

Thalassa Cruso Hencken

1909 - Jun 11 1997

AAFA #0330

THALASSA CRUSO HENCKEN

AAFA #330

STANDARD-TIMES
New Bedford, MA—15 June
1997

Thalassa Cruso
Hencken, author,
"Making Things
Grow" creator, dies

WELLSLEY—Thalassa
Cruso Hencken, formerly of
Marion, known by gardeners
everywhere as the Plant
Lady, died on June 11, 1997.
She was 88. She was the
widow of Hugh O'Neill
Hencken of Boston and
Marion

Mrs. Hencken, who was
known professionally as
Thalassa Cruso, was born in
London, England. She
received her Academic
Diploma in Archaeology
from the London School of
Economics, London
University in 1931, and
subsequently became
Assistant Keeper of the
Costume Collection at the
pre-war London Museum.

From 1966 until 1969,
she wrote and starred in
"Making Things Grow!" for
WGBH-TV. Following the
success of that show she
became a regular guest on the

"Tonight Show" with Johnny
Carson, published four books
on gardening, and for twenty-
two years, wrote a gardening
column for the Boston
Sunday Globe.

She also trained in field
archaeology, and from 1933-
1936 directed the excavation
of Bredon Hill, an Iron Age
fort in Worcestershire,
England. The report on this
excavation established a basis
for much of the later
archaeological work on
British Iron Age sites, and led
to her election to the Society
of Antiquaries of London in
1938.

In 1935 she married
Hugh O'Neill Hencken of
Boston and Marion who later
became Curator of European
Archaeology at Harvard
University. During World
War II, she wrote reports on
American public opinion for
British Intelligence, for
which she later received a
special commendation.

After the war, Mrs.
Hencken joined the Chestnut
Hill Garden Club and began
her career in horticulture and
the environment. In 1961 she
was made a Garden Club of
America Horticultural Judge.
In 1962, with two friends, she

established the Amateur
Horticultural Competition at
the Massachusetts
Horticultural Society's
annual Spring Flower Show.

She was awarded the
Medal of Merit by the
Chestnut Hill Garden Club,
for the Garden Club of
America, in 1969, the
Distinguished Service Medal
by the Garden Club of
America in 1970 a
Distinguished Citation by the
Horticultural Society of New
York in 1970, and the George
Robert White Medal of
Honor in 1985 by the
Massachusetts Horticultural
Society. She also served on
the Boards of the
Massachusetts Horticultural
Society and the Brooklyn
Botanic Gardens.

She leaves three
daughters, Ala Reid of York
Harbor, Maine, Sophia Stone
of New Orleans, La. and
Thalassa Scholl of Boston;
seven grandchildren; and
three great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will
be held at two o'clock in the
afternoon on June 24th at the
Church of the Redeemer, 379
Hammond Street, Chestnut
Hill.

Thalassa Cruso Hencken

In January AAFA Member Franceine Rees called our attention to the fact that accomplished gardener, author, and TV personality Thalassa Cruso Hencken is AAFA Member #330. Thalassa is probably best known for her books, *Making Things Grow* and *Making Things Grow Outside*, and for her television show also called *Making Things Grow*. Thalassa obliged us with some of the details of her very interesting life, and we got some more information from one of her book jackets. We're delighted she's an Alford!

From Thalassa:

I excelled at tennis as a young woman, winning many trophies. My talents were all athletic as any of the musical genes were passed onto my brother and now some of my grandchildren.

School, at Guilford High School, was never one of my favorite activities although I went on to graduate from the London School of Economics with a degree in archaeology. My brother, Francis Julian Alford Cruso, was a Master at Eton, teaching Greek; he remained unmarried for his entire life.

After graduating from the University, I began work at the London Museum where I performed all sorts of tasks: tour guide, head of the costume



collection, head of the Royal Robe collection, writing about the collections, etc. While there, I was sent on an archaeological expedition to Ireland to inspect a new instrument that the American team was utilizing in their dig. It was there that I met Hugh O'Neill Hencken; we married the following year and spent the summers in London and the winters in Boston. When the war came, we moved to Boston permanently; our house in London was bombed and my family possessions were totally lost.

Our first child, Ala, was born in America as were our twins (identical), Thalassa and Sophia. As they grew, I continued to expand my interest in gardening. I started my television show on PBS, *Making Things Grow*, and continued to write, only this time with a total gardening bent. I have authored numerous books, published in hardcover by Alfred Knopf and now in softcover by Lyons & Burford. My television show lasted for many years. At the same time, I appeared on the Johnny Carson Show each year. Now, I

Thalassa C. Hencken 0330
b. & d.
Lived in Boston, MA
Family HEN810EN/MAT567EN
Attended 0 meeting(s).

still write weekly gardening columns for the *Boston Globe*.

I summer in Marion, MA, where I have wonderful gardens with a great variety of plants. Although I no longer play tennis, I am a fierce competitor on the croquet lawns. I was taught croquet by my Cruso grandfather, who married an Alford bride. It is still very clear in my mind my grandfather's response when I would miss a shot: "Muddled it, muddled it, muddled it!" My grandmother died before I was born but it was her father who was Dean of Canterbury. I have a table that he had made in Italy and a portrait of his daughter when she was a little girl.

From the book jacket of
*Making Things Grow
Outdoors*:

... Now the incomparable Thalassa applies her wisdom outdoors—and whether you have a new garden or a

beloved old garden, a barren waste or a tangled wilderness, a suburban yard or a country acreage, her supremely workable advice on planning, planting, and maintaining will prove a revelation and a delight.

... All her advice—specific, precise, easily followed—is based on a firm belief that the whole purpose of gardens and gardening is to give pleasure. "A lovely well-kept garden can be a delight to the eye," she says, "but to be really beautiful it must also look lived in and loved." Not a show-place but a place that enhances the lives of those who use it—that's the kind of garden this book helps you achieve.

To read it is to have Thalassa at your side, holding your hand, guiding

your hoe, cheering you on to horticultural triumphs, sharing all the savvy she has accumulated during her wide and varied experience with *Making Things Grow Outdoors*.

Thalassa Cruso has lived and gardened in Boston since 1935. She was born and raised in England, where she had a thorough apprenticeship in horticulture at the hands of innumerable gardening relatives. Throughout her career as an archaeologist, curator, writer, wife, mother, and grandmother, she has gardened indoors and outdoors, here and abroad. And since 1967, when her television program *Making Things Grow* found its first delighted audience over WGBH-TV, Boston, she has been guide and mentor to America's indoor gardeners. She is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, a member of the Royal Archaeological Institute, the Royal Horticultural Society, the Garden Club of America, the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, and is an accredited horticultural judge and the winner of many gardening and greenhouse awards. In 1969 she was awarded the Garden Club of America's Medal of Merit by the Chestnut Hill Garden Club. In 1970 she was the recipient of the Horticultural Society of New York's citation for distinguished horticultural service and the Garden Club of America's Distinguished Service Medal. ❖