

History of The Tuckahoe Garden Club of Westhampton

The Tuckahoe Garden Club was founded on May 16, 1928 by Mrs. Stuart Michaux and a few of her close friends and neighbors. Originally, they were called the "Club of Six." By the end of the summer of 1928, several other friends in the Westhampton area of Richmond joined the group and the name was changed to The Tuckahoe Garden Club of Westhampton. The club became a member of The Garden Club of Virginia [GCV] in 1933 and then joined The Garden Club of America [GCA] in 1952. Our club currently consists of 75 Active members, 25 Sustainers, 8 Sustainer Emeritus members, 9 Honorary, and 1 Non-Resident member.

The center of our club seal is the *Peltandra virginica* (or Tuckahoe arum) which early settlers found growing along Tuckahoe Creek. The starchy corns were roasted and eaten by Native Americans. Their name for the plant was "tockawhough." Our name was created from the political district of Tuckahoe, and the residential area of early members, Westhampton. Once a neighborhood club, we have now expanded to include members from neighboring counties of Goochland, Henrico, Fluvana and Charles City.

The club has a long tradition of supporting roadside beautification and civic improvement. In the early days, club members were active in politics and sponsored a landscape engineer, Mr. Harold J. Neale, to serve on the Virginia State Highway Commission. For his successful efforts to improve the beauty of the Virginia roadsides, Mr. Neale was made the sole honorary gentleman member of The Tuckahoe Garden Club of Westhampton. The club continued its emphasis of roadside beautification with annual service station improvement contests. We supported The Garden Club of Virginia slogan "Beauty is Good Business" and it became a motto for the club.

The Tuckahoe Garden Club of Westhampton has a long history of planting trees. In 1932, mindful of George Washington's second centennial birthday, members planted 13 strong, young elm trees along a bare block of Grove Avenue, one elm for each original state. In the 1930s when bank doors closed and civic projects were scarce, The Tuckahoe Garden Club of Westhampton planned and supervised the first roadside planting along River Road. Our plantings of flowering trees, shrubs, and hundreds of iris and daffodils extended west from the Country Club of Virginia gate for two miles. In the middle of the century our club ran a "Pilot Project" at the Richmond Public Library where three separate parcels were planted to fill a long-standing need for "small spaces of peace and beauty between the parks of our Old Town of Richmond."

From the beginning, the club has supported restoration projects in the City of Richmond and throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. We have participated for years in The Garden Club of Virginia's Historic Garden Week, which brings visitors from all over the world to see the fine homes and gardens in the area. Every year our club members serve in positions varying from state chairman, flower arrangers, hostesses, copy writers, marketing and media chairmen, treasurers, and members of the house procurement and transportation committees, to name just a few. All of the proceeds from Historic Garden Week go toward garden restoration projects around the state. In 1947, our club restored the garden at the John Marshall House with further improvements made again in 1968. In 1972, we joined forces with the James River Garden Club to restore the fountain at Maymont Park.

Conservation has always been a mainstay of our club. In the early days, booths were manned during the holiday season in the old Sixth Street Market to show farmers and sidewalk flower vendors how to cut holly, pine, and running cedar without destroying the plants. The club has always eschewed improper land development and the proliferation of billboards along our highways. Hylah Boyd, one of our long-time members, founded Scenic Virginia, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public on the economic and cultural benefits of highway beautification. In 2016, we created our very own "Bee Sustainable" conservation effort. The first year focused on efforts to reduce our carbon footprint in our

home and gardens. 2017-18 focused on ways to improve the energy consumption and efficiency of our homes. Moving into 2019, our initiative will focus on climate change education.

Horticulture has been at the heart of Tuckahoe Garden Club activities. We have had numerous programs and propagation workshops over the years, often emphasizing historic plants. Our members took cuttings at Hollywood Cemetery and many of the antique roses from the cemetery have been preserved and passed down through our members. We have taken annual pilgrimages to nurseries, gardens, and parks to broaden our knowledge and explore new, rare, and unusual plants. Members generously share their knowledge. We produced the *Gardening Guide* in 1983, which for years has been a mainstay for new home owners and families with gardens in the Richmond area. From the care of boxwood, to pruning techniques, to month-by-month instruction, our gardening guide has served as a “how to” book for those cultivating their own gardens. Two Tuckahoe Garden Club members recently became GCA Horticulture Judges. Twelve of our members have received the Horticulture Award of Merit.

In 1959, just seven years after joining The Garden Club of America, we co-hosted with the James River Garden Club, Richmond’s first Annual Meeting of The Garden Club of America. In 1976, Tuckahoe hosted the members of Zone VII in Richmond for a Zone VII Meeting. In 2009, we hosted The Garden Club of Virginia Annual Meeting in Richmond, held at The Jefferson Hotel. In 2010, we hosted the GCA clubs again for The Garden Club of America Zone VII Meeting. We held our first flower show in many years, and it was very educational and inspiring for our members.

‘Tuckahoe Plantation’, the boyhood home of Thomas Jefferson, has been a big part of our life. Two of our current members, Mrs. W. Taliaferro Thompson III (Carey), and Mrs. Addison B. Thompson (Sue) and their families are faithful stewards of the historic property. Carey’s daughter is now a member of our club. We have bathed in its rich history, learned the history of its plants, immersing ourselves in its beauty. We hold meetings and celebrations there annually. We have held propagation and flower arranging workshops, served as hostesses for Historic Garden Week., and have enjoyed watching the gardens evolve and be maintained with plant selections that are reflective of the 18th century.

Our club has been home to many talented and creative flower arrangers. Much of our flower arranging inspiration come from Virginia’s beautiful spring season, with budding branches, bursting bulbs, and abundant flowering shrubs and perennials. For the past several decades, our club has had active GCV and GCA artistic judges. We try to have flower arranging workshops for new members each year. At most of our meetings, we exhibit artistic arrangements and horticulture, competing for awards at the end of the year.

Over the years we have been engaged in projects in our community. These include a project at Library Park, the Microclimate Wall at The Science Museum of Virginia, and the “Extreme Stream Makeover”, a clean-up effort of a stream flowing into the James River. In the late 1990s, we assisted with the planting of native plants at Bandy Field, a neighborhood urban park on Three Chopt Road. In 2004, the Bandy Field Nature Park received GCV’s prestigious Commonwealth Award. Tuckahoe remained involved until the Bandy Field Nature Park was put into a Conservation Easement to protect against further development. We have supported educational programs at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, an educator at Peter Paul Development Center, sent students to Nature Camp, supported landscaping for an inner-city school playground, and donated a “Grow Lab” at St. Andrews School. In 2001, we planted a Riparian Buffer Project along Tuckahoe Creek for the James River Association. Beginning in 2010, with the encouragement of the Bessie Carter Award of The Garden Club of Virginia, we began a joint four-club urban tree project in downtown Richmond called Capital Trees. Thus began the greening efforts of 14th Street and planting rain gardens to mitigate water runoff near the James River. To this day, we remain involved with Capital Trees planting bulbs, trees and fundraising. We have helped to revitalize the area under the railroad trestle along Canal Street creating urban green spaces, affectionately named “The Low Line”. Continuing the clean-up effort in that area, we joined forces with the James River Garden Club in

2017 in a Garden Club of America initiative, "Partners For Plants" with the goal to remove invasive plants from nearby Chapel Island. Once completed, the island will be replanted with native species.

The Garden Club of Virginia has been a guiding force for our club for the past eight decades. Many of our members have served on the board and on committees for The Garden Club of Virginia. Three of our members, Jane Murrell, Charlotte Massie, and Sue Thompson have received the Massie Medal of Distinguished Achievement. Three of our members, Mrs. Arthur B. Collins, Mrs. Thomas W. Murrell, Jr., and Mrs. John Thomas West IV have served as President of The Garden Club of Virginia. Our club has benefitted from the GCV activities of Historic Garden Week, Horticulture Field Days, Flower Arranging Schools, the GCV Symposium, the Conservation Forums and Legislative Day.

Furthermore, our club members have served on the GCV Flower Show, Horticulture, Conservation, Finance, Membership, Restoration, Journal and Development Committees, just to name a few. We have won many awards at the Lily, Daffodil and Rose Shows as well as the Symposium and enjoy our participation in these events. Our club has especially enjoyed the benefits of being in Richmond and using the Kent Valentine House for membership meetings. Our members have faithfully arranged flowers for headquarters. Our club chairs Garden Week in Richmond every four years. We help procure homes and gardens for Historic Garden Week.

We are always thinking of creative ways to accommodate members with the ever-growing pressures of work schedules and competing volunteer interests in order to remain current and relevant. We shall continue to offer educational opportunities for our members so that they can pass on their knowledge of plants and the love of gardening to the next generation of gardeners. To quote Gertrude Jekyll, "The love of gardening is a seed that once sown never dies."

The Tuckahoe Garden Club of Westhampton has always been home to plant lovers, conservationists, and gardeners who love making things beautiful. We are moving ahead with an urgent mission to keep things as green as possible and to reduce our carbon footprint. As we move forward in this century, we know that our traditions will remain true and our passions will deepen.

October 2018
For GCV Board of Governor's Meeting