

# Spatial Stories of Sustainability: The Women Building Philadelphia's Green Spaces

*Elizabeth Riedman, Temple University*

*Graduate Research Award Sustainability Program recipient, 2022*

## Abstract

In urban greening scholarship, many have focused on the role of public institutions and professional leaders when looking at urban greening patterns (Boone et al., 2009; Eisenman, 2013; Lawson, 2005). However, a few scholars have begun to shed light on the lesser known work that other identities, such as women, who have historically contributed to the development of urban green spaces (Deutsch, 2000; Dümpelmann, 2015; Flanagan, 2002; Sewell, 2011; Spain, 2001). This project builds on feminist historical methods to consider the often-invisible role of women in the creation and maintenance of green spaces. I refer to Philadelphia's long history of urban greening efforts (Rosan and Pearsall, 2017) to show examples of how women have historically contributed to the development of green spaces, and how current day urban greening initiatives reflect the legacies of this labor. Using archival research, oral histories and storymapping techniques, this project seeks to challenge historical accounts that overlook over the contributions of women, and center gender as a key category within the 'spatial stories' of Philadelphia's green spaces.

## Introduction

According to historian Dorceta E. Taylor (2009), women have long been behind the scenes to initiate and organize urban greening projects "while men represented the organization in more public roles" (p. 252). For example, she argues that while Robert Minturn is credited with the proposal of Central Park in New York City, it is likely that his wife Anna Mary Minturn was the real architect and initiator of the project, who inspired her husband and friends to move forward with the idea. Historical accounts such as these have begun to highlight what has been suspected among scholars but rarely acknowledged within urban historical accounts- that women's contributions and labor often extended beyond the 'homespace' to become key creators and stewards in the development of urban, green spaces.

Other feminist scholars have uncovered similar insights regarding the influence of 'municipal housekeeping', a term to describe the volunteer work of often wealthy, white women of the Progressive Era who established Settlement Houses and garden clubs to help address what they viewed as 'social ills' of the day- massive poverty, struggling working women with no childcare, and crowded housing conditions (Spain, 2001). Within these accounts have been brief descriptions of women's role in sponsoring greening initiatives within philanthropy organizations, organizing street tree planting efforts, and aiding with general fundraising for increased greening efforts. In referring to these examples as 'municipal housekeeping', scholars emphasize how certain women who were often confined to work within the 'homespace', began

to slowly expand their influence to include the surrounding urban landscape. Gardening thus was a natural extension of this influence, and thus a primary focus of many women-led clubs.

This connection between an interest in gardens and urban forestry even allowed women to establish themselves within the profession of landscape architecture, a rare opportunity at the time (Dümpelmann, 2015, 2019). In *Unbounded Practice* (2009), author Thaisa Way describes the slow growth of opportunities for women to begin their own landscape architecture and design practices, own nurseries, author books on botany and gardening practices, and tour the country giving lectures. However, the work of these women often extended beyond their commissions and paid work to include many community and volunteer organizations. For example, horticulturalist Kate Olivia Sessions (1857-1940) became known as “mother of Balboa Park” for her care of one park in San Diego, California, which included providing free trees and plants for city parks and streets and advocating for green spaces around the city (Way 2009, pg. 65). Other women could be found volunteering on park and tree commissions and chairing gardening clubs. Overall, this historical analysis centering gender as a key category within the archive suggests a more complex web of relations behind those who are credited with the governance of urban green spaces, and the volunteer work driving the creation, maintenance and funding of these spaces.

This research aims to expand on these feminist historian accounts to observe the role of women in urban greening projects today, as well as compare how this gendered volunteer labor has changed over time. It will ask who has been involved in urban greening initiatives in the Philadelphia community, and how can we acknowledge and share the stories and contributions of identities, like women, who have been overlooked in the archive. In the summer of 2022, I conducted archival research and oral histories to shed light on these gendered accounts of prominent Philadelphia women both in the past, and those who continue to contribute this labor today.

First, I drew from archival materials, such as newspaper articles, organizational reports, newsletters, and correspondence, related to prominent urban greening organizations and initiatives run by women in Philadelphia during the 20<sup>th</sup> century at Special Collections Research Center at Temple University and the Philadelphia Horticulture Society Mclean Library. Secondly, I conducted interviews with ten women currently volunteering in greening initiatives, all who had been involved in caring for spaces, such as urban gardens, vacant lots, trees, and parks, for ten years or more. They shared with me the fruits of their labor, motivations behind their work, and some of their proudest accomplishments over the years. Lastly, I created a Story Map bringing together these oral histories in an interactive, publicly accessible format to help make these gendered histories visible for the next generation. This project was conducted as part of my dissertation research, which focuses on applying a social reproductive framework in order to understand the role of unpaid labor within urban greening initiatives. Together, these stories highlight the range of care and labor that goes into maintaining Philadelphia’s green spaces and uncover the historic contributions of women volunteers.

## The History of Women Greening Philadelphia

Many might be familiar with the famous founder of Philadelphia, William Penn, who is often quoted for his vision of Philadelphia as a ‘Greene Countrie town’, with ample planned parks and open space. The legacy of this quote can be found in housing developments, nonprofit program names and the promotion of public parks to visitors. However, the development of Philadelphia’s green spaces extends far beyond what is credited to William Penn. While often

credited as ‘volunteers’, women have a long history of contributing to the success of urban green spaces and programs related to maintaining parks, planting trees and running community gardens since the late 1800’s. Women became leaders of volunteer gardening clubs such as the Women’s National Farm and Garden Association (WNFGA), the Garden Club of Philadelphia and the Neighborhood Garden Association (NGA). They founded the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture, where girls could become trained in landscape architecture and forge new career paths. Lastly, women’s work inspired many current-day greening efforts, including the origins of the Philadelphia Horticultural Society and projects such as Philadelphia Green and Green Countrie Towne.

Beginning in the late 1800’s, there were several wealthy, white women, such as Ellen Waln Harrison, Jane Bowne Haines, Mrs. J Willis Martin and Miss Ernestine Abercrombie Goodman, who aided in the establishment of parks, landscape architecture in public institutions and more (McNulty and Roman, 2022). Since women during this time were prevented from entering the workforce, these wealthy women often worked ‘behind the scenes’ in a volunteer capacity to help influence or shape the creation of green spaces in the city, while their husbands occupied a more formal, recognized position. For example, McNulty and Roman (2022) argue how Ellen Waln Harrison, the wife of University of Pennsylvania Provost Charles Harrison, played an important role in greening and beautifying the university’s campus from 1894 to 1910. Records reveal Harrison’s extensive personal financing of gardens, fundraising work to expand existing green space and overall advocacy of expanding Philadelphia’s parks and maintenance (McNulty, 2020). She was also involved in tree-planting as part of her membership in the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Colonial Dames and served as Vice-President of Bartram’s Gardens, where she advocated for the restoration of the garden to city officials (McNulty and Roman, 2022, p.340). Although Ellen Waln Harrison is not formally credited for her involvement, there is no doubt her efforts played a significant role in establishing and caring for Philadelphia’s green spaces.

Other prominent public garden advocates and wealthy benefactors were Mrs. J Willis Martin and Miss Ernestine Abercrombie Goodman, who as city residents were involved in tending to surrounding city parks and gardens, such as Rittenhouse Square, and founding the Garden Club of Philadelphia. In 1913, these two women helped plan a gathering of eleven other garden clubs through personal connections, including some other wealthy women who would winter together, which led to the foundation of the Garden Club of American (GCA). GCA’s mission was to promote women’s role in the stewardship of both private and public spaces, including public and open spaces in the urban environment (Way, 2009; Seale, 2012). During WWI, club members focused on farming and the production of food. In later years, the club fundraised to help preserve and maintain public gardens such as Bartram’s Garden and historic homes in Fairmount Park (Seale, 2012, p. 125).

Women’s involvement in gardening at home also grew into a rare career option when Jane Bowne Haines founded The Pennsylvania School of Horticulture (PSH) in 1911. One of the first of its kind in the United States, PSH provided training in gardening, tree care and farming for young women (Carey and Fry, 2011). Haines and several other educated women, including fellow Garden Club of Philadelphia and Byrn Mawr College alumnae, formed PSH’s first board of trustees and worked to establish a program aimed for the advancement of women in careers that would provide economic independence beyond the confinements of secretarial work (Way, 2009). Graduates of the school became landscape architects, authors of gardening books, educators and directors of gardens, and horticultural societies.

In addition to starting careers in the field of gardening, many women founded volunteer societies, such as the Women's National Farm and Garden Association, which was founded in 1914 by PSH students to help support working-class women (Nolan, 1985). During war efforts, other PSH graduates started victory gardens to maintain food rations and volunteered in farm work camps to provide relief from missing labor, forming the 'Women's Land Army of America' (Carey and Fry, 2011; Pen & Trowel, 1944, 1945). Wolschke-Bulmahn (1992) argues that this volunteer gardening and farming work became equated to serving the nation by leaders such as President Woodrow Wilson, who stated "every housewife who practices strict economy puts herself in the ranks of those who serve the nation" (p. 53). Many graduates volunteered with 4H clubs in Philadelphia, and the Neighborhood Gardening Project. In the 70s and 80s, students became more involved in urban tree planting, city garden blocks and the development of school grounds (Carey and Fry, 2011, p. 60).

Beginning in the 1950's, a few women gardening clubs turned to greening as a form of community improvement. The most famous of these organizations was the Neighborhood Garden Association of Philadelphia (NGA), which was founded by Louise Carter Bush-Brown, a graduate (class of 1916) and then director of School of Horticulture for Women (1924-1952). The NGA's aim was to help neighbors, homeowners, settlement clubs and garden clubs beautify and green their neighborhoods and vacant lots in Philadelphia (Bush-Browne, n.d; Rosan and Pearsall, 2017). In many cases, NGA accepted sponsorships from surrounding garden clubs in the suburbs, where groups could provide financial support to help purchase plants or provide help during planting events. Urban beautification projects included, for example, organizing Green Thumb 4-H clubs to plant and maintain flower beds in urban gardens and public spaces, such as the Philadelphia City Hall Courtyard (1961), creating Green Block collaborations to plant flower boxes and sidewalk planters, and developing demonstration gardens on vacant land with the help of the Penn Extension Service (1963). According to Carey and Fry (2011), the NGA was reported to have organized "301 blocks, 15 vacant lot gardens, 12 play areas, 122 4-H (head, heart, hands, health) project gardens and 1200 doorway gardens in low-income housing projects" (p. 45).

Many of the spaces that these greening and beautifying projects chose were low-income housing, such as the Richard Allen Homes housing project funded by the US Housing Authority in lower North Philadelphia (1953), and vacant lots, such as the Secret Garden formed on Rodman Street. Louise was honored for her work in the community with a National Recreational Award for the Neighborhood Garden Project in 1959 and invited to speak at the White House in 1967 (Carey and Fry, 2011). Today the NGA has inspired similar organization such as the Neighborhood Gardens Trust (NGT), which focuses on land preservation to help protect and support community gardens in Philadelphia.

Another influential leader in community gardening was Ernesta Ballard, director of Philadelphia Horticultural Society, who built on the legacy of Louise Bush-Brown to create Philadelphia Green, a program aimed at greening various parts of Philadelphia in the 1970's. Included in this project was the Garden Mobile, which traveled around the city educating residents on gardening techniques. In a video celebrating Philadelphia Green program, Ballard describes how this catalyst for Philadelphia Green was President Johnson's Urban Block Grant Program (PHS Archives Digital Image Collection, 1994). This grant provided Ballard and other PHS employees with funds to aid other community gardeners, many women, to create their own community gardens all over the city.

These examples reveal the extensive history of women's involvement in urban greening development from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when wealthier women would aid in general fundraising for the creation of gardens and parks, to the 1970's, when women established and lead nonprofit organization and gardening clubs to help support and grow gardening on a wider scale. Amid all the care and labor, most women highlighted contributed to these greening projects on a volunteer basis and are not widely acknowledged by the public for their role in urban greening stewardship. Additionally, these histories do not encompass the many other women who likely created smaller plots of gardens or aided in the clean-up of neighborhood parks. This gap in the archive leaves an opportunity to collect these stories from women living today, who have been on the forefront of urban greening initiatives for years.

## Spatial Stories Today

Over the course of one of the hottest summers in Philadelphia history, I set out to collect the oral histories of ten women who have worked throughout their lifetime to found and maintain a range of green spaces in the city. Using a 'snow-ball' method, I asked greening organizations such as the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to refer me to women who have been active participants in activities such as planting trees, leading community gardens, and more. Interviewees were then asked to participate in an oral history project, where their stories would be shared in an online Story Map. All agreed and were happy to share their experiences associated with their name with the public, a protocol specific to oral histories where personal information can be preserved for the purpose of archiving their stories for future generations. Interview questions included, "How did you first get involved in urban greening?" "What were your motivations behind your work?", "What were some barriers you encountered?", and "How has your work impacted your surrounding community?". Many interviews were conducted in a green space such as garden or park that was created or shaped by participants. Many chose to give me a tour of these spaces as part of our interview and some even provided materials they had created, describing the history of how each space grew over time.

Collectively, these stories reveal women who have planted trees, organized greening community groups, founded urban gardens and school gardening clubs, saved parks from business developers, and led tree-planting initiatives throughout the city. Many of these women were involved in multiple initiatives simultaneously, most of which were volunteer based. For example, Ruth, founder of her own community organization Heritage CDC, has been a community activist and volunteer for over 50 years. Growing up, she would spend every Saturday morning with her family helping their older neighbors sweep their steps, clean up the block and more. "Volunteerism is important. Volunteerism makes the world around. Volunteerism makes communities better," Ruth emphasized. Even small changes, like seeing more dragonflies or birds in the neighborhood, brings her joy and confirms that her work is making a difference.

Many women contributed significant time, labor, and organizational skills to these green projects, while balancing full-time jobs or home responsibilities. Miss Helen told me how she always made time for her community garden, despite raising three children and working full time as a single mother. She would often organize clean-ups or workdays on the block with her kids and other neighbors, where she would provide a homecooked meal in exchange for picking up trash or raking leaves. Similarly, Iris has spent decades creating meaningful green spaces that reflect her culture and heritage in the Norris Square neighborhood. When one walks through Las Parcelas, one can experience the love, care and history of women like Iris, who have created

each plant, structure and program in the garden with the goal of honoring the experiences and culture of the Puerto Rican community. The hope is that these spaces bring peace for future generations, a spot where anyone can come and rest, sip coffee and enjoy music.

These Philadelphia women are also key leaders in their community spaces and frequently aid city-sponsored projects with goals to increase green spaces within Philadelphia significantly over the next few years. Cynthia is one of the founding members and current leader of her local Tree Tenders group, having planted over 1,000 trees along the streets in East Falls. She told me how she now enjoys taking walks with her husband and seeing more people walking their dogs or pushing strollers under the tree canopy, happy to have the cool shade under the summer sun. Other women like Mindy, Lori and Sally have made it their life's work to plant trees and create community gardens all around Philadelphia through their jobs working at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, while also spending their weekends and free time working in their own neighborhoods.

The resulting stories and experiences are summarized in an interactive, online Story Map (See Appendix), where visitors can view a map of each green space, along with a summary and photo of the woman who helped create and care for it. The intent behind creating a Story Map builds upon feminist and Black geographical approaches, where scholars have begun to push back against traditional outcomes of research, such as articles published in academic journals, and consider more accessible methods of sharing research results. In 'Spatial Stories of Sustainability', viewers can interact with the map, showing each project in relation to the wider urban environment. Each point on the map can then be expanded to reveal the face and experience of the woman who has poured years of care and labor into these spaces all around the city. All in all, it hopes to make visible the labor and care that Philadelphia women are pouring into green spaces all around the city, as well as honor their work in a format that can be easily shared within the wider Philadelphia community.

## Ruth

*North Philadelphia, tree planter, community activist*

Ruth, the founder of Heritage Community Development Corporation (CDC), a nonprofit organization founded in 1989, is a longtime North Philadelphia resident and an advocate for urban green spaces in her community. She told me of the important example her father had set for her at an early age as a community organizer: "We were raised helping out in the neighborhood... sweeping the block every Saturday, sweeping the back alleyway, scrubbing the steps for your elderly. That's the way we were raised to take care of our community." She has continued this care for her neighborhood for almost 50 years, leading a local tree planting group to plant, water and prune trees, serving on the board of TreePhilly and advocating for a host of issues around the city, including resources for homelessness. Ruth emphasized how "Volunteerism is important. Volunteerism makes the world around. Volunteerism makes communities better." When faced with issues such as rising heat temperatures, lack of shade, high rates of asthma and other health factors, Ruth has taken on the improvement of her North Philadelphia community as a personal mission. Never once while we chatted did Ruth stop to rest. She pulled large hoses around from tree to tree, making sure each got plenty of water in the 90+ degree heat. She chatted with neighbors who stopped by, with some even offering to help us or provide updates on the latest news of happenings around the lot.



## Laurel

*Olney neighborhood, urban gardener and park volunteer*

Laurel is one of the founding members of Fischer Park Community Garden, which was started when she and a group of neighbors involved in cleanups in Fischer Park had the idea to turn a small patch of the park into a garden in 2002. They enlisted the help of the Fairmount Park Commission to help with the initial building, while Laurel and other neighbors took over the organizing and maintenance moving forward long term. Laurel described how starting the garden was a way to feel more connected to the community and her fellow gardeners. She described; “what I found was what feeds me is seeing a lot of people here, you know, working together, having a good time talking to each other. You know, it's such a positive experience.” Nature for her is a way to bring peace and fun into her life, and she continues to fuel this experience by maintaining the garden and always being the one to bring snacks.

## Sally

*Olney, Northern Liberties, and Philadelphia-wide, Associate Director of Community Education at Pennsylvania Horticulture Society (PHS), urban gardener*

I interviewed Sally alongside Laurel, who is a longtime friend and fellow urban gardener who now organizes the Garden Tenders program at Pennsylvania Horticulture Society (PHS), and aids hundreds of urban gardeners citywide. Sally is everywhere at once- and is the self-proclaimed, “stuff person and tool person,” meaning she always finds herself helping others with her truck full of supplies. “Well, I got plants, I got seeds, I got supplies, I pick trash, I always have. I always know where the stuff is” she told me. Sally described how gardens can be as time-consuming as a job because of all the hard work, although the payout tends to be in food instead of a salary. Gardens can be a way of investing in a better future for a neighborhood; “what I realized is that with community gardens, because these people that are pouring their lives into their gardens, for no payment, so as volunteers- if we could get everyone involved in a community garden, they would have to talk to their neighbor, they would have to learn whether there was a language barrier....they would have to learn how to resolve problems on a small scale. So, what we're doing with these community gardening projects, and these greening projects, and these park projects and stuff like that, is we are saving the world one little plot at a time.”

## Iris

*Norris Square, urban gardener and Grupo Motivos founder*

Las Parcelas, a collection of garden spaces in the Norris Square neighborhood in Kensington, has been at the cornerstone of the community gardens movement in Philadelphia since the 1990s. Started by a group of women called Grupo Motivos, this garden has continued to grow and expand past its original small plot of land to include multiple gardens and structures. Iris is a legend in the city, having been a co-founder of Grupo Motivos, leader at Norris Square Neighborhood Project, mother and advocate for sharing Puerto Rican culture with all who are interested in learning. Right from the start of our interview, she emphasized how she intended the garden to grow from the seeds of stories and knowledge of her mother, grandmother and all the women from her community back in Puerto Rico. Iris started the garden back in the 90's, when

the neighborhood was facing high rates of crime, incarceration and drug addition. She told me how at first, the priority had to become not about horticulture, but focusing on the needs of the community; “What we wanted to do was to have a clean space where we could gather. We didn't think about trees, not that that was not important at that time. When you are suffering. It doesn't matter when you are hungry. It doesn't matter if we are eating fruits... you are hungry! Who is going to be paying attention to flowers, when you are hurt.” So, she and fellow neighbors started enlisting teenagers to help with cleanup, collecting materials to build benches and art, and cooking Puerto Rican food with coffee to bring people off the streets to gather in a safe, public space. This small project eventually grew to become a Pennsylvania Horticultural Society sponsored community garden, with Iris volunteering on the board, where she had to face being one of the Spanish-speaking women to offer feedback city-wide. For her, the garden has grown to become “my sixth child”, where “it becomes a friendship. Something like a family. And that is such is extremely, extremely important to me, because I come from a community growing up that we were all family.”

### Mindy

*Germantown and Philadelphia-wide, Tree Tenders founder and leader at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS)*

Mindy standing in "Sam's Forest" section of the Wissahickon Park

When I was first starting out learning about greening projects in the city- there was one name that kept coming up- Mindy. Mindy. Mindy. ‘Everyone knows Mindy!’ Indeed, Mindy, or ‘the mother of trees’ as some call her, has been working at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society since the early 90’s, when a side interest in the environment inspired her to create one of the first citizen-led tree-planting programs in the country. Tree Tenders, a program where residents sign up to volunteer and plant street trees in their neighborhoods, was started with the idea to enable community groups with a few resources and a way to organize around tree planting. From 30 people in the first class, Tree Tenders has grown to enroll hundreds of Philadelphia residents and plant thousands of trees each year. For Mindy, trees have always been a way to connect with one’s neighbors and community, and the program has even provided career opportunities for Philadelphia youth to become arborists. Mindy told me “it has helped to change lives. I mean, not everyone's, but it's helped. It gives people a sense of pride to do something like this. And sometimes living in the city you need something to care for, you need something green, and you need to be able to make your community better. So, all we do is- I give it them permission. I don’t know if it's needed, but people sometimes feel like they need it.”

### Cynthia

*East Falls, tree tenders leader*

Cynthia has been a leader in all things trees and greening in East Falls since 1971. She was one of the first participants in the Tree Tenders program, and when giving me a driving tour of her neighborhood, you could see the difference her work has made in helping East Falls become a green and beautiful place to live. In just one drive, Cynthia pointed out no less than 30 full-grown trees that she and her fellow volunteers have planted over the years, although the real number is over 1,100. Currently retired, she is still very active in tree planting, serving on the Tree Tenders board and applying for grants to help fund outdoor adventures and Arbor Day



activities for Philadelphia schoolchildren. She told me how rewarding it has been to take her morning walks with her husband, knowing she had helped contribute to the shady streets: “It's being in the neighborhood and on a hot day walking and seeing how - it's the dog walkers, that people with the strollers- they're able to enjoy and with the hot weather, walk safely because of the shade of the street trees.” She believes volunteers should take time to recognize their accomplishments, in order to “feel how the positive always outweighs the negative” and keep fighting the various barriers ones finds in this kind of work.

### Alice

*East Falls, tree planting and park maintenance*

I met Alice in her home in East Falls, which she has lived in since moving there in 1950 with her husband. She met me on her 96th birthday to share her experiences in maintaining green spaces in the neighborhood. She was one of the first members of Tree Tenders in East Falls and started Arbor Day, a local day celebrating trees in the park with young schoolchildren. She spent many years caring for the small park next to her home, watering the trees, and fundraising for supplies, such as benches. One of her biggest accomplishments was also preserving a small park from being developed as a parking lot by the business district, particularly when she had to stand up in the local council meeting and speak up against a 'very angry businessman'. As hard as it was for her to speak her mind, leading her to “shake all over”, Alice maintains this moment as a point of pride in her fight to keep her community greener and healthier for future generations. When I asked her for any advice she might have, she told me, “Just keep fighting. You'll win. There's more people that like the green than those who don't like it.”

### Helen

*Strawberry Mansion, urban gardener, block captain*

Helen has been an active neighbor, block captain and steward of her beautiful, little block in Strawberry Mansion for 50 years. She's helped keep the block clean, taken care of vacant lots, fundraised to help neighbors in time of need, and turned one into a beautiful, little pocket park and community garden. “I love people. And it started like that. Anything where I can help be of service,” she told me. The list is endless with Helen's involvements, all while being a single, working mother of three. When I asked her how she balanced all this, Helen described how she would often involve her children or other neighborhood kids in the various cleanup tasks in exchange for a homecooked meal. She taught her children early on to help out fellow elderly neighbors by cleaning the porch steps, or picking up trash on the street. For others, she would provide tools and supplies, such as gloves and trash bags, and even collect the trash bags herself to help make cleaning the block a community-effort.

### Maria

*Overbrook, tree planter, urban gardener*

Maria is also an active tree-planter and gardener in Philadelphia. As I walked up to Maria's rowhome in Overbrook, I instantly noticed her beautiful front yard, flowers spread in every possible spot, pots overflowing with green on the porch and a street tree providing some shade. Maria wears many hats, including (recently) retired school teacher where she started a gardening

club for the children, avid gardener, a community organizer with her neighbors and a Tree Tender in Overbrook. She moved to the United States in 1993 from Puerto Rico, what she affectionally calls her 'first home'. When I asked her what a typical day looked like for her, she described being out the previous day watering, mulching and weeding over 15 trees in a nearby park, almost passing out from the heat. Maria knows all her neighbors and has taken it upon herself to provide plants and resources to anyone who might be interested in adding more greenery to their front yards. She told me that sometimes she has trouble getting places on time because she stops so much while driving; "So when I'm driving around, If I see something that is not quite right, I'm gonna stop because I have tools in my trunk. And I stop and then I start talking to the neighbor. And then I usually I have to tell them where to get the mulch but it's better if I have a piece of paper that they can take a picture of or give it to them." This includes pruning trees, giving gardening tips and more.

### Lori

*Philadelphia-wide, Director of Urban Forestry at Philadelphia Parks and Recreation (PPR)*

Lori has been an employee of the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation department for 41 years, slowly working up from a ground's maintenance worker to Director of Urban Forestry. She described the influence of an early exposure to horticulture growing up with her grandmother, which led her to enroll in an agricultural high school in Philadelphia and develop a love for horticultural nomenclature. This early love for nature led Lori to a lifetime of improving Philadelphia's city parks. When I asked about her journey to the director, she told me, "it's just been about showing up. Because of maybe my high school, I really have not worried about who I look like, or what I look like. It's like, just doing the best you can." The best for Lori has meant always learning, growing and not being afraid to be out there with the rest of her male colleagues. She described the importance of her support system in allowing her to do this kind of work, particularly her grandmother who would watch her daughter when she had to work and other professional mentors who helped offer advice as she was growing in her career. While Lori has faced barriers as one of the few Black women in urban forestry, she described her advice as continuing to "show up every day. I don't let anything run me away."

### Conclusion

The aim of this project was to expand the public's understanding of the gendered labor that has been contributed to the establishment and growth of Philadelphia's green spaces. It works to contribute to traditional archival accounts in adding a focus on gender, revealing the often-hidden identities of women philanthropists, garden club leaders and landscape architects. In conducting oral histories and creating a forward-facing Story Map, this project emphasizes the importance of adding diverse accounts to the archive. It is my hope that public appreciation and acknowledgement for parks, trees and gardens will no longer be associated with William Penn's idea for a 'Greene Countrie Town', but rather, the tireless dedication and sweat of generations of women who have shaped Philadelphia's urban environment to what it is today.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and honor all the Philadelphia women who shared their stories and experiences with me. They truly are co-creators and fellow authors in my on-going dissertation work. This project would not have been possible without the guidance of Dr. Hamil Pearsall and the support of Temple University's Office of Sustainability.

## References

- Baum, B. (2022). A horticulture school of their own. *Temple Now*. Retrieved from [https://news.temple.edu/news/2022-03-29/meet-pioneering-women-who-helped-launched-temple-ambler?utm\\_source=Salesforce&utm\\_medium=Email&utm\\_content=33122&utm\\_campaign=Temple-Now](https://news.temple.edu/news/2022-03-29/meet-pioneering-women-who-helped-launched-temple-ambler?utm_source=Salesforce&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=33122&utm_campaign=Temple-Now)
- Boone, C. G., Buckley, G. L., Grove, J. M., & Sister, C. (2009). Parks and people: An environmental justice inquiry in Baltimore, Maryland. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 99(4), 767–787.
- Bush-Brown, L. n.d. "The Philadelphia Story." Preliminary Inventory of the Published Materials of the Neighborhood Garden Association (NGA), Pennsylvania Horticultural Society McLean Library.
- Carey, J. R., & Fry, M. A. B. (2011). *A Century of Cultivation 1911-2011: 100 Years of the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women to Temple University Ambler*. Temple University.
- Deutsch, S. (2000). *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940*. Oxford University Press.
- Dümpelmann, S. (2015). Designing the “shapely city”: Women, trees, and the city. *Journal of Landscape Architecture*, 10(2), 6–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18626033.2015.1058560>
- Dümpelmann, S. (2019). *Seeing Trees*. Yale University Press.
- Eisenman, T. S. (2013). Frederick Law Olmsted, Green Infrastructure, and the Evolving City. *Journal of Planning History*, 12(4), 287–311. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538513212474227>
- Flanagan, M. A. (2002). *Seeing with their hearts: Chicago women and the vision of the good city, 1871-1933*. Princeton University Press.
- Fuentes, M. J. (2016). Dispossessed Lives. In *Dispossessed Lives*. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812293005>
- Hartman, S. (2019). *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments: Intimate histories of riotous Black girls, troublesome women, and queer radicals*. WW Norton & Company.
- Lawson, L. J. (2005). *City bountiful: A century of community gardening in America*. Univ of California Press.
- McKittrick, K. (2006). Demonic Grounds. In *University of Minnesota Press*.
- McNulty, M. L. (2020). *Forgotten Contributions: The overlooked impact of Ellen Harrison and Early 20th century women in Urban Greening*.
- McNulty, M., & Roman, L. (2022). Forgotten Contributions: The Overlooked Impact of Ellen Harrison and Early 20th Century Women in Urban Greening. *Arboriculture & Urban Forestry*, 48(6), 333–346. <https://doi.org/10.48044/jauf.2022.025>
- Nolan, M. A. (1985). *A Chronicle: The History of Woman's National Farm and Garden Association Incorporated 1914-1984*. Leshner Printers, Inc.
- Pen and Trowel. (1944). Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women Records, Special Collection Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.
- Pen and Trowel (1945). Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women Records, Special Collection Research Center, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.
- PHS Archives Digital Image Collection. (1994). “Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Philadelphia Green. Celebrating 20 Years”. <https://digitalarchives.powerlibrary.org/papd/islandora/object/papd%3A60731>

- Riedman, E. (2021). Othermothering in Detroit, MI: understanding race and gender inequalities in green stormwater infrastructure labor. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 23(5), 616–627. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2021.1910019>
- Rosan, C. D., & Pearsall, H. (2017). *Growing a sustainable city?: The question of urban agriculture*. University of Toronto Press.
- Seale, W. (2012). *The Garden Club of America: 100 Years of a Growing Legacy*. Smithsonian Books.
- Sewell, J. E. (2011). *Women and the everyday city: Public space in San Francisco, 1890-1915*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Spain, D. (2001). *How women saved the city*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Taylor, D. E. (2009). *The environment and the people in American cities, 1600s-1900s*. Duke University Press.
- Way, T. (2009). *Unbounded practice*. University of Virginia Press.
- Wolschke-Bulmahn, J. (1992). From the War-Garden to the Victory Garden: Political Aspects of Garden Culture in the United States during World War I. *Landscape Journal*, 11(1), 51–57. <https://doi.org/10.3368/lj.11.1.51>

## Appendix: Story Map "Spatial Stories of Sustainability: The women building Philadelphia's green spaces" (Riedman, 2022)

Link: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d3f7e23b78254320a80d892becde7b1b>

### Stories of Sustainability

