



Invitation to an Open Discussion of Our Organization's Name February 13, 2021, at 7:00 PM EST via Zoom

On December 4th, 1895, William G. Farlow wrote to his colleague George G. Kennedy to ask "*Whether or not it is possible to unite those most interested in the study of our local flora into some sort of society...*". After two organizational meetings of the invited group, they convened on February 5th, 1896, and officially founded the New England Botanical Club, with Farlow serving as the first President.

On February 5th, 2021, the New England Botanical Club celebrated the 125th anniversary, which is a remarkable accomplishment and an ideal time to reflect on the club's history, as well as look forward to ensuring our organization's continued vitality and relevance over the next 125 years.

As part of our discussions on this topic, the New England Botanical Club Council is seeking input from membership on an important and significant issue: the name of our organization. To this end, the Council invites all NEBC members to a virtual discussion on **Saturday, February 13th at 7:00 PM EST** to contemplate the possibility of changing the name of our organization to *The New England Botanical Society*.

This open, non-binding discussion will be to assess NEBC members' views on this issue and to share Council's rationale for raising the possibility of a name change at this time. Some of the key issues leading Council to bring this topic to membership for discussion are outlined below. Following the open discussion on February 13th, a non-binding online poll (**February 14-25**) will be circulated to all members to collect as many perspectives as possible. Council will consider bringing forward a formal proposal and calling for an official vote of membership on the name change issue at a Special Meeting of NEBC to be held on **Saturday, February 27th at 7:00 PM EST**. Council is calling this Special Meeting to vote on revisions to the NEBC Bylaws, including the possibility of a name change. The Bylaws were last updated in 1996 and changes are proposed to better reflect our current and future operations. Members will receive a separate email with materials detailing the proposed updates to our organization's Bylaws.

In the sections below, we present a series of points that have led Council to bring the question of a name change to membership for feedback and discussion.

What's in a name?

Although a name change for NEBC might seem superficial for those of us who know the organization from the “inside” and are already familiar with its scientific mission, activities, and resources, this view does not take into account the critical importance of how the organization is perceived from the “outside.” We do not always have the opportunity to interact with potential members to explain the true nature of NEBC. In order to better reach and recruit new members and to maintain our existing membership, formally adopting “Society” for our organization could be a valuable step. In parallel to this possible name change, we are already increasing efforts to engage with potential members through a new website in development, increased presence online and on social media, expanded field trips and workshop offerings, and better publicized awards programs. The Council believes that these efforts on behalf of NEBC might be boosted even more with the adoption of a new name for our organization: *The New England Botanical Society*.

We do not take this proposal to change our organization's name lightly, given NEBC's long history. However, we feel that the 125th anniversary of The New England Botanical Club is an appropriate time to reflect and to envision how our organization's success might be best ensured into the future. Adopting the name *The New England Botanical Society* could better serve the organization in maintaining a vigorous, growing membership, as it would more accurately project the true nature of our organization in terminology that is readily understood by modern academic and other professional audiences.

NEBC already functions as a “scientific society”

Since its founding in 1896, The New England Botanical Club has been a vital organization, bringing together professional and amateur botanists from across the region. The mission of the organization, as affirmed in the new Mission Statement adopted in 2020, is “to increase the scientific knowledge and appreciation of the flora of New England.” To this end, the organization publishes the peer-reviewed botanical journal *Rhodora*, maintains an herbarium collection of over a quarter million sheets at the Harvard University Herbaria, hosts a monthly botanical lecture series during the academic year, coordinates botanical field trips and forays across the region, and distributes awards and grants for botanical research (totaling almost \$20,000 in 2020 alone).

The mission, activities, and resources of NEBC described above align closely with what would commonly be understood and recognized today as a *scientific society*, not unlike other regional and national organizations, such as the Connecticut Botanical Society, Josselyn Botanical Society, Torrey Botanical Society, Southern Appalachian Botanical

Society, Botanical Society of America, and the Ecological Society of America. Although most members of NEBC are fully aware of the organization's nature and functioning as a *de facto* "scientific society," this aspect of NEBC is not readily apparent to those outside the organization, particularly undergraduate and graduate students, junior faculty members, and other botanical professionals who are new to the New England region or just beginning their careers. For these prospective members, the term "club" appears to be outdated and to have several negative connotations, ranging from informal, amateurish, or unprofessional at one extreme, to exclusive, private, or unwelcoming at the other. In contrast, the term "society" is widely used by organizations like NEBC and is easily recognized, even expected, as the standard descriptor for scientific organizations that students and young professionals regularly seek out as a venue to connect and network with others who share their scientific interests.

A series of informal surveys of non-members conducted in 2018 confirmed this perception. For example, a group of biology and plant-focused undergraduates at Smith College, who were not aware of the organization's current name, overwhelmingly preferred "society" as appropriate for an organization that undertook the activities described for NEBC. These trends were also apparent, and even stronger, for botany and ecology-focused graduate students and junior faculty members from across the Northeast region: many found the "club" name to be mismatched to the described mission, activities, and resources of our organization.

Relevance to current members, officers, and awardees

In addition to the negative connotations of "club" perceived by non-members who we hope would seek out and join NEBC, our name is also a concern for some current members and officers, as well as recipients of awards from NEBC (e.g., Graduate Student Research Award, Junior Faculty Award). Membership, service, and awards associated with an organization bearing the name "club" have been viewed less favorably or with less distinction than those from other scientific societies. This is true for academics and other professionals alike: academic review boards, as well as employers, do not understand or ascribe significant value to involvement or service to a "club," while participation in a scientific "society" is viewed positively and with more prestige. This is especially a key issue for aspiring and early career botanists seeking to build their credentials, and for NEBC's ability to attract and retain members and officers.

Peer organizations have already made this change

Two of our peer organizations in the eastern U.S., the Torrey Botanical Society and the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society, formerly known as Clubs, adopted name

changes to Society in the 1990s. Reports from these organizations suggest that the name changes were made precisely because of concern about how the “club” name reflected poorly on the organizations’ missions, activities, publications, and memberships.

In Conclusion

In bringing this question to membership, Council is not proposing to change what NEBC is and does, just proposing a name that better describes what we already are.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important issue, and we encourage all members to participate in the open discussion, online poll, and formal vote in coming weeks.

New England Botanical Club
Council 2020-2021

ZOOM INVITATION TO OPEN DISCUSSION

Topic: NEBC Open Discussion on Organization’s Name

Date and Time: February 13, 2021, 7:00 PM Eastern Standard Time

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/98845538584>

Meeting ID: 988 4553 8584

One tap mobile

+19292056099,,98845538584# US (New York)

+13017158592,,98845538584# US (Germantown)

Dial by your location

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Germantown)

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

Meeting ID: 988 4553 8584

Find your local number: <https://zoom.us/u/adKxNNXCOj>

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NEBC WEB SITE: <http://www.rhodora.org/>
[New England Botanical Club brochure](#)

[Mission and Vision Statements](#)
[Strategic Goals for 2020-2025](#)