**Homer Garden Club Meeting**

**October 21, 2018**

President Kathy Dube’ called the October 21 meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.  She welcomed one visitor, Astrid, to the meeting.

The minutes from the prior meeting are posted online on the Homer Garden Club Website. Treasurer, Louise Ashmun, gave her report. The fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30. The year began with $17,938.73 in the account, and will consider requests for donating funds to nonprofit groups. Homer Garden Club contributed to the Chef at the Market program last year. Members can pay your dues after the meeting.

Gardeners’ Weekend Committee coordinator, Brenda Adams, announced a special speaker for the Gardeners’ Weekend, 2019. Fergus Garrett, head gardener of the world-famous Great Dixter Garden in Sussex and Director of the Great Dixter Charitable Trust will come from the United Kingdom.  Great Dixter is known for its innovative use of color and style. The speaker event will be at Islands and Ocean Visitor Center, 150 seats, so buy your ticket early. The event will be Saturday evening, the last weekend in July. The committee is looking for two more gardens for the tour. We need ideas, volunteers, and new steering committee members.

Renee’ Patten and Jan Peyton, co-Vice Presidents charged with finding speakers for the club’s general meetings, are looking for suggestions.

Brenda also announced that the security camera the club purchased for the Baycrest Garden has been installed, and no more plants have been removed. The committee that spearheads the tending of the garden club’s plot consists of Joan Splinter, Carol Demers and Brenda Adams. A signup sheet will be passed around in the spring for people to sign up to work at keeping it looking nice. Two people sign up for one week, and they can work out their own times during that week. She also mentioned that the Food Garden next to our garden needs help with weeding. They are very short on volunteers.  Tourists love the gardens at Baycrest and it is a great introduction to our community!

President Kathy mentioned that the club still needs a Social Secretary. Beth and Dave Shore coordinated this meeting’s refreshments and set up the tables. The sign-up list for the November meeting was passed around.  She also displayed the Homer Garden Club’s aprons that were available for sale… “Everyone needs two because they are in two different colors!” $25 for members, $30 for non-members.  The clubs gardening manual*, Kachemak Cultivating, Seaside to Summit* has been compiled, edited, and the committee is still figuring out the most economically feasible format for final production

Renee introduced Guest Speaker Judith James. Ms. James visited farms and gardens in Europe but made clear that she is not a “flower expert!” Her main interest was in food production and how people farmed in the countries they visited. Her slide show included maps and she explained that she flew Condor Air at 82 degrees North—close to the North Pole, landing in Frankfurt, Germany, then traveling to Munich on a train at 245 kilometers/hour. She visited Prague, CZ, Bratislava, SK, the Slovakia/Carpathian Mountains, Budapest, HU,  and Vienna, AU, before returning.  Judith shared Central European history within her talk.

At the [Bojnice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bojnice%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) castle north-east of Ternava, Slovakia, is a 700-year-old Lime Tree (Little Leaf Linden) planted by King Matthias Corvinus.  Judith said that people grow gardens for a reason: to eat. At the old monastery in Seligenstadt, Germany, the monks still grow fruit and herbs. Stone-tiled roofs there were quite artistic, with one showing a figure sowing grain as part of the motif within the tiles

The “orangery” on the castle grounds in Prague, Czech Republic, was the most high-tech “high tunnel” she had ever seen, with dozens of large orchids growing inside. In Slovakia red geraniums were in windowsill boxes everywhere. Judith spoke of the concept of time; in Alaskan history, a cabin 50 years old is considered old. In Europe, “old” is measured in centuries. The people have been farming the same land for centuries.

In Vienna, Austria, the Hundertwasser Haus (a public housing complex) trees, flowers and vegetables grow on balconies and roof tops. Also in Vienna is a modernistic tower that is actually a trash incinerator. Its output provides electricity for ten thousand homes.

In Budapest, Hungary, near the Gellert Spa and Hotel along the Danube River, there were shrubs with many hanging pods that resembled tomatillo fruits.

As elsewhere in central Europe, the old town square in Bardejov, Slovakia (SK), portrayed a sense of history: statues remind the people of wars and atrocities.  For example, at a memorial in north-central Slovakia, four or five World War II tanks have been left in position in the fields, and the people farm around them. There is also a dramatic war museum in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia.

The Kleingartens of Germany are small community gardens along the roadsides, railroad tracks, and streams. Many small cabins/shacks were along the right-of-ways. The law dictated the size of the plots and the number of rooms in shacks. In wartime these were used for shelter and today are used for food production and relaxing.

One slide showed acres and miles of sunflowers in Slovakia. In Germany, Czech Republic, and Slovakia there were fields of corn for miles, as well as fields of poppies, which are grown for seeds.  She said the white seeds taste like walnuts. There were fields of all kinds of grain: wheat, barley, and rape/canola seed.

Wind energy is important to these countries, which have erected many wind turbines.

In Seligenstadt, Germany, as well as in Slovakia, she saw many backyard garden plots with cherry, plum and pear trees as well as grapes. There was a grocery-store sign that she translated with a phone app to say, “Think of your Health.”  She also saw a robot lawnmower, similar to our “Roomba.”

Gardens were neatly planted and trimmed in flowers. One slide showed a greenhouse made of liter-size (5-quart) glass jars stacked and cemented in place. Beekeepers raise their bees in a house style different from ours, and one house was an old stump. Hives produce 20 kilos of honey per month. In the winter they feed the bees 6 kilos of sugar per liter of water.  Judith said the bees there seemed larger than ours.

Judith traveled with Ron Matviyak whose family still owns a farm—the Matviyak Family Farm in Sulin, SK. One photo showed the farm with Poland’s Carpathian Mountains in the background.  Ron’s paternal grandparents arrived in America in 1906 and worked for 8 years saving their money. In 1914 they returned to Hungary and bought the farm of about 15 acres. In Hungary in those days, 52% of farms were smaller than 15 acres. After World War I, their oldest son (Ron’s father) returned to the United States to work and raise a family. The problems of maintaining a farm in Slovakia are the same as in the US; they struggle to find workers. Many of the younger generation do not want to farm.

Many farms in Slovakia grow potatoes, sometimes using “scare deer” (much like a “scare crow”) to keep deer out of the fields. Unfortunately, they bought seed potatoes from the US and inadvertently introduced the Colorado Potato Beetle, which they are now fighting.

Around Plavnica, SK, Judith visited co-op farms. The co-op owns land, and leases/rents other small plots from individual farmers.  The entire farm she visited was 2,000 hectares in size while some are 15 hectares.  The area is just north of the 49th parallel, which puts it just north of the US/Canada border. About 100 hectares were planted in clover and corn, and they were able to harvest 2 corn crops a year. The farms are organic, the plants are vigorous with few-to-no insects. Purple potatoes grow better in Poland than in Slovakia due to different soil.  They store potatoes for eating and animal feed at 5 degrees C, and colder (2-3 degrees C) for seed potatoes. They use stone root cellars for storage.

At one co-op, Judith was surprised to see fields of weeds planted in rows.  Turned out it was 70 hectares of Plantain! They mash the leaves, cook, and distill for medicinal purposes.  There was a smaller beef co-op near Sulin, SK, where they were still using communist-era equipment. Their method of making silage was different than the US: after the green hay or corn stalks are harvested and spread on top of the previous layers in a huge, flat pile, a large-tired tractor packs it down, expelling all the air.

Judith was also impressed by another commercial operation, the Elixir Tea Company, in Plavnica, Slovakia. They use local medicinal plants, flowers, and fruits, harvested by local workers. The tea products are organic, with no artificial flavors. She enjoyed a tour of the production facility while suited up in white gown, hat and shoe coverings. The process is fully automated and machines pack the ingredients into tea bags, completely clean! The product is so special, the company has resisted an offer to rebrand to the Celestial Tea line. The company website is <https://www.agrokarpaty.com/index.php>.

Along the Slovakia-Poland Border, Judith saw more wild plants and flowers: fireweed, cranesbill, lupine, dock, baby’s breath, thyme or oregano, and orchids. In Slovakia, villages were clustered in separate valleys with farms or forest in between the villages. In Poland, the houses were scattered, looking more like the Homer area. Her explanation was that Communism wasn’t monolithic, and development depended on the country. Slovakia gave up their individual farms and created co-ops; Poland resisted the effort and small family farms survived.

In Poland, Aronia berries are grown and juice is sold in the stores. The market for black currants is decreasing.  Members of one Polish co-op are growing apples on semi-dwarf rootstock in an experimental, intensive method: posts are made of cement, three wires are strung to support branches, and 7-ft bamboo posts are tied with stretchy ties to the tree branches. In this way the trees are trained in espalier-type rows, with the trees 1 meter apart. Harvesting is done by hand with workers walking along picking apples and putting them directly into a tractor-pulled wagon.

For a little history and geography of the region: In central part of Slovakia, the Poprad River forms the Slovak-Polish border, then flows north from the Carpathian Mountains into the Dunjec River, which flows into the Vistula River and on across Poland to the Baltic Sea. This river system was a primary river trade route in pre-history and more recent times. People floated minerals such as copper to the sea on the river, sold their products, then walked back to their farms.

This very informative slide show and talk ended at 3:59 p.m. and the group enjoyed the wonderful snacks and conversation. Next meeting:  Sunday, November 18, 2 p.m., Bidarka -Best Western meeting room.

Sharon Wilson,

Acting Secretary