

History of the Garden Section
of
The Faculty Women's Club
By Laura Moore

Whether you know it or not as members of the Garden Section of the Faculty Women's Club you are a part of history. Our Garden Section is over fifty years old. If furniture, silver and glass are "antiques" when one hundred years old surely an organization, which has existed for fifty years deserves the designation, historical.

The first minutes of meetings in the possession of the Garden Section were for the school year, 1927-1928. In the text of those minutes, however, was a reference to meetings held the previous year. As the Faculty Women's Club was organized in October 1921, by Mrs. Burton, when she came to the University of Michigan as the President's wife, it seemed there was a change that this section of the club might have been formed even before 1926. The records of the Faculty Women's Club have been deposited in the Michigan Historical Collections in the Bentley Library on North Campus. It was there I discovered that the Garden Section was organized in April of 1923 with Mrs. Ferguson as the first chairman (yes, she was chairman). This was the sixth section of the Faculty Women's Club to be formed. The others then in existence were the Drama, Athletics, Music, Day Nursery and Art History.

The section's earliest membership list was for 1929. Forty members were on the list, eleven of them new in that year. One of the forty was Mrs. Geo. Lindsay, a member whom many of you remember. She continued to entertain us in her home long after her husband had retired. Many of you, too, have bushes and even trees from her garden because she was generous in her giving. The next membership list our records contain was for the year 1933-1934 and it had sixty-five names on it, most of them marked paid. There was a fifty cents dues then as now, a great bargain if ever there was one in these days of inflation. There were sixty-nine members on the list for 1939-1940.

On the 1933 list Helen Dennison's name is to be found; she is still one of our active members, and recruited, she says, by Mrs. Lindsay. On the 1933 list in addition to Helen Dennison were these names whom I remember from my early years in the Garden Section: Mrs. McConkey, Mrs. Keloche, Mrs. Henry Miller, all of whom had unusually lovely homes with beautiful gardens and plantings. Mrs. Keloche's Tudor style house was built on a steep hill just off Riverview Drive. Mrs. McConkey's stone house was set far back from Washtenaw Avenue near the Londonderry intersection. Mrs. Miller's house was on Barton Drive (now in view of U. S. #23) and had a sizable well-landscaped acreage.

Others I remember were Mrs. E. B. Mains, a trained botanist who was a mainstay of the section for many years. Her house and those of Mrs. E. V. Sink and Mrs. W. H. Williams were all in areas fairly close to the campus.

On the 1935 membership list I found the name Gladys Eggleton, still one of our most knowledgeable members. She signed the minutes of the section as secretary for several years. On the 1938 list was Mrs. Woodhead who died about a year ago. She was an honorary member the last few years of her life as some of you remember. On the 1936 list was Elzada Clover, a member of the Botany Department for many years. My first impression of the Garden Section when I became a member in 1954 was the unusual competence of many of the women in the group. There seemed to be a large number of wives of Professors of the Natural Sciences. A number of them were experts in their own right and all members seemed anxious to share their knowledge of gardens.

We have seen that from the beginning the list of members was long. Meetings had to be held in various University locations, apparently not often in the members' homes. The early meetings were held in the League, the School of Architecture, the University Library, the Women's Athletic Building and Palmer Field House (this, an unknown to me). Membership remained high through 1941, but in 1942 the list had but eighteen names. The war was on; faculty members were moving, gas was rationed, and household help was scarce. After two meetings with poor attendance it was decided to suspend the organization's meetings "for the duration".

The minutes recording this decision were signed by Mary Margaret Caldwell. At the same time two \$25.00 war bonds belonging to the Garden Section were signed over to the Faculty Women's Club with the proviso that if the section was reorganized the bonds were to be given back; if it were no longer in existence when the bonds matured they were to belong to the Faculty Women's Club. The section was, in fact, reorganized in 1946. For a time I thought what happened to the two war bonds was going to be a mystery I might not be able to solve, that it might be a good project for us to work on this coming year. But when I went to the records in the Bentley I found that in April 1947, the chairman of the reorganized section had asked the Faculty Women's Club to give back the bonds. "After much discussion" (we can all imagine this "discussion" to give it a polite name") the board of the parent club voted to do so.

The reorganized section had new by-laws which limited the membership to twenty-five. If more than that number wanted to join a garden section a new one should be formed. The smaller number made it possible to meet in homes. The new-old group also wanted to be known as "Dirt Gardeners", however, in the minutes of the Faculty Women's Club the section continued to be called the Garden Section as we are today. The change limiting the membership led to the formation eventually of a second section. Some of the members also felt the programs of the original section were not very practical. They wanted a section geared to real do-it-yourself gardeners. A few belonged to both sections for a time, but the Garden Section, the original one, has continued uninterrupted from the reorganization until now.

So much for the history and organizational development of our group. The story of some of the projects that have been undertaken is an interesting one. I have concentrated on the early years feeling that many of you remember the more recent projects. I think all of you will agree that our major project is and has been the making of the Christmas terraria for the bedfast in University Hospital. This Terraria Project saw its beginning and development in the 1950s. In recent minutes Helen Smith gave Helen Cowan who was a chairman in the early fifties and Mrs. Mains credit for the project. The 60s brought the fall plant auction (first in 1966) to raise money to buy terrarium materials, and Friendship Gardens, or Plant Exchange in the spring. It was in 1965 under Betty Hutchcroft's leadership that the present by-laws were adopted. They provided for honorary memberships for long time members who were no longer able to be active, but were still interested. Mrs. Mains was the first honorary member. At the same time this by-law change was adopted the requirement was made that an active member must attend at least four meetings a year. In the Faculty Women's Club minutes it was noted in 1965 that one other garden section had a similar requirement.

Another project was an attempt to beautify a small triangle on West Stadium Boulevard by donating twenty-five dollars for plantings. Some members helped with the planting and weeding. In 1967 the section sent a statement to the City Council opposing a proposed Marina Project in the Geddes Pond area. More recently members helped with an Elm Planting at Northside School. These beautification projects and some others seem to have frustration and disappointment as common ingredients. The fall after the Elm Planting a member reported that forty per cent of the trees had died.

Garden tours and visits have been on the agenda since the very beginning. In the early years trips were taken to the gardens of Henry Ford's Fairlane Estate and visits to the Inglis House gardens here in Ann Arbor were frequently made. There was a standing invitation for section members to visit the garden of Mrs. Mains.

In the 1920s and 1930s Flower Shows were popular. Today we'd say they were BIG and IN. In those years our Garden Section cooperated with the Ann Arbor Garden Club and the Ann Arbor Women's Club to hold flower shows. The 1929 show was held in the Detroit Edison Building. The proceeds of the 1928 show were \$55.60, but expenses were \$63.60. Accounting for part of the expense were four prizes offered that year, two prizes of \$3.00 and two of \$1.00. In the years when the section was doing the flower shows the members paid dues to the Federated Garden Clubs, \$6.88 in 1938 when a committee was appointed to decide whether to continue the payment. Apparently the decision was to continue because \$6.20 was paid in dues in 1941 and again in 1942. After that came the suspension and no more records.

Another project undertaken quite early was the decoration of the table (or tables) for the Faculty Women's Club Spring Luncheon. In 1928 the members apparently decorated the tables without cost to the section, but in 1929 there was a vote to take

the money from the treasury. \$2.50 bought sweet peas for the table. In 1930 the flowers cost \$3.00. In 1937 the Garden Section was still responsible for this task but the flowers cost \$15.45.

The program given before the section have been varied, sometimes criticized, as we have seen, but, in general, I should say, from the records, interesting and informative. This program on our history is not the first one to be given. In 1965 Lu Elliott gave a history of the Garden Section from notes given her and talks with Jean Arnold and DeEtta Miller. Since I could consult neither I have talked to a number of past and present members but for facts and figures I have relied on our written records. In addition to holding flower shows, reports by members attending the Detroit Flower Show comprised the program several times.

In general, I think it can be safely said, more outside speakers were used in the past than recently. Professor Whittemore and some of the professors in the Landscape Architecture Department were favorites. Being experts and professionals they often showed slides, which were always popular. (Mrs. Cone, wife of the head of the Department was a member of the section.) Elzada Clover, a Botany professor, was for a time a member of the group. She gave several programs over the years on the topic, which was her specialty, Cacti. Genevieve Gillette has given many programs, many of you will remember she last spoke to us about five years ago at Ann Okey's; but she also gave a program to the Garden Section in 1930, forty-seven years ago! She is still alive and working hard for all manner of Conservation projects. I believe I am correct in thinking that she was the first woman to graduate in landscape architecture from Michigan State. After hearing her speak my husband and I will be using her as a consultant in developing our yard. She advised doing very little in a woods setting, to put in only plants native to an oak and hickory forest.

Flower Arranging talks and demonstrations were sometimes used as programs. Mrs. Goodhue of the Goodhue Flower Shop gave some programs and our own member, Hanako Yamagina, with another woman, gave a demonstration of a Japanese Flower Arrangement. I hope the present program chairman is listening! A newspaper clipping of this event is in our book of minutes kept by the secretary.

In the early years there were yearly Catalogue Programs. Plants announced in new catalogues were discussed and the catalogue exchanged. In the early years of my membership, the fifties, there were always some members asking to have catalogue programs, but there were usually some others who were less than enthusiastic about them. It seems, in fact, that disagreement over this particular program along with other dissatisfactions led some of the members to join new members in the formation of a new garden section. One former member, who belonged to both groups for a time, told me she remembered this particular program as boring and repetitive.

In the years since there have been several garden sections organized. Two or more of the sections have sometimes held combined meetings, particularly to hear an outside speaker or to see a program of slides.

I remember, I remember. . . lots of good programs and unusual ones in the twenty-three years I have been attending the Garden Section programs. I end recounting some of them and I hope all of you will recount the ones you remember with pleasure. On my list is a program by Jean Bender on Poisonous Plants, one by Bill Stapp in 1965 on Nature Trails and City Parks in connection with his development of nature and conservation studies at the High School, Bill Hopkins on Kensington Park, Helen Smith on English Gardens she had visited, Betty Hutchcroft on Roses, Betty Graham on Pines and Evergreens. And I remember one fiasco, a program on Fertilizers by Laura Moore (a subject I was assigned and about which I never succeeded in working up any enthusiasm and I certainly did not edify the members.) But I also remember with real pleasure another program I worked on and became fascinated with, on Vines.

To me the best thing about The Garden Section of the Faculty Women's Club is the program given by the members. I hope in the future we won't get lazy. We have experts in our own membership. And even those of us who are not can become, if not experts, at least informed on some one, small subject and can pass on that bit of information to others in our membership, The Garden Section has been doing that for over fifty years. May it do the same for members in the next fifty! As I said at the beginning, You are a Part of History.