

HISTORY OF THE GREENVILLE ARTS FESTIVAL

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There are many versions as to the origins of the idea for the Greenville Arts Festival -- all of them quite valid and giving proof of the theory that when the right idea meets the right place at the right time things happen. There is no doubt that Greenville evolved the right environment to be receptive to an Arts Festival in the 1960's.

Of course, local activity in the arts pre-dates the emergence of the Arts Festival. In *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960* (edited by Alfred Sandlin Reid), Lila Easley Earle and Evelyn Pack Daniel have an article, "Architecture and Painting," which tells of the organizing of the Fine Arts League on May 11, 1935, with Marshall Prevost as president. The stimulation for the forming of the Fine Arts League came from the writing of Hattie Finlay Jones in the *Greenville News* describing the Chattanooga Fine Arts Festival. The members of the Fine Arts League felt that Greenville was ready even then for some sort of joint effort in the arts and sought to interest others. Mrs. Daniel was involved in this initial effort and continued her interest and support through the 1969 Festival.

Another key person in the creation of the Greenville Arts Festival was Carolyn Frederick (later she was the Director of the first three Festivals). She had been the Executive Secretary with the Greenville Symphony for many years and found herself constantly frustrated with the lack of organization in scheduling of arts performances. There would be a dearth of entertainment for weeks and then three things would happen in one night. Mrs. Frederick conceived the idea of an arts council that would have input and representation from all the organizations in the cultural areas. From this agency would come a scheduled program that would allow each group to perform without competition of time and audience. It would also encourage some cooperation for joint ventures and exchange of ideas and experiences. There was one problem. Bob McLane, Director of the Little Theatre, would have nothing to do with it. Since the Little Theatre was such a vital part of the community, an Arts Council without it would be undesirable. Thus the temporary shelving of this idea was necessary.

However, from other sources came another answer for some kind of system. In December, 1963, Greenville had its first cultural calendar. The publication was a joint effort of the cultural committee of the Greenville Chamber of Commerce whose chairman was Alester Garden Furman, III, and the Community Relations Director of the Greenville County Library, Laura Smith Ebaugh. This effort was only a recording of upcoming performances in one place but took no part in scheduling. The cultural calendar was underwritten by the People's National Bank.

The actual formation of the Greenville Arts Festival was initiated about the same time by the Fine Arts Committee of the American Association of University Women (AAUW). The group began by getting the reaction of the community. Letters were sent to arts related organizations that included this statement:

The purpose of the Festival would be to stimulate appreciation and familiarity of the general public with various art media; to encourage the artist in his work; to encourage cultural groups, to improve weaker areas of the arts in our community and to broaden and deepen participation and appreciation. This will naturally lead to greater support of the arts.

Returns from this study indicated broad interest and the AAUW decided to call representatives of interested organizations together. The first meeting was held May 15, 1962, at the C. Douglas Wilson Building with Mrs. T. C. Stoudemayer, President of AAUW, presiding. The nineteen organizations represented were: AAUW, Bob Jones University, Camera Club, Chamber of Commerce - Fine Arts Committee, City Recreation Department, Civic Ballet, Community Concert Association, Council of Architects, Crescent Little Symphony, Furman University - Department of Arts and Drama, Greenville Art Association, Guild of the Greenville Symphony, Junior League, Greenville County Library, Greenville Little Theatre, National League of Pen Women, and Rotary Civic Chorale.

From this meeting the Greenville Arts Festival was organized and it presented the first Festival a year later, May 16, 17, and 18, 1963, with Alester Furman, III, President and Carolyn Frederick as Executive Director. The Festival was largely financed by a \$2,000.00 contribution by the J. P. Stevens and

Co., Inc., as part of Steven's 150th anniversary celebration. From the beginning it has been the general consensus that the Festival should be free to the public. This has been true throughout the years. All financing has been from the business community and interested individuals.

The 1963 printed program was probably the most ambitious of all that have appeared. The cover was painted by artist Betty Lee Coburn and the original painting was given by the artist as a door prize. This was won by Mrs. Frank Whitlock and is now in the farm house of her daughter, Jane Famula.

The first Festival was divided with activities on four sites; the Side Walk Art Show at Main and North Street; exhibits and performing arts at Memorial Auditorium, young people's festival at the old Art Museum on Dupont Drive and film presentation at Bob Jones University. One of the biggest opening ceremonies ever was planned with the help of Charles Daniel and the Southern Bell Telephone Company. A former Miss America, Marily Van Derhur, cut the ribbons and the first Greenville Arts Festival became a reality.

It was an unqualified success and was best expressed by a "Doubting Thomas," who wrote the following letter to the editor of the local paper:

The Arts Festival has been thrilling and inspiring as well as thoroughly enjoyable. We who felt that 1963 was too soon for Greenville to try this are delighted to have been proved wrong. Isn't it stimulating to realize that this was an entirely voluntary effort? That neither city, county, state nor federal tax money was requested or received.

I am enough of a "Moss Back" to be proud of Greenville for the way in which the Festival was produced as I am for the high quality of the work displayed in every field. And to my eye and ear the work of our artist - fellow citizens is of very high quality, indeed.

In yet another way Greenville has demonstrated that it is truly a city — a center of civilized living and not merely a place where a lot of people earn their livelihood. Signed: Sterling Smith.

As a follow-up, the Arts Festival Association met in July, 1963, to make plans for the 1964 Festival. It elected Charles A. Gibson as President. He well expressed the enthusiasm of the organization in this way:

We must remember that the thing we are working for is a long-term accomplishment, something we believe will be good for Greenville 5 years or 10 years hence. If Greenville is to be the leading city of the Piedmont, its citizens must face up to the fact that it must furnish leadership in the cultural arts as in the field of commerce.

In reevaluating the first Festival it was generally felt that the four separate sites made it difficult to present a single package. New sites were discussed and the final decision was to move to Cleveland Park using the skating rink for the indoor art exhibit. Programs and exhibits stretched from the tennis courts to East Washington Street. On Thursday noon, April 23, 1964, the Governor of South Carolina, Donald S. Russell, opened the second Greenville Arts Festival. There were many innovations. The Library had its Bookmobile. An outdoor stage was built. The Festival had its colors that tied it together within the park. A program faced with a branch of dogwood showed the schedule of events. Thousands from the area came Thursday and Friday but Saturday and Sunday a spring rain dampened the basically outdoor Festival. Nevertheless everyone thought the outcome was great.

It was in the 1965 Festival that I became active. Tommy Wyche was President. It was Carolyn Frederick's last year as Director. The decision was made that Cleveland Park was a lovely place to have a Festival, but spring was not the right time as it always rains. So the Festival was scheduled for October 20 - 24, 1965. Unfortunately, it rains in the fall also. But it was still a glorious event. New Festival colors were introduced. The designer, Ladson Tankersley, chose two colors that usually were not found in nature in the autumn months - blue and purple. Among the browns, yellows, greens and reds of Cleveland Park in October was a flowing, blowing banners and forms of blue and purple known as the 1965 Greenville Arts Festival. The approximately eighteen acres were covered with run-through, crawl-through panels and peaked kiosks. Blue with purple child-handprints was the background paper of the printed programs. The Festival opened with a most ambitious production of "Noye's Fludde" including a cast of over one hundred children from junior choirs of five churches. The original plan was the for the ark to be on a stage in the ball field, but because of the threatening weather, it was moved to McAlister

Auditorium at Furman University. The two celebrity guests for this Festival were Eliot O'Hara, a water-colorist from Flat Rock, North Carolina, and Miss South Carolina, Nancy Moore (now Mrs. Strom Thurmond).

The follow-up Association meeting dealt with two important issues. Carolyn Frederick resigned as Director after three excellent Festivals and had to be replaced. Secondly, the group came to the conclusion that even though the beauty of the park was unparalleled for a Festival, the weather would always be a factor and an indoor home must be found. When Textile Hall Corporation offered the use of Textile Hall rent-free, the decision was made to go to Textile Hall. This would solve many of the problems that plagued the first three Festivals - one roof over the entire presentation, an all-weather cover, and plenty of parking. The dates were changed again to spring as the fall festival made preparation for entries by the schools difficult. As the 1965 Festival had been late in the year, it was decided to skip 1966 and schedule the fourth Festival for spring, 1967.

Although Textile Hall answered many needs it also presented many problems; the biggest one was its bigness, a tremendous box, functional but with no beauty and poor accoustics. At this time a new combination of people, know-how, and material resources that had never been known before came to the leadership of the Festival. Russell Graham was elected president. Mr. Graham was a newcomer to town. He came with the Saco-Lowell Company that was so welcomed into Greenville with the many jobs it brought to the local economy. Greenville was doubly blessed by its President being an art lover. Mr. Graham was as generous with his resources as he was in physical size. To balance the newcomers were representatives from old Greenville. Harriet Wyche and Betty Norris agreed to be co-directors. Assisting them were Vasti Gilkerson as secretary; Wilton McKinney, treasurer; and James Lawrence as designer. These leaders attacked the challenges of staging a festival in the Textile Hall. The big space was filled with carpenters, painters, and electricians - any labor needed. A crew from Saco-Lowell, provided by Graham, worked many days full-time before the Festival. A logo was designed that has been used with one exception for each following Festival. The theme was *Arts Alive* and the logo depicted music, painting, writing, dancing and

drama in the colors of orange, red and blue. This logo was designed by Herbert Smith from Henderson Advertising Agency. A big feature was an artist, Quida Canadau, from Atlanta, who put on a large canvas many of the folk who were key figures of the Festival as well as the happy festival-goers themselves.

The impact of the Festival was so great that Congressman Robert T. Ashmore extended his remarks in the *Congressional Record* of the United States House of Representatives to include a reporting of the 1967 Greenville Arts Festival by Lucille B. Green. Included in this was the account of opening program remarks by the then Lt. Governor John West who said: "The effect of your Arts Festival has been felt on the state level since its beginning four years ago" and the article continued with Lt. Governor West's reporting, "the creation of an Interagency Council of Arts and Humanities with the bill then pending before the South Carolina Legislature to create a South Carolina Arts Commission -- both received impetus from your Arts Festival which has led the state in this area." Backing up the Lt. Governor's words was a resolution which passed unanimously in both the Senate and the House of South Carolina lauding the Greenville Arts Festival "as the first of its kind in the state -- providing art in every form for the free enjoyment of all people." At this time Yancey Gilkerson was not only Executive Director of Textile Hall but also President of the Greater Greenville Chamber of Commerce. His remarks at the close of the 1967 Festival were: "It's the best thing I know of that Greenville has ever done in terms of community organization and individuals working together to produce an event of this kind."

By this time the Arts Festival had grown to proportions undreamed of at the beginning. The leadership carried on some dialogue that an annual Festival was just more than could be handled. The Festival would not always have the generosity of the public relations department of Saco-Lowell; artists felt they could not come up with something that often, and the volunteers were just spent. Harriet Wyche as co-director sent a questionnaire to the membership to get their feelings about it and on June 13, 1968, she reported fifteen out of twenty-two voted in favor of a Festival every two years with the next

Festival in 1969.

The 1969 Festival maintained not only the logo but the theme, adding only the dates. It read *Arts Alive - 1969*. Andrew Marion was President, with Ann Sellars and Rose Thackston as Co-Directors. Wilton McKinney and James Lawrence remained on their jobs and Margaret Brockman became secretary. Textile Hall gave 6,000 square feet of floor space. More and more organizations had exhibits - Greenville Technical Education College, the Young Men's Christian Association and the International Club. The Chamber of Commerce offered a package deal for out-of-towners: transportation to Greenville plus motel. The biggest attendance ever was expected and the planners were not disappointed.

When plans began for the 1971 Festival, a position of the Executive Committee was established - that of the President-elect. Philips Hungerford, the new President, felt continuity was imperative for the continuing success of the Festival. Kirk Craig agreed to be this new figure. Judy Cromwell with Fritz Mumford and Mary Jane Smith were the directors. A new designer, Jack Pickney, came on board. This group decided a new logo was needed - a simple expression of the Festival. It was a glob of blue paint, designed by Jack Pickney and used mostly on yellow. The new wing in Textile Hall was now finished and this could be used for performances. Even though there were still acoustical problems at least the performing arts could be separated from the other sounds of the Festival. A portable stage was available, chairs were set up and a temporary auditorium became a reality with the help of stones and greenery at the entrance. This became the best facility we had had until that time. Here again the enormity of actually building the Festival inside Textile Hall was overwhelming. The layout chairman, Jack Pickney, designed walls of blue, green and yellow yarn hung on 7,000 feet of wire. There were 1,920 streamers - each ten feet long - one hung every foot. The pathway was made of 7,000 feet of yellow tape.

Most of the leadership from the 1971 Festival moved to the 1974 Festival but in different roles. Philip Hungerford became the fund-raiser; Kirk Craig, the President; Judy Cromwell stayed on as advisor. In 1971 Lyn Mitchell had been chairman

of the Visual arts and I was chairman of the performing arts. Lyn and I agreed to co-direct the next Festival.

After three Festivals, the Association took a hard look at Textile Hall. There were many problems. The creating of a festive atmosphere inside the cavernous structure was all consuming. It was expensive. It took days to construct and days to take down. It was getting more and more difficult to find the "Big Carpenter" - the magical person who had the know-how the tools and most of all the free labor to construct. As the Art Museum was being added to the grounds of what was then unofficially called the Fine Arts Center, now called Heritage Green, the Board decided to move again and Kirk Craig, the new President, sent the membership a letter stating:

The decision to move the Festival to the Fine Arts Campus seemed a natural one. The Festival will focus attention on the facilities which relate most to the arts in Greenville, and the use of the buildings will benefit the Little Theatre, Symphony, Museum and Library as well as the Festival.

Alas, we did not know how long it takes for an art museum to be built, especially one made from pressed concrete. The hole in the ground stayed a hole in the ground for months and months and months. The architect for the building was very dubious about the structure being finished by spring of 1973. This was very helpful inside information as the architect happened to be the President of the Arts Festival. So the Board decided to postpone the Festival until 1974. This was a wise move because even in 1974 the grounds were still red mud from construction not only of the Museum, but also First Federal Savings and Loan across the street and the Bell Telephone center in the parking lot behind the library.

The designer for the 1974 Festival was Jim Neal. Although we had beautiful art-related buildings and grounds to work with, getting a Festival of this size in place was a job that not only required creativity but diplomacy and political expertise. The new museum had its dedication several weeks before the Festival started and opened its exhibit space with an unprecedented collection showing of N. C. Wythe's paintings. Since this exhibit was scheduled to run for a week after the Festival opened, it was decided to include it as part of the Festival and not to use the Museum facilities for any Festival exhibits. Fortunately we had

a Santa Claus by the name of Charles Scales at the First Federal Savings and Loan across College Street. This building was brand new and three floors had not been rented. He offered these to the Festival. They were perfect for the purpose: no inside walls, unfinished floor, and a panoramic view of the whole area. All art exhibits were hung here except the elementary and kindergarten that were in the Library.

Holding the Festival at Heritage Green meant that we had to deal with Bob McLane. Although he had shown little or no interest in the past with the Festival, most of us still felt the Little Theatre was very much a part of the cultural scene in Greenville. Lyn Mitchell and I had talked with him for three years hoping that in that amount of time he would come up with the idea that the Little Theatre should be part of the Festival. Also, we needed the auditorium for concerts so we would not have to depend on the good Lord for nice weather. Fortunately, we had the good Lord as McLane did not offer the use of the auditorium, and we were blessed with no rain for the entire four days.

Besides the move to Heritage Green the 1974 Festival changed its schedule to the first part of the week. During the 1971 Festival we were disappointed in the attendance on Saturday. There was much to do on Saturday during the month of May. This was the day before Mothers' Day and those who were not at Hartwell Lake were at McAlister Square buying Mother's last minute gift. So in 1971 on Sunday afternoon everyone came to the Festival with mother and the entire family dressed from church and dinner out. This was one of the few times the attendance outshone the show. After three days of wear and tear the Festival was not at its best. Taking a cue, the leadership decided to open the Festival on Mother's Day, 1974 -- a Sunday. This also gave us three school days for the student tours. We also decided to do away with the opening ceremony. We felt the Festival itself was the attraction and we did not need a national or local celebrity.

The unsung heroes of the 1974 Festival were the permanent staffs of the facilities used. They not only worked at their usual jobs but contributed time and cooperation to the Festival. Sometimes their patience was really stretched and only a joy of sharing and a sense of humor saved the day.

The school tours were probably the most exciting sight of the whole Festival. Three mornings were planned just for school tours. Monday was kindergarten through third grade; Tuesday it was fourth and fifth grades, and Wednesday, middle and high schools. There were three starting points, Magill Hall, the auditorium of the Museum, and Parker Auditorium in the Library. There was a fifteen minute performance at each place. From there each group was given a tour of the exhibits related to their grade level. There was a new tour every thirty minutes from each starting point. As wild as it sounds, it worked and we were able to accomodate around 10,000 school children.

During the planning of the 1974 Festival sounds of an interarts council rose again. This time it acquired a name and a director. This became our Metropolitan Arts Council (MAC). The history of this agency has been stormy and erratic, stemming probably from unfortunate and incompatible personalities at the beginning. But it survived and thanks to a grant from the South Carolina Arts Commission and Comprehensive Manpower there was a staff and from the generosity of the First Federal Savings and Loan, who gave the use of an office. This office has now moved to Falls Cottage on South Main Street.

There was some dialogue over the feasibility of a merger of the Greenville Arts Festival Association and the Metropolitan Arts Council. At the time Festival individuals wanted to keep its finger in control. The main issue was the concern that the Festival might become too professional. This goal was for quality with contributions of time, effort, talent and creativity coming from the total community. There was strong feeling that the Festival should keep this identity.

The board of Directors for the 1976 Festival was headed by Ernest Blakely with Charles Scales as President-elect. The Association ran into a fact of life that had been slowly happening for years. To be the Director of the Arts Festival meant devoting practically full time effort for at least a year to this project. This meant that the person chosen as Director must fit into most of these categories: someone who is unemployed, who has full time domestic help, whose children are grown, whose mate is gone a great deal, and who has a physical stamina of the most highly trained athlete. Traditionally, anyone who was not employed would have to be a woman and in our changing times,

everything else fell into place. But the role of the woman had been shifting for sometime. Many women now worked full or part time; domestic help was hard to find. Most women with the energy to handle the Directorship also had small children to drain that energy. Despite all the support from so many sources to put on the Festival, it had to be orchestrated by one, full-time, committed person. Then as the problem of a proper director neared crises, something happened that provided a workable answer. The Metropolitan Arts Council received a grant from the Labor Department's Comprehensive Manpower and hired Bobbi Wheless as its coordinator. Bobbi was a good inhouse candidate. She had lived in Greenville long enough to know its values. She had had the professional experience in the arts to have sound judgement. Some of the fears of a too slick and polished Festival were calmed by Bobbi's reputation and the Festival Board voted to retain the services of Metropolitan Arts Council with Bobbi Wheless as Director of the 1976 Greenville Arts Festival.

The dates were May 9-12, 1976. The place was again Heritage Green and the theme was *The Many Faces of Greenville*, using the bicentennial year to recognize the many heritages that made our community what it was. These "faces" surprised many long-time residents of Greenville. They made a visible statement that we had become a very cosmopolitan community. The ethnic food carts of 1974 Festival was so successful it was decided to use this group as a base and elaborate with a parade led by the Mayor and other members of the local government. The many faces of Greenville were recorded by photographer Robert Smeltzer, and Ernest Blakeley commissioned a collage to be made of them. This collage now hangs in the entrance wall of the Greenville City Hall.

Due to an unfortunate illness, Charles Scales could not take the leadership for the 1978 Festival. I was asked to step in at that time as President. Again we used the services of the Metropolitan Arts Council for our directorship. As the American Textile Machinery Exhibit - International was being held in the spring rather than its usual fall schedule, the Festival adjusted its calendar to coincide with the show and adopted as

the 1978 theme was *Arts Interwoven*. Heritage Green was our home. The Museum opened its whole facility to us. The Little Theatre put on a performance for Senior citizens and, as always, the Library embraced us. A marathon foot race that drew hundreds of runners followed the opening parade and ceremony.

There has been some questioning of the value of the Festival as opposed to on-going programs. My feeling is that we need both. The Festival's main purpose is to present the arts to bring the people in to see and hear, to develop an audience, arts benefactors, and a supporting community. It is not just the people of lower social-economic levels who benefit from this introduction. I was appalled by one of the young volunteers, who was a native of Greenville and who was affluent enough to send her child to a private school, as she came to deliver the school's exhibits. This was the first time she had ever been in the Library! I saw this over and over. And if the large number who had not been in the Library before was not enough, the numbers of Greenvillians who had never made a visit to the Art Museum was an even more reason for concern.

I do believe the Arts Festival has been partially responsible for the audience, the supporters, and the participation in an amazing number of cultural agencies for a city this size. We can boast of drama coming from four theatrical groups within the metropolitan area: the Furman Theatre Guild, the Bob Jones University Classic Players, the Warehouse Theatre and the Greenville Little Theatre. The Fine Arts Center of our public school system has not only drama but all the other arts including filmmaking. We have an outstanding Symphony Orchestra, a Civic Band, a youth symphony, at least three chamber-music groups, three ballet troupes, a contemporary dance cooperative, two resident artists - a mime artist and an English puppeteer, a poet-in-residence, a choral singing association, plus continuing interest in the Furman-Greenville Fine Arts Series. The presentation of the arts at Furman and Bob Jones universities are well received. Only recently a non-professional group has been established whose main purpose is the study and presentation of the works of Gilbert and Sullivan. In 1979, Spoleto in Greenville presented three concerts following the two weeks festival in Charleston. One of the more significant evidences of progress is

the Fine Arts section in the Sunday *Greenville News-Piedmont*. So much is going on and so much interest is being shown that a section in the paper for the arts is deemed marketable just as the sports page, the editorial page, and the society page.

Smaller festivals in places like Easley and Simpsonville are appearing each year. Churches, schools, and community clubs are communicating through the arts. Many knowledgeable, talented and interested artists and their patrons have been responsible for the outstanding on-going programs. However, I do believe the Arts Festival can take considerable credit for the celebration, in whatever manner, of the arts in Greenville.

In spite of four days of continuing rain the 1978 Festival was probably the best organized with the most experienced workers with the highest attendance we have ever had. Yet there was something about all these things having been accomplished that made us look honestly at where we were. There were those of us on the inside who felt the Greenville Arts Festival was getting to be "old hat." Why? Basically, it is because Greenville of 1979 is not the same community it was in 1963 - particularly in the arts. We have become very sophisticated with our many local opportunities. International and national arts presentations such as the Spoleto in Charleston and the Metropolitan Opera in Atlanta are within a few hours' drive. Most citizens can enjoy the outstanding arts performance on educational television in South Carolina.

The Greenville Arts Festival must look at this new community and decide where to go from here. What form it will take I don't know, but David Freeman, our 1980 President, is a very creative leader. We have an enlarged, much younger, broader-backgrounded Board with a number of time-worn members hanging on. Our President-elect for the 1982 Festival is of the new generation leadership, Harold Gallivan, III. The wonder of the Festival is still with us -- old Greenville and new Greenville working together to bring a quality way of life into our community through its arts.