

To be given to a Garden Club member

HISTORY OF THE GARDEN CLUB OF WARREN COUNTY

On June 29, 1929, the Garden Club of Warren County was officially organized after a preliminary meeting held ten days earlier to discuss the formation of a Garden Club. Of the original ten women only Mrs. Browne and Mrs. Weaver have been continuously on the active list. Mrs. Major was present at the preliminary meeting but did not join the Club until 1935. There were only seven present at the first meeting but they certainly had action; not only did they elect five of their number to be officers but they adopted a Constitution.

The first business brought before the Club was the subject of refuse dumped promiscuously along roadsides. There are frequent references to this nuisance in the minutes for some years and reports by the Chairman of an interview with the Mayor, Council, and Supervisors. It is reasonable to believe that the establishment of a Town Dump was the direct result of Garden Club efforts.

In the early days the meetings were on 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the months from April through October and on the 4th Thursdays of the other months. But planning so many programs proved too difficult and in 1936 the extra meetings were given up.

During the first summer a motion was adopted to have a competition in flower arrangements at each meeting. These arrangements were to be judged by any three members not exhibiting and, since all were equally ignorant, that was, perhaps, a good plan. For some time, each year showed changes in the method of judging. The second Historic Garden Week of the Garden Club of Virginia was in 1930 and our Club went on an all-day tour to visit such places as were within reach in Clarke County and Loudoun County. It was an excursion well worth repetition. That year we had the first invited speaker

at the Club, Mr. Burson of the Waynesboro Nursery; and Mr. Burson appeared frequently in our later records.

Late in 1930 the Garden Club was asked for suggestions for making the Park-given to Front Royal by Colonel Millar-more useful to the public. A committee visited the Park and made some suggestions but nothing was done to improve the Park; and, when in 1950, the site was given for the Warren Memorial Hospital, it was the privilege of the Garden Club to undertake the landscaping and care of the grounds and that same Mr. Burson was called to make plans for that project.

Ten dollars were spent for improving the appearance of the triangle at the junction of Royal Avenue and Chester Street where a piece of artillery stood as a memorial of the World War in a neglected weed patch. Later the Town took the plot over and the cannon was returned to the Government at the beginning of World WarII.

The Club was interested in plans for improving the appearance of the Court House grounds; \$20.00 was spent in 1931 for that purpose.

Our first Flower Show was held in the Court Room of the Old Court House on May 31, 1930. The schedule had 30 classes, only two of which were for flower arrangements. Our Scrapbook contains a very amusing newspaper account of what was to us a serious affair. Very few of the members had ever been to a Flower Show and the schedule and staging furnished many problems.

During the summer of 1930 the Club sponsored the first of many competitions, all of them aimed toward making the public more garden conscious. In November, 1930, the Town Council asked the Garden Club to sponser a contest for the best outdoor illuminations; it was the first one ever held in Front Royal and there were over

fifty entrants. Prizes were donated by the Electrical Supply Company. The meeting of April, 1931, was considered the most instructive in our history up to that time. The Mayor, the newly appointed Town Manager, and Mr. Burson each gave a talk on town improvements. Mr. Burson said Front Royal had the most beautiful setting of any town he knew and had the worst approaches.

The second Flower Show was held in the Court House and there were 54 entrants, which indicates a good deal of interest outside of the Club. The Show in 1932 was held in the old brick house on Chester Street, then vacant, which is now Scott's Funeral Home. The Show, staged in several large rooms on the ground floor, was unusual and attractive.

The Show in 1933 was the first one to be held in the auditorium of the School; that was the best room in which I have ever staged seen a show staged. The only drawback was that we had to put the show very late in the season after school had closed. Several other places were tried but the shows always came back to the school until it burned down.

In the third year it was recommended that the Club adopt a Questionnaire to be filled out when submitting a name of membership; up to that time the election of members had been distinctly informal. At an early meeting Mrs. Aubrey Weaver had proposed five names and all were elected unanimously on the spot.

As early as 1929 the subject of billboards came before the Club. Reports of many Roadside Beauty Chairmen show how continuous and how active was the interest in this subject.

In 1936 a formal Resolution was adopted; we had it printed and distributed from house to house with literature about a Garden Contest. There is a copy of this Resolution in the Club Scrapbook.

Almost every spring there were tours of members' gardens in the early years of the Club, and we never failed to visit the garden of the hostess at each meeting in the growing season.

1932 was the bicentennial of George Washington's birth and throughout the country there was a movement to plant commemorative trees. The Garden Club of Warren County voted to take part in the movement and the white pine in the Post Office yard, planted with official permission of the Post Office Department, is the result. A small bronze marker was put by the tree to explain its object but it was pulled out of the ground by vandals almost at once; however, the Postmaster rescued it and later it was imbedded in a concrete post, sunk deeply in the ground, and is still there. We understand that plans for enlarging the Post Office will do away with the handsome 30-year-old tree, which is regrettable.

In 1932 six Garden of Club Members were opened to the public for two days; there was a charge of twenty-five cents to visit all six. There must have been a good deal of interest as the Club realized \$15.00 from the tour. In that same year the Club undertook one of its major civic projects known as "The Reclaiming of Happy Creek". Our enthusiastic Committee worked day after day with the help of two men to clear away the trash and several truckloads of junk were hauled away from the banks and beds of the creek. Trees were planted and quantities of hardy flowers were put in along the banks. A committee for this work appears in the Yearbooks for ten years but it was finally given up as hopeless. People living along the creek cut down the trees and pulled up the flowers, high water washed still more, and the creek continued to be a dumping place for old tin cans and worn-out tires.

There had been interest in planting street trees ever since the Club was organized but we were advised to wait for the laying of curbs and other improvements. In 1932 we set out 24 Chinese Elms on Royal Avenue. These trees were the selection of the Town Authorities and we could not know that Chinese Elms would be frowned upon in the future.

We promoted an interesting ceremony on Armistice Day, 1932, in which the Flint Hill Community Garden Club of Rappahannock County, the Piedmont Garden Club of Fauquier County, and the Garden Club of Warren County took part. For generations three stately chestnut trees had stood near the highest point of Chester Gap where corners of these three counties came together—one tree in each county. These had been destroyed by the chestnut blight and it was arranged that these other Clubs join with us in planting white oaks to perpetuate the landmark. There is a full account of the ceremony in the Scrapbook. The trees had every care, were supported by guy wires contributed by Mrs. Forsyth, fenced to protect them from cattle, and mulched several times with manure contributed by the Commanding Officer of the Remount Depot. The soil was rocky and the situation dry and windswept but the trees lived until 1946 when the highway was relocated and the entire mountain was cut away, trees and all.

In mid-December of 1932 there was an all-day meeting, which would now be called a "Work Shop", to make Christmas wreaths which were displayed ~~would-new~~ for sale in a window on Main Street. This was planned largely to show what could be done without using evergreens which should be protected. The sale brought in \$14.50 and, since everyone had enjoyed the day, the project was repeated the following year with a somewhat larger profit.

In 1933 the Club declined an invitation of the Spottswood Garden Club to propose the Garden Club of Warren County for membership in the Garden Club of Virginia. It was felt we were not ma ture enough for such a step.

In the Town Manager's annual talk to the Club that year he told of plans for parking areas in town to provide for the expected motorists when the Skyline Drive was completed. He also told the good news that the Town had purchased an unsightly ware-house on Royal Avenue between the Methodist and Baptist Churches and would build a handsome Town Hall on the site.

Mrs. W. E. Carson was Program Chairman for the year 1933-34 and through her many contacts the Club had oppo rtunities of visit- ing a number of places of great interest. In September we went over the newly opened Skyline Drive, to Skyland, for a visit to the beautiful wild garden built on a rocky mountain site by Mrs. Judd- many flowers, ferns and shurbs had been naturalized with charming effect and the superb view of the Shenandoah Valley from that height was new to us all. Through the kindness of Mr. Carson we were priveleged to visit the Camp on the Rapidan, built by Pres- ident Hoover, on that same day. The next spring the Club had a private view of Gunston Hall; the house with all its treasures and the garden were shown us by Mr. Hertle, the owner. His complete knowledge of the history of the place made the visit especially memorable. Later that day we visited George Washington's mill, the reconstruction of which had just been completed. Much of the material used in the reconstruction had been taken from a very old mill in the "Fort Valley" in Warren County, which gave it an especial interest of us.

The Club contributed a small sum toward the printing of Conservation literature by the Garden Club of Virginia and later distributed much of it among local school children. In line with that, one of our members gave a talk at the High School on Conservation and the protection of wild life. Another talk to school children in 1934 was on the simplest rules of flower arrangement with an accompanying demonstration.

In our seventh year it was proposed that we adopt a Club Flower. Several were suggested and discussed and the Lily was chosen by vote; the Yearbook for that year is the first to show a lily on the cover.

In the summer of 1935 our record for contests reached its peak. There were four going on at once: (1) for improvement in members' gardens, (2) the usual porch-box contest, (3) a prize offered for the handsomest climbing rose visible from the street, and (4) the first contest for improvement of yards among our colored citizens. This last was prompted by the fact that the new highway from Washington would come through that section and we hoped to stimulate interest to improve that approach. The prizes were awarded in one of the colored churches with a number of Garden Club members present.

In 1936 we received the plans for planting around the new Court House at the cost of \$150.00, payable in three installments. At the time our Treasury contained \$44.00—so there was a period of the strictest economy.

At the Annual Meeting in 1936 there was a change in the Constitution to include a Corresponding Secretary in the list of Officers. In that year there was a second contest among colored people, the Club Scrapbook was established, and Warren County made

its debut in Inter-Club Arrangements, winning an honorable mention at Leesburg. That was the summer of our most ambitious contest, one for improvement of the grounds on Royal Avenue, a main approach to the Skyline Drive. The Club was gratified to receive letters from the Town Council, the Rotary Club, and the Lions Club complimenting the Club on results.

There were two "Quiz" programs mentioned in the minutes at different times; one for the most correct naming of the foliage of 24 evergreens--won by Mrs. John Downing with 21 correct; and another when each member was given a list of the horticultural names of 27 most familiar garden flowers to supply the common names--this was won by Mrs. Rosel who was attending her first meeting as a new member. It did not speak too well for the old members!

For the ninth year the Program Committee divided the Club membership into Study Groups, each group to furnish a program during the year--and the programs were interesting, original, and well worked out.

In 1938 we won our first blue ribbon in an Inter-Club Class at Purcellville; there are photographs of the entry and the silver challenge bowl, won for a year, in the Scrapbook.

At the Annual Meeting in 1939 Colonel and Mrs. Whitside presented the Garden Club with a beautiful silver bowl as a memorial to Dr. Lyle F. Hansbrough; this is still our most cherished trophy.

In 1939 members of the Garden Club of Warren County for the first time attended a class for Flower Show Judges at Blacksburg. None of these four were ever able to continue these courses and

it was not until many years later that we were able to boast of an Accredited Judge on our roster.

In September our Club was invited by the Winchester-Clarke Garden Club to take part in an Inter-Club Impromptu Arrangement Contest with four other clubs, held in a garden in Berryville. There were three classes and every club had a team for each class. Each team was to select flowers from large tubs full provided and make an arrangement in the allotted time. It was a re-letter day for Warren County as our arrangements won all three classes.

The December meeting of 1939 was an innovation, being held in the evening, at the Hotel Royal. A special class of Christmas decorations and a program of slides provided interest for the husbands who were guests of the evening.

At the January meeting in 1940 the Club received a most valued gift—a hand-turned gavel—from the Stossel Company, which is still in use at every meeting. That year the Club furnished 50 dogwood trees and 50 redbuds for planting along the John Marshall Highway; the State furnished an equal number and planted all of the trees. It ~~is~~ is distressing that none of them survived.

In July of that year the Garden Club of Fauquier-Loudoun offered to sponsor the Garden Club of Warren County for membership in the Garden Club of Virginia; this was seconded by the Winchester-Clarke Club. We took some time for thought and discussion and, after a month, filled out the questionnaire which was forwarded with the application by our sponsors. In June, 1941, the notification was read to the meeting that the Garden Club of Warren County had been admitted to membership in the Garden Club of Virginia, so bringing to us greater opportunities as well as greater obligations.

PART TWO

Such a vast amount of work has been done since this Club was admitted to membership in the Garden Club of Virginia in 1941 that it is only possible to outline our most important activities to bring the present membership up-to-date with Club history.

During those first War years Club activities were, naturally, much curtailed. Each individual member was giving all possible time to such War efforts as the Red Cross, the U. S. O., etc. The Garden Club of Virginia adopted as a special project to give aid to the French village of Ver Sur Mer which had been almost destroyed--and our Club responded generously to a request for clothing.

After admission to the Garden Club of Virginia we immediately set up the three required Test Gardens--for roses, lilies, and narcissi; our Club has never failed to have entries in every annual narcissus and lily show. There have been seasons when roses could not be exhibited but we have taken our share of awards. In addition, talks have been given from time to time by the Chairman of the Test Gardens to our own and neighboring clubs on the culture of the collections. Delightful programs given by study groups have continued at intervals and these, too, have often been carried to other clubs. Seasonal radio programs have been a continuing source of information to our local community in the field of Horticulture. For many years we conducted spring Plant Sales in an effort to make reasonable plants available to the public. When the Ten-Cent Stores and Supermarkets began selling plants, we gave up our sales. Active efforts have continued toward tree planting, and to promote legislation for the preserving of the dogwoods, and the restriction of billboards. Every year the Club sends an outstanding high school student for a week at a Nature Camp,

sponsored by the Garden Club of Virginia.

In 1950 we joined the National Capitol Garden Club League, as a Charter Member, and at first some of our members took quite an active part in their big Flower Shows; but by 1963 the cost was higher and the benefits seemed fewer, so our resignation was put in and accepted.

In 1942 Mrs. Browne was made Tree Planting Chairman for the Garden Club of Virginia and, when that term expired, she was appointed to the Board of Directors for three years. In 1958 to 1960 we again had a State Chairman when Mrs. Joyce was made Chairman of Horticulture.

It has been our privilege to have four Presidents of the Garden Club of Virginia and two Ex-Presidents as speakers before our meetings, once with the Winchester-Clarke Club also as our guests for the afternoon; and on another occasion the Garden Club of Warren County was invited to a meeting in Winchester to hear a talk by the State President.

In the Spring of 1949 seventeen of our members took advantage of the delightful tour organized under the Garden Club of Virginia to visit southern Azalea Gardens. The party lived for a week on a most comfortable private train. There was a day in Mobile, two days in New Orleans where the party was entertained at a luncheon at "Antoine's" by the Garden Club of New Orleans and at a reception by Mrs. Frances Parkinson Keyes at her home, once that of General Beauregard. There was a tour of the Bellingrath Gardens and two wonderful days in Natchez. It is to be hoped that there may be another such opportunity in the future.

Our most successful tree-planting program was the 35 pin-oaks

planted along Route 522, the Remount Road, and at the extreme western end of the John Marshall Highway; these trees have all survived and many are well grown.

In 1950 the Garden Club accepted the responsibility for landscaping and caring for the grounds of the Warren Memorial Hospital. To raise funds for this project an all-day carnival and evening dance were held at Mrs. Slaughter's home, "Meadowbrook Hall"; this entertainment made a net profit of \$1234.00 - so the work could go forward promptly. Mrs. Slaughter was chairman of the Committee for many years. Since the enlargement of the Hospital necessitated many changes in the planting, the work has gone ahead most successfully under the devoted leadership of Mrs. Julian Major. At another time a benefit Card Party was held to raise money for the Hospital which brought in \$300.00; a member of the Hospital Committee gave and dressed a doll on which the sale of chances realized \$248.00.

Another Civic Project which as required great effort over the years has been the care of the grounds of the Samuel's Library. These grounds had once been a lovely garden, the pride of the Garden Club, but they were reduced to a sad state. The Club employed a landscape architect from Washington to make a survey and plans, and the Town cooperated by having a number of dead or dying trees cut and carried away; the Town also gave the Garden Club the use of two garages on the grounds for storing Club properties. The repair of the buildings was quite an expense but the Club is most fortunate to have them. Although the Town has provided most of the labor, the Garden Club has supervised it and given some financial help. The borders were so overgrown by poison ivy that no one liked to work there; however, this summer, with the continuous help of a man loan-

ed from the jail for a week, and the constant attention of the Chairman, Mrs. Parrish, the library grounds are in the best condition possible.

The Garden Club of Virginia accepted our invitation to hold the Board of Governors Meeting in Front Royal in the fall of 1950. Mrs. Stokes was our President at the time, and Mrs. Browne was appointed Chairman for the meeting, and all members willingly assumed committee assignments; so all plans went forward smoothly at first. Since 1946 funds had been put aside earmarked for this entertainment, and the Ways and Means Committee with Mrs. Harold Smith as Chairman raised \$713.00 so that our total amount in hand before the meeting was \$2574.41. When it was over we still had a balance of \$464.00. Two hundred dollars of that formed the nucleus of our present savings account, and we will not be caught unprepared when we again need an entertainment fund.

As stated, all went smoothly at first; but, just a few weeks before October 6th the Hotel Manager, upon whom all our arrangements for the cocktail party and banquet depended, died very suddenly as the result of an accident. It gave us many anxious moments but the new manager proved equally helpful, so that trouble was overcome. But, two weeks before the meeting the speaker we were depending on for the dinner had a stroke of paralysis and a new speaker had to be found at the eleventh hour. Mr. Owens of "Greenfield Farm" agreed to undertake the task, a task it proved to be. Mrs. Alexander Gordon, though an Associate Member, very graciously agreed to entertain the President and three other members of the Board of Directors in her home and to give the dinner for the Directors the evening before the first business meeting. The entertainments planned by the Club were

a luncheon at the Skyline Terrace after the Registration, an afternoon tea given by Mrs. Weaver and Mrs. Browne at "Druid Hill" after the first meeting, a cocktail party, at which Mrs. Stokes was the hostess, given at the Hotel, followed by the dinner, and a buffet lunch on the second day which the Skyline Corporation made possible as they left the building at Dickey Ridge open much later than usual and brought the elaborate food and the personnel all the way from Big Meadows.

In 1952 the Garden Club of Warren County and the Winchester-Clarke Club together were hostesses for the State Lily Show. As the Show was held in the gymnasium of the Front Royal High School, the staging was done by a committee from this Club with Mrs. Gibb as Chairman and we were all proud of the result. The Winchester Club did their part fully, furnishing the refreshments for exhibitors and many hostesses. Again in 1957 this Club Sponsored the Lily Show which was staged this time in the beautiful setting of the Melton Memorial Gymnasium at R.M.A.. Mrs. Joyce was Chairman and again we had reason to be proud of the result. This Show was much better attended than the previous one and there were outstanding exhibits from many other clubs.

In 1957 two bird sanctuaries were established by the Club, one at the Skyline Caverns and one at Samuel's Library.

During our early years in the Garden Club of Virginia we made no attempt to open houses for tours during Garden Week, feeling that Warren County had so few places to show in comparison with many other sections of Virginia. At first we contributed a flat sum of \$100.00 to the Garden Week Committee and when, at last, we did attempt a tour, it appears that we had only \$25.00 to contribute, but longer experience, greater effort, and better publicity have achieved quite astonishing

results, and for the last several years our contributions have steadily increased.

The dinner dances which the Club has held for the past several years have been most enjoyable.

It is hoped that this will sum up for the Club members most of the opportunities and obligations which have been ours through the Garden Club of Virginia during 24 years. Each year the Delegate to the Annual Meeting is selected by her length of membership, and eventually each one will have had the inspiration which these meetings give - the sense of being one of a splendid group throughout Virginia, all working for conservation and the preservation of treasures of historic beauty.