would also like to contribute \$_____ to help defray the costs of the Friends.

Contributions over membership dues are deductible from income taxes to the extent provided by law.

Enclosed is my check for \$_____ payable to *Mount Auburn Cemetery*.

M

Name(s)

Address

Telephone

If you would like this to be a gift membership, please enclose your name and address so that we may notify the recipient.

Friends of Mount Auburn
Mount Auburn Cemetery
580 Mount Auburn Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
617/547-7105



oliday Gift Membership

Valentines Day is the perfect time to remember someone with a gift membership in the Friends. If you would like to share Mount Auburn's year-round natural and cultural attractions with a friend, please use the form above.

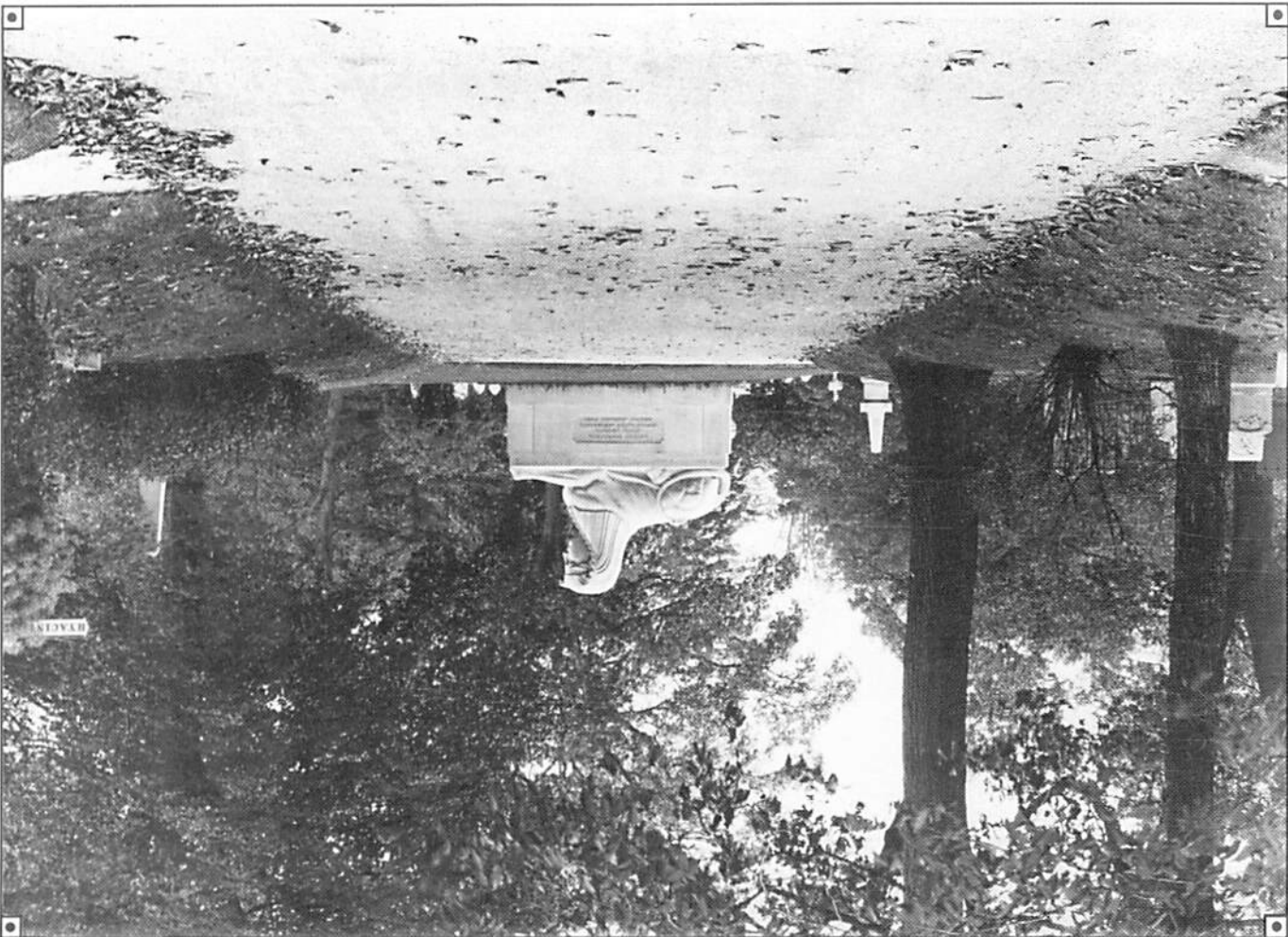
Notice

New Cemetery Hours

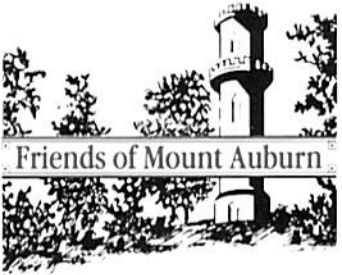
The Cemetery Office is now closed on Saturday afternoons after 12:30 p.m. The grounds, however, remain open every day until 5:00 p.m. Normal office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Friends Membership Fees Increase

The Trustees have voted to increase the membership fees of the Friends by \$5 in each category as of January 1, 1989. The present fees were set in 1986 when the Friends was begun and do not cover the costs of the publications and programs offered as benefits to Friends members. We do not like to increase fees, but we do feel a responsibility to cover our expenses, which have gone up considerably over the last three years. We very much hope that you will renew your membership in the coming year and that you will continue to enjoy your special relationship with America's first garden cemetery.



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