

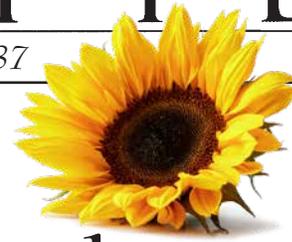
# Connecticut Horticultural Society

# NEWSLETTER

Volume 63, Number 5

Serving Horticulturists Since 1887

February 2021



## Lessons from the Land: The Legacy of Sub Edge Farm

By Jody Morgan – writer and CT Hort member

Connecting generations of farmers and educators, Sub Edge Farm straddles the Avon/Farmington line. Its legacy actually began some 20,000 years ago when the last glaciers retreated from Connecticut leaving behind some of the finest soils in the world. The land was tilled by Native Americans long before European settlers arrived.

Fast forward to 1636 when Reverend Thomas Hooker brought some 100 folks with him from Boston to Hartford prompted by displeasure with some of the Puritan prelates' policies. The colonists retained rigid requirements concerning weekly attendance at Sunday services. Stressed by treacherous winter travel to Farmington from what is now Avon, John Tilloston was among the 31 signers of the petition that granted the Society of Northington permission to form their own congregation in 1750.

The current farm was patched together piece-by-piece through the 1800s by Ashbel Tilloston (John's son) and his descendants. Deeds recorded early in the 19th century indicate the area where

the property stands already was known as "Old Farms." Tillostons continued to occupy homesteads in the vicinity of Lovely Street after Ashbel installed his progeny on the opposite side of the parish.

According to family lore, Ashbel built the 1820 farmhouse in anticipation of his son Hezekiah's marriage. When Hezekiah drowned at the age of 25, his older brother Seth brought his own bride to the farm. As a schoolteacher in West Hartford, Seth was not considered an appropriate match for the youngest daughter of a prominent Farmington family. Frances (Fannie) Whitman went ahead with the marriage and her family disinherited her. A Tilloston family remembrance states: "The farm was paid for by raising corn, and was a long and discouraging task."

When the Northington Society separated from Farmington to incorporate as Avon, the boundary was drawn through Fannie and Seth's land. Miss Bessie Tilloston relates: "When Avon was set off as a town in 1830, Fannie Whitman Tilloston used her influence to keep the new town line to the north of her house

so she could still live in Farmington." Consequently, her household would attend church in Farmington. Fannie possibly wanted to distance her side of the family from the Lovely Street branch.

Ashbel's nephews, Shubel and Romanta owned a sugar plantation in Louisiana. Every summer they brought 20-30 of their slaves in a parade of wagons to plant and harvest their crops. The West Avon Congregational Church didn't officially denounce slavery as "a violation of the law of love" until 1853.

Seth bought "the Bodwin place" a bit farther south in Farmington, but died in 1859, a year after building a new house there. Fannie deeded the property to their son John Whitman Tilloston and resided there until her death in 1890 at the age of 96. Despite already having five children and a wife to care for, John enlisted in the Union Army, serving in Company A, 12th Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers from December 1861 until the fall of 1862 when he was discharged disabled.

Hezekiah (1824-1908), John's older

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Connecticut  
Horticultural Society  
P.O. Box 330966  
West Hartford, CT 06133-0966  
(860) 529-8713

email: [office@cthort.org](mailto:office@cthort.org)  
website: [www.cthort.org](http://www.cthort.org)

Phone Hours  
Tuesday & Thursday  
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Barbara Skomorowski  
CT Hort Director of Communications  
[news@cthort.org](mailto:news@cthort.org)

*All announcements, advertising news  
and articles for publication should be  
sent to: [news@cthort.org](mailto:news@cthort.org).*

Send Membership Information  
& Direct General Questions To:  
Mary Anna Martell  
Office Administrator  
P.O. Box 330966  
West Hartford, CT 06133-0966

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## President's Letter

### Winter's Pace

Dear Members,

February is here and I am reminded that winter has its firm grasp on us. Winter is a time when we slow down, just as our New England landscape does. Surrendering to the rhythm of each season's developments and dormancies is to savor the secret of living well.

After listening to January's speaker Joseph Tychonievich, I chuckled at the gyrations I go through each fall to over-winter my treasured annuals in my basement. Last season, I acquired a Magnolia which has joined the group of Ferns, Begonias, Hibiscus, and an Olive tree that take up occupancy in the basement each winter.

The Symposium Committee, headed by Nancy DuBrule-Clemente, is gathering (virtually) to plan the 2022 event. Anyone interested in getting involved in the planning of this biennial tradition should let Mary Anna know by calling her at (860) 529-8713 or sending her an email at [office@cthort.org](mailto:office@cthort.org).

Our February speaker, Rodger Phillips will discuss what it takes to work the land at his local Sub Edge Farm. Rodger and wife Isabelle were selected from over a dozen proposals to lease the farm. They chose the name 'Sub Edge' in deference to the time the property was owned by Theodate Pope. CT Hort member and writer Jody Morgan has written a great article on the history of the farm which offers cognizance of how deep our farming roots reach here in Connecticut.

Warmly,  
Cheryl Marino

Thank you to our generous business members and contributors!

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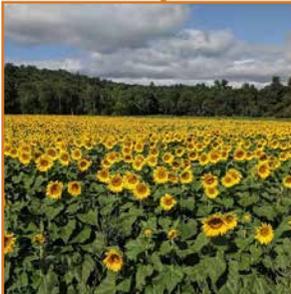
NATUREWORKS

White Flower Farm  
PLANTSMEN SINCE 1950

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The Garden Barn Nursery

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Rodger Phillips

# Farming the Land: Seven Years Growing on a Diversified Farm

with Rodger Phillips from Sub Edge Farm

Thursday, February 18, 2021, 7 p.m.



Rodger Phillips owns and operates [Sub Edge Farm](#) in Avon and Farmington, Conn. With his wife Isabelle and five children, the Phillips' family life is centered on the farm and the seasons. Sub Edge grows 20 acres of vegetables, fruits, flowers, and culinary herbs as well as humanely raised pigs, pasture-raised poultry, and 100% grass-fed beef. Their crop plan includes more than 150 varieties of certified organic vegetables, herbs, fruits and flowers.

The farm offers shares in a [CSA \(Community Supported Agriculture\)](#) and sells wholesale to local restaurants and schools. Sub Edge also has a farm shop that is open year round. Rodger brings his passion for good clean food to his growing and is committed to sustainable and organic farming practices.

As our February guest, Rodger will share the successes and challenges of working and managing a local, organic farm. He and wife Isabelle's proposal to steward the farm was chosen from more than a dozen others submitted to the towns of Avon and Farmington. Prior to working the land at Sub Edge, the Phillips's were trained on and managed a number of small farms.

## UPCOMING SPEAKERS IN 2021

The speakers we have scheduled for the upcoming season include farmers, designers and award-winning authors:

DATE	Speaker	Presentation
March 18, 2021	<a href="#">Karen Perkins</a>	Epimediums: Jewels of the Shade
April 15, 2021	<a href="#">Leslie Duthie</a>	Fronds with Benefits: Ferns from the Wild to the Garden
May 20, 2021	<a href="#">Tom Christopher</a>	Nature into Art: The Gardening Lessons of Wave Hill
June 17, 2021	<a href="#">Gordon Hayward</a>	The Inevitable Garden



### Speaker Feedback

After you attend a speaker meeting, please take a moment to tell us what you thought of the presenter. Your candid feedback helps us to arrange for speakers that will hold your interest. Take the five-question survey on our website – [cthort.org](#). Click on the survey icon found on any page then chose the speaker you want to rate. Thank you for your feedback.

“Lessons from the Land” from page 1

brother, lived with his family on the original property, adding to the farm until he held 309 acres by 1866. He was probably responsible for turning the enterprise into a dairy farm.



Theodate Pope Riddle

As a student at Miss Porter’s School in Farmington, Theodate Pope took long walks with a young teacher, Mary Hillard. They discovered the site where Theodate eventually created Hill-Stead on a ramble. Mary’s niece, Phyllis Fenn Cunningham writes in *My Godmother Theodate Pope Riddle*: “She envisioned a New England farm, complete with cows, sheep, pigs, chickens, and an ample vegetable garden. It would be completely self-sufficient, and for the first time ... she felt perfectly at home.” Years later, as the first woman to be licensed as an architect in Connecticut and New York, Theodate dreamed of making the New England farm a central piece in a progressive school for boys.

When Theodate’s father died suddenly in 1913, she began seriously planning to build a school honoring his memory. She married John Riddle on May 6, 1916. Despite disruptions from World War I, she carried forward her intention to design and found the school in Avon, buying up land in the Old Farms area including Seth & Fannie Tilloston’s farm.

Whether legend or fact, an incident described by Gordon Ramsey in *Aspiration and Perseverance: The History of Avon Old Farms School* concerning vetting a candidate to serve as gardener at Hill-Stead aptly illustrates Theodate’s ability to judge character and impose her will. “Mrs. Riddle sent for the gardener, and instructed him to plant six bushes in a

flower bed, with the leaves of the bushes exactly eighteen inches in the ground, and the roots straight up in the air. He willingly assented, though doubtless with thoughts that can be better imagined than described. His task completed, he returned to Mrs. Riddle to report that the bushes were ready for her inspection. The inspection completed, Mrs. Riddle turned to the gardener and said, ‘Good. You did exactly as I asked you to do, and you are hired. Now plant them right.’”

In *Dearest of Geniuses*, Sandra L. Katz summarizes the brochure inviting students to apply to Avon Old Farms when the campus opened in 1927. “Most unconventional in the curriculum were the activities on the farm, in the forest, and in the workshops, which Theo declared ‘will stress equally the development of mind and body.’ The boys would plant gardens, raise poultry, and work in the school’s dairy. In addition, they would be required to study the surrounding forest ...”

Brooks Emeny, son of Theodate’s favorite cousin Betty, recalls in *Theodate Pope Riddle and the Founding of Avon Old Farms*: “Always interested in education, she determined to focus her attention on that branch of training which stresses character development. She saw the sons of her friends returning home from school for the Holidays, ‘Pleasant little gentlemen,’ as she called them, ‘lacking initiative and willpower.’”

The Avon Old Farms Deed of Trust drafted in 1930 notes: “*The Founder believes that a boy who has never known the hardship of work on a farm, in a forest or in shops and has never experienced the joy of completing a task, even though it meant enduring physical discomfort, has been deprived of one of the most valuable experiences that life can offer for the development of character.*”

The Farm Manager needed expertise in practical farming as well as educating boys. “He shall be responsible for planning and overseeing the work of the students on the farm, in the stables and in the poultry run.” He was tasked with teaching “the elementary principles of animal

husbandry” while also giving “special attention to keeping up the quality of the herd, the sheep, poultry and other farm stock.”

The Forest Manager needed to be “a practical working woodsman, who shall be qualified to instruct the boys in woodcraft and in the elements of Natural History.” The care of the forest included cutting trees for cordwood and responsibility “for any destruction or waste of the flowering plants and desirable animal life.”



A number of issues caused the school to close during World War II. Theodate offered the campus to the US Army for the rent of \$1 per year. From 1944-1947, Avon Old Farms served as a convalescent home for blind veterans... A booklet produced by the Southern New England Telephone Company describes activities preparing veterans for careers. Once again the farm was a major resource. “Gardening is perhaps a new field of endeavor for the blind, but, with the aid of specially-equipped tools, it is a practical occupation that permits the boy from back on the farm to continue agricultural work and can give the non-farmer trainee an interesting hobby.”

Avon Old Farms offered land for sale to overcome financial problems when the school reopened. In 1954, Stanley Fisher bought 400-plus acres that included the original Tilloston farm straddling the Avon/Farmington line. The old farmhouse was lost in the 1955 flood. Not a farmer, Fisher employed Richard Merritt, who had leased the farm since Theodate’s death in 1946, to manage the dairy operation. Upon Merritt’s retirement in

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## “Lessons from the Land” from page 4

1988, Stanley’s daughter Diane Fisher Bell ran the farm long-distance from London. In “Bittersweet End to Family Legacy” (*Hartford Courant*, 5/6/2002) Stephanie Reitz notes: “Diane Fisher Bell speculates that her father, a businessman and developer, may have been entranced by the beauty of the open land and snagged it on impulse. Diane added, “There’s a magical feeling on the farm.” But hiring reliable help to keep the farm going became almost impossible.

In 2002, Farmington voters voted to purchase the land lying within their borders and Avon voters agreed to buy the remaining 318 Fisher Farm acres on their

side of the town line. Fisher Farm open land offers hiking trails accessible to the public described on the Town of Avon’s website.

Ronald Simmons leased the farm for the next decade. But the cyclical nature of the dairy market put him into financial difficulties. Isabelle and Rodger Phillips were selected from the dozen proposals received by Avon and Farmington to take over the lease. Honoring a name used during Theodate’s ownership, they decided to call their new enterprise Sub-Edge Farm. Organic produce grown at Sub Edge Farm is sold by subscription shares and in the farm shop. In non-pandemic times, visitors



*Sub Edge Farm Caretakers Isabelle and Rodger Phillips*

are invited to learn about farming and see the selection of heritage farm animals.

## Horticultural Happenings & Announcements

*Note: Happenings are listed on a space-available basis. To submit an event, send details to [news@cthort.org](mailto:news@cthort.org). Please format the announcement to resemble the entries below. Deadline for March issue is February 15.*

**Thurs. Feb. 4, noon – West Hartford Garden Club** presents **Jana Colacino**, Site Administrator of Butler-McCook House & Garden and Isham-Terry House. At 1 p.m. (following the business meeting), Jana will present an overview of CT Landmarks gardens in her talk, “**Historic Gardens of Connecticut.**” To register for this free Zoom presentation, go to [www.WestHartfordGardenClub.org](http://www.WestHartfordGardenClub.org) and you will be emailed the link to attend a few days prior to the presentation. You **must** be signed in thru the Zoom link no later than 1 p.m. to be able to attend.

**Weds. Feb. 17, 7:30 to 8:30 pm – Hardy Plant Society of New England CT Chapter** presents Adam Wheeler of Broken Arrow Nursery. Adam will discuss **The Magical Witches of Winter: A Closer Look at the Genus Hamamelis.** Open to members and guests. [Click for additional details.](#)

**Fri. & Sat., March 5-6 and Sat. March 13 – NOFA Virtual Winter Conference – Growing Our Community Through Essential Work.** See Keynote Speaker Karen Washington’s address on March 5 with additional workshops taking place March 6 and 13. [Click here for registration info.](#)

**Sat., March 20, 9 a.m. – Connecticut Master Gardener Association (CMGA) VIRTUAL Garden Symposium: Gardening Any Time, Any Place** Open to members and guests – \$60 for CMGA members | \$90 non-members. [Click here for additional details.](#)

ctnofa lists a number of interesting distance learning opportunities on their event calendar. [Click here to review.](#)

**Rutgers University Home Gardeners School @Home Edition** will air a series of one-hour online workshops. Continue learning from the comfort and safety of your home. [Click for more info \(including fees\) or to register.](#)

Upcoming classes:

– **Feb. 1-15: Bee-ginner’s Beekeeping: Basics of Apiculture**

– **Feb. 20, 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.: Prepare for a Blossoming Spring**

– **Mar. 11, 6:30 to 8 p.m.: Seasonal Planting for Honey Bees**

– **Mar. 24, 6:30 to 8 p.m.: Small Scale Queen Rearing**

**UConn Home & Garden Education Center (HGEC)** [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu). An invaluable horticultural information resource for novice and seasoned gardeners. At present, analysis of physical samples has been suspended but digital images can be sent to [ladybug@uconn.edu](mailto:ladybug@uconn.edu) along with description of symptoms or problems, and any other relevant information/questions.

**UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources (CAHNR) Blog** <https://blog.extension.uconn.edu/vegetable-gardening/>. Here you’ll find an abundance of information on current topics from COVID to Vegetable Gardening. Check link regularly as content changes frequently.

Visit [cthort.org](http://cthort.org) for the MOST CURRENT listings and links.

## Get involved in the planning of the 2022 Symposium!

The 2022 Symposium Committee is taking shape and now is a great time to join in the conversation. The biennial Symposium is traditionally held in early-February and provides gardeners with a taste of spring at a time when it is most needed. Headed by Nancy DuBrule-Clemente, the Committee is currently

working on defining the theme and narrowing down speakers to consider.

To get involved in this interesting and enriching CT Hort event, please email Mary Anna at [office@cthort.org](mailto:office@cthort.org) or give her a call at (860) 529.8713.

## CT Hort Travel



**2021 Philadelphia Flower Show**  
**Saturday-Monday,**  
**June 5-7, 2021**

***HABITAT:***  
***Nature's Masterpiece***

For the first time in its 200-year history, the **Philadelphia Flower Show** will take place outside—and CT Hort will be there! The backdrop for this year's show will be the beautiful, lush landscape of FDR Park in Philadelphia. Overnight accommodations have been made at the **Marriott Downtown**, in the heart of Philadelphia, just steps from Reading Market.

**SATURDAY** includes lunch and a guided tour of the **Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania**. The arboretum is a new kind of ornamental garden inspired by John and Lydia Morris' extensive travels through Europe and Asia and includes native and exotic flora and art from around the world. CT Hort's friend and past speaker Bill Cullina (formerly of Coastal Maine Botanical Garden) will greet us as he was appointed Executive Director of the Arboretum in 2019. Once we reach Philadelphia and settle in to our hotel, the welcome dinner will be held at Maggiano's Little Italy, conveniently located right next door to the hotel.

**SUNDAY** will be spent at the show. This year's theme, '[HABITAT: Nature's Masterpiece](#)' will explore the beauty

of life through nature's kaleidoscopic lens. Visitors should be ready to see exceptional beauty, learn from a diverse line-up of designers and leading horticulturalists and enter a new gardener-centric experience that invites everyone at all skill levels to nurture a lifelong connection to plants and gardening.

After the show, you'll enjoy a **private after-hours tour and wine & cheese reception at the [Barnes Foundation](#)**. The Foundation houses one of the finest collections of 19th and 20th century French paintings in the world. The museum's permanent collection features 181 Renoirs, 69 Cézannes, and 59 Matisse's, along with works by Van Gogh, Manet, Degas, Seurat, Prendergrast, Picasso and more, set among ground breaking African sculpture and Native American ceramics, jewelry, and textiles. Following the reception, we'll have dinner together at one of Philadelphia's great restaurants.

On **MONDAY**, it's back to the **Philadelphia Flower Show** to catch what you may have missed and to do some shopping. Lunch will be on your own before we head home.

A deposit of \$100 per person will hold your spot with final payment due April 16, 2021.

Cost: \$819 per person, double occupancy | \$999 per person single | **Non-members must add \$50**

# CT Hort Travel

## 2021 Christmas in Cape Cod Saturday-Sunday, December 4-5, 2021



We have wasted no time to reschedule this festive, fun-filled holiday weekend. Although unable to make this happen in 2020 due to state health restrictions in place at the time, this overnight was so well received that we have brought it back as the 2021 holiday trip. The weekend will be escorted by Brett Isaacson and includes:

### DAY 1:

- A stop in **Brown & Hoskins Country Store**—one of America's oldest country stores and it will be dressed for the season
- Enjoy an appetizer tasting at **Yoleni's Greek Market** in Providence—modeled after its flagship store in Athen's—followed by lunch on your own
- Arrive at the **Cape Codder Resort** in Hyannis in the afternoon with time to enjoy their incredible grounds, decorated as an enchanted village.
- Freshen up for dinner at the **Hearth & Kettle Restaurant**, known for its commitment to 'fresh, wholesome food, thoughtfully prepared.'
- After dinner the day is concluded with a visit to **Gardens Aglow** at the **Heritage Museums and Gardens** in Sandwich to delight in a 9-mile wonderland trail of lights, marshmallow roasting, music, and model trains.

### DAY 2:

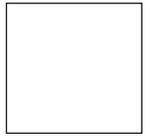
- Following breakfast, a local garden shop—**Country Gardens**—will host a workshop to make an air plant ornament. There will be time to shop as well.
- The historic **Dan'l Webster Inn** will be our spot for lunch before enjoying a live holiday cabaret performance by Jody Ebling.
- Before leaving the Cape for home, the final stop will be to the **Sandwich Glass Museum** to experience a **Glassblower's Christmas**. The museum will feature glass blowing demonstrations along with the creations of local Cape Cod glass artists.



A deposit of \$75 per person will hold your spot with final payment due October 1, 2021.

Cost: \$439 per person, double occupancy | \$519 per person single | Non-members must add \$50

**To reserve your spot or for more information, please call  
Friendship Tours at (860) 243-1630 / toll-free (800) 243-1630  
or visit [www.friendshiptours.net](http://www.friendshiptours.net).**



*Dated Material* 🌿 *Please Rush*

### CT Hort Calendar at a Glance

- Thurs., Feb. 4** – Board of Directors Remote Meeting, 7 p.m.
- Mon., Feb. 15** – Deadline for March *Newsletter*
- Thurs., Feb. 18** – CT Hort ONLINE Program Meeting, 7:00 p.m., Rodger Phillips, *Farming the Land: Seven Years Growing on a Diversified Farm.*  
Go to [CTHort.org](https://CTHort.org) to link to the meeting.

Printed on recycled paper.



*Justine and Sean Ramsey with baby Jack.*

*Jack Ramsey*

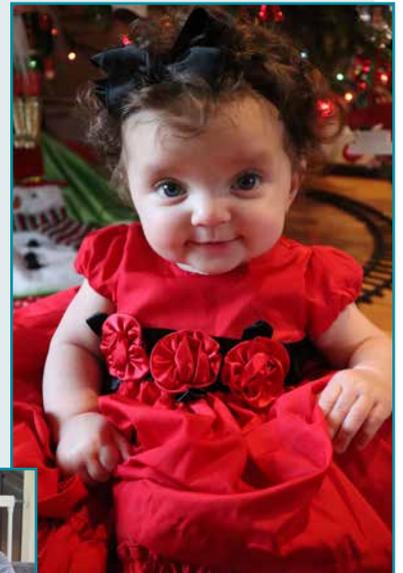


## Growing More than Plants!

We take great pride in announcing two recent births in the CT Hort family. Past-Director and current Chair of the Scholarship Committee, Christopher Tuccio and wife Karin, welcomed their third child in July of 2020. Rosalie joins older brother Chris (2 years) and sister Evelyn (4 years).

CT Hort Director Justine Ramsey and husband Sean, welcomed their first child on November 14, 2020. John Charles Ramsey is affectionately known as Jack.

Best wishes to the growing Ramsey and Tuccio families.



*Rosalie Tuccio's first Christmas*



*Siblings Chris, Evelyn and newborn Rosalie Tuccio. Miniature dachshunds Jasper (black) and Dash (brown) join the fun!*