

History Highlights of Upper Keys Garden Club 1952 to 1967

On June 10, 1952 ten ladies met at the home of Mrs. Everett Perkins and formed a club "of civic and cultural advantage to native plant growth in the Keys," named the Key Largo Garden Club.

There were many interesting and informative meetings, with members preparing papers and demonstrations of their experiences dealing with such things as rock melons, limes, tomatoes, native roses, compost beds, etc. Original membership was limited to 20 members because of meeting in private homes. Many of these places were destroyed by "Donna" in 1960.

By 1954 the club had grown so large that it was voted to form a second one -- the original to serve Key Largo area and the new Upper Keys Garden Club to serve Islamorada, Maticumbi and Plantation Keys. By-Laws were accepted and on Sept. 11, 1956 in Key West 15 Charter Members, including Francis Tracy and Margaret Bond, signed our legal charter as a non-profit organization. Article 11 of the Charter states "The general nature and objects of the Corporation shall be to foster, promote, develop, protect and conserve the natural beauties of the Upper Keys through education and publicity; to encourage cooperation of all members, residents and visitors in these matters, etc. Article X states "This Corporation shall not own real property of a value in excess of \$50,000.

The Club's first flower show was held at Coral Shores School in 1956 in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Fred Bond as chairman. Beautification of Coral Shores School got underway in 1957 and by 1960 was written up as most beautiful school grounds in state. After Donna in 1960 grounds of Monument at Islamorada and Isla Beach Park were cleaned up; trees and plants were put in.

With 60 members in 1962 the need for larger meeting space was urgent. Under the presidency of Mrs. Arthur Gasser this major undertaking was realized when Dr. Fred Bond offered our fine piece of property, stipulating that it never be sold for commercial use, and that it be named Frances Tracy Garden Center, to honor our "Angel of Mercy of the Keys." If the Garden Club should cease to operate as such the land shall revert to the Bond Estate. Dr. Bond arranged for financing of our building project and our insurance. Only those people involved know how many hours and how much work went into all the money raising events needed to start the building. A mortgage of \$8,000 was secured from the Bank of Florida in Homestead for the balance to complete it.

Mr. George Coffin of Miami drew the plans without cost and D. L. Skidmore of Islamorada was the builder. A granite cornerstone, salvaged by Rodney Albury from a ship's hold off a reef in Tavernier in 1890 was placed in the south side front wall containing names of all the members.

The first meeting in the new building was held Sept. 1964 and official public opening was held in November 1964 with over 200 friends present. Many donations of furnishings and equipment were gratefully received including tables by Mr. Arthur Miller in memory of his wife. Each member was asked to purchase one chair at \$3.75; 100 were bought. Much effort went into raising the \$8,000 to get a "Satisfaction of Mortgage," on Dec. 4, 1967. Mrs. Tracy, at 90 years of age, lit the flame to burn the mortgage.

During my research of all the minutes of meetings of The Upper Keys Garden Club, since 1952, and the Charter being issued in 1956, as well as interviews with some past presidents and long term members, these are some of the important decisions made for the club.

- No political or religious programs or promotions of same shall be made during our meetings.
- Since we are a non-profit organization, no contributions shall be made to civic, service, or fraternal organizations, or other non-profit groups.
- None of our club properties, such as chairs or tables, may be loaned, rented or taken from the club premises.
- In order to avoid an embarrassing omission of some deserving person we do not send gifts or donations to families of deceased members. We only send cards from the club but encourage planting of trees or other plants by individual members.
- It was voted 6/18/72 to get a plaque for the wall, with names of all deceased past presidents, showing the years served. It would be impossible to so honor all deserving past members.
- Voted 9/17/72: No pictures on the walls except Mrs. Tracy's.
- Voted 7/18/72: Immediate Past President and all Committee Chairmen shall be on the Board of Directors.

Our By-Laws are intended to keep the Club operating as it was chartered -- as an educational aid to preserve the natural beauties of the Keys. Any member who is unable or unwilling to abide by the accepted By-Laws should not accept an office in the Club. Refusal to do so should call for the dismissal of such person through due process as provided in the By-Laws.

Mrs. Frances Tracy was one of our founding members and served the club faithfully for 18 years until her death on Oct. 19, 1970. In her "History of the Upper Keys Garden Club," dated late 1966, Mrs. Tracy stated, "A garden club is not a money making organization primarily, but building a club house seemed a worthwhile cause for the Keys as well as the club." Therefore there were many fund raising projects for several years for the building, furnishings and grounds of our club. Several members now recommend that we limit the number of such endeavors to those necessary for the maintenance and operation of our club and worthwhile educational or environmental projects.

Our Comprehensive General Liability Insurance Policy states that: The insurance does not apply to bodily injury or property damage arising out of (a) activities to which the public is admitted if an admission fee is charged by the insured. . . . (c) The use of premises occupied by the named insured for purposes other than meetings of members and guests.

Fla. Dept. of Revenue: Notice 10/20/89: Surtax is imposed -- on conditions: #2: The event for which an admission is charged is located in Monroe County.

It is imperative that we not use sale, ticket or admission in our advertising or fund raising activities.