

# Annals of the Wild Life Reserve

## The Writings of Eloise Butler



### Trees in the Wild Garden - 1926

A census was taken at once of the most obvious inmates of the Reserve, which has been increased from time to time by many delightful surprises. To begin with the trees, the most conspicuous is a majestic white oak, 700 years young, the largest and oldest in the vicinity of Minneapolis. "Monarch," as we call him, was slowly dying atop. So, in obedience to the scriptural injunction, his dead limbs were cut off and cast away, and decayed portions of his "heart" - not essential as with humans for circulation -- were taken out and replaced with concrete. [done in 1912] Thus, lopped and reinforced, he bade fair for many more years to hold sway. Alack and alas! In the tornado of June [1925], large chunks of concrete were belched out and all the limbs torn off. How long will he yet stand without his crown? (1)

The leading tree in the swamp was the tamarack. They were piled up like jackstraws by the tornado, and but few left standing. But most of the white birches, which were nearly equally abundant, were spared by reason of their deeper root system, as was also another prime ornament of the garden - a much be-photographed eight-boled white birch that dominates the eastern hillside. A few clumps of yellow birch reside in the swamp, the rarer small tree, *Betula sanbergii*, and many dwarf birch, *B. pumila*. One river birch, *B. nigra*, has been planted at the base of the south hillside. A few ash trees both black and white, border the swamp, and the green and red ash have been introduced. A single tall hackberry, with its beautiful corrugated bark, adorns the west side of the pool. Younger trees will be developed in time to take its place. Next in size to "Monarch" are the white and red elms, more or less defaced by the storm. Two cork elms have been planted on the west bank. A goodly sized basswood stands in the east meadow and young basswoods are springing up on every side. A fine specimen of large-toothed poplar, *Populus grandidentata*, is on the "Plateau" near the south entrance to the garden, and innumerable youngsters are springing up that must be held in check. The smaller quaking [aspen] is much in evidence, and two cottonwoods are beginning to tower above the landscape.



The large white birches on the east hillside in 1926-referenced in the text. Photo Martha Crone Archives.

In the garden's second spring, a small balm of gilead was planted at the base of the west hillside. It has grown into a lusty tree, and, after a shower, the fragrance of the young leaves is wafter over the whole enclosure. In September 1919, the curator, on a trip to the North Shore of Lake Superior, dug up a balsam poplar, as fragrant as its variety, the balm of gilead, and added it to the treasures of the garden. It is planted near the gate on the south side of the tarvia road that divides the precincts. (2)

Besides "Monarch" there are many other white oaks whose leaves in rich shades of maroon lend a special glory to the autumnal coloring. And red oaks vie with them when dressed in reds and browns,

not to speak of the tender blush of the young leaves just escaping from the bud. Several bur oaks express their gnarly individuality - the Carlyles among the oaks. A few swamp white oaks *Quercus bicolor*, have been introduced, also *Q. prinoides*, the chinquapin oak, the latter from Boulder Colorado.

The most popular tree in the Reserve is commonly called the "fire tree," the red swamp maple, *Acer rubrum*. It really is aglow twice a year. The young leaves and keys warm the landscape and often in August, before frosts, the trees are aflame throughout the swamps. Our other native maples have been introduced to the Reserve, even the common white or silver maple and the hard or sugar maple which form large "orchards" in many sections of Minnesota. Very interesting additions are two northern species, *Acer spicatum*, the mountain maple, thickly hung with yellowish flower plumes which develop into highly decorative small rose-red keys, and the striped maple, or moosewood, whose showy striped bark is a tidbit for moose. It bears drooping green racemes and the largest leaves of any of our maples.

Below: Tamaracks and Red Maples in October color at Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden in recent times. Photo ©G D Bebeau.



The ten most abundant trees in the Native Plant Reserve, Minneapolis, are: tamarack (*Larix laricina*), white birch (*Betula alba* var. *papyrifera*), ironwood (*Ostrya virginiana*), northern pin oak (*Quercus ellipsoidalis*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*), white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), basswood, (*Tilia americana*), large-toothed aspen (*Populus grandidentata*).

The least frequent trees in the Reserve are: Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*), one tree only; white maple (*Acer saccharinum*), one tree endemic; hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), one tree endemic and a few young ones.

The other trees in the Reserve are not rare in the immediate vicinity. Two other rare trees in Minneapolis are Kentucky coffee-tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*), swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*).

**Notes:**

For a history of Monarch and a refutation of the 700 year age, see the separate article about Monarch.

2. The notation of the tarvia road dividing the precincts is a referral to the Garden being divided into two sections by the wide pathway the runs east and west outside what is the current back fence of the Garden. In 1926 the meadow north of this path was part of the Garden proper cared for by Eloise Butler. It was in this northern section that she build the Mallard Pool in 1932. The northern section was abandoned in 1944.

3. The photo at the top of the page is a collage of Eloise Butler at 4 stages in her life: A young woman, ca1890, Garden Curator 1910-20, mid 1920s and age 80 at her birthday party, Aug. 2, 1931. *Photos courtesy Minneapolis Public Library, Minneapolis Collection, and Minnesota Historical Society.*

4. The text of this article is one of a number of short essays that Eloise Butler wrote while curator of the Garden that after her death were collected in a series titled *Annals of the Wild Life Reserve*, but most were never published. The text indicates however, that this essay was sent to the Gray Memorial Botanical Chapter, division D, of the Agassiz Association for their circular bulletin. Eloise was a member of Division D (the middle west) from 1908 until her death. Those bulletins were circulated among members by postal round-robin circulation. The Agassiz Association was founded in the late 1800's to be an association of local chapters that would combine the like interests of individuals and organizations in the study of nature but after 1901 was largely defunct and only the Gray Memorial Botanical Chapter, with its several divisions, was still active and remained so until 1943.

5. The Wild Botanic Garden in Glenwood Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.