

Claire Wagner Tribute from Deborah Shapley on behalf of Restore Mass Ave
Memorial Gathering at Friends' Meeting House February 13, 2025

Claire joined the Restore Mass Ave Board of Directors in 2010.

Her first tree project was to assist in planting a red maple tree at the request of the Ambassador of Albania. The tree would be dedicated by the Albanian Foreign Minister who was coming to Washington to visit Michelle Obama at the White House. RMA and FOMP chose a site on the bluff of Mitchell Park overlooking S Street near that Embassy. Claire, I and the Albanian official met to figure the exact spot. I have a photo of Claire posing with her arms upraised pretending to be a large red maple tree.

She was dressed all in blue. One thing I learned from Claire was how many shades of blue there can be!

Claire always wore blue. But RMA's project color is green! Claire tolerated this.

She became RMA Treasurer in about 2012. She remained in the role up until her stroke in December. She presented monthly financial report at every monthly meeting.

Claire guarded our finances with precision. She was skeptical and sensible; she trimmed some of my wilder ideas, for example. She helped Board debates get to the point.

She was imaginative about getting things done. She was tough; she bargained with contractors - including the landscaper many of you know. "I can get his price down," she said. He lowered his price. She and Pierre loved being in Nature.

She fulfilled the Board Members' key role of representing Restore Mass Ave in the larger world, with unmatched elegance. She will be missed.

I take this occasion to recognize all of our Board. Five founding Board Members are still on. Many so-called late joiners have served ten or more years. Holly started the practice of meeting monthly, which we do almost year-round. Each person does their job or brings their expertise to these sessions. The strength of RMA is not me but the Members of the Board. They are pillars.

Okay. Not pillars. How about ... each RMA Board Member is a tree! Together we're a grove! We have roots in the ground and strong, tough trunks. (Claire was very tough.) We have branches reaching into the larger space of embassies, city forestry, historic preservation, green education, etc.

Happily, the streetscape is being transformed to look like us. In many places the trees now work together to re-green Embassy Row! But we have a lot still to do. Donations and in-kind help are needed. On restoremassave.org you are welcome to visit the donate page. Our prize-winning booklet is available for you to take home.

I close by noting that one of Claire's first projects was to get a wood frame and backing for the enlarged 1913 photo so we could display it at events. This remarkable photo was taken in 1913, near here in the 2000 block of Mass Ave.

It shows the double row of American linden trees that the city planted in the 1880s for five miles on both sides of the Massachusetts Avenue thoroughfare through town. Restore Mass Ave is re-growing the double tree rows for just two miles, the historic Embassy Row segment from Dupont Circle toward Wisconsin Ave.

Claire said: "No matter how many times you look at this picture, you still feel inspired."

The photo - and we hope our project to recreate this landscape - speaks to the spirit.

In the restored rows of trees along Mass Ave, Claire's spirit will live on.

Deborah Shapley

Founder and President



Claire Wagner
RMA Benefit at Costa Rica
Ambassadorial Residence 2013