

LEESBURG GARDEN CLUB

Time Capsule Submission

January 2020

The object of the Club shall be to promote active interest in gardening and to assist in the protection and development of the natural beauties of the State.

Leesburg Garden Club has a problem. We have no iconic artifact. We have nothing representative of our 104-year history, nothing that can be contained within a capsule or harvested for the very important Centennial of the Garden Club of Virginia, of which we are a proud member club.

There are twenty-six boxes at Thomas Balch Library, packed to bursting with papers outlining our history; and these have been assiduously combed through in search of possibilities for a time capsule. They tell of many Leesburg Garden Club (LGC) ladies, ladies who were of the times, who also shaped their times. Their stories are riveting, and I share a few here to give you a flavor of their time, a glimpse of their service to us all.

During The Great War, Francis Gibson, wife of a founder of Leesburg Hospital, established a garden on the hospital grounds, which she operated from 1917 through 1940. In alliance with Charlotte Noland, not an LGC member, but founder of Foxcroft School, and Miss Eleanor Chamberlin of “Greystone,” she established multiple gardens at elementary schools, including what were then called “colored schools,” such as Douglass Elementary School. The emphasis was on teaching self-sufficiency through gardening. Alas, none of these flowers or vegetables remain uneaten or unenjoyed, to be included in our time capsule.

During the Great Depression, Miss Mary Metzger, of “Old Acre,” maintained and oversaw the official voting site for the tiny village of Waterford, now a National Historic Landmark Village. Her mother, Mrs. William Metzger, an early member of LGC, had overseen voting before her, and no doubt received some of the first votes cast by women after the passage of the 19th Amendment. Those who remember seeing the metal

box, reportedly about 8" X 10" X 4", are heartsick that that box is now lost to us and cannot be found.

Would that we could include something so momentous in our time capsule!

Vegetable gardening efforts continued through World War II, with fresh fruits and vegetables available in season to the hospital patients. The advent of frozen and canned vegetables available commercially led hospital workers to declare the garden "outdated" and preparation "Too time-consuming." The ladies turned their attention to beautification.

In the early 1940's, Mrs. Vinton Pickens began to actively oppose the construction of billboards in Loudoun County. As the story goes, she would go out scouting for offending signage, and finding such, would instruct her driver to stop. Out came a little hatchet, and under Mrs. Pickens' guidance, the sign would be brought down! In 1942, Loudoun County passed the zoning ordinance that Mrs. Pickens had sought. She chaired the first rural Planning Commission in the country. Would that we had Mrs. Pickens' hatchet to offer up to the future!

After the war, LGC members continued to be active in community efforts, weaving their stories into the larger story of our country. These women live still, in the memories of our older members, and we hope, in the imaginations of our younger members.

Agnes (Mrs. B. Powell) Harrison, president in the mid-sixties, was called "the powerhouse behind the throne" of preservation. In 1972 she was a prime player in the Piedmont Environmental Council, still actively protecting the Virginia Piedmont's history and natural resources.

Leesburg Garden Club members raised and donated thousands of dollars for famine relief in France, England, and Germany, and for replacement windows for a church at Ver Sur Mer. This was but a small part of a GCV effort, done under the auspices of The Marshall Plan.

Many of our members have been active in restoring the George Marshall House and International Center, formerly known as Dodona. The house and grounds are a testament to the power of well-considered diplomacy and international friendships.

In similar fashion, Leesburg Garden Club members have been tireless supporters of other local historic landmarks, such as Oatlands, Little Oatlands, and Morven Park, and of the keepers of history, such as the Loudoun Museum and Balch Library.

In the early 1970's, Margaret (Mrs. W. Hugh) Peal of "Woodburn," and later at her home on Ayer Street in Leesburg, made Christmas wreaths for the Town of Leesburg. This is a practice continued to this day by the ladies of Leesburg Garden Club.

Pat (Mrs. Donald W.) Devine, had her own career as a mathematician, even as she led LGC through the end of the 1990's.

The family of Caroline (Mrs. Claude) Arthur, remember their mother's years in LGC to be among her happiest, and so have funded a scholarship to Nature Camp. Leesburg Garden Club members, having raised money through plant sales and symposia, continue to sponsor Nature Camp and college scholarships.

Some of our past presidents, of course, continue among us, active and actively inspiring us.

Jean (Mrs. William Holmes) Brown, whose family has been farming in Loudoun County for nine generations, took LGC through to the twenty-first century, balancing her duties as president with her lifelong commitment to preservation and civic engagement.

Kassie Kingsley, known for her expertise with daffodils, says she loved her time as our president. She advises us "walk out through your garden, see what's there, use it, grow it, enjoy it. Your garden is your last sanctuary." And of course, she advises using native plants. Perhaps a few daffodil bulbs might've made a suitable artifact.....

During our own Centennial Year, 2015, Leesburg Garden Club planned and executed The Native Tree Walk, at Ida Lee Park in Leesburg. Catharine Patton was key in this effort, as was our president at that time, June Hambrick.

Gladys Lewis, another recent president, continues to this day to work to limit signage in Loudoun County.

Since Leesburg Garden Club joined Garden Club of Virginia in 1926, the fourteenth member club, our members have been enthusiastic participants in GCV's many initiatives.

Leesburg Garden Club or its members have been honored to receive the Massie Medal four times. In 1945, LGC was honored for saving the Broad Run Bridge. In 1964, the Massie Medal went to Mrs. Robert Pickens (Vinton Pickens), for her work that led to the banning of billboards in Loudoun County. In 1975, the award went to Mrs. James Birchfield, and in 1983 it was given in acknowledgement of Mrs. W. Hugh Peal's donation of trees to the Douglass Community Center Project.

In 1975, Mrs. B. Powell Harrison received the deLacy Gray Memorial Medal for her "dedicated and effective work to protect the natural resources of the Commonwealth, and for her years of service in the promotion of recycling and reuse, of environmental education, and of legislation to preserve the beauty of the land."

The GCV Horticultural Award of Merit has been awarded ten times to LGC members, most recently to Eeda (Mrs. Alfred P.) Dennis, in 2003 to Mrs. Katherine B. Kingsley, and in 2006 to Ellie (Mrs. Philip) Daley.

Today, many of the ladies of Leesburg Garden Club are active in current efforts to engage children in a love of gardening, through thoughtful grants to public school gardens. We continue to "keep up the good fight" against the incursion of excessive signage that was begun so long ago by Vinton Pickens and continued by Judy Acheson and Gladys Lewis.

Members are faithful attendees at GCV Horticulture Days and Legislative Days; there is a real energy surrounding conservation efforts.

Opportunities to hone our flower arranging skills at the state level are also enjoyed by many among us.

Throughout our history, Leesburg Garden Club members have been part of the warp and the weft of everyday history, seeking to instill the legacy of passionate involvement, to leave behind artifacts carved into the hearts of those whose lives we may have influenced.

And so we humbly submit this small narrative in lieu of the expected totem.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan R. Honig-Rogers
President
Leesburg Garden Club