



Barrington Questers Chapter #544 met at the Barrington Area Library in February. Their officers are (from left) Norene Oviatt, treasurer; Nancy Koutis, president; Jane Davis, membership; Maureen Doessel, publicity; and Lynnette Hillard, secretary. (Not pictured: Barbara Cragan and Gloria Johnson, 1st vice presidents, and Pat Pulsifer, 2nd vice president.)

## The Questers

LEARNING, COLLECTING, AND PRESERVING AMERICA'S HERITAGE

VILLAGE HISTORY is showcased in a unique way on the walls of Barrington's White House, where restored and framed plat maps record for perpetuity the early details of land development and ownership within village limits, beginning in 1855 and until 1935. A contribution towards the preservation of these significant Village documents was made by Barrington Chapter #544 of the International Questers, which is headquartered in Philadelphia. Barrington Village President

Karen Darch, and BWH Director Beth Raseman joined Questers' president Nancy Koutsis and the Questers' donation committee for the presentation.

This was one of the many important history related projects that are supported by the Questers across America and also in Canada. The members of this organization are devoted to sharing their personal collecting interests and supporting the stewardship of the architecture, artifacts, antiques, and ephemera which form the tangible fabric of America's past.



Presenting a completed piece for use in the White House are (from left) Karen Darch, Village of Barrington president; Barb Cragan, chair of the Quester donation committee, and Nancy Koutsis, president, Barrington Questers #544.

Their inspiration originates in the person of a Red Cross Production Chairman living in Fort Washington, Penn., in 1944 during the difficult days of the Second World War.



The smaller pitcher is Mrs. Bardens' original syrup pitcher. The larger one was donated by Maryland Questers who had originally received it from Mrs. Bardens. Marks indicate the manufacturer as Messrs. Thomas Latham and Richard Boote, who were in business in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, England from 1842-1878. Photo Courtesy of The Questers headquarters in Philadelphia.

Jessie Elizabeth Bardens would pass an antique shop on her way to work, and in October 1943 her eye was taken with a little blue syrup pitcher, which she purchased, and placed on her desk at work, where it became a conversation piece. This started a stream of her co-workers bringing in small antiques so that Mrs. Bardens could give her opinion about them. Seeing the opportunity for sharing and knowledge, on April 6, 1944, she invited 14 people to her home for more discussion and study. At year's end, 35 people were meeting to learn more about antiques. For most homes of that time, this was serious overcrowding, and Mrs. Bardens encouraged all those who wanted to join to form their own groups, and before long there were five more groups meeting regularly.

### FROM LOCAL TO NATIONAL

By March 1950, with the well-established six groups, Mrs. Bardens made them the foundation of a national organization, which in 1953, she incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a nonprofit corporation. She would be the first National Quester President serving from 1950 to 1956. Nationwide interest grew in forming chapters, and in some cases affiliating them with existing antique clubs. Mrs. Bardens went personally wherever she could to organize the

groups, and the rest she did by mail. She was diligent in answering the many questions that arose as chapters were formed, and in 1954, drove with her husband to Iowa, organizing chapters as they went.

As America recovered from the war, interest in antiques and history took on new meaning, perhaps in response to the turmoil and losses of the war. When Mrs. Bardens died in 1963, she had attended the first National Quester Convention at the William Penn Inn in Ambler, Penn., and seen the Questers organization grow to 149 chapters located in 22 states. At a high point, there were 900 chapters in 43 states, and two Canadian provinces. In 1991, the Questers added "International" to their name, and they were governed by International, State, or Provincial and Chapter Bylaws, with International Bylaws as guidelines. Chapters were required to have a minimum of eight dues-paying members, and to hold nine meetings a year.

By 1967, with the success of the Questors, which had taken as their motto "It's fun to search and a joy to find" they embarked on a dream project, which became known as "Quarters for Questers". They needed a national headquarters to link Chapters across the country in common goals and shared enthusiasms. Besides their individual member interests, Questers were increasingly addressing important local historic preservation and restoration needs.

#### ON A SPECIAL QUEST

"Quarters" and more were collected, and a small, three-story, one-room wide, 19th century brick house, one of a pair originally built in 1802 by a blacksmith, became The Questers National Headquarters in Philadelphia. 210 South Quince Street needed restoration after a history of varied uses.

Eventually, the building would be recognized by the Philadelphia Historical Society for its historic significance. The Questors Headquarters and its twin house have been likened to a pair of jewels, as no other old houses are located now so close to Walnut Street, providing a reminder of the growth of a city. This mini-museum showcases the extensive tea caddy collection of Bess Bardens, that beautiful blue syrup jug that began it all, and the Bess Bardens Memorial Library.

With a home base, Questers' Chapters could now devote their energies to their passions of collecting, learning, preserving, restoring, and education about antiques and their place in American history. Fundraising could provide preservation and restoration grants, for projects in local communities, and through the years, these P&R grants, with education a priority, have been raised through voluntary donations. Questers members proudly fund two annual scholarships. One is a two-year \$17,000 scholarship to a graduate student earning a Master of Science Degree in Preservation and Restoration at Columbia University, and the second is a three-year \$40,000 fellowship to a graduate student earning a Master of Science Degree in Art Conservation at University of Delaware/Winterthur.

#### BARRINGTON QUESTERS

Barrington Chapter #544 is very active 45 years after it was chartered. Several Barrington women who had been members of a large Chapter, Clarinda Cady in Inverness, were the nucleus of Chapter #544. Lois Lee, a founding and current member of the Barrington group recounted those early days of monthly meetings, when members would mostly

#### What's in a Questers Name?

**JUST AS THE NAMES** of thousands of quilt designs became quintessentially American, so did the naming of Questers Chapters to reflect their states, locales, and history. A random sampling of Chapter names from a recent issue of "The Quester Quarterly": In Florida, Bertha Honore Palmer; in Iowa, Okoboji Queen; in Michigan, Heartland Stage Coach Inn and Waldenwoods; in Missouri, Westward Gateway; in New Jersey, Barnegat Windjammers; in Pennsylvania, Sullivan Trail; South Dakota, Dakota Territory; in Wisconsin, Swiss Attic Fanciers and others include Blackhawk, Capitol, and Kishwaukee. Illinois includes Princess Onarga, Iroquois Antiquers, and close to home, Clarinda Cady, recalling the name of one of the earliest settler families at Deer Grove, who rest in peace in the Cady Cemetery, which is maintained by the Questers of that name. Interestingly, Barrington #544 is the only Chapter without a descriptive name.

provide the programs, perhaps highlighting their own collections. Occasionally, an outside speaker was invited, and field trips were scheduled. Initially, about 40 people crammed into each other's homes, just as in Mrs. Bardens' day, and membership now stands at 30. September meetings are traditionally "show and tell" where members share their finds from summer vacations.

#### Antiques and Imaginations

**FROM MRS. JESSE BARDENS:** "Antiques are part of human history, a tangible record of the things of everyday living. A fascinating hobby, the study of antiques gives the most pleasure to those who strive to learn all they can about where, when and how they were made. Through the discovery and knowledge of antiques, we may bring the past to life and profit by experiences of previous generations."

From Ralph Waldo Emerson: "In history our imagination plays us false. Kingdom and lordship, power and estate, are a gaudier vocabulary than private John and Edward in a small house and common day's work: but the things of life are the same to both..."



Lois Lee of Barrington is a founding member of the Questers #544 Chapter.

A more recent field trip for the Barrington Questers was to the Alphonse Iannelli Studio in Park Ridge. The renowned sculptor and designer had been the interior designer for Barrington's Catlow Theatre and the Park Ridge Pickwick Theatre. He and his wife Margaret were frequent collaborators with Frank Lloyd Wright. Their studio has now been preserved as a Park Ridge Heritage site.



*A Questers field trip to the Alphonse Iannelli Studio.*

Members attend state, national, and international conventions which by any convention standards are jam-packed with programs, lectures, and site visits to museums, galleries, and period buildings. The International Convention's Annual Luncheon is highlighted by announcing the Founder's Award winners for research papers. Awards are also presented for local Chapter publications. Cross-country friendships have been formed at these conventions through a shared love of history and antiques. Questers International has formed an important partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation whereby local Chapters can use the Trust's logo "This Place Matters" for local programs of preservation and restoration.



*Barrington Questers gather for a luncheon.*

Beside the Plat Maps at Barrington's White House, Chapter #544 had previously supported the restoration of the pantry in the Historical Society's Applebee House, and its members are generous donors to the national programs and scholarships.

Jessie Bardens was once asked "What is a Quester"? She replied: "A Quester is a socially well-adjusted, intelligent person who has curiosity, enthusiasm, imagination, and a good memory. The powers of the mind are memory and imagination. Without memory we have no past; without imagination, no future."

Jessie Bardens' imagination provided the inspiration for thousands of people to treasure and learn more about America and Canada's tangible past. U



*Barbara L. Benson grew up in Kent, England, and later moved to New York. She settled in Barrington and has walked with our history since she first arrived here in 1980.*