

The West Chester Garden Club History

Compiled by Mary Allinson

In July 1925 the West Chester Garden Club was initiated by Mrs. Charlotte N. Waln after she had made a visit to Naragansett and attended a meeting there of one of the early Garden Clubs. She invited a number of her middle aged friends, most of them with sizeable places in this area and Wilmington, to tea at her home on South Church Street. All agreed on a club with a small membership and \$3.00 dues! At the next meeting, held at the home of Mrs. James N. Carter overlooking the Brandywine at Chadds Ford, each of the original group suggested others who might be interested. All of those who agreed to join at that time should be considered charter members. Here it was that Mrs. James Rhodes, then living in California, told us how easy it was to have a garden without spending any money! You simply asked your friends for seeds, snatched cuttings, planted them in sand, and presto you had a garden, and shortly a Garden Club!

It was Mrs. Waln's ambition to join the Garden Club of America, at once, but, of course it is not done quite that way and her application was promptly and properly turned down. It was not until 1934 that we were invited to join and did so after much discussion and division of opinion. In fact most of our meetings, led by Mrs. Waln, were quite spicy, since all of us were new at Garden Club ways and each had a different opinion. The meetings were held almost every week in the spring and summer, the place and program for each, decided from meeting to meeting. There were informal flower shows and trips to see established gardens on the Main Line or near Wilmington. Conservation, to us meant the preservation of wild flowers, work with the schools was stressed, but usually met cold cooperation, if any, and civic projects were by vaguely discussed.

By 1929 dues were raised and membership increased, and in 1930 we were asked to help establish the Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania. Then we began to discuss bill board regulation, bird preservation, and a slightly wider area of Conservation.

In 1940 war relief took precedence and victory gardens, canning and every possible army assistance was undertaken. Various members gave parties in their gardens for the ambulatory soldiers from the Valley Forge Hospital and some drove the Red Cross station wagons. Several members started and worked hard at the House and Garden Exchange, then completely independent and not connected with the Women's Exchange. A store was rented and manned in West Chester, canning was taught, busy women were helped with canning and there was an active plant exchange. One member wrote a Victory Garden Column for the Daily Local News for 10 years.

Each year one or more fund raising activities were held to finance our projects, some civic beautification ones having been started, but there were no fund raising "drives" – we operated comparatively economically, using our own talent.

The Brandywine Valley Association started in 1945 and probably was the first planned water shed association, and has been of great interest to our community, several members of the Garden Club have been on the Board and one served as President.

In 1946 and 1947 we proposed the Tyler Arboretum for the Founders Fund of the Garden Club of America, but did not achieve final recognition. However, our "Garden for the Blind" at the

Arboretum became well known and was the result of many hours of physical effort as well as financial contributions. At this time we also participated for several years in the Rittenhouse Square Flower Market, but the distance and the fact that 80% of the proceeds went to Philadelphia Charities discouraged us. With the West Chester branch of the Chester County Hospital Auxiliary, we started our own – the Marshall Square Flower Market – which for several years was quite successful. However rainy days and our change in policy in order not to have money raising activities put an end to this also. The Market has been carried on and made into more of a children's fair and carnival by other organizations. We note it here to claim credit for having originated it!

Our dues in several steps were raised to \$25.00, in order, as indicated above, not to have money raising activities, but some of us believe that we lost thereby the values of a common activity.

In 1951 our prize winning Garden Market th the Philadelphia Flower Show brought a request from House and Garden Magazine for scale drawings and plans. Part of this Market was subsequently erected in Renee keen's Garden. And in 1941 our pictures were taken in Mary Allinson's garden for Life, but the war interrupted.

In 1949 we joined the Inter-Club Garden Club of America Conservation Group in Philadelphia. We sponsored an Audobon Lecture Series here, the proceeds of which were given to Swiss Pines Park and we started the contribution of a scholarship to the Conservation Workshop for Teachers conducted at the West Chester State College and sponsored by the Brandywine Valley Association. This scholarship has been continued each year and once or twice we have had our scholarship teach speak to the Club on her experience with it. A Tree Box (a large box containing sheets with descriptions, culture, etc. of many trees) was well executed and having been passed around to various schools, was finally given to State College, which still has requests for the loan of the box. We also cooperated with Zone IV of the G. C. of A. Fellowship Fund, to finance horticultural student in Europe.

In addition to our routine activities there have been a few outstanding ones. One member donated the fund for the purchase of 200 trees to be planted at the Tinicum Marsh below Philadelphia. We did the original plan and planting around the Court House, later extensively added to by the County Commissioners; we planned and planted a complete area around the West Chester Library; we planted the grounds of the new Chester County Are Centre and with the cooperation of other local clubs, our landscape plan and the planting of the new Nursesea Home at the Chester County Hospital was accomplished.

In 1938 and again in 1963 we were co-hostesses with the eight other Philadelphia Garden Clubs, first for the 25th and then for the 50th, anniversary of the Garden Club of America. In connection with the latter we planned and planted the grounds at Woodford, one of the historic houses in Fairmount Park.

We are constant supporters of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. Several members of the club are on the Council and we not only have many memberships, but donated our refund from the Garden Club of America's 50th Anniversary Fund, to the Society's Capital Drive.

Several of our members are outstanding in the fields of Conservation, Civic Enterprises and Horticulture and have received the Garden Club of America's award of merit or horticultural certificate, as well as other citations and awards.

Spurred by the "Beautification of America", we have joined with other Philadelphia area Garden Clubs in forming the Philadelphia Committee of the Garden Club of America. In our own immediate locality, we are working with the residents of certain less attractive neighborhoods to improve the houses, with window boxes and to inspire the improvement of the backyards. And we are planning to help the inhabitants of the government housing projects with horticultural advice and assistance.

Our members have held positions on Garden Club Federation, National Council and Garden Club of America boards and committees. We have contributed articles for the G.C. of A. Bulletin. We have always been extremely active in the Horticultural Society's part in the Philadelphia Flower Show and several of our members have been chairman of that section of the Show when it was run by the Philadelphia Flower Show Association, and now that it is run by the Society alone, are heading various committees.

In 1968 we had three Honorary members, ten Associates with dues of \$30.00 and 40 Active with dues of \$25.00. We have six Provisional member – dues \$18.00 We average ten meetings a year. A list of our Presidents is appended.

Mary Crew started her presidency in 1968 and proved a conscientious and able leader. Our chief Civic activity was continuing an effort to put window boxes in the houses on S. Adams Street, in West Chester. There were two outstanding meetings, one with Dr. John Fogg who gave the outlines of botany, and one with Holly Whyte who talked on the latest attempts on keeping open space, partly through cluster housing, etc. The category of "affiliate" members was inaugurated for those members who having belonged for at least ten years, were no longer able to attend, but wished to continue the association.

Cooperation with the G. C. of A. Committee in Philadelphia and cooperation with other Garden Clubs in this area was a feature of this regime. We were invited to a party by the Town Gardeners of West Chester at which we heard of their activities. In April 1970 a Community Flower Show was held at the Art Centre, three Garden Clubs cooperation – The Planters, the Town Gardeners and the West Chester Garden Club. It was a good show, and attracted a fair attendance and the vote was to continue this form of show as has been done.

In 1970 Virginia Mackey became a very successful and conscientious president and her committees carried on well. A second Community Flower Show was held at the Art Centre in April in cooperation with The Planters and The Town Gardeners. It has been pointed out that the year as a whole was notable rather for individual efforts than for Club activities. The usual Annual Meeting of the Philadelphia Committee of the G. C. of A. had a report on the Vest Pocket Parks on which they are working. The subject of the meeting was Trend f the Times.

An outstanding meeting was held with other Garden Clubs at Old St. Davids and featured Mme. Arai on Japanese Flower Arrangements. Mrs. Cornwall at her meeting showed an interesting collection of ivies. The beginning of preparation for the 1971 Zone V meeting of the G. C. of A. was under way. Part of the preparation was the planting of the grounds of the 1704 Brinton House belonging to the Chester County Historical Society, including a traditional herb garden.

The second year of Virginia Mackey's term proceeded in orderly fashion, the highlight of the year undoubtedly being hostess for the Zone V meeting of the Garden Club of America in October. Radley run Country Club was the center for the meetings and proved attractive both as to space and meals. Mrs. John R. Clark, Zone Chairman, presided. Due to the somewhat limited space only a few of our members could attend the luncheons and dinner, but the

Conservation and Horticulture meetings were open to all. The evening before the conventional opening, Virginia Mackey and her husband gave a charming cocktail party at the Treadway Inn, south of West Chester, to which all members of the Garden Club, as well as the guests who had already arrived, were invited. Dinner followed and a visit to the new Brandywine Riverview Museum followed that and the guests returned to the Treadway Inn where most of them were housed. The Horticulture meeting with Mrs. Pancoast Reath as Chairman and the Conservation meeting with Mrs. Horace Dugdale as Chairman were held at Radley Run. The first was followed by a dinner at which awards were given. Mrs. J. Folsom Paul received the Horticulture Award for her years of teaching at Longwood and elsewhere. Mrs. E. Page Allison was given the Conservation medal for long years at various Conservation projects and local and national chairmanships. The final event was an I fresco lunch beautifully arranged in Mary Crew's garden with dessert at Margie Schiffer's interesting house. There were visits to the 1704 Brinton House, at which work on the garden rehabilitation and the new herb garden had progressed, and to an active mushroom house.

The Club did its usual good job of Christmas greens, this time for the Chester County Hospital only, and generous contributions were made to the Conservation Workshop and other Conservation organizations. An interesting talk was given by Mrs. Albert Miller on Colonial botanists, some of whom lived and collected in Chester County. Clinics designed to help arrangers and an excellent Flower Show at the Chester County Art Centre completed the year.

PAST CLUB PRESIDENTS

*Mrs. C. N. Waln	July 1925
*Mrs. Walter B. McIlvain	1928-1929
Mrs. E. Page Allinson	1930-1931
*Mrs. Roger B. Combs	1932-1933
*Mrs. Frank Adams Keen	1934-1935
*Mrs. George Thomas, III	1936-1937
*Mrs. Otho E. Lane	1938-1939
Mrs. J. Gibson McIlvain	1940-1941
Mrs W. Butler Windle	1942-1943
Mrs. Robert W. Wolcott	1944-1945
*Mrs. Albert W. Hoopes	1946-1947
Mrs. Merkley Stevenson	1948-1949
Mrs. Channing Way	1950-1951
Mrs. Edward Neilson	1952-1954
Mrs. Fisher L. Boyd	1954-1956
Mrs. Joseph Scattergood	1956-1958
Mrs. George E. deCoursey	1958-1960
Miss Estelle Sharp	1960-1962
Mrs. W. Bradley Ward	1962-1964
Mrs. H. Cameron Morris, Jr.	1964-1966
Mrs. Kenneth H. Anthony	1966-1968
Mrs. Francis D. Crew	1968-1970
Mrs. B. F. Mackey	1970-1972
Mrs. Robert S. Gawthrop, Jr.	1972-

- = deceased

**Summary of Highlights of Civic and Conservation Activities
of the West Chester Garden Club
1926 through 1968**

	<i>Civic</i>	<i>Conservation</i>
1926 thru 1938	<p><i>Worked with the Town Planning Council of the West Chester Civic Association towards preserving and beautifying West Chester.</i></p> <p><i>Raised \$400 for the Regional Planning Committee of the Chester County Health and Welfare Council and for the planting of the Philips Memorial at the West Chester State Teachers College.</i></p> <p><i>Contributed \$30. To the newly formed Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania for civic work.</i></p> <p><i>Donated a holly tree to the Washing Cathedral Garden, at the request of Mrs. George Wharton Pepper.</i></p> <p><i>Planted trees, usually dogwoods, at Scanneltown, south High Street and some of the other schools.</i></p> <p><i>Planned and planted parts of the West Chester Court Houses lawn and did a complete planting at the West Chester Library, including a brick wall around the yard.</i></p> <p><i>Donated plants and helped plant the grounds of the new Community Center.</i></p>	<p>Worked on Wildflower preservation through schools and newspapers. Joined the wild flower Preservation Society, the National Roadside Preservation Society – the predecessor of the Pennsylvania Roadside Council. Entered the fight for illboard ontrol by lobbying at Harrisburg.</p> <p>Backed bills to control Cutch Elm disease then becoming prevalent. Donated trees to the Bowmens Hill area of native trees called Penn’s Woods. Joined the fight for the eradication of the Tent Caterpillar.</p> <p>Appealed to Harrisburg for help in planting eroding roadsides, cut down to give work to the W.P.A.</p>
1938 Thru 1948	<p>Gave \$1—for tulips for Logan Square in Philadelphia in honor for the 25th Anniversary of the G C. of A. (These tulips bloomed before the meeting took place!) Gave prizes for the vegetable gardens promoted by the Victory Garden Committee. One member wrote a weekly column on gardening for the Daily Local News through the war. Helped Girl Scouts with their Nature Merit badges. Interested Service station in the National Council Awards of Merit for improving their stations. Planted around the House and what was left of the Garden of the DeHaven House on N. Church Street, on loan from the School Board to the Chester</p>	<p>Worked for the Brandywine Valley Association. Sent a scholarship to the Penn State Conservation Workshop. Worked towards a Chester County Soil Conservation District, later brought about the Brandywine Valley Association,, Gave Conservation parties each year at the West Chester Library. Acted as guides at Bowmen’s Hill. Established briefly a bird sanctuary the grounds of the American Legion Home. (This proved too hard to maintain.)</p>

	<p>County Art Association. Planted with native plants and wildflowers the triangle between the roads east of Jefferis Bridge. Donated trees and a lawnmower to the camp at Indiantown Gap and sent trees and decorations there for Christmas. Made wreaths for the Chester County Hospital for Christmas.</p>	
1938 Thru 1948	<p>In 1943 opened the House and Garden Exchange and paid six months rent on a vacant store for its use. There was an active plant exchange in it, as well as canning demonstrations and assistance. Made Easter and Christmas decorations for the Valley Forge Hospital, and gave parties for Valley Forge patients. Also gave \$100 towards the Valley Forge Gardens which were used for therapy. Gave \$100 for the Stage Door Canteen. With a tree given by Westtown School, planted the small triangle between Gay Street and Hannum Ave</p>	<p>Visited the Pine Barrens New Jersey. Had lectures on Soil Conversation, National Parks and an Audubon Screen Tours.</p>
1948 Thru 1958	<p>Interested the Italian Social Club, since its Club House is along Route 322, in the model mile project of the Pennsylvania Roadside Council, but without much success. Contributed \$25 toward magnolias for Independence National Park.) Since the triangle planting between Gay St, and Hannum Ave., did not flourish, we turned it over to the Borough Tree Committee and it was later concreted over. Planned and planted the grounds of the new Art Centre on Bradford Ave. Sent tools and seeds for Mrs. Bush Brown's rehabilitation work in Philadelphia.</p>	<p>Conservation lectures continued. Helped the G. C. of A. Conservation Exhibit at the Philadelphia Flower Show. Persuaded County Commissioners to establish the Park and Recreation Commission.</p>
	<p>Conservation activates were not necessarily confirmed to the era specified</p>	

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