**Bedford Famers Club**

**June 12, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m. at the Sweet Earth Co. farm in Pound Ridge.

In the absence of the secretaries, Mary Farley read the minutes from the May meeting. They were unanimously approved.

Treasurer Roger Vincent, presented the financial report – we are solvent – and passed around the sign in sheet with the envelope for dues attached.

Historian John Stockbridge discussed BFC meetings concerned with flower growing since Sweet Earth Co. is a commercial flower farm. At the June, 1894 meeting the topic was “Old-Fashioned Flowers” including discussion of the rose, lily, marigold, geranium, lady slipper, lavender and honeysuckle. Henry Wood stated that he had “a weakness for the marigolds that are always open to receive you… My wife detests them,” he added, “and relegates them to the companionship of sunflowers and single hollyhocks.”

Interestingly, the BFC founded the Bedford Flower Club in 1896, preceding the Bedford Garden Club by more than a decade. Their programs included a rose show in June and a chrysanthemum show in the fall.

Mr. Anthony Tharp established a commercial flower nursery on Cantitoe Street across from St. Matthew’s Church that included several greenhouses. He planted the maples along Cantitoe Street. The John W. Young flower company had another large (93 acres) nursery on Broad Brook Road on the property originally owned by the Sutton family. The Sutton’s stone ice house on that property can still be seen at the corner of Broad Brook and Bisbee Lane. As the Bedford Flower Farm later, it became known for its “Bedford Belle” rose.

The 1924 meeting topic was “The Home Flower Garden” at which the speaker, in the sexist way of the times, said “every farmer’s wife takes pride in her flowers.” President Hollingsworth Wood cited the French Huguenot custom of sending a rose bush with a bride to her new home, a rose that was still blooming at Braewold.

Local flower nurseries include Troy’s Garden Nurseries founded in 1887 and Perennial Gardens, founded in 1946 by Gus Alvarez and his colleague who worked at the Tucker estate.

Next, Pam Sorkin presented the Timely Tips. She elaborated on the boxwood blight that we heard in May had devastated the sunken garden at Caramoor. The blight is a fungal disease caused by *Calonectria pseudonaviculata*. It was first detected in North America in October 2011. It is now in more than 20 states and spreading. It also infects pachysandra. The blight loves high humidity, and can cause rapid defoliation, which begins in the lower branches and moves upward. Look for narrow black streaks or cankers on stems, and white fuzzy masses that emerge from these cankers. The fungus can overwinter on the infected plant and in infected leaf litter. It can last in the soil for up to 5 years. Therefore, you do NOT want to compost any infected plants, or plant in the infected soil. You should either burn, bury, or trash bag the infected plants. There is no cure for the blight, only prevention. Fungicides can protect disease free plants, but cannot save those with the blight.

If you are tired of your OWN garden, Pam recommended a trip to visit Stone Crop Gardens in Cold Spring which was established by Frank Cabot, a president of the NYBG and founder of The Garden Conservancy – giving him a lot of “street cred.”

Pam also admitted defeat (again, after losing the daffodil race to Jim Wood in April) in the “Soil Your Undies” challenge. Her undies didn’t decompose as they should have, blaming the cold spring and her planting techniques for the poor result. She is trying again and will report in September.

Our hostess, Xenia D’Ambrosi, proprietor of Sweet Earth Co., took the floor to introduce her commercial flower farming. While working in finance in NYC, Xenia was diagnosed with cancer and needed to take a step back from her stressful life and address her well-being. Always interested in gardening, she took time to apprentice at farms and learn as much as she could while healing. Her financial background pushed her towards high-margin products: flowers! She determined that a small area like her home could successfully produce larger, more lucrative amounts of flowers than of vegetables. Her highest margin products are peonies and dahlias. She offers flower CSA shares during the summer so one can obtain beautiful home-grown bouquets weekly.

Xenia is part of the “slow flower” movement, which supports domestic flower growers. In the “War on Drugs” the U.S. Government started paying farmers in Central America to NOT grow opium poppies so they began to grow flowers for export instead. Most of the flowers for purchase in supermarkets and delis are imported from Central America, where they are bred for hardiness and doused with chemicals and fertilizers. Some florists are experience dermatological problems from handling these chemical-infused flowers. I think all of us were awakened to the benefits of buying locally produced flowers.

In addition to the flowers she grows and uses in floral design for events like weddings, Xenia does landscape and garden design, which is currently about 80% of her business which she would like to reduce. Xenia took us on a tour of her gardens, which were quite bare of flowers since she cuts them while they are buds and “

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Farley

Secretary pro tem