



History of The Garden Club of Teaneck

Founded in April 1932



By Patricia O'Brien Libutti, Compiler May, 2013

Such makes up a local history: Stories about people and plants. Town Council records and newspaper clippings. Saved blue, red, gold, green and tricolored award ribbons. Photos of children's' excited faces after a Greenhouse class, members at a Club Holiday party. Notes in a worn composition book from a president's meetings in 1947. Flower Show programs. Membership lists from 78 years ago.

And we begin this history of the Garden Club of Teaneck with where we began:

1932: The Depression didn't stop the new Garden Club of Teaneck from emerging in April 1932. It quietly bloomed into being, with Carl Fleishman as its first president. There were 120 members, 76 of whom were male. The earliest members are listed in the 1934 Spring Flower Show program.

The Garden Club was actually incorporated, though, in 1953.

So what did these 120 members have as their purpose in this new club in these times? Although we don't have the first sets of *Minutes* or *Bylaws*, local history books mention Garden Club activity, including plant sales and beautification of city areas. But the activity that survives in documentation most is the *flower show*. All seem grounded in our present day bylaw: "*the objective of the club shall be to stimulate interest in and spread the knowledge of gardening.*"

In 1932, the first annual flower shows were staged, both spring and fall, The shows, held in schools, the library, the Women's Club and once at a local church, brought Teaneck in to see the best local gardeners had to offer in decorative displays.

The 1934 program also featured ads from many local businesses, which included Wm. Ludewig. He offered: "quality grass, white clover seed, bone meal, and Vigoro." Teaneck was described in the program as, "the flowering town in the flowering state."

The Spring Show, the Fall Show and the Christmas Show were the mainstays of the Garden Club calendar for decades. The records of programs spanning 1934-1974, survive as colorful memorabilia, and cover some, but not all years. They show the Club member responsibilities and roles, the categories for competition in the show and the requisite qualifications.

The Garden Club of Teaneck won local competitions, as seen by *this New York Times* headline: *Teaneck Flowers Lead Bergen Show; Garden Club wins Sweepstake Prize in Competition of North Jersey Fanciers. 1937---Special to the New York Times, September 27, Monday.*

During the Thirties, the Club was led by Carl Fleishman, John Wuerth, Victor Palmer, R.C. Halstead and N. Ralph Romaine, among others

The Forties

Flower show programs and Robert Naumburg's notebook (written while he was president in 1947 and 1948) provide the best views on life in the Garden Club. In the fall show of 1945, the program was titled the "Fall Flower and Victory Garden Show." All vegetables had to be grown by the exhibitor.

On March 31, 1947, the Garden Club was admitted as a member of the Garden Club of New Jersey, as well as to the Federation of Bergen County Garden Clubs. The initial entrance into the Garden Club of New Jersey involved the Club administering surveys to townspeople on the beautification of roadsides (Rt. 4 from the George Washington Bridge to Paterson.)

Also in 1947, the Club celebrated its 15th Anniversary.

The titles of talks and lectures for 1947 were recorded, many titled "sound movies," "Technicolor movies" and "Kodak" slide shows of flowers, travels, or unusual plants from the owner's collections. Many presenters were members of the Club. During the Forties, the Club was led by Robert Naumburg and William Kraus, among others. There were 100 members in 1947.



The Fifties

Flower shows continued, at a pace of three shows a year. The Club was garnering prizes and fame, as seen in this *New York Times* article:

Flower Shows Held. *Teaneck and Radburn Garden Clubs Hold Exhibitions for Clubs in the Sixteenth Annual Flower Show of the Federation of Garden Clubs of Bergen County, Held Today in the Hackensack Women's Club. More than 2,000 persons attended the show, which established a record for size. Thirty-three clubs participated. There were 750 entries.* *New York Times*, September 19, 1951.

The Club was led by Charles Tanner, George Ackerman, Warren Dierksen, George Ackerman, Frederick Auer, and Carl Fleishman (who also had been the first president, in 1932.)

The Greenhouse: A Committee of the Garden Club

The Greenhouse is one of only three municipal greenhouses in the State of New Jersey, the others being Maplewood and Belmar. Although highly visible, it is a committee of the Garden Club. During 1953 and 1954 Town Council Minutes record the development of the Greenhouse, refurbished using the obsolete Vandelinda Sewerage Treatment Plant. Adapting the sewerage treatment building for use would mean “covering the concrete vats, repairing the roof, and installing a heating system. The Club formed a Greenhouse Project Committee, and took on cleaning up glass and debris, as well as fundraising (asking for \$25 per family to turn the site into the Greenhouse.)The roof, sides

and glass windows were repaired and replaced. Garden Club members cleaned up broken glass shards and debris to be able to actually use the building.

The Greenhouse opened up officially on January, 30 1954. Since its beginning, work groups formed by interests (such as Herbs, Geraniums) would take on propagating plants for the use of the Township in parks and malls. This practice continued what earlier Garden Club of Teaneck groups did in the town.

There were 21 original benches that were assigned to Mr. & Mrs. Ackermann, Mr.& Mrs. Dolder, Mrs. Muller, Mr. Argent, Mr. & Mrs. Fleishmann, Mrs. Nugent, Mr. Auerbach, Mr. & Mrs. Lofberg, Mr. & Mrs. Tanner, Mrs. Buteau, Mrs. Meyers, Mr. & Mrs. Romaine, Mrs. Bodo, Mr. & Mrs. Martinson, and Mr. & Mrs. Toepler. An additional 10 were added during that year; all paid dues of \$3.00 .

The Greenhouse grew to house many horticultural enthusiasts. It also has developed outreach activities in the community, covered in a later section. Members who joined the Greenhouse needed to be members of the Garden Club, live in Teaneck and commit themselves to the work of the Greenhouse by joining a group and developing plants for the Township. Currently forty members belong to the work groups. Greenhouse Directors have included Gene Hubbard, Lou Schwartz, Dania Cheddie, Len Schwartz and Stephanie Murphy, among others.

Present Day Greenhouse, right before the Plant Sale.



Based on *Town Council Minutes*, April 1954, *The Teaneck 100 Year Book*(Jim Edmunds)

Another Greenhouse Building: on the Hackensack?

Another sewer processing plant, one on the Hackensack River, played a brief role in the Club's activities, as seen in this April 2008 reprint of an April 1958 article:

1958---April. The Garden Club of Teaneck and the Township administration has announced plans to turn a former sewer treatment plant along the Hackensack River into a bird sanctuary and rose garden. An abandoned building was part of the plant prior to 1953 when the township joined the Bergen County Sewer Authority. It had been turned into a greenhouse but had fallen into disrepair. Garden Club members transformed into a heated meeting place with redwood benches and redwood walks over clean course sand. ...A wildflower dell and lily pond for the four and a half acre site.

The club proposed designating the tulip as the official town flower. Each year the club donates 3,000 bulbs for planting. April 1958, Suburbanite

The Sixties

The dues were \$3.00 and the shows went on. Spring shows had elaborate themes; the fall shows had exhibits of specimens which were displayed precisely ("One flower, no buds.") Themes included the 31st Annual Spring Show: "The Past, the Present, The Future," "Welcome, Indian Summer," and "The Year of the Gypsy" (1969.) Members of our Club today who took part in Flower shows them included, in 1963, Yolanda Napoliello, judge, special effects.

A "Hat Fashion Show," in which participants wore hats made up of decorations with Christmas materials, was a part of the Christmas Show. A Junior Educational Display had display instructions: "mount seeds of six different field flowers and identify them." As had been true since the thirties, the Award ribbons were colored Blue (first place) Red (second place), Yellow (third place) and Green (honorable mention.) A tri-colored ribbon was merited for the best exhibit.

The Seventies

We move into an era in which we will remember many of those mentioned. Garden Club members shared their love of plants; their expertise was freely given. Members experienced a joy in discovery and mentoring another. The names that will follow in these brief paragraphs are by no means the only ones

in the story, there are many others who gave and continue to give richly to the Garden Club of Teaneck. For such a depth of personality, the Club is fortunate. For such a history we need three more volumes.



In the 1974 Flower Show, Warren Diercksen was General Chair, staging, and Yolanda Napoliello was a judge of Artistic Design. The Presidents during this decade were John Brill, Ed Dyer, Harry Jorgensen, and Lou Schwartz. During this period the Garden Club of Teaneck withdrew from the Federation of Garden Clubs, citing little return on financial investments.

The Flower shows continued, with several of our present day members flowering as designers, judges, stagers and general chairs.

Left: Yolanda Napoliello “works diligently to create an artistic arrangement for the 1970 Flower sponsored by the Bergen County Federation of Garden Clubs and the Hackensack Women’s Club. May, 1970 *Record*

Herb Garden Club Project



The installation of the Herb Garden, later the Grace Kriegel Memorial Herb Garden, began as a Centennial project. The text is taken from the dedication of the Garden in 1996 as the *Grace Kriegel Memorial Garden*.

(Left: The Herb Garden in 2008 before renovation in 2011)

“On April first, 1975, then-Mayor Eleanor Kieleszek turned over the first spade full of earth for the Bicentennial Celebration Herb Garden, located on the Municipal Green. But work on the project really began two years prior to that date. A group of Garden Club members, headed by Grace Kriegel, prepared a plan for a permanent garden as a gift for the township. The garden would be composed of an “Inner Knot Garden” based on authentic colonial designs and

bordered by a four foot brick walk. Surrounding the walk would be an “Outer Garden” composed of culinary, decorative, medicinal and aromatic herbs. Plants would be indigenous to the northeastern area, with minor exceptions for educational purposes. Most of the plants would be propagated at the township greenhouse. There were many hours of painstaking research and trips to sample gardens in NJ, NY, CT, and PA.

A small group of members began to create the inner knot garden in the spring of 1975. They were joined by several Cub Scout Den members on Saturday mornings, learning how to plant, mulch, weed, rake and water a garden. In April of 1976, the hopes of having the garden enclosed by a brick path were realized through the helpful efforts of Miss Olive Tamborelle of the Teaneck Public Library. An anonymous contributor donated two thousand used bricks and Mr. Ed Carratura generously contributed the labor. The outer garden was soon completed. Twenty years later, the garden still retains most of the original design.”

Excerpt from the program for the Dedication of the Grace Kriegel Memorial Herb Garden, October 5, 1996,

Presently, the *Grace Kriegel Memorial Herb Garden* shows the refurbishment done in a two-year period, with new stone borders, cleared overgrowth and a redesigned herb display. It is maintained by an Herb Garden Committee of the Greenhouse, Nancy Cochrane is the Chair, and is a Garden Club responsibility.

Eighties

In the eighties and nineties, a *Show and Tell* segment at meetings was enjoyed. Members would bring specimens that they grew for a *Show and Tell*. The meetings took place at the Town House then. It would not be until 1980 in the Club’s history that the first female president, Grace Kriegel, was elected by the members of the Garden Club. Other members who were elected president of the club included: Larry Larson, Helen Snyder, Gene Hubbard, Helen Bove, and Julia Condit.

Garden Club Logos: Rooted in Teaneck’s History

The beginning of this History has two logos at either side of the title, both used by newsletter editors. How did the Garden Club of Teaneck’s logo evolve? It was designed by Otto Siess in the eighties. Otto, a long time member who served in the Herb Group of the Greenhouse. His design used an element from the Teaneck insignia: the windmill. Earlier versions of the logo clearly show the signature “Otto.” It graced the newsletter masthead for at least two decades.

Our current newsletter editor, Martin Steeil, redesigned the logo to show “Now.”

Present Day Garden Club: The Nineties and Forward

In 2002, meetings were shifted to the Richard Rodda Center - South end of Votee Park in Teaneck (250 Colonial Court). The Club has a post office box (Box 3253, Teaneck, NJ 07666) for correspondence.

Club members who served as President in the Nineties were Julia Condit and Nancy Cochrane. Members elected as president from the year 2000 on include Rosa Fobbs, Pat Pacheco, Jane Furman, Aura Altieri, Debbie Morgan and Pat Fromm (incoming, 2013-14.)

Current members who once were or are now President of the Club include: Lou Schwartz, Warren Diercksen, Deborah Morgan, Jane Furman, Aura Altieri, Nancy Cochrane and Pat Fromm. There has been a continuous line of presidents from 1932 on.

The club has 71 members, as of the most recent membership listing (January 2013) although there are new members who joined after that. Meetings are held in the Rodda Center on the second Thursday of each month, from September through June, except January. Members pay \$20 a year for dues and gain access to the newsletter. The dues were \$1 in the forties, \$3 in the fifties, \$10 prior to 1997, and \$15 in 1999. Programs begin at 7:30 PM with a guest speaker who will share his/her enthusiasm, insights and knowledge on a variety of gardening topics.

Web Site. The club’s web site, www.gardenclubofteanck.org has up to date event and speaker listings, special event descriptions and an archive of newsletters for the last five years. Pat Pacheco was the first webmaster; Anna Kurtz and Martin Steeil continue this site.

Newsletter. In 1989, Ken and Ethel McEwan prepared the newsletter. Now the newsletter is digital, but still available in print. Club members who served as editors also include: Paul and Helen Hurlbut, Nancy Cochrane, Rosa Fobbs, Dania Cheddie, Jane Furman, and Pat Libutti. The current editor is Martin Steeil.

Garden Club & Greenhouse Scholarships. The Community Scholarship Program administers diverse organizations’ donations who wish to further a student’s education. The High School Scholarship program has been a yearly activity of almost 20 years. Helen Humpheys has served as the Garden Club

and Greenhouse representative. Two scholarships are awarded each year from the Garden Club (one from the Greenhouse), usually to students interested in horticulture, environmental studies or the like.

Programs and Events

A rough estimate of the number of programs presented by the Club is close to 656. although there probably have been less. The programs have always made available to the public, in places such as the Town House, Public Library, and now the Rodda Recreation Center.

One program chair, Catherine Lloyd, developed over 100 programs (about 15% of those planned over 80 years.) She held the post for 15 years.

The workshops, lectures and presentations have spanned the world of plant interests to include “all things related to plants in an interesting way.” The careful documentation by President Robert M. Naumburg (1947, 1948) has notes and invitations for members on monthly speakers. Topics included: “How to Start Seeds in Your Garden,” by Mr. L.L. Burpee, (who was not a relative of the Burpee of seed company fame,) “A Sound Movie Picture: A Natural Playground.” by Mr. Henry James, Director of the Palisades Park Interstate Commission and “Tulips in Technicolor,” presented by a member who had travelled to Holland.

In the last two decades, speakers from all horticultural practices came to present to the Club. They included: a fig tree grower, a butterfly specialist (complete with them flying around the room,) a lilac maven, an Audubon Club president, and Nature Conservancy presenter,

Ray Edel, the garden columnist for *The Bergen Record*, spoke to the Club in May 2013 and challenged the audience with “ten ways to deal with garden pests.” Another was Cyrus Hyde, who was just starting Well-Sweep Herb Farm in 1989 when he came to the Club for the first time. Twenty years later, he returned in November 2009, to a packed house. A good number of our own members have given presentations during the years, sharing their expertise in vegetable gardening, bonsai care, roses, herb use in cooking, holiday centerpiece construction, landscape design and more.

Workshops are an outreach effort to the community as well as to the education of members. Current program Chair Pat Taafe has led the Club in providing all year programs including herb workshops and native plant tours. A member

who gave back to the Club was Julia Condit, Club President. She led a wreath-making workshop, with seasonal materials, including dried grape branches.



September 2010 Picnic on the Greenhouse Lawn, an annual event

Special Events

The Garden Club has held **parties** since the first day of its founding. Currently, a *Holiday Party* is held, sometimes in a restaurant, sometimes in the Rodda Center. A *Spring Luncheon* is held in June to end the membership year. The Garden Club May officer election is followed by the installation of officers at the Luncheon.

A **September Picnic** is held at the beginning of the Club Year on the Greenhouse Lawn. Other celebrations are informal, and may include events such as a Harvest Dinner, celebrated with the Community Garden group.



Trips to places such as the **Philadelphia Flower Show** have been a staple part of the calendar. Many other events are advertised of interest to flower lovers. In the past, groups such as the *Garden State Rose Society*, *The Dahlia Society* and *New Jersey Garden Club Shows* drew many members, Some members competed in the shows

Other memorable special events have featured tours of member's gardens and car pooled tours of gardens or museums.

Current Greenhouse Programs

The Greenhouse is located at Garden Club of Teaneck Greenhouse - next to #296 Lindbergh Boulevard. Len Schwartz is the current Director of the Greenhouse, making him the only father-son succession in the history of the organization (Lou Schwartz was director in 1989.)The Town Council criticized the Greenhouse for utility expenses in 1976 (J. Walsh, April 29, in *Town Council Minutes*, "Greenhouse Fuel Consumption.")

The concern was not followed at that time, but resurfaced in September of 2009. The expense of the Greenhouse utilities was questioned. Greenhouse members conducted a self-study of utility efficiency. The result of the actions taken was that the efforts succeeded, as measured by utility bill reductions. The leadership also renewed their effort to provide the Township with quality plants for municipal malls and areas.



Greenhouse Gardens, 2011, demonstrating a variety of gardening styles

These gardens have been farmed for over fifty years by Greenhouse members. The use of gardens, open to Greenhouse members, is specified by the bylaws of the Greenhouse that requires of the member that the plot be well-maintained.

Garden Club Sale in the Greenhouse

Members can still recall when there was a Fall Sale at the Library in which featured houseplants and mums. Sales over time occurred in a variety of locales, such as outside shopping centers, grocery stores. These sales go back to the founding of the club.

Each Director specified how display space was to be used, as seen in Gene Hubbard's 1992 display of a per-square foot financial return for various kinds of plants. This year, marketing statistics were prepared on shoppers' reactions by Joe Papa, presently Horticultural Director of the Greenhouse.

A Pre Sale Kick-off Brunch is celebrated each year.

Vigorous sales in 2013 included point of purchase discussion to help the customer, as told to us in surveys. We count on our members to share knowledge with fellow gardeners, which every customer is.

Greenhouse Children's' Program

The Greenhouse has annual programs for Hawthorne students. They came to the Greenhouse for six weeks for classes in *Herbs*, *Garbage Gardening*, and *Plant Propagation*. Each got the opportunity to buy some plants at the special "child's price." The program was started by Ken and Ethel McCuen district-wide; Lou Schwartz began it at Hawthorne, bringing the Greenhouse to the classroom. Helen Humphreys led the program for many years; Olga Newey now leads the 3 teacher team

Recent and Ongoing Outreach Activity of the Garden Club

The Junior Garden Club of Teaneck is designed to involve grade-school children in gardening. Members of the Club donated produce from their gardens to the Food Pantry. More than 100 pounds of fresh tomatoes, peppers, beans, salad and more found their way to community tables. The Greenhouse and the Bergen County Audubon Society joined forces to plant 300 native shrubs (roughly 10-15" tall) just to the east of the Greenhouse. And the Teaneck Firehouse Plantings continue every May, with annuals planted by the Club at the town firehouse stations.

The Beautification of the Municipal Green at the Library: 2010,

The Garden Club Has has contributed to the Township of Teaneck in both design and maintenance. This Municipal Green design was developed by Mary Topolsky, Garden Club member, and presented to the Town Council by Mary and Christina Mackensen, Horticultural Director for the Greenhouse in 2010. The design for the two beds is seasonal in theme. The bed facing the Library parking lot is dedicated to spring and summer.

What is Ahead for the Garden Club of Teaneck?

It will always be true that a flow of new ideas, new members—and new plants—will bring our Club development opportunities. The vitality and creativity of newcomers keeps us “young.” The continued energy and expertise of the members with us now keeps us wise. We have every reason to believe in our good future as gardeners to Teaneck and beyond.

Photos & Graphics: *M. Steeil, P. Libutti, B. O'Brien, A. Kurz*