



## President's Report Winter 2008



Dear Friends,

As I write this, 2007 is nearly history and, with its passing, the wonderful Anniversary Year of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary also comes to a close. I hope you were at the Garden for at least one of the celebratory events, perhaps *Lady Slipper Day* in June when the blooms took one's breath away, or maybe the MPRB's splendid *Birthday Bash* in August with the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre's marvelously creative tributes to Eloise and the Garden's 100 years. The Friends can be very proud of the creative commemorative projects we commissioned this year. The Jennifer Davis "Sanctuary" poster and note cards turned out beautifully, as did *A Century of Seasons*, the truly superb DVD filmed and produced by John Akre of Minnesota Television Network. The film premiered at our Volunteer Appreciation Event, held in the MTN studios at St. Anthony Main. The Event was an Anniversary success in its own right, thanks to our Volunteer Coordinator, Ann Godfrey. Another special creative event occurred this year when Gary Bebeau and Christi Bystedt became the Friends' webmasters and made a very significant dream come true---our web site!!! (See article inside.)

Looking back on this once-in-a-century year, it is my honor and pleasure, on behalf of the Friends, to express appreciation to the Board Members who directed Anniversary activities and of course to Susan Wilkins, Garden Curator, along with her staff, and most certainly to the MPRB for their extensive efforts at planning and implementing terrific events. We also express our sincere gratitude to the wonderful volunteers in the Shelter, at the parking lots and in the Garden itself, "boots on the ground" against invasive plants. Their commitment was so visible this year and while the same is true every year, I believe their contributions were even more evident during this special chapter in our history.

Now, looking ahead to the beginning of the Garden's second century, the Friends have rich resources from the past 55 years of stewardship to guide our course.

We must continue to pursue and to improve on our traditional functions: membership and volunteer coordination, financial support for the Garden, and publication of *The Fringed Gentian*. We must strengthen our partnership with the MPRB to maximize our contribution to the well-being of the Garden and we must develop strategies to do our part toward alleviating the problems the 21st century has brought to South Wirth: the devastation caused by invasive species, requiring both removal and restoration, coupled with the complex politics of multiple use demands in the Garden's buffer zone.

And just how, you may ask, do we undertake these challenges? Common sense and past experience suggest that more money and more volunteers are surely appropriate vectors for an effective response, and I would agree, with the caveat that more knowledge is the most important component of all. In future letters, I will explore the principles of systemic ecology, in reference to the environmental health of the Garden's species and habitats, to the role of humans in this remnant of urban forest, and to our own robustness as an organization. With the excellent input of our Garden Curator and the expertise and experience to be found on our Board of Directors, this knowledge will guide our efforts to secure the health of the Garden.

As always, I welcome comments and questions about the Garden, our stewardship or any concerns you may have. Please email me at [drjpw@earthlink.net](mailto:drjpw@earthlink.net) or call (612) 377-3573. On a rather sad note, we are going to lose our fine, new Fringed Gentian editor, Linda Cody, all too soon. Family obligations are taking her to the East Coast so we are once again in search of an editor. Please see the article in this issue and let me hear from you if you are interested or know someone we might approach. Let us wish for a Happy New Year - Year 101 in the Garden!! Sincerely,

J. Pam Weiner



## President's Report Spring 2008



Dear Friends,

By the time you read this, surely spring will have arrived, deeply desired by one and all. Is there anything more delicious? The sun warms the air, the soil drinks the snowmelt and the cardinal sings his strong, sweet song. As soon as the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden opens, we can search for skunk cabbage and snow trillium, listen for the first warblers and hope to see a fox kit or two. It's like this every year, I know, but it never gets old.

Spring may be late this year, or winter hard to forget, but there's fresh and cheerful news on another front. I am pleased to report that we have a new and exceptionally qualified and talented editor for the *Gentian*. (Perhaps you've already noticed that this issue looks especially beautiful!) Judy Remington, a longtime Friends member, has agreed to take this important position, and we are truly fortunate to have her. Judy has both professional editing experience and extensive knowledge of garden design and native species. She is very familiar with the Garden's plant and bird communities as well as those in South Wirth. And, already, she seems to be full of ideas about how to make the *Gentian* better than ever. Welcome, Judy, and thank you for your willingness to make this commitment to the *Gentian*, the Friends and, of course, the Garden.

The Friends have yet another important search to mount; we need a historian to track important events and archive materials related to the history of the Garden, Eloise Butler and our own organization. Please see the article inside and consider volunteering. Or, maybe there's someone you know who might like to help in this way.

And, speaking of someone you know, spring is the season for many membership renewals. When you send in yours, please consider adding a gift membership for someone special who would appreciate the introduction. We are hoping to expand our numbers and welcome new people and their energy into the Friends and to the Garden.

I have started my self-study of ecology, as promised, in conjunction with a desire to become somewhat knowledgeable about factors affecting the present and future health of the Garden. I had bravely suggested that this endeavor could inform our priorities when we make decisions about money and volunteers, our two types of capital, so to speak. What have I learned so far?

My trusty Oxford English Dictionary (vintage 1955) defines ecology as "... the branch of biology which deals with the mutual relations between organisms and their environment ... collectively ...." I found several Ecology 101-type outlines on the web, and Wikipedia has hundreds of pages on the topic, mostly focusing on specific ecosystems facing crisis or a stochastic event (unpredictable change) that involves one or more environmental factors impacting one or more species. Biodiversity is the most dominant positive concept throughout, but I have yet to find a clear theory or hypothesis that offers the overall picture. I will keep looking!

Once again, let me repeat that I would appreciate input from Friends on any and all matters relating to the Garden and our activities. I can be reached at [drjpw@earthlink.net](mailto:drjpw@earthlink.net) or 612.377.3573. If you haven't yet done so, please do visit our website at: [www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org](http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org); it is a lovely mini-trip to the Garden as well as a great source of information. Finally, the Friends annual meeting is Saturday, May 17, at 10:00 a.m. in the Martha Crone Visitors Shelter, and you are invited.

Sincerely,  
J. Pam Weiner, President



## President's Report Summer 2008



Dear Friends,

Remember Sunday, June 1? It was beautiful—one of the first sunny, warm, calm days of late spring 2008. It followed a week of wild weather with high winds, hail and fluctuating temperatures. Well, I'm writing this letter late in the afternoon of that lovely day, after returning from pulling garlic mustard from the ground along the western fence just outside and above the Garden fence.

Jim Proctor's volunteer crew included old hands Emily, George, Ellen, Liz and Chris and one new hand, Sima. This hardy group attacked the enormous masses of garlic mustard for a couple of hours, removing more than 200 pounds of flowering invasives from the Garden's immediate buffer zone. As we dug and pulled and bagged, we noticed many small but healthy native plants sprinkled throughout the area where garlic mustard and buckthorn predominate. Little cherry trees, Jack in the pulpit, Solomon's seal and gooseberry were noted; they made us feel optimistic about the possibility of returning the Garden boundary area to the diverse and thriving woodland it was in Eloise's day.

Of course, as Jim frequently reminds us, the primary purpose of this fence line work is to protect the Garden itself. On the western perimeter, we are pulling from south to north, at the top of a hillside approximately above stations 11 to 21. The rain runs down into the ferns at the southwest corner of the Garden, carrying seeds from the garlic mustard above. Wild geranium, dogwood, shooting star and many other ephemerals occupy this western part of the Garden and are vulnerable to encroachment from above.

Jim and Garden Curator Susan Wilkins have stressed the importance of understanding the life cycle of invasive plants in relation to our work. Timing is everything, they say. After flowering, plants produce their seeds, which are then dispersed. Every plant we don't remove before this happens can reproduce itself hundreds of times over.

The best time for garlic mustard deterrence will be over by the time you read this, but the season to work on buckthorn removal will be approaching. In coordination with the MPRB's South Wirth Restoration Project, directed by Marcia Holmberg, Jim will be leading teams in the buffer zone into the fall. Details are available at [www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org](http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org). Please consider joining us in fighting these threats to the Garden's health and pass the word to your nature-loving friends and colleagues. All are welcome, and everyone seems to enjoy working together.

I am still a seeker on the path to eco-wisdom or at least a modicum of insight about ecology and biodiversity. One step I have taken is to read a fine book about the role of native plants in healthy ecosystems (see review, page 5). I am increasingly aware that this pursuit will be a lifelong one, as there is an amazing amount to learn. I would very much like to hear your thoughts on these matters of ecology. Please email me at [drjpw@earthlink.net](mailto:drjpw@earthlink.net) or call 612.377.3573.

Sincerely,  
J. Pam Weiner, President



## President's Report Autumn 2008



Dear Friends,

As another wonderful season of blooms, birds and butterflies at the Garden comes to a close, I can't help but try to keep the sights and sounds alive for just a bit longer. I know another season will begin in a few months, but today I'm not ready for a winter's wait.

I'd like to share the memories of one lovely morning with you. On Monday, August 25, I prepared for my regular volunteer shift in the shelter, left my home and drove toward Theodore Wirth Park. Coming onto Wirth Parkway from the south, I crossed over I-394 and checked the sky for the pileated woodpecker I've seen a couple times, flying from the Garden parking lot over to Brownie Lake. I scanned Birch Pond for wood ducks, then turned into the Garden drive, watching for runners, and instead saw a young doe ambling across the Parkway toward the lake. I slowly drove up to the parking lot, savoring the dappled sunshine and the green growth around me.

Others have spoken fondly of the way it feels to come down the path into the Garden, the pleasure of walking on its cushion of shredded white cedar and seeing favorite plants. On this day, the parking lot was empty except for Curator Susan Wilkins's car and Program Coordinator Lauren Borer's truck, so the area was exceptionally quiet.

Once inside the gate, I felt a sense of peaceful solitude that erased the impressions of traffic and noisy activity I had left behind. Looking at the wild ginger and ferns along the path, I marveled at how much better they looked than the ones in my yard. No rain had fallen in either place for weeks, but here the protection of deep shade and the absence of concrete and blacktop made a real difference.

I heard the sing-song voice of a bird that might have been a phoebe. As I turned onto the short path to the shelter, I saw the blue flash of an indigo bunting leaving one of the feeders.

In the shelter, it was quiet and cool. Lauren was working at her computer. I straightened the tables a bit and noticed the new displays. Looking out, I saw a female hairy woodpecker on one of the suet feeders; she hung around most of the morning. A couple pairs of downies came and went, and there was a white-breasted nuthatch in attendance, too. At one time, there were two pairs of goldfinches on the thistle feeder; lined up perfectly, they looked like they were decorating it or getting ready to do-si-do. With Lauren's coaching, I was able to hear the soft clicking noise of the cecropia caterpillars feeding on maple and cherry leaves in the netting cube on the counter.

Seven people visited the shelter that morning. A young Belgian couple came in with their Bryn Mawr hostess, amazed to see this pocket of forest with its birds and woodchucks in the midst of the city! An older couple came to preview the paths and layout in preparation for their garden group tour later in the week. Lauren told me about the summer school groups from Bryn Mawr and Anwatin schools that came day after day for weeks, every single class. I noticed there is a new, brightly colored, informational postcard map of the Garden that helps orient visitors.

I'm hoping to hold onto the memory of this beauty and calmness until next year, and I hope you also have lovely Garden memories to carry you through the winter months.

Sincerely,  
J. Pam Weiner, President