

Then and Now: Herndon's Gardening Pride

By Barbara Glakas

Gardening and hometown beautification have been time-honored traditions in Herndon. Over the years this has included individual home gardens, farm gardens, and garden-related organizations.

In 1935, some of the women of Herndon formed The Home Interest Garden Club of Herndon. Their club objectives included promoting interest in gardens, protecting windflowers and shrubs, encouraging civic planting and landscaping, and encouraging the culture of flowers among young people.

Charter members of the club were Mrs. George Bready, Mrs. Harry Bready, Mrs. Arthur Buell, Mrs. Harvey Hanes, Mrs. Cassius Lawrence, Mrs. Russell Lynn, Mrs. William Myer, and Mrs. Floyd Thompson. Mrs. Lawrence served as its first president from 1935 to 1937, and the first meeting was held in her home. They approved the rose as the club flower and limited club membership to 25 people; they later increased their numbers to about 45 members.

Some of their early projects included:

- Erecting a stone entrance and an iron gate at the Chestnut Grove Cemetery.
- Furnishing a water pipe line to run Town water into the cemetery.
- Joining the Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs and conducting flower shows.
- Holding flower arrangement lectures and demonstrations.
- Arranging for a shelf on gardening and related subjects to be set aside in the Fortnightly Library.

During World War II, the Club members engaged in many activities to help service members and the wounded, such as making surgical bandages and knitting afghans. They sent the proceeds from one of their flowers shows to the Fort Belvoir Hospital and to the Red Cross to help decorate veteran's rooms with potted plants.

Post-war projects included helping to beautify the Herndon Town Green. They planted azaleas and a silver birch on the lawn and made Christmas wreaths for the Town Hall building. Additionally, they planted bulbs along the banks of Folly Lick Creek.

In 1956, a memorial garden was established in Chestnut Grove Cemetery to honor the club members who had passed way. The garden featured two marble benches, a birdbath, and various plants including boxwoods, azaleas, and bulbs.

By 1969, the Club had resigned from the Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs because it was too difficult for their aging membership to drive to district and state meetings. However, they continued their beautification efforts around town. They planted 23 dogwood trees along Van Buren Street and made numerous efforts to remove debris from the streets and public areas of Town.

In 1975, members of the Club took on projects in preparation for the Town's Centennial celebration. They cleared the old John Coleman cemetery of honeysuckle and trimmed the trees. (Coleman was a Revolutionary War veteran who built the first house in Herndon.) They also donated 100 tulip bulbs and money for benches in the area of Town Hall and the Depot.

The Herndon Home Interest Garden Club had about 185 members during the years from when it was established in 1939 until it ceased operating in the late 1980s. The last club president, as listed in a 50th anniversary document, was Mrs. Ruth Updike.

Today, the gardening spirit continues to live on today among Herndon residents. In 2004, the Town established the Cultivating Community Initiative (CCI). Robin Runser, who at that time was the Town Public Information Officer, served as the first chair. The CCI members are citizen volunteers who work in collaboration with Town staff.

One of the missions of the committee is to encourage neighborhood beautification. Herndon's annual Garden Tour and the Yard of the Month recognition program are sponsored by the CCI. Early CCI literature explains, "As the beauty of the garden reflects the work of the gardener, the appearance and health of a community reflects the collective effort of its residents to maintain it. By taking pride in your home and neighborhood, you can set an example for everyone in the community and influence your neighbors to engage in similar efforts."