

Our Old House

178 South Central Street, Plainfield



Sometimes, all it takes is a story from a neighbor to begin uncovering the history of an old house. When my husband Gary and I purchased our home in 1987, longtime residents told us it had once belonged to a professor from Smith College and was locally known as “The Studio.” Years later, while working on the *Our Old House: Uncovering the Past* project, I decided to look deeper into that story.

By then, many of those “old timers” were gone, and tracing the history of 178 Central Street proved more difficult. While not as old as many of the houses in town, I was still curious.

The house started as a small summer home, and then hunting cabin, and over the years has been expanded to include more rooms, and a couple of outbuildings. The question was where to begin my investigation. The answer came with a search through the registry of deeds.

A deep dive into the deeds to our property showed the ownership as follows:

- 5/22/1911 - Charles E. Thatcher to Vernon Ellis
- 10/21/1919 - Vernon Ellis to Ruth C. Porter
- 8/18/1937 - Ruth C. Porter to Annette M. Garrett
- 10/10/1958 - Robert Hardman(Garrett administrator) to Bethalee J. Ahimari
- 11/01/1977 - Ahimari to Robert A. and Madeline C. LaValley
- 04/07/1979 - LaValley to Robert P. Cernak (by foreclosure)
- 11/03/1986 - Cernak to Hubert and Marie Grull
- 12/14/1987 - Grull to Gary and Lori Austin

After I searched all the previous owners on the deeds I discovered the following about one of the owners, Annette Garrett. Indeed, she had been a Smith professor, and being a Smith graduate myself, I decided to explore further and visited the Sophia Smith archives at Smith College.

Annette Marie Garrett (1898–1957) was a leading figure in twentieth-century social work education, whose teaching and writing helped define dynamic casework practice and the role of theory in the profession. Born on a Kansas farm, she studied at the University of Kansas and the University of Chicago before earning her M.S.S. from the Smith College School for Social Work in 1928.

After seven years in professional practice, including service as Chief of Social Service at the Judge Baker Guidance Center in Boston, Garrett joined the Smith faculty in 1935, where she remained until her death. There she played a central role in shaping the casework curriculum and supervising field training.



Ms. Garrett at home at 178 S. Central Street, Plainfield, MA

Working closely with director Florence Day, Garrett advanced a vision of social work grounded in psychological theory while maintaining its distinct professional identity. She was an early advocate for incorporating ego psychology into practice, while carefully distinguishing social work methods from psychoanalysis.

Renowned as a teacher, Garrett was admired for her clarity, insight, and intellectual rigor. Her principal works, *Interviewing: Its Principles and Methods* (1942) and *Learning Through Supervision* (1954), became influential texts in professional education.

178 South Central Street was Ms. Garrett’s summer home, a place to get back to her agrarian roots. One can only imagine the lively conversations that must have taken place here, with both her colleagues and students.

While there is much more investigating to do, it has been great to discover that such an important person as Ms. Garrett once graced the rooms of our old house.



Annette Garrett at her home at 178 S. Central St., Plainfield



Annette Garrett at Smith College

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