

By Leslie Cox, President, CVHS (2013)

April 2013 marks the 35th Anniversary of the formation of the Comox Valley Horticultural Society. Starting this month, and throughout the next year, we will taking brief steps back in time to walk down memory lane together. We will discover how the Society was formed, what activities the members were involved in and perhaps, we will see the impact this garden club had on its members and the community at large. So, without further ado, here is...

The first meeting of what was to become the Comox Valley Horticultural Society was held on April 12, 1978. There were six people present:
Lloyd Park, Verla Park, Jean Farquharson, John Dickenson, Harry Wright and Gwen Wright.

They met at the home of Harry and Gwen. Jean Farquharson opened the meeting with a discussion on how they should get established, whether they should be a part of the B.C. Nursery Trades Association or whether they should form their own club. All present agreed they should form their own club.

Lloyd Park then discussed his various experiences involving different clubs. One thing was always specialized, he noted. For example: guest speakers. Someone to speak on roses, fuchsias, begonias, landscaping and pruning.

One suggestion arose that received some attention: a Fall Fair pertaining to horticulture. It was to be held in September with vegetables and flowers only.

Lloyd Park said he would check into a location for this event, possibly the Curling Club or the Sports Arena.

Another suggestion of interest to the fledging club on their first meeting was to enter a float in the July 1st Parade. The members also talked about promoting the [horticultural] trade by giving a trophy to someone with a nice garden, for fixing up their grounds, for [beautiful] flower beds or for nice hanging baskets.

Further discussed was the improper landscaping practices around some of the local commercial buildings. The members present were hopeful if their group became large enough they would be able to apply pressure to the City and Town Councils to ensure that landscaping would be carried out as originally planned. Also noted was the practice of the City of Courtenay of purchasing shrubs from non-local nurseries without giving local nurseries a chance to place a bid on contracts.

As the meeting wound to a close, attending members were asked to give some consideration for a name for the new club and to also think of a dues structure which would be used for advertising and office expenses. And so ended the very first meeting of a new garden club.

A second meeting was held on April 19th at the home of Lloyd and Verla Park.

People present at the meeting, included the Parks, Jean Farquharson, Jock Smith, Pam Dickenson, Louise (no last name), Hugh (no last name), Harry Wright and Gwen Wright. Jean Farquharson opened the meeting listing the "Aims" and "Purpose" (later changed to "Benefits") of the club they were forming.

The Forming of a Garden Club: Part I

Aims:

- (1) Organize the Garden industry;
- (2) Create a vehicle through which we can promote general gardening interest on the Island;
- (3) Create competition among home gardeners;
- (4) Make Vancouver Island the Garden of Canada through creation of Flower Clubs, Vegetable Clubs, etc.

Benefits:

- Organization able to advise Municipalities in creating Bylaws etc. to include levels of landscaping for new developments;
- Organization to convince local authorities that local people in the industry have a first chance to give estimates for local jobs;
- Bulk buying;
- NOT a price fixing group.

The Minutes of the April 12th meeting were then read by Harry Wright. Immediately following the reading of the Minutes, discussion began on the running of the Fall Fair.

Lloyd Park was given the task of enquiring with the C.R.A. on the use of the hall for the Fair. Cost would be \$100.00 per day. Items to be included in the Fall Fair were:

- Fruits: apples, pears, peaches, grapes, plums;
- Vegetables: bean family, peas, corn, pumpkins, squash, carrots, cucumbers;
- Flowers: Dahlias, Mums, Gladiolas, Roses, Carnations, Fuchsias, Geraniums (likely zonal Geraniums or Pelargoniums), Sweet Peas, Mount Washington (Indian Paintbrush), Sweet Williams, Zinnias, violets, and any others in bloom.

Lloyd was commissioned to obtain a brochure from the Saanichton Fair in Victoria to see how they ran their fair. In the competition, there were to be categories for children and adults. There would be entries for Best Hanging Baskets, Window Boxes, Patio Boxes, Flower Arranging and there would be a category for any item overlooked.

Advertising was discussed.

Posters were to be displayed in Members' businesses. Advertisements were placed in the [Comox District Free Press] Green Sheet under the Calendar of Events and also announced over the local radio station.

An election of Committee Chairs was then held. The results were:

President - Jean Farquharson
Secretary - Harry Wright
Treasurer - Lloyd Park
Membership Chair - Jock Smith

Following the Election, a discussion of Membership Fees occurred. The suggested fee of \$20.00 per person per year would be sufficient to cover the Club's operating costs, providing they could get enough members to join.

A small fee would be charged to enter an exhibit at the Fall Fair to help offset the cost of the trophies.

Discussion ensued into the size of the booth. It was determined this would greatly depend on the size of the hall that would be used as well as the number of exhibitors.

Current members were encouraged to contact potential new members personally. Written notice of the next meeting would also be provided. It was hoped the membership numbers would increase enough by the next meeting in order to organize the necessary Committees for the July 1st Parade and the Fall Fair.

Finally, a discussion of possible names for the fledgling club. Names proposed that evening were:

- Growth Galore
- Gardens Galore

Members Plant Sale

- Upper Island Sow & Grow
- Upper Island Earth Society
- Grow & Show 4 F's Club (Fall Fruits & Vegetables - Flower Festival)

And on that note, the second meeting of the fledgling garden club ended with final instructions to those present to check into the possibility of obtaining a booth at the upcoming Market Day to provide further exposure for the new club. A suggestion was made to advertise the club through a display in a store window if a booth was not available.

(Note: Excerpted from the Minutes of the April 12th and April 19th, 1978 meetings which were taken by Harry Wright.)

I left off last month's history piece about our fledgling club at the end of its inaugural month of meetings. Two of them in that first month. And at the end of the second meeting, the members were instructed to think of a suitable name for the newly formed club.

The third meeting held on May 1st at Harry and Gwen Wright's home was convened by the President, Jean Farquharson, at 8 p.m. Skipping quickly through the business of the past Minutes, followed by a lively discussion on the pros and cons of a Fall Fair.

George Prothero stepped forward and volunteered to be the Chairman for a Names Committee for the Club. It was then decided they would use the name "Horticulture Club" for the time being. It seems deciding on a name was tough.

Perhaps deciding on an appropriate amount to charge for Membership Dues would be easier.

The attending members quickly determined \$20.00 per person was too much. However, then they could not decide on a price for a Membership. The matter was put off until they could add more people to the Membership list. More people would mean they could offer a lower Membership fee.

Next item for discussion was a Float for the July 1st Parade. Norm Leung volunteered to look into acquiring the means for building a float using a theme to promote the Club and advertise the Fall Fair.

With the idea more Members would be attracted to attend the next scheduled meeting of the "Horticulture Club," Steve Allison was charged with inquiring at the School Board Office about using a room at one of the schools for the next general meeting. Jean was to look after advertising the meeting on the local TV station and Calendar of Events in the Free Press.

Everyone else present was to spend the next two weeks contacting "as many people as possible in order to promote the Club and increase our numbers."

And so ended the third meeting of the fledgling garden club. The fourth meeting was held on May 15th in Room #400 at Vanier High School with seven Members present. Not a huge increase in numbers although there were a few new names but also some absent members.

Business quickly jumped to discussion about Membership dues. Jock Smith suggested the following Membership dues structure:

- Business - \$25.00
- Joint Membership (husband & wife) - \$15.00
- Individual - \$10.00
- Senior Citizens & Youth - \$2.00

No mention in the Minutes if this was voted on, passed and implemented or if these figures were left for consideration to be further discussed in a future meeting. The rest of the meeting was taken up with the Fall Fair and all that had to be settled before September 8th & 9th when the Fair was scheduled to take place.

End of the fourth meeting.

As with any group, there is always lots of planning that goes into any event. Even today. Guest speakers are not always knocking on our door, or showing up in our email Inbox, clamouring to present their slides at our meetings. Well, some do.

But not many. The Program Chair does have a little work to do behind the scenes to pull our delightfully varied program together for us.

Same goes for the Gardens in Bloom Tour. While some gardeners gladly offer up their gardens for viewing, there are many more highly deserving gardens that remain hidden in the woods and back streets that must be sourced out.

Imagine what our general meetings and garden tour activities would be like without the planning of these two positions?

And 1978 was no exception. Our fledgling club had great plans to participate in the July 1st Parade down 5th Street. And they were determined to host the Comox Valley Fall Festival on September 8th and 9th.

Farquharson Farms donated their trailer to be decorated as a float in the parade and Jean Farquharson secured a donation of 100 flats of flowers from a Victoria company with which to decorate the farm trailer. Must have been a goodsized trailer as 100 flats is a lot of flowers!

I wonder if this is where the Mile of Flowers originated as the Minutes note the flowers from the float would be donated to the City of Courtenay after the parade.

(Imagine all that work to decorate the float and then having to take it all apart! It would be like decorating for Christmas in late June). Lots of discussion went into the planning on how to decorate the float.

Work parties were arranged to be held on June 29th and 30th for building the frame for the float and to decorate. There was no mention of work party dates to dismantle the float, though.

From planning for the July 1st Parade, the talk Well...back in August of 1978, things were gearing up in the Garden Club for the upcoming Fall Festival on September 8th and 9th.

So much so, the members met three times that month! But in reading through the Minutes of those three meetings, one can almost feel the excitement building as more and more details fell into place. Trophies were organized, ribbons were ordered, 1500 Entry Books were being printed, display containers were being rounded up, donations of raffle prizes were promised....

Whew, a lot of work! I am left wondering if any of those members had any time left over for gardening that summer...let alone run their businesses. But they must have got through it with flying colours because the Fall Festival was definitely held in the Driftwood Mall that September weekend.

As near as I can decipher from those Minutes, a trophy was to be awarded for Best in Class. It was also possible for there to be more than one First or Second.

Going through the Entry Book, which will be on display at the August 19th General meeting for any who are interested, I noticed there were classes of different plant species and whole revisions of others. Chrysanthemums and dahlias naturally each had their own division, as did Gladioli. There was also a Fall Flower Division for asters through to zinnias as well as a General Growing Division in which assorted plant species were grouped such as roses, calendulas and sweet peas.

I especially got a chuckle out of the Arrangement Division with its "Nursery Rhyme" theme:

- Ring Around a Rosie: mass arrangement
- Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star: vertical design in blue & gold
- Rub a Dub Tub, Three Men in a Tub: composition using three blooms
- Goldilocks, Goldilocks: arrangement of marigolds
- See Saw Margery Daw: Siamese twin arrangement, one container higher than the other
- Olde King Cole: design using a large flower & three smaller ones
- A Tisket a Tasket: arrangement in any basket
- There Was a Crooked Man: design using red flowers
- Here We Go Around the Mulberry Bush: composition using fall flowers & berries
- Wynken, Blynken & Nod: composition incorporating driftwood
- Nursery Rhymes: miniature composition depicting any nursery rhyme, not more than four inches all ways and must be titled.

Okay...so here's the thing. The Comox Valley Exhibition is coming up on August 23rd-25th. I just bet there are some members who probably have some blooms happening in their gardens...despite this heat...who could enter a Nursery Rhyme arrangement for our booth display. (Sorry no trophies will be awarded.)

The theme of the Exhibition is "From Island Roots Grown." How better to arrange our booth display than around the entry divisions as stipulated in the Comox Valley Horticultural Society's very 1st Annual Fall Festival?