

Queens' Green Thumb: The Flushing Garden Club

Flushing Garden Club Mission

"To help those who love gardens to make them more beautiful. To stimulate interest in cooperative gardening. To study in all aspects the fine art of gardening and in the protection of Wild Flowers and Birds."

The dedicated women of the Flushing Garden Club (FGC) were instrumental in contributing to the horticulture and formation of parks in the Flushing community. Before Kissena Park was sold to the city by Francis Johnstone Paris' husband's real estate firm Paris and MacDougall in 1906, the Parsons Kissena Nurseries occupied the land as the first commercial nurseries in the United States. By 1914, Kissena Park was comprised of 31 houses, including Paris' home, farms, open fields, and dozens of plant species that still thrive today. It seems the precursor to the FGC began when Mrs. Paris decided to make her husband's development more attractive for business, using her main interest in horticulture. She encouraged the residents to participate in a beautification project of their new community in Kissena Park. The project sparked a fervorous interest from the residents who asked Paris countless questions on soil, grass, what to plant and where to buy such plants. Enthusiasm was so keen, it occurred to her one night "Why not have a Garden Club?" Shortly after this inspiration, Paris expressed her wishes to all the residents of the park.

The Flushing Garden Club (originally named the Park Garden Club) was then founded in 1914 by Francis J. Perkins, a resident and horticulturist of the community. On April 1st, 1914, the first meeting was held at Perkins' home. Twenty-six members joined the meeting, bringing with them enthusiasm, and expertise from varying fields. Before the club began to grow and flourish, its focus was mainly on promoting nature and beautiful gardens to the residents in the new development known as Kissena Park. It wasn't until Francis Johnstone Paris was elected president in 1924, that the club extended its membership to one-hundred active members, including residents outside the Kissena Park area. In March of the same year, Paris spearheaded plans with 24 other garden clubs in New York that resulted in the formation of the Federated Garden Clubs of New York State, Inc. (FGCNY). Today FGCNY includes over 209 clubs promoting the appreciation of gardens through family outreach programs, large scale flower shows, raising funds for environmental preservation efforts, providing grants and scholarships, floral design courses and symposiums.

All items in this collection were donated by Carmen Pitaro, a former Board member of the Flushing Garden Club.



Johnston, Frances Benjamin, photographer.
Seven women and two small girls in the garden of
Mrs. John W. Paris, Flushing, Long Island, New York. New York.
[Between 1909 and 1927] Photograph.
Library of Congress.