

WHAT IS A QUESTER?



The year 1944 was full of misery for many people. Everyone was so weary of the War, and many had lost loved ones. Morale was slipping, and anything that would give it a boost was needed. This is what Jessie Elizabeth Bardens, who was a Red Cross production chairman (living in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania), had in mind when she asked a group of her co-workers to come to her home. They were to "bring an antique and a sandwich". She had purchased a little blue syrup pitcher from a shop near work in October 1943. On her way to and from work, what would be more natural than to stop at an antique shop if you were passing by?

After showing this pitcher to her co-workers and discussing it, others stopped by her desk and more questions were asked with still more discussion following. This started a whole stream of small antiques being brought to work by her co-workers, just so Mrs. Bardens could give her opinion on them. This convinced her something was needed. So, on April 6, 1944, she invited fourteen people to come to her home for more discussion and study. By the end of that year, there were 35 people meeting to learn more about antiques. At this time, most homes could not accommodate this many people, so Mrs. Bardens encouraged all those wanting to join to form their own study groups. Before long, there were five more groups. In March 1950, Mrs. Bardens organized Questers into a national organization and in 1953 incorporated it under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a non-profit corporation. Mrs. Bardens was the first National Quester President, serving from 1950-1956.

The word soon spread, and inquiries came from all over the country about forming chapters, as well as how to affiliate existing antique clubs with this national organization. Mrs. Bardens personally went where she could to organize these groups - the rest she did by mail. She always made it a point to answer all questions. In 1954, she and her husband drove as far west as Iowa, organizing chapters as they went.

Mrs. Bardens had a large and choice collection of tea caddies that she was frequently asked to talk about. She gave Mildred Hanna (of Michigan), the National President from 1964-1966, and a friend, a sterling silver tea caddy. Some years later Mildred donated it to the Questers Headquarters in Philadelphia.

Before Mrs. Bardens passed away in 1963, she attended the first National Quester Convention and see the Questers organization grow to 149 chapters located in 22 states. Now, there are 633 chapters in 41 states and 2 Canadian provinces.

In 1991, The Questers earned the right to add "International" to their name. The organization promotes preservation and restoration of memorials, historical buildings and landmarks, and any money earned must be used for these purposes. The Questers is a non-profit organization.

International, State or Provincial and Chapter Bylaws, with the International Bylaws setting the example, govern the Questers. There is a set of International Officers, State or Provincial Officers, and each chapter has its own officers. Any Quester who meets prescribed criteria can become an officer. The slate of nominees for the election of state, provincial and international officers are selected because of their personal qualifications and their experience serving at the chapter, state and provincial levels. In Chapters all members should take turns becoming an officer to make the chapter experience better for all members. Everyone brings something different to a job well done.

An individual becomes a "Quester" when joining one of THE QUESTERS existing chapters, or joins a group of at least eight individuals (female, male, all ages) to form a new chapter. Chapters are chartered as a subsidiary of THE QUESTERS, a non-profit organization under IRS 501 (c) (3). The number of Questers in a chapter varies. The current chapter membership averages 15 individuals. The number of members is determined by the membership and influenced by where the chapter holds its meetings, home, public spaces available as at libraries, or in meeting rooms available in retirement villages, etc.

When Mrs. Bardens was asked, "What is a Quester?" she gave this answer: "A Quester is a socially well-adjusted intelligent person who has curiosity, enthusiasm, imagination and a good memory. For the powers of the mind are memory and imagination, for without memory we have no past, without imagination, no future." She also said, "A Quester spends time constructively, does research about the history of antiques and collects knowledge. Sooner or later the 'Bug Bites' and they have acquired a hobby and are a collector."



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