



## WELLESLEY COLLEGE

### An Artist's Botany: A Botanist's Art

**H**anging in the corridor leading to Wellesley College's Greenhouses are 1,349 watercolor studies of plants by various artists. Very little is known about these botanical illustrations or the artists who made them. The only information found in the Wellesley College Archives is a single sentence in *the Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer* in 1907, which states that 1,700 watercolor studies of native plants were given by Helen Frances Ayres, of Medford, Massachusetts, to the Department of Botany that year.

Who was Helen Ayres? Who were the artists? What was the impetus to collect these watercolors? What prompted Ayres to give them to Wellesley College? After months of research on Ayres, her acquaintances, and her time, I have been able to piece together a rough outline of her life, although many questions remain unanswered.

Born in 1836, raised in the Greater Boston area and single all her life, Ayres attended progressive schools, received early training in art, became a teacher of drawing and painting, and took great interest in botany. In all of her watercolors the plants are recorded by their scientific names, most of the time with the places where they were found. This suggests botanical

documentation, rather than merely leisure art activities. Further evidence of this interest comes from her involvement with the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, her submission of botanical specimens to the Gray Herbarium at Harvard University, and her correspondence with botanist Walter Deane, a founding member of the New England Botanical Club.

Perhaps Ayres's interest resulted from societal influence as well as personal enthusiasm. Her life overlapped with the time when botany was transforming from a subject for women's leisure to a prestigious science in the United States. During the early to mid-19th century, when Ayres was growing up, botany had been considered an amateurish science and "essentially a study for women." Starting from the mid-19th century, however, efforts of American botanists like John Torrey and Asa Gray, many of whom lived in the northeast, changed the reception of botany and professionalized it.

With a handful of exceptions, the illustrations in Ayres' collection feature plants against a blank background, some on white paper, and others on tinted paper. The signatures include about a dozen artists, including Mrs. R, Miss Grinnell, Miss C. Clark, Mrs. Richards, Mr. Jack, Mrs. DeLong, Mrs. Stevens, Miss Robbins, Mrs. Paul, Miss Forbes, H.



This watercolor of *Ranunculus bulbosus* shows Ayres's artistic skill and botanic interest.

Kimball, C.R.W., and P.D. Gilbert. Most of the artists who signed their drawings were female. Some produced multiple works, notably Mrs. R., who was extremely prolific, while others such as Miss Forbes and C.R.W. only signed one or two works, although they might have contributed

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## NOTES **from the Director**

**G**reetings from hot, dry Wellesley! We had the driest summer on record, with only 3.92" of rain falling in Boston during June, July and August, combined with the hottest August on record. Trees generally are quite stressed, especially those hit hard by winter moth or gypsy moth caterpillars earlier in the growing season, forcing a second leaf-out. Many local gardeners abandoned attempts at veggie gardens, although those with the foresight to drought-train tomatoes with deep roots and infrequent watering are getting great yields, with little fungal disease in this year's climate. Reminds me of growing up in California!



D. Sommers

Ginger Simms '18 and Irene Galarneau '19 harvested lavender sprigs.

Under these conditions, it's impressive to see the resilience of many plants and established plantings on campus. I'm especially proud of the Edible Ecosystem Teaching Garden, where the tremendous diversity of plants has meant that something seems to thrive under any given conditions. The American persimmon is so loaded with fruit that we need to prop up the lower branches. The jujubes have grown a lot, show no evidence of drought stress in their glossy green leaves, and are fruiting for the first time. Chamomile, which I think of as a tough little weedy plant, had spread nicely last year but finished blooming and dried up much earlier this year. The Chicago Hardy fig, planted last year, scared us by looking dead



D. Sommers

Ginger Simms '18, Irene Galarneau '19 and Courtney den Elzen '17 planting an African keyhole garden this summer.

well into June, but then sent up some new shoots and is developing a handful of figs. Woodland strawberry is proving to be a wonderful member of the Fruit Woodland and Nut Grove understories, covering at least half of the ground and delighting June visitors with hundreds of very tasty berries.

This year's Research Technician, Tania Ahmed '16, has been taking data on the health and productivity of the EETG plants, as well as maintaining the garden with the help of summer interns Courtney den Elzen '17, Ginger Simms '18, Hanna Vaughn '19, Irene Galarneau '19, and Maddie Sorensen '19. Tania also is growing the fourth iteration of the "Farm in a Box" experiment, comparing organic vs. conventional approaches to growing carrots and spinach in replicate planter boxes. This long-term experiment once again is being used in multiple classes this semester. And the interns designed and implemented this year's Kitchen Garden, using crop plants commonly grown in Africa—a fun and interesting new theme for the garden.

Botanical opportunities for students continue to increase, with a tremendous leap this year thanks to two distinguished

alumnae. Maria Barlow '71 has created a unique Botanic Gardens fellowship in honor of her mother, Suzanne Kibler Morris '44 (see p. 6). And Wendy Paulson '69 has established an initiative that has faculty, staff and students all

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*Friends of*  
**WCBG**

WELLESLEY COLLEGE BOTANIC GARDENS

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## For Beauty, War or Cleaning up the Wetlands

Indian Shot, known to botanists as *Canna indica*, is a monocot in the Cannaceae family native to much of tropical South and Central America. It was named by Carl Linnaeus who thought it came from India ('*indica*'). While this beautiful garden perennial is heavily cultivated, the plant in our greenhouse is probably a species plant which means it is the wild, un-hybridized form.

*Canna indica* has diverse uses. The plant has been grown for centuries by indigenous people in Mesoamerica who roasted the edible rhizomes and wrapped tamales in the tasty, pliable leaves. Cannas are now cultivated widely as an ornamental in tropical regions around the world and many other uses have developed. Starch from the rhizomes is marketed as arrowroot, a food thickener. Fiber from the stems has been used as a substitute for jute in cordage and to make a tan paper; the seeds yield purple dye, and burning canna leaves are insecticidal. In remote regions of India cannas are fermented to make alcohol and used externally as a wound healer. Other medicinal uses of the root extract include treatment for diarrhea, as a diuretic and for "women's complaints." More recently, cannas have been grown in wetlands to treat industrial waste—the canna rhizomes absorb noxious organic chemicals and remove them from the ground water. The round, black seeds can be made into beads for jewelry, rattles in musical instruments or, if necessary, shotgun pellets. The heavy seeds sink in water and some think they are hard enough to shoot through wood. A BBC documentary says that during an 1857 rebellion in India against the British East India Company, soldiers might have used the seeds of *Canna indica* when they ran out of bullets (thus the common name Indian Shot?) What other plant do you need?

I am always interested in flowers that have parts that are difficult to define.



© Carol Govan

*Canna indica* is a really complicated flower where nothing is what it is supposed to be. Flowers are often described as regular (radially symmetrical, or like a wheel) or irregular (bilaterally symmetrical, or like your face—the same on each side though the tops and bottoms are different). The thing that intrigued me about canna is that it is not radially or bilaterally symmetrical. It is REALLY irregular with no symmetry.

It appears to have five colored petals (unusual for a monocot that is supposed to have parts in multiples of three) but they are really other structures. There are three colorful outer stamenodes (or sterile stamens). An inner stamenode is thinner with its tip bent backward. It is sometimes called a labellum, like the fancy part of an orchid, where pollinators can land. The fifth petal-like structure is a filament that is also flat and curled but attached to an anther containing pollen. This is the only fertile stamen. You can see the stigma and style of the pistil because it goes right through the center of the flower to the hidden ovary that will ripen into

the fruit. The fused real tepals (3 petals and 3 sepals) surround the bases of the fertile flower parts. Some sources even mention bracts and bractoles (extra stuff attached to the flower). As the flower ages all the parts fall off except the persistent sepals, revealing a beautiful 3-part capsule covered in warts. A canna can both cross pollinate and self-pollinate so we will definitely be able to find the black seeds inside the capsule. Since most of the plants in our greenhouses aren't visited by their pollinators, we seldom see seeds.

See what I mean? This is a beautiful, useful, complicated flower that has evolved interesting adaptations to reproduce.

by Carol Govan  
WCBG Friends Instructor

Information sources: Wikipedia, [cannanews.blogspot.com](http://cannanews.blogspot.com), [waynesword.palomar.edu](http://waynesword.palomar.edu), [naturalmedicinalherbs.net](http://naturalmedicinalherbs.net)

## It's All About the Journey

*A talk to family, friends, colleagues and teachers of the Certificate in Botanical Arts Program, by 2016 certificate recipient Susie White, at the awards ceremony on June 6, 2016.*

It's been quite a journey since I stepped into the greenhouse office in the summer of 2011. I was there to meet with Gail Kahn, assistant director of the Botanic Gardens, on behalf of my garden club. As that year's program chair I thought the group would be interested in a lecture on the history of botanical art, so we secured a date. Then I wandered into the classroom in which Sarah Roche was teaching a dozen women to paint, and I thought, I want to be there. By December I was in my first class, "Making a Holiday Card." I was in over my head but determined to continue. Well, it took a while, but now I am graduating. It's very exciting!

As I reflect back on my hours (and hours!) of time in the classroom, I want to share a few things I learned along the way:

### From Sarah, the program's education director:

One can be very proper British, and still very funny, silly and spontaneous. Although she said, early on in my career, in her British accent, "Neva, neva, neva paint from a photograph!" I did do it



A *Tillandsia stricta* hybrid illustration by Susie White.

© Susie White

sometimes as a reference, and it worked out okay. Who knew what "posh" paper towels were?! They are the most absorbent! Even better are the posh paper hand towels at nice restaurants, hotels and clubs. Sarah suggested that it was all right to take a few home from time to time! Be patient. Think things through. Layer color slowly. Finishing details are important. Anyone can learn to paint. Love of family and friends is what life is really all about.

### From WCBG Friends instructor Carol Govan:

Some people like to sketch, and some people don't. I am one of the latter! I am all about getting color on the paper. Observing every aspect of nature, every day, will provide you with a lifetime of learning enjoyment. Plants, and all their integral parts, are complex and intriguing. Carol may be one of the most knowledgeable students of botany I know. When someone is struggling with a class or concept, humoring them goes a long way in making the day a better one.

### From my fellow students:

We are from a wide range of backgrounds, careers, and locations: big families, small families; doctors, nurses, psychologists, chemists, landscape architects, interior designers, teachers, corporate business women and more. Some have lived around New England forever and others are new to the area. I live two miles from campus. With students commuting from as far as Maine and Connecticut, I knew I must take advantage of such an incredible opportunity so close to home. Observe those working next to you. How do they set up? How do they draw? What brushes and paints do they have? Study their finished work and learn from it. How do they lug around all those heavy and cumbersome supplies! And finally, it's fun to have a bag lunch in the classroom or in the garden or take a trip to The Kampong to "paint 'til you drop" and then wine and dine!



Susie White (l) received her certificate, hand painted by instructor Sarah Roche (r).

### And here's what I learned about myself:

I am patient, but only to a point. I definitely like color. Looking under a microscope and magnifying incredible flower parts is not as boring as I thought it would be. A dreaded 20-page research paper and PowerPoint project may end up being your favorite assignment of the entire Certificate Program. Layering watercolors in a controlled way can produce amazing results.

Painting may just be the thing I do for the rest of my life. It's all about the journey taking you to a destination unknown at the time, but to a place you want to be.

## A Very Lucky Bamboo

Lei Wei '16 approached the horticultural staff with a special donation last May—her lucky bamboo plant, which she acquired during First Year Orientation in the Fall of 2012 and had been nurturing ever since. Lei had a close bond with her plant, finding it calming to come into her room and have something living and green there. “Taking care of a plant is a responsibility, like feeding a pet,” she explained. And she discovered a correlation between the health of her lucky bamboo and how stressed she was. “If my plant didn’t look happy, it probably meant that I was not taking care of myself very well, either. My plant was a reminder to me to take a small break periodically.”

A California native, Lei left her plant in the Visitor Center to be cared for by the Friends of Botanic Gardens when she went home during winter and



Lei Wei '16 with her very tall, very lucky bamboo plant.

summer breaks in her first couple of years at Wellesley. For the last two winter breaks and summer break, Lei was on campus doing research, thus, able to be around to care for it. As she approached graduation though, Lei’s immediate future plans were not set. She may need to travel or relocate, depending on what she hears back from job possibilities in her chosen field of biochemistry on both the east and west coasts. Her solution was to donate the plant back to the greenhouses, with the hope that it would be passed on to another student.

As a first-year, Lei was drawn to the lucky bamboo because of its symbolism in Chinese culture of bringing good luck and tranquility to the household. “As the plant gets taller, your luck gets better,” Lei explained. If that’s the case, Lei is leaving Wellesley College with a good dose of luck indeed.

## Remembering Karen Pugh

Docent Karen Pugh passed away on May 23, 2016, having been diagnosed with multiple myeloma the previous August. Alongside a teaching career, Karen was an active volunteer for many organizations in the town of Wellesley and elsewhere. When she joined the Friends as a docent in 2011, her knowledge of the campus and its gardens, along with her education as a Master Gardener, meant that she needed little training before jumping in to give tours. Karen led tours for many different groups, but her special interests were children and disabled individuals. An active birder along with her husband Jim, she led bird walks during Reunion, an activity organized by the Friends. Karen’s unflappable disposition and love of the campus and its plants made her a great docent; her sense of humor and her easy laughter made her tours fun. She is truly missed by all of us who knew her.



Karen Pugh (light blue jacket) gathered alumnae and friends for her bird walk in 2011.

## Botany in the Largest Possible Sense

**W**e are thrilled to announce an exciting new fellowship in the Botanic Gardens, established in honor of Suzanne Kibler (“Susie”) Morris ’44, by her children, including Maria Morris Hambourg Barlow ’71. Susie Morris, a quintessential Wellesley woman, had broad interests in plants, landscape, geography, and art, and strong connections to the College, serving as a Trustee from 1986-1993.

The family specified that the fellowship should be “in botany, in the largest possible sense.” It was a great fit, as the Botanic Gardens (including the greenhouses) are intended as a resource for the whole campus and



Susie Morris '44 had broad interests in plants, landscape, geography, and art.

community. Botany at Wellesley connects science with art and the rest of the liberal arts, environmental sustainability and aesthetics. This fellowship will further develop the Botanic Gardens as places where nature meets culture.

The Suzanne Kibler Morris Fellowship enables one outstanding Wellesley student per year to deepen her understanding of and passion for plants and the natural world, through a creative project with the Global Flora or other Botanic Garden collections. Each project will interpret some aspect of the botanical collection, sharing it with fellow students and the broader community through the fellow’s own unique lens. The poem project of Johanna Lake ’09, connecting Robert Frost poems to particular spots in the Botanic Gardens, lives on in a series of poem snippets on plaques and an accompanying “Botany Walk” brochure, serving as a wonderful example.

Wellesley students and the wider community will be the beneficiaries—not just the Morris Fellows themselves, but all who will experience the gardens and plant collections in as many different ways as the Morris Fellows can imagine. A call for proposals has gone out, and the first fellow will be chosen shortly!

Susie Morris learned of this gift from her children shortly before she passed away at home on August 18, surrounded by family and with a clear view of her garden.

## Conference to Campus: Tree

**M**aps have the ability to take us on mental, emotional and physical journeys. They allow us to find destinations that we want to explore: whether around the globe or around the block to that new Mexican restaurant. The complex but user-friendly platforms that are possible in mapping today are beyond impressive! While many companies strive to build geodatabases, data repositories and other types of management systems to meet the diverse mapping needs of our society, Esri is the largest. Its geographic information systems (GIS) software and products are used for research, fire management, weather prediction, city utilities, facilities management, botanic garden planning, and much more.

From June 25<sup>th</sup> to July 1<sup>st</sup> this year, I was able to attend the Esri User Conference in San Diego with the help of a Friends of Wellesley College Botanic Gardens travel grant. Since the 1980s, Esri has been hosting this international meeting every summer to bring together the disciplines and experts that benefit from Esri products. The conference provided me with many professional and personal network connections. I watched and participated in presentations,

## Paulson Gift Establishes Ecological Initiative

**W**endy Judge Paulson '69, lifelong activist and chairman emerita of the worldwide conservation organization Rare, has a deep love of nature that grew during her time as a Wellesley student and that has driven her work ever since. She recently made a gift to the College to establish a five-year intensive effort that will transform and reshape Wellesley's relationship with its landscape. The initiative, which will inspire and prepare students to make a positive ecological difference in the world, will take full advantage of Wellesley's campus and global alumnae network to advance conservation and stewardship of biodiversity by connecting diverse, talented women to nature and to many different ways of working on nature's behalf.

"We are so very grateful to Wendy for this opportunity, and we look forward to partnering with her and her team as we collectively work to engage the campus community more proactively

with our magnificent landscape and the ecosystems it supports," said Cathy Summa, director of the Wellesley College Science Center. "This effort will help us reconnect with the founding vision the Durants had for the role the campus landscape plays as a key element for teaching and learning."

By using the beauty, diversity, and history of the landscape more intentionally to connect students to campus flora and fauna and to the natural rhythms of life outdoors, and by managing key ecosystems for research and other academic purposes, the initiative aims to make the campus an increasingly effective "living laboratory" and to empower students to take their ecological foundations into the world when they leave Wellesley. For the campus, this initiative will enable continual improvement of key ecosystems such as the Alumnae Valley constructed wetlands, providing support to study them and adapt management plans accordingly.

"Developing connections to nature and a stronger sense of place for all of our students is the proximate outcome we're aiming for with the Initiative," said Kristina



Picturesque Alumnae Valley is a wetland constructed to manage campus run-off.

Niovi Jones, director of the Wellesley College Botanic Gardens. "Reversing the reckless decline of ecosystem health and biodiversity globally is the ultimate goal, as graduates take their love of nature with them."

Reprinted in part from the *Wellesley News*, April 22, 2016.

## Map

workshops and demonstrations that broadened my interests and knowledge. I saw firsthand the almost infinite limits of both Esri software and the ability of maps to communicate groundbreaking topics. For example, in the large Expo room I flew in a computer simulation by Birdly. The 4D experience took me through New York City as if I were a bird. I could also ask questions about data systems that other universities use.

The Esri conference helped me with my summer job as well as my future career as a biologist and lifelong student. I have been able to create a user-friendly web map to which people can submit photos and comments about the 150 or so class trees on campus. The map is not live yet, but I hope it will be soon. Thanks Friends of Botanic Gardens for helping open this wonderful door!



Joy Price '17 (l) with Esri founder Jack Dangermond and two other Wellesley women, Sophia Garcia '15 and Alisha Pegan '16 at this year's conference.

by Joy Price '17

# Learn With Us

- \* All classes are held in the WCBG Visitor Center unless otherwise noted.
- \* For classes over the lunch hour, bring your own lunch or walk to local shops.
- \* Full course descriptions and material lists may be found on our website.
- \* Parking on campus is restricted to the Gray Lot.

To register for classes, use the form on page 11 or visit [www.wellesley.edu/wcbg/learn](http://www.wellesley.edu/wcbg/learn) and print a registration form.

## Family, Form and Function: Lectures and Greenhouse Walks with Carol Govan

Carol talks about the connections among related plants and how they express their genetic heritage in response to their environments.

Each lecture

Members Free | Non-Members \$10

## Succulents HOR 17 050

Friday, Oct. 21  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

## The Gingers and Their Relatives HOR 17 060

Friday, Nov. 18  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

## Planting Design HOR 17 101

Learn strategies to best lay out your garden planting plan in this lecture and classroom activity with landscape designer Christie Dustman.

Friday, Jan. 20 (Snow date: Jan. 27)  
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Members \$35 | Non-Members \$45

## Herbs for Stress HOR 17 070

There are many herbs that can help support us in making positive life changes. Herbalist Steph Zabel covers practical herbal remedies that can be useful in dealing with stress, anxiety and sleep issues.

Tuesday, Dec. 13  
1:00 – 2:30 p.m.  
Members \$20 | Non-Members \$30



## Landscape Design Studio HOR 17 102

This 5-session hands-on studio with Christie Dustman will help you work out a landscape design plan for your home.

5 Wednesdays: Jan. 25;  
Feb. 1, 8, 15; March 1  
(Snow date: March 15)  
6:30 – 8:30 p.m.  
Members \$110 | Non-Members \$135



## Painting: A Beginner's Beginning WCC 17 100

Have you never held a paintbrush, have no idea where to start, or feel confused about art supplies and media? Lynda Davis Jeha will help you experiment with basic painting techniques. All materials included.

4 Saturdays: Oct. 29; Nov. 5, 12, 19  
1:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Members \$135 | Non-Members \$170



## Introduction to Watercolor: Three Colors BAC 17 126

Join Jeanne Kunze in an art and paint exploration inspired by the interrelationship of paper, brushes, water and pigments.

4 Saturdays: Jan. 21, 28; Feb. 4, 11  
(Snow date: Feb. 18)  
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Members \$160 | Non-Members \$195

## Mark Making Techniques: Your Inner Doodle BAC 17 032

Jeanne Kunze encourages you to discover "your inner doodle" as a means of expression in this fun, non-traditional approach to interpreting the textures of plants using Micron pens.

3 Fridays: March 10, 17, 24  
(Snow date: March 31)  
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Members \$125 | Non-Members \$150

**Wine and Watercolors:  
A Social Sip and  
Paint Event  
WCC 17 010**

This event with Hillary Parker is for everyone, including those closet artists wanting a little “liquid courage” to pick up a paint brush for the first time. Bring your friends! Thursday, Jan. 12 (Snow date: Jan. 13) 6:30 p.m. Members \$45 | Non-Members \$55



**See Our Full Course  
Listing Online.**

More classes of interest . . . complete details online, in our program brochures, or contact the Friends office.



**Drawing in the  
Greenhouses:  
From Root to Tip  
BAC 17 140**

Enjoy this opportunity with Carol Ann Morley to capture some of the unique and beautiful plants in the Ferguson Greenhouses with graphite and colored pencil.



© Carol Govan

3 days: Friday, Jan. 6 – Sunday, Jan. 8 (Snow date: Jan. 9) 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. Members \$250 | Non-Members \$300

**Introduction to Scientific  
Pen Techniques  
BAC 17 144**

In this 4-week class with Ellen Duarte, you will learn the use of line quality, stippling and cross-hatching along with other Micron pen techniques. 4 Thursdays: March 30; Apr. 6, 13, 20 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Members \$150 | Non-Members \$200



© Ellen Duarte

**Volunteer With the Friends**

Share your love of nature and gardens with others by becoming a tour leader for the greenhouses. Free training sessions on Fridays from 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon: Oct. 28; Nov. 4, 11; Feb. 3, 10, 17 New docents are encouraged to participate in as many of the training sessions as possible. Pre-registration is required.

**Family  
Programs**

**Print a children’s art class  
registration form at  
[www.wellesley.edu/wcbg/  
learn/families\\_kids](http://www.wellesley.edu/wcbg/learn/families_kids)**

**Art Alive at the  
Greenhouses  
Arts Exploration:  
Ages 7-12  
CHP 16 101**

Each week aspiring young artists will have fun creating a different project using acrylic paints, watercolors, oil pastels, markers, pencils, different types of paper and unexpected materials. All materials will be provided. 6 Sundays: Oct. 23, 30; Nov. 6, 13, 20; Dec. 4 3:15 – 4:15 p.m. Members \$75 | Non-Members \$95



**Greenhouse Activities  
for Families**

Drop in at the Ferguson Greenhouses during school vacation weeks in December, January and February, where you can pick up activity sheets and scavenger hunts to help you explore the fantastic world of plants.



**Greenhouses are open daily  
8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

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more anonymously. Helen Frances Ayres never signed her name, but a monogram found on about ten illustrations represents her initials. The geographical range of the art covers a great number of places in New England and the East Coast, and includes states as far away as Ohio, Illinois, Florida, Oregon, and California. Towns that appear most often are Fitzwilliam NH, Medford MA, Pinehurst NC, and Magnolia MA.



Watercolors donated by Helen Ayres hang in the corridor outside the greenhouses.

Although only very few works contain Ayres's monograph, the handwriting of the inscriptions suggests that she created hundreds of watercolors in Medford where she resided, and Fitzwilliam, which she visited frequently.

The illustration of *Thalictrum dioicum*, whose 1867 date is the earliest in the collection, is not signed but the inscription "Medford" bears some resemblance to Ayres' handwriting. This illustration is of amateur level at best. The flowers look almost identical to one another without even the slightest variation in light and shade, and the leaves, in particular, are poorly represented. All leaves, regardless of their orientation, have the same lighter tone on the edges and darker paint near

the stem. The artist did not concern herself with representing the texture of the leaves or the impact of light on the colors.

Compare this with an illustration of *Ranunculus bulbosus* made in 1902, which demonstrates much more attention to detail and control of color. Again, this watercolor is not signed, but the handwriting is similar to that of a letter written by Ayres. If the assumptions about the artist are correct, then her skills in botanical watercolor dramatically

improved, for in *Ranunculus bulbosus* not only did the artist represent even the veins of the leaves with much more refined brushstrokes, but she also carefully shaded different parts of the leaves and flower, showing both the back and front sides as well as the effects of light.

The identity of the group of artists whose work is in the Ayres collection is still an unanswered question. Attempts to locate demographic information based on the combination of initials and common last names have met no success. However, there are a few hypotheses we could make about their identity. Since Ayres was an art teacher, this group might have been people who enrolled in art classes with her; the watercolors indeed reveal different levels of

artistic skill. Another possibility is that this was a small cohort of botanical enthusiasts who met regularly to create illustrations together and to share their individual works. Both hypotheses could explain why some watercolors were made in the same places, such as Fitzwilliam and Medford, but by different hands. Nevertheless, the speculations do not provide a satisfactory explanation for why the artists chose not to keep their works but left them in the possession of Ayres.

In 1907, shortly before her death, Ayres decided to give her watercolor collection to the Department of Botany at Wellesley College. We do not know why she gave the watercolors to Wellesley rather than Lasell Female Seminary, where she had studied, or another institution in the area, since no evident ties between her and Wellesley College have emerged. One possible reason is that at the time Wellesley had a robust botany program that was expanding under the direction of Margaret Ferguson, Professor of Botany after whom the Greenhouses were later named. According to Ferguson in "Botany at Wellesley", by 1882 the Botany Department had become "the best housed and best equipped department to be found in any college, man's or woman's, in the country." Notes from the Botany Department indicate that in 1908, Botany was the biggest science department in the college, with "unprecedented growth." Well connected with the circle of botanists, Ayres might have heard of the Botany Department at Wellesley College and decided to make a contribution to the thriving program.

Ayres's watercolors were an artist's botanic endeavors and a botanist's artistic pursuits. Given their aesthetic, scientific, and historical values, the watercolors in the collection of Helen Frances Ayres merit further investigation and conservation.

by Ningyi Xi '17

*Editor's note: This excerpt has been condensed from Ningyi's original essay, written for the Art History class, "Seminar in New England Arts and Architecture".*

**Director's Notes** *Continued from page 2*

over campus buzzing, and will deepen connections to Wellesley's famous landscape (see p. 7). You will be hearing much more about these fabulous developments in newsletters to come!



A ripening persimmon in the EET Garden.

Last but not at all least, planning for major renovation of the Science Center is off and running with a great design team: Roger Duffy's group from Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. A key objective is to integrate the Global Flora greenhouses into a science neighborhood that is much more welcoming and engaging for all students. Dean Ann Velenchik and Science Center Director Cathy Summa are leading the visioning and program prioritization processes for the Wellesley community thoughtfully and inclusively. I am participating in the faculty working group, and have great confidence in the team. Can't wait to see what shape this science neighborhood will take!

With best wishes for a beautiful fall season,

Kristina Niovi Jones, Director  
Wellesley College Botanic Gardens  
kjones@wellesley.edu 781.283.3027

**MEMBERSHIP IN WCBG FRIENDS**

A membership level of \$50 or above entitles you to discounts on WCBG Friends programs and discount admission to botanical gardens across the U.S. through the American Horticultural Society's Reciprocal Admissions Program. For an up-to-date list of participating gardens and for details on how to enjoy benefits, see: [www.ahs.org/gardening-programs/rap](http://www.ahs.org/gardening-programs/rap)  
**Your membership is valid for a full calendar year.**

My membership gift: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Gift Payment Type (*circle one*):

CHECK or MasterCard / Visa / AMEX

Acct. # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration date: Month: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_ CVV \_\_\_\_\_

Or **SEPARATE CHECK FOR MEMBERSHIP GIFT**

made payable to: **Friends of Wellesley College Botanic Gardens**

Or send your membership gift to the Friends online: [www.wellesley.edu/give](http://www.wellesley.edu/give)

**REGISTRATION FORM**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work/Cell \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

If applicable, Wellesley College Class \_\_\_\_\_ CBA student? \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this completed form and your payment to: **Friends of Wellesley College Botanic Gardens, 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02481-8203**

**COURSE REGISTRATION**

(See Programs and Classes Information and Cancellation Policy.)

Course ID #	Class title	Fee
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**SEPARATE CHECK FOR PROGRAM FEES**

made payable to: **Friends of Wellesley College Botanic Gardens**

*Friends of WCBG cannot accept credit cards for course fees.*

*Checks or cash only please.*

\$ \_\_\_\_\_



## Look for Fairies on Fiske Path

**F**airy gardens are popping up everywhere this year, in botanic gardens and sculpture parks, at garden centers, on Amazon! Now Wellesley has one too. As Gail Kahn, the Botanic Gardens assistant director, tells it, “the fairy village came about in this way: The two preschools (Child Study Center and Wellesley Community Children’s Center) are on Fiske Path right near the botanic gardens and the students and teachers are frequent users of that part of the gardens. They also come on walks through the greenhouses from time to time. For a long time, I’ve been wanting to acknowledge this constituency in a way that is age-appropriate, low maintenance and a good fit for our gardens. I especially wanted to have a place where the kids are encouraged to play creatively with natural materials. So I had the idea of a fairy garden and it really took off when I mentioned it to WCBG Friends instructor Katie Griffith and her daughter Violet. They enthusiastically undertook the project this summer.”



Katie and Violet Griffith built a fairy seating area sheltered by the roof of the fairy house.

Katie and Violet constructed their fairy garden in the woods conveniently close to the preschools where there are construction materials on site and kids are encouraged to make their own houses. The fairy garden consists of: a stump turned into a fairy house with a green roof and a small fairy seating area with a little fairy bird house; a large pine trunk converted into little houses with windows made of hydrangea wood and a door made of twigs; a second large pine trunk with just one little window on it (a fairy spy house?); a trail of white stones leading from the tree trunk door to the little structure; two signs—one in the fairy house area and one in the build-it-yourself area. Nothing from Amazon.

Katie recently reported that, “We finished the fairy house yesterday, and as we were leaving the area a couple of people walked by so we sort of hid in the bushes to see their reaction. They stopped for a bit and took photos! It was fun to see.” If you are in the neighborhood, come see for yourself, but quietly, in case the fairies are having tea.