

THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC. HISTORY AND PURPOSE

The Herb Society of America, Inc. was founded in 1933 for the purpose of furthering the knowledge and use of herbs, and for contributing the results of the experience and research of its members to the records of horticulture, science and the related arts. It is a non-discriminatory organization incorporated in Ohio as non-profit and tax-exempt (IRS Code Section 501(c)(3)).

The Society is concerned with the cultivation of herbs and with the study of their history and with their role, both past and present, as flavoring agents; as medicinal, fragrant and dye plants; as ornamentals in garden design; as household aids, and as economic plants supplying products for modern industry. Projects include the establishment of herb gardens, both public and private, for education and demonstration, including the National Herb Garden at the U.S. National Arboretum, Washington, D.C. The Society awards educational and research grants and supports publications that fall within The Society's area of interest.

In 1933, six Boston women studied botany and horticulture under Dr. Edgar Anderson of the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University. Dr. Anderson offered the use of testing grounds at the Arboretum and supplied expertise and interest so vital to their study. These six women, along with a seventh who summered on the New England shore, made the decision to form a society whose intent and purpose was the study and research of herbs. On August 23, 1933, at the Ipswich, Massachusetts home of Mrs. Albert C. (Anne) Burrage, Jr. The Society was formally organized. Once the founders adopted the initial by-laws and policies, other interested gardeners and students were invited to join the group.

Mrs. George C. Bratenahl selected the motto, "Herbs for Use and For Delight", from John Parkinson's herbal. She incorporated the phrase into her design for the seal, which featured seven thyme branches, all growing from the same stock. Each branch represented one of the founding members.

Early projects and programs centered on the cultivation and identification of herbs, with work in the Harvard laboratory. In 1934, the group began their first public garden project in Boston, at Franklin Park. The Herb Garden at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. was planned with Mrs. Bratenahl, whose husband was Dean of the Cathedral, being the guiding force. The first bulletin, later to become an annual publication, *The Herbarist*, was edited by Mrs. Burrage in 1934. The original by-laws were changed to reflect the growth of The Society, as twenty-six more gardeners were invited to become members.

In 1935, the new Society entered its first exhibit at the Massachusetts Horticulture Society's Boston Spring Flower Show. They received a Gold Medal for their "17th Century Still Room", the first exhibit to feature herbs in this country. The first Annual Meeting of The Society took place in Boston in March of that year. The Society was formally incorporated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1935.

In 1937, the first of many three-year projects was voted into action: the Study of Culinary and Aromatic Herbs Grown under Different Soil and Climate Conditions. By 1939, there were a total of 117 members of HSA and 1,000 herbarium specimens that the group in Boston had collected. By 1946, The Society had grown to 282 members, with six units and 60 members at large.

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The decade of the 1950s saw rapid growth of HSA. Many procedures and policies were established that still exist today. The rotation of national officers and hosting of the Annual Meeting were begun. The first full-time Executive Secretary was hired and the first Awards of Merit were given. Herb gardens were proliferating throughout the country in the post-war boom days. Standing committees for new units, membership, and awards were formed. The original group slowly enlarged with an emphasis on horticulture and scientific research. The 25th anniversary of The Society was celebrated in 1958.

In 1960, the endowment and scholarship funds were begun, the Helen De Conway Medal of Honor was awarded for the first time, the library at Society Headquarters was inaugurated, and the beginning glimmers of the National Herb Garden in Washington were seen. The first scholarship was actually awarded in 1972 to Arthur Tucker, for his doctoral thesis work on the taxonomic study of the *Mentha* genus. Society membership grew to over 1,000. The Certificate of Achievement was established, as was an executive committee to carry out the day-to-day business of the board of directors. A fund raising campaign was begun to build the long talked about National Herb Garden, which would be presented as a gift to America in honor of the 1976 Bicentennial.

The National Herb Garden in the nation's capital was dedicated in 1980, with a festive evening, complete with the U.S. Marine Band and governmental representatives. Fifteen new units joined HSA in the 1980s with a phenomenal growth rate, almost doubling the membership.

The rapid growth of The Society led to the need for a new facility for The Society. After deliberation, the search committee recommended the purchase of the Vineyard House, an historic stone structure owned by the Holden Arboretum in Kirtland, Ohio. A complete renovation project was embarked upon, and in October 1988, the building was dedicated as headquarters of The Herb Society of America, Inc.

In an effort to reach a broader base of the membership, the annual meetings were changed to a symposium format rather than garden tour. These educational meetings, organized and presented by HSA members, heralded the rebirth of research and education in The Society. Many major changes in organizational procedures were started in the mid-1980s, the most important being a move to elect officers from the membership at large, rather than from a specific unit. A decision was also reached that annual meetings and board meetings would be organized by a standing committee of The Society, rather than by individual units.

The Society is now prepared to meet the challenges associated with a growing membership and a high public interest in herbal information. Along with a newly formatted structure for the Board of Directors came the review of the organization's policies and guidelines. Staff roles were re-examined by the Executive Director; job descriptions were clearly defined for each officer and standing committee chair on the board; procedures were established for members wishing to transfer from member at large status to membership within a unit and vice versa; and the steps involved in the formation of a unit were reevaluated and streamlined.

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The Society continues to fulfill its mission to provide information and resources to members and the public in the cultivation, use and delight of herbs through its publications, educational programs, library and website.

The above synopsis was based partially on The History of The Herb Society of America, 1933-1983 by Priscilla Sawyer Lord, Honorary President and Historian of The Herb Society of America Inc.