



The Hecht's home gardens are still in place at Bellarmine. Pear trees line the driveway entrance to Bellarmine.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF BARRINGTON COUNTRY GARDENS

THIS YEAR MARKS the 100th anniversary since the Garden Club of Barrington was founded. The Introduction to their beautiful 90th Anniversary Commemorative Book describes their beginnings 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 became a Charter member of the Garden Club of Illinois.

The Club's civic activities and expertise in all aspects of gardening quickly grew, so that by the mid-1930s, they were ready for that most challenging of events, home and garden shows open to the public.

And a great step forward this was. Barrington was still considered a country outpost at that time.

But by 1940, the number of estates open to the public had increased to nine, when over 1,500 people found their way along country roads to beautiful gardens. A portion of the proceeds went 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 so honored in the Chicago area. Those two clubs had recognized the achievements of their country sisters.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hecht, Jr. then lived on their estate, "The Meadows," on County Line Road. The tours often ended there, with tea served in the Hecht's beautiful gardens. In 1947, The Meadows was acquired by Members of the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus to become the Bellarmine Jesuit Retreat House that we know today.

Bellarmino continues to be a loving steward of the grounds with many Garden Club of Barrington members following the efforts to keep the legacy of the Hecht gardens flourishing. Public celebrations are planned for this anniversary year, continuing the civic and philanthropic history of the Garden Club of Barrington, minted back in 1925, in the then rugged soils of the hills of Barrington. 