



# BULLETIN

**Fire**

**2016 National Affairs and  
Legislation Conference**

**Freeman Medal**

THE GARDEN CLUB OF AMERICA  
SPRING 2016



# From Sepia to Technicolor



Las Tejas, Santa Barbara, CA, 1914. Hand-colored glass lantern slide. This and other garden photos courtesy of Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Gardens, The Garden Club of America Collection.

As a newly minted Zone I rep for the Garden History & Design Committee, I had a few preconceptions of what my job would entail. I imagined looking backward in time, exploring the past, celebrating the Golden Age of American gardens, and trying to recapture a lost Eden.

If my GCA role had a color, it was sepia. If it had a date, it was turn of the century. If it had a place, it was New England.

I have witnessed many great gardens fall victim to development, and in my conversations with others I hear the same story again and again: "The garden of my childhood was torn down to make way for a..." Unfortunately,

many of us have personally had to fill in that blank. In accepting the role as zone rep, I felt a sense of purpose: to save as many gardens as possible.

Last fall, I was invited to join the committee in Washington, DC, for our annual conference at the Smithsonian Institution. The relationship between The Garden Club of America and the Smithsonian, begun in 1987, is unique. GCA club members throughout the United States are invited to document gardens for inclusion in the Smithsonian's Archives of American Gardens. This collection is rich and varied—the Smithsonian seeks out not only the elaborate estate gardens of the past but also the many variations of gardens that we see today: vernacular gardens, urban gardens, rain gardens, drought-tolerant gardens... At present The Garden Club of America Collection at the AAG includes over 4,500 gardens, and the number grows each year.

I am inspired by the work of The Garden Conservancy, whose mission is to save and to share outstanding American gardens. But garden conservation is a moving target. As George Shakespear of the

Conservancy points out, "Gardens are living works of art. All works of art age over time, but unlike painting masterpieces or historic buildings, gardens also keep growing and changing. They are subject to weather and other natural forces, as well as manmade threats such as development or simple neglect." He continues, "Like endangered species of animals or plants, gardens can only be considered 'saved' at a specific moment in time. They may still be lost tomorrow. Saving gardens is an ongoing challenge."

These words underscore the importance of the GCA's work in documenting gardens for the Smithsonian. Archiving them, we secure for them some measure of longevity. Though development will claim some and weather and age will claim others, it is in our hands to ensure that our gardens will live on at the Smithsonian. This is a considerable achievement and a fabulous gift to posterity. My focus as Zone I rep has shifted from past to present, from sepia to Technicolor. After all, today's gardens are tomorrow's "historic gardens."

—Georgia Lee, Milton Garden Club, Zone I