



CHAPTER EIGHT 2000-2006

ON THE CUSP OF A NEW ERA

“As the 68th year for the Berkeley Garden Club is winding up, we find that we have been more active than ever. We have been pleased to welcome eleven new members, bringing our total membership to 85. Our monthly meetings have been well attended, and our speakers have delivered excellent programs on topics including gardening with butterflies, edible landscapes, aesthetic pruning, wildflower walks in the Sierra, flower arranging, English gardens, and the wildlife refuge at the Alameda Naval Air Station. In addition, our own Master Gardeners have spoken at our general meetings, giving us numerous tips for gardening. ...

“Our seven study groups have been very busy as well. Meeting monthly at members’ homes, Herbs and Spices, Kitchen Gardens, Succulents, Geraniums & Begonias, Floriculture, Bonsai, Flower Arranging, and Nature Walks study their various specialties in depth, and also organize many field trips throughout the year. ...

We continue to be involved with our community at large. With generous amounts of funds from our Conservation Account, we were able to make donations to Audubon Canyon Ranch, Golden Gate Audubon Society, California Nature Conservancy, Citizens for Eastshore State Park, Greenbelt Alliance, Point Reyes Bird Observatory, East Bay Regional Parks Foundation, Estuary Action Challenge, California Native Plant Society, Save Mt. Diablo, Sempervirens Fund [Since February 1976, the BCG has contributed \$7,828 to this fund.], Penny Pines and Save the Bald Eagle Fund. Our members continue to volunteer in local gardening and restoration projects. And finally, our Scholarship Committee was able to make sizable donations to both the Bay Bridges District Scholarship Fund, and also directly to the Merritt College Department of Horticulture. As an organization with great support from its membership, we feel very good about what we’ve accomplished this year.”

-Alison Zaremba, President's Report, April 2000

The minutes of the first general meeting in the new millennium record a controversy over the matter of Club dues.

“A discussion followed concerning the raise in the Club’s dues. The President pointed out that ‘we all want what’s best for the Club.’ A review of what has been pointed out before ensued. There has been an increase in rent, a drop in membership and cuts in the budget for the library, conservation and scholarships. The questionnaires returned showed about twenty-six favored an increase of \$10 [which the Board had recommended], three favored \$5 or \$10, eleven favored \$5, and two favored no increase. George stated that the report from the Budget Committee was unbiased.”

After more impassioned discussion, a motion was made to increase the dues by \$10 and a vote was taken. Final count: Twenty-nine for the increase, five against. The increase was to go into effect July 1, 2000.

Without the Club Chairs involvement, the Club could not operate. One appointed position that evolved with the Club is the Courtesy Chair. This member’s responsibility is to stay abreast of the physical wellbeing of the membership. One way this is accomplished is through word-of-mouth. Another is to monitor attendance and contact those who have abruptly stopped coming to meetings. She sends cards of condolence and of well wishes, and updates the Club during the general meetings with ailing members’ health status. At some point, the Club had established greeters at the general meeting whose job it was to greet members as they arrived, provide them with a name tag and check off their name in a membership attendance book. This record keeping provides data useful to the Courtesy Chair in attaining the information she needs to perform her duties effectively. As the membership ages, this position has proved crucial in comforting ailing members and keeping them in the hearts and minds of the rest of the Club.

A committee with equally vital purpose is the Social Committee. It reviews the supply cabinet and restocks it to appropriately reflect the needs for the coming year, and members pass around the signup sheet for cookie volunteers for each meeting (with the refreshments for the first meeting of the year being provided by the Board as is the Club’s custom). The Holiday Luncheon requires picking a site, choosing a caterer, costing out the event, arranging for volunteers as needed to sell

wine, work in clean-up, etc. Things like appropriate parking must be considered when choosing a site, as well as finding a caterer with tasty food that falls within the budget.

The Spring Tea is hosted solely by the Club's Social Committee, so not only do the members line up volunteers, but also they arrange the food platters; members serve the tea and coffee from silver urns and they keep the silver trays full of the glorious delectables provided by the tea attendees. Then the entire room must be cleaned up and put away as it was found. In this yearly report, it was noted that a person would be hired for the following year to wash the dishes.

Finally, the June Pie Social for the installation of officers must be planned and carried out. From the Club's perspective, most meetings and events sail by with tremendous success and it's easy to forget the extent of the organization and attention to detail that is required to plan these parties each year.

The Conservation Committee keeps the Club abreast of its activities, which include researching the multitude of worthy organizations that could use the Club's support, and making recommendations for the Club to consider. In 2002 the Club voted to distribute its allocated \$710 among ten organizations including some previously mentioned, as well as the following new additions: Estuary Action Challenge, Natives Here Nursery, Friends of Five Oaks – Urban Creeks Council and Anza Borrego Desert Park.

The BGC continues to be well known and well respected by other sister and related organizations. The Club is frequently asked to host meetings and co-plan events and its members are often honored. Bay Bridges District of CGCI honored four members with awards: Rebecca Cason for 54 years of membership, Sheila Pierce for flower arranging, Roberta Ghertner for her garden, and Claudine Read for Lifelong Achievement. In 2004 the Bay Bridges District bestowed an honorable "Certificate of Appreciation" to the Club for the development of the Children's Park from 2001-2005. This year also proved very exciting for George Perko, as he was awarded CGCI Man of the Year for his assistance to the state in various financial and tax issues. George recalls the awards' ceremony as follows:

"Various BGC members fondly recall driving to the CGCI convention in Sacramento in June 2005 for the Man of the Year awards ceremony. CGCI maintains secrecy as to the Man and Woman of the Year award winners each year. A table for a party of

12 is reserved for the family members of the awards winner, and the attendees are invited to surreptitiously surprise the winners at the awards dinner. In 2005, members Nancy Baxter, Lorcy Burns, Dee Plunkett, Phil Stanley, and Alison Zaremba surprised me. They had search throughout Sacramento to find a personalized gift.” Their special gift to George, in honor of his fabled cooking skills as recounted in the Herbs and Spices Study Group, “was an autographed can of Spam (found at a liquor store)! However, no one requested that I make my signature dish of Spamburgers with cheese, with sauerkraut on the side. No one can say that the Herbs and Spices Study Group members don’t have fun!”

Also in 2004, during the Presidency of Barbara Berniker, the Club took the leap into the 21st century by setting up a web page. The first Webmaster was Isaac Berniker, who acquired the domain name for the Club and lined up the web server. Barbara Berniker and Paula Meader designed the first web page, which still forms the basis of the Club’s current page. Later, member Phil Stanley took over the job of Webmaster and still assumes this responsibility.

The web page is a beautifully arranged, easy to navigate and decorated with photographs, many taken by club members. It is designed to not only inform those unfamiliar with the Club but also to provide easy reference to members. The years’ program schedule appears on line, as well as the bylaws, committee-meetings schedules, special events, officers, a plant list and library inventory.

The BGC library is amazing. It may be difficult to picture what a library of 400 books looks like, but when you go to the bibliography on the web page and see the numbers of titles and variety of subject matter, it is impossible not to be impressed. The love, dedication, and diligence of each Librarian throughout the years has been poured into the proliferation, cataloguing, and preservation of this amazing collection.

With the 75th year in full swing, below is a word from the Historian for the year 2005-2006 as well a recap of the programs offered this 2006-2007 session.

“With a great honor and a humble heart, I hereby submit to you the history of our club for this past year, 2005-2006.

This has been a wonderful one to remember. The Club's projects and activities were absolutely amazing, benefiting both the City of Berkeley and our individual members.

We started September 20, 2005, with our first meeting at the Epworth Church led by the Club Co-Presidents, Chris Henri and Alison Zaremba, and the Secretary, Paula Meader. They guided our club with the help of an amazing support team of Gloria, Sherrill, Joan, Dee, and Nancy. What a delightful team!

This year, we lost our dear Claudine Read, who is now in Heaven watching us and praying for us. Also this year we lost other beloved members: Roberta Ghertner, Betty Holsinger, Leora Ladwig and Grace Suzuki. I can imagine they are all starting a new garden club in Heaven.” *-Historian, 2006, Helen Rendon*

The 2006-2007 Program Committee shined through for the Club again this year with the following schedule:

- September: Dry Gardening;
Richard Ward, Owner, Dry Garden Nursery
- October: Gorgeous Gardens Made Easy;
Kim Hayworth, Producer of TV's Henry's Garden
- November: Great Garden Books and Resources;
Ann Leyhe, Mrs. Dalloway's Library and Garden Arts
- December: Holiday Luncheon
- January: Treasures of Mount Diablo; Seth Adams,
Director of Land Programs
- February: National Trust Gardens of England;
Carole Austin
- March: Brighten Your Garden With Birds;
Pat Bachetti, Local Birding Author
- April: Spring Tea and Floral Design Presentation;
Howard Arendtson, Owner of H. Julien Designs, Berkeley
- May: Hardy Geraniums and Scented Pelargoniums;
Robin Parer, Owner Geraniaceae, Kentfield
- June: Installation of New Officers.

In the winter of 2006, the Club was approached by a staff writer for the San Francisco Chronicle. She wished to write an article about the garden clubs in the area and she wished to include the Berkeley

Garden Club in it. As a result, she interviewed the Club's presidents and attended a general meeting. The following is Susan Fornoff's account, which appeared in the Chronicle on April 12, 2006.

It's a gloomy Tuesday afternoon and the Berkeley Garden Club listens attentively to a lecture on daffodils from one of its greener thumbs. But when she warns against cutting, braiding or rubber-banding the inevitable wilting leaves, mumbling erupts in the peanut gallery.

"There's a little group in the back that has been rubber-banding their daffodil leaves for years," someone finally says.

The speaker ponders this. "Well," she says, "you'll know that it's wrong now."

And the whole gang roars with laughter. The rest of the meeting is less raucous but no less lively, with one member exhorting others to sign up for a Sonoma County bus trip in May, another begging for volunteers on setup and cleanup for the Spring Tea and Floral Design Show, and others reporting on the progress of projects, including a garden at Aquatic Park and a book commemorating the Club's 75th year.

"They did wear hats and gloves in the beginning," says Club Co-President Chris Henri. "But even then they were interested in what we're interested in now – native plants, civic beautification, ecological activism."

In 1932, there were only a handful of garden clubs in the Bay Area; now there are more than 100. And though interests may not have changed much, garden clubs are shifting into a higher gear.

"The social aspect is still there, but it's not hats and gloves and tea," says Bob Gordan, the immediate past president of California Garden Clubs, Inc. "It's cookies and punch on the run, going out to do a project.

"Everybody does things in this club, it's extremely active," says Co-President Alison Zaremba. Gardeners, after all, are expected to get their hands dirty. ...

The Half Moon Bay club ... already has 32 members. With two-thirds of the group younger than 65, it holds its monthly meeting on Monday nights. ...

But older clubs, rooted in the tradition of afternoon meetings for ladies of leisure, are struggling with the idea of night meetings; many of the longest standing members do not want to go out at night.

Besides, says Evelyn Humphrey, a 45-year member of the Berkeley club, “we’re so hidebound in tradition, it’s hard to change.

... Traditionally, garden clubs have been bad places to be a man and good places to meet women. George Perko, remembers when he busted into the all-female Berkeley club a few years ago.

“One elderly member who was probably in her 90s came up to me and said. ‘You’re so brave to join a garden club,’” says Perko who is self employed and can make time for weekday meetings.

“Then I just had to show that I could grow stuff.”

There are, (Bob) Gordon says, a few all-male clubs around the country – so there. He joined his first club when he was a junior in high school.

“A woman in our church came up to me and said, ‘I’m starting a garden club and you’re going to be in it,’” he says, retelling a story he has relished over the years.

The woman’s daughter was to be his wife of 57 years, Ruth. Gordon says one can still find romance in a garden club, but it’s less likely to blossom over a cup of tea, more likely to grow out of the weeds. ...

The year 2007 is the seventy-fifth year for the Berkeley Garden Club. During this time it has lived and breathed as an organization through prosperity, hardships, a world war, national and international crises, widespread social reform, and increased civic and environmental conscience. Does it have a strong interest in pretty gardens and floral arrangements? Absolutely, but throughout its 75 years, the Berkeley Garden Club has been about so much more. Its members are extraordinarily intelligent, motivated, and at times quite powerful as a group. They are extroverted, approachable, tied to their community and dedicated to the wellbeing of the earth. So at the end of this era, we sit at the beginning of the next and await whatever great things are to be brought to fruition by the ladies and gentlemen of the Berkeley Garden Club. “As is the gardener, so is the garden.”

Study Groups (from page 80)



Garden Literature



Herbs & Spices



*Nature Walks, visiting the Children's Garden at Aquatic Park in Berkeley,
planted by BGC. -Above photos by Deleye Bailey-Smith*



*Installation of Officers 2006–2007 and Pie Social, June 20, 2006
-Photo by Mona Reeve*