

## Prologue to the Bedford Garden Club

### A bit of early history...

Cora Champney said that Bedford was such a pretty little town when she first came here to live in the 1920s. She mentioned the white picket fences lining the lawns along The Great Road, with colorful flowers and a pleasant "rural village" feeling. There were small shops, old homes, barns, and great elms. Her husband, George Champney, was an architect working in Boston, and he appreciated the good train service within walking distance, as did many other local people. Mrs. Champney said she could get on the streetcar in front of her house and go wherever she wanted, even to Maine. They had bought the old house at 1 The Great Road, which had been the home of Mrs. Simonds.

We have teamed a little about Winifred Thorndike Simonds from newspaper articles. Her obituary said, "She lived in Bedford for nearly thirty years until after her husband's death in 1919. She then moved to Rockport, Maine to live with her daughter Ruth. Her other daughter lived in Indianapolis, Indiana. Winifred served four years on the School Committee. She was a charter member and first president of the Winifred Thorndike Simonds' Nature Club, which was named after her. She was also a member of the Bedford Parent Teacher Association and the Massachusetts State Parent Teacher Association. Sarah J. F. Brown wanted to add a few words in connection to the obituary and wrote the following to the editor of the *Lexington Minuteman* on September 16, 1937, "Mrs. Simonds came to Bedford to teach in the high school. When the Town Hall building was abandoned for schoolrooms, Miss Thorndike was made Principal of the new Union School, and taught French and Latin in the high school. She married William H. Simonds after the death of his first wife, who was the mother of the distinguished Frank Simonds. She made an ideal stepmother. She was greatly interested in birds and flowers. She was an expert in the knowledge of birds, knowing them both by sight and by song. She was also an interested member of the Friday Club. The Friday Club devoted its time to the study of European artists and their art. The club ended its existence only when the work of the Red Cross in connection with World War I absorbed the attention of all Bedford citizens. She was much beloved and will long be remembered by all who knew her." She died in 1937 and is buried in the old Colonial Cemetery in Lexington in the Simonds family lot. We do know that Winifred Thorndike Simonds was one of a group of Bedford women who saw and loved the natural beauty of this small country town.

The woods, the fields, the waters, the flora, and the fauna were diverse and beginning to change noticeably. The town was growing; sizable land parcels would go to the Edith Norse Rogers Veterans Administration Hospital and to the new air base at Hanscom Field. Farmers' fields would become wooded house lots. Mrs. Simonds and friends who shared her interest in the natural beauty and resources of Bedford formed a study group. When she moved from Bedford, her friends named the group, "The Winifred Thorndike Simonds' (WTC) Nature Study Club." (*Editor's note: The March 24, 1920, minutes read, "Mrs. Riese suggested changing the name of the club from the Nature Study Class to Winifred Thorndike Simons Nature Club. It was unanimously voted to change the Name"*). Some of the club's minutes and records have been passed down to us and provide some local history. Reading these yellowed pages, one realizes that those women were sincerely interested in educating themselves in natural history and horticulture, as well as sharing this interest with the town.

We also have some information about them from newspaper articles. The January 1928 *Lexington Minuteman* reports the Winifred Thorndike Simonds' Nature

Study Club met to hear Mrs. Mabel Riese give a talk and slide presentation on *Trees of California*.

"One of the interesting pictures shown was that of the Glenwood Mission Inn, at Riverside, California, with its quaint and charming garden and its collection of bells.

Mrs. Riese said that her excuse for showing this picture was because of its historical collection of old bells, one of which was the old town crier's bell from Bedford. This bell was the one which has the inscription ... 'This bell was rung on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> day of April 1775 to arouse the people and farmers, and tell them that Paul Revere had brought news that the British army was coming to destroy stores of ammunition at Concord, Massachusetts, and to attack them at Lexington and there they met the foe. Here commenced the Revolutionary War in the early morning hours.'" Mrs. Riese suggested we take steps to return this bell to Bedford, the proper place for this historical bell.

A November 1930 newspaper tells of a talk on *Medicinal Herbs* by Dr. Fred S. Piper of Lexington. The March 5, 1931, edition of the *Lexington Times-Minuteman* reports on the Nature Club's Flower Show in the Town Hall. We know it was a rainy, chilly day, but "when one entered the hall, a feeling of warmth and comfort caused everyone to forget the outer discomforts and to enjoy spring in all its loveliness and beauty." An exhibit which also attracted considerable attention was the rock garden of Miss Marcia Webber. This was most complete-the house, with its broad veranda where the gingham dog and the calico cat dozed in peace; little garden seats among the plants around the pool where lazily swam the goldfish amid the water plants, all made a charming picture."

The *Bedford Minuteman* reports in 1943, "The Winifred Thorndike Simonds' Nature Club enjoyed an interesting talk on *Iris*," by Prof. Jamison B. Harrison, who raised the plants from seed. They also report of a meeting in which "each member prepared a design interpreting the subject, *My Yard and Garden as I Dream It*." Mrs. Frank (Florence) Goodwin won a pot of lavender for the best garden design.

The following women were members of the Winifred Thorndike Simonds' Nature Study Club that existed in Bedford between World War I and World War II: Mrs. George (Cora) Champney, Mrs. Richard (Hazel) Dodge, Mrs. Warren (Lillian) Dutton\*,

Mrs. Hany (Gertrude) Gilman, Mrs. Charles {Edith) Kimball, and Mrs. Louis (Lucy) Pfeiffer.\*\* It was a small, but active group of local matrons who met in their homes to share their interest in Bedford's flora and fauna, especially birds. They wrote papers, gave reports, made field trips, and encouraged nature study in the schools and the town.

The passing years and World War II saw the WTS Nature Study Club gradually fade away. They gave their records and their small assets to a newly formed Bedford Garden Club in 1956. Our records are not complete, but they give us a glimpse of Bedford as a small town and a group of women who enjoyed good company, natural beauty, and inquiring minds. It would seem that those earnest ladies also bequeathed eyes for beauty, green thumbs, and kindly thoughts.

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\*(Editor's notes: Mrs. Lillian Dutton may or may not have been a member of the Nature Study Club; however, she was a well-known gardener and herbalist. She was chosen as an honorary member of the Bedford Garden Club (per the 1967-1968 financial records). The Lillian Dutton Herb Garden, which was designed by and is maintained by the Garden Club at the Job Lane House, is worthy evidence of the respect held by our club for the woman who was known as *The Herb Lady*.

\*\*It took a lot of "digging" to find out the first name of Mrs. Louis Pfeiffer. Joan Waite solved this mystery and called to say that her name was Lucy (Waite) Pfeiffer. Joan said, "Lucy used to press the fire alarm in town to alert the firemen when there was a fire."

## Introduction

Donna Argon, Bedford Garden Club Historian from 2002 to 2003, was the first to research information about our charter members, our first honorary members and our early officers. She said, "It is difficult in 2003 to determine exactly who were charter members. The first meeting had twenty-three in attendance. Our records show that thirty-one people paid their \$2 dues the first year. There were no membership lists available, so I relied on the written records of that first year. It is assumed that those who were active and involved were members, giving their time and talents to offices, committees, programs, and tours." (*Editor's note: Initially Donna Argon and Susan Wingfield thought everyone present at the first meeting should have been a charter member, but further investigation and reading of later minutes confirmed that only six were named as charter members. We wish we could give that recognition to others too!*)

Susan Wingfield, Bedford Garden Club Historian from 2004 to 2006 and her committee, continued the project of capturing our history from minutes, newspaper articles, newsletters, yearbooks, presidents' notes, financial records, and interviews. Susan said, "As I began to write our history, I discovered it was similar to putting together a jigsaw puzzle. We had a lot of information-some in the minutes, some in financial records, some

on single sheets of paper tucked in boxes, some in yearbooks and newsletters-and it just needed to be sorted and put together. Some of the information we looked for was missing, and some was confusing, so this document is still an incomplete puzzle." She also noted that, "Sometimes we voted on something one year, and by the next year we forgot all about it! But more importantly, I discovered that we have always had diligent workers who have accomplished much to be proud of during the past fifty years."

## Bedford Garden Club Formation 1956..1957

In the spring of 1956, a group of Bedford women who shared an interest in gardening and civic improvement discussed the formation of a club that would foster the efforts of the Nature Study Club. There were several meetings during the summer that produced a slate of officers, a purpose, and an organizational framework for a garden club. The first officers and committee chairs were: President: Mrs. Walter (Mina) Bragdon; Secretary: Mrs. Leo (Elsa) Sullivan; Treasurer: Mrs. William (Rosemary) Hoppe; Civic: Mrs. E. Stanley (Helen) Nowers; Publicity: Mrs. John (Betty) Balfour; Programs: Mrs. Frank (Peg) Joslin.

The first meeting was held on September 25, 1956, at the home of Mrs. Frank (Peg) Joslin. (*Editor's note: Her home was originally the old Fitch Tavern where Bedford Minutemen and militia gathered on the morning of April 19, 1775.*) The hostess served coffee to twenty-three members. They decided to name the club The Bedford Garden Club. They voted to have \$2 annual dues, plus a twenty-five-cent charge for special programs. Our records show that thirty-one people paid their dues the first year. These ladies decided to have three separate but integral groups: the morning study group (to meet two times a month), the regular monthly meeting (to meet on the last Tuesday evening of the month), and the civic group (to give attention as needed). They discussed possibilities of educational field trips to the Arnold Arboretum, the Garden in the Woods in Sudbury, and Davenport's Garden Shop in Lexington. At this first meeting, their civic attention focused on the memorial circle and the watering trough

on The Great Road.

Our records indicated we had six charter members: Mrs. Walter (Mina) Bragdon, Mrs. Karl (Miriam) Adler, Mrs. John (Betty) Balfour, Mrs. Richard {Helen} Cloutman, Mrs. Frank (Peg) Joslin, and Mrs. Elmer (Ethel} Mason. *(Editor's note: Ethel Mason's name does not appear in the minutes the first year, and the financial/membership records are missing. However, on April 15, 1971, Mina Bragdon said that Ethel Mason should be considered a charter member. From that point on, she is listed as charter. Since Mina was the founder, we felt she knew who the charter members should be. The Appendix lists all of our charter and our honorary members that were recorded in our records. We may never know why others present at that first meeting were not listed as charter members.)*

Attendees mentioned in the minutes of the first meeting were: Mrs. Walter {Mina) Bragdon, Mrs. Karl (Miriam) Adler, Mrs. John (Betty) Balfour, Mrs. Richard (Helen) Cloutman, Mrs. Frank (Peg) Joslin, Mrs. Leo (Elsa) Sullivan, Mrs. William (Rosemary) Hoppe, Mrs. E. Stanley (Helen) Nowers, Mrs. Kay Roberts, Mrs. Enoch Karrer, Mr. and Mrs. Frank (Lillian) Horton, Mrs. Daniel (Betty) Dellovo, Mrs. Paul (Elizabeth) Crandall, Mrs. Lee Pavlas, Mrs. Charles (Olive) Scrymgeour, Mrs. John (Olivia) Berquist, Mrs. M. Bernard (Florence) Webber, and Mrs. M. Bernard {Alice) Webber, Jr.

The second meeting was scheduled for October 30, 1956. The club was invited to tour the greenhouse of Charles and Olive Scrymgeour on Springs Road. After the tour, Daniel Dellovo answered questions about houseplants and bulbs.

That was the beginning of the Bedford Garden Club. Since then, we have gathered for almost fifty years to share our love for gardening with each other, to work on local civic projects, and to learn something new every year related to gardening and horticulture. Now you may begin to read our year-by year accounts of what we have done during these past fifty years.

## Concluding Thoughts

The Bedford Garden Club members continue to be energetic, enthusiastic, friendly, and filled with ideas. They willingly help when asked... working on the Brigade, maintaining triangles and curves, leading committees, being a part of a committee, baking for events, etc. When you think about it, our achievements, though small, have really been outstanding: living scholarships; beautifying the triangles and curves and herb garden; working with children to instill a love for gardening; donating a fence, planters, benches, and trees to Bedford and to organizations in town; joining other clubs for events; and more.

Town triangle and curves are greatly admired and appreciated by Bedford residents and others just driving through town. Many of us share similar experiences while working on our triangles, islands, curves, or at the Lillian Dutton Herb Garden at the Job Lane Farm

Museum-people stop to thank us, or to ask directions. Donna Argon tells of a unique experience when one time as she was working on the area at North and Chelmsford Roads, "a person who drove by, rolled down his window and on his trumpet played *When Those Saints Go Marching In.*" Our members invest much of their time and energy planting, fertilizing, watering, and weeding to keep our town looking beautiful, not only on the triangles and islands, but in their own back yards. It is our labor of love to this fine community. We are thankful for all the other residents who are not members of the Garden Club, and for businesses that keep their places looking beautiful too.

For the past (almost) fifty years, the Bedford Garden Club has been an important link to the beautification of our town. Members continue to share their love of gardening by beautifying public spaces and setting a good example for the next generation.

It is a privilege to be a part of the Bedford Garden Club. Though everything you just read about may not be of interest to you, it may be to someone else who is reminiscing about the "good ole days." Finding so many golden nuggets of information from our resources on hand has been rewarding. This is a glimpse of the first fifty years... and they were golden! May your next fifty years be filled with as many accomplishments and fond memories. And may gardening always be medicine for your soul and bring joy to your heart.

Sincerely,

Susan Wingfield