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Men's Garden Club of Villa Park 75th Anniversary 1936 - 2011

An Historical Review

October 25, 2011



Presidents of the MGCVP

Acknowledgements

Welcome to our presentation on the origin and development of the Men's Garden Club of Villa Park from 1936 to 2011. As you read the story on our Club as it progressed, be aware that all facts have been documented from our Sprout archives, which were printed by our first editor Glenn Winans and preserved by him.

This is our journey of the history of the Men's Garden Club of Villa Park. I hope it answers any and all questions you may have had on the history of the Club, and you enjoy the trip down memory lane as much as my staff and I had in bringing it to you.

Thanks to my collaborators Mary Ann Daugherty and Debbie Templeman-Klein for their many hours of research. So, now, let us review the history of our Club.

Wayne Matousek

Glenn Pierce*	1937 & 1938	Erv Ziemer	1975
Herb Frick*	1939 & 1940	Rolland Hein	1976
Arch Healey*	1941 & 1942	Ed Klein	1977
William Boulton*	1943 & 1944	Lou Schloderback	1978
Glenn Winans*	1945	John Cioper	1979
Leonard Lescher	1946	Ed Decker*	1980
George Freibert	1947	Gary Easthope*	1981
Elmo Smith	1948	Greg Martin	1982
Anton A. Sobolik	1949	Harold Bade	1983
Vernon Gibson*	1950	Roy Westrich	1984
Charles Gearhart	1951	Bruce Mitchell	1985
Otis Butler	1952	Ed Snyder*	1986
P. M. Keast	1953	Joe Karel*	1987
Clarence Damhorst	1954	Harold Bade	1988
Ed Baierbach*	1955	Chuck Cornell*	1989
David Golden*	1956	Ray Bednar	1990 & 1991
George Weaver*	1957	Ed Snyder*	1992
Len Jugle*	1958	Jim Tyson	1993
Albert Roach*	1959	Kevin Lattner	1994
Gil Ren*	1960	Dave Beranek	1995
Eugene Christianson*	1961	Jon Pruner and John Leszczyński	1996
Harold Moore*	1962	John Matyasik	1997 & 1998
Bill Brown*	1963	Debbie Templeman	1999 & 2000
Harold Alford	1964	Ray Bednar	2001
Harold Harrison*	1965	Nick Janakas	2002 & 2003
Ralph Lightle*	1966	Don Brant	2004 & 2005
Wayne Matousek	1967	Bob James	2006 & 2007
Harold Vanderheiden	1968	Debbie Templeman	2008 & 2009
Fred Bach	1969	Wayne Matousek	2010
Len Berkshire	1970	Marty Kapolczynski	2011
Don Frega*	1971		
Don Petry*	1972		
Dale Schafernak	1973		
Sean Finnegan	1974		

*Deceased

Seminars

Growing flowers are a major part of any garden club. Therefore in 1949, a seminar for members to gather and discuss flower culture was started and chaired by C.F. Anderson. Meetings were held on the second Tuesday of the month at members' homes. "Andy," as he later became known, was a champion of *Penstemon* common name *beardtongue*. Many a garden in the area had penstemon growing that originated from "Andy's" seeds.

A greenhouse seminar was also started among members who owned a greenhouse. Chairman of this first group was Bill Larsen. Discussions centered on maintenance and which plants to grow.

Arrangements became part of the Monthly Competition early on. Gil Williams led 15 members in making them with knowledge of color, texture, and design elements.

One of the last seminars to be started in the Club during the 1960's was an organic seminar. The chairman of this event was "Dinty" Moore. It came about after the book by Rachel Carson "Silent Spring" came out. It was not uncommon to see "Dinty" collecting hair from the barber shop for his organic compost.

The Club benefited greatly from these seminars. Members got to know one another more intimately and formed lasting friendships.

Campaigns and Inductions

Right from the beginning, our Club had a unique way of getting members to run for various offices. First, they were nominated by a committee. Then, they actually campaigned for the office via posters, handouts, and humorous attacks on one another, which were printed in *The Sprout*. The November meeting was designated as election night. After the election, the officers were asked to attend a meeting at one of the nominating committee's home for the reveling of the play presentation at the January induction meeting.

This meeting, year after year played to a standing room only crowd. Skits had members being interviewed from exchange gardeners for a foreign power or examined by a psychologist. Many times, just for laughs, members performed in dresses or swimwear from the 1890's. Roy Chidlow, an actor by trade, wrote and directed the skits. They were always a welcomed event at the January meeting.

Enter the Women!

In May of 1993, men's garden clubs, in general, were having difficulty attracting new members. A trend to open up membership to the "fair sex" evolved and, we too became coed. This move helped to stabilize and grow the membership. It turned out to be a good thing.

The Beginning

Let's begin in 1936. There was a Civic Garden Club of Villa Park, whose members consisted of both men and women. At that time, this club was suffering from an acute case of incompatibility and it was decided to disband. Men and women went their separate ways. The women were already meeting in the afternoons and continued to do so. They were to be known as Women's Garden Club of Villa Park. The men held meetings in the village hall library several times but could not get enough to turn out for a quorum.

Finally, on August 11, 1936, they succeeded in gathering 16 men together, and as John Lessing put it, "we locked the door and pocketed the key so no one could get away until we got the club started." Our founders and charter members emerged from the meeting: Glenn Pierce, John Lessing, Roy Chidlow, Arch Healey, N.L. Allen, Cliff Dennison, and Roy Hurd.

The group met to establish certain policies from which we have never digressed. Among them are: the adoption of our Name, The Men's Garden Club of Villa Park; the selection of the fourth Tuesday of the month for our meetings; and dues of one (1) dollar a year. Another important matter was discussed among the group to have refreshments served at each meeting. This was adopted and for the next several meetings, we served twinkies, twinkies, and more twinkies.

The Fall Show

The Club grew with more men joining and it was decided to have a fall show in 1937. The show went over so well that it was decided to make it an annual event. At this time, the dahlia-flowered zinnia was adopted as the Club's official flower.

Over the years, the fall show grew. In 1938, there were 1,551 entries for our second Annual Flower Show held at the Garrett Dancing Studio in the Villard Theatre building. The 1939 show had 1,457 entries. In 1940, the show then moved to the Ardmore School gymnasium to accommodate a larger show of 3,000. But it would be much later, in 1961, our silver anniversary show that we had a record of 3,201 entries. There were times when we could not hold the show at Ardmore, so it was held in the Stratford Shopping Mall. Several were also held in the Yorktown Shopping Center. Costs kept increasing to the point that it became apparent we would have to give up the Flower Show. At that time, we modified our Monthly Competition to include the major awards, which is our current practice.

Some of the major awards were first given in 1940. Member Paul Ballange who was president of the Villa Park Bank and Trust gave us our first zinnia competition cup. Over the years, G. T. Robertson had won the cup several times. Upon his death, the zinnia competition cup was changed to the G. T. Robertson Award. Recently the name was changed again, to the Al Dekker Zinnia Award.

York State Bank gave us a trophy cup to be awarded to the member who had the highest percentage of points in the show. It became known as the Showmaster Sweepstakes Cup. It was awarded from 1961 to 1968 when it was retired. These are just two of the 17 awards we present to our members.

Monthly Competition

Monthly Competition began in 1939 to stimulate interest in having a real flower and vegetable show each month from March to October. It started with 27 exhibitors entering 205 entries. Increased interest in the following years helped to make it one of our most participated activities in the Club. The Competition helped our new members meet other gardeners and learn how to prepare for upcoming flower shows. It was and still is the envy of other garden clubs in the area. Members who participated in the competition and then entered Annual Flower Shows usually walked off with top honors. Other garden clubs envied our competition and tried it in their club, but non have lasted as long as ours.

The Sprout

Now, how do you keep the membership informed on the ongoing happenings of the Club? You need a publication. Hence *The Sprout* was born in August 1939. Glenn Winans, a printer by trade, was our first editor. Glenn and an able bodied staff brought forth issue after issue containing gardening news, humor, and cultural topics. *The Sprout* is one of the outstanding achievements of the Club's career and as such has been a stimulating factor in our development. Thanks to some of the editors who guided *The Sprout's* path: Glen Winans, Roy Green, Wayne Matousek, Harold Moore, John Matyasik, and our first woman editor Mary Ann Daugherty.

A Club Directory

Keeping an account of who was in the Club inspired the creation of a Club Directory. In July 1939, the first membership director came upon the scene. It held the names and phone numbers of 112 members. Our membership grew, especially during the 40's — the war years — with the interest in Victory Gardens. In 1948, we had 449 members. There was a drop during and next few years and peaked at 401 in 1961, which was our Silver Anniversary.

Chicago World's Flower Show

Another eventful time for the Club was our participation in the Chicago World's Flower Show at McCormick Place. Under the leadership of Len Jugle, who engineered our greenhouse exhibit; cold frame; and growing under lights —we made quite a splash at the show for the six years we entered. A medal was awarded to us for the best educational exhibit.

But the recognition of the Club drew many visitor gardeners who came to our meetings and joined as members. During the six years we exhibited, it was not uncommon to induct 20 new members to the Club several months after the show. The Club grew rapidly during this time.

Ladies Night and Awards

On May 28, 1940, the Club issued an invitation via The Sprout to the wives and sweethearts of our members to attend our first “Ladies Night” at the Village Hall. The invitation promised them to find out just what makes your husband or boyfriend dress up on the fourth Tuesday evening every month and attend the Men's Garden Club.

Entertainment for the evening was David and Mrs. Hall of Wilmette IL who presented a talk and showed 100 slides on iris hybridization.

The overflowing crowd overwhelmed Club officers. With such a success, a vote was taken to find a larger hall for future “Ladies Nights.”

The October 28, 1941 fifth anniversary of the Club was combined with the “Ladies Night” in the Village Hall. The speaker gave a presentation on orchids.

The community room of the Community Congregational Church of Villa Park was the site of the October 27, 1942 “Ladies Night” with a crowd of 197 members and guests heard a talk on *Refuge in Gardening*. In succeeding years, we were entertained by member Vic Perry, slight of hand performer, from England who later appeared on the Johnny Carson Show. (His specialty was removing your wallet, watch, and tie while talking with you.) Win Strake also sang folk songs for us.

Several years ago, I became Master of Ceremonies for “Ladies Night,” presenting the various Show and Monthly Competition Awards. It is such a pleasure to see the enjoyment on the faces of the recipients; I would not trade it for anything.

Memories

There are other momentous recollections — like the time that John Dekker won so many Flower Show Awards that we supplied him with a bushel basket to carry them home. After that, he was referred to as “Double Dekker.”

Another first was our awarding of the Distinguished Gardener Award. It was given to members who worked inside and outside of the Club, writing gardening related articles, judging shows, speaker to clubs on various topics and promoting gardening in general. Some members who received this honor were Elmer Anderson, Ed Baierbach, G.E. Christoph, Len Jugle, Fred La Paglia, John Lessing, Wayne Matousek, “Dinty” Moore, Clenn Pierce, Ed Scully, and Sam Wissing.

It should be noted that the introduction of “Coral Charm” peony was developed by our own Sam Wissing and Roy Klehm. This peony has gone on to be the parent of several “Charm” peonies.