

Notes on Hillside Garden Club History 1935-1995

Christened the Junior Garden Club at its first meeting in 1935, the club soon recognized the complications such a name would present as members aged. Before the club adjourned its second formal meeting in the city of seven hills, it had become Hillside Garden Club.



In 1941, at the Spring Flower show of the Lynchburg Council, Hillside captured first prize for the floral hooked rug made largely of pansies, the award was the first such honor for the club. During the sad year of 1942, war gardens became the chief concern. The garden at Point of Honor Playgrounds was taken over; the annual Christmas Tour was not held, but members brought presents for soldiers. The gifts were judged for the attractiveness of their wrappings. Throughout the war years, the spring and summer meetings were turned into Red Cross work periods, and much time was given in the city garden at the playground and toward other war efforts. The Club sponsored a contest at the playground with prizes for the best gardens. The recipients requested umbrellas, which were given to them.

In 1944, in true garden club spirit, a prize was awarded to the 6 members having perfect attendance; the prize was a load of manure! In 1946, a Garden Quiz was constructed by Mrs. W.W. Lynn. The erudite Mrs. Dillard won a bale of peat moss for an "A" performance. These ladies were certainly hands-on-gardeners!

In 1946, the club added to its civic work by cooperating with the local council in the establishment of the Hollins Mill Road Native Park and the restoration of the Quaker Memorial Cemetery. The Club supported the Lynchburg Garden Club's project to plant hundreds of dogwood trees in public gardens and private lawns. In the late 1940s, Mary Spencer Craddock was pictured in the newspaper planting kudzu alongside Hollins Mill Road, in a beautification effort. That work is evident today! The Club voted in 1950 to meet every month instead of ten times a year.

Sponsored by the Lynchburg Garden Club, Blue Ridge Club of Lexington, and Mill Mountain Club of Roanoke, Hillside became a

member of the Garden Club of Virginia in May of 1953. At the same time, the club raised its membership to fifty and changed the start of the official year to April.

In March of 1954, Hillside's first joint meeting with the Lynchburg Club convened to discuss Historic Garden Week, and thus began a cordial, cooperative practice that has done much to make Garden Day in Lynchburg a premier event statewide.

During the later 1950s, Hillside took on the beautification of the garden on the grounds of the Lynchburg Nursing Home on Federal Street and the improvement of a shopping area on Rivermont Avenue. The club also established the custom of planting a tree somewhere in the city as a memorial to a deceased member and initiated the practice of sending young people to Nature Camp each year.

The club celebrated its 20th anniversary at Boonsboro Club. The following year the club voted to increase its membership to 55.

The Garden Club of Virginia published *A Garden Potpourri* in 1963. Poems by seven Hillside members appeared in that collection.

On the grounds of Virginia Baptist Hospital, a garden in memory of Rosalie Loving was created in 1968. Landscaped and planted by her husband and Edward Hickson, and financed by club members and other friends, this garden is a fitting memorial for a good horticulturist. Many of the plants in it came from Rosalie's own garden.

The highlight of 1970 was the beginning of the renovation of the greenhouse at the Dabney-Scott-Adams House on Cabell Street. This handsome family home was given to the Lynchburg Historical Foundation by Annie Harris Robertson, one of the club's charter members. Owing to the dedicated leadership of Bessie Sackett and Frances Hodges, the greenhouse stood in perfect condition and was filled with bloom by year's end.

At the 1973 meeting of the Garden Club of Virginia, Frances Hodges and Bessie Sackett were honored with the presentation of the Horticultural Award of Merit. The award's citation reads: "For the joint effort of two dedicated women, whose love of growing has surmounted difficulties which would have deterred most of us, but

who achieved success by hard work, enthusiasm, and perseverance.” That same year, the club voted to continue the maintenance of the greenhouse and added care of the grounds to that commitment. Hillside supported the effort until the house became the property of the City of Lynchburg.

At the 1979 Garden Club of Virginia’s annual meeting in Martinsville our own Mary Morris Booth, Dr. Richard Parke of RMWC and Dr. Allen Huezte, professor at Sweet Briar entertained with a history of the GCV using the book *Follow the Green Arrow*, a history of the organization. Musical choices were sung by Mary Morris and Richard, telling the story of strong ladies who established Garden Week in Virginia and supported protection our environment.

In 1980, the Lynchburg Garden Club and Hillside assumed responsibility to help the city keep the grounds of Point of Honor in shape. The aviary in Miller Park became a Virginia Historical Landmark in 1980, and the local council of Garden Clubs undertook its restoration and care. Hillside restored one of the aviary’s windows. At Westminster-Canterbury, later in the year, the club began a garden attractive to birds and visible to patients in the Health Center.

Among the most important projects to unfold during the club’s first half-century is the restoration of the garden of the Anne Spencer House on Pierce Street, beginning in 1983. Led by Nell Holt and Jane White, this undertaking revitalized the grounds and garden of Harlem Renaissance poet Anne Spencer. Her home is both a Virginia Historic Landmark on the National Register of Historic Landmarks and recorded in the National Register of Historic Places. Beyond the hundreds of hours invested in research, planning, and gardening, Hillside also contributed more than \$8,000 toward the garden’s restoration. The total value of the work done there was over \$20,000, which included numerous in-kind gifts of labor and materials from club members and the community. Hillside received the 1985 Commonwealth Award of \$6000 from the Garden Club of Virginia, spurring the club to complete the project and fund a \$10,000 endowment to support its subsequent maintenance. The Anne Spencer Garden, which had attracted thousands of visitors as its restoration progressed, drew thousand more during Garden Week. Of special significance is the fact that this garden is the only known restored garden of an African American in existence.

Jane White received the Massie Medal for her work in the garden in 1989 and continued to spread the word two years later as a featured speaker at the Southern Garden History Society conference in Old Salem, NC. By then the topic had broadened to include the roses in the Old City Cemetery, another of her community projects.

A decision to make the Old City Cemetery a primary project in 1993 led Susan Mullin to donate trees from her tree nursery as part of the grounds rehabilitation there. The cemetery continues to be a place for fresh ideas, new programs and gardens that provide opportunities to volunteer both as administrators, docents and gardeners while educating the public enhancing the beauty of our community.