

'A real gardener never grows old. There is always something even in his own small patch to keep alive the zest in life.'

Mr van den Houten

Judge of CHS/Cape Argus sponsored 'My Garden' competition – 1934

In a year when Kirstenbosch celebrates its centenary with much razzmatazz and well-deserved congratulation, it is worth noting that the Cape Horticultural Society (CHS) has reached the even more venerable age of 110. There can be few, if any, volunteer societies in Africa that can claim such a long history. The records show that in March 1903, a meeting of suburban residents, interested in gardening, met in the Claremont Town Hall with the object of forming a horticultural society. The name suggested was the Suburban Amateur Horticultural Society. The first President was Sir Walter Heely Hutchinson with HM Arderne as Vice-President. By 1912 the name of the Society was changed to The Cape Horticultural Society, "necessitating the reprinting of several items in stationery".

Annual flower shows were the order of the day with a Daffodil Show being held for the first time in the Rondebosch Town Hall in August 1904, followed by a Chrysanthemum Show in the October. For many years an astonishing variety of such events were held throughout the year: the Summer Show; the Rose and Wild Flower Show; the Sweet Pea, Carnation and Summer Flower Show; a Rose and Early Spring Flower Show; and an Autumn Show. A Wild Flower Show held in September 1935 brought in £195 which was generously split between the National Botanic Gardens at Kirstenbosch and Whitehill Botanic Gardens in Matjesfontein (now morphed into the Karoo Desert National Botanical Gardens in Worcester).

Today the appetite for so many different flower shows has waned but the CHS tradition of an Annual Flower and Garden Show continues every spring at the Alphen Hall in Constantia where our members exhibit cut flowers, shrubs, perennials and pot plants, all grown in their gardens to the great delight and interest of the general public. Trophies, some dating to the early days of the Society, are vied for and awarded to the worthy winners. Later in the year there is also a popular Plant Sale where good value, and often unusual, plants grown by the members of the society are on sale to everyone.

On the first Monday of every month there are well-attended meetings at the Athenaeum where members and visitors alike can enjoy excellent horticultural talks and visual presentations, admire samples of what is flowering in other members' gardens, swap hands-on-information and buy well-priced seedlings, plants or cuttings that probably can't be obtained in the commercial nurseries.

The original ethos of the CHS, as stated in 1903, 'to encourage, improve and extend the cultivation of flowers, shrubs, vegetables and other plants' and to support other organizations involved in this goal also inspires the presentation of a substantial Book Prize to the top students at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology each year. To date 6 students have been recipients of these awards.

As a celebration of 110 years of existence and an act of faith in the future a new logo was presented to the members at the Christmas Party last year. The modern design reflects the history, dignity, and purpose of the CHS whilst also celebrating change and growth which are, as every gardener knows, the signs of life. As in 1912 it will, again, be necessary to reprint 'several items of stationery'.

Many of the 1903 founding and early members are remembered today through their descendants who are still associated with the art and science of horticulture and are members of the CHS. Maybe it is possible that the CHS can grant immortality!

Clare Gibbon
2013