

Lenox Garden Club Celebrates 100 Years

The Lenox Garden Club During the World War

Being President of a Garden Club entails a good deal of responsibility at any time, but during a World War with the constant demands for cooperation in increasing food production and conservation and all the many activities brought forth by a wartime basis, one can easily picture the bewilderment of an inexperienced Executive during the years 1917 and 1918.

Having been elected President of the Lenox Garden Club in October 1916, to succeed Mr. Thomas Shields Clarke, the genial and hospitable host to the Garden Club of America at their annual meeting in Lenox that summer, I was confronted early in the following spring with the problem of what the Lenox Garden Club should do to help in the war. At the suggestion of the First Vice President Dr. W. Gilman Thompson, a special meeting of the Lenox Garden Club was called at his house in New York City, on April 1, 1917, "to determine how the club can best adapt its activities to the present needs in the matter of the country's food supply." The list of lecturers and subjects proposed for the coming season was read, and it was voted to change these topics to make them bear chiefly on increased food production and kindred topics. Dr. Thompson urged a radical change in the objects of the club from the ornamental to the useful, for the sake of example and to stimulate the community to take up definite lines of helpfulness and cooperation, in the serious food situation confronting the world which would certainly last several years. He advised the formation of three committees to cooperate with existing organizations: First, a Census Committee to gather information on the number and acreage and yield of existing vegetable gardens throughout the Berkshire; Second, a committee to report on the most economical purchase of seeds and fertilizers; Third, a committee to inquire into the question of food conservation, canning, drying, cold storage, etc. Mr. R.R. Bowker made helpful suggestions about crops yielding the best returns for the least labor and the function of the Berkshire Farm Bureau and

the Committee of Public Safety, appointed by Governor McCall. Mr. Clarke referred to the cooperation of the Amherst Agricultural College and the United States Department of Agriculture. A letter from Dr. H.P. Jacques was read, stating that the town of Lenox had appointed a committee on food supplies and conservation, on which the Board of Selectmen, High School, Grange, superintendents of estates were represented. Land had been given for school children and for men having no ground to cultivate. The Chairmen appointed for the special committees were: Census, Mrs. Gilman Thompson; Seed Distribution, Miss Gertrude Parsons; Food Preservation and Conservation, Mrs. Banyer Clarkson and Miss Georgiana Sargent.



The Lenox Garden Club During the World War

It was suggested by Miss Kneeland that the curtailment of all unnecessary work on the large estates should be urged that the labor might be expended on something more important than the shearing of lawns, or the raking of leaves, or even the raising of hot house flowers or fruits. Mr. Clarke spoke of the desirability of simplifying the style of living and entertaining, as well as of omitting horticultural superfluities. These motions were all passed and recorded.



On May 7, the Executive Committees and Chairman of the new sub-committees, met at the residence of Dr. Gilman Thompson who, as always, took a leading and dynamic part of the club activities, and was a constant inspiration and incentive to all the members. Reports were read of the preliminary surveys by the Census Committee, Food Conservation and the purchase of seeds. The subjects touched on were the establishment of cooperative cold storage warehouses, storage pits, dehydrating plants for vegetables and fruits, distribution of seeds, community canning at the public schools, and the plan to have lectures given on the use of cheap foods and their preparation. It was voted to use part of the \$355. then in the treasury for this purpose. It was also reported that the West End Settlement of Boston had offered to send to the Farm Bureau a number

of "well-behaved boys over sixteen, but without experience", to farm camps from which farmers could draw for labor. Mr. Henry McBurney was looking into the possibilities of this plan.

At the next Executive Meeting, held June 9 in Stockbridge, reports were read on the rapidly maturing pan of community canning, lectures on food conservation, school gardens, etc. The programs for the summer were announced and lectures, most of them dealing with timely subjects. In July,

Mr. Corbett of the Bureau of Plant Industry gave a talk on the Production, Conservation and Transportation of Fruits and Vegetables. In August, Dr. Bryant Fleming spoke of Landscape Architecture. In September, Dr. D. F. Fairchild gave an interesting talk on New Food Plants. Meanwhile, community canneries had been started both in Lenox and Stockbridge. The school gardens and distribution of seeds, plants and fertilizers were under way and the boys' camp was occupying land loaned by Dr. Austen Riggs on his own property. During the winter of 1918, the increasing necessity of food conservation and the mobilizing of women by the Land Army to do farm labor in place of men in service, brought up the question of

active participation by the Lenox Garden Club. On February 15, at a special meeting of the Executive Committee in New York, the advisability of continuing the usual number of meetings during the summer was discussed. It was voted to do so, but to restrict the amount spent on lectures to \$100. The members present then adjourned to the residence of Miss Adele Kneeland, where a special meeting of the entire club was held, to hear Miss Delia Marble speak on the Women's Agricultural Camp at Bedford, New York, which had been in operation during the summer of 1917. The desirability of starting a similar unit in the Berkshires was discussed, with the result that an appeal was sent to all club members stating the plan, in which a letter of Mr. Hoover's was quoted, urging every community to make itself, as far as possible, self supporting, "to take itself off the market".

The Lenox Garden Club During the World War



A canvass of the territory in the vicinity of Lenox brought reports "that the farmers in Tyringham took no interest" – "That the superintendents in Lenox were not in favor of employing farmerettes." The only favorable report was that of Mrs. Austen Riggs of Stockbridge who had learned through Mr. Post, President of the Great Barrington Grange, that the farmers in Alford were eager to try the experiment and had agreed to employ a number of women. This open-minded point of view was perhaps due to the fact that there were already two women in Alford who ran their own farms.. The committee appointed in charge of organizing this Farm Unit consisted of Mrs. Austen Riggs, Mrs. Gilman Thompson, Mrs. Banyer Clarkson, Mrs. Carl deGersdorff, and Mrs. Hoffman. Generous response followed the appeal. And at the first Council Meeting of the summer, June 17, it was reported that over \$1000 had been subscribed, and that the Alford unit had been in operation for about two weeks.

A report was made in person by Miss Grace Hariman, supervisor of the Unit. Starting with eight girls, from colleges, physical culture schools, etc., the number was later increased to twenty- three, this at the peak of the harvest season. The farmers first treated the girls as a joke, but later came to appreciate them as real workers, and by the end of the season, were offering them every inducement to bring them back another year. Miss Hariman's very comprehensive report at the end of the season was written and sent in to the Club, to be read at the Annual Meeting in October. This meeting never took place on account of the serious epidemic of influenza, as the Board of Health forbade all public gatherings. During the summer of 1918, all Council and regular meetings of the Club were held, and the programs consisted almost invariably of timely lectures on food conservation, dehydrating plants, a talk by a Chinese lady, Dr. Kim, on Uses and Preparation of the Soy Bean and its Desirability as a Cheap and Nourishing Food. The one exception to the preoccupation with food production and conservation was an illustrated lecture with slides on the Arnold Arboretum, given by Mr. Edward A. Farrington, at Shadowbrook, the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Carnegie. The community canneries at Lenox and Stockbridge, while not under management of the Lenox Garden Club, were only one of the many wartime activities in which our members worked. The school children's gardens both in Lenox and Stockbridge were continued and a Patriotic League Of Stockbridge Girls was organized by Mrs. Henry McBurney. The girls were enrolled for service and pledged to work a certain number of hours a week in gardens or as helpers in the cannery.

If I were to use to the fullest extent the documents relating to the activities of these two war years, a large volume and complete prostration on the part of my audience would result, but I hope that enough has been said to show that the Lenox Garden Club did its share nobly in helping increase food production, and in food conservation during the World War. One thing is certain: No crops were plowed under during those years, and no farmers were paid not to raise pigs or potatoes.

Mrs. Bernhard Hoffmann

(from the 1933-36 LGC Yearbook Notes)