



The garden, photographed in 2018 on the grounds of Bellarmine Jesuit Retreat, was the garden of Mrs. Frank A. Hecht, Jr. at her family's estate, The Meadows. Inset: Mrs. Frank A. Hecht, Jr. (c. 1920s).

Country Sisters

A 1930S VIGNETTE OF BARRINGTON COUNTRY GARDENS

THIS YEAR MARKS the 95th anniversary since The Garden Club of Barrington was founded. In the introduction to their beautiful 90th Anniversary Commemorative Book, their beginnings are recorded thus:

"On October 12, 1925 ... A group of women gathered at the home of Mrs. James E. MacMurray to discuss the preliminaries of forming a garden club.

"Our skyline was truly a limited one, and our vistas short, and our roots but recently transplanted from city ground to the clay soil of our countryside. Our knowledge of gardening was meager, but our courage, though perhaps born of ignorance, was of an indomitable kind, and soon we found Experience a wise and resourceful teacher.

"So it began, a handful of ladies bursting with enthusiasm for having successful, lovely gardens in their hills of Barrington."

And successful they were. Just as the early settlers had broken the prairie, now a new generation took the farm fields dug from the prairie,

transforming them into beautiful gardens. Initially, the Barrington Flower Shows were held within GCB members' homes, but soon, in 1927, the Club had entries in the Chicago Flower Show and also became a Charter member of The Garden Club of Illinois.

The Club's civic activities expanded to include sponsoring a Nature Lady teacher for Barrington schools, including the rural ones, and the donation of gardening books to the Barrington Library. And steadily, the club's expertise in all aspects of gardening, participating in local and Chicago competitive flower shows, grew, so that by the mid-1930s, they were ready for that most challenging of events—home and garden shows open to the public.

By 1940, the number of estates open to the public had increased to nine, when over 1,500 people attended, with a portion of the proceeds going to the Red Cross. Mrs. Frank A. Hecht, Jr. was president that year, and learned that by the

sponsorship of the Lake Forest and Lake Geneva Garden Clubs, the GCB had been invited to join The Garden Club of America, one of only five in the Chicago area to be so honored. Those two clubs had recognized the achievements of their country sisters.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hecht, Jr. then resided on their estate "The Meadows" on County Line Road. This was often the final destination on the tour, with tea served in the Hecht's beautiful gardens. Those gardens survive today, carefully stewarded by the new residents: Members of the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus, for in 1947, The Meadows became Bellarmine Jesuit Retreat House.

Landscaping and gardening, with consultation from members of The Garden Club of Barrington, has retained the essence of the Hecht's grounds, a truly historic vista; a memory of when those newly minted country ladies first made magic with the soils of Barrington. 



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.