



HAH Happenings

August 2026



The Horticultural Alliance of the Hamptons
P.O. Box 202, Bridgehampton, NY 11932-0202

631.537.2223 hahgarden.org
at the Bridgehampton Community House

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The Horticultural Alliance of the Hamptons



Spring 1986 Newsletter

Vol. 1, No. 1

A non-profit organization dedicated to the advocacy of horticulture in the Hamptons.

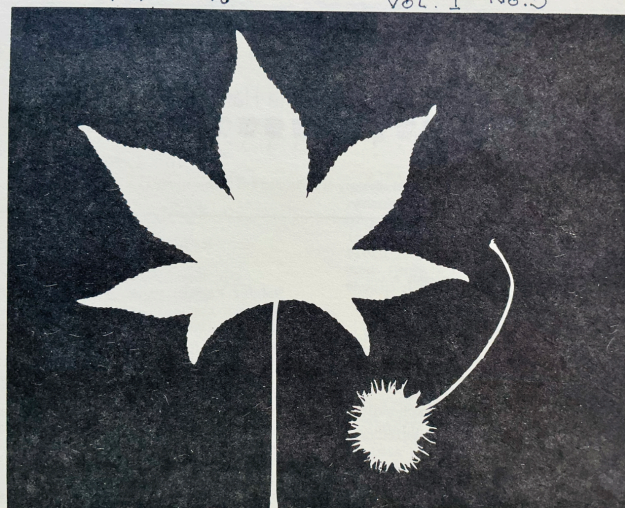
What We Are About

The Horticultural Alliance of the Hamptons contains a broad cross-section of people united by their interest in and love of gardening. Despite the diverse composition of the group, there is a remarkable consensus on the organization's purpose.

One of many benefits of belonging to the Alliance is the opportunity to meet and talk with other gardeners. We all believe we can learn from the shared experience and knowledge of others and be better gardeners for it.

FALL 1986

VOL. I No. 3



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO HAH!

As we celebrate 40 years of consistency and the stability of an all volunteer membership of passionate gardeners, we'll bring you reminders of where we started and where we have been. One of the highlights of our organization has been the well written and informative contributions to our newsletter and Journal by our knowledgeable members. Look for the new column of "From the Archives" in upcoming newsletters and read articles that still have as much relevance today as they did many years ago.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Welcome to the special Horticultural Alliance of the Hamptons 40th Anniversary newsletter. Our editor, Elaine Peterson, who has valiantly produced the HAH newsletter for almost 20 years (including when HAH President!) has chosen some fun-to-read articles from the early days of HAH newsletters. I've undertaken a contemporary task of chatting with the eight past HAH presidents still involved with HAH (dates are terms as president) and founding member Erika Shank: Bettina Benson (2007-2009), Erik Brockmeyer (2022-24), Carolyn Gemake (2005-06), Elizabeth Lear (1990-92), Janet Ollinger (2016-18), Elaine Peterson (2013-15), Lydia Wallis (2000-01), Alicia Whitaker (2019-21). This is an introduction to the full interviews, which will be online at hahgarden.org/40thInterviews.

Part of the idea for me in doing these interviews is related to how struck I was during my first year as president when I was putting together badges related to our annual new members get together that identified so many of our HAH welcoming group as "President Emeritus." HAH is an all volunteer organization—people stay involved for decades of volunteering, hanging out, wearing many hats, making sure things work out.

My interviews were focused less on a timeline of when initiatives happened, programs were created, than about the personal relationship(s) of these stalwart HAH members to HAH (Carolyn Gemake has compiled a detailed history, which we'll be sharing later).

The HAH origin story, in case you've missed it, goes like this: in 1986 two neighbors in Amagansett, Bill Shank and John Whitney, started having conversations over their property line fence (a very low fence, per Erika Shank, probably a pool requirement) about wanting to know more about

the essentials of gardening. Garden clubs were exclusive (you needed to be invited) and, anyway, didn't feature the digging, pruning, seeds, and weeds they were interested in. Here's more about the HAH origin and how these presidents got involved.

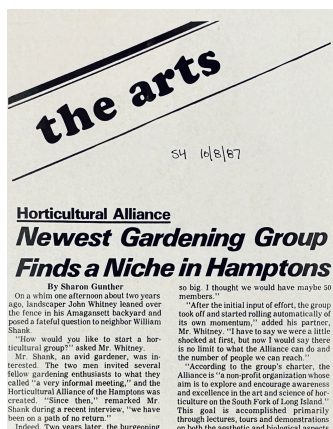
Erika says, "What was unusual about the organization was what we were not. There were no allegiances to any national organizations. There were no social agendas. We were inquisitive and inclusive. We welcomed men and women, enthusiastic beginners, as well as professional gardeners. And nothing like that existed out here. People maybe come to a lecture and come up to me and have a question and they say, 'Oh, I'm afraid I am not qualified enough to join this organization.' And I say, 'Well, that's the whole point of it, that you can gain knowledge. You just have to have a basic interest.'" She added, "I was not a gardener, I was an interior designer."

Erika Shank and Elizabeth Lear were there from day one. After Erika's husband Bill had the legendary conversations with co-founder John Whitney he invited Elizabeth to the first small meeting in Bridgehampton at the Saint Anne's Annex to discuss getting an organization up and running.

Elizabeth, already a landscape designer in 1986, so already a pro, explained, "Bill invited me, I knew Bill and Erika socially." She then described something I'd always

wondered about, the name. "There were so many discussions like what shall we name this group? And the guys decided they didn't want it to be exclusive, so we didn't name it The Horticultural Society—we came up with the idea of The Horticultural Alliance, because it would be inclusive of more people.

We began with the lectures. We then began a newsletter. All the activities of the Alliance were defined one by one, it evolved over the



Members of the board of directors of the Hamptons Horticultural Alliance at a recent board meeting. Left to right, standing, Lois Underhill, Muriel Hanson, Paul Karish, and John LoGerfo. Seated, president

Elizabeth DeMauro Lear, Susan Seidman, Kate Tyree, Robin Brown, Bill Shank, Jim Vandermade and Julia Vandermade.
—Leslie Santapaul Photo

years, like the idea of the trips. The first meeting we discussed what the subject was going to be for the first lecture, which maybe Andrew Messenger gave, it was on weasels in the greenhouse.

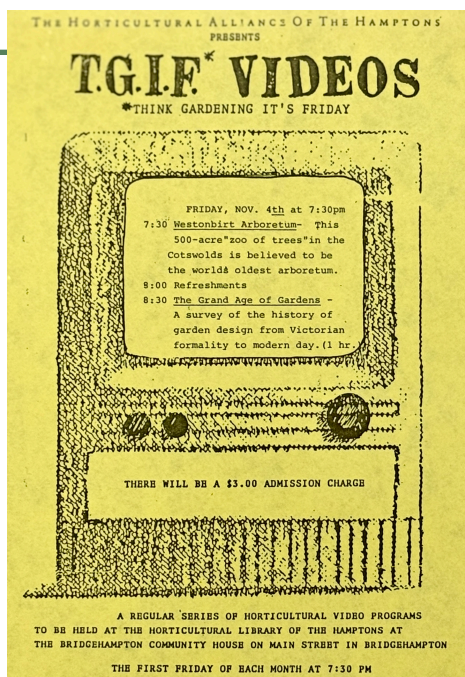
From weasels, topics branched out through a roster of local, national, and international garden experts. Robert Dash, who was then creating Madoo, spoke; there was an English connection to famed Rosemary Verey and Penelope Hobhouse. Asked about favorite speakers over the years, those names came up, as well as (to name a few in no particular order), legendary local rose guru Harvey Feinstein, Tovah Martin, Ruth Clausen, Michael A. Dirr, Dan Hinkley, Ken Druse, Dennis Schrader, Signe Nielsen, Doug Tallamy, Margaret Roach, Marco Polo Stufano, Beronda Montgomery.

As the organization grew, the programming and events expanded. A mysterious flyer from the late '80s advertises a "T.G.I.F. Videos" night the first Friday of the month, \$3 admission. No one I asked had any memory of what that was like, but the flyer sure is fun. Enduring formats were all in place by the mid-90s: lectures, round tables, workshops, local and foreign garden tours, the Karish Seminar library fundraiser, a spring plant sale fundraiser, first called Yard Sale, then changed to Garden Fair, with Yard Sale later recycled as a library fundraiser.

Several questions on my list started, "Do you have a favorite...," which prompted more than one answer that started, "That's like asking who your favorite child is...." But my question wasn't about rating programs, we all have things that engage us more than other things. The three foundational attractions were, unsurprisingly, new plants; wanting to learn and keep learning about all things garden; relationships with fellow HAH members.

Alicia Whitaker, on first encountering HAH: "In the late '80s I was a new gardener in my first house living on the North Fork and an Ellen Samuels broadcast mentioned this new organization was having a plant sale at the Bridgehampton Community House. Which was kind of out of my range but I said, 'Well, I can find this,' and I went. There were not a huge number of plants, but there were plants that I'd never seen for sale before. And I think that was first time I met Erika. Of course I bought plants, and I said, 'How can I become involved in this organization?'"

Elaine Peterson was a member for years starting in the late '80s focused on the HAH Journal, a sister



publication to the newsletter she's now been the editor of for many years: "I joined basically for the Journal, so that I could read these articles by people who lived out here and gardened out here. I wanted some local information, I didn't live here full time yet. And it was my favorite piece of mail for the whole year. I really looked forward to those four issues. I didn't actually get involved in a lot of attendance of lectures and other events or the fair until the late 90s."

Lydia Wallis discovered HAH a few years later. "Probably in 1994 or 1995. I was living in Connecticut and a very good friend of mine read an article in

a magazine about HAH and in it was a picture of Erika and Bill Shank. We'd just bought this house [out east] and we came out on weekends and I was looking for things to do on weekends. So I called and John LoGerfo, who the library is named after, answered and told me yes it was open to everyone, just come. Most of my friends are athletes, and I am not an athlete, so I was looking for garden interest and while I joined the garden club, I needed more stimulation than that, garden-wise."

Bettina Benson also read about HAH and was intrigued. Her first event was apparently the first day-long Karish Seminar fundraiser for the library. "I can't remember if it was '94 or '96. There was going to be a lecture at Elizabeth Lear's house with Penelope Hobhouse. No, it was a party. I think it may have been a lecture first and followed by a party. We loved the people we met—we were new gardeners, and we saw that this was an organization where we could learn a lot. And sure enough, that's what wound up happening."

Carolyn Gemake heard about HAH a couple of years later while house hunting: "We were looking for a house for seven years, our real estate broker was extremely patient with us. We were renting a little cottage in Amagansett as we were looking for a house. I read in the paper about The Horticultural Alliance of the Hamptons having a lecture, on Sunday afternoon and I thought, 'Oh, okay, I'm going to go check that out.' And who was the speaker, but Tovah Martin, I had read a couple of her books. I just loved her talk, and I thought, 'Gosh, if I'm ever lucky enough to move out here I am going to join this organization.' We bought our house in '97 and I immediately joined HAH."

Janet Ollinger was drawn in by the Garden Fair, which she's ended up running for the last ten years: "HAH came on my radar with the annual plant sale. I wandered over

there, and I wandered around, and there were all these very knowledgeable women. It was soon after we bought our house in 2001 and they just engaged me. Marie Donnelly—I've told the story a 1000 times—talked me into buying this little tree, and I bought it, and it is now the Marie Donnelly tree in my yard. And she handed me a pamphlet and said, "You should come around."

Erik Brockmeyer was both intrigued and cautious about attending a HAH event: "I was vaguely aware of HAH—I'm a paper reader, so I would see things about HAH, but I never really followed through. I think that both my husband and I had a little trepidation because you never know how people are going to react to a gay couple. The first thing we did with HAH, early 2016, was a walk with Vicki Bustamante in Montauk. And we met Janet and Mark, Bettina and John, Marie. We had a really nice time, it was a very welcoming group. It's one of those things you look back and think, 'What took me so long to do this?'"

My own story fits the pattern...buying a house in 1998, starting to garden, seeing a listing item in Dan's Papers describing the organization mentioning its Journal, that it's acronym was "HAH." And I thought, "Well, they have a sense of humor, I'll send in \$25 and see what it's about." Then I, like Elaine, mostly just read the Journal and bought lots of plants at Garden Fairs until I started contributing plants from my overflowing succulent obsession, eventually joining the board in 2021. I referred to myself as "The Zoom board member" because I was the first to join after the board meetings went to Zoom due to the pandemic.

There's tons more in the full interviews, which I found fascinating because, well, HAH members are so often fascinating people—including learning about the folks HAH things are named after. Marie Donnelly, especially, will be a person you're so glad you knew, if you did, or sad you didn't.

One final thing HAH history I'll add is the astonishing way it dealt with the pandemic, a testimonial, again, to it's members led by the president, Alicia Whitaker: "So when the pandemic hit, first of all, all of us were terrified. So the question was, how are we going to keep the organization together? How are we going to continue to deliver value to our members? And how do we reach out to help each other during this awful time?"

And a lot of people said, 'Oh, I couldn't possibly use Zoom, way beyond my technical capability.' But, you know, we were able to teach people how to use that resource, and we would have 50 and 60 people in our lectures. And people who you think would be the most computer averse suddenly figured it out."

- Michael Longacre

WHAT DOES THE NATIVE/NATURAL GARDEN MOVEMENT MEAN TO YOU?

Paul Karish

Amagansett Gardener

My first reaction to the idea of gardening with native plants is to remember that indiscriminate collecting of plants for commercial purposes has led to wholesale devastation of native flora in many parts of the country. Most further development in this area should depend on nursery grown stock.

Temperamentally I tend to chafe at what seems to me ideological patterns. There are styles and fashions in gardening as in most other areas and I tend to be wary of vogue and fashion. I do think we have tended to neglect much good native material. What English hybridizers have done with our native azaleas and goldenrod is instructive. However, I cannot agree with a dogmatic use of native materials only as a principle. I have tried to grow what will flourish and adapt itself to local circumstances, be it native or exotic. My own garden of sandy soil and mature oaks has led me to concentrate on ericaceous plants, and while I value our natives such as Pink Ladyslipper (*Cypripedium acaule*) and Trailing Arbutus (*Epigaea repens*) which live happily together, I should hate to do without the invaluable Epimediums. And while our native Rhododendrons, Pieris and Kalmias are splendid, I should hate to do without the hybrids based upon them and on Asiatic species. As a matter of fact, *Pieris japonica* does far better here than the native *P. floribunda*. Why, I do not know.

One thing I have tried to do with varying success has been to rescue natives threatened by the bulldozer. Last year my favorite patch of *Pyrola elliptica* vanished while I was on a short vacation; its site is now paved over, alas.

In conclusion, I say, yes, let us use our natives, but not to the exclusion of the great variety of temperate zone plants from other continents.

Fall 1986

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Vol. 1, No. 3

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WHAT WE ARE ABOUT It hardly seems a year since John Whitney asked me if I would be interested in helping to start a horticultural group in the Hamptons.

I am an obsessed gardener, he is a professional plants person. The idea of having a group with members of both persuasions for the purpose of exchanging ideas and information was very intriguing to me.

In less than a year, the Alliance has grown to almost 90 members: 50% amateur, and 50% professional.

As members, you have been very supportive, and my fellow officers and board members want to thank you. Your support has allowed us to present interesting programs and tours in the last few months; more importantly, however, it has allowed us to plan for the future.

We have planned exciting speakers and garden tours for next year. Selected for early 1987 are programs on winter pruning and English gardens. Among the scheduled speakers are the local artist and gardener, Robert Dash, and the English author and gardener, Rosemary Verey. In addition, we will visit the wonderful gardens of two leaders in the field of design. We also hope to organize a plant and seed exchange in 1987 for our members.

So I think you can see that your membership will be more and more rewarding as the next year evolves. Your membership enables us to serve the needs and interests of gardeners on the South Fork and to foster the growing involvement in horticulture here.

Our two patrons, Warner Leroy and Robert Kirwin of American Tree Care, support the Alliance because they recognize its favorable influence on the attitudes of landscaping in our area. As an amateur and a professional respectively, our patrons feel that their support is advantageous to the other members, to the Hamptons and to themselves as well. This interaction is what makes the Alliance so unique. The board would especially like to thank Mr. Leroy and Mr. Kirwin for having confidence in us during our year of organization. They along with our contributing and supporting members have made a substantial contribution to the Alliance's programs and operations.

We value all our members, so please join us again next year so that you, your garden and the Alliance will grow together.

--Bill Shank, President





To the members and friends, we thank you for your support. Without your help, we would not have been able to hold the events we have had this past year. You also made the opening of our office in Bridgehampton possible. We now have a central location for our members and officers to meet and store our equipment.

This space also houses our Horticultural Library of the Hamptons. We have a fine collection of information on gardening in this climate. The library volunteers, under the tireless efforts of John Whitney, have created a great asset to the community.

As for myself, I want to let you all know what a privilege it has been to serve as President the last three years. I have learned so much from all who participated in our activities.

I have tried to take advantage of the diverse interests and areas of expertise of the members which, collectively, bond us together in our common interest. It is the diversity of our group and the generous sharing of ideas and knowledge with one another that makes the Alliance so special. The contributions of each individual have helped the Alliance reach its goals. This is what has made the Alliance so rich and rewarding for me and its active members.

Personally, I have learned that, in gardening, there is no given set of rules to be followed. Rather, there is the freedom to explore, grow, and learn the importance of treating our environment with respect. A good gardener has to be an optimist.

I have met so many wonderful, generous people from all over the world who have given freely of their time, talent and facilities. I have, most importantly, met fellow gardeners whose friendship goes far beyond the garden. I thank all of you for your help. It has been essential to our success.

My last thank you is to my wife, Erika, jokingly referred to at home as "The First Lady of Horticulture," who took on much work by just being my partner in life. Thank you for your help moving office furniture, baking for parties, running slide projectors and helping with whatever else had to be done. There were times that weren't fun for either of us, but being a part of such a vibrant group has always made the end result so positive.

I hope you all do yourselves a favor and take the time to be more involved with this great group of people. I know you will find it as enriching as we have.

Bill Shank, President and Chairman

A Brief Note on the Geology of L.I.

The casual visitor touring Long Island for the first time finds our landscape a relatively uncomplicated one. Its northern backbone is composed of a ridge of low hills whose highest elevation reaches some 300 feet, and stretches the full length of the island from Brooklyn Heights to Montauk Point. For most of this length it juts up from the shore of the Sound to form the hilly landscape of the North Shore. South of this upland a level sloping plain extends down to the Atlantic shore varying in width from five to almost thirty miles. How did this configuration come about?

At the end of the last Ice Age some twelve to fifteen thousand years ago, the great glacier which had come south over New England scraping rock and soil in its wake for hundreds of miles, reached the sea on the southern shores of New England. It rested there for the slow centuries of its dissolution, and its great weight produced the depression later filled by the sea, which we call Long Island Sound. As the atmosphere warmed and the ice melted, the moraine* formed by runoff carried by the glacier's waters created the backbone of what was to become our island. This was not a simple unitary process, the ice advanced and retreated at long intervals at least twice leaving a complicated interweaving of two distinct moraines. Geologists have named these the Harbor Hills and the Ronkonkoma moraines. It is the latter which has formed the South Fork and extends to Montauk.

As the glacier slowly melted by day and congealed again by night, its runoff was carried south in a wave-like pattern, the fine grains being carried farthest by the outflow and the heavier materials being deposited in a regular sequence. Today one can trace its path from the great boulders of the moraine through gravel beds to the fine sands that have made our beaches world famous. The great bulk of soil brought down from then northern reaches of the continent remained to a considerable extent in the hills of the moraine together with the masses of rock. In many places it is possible to trace the continental origin of these "erra-

* Moraine is the term used to describe the accumulation of boulders, stones and other debris deposited by a glacier.

tics", as geologists call these boulders transported from their places of origin. For example, great chunks of pink granite which are embedded in the hills of the Oyster Bay region were brought there by the ice from the Brandford-Stony Creek area of Connecticut east of New Haven.

The particular features of the North Shore landscape, the deep and often fiord-like harbors from which rise steep hills, is to a great extent the work of the second ice advance. The glacier pushed sharp prongs of ice into the previously laid down moraine forming the harbors from Little Neck Bay and Hempstead Harbor to our own Three Mile Harbor. Along with the soil from New England came to a great extent the flora of that region. The hills of the North Shore form a kind of appendix or epilogue to the forest which once covered the New England landscape; its trees, shrubs and herbaceous woodland plants are a continuation of the New England botanical province. The flora of the great outwash plain is quite distinct. It is in many ways more closely related to the eastern seaboard flora of the South Jersey plains and pine barrens.

One other noteworthy feature of the landscape relating to the island's glacial origin are the numerous potholes dotting the land's surface. These range in size from tiny ponds to the largest of all, Lake Ronkonkoma. They were created by huge chunks of ice broken from the main mass that became embedded in the outflow regions. As they melted, they produced the pot or kettle-hole ponds which are such a distinctive feature of our scene. What a chunk of ice it must have been that made Ronkonkoma!

As more and more of the island has been covered with roads, parking lots, shopping centers and housing developments, the natural lineaments become more difficult to observe. As more and more water is pumped from the substrate, the water table falls, and streams and ponds dry up. Filling in of wetlands has changed vast areas of the Island's shore, yet even the most casual observer can perceive the grandest outline of our glacial origins, the modest hills and wide plain continue to attest to the work of the ancient ice.

Paul Karish, an HAH board member and former college professor of European history in New Jersey, has gardened in Amagansett for 30 years.

HAH Sunday Lecture Program - 2 pm
At the Bridgehampton Community House, Main Hall
2357 Montauk Highway, Bridgehampton, NY

September 13	Roy Diblik - <i>Growing Plants in Communities</i>
October 18	Dr. Eve Beaury - <i>Seeding Ecosystems of the Future</i>
November 15	Michael Gibson - <i>The Gibson Method: Reimagining Topiary As Living Art</i>
December 20	Roman Roth - <i>How to Grow and Achieve World Class Vineyards Right Here on the East End</i>

Last Quarter Moon 🌖 August 5 evening

New Moon 🌑 August 12 afternoon, total solar eclipse 1:45 pm EDT

First Quarter Moon 🌒 August 19 evening

Full moon 🌕 August 28 morning, partial lunar eclipse 12:12 am EDT



HAH happenings
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100% Recycled 

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