

Obituaries

LOVERS OF THE WILDFLOWER GARDEN OWE A GREAT DEBT TO MARTHA CRONE

'Wildflower Lady' Martha Crone dies; made Butler Garden grow

By Ted Jones
Staff Writer

"... Dry flower stalks are crowned with puffs of snow... and the green of pines and hemlocks are sternly etched against a clear blue sky..."

The description of a garden in winter was written more than 30 years ago by Martha Crone, Minneapolis' self-taught "Wildflower Lady," who died Sunday in Minneapolis after a short illness. She was 95.

Crone was an award-winning curator, or head gardener and administrator, at the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden at Theodore Wirth Park from 1933 until 1959. She was editor of the "Fringed Gentian," a newsletter for the Friends of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, from which the quote is taken.

During Crone's tenure, the Butler garden (named after botanist Eloise Butler, who headed the garden from 1911 to 1933) grew to encompass 13 acres and hundreds of species of wildflowers that Crone transplanted.

In 1969, the wildflower garden society donated the garden shelter and named it in Crone's honor.

"She did tremendous work saving flowers from spots in Minnesota that were about to be plowed under," said Kenneth Avery, who followed her as head gardener in 1959.

Crone, who was born in Minneapolis, quit school after the eighth grade to work. Friends and associates say she was largely self-taught in botany, horticulture and writing.

"Gardening was always an interest of hers, fostered from the times when she and my grandfather would take the streetcar out to Anoka and walk back so they could see what was growing alongside the road," said Judith Prevey, Crone's granddaughter. "Her interest was expanded after she met Eloise Butler in 1921." From that point, Prevey said, her grandmother was Butler's first assistant in the garden. Crone, who always wore her trademark tam-o'-shanter while gardening, replaced Butler when she died in 1933.

Crone's achievements included the addition of wild ferns and orchids into the garden, and the transplanting of one of Minnesota's wild poinsettias shortly before the last patch was destroyed near New Ulm in the late 1940s.

"She always had her tools and gunny sacks for transplanting in the car," Prevey said.

Crone's gardening season began each year in March, about a month before the garden opened. She oversaw repair to walkways, transplanted species and planted seeds. Once the garden was open, she was on hand for day-to-day operations, led groups through the garden and answered questions.

When snow covered the garden in winter, Crone worked at the Minneapolis Public Library and gave lectures.

Crone was active with the Cook County Historical Society and was an officer of the Order of the Eastern Star.



Martha Crone

Besides her granddaughter, Judith, of Minneapolis, Crone is survived by her daughter, Janet C. Prevey, of Mankato, Minn.; granddaughter, Lynda Wander of New Brighton, three great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

At her request, no services will be held. Private burial will be held at Crystal Lake Cemetery in Minneapolis.