

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. Headquarters

From 1951 to 1959, members of Texas Garden Clubs donated \$36,000 to National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc. to build a national headquarters in St. Louis, MO. At the 1958 spring state convention in Fort Worth, members discussed the possibility of a permanent state headquarters, which would be the first statewide headquarters in the nation. State President Anavi Buchanan wrote, "You voted a resolution in Fort Worth that should affect the lives of all of us Texas Gardeners from now on. Unanimously you voted to place \$5000 from the general fund in a savings account to start a fund that some day in the not too far distance will provide a headquarters for Texas Garden Clubs."

The Garden Club Council of Fort Worth began their 1958-59 club year with one goal uppermost in their mind - to obtain the permanent headquarters for Fort Worth. A Fort Worth Committee was formed: Mary Kittel, former president of Fort Worth Garden Club, Chairman; Mrs. Walter Ramsey, President of the Garden Club Council of Fort Worth; Mrs. I.B. Nye, District II Governor; Mrs. C. E. Beavers, former president of Texas Garden Clubs; and Mrs. Varner Beall Stevens, former president of Fort Worth Garden Club.

The recommendation of the Fort Worth Botanic Garden site was presented by Mary Kittel to the Texas Garden Clubs Executive Committee at the state convention in Texarkana on October 16, 1958. The presentation included blueprints and a model of a proposed building, a contract from the Fort Worth Parks Department for approximately 9 acres with landscape maintenance and a 99 year lease, plus a pledge of \$6000 from Fort Worth area garden clubs.

Fort Worth architect, Robert P. Woltz, Jr. was recommended. He was known for designing several Fort Worth schools and for additions to the Fort Worth Garden Center (now known as the Rock Springs Building). The original headquarters presentation was for a diamond-shaped building for a cost of \$25,000-30,000.

The Board of Directors voted unanimously for the project. An immediate response of financial pledges from convention delegates came after the Fort Worth site was chosen. A new building plan was introduced that doubled the building's size. Woltz's second plan was a low stone and stucco building, 125 feet long with about 3600 square feet of floor space for a new cost of \$47,500. Woltz was a great admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright. His design of TGC Headquarters is considered a particularly good example of the Wrightian style. The building provided for office space, storage for archives, library and a meeting room to accommodate 150-250 persons. Future plans included enlargement of the back patio and roofing of it to add meeting room space.

The board voted to designate one-half of Life Membership fees to a Permanent Headquarters Fund. Additional funds would be raised through donations to Gift Books: the Memorial Book (min \$5), the President's Book (\$10), the Silver Book (\$25) and the Gold Book (\$50). Donations of \$500 would place the donor's name

on the Founders Bronze Plaque. Names of Friends and Benefactors ((\$1000) would be placed on a Bronze Plaque at the front entrance

A building committee of 40 members from throughout the state was created. In setting up the general headquarters committee, President Anavi Buchanan also named a Board of Trustees composed of one member from each of the nine districts.

Mrs. Buchanan reported that following the 1959 spring state convention in El Paso that “many of us went to St. Louis to the National Convention and the dedication of the Permanent Home. Here Mrs. Harmon [President-Elect] and I looked at, under, and into everything about this lovely building, knowing much work was ahead for us when we returned to Texas.”

By January 1959, the treasurer reported an additional \$5,684.15 had been collected toward the new cost of \$65,000. During the 1959 spring state convention, it was announced that the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce would underwrite the construction for \$15,000 so the increased cost would not prevent the construction of headquarters by Cain & Cain Construction Company, Fort Worth.

Ground breaking was held on June 29, 1959. The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* quoted President Buchanan, “It was at a convention here in Fort Worth [1958] that 675 delegates voted unanimously to take \$5000 from the general funds and set it aside in the hope that it could be used to attract an angel with an acceptable gift. Several angels came along in the course of the development of the project. Those included the city of Fort Worth, the local chamber of commerce and the park board.”

Mayor Thomas McCann extended the welcome to more than two hundred members and guests. Mrs. Margaret Scruggs Carruth, played a tape recording from Mrs. Gross R. Scruggs, Founding President and Honorary Life President, “Today there is added to our Cherished Garden Club dates a NEW DAY—June 29—for we are taking the first step toward creating a building that we shall all call HOME.”

The building was completed in less than six months with an Opening Ceremony held December 5, 1959. W. L. Stewart, representing the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, congratulated the current president, Nita Harmon “May all your plans come to full bloom.”

Fund raising projects included donations to the Grandmother’s Book; members chipped in to the Chips and Logs Clubs; sold Christmas gift wrap (a joint project with The Lighthouse for the Blind), note paper and bulbs. Continental National Bank offered a \$30,000 loan at 4 ½% for five years toward the construction cost, but fund raising made it possible to pay off the loan early in 1961.

Clubs throughout the state donated toward the purchase of furnishings. The auditorium was set up with three different furniture groupings including sofas and

chairs, silver tea service, buffets and rug. The furniture could be moved to create settings for small meetings, for buffets and tea, or rearranged for business meeting using stack chairs, eight foot tables and projector and screen. All furniture and many recovered upholstered pieces are still in use. The donors list is displayed in the auditorium.

The library was furnished with drapery, rug, couches and chairs, and donated and purchased books. More than 500 books were donated by District II. District II Governor, Marion Campbell, selected the books with the guidance of Scott Fikes, horticulturalist with the Fort Worth Park Department. More than \$2500 was raised through the sale of subscriptions to *Horticulture* magazine, published by the Massachusetts Horticulture Society. A representative of the MHS attended the formal dedication. Another significant donation was by Mary Kittel of her collection on Japanese floral and architectural design. The Library was later named the Marion Campbell Library in honor of its primary benefactor.

The formal dedication was held on March 24, 1963 with Mrs. Charles Nettleton, National Council of State Garden Clubs President, dedicating the building to "useful purposes and its service in the community and state." Mrs. Nettleton was accompanied by the incoming NCSGC President, Mrs. J. Gordon Gose.

On behalf of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, President Raymond Buck congratulated the women on the building and on "the beauty, happiness and contentment in the great outdoors" which they achieve through the garden club work. A Proclamation from Governor Price Daniel was read declaring March 24-30, 1963 as Garden Club Week

A new sign on University Drive, donated by the Winnsboro Garden Club, guided members to Headquarters. Members posed at the new bridge and bird bath, gifts from Garden Club Council of Fort Worth.

At the 1963 spring convention, National Council of State Garden Clubs recognized Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. with its highest award for a state garden club, the Bronze Seal for the Establishment of a State Garden Club Headquarters.

Major campaigns made the renovation of the landscape possible in time for the 1995 NCSGC convention in Dallas, the creation of Wildscape Pocket Gardens and redecorating the interior. Trustees from each District continue to administer the Endowment Funds and donations for Headquarters maintenance.