

Council History

Part One - The First 10 Years

The Council, a group of women already affiliated with the Museum and interested in its programs, was launched on May 17, 1955 at a luncheon meeting in the new Members' Suite. The 49 women present became the charter members, with Mrs. E. Angus Powell as chair of the small steering committee appointed to organize the newly formed Council.

The concept of a council of women who were already members of the Museum and were interested in many aspects of the community was brought to the Board of Trustees by Mrs. Muriel Christison, Assistant Director of the Museum. Mrs. Christison knew of similar projects operated successfully by other museums with which she had been associated. The 49 women were chosen by the Chair and another member of the Board's Membership Committee, and Mrs. Christison.

Later in that first summer the Steering Committee chose as president, Mrs. E. Angus Powell; first vice president, Mrs. James Asa Shield; second vice president, Mrs. W. Henry Schwarzschild; secretary, Mrs. Warwick Davenport; and treasurer, Mrs. Robert Philbrick (fig.1). The secretary was asked to draw up Articles of Association for presentation at the general meeting to be held in June. At that meeting, the Articles were approved and the officers officially elected. Over the summer, each charter member was asked to submit two names of women interested in the Museum to the Council Membership Committee for membership. Invitations including an application were received and accepted. Thus, by September 1955, the Council membership had grown to 150 women. The group's purpose was "broadening the influence of the VMFA throughout the community by supporting its activities and promoting its interests."

It was agreed the Council would hold three general meetings each year, in the fall, winter, and spring. The format would be the meeting and a luncheon followed by a speaker, who would talk on current Museum exhibitions. Council members acted as hostesses at exhibitions and concerts. From October through mid-November, Council members enrolled in three series of eight talks given by members of the staff on Studio Techniques, Modern Art and Theatre. At Christmas and on two other occasions, the Council held a treasure hunt in the galleries for members' children.

1956

Now with a membership of 250 and in its second year, the Council held its first fund-raiser, "A Fashion Festival of Arts and Flowers," in the Museum Theatre April 3-6, with sold out performances for 3 evenings and a matinee. Coordinated by Miller and Rhoads and Harper's Bazaar, the event was narrated by stage and screen star, Basil Rathbone (fig. 2), was featured in the April issue of Harpers Bazaar, and netted over \$3,000 for the benefit of the Museum.

1957

"The Big Frame-Up," a spoof of television game shows, was the next fundraiser. The opening scene starred the Council's "All Girl Orchestra," which featured Sally Chase, Martha Davenport, Liz Graves, and Martha Newell (fig. 3). It was a howling success with Polly Daffron as Mistress of Ceremonies and Mary Tyier Cheek in one of the skits.

The Council manned the Loan Own Gallery, a lending library made up of works by Virginia artists, which could be rented or bought. There was a preview party for the exhibition, which raised funds for the artists. The Council also formed a committee to urge businesses to purchase art from the

exhibition. The sale of art works brought in over \$2000.

1958

A lecture series in the late winter on "Art in Travel" with four speakers from the Metropolitan Museum was sponsored by the Council. The Council formed a committee to work with the Museum's staff to renew and increase memberships. Additional programs involved providing 75 hostesses for Museum events, the decorating of the Member's Suite at Christmas, and the sponsorship of the Christmas children's film as well as a children's drama, "The Enchanted Treasure." Volunteers were asked to assist the Museum in promoting its theatre season through ticket sales, public relations, and serving refreshments during intermissions.

1959

Through its Museum Service Fund, the Council underwrote the costs of four Travel Talks for Museum members, presented on successive Wednesday afternoons and given by members of the staff of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Council also assisted at a Collector's Reception held before the opening of the Virginia Artists Exhibition. The artists made over \$6000 in a six-hour period.

The first Viennese Ball was held in May, attended by 475 people (fig. 4). As the two orchestras played classical music and fox trots, Arthur Murray gave instruction on a polka and three different waltzes, with narration by Mallory Freeman. Proceeds were used for kitchen equipment for the new North Wing.

1960

With a Richmond area membership of 400, the Council continued to expand its statewide membership, recruiting 55 out-of-town members. The Council's Theatre Committee provided box office assistance for 47 performances and 25 assistants for clerical work, while 380 Council members served as hostesses for exhibitions and Theatre

intermissions.

The annual Children's Christmas program, originally for Council members and their children, was opened to the public. Attendance included persons from every part of the state.

The second Viennese Ball was a big success, with 500 people in attendance.

The Council was asked to join the Volunteer Committees for Art Museums (VCAM). The membership voted to join for three years at a cost of \$30.

1961

The Museum provided a Council office, just off the Members' Suite, equipped with desk, file cabinet, typewriter and telephone; all these were available at any time for Council use.

A 25th Birthday Ball with a Viennese flavor was held with 550 attending. Proceeds from the Ball were used to buy 2 pairs of candelabra for use in Museum entertaining. One pair was made by Mathew Baldwin in 1822, and the other was early 19th century Sheffield. They were given to the Museum as a birthday gift.

To encourage the sale of works by Virginia artists, the Council appointed a committee to visit businesses in Richmond to secure their agreement to purchase an object from the Virginia Artist Exhibition. In total, 49 objects were sold, yielding \$4000.

1962

Council membership reached the 500 mark with the addition of 54 new members.

With Mrs. Albertis Harrison, first lady of Virginia as honorary chairman, the fourth Viennese Ball was held in January. Profits were over \$1500, and the Library Fund was established with a \$1000 donation by the Council.

Mrs. J. Clifford Miller, Jr., chairman of VCAM, and Mrs. John Pearsall were named to attend the

VCAM meeting to be held in Boston in May. As a result of that meeting, Mrs. Pearsall, in conjunction with Museum Director Leslie Cheek, started the Council Shop. Mr. Cheek designed and the Council paid for three "art carts," movable showcases which could be placed wherever needed (fig. 5). Council volunteers were trained as buyers and as sellers of the art objects from these carts. The merchandise was in keeping with the Museum's high standards.

A second project was approved a month later. The National Cultural Center, to be built in Washington, DC, would present a closed-circuit telecast, "An American Pageant of the Arts," on November 29, in over 100 cities throughout the country. The Virginia Museum was asked to take part in this program. Council members promoted and sold tickets to the black tie affair, which was held at the Mosque. Over \$16,000 was raised, with the Council receiving half that amount, and the remainder going to The National Cultural Center (now known as The Kennedy Center). The Council bought two large and four small chandeliers to be used for the Viennese Ball and other Museum events.

1963

For its three regular lecture/luncheon meetings, the Council chose the theme, "Know Your Museum." In addition, Mrs. John Butzner, a Trustee of the Museum and a former professor of art history at Mary Washington College, gave a series of 13 art history lectures to Council members. The Council appropriated \$1,000 for the purchase of color slides to be used in Mrs. Butzner's classes and then donated them to the Museum.

In reaction to seeing a bus driver conduct a school group through the galleries, 20 Council members began an intensive six-week training course on the Museum's collections, in order to become the first official Tour Guides. Tours were offered both in the galleries

(fig. 6) and behind the scenes of the Museum. (The Junior League of Richmond had been providing docents to give morning elementary school tours for a number of years.)

The Council Library Committee began consulting with Museum curators and other scholars before making book purchases for donation to the Library.

It was agreed that the shop was successful and would be continued, remaining financially independent from the Museum while maintaining a close working relationship.

The 5th Viennese Ball drew near capacity attendance and netted over \$5,000.

1964

A local PTA held its regular meeting at the Museum, followed by a tour given by Council tour guides, marking the first time evening tours were provided. To meet expanding needs, 4 additional tour guides were trained. 2107 students were given tours of the Museum.

The Council Shop reported a profit in excess of \$8,000.

As specially invited guests of the Trustees and of the Council, 99 Richmond executives attended 3 luncheons. Specially trained Council members served as hostesses at these luncheons and as tour guides afterwards.

An eight-session lecture course, entitled "Aspects of Art," was conducted for Council members by the Museum staff. A total of 560 members participated in the program.

