

The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden



Our Memories - Section Two

Note: On these "Our Memories" pages will be found a collection of stories, photographs and remembrances contributed by current and former members of the Friends who shared their experiences during The Friends 50th Anniversary in 2002 and were published in *50 Years of Friends*. There are three separate sections, with the contributors arranged alphabetically.

J. S. Futcher - A Birdwatcher's Eloise Butler

As a young birdwatcher, I became acquainted with the Garden and Mrs. Crone while I was in the eighth and ninth grades in 1946 and 1947. At first I would walk from our home at 14th and Girard Avenues North to the Theodore Wirth golf course and explore the hills, woods and Bassett's Creek. At the same time I started going to the Science Museum on the fourth floor of the old downtown public library. There, in case after case, were all the mounted bird specimens. I started going on nature field trips led from there by the museum director, Milton D. Thompson. It was at this time that I became acquainted with Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden. Here Thompson would introduce Mrs. Crone to us, and she would give us an update as to what was occurring in the Garden, plant-wise and bird-wise.

Mrs. Crone seemed so approachable that in my following high school years, while birding by myself in the Garden, I felt bold enough to knock on her cottage door. That was a brown, vine-covered wooden house, or what I called a shack. She could always tell me what birds were in the Garden that day.

One autumn day in the Garden, I remember her telling me where to look for a Winter Wren. I went to that spot, and sure enough, it was still there. That was my first look at a Winter Wren. Mrs. Crone always seemed to be wearing a green woolly beret, or as Hellander in *The Wild Gardener* calls it, a tam-o'-shanter. And always she seemed to be wearing a green or brown slacks outfit. The first time I saw her in a dress was at the Science Museum, where I would attend the Minneapolis Bird Club evening meetings. During the winter months she worked there as the night overseer -- the same job I was to have several years later while attending the University.



Martha Crone in the Garden in 1950. *Minneapolis Tribune* photo.

Once, after I started to teach school, I made my usual stop at her cottage. In the course of the conversation, she asked whether I was a member of the Friends of the Wildflower Garden. "Noooo," I answered. Emphatically she replied, "Well, you should be!" [Mr. Futcher joined several years later after he married.]

Soon afterwards a package arrived containing a number of back issues of the *Fringed Gentian*TM along with a green binder was given to me. A sentence at the bottom of the first issue stated, "The enclosed binder was designed for filing of issues of our publication for future reference." As long as Mrs. Crone was editor of the *Fringed Gentian*TM, there was always a directive at the bottom of one of the issue's

pages that read, “File this issue with the others in your *Fringed Gentian* green cover.” And so we did, and still do, even though the color of the binder isn’t always green.

In those early years of my teaching career, I had great plans to grow some ginseng as a money crop on a wooded plot up north. So, I asked Mrs. Crone where I could buy some. She said I didn’t need to buy it and proceeded to dig up a clump for me, then added a goldenseal plant for good measure.

While courting my wife, I brought her into the Garden, and, of course, we ran into Mrs. Crone. I introduced them. Mrs. Crone became the first of my nature friends to find out that I was soon to be married.



The Great Medicine Spring, referenced by Mr. Fitcher. Shown here in 1939 just after the fountain and canopy was erected. Photo by Walter Dalhberg.

So what physical changes have taken place in the Garden and surrounding park in the intervening years? Well, when I was a kid, all three of the springs were running and available for people to come with their jugs and take the water. Besides the main one, there was the one on the northwestern corner of Glenwood Avenue and Theodore Wirth Parkway, and the one to the east of the back gate. The area was so full of springs that when we went swimming at the nearby Wirth Lake bathing beach, we could feel the cold spring water coming up from the sandy lake bottom in certain spots. The old bath house was surrounded by a wooded wetland with tall peachleaf and black willows. In the wet area north of the Garden was a good stand of paper birch. Sometime in the early ‘50s the Park Board removed the fence, and from then on this beautiful grove deteriorated. That area changed more when the Park Board placed an aboveground pipeline

near Glenwood Avenue, which disrupted the natural drainage and caused a pond to form.

A great place for us gang of boys to play was what we called the artificial falls, but this man-made construction actually had the official name of Loring Cascade. We never heard it called by that name, but then we never saw water pouring over the cascade either. The Cascade, located on Theodore Wirth Parkway north of Glenwood Avenue, no longer exists.

On our Science Museum field trips to Eloise Butler, Mr. Thompson would also take us over to the tamarack bog west of Birch Pond.

There we could find the pitcher and sundew plants. Later, when I taught general science at Jordan Junior High School in north Minneapolis, I would gather one specimen of each for our classroom terrarium. I did this for two years before I switched to just teaching physical science. When I resumed teaching life science in the ‘70s, the bog had been taken over by the invasive common buckthorn shrub. This bog has been restored in recent years due to the efforts of volunteers and the Park Board.

Outside the back gate, fenced separately, was a large, open, old bird-feeding table. I became acquainted with the lady who for many years maintained that feeder, a Ms. Lulu May Aler. During the 1950-51 feeding season Ms. Aler told me she was getting too old to continue this volunteer task next season. Would I happen to know of anyone who could take over for her? Well, it just so happened that I did. There were four boys in the Minneapolis Bird Club who lived in the Homewood district not too far

from the Garden. Yes, they eagerly took on that job. Eventually the Minneapolis Bird Club, now part of the Minneapolis Audubon society, took over from the boys. I received a thank-you Christmas card from Ms. Aler that year which showed a photo of the feeding table taken in about 1936.

So, as a young birdwatcher, I enjoyed seeing Scarlet Tanagers in the oak woods south of the Garden, and I believe at that time they were nesting in those oak woods. There were not as many trails going through those woods then as now. I found the nest of a Black-billed Cuckoo in the dense thicket, a bird not too easily seen in the urban area these days. In 1949 I saw my first Red-breasted Nuthatch in the Garden, and that bird continues to show up at the front gate feeders whenever I am there in the right season. In those days, if one wanted to see a Pileated Woodpecker, the Garden was the place to see it. That bird was not as common in the '40s and '50s as nowadays.

I noticed that Ms. Butler listed some birds for the Garden area in 1914. She listed the "rare crested Wood Duck." In the late '40s and early '50s, the Wood Duck population was still reduced in numbers. If I was very quiet and if it was early enough that other people were not around, I would sneak up to the pond by the back gate and just maybe see a pair of Wood Ducks. Otherwise, I might find them on Birch Pond, but I would not be able to see them as well there. They would be too far off. I did not have a good pair of binoculars until I was partly through my University years. Ms. Butler listed some other surprising birds in her 1914 notes, but I won't go into that. She did mention the Wilson's Snipe, nowadays called the Common Snipe. And I saw that bird quite regularly through the '80s in the wet areas during migration.

In one of those early birding years, a Cooper's Hawk nested in the Garden. Mrs. Crone asked Mr. Thompson to come and shoot it. This hawk was doing what it was supposed to do - that is, eat small birds - and Mrs. Crone did not want to lose all her songbirds. Sometime in the '60s or early '70s a pair of Broad-winged Hawks moved into the Garden area and have nested almost every year. Meanwhile, out behind the golf course, the Cooper's Hawk nests once more.

Because of persistent wild fruits and the open spring flows, in most years during the winter months I could see at least one American Robin outside the Garden. In these latter years, this wintertime observation has become more common in the metro area. And speaking of fruit, I always remember the day in July when our gang chanced upon a ripe, red raspberry thicket just outside the park -- in the area which is now part of the Anwatin School backfield.

For me the most destructive environmental change happened outside the Garden, but still within Theodore Wirth Park. This was the construction of the Par 3 golf course addition in 1962. The Par 3 addition is built over what was in my early days a viable marsh. In this prime birding spot, I saw my first American and Least Bitterns. Because of these sightings, I named the marsh Bittern Slough. Along the south side of the slough ran railroad tracks. We could sit in the open boxcars and look out over Bittern Slough. The boxcars acted as our duck blinds. One of my friends would trap muskrats there in the wintertime. He did this until the day he found a body hanging from a tree. The dead man had run away from the Glenwood Hills Mental Hospital, which was situated just north of Bittern Slough.

It is my hope to live once more within walking distance of the Garden and Wirth Park. Until then, I have to be content with a once-a-year visit.

Karol Pieper Gresser - Memories of Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden

I have many fond memories of Eloise Butler Garden, starting in about 1953, when my friend, Helen Woodward, introduced me to birding there. We shared her binoculars and she pointed out the warblers. I had never heard of a warbler then. The feeders were outside the old wooden shelter, and once in a while Martha Crone was there. I remember struggling to keep the chickadee and the white-breasted nuthatch separate. They came and went so fast!

Helen was raised in Michigan around the turn of the century and she knew all the plants, whether medicinal, edible, or no-no's. She shared her flower and bird books with me, too. Her association with the Garden lasted as long as she was able to go and could find transportation.

Later I acquired my own binoculars and books, and **took up birding in earnest**. I remember seeing my first black-throated green warbler — the record says 5/12/67. Ed Bruckelmyer was working there then and I showed him my exciting find. Over the years I often think of that first one when I see my annual "first."

My family didn't share my birding interest, but sometime in the '60s or '70s my father, Elmer Pieper, made a wood duck box which Ken Avery put in the bog area. No one ever reported a wood duck in it that I know of but maybe a squirrel enjoyed it.

The Minneapolis Bird Club (now the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis) had many field trips to Wirth Park and, of course, the Garden was the highlight. Especially exciting one time was the wood duck nest in a tall broken-off tree stump near the parking lot. The down from the nest fluttered to the ground when the disturbed female flew out. Another exciting bird was the Townsend's Solitaire which Helen and I found in a spruce tree by the parking lot in December 1966. These birds seem to be more common now, but that was my first one and I remember what a thrill it was.

There is no other place around the Twin Cities where the seasonal changes are so enjoyable and visible, or where one feels safe walking the paths, as in our special Garden. It has been a place of peace and quiet to enjoy our native plants and birds, and to recharge my spirit. I am so grateful to Theodore Wirth, Eloise Butler, Ken Avery, Clinton Odell, and all the others who have worked to preserve this very special place. May we always have such "friends" for the Garden.

Karol is a life member of The Friends.

John Haldeman - Wedding Memories

Our wedding scenario began with a plan for an outdoor ceremony in the Upland Garden on Saturday, October 3, 1981, at 4:30 in the afternoon. But cool and rainy weather forced us inside the shelter, where, thankfully, our curator friend Ken Avery made sure we were warm and cozy with a splendid, roaring fire in the fireplace. And so, Joan and I were married in the Martha Crone Shelter by Dean Doug Fontaine of St. Mark's Cathedral, attended by 15 members of our families.

We have always had a special attachment to the Garden and its environs. Both of our mothers loved the Garden and are memorialized there. On our tenth anniversary in 1991, Joan and I



returned to the original plan and renewed our vows in the Upland Garden. We will always remember these treasured times in God's unique and natural Garden setting.

Marguerite Harbison - Garden Memories



It was going to be one of those hot, humid days. My daughter was visiting from the west coast. She wanted to visit the Garden because she hadn't been there since her Girl Scout days. We got up at six a.m. to take our walk through and beat the heat.

We were strolling up the woodland path when we were treated to an unforgettable sight. Three young pileated woodpeckers were feeding! They made such a commotion! They were flitting from bush to branch to the path, back and forth, getting in each other's way. We stood still and quiet for a long time to watch the show. It was a special treat and remains a treasured memory.

I had used the Garden as a resource on wild plants for many years. My husband and I had bought some land, and I needed help identifying the flora I found there. After my husband died, I moved back to the city. My friend, Harriet, told me about a volunteer job that could help me not miss my woods so much. Following her advice, I joined the Friends, and the next thing I knew, I was on the Board! And now it's been ten years. The Garden is truly a magical, peaceful place in the midst of a busy, lively city. I am grateful for Eloise Butler and her vision.

Marguerite was Memorials Chairperson for a number of years, retiring from the Board of Directors in 2006 after serving since 1994.

Lynne Holman - A Friends Landmark Event Remembered

In the late '70s, as an active member of the Friends, I was involved with the development and realization of **the original Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden self-guided tour** along the Garden pathways. It was a classic Park Board / Friends collaboration, with much support from our gardener, Ken Avery. The primary booklet writer was Mike Ryan, the MPRB environmentalist assigned to the Garden.

In 1980, there was a celebratory event to "open" the self-guided tour, and I was honored to cut the ribbon at the entrance on that special day. We also planted a commemorative tree, west of the open area by the shelter, and a bit north toward the bog.



In this photo, I am standing between the Friends' Board President, O. Lynne Deweese, and MPRB Commissioner Naomi Loper.

Remembering this event and the success of our project gives me a feeling of satisfaction and pleasure even today, after 20-plus years. Perhaps it's significant that, after a career as a health consultant, I am now a master gardener beginning work as a horticultural therapist. I can say, with certitude, that helping to create the self-guided tour in the Garden is one of the things I'm truly proud of in my life.

Below: In this group photo around the tree, from the left, are Naomi Loper; Pat Huntington, the MPRB public relations head; Friends Board members Marie Demler and Moana Odell Beim; Mary Maguire Lerman, Park staff; a naturalist; another Friends member; Ken Avery; myself; O.L. Deweese; and Mike Ryan.



Lynne Holman served on The Friends Board of Directors from 1978 to 1981 and was Vice President 1980 and 1981.

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