



The Secret Garden at Potter Place has a new plaque in honor of Bob Hamilton and Ken Reid who established the garden in the old cellar hole of Richard Potter's homestead. Photo: Lindsey Schust

New AHS Plaque Honors Bob Hamilton and Ken Reid

Located in Secret Garden at Potter Place

Lindsey Schust
Andover Historical Society

If you have ever visited Potter Place, you will have seen the knoll next to Richard and Sally Potter's gravestones. If you walk to the top of this knoll to look over the fence, you will see a mystical shade garden inside the old cellar hole from Potter's original homestead. The entrance to the garden is just off Cilleyville Road., and you might miss it if you didn't know to look for it.

Once you have been in the Secret Garden, you will always remember it because it is a magical place. As you stand inside the garden and look around at the beautiful plants and sculptures, you are surrounded by a stone foundation. How did this garden come to be? Who created it? I talked to Luan Clark and found out the story of the Secret Garden of Potter Place.

Richard Potter was a celebrated 19th-century ventriloquist and magician. He is known as the first black celebrity in America, and he and his wife Sally lived in Andover from 1815 to 1835. They built their home on the top of a knoll, in what was later named Potter Place in his honor.

In the Andover Historical Society archives, there is a photograph of Potter's house, from the early 1900s after it had been renovated by the Downes family. Unfortunately, the Downes' house burned to the ground in 1923. Today, there is no house on the plot of land, but you can still visit the original cellar hole of Richard Potter's home, which was magically transformed into a shade garden. Here is how it happened.

In the early 2000s, Kenneth Reid and

Robert Hamilton moved to Andover and quickly became a part of the Andover Historical Society. Pat Cutter was the president at that time, and she asked Ken and Bob to help revitalize the old JC Emons Store and Post Office, which are a part of the AHS museum on Depot Street.

As a part of their work, they redecorated and "re-established" the store, to make it feel more historic. If you visit the Emons store today, you might feel like you've stepped back in time.

While volunteering for the AHS, Ken kept thinking about the cellar hole of Richard Potter's home and how it might make a good spot for a shade garden. Ken had grown up on a farm and as he liked to say, "I never quite got the dirt from under my fingernails". Later in life he studied gardening in Pennsylvania and learned the art of transforming roofless stone farmhouses into sheltered gardens.

He recalled in a letter to the AHS that he tried to ignore the idea but it kept coming back to him until he finally embraced the challenge to transform the cellar hole. At that point, the cellar hole was far from "garden ready." In fact, it was packed full with rotting leaves, dead trees and branches, old rusty car parts, glass bottles and cans, and all sorts of rubble.

Ken's creative vision was so strong that he and Bob kept working on emptying out the cellar hole, repairing the stone walls, and replacing the floor with fresh soil. The cleaning-out process took almost two years to complete.

Once the interior of the cellar hole was prepared, they began planting shade plants. They received a donation of two large concrete planters which

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Donna Baker-Hartwell, of East Andover, took this picture of a fledgling Barred Owl, one of two, who visited her yard this summer. She noted that they are very curious at this age and respond to someone mimicking their call. She also pointed out how well they blend into their surroundings.

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