



History of the Memorial Garden Fountain at Ballard Gardens

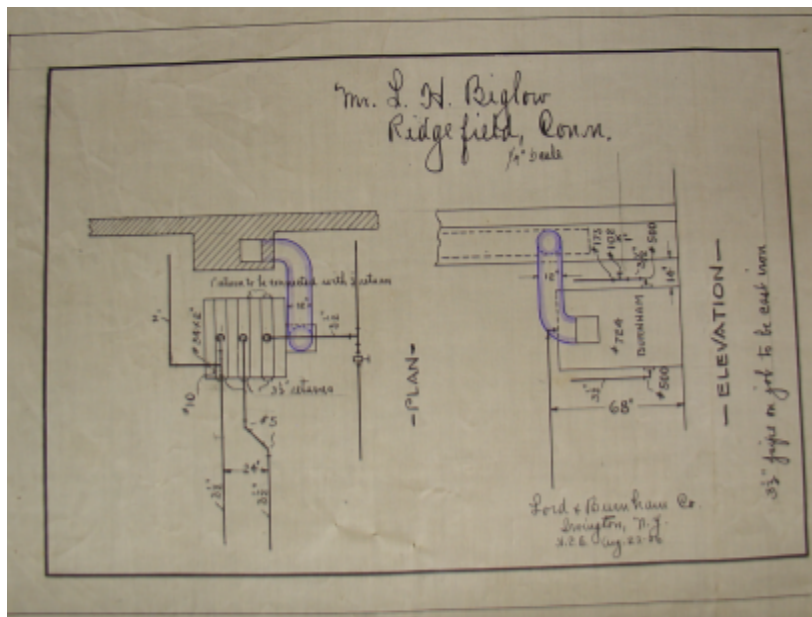
Terry McManus, Ridgefield Garden Club historian/archivist, August, 2018

Summary: Based on a review of Ridgefield Garden Club archives and photographs from the Ridgefield Historical Society, the fountain in the area of Ballard Gardens that the Ridgefield Garden Club now calls the Memorial Garden was first installed in 1972 by the club as part of our club's renovation of that area immediately east of the greenhouse. In addition to the fountain, the renovation included new plantings as well as the installation of two stone benches and a bronze plaque. The club named the area the Memorial Garden. Prior to that time, a small goldfish pond, installed by the Ballard family around 1923, was in place in the same location. Club archives include undated photographs of the pond from perhaps the 1930s or 1940s.

History of the greenhouse

The Lord & Burnham greenhouse at Ballard Park was built at the turn of the twentieth century for owner Lucius H. Biglow, the father of Elizabeth Ballard. The only early plan related to this greenhouse in the Lord & Burnham archives at the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) is this 1906 drawing related to a very small part of the greenhouse.

Many of Lord & Burnham's early archives were destroyed in a fire. The remaining archives were later moved to the NYBG.



1906 plan for Mr. L.H. Biglow from Lord & Burnham Co. archives

When Elizabeth Ballard died in 1964, she bequeathed the Ballard property to the town. She instructed that her house be torn down. The greenhouse remained in the family.

In January, 1965, Mrs. Ballard's daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth B. (James) Doubleday, offered the use of the greenhouse and about an acre of land to the Ridgefield Garden Club. The greenhouse had stood deserted and unused since before World War II requiring repairs and additions. The club accepted the offer and began working the greenhouse on an experimental basis. A new heating system was needed to run the greenhouse efficiently. The first fundraising project toward that end was a silent auction held in April, 1965. From the start, the goal was to open the use of the greenhouse to the community once it was in perfect working order.

The goldfish pond

Club archives show that the Ballards installed a small goldfish pond in 1923 just east of the greenhouse in the area now known as the Memorial Garden. Two undated photographs in Ridgefield Historical

Society archives show Ethel Wallington Rogers, the daughter of longtime Ballard caretaker Frank Wallington, sitting at the goldfish pond. Longtime Ridgefield residents, including Ridgefield Historical Society's Betsy Reid, remember vestiges of at least one other goldfish pond on the Ballard property as late as the early-1960s, located by the north wall of the estate.



Ethel Wallington Rogers



Ethel Wallington Rogers

Another undated photograph from Ridgefield Historical Society archives is labelled Pat Bennett. Pat was the spouse of Mr. Bennett, the Ballard caretaker who still worked at the estate in the early 1960s.



Lois Bennett

The early days of the Memorial Garden

In 1971, under the guidance and design work of Miss Elizabeth Hull, the club began renovation of the area east of the greenhouse, naming it the Memorial Garden, a memorial to deceased club members. These two 1969 photographs show the area shortly before the renovation began.

The club cleaned the area and removed old plant material like



shrubs. Wall copings and the pool edge were levelled and new flagstone was installed, replacing broken flagstone pieces. *“The beautifully planted, evergreen garden adorned with a small lead fountain and birdbath was completed in time for the plant sale.”*

Club archives show that by May 27, 1972, the garden was groomed, the fountain was placed, and insurance was obtained from Carnall Agency to protect the fountain against theft. A special committee was appointed to maintain the garden. A year later, the club reported that the lead fountain had been left out all of the previous

summer with no damage or disturbance. Other reports of the early years of the Memorial Garden, taken directly from club archives, include:

1975: Bulb plantings were bright and colorful in spring, and later the laurel was particularly beautiful. Mrs. DuBois gave a handsome check for the purchase of two small stone benches to place on either side of the greenhouse door. One sitting there could look over the fountain and gardens toward Ballard Park. Miss Elizabeth A. Hull donated the plaque on September 23, 1975, "To the Ridgefield Garden Club in loving appreciation of the happy experiences and the many friendships being a member have brought me since I moved to Ridgefield." Note: This is not the same plaque that is in place today which simply states, "Memorial Garden, The Ridgefield Garden Club, In loving memory of those we have lost long since and lost a while, 1975." There is more research to be done about this!

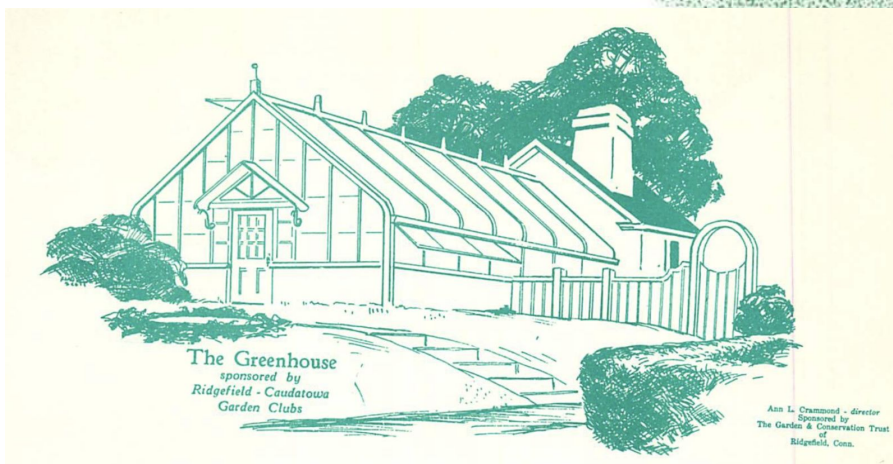
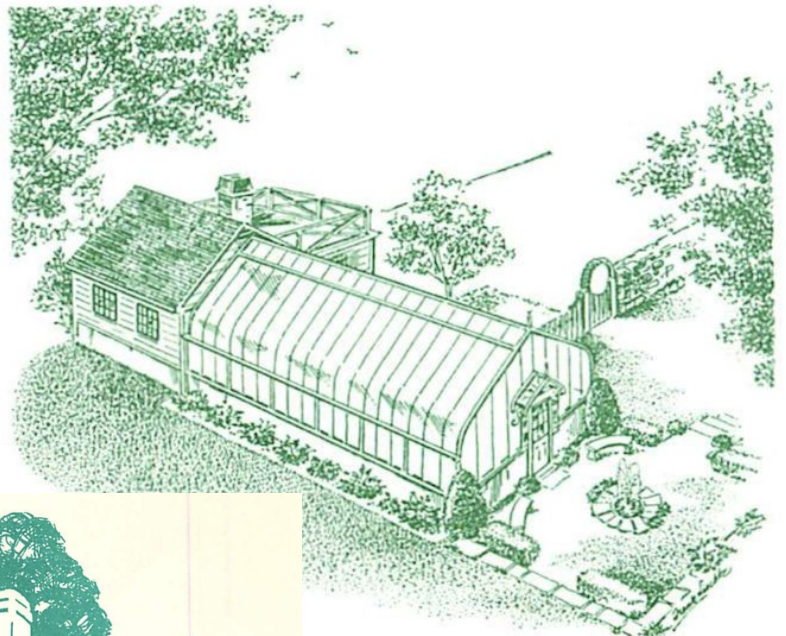
1976: Two benches were placed in the garden. The plaque had not yet been attached but it had been purchased and was in the greenhouse. Grass had been cut and vandalism to the fountain repaired. Nine people contributed \$390.00 to the Memorial Fund for the garden in 1976, in memory of Elizabeth Ballard Doubleday Rand, and Mrs. Henry K. McHarg, both former members of the club.

1977: The Memorial Plaque was put in place. Two junipers were presented in memory of Mrs. Harris Murdock by Mrs. Dubois.

1978: 100 tulip bulbs were planted by Mrs. Newell, Memorial Garden Chairman, and Mrs. Farrington and Mrs. Ross. The gardens were cleared of encroaching vines. Mr. Farrington and Mr. Ross assisted by repairing the gate to the garden and the fence. Gifts amounting to \$150 were received in memory of Mrs. DuBois. \$30 was paid for fountain insurance after it had been vandalized, and a \$25 Christmas gift was sent to Mr. Chic Ciuccoli for he had repaired it at no charge. There is a balance of \$804.30 in the Memorial Garden account.

The Memorial Garden Fountain

Club archives show that on May 30, 1972, the club paid \$153.22 to Erkins Studio for the "Tulip Fountain and Spray Nozzle." John Tulipani was paid \$44 the next month to check on the fountain. There are no photographs of the 1972 fountain. It is interesting to note, however, that the while



the fountain is included in the sketch of the greenhouse that dates to the early 1980s above, it doesn't appear in the 1970 sketch at left, which makes

sense given that the fountain wasn't yet installed at that time.

The oldest dated photograph of the fountain in club archives is this 1978 photograph on the right. The photograph below probably dates from the same time, as does the first photograph on the next page (page 6).





Other photographs of the fountain area in club archives are this photograph below from 1985,



and this photograph of Martha Lischke planting shrubs around the fountain area in 1986. (While exceedingly difficult to see, note the shape and all the text on the plaque to the left of the greenhouse door. This is most likely the plaque installed in 1975.)



The plaque that is currently in place on the greenhouse is below. Note that it is much more square than the plaque above. More research for another day!

