

A Tribute to Suzanne Munson

*By Martha Ware Bryan, Historic Garden Week Chairman,
The James River Garden Club*

What if we had a party and forgot to send the invitations? For the past 19 years, with Suzanne Munson as Executive Director of Historic Garden Week, we have never had to worry about the invitations or any other aspect of Historic Garden Week. In every way possible, Suzanne made sure that the entire world was invited to “America’s Largest Open House” and that garden clubs across the state had the support they needed to make their tours sensational. The continued success of Historic Garden Week as a celebration of historic Virginia and a fundraiser for restoration projects is a direct result of Suzanne’s efforts and expertise.



*Suzanne Munson, flanked by
Martha Ware Bryan and Kim Nash.*

Each HGW guidebook, the main marketing tool for our statewide tours, has borne Suzanne’s indelible mark. Every October and November, Suzanne poured through the copy prepared by tour chairs, editing it for publication. She pulled out interesting ideas, such as architectural elements, unusual interiors or historical notes, featuring them on our website and using her contacts to place them on websites and in publications with nationwide distribution. Suzanne’s love of writing and her keen interest in Virginia history was evident in every book. With the addition of more color and larger advertising for a new look, the guidebook itself even turned a profit this past year.

Suzanne was also the best resource for all HGW questions. At the six District meetings she attended and led during February each year, she drew upon her 16 years of Historic Garden Week experience to share ideas and suggestions from the past. She encouraged innovative marketing ideas and outside the box thinking – the addition of an art exhibit or arranging workshop were often wonderful supplements to a tour. She doubled as travel agent and tourism guide for visitors requesting information and itineraries. Her articles in the *Journal* and her reports at the Annual Meeting and Board of Governors meetings were always interesting and fresh. Always mindful of volunteer time, she thanked our tour chairs and club presidents at every opportunity.

We are so fortunate that in 1929, after their first year of opening their houses, those GCV ladies decided that a house tour was worth continuing. Our beautiful commonwealth is richer for the significant restoration projects we have been able to accomplish with Historic Garden Week funds. Suzanne’s commitment to raising funds for restoration was always evident as she looked for savings in the HGW expenses as well as increased revenue. We are grateful to Suzanne for her service and will look for Suzanne and her husband Ned on garden tours in Aprils to come. Best wishes to Suzanne in her retirement as she pursues research and writing projects. If a book is in her future, maybe her first novel will be set in Virginia during Historic Garden Week. 🌸

*Karen Cauthen Miller has been hired as the Historic Garden Week Director
and will be introduced on these pages in the September issue.*