



CHAPTER TWO 1942-1945

LEST WE FORGET

December 11, 1941

“A special meeting of the Board of Directors was called to order by the President, Mrs. Robert Cushman, at her home on December 11th.

There were eight members present. The first question the President asked the Club was what the Board felt should be the Club’s attitude during the present emergency. The problem was discussed at length and it was decided that the Club better carry on as usual – at least for the present, that the members would be working for defense and would need the recreation. Home gardening is a constructive means of keeping up a nation’s morale as the English government has found out. However, as defense is so important, we felt it wiser to combine the committees of citizenship and conservation under one chairman who could then work for defense.” *-Anna Hayes, Recording Secretary, 1942*

While the Club attempted to “carry on as usual” there was mention, here and there, of items directly related to the war such as this entry which appeared in the minutes for the first meeting in February.

“Mrs. Berry made a report on a Berkeley Defense meeting and discussion followed as to our duties.”

No details of the discussion were included. In fact, the minutes for the first part of the year were sparse. This entry for March 3rd was typical.

“The regular meeting of the Berkeley Garden Club was called to order March 3rd by the Vice President, Mrs. Burnhill. Minutes of the Board meeting were read. Minutes of the last regular meeting were read and approved.

Treasurer reported \$107.78. There were 36 members present. Mrs. Hansen introduced Ms. L.L. Edmonds of Danville, who spoke on ‘Natives.. Being no further business, meeting adjourned.’”

-Anna E. Hays, Recording Secretary, 1942

...as was this one in April.

“The second April meeting was a plant sale held at the home of Miss Nada Gilmore. \$68.45 was made at the plant sale.”

-Anna E. Hays, Recording Secretary, 1942

The bombing of Pearl Harbor was clearly a shock to the ladies of the Berkeley Garden Club; the brevity of the minutes reflects that. The Historian's Report, which may have been written later in the year, was more personal and contained considerably more detail.

During the first few months of 1942, members found they were motivated by more than the love of gardening, the hunger for botanical knowledge and the desire to be involved in civic beautification. The war lit a fire under these ladies giving birth to a new activism. Members contributed to the stateside war effort by growing Victory Gardens, raising poultry, acting in the capacity of community advisors, and caring for the needs of the troops stationed or hospitalized in the Berkeley area. As usual, they were generous with their time and determined in their spirit. Included below are the items in the Historian's report which pertain to their war work.

“At this time (March, '42) we began to help a bit more with war work. Individual members had already been contributing to the various cookie jars but now, after hearing a talk by Mrs. Riker, we as a Club decided to act as hostesses and furnish cakes for refreshment for the boys at the Veterans Building. In the short space of time since war was declared, hundreds of troops had come to Berkeley or near here and these boys being far from home were often lonely.

March and April are always months to look forward to, especially if the two previous months have been as rainy as this year. Of course we all love to garden or we wouldn't be members of this Club but from now on it's a real battle to see whether our deep Fall spading, careful planting, fertilizing and watering are going to win, or whether those Nazis, heavy clay soils, cold dry winds, slugs, pests and diseases will leave our tables bare of vegetables and flowers.

In April, Mr. John Aitkin gave a very interesting talk on vegetables for our Victory Gardens and told us which varieties were most suited to the Bay Area climate.

Mr. Gillespie was supposed to talk to us about 'Lily Ponds,' but when he could not appear, Mr. Butterfield gave a talk on the

‘Construction of Pools.’ Again in August when Mr. Gillespie could not get here, he asked Mr. Harry Nelson to tell us ‘How and What to plant for Winter.’ When Mr. Gillespie did finally appear, Mrs. Hansen was beginning to think that getting speakers during war time can prove rather difficult. This idea was strengthened a few weeks later when Mr. George Wilson failed to appear. Of course neither one could help himself since they are both a part of our great army and must go where sent.

On October fifth a joint meeting was held at our clubhouse of the Garden Clubs of District Four East Bay Division of the State Garden Clubs. The meeting was turned over to Mrs. Stuebgen who urged greater cooperation among the garden clubs of District Four.¹

Mrs. Stuebgen urged members to care for their gardens better than ever, since so much more time is going to be spent there, yet stressed the need of garden clubs in war work.

Mrs. Couture thought the garden clubs would be asked to raise vines, and shrubs for camouflage [The request to grow wild blackberries and gooseberries for that purpose did come at a later date.], and urged clubs to help each other with programs since lining up speakers is going to be a difficult problem in the future. A representative of each club presented both the garden work and war work they had participated in the past year.

An interesting feature of our November meeting was the report given by Mrs. Hawes who is a member of the Victory Gardens and Home Food Production Committee. She urged that members of our club act as neighborhood advisors and get people to raise vegetables and, whenever possible, rabbits and poultry.”

- *Melissa A. Berry, Historian, 1942*

Once the Club adjusted its focus from home gardens to gardening for the war effort, Anna Hays’ minutes assumed some of the flair which was characteristic of earlier logs. She provided this detail of war work in the November minutes.

“Miss Agard made a plea for plants and shrubs to be brought to the next meeting. These are to be used by the Army in planting hospital units. She also reported on a meeting which had been held

¹ California Garden Clubs was founded in December of 1931, and the state was divided into eight districts in 1932. BGC’s district was known as District 4 until the 1958 change to Bay Bridges. BGD has remained a well respected member of this association to the present.

at the Oakland City Hall in regard to plant material for camouflage work. She read a list of plant material which she urged members to start growing now.”

A major change in the structure of the Garden Club occurred in December of 1942. As an item of regular order of business, the Club elected to meet only once a month. The third Thursday of the month was selected. Catherine Fuller, the Historian for 1943 explained the decision to cut back on meetings in the opening to her report.

“With our country facing another year of war it was no easy task which challenged this Board. War, with its destruction of life and materials and man power, was causing an acute shortage of food. Help was needed in the factories, on the farms and in many war projects all around us: the Red Cross, the USO, Civilian Defense, and Ration Boards. In order that our members might have more time to devote to these projects it was decided to hold our meetings but once a month.”

1942 ended for the Club as follows, according to Mrs. Berry:

“Mrs. McGregor and her assistants have again won ribbons for the Club at ‘Victory Harvest for Army and Navy Relief.’

They say that a good gardener is never a good cook and vice versa, but also there must be an exception to every rule. That certainly applies to the Berkeley Garden Club as anyone who has attended one of our potluck luncheons can testify. Miss Agard has had a rather difficult task as civic and conservation chairman.

So much had to be done when tires had to be saved² but she did her work well. “Thanks to each member of the Board of Directors and to each member who contributed to our club this last year.”

-Melissa A. Berry, Historian, 1942

Because vegetable growing was going to be more important than flower growing in 1943, the first four meetings of the year focused on the subject of food. Mrs. Hawes spoke on which vegetables were best suited to our climate and Dr. W.E. Newlon of State University system spoke on raising poultry. Apparently, many of the garden club members had found room in their yards for chicken coops. One guest speaker informed the Club of the nutritive value of vegetables and Dr.

² The Americans were under restrictions like this one: “TIRES - Tires for essential driving are available on application to rationing boards. Recapping with reclaimed rubber camelback (Grade F) is now available to all without restriction.”

Ruth Oakey University of California Home Economics Department discussed the subject of canning and dehydration of fruits and vegetables. It was also about this time that the Club began what is currently referred to as "Garden Notes". A member was asked to speak very briefly at each meeting on what should be done in their Victory Gardens that month. This was established as a part of the meeting in order to maximize the harvest.

Helen K. Schofield was recording secretary and included many war relief-related activities in the minutes for 1943.

"In keeping with the time, members brought meat substitute dishes to the March potluck luncheon and the meals were so tasty that everyone went around complimenting everyone else on being a good cook.

Mrs. Hawes reported on the activities of the Food Production Committee to the Board of Directors. Vacant lots, available for cultivation, are listed, and anyone who wishes may secure them through the committee. Garden Advisors for the various communities have been appointed and a produce show has been planned for the middle of June.

Mrs. Ivie, who is doing valuable work for the USO in Berkeley reported on the need for scrapbook materials and workers to help make the scrapbooks. Magazines, games, crossword puzzles, phonograph records, etc. are needed. The work is being done in the basement of the PG&E building and Mrs. Ivie made it very clear that the boys need and appreciate our efforts.

On October fifth, Mrs. Berry read a letter from the Office of Civilian Defense asking for volunteers for tomato and walnut picking in the San Ramon valley. An effort is being made to recruit volunteers for a day.

On November sixteenth, Mrs. McGregor appealed to the members for wreaths and greens for decorating the chapel at Oak Knoll Hospital for the holidays and on December seventh, a representative of the Red Cross asked members for their cooperation in the preparation of Christmas swags. It is the aim of the Red Cross to provide one for every hospital bed of servicemen in the area." *-Helen K. Schofield, Recording Secretary, 1943*

Catherine Fuller offered this hope for the year to come at the end of her report:

“Ere another chapter of our history be written, may the magic words of Peace and Good Will be ringing round the world and our boys be safely home again enjoying the Pursuit of Happiness in the good old American way. Then we can lay aside the surgical dressings and canteen aprons and take up our trowels and plant again our fabulous flowers, then the commercial growers will have to figure out whether or not to water the tomatoes.”

-Catherine Fuller, Historian, 1943

The Berkeley Garden Club continued its ongoing war work in 1944 in much the same manner as it had the first years of the war. Anna Hays, Historian for that year recorded details of one event that served as a reprieve from the stresses of war.

“One of the most outstanding events each year is the potluck luncheon which was held in April. For a day we all turned aside our war work and worries and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The tables were decorated with Mrs. Wilman’s wonderful pansies and the hall was made lovely, not only with Mrs. McGregor’s exquisite arrangements but with interesting photographs on the walls. These had been loaned by Miss Portia Waggonet.

The Club had the pleasure of greeting Mrs. Gilbert, Mrs. Compton, Mrs. Templeton, and Mrs. Bosworth, all four of whom were charter members. Mrs. Compton gave a talk on the Fremontia Californica, the emblem of our club. Many of us learned for the first time that Miss Agard colored the insignia.

Then Mrs. Ivie showed wonderful colored photographs of Berkeley gardens – including her own charming one and pictures of the Exposition on Treasure Island. Reliving the fair with Mrs. Ivie, it seemed even more beautiful than it had in our carefree days.”

-Anne Hays, Historian, 1944

In January, 1945, 201 servicemen were served at Hospitality House; in February, 298 were served; in June, 313 were served; and in August, 324 were served.

One more entry from 1945 is included to close out the “War Years.” It appeared in the Historian’s logbook; however, there was no mention of who the historian was for that year. The entry isn’t signed. It was not written in a script that can be recognized from any of the other hand-written logs of that time. The author wrote it in even, slanted

print much like the font I chose to represent it. These words are the last half of her report exactly as it appeared.

"... And then came May. - May eighth - V-E Day. Lest we forget. Lest we forget. This was the day the nation had prayed and hoped and longed for but there was little celebrating. Now that it was here, the memories of Anzio and Normandy were too vivid, and we looked with prayers and longing to the Pacific.

It is said that a plant is only as good as its roots and the Club proved at this time that its roots were strong, and that its years of civic consciousness made it a great asset to the community. The members and those on the various committees plunged with renewed vigor into the Red Cross, USO, and other war activities, while the monthly meetings of the Club and the board of directors continued to encourage the growth of the entire group. New members were welcomed, new speakers addressed us and we tried to pursue the even tenor of our ways.

Then came August and atomic bombs shook the earth. V-J Day came at last and we stood, after nearly four years of blood, sweat, and tears, upon the threshold of peace.

In the minutes that followed this realization, we thought of those things, those simple things we had been denied so long and were now to be able to enjoy again. Then we realized that our roots were too deeply buried to bear selfish fruit and we again renewed our work for those who would soon return to us.

What is a history? It is said that only a country without a history is happy. Perhaps this is true for a city, a club, or an individual. Certainly this year for the most part has been one of great unhappiness, but of great achievement. The record for us, as a club, lies in the minutes of the meetings. It lies in the chapels decorated, the hundreds of service people served at the USO, the beautiful flowers there, the successful accomplishments of individual members. But this is a record, not a history, for a history is filled with inner values, some of which are too fleeting to be recorded except in the heart.

What, then, is history? It is the flowering of a plant. It is the fruit of the blossom. It is the light in a sailor's eyes when he sees beauty on an altar, it is the mistiness in his voice as he touches a flower or munches his toast and sighs, 'Like Mom's!' It is the shout as he sees real apple pie and says, 'Now I know I'm home.' These and many more make our own particular history for the tragic year of 1945 for it is these things that, in the words of General Wainwright, make us give thanks for the things we take for granted, for freedom, for security of life, for food and shelter and the presence of loved ones. Keep us humble in the day of victory, make us wise in the presence of great problems, strong and brave in the face of danger, and sympathetic and generous as we face the appalling need of a war torn world."

December first

Nineteen forty-five



BGC's "Pageant of the Arts and Flowers" included potted plants and gardening notebooks exhibited by the Emerson School Camp Fire group who were in the Club's Junior Gardening Program. -Clipping from BGC's scrapbook.