

History of Halten Garden Club

Founded 1916 --- Baltimore County, Maryland

Member of the Garden Club of America and the Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland

Halten Garden Club was founded on July 28th, 1916, when Mrs. Harry Fahnestock invited several women to her home, Halten Farm, in Sparks, Maryland, to form a garden club. The dues were set at a dollar a year. Members researched plants and presented papers monthly. A student at Sparks Agriculture High School who was interested in horticulture, was excused from classes to attend the garden club meetings. This resulted in Sparks School becoming Halten's first civic project. Since this simple beginning in 1916, Halten has continued to work with students and on the campus of the school, making Sparks School the oldest continuous civic project in GCA.

During World War I, the Halten members taught seed saving and distribution, vegetable gardening, and sheep husbandry at the school. In 1932, Halten sponsored the first Junior Garden Club in the United States at Sparks School. The Junior Club learned to grow and show flowers and vegetables. During WWII, Halten demonstrated victory gardens at Sparks.

In 1920, Halten was invited to participate in Flower Mart, a spring time Baltimore tradition since 1911 in which flowers and farm specialties were sold. For several decades, members took plants, produce, and eggs to the city in a farm cart for the annual festival. Proceeds were used for club projects, including planting an American Elm in 1932 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of George Washington. The still-healthy tree now boasts a trunk circumference of more than 17 feet.

Planning and planting the landscape design of the new Baltimore County Public Library main branch in 1971 was among Halten's most ambitious ventures. The huge project received national awards. The club maintained the garden for many years, until a garage was erected on the site. Other projects met similar fates, but none as sad as the original Sparks School gardens, destroyed when the school burned in 1995. Undaunted, Halten members cultivated gardens at the temporary site for the school.

Planting Halten in history has been reflected in donating a 'Princeton' American Elm to Fort McHenry to celebrate the club's 90th anniversary. A Wye Oak seedling planted at the Sherwood House in Cromwell Valley honored Halten's 80th anniversary. When Halten's Joan George was GCA President, the club funded, in her honor, a Zone VI Urban Forestry scholar.

Today, Halten seeks to share the joys of gardens on many levels. Sparks School remains an important endeavor, educating students about native plants and trees. Designing and maintaining a meditation garden at a hospice center educates the public about the therapeutic role of gardens. A recent project to renovate the kitchen herb garden at the Sherwood House celebrates the value of quiet spaces. This October found Halten members participating with Reisterstown Elementary school in creating a natural habitat for monarch butterflies. In-between all of these projects, Halten members are not idle. Ladew Mansion, Hampton Historic House, and the Walters Art Museum challenge creativity. Spring beckons massive potting of plants to sell to fund our endeavors. Flower Shows and Photography Shows round out the enthusiasm and energy that pay tribute to the vision of Mrs. Harry Fahnestock nearly one hundred years ago, Halten Garden Club.

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