

*Tribute to Mary Frances Flowers  
by Jane Cowles, President of the Boxwood Garden Club*

*"The Garden Club of Virginia has lost a close friend and visionary leader -- Mary Frances Flowers, who died Tuesday, March 16, 2010, in Richmond at the age of 91. Mary Frances would be delighted, as are we, to have the presence of some of her family with us today -- son Bill Flowers and daughters-in-law Susan and Alice, both members of Boxwood Garden Club.*

*Mary Frances Flowers forever changed the Garden Club of Virginia.*

*In 1957, at age 38, Mary Frances joined Boxwood Garden Club and within six years became its president. Seven years later, she became President of the Garden Club of Virginia (1970-1972). During her two-year presidency, Mary Frances led a stunning 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 to fund special projects."*

*According to Lee Cochran, who followed Mary Frances as GCV President, Mary Frances had "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," and, in so doing, revitalized the entire membership. 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.*

*The purchase and restoration of the Kent-Valentine House was a tremendous act of faith in the future of the GCV. With success not assured, Mary Frances remained committed beyond her GCV presidency. She became the first Chairman of the Kent-Valentine House. She hired personnel, welcomed guests, conducted tours, and catered seated lunches. She spent so much time at the house that her young grandson thought she lived there! Under Mary Frances' leadership, the loan on the house was paid in full in six years.*

*In 1974 Mary Frances was recognized with the Massie Medal for serving as "the guiding spirit of the Kent-Valentine House". In 1987, GCV designated Mary Frances as its Honorary President.*

*How pleased she must have been when her grandson and his wife chose to have their 2006 wedding and reception at the house!*

*Mary Frances' bold adventures extended well beyond the Kent-Valentine House.*

*She “believed deeply in what she was doing”, according to her pastor, 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”.*

*Together with Logan Johns, Mary Frances informed an estimated 5,000 citizens about the value of conserving and beautifying the James River in Richmond, for which 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 from Connecticut, to oversee the GCV’s restoration of historic gardens throughout Virginia. In appreciation for his numerous distinguished contributions as our landscape architect, the GCV established the Favretti Fellowship which to date has sponsored 14 fellows in historic landscape scholarship.*

*Mary Frances was also a first female elder and chairman of the pastor search committee at Second Presbyterian Church; President of the Board of Managers of Sheltering Arms Hospital when it decided to move to its current location; founding trustee of Westminster-Canterbury Richmond; and an active member of the Junior League, The Woman’s Club, the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Historic Richmond Foundation, and the National Society of Colonial Dames.*

*Mary Frances accomplished all of this while caring deeply for her husband, George Horace Flowers, Jr. who died of cancer in 1969, three sons George III, Bill and John and their wives, Alice, Susan and Ellen, a daughter Mary Flowers Cadwallader who died of leukemia last year, a son-in-law Jeff Cadwallader, ten grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.*

*Most special to Mary Frances were times at the family cottage in Nags Head. There, with family and friends, she surf-fished (a passion inherited from her mother), cooked (her pear chutney recipe remains a secret), cheered Duke basketball (she was a “Tarheel”), and entertained (including her grateful GCV Board members).*

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

*Mary Frances Flowers (1918-2010) forever changed the Garden Club of Virginia.*

*Thank you, Mary Frances!*