

## *A Bit of History*

Welcome to the Garden Club of Virginia's 94th Board of Governors meeting as The Garden Club of Danville marks its 95th birthday.

Individually and in concert with garden clubs, civic organizations, schools and city government, The Garden Club of Danville has been active in all aspects of education and beautification in our city. The club was an early supporter as beautification and conservation were promoted by the GCV. In 1928, representatives were sent to Richmond to appear before a legislative committee at a hearing of a bill to remove outdoor advertising along the highways. Most recently we are promoting the city's recycling effort and have published and distributed a comprehensive recycling guide.

As charter members of the GCV, we have participated each spring in Historic Garden Week and have actively supported garden restoration throughout the state. The restoration of the 19th century picket fence surrounding the historic Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History was presented to the city by the GCV in 2004. Nearby, during a visit in 1922 by Lady Nancy Langhorne Astor to her native city, 1,000 rose plants were distributed to school children, in honor of the first woman to sit in the British House of Commons. The plants were displayed and prizes were awarded the following year. Located near the site of the Lady Astor giveaway is the Perkinson Rose Garden. It honors "Sigie" Perkinson, longtime member of the Danville club and for 13 years, GCV Rose Test Chairman.

The Garden Club of Danville was formed in 1918 when Mrs. S. Rutherford Dula invited 9 ladies to her home on Main Street. These close friends lived in the neighboring Victorian houses with large, tended gardens. At the second meeting they decided to increase the membership to 25 and to meet monthly, except during "the blooming season" when they would meet twice each month. They hoped to spark interest in "gardens beautiful as well as gardens useful."

During the Depression, the grounds at the "Last Capitol of the Confederacy" (later the Danville Museum) needed help badly. But, how were they to raise money in the depths of the Depression? It was decided to convert the \$7,000 in bonds in the lockbox, to which each member through the years had given a \$100 bond annually. Mrs. B.V. Booth took the bonds to her husband, president of the bank. He pointed out that the bonds had not yet matured and were not worth the full value. Mrs. Booth brushed aside this masculine logic with a firm, "Benjamin, let us have the money." Of course, Benjamin let them have the money. The funds were dedicated to the project and the ladies dedicated themselves to supervising this project. The foreman in charge of the work commented: "This must be the biggest garden club in America. I couldn't count the number of ladies who have come to offer a little advice."

In 1945, the GCV resumed state meetings that had been curtailed during the war years and Danville club member, Mrs. Louis Dibrell, was GCV president. The next year her chauffeur, James, insisted the Packard be replaced by a Cadillac, saying he "wasn't going to drive her to another GCV meeting in a Packard when all the other chauffeurs were driving Cadillacs."

Our club sponsored GCV daffodil shows in the '70s and '90s and the annual meeting in 1984. The night of the banquet at the Danville Golf Club, the tables were beautifully set, and the arrangements were exquisite. However, just before the guests were to enter the ballroom, the grand piano needed to be moved just inches. On doing so - Crash! The legs of the old piano splintered and the piano went down to the floor. We called a local company and within an hour a substitute piano was delivered. The evening program went on as planned and the little-noticed collapsed piano was covered with a cloth. We have stayed away from pianos as we prepared for this GCV meeting.

The Danville club has twice received the prestigious Massie Medal. In addition, a member received the de Lacy Gray Medal and the club's nominee was presented with a Distinguished Achievement Award.

With its rich past and bright future, The Garden Club of Danville is dedicated to the mission and goals of the Garden Club of Virginia.

-Nan Freed-

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