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The Early Years

The Gilded Age to the Garden

Nature does not proceed by leaps and bounds . . .

. . . wrote the famed eighteenth-century botanist Carolus Linnaeus. Nor is a garden built in a day. Ground was broken in 1965 for the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe, Illinois, but the Chicago Horticultural Society labored for decades to turn that first spadeful of dirt. In 1890, in a small meeting room at the now-defunct Sherman House hotel in downtown Chicago, a civic-minded group organized the Chicago Horticultural Society[1] for the "encouragement and promotion of the practice of Horticulture in all its branches and the fostering of an increased love of it among the people."[2] The Chicago Horticultural Society, despite world wars and financial downturns, notwithstanding fads and fashions, remained true to its mission, its history intertwining with and contributing to the growth of the city of Chicago and the surrounding region.

A bronze sculpture of Linnaeus, the eighteenth-century Swedish botanist, encourages the love of nature in the Chicago Botanic Garden's Heritage Garden.

The Chicago Horticultural Society hosted prominent flower shows to bring new gardening ideas to community planners and homeowners.

Horticulture reaches people in their own backyards, on their dinner table, and at virtually every significant life event. A new baby is welcomed with flowers, brides and grooms pose with bouquets and boutonnieres, newlyweds plant their first tree, the ill take comfort from floral greetings, and mourners sow forget-me-nots in remembrance of lost loves. Since its inception, the Society has enhanced the public and private lives and spaces of the Chicago area through its horticultural programs and partnerships with kindred organizations.

In its early days, the Society orchestrated highly popular flower shows. It participated in the Plan of Chicago of 1909 and the development of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Through philanthropic work in school gardens, shelters for disadvantaged women and children, and hospitals, the Society advocated horticulture for health and education. Midcentury, the Society propelled World War II victory gardens into sustained community gardening, resumed the hosting of flower shows, organized garden tours in the city and suburbs, and offered classes throughout the region. Today, the Society serves—at the Garden, online, and at satellite locations—millions of people each year.

Seedling after seedling, flower show after show, garden tour after tour, the Society's mission dovetailed with the projects and people who built Chicago. Its living legacy has created urban farms in the "city that works" and propagated the love of flowers displayed throughout the "city beautiful."

Urbs in Horto, *the motto captured on the official seal of the City of Chicago, offered an optimistic vision for the early city.*

Courtesy Creative Commons.

Cuttings from the "City in a Garden"

Despite its frontier beginnings, Chicago has had a long horticultural history. The first mayor of Chicago, William B. Ogden, himself an amateur horticulturist, joined the subcommittee responsible for designing the official seal of the City of Chicago in 1837. Amid the soft palette of blues, greens, and yellows, a brilliantly colored crimson scroll proclaims the city motto, *Urbs in Horto*, which translates as "city in a garden." At that time, the Chicago landscape consisted largely of swamps, barren sand dunes, and sparsely settled prairies. It took vision and more than a dash of optimism to declare the forlorn site a garden city. Yet Ogden

and other civic leaders so believed in the restorative powers of nature and of horticulture as evidence of refined taste that they embraced the slogan as integral to the city's growth.

More than a slogan, the garden city ideal prompted Ogden and other civic leaders to form the first incarnation of the Chicago Horticultural Society in 1847. This group comprised patrons of horticulture, such as Ogden, and professional nursery owners whose livelihood depended on growing and selling plants to pioneer homesteaders, farmers, and city window box gardeners. Local nurseries played a critical role in Chicago's growth because many of the plants that had been obtained from established growers on the East Coast simply did not thrive in the Midwest. It became a practical matter of survival to discover trees for fuel, food, and shelter, and vegetables and herbs for sustenance and health.[3]

Each group in the early Society depended on the other. Nursery owners relied on clients for plant purchases, to act as cheerleaders for horticulture, and, indirectly, to help subsidize experimentation that accompanied new planting methods or varieties. Agricultural schools or government-funded experiment stations did not yet exist, and plant trials occurred at the expense of the private grower. The so-called wealthy amateurs, a nonpejorative term of the day that described horticulture patrons, sought new plants for their own greenhouses and to beautify the city in which they had invested their time and money. This public-private partnership of commercial growers and civic leaders would set a successful precedent for years to follow.

The W. B. Egan garden, ca. 1860, reflected the horticultural interests of an early Chicago Horticultural Society founder. His son, W. C. Egan, helped revitalize the Society in 1890.

Courtesy Chicago Public Library, Special Collections and Preservation Division, G.P. Smith 566.

In addition to Ogden, early members of this first Society included prominent physician William B. Egan, businessman and library founder W. L. Newberry, and Society president John H. Kinzie, noted son of one of Chicago's first European settlers. Charter member John A. Kennicott, a physician and nurseryman, typified the well-educated commercial grower who joined the fledgling group. Supported with good publicity from the main agriculture and horticulture newspaper of the day, the *Prairie Farmer*, this early Society hosted public exhibitions of fruits and flowers and met to trade tips on growing plants on the prairie.

During these antebellum years, membership in the Society waxed and waned, and other groups such as the Cook County Agricultural and Horticultural Society (1856) and the Chicago Gardeners Society (1858) formed. The new groups included many of the original members of the Chicago Horticultural Society, particularly the commercial growers. As a testament to the stewardship ideals the Society founders held toward the young city of Chicago, often their descendants joined or initiated subsequent iterations of the original Society. The passion they brought to their work and the care with which they tended their own gardens served as exemplars of horticultural possibilities to the citizenry at large.

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 caused massive damage, including the loss of many greenhouses in the burn district. This fire and others like it were among the catalysts for sustainable lumber practices.

Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. LC-DIG-pga-02062.

Following the Civil War, consensus grew around the creation of public parks for health and recreation, culminating in 1869 legislation that established three park districts for Chicago's North, South, and West Sides. Frederick Law Olmsted, the premier landscape architect of the day, was commissioned to prepare a design for the South Side parks in 1870.

Then came the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The loss of life and property and the personal tragedies resulting from this calamity evoked a nationwide charitable response. Many influential greenhouses, then located within the city, were destroyed. Horticultural pursuits took a back seat to bricks-and-mortar reconstruction. The logging and timber industry, however, came under scrutiny after it was determined that many frame houses in Chicago contributed to the great conflagration. Ogden was among the many "lumber barons" who lost houses in Chicago and investments in other areas affected by 1871 fires, such as lumber town Peshtigo, Wisconsin. These incidents and others helped spur the conservation movement related to reforesting.

In the rebuilding years after the fire of 1871, many of Chicago's most significant buildings and institutions debuted. William Le Baron Jenney designed the Home Insurance Building, said to be the world's first skyscraper, in 1885. The Chicago Woman's Club formed in 1876 and would soon become a national model of organization. The Chicago Academy of Fine Arts emerged in 1878 (and later became the Art Institute). The Chicago Public Library (1872), Fine Arts Building (1885), Newberry Library (1887), and Hull House (1889) further solidified the city's cultural and philanthropic scene. Many future Society leaders helped organize or manage the development of these bedrocks of culture in Chicago.

Coincident with the development of these cultural icons, this period also saw a growth of horticultural organizations nationally and locally. The national Society of American Florists first organized in Chicago in 1884. Many local horticulturists were among its founding members, and the Chicago Florists' Club (1886) became one of its most influential chapters. The newly built Inter-State Exposition Building (1872) not only was the early home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, but its primary function was to host conventions, including displays of floral exhibitors.

The World's Columbian Exposition horticulture and landscape surpassed all previous world's fairs and set the standard for future expositions.

Courtesy Cathy Jean Maloney.

Despite these signs of renewal, Chicago's charms remained unrecognized by many observers on the more established East Coast. Typical is this opinion from an 1884 New York–based *Puck* magazine article: "Chicago is famous for divorces, conventions, trotting horses and the large feet of its women. It is called the Garden City, and a committee of investigation has been sitting for the past six weeks to find out the reason." The article further asserted that there were no museums or art galleries in Chicago and that its citizenry "have not yet got the hang of what is considered etiquette in older places."[4]

To many, Chicago still suffered from its frontier image. Something big was needed to change the world's perception of the City in a Garden.

Chrysanthemums Color the White City

By hosting a world's fair that would eclipse all previous fairs, Chicago's civic boosters hoped to elevate the city's image from that of a backwater village to a modern metropolis. As with any great idea, many claimed authorship of the bold plan to host the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. More likely, the fair resulted from the confluence of many independent minds working together. In 1889, Chicago Mayor DeWitt Cregier formed a committee of 100 to explore the feasibility of hosting the exposition. This executive committee of the task force included several future Society charter members or patrons, such as Andrew McNally, Charles Hutchinson, Samuel Allerton, Harlow Higinbotham, and Victor Lawson.[5] Society president George Schneider served as a commissioner responsible for securing early stock subscriptions for the fair, and Higinbotham, a future Society patron, served as president of the exposition.

In April 1890, Congress appointed Chicago as the host exposition city over arch rival New York City.[6] Great architects with national repute designed the buildings, all of classic white, thus earning the fair's sobriquet of the White City. Horticulture would play a huge role in the fair, and world's fair organizers had commissioned the noted landscape architect Olmsted to design the

fairgrounds. Local horticulture and professional groups recognized the fair as an opportunity to feature the city's gardens and floriculture industry. Buoyed by the encouragement of kindred groups that met in Chicago in August 1890, a newly formed national federation of societies, the Columbian Horticultural Association, toured potential fair sites with World's Columbian Exposition vice president Thomas B. Bryan.[7] As with all sanctioned American world's fairs, a national umbrella organization oversaw the horticulture department but depended on local expertise to get the work done.

A flurry of recruiting efforts ensued to create a local organization of sufficient stature to lead the exposition's horticulture efforts. The self-styled "Chicago and Cook County Horticultural Society" (the fledgling group would undergo a number of name changes) distributed a circular inviting anyone interested in horticulture to attend an organizational meeting on September 1, 1890, at the Sherman House. Signed by the temporary Society chairman, the venerable market gardener Jonathan Periam, the circular targeted members of the Chicago Florists' Club and also noted, "It is earnestly desired that as many influential individuals as possible will be present and become charter members."[8] Members of this new group, including many longtime Chicago horticulturists, held their first exhibition in the Inter-State Building from early September through mid-October.[9]

During the September meeting, a subcommittee was tasked to incorporate the Chicago Horticultural Society. Inspired by the energy and the membership of the predecessor groups, the Chicago Horticultural Society was incorporated on October 1, 1890.[10] As with its earlier incarnations, the Society brought together businessmen, professional horticulturists, and the public. In 1891, the Society began a tradition of hosting flower shows that rivaled those on the East Coast and garnered acclaim from first national and then international press. Shows of the 1890s drew from the private greenhouses of Chicago's leading citizenry and from the most prominent florists and nursery owners of the day. The shows anticipated and helped prepare for the spectacular horticultural achievements of the world's fair.

Society members and World's Columbian Exposition horticulture and landscape professionals were mutually supportive. John Thorpe, the exposition's superintendent of floriculture and also a Society member, read a paper at the October 1891 Society meeting on "The Possibilities of Horticulture at the World's Columbian Exposition." Thorpe predicted that the exposition "will advance floriculture twenty-five years" and that "groups of plants of all kinds will not be shown simply in hundreds, but in thousands and tens of thousands." Thorpe asked the Society to raise subscriptions for the fair, and members approved a motion "towards making the Horticultural Department of the World's Columbian Exposition what it ought to be."[11]

Even as the annual shows helped raise awareness of fine gardens and flowers, the Society also fostered strong relationships with the creators of World's Columbian Exposition landscapes. These friendships helped promote the cause of landscape architecture within the Society itself and ultimately throughout the city. Many Society members enjoyed acquaintanceships with Olmsted, as evidenced in letters sent to him from his son, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. The younger Olmsted apprenticed at the World's Columbian Exposition construction site during his summer break from Harvard and received the hospitality of his father's Chicago Horticultural Society friends.

Writing about a "very pleasant evening" he had at an intimate dinner party hosted by the Charles L. Hutchinsons, which included fellow Society members the John Glessner family, the younger Olmsted concluded, "They were all entertaining and cultivated people and Mr. Hutchinson in particular attracted me very much."[12] Shortly after this encounter, he called on attorney and longtime horticulture champion Ezra McCagg, who received his visitor very kindly. Young Olmsted wrote of McCagg, "He was much interested in the exposition work and when he said he thought of driving down to the grounds on Sunday I offered him my services as a guide and he at once accepted."[13]

The sophistication of these civic leaders must have reassured the elder Olmsted, who famously and frequently maligned Chicago's landscapes. Typical is this note from the senior Olmsted to his on-site colleague Harry Codman: "Neither public nor private grounds and places are ever kept in America nearly as finely as it is . . . here [in England], and what . . . Chicagoans

might regard as creditably clean and neat [and] well-ordered, would here be thought shabby, sluttish and neglected."[14] Putting aside Olmsted's uncharitable remarks, his opinion carried weight in many social and investment circles. Boosters such as Hutchinson and Glessner offered a more favorable impression of the city and its sophisticates to Olmsted and others in his milieu.

World's Columbian Exposition director and Society member James W. Ellsworth negotiated Olmsted's commission, appealing to his sense of patriotism with such entreaties as, "The reputation of America is at stake . . . I know that you will rise to the occasion . . . realizing fully the influence you will have in assisting us to accomplish the great ends in view."[15]

Society members also contributed directly to the displays at the exposition. Society officer J. C. Vaughan commanded worldwide attention with a spectacular show of pansies and, later, cannas at a prime location in front of the Horticultural Palace. The Peterson family nursery provided advice, along with many of the trees and shrubs planted at the exposition. In August 1893, the Society hosted a reception and banquet for those visitors from around the world who attended the World's Columbian Exposition Horticultural Congress, chaired by Vaughan.

According to the *Annals of Horticulture of 1893*, written by preeminent horticulturist L. H. Bailey of Cornell University, "The most striking circumstance of the year in floricultural directions was the chrysanthemum show at Chicago, following the World's Fair, November 4 to 12."[16] This Society-sponsored show, held at the newly built Art Institute, included exhibits from 16 states as well as Canada and England.[17] Cohosted by the National Chrysanthemum Society, the show highlighted mums, with minor exhibits of roses and carnations.

Throughout the 1890s, the Society built on the World's Columbian Exposition momentum by hosting bigger and better flower shows. The group also weighed in on political issues of the day, counseling against efforts in the Chicago Park System to remove park superintendent (and Society member) J. A. Pettigrew. Political wrangling in the parks continued to be an issue such that in 1897, the Society invited member and

J. C. Vaughan and other Chicago Horticultural Society members contributed directly to displays at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

Courtesy Cathy Jean Maloney.

This image, from the Chicago Horticultural Society's 1893 Chrysanthemum Show program, featured flower arrangements at the Art Institute.

Courtesy Center for Research Libraries.

noted landscape gardener O. C. Simonds to read a paper specifying the traits of "The Ideal Park Superintendent."[18] Landscape architect Jens Jensen, who would have his own issues later with the park system, also began his long-term relationship with the Society during this decade, reading a paper on trees at the 1897 annual meeting. Affiliated with the West Side parks, Jensen displayed rare plants at the 1899 flower show and continued to support the Society in future shows.[19]

As the Gilded Age drew to a close, the Chicago Horticultural Society had succeeded in consistently bringing noteworthy flower shows to unprecedented numbers of Chicagoans. Partnerships forged among the Chicago Horticultural Society, professional flower organizations, and philanthropic groups established traditions for decades to come.

Landscape architect Jens Jensen frequently lectured at Chicago Horticultural Society meetings and became a member and supporter.

Courtesy Sterling Morton Library, Morton Arboretum.

Bouquets for the City Beautiful

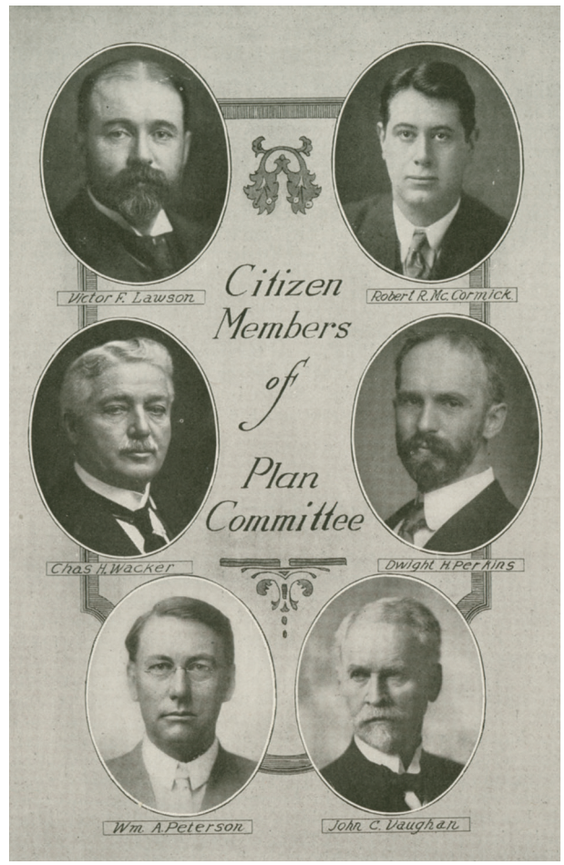
The turn of the twentieth century coincided with the Progressive Era, when, across America, social reforms aimed to elevate the lives of the poor and working people, resolve class conflicts, and improve the living conditions in urban and rural homes alike. Chicago, with its hordes of newly arrived, impoverished immigrants pitted against a concentration of wealth in the city's expanding industries of real estate, banking, railroads, and commerce, provided a crucible for experimental Progressive programs and policies. From the Pullman strike of 1894 to Upton Sinclair's scalding account of 1904 stockyard life in *The Jungle*, Chicago's business community from railroad barons to meatpackers clashed with the burgeoning labor movement and media reports.

Concurrently, Chicago launched many groundbreaking Progressive initiatives. Jane Addams and her Hull House social settlement brought wealthy donors and poor immigrants together. Many such philanthropic endeavors originated in Chicago between 1900 and the First World War, and the Chicago Horticultural Society participated, as individual members or as a group, in most of them. The Society's own mission, **"the encouragement and promotion of the practice of Horticulture in all its branches and the fostering of an increased love of it among the people,"**[20] emphasized an egalitarian outreach and sought to improve societal conditions through the beauty of flowers. Thus flowers were delivered to invalids, and schoolchildren were taught to garden.

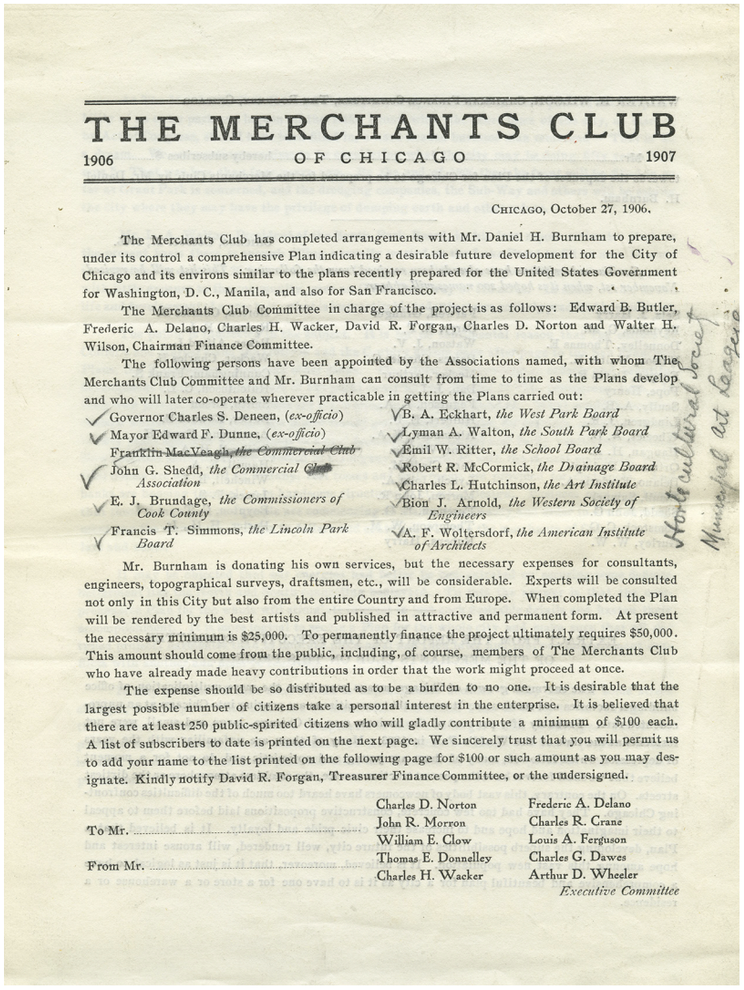
The horticultural arts transcended socioeconomic lines. The City Beautiful movement, which arose from the World's Columbian Exposition, emphasized green space in city planning to improve the crowded, urban environment. Author Carl Smith notes, "The Columbian Exposition as a whole . . . was a cultural milestone that established City Beautiful principles as the standard for urban design . . . Frederick Law Olmsted's ground plan emphasized functionality as well as visual pleasure."[21] Beautiful landscapes and the inherent knowledge of horticulture dovetailed with the City Beautiful ideals.

Chicago Horticultural Society members embraced the City Beautiful movement in Chicago from the outset. In 1903, the Cook County Board established the Outer Belt Commission to identify parcels of land that could be preserved for the public. The executive committee of this group included Society members Charles L. Hutchinson and John J. Mitchell.[22] The Outer Belt Commission evolved into the Municipal Science Club and then later the Special Parks Commission, which also included Hutchinson, Simonds, Clarence Buckingham, and Jens Jensen.

Ultimately, the works of these commissions paved the way for the successful establishment of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County on November 30, 1914.[23] Many individual Society members were intimately involved with the creation and early management of the forest preserves. Jensen created conservation groups, such as the Prairie Club and Friends of Our Native Landscape, that explored and created public awareness of the natural treasures in what would become forest preserve land. Peter Reinberg, the first Forest Preserve District president, a city alderman and a professional rose grower, frequently displayed his roses at Society shows. Vaughan, Charles Wacker, and William A. Peterson, all Chicago Horticultural Society members, served as appointed members of the Forest Preserve Plan Committee. A 1918 book commemorating the forest preserves recognized the unique contributions of all three men, hailing Wacker's experience as



The Forest Preserve Plan Committee included Chicago Horticultural Society members Charles Wacker, J. C. Vaughan, Victor F. Lawson, Robert McCormick, and William A. Peterson.
Courtesy Chicago History Museum, ICHi-68452.



THE MERCHANTS CLUB

1906 OF CHICAGO 1907

CHICAGO, October 27, 1906.

The Merchants Club has completed arrangements with Mr. Daniel H. Burnham to prepare, under its control a comprehensive Plan indicating a desirable future development for the City of Chicago and its environs similar to the plans recently prepared for the United States Government for Washington, D. C., Manila, and also for San Francisco.

The Merchants Club Committee in charge of the project is as follows: Edward B. Butler, Frederic A. Delano, Charles H. Wacker, David R. Forgan, Charles D. Norton and Walter H. Wilson, Chairman Finance Committee.

The following persons have been appointed by the Associations named, with whom The Merchants Club Committee and Mr. Burnham can consult from time to time as the Plans develop and who will later co-operate wherever practicable in getting the Plans carried out:

Governor Charles S. Deneen, (*ex-officio*)
Mayor Edward F. Dunne, (*ex-officio*)
Franklin MacVeagh, *the Commercial Club*
John G. Shedd, *the Commercial Club Association*
E. J. Brundage, *the Commissioners of Cook County*
Francis T. Simmons, *the Lincoln Park Board*
B. A. Eckhart, *the West Park Board*
Lyman A. Walton, *the South Park Board*
Emil W. Ritter, *the School Board*
Robert R. McCormick, *the Drainage Board*
Charles L. Hutchinson, *the Art Institute*
Bion J. Arnold, *the Western Society of Engineers*
A. F. Woltersdorf, *the American Institute of Architects*

Horticultural Society
Municipal Art League

Mr. Burnham is donating his own services, but the necessary expenses for consultants, engineers, topographical surveys, draftsmen, etc., will be considerable. Experts will be consulted not only in this City but also from the entire Country and from Europe. When completed the Plan will be rendered by the best artists and published in attractive and permanent form. At present the necessary minimum is $25,000. To permanently finance the project ultimately requires $50,000. This amount should come from the public, including, of course, members of The Merchants Club who have already made heavy contributions in order that the work might proceed at once.

The expense should be so distributed as to be a burden to no one. It is desirable that the largest possible number of citizens take a personal interest in the enterprise. It is believed that there are at least 250 public-spirited citizens who will gladly contribute a minimum of $100 each. A list of subscribers to date is printed on the next page. We sincerely trust that you will permit us to add your name to the list printed on the following page for $100 or such amount as you may designate. Kindly notify David R. Forgan, Treasurer Finance Committee, or the undersigned.

To Mr. .....

From Mr. .....

Charles D. Norton
John R. Morron
William E. Clow
Thomas E. Donnelley
Charles H. Wacker
Frederic A. Delano
Charles R. Crane
Louis A. Ferguson
Charles G. Dawes
Arthur D. Wheeler
Executive Committee

Many Chicago Horticultural Society members belonged to multiple civic and business clubs, such as the Merchants Club. The handwritten notation on this Merchants Club appeal targets the Horticultural Society as a supporter of the Plan of Chicago.

Edward H. Bennett Collection, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, Art Institute of Chicago. Digital File #197301.A000015_1.

president of the Chicago Plan Commission and Peterson as having a "thorough technical knowledge of horticulture, and one of his chief treasures is a library of some 4,000 volumes." Vaughan was praised as "one of the little band of public spirited citizens who have shown a fatherly spirit towards the Forest Preserve idea since its conception."[24]

The forest preserve movement paralleled the development of the Plan of Chicago, an ambitious, imaginative city-planning project orchestrated by architect Daniel H. Burnham. This comprehensive, daring plan would "stir men's blood," to paraphrase an oft-quoted Burnham axiom. The Commercial Club and its predecessor, the Merchants Club, which both included the city's leading business leaders, hired Burnham in 1906 to prepare the plan. An October 1906 draft of the Merchants Club solicitation letter to prominent businessmen includes a notation targeting the Horticultural Society as potential supporters. Charles L. Hutchinson is listed as an advisor to the plan, representing the Art Institute, and Society member John G. Shedd for the Commercial Club.[25]

The plan itself, published in 1909, listed the following Society members as being instrumental on Commercial Club committees: Chairman of the Plan Commission Charles H. Wacker, John V. Farwell, Jr., Victor F. Lawson, Harold F. McCormick, Cyrus H. McCormick, Martin A. Ryerson, John G. Shedd, John J. Mitchell, and Charles

Charles L. Hutchinson, philanthropist and business leader, was an early and ardent supporter of the Chicago Horticultural Society.

Courtesy Chicago History Museum, ICHi-68455.

The Plan of Chicago, a monumental civic planning vision, included the Chicago Horticultural Society and many other groups. This image shows how integrated greenery was woven into the plan.

Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago.

L. Hutchinson. Each of these individuals, through either his professional or philanthropic role, helped further the interests of the plan. Hutchinson, for example, at Charles Wacker's request, agreed to host an exhibition of the plan drawings at the Art Institute, noting, "I need not tell you that the Trustees of the Art Institute will be very glad indeed to do anything in their power to promote the excellent work of your Plan committee."[26]

Throughout the years of the plan development and the movement for the forest preserves, the Society flower shows emphasized Progressive themes. Like many civic improvement groups, the Chicago Horticultural Society also encouraged the *Chicago Tribune's* citywide garden contest with Society leader Edwin A. Kanst's endorsement: "[The contest] will be attended by a general cleaning up of the city, which is of vital importance."[27] The Society uniquely contributed to the success of the effort by encouraging children's gardens with a separate prize category and one-of-a-kind silver medal.[28] E. J. Vlasek of South Central Park Avenue won the children's contest and was awarded the silver medal along with other prizewinners at the public celebration at the Art Institute on August 18, 1908. Opening the award ceremony, Hutchinson pronounced the garden contest a success: "The culture of flowers . . . is not only a pleasure to the individual, but benefits all those who are about us . . . Nothing gives such universal pleasure. Nothing is so democratic and at the same time so aristocratic."[29]

The Progressive Era coincided with the rise of women's garden clubs in the United States. The strength of Chicago's women's club movement had surprised out-of-town visitors during the World's Columbian Exposition, and the clubs grew in number and membership. Many of these women's clubs had included subcommittees on flowers or forestry, and these groups frequently formed the nucleus of new garden clubs.[30] While furthering the cause of beautifying the Chicago area, these new clubs likely offered an attractive alternative to potential Society members. With the emergence of "country estates" in the suburbs, women found avenues for horticultural pursuits closer to home. The Lake Forest Garden Club (1912) and the North Shore Garden Club (1916) were among many that siphoned the women's energies from the Society to various clubs. Often, clubs mounted their own flower shows, which further weakened the attendance at Society shows. Although women had not been elected to board positions, Society flower shows and many philanthropic events depended on the work of women members.

A gradual decline in the Society's momentum became apparent in 1912 with the solicitation to prominent businessmen for pledges to support the flower shows. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that a Society committee had been formed to develop "a plan which would create wider interest in the work of the organization. It was decided to make an appeal to men who own their own estates to join in the work of the Society and to set aside a certain sum each year to be used by the expert gardeners employed on their estates for experiments and for the growing of special flowers and vegetables to be exhibited annually."[31]

The next year, the *Chicago Examiner* headlined, "Women Will Rescue City Flower Society." According to this report, "When the board of directors of the Chicago Horticultural Society met yesterday, its members found for the second time that they

were still minus candidates for president and for the executive body. Two weeks ago they arranged to apply to all the women members of the Society to get a list of women candidates. The men are convinced they can no longer run the organization."[32]

With a world war on the horizon and drastic business changes resulting from Progressive legislation, it may be that the men of the Society were too preoccupied to sustain the organization. With their local garden clubs, and, having just obtained municipal suffrage in Chicago in 1913, perhaps women, too, could not devote sufficient time to the Society. The Great Depression also drained resources from many cultural groups. Records are lacking from this period, but from all that remain, it appears that the Chicago Horticultural Society began a hiatus that would last until 1945.

Victory Gardens and the Atomic Age

Although the Society as a whole remained quiescent during the 1920s and 1930s, individual members continued to shape the city's horticultural scene. Many future and former Chicago Horticultural Society women organized the Chicago Flower and Garden Shows sponsored by the Garden Club of Illinois from 1927 through 1941 at Navy Pier. Chicago's Century of Progress Exposition of 1933 and 1934 tapped the talents of many future and former Society members. But it was the victory gardens in neighborhoods throughout the Chicago area that brought the Chicago Horticultural Society back to life during World War II.

As one of nine cities designated as a regional center for the Office of Civilian Defense in 1941, Chicago participated in many Civilian Defense support efforts. Victory gardens dotted the city with fresh vegetables. "Because of food rationing, and to bring communities together, we had victory gardens," says local gardener Gertrude Gallagher, who lived in the city on South Peoria Avenue at the time. She remembers creating her own backyard garden and that the corners of many blocks were commandeered for community gardens. "Most of the people on our block were city people," she remembers. "They didn't know which end of the seed to plant!"[33]

To teach people about gardening, the Office of Civilian Defense relied on the efforts of horticulturists from

In the 1920s and 1930s, many members contributed individually to significant horticulture events, such as this garden by J. C. Vaughan at the 1933 world's fair.

Courtesy Cathy Jean Maloney.

the Chicago Park District, such as Society member Fred Heuchling. With 18,000 block captains engaged in the effort, Heuchling described the success: "Chicago leads all other large cities in war gardens . . . I have conducted numerous groups of out of town people to inspect war gardens in all parts of Chicago. Almost universally they remarked upon the interesting and often very beautiful block installations at street corners with flagpoles and usually floral decorations."[34]

The Office of Civilian Defense also solicited experienced gardeners to help novices. Among the first were garden clubs such as the Lake Forest Garden Club, which, under the direction of Society members Edith Farwell and committee chair C. Eugene Pfister, hosted open houses for the public to view thriving vegetable plots. In Highland Park, Pfister reported, 650 families started home and community gardens even though "more than half of them had never weeded a potato patch before."[35]

The community-building aspects of victory gardening and the clear need for horticultural education prompted the Chicago Horticultural Society to revitalize. The Society's original charter had lapsed, but according to its rules, any ten members could call a meeting at any time. After some investigative measures, in fall 1943, eleven living members of the old Society lobbied for its renewal. Some no longer lived in the Chicago area, such as Harry Gordon Selfridge, famed retailer then living in London, or Florida resident William A. Peterson of the Peterson Nursery family. Others were venerable local horticulturists, such as August Poehlmann, owner of the expansive Morton Grove greenhouses, and Kanst of the Chicago Parks. Other members, as listed in Chicago Horticultural Society records, were James Burdett, Carl Kropp, Leonard Kill, Clyde Leesley, Jacob Kesner, Philip Schupp, and Mrs. Ernest A. Hamill.[36]

After World War II, the Chicago Horticultural Society helped people plant victory gardens throughout the area including the city parks.

Courtesy Chicago Park District Archives.

Victory gardens extended to the suburbs, such as this backyard garden on the North Shore.

Courtesy Chicago History Museum. HB-07533-A.

In 1945, the reborn Society renamed itself the Chicago Horticultural Society and Garden Center to reestablish its organization and bylaws. Among its stated objectives were the following:

- Crystallize the popular interest in victory gardening and provide the means for perpetuating this interest in Chicago and suburbs after peace comes,
- Conduct garden demonstrations or courses of instruction; to publish a bulletin or periodical; and to operate garden centers or horticultural museums,
- Be active in conserving, protecting and extending the horticultural beauties of Chicago and its suburbs,
- Help popularize gardening in every family in Chicago and its suburbs; and especially to direct these efforts to children.[37]

This set of objectives expanded on but remained true to the original mission of the Society. The newer version updated horticultural pursuits with specific language about conservation and children's education, and it emphasized the community-building aspects of gardening.

The new organization of the Society reflected the democratization of horticulture since earlier days when wealthy amateurs and professional men composed the main groups active in the Society. Now, along with a Board of Trustees, the Society included a Board of Governors with three groups: amateurs; professional and commercial; and governmental, educational, and civic. Marking the changing demographics, the Board of Trustees now included three women: Mrs. Walter S. (Kate) Brewster, niece of early Society founder Charles L. Hutchinson; Mrs. Joseph M. Cudahy, daughter of the Morton Arboretum founder; and Mrs. Albert D. Farwell, author and renowned herb grower. John C. Vaughan II, son of the early Society founder, held a board position, as did Chairman Laurance Armour.

The "amateur" group of the Board of Governors included C. Eugene Pfister, an accomplished rosarian, who also served as the Society president. In a remarkable gender role reversal, amid the throng of women's garden clubs that now proliferated, a national Men's Garden Club had emerged from a nucleus group in Chicago in 1927. Pfister not only led the Men's Garden Clubs of Chicago but also the Men's Garden Clubs of America.[38] Frank Balthis, Garfield Park horticulturist and president of the 1945 Midwest Horticultural Society (which had been launched during the Chicago Horticultural Society's quiescent period), and Fred Heuchling also served as early officers of the Chicago Horticultural Society and Garden Center.

Among the early "professional and commercial" group of the Board of Governors were James Burdett, garden columnist; Otto Clauss, landscape specialist; R. Milton Carleton of Vaughan Seed Company; James Sykora of Amlings; and one woman, Mrs. Bert Schiller McDonald, an internationally known flower stylist.

Governmental, educational, and civic agencies were well represented by such individuals as Kanst and August Koch of the Chicago Parks; Charles G. Sauers of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County; Robert Kingery of the Chicago Regional Planning Association; Anna P. Keller, chair of the Chicago Public Schools' garden project; and Dr. M. J. Dorsey, chief of the pomology department at the University of

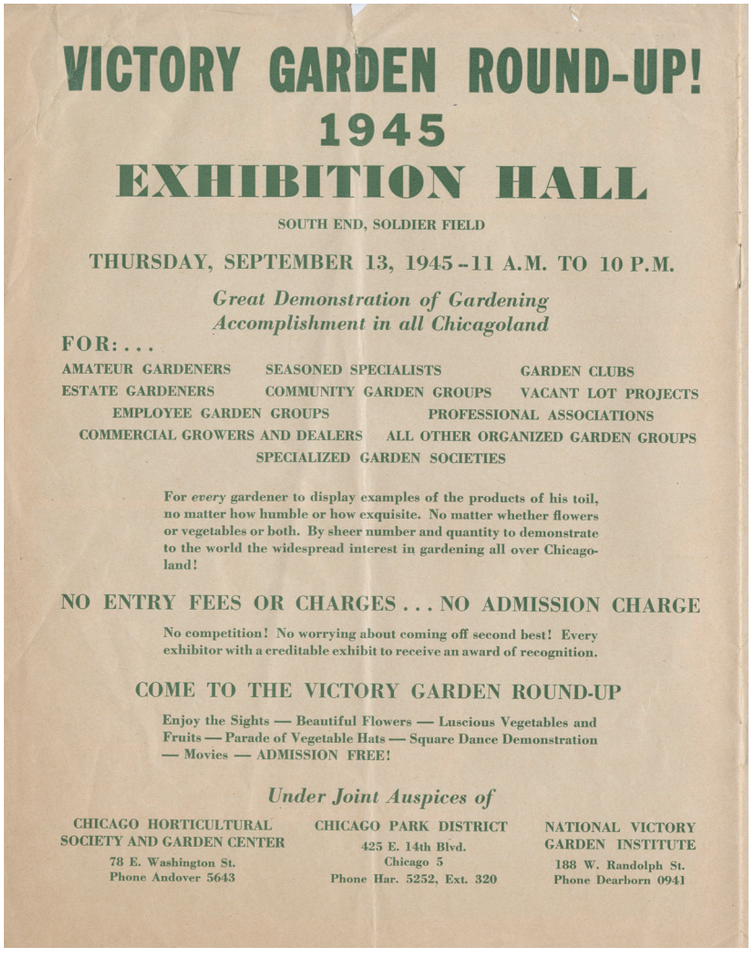
Illinois.[39] With these liaisons, the Chicago Horticultural Society and Garden Center resumed its successful partnerships in horticulture.

Society president Pfister observed how the passage of time had shaped the new structure of the Chicago Horticultural Society and Garden Center: "We might well say that we are taking up today where our forefathers left off some twenty or more years ago . . . Times have changed since 1890, when this Society was first chartered . . . In those days there were no garden clubs, there were no suburbs in the present sense of the word, and Chicago was more truly the garden city. Now, industry and commerce, with greater congestion of population, threaten to destroy the garden city."[40]

The new Chicago Horticultural Society and Garden Center did not let any moss grow before acting on its objectives. The first bulletin, *Garden Talks*, published every other month in April 1945, contained hands-on information and growing tips. *Garden Talks*—which became *Garden Talk* in 1961—began the tradition of consistent education through the written word that continues to this day via the Chicago Botanic Garden website and the seasonal magazine *Keep Growing*. On April 16, 1945, the Society opened its first Garden Center at the Randolph Street entrance hall of what was then the Chicago Public Library (now the Chicago Cultural Center). This first center served as a clinic for gardeners to drop in with questions and also as a venue for small-scale flower displays.

The Society recommitted to philanthropy, a consistent component of the Society's mission, in the beautification of the west suburban Vaughan General Hospital grounds from 1944 to 1945. The Chicago Botanic Garden's programs for veterans at the Edward Hines, Jr. Veterans Adminstration (VA) Hospital continue today.

To foster community gardening, the Society and Garden Center cohosted the Victory Garden Round-Up with the Chicago Park District and the National Victory Garden Institute. The all-day event at Soldier Field on September 13, 1945, targeted everyone from amateur gardeners, "seasoned specialists," developers of vacant lot projects, and estate gardeners to join the roundup for information sharing, movies, bountiful harvests, square dance demonstrations, and a Parade of Vegetable Hats.



VICTORY GARDEN ROUND-UP!
1945
EXHIBITION HALL

SOUTH END, SOLDIER FIELD

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 1945 – 11 A.M. TO 10 P.M.

Great Demonstration of Gardening Accomplishment in all Chicagoland

FOR: . . .

AMATEUR GARDENERS · SEASONED SPECIALISTS · GARDEN CLUBS
ESTATE GARDENERS · COMMUNITY GARDEN GROUPS · VACANT LOT PROJECTS
EMPLOYEE GARDEN GROUPS · PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS
COMMERCIAL GROWERS AND DEALERS · ALL OTHER ORGANIZED GARDEN GROUPS
SPECIALIZED GARDEN SOCIETIES

For *every* gardener to display examples of the products of his toil, no matter how humble or how exquisite. No matter whether flowers or vegetables or both. By sheer number and quantity to demonstrate to the world the widespread interest in gardening all over Chicagoland!

NO ENTRY FEES OR CHARGES . . . NO ADMISSION CHARGE

No competition! No worrying about coming off second best! Every exhibitor with a creditable exhibit to receive an award of recognition.

COME TO THE VICTORY GARDEN ROUND-UP

Enjoy the Sights — Beautiful Flowers — Luscious Vegetables and Fruits — Parade of Vegetable Hats — Square Dance Demonstration — Movies — ADMISSION FREE!

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CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT
425 E. 14th Blvd.
Chicago 5
Phone Har. 5252, Ext. 320

NATIONAL VICTORY GARDEN INSTITUTE
188 W. Randolph St.
Phone Dearborn 0941

As one of its first significant events, the reinstated Chicago Horticultural Society helped launch the Victory Garden Round-Up.

Courtesy University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections.

Achieving all this in such a short time with a membership of just over 130 individuals reflects on the vigor of the reenergized group. Nonetheless, the Society was fortunate to have public-spirited women who proposed the formation of a Woman's Board to assist with member recruitment, to help raise funds, and "to further the goal of the Society: permanent headquarters and a garden center adequate to serve Chicagoland."[41] The Society Board of Trustees approved the creation of the still-vibrant Woman's Board in 1951. The legacy of leadership of the Woman's Board of the Chicago Horticultural Society spans more than six decades—predating the opening of the Chicago Botanic Garden in 1972. The Woman's Board has initiated new

horticultural programs and education activities, funded new landscapes, and raised millions of dollars in financial support—all while building awareness of the Garden and its mission.

But when you have no permanent home "adequate to serve Chicagoland," what do you do? The enterprising Woman's Board members opened the doors to their own homes. The early 1950s saw a variety of garden tours conducted at members' homes, from the famed herb garden of Edith Farwell to the Rose Institute at the Pfister garden to the plant sales at the Vasumpaur garden of Western Springs. Garden tours included city as well as suburban gardens, with the Patio Garden Institute conducted in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood in August 1953.

The Fragrant Garden for the Blind, shown in the schematic here, was one of the many philanthropic relationships that have stood the test of time.

Courtesy Lenhardt Library of the Chicago Botanic Garden.


Price 10¢ – $1.00 per year

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Garden talks

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THE FRAGRANT GARDEN for the Blind
THE CHICAGO LIGHTHOUSE FOR THE BLIND
THE WOMEN'S BOARD OF CHICAGO HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

—in this issue

FRONT COVER:
Artist's Conception of Fragrant Garden for the Blind (see page 2).

A long-standing philanthropic partnership began in the 1950s with the establishment of the Fragrant Garden for the Blind. Horticultural therapy, while dating to ancient times in its broadest definition, received new attention with the return of so many wounded World War II veterans. This garden, created next to the newly built Lighthouse for the Blind facility on Roosevelt Road in Chicago, was said to be the first in the United States that enabled blind patrons to stroll its paths in the regular course of training. Today, the Society continues its relationship with the Chicago Lighthouse with horticultural therapy programs.

Educational subjects during the 1950s and 1960s in lectures and *Garden Talks* focused on plant recommendations, cultural care tips, and garden design pointers. Topical issues such as "The Atom in the Garden" and "Plastic Flowers . . . Boom or Bust" received attention, with "atomic treated novelties" deemed unlikely to succeed and plastic flowers decried as a fad.[42] Discerning discussions in the Society's publications on the use of mulch and organic methods versus pesticides presaged today's headlines.

In 1959, the Society renewed the tradition of cohosting a flower show by organizing the World Flower and Garden Show. For twenty years, the Society partnered with a blue-ribbon list of kindred organizations to produce shows with international themes and scope. Although most exhibitors hailed from the United States and Canada, many exhibits offered visitors a chance to see gardening techniques and designs from around the world.

The 1960s brought even greater crowds to an expanded flower show relocated to the newly constructed McCormick Place. The Society continued to sponsor lectures, plant shows and sales, and exhibits. The biggest headline of this decade, however, was House Bill 1487, which passed the Illinois state legislature to establish a Chicago Botanic Garden on Cook County land and to be ultimately managed by the Chicago Horticultural Society.

With the 1965 groundbreaking of the Chicago Botanic Garden,[43] a new era of landscape design opened in the Chicago region. The Society commissioned the Pittsburgh-based landscape architecture firm of Simonds and Simonds for a master plan. The firm of brothers John O. and Phil Simonds was known for

its pioneering designs that worked in harmony with nature. Over the years, the Society continued to work with prominent landscape architects to design each space within the overall Simonds plan to achieve an environmentally friendly treatment of the entire grounds. With a comprehensive master plan as a guide, each designer offered new vistas, ranging from the Heritage Garden to the English Walled Garden, thus rendering the Chicago Botanic Garden a living museum of landscape design.

In 1972, the Chicago Botanic Garden opened to the public. The idea of a botanic garden, a dream held for decades among Chicago's garden lovers, had finally been fulfilled. The Garden evolved during the next forty years, such that today it comprises 26 distinct gardens and four natural areas. With 50,000 members, the Garden enjoys one of the largest memberships of any U.S. botanic garden—and represents an extraordinary growth from the 130 members on the rolls in the early 1950s.[44]

The establishment of the Garden, long a dream of the Chicago Horticultural Society and garden lovers throughout the Midwest, is a story for the next chapter. Transforming decades of discussion and possibilities into the reality of a botanic garden worthy of the Chicago metropolis required the political will, volunteer effort, funding, and support of the people of Chicago. The Chicago Botanic Garden is living testimony to that spirit.

The World Flower and Garden Shows of the mid-twentieth century were immensely popular.

Courtesy Lenhardt Library of the Chicago Botanic Garden.

The Chicago Horticultural Society has a tradition of philanthropy, education, and outreach. The early Society helped schoolchildren create vegetable plots and worked with community victory gardens. Today, the Chicago Botanic Garden's Regenstein Fruit & Vegetable Garden offers practical tips for homeowners, while Windy City Harvest, a thriving urban agriculture program, offers instruction and job skills to underserved communities.

The Regenstein Fruit & Vegetable Garden

Joseph Regenstein, Jr., a lifelong learner, grew a wide variety of vegetables and fruits as a hobby. On his quarter-acre plot in Barrington, he raised traditional vegetables—beans, squash, and corn—and some novelties, such as round zucchini. On another acre, he grew fruit—even experimenting with apricots in Chicago's temperamental climate. A philanthropist committed to Chicago-area charities, Regenstein emphatically stated the goal of the new garden: "I want it to be a real learning center. And not just another pretty garden!"[45]

True to this vision, the Regenstein Fruit & Vegetable Garden demonstrates the best ways to grow the most ornamental and delicious plants for the Midwest. The nearly four-acre garden is filled in summer with more than 500 varieties of edible plants that grow well in the Upper Midwest. Here visitors will find aromatic herbs, shiny peppers, juicy grapes, and crisp apples in beautifully landscaped beds.

In addition to beds of fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers, this garden features unusual and attractive methods of growing edible plants. Design features include compact espalier fruit trees trained to grow against fences, a vertical wall filled with changing displays of greens and edible flowers, and a shaded walkway covered with grapevines.

The garden has decorative features not often associated with fruit or vegetable gardens—restful fountains, shady arbors, colorful containers and borders, and grassy resting places.

Businessman Joseph Regenstein, Jr., had a vision for the Fruit & Vegetable Garden that bears his name: "It should be a place where people learn not only what to do, but why," he explained.

The "backyard bounty" beds of the Regenstein Fruit & Vegetable Garden are filled with herbs and vegetables that can easily be grown at home. Pictured here are fall cool crops.

Mellow fall sunlight illuminates the grape arbor dividing bramble and trained (espalier) fruits at the Regenstein Fruit & Vegetable Garden.

Plants started under a cold frame running along the base of the "glassroom" (classroom) thrive in the Fruit & Vegetable Garden, near other vegetables in small-space beds (left, top). Through season-extension techniques and thoughtful planning, the harvest extends into three seasons, including summer crops (left, bottom).

The centerpiece of Windy City Harvest "incubator farm" program is Legends South Farm, located at the site of the former Robert Taylor Homes project on Chicago's South Side.

The Windy City Harvest Youth Farm at Washington Park in Chicago is reminiscent of the neighborhood victory gardens that flourished in Chicago during World War II.

Windy City Harvest

Windy City Harvest is the Chicago Botanic Garden's urban agriculture education and jobs-training initiative, aimed at helping to create a local food system, healthier communities, and a greener economy. The program has three components: Windy City Harvest Youth Farm, Windy City Harvest Apprenticeship, and Windy City Harvest Corps.

The Garden's Windy City Harvest Youth Farm program works with at-risk teens, teaching them about the food system and good nutrition. Each year, approximately 70 teens from underserved communities are educated and employed at farm sites in Chicago and Lake County. As they move through the program, they learn about growing food, working as a team, being a responsible and accountable employee, and the importance of good nutrition for themselves and their communities. Ultimately, Youth Farm students become better students (all complete high school and many go on to higher education) and are inspired by the belief that their actions can contribute to positive change in small and large ways.

The Garden offers a nine-month accredited certificate and paid internship in sustainable urban agriculture for 15 to 20 adults each year through its Windy City Harvest Apprenticeship program. The program is delivered by Garden staff at the Arturo Velasquez Institute, a satellite campus of Daley College, which is the official

In 2013 the Chicago Botanic Garden launched a new Windy City Harvest program—the largest rooftop farm in the Midwest—atop McCormick Place, the Chicago convention center.

program partner. There are currently six urban farm sites where apprentices learn and practice their production skills. To date, 89 percent of the certificate graduates have found seasonal and full-time jobs in the local horticulture and urban agriculture industry.

The Windy City Harvest Corps program provides opportunities for people with multiple barriers to employment and is intended for both juveniles (ages 17 to 21) and adults who have been involved with the justice system. Specifically, the program provides training in sustainable urban agriculture and transitional employment at Windy City Harvest operation sites for approximately 30 Corps members annually. These participants complete the Roots of Success job-readiness curriculum and are encouraged to apply to the Apprenticeship certificate program.

The Windy City Harvest garden thrives at Arturo Velasquez Institute, where the certificate program in urban agriculture is offered.

In Lake County, participants work as a team at the Windy City Harvest Youth Farm in North Chicago to grow, harvest, and sell vegetables and fruit to underserved urban communities.