

The following is by the late Elizabeth Wade White on the 25th birthday of the Ct. Unit

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE HERB SOCIETY

In August of 1933, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, a group of herb-growing ladies who spent their summers on or near Cape Ann joined together to form what they proudly and ambitiously named The Herb Society of America. The leading spirit of the project was Mrs. Florence Bratenahl, wife of the dean of the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. and creator there of the beautiful mediaeval box-garden and the very successful fund-raising Cottage Herb Garden. Those who joined her as founders of the H.S.A. were: Mrs. Lace Brown, Mrs. Albert Burrage, Mrs. E.B. Cole, Mrs. Ferris Greenslet, Mrs. Charles Norton, Mrs. E.L. Mitchell, and Mrs. Hollis Webster. Mrs. Norton's daughter, Peggy, assisted her mother in the study of native dyes in their old-time herb house at Annisquam and was the inventor of a powerful mixture which she names "Lady Macbeth's Hand-Soap". (So far as I know this was never used by an accessory to murder, but it was certainly efficient in cleansing the grubbiest of gardening hands).

The majority of the founders lived in or near Boston in the winter so Horticultural Hall, the headquarters of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, became the permanent national office of the H.S.A. At the small meetings of the original group, the "logo" of the society, with the motto from John Parkinson: "For use and for delight", was designed, By-Laws were drawn up and printed in a charming pamphlet, and invitations to join the society were sent to such herbal authorities as Dr. Edgar Anderson of the Arnold Arboretum, Eleanour Sinclair Rhode, Louise Beebe Wilder and Henry Beston. Because I had been herb gardening for several years, had done a bit of writing on herbs and early herbals, and had met some of the founders during summer visits to Cape Ann, I was invited to become a member in December of 1933 and, thereafter, served as Corresponding Secretary (not very efficiently) and on the Board of Directors for several years.

Membership increased rapidly as a result of invitations and of requests to join from interested herb growers all over the country; the latter were asked to answer a questionnaire to show that their qualifications were adequate. The first New Letter was circulated in 1934 and in the spring of 1935 we became The Herb Society of America, Incorporated, under the laws of the State of Massachusetts and "with proper invocation to Deity", as the Recording Secretary, Mrs. Brown, wrote to me.

Two important events took place in 1935: the publication of the first issue of THE HERBARIST and the society's exhibit at the Mass. Horticultural Society's Spring Flower Show in Boston. We all worked hard at creating a reproduction of a seventeenth century Still house, where actual distilling was done on every day of the show, surrounded by a small garden of suitable herbs. The exhibit was a sensational success and won the Gold Medal of the MHS. In the following spring the H.S.A. again carried away the Flower Show's Gold Medal, with a rating of 100% for and Old-World Bee Garden, complete with a row of herb-surrounded straw skeps (although I do not recall that an actual colony of bees was present!).

Along with the continuing annual HERBARIST, the society has published many pamphlets and papers of permanent interest to herb growers; just one example is THE ROLE of the HERB GROWER in the WAR EFFORT, Dr. Paul Kolochoy's address to

the annual meeting of the H.S.A. in May 1943. Our membership in this country, Canada and other parts of the world now total well over 1,000, organized into separate active Units which began with New England in 1936; New York in 1938; Philadelphia in 1940; Western Reserve in 1942; Northern and Southern California in 1953; our own Connecticut Unit in 1955, and now includes many other states and regional groups. The history of The Herb Society is one of creative endeavor and fruitful accomplishment; probably its crowning achievement to this date, almost fifty years after its founding, is the planning, designing and actual planting of the National Herb Garden in Washington, D.C. What a source of pride and pleasure this would be to those far-seeing ladies of Cape Ann, who are no longer with us, and must be indeed to our surviving founder, Mrs. Albert Burrage of Ipswich.