

What is a NEHS Supported HEATHER Garden? The Fells

All NEHS supported heather gardens are public gardens. In most instances the heather garden was established and nurtured by private individuals. Such is the case of The Fells heather bed originally planted in 1931 under the direction of Clarence Hay, son of John Hay who was the Private Secretary to Abraham Lincoln and a leading politician and diplomat at the height of his career. Clarence Hay inherited his father's estate of 1000 acres with over a mile of Lake Sunapee shoreline in 1905. He and his wife, Alice, soon undertook the arduous task of turning the land into beautiful gardens, one of which was the Heather garden on the knoll over-looking Lake Sunapee. Over the years the estate was down sized. In 1960 the Hays donated 675 acres to the [Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests](#). After Clarence Hay died in 1969, Alice Hay gave the remaining 164 acres to the [United States Fish and Wildlife Service](#), reserving 143 acres for use during her lifetime and that of her children. Alice continued returning each summer until her death in 1987. The remaining land then became the John Hay National Wildlife Refuge.^[2] Renovation of the house and land began in the 1990s. In 1996, "The Fells", a [not-for-profit](#) organization, was created to manage the house and surrounding lands. In 2008, "The Fells" bought the lands surrounding the main house from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, in exchange for lands in northern NH.

The Northeast Heather Society first helped with the trimming of "The Fells" heather in April of 1996. Wow, that was 25 years ago. Viewing the archived Heather Notes which are available on this website, I found announcements of The Fells heather trimming dates every year up to the present inviting NEHS members to help trim. NEHS Spring meetings have been held at The Fells Gate House usually ending up with trimming the heather bed. Tours were held of the Hay Estate's many gardens. Never missing an educational opportunity the wise sages of the NEHS conducted Heather workshops and held a few Annual Conferences at The Fells. The NEHS has had a presence at The Fells through good growing years and bad. After the devastating winters of 2005 and 2006, The Fells 50 year old heather plants showed little life but fortunately the garden restoration plans included preserving the heather garden. In the spring of 2007, ten members of the Northeast Heather Society, along with Fells landscape staff, removed the dead heather and planted 90 new heathers on the knoll. Freely giving advice, providing volunteer labor and sharing sources for plants is how the NEHS supports The Fells Heather Garden. Today The Fells is maintained by a large group of volunteers as well as garden staff and administrators. The house and surrounding lands are still open to the public and The Fells hosts many cultural and educational events. A newly erected outdoor Pavilion over-looking the Heather and Rock gardens is a sure sign of The Fells commitment to the community and an investment in the future.