



Physic Garden of the Pennsylvania Hospital

Compiled in 2021 by Susan Ayres, PCGCA Chairman, as leadership of the garden maintenance was transitioning. Supporting documents are in the PCGCA Chairman's Physic Garden file.

Evidently there appeared, in the 1774 Minutes of the Board of Managers of the historic Pennsylvania Hospital, a plea for a garden with plants for the concoction of medicinal tinctures. Nothing seemed to come of it until John Clark, who as Chairman of the Board in the late 50's – early 2000's, suggested to his wife Cecily that such a garden would be a wonderful project for her garden club - **Four Counties** - but alas they did not have the resources to do it on their own.

So, in 1974, in anticipation of the US Bicentennial, The Philadelphia Committee of The Garden Club of America (PCGCA formed in 1966) was looking for a project. A proposal from Cecily Clark to create this garden received strong support from the hospital and unanimous support from the 10 clubs comprising PCGCA.

Funding and eager volunteers appeared quickly to make possible underwriting the construction of this formal, 18th Century medicinal plant garden, which was to be on the site of an old tennis court once used by student nurses. Trees, plants and shrubs were donated as memorials and tributes, and volunteers dug right in and got to work. The only work done professionally was the masonry.

See acceptance speech by Cecily Clark of an award

Since then PCGCA has periodically underwritten or, more recently, through Fertilizer Fund grants, the cost of maintaining the plantings and keeping the design of the garden and the plant material accurate. Total invested to date is around \$34,000 which has included plant material, some infra-structure and an irrigation system.

Details of grants is included in the Grant Oversight chairs' files.

From the beginning there was a Core Committee of dedicated volunteers, Betty Toland (**The Garden Club of Philadelphia**) being among the first to volunteer. As always, the head of the hospital's grounds crew has been available to help. Cecily and Betty led the charge for 17 years. Many awards were received for this garden including the hospital's Good Samaritan Award, presented in 2002 to John and Cecily Clark.

Jenny Rose Carey (**The Garden Club of Philadelphia**), became deeply involved in the 1990's, and provided some interesting information when she spoke recently with the current presidents of Four Counties and The Garden Club of Philadelphia:

- There are a collection of brown record books kept at the hospital (the volunteer office presumably) which were pulled out at every visit. Each visit recorded where and what plants were purchased, where they were planted and what other work was done in the garden. Hopefully these log books are still in existence and accessible?
- Martha Ludes Garra, Consultant in Horticulture from The Temple School of Horticulture created the original plan for the Physic Garden.
- There is supposedly a large-scale copy, if not the actual plan for the garden, which hung in an area of the hospital near the cafeteria - where it could be seen by whoever was there to work in the

garden. The hand-drawn plan has the dedicatory inscription "A.M.D.G." at the top, for "*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* - To the Greater Glory of God". A nice touch! Hopefully the hospital archivist knows of its whereabouts.

- Smaller photocopies are in the garden file.

Lucia Schen (***Four Counties***) became the leader after Jenny, followed in 2011 by Kate McGrann, who was not a GCA club member but a former social worker at Pennsylvania Hospital and very interested in maintaining it. Kate announced, in 2019, that she wanted to retire when she turned 80! In 2021 leadership responsibilities were divided up into three categories and was turned over to a threesome – one to manage each set of responsibilities. Historically there had been, on average, 23 workdays during the growing season. This arrangement did not work out for a variety of reasons. The hospital has now agreed to take on the general maintenance of the garden, but has requested help identifying the plant material that needs to be added or replaced; sourcing the necessary materials; making the trips to purchase them; and advising as to the best location in the garden for the new plants.

Records of plantings are on file with the Curator and Lead Archivist, Stacey Peeples, at The Pennsylvania Hospital. As required for this historic site, the general garden design and the plant list is to be maintained as it was originally conceived.

The challenge is to maintain the gardens with these historically correct plant cultivars; to keep plants from wandering; and to keep plants thriving when growing conditions, such as water and shade, change over time.