

# Mary Frances Buchanan Flowers

1918-2010

*By Jane Cowles*

*The Boxwood Garden Club*



**T**he Garden Club of Virginia has lost a close friend and visionary leader—Mary Frances Flowers, who died March 16, 2010, in Richmond at the age of 91.

In 1957, at age 38, Mary Frances joined the Boxwood Garden Club and within six years became its president. She became president of the Garden Club of Virginia in 1970. During her presidency, Mary Frances led a reorganization, in which the GCV amended its constitution and bylaws, obtained tax-exempt status, purchased and began restoring the historic Kent-Valentine House as its headquarters, and established two endowments to support the yearly operating budget of the house and fund special projects.

According to Lee Cochran, who followed Mary Frances as president, Mary Frances “led (or pushed), when necessary, the GCV through two of its most productive years. Almost single-handedly she engineered the purchase and restoration of the Kent-Valentine House.” The Historic Garden Week office emerged from the basement of the Jefferson Hotel. GCV records came out from under the president’s bed. Dues and gifts became tax deductible. Membership grew.

The purchase and restoration of the K-VH was a tremendous act of faith in the future of the GCV. With success not assured, Mary Frances remained committed beyond her GVC presidency. She became the first chairman of the K-VH. She hired personnel, welcomed guests, conducted tours and catered seated luncheons. She spent so much time at the K-VH that her young grandson thought she lived there. Under her leadership the GCV paid the loan in full in six years.

In 1974 Mary Frances received the Massie Medal for serving as “the guiding spirit of the Kent-Valentine House.” Mary Frances was named Honorary President of the GCV in 1987.

Mary Frances “believed deeply in what she was doing,” according to the Rev. Ben Sparks. “She made you want to be a part of whatever her agenda was. She was a doer, an organizer, and faithful to the task. She never put herself forward. When she took leadership, it was for the common good, for the community to strengthen and inspire”.

With Logan Johns, Mary Frances instructed an estimated 5,000 citizens about the value of conserving and beautifying the James River. For this work the GCV awarded them the de Lacy Gray Medal in 1970. As Restoration Chairman (1978-1980), Mary Frances arranged for Rudy Favretti, a nationally renowned landscape architect, to oversee the GVC’s restoration of historic gardens throughout Virginia.

Mary Frances was active at Second Presbyterian Church, Sheltering Arms Hospital, the Junior League, the Woman’s Club, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Historic Richmond Foundation, National Society of Colonial Dames of America and she was a founding trustee of Westminster-Canterbury Richmond.

Mary Frances accomplished all of this while caring for her husband, George Horace Flowers, Jr. who died in 1969, three sons George III, Bill and John and a daughter the late Mary Flowers Cadwallader.

“She did it all,” recalled Lee Cochran. “It could have been her theme song.”