

The Dorcas Society of Reedy Point Members' Handbook



Table of Contents:

DSRP Foundations _____	2
Membership _____	2
Statement of Faith _____	3
Code of Conduct _____	4
Authenticity Guidelines _____	5
Interpretation Guidelines _____	6
Visitor Engagement _____	6
Interpretive Information _____	7
Etiquette for Interpreting Spaces _____	9
Food Etiquette _____	10
Event Checklist _____	11

Last Updated: March 2024

DSRP Foundations

Who We Are:

We are a faith-based group of living historians interpreting the history of American female charity work.

Our Mission:

Our mission is to preserve the legacy of women's creative contributions to their communities through living history and community service.

What We Do:

- 1.) We educate the public through historical interpretation, programming, and presentations throughout the Mid-Atlantic region.
- 2.) We serve the community by teaching historic skills and producing handmade items to share the love of Christ with those in need.
- 3.) We provide a space for our members to grow in their faith, their knowledge of history, their gifts and skills, and their friendships.

Membership

Qualifications for Membership:

We welcome women and girls, ages 10 and up, who:

- are interested in learning and interpreting the history of women's charitable organizations and activities.
- are interested in doing handicraft projects for educational and charitable purposes.
- commit to attending at least 2 scheduled DSRP activities per year (exceptions can be made).
- agree to abide by the DSRP Code of Conduct and Authenticity and Interpretation Guidelines.

All new members will begin with a trial period consisting of their first three DSRP activities, at least two of which must be historical events. After this trial period, their participation in DSRP will be reviewed with DSRP leaders.

Members may choose to leave DSRP at any time. However, they should inform DSRP leaders if they no longer wish to participate in DSRP or receive DSRP information.

All members between the ages of 10 and 17 will join as Junior Dorcases. Once 18, Junior Dorcases may become adult members.

Members with daughters under the age of 10 may bring their daughters to select DSRP activities, if approved by DSRP leaders. Members are fully responsible for supervising and chaperoning their own child(ren) during DSRP activities. DSRP assumes no responsibility for members' child(ren). Basic authenticity guidelines will still apply at historical activities, and children's clothing should be discussed with DSRP leaders prior to the event.

Statement of Faith

Members are not required to agree with our statement of faith. However, by participating in DSRP activities, all members understand that these beliefs are part of the foundation of DSRP. All members of the leadership team must accept the statement of faith.

- We believe in one sovereign, Triune God, Creator of all the Universe, eternally existing in the three Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.* Colossians 1:16
 - *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* Matthew 28:19

- We believe that God created human beings in His image. However, because of man's disobedience, we are all sinful and live in a broken world. It is only by the grace of God and faith in Jesus Christ that we are saved.
 - *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* Genesis 1:27
 - *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* Romans 3:23
 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Ephesians 2:8-10

We believe in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, who died for our sins to save us.

- *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* John 1:1,14
- *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* Galatians 4:4-5

- *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 1 Peter 3:18*
- We believe that, as God's people, we are called to glorify Him in all that we do.
 - *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17*
- We believe the Bible is the infallible and inspired Word of God.
 - *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

Code of Conduct

All Members must:

- Conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times when representing DSRP, whether in-person or online/social media.
- Refrain from foul language, swear/curse words, derogatory terms/slang, or misuse of the name of God. Gossip and slanderous talk are not tolerated.
- Keep topics of conversation appropriate for all ages.
- Respect other group members, members of the public, and staff/volunteers at any site where a DSRP activity takes place. Physical and verbal harassment, bullying, and threats are not tolerated.
- Respect DSRP property, the personal property of other members, and all property of any site where a DSRP activity takes place, including buildings, grounds, and material items.
- Be prepared to replace or pay for any item belonging to DSRP, other DSRP members, a member of the public, or a site of a DSRP activity, if the member damages it.
- Report any unsafe behavior, perceived dangers, or concerns for personal safety or the safety of other members to DSRP leaders immediately.
- Dress appropriately and modestly and maintain good personal hygiene. Clothing with inappropriate/offensive language/imagery, shorts shorter than the fingertips, strapless tops, or tops that do not cover the midriff area are not allowed.

- Not bring any weapons to any DSRP activity unless previously approved by DSRP leaders, including guns, knives, and explosives.
- Not possess or use any legal or illegal drugs at any DSRP activities. Medications prescribed by the member's doctor are exempt.
- Not bring or consume alcoholic beverages at any DSRP activities, unless previously approved by DSRP leaders. NO underage consumption of alcohol will be tolerated.
- Cooperate with DSRP leaders and their requests.
- Inform DSRP leaders at least one week prior to a scheduled DSRP activity if they will or will not be attending. Arrive on time for DSRP activities, unless special arrangements have been made. Inform DSRP leaders as soon as possible if the member is no longer able to attend or will be late.
- Know that the DSRP Code of Conduct can be amended at any time by the leaders of DSRP. In the event of any changes, members will be notified and asked to acknowledge that they are aware of the changes.

Junior Dorcas Members Must:

- Not leave the group at any event or activity unless a DSRP leader or designated DSRP adult member has been informed and accompanies the Junior Member.
- Inform a DSRP leader or designated DSRP adult member prior to leaving at the end of any DSRP activity with their parent/authorized pickup person.

Infractions will be reviewed by DSRP leaders. Repeated infractions may lead to dismissal from any DSRP event, and/or termination of DSRP membership, at the discretion of the DSRP leadership team.

Authenticity Guidelines

Members are expected to dress appropriately for the period of interpretation selected for each historical DSRP activity. Clothing, shoes, and accessories should be as historically accurate as possible. This includes: fabric print/material, dress and outerwear style/cut, shoe style, jewelry, purses, baskets, and all visible food/beverage containers.

Personal modern items such as cell phones, wallets, keys, small purses, and water bottles may be brought as long as they can be hidden away when engaging with the public.

Clothing specifics will be discussed for each period of interpretation. In general, the following basic rules apply:

- No synthetic/anachronistic (not from the time period) materials. For example, shiny “costume” fabrics and clearly modern patterns/designs should be avoided, as well as plastic buttons, velcro, snaps, or zippers on pre-20th century clothing.
- No unnatural hair colors that cannot be hidden (vibrant colors such as pink, red, blue, green, etc.).
- No unnatural makeup (colored eye makeup, glitter, eye liner, exaggerated contouring, false lashes, or lipstick) unless discussed and approved for the period of interpretation.
- No fingernail polish, unless approved for the period of interpretation.

Please ask DSRP leaders before purchasing any clothing, clothing patterns/materials, accessories, or interpretive items for use at DSRP historical activities.

Interpretation Guidelines

At our public-facing historical events, our goal is to share the history of Dorcas societies to people in a relatable, engaging way that helps them understand what they did and why they did it. Below is a review of methods and information for interacting with members of the public at these events.

Visitor Engagement

If you ever have any concerns about the space you are in or the visitors around you, please immediately reach out to a DSRP leader. Your comfort and safety are our priority.

Here are some great ways to start a conversation with visitors:

- Welcome visitors with a smile and pleasant greeting when they come into our space. Even if the visitor does not want to talk, it is still important to acknowledge them.
- Discuss your current project or assigned interpretive activity.
 - In consultation with DSRP leaders, each member will have a period-appropriate project to bring to every event.
- Discuss what the role of Dorcas societies would have been during the period of interpretation (see Interpretive Information below).

- Discuss your clothing (how it's made, type of fabric, how and why it was worn)

We will generally do *third person interpretation*. This means that we will wear historical clothing, but talk to people as we normally would, knowing that we are all in the present day. Some sites may require us to do *first person interpretation*, meaning we will act like we are living in the past.

Interpretive Information

What should you tell visitors about Dorcas societies? Here is some key content information about 19th century Dorcas societies that you can share. Specific information will be provided for events.

The Story of Dorcas

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

Acts 9:36-42

Key Dorcas Society Facts

1. Women started Dorcas societies to help others using a common, effective means available to them: sewing. During the 19th century, all women and girls were expected to know how to sew.
2. These societies were traditionally connected with a church, and members generally viewed their charitable labors as an outworking of their Christian faith.
3. Dorcas societies played an important role in their communities. They allowed women to:
 - a. Build intergenerational relationships with other women, learning and growing through fellowship.
 - b. Influence their communities, at a time when it was difficult for women to be changemakers.

- c. Play an active role in social issues of their day, like poor relief and abolition. These societies raised lots of money, in addition to making and collecting lots of items, which they contributed to causes that were important to them.

Historical Overview

1. The first Dorcas societies (very late 1700s, early 1800s) focused on making and collecting textiles (clothing, bedding) to give to the poor, especially in winter. They took their name from Dorcas in the book of Acts in the Bible, who made clothing for the poor. (Acts 9:36-42)
2. By the 1830s, industrialization made textile goods cheaper and more readily available. Also, the welfare system was becoming more institutionalized. However, by this time Dorcas/sewing societies were everywhere—villages, towns, cities.
3. While Dorcas societies still provided basic material necessities, they took on other causes beyond seasonal local poor relief. Their causes included: abolition, schools, missionaries, orphanages, widows, church building projects, and, during wartime, soldiers' aid.
4. To support their causes, they held fundraising fairs to raise money. Members hand-made popular decorative items, known as “fancywork,” to sell at the fairs. Fundraising fairs were often advertised in local newspapers.
5. By the mid-20th century, Dorcas societies no longer looked the same. Women's roles in both culture and the church changed dramatically. Women now had other ways to impact their communities, and continued industrialization had rendered much of the Dorcas society's material service obsolete. However, there are still some Dorcas societies today, and many other types of women's service groups today take cues from their 19th century predecessors, like Dorcas societies.

Additional Details

1. There were many other types of benevolent societies and social organizations during the 19th century. Dorcas societies/sewing societies were only one type. Their distinguishing factor was their focus on sewn material aid and auxiliary fundraising assistance.
2. Not everyone was a fan of Dorcas societies. Some people thought they were just clubs for women to get out of household duties and gossip, and there were a lot of jokes written about them. Was any of this true? As with all things, probably for some, but not for all. Human nature doesn't change.

3. Another problem for Dorcas societies was that sewing was one of the only ways for poor women to earn money during the 19th century. Since Dorcas societies sewed and gave away material items, some argued that Dorcas societies were taking potential work away from the same poor women they claimed to help. Some societies did actually commission poor women to make some items for them. However, this was a complicated issue.
4. When sewing societies provided direct relief (meaning they directly took items they made/collected to people who needed them), they often had committees that visited the potential recipients before giving them anything. This allowed the society to make sure that the needs were genuine, as well as to offer other encouragement and support. They built personal relationships with the people they helped in their communities.
5. Sewing societies, especially in cities, might have “subscribers,” or people who made regular financial donations but were not active members. Societies held annual meetings and made annual reports for their members, subscribers, and the community. They had officers or a board of directors. Members usually paid dues.

Etiquette for Interpreting Spaces

Many of the places where we will be interpreting have enclosed spaces with valuable or fragile items. It is imperative that we are mindful of ourselves, our clothing, and our materials when moving around these spaces.

- Historical clothing often changes the shape of our “personal bubble.” Always take your time and look before you leap.
 - Ex: 1860s hoop skirts are very full, so it is easy to accidentally bump into something and knock it over. PLEASE be aware of the space and items around you, and where your skirts are.
 - Before sitting in full skirts, look around the chair and pull the chair out and make sure there is room for you to sit.
- DO NOT move, touch, or use any items, including tables, chairs, benches, or other furnishings at historic sites unless you are given permission to do so by DSRP leaders or site/museum staff. We may be in historical spaces with collection objects.

Remember, it is a privilege to be in these spaces. Please respect the space.

Food Etiquette

While food is sometimes provided, we typically ask members to provide their own snack/lunch for our historical events. In these cases, the guidelines below apply. We will provide information prior to each event if alternate arrangements are being made.

- Please bring a water bottle with you to every DSRP activity, as well as a period-correct drinking vessel. Keeping hydrated is important in all weather.
- Unless otherwise indicated, food is NOT to be eaten in view of the public. Note we are often in historic spaces, where food and drink are not permitted. Do not offer food to anyone who is not a member of DSRP (including members of the public, site staff/volunteers, etc.) without previous approval by DSRP leaders.
- Be prepared to pack out any trash with you. Not all sites provide trash receptacles.
- Please bring foods that can be eaten quickly, quietly, and will not require prep or clean-up. Do not bring any food items that require a microwave or refrigeration. All food must be brought pre-prepared. Hand-held food is recommended. If a utensil is required, you are responsible for it.
- Suggested Foods:
 - A sandwich
 - Sliced chunk of cheese
 - Summer sausage/jerky
 - Crackers, fresh bread, muffins
 - Fruit, such as apple, grapes, or dried fruit
 - Nuts
- Please do not bring:
 - Greasy or messy foods
 - Condiments or sauces
 - Carbonated beverages
 - Foods in loud packaging (i.e., chip bags)

When in doubt, ask DSRP leaders if a food item is okay to bring. If you would like to display food at an event, please check with DSRP leaders to make sure it is appropriate for the time period. This includes the container it will be displayed in.

Event Checklist

For most activities, members are expected to wear/bring:

- Historical clothing
- A historical means of carrying your items (can be a basket with a plain cloth cover, or a plain cloth bag)
- Water bottle
- Period drinking vessel (plain ceramic mug, tea cup, plain water glass)
- Lunch/a snack (depending on length of event)
- Your current historical handicraft project and all needed materials
- Small sewing kit with at least:
 - Small all-metal scissors
 - Pins (in a plain pincushion)
 - Needles (in a needle case or other secure container)
 - Thread for your current project

Don't worry! We will help you build up the items you need for events. Do not run out and buy things that you think you might need, as we can provide or loan some items, or make recommendations. When getting started, all items must be approved by DSRP leaders.