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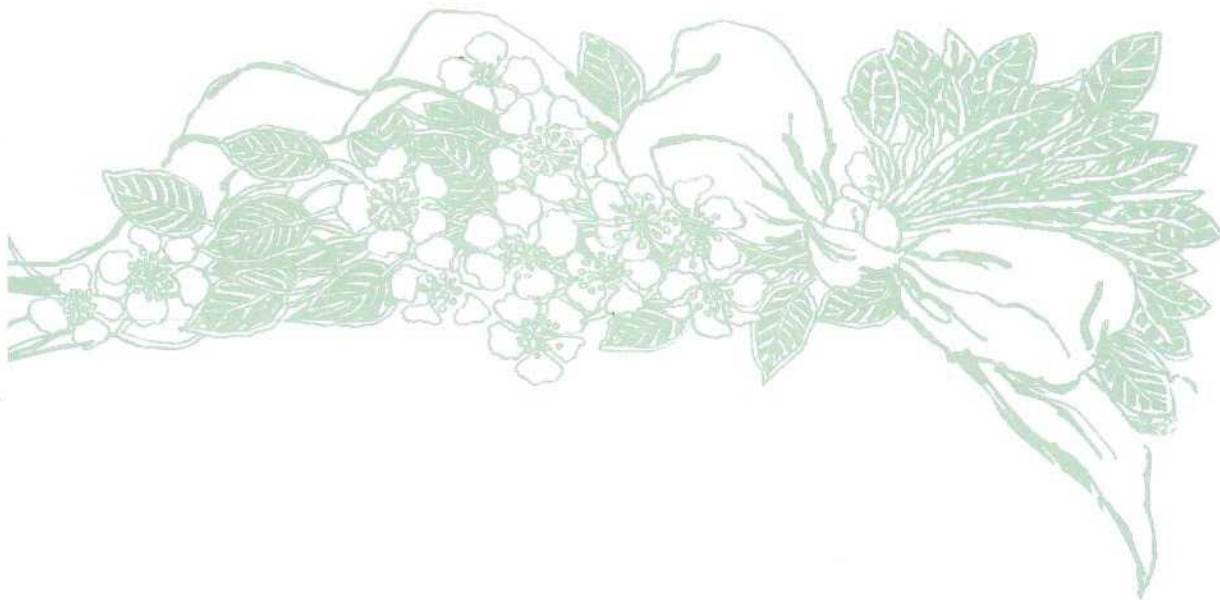
The City Gardens Club Medal of Honor, designed by Mr. Herbert Samuel Adams and produced in 1929 in editions of gold, silver, and bronze.

THE FIRST 85 YEARS

A HISTORY OF THE CITY GARDENS CLUB OF NEW YORK CITY 1918 TO 2003

by Emily Legutko

in collaboration with Janet M. Desforges and Carol F. Humstone



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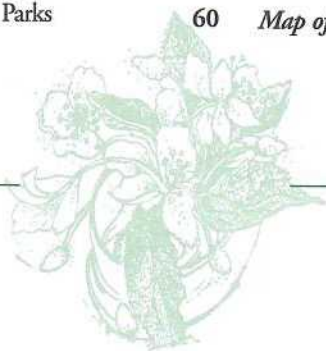
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"The object of the Club shall be to preserve, enrich
and increase the natural beauty of the environment
with special regard to our City for the public benefit
through education, horticulture, conservation,
and other related undertakings."


*from the Constitution of
The City Gardens Club of New York City, Inc.*



THE FORWARD VIEW

*"Full lasting is the Song, though he, the Singer passes;
... Lasting too [is] the Rapture of the Forward View."*

The Thrush in February
George Meredith, 1826-90

he forward view of Frances Peters, founder of The City Gardens Club of New York City, is our legacy. Her vision in 1918 of a worldly metropolis enhanced by nature has inspired a legion of New Yorkers "...to preserve, enrich and increase the natural beauty of the environment with special regard to our City for the public benefit through education, horticulture, conservation and other related undertakings."

That is our mission, our credo, our goal. And now the achievements of the past and the promise of the future are presented in a narrative that preserves the efforts and dedication of those who shared the "rapture" of our founder's view through the decades.

From 1918 through 2003, and beyond, members of the City Gardens Club have sought out areas of need, assisted in the development of solutions, and participated actively in the completion of a myriad of projects. The earliest undertaking in the Club's history was the conversion of a single vacant backyard into an oasis of greenery. Today, the Club continues to support numerous community gardens while its many active committees reach out to all corners of the city with educational, aesthetic, and environmental programs.

The record of these activities is now informatively chronicled in this volume for all to share. And, of prime importance, we can also learn of the people whose dedication to the ideals of the City Gardens Club provided the continuity that has brought us into the 21st century with renewed enthusiasm for the tasks ahead.

The year 2003 marked the 85th anniversary of our organization. Under the leadership of co-presidents, Mrs. William T. Stubenbord and Mrs. John F. Sullivan, a special committee, chaired by Mrs. Bruno Desforges, was formed to develop projects to commemorate this unique occasion. Under the guidance of Mrs. Desforges, and with the support of Ms. Carol F. Humstone, the first written account of the activities of the City Gardens Club was undertaken. The project proved to be complex and challenging, but after months of research, the history has been completed. On behalf of all past, present and future members, may I express our deepest appreciation to Mrs. Desforges and Ms. Humstone for their vision and dedication to this project. And, a special salute to Mrs. Robert K. Kotur for contributing the original illustrations that grace these pages.

It is our hope that the seeds we have sown through the years will blossom into fresh inspiration and dedication by future generations of City Gardens Club members.

Mrs. Symon B. Cowles
President



A PROMISING BEGINNING

The founder of the City Gardens Club, Miss Frances Peters, was a civic activist from a socially prominent family. Born in New York City on March 11, 1862, Miss Peters was the eighth of fourteen children of Thomas McClure Peters and Alice C. Richmond Peters.

Her father was an ordained Episcopal minister who served as the rector of St. Michael's Church for many years and founded numerous organizations to assist the city's orphans and the poor. Shortly before he died in 1893, Rev. Peters became Archdeacon of New York.¹

Frances Peters was educated in private schools and, like her father, she took a great interest in civic affairs. In the early 1900s, she joined the New York State Woman Suffrage Party, which established dozens of committees to educate both American and immigrant women about citizenship, legislation, civics and government, rural problems, and labor issues.

Miss Peters held leadership positions in two of the party's New York City assembly districts from 1914 to 1916. And the following year, while still active in the Woman Suffrage Party, she volunteered to help take the New York State Census.²

Responding to the outbreak of World War I, she joined the United States Food Administration, a government entity that encouraged citizens to conserve food by planting gardens and raising their own vegetables.³ She also served as a medical volunteer with the Red Cross and

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worked for the Army and Navy League, sewing and distributing clothes for servicemen.⁴

It was during this turbulent period that Miss Peters became interested in the City Beautiful Movement, which had been founded in the 19th century to improve the design, planning, and management of cities by emphasizing beautification and citizen participation. In 1917, while serving as corresponding secretary for the Women's League for the Protection of Riverside Park, she took part in a heated public debate about a proposal to run tracks for the New York Central railroad through the park.

Later that year, Miss Peters and Mrs. Frederick Hill, a landscape designer, converted the backyard of the headquarters of the Women's Municipal League at 46 East 29th Street into a garden with flowers, vines, a graveled walk, and places to sit. Pleased with the transformation, Miss Peters decided that more should be done to promote greenery in New York's public spaces and private homes.

The City Gardens Club Takes Root

In March of 1918, Frances Peters founded The City Gardens Club of New York City, serving as its first president. Initially, the Club had only two members, but it quickly attracted city residents who shared an interest in gardening and civic improvement, including Mrs. Andrew (Louise W.) Carnegie, Mrs. Oliver (Grace C.) Harriman, Mrs. William J. (Joy) Schieffelin, and Dr. N. L. Britton.⁵

Soon the City Gardens Club was engaged in numerous projects to transform empty and unattractive spaces around public buildings, hospitals, churches, and apartments

into areas of greenery and respite from the noise and other harsh elements of city life. When the Department of Agriculture learned of the Club's endeavors, it supported the work by supplying flower and vegetable seeds.⁶

A Club member, Mrs. T. Carlyle (Rosalie Warner) Jones, designed an attractive seal to serve as a graphic image of the Club's identity on correspondence, brochures, and other printed information. Printed in green and depicting a potted shrub with the initials "CGC" entwined in its branches, the seal has been in continuous use since 1918.

An early goal of the City Gardens Club was to inspire townhouse and apartment dwellers to create their own backyard gardens, roof gardens, and window boxes. In the spring of 1919, the Club presented its first exhibit to the public as part of The Horticultural Society of New York's Flower Show at the American Museum of Natural History. The exhibit was a dramatic, life-sized display of a typical city resident's backyard, before and after it had been improved by gardening.

In its original condition, the backyard was dreary and devoid of greenery. It was fenced with drab wooden clapboards and filled with dirt, litter, and a turned-over trash receptacle. The building's brick facade, which was dark with soot, supported a laundry line strung diagonally over the yard.

In dramatic juxtaposition to this bleak display was the transformed backyard. Window boxes full of flowers brightened the brick facade, which had been cleaned to a uniform lighter color. Small potted shrubs flanked the back doorway, and a new white lattice fence was covered with vines and ivy. The unsightly laundry line had been removed and the ground covered with smooth stone.





The Club's first exhibit, at The Horticultural Society of New York's Flower Show in 1919, showed a dreary city backyard (left) improved by cleaning, paving, and planting (right).

Public spaces were an equally important focus of members' attention. The Club urged city residents to become more involved in the public parks and playgrounds,

taking advantage of the opportunities they offered for recreation and relaxation and recognizing their importance to the city's quality of life.

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In 1920 an article in *The New York Times* conveyed Miss Peters's firm belief in the benefits of greenery to city dwellers and included the following comment:

"One acre of grass," says Miss Peters, "emits 6,400 quarts of water in 24 hours, and the temperature of a tree never rises to more than 56 degrees Summer or Winter, all of which serves to emphasize the need of more extensive planting throughout the greater city."⁷

In an effort to enhance the appearance and comfort of city streets, Miss Peters led a Club project in the late teens and early 1920s to plant street trees in residential neighborhoods in honor of servicemen whose lives had been lost in World War I, and she encouraged homeowners throughout the city to do the same.

Committees Multiply as Membership Swells

As membership and activities increased, the Club decided to launch its own publication, the *Bulletin of the City Gardens Club*, to more efficiently disseminate information, ideas, and instruction to the membership. The planting of window boxes was a popular activity at the time, and the *Bulletin* provided advice on containers, drainage, watering, and fertilizing. It also carried reports by chairmen of the Club's numerous committees, which by the mid-1920s included a Planting and Advisory Committee, a Parks Committee, a Tree Planting Committee, a Flower Show Exhibition Committee, and a Pictorial Records Committee.

Club members met on a regular basis to discuss programs and activities. In the late teens and early 1920s, many meetings took place in members' homes, including

Miss Peters's home at 50 West 67th Street and Mrs. Carnegie's on Fifth Avenue at 91st Street. As membership grew and more space was needed, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the American Museum of Natural History were sometimes used as well.

By 1925, Club meetings offered a broad spectrum of activities, including visits to gardens, discussions, and slide lectures on such topics as "Tropical Gardens," "Some English Gardens," "Our Bird Friends," and "Gardening in Our City Schools."⁸ In addition to monthly meetings, the Club held flower shows, photograph exhibits, and window box competitions.

Members were encouraged to participate in current events and to be informed about issues relating to the city's environment and the use of its outdoor facilities. When parks were misused or threatened with destruction for the building of roads and industrial sites, members voiced their opposition.

In the mid-1920s the City Gardens Club urged "that the old south reservoir in Central Park, no longer being used by the Department of Water, Gas and Electricity, be turned over to the Parks Department for park purposes in harmony with the original design of Olmstead and Vaux."⁹ In two other efforts to preserve the original character of the park, the Club opposed the construction of a fence around the reservoir and the addition of a playground.

When it came to members' attention that a reservoir area between Prospect Park and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden was being considered as a site for a new building, the Club issued a resolution urging that the property be preserved and added to the Botanic Garden. Another Club resolution opposed the construction of private monuments in public parks.

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Seeking to improve the appearance of the city's commercial areas, the Club supported the National Committee for the Restriction of Outdoor Advertising. And, in an effort to reduce air pollution, it endorsed city sanitation measures and smoke abatement ordinances.

The City Gardens Club's prominence in civic affairs generated a great deal of interest in its programs. In the mid-1920s, membership had grown to more than 600, and the Club recognized that revisions to its structure and organization were needed. By 1922 the Club had been incorporated, but in 1924 it also formed a board of directors and began revising its original constitution. A list of the Club's board of directors, published in the *Bulletin* the following year, included four men and ten women. (The participation of a small number of men in Club activities was a phenomenon that would continue sporadically through the late 1930s.)

Frances Peters, who had served devotedly and energetically as the Club's president since 1918, resigned her post in the spring of 1924. She died later that year, on October 23rd at age 62. Saddened by her sudden departure, the board of directors called a special meeting at which the following tribute was read:

...[W]e, the members of the City Gardens Club of New York, do make this record of our affectionate respect. Miss Peters was ever alert to the interests of the Club and keenly alive to all that she thought might affect its highest welfare, presiding over its deliberations with dignity, administering to its affairs with devoted attention to detail, ever generous with the hospitality that added much to many of our most pleasantly remembered meetings, and as our official representative, fulfilling her duties in such a manner as to command

alike our gratitude and our pride. A patriotic citizen, an earnest advocate of municipal reform, a sympathizer with all good work, a lover of beauty, her memory shall long be with us.¹⁰

In 1925 the Club planted a silver linden tree on a knoll near 80th Street and Riverside Drive and dedicated it to her memory. The tree was maintained by the Club as a living symbol of Miss Peters's efforts to make the city a better place for all its citizens.


Public Libraries Are Beautified

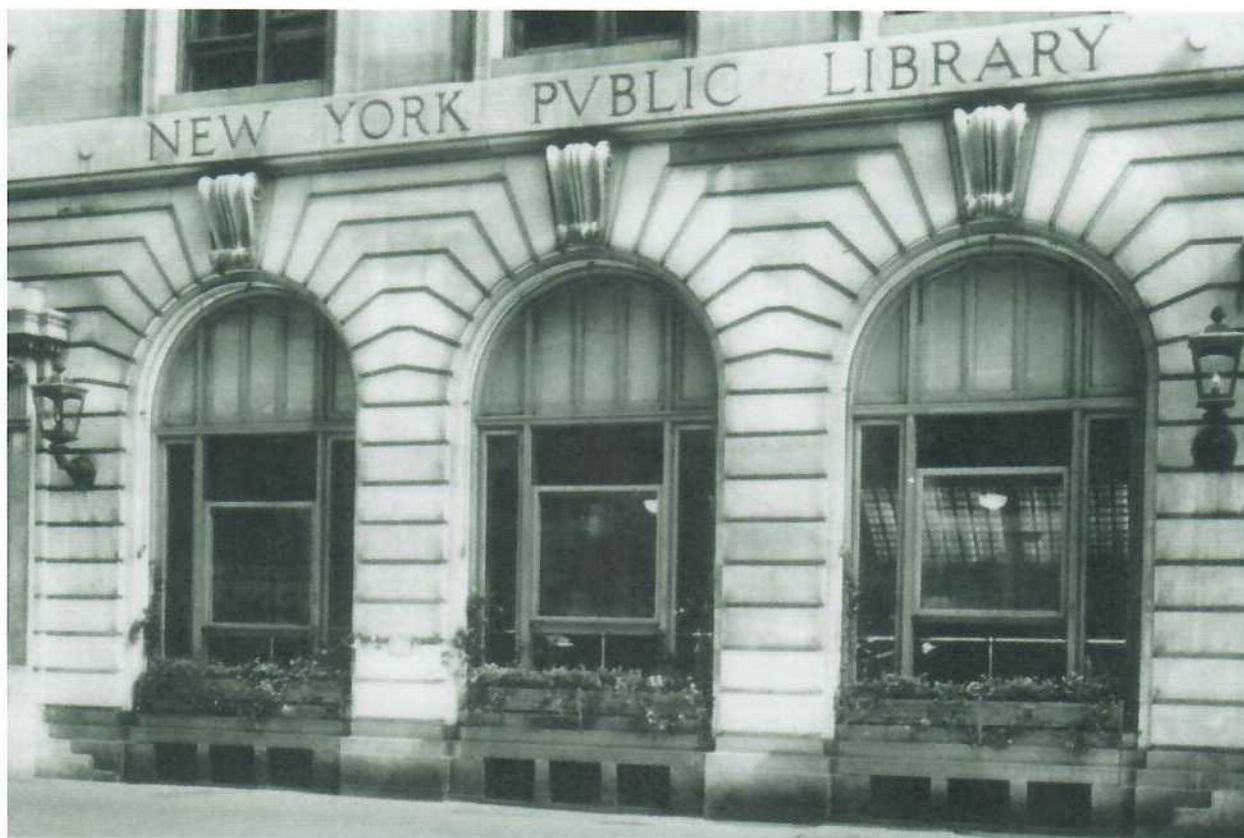
In 1925 the Club formed a Library Planting Committee and began to design and build window boxes for the New York City public libraries. The committee not only improved the buildings' facades, but also devised clever indoor arrangements of potted plants, which added greenery and color to otherwise drab reading rooms.

The chairman of the Library Planting Committee from the mid-1920s and into the late 1930s was Miss Florence King. During her tenure, she worked with Mr. Franklin F. Hopper, head of the Circulation Department of the New York Public Libraries, to install the window boxes and indoor plants each year. Expressing his gratitude in a letter, Mr. Hopper wrote, "I can not begin to tell you how deeply we all appreciate your wonderful interest in the little gardens and window boxes of the branch libraries."¹¹

By 1930, the committee had enhanced the appearance of 14 public libraries.¹² Once the window boxes and plants were installed, the librarians made a special effort to involve the community by inviting neighborhood residents, including children, to take part in their ongoing care. For

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The City Gardens Club installed window boxes at branches of The New York Public Library in the 1920s and 1930s.

many years, the project contributed to the improved appearance of the libraries and the pleasure of their patrons and staff.

In 1926 the Club made similar improvements to the children's wards at Bellevue Hospital, installing window boxes filled with vibrant, cheerful autumn crocuses, paper-

white narcissuses, and radishes. The young patients were delighted and, in a report of the Club's Planting and Advisory Committee, it was noted that "[t]he radishes had matured and there had been enough so that the children had been able to give a radish party asking others in the hospital to come and eat radishes with bread and butter."¹³

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A large, stylized green floral illustration with various leaves and flowers, including what appears to be a daisy-like flower, serves as a background for the text on the right side of the page.

GROWTH AND RECOGNITION

By the late 1920s the City Gardens Club was associated with some of New York City's most important institutions. It had become a large membership organization with substantial revenues and considerable influence. A 1927 article in *The New York Times* referred to the Club's mission of "...encouraging the planting of street trees, window box decorations and indoor winter gardening...[as well as promoting] a better system of administration of the city parks and recreation gardens...."¹⁴

As experienced gardeners, Club members could educate the public about the most common obstacles to city gardening – space restrictions, poor or no soil, too much or too little sunlight, air pollution, soot and smoke, the strong winds on high-rise roofs and terraces, and the poor air circulation at street level. Not surprisingly, city residents looked to the Club as a source of information and advice on the flowers, plants, and trees that could be most successfully cultivated indoors, on terraces and roofs, and in backyards.

As gardening became more popular, members were frequently invited to serve as judges at flower shows. The Club's annual exhibits and other events received an impressive amount of publicity. Admiring one of the Club's flower exhibits in 1927, the department store R. H. Macy & Company bought the entire show and displayed it for two weeks at the store to help advertise its garden supplies.

That same year the Museum of the City of New York invited the Club to conduct a competition to design its gardens and grounds. In those days the museum occupied

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Gracie Mansion at 88th Street and the East River in Carl Schurz Park. Members assembled a panel of distinguished judges, which included the city's parks commissioner. After publicizing the competition in the newspapers, the Club received over 75 submissions from landscape architects throughout the country, as well as from its own members.¹⁵

Reputation Spreads Nationwide

By the late 1920s the City Gardens Club had a national reputation and received frequent requests for copies of its *Bulletin* from garden clubs in other states. In the spring of 1928, when the Club was evaluating its role in New York City, the extensive contacts it had with other clubs enabled members to conduct an informal survey of garden club activities throughout the country. The City Gardens Club also formed an advisory board in 1929 to assist the board of directors in deciding "what constructive work can be done in New York City...."¹⁶

The year 1928 marked the 10th anniversary of the founding of the City Gardens Club. To commemorate this important milestone, the Club decided to create a special medal that would recognize distinguished work in city gardening. The noted American sculptor, Herbert Samuel Adams (1858-1945), was commissioned by the Club to design it.¹⁷

Mr. Adams was the founder and president of the National Sculpture Society, and he was widely known and

admired for his sculptural portrait busts and medallic art. His work, including reliefs, friezes, and decorated doors, adorned many noteworthy buildings in New York City.¹⁸

The handsome medal he created for the City Gardens Club measured 3.5 inches in height and had the shape of a doorway arch, which, Mrs. Willard C. (Laura M.) Brinton, the Club's president in 1929, noted "remind[s] the beholder that the spirit of architecture [is] present in the planning of gardens even though in humble guise."¹⁹



In delicate *bas relief*, the medal depicted a youth with dragonfly wings sitting on top of a bird bath, surrounded by vines and potted plants. At the base of the bird bath was a potted shrub decorated with a ribbon.

Produced in 1929 by the Medallic Art Company in editions of gold, silver, and bronze, the Medals of Honor were awarded almost every year from 1929 until the mid-1940s. An image of the medal, from the *Bulletin of the City Gardens Club* of April 1929, appears on the cover of this history.

One of the first Medal of Honor recipients in 1929, was Mrs. George (Emma) Bellows, the widow of the noted American painter. As a contestant in the Gramercy Park Window Gardening Competition, Mrs. Bellows enhanced the facade of her red brick house on East 19th Street by adding white trim and white window boxes, which she planted with dwarf privet. Mrs. E. W. (Zella) Mitchell, another early recipient, was honored for her out-

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standing garden photographs, which for many years had been featured in the Club's photographic exhibits. Mrs. Mitchell, a Club member, was also responsible for a traveling photography exhibit that was displayed at museums and schools of design in several states during the late 1920s.

In 1934 the Club's medal was featured in an exhibit of more than 30 works of medallic art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. A member who visited the Corcoran Gallery during the show noted

with pride that the City Gardens Club's Medal of Honor was the only garden club medal represented in the exhibit.²⁰

Gardens Are Showcased

The Club's annual winter exhibits provided an ideal opportunity to inspire city residents with creative and original gardening designs for small spaces. An especially elaborate exhibit in the late 1920s included a dining room and a European-style courtyard garden shared by multiple



An elaborate exhibit by the Club at the Art Center in the late 1920s depicted a European-style courtyard garden shared by multiple residences.

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residences. It was displayed in a rented space at the Art Center, located at 65 East 56th Street.

The dining room featured an attractive arrangement of potted plants and a long dining table with decorative table settings that were changed by Club members each day of the show. The table settings included blue china, various flowers and vases, candelabras, and modern table linens and decorations donated by the then well-known Manhattan gardening shop, Max Schling, Inc.

Open archways and a decorative wrought-iron gate led from the dining room onto a green-tiled courtyard garden. Hyacinths, pansies, and peonies were planted amidst a central bed of ivy that encircled a small ailanthus, or Tree of Heaven. A marble bench, a walled fountain, and a variety of flowers and plants in matching blue ceramic containers were also on display.

A number of Club members were talented gardeners who enjoyed design competitions. In the fall of 1930, the Club invited members to submit designs for an empty lot on the property of the New York Infirmary for Women and Children at 321 East 15th Street. Members visited the property in early 1931 to obtain the site plan and formulate ideas for the lot's improvement.

The winning design showed the lot transformed into an attractive, restful garden. Yellow-flowered forsythias brightened the center of the garden, and airy white trellises were artfully spaced around the yard. A small white sculpture served as a eye-catching centerpiece on a far wall. The designer of the garden was awarded the Club's Medal of Honor.

The private rear gardens of New York townhouses, while challenging to maintain, were greatly admired by Club members. Many in the Club were fortunate to own such gardens and, in the spring of 1930, the Club formed a Backyard Gardens Committee to plan a two-day pilgrimage to the gardens of 18 members.

Described as "green gardens" because of their lush plantings and use of soil, the members' gardens on the Club's first pilgrimage were found to be "[i]nteresting and original in design, harmonious and decorative in color, [and]...fondly cherished."²¹

The excursion was so successful that the Club decided to make it an annual event and, within a few years, the pilgrimage became quite well known. An article in *The New York Times* in 1934 reported,

A series of tours of city gardens, including penthouse gardens and formerly degraded backyards that have been converted into havens of rest and charm will start this week for the benefit of the Anne Brown Alumnae Free Nursery School.²²

Mentioned in the article were the gardens of Mrs. Lucius (Helen P.) Beers, Mrs. Andrew (Louise W.) Carnegie, Mrs. W. Rodman Fay, Mrs. Arthur L. Kerrigan, Mrs. Henry Goddard (Agnes B.) Leach, and Mrs. Schuyler (Julia C.) Schieffelin.

In the same year there was an article about a private rear garden at 125 East 70th Street in *The New York Sun*, a city newspaper. The reporter wrote that it "has been flourishing for fifty-three years — and under the same hand."²³ The garden belonged to a longtime member of the

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Club, Mrs. Cornelius (Clara A.) Poillon, whose daughter Mabel was also a member. They had invited the public to an informal afternoon viewing of the garden which Mrs. Poillon had started more than 50 years earlier, in 1881, just after she and her husband moved into their home as newlyweds.

Over five decades the garden had grown and evolved and, on the day it was opened to the public, in the fall of 1934, it was "abloom with chrysanthemums."²⁴ Shaded by a white birch, a dogwood, and a rowan tree, the garden featured a walled fountain and a flagstone path, surrounded by rhododendrons, flowering quince, wisteria, and ivy.

Mrs. Poillon also had a garden at her country residence and often brought back plants from the country to add to her garden on East 70th Street. Commenting in 1934 about her mother's dedication, Miss Poillon explained, "She always has to put in [flowers and plants] the very same night that she gets home. She used to do it by lantern light, but now she transplants by flashlight."²⁵

The Depression Creates New Challenges

In the early 1930s, the devastating effect of the Great Depression created bank failures and high rates of unemployment throughout the United States. In New York City, spending and the production of goods and services were greatly reduced. Many City Gardens Club members could no longer afford the membership dues and reluctantly had to resign. By the early spring of 1933, the Club's membership had fallen to 250.

The Club's annual pilgrimage suffered as well. A tour of backyard gardens that had been planned for the

spring of 1932 to benefit unemployed draftsmen of the New York Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects was canceled "as the amount possible to be raised was small."²⁶ The pilgrimage was also suspended in 1933 and 1934 because of a general reduction in Club activities during those difficult years.

Despite the decline in membership and the suspension of the pilgrimages, the Club continued to engage its members and the public through its annual exhibits and other projects, thereby serving as an important source of employment for florists, carpenters, painters, and suppliers of seeds, bulbs, and plants.

In one of its most ambitious and visible exhibits, in 1934 the Club designed a garden for the sunken plaza at Rockefeller Center. The construction of Rockefeller Center's complex of commercial buildings, extending from 49th to 52nd Streets, had begun in 1931 as a project of commercial and cultural renewal, with landscape designs for both the street and rooftop levels. Planners chose to create a sunken plaza in front of the skyscraper at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, the tallest building in the complex, to intensify the height of the skyscraper.²⁷

Mr. Paul Manship's eight-foot gold-leaf sculpture, Prometheus, was unveiled in 1934, with the Club's garden exhibit a major feature of the sculpture site. The garden design was formal and geometric, with colorful beds of flowers surrounding the base of the sculpture in a pattern of rays. Complementing the angular flower beds were triangular beds of greenery placed around the edges of the plaza. The massive gold-leaf sculpture and the bold, formal design of the beds created a striking display for the public's enjoyment.

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The Club's garden design for the sunken plaza at Rockefeller Center in 1934 was formal and geometric, with colorful flower beds and triangular beds of greenery.

Unfortunately the site failed to draw visitors to the more than 20 shops and restaurants in the sunken plaza, and by 1935 several businesses had failed.²⁸ With many buildings

in the complex still under construction, tourist access to the site was sometimes impeded, and there were too few office workers to support the plaza's struggling establishments.

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In an effort to increase pedestrian traffic, the Rockefeller Center planning committee decided to make the Channel Gardens, a narrow promenade of six rectangular garden pools connecting Rockefeller Center to Fifth Avenue, a more prominent feature that would draw the public into the area. In 1936 an ice skating rink installed in the sunken plaza and a display of international flags on its periphery added color and vivacity and eventually created more interest in the underground shops and restaurants.

Despite the Depression, the Club's Library Planting Committee continued to design and provide window boxes filled with flowering plants for the city's branch libraries. The window boxes needed to be custom-made for each library, and the committee forged partnerships with several public high schools to obtain the lumber and design the boxes. The schools' Manual Training Departments added the construction of the window boxes to their curricula and contributed the finished boxes to the library planting project.

When the City Gardens Club phased out the library window box project in 1938, a final report concluded that "[t]housands of children as well as adult patrons of the Libraries have been cheered by the bright blooms and fresh foliage, and as it was hoped, many of those living near have striven to imitate the example given."²⁹ Pleased with the success of the library project, the Club began working with the Fifth Avenue Association to increase the number of window boxes along its length and with the American Society of Landscape Architects to beautify Park Avenue.

During the 1930s the Club also participated in the annual International Flower Show at Grand Central

Terminal, where members distributed comprehensive lists of plants recommended for city gardening. Included in the lists were large and small trees, as well as evergreen and deciduous shrubs, groundcovers, vines, perennials, annuals, and bulbs.

As preparations were underway for the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, Queens, the Club arranged for the fair's chairman of the Board of Design, Mr. Stephen F. Voorhees, to give a lecture to the members about the design of the World's Fair buildings and grounds. In anticipation of the fair's high attendance, the Club urged residents to add to their outdoor greenery as a way of welcoming the thousands of visitors to New York City.



A member's imaginative entry in a 1938 table setting competition for the Club's December luncheon at The Pierre Hotel.

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By the late 1930s the City Gardens Club had established an annual December luncheon. For its 1938 luncheon at The Pierre Hotel, the Club held a table setting competition in which about 30 members participated, creating striking displays of stylish and unique motifs for entertaining. Speaking at the luncheon was Mr. Alfred Rheinstein, chairman of the New York Housing Authority, who shared his views on city housing, parks, and parkways with the assembled Club members, representatives of civic organizations, and other guests.

Mr. Wells Becomes the Club's President

That same year, in a departure from tradition, the City Gardens Club asked Mr. Nelson Miller Wells, a distinguished landscape architect, to become its president. Although other men had served as officers and directors of the Club in the past, Mr. Wells was the first and only male to assume the presidency.

Mr. Wells had been trained in landscape architecture at Cornell University and practiced for many years in Massachusetts. In the mid-1930s he served as chief planting designer for the Parks Department of New York City, supervising the planting programs for more than 700 city parks and parkways. Not surprisingly, he was in great demand for lectures and private consultations about landscaping and gardening.

During his presidency, the City Gardens Club sponsored a design competition for a garden at the Greenwich House Music School at 46 Barrow Street in the West Village. More than 30 plans were submitted, and the Club's Medal of Honor was awarded to the winners,

Messrs. Rudolph Tuma and Arno Beidermann, Jr. The top 10 entries were later exhibited at a meeting of the Club.

In the fall of 1939, Mr. Wells proposed an ambitious project that Club members embraced with much enthusiasm. Called a "Demonstration Garden," it was to be an education center that would "crystallize the aims and interests of the City Gardens Club as developed through the years of its existence."³⁰ The center would be open year-round to serve city gardeners and stimulate interest in gardening among low-income residents. The city was to provide the Club with a Manhattan location at no charge, Park Avenue and 39th Street being the favored site.

The education center would house model rooms displaying garden designs, plants, paving materials, enclosures, and structures. Exhibits would illustrate gardening techniques, such as soil preparation, plant cultivation, greenhouse gardening, soilless plant culture, spraying, and pruning. To complement the exhibits, a series of lectures, meetings, and workshops would also be offered. The center was to be managed by the City Gardens Club, with cooperation from the city and from civic and gardening associations.

The Club spent many months researching and planning the large-scale project, but with the departure of Mr. Wells as president in spring of 1940 and, especially, the start in Europe of the Second World War, the project was regretfully canceled. In recognition of his inspiring leadership from 1938 to 1940, Mr. Wells was made an honorary member of the City Gardens Club in the fall of 1941.





RESPONDING TO A CHANGING WORLD

With war on the horizon, the Club held a Christmas Greens Decoration Contest during the holiday season of 1940. Members assembled greenery for outdoor display, and a number of them went from door to door in the East 70s asking residents to spread the Christmas spirit by decorating their homes. Later the Club held an exhibit of the members' wreaths and other holiday displays in its office at 598 Madison Avenue between 57th and 58th Streets.

By the spring of 1941, the City Gardens Club was operating at a deficit. The board of directors voted to borrow money from the reserve fund and appealed to members to contribute whatever they could.

War Prompts Relief Projects

The pilgrimage, which had been reinstated in 1935 after a three-year hiatus, became an important source of funds. In the 1930s it had been a small afternoon event, but in 1941 the Club began to use the pilgrimage as a major fundraising vehicle. Revenues earned from these garden tours allowed the Club to support several wartime causes.

Some of the proceeds from a 1941 tour of 13 gardens were donated to a program called American Seeds for British Soil, which supplied vegetable seeds to a British organization, the National Federation of Women's Institutes. The onset of World War II had created a severe shortage of vegetable seeds in England, and the British War Relief Society had appealed to the United States for

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300,000 packages of seeds to distribute among the federation's 6,000 wartime units.

The 1941 pilgrimage brochure explained that "\$1.00 will buy almost two pounds of mixed vegetable seeds, which will supply one family [in England] with vegetables for a whole season."³¹ Another contribution was made after the pilgrimage of 1942 in order to help the federation meet its goal of providing seeds for "every square foot of tillable land in Britain."³²

The Club supported similar programs for Russia and China. A well-attended Club event in 1943 featured a speaker for Russian War Relief, followed by a member's slide show and talk about her trip to Russia in 1935. That same year a donation was sent to the Seed Committee of Russian War Relief.

Contributions were also directed to United China Relief, an organization providing aid to Chinese citizens who were sick and destitute because of the war. The cover of the 1943 pilgrimage brochure displayed four Chinese ideograms conveying the sad plight of farmers in China.

The pilgrimage brochures of the 1940s were quite varied and informal, featuring color illustrations of flowers and reproductions of Vincent van Gogh paintings. Noteworthy gardens on display in the 1940s included:

- *the garden of Miss Elizabeth Arden, cosmetics entrepreneur*
- *the formal garden of Mr. David Sarnoff, RCA media executive, and Mrs. Sarnoff*
- *the penthouse terrace, herb garden and art collection*

of Mme. Helena Rubinstein, cosmetics entrepreneur, collector, and philanthropist

- *the garden of Mr. Bennett Cerf, founder of Random House, and Mrs. Cerf*
- *the informal garden of Mr. Russell Crouse, musical playwright, and Mrs. Crouse*
- *the garden of Mr. Walter Damrosch, musical director and educator, and Mrs. Damrosch*
- *the gardens of Messrs. Sidney and Arthur Diamond, real estate developers*
- *the terrace garden of Mr. and Mrs. Albert D. Lasker, founders of the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation for medical research*

The Club decided to use some of the proceeds from its spring 1942 pilgrimage to create window boxes and indoor arrangements of plants for the Seamen's Church Institute, a shore-based agency providing services and a home base for merchant seamen. The Institute, still located in New York City, was then at 25 South Street in downtown Manhattan.

In an appeal for support of the project, the pilgrimage brochure stated, "...we hope that many who appreciate the commercial and war services of the merchant seamen will want to make their port headquarters still more homelike."³³ In keeping with the patriotic spirit of the war years, the window boxes were painted red, white, and blue.

In 1944 the Club decided to change the name of its annual viewing of private gardens, dropping the word "pilgrimage" and instead describing the event as a "showing." (This term would remain in use for more than a decade, eventually being replaced by the garden "tour.")

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The Tool Shed, staffed by City Gardens Club members, provided information to the public on planting victory gardens.

Another project of the City Gardens Club during World War II supported the Victory Garden movement, which encouraged Americans to plant their own vegetable gardens so that more of the nation's agricultural production could be distributed to Allied troops abroad.³⁴ In 1944 the Club's board of directors approved an expenditure of \$68

to establish an information booth called the Tool Shed at a Civilian Defense Volunteer Office in Manhattan.

Staffed by Club members, the Tool Shed offered seeds as well as instruction booklets describing how to plant a victory garden, and it housed a small lending library for

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visitors. City residents starting their own victory gardens could obtain advice by visiting or telephoning the Tool Shed which, in addition to providing information, helped coordinate other victory garden efforts throughout the city.

Veterans Are Remembered

By the mid-1940s, members of the country's armed forces had begun to return home. A number of veterans hospitals were established in the city to provide temporary and long-term care for wounded and traumatized servicemen. Starting in 1943 and continuing through the 1950s, the City Gardens Club decorated one or two veterans hospitals each year with Christmas trees and ornaments that had been made by Club members. The long-term project was large in scope and widely supported by the hospitals and the city.

The Club first became involved at the request of the American Red Cross which asked it in 1943 to supply 75 Christmas trees and as many decorations as possible for Halloran General Hospital, a large army hospital on Staten Island. Trees were brought in from Long Island, then decorated with more than 3,000 ornaments made by members with the help of children at several neighborhood schools.

Members also made 1,000 Christmas stockings, which they filled with Schrafft's Christmas candies, Camel cigarettes, and Lorna Doone cookies, all donated by various companies. Department stores Lord & Taylor, R. H. Macy & Company, and Bonwit Teller contributed dozens of glass ball ornaments, ribbon, and other decorations.

Miss Thirza B. McDonald, field director of the American Red Cross at the hospital, expressed gratitude for

the Club's immense effort just after the Christmas of 1943:

I cannot begin to tell you how delighted everyone on the Post is with the beautifully decorated trees that you and your group provided for the patients here at Halloran. ...I am so conscious of the way you came to the hospital, got the assignment and carried it out so perfectly...³⁵

Ornaments for the Veterans Hospital Christmas Project were assembled at the home of Mrs. Henry B. (Elizabeth) Guthrie, who was president of the Club through most of the 1940s. During one of the assembly meetings in 1947, General Ralph DeVoe, the director of a Veterans Administration hospital on Kingsbridge Road in the Bronx, spoke about the veterans and about the importance of the Club's project.

In 1948, when 10,000 ornaments were to be made for 300 Christmas trees, the Club needed a larger space for the assembly, and Mrs. Ward (Dorothy B.) Melville, a member, offered the use of her loft at 26 East 42nd Street. To assure the completion of thousands of ornaments each year, members began making them in the loft over the summer. The loft became known as the Workshop and was used for several years for the Veterans Hospital Christmas Project.

Members decorated rooms of the Kingsbridge Veterans Hospital in the Bronx in the early 1950s, using small Christmas trees and hundreds of ornaments made at the Club's Workshop on 42nd Street. In a letter of thanks, the special services chief at the hospital said the decorations were "...a big hit with the patients, [helping] somehow to compensate for the separation from family and friends during the holiday season."³⁶

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Patients at the Halloran General Hospital in 1949 with a Christmas tree and decorations provided by the Veterans Hospital Christmas Project, a popular Club activity in the 1940s and early 1950s.



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Artificial botanicals were becoming popular at the time, and it was decided to use some of them to decorate the area surrounding the hospital swimming pool. An attractive scheme of wicker baskets filled with English ivy was installed. In the spring of 1952, the Kingsbridge Veterans Hospital presented the City Gardens Club with a certificate of appreciation, and in 1953, General Ralph DeVoe, the hospital director, again expressed thanks on behalf of the staff and patients.

Children's Gardens Thrive

In 1945 the City Gardens Club planted the first of a series of Children's Gardens. The aim was to unite young people in a specific neighborhood through the experience of community gardening. In planning the first Children's Garden, the Club worked with the Police Athletic League, a city youth agency.

After surveying prospective sites, the Club chose a 100 square-foot lot on Monroe Street on the Lower East Side. The site was right next to the Manhattan Bridge and adjacent to Vladeck Houses, a complex of buildings containing 1,700 apartments built in 1940 as the city's first municipally-subsidized housing project.³⁷ The Police Athletic League helped clear and plow the ground for gardening and, in the spring of 1945, more than 60 neighborhood children ages 7 to 17 planted over two dozen garden plots with vegetable seeds.

Interest in the Monroe Street Children's Garden grew, drawing ever-increasing numbers of Vladeck Houses residents to the site. By 1949, just four years after its creation, 73 individual plots had been planted and were being

tended by more than 150 "young specialists."³⁸ With two children in charge of each plot, the garden was filled with new vegetables and flowers each year.


Young gardeners worked together on special attractions, including a sunflower garden and a sizable wall section for morning glories. At the close of each gardening season, there was a celebratory corn roast during which the City Gardens Club and the president of the Police Athletic League awarded certificates of merit to the children.

Because of the Monroe Street Children's Garden, scores of young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in the neighborhood were introduced to gardening. One of the project chairmen wrote in the Club *Bulletin* in 1949 that the garden project "... has given us [a] remarkable and timely example of tolerance among children of all races and creeds...."³⁹

Inspired by the Monroe Street garden, the director of a detention center for delinquent girls appealed to the City Gardens Club in 1947 to create a Children's Garden for the detention center on Welfare Island (which is known as Roosevelt Island today). That summer Mmes. Elizabeth Guthrie and Willa Plank led an effort to plant a 50 x 50 foot vegetable garden, engaging 63 girls and members of the detention center staff. It was reported that "...vegetables were grown and harvested in a goodly number,"⁴⁰ and that pots filled with flowering plants and beds of zinnias were added to the front of the building. At summer's end, enthusiasm for the project led to another planting of spring-flowering bulbs.

By the early 1950s, the Club had established Children's Gardens in collaboration with a number of organizations in the city, including the New York City Mission

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In 1945 the Club's first Children's Garden on Monroe Street encouraged children from diverse backgrounds to work together on a community garden with more than 70 plots of vegetables and flowers.

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Society in Harlem and the Hudson Guild in Chelsea, and the maintenance of each garden had been turned over to its community group or institution. The Children's Gardens demonstrated how valuable it was for young people to have firsthand contact with nature and also revealed that, for many of the city's youth, such opportunities were all too limited.

The Club Brings Nature to Public Schools

In an effort to introduce more city children to the wonders of nature, the City Gardens Club gradually shifted its focus from working with young people in community gardens to improving natural science education in the public schools. Mrs. Guthrie, who had served as president from 1941 to 1948, became the chairman of the Club's Conservation Committee. She had been teaching nature study classes at Public School 612 in Manhattan and was aware that the Board of Education and the Audubon Society were interested in developing a program to bring nature specimens into the public schools.

In the spring of 1951, Mrs. Guthrie proposed that the City Gardens Club undertake the collection of nature specimens for public schools to enhance the teaching of natural science. Club members collected specimens over the summer, and items such as flowering branches, seed pods, burrs, fungi, shells, and catkins from willow, birch and oak trees were assembled in boxes at the headquarters of the National Audubon Society.

The effort was so successful that Mrs. Guthrie persuaded the Club to establish an ongoing program of nature specimen donations. The nature specimen boxes became a highly valued teaching aid, bringing science lessons to life and

helping thousands of city children and teachers to gain a better understanding of the natural environment.


That same spring Mrs. Guthrie suggested that the Club use some of its funds to award scholarships to the Audubon Society's summer nature camps held each year on Hog Island in Maine. The Audubon Society had started the summer nature camps in the 1930s as part of an education movement emphasizing the interdependence of living things and their environment rather than mere identification of plant and animal species.⁴¹

Mrs. Guthrie's suggestion was enthusiastically received, and in May of 1952 the Club awarded scholarships to two public school principals. Soon thereafter scholarships were extended to public school science teachers, giving them invaluable firsthand knowledge of the natural world, which greatly enhanced their classroom teaching.

The scholarships and nature specimen boxes became a primary focus of the Club. By the fall of 1954, 178 boxes were being distributed to more than 50 public schools. However, the need to instruct teachers in the use of the specimens soon became apparent. It was noted that "[s]even schools sent teachers to be briefed on using material — some did not know the difference between a dandelion and a clover."⁴² In 1955, the Club prepared a manual to be distributed to the schools, along with the nature specimen boxes. That same year Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts were invited to help collect the nature specimens, and over 350 children participated.

The City Gardens Club's public education projects also included building birdhouses and taking field trips with delinquent juveniles in the city school system. Some

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of the young people enjoyed fishing, and Club members supplied them with bait. For the 100th Anniversary of Central Park in 1953, members created a slide show and script about the park, producing six sets of the slides for city public and Catholic schools.

In 1955 the Club donated plants for a garden at Public School 33 in Chelsea. The garden generated a lot of enthusiasm among the students, and at a tree-planting ceremony in the late spring, the children pledged to care for the tree and maintain the garden.

Conservation is a Priority

The City Gardens Club's commitment to conservation, which had prompted many of the Club's activities in the 1920s, re-emerged as an important focus of members' attention in the years after World War II. In 1948 and 1949 the Club took part in a land-use dispute over a large wetlands area in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx. The area was the city's only freshwater swamp within walking distance of a subway. As a sanctuary for birds, wildlife, and plants, it was valued by naturalists, ornithologists, students, and numerous other city residents who were interested in nature and ecology.

The Parks Department planned to destroy a large part of the swamp in order to add two more holes to the Van Cortlandt Park golf course, which had opened in 1895 and was the country's oldest public course.⁴³ In the 1930s and 1940s, a number of the course's holes had been eliminated due to the nearby construction of the Henry Hudson Parkway,⁴⁴ and the wetlands area was being considered as a site for replacement holes. At roughly the same time the Parks Department was also developing a plan to connect

the Henry Hudson Parkway with the Mosholu Parkway by building a cloverleaf through part of the wetlands.


The City Gardens Club, the Audubon Society, and numerous other community and environmental organizations united to oppose the Parks Department's plan, issuing position statements against the destruction of the swamp and requesting public hearings. By the fall of 1949 the plan to create two more holes for the golf course had been stalled, and in later years the cloverleaf was defeated as well.

Another collaboration with the Audubon Society concerned the use of wild bird plumes for the millinery trade. Earlier in the 20th century, leading conservation groups had succeeded in establishing laws that limited the hunting of birds for the use of their feathers in hats and garments.⁴⁵ In 1949 the City Gardens Club joined the Audubon Society in writing to senators and to the Senate Conservation Committee, urging the defeat of a bill that, if passed, would ease the earlier restrictions on the shooting of wild birds.

The Club also maintained an association with the American Museum of Natural History. In the fall of 1950, when Mr. Richard Pough, the museum's curator of conservation, hosted a series of discussions known as the Conservation Round Table, Mrs. Guthrie was invited to participate as the City Gardens Club representative.

In 1953 the Club became involved in an effort to save Sunken Forest on Long Island, donating money that year and again in 1955 toward a campaign to purchase the land from developers. In 1959 there was news that Sunken Forest had been saved, and in 1960 its successful preservation was detailed in the publication of the Garden Club of America.

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PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ENDEAVORS

Throughout the 1950s the Club organized numerous short-term projects. Many churches celebrated the Easter season with displays of flowering plants, such as azaleas, daffodils and hyacinths, which were often discarded after Easter Sunday. In 1952, Club members decided to collect the plants from various churches and deliver them to places in need of greenery and cheer. One such place was the New York Home for Homeless Boys, where the plants were greatly appreciated.

That spring the Club improved the small garden at the Home for the Aged and Indigent on 103rd Street. Finding that the grounds were in dreary condition, Mrs. Melville led an effort to restore the outdoor plantings and decorate indoor rooms with geraniums and ferns.

Collaborating once again with the Audubon Society, the City Gardens Club, in 1953 and 1954, helped create a bird sanctuary on the roof of the headquarters of the National Audubon Society, then located at 1130 Fifth Avenue at 94th Street. Other agencies, including the Hudson River Preservation Society and the Palisades Society, were also involved, and a landscape designer was consulted.

The completed sanctuary featured a variety of potted and boxed shrubs surrounding the small rooftop area designated for the facility. A three-tiered fountain for the birds was the highlight of the space. The bird sanctuary was completed in the fall of 1954 and was included the following spring on the Club's annual garden tour.

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Publicity Intensifies as Gardening Becomes Popular

City Gardens Club activities attracted much attention in the late 1940s and early 1950s as New Yorkers became more interested in gardening. A Publicity Committee was formed in 1948 to handle the increased coverage of the Club in newspapers and magazines. In addition the Club received numerous requests for information on selecting plants and maintaining gardens and window boxes under city conditions.

Interest from the public was so high that in 1951 the Club hired a publicity firm, Hartwell, Jobson & Kibbee, which prepared the Club's garden tour announcements and brochures, press releases, and complimentary tickets. The firm also issued text to radio stations for on-air promotions of the garden tours and secured a televised announcement on *Tex and Jinx*, a popular daytime show hosted by Tex McCrary and Jinx Falkenburg. Broadcast from the Waldorf-Astoria hotel, *Tex and Jinx* featured talk of the day, household hints, and interviews with celebrity guests.⁴⁶

Mindful of the need for good publicity pictures, City Gardens Club members began taking photographs of their gardens. Before long, the Club was known as a source of pictures of indoor and outdoor gardens and received many requests for photographs from magazines such as *The New Yorker* and *House and Garden*. The Club also had a members' lending library of books on gardening and related topics.

Private Gardens Flourish

Interest in the Club's annual garden tour continued to grow, drawing visitors from the membership, the


public, and suburban and outlying areas to the annual event. In 1950 the Club had moved to a new office at 9 Rockefeller Plaza, and the Rockefeller Center Observation Roof was a highlight of the garden tour that spring. The Observation Roof offered spectacular views of other roof gardens in what was by then a growing business district. Following a lecture, tour participants convened at the Rainbow Room on the 65th floor for cocktails.

Throughout the 1950s gardening was much in vogue, and the Club had little difficulty finding exceptional gardens to include in the tour. New gardening clubs were established in the New York City area, and a degree of competition was evident in the newspaper listings of gardening events.

City gardens were increasingly viewed as a desirable residential feature, although gardeners had to "fight off crows, woodpeckers, bats, pigeons, aphids, tent caterpillars, and go after all sorts of crawlers with spray guns."⁴⁷ One gardener commented, "You wonder how [so many wild creatures] get here, only a couple of blocks from Grand Central."⁴⁸ Small greenhouses were popular, as well as small vegetable gardens of tomatoes, corn, and Puerto Rican yams.

New York City had a diversity of seasons that kept gardening businesses and gardening professionals occupied throughout the year. Residents increasingly used their gardens and terraces for entertaining, creating demand for the many new styles of terrace furniture and decor that were introduced in the 1950s. Terraces, rooftops, and backyards were popular spots for relaxation, picnics, parties, admiring sunsets, and even sleeping on hot summer nights.

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The diverse architectural styles of Manhattan residences were reflected in garden designs. Many gardeners created backyard and terrace gardens that were a symphony of greenery, flowers, and trees, making visitors unaware of the street below or just a few paces away.

Club Programs Benefit City Institutions

In 1957 and 1958, thanks in large part to the efforts of Mrs. Melville, the Club established a garden in an outdoor space at Bellevue Hospital, which was erecting a new building at the time. After concrete paving had been removed, a 100 x 45 foot garden was installed, with eight trees, a variety of herbs and flowers, and a new fence supporting a profusion of morning glories.

Children at the hospital and from the neighborhood helped with the planting. In the spring of 1958, the Club arranged for the care and maintenance of the garden to become a project of the hospital's Occupational Therapy Department.

A year later, City Gardens Club members became involved in a New York Botanical Garden project to establish a three-acre wildflower preserve, with a number of members donating plants from their own gardens for the venture. Included in the wildflower garden were informative plant labels for visitors to study.

A significant effort for the Club, which began in December of 1959, was the decoration of tables for a yearly Christmas dinner at a veterans hospital on First Avenue at 24th Street. The endeavor was reminiscent of the Club's project for veterans during the war and postwar years. It was

started by Mrs. Maurice P. (Caroline P.) van Buren, who directed it with inspiring dedication throughout the 1960s.

Each year Club members designed approximately 25 festive centerpieces for the hospital dinner tables. In the weeks before the dinner, a group of 10 to 15 volunteers created the centerpieces, sharing ideas and materials. They then delivered them on the day of the dinner, which was always the Sunday before Christmas, and worked with the veterans to decorate each table. The Club also contributed small Christmas trees, trimmed with colorful ornaments, and stockings filled with small gifts.

An appreciative letter from the hospital noted that Club members had "[m]ade it a Christmas that would be long remembered."⁴⁹ In May of 1963 the hospital awarded Mrs. van Buren and the City Gardens Club a citation for the Veterans Hospital Christmas Project.

The Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, located at 400 East 34th Street, was another beneficiary of the Club's volunteer services. In 1958 the Institute had opened the Enid A. Haupt Glass Garden, known as "The Garden of Enid," which offered people who were disabled or undergoing physical rehabilitation an opportunity to participate in gardening activities for their therapeutic value.⁵⁰ Serving as a retreat from the hospital atmosphere and open to wheelchair and ambulatory patients, the garden featured a large variety of flowers, non-flowering plants, shrubs, a solarium, and a still pool for sitting and relaxation. An aviary had small trees for parrots and love birds.

In 1960, the Rusk Institute asked the City Gardens Club for assistance with the Glass Garden, and the

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Club members supported the therapeutic Enid A. Haupt Glass Garden of the Rusk Institute by giving advice on greenhouse gardening, spending time with patients, and including the facility on the Club's 1962 garden tour.

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Club responded, providing advice on greenhouse gardening and spending time with the patients. Wishing to increase public awareness of the therapeutic effects of gardening, the Club included the Glass Garden in its 1962 garden tour.

Two other institutions to benefit from the Club's expertise were Inwood House, a youth services organization, and the Soldiers', Sailors', Marines', and Airmen's Club, which provided accommodations for members of the uniformed services and the Merchant Marine. In 1965 members helped plan and install window boxes for Inwood House at 320 East 82nd Street, and in the fall of 1969 Mrs. van Buren led an effort to provide plants for the interior of the Soldiers', Sailors', Marines', and Airmen's Club at Lexington Avenue and 37th Street.

Beautification Efforts Target Streets and Parks

The planting of trees on residential streets, which had been one of the Club's earliest projects, enjoyed renewed interest in the late 1950s and early 1960s. A member living on East 70th Street had added to the trees on her block, and more were planted throughout the neighborhood. Mrs. Melville was a strong supporter of street tree planting and proposed that every member try to have trees planted in front of her home or apartment building.

In 1959 the Club was awarded a Certificate of Commendation from The Parks Association of New York City for its street tree plantings. The Citizens Committee To Keep New York City Clean, Inc. also recognized the Club's work, citing the aesthetic improvement the newly-

planted trees lent to struggling neighborhoods. Further support for the Club's initiative came in 1962 from the Parks Department, which sent informative leaflets to members detailing procedures for tree planting.

The Club helped establish a neighborhood sitting park at 103rd Street and Northern Boulevard in Corona, Queens in 1966. The Vest Pocket Park, as it was called, was a collaborative effort of the City Gardens Club, the City Real Estate Department, the Corona Congregational Church, the 103rd Street Block Association, and other organizations.

Young people from the Neighborhood Youth Corps worked during the summer to clear the 40 x 100 foot site and seed it with grass. Community residents helped to put up seven trellises for climbing roses and other plants, and eight benches were installed, alternating with the trellis plantings. Following the official opening of the Vest Pocket Park, the city Parks Department commended the City Gardens Club for "having brought a spot of beauty to a neighborhood that was greatly in need of such assistance."⁵¹

Several years later the Club's Special Projects Committee added to the beauty of Central Park, planting ten species of magnolia trees in an area near the statue of William Shakespeare and not far from the Mall. At an event at The Pierre Hotel in the late spring of 1969, the City Gardens Club president, Mrs. James N. (Katharine L.) Dunlop, and several members unveiled an attractive oil painting of the newly planted trees. The site was dedicated the following year in a ceremony attended by Mr. August Heckscher, commissioner of the Parks Department.

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MEETING NEW CHALLENGES

In the 1960s, the City Gardens Club again suffered financial constraints. Membership had declined and numbered only 135 in 1962. At a board meeting it was noted that the garden tour of 1960 had raised only one dollar more than the previous year's tour. More bad news came during the summer of 1961 when it was discovered that the typewriter had been stolen from the Club's office, which was then at 829 Madison Avenue. Shortly after the theft, the Club took out an insurance policy and changed the lock on the office door.

The Club was particularly concerned about its ability to fund the conservation education program which had been providing annual scholarships for Audubon summer camps in Greenwich, Connecticut and on Hog Island in Maine since the early 1950s. Members took great pride in each year offering a new group of public school teachers the opportunity to enrich their knowledge of natural science, but in 1961 the number of scholarships the Club could afford was limited to 10.

Members continued to collect natural science specimens for the nature specimen boxes, which were by then known as the Nature Kits. About 200 kits were distributed each year to public schools. Specimens were dropped off at the Natural Science Center for Young People at the American Museum of Natural History, where the assembly of the kits took place in mid-fall. A special green label was designed and affixed to the Nature Kits to make them readily identifiable and facilitate their distribution to the schools.

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By the mid-1960s floral arrangements had become an interest of younger Club members, who asked a well-known floral designer to teach a class on decorative arrangements. A committee was formed to create attractive floral displays which soon enhanced the Club's meetings, teas and lectures.

Citations Are Awarded

In 1961 the City Gardens Club established a citation to be presented annually to a person who had made a significant contribution to the preservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the country. The first citation was awarded to Mrs. Albert D. Lasker for her leadership of urban beautification projects in New York City and Washington, D.C.

Beginning in the 1940s, Mrs. Lasker had donated trees, gardens, and flower beds to neighborhoods throughout New York. In 1957 she had established the Salute to the Seasons Fund for a More Beautiful New York to support community-based beautification efforts and develop demonstration projects that would inspire others.

In the spring of 1963, the Club awarded a citation to two American scientists who had done research on the terrestrial ecosystem of Antarctica. Antarctica was in the news that year because the Antarctic Treaty, which had been in the works for several years, was enacted. This international agreement stipulated that the continent be used only in peaceful cooperation toward the pursuit of science.⁵²

An American team had conducted successful planting experiments on Antarctica's terrestrial ecosystem,

which covered only two percent of the continent. Their work demonstrated that "...the richness of Antarctica's life lies not in its abundance, but in its toughness."⁵³ The treaty prohibited the establishment of military bases and weapons testing, both of which were prominent issues of the Cold War.

The City Gardens Club awarded its 1965 citation to Mrs. Lyndon Baines ("Lady Bird") Johnson, for "her interest in conservation and her outstanding contribution to the beautifying of the country."⁵⁴ That same year Mrs. Johnson had established the Committee for a More Beautiful Capital. Under this program, hundreds of volunteers planted flowers, grass, and shrubs in the nation's capital and led neighborhood cleanup campaigns. The program was soon replicated in many other cities around the country.

In October of 1965, when the Highway Beautification Act was passed by Congress, the Club sent a letter of congratulations to Mrs. Johnson, who had been a major proponent of the Act and worked hard for its passage. The Highway Beautification Act limited billboard advertising on highways and was one of the first modern environmental laws in the United States.

The 1966 citation was awarded to Dr. Carl W. Buchheister, who had been the president of the Audubon Society since 1959. Dr. Buchheister had led the effort in the mid-1930s for the Audubon Society to acquire wildlife property in Maine to use for educating teachers and other adults in environmental science. The ecology workshop on Hog Island, Maine opened in 1936, and Carl Buchheister served as its director for 22 years.



Environmental Issues Are Addressed

The City Gardens Club continued to promote conservation of our natural resources throughout the 1960s. In 1962 when the natural environment of Welfare Island was threatened, the Club returned to the site of one of its early demonstration projects. The Club had planted a Children's Garden at a Welfare Island detention center for delinquent girls in 1947. By the early 1960s the island, which would be renamed Roosevelt Island in the 1970s, was home in part to Goldwater Memorial Hospital, a large complex of buildings.

The Club wrote to Mr. Newbold Morris, commissioner of the Parks Department, protesting the development of the island and the destruction of trees and other natural features. Members who had visited a women's ward at the hospital arranged for the Club to provide greenery for the two solaria on the ward. Forty-eight geranium plants were delivered and installed around the Easter holiday of 1963.

In the spring of 1964 members protested the overuse of water for cleaning sidewalks and public spaces in Manhattan. Members also protested the city's unhealthy air, particularly the pollution at street level caused by buses and other vehicles. Taking a stand on a state issue, the Club sent letters to Con Edison opposing the construction of a power plant in upstate New York. And in 1967, the City Gardens Club joined a national effort to officially declare the bald eagle an endangered species in all areas of the United States.⁵⁵

In January of 1964, the noted environmental activist, Miss Rachel Carson, was asked to be honorary

chairman of the spring garden tour. Miss Carson accepted but, sadly, in April she died. The Club honored her posthumously with its 1964 citation, which read in part, "More than any other single individual, Rachel Carson awakened the concern of the whole country to the dangers facing all living matter through the widespread misuse of pesticides."⁵⁶

The garden tour of 1964 was the most successful the Club had ever had. With the opening of the World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, Queens, many out-of-town visitors to the fair were interested in seeing city gardens as well. Club member Miss Helen Mober obtained excellent publicity for the tour, which comprised 12 city gardens, each with outstanding design, a profusion of flowers and trees in bloom, and modern outdoor sculpture.

Included in the tour was an all-pink-and-blue backyard garden, a unique sunken garden along the East River, and a three-level garden at the former John Jacob Astor Farm on East 87th Street, which featured rare shrubs, lavender and white flowers, and a wall fountain backed with Portuguese tiles. The property was owned by Miss Amy Vanderbilt, a descendant of Mr. Astor and a popular author of books on etiquette.

Inspired by the example of the revered environmental activist who was to have served as honorary chairman of the tour, the City Gardens Club took action when the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge was threatened in 1968 by a proposed expansion of Kennedy Airport. Mrs. Guthrie urged members to write to New York City Mayor John V. Lindsay opposing the plan. Members also wrote to state officials and Governor Nelson Rockefeller. By the spring of 1971, due in part to the efforts of many conservation

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Mrs. Henry B. (Elizabeth) Guthrie (right) and a public school science teacher (second from right) joined Parks Commissioner August Heckscher (third from left) at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in 1971.

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groups, organizations, and concerned individuals, the airport expansion was stopped.

The area was formally dedicated as a wildlife sanctuary in May of 1971, and several City Gardens Club members attended the event, along with four of the Club's Audubon scholarship recipients. Parks Commissioner Heckscher, in a letter to the City Gardens Club president, wrote, "It was especially gratifying to me to join together with you and all the other people who have been such steadfast and thoughtful friends at the Jamaica Bay parklands."⁵⁷

In the spring of 1972, the Club awarded its annual citation to Mr. Herbert Johnson, custodian of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. Today Jamaica Bay is one of the most important urban wildlife refuges in the United States, with diverse habitats and hundreds of plant and animal species.

Gardens Are Designed for Historic Sites

In 1968 the City Gardens Club celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding. A reception, attended by civic leaders, honored guests, and members, was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Melville. To commemorate its anniversary, the Club planted a garden near the Susan Wagner Memorial Wing of Gracie Mansion and, later in the year, a bronze plaque acknowledging the gift by the City Gardens Club was placed at the site.

The finished garden was included on the Club's 1969 garden tour, for which Mrs. Richard M. (Patricia) Nixon, who was then a resident of New York City, served as honorary chairman.


In the early 1970s, the City Gardens Club worked on garden restoration projects for two other historic city sites, the Morris-Jumel Mansion and Old Merchant's House. The Morris-Jumel Mansion in Upper Manhattan was a colonial house that was occupied for several weeks by George Washington during the Revolutionary War.

It had been maintained by the city for a number of decades, eventually serving as a museum, but the garden had suffered from storm damage and neglect. In restoring the property, the Club used plants and a design appropriate to 18th century gardening. Mrs. van Buren volunteered to oversee the replanting of trees and the reestablishment of a circular rose garden on the grounds.

Shortly after the start of the project, around 1970, Mrs. van Buren died. She had given many years of service to some of the Club's most important projects, particularly the Veterans Hospital Christmas Project. In recognition of her invaluable contributions over the years, the Club decided not only to establish a Memorial Fund in Mrs. van Buren's honor, but also to create a memorial in her name on the grounds of the Morris-Jumel Mansion. With the help of the Parks Department, four Austrian pines were obtained and planted as a screen on the southern edge of the property.

The other garden restoration project, Old Merchant's House, at 29 East 4th Street, was a National Historic Landmark and a New York City Landmark that had been restored as a typical New York City house of the 1830s. In the fall of 1972 the board began to investigate the feasibility of restoring the small garden on the site.

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Members made numerous visits, conducted extensive research, and consulted with the architect of the renovation project, Joseph Robert. By spring of 1973, an attractive plan had been developed.

Other organizations, as well as New York State, joined the City Gardens Club in contributing funds to the project and, when more money was needed, the Club helped organize a theatrical benefit in the fall of 1973. The production, "Crown Matrimonial," was written by Royce Ryton and told the story of the abdication of King Edward VIII.

By the early 1970s the City Gardens Club's ability to fund projects had greatly improved. In addition to increased revenues from the garden tours, a sad occurrence in 1968, the death of Miss Mabel Poillon, had left the Club with a sizable bequest.

Miss Poillon and her mother had been longtime city gardeners and Club members. Her generous gift enabled the Club to establish, in 1969, a Gift and Memorial Fund for special charitable projects.

Several years later, the Club received another meaningful gift from Mrs. James N. Dunlop, who had been president from 1967 to 1970. It was the original drawing of the City Gardens Club seal made in 1918 by Mrs. T. Carlyle Jones. Inspired by a lecture on the subject of decorative glass paperweights at a Club program, members decided to order glass paperweights bearing the seal, which were then given to the owners of gardens on the garden tour as a gesture of the Club's gratitude.



An article and photograph in The New York Times publicized the 1966 garden tour, which raised funds for the Club's Audubon scholarship program.

Pictured were Mrs. Roy E. Jones (left) and Mrs. Ward (Dorothy B.) Melville (right).

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COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS


While the garden tours continued to be popular, flower shows offered the Club another opportunity to educate city gardeners. The first annual Bryant Park Flower Show was held in 1969, and the City Gardens Club was invited to create an exhibit for the show's education tent.

The Bryant Park Flower Show, which ran for several days each October, attracted 50,000 attendees in its first year. In addition to the City Gardens Club, participating organizations included the Garden Club of America, The Horticultural Society of New York, and the National Audubon Society.

The Club's 1969 exhibit, staffed by members, consisted of a large framed panel displaying photographs of Club projects and gifts to the city. Mrs. John V. (Mary H.) Lindsay, whose husband was mayor at the time, presented the City Gardens Club with an Award of Appreciation on behalf of the Bryant Park Flower Show "for bringing the people of New York the joy, beauty and importance of living plants."⁵⁸

Subsequent exhibits for the show reflected various Club activities and interests. The 1970 exhibit, "House Plants for New York City," was followed in 1971 with, "Exhibit Planting for a New York City Terrace." Mrs. Franklin B. (Laura D.) Benkard, chairman of the Club's flower show committee, lent a number of her own plants for the display. After the show was over, a report stated that, true to city life, some of the plants were missing and presumed stolen. The Club reimbursed Mrs. Benkard for her loss.

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The City Gardens Club's restorations of historic gardens inspired the 1973 exhibit of a Victorian garden. Members worked with a popular gardening shop, The Manhattan Gardener, Ltd., to prepare it. Afterward it was noted that the exhibit "took many hours of work, and the results were wonderful."⁵⁹

The 1974 exhibit, entitled "The Americas," featured exotic tropical plants. Also shown was a model of the proposed garden restoration at Old Merchant's House. (The actual restoration was still in progress.) The Club printed a brochure for distribution at the show to introduce more city residents to the possibilities of gardening. There was a large turnout of attendees, including a group of teachers from New Jersey who were interested to learn about the Club's Nature Kit and Audubon scholarship programs.

After the mid-1970s the Bryant Park Flower Show was less well-attended. The Club did not participate in 1976, but returned to the show in 1977 with "A Tree for All Seasons," an exhibit of landscape and garden photography of the four seasons in New York City, which received very positive reviews. The Club's exhibit also included a display of dried flowers that drew much attention and interest.

Educational Activities Continue

While the Club's flower show exhibits were providing information to the general public, members worked to educate each other as well. Conservation issues continued to be a major focus of the Club. At a board meeting, an announcement was made about the first annual Earth Day to be held April 22, 1970.

When a recycling program was started in the city by the Citizens Environmental Lobby, members made announcements at Club meetings, explaining the program and outlining ways to participate in it. Mrs. Melville researched the potential toxicity of popular household cleaning products and informed the membership about which ingredients were hazardous and which products were the safest to use.

In the mid-to-late 1970s the Conservation Committee helped support the preservation of South Carolina's Congaree Swamp which was being threatened by development. The Committee communicated with the Columbia Garden Club about measures that might be taken to prevent the development and save the swamp. Not only was the rescue effort successful but also, in 2003, Congaree Swamp was designated a national park, preserving the largest intact, old-growth, bottomland, hardwood forest in the United States.

Instilling an appreciation for natural resources like the Congaree Swamp was an important objective of the Audubon Society's summer workshops. In 1975, the City Gardens Club's annual scholarship program, enabling teachers to attend the workshops, was lauded by Dr. Carl Buchheister, president emeritus of the National Audubon Society, who wrote:

No other garden Club, no local Audubon Society, no other organization of any kind, and no individual has the impressive distinction that the City Gardens Club has, of having given 480 scholarships [from 1952 through 1975] to N.Y.C. schoolteachers....Through that truly great generosity the City Gardens Club has helped to shape the minds

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and hearts of thousands of children,...truly a great achievement, which... 'is on the side of life.' ⁶⁰

The following year the City Gardens Club was proud to receive a citation from the Audubon Society in recognition of the Club's 25 years of providing scholarships for New York City teachers to the Audubon Ecology Workshops.

In another effort to improve natural science education in the public schools, the Club decided in the fall of 1977 to rewrite the teaching manual that accompanied the Nature Kits. A contribution from Con Edison helped fund the publication, which provided illustrations and detailed information on the items in the kits, as well as instructions on collecting and preserving specimens. To involve more members in the Nature Kits and other projects, the Club formed a Volunteer Committee.

In October of 1978 the City Gardens Club celebrated its 60th anniversary at an event held at the National Society of Colonial Dames on East 71st Street. Honored at the event were several long-standing members, including Mrs. Guthrie, who had initiated the Nature Kit and Audubon scholarship programs and served for many years as chairman of the Conservation Committee. Each honoree was given a hand-painted, illuminated scroll made for the Club by the Community of St. Mary's Convent in upstate New York.

The Club Assists Other Nonprofit Organizations

The Club's Horticulture Committee undertook several new projects in the mid-1970s. One was the plant-

ing of a garden on the grounds of the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, which at the time was located on First Avenue at 71st Street. The site already had some planted areas, but it lacked a comprehensive design.

Once a design had been determined, the Club donated funds for the purchase of plants. The completed garden included a plaque recognizing the City Gardens Club's contribution and stating the Club's mission to promote and conserve gardens in New York City. The opening of the garden was featured on the evening news.

Another Horticulture Committee project involved Amsterdam House, which had a new building and 200 square feet available for planting. Members of the committee worked with the trustees of Amsterdam House to help design the grounds.

The City Gardens Club's interest in garden restorations and children's education resulted in financial support for several projects of other nonprofit organizations. In 1978 the Club contributed to the restoration of The Biblical Garden at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, and in 1980 it supported the Senior Citizens Garden Project of the East Side House Settlement in the South Bronx, receiving a photographic exhibit of the work that was done on the garden as a token of the settlement's appreciation.

Contributions were made in 1979 and again in 1980 to an education program for elementary school children at the six-acre Central Park Conservatory Garden at Fifth Avenue and 104th Street. The program, which the Garden Club of America supported as well, involved chil-

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dren from two schools, Central Park East and the Harlem Block School, who planted bulbs with the help of Club members and other volunteers.

Conservation Efforts Are Fruitful

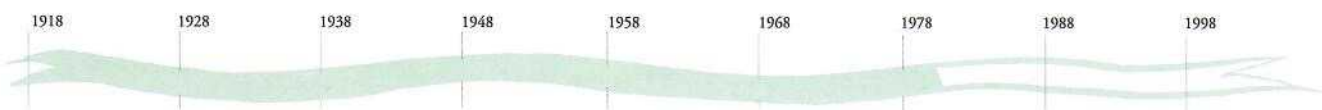
The Conservation Committee, led by Mrs. Guthrie, regularly reported to the Board of Directors on local and national conservation issues. In the early 1980s, the committee reported on water shortages, the safety of Long Island's water supply, the gypsy moth infestation, ticks, and legislation to protect wilderness areas in Alaska.

Members who wished to advocate on conservation issues were given news articles and other background information, names of public officials to contact, and advice on advocacy techniques. In 1981 members wrote to their elected representatives conveying their opposition to the policies of Secretary of the Interior James Watt and supporting a public campaign to remove him from office.

Continuing to promote conservation education for children, the Club donated funds in 1981 to the Fireboat House Environmental Center at 90th Street and the East River. Built on a dock, the former fireboat station had two classrooms for the study of alternative energy sources and a greenhouse equipped with fish tanks and solar panels, where various uses of solar energy were on display.

The Club contributed plants as well as funds for the purchase of hydroponic equipment and tools. That year more than 2,000 elementary and junior high school students visited the center.

Also in 1981, the City Gardens Club appealed to the Exxon Corporation for assistance in reprinting instruction manuals for the Nature Kits. In recognition of the value of the Nature Kits to New York City public schools, Exxon agreed to provide funds for the printing. The new manuals featured a revised text and illustrations by Mrs. E. Madsen (Eve) Adams, a Club member and scientific illustrator.





BRANCHING OUT


While the Nature Kits were being revised, the Club was developing a more formal program of financial support for horticultural and conservation projects by other organizations. In the 1980s donations were made to the New York Zoological Society for projects at the Bronx Zoo and the New York Aquarium. A 1980 grant to the zoo stipulated that the monies be used "for the labeling of birds and the supplementing of flora and fauna."⁶¹

The Hudson Guild, a family and youth services organization, received funds to improve its small garden in Chelsea. Children from a nearby school were invited to participate in the garden renovation which featured magnolia, hemlock, and juniper trees, as well as shrubs and a trellis. Another contribution went to the Yorkville Common Pantry in East Harlem for a flower and vegetable garden.

A 1982 grant supported an innovative work study program for teenagers that had been started by the Parks Council. Its aim was to give young people a valuable and realistic work experience and introduce them to environmental and conservation issues in an urban setting. The program employed 700 teenagers who worked during the summer in 20 city parks, where they planted seedlings, sowed grass seed, pruned shrubs, studied erosion, and learned the basics of public park maintenance.

Another grant, in the spring of 1983, helped the Urban Park Rangers to purchase equipment and continue their program of information and assistance for visitors to Central Park. The Rangers were uniformed patrollers who

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were available in the park year-round to answer questions, give tours, and promote compliance with the Park's rules and regulations.

The Club also provided funds in 1983 for the LaGuardia Corner Gardens, a community garden in Greenwich Village at LaGuardia Place and Bleecker Street. At the time, leases for the site had just been obtained from the city and state, and the project had drawn the interest of a landscape architect and community volunteers. The finished garden, which included an irrigation system, rain barrels to conserve water, and a demonstration garden, was one of the largest flower and vegetable gardens in Greenwich Village.

The Cathedral Garden Bioshelter of Saint John the Divine received a grant from the Club in 1985. The Bioshelter was a vegetable garden providing food to a lunch program for the homeless. A greenhouse at the site was used by educational groups, and the garden was maintained by volunteers, including homeless participants in the program.

In 1986 the City Gardens Club office was moved to its current location, a room off the inner courtyard of an apartment building on Park Avenue. Amidst the files and Nature Kit specimens that filled the office was a small white marble sculpture entitled, "Ice Maiden," of a woman standing with a bear. A gift to the Club from Marynia Apel in 1985, the signed piece was a smaller version of a statue by Ms. Apel's mother, Mme. Marie Apel, that had been featured in a garden exhibit by the Club in 1929.

Although the new office was small, it was ample enough for storage of Club records and Nature Kit specimens.

By 1987, members were collecting 11,000 specimens each year and assembling 250 kits.

The City Gardens Club scholarship program, enabling public school teachers to attend Audubon summer workshops, was a continued success. One recipient who wrote to the Club said, "I do feel an appreciation for wildlife is an important value to instill in my children. I can't see anywhere else my inner city students will obtain it; now, when they have questions, I will have the answers."⁶²

School Science Programs Inspire the Melville Award

In 1989, wishing to recognize outstanding teachers of natural science, the City Gardens Club established the Melville Award in memory of Mrs. Ward Melville, who had been a strong leader and generous supporter of the Club's charitable activities from the time she joined in 1936 until her death in 1989 at age 95. The Melville Award is given each year to a person or persons who have excelled in educating children or young adults about the environment.

Also in 1989, for the first time, an Audubon scholarship was awarded to a science teacher outside the United States. The recipient, Mr. Roy Young, was living in Belize, where, in addition to teaching, he was studying sustainable agriculture and helping to start an environmental education program.

A few years later, another Central American, Mr. Federico Gahsen, received a scholarship. He attended the ecology workshop in 1992 and, after he returned to his native Guatemala, inspired his students to purchase and save six acres of rain forest.



NATURE KITS

Members assembling specimens of maple leaves.



Mrs. Wayne D. (Barbara) Thornbrough (left) and Mrs. David N. (Marguerite) Platt (right) preparing Nature Kit boxes in the Club office.



A student at a public elementary school examining the venation of oak leaves, with the help of a magnifying glass.

Ms. Margaret Santry (left) and Mrs. David J. (Ginny) Butters with some of the 200 Nature Kits delivered to public schools in the fall of 2002.

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Members Tour Gardens at Home and Abroad

In 1987 two members organized a trip to Argentina, the Club's first excursion abroad. For two weeks about 25 members and their guests visited 17 noteworthy houses, gardens, and ranches. Hosted in part by members of the Argentine Society of Horticulture, the tour included two of the country's national parks, Bariloche in the southern Andes and the Falls of Iguazu in the north. Much of the itinerary had been suggested by Helen Detry, a former president of the Argentine Society of Horticulture and a leading landscape architect.

In addition to providing a fascinating view of the Argentine landscape, the trip generated interest in the Nature Kits among the Club's Argentinean contacts, who received sample kits and letters explaining the Nature Kit Program upon the travelers' return.

The following year when the City Gardens Club celebrated its 70th anniversary with a festive event at the National Society of the Colonial Dames, one of the highlights was a short film of the trip to Argentina made by Mr. Rudy Wood Muller, the husband of a member.

Pleased with the success of the 1987 trip, the Club organized other excursions in the United States and abroad. In the fall of 1989, there was a trip to Italy, where Club members and other garden enthusiasts visited some exceptional gardens and enjoyed cultural activities in Florence, Venice, and on Lake Como. The following spring, with the help of the Garden Club of Virginia, there was a trip to Richmond.

Ten members of the Club traveled to Ireland in the spring of 1991 for a two-week tour of historic gardens and houses. And the next year, there was a three-day visit to Baltimore to see public and private gardens, as well as the Walters Art Museum. Throughout the 1990s, the number of trips increased. In addition to a great variety of day trips in and around the New York area, Club members and guests visited Charleston and Boston, made several excursions to the annual Philadelphia Flower Show, and participated in a third tour of Italian gardens in 2000.


Although the City Gardens Club's major fundraising activity continued to be its popular annual tour of private New York City gardens, charitable contributions from participants on the trips were also helpful, enabling the Club to expand its philanthropic activities. By the late 1990s, the number of Audubon scholarships awarded each year had increased to 45.

Grants Provide Critical Assistance

The Club's support for projects of other nonprofit organizations and community groups continued in the late 1980s. A grant to the Chelsea Conservancy enabled major improvements to the central garden at the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, on Ninth Avenue between 20th and 21st Streets. Another recipient was the Green Oasis Community Garden on the Lower East Side, where the Club's contribution helped to create a program for disabled and elderly residents of the neighborhood.

Throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s, grants were made to educational and garden projects in various

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parts of the city, including those of the Goddard-Riverside Community Center on the Upper West Side; the Environmental Education Garden and Edgecombe Avenue Community Garden, both near the Morris-Jumel Mansion in Upper Manhattan; Friends of Morningside Park in Harlem; El Jardin Del Paraiso on the Lower East Side; Chenchita's Garden in East Harlem; and the Magnolia Tree Earth Center in Brooklyn.

The grants were awarded on an annual basis, with follow-up visits during the year to assess the status of projects for which the grants were made. In addition to grants for specific sites, the Club supported citywide programs, including the Council on the Environment's Grow Truck, which lends gardening tools and delivers donated plants and garden supplies to community-based greening projects, and the Green Guerillas, which for 30 years has worked to establish and maintain community gardens throughout the city.

Over the years, the grants have been a critical source of support for the city's small parks and community gardens. Although there are more than 700 such spaces in New York, many are imperiled by the pressures of real estate development and a steady decline in funding from the city.

New Committees Emerge

In the spring of 2002, when community gardens were threatened by a plan to build apartments on city-owned lots, the City Gardens Club reestablished a Conservation Committee to provide information and encouragement to members who might wish to advocate for the preservation and conservation of these and other

green spaces in New York City. A number of organizations opposed the city's plan and, in the end, many of the community gardens were saved.

Another issue that the Conservation Committee brought to the Club's attention was the presence in New York of Asian longhorned beetles, which posed a serious threat to hardwood trees, including maples, horsechestnuts, poplars, willows, and elms.

A Club newsletter, which was started in early 2003, helped to keep members informed of conservation issues as well as the activities of its other committees, which by then included Diplomatic Visitors, Finance, Garden and House Tour, Grants, Lectures, Membership, Nature Kits, Nominating, Scholarships, and Trips.

One of the newer committees, Diplomatic Visitors, was created in 1998 to extend the hospitality of the City Gardens Club to wives of ambassadors to the United Nations. Since then, this special membership category has enabled women from Argentina, Denmark, Monaco, Portugal, Spain, and the European Union to participate in the Club's monthly lectures, trips, and other activities.

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REMEMBERING THE PAST

In preparation for the City Gardens Club's 85th anniversary, a special committee was formed in the spring of 2002 to plan and coordinate activities. Its ambitious agenda was shaped by three objectives: to fund a project that would make a significant contribution to the city, to improve the awareness of the Club's long history of charitable services, and to celebrate the Club's ongoing activities and partnerships with other community organizations.

However, it was the tragic events of September 11, 2001 that inspired the Club's first anniversary activity, a fundraising campaign for the planting of trees near the site of the former World Trade Center in memory of those who lost their lives. Each member was asked to consider a contribution of \$85, an amount chosen to reflect the Club's anniversary. It was noted that decades earlier, in 1918, the Club's founder, Miss Frances Peters, had led a similar effort to honor servicemen whose lives had been lost in World War I.

On Its 85th Anniversary, the Club Funds a Library Garden

As the 85th Anniversary Committee reviewed options for a major commemorative project, it was intrigued by a proposal from The Horticultural Society of New York for the design and creation of a library garden in a heavily-populated public school district.

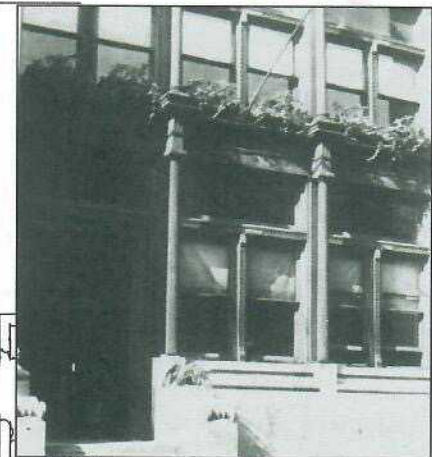
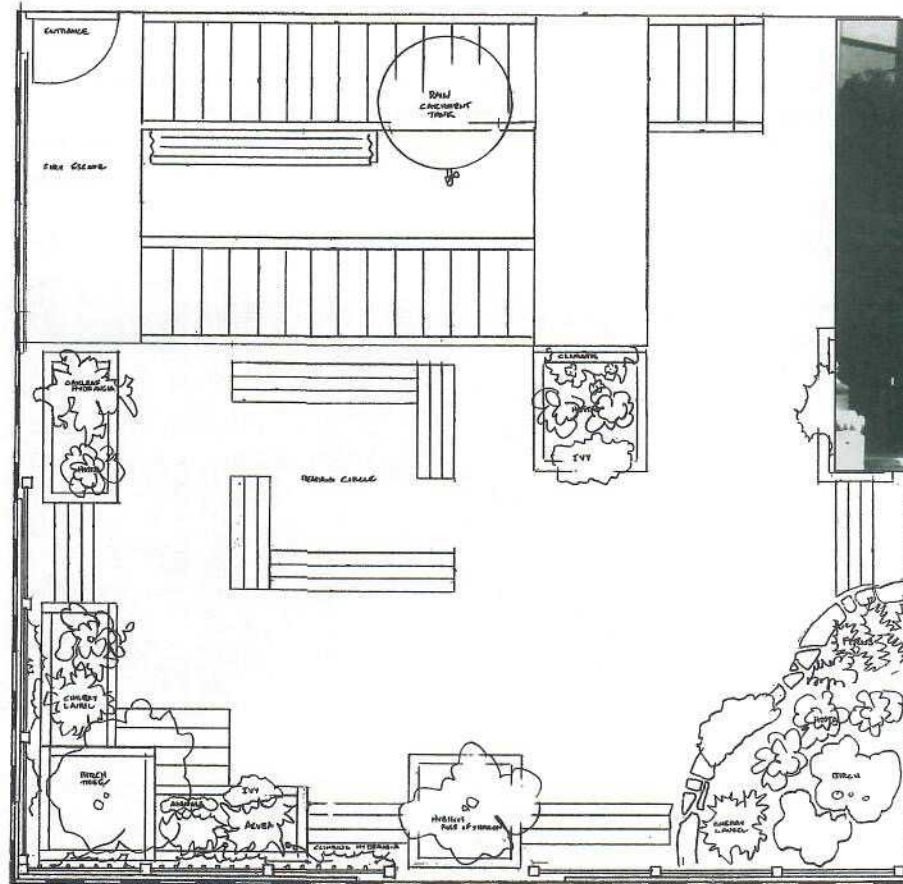
The Aguilar branch of The New York Public Library on East 110th Street had been built in 1886 with funds donated by Andrew Carnegie. Behind the building,

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accessible by elevator and stairway, was an unused cement-paved, 20 x 20 foot space. It seemed an ideal spot for a garden that would offer a leafy retreat for community residents and provide a comfortable and attractive setting for the library's summer reading groups, storytelling, and other programs for children.

The Club decided to make a significant grant to the Horticultural Society's GreenBranches program to create the garden. GreenBranches had already succeeded in establishing 12 gardens at Carnegie branch libraries, with the help of two other Horticultural Society programs, GreenHouse and GreenTeam.



Site plan of the proposed garden for the Aguilar branch of The New York Public Library on East 110th Street. Inset: window boxes installed by the Club at the Aguilar branch in the mid-1930s.

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Participants in the GreenHouse program, which trains inmates of the New York City Detention Facility at Rikers Island in horticulture and carpentry, made planters and benches. And members of GreenTeam, an internship program for GreenHouse graduates, helped install and maintain the gardens.

Ms. Christiana Pinto, head librarian at the Aguilar, was enthusiastic about the plan. Speaking at the City Gardens Club's annual meeting in the spring of 2003, she explained that New York's public libraries were struggling to maintain programs and services as their budgets had been greatly reduced, and she thanked the Club for its support. The garden, she said, would be "an absolutely wonderful gift to the library and the neighborhood."

In early April of 2003, the City Gardens Club hosted an event for more than 200 members and guests at The Cosmopolitan Club to raise funds for the Aguilar garden. On a lovely warm day, the "Bonnets and Baskets" luncheon heralded the start of spring, with large baskets of bright yellow daffodils throughout the spacious dining room. Many of those attending wore straw bonnets adorned with flowers, which the 85th Anniversary Committee had made available for the occasion.

Horticulturist and radio and television personality Ralph Snodsmith gave a lively talk, "A Basket of Tricks for Your Garden," and Dr. James M. Hester, a former president of The New York Botanical Garden, served as the master of ceremonies. The event was very successful, raising the amount needed to fund the Aguilar garden and stimulating interest in the Club's activities among all who attended.

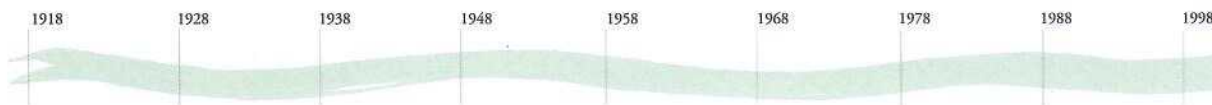
Frances Peters Award is Established

Honored at the luncheon was the noted landscape designer, Mrs. Leigh M. (Lynden B.) Miller, co-chairman of New Yorkers for Parks and creator of some of New York's loveliest public spaces, including gardens at Bryant Park and Madison Square Park, as well as The Conservatory Garden in Central Park.

Mrs. Miller was the first recipient of the City Gardens Club's Frances Peters Award. Named for the Club's founder and first president, the award was established to honor a person or persons whose unique vision and significant accomplishments have helped to preserve, enrich, and enhance the natural beauty of New York City.



Mrs. Symon B. (Christine) Cowles (left), first vice president of the City Gardens Club, with Mrs. Leigh M. (Lynden B.) Miller (right), recipient of the Club's Frances Peters Award, at the "Bonnets and Baskets" luncheon in April 2003.



In selecting recipients of the award, the Club decided that its primary consideration would be the positive impact of their work on the people of New York City, whether through educational, horticultural or environmental endeavors.

Mrs. Miller was recognized not only for her tireless efforts in designing and maintaining public gardens, but also for her initiation and organization of the Daffodil Project. A permanent memorial to the victims of September 11, 2001, the project entailed the planting of one million daffodil bulbs along highways and in parks, plazas, and playgrounds in every borough of New York City.

Throughout its 85th anniversary year, the Club hosted events to commemorate its history and ongoing



Mrs. Leigh M. (Lynden B.) Miller (center), with Ms. Catherine C. Crane (left) and Ms. Caroline Brady (right) at the "Bonnets and Baskets" luncheon.

partnerships. Past and present Club presidents were honored at a lecture program in January 2003. Grant recipients and project partners were guests at a March lecture by Steven Frillman, executive director of Green Guerillas, who spoke about its efforts to help neighborhood groups start and maintain community gardens.

Mr. William Castro, Manhattan borough commissioner for the city's Department of Parks and Recreation, attended the lecture and read a letter of congratulations from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, who noted, "...the tremendous efforts of the Club to preserve our City's parks and community gardens..." and "...the lasting contributions [it has] made in strengthening our great City and protecting some of our City's most valued assets."⁶³

Mindful of the City Gardens Club's important role in the history of New York City, the 85th Anniversary Committee, as one of its first acts, had launched an effort to ensure the long-term preservation of its archival materials and increase awareness of its past activities. An archivist was engaged to organize documents, photographs, and other historical items, including glass slides from the 1920s and 1930s, and to write a history of the Club's first 85 years.

As the archivist's research progressed, it was discovered that, in the mid-1930s, the Club had installed window boxes and indoor plants at the very site of its 85th anniversary project. How fitting it was that, as the City Gardens Club commemorated its 85-year history, members were contributing once again to the beauty of the Aguilar branch of The New York Public Library and helping to create a garden for the enjoyment of the community and the education of children, as Miss Frances Peters would have wished.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Edmond Frank Peters and Eleanor Bradley Peters (Mrs. Edward McClure Peters), comp., *Peters of New England, A Genealogy, and Family History* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1903) 139-141.
- ² Mabel Ward Cameron, comp., "Frances Peters," *Biographical Cyclopaedia of American Women* (New York: Halvord Publishing Company, 1924) I.
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- ³² Brochure of the pilgrimage of the City Gardens Club, 1942.
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⁵⁷ Unpublished letter from Mr. August Heckscher to the City Gardens Club president, dated 1971.

⁵⁸ Bryant Park Flower Show Award of Appreciation, dated October 2-7, 1969.

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⁶³ Unpublished letter from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg to the City Gardens Club, dated March 31, 2003.

PRESIDENTS OF THE CITY GARDENS CLUB

Miss Frances Peters *1918-1924*
Miss Elizabeth White *1924-1925*
Mrs. Frederick C. Hodgdon *1925-1928*
Mrs. Willard C. Brinton *1928-1929*
Mrs. Frederick C. Hodgdon *1929-1931*
Miss Emma L. Martin *1931-1933*
Mrs. Frederic Pruyn *1934-1936*
Mrs. Elliot Tuckerman *1936-1938*
Mr. Nelson Miller Wells *1938-1940*
Mrs. Roger B. Hull *1940-1941*
Mrs. Henry B. Guthrie, Jr. *1941-1949*
Mrs. E. Kirk Haskell *1949-1951*
Mrs. Roger B. Hull *1951-1960*
Mrs. Hugh W. Littlejohn *1960-1964*
Mrs. Russell C. Veit *1964-1967*

Mrs. James N. Dunlop *1967-1970*
Mrs. Edward A. Bacon, Jr. *1970-1974*
Mrs. Robert W. Devine, Jr. *1974-1975*
Mrs. John White Delafield *1975-1977*
Mrs. Henry H. Weldon *1977-1980*
Mrs. John E. Merow *1980-1983*
Mrs. George M. Hasen *1983-1986*
Mrs. James L. German, III *1986-1989*
Mrs. William Leach *1989-1992*
Mrs. Howard Cobb *1992-1993*
Mrs. David L. Luke, III *1993-1995*
Mrs. Thomas H. Barton *1995-1998*
Mrs. Joseph Edmonds Bafford *1998-2000*
Mrs. William T. Stubenbord and
Mrs. John F. Sullivan *2000-2003*
Mrs. Symon B. Cowles *2003-*



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CLUB'S HISTORY

1918

The City Gardens Club of New York City is founded by civic activist Miss Frances Peters. An early project involves planting trees in memory of the victims of World War I.

1919

The Club's first public exhibit is presented at The Horticultural Society of New York's Flower Show at the American Museum of Natural History.

1922

On April 1, The City Gardens Club of New York City is incorporated.

Early 1920s

The *Bulletin of the City Gardens Club* is launched. (Publication continues until the late 1940s.)

1925

A Library Planting Committee begins a 13-year effort to enhance the appeal of New York City public libraries.

Mid- to Late 1920s

Membership grows to more than 600, revenues increase substantially, and the Club develops a national reputation.

1928

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the City Gardens Club, a Medal of Honor is created. The medal is awarded from 1929 until the mid-1940s.

1930

Private gardens of 18 members are featured in the Club's first pilgrimage.

1934

The Club creates a geometrically patterned garden for the Rockefeller Center sunken plaza as its annual exhibit.

1938 to 1940

The noted landscape architect, Mr. Nelson Miller Wells, serves as the first and only male president of the Club.

1941

The Club's annual pilgrimage becomes a major fundraising vehicle, supporting several wartime relief programs for England, Russia, and China.

1943

Members decorate veterans hospitals with Christmas ornaments, trees, and gifts; the project continues through the early 1950s.

1944

In support of the Victory Garden movement, the Club establishes the Tool Shed at a Civilian Defense Volunteer Office in Manhattan.

1945

On the Lower East Side, the Club plants the first of a series of Children's Gardens which seek to bring young people together through community gardening.

Late 1940s to Early 1950s

Conservation becomes a focus, and the Club helps preserve endangered habitats and wildlife.

1951

Interest in the annual garden tour grows, and a publicity firm is hired to handle media coverage.

1952

The Club starts an annual program for the collection and donation of nature specimens to public schools. Scholarships are established, enabling teachers to attend Audubon Ecology Workshops.

1959

Festive holiday decorations are created for Christmas dinner at a veterans hospital, and the project continues through the 1960s.

1961

The Club presents its first citation, recognizing leadership in preservation and beautification, to Mrs. Albert D. Lasker. Later recipients include Miss Rachel Carson and Mrs. Lyndon Baines ("Lady Bird") Johnson. Citations are awarded until the early 1970s.

1964

The World's Fair brings visitors to the Club's annual garden tour, its most successful to date.

1966

The Club collaborates in creating a Vest Pocket Park in Queens.

1968

For its 50th anniversary, the Club plants a garden at Gracie Mansion. The garden is featured on the 1969 garden tour.

1969

Joining other leading gardening organizations, the Club creates an exhibit for the Bryant Park Flower Show and continues to exhibit in the annual event until the mid-1970s.

Late 1960s

Members help to save the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge from threatened development.

Early 1970s

Gardens at two historic sites, the Morris-Jumel Mansion and Old Merchant's House, are restored.

Mid- to Late 1970s

The Conservation Committee helps to preserve South Carolina's Congaree Swamp. The Horticulture Committee creates gardens at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House and at Amsterdam House.

1978

The Club celebrates its 60th anniversary with an event honoring several long-standing members at the National Society of Colonial Dames on East 71st Street.

1981

Funds and plants are donated to the Fireboat House Environmental Center, promoting conservation education for children; more than 2,000 students visit the Center in its first year.

Early 1980s

A formal program of financial support for educational, horticultural, and conservation projects is developed. Grants are made to a variety of organizations involved with young people, parks, and neighborhood gardens.

1987

Two members organize a trip to Argentina, the Club's first excursion abroad. Samples of the Nature Kits are sent to Argentinean contacts interested in the program.

1988

A 70th anniversary celebration is held at the National Society of Colonial Dames.

1989

The Melville Award is established in memory of Mrs. Ward Melville to recognize individuals who have excelled in educating children and young adults about the environment.

1990s

Grants are made to educational projects, garden sites, and citywide programs. Approximately 11,000 nature specimens are collected and more than 40 Audubon scholarships are awarded each year to enhance natural science education in the public schools.

1998

The Diplomatic Visitors Committee is created to extend the hospitality of the Club to wives of ambassadors to the United Nations.

2002

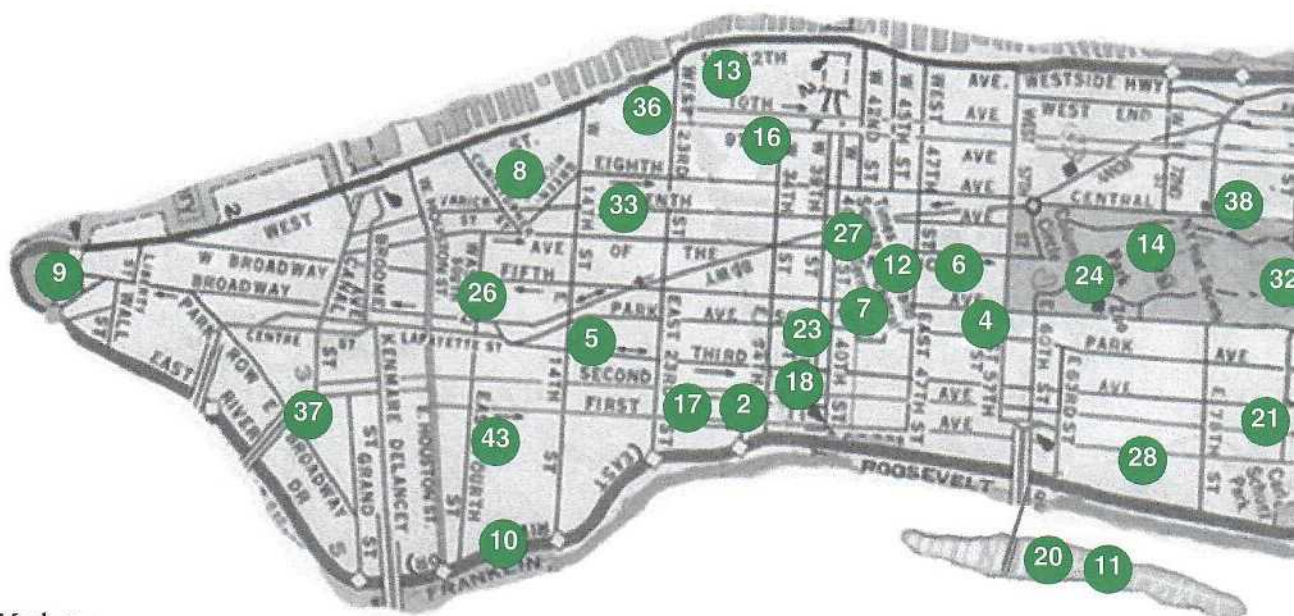
The Conservation Committee is reestablished, and an 85th Anniversary Committee is formed. Members contribute funds for trees to be planted in memory of the victims of September 11, 2001.

2003

A newsletter is created to inform members about committee activities, conservation issues, and upcoming events.

2003

The Club marks its 85th year with programs honoring current and past presidents and community partners. A Club history is written, and a major grant is awarded to create a garden at the Aguilar branch of The New York Public Library. The Club establishes the Frances Peters Award, in honor of its founder, to recognize leadership in preserving, enriching, and enhancing the natural beauty of New York City.

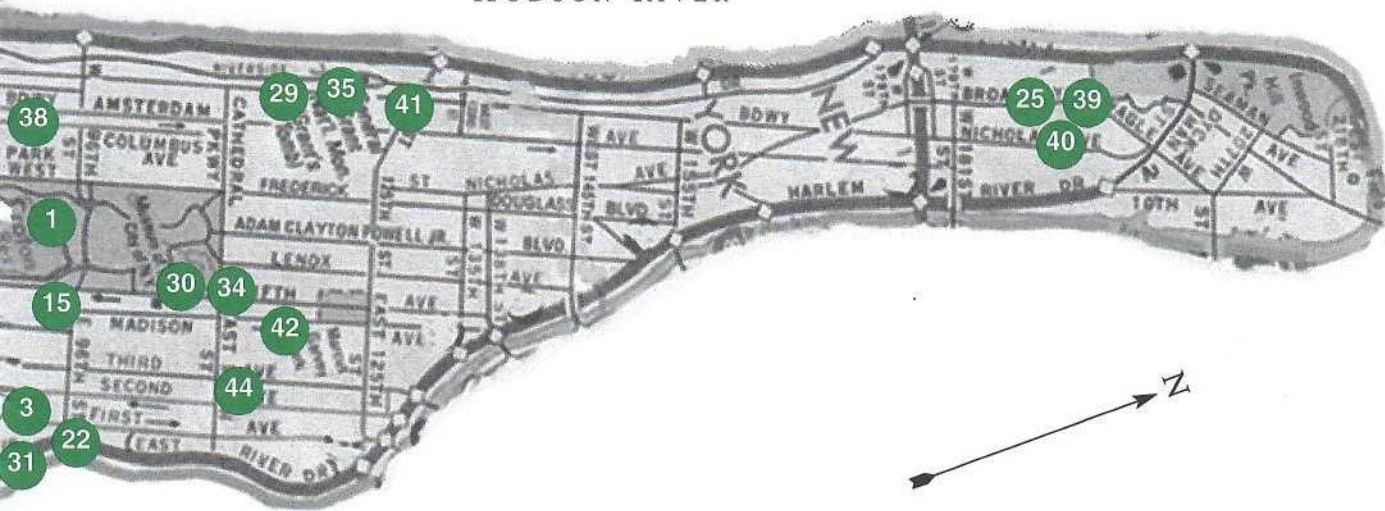


Borough of Manhattan

- 1 Central Park, reservoir, 1926
- 2 Bellevue Hospital, 1926 and 1957-58
- 3 The Museum of the City of New York, 1927
- 4 Art Center, late 1920s
- 5 New York Infirmary for Women and Children, 1931
- 6 Rockefeller Center, Sunken Plaza, 1934
- 7 Grand Central Terminal, 1930s
- 8 Greenwich House Music School, late 1930s
- 9 The Seamen's Church Institute, 1942
- 10 Monroe Street Children's Garden, 1945
- 11 Children's Garden, Welfare Island detention center, 1947
- 12 Workshop, Veterans Hospital Christmas Project, 1948-early 1950s
- 13 Children's Garden at the Hudson Guild, early 1950s and 1980s
- 14 Central Park, slide show, 1953
- 15 National Audubon Society, 1953
- 16 Public School 33, 1955
- 17 Veterans Administration Hospital, 1959-61
- 18 Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine, 1960-62
- 19 American Museum of Natural History, 1960s
- 20 Goldwater Memorial Hospital, 1963
- 21 Inwood House, 1965
- 22 Gracie Mansion, 1968
- 23 Soldiers', Sailors', Marines' and Airmen's Club, 1969
- 24 Central Park, magnolias, 1969
- 25 Morris-Jumel Mansion, 1970-71
- 26 Old Merchant's House, 1973-74
- 27 Bryant Park Flower Show, 1969-mid-1970s
- 28 Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, mid-1970s
- 29 The Biblical Garden, Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, 1978
- 30 Central Park Conservatory Garden, 1979-80

FIRST 85 YEARS

HUDSON RIVER



EAST RIVER

- 31 Fireboat House Environmental Center, 1981
- 32 Urban Park Rangers, Central Park, 1983
- 33 La Guardia Corner Gardens, 1983
- 34 Yorkville Common Pantry, 1984
- 35 Cathedral Garden Bioshelter of Saint John the Divine, 1985
- 36 Chelsea Conservancy, late 1980s
- 37 Green Oasis Community Garden, late 1980s
- 38 Goddard-Riverside Community Center, 1990s
- 39 Environmental Education Garden, 1990s
- 40 Edgecombe Avenue Community Garden, 1990s
- 41 Friends of Morningside Park, 2002
- 42 Chenchita's Garden, 2002

- 43 El Jardin Del Paraiso, 2003
- 44 Aguilar branch of The New York Public Library, 2003
- Various branches of The New York Public Library, 1925-38
- Tool Shed, 1944 *
- New York City Mission Society, Harlem Unit, early 1950s *
- New York Home for Homeless Boys, early 1950s *
- Home for the Aged and Indigent, early 1950s *

* (exact addresses unknown)

Projects in Other Boroughs

- Brooklyn Botanic Garden, late 1920s
- Halloran General Hospital, Staten Island, 1943
- Van Cortlandt Park, Bronx, 1948-49
- Kingsbridge Veterans Administration Hospital, Bronx, early 1950s
- New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, 1959
- Vest Pocket Park, Corona, Queens, 1966
- Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens, 1968-71
- East Side House Settlement, Bronx, 1980
- Bronx Zoo, early 1980s
- New York Aquarium, Brooklyn, 1980s
- Magnolia Tree Earth Center, Brooklyn, 2002-03

AT THE FLOWER SHOW



*They have had two
solid hours of perfect
bliss smelling each in-
dividual flower, and
are still going strong.*

This drawing by Helen E. Hokinson, along with three sketches by other artists, appeared in the March 20, 1926 issue of *The New Yorker*. Miss Hokinson's work was a popular feature of the magazine for many years. In addition to this drawing, the City Gardens Club owns another original Hokinson cartoon which was published in *The New Yorker* in 1938.

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