***Meeting of the Bedford Farmers Club***

***June 15, 2022***

***Boscobel House and Gardens, Garrison, NY***

President **Mary Farley** welcomed members and guests to the new pavilion on the beautiful grounds of Boscobel House and Gardens for an al fresco meeting overlooking the Hudson River.

Secretary **Sheila Crespi** presented the minutes of the May 18th meeting held at the Sing Sing Kill Brewery in Ossining. The meeting featured a fascinating presentation on craft brewery in New York State by SSKB co-founders Eric Gearity and Matt Curtin, and a tasting of four of the Brewery’s signature beers. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

Treasurer **Roger Vincent** reported on the Club’s solvency and passed the clipboard for attendance and annual dues. Reflecting on the wonderful venues and programming of the BFC, Roger exclaimed “this is just too great a club not to be a part of!”

**Ellen Best** followed with Timely Tips on boosting the nutrient value of soil by using weeds as a natural fertilizer. To harness the minerals they’ve accumulated from the soil, Ellen recommends finding the best-looking weeds in your garden and pulling them out entirely or cutting the leaves off and keeping the roots in the ground. With the whole plant, shake the dirt into a bucket to capture the soil with the minerals it holds, and combine that with the leaves you’ve cut from other plants. Add water and allow the mixture to soak for two to three hours, then strain it and use it as a spray to fertilize your plants. Cover crops such as buckwheat and clover and a variety of weeds such as amaranth, goldenrod, comfrey and garlic mustard can be used in this way, with the remains suitable for composting. However, Ellen cautioned against using plants once they’ve gone to seed.

Mary then introduced special guests in attendance – Matthew Weigman, incoming President of the Philipstown Garden Club (PGC), and PGC Board Member Felicia Saunders. Matthew and Felicia are in charge of the Boscobel Herb Garden.

Stephen Hutcheson, BFC member and President Emeritus of the Philipstown Garden Club, then took the floor. He provided more background on Felicia’s involvement with the Herb Garden. In 1972, her mother, Mary Dodge, and another PGC member Tinky Frazier, were the planners of the Boscobel Herb Garden, which the PGC has maintained for nearly 50 years. Felicia represents one of four generations in her family connected to the Garden – in addition to herself and her mother, Felicia’s daughter and granddaughter have worked there too.

Stephen explained that the Boscobel Herb Garden was conceived as an 1820 period garden, which is contemporaneous with the Boscobel mansion itself. One research source were the garden journals of Thomas Jefferson, which he kept from 1767 to 1824; these were studied to help understand the functions of a colonial garden. Also studied were indigenous people’s use of native plants and what colonists learned from them. Still another source were the letters of Elizabeth Dyckman, the original occupant of the House (with her husband, States Dyckman); in them she mentions buckwheat more than any other plant and so it is one of the many plants included in the Garden.

Attendees were invited to tour the grounds at leisure. Stephen, who is a guide at the mansion, would be available there to answer questions. Michael and Felicia would be in the Herb Garden, and guest and U.S. Military Academy guide Penny Brickman would field questions about the Hudson River and the Academy at West Point. Stephen also pointed out the sculpture garden featuring the work of Greg Wyatt, representing the Hudson River School of Art.

The group assembled in front of the mansion, built in the early 1800s by States and Elizabeth Dyckman. It is an example of neo-Classical architecture, corresponding to the Federal Period in the United States and the Regency Period in England. Stephen highlighted some of its salient features – the symmetrical design, soaring columns, fretwork railings, extensive use of molding, colossal-sized windows, and a Palladium window on the third-floor storage area, surrounded by an “angel wings” molding. These and other features attested to the wealth of the Dyckmans. Another distinctive aspect of the facade are the wooden festoons and tassels. Stephen’s research revealed that these elements should have been rendered in canvas but the architect had them carved in wood, thus creating the only such example in American Federal architecture in the United States.

The layout of the mansion includes a kitchen in the basement; on the first floor are the grand center hall, drawing rooms, food prep area and formal dining room; and on the second floor are bedrooms and a library that holds approximately 500 of Mr. Dyckman’s original 2,000 books. The front of the home does not have shutters because they are built into the casement moldings of the windows on the interior. This innovative feature later became widely used in the Victorian Era.

The mansion was originally situated on 250 acres of farmland in Montrose that is now the site of the VA Medical Center. Eliza, granddaughter of Elizabeth and States, was the third generation of the family to live at that location. She had three husbands, each of whom spent the Dyckman fortune so recklessly that eventually she forced to abandon the property. Ultimately, the mansion was slated for demolition when the property was sold to the Veterans Administration. Some parts were sold for a house that was being constructed on Long Island. Lila Acheson Wallace (of Reader’s Digest fame, whose husband, DeWitt, was a friend of Tinky Frazier’s husband, Benjamin) went to that house and negotiated the return of a number of original pieces so that reproductions could be made. Technically, Boscobel is not an historic building but a new building with some original features: only about 10% of front of house is original, while overall in the mansion the figure is about 70%. The mansion was moved to its current site in Garrison in 1950s and opened in 1960s. Mrs. Wallace and her decorator furnished the house with English, Georgian and Queen Anne furniture that was not accurate to the time period of the house. Seven years after the house opened to the public an inventory done by Peter, son of Elizabeth and States, was discovered: States had ordered most of the original furniture from Duncan Phyfe, one of America's leading 19th-century cabinetmakers. Sotheby’s auctioned off the good Georgian furniture and the house was refitted with Dyckman items or similar period pieces. In fact, Boscobel now boasts the finest collection of New York State Federal Period furniture, mainly attributed to Duncan Phyfe.

The group next gathered in the Herb Garden, which dates to 1965. It was laid out on the central axis of the Orangery, with beds excavated to a depth of six feet. In 2019, Matthew and Felicia were given access to plants lists that were based on research done by Boscobel guides of the correspondence between Elizabeth and States, who spent a great deal of time in England and was a Loyalist. His letters detailed the many varieties of trees he was sending her for their farm. Also examined were letters from Thomas Jefferson written as the War of 1812 approached, advising fellow planters to lay in extra crops to head off the shortages that would inevitably result from that conflict. Visitors to the Herb Garden may take a copy of the extensive list of plants that are grown there, giving their common and botanical names and their uses in an early-19th century household – for foods, teas and flavorings, for medicines, for fabric and dyes, for perfumes and potpourri. A few notable examples:

* Opium Poppy – This plant has been growing continuously in the Garden since 1972, started from poppy seeds brought in by Mrs. Frazier. Opium poppy was used as a pain killer in the form of laudanum.
* Maiden’s Blush Rose – This rose is associated with the Loyalist cause. When Loyalists chose to leave the United States during the Revolutionary period, going to Nova Scotia and other areas, they took cuttings of the Maiden’s Blush Rose with them. The bush growing in the Herb Garden comes from a slip from one of those Nova Scotia bushes.
* Quince Tree (non-ornamental variety) – The tree does not yield a particularly flavorful fruit but it is a great source of pectin, which was essential in a Colonial kitchen.

There is a ladder for hops, a primary flavor ingredient in beer; and although bees are not raised in the Herb Garden now, honey would have been another important staple in the Colonial kitchen, as the price of sugar was exorbitant.

Reconvening at the pavilion, second-time attendee Sharon Bodenschatz was unanimously inducted as a new member of the Bedford Farmers Club.

Historian **John Stockbridge** reported on numerous BFC meetings focused on herbs and flowers. The May 1961 meeting featured Helen Whitman who spoke on herbs and their culture; she maintained an extensive herb garden with over 60 varieties at Salem Center along the shores of Titicus Reservoir. In October 1954, Mrs. Willie Waller welcomed members to Tanrackin Farm, flanked by two giant 60-pound pumpkins. Speaker Elizabeth Van Brundt, one of the country’s leading experts on herbs, urged people to discover “the fragrant, flavorful world of herbs,” and noted that the knowledge and use of herbs dated back 3,000 years. In 1894, Henry Wood, Jim Wood’s great uncle, discussed the long history of flowers. The rose, the queen of flowers, and the lily, the emblem of purity, are documented as far back as the times of King Solomon and the prophet Isaiah.

The warm afternoon was capped off with refreshing cold beverages and delicious cookies provided by Hospitality Chair **Julie Henkin.**

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Sheila Crespi*

*Secretary*