

History of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden

The 103 year history of the Garden is exceedingly rich. The story of its creation, development and care fills many files with letters, reports, newspaper articles and more. This appendix is a greatly condensed version of the Garden's history. In the future, more details, stories, and anecdotes about the Garden will be added to this document.

Pre-settlement era to purchase of land for Glenwood Park in 1889

As part of the Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota in 1851, the Dakota Nation ceded most of southern Minnesota to the United States government. In 1853 public land surveyor Jesses Jarrett noted that the area now known as Theodore Wirth Park had numerous streams, marshes, ponds, swamps and tamarack bogs – which he declared “unfit for cultivation”. He also noted that near these waterbodies there was abundant “heavy timber” including elm, linden, ironwood, ash, aspen and oak, and that farther away from the water, there were only sparse oak trees – most likely indicating oak savanna or prairie ecosystems.

The area surrounding Birch Pond and the tamarack bog were purchased by land speculator Samuel Gale in 1883. Two years later Gale sold the parcel to Thomas W. Wilson who made plans to drain the bogs and swamps and platted the area with streets and house lots.

In 1889 the adjacent neighbors petitioned the Board of Park Commissioners to buy the land and prevent development. Residents sweetened the petition by offering to bear the cost of the land acquisition. When writing the history of the Minneapolis Park System, Superintendent Theodore Wirth described this 64 acre parcel of land as having “topographical contour and many natural attractions of those beautiful wooded hills and open country along the western city limits, as well as the possibilities for a charming water landscape through the Bassett’s Creek Valley,” which, he said, “impressed me as affording splendid opportunity for the development of an extensive natural park.”

The Commissioners sided with the petitioners and proceeded to secure the park’s initial 64 acres known as Saratoga Springs for \$100,000. The next year the park’s name was changed to Glenwood Park. For the next 20 or so years, the Board continued to acquire land until Glenwood Park reached 681 acres.

Wildflower Garden Beginnings 1907–1910

“On account of the rapid growth of the city—spreading out like a spider’s web for miles in all directions—and the consequent disappearance of the wild lands and their indigenous vegetation—making it necessary for students to go farther and farther afield for specimens, it occurred to the writer, some years ago, that means should be taken to establish a plant preserve, within which to maintain representatives of the flora of our state; to serve also as a depot of supplies for the schools; as a resort for the lovers of wild nature; and to afford an opportunity to study botanical problems at first hand.”

—Eloise Butler

For years high school botany teachers from across Minneapolis utilized Glenwood Park for fieldwork with their students. Riding the streetcar to the end of the line in the Bryn Mawr neighborhood, botany classes walked the rest of the way to the park to begin collection of plant specimens. Eloise Butler in particular was well-known for taking her Central and South high school students tromping through the bogs of Glenwood Park.

Even though the land had been secured as a public park it did not guarantee that wild spaces within would be left untouched. Dredging, draining and filling swamps, shoreline shaping, and extensive earthwork were common in this era of creating new parks. It was paramount to local botany teachers that Glenwood Park’s wildest spaces be protected, especially the treasured tamarack swamp abundant with orchids, pitcher plants, and sundew.

In 1907, Eloise Butler and three other Minneapolis high school botany teachers (Clara Leavitt, Elizabeth Foss, and Julia Clifford) organized a petition to persuade the Board of Park Commissioners to set aside land within Glenwood Park for a natural botanic garden. The petition was signed by 32 people including all the principals of Minneapolis high schools, University of Minnesota president Cyrus Northrup, several University professors, and local botanists C.W. Hall and Josephine E. Tilden. The petition requested that a “certain portion of the park grounds of Minneapolis [be] permanently set aside for a natural Botanical Garden for the instruction of students of botany and for the enjoyment of all lovers of nature.”

The petitioners’ desired Garden location was the eastern section of Glenwood Park because it consisted of “an undrained tamarack swamp with adjacent meadow land and wooded slopes. An undrained tamarack swamp is essential for the proposed garden because, on account of city improvements, such land is fast disappearing, together with certain lilies, arums, heaths, dogwoods, mosses and fungi and the rare and curious insectivorous plants which are never found elsewhere.”

The petition also stated that the “aims of this garden would be to show plants as living things and their adaptation to their environment, to display in miniature the rich and varied flora of Minnesota, and to teach the principles of forestry.”

The Board was persuaded as to the value of preserving this wild habitat and approved the request. The Board allocated \$200 to the Garden for paths and fencing. Three acres of bog, meadow and hillside were quickly fenced and the “Natural Botanical Garden” opened on April 27, 1907.

The botany teachers spent the first gardening season documenting the species found within the Natural Botanical Garden’s original three acres. In May of 1907 their plant census listed sixteen species of trees, twenty-seven shrub species, ten fern species, eight mosses, two liverworts, and seventy-six species of wildflowers and many grasses. By the end of the season more than 130 species had been documented in the Garden. See the *Indigenous Plants of the Wildflower Garden/1907-1916* appendix for a complete inventory.

Working as volunteers, the teachers visited their favorite botanizing locations to acquire more plants for the Garden. Favorite sites included Minnehaha Falls, Minnehaha Creek, the Mississippi River near the Lake Street Bridge, and also the small towns of Mahtomedi and Mound. These sites were sources for pitcher plant, yellow lady’s slipper, wild calla, pasque flower, and many kinds of ferns which were transplanted into the Garden. And although the stated aim was to focus on Minnesota flora, plants from Maine (Butler’s home state) also found a home in the Garden.

The Garden doubled in size in 1908 when the Board of Park Commissioners purchased more land for Glenwood Park. The Garden’s new addition featured a wet meadow and a spring-fed stream meandering through a marsh. The stream also connected in the open north meadow to a bubbling spring along the Garden’s east boundary. The stream was dammed near the spring to form a small pool within the Garden providing habitat for carnivorous sundew plants. A pinetum was established in 1909, just outside the Garden’s fence and included Norway pine, white pine, junipers, and yews.

In a 1910 publication Butler provided this description: “About seven acres have been given up to the Wild Garden, which has for its core a tamarack swamp, surrounded by untimbered bog land, merging into meadows and wooded slopes. The meadow is threaded by a tiny, tortuous brook, falling through several levels in little, musical cascades. When it leaves the Wildflower Garden, the brook has been widened by means of a dam into a small pond for the harborage of the water lily . . . and other choice aquatics.” In this publication Butler also enthused that the “tamarack swamp is an abiding joy, being the only one within the city limits that has been saved from drainage and devastation for fence posts.”

During these early years, the Garden was cared for solely by the botany teachers. Plant hunting, transplanting, weeding, watering and mulching were the teachers’ regular chores.

Eloise Butler, Curator 1911-1933

“A paramount idea is to perpetuate in the Wildflower Garden its primeval wilderness. All artificial appearances are avoided and plants are to be allowed to grow as they will and without any check except what may be necessary for healthful living. Those in excess may be removed, when others more desirable have been obtained to replace them. Each individual, when procured, is to be given an environment as similar as possible to that from which it came, and then left to take care of itself, as in the wild open, with only natural fertilizers furnished by decaying vegetation.”

—Eloise Butler

Upon her retirement as a Minneapolis high school teacher in 1911 Eloise Butler was hired by the Board of Park Commissioners to serve as the Curator for the Garden. In Butler’s first year as Curator half of her salary was paid by the Minneapolis Women’s Club.

The first mention of the Wild Botanic Garden in the annual reports of the Board of Park Commissioners is 1911. Butler’s letter to the Superintendent and Board reiterates that the most valuable and important plants are those “indigenous to the place” meaning the Garden. However in contradiction to her statement, Butler records that she planted 157 species, 40 of which were new to the Garden. In addition, the “primeval wilderness” of the Garden was not entirely pristine and Butler spent her time “discouraging noxious weeds, especially the Canada thistle, which has come in the Garden from an adjacent part of the park where it is the chief vegetation.” During this first season as Curator she planted a grove of eastern hemlock, which was also not indigenous to the Garden.

In 1912, a small building was constructed in the Garden to serve as a combination tool shed and Curator’s office (see photo). Butler’s letter in 1912 describing the status of the Garden exalts that a “cause for congratulation is the generous extension of the garden limits by the addition of an adjacent hillside and meadow. This greatly increases the value of the place by contributing a number of choice plants not indigenous within the former boundaries.”



Curator’s office/garden shed, 1935.

She also makes clear that much of her time is spent “exterminating pestilent weeds like poison ivy, Canada thistle, burdock, Lappula; grubbing out the excess of prickly ash and sumach [*sic*], clearing the ground from fallen branches; and protecting the property from marauders.”

During Butler’s tenure as Curator, thousands of plants were added to the Garden each year. Working toward her goal of acquiring representative flora from across Minnesota, hundreds of species not indigenous to the Garden were added and so were some of her favorite species from Maine and Canada. During this era of gardening, native plant nurseries were exceedingly rare. It was no small undertaking to increase the Garden’s plant collections. Plants were dug up in the wild and most likely transported to the Garden by rail and streetcar. From the streetcar stop on Glenwood Ave, the plants were carried or rolled to the Garden’s gate before transplanting. The Garden log kept by Butler identifies many of the original locations for the transplants.

While common weeds were regularly eradicated, at least one species considered an invasive weed today was purposely planted in the Garden. Butler’s annual letter of 1912 reveals that “the pretty purple loosestrife (*lythrum alatum*) is a desirable adjunct” for the Garden. In fact, during the early 1920’s more than 700 plants of purple loosestrife were installed on the shoreline of Birch Pond located adjacent to the Garden. *NOTE: In the late 1990s purple loosestrife beetles were released at Birch Pond and successfully controlled the invasive plants.

At least one invasive species in the Garden was the result of a shipping error. In 1913 a South Carolina nursery sent the wrong plant glossy buckthorn, *Rhamnus frangula* (now *Frangula alnus*) instead of *Rhamnus alnifolia*. By 1922 Butler noted the plant's invasive qualities as it ran rampant over previously open hillsides and shaded out some native species.



Butler saw that one of the roles of the Garden was as a teaching tool, "Visitors find the garden helpful in suggestions, being there enabled to note, in a natural environment, the habitat, size, and form of our native plants; the color, succession, and other characters of flowers and fruits; and thus to decide for themselves what is

appropriate for the ornamentation of their homes; and in gratifying their individual tastes, to raise the standard of public taste, and to break down the wearying monotony too often seen in cultivated grounds."

Butler's plant records of 1914 show that the "garden contains, excluding liverworts, mosses, fungi, and algae; 774 species of plants, 326 of which are indige-

1925

A tornado uprooted most of the Wildflower Garden's mature tamaracks. This drastically altered the bog's habitat by opening up the canopy and allowing more sunlight to penetrate to the ground plane.

nous, distributed among 66 trees, 101 shrubs, and 607 herbs."

Throughout the years the Garden boundaries were somewhat fluid; even unfenced portions of Greenwood Park were considered part of Garden. No

maps survived that may have recorded the Garden's boundaries as they grew and shrunk.

As the Garden's first Curator and one of its principal founders, Butler saw a need for a place in the city where native plants could be protected, cared for, amassed and studied. She wrote that she envisioned a wild botanic garden that would serve "as a depot of supplies for the schools; as a resort for the lovers of wild nature; and to afford an opportunity to study botanical problems at first hand." One of her main goals was to transplant specimens of each native plant species from across the state of Minnesota to the Garden so that visitors and students could see "representatives of the flora of our state" in a single location.

A SAMPLING OF PLANT COLLECTION SITES AS LISTED IN ELOISE BUTLER'S GARDEN LOG

Minneapolis Parks

Minnehaha Park, Twin Lakes, Bassett's Creek, meadow on golf links, Quaking Bog,

In town collection

Brownie's Pond, cow pasture near Quaking Bog, meadow off of 6th Ave S, woods off of Superior Blvd., a field off of Xerxes Ave, east river bank near Franklin Ave Bridge, meadow off of Luce Line RR, Fort Snelling, and Battle Creek in St. Paul

Throughout Minnesota

West Concord, Sullivan Lake near Hillman, vicinity of Eden Prairie, Girl Scouts' camp off Dan Patch Line, Medicine Lake, Echo Lake, White Bear, Minnesota River bottom, River-view Heights, Northome, Cambridge, Lake of the Woods, Bryan, vicinity of St. Francis, Lake Kabekona, Grand Marais, Coon Lake, vicinity of Anoka, Bemidji, Minnetonka, big bog near Clear Springs, Jefferson Highway, Fridley, Lake Independence

And nearby states

North Dakota: Grand Forks
Iowa: Maquokata, Denison, and Graettinger
Wisconsin: Taylor's Falls, Lake Geneva, and Solon Springs

Unlike other botanical gardens, which tended to create formal collections of plants in unnatural groupings, Butler felt it essential to maintain and foster the natural characteristics of the land that became the Garden. “A paramount idea” Butler noted, “is to perpetuate in the Wildflower Garden its primeval wilderness.”

While working in the Garden on April 10, 1933 Butler suffered an apparent heart attack. It’s not clear if the “boys” helped her get home, but Butler passed away at her lodgings on Xerxes Ave. She was 81.

NOTE: an extensive history of Eloise Butler can be found in Martha Hellander’s book, *The Wild Gardener: The Life and Selected Writings of Eloise Butler*.



April 19, 1933

Excerpts from a letter to the Board of Park Commissioners from Theodore Wirth upon the death of Eloise Butler on April 10, 1933

“Miss Butler had faithfully, efficiently, and lovingly devoted her labor and knowledge of plants to the preserve, in the preservation and enlargement of the native plant life, ever since the garden was first established in 1907 . . .

“. . . and ever since that time until the ripe age of 81 years, Miss Butler has most devotedly and kindly rendered valuable service to the garden and information to large numbers of botany students and friends of nature in general. For a full quarter of a century, her useful life has been spent in a labor of love – not only in the preservation and protection of our native trees and flora, but in the introduction of plants native to other parts of our state and country.

“Every plant in her garden, large and small, was her living child, upon whom she bestowed her devotion and care – and her love went to the birds and all other members of the Animal Kingdom who were inhabitants of and attracted to the peaceful, beautifully wooded glen in which she studiously and untiringly labored for her beloved beings of Dame Nature. I say “be-loved” advisedly, for she did not shrink from manual labor in order to protect her treasures from inexperienced or unthinking hands or feet of visitors or willing helpers. Hers was a life of happiness in a kingdom all of her own, and her spirit has not departed from those grounds which have been so fittingly named for her, and which should for all time in the future be devoted to the purpose for which they were dedicated at her wish and that of her co-workers in nature study.”

Martha Crone, Curator 1933- 1958

“Wild flowers are my life work and they are important. Everything was wild once.”

—Martha Crone

While accounts vary, Martha Crone began visiting the Garden and Eloise Butler somewhere between 1918 and 1920. Crone was in her early 20s and eager to learn about native plants. Butler was taken in by Crone’s uneducated enthusiasm for wild plants and came to rely on her help transplanting, plant hunting in greater Minnesota, and heeling in the many plants shipped from Butler’s vacation trips home to Maine. Crone also accompanied Butler on the many Garden tours she provided to students and the public. She literally served as Butler’s guard, following the tour stragglers to make sure they did not pick



the flowers. Besides becoming great friends, Crone worked [volunteered] alongside her until Butler’s death in 1933.

Within a week of Butler’s death, Superintendent Wirth noted that the Garden needed “proper care and attention, if the labors of its late Curator, Miss Eloise Butler,

are not to be lost. The work can only be performed by some person with the necessary knowledge of plants and the essential training in their preservation.” Wirth recommended Martha Crone for the Curator position, stating that “Mrs. Crone seems best qualified to carry on Miss Butler’s work.” In his letter to the Board, Wirth also stated that “Mrs. Crone is also recommended by close friends of Eloise Butler, who are aware of the professional and scientific relations and friendship that existed between the two plant lovers.” The Board endorsed these recommendations and Martha was hired to work thru October with a monthly salary of \$60.

The first few years that Crone served as Curator, the Garden endured an extended multi-year drought. The Board of Park Commissioners 1934 Annual Report states that as a result of the drought, the “entire supply of Showy Orchids, Shooting Star, and some varieties of ferns were wiped out.”

Clinton Odell, a former botany student of Eloise Butler’s, developed a keen interest in the Garden after Crone became Curator. At that time Odell served as president of the Burma-Vita Company (the makers of Burma-Shave with their ubiquitous signs) which was located in the Bryn Mawr neighborhood and just blocks from the Garden. Odell preferred wildflowers to golf and spent many of his lunch hours walking through the Garden as well as helping Crone remove weeds and repair trails. Odell was especially passionate about eliminating the rampant jewelweed which he felt was destroying Butler’s plantings.

Succumbing to the relentless march of weeds that were smothering Butler’s plantings, portions of the Garden were abandoned in 1938 including Lady’s Slipper Path and the area that at the time was known as Mallard Pool (this is not the pool of water within the Garden’s fence today). By reducing the boundaries of the Garden, the remaining portions could receive more intensive maintenance.

Odell was supportive of Butler’s goal to have every species of Minnesota flora represented within the Garden. To help Crone achieve that goal, in 1944 Odell offered the Park Board \$3000 to expand the Garden to include two acres of upland hills [the prairie today]. The funds were used to clear sumac, underbrush and tress, and to fence the area for “open field and hilltop flowers.” At the same time, a northern swampy section of the Garden was abandoned.

For many years Odell annually contributed funds to the Park Board to hire two men to work full time for Crone during the gardening season. The addition of two workers made a huge difference. Suddenly, the number of plants added to the Garden dramatically increased from several hundred a year to several thousand per year.

Crone also had a stated goal of trying to grow flora from across the United States from the same latitude as the Garden. And as a gardener she was fervently committed to creating the most beautiful Garden possible. Taken together, this led Crone to experiment with flowering species from warmer latitudes such as azaleas, rhododendrons, Oconee bells, and redbuds. She also experimented with tree species from various climates to test their cold hardiness. This service to home gardeners was ended in 1958, when the University of Minnesota took over that role with the opening of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chanhassen.

In 1946 “a new item of interest added to the garden is a series of pools wherein are planted water lilies, pickerel weed, lotus lily and water crowfoot. These pools are situated along the swamp trail where an intimate view of them may be had when in bloom. The undertaking in establishing the garden was a real challenge, inspiring a great determination to succeed, for in the cultivation of wild plants, many

MONARCH

In 1940 the Garden lost one its landmarks; the magnificent 700+ year old white oak known as Monarch. Eloise had earlier tried to save the tree by having its’ hollow core filled with concrete, a common forestry practice in the early 1900’s. By 1940 Monarch apparently threatened the safety of Garden visitors so was removed.

problems are met, some of which respond satisfactorily, while others require considerable patience and intelligent care in handling. To offset the years of drought, a steady supply of water is most essential. This was realized and a water system installed in 1947 connecting with the main on Chestnut and Xerxes Avenue North.”

Ken Avery began working with Crone in 1954. In 1958 it was noted in the Fringed Gentian newsletter that the city skyline and the Kenwood water tower were visible from the prairie’s hill top. A bench was placed there for Garden visitors to enjoy the scenery. In 1958 a new partnership developed for the improvement

of the Garden. The Minnetonka Garden Club and the Little Minnetonka Garden Club sponsored the planting of Fern Hill, now known as the Fern Glen.

Crone retired as the Garden’s Curator in 1958. Her last annual report to Superintendent Doell and the Board of Park Commissioners notes that during the previous 12 years, 40,999 plants were added to the Garden. She also acknowledges the contributions of the Minnetonka Garden Club, the Friends, and Clinton Odell. Crone closed her letter with a wish, “May this beautifully situated garden always be sponsored and protected for future generations to enjoy.”

Above all, Crone viewed the Garden as precisely that, a garden for wild flowers and other native plants. She did not attempt to restore the ecosystems of the garden to what they once were. Instead she enhanced the garden by creating diverse and dynamic displays of native plants in a naturalistic setting.

She wrote in her 1951 History of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, “Here is offered an opportunity to see and enjoy within a short time plants grouped together from all parts of Minnesota, as well as from distant states. Their cultural requirements vary; the conditions under which the given species thrive naturally in the wilds must be carefully imitated... Even if a plant lives and thrives, it must be remembered that the life of each individual plant is limited. The span of life for some is very short, others many years. It is therefore quite understandable why a constant replanting must be carried on year after year to maintain a sufficient supply of native plants for educational purposes, to preserve the indigenous flora, and to introduce flora from other regions for the benefit of students of botany and lovers of wild life... The garden is intended to stimulate an interest in, and an appreciation of, our wild flowers, which is a natural resource second to none in value and in beauty- a priceless heritage which should be handed down for enjoyment.”

NOTE: More detailed information about Martha Crone and her work in the Garden as well as with the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden can be found at www.friendsofeloisebutler.org

Ken Avery, Head Gardener 1959-1987

“We have [plant] beds, of course, but they don’t look like beds. And we can’t go moving around plants just so they look nice. Wild plants have an integrity that we must respect.”

–Ken Avery

When Martha Crone retired as Curator in 1958 so did the title and Ken Avery was hired as the Gardener at the Garden. In 1980, when Avery was looking back on his career, he wrote that he made a couple major decisions when he took over primary care of the Garden in 1959. The first decision was the result of the University of Minnesota’s opening the new Arboretum in Chanhassen. This meant there was no longer a need to invest time and energy “testing the hardiness of exotic plants” at the Garden. The second decision was to “concentrate on reintroducing the plants that had once grown in the area and to a lesser extent to attempt to grow all the plants native to Minnesota.” His last decision was to try and “institutionalize the Garden — that is to remove the Curator’s personality as an important element in its makeup.”

Avery had worked for Crone since 1954 so he knew the Garden extremely well. He also understood Martha’s vision for the Garden as well as how to care for the plant collections. As for the Garden itself, in the late 1950’s the plantings by Crone were still in good shape. The wetland area of the Garden still had three separate pools which were refilled with water each season by moving around a garden hose. Avery and garden laborer Edward Bruckelmeyer dug channels between the pools so they didn’t have to drag around the garden hose. The pools regularly silted in so every few years Bruckelmeyer and Avery would dredge them out to about two feet deep and put the “spoils” back on the adjacent pool edges to once again seep back in.

Maintaining the Garden was still predicated on the concept that “In our Wild Garden the ideal is that it appear that the present viewer is the first person to see the area. That is, we try to weed in such a way that it doesn’t appear that we did so but that the most desirable plants just happened to grow where we wanted them to”.

During the 1960s the dirt paths were first wood chipped with chips from the Forestry division. Garden care practices that one would not normally associate with a natural area were still commonly used in the Garden. Avery was actively using “leaf coverings” to keep down weeds and reduce erosion on slopes. Hay was even placed over prairie plantings because “exposure to the winter sun is disastrous.” Plant species lost to severe winters like trilliums were readily replaced. Within various issues of *The Fringed Gentian*, Avery makes frequent mention of propagating plants through seed and division but no descriptions could be found on the species or volume of plants produced.

Pit toilets were replaced with chemical toilets in 1961 which was a boon to ground water quality and general sanitation. The Garden’s water lines were extended in 1963. This may have facilitated the decision in 1965 to stop mowing the prairie each spring and to instead use fire. Avery decided to try burning because he had read that



is was “an effective method of preventing the encroachment of trees and shrubs and if it does this for us it would be preferable to the use of chemicals or physically removing these weeds”.

Also in the 1960s, it was repeatedly noted in *The Fringed Gentian* that “experiments with Rhododendrons and Azaleas” had proved successful. And that in general, “plants native elsewhere will prosper here,” including dwarf and yellow trillium. Advice was provided to home gardeners on how to protect non-native plants from winter damage in their yards.

During the 1960s the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden provided an annual \$500 donation to the Board of Park Commissioners for Garden maintenance. This was most likely a continuation of the tradition Clinton Odell started in the 1950s by donating funds to cover costs for additional garden labor. Neither Park Board Annual Reports nor Fringed Gentians newsletters record specifically how the funds were spent.

It should be noted that Martha Crone remained active with the Garden by continuing her role as the editor of the Fringed Gentian. Her passion for rescuing plants can be seen by the frequent publication of pleas to salvage native plants from construction sites, “as urban development envelopes these bits of

BIRCH POND

Letter from Avery to Superintendent Robert Ruhe

March 4, 1966

“I suggest serious thought be given to poisoning little Birch Pond to remove the rough fish living there. Mrs. Crone . . . told me that 10 or so years ago the little lake was crystal clear and many water lilies grew there. She was of the opinion that the goldfish and carp that were introduced into the lake grubbed all the vegetation from the bottom and stirred it into the mud hole it has been for as long as I can remember.”

No records show such action was taken. And today the pond does have water lilies.

it seems he was less inclined to pursue this path of plant acquisition. However, orchids and similar native plants were donated to the Garden by local residents.

In 1964, Avery developed a proposal to declare the 40 acres surrounding the Garden as under the care of Garden staff. His goal was to manage the entire area to benefit the Garden. The Friends brought Avery’s proposal to the Board of Park Commissioners and in August 1964 the Board declared the area surrounding the Garden a native conservatory. Avery noted in his correspondence to Superintendent Moore that he was excited about managing the area as a single integrated unit and felt that the “chief value of this area was for the study and appreciation of nature.” Avery’s expectation was that the existing maintenance and forestry staff would take direction from him to manage the area’s natural resources.

While the Board of Park Commissioners did affirm Avery’s proposal, no shift in supervisory duties or reassignment of staff occurred. He continued to hope that this proposal would come to fruition. Years later when David Fisher was Director of Operations, Avery again submitted a proposal requesting that “the Curator be given complete authority over the area.” This did not happen.

In 1969, the Garden was renamed The Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary. The name change served as acknowledgement of the many resident and migratory birds found within the Garden and greater Theodore Wirth Park.

A major addition to the Garden began in 1969 with the construction of the Martha Crone Visitor Shelter which was funded through donations from the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden and built by Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board trades. The main purpose of the Visitor Shelter was to provide visitors with additional educational opportunities and protection from the weather. The building replaced the Curator’s decrepit shack which lacked running water, heat or insulation, and had been built in 1912 when Eloise Butler was Curator. The new building was designed by H.H. Livingston and opened in 1970.

Loss of Garden Labor

Up until 1970, Avery was assigned two full time workers each season to help care for the Garden and keep the gates open on weekends. Workers included Sam Baker, Edward Bruckelmyer, and Richard Wick. Written records could not be found

GROW YOUR OWN BOG

When Avery first started working in the Garden in the 1950s, he experimented with growing a “little sphagnum bog” in the wetland area. His first attempts failed but he later hit upon a new idea, “I made a raft upon which I could grow an artificial bog. I did this by taking throw-away beer bottles which were found in the park and pushing their tops through chicken wire. I then placed sphagnum moss on it [and] waited to see if it would grow under these circumstances. In a couple years, I had a little island with quite a luxuriant growth of moss on it.”

With this success, Avery was ready to build a bigger bog raft. However, the brewery had stopped making the bottles he had first used. In 1978 he found an alternate base – wine bottles. This required a different strategy, “instead of thrusting the tops through the chicken wire, I tie them beneath it like logs . . . Richard Wick and I went over to the dying bog in the park for sphagnum and put in on the raft and set it in the pool. . . The next time you go through the GARDEN you may notice the two little islands in our pool. The one in front looks awful, but don’t look on it as an eyesore. In a few years it will look as luxuriant as that smaller island behind it.”

Fringed Gentian, Summer Issue, 1978

that explained why there was reduction in labor. Potential explanations include the recession of the 1970s, reassignment of workers to other parks, retirements, or maybe donations were dedicated to infrastructure needs.

Whatever the cause, the loss of these laborers had an impact on the maintenance of the Garden’s plant collections. Several mass plantings gradually died out. Other collections nurtured by Martha Crone, such as lupines and hepaticas diminished as well.

The loss of consistent labor may have been the catalyst for Avery to adopt the philosophy of “nature knows best” – which freed him from trying to maintain a 13 acre garden with only a third of the previous manpower. Avery writes of the Garden’s

prime as being prior to 1970 when he had laborers and before Dutch elm disease wiped out the tree canopy.

Dutch elm disease had a devastating effect on the Garden. In less than ten years during the 1970s almost the entire woodland canopy - 175 mature elms – succumbed to the disease. The loss of these trees meant the Garden was sunnier, drier and hotter. Collections of spring ephemerals suffered, and some woodland species even disappeared.

In an interview with the Minneapolis Tribune in the mid-1970s, Avery lamented that the Garden “used to be just beautiful. It does not compare with what it was. It has to go back to what it used to be; [now] it’s a highly disturbed area. It’s a tragedy in many ways. I go into mourning over it. The flowers are not as nice as they used to be. But by the same token, if a person is interested in nature, he has to be interested in what is happening. It’s an experiment [removal of the tree canopy] I wouldn’t have the nerve to conduct.” The elms were replaced with plantings of swamp oak, butternut, balsam fir and black ash.

The newspaper article went on to describe how bittersweet nightshade, boxelder and groundnut had moved into the woodlands of the Garden. Blackberries and raspberries were problematic. And welted thistles, common in disturbed sites such as abandoned fields, were also starting to appear. According to Avery, “We didn’t have one [welled thistle], five years ago. They’re one of the things that are coming in since the trees are gone.”

Avery’s management philosophy is captured in his quote that “the more you control something, the more it upsets the balance of nature and the more you have to control something else.” This viewpoint may help explain the slow creep of invasive species into the Garden during the early 1980s.

When Avery retired in 1986, botanist Barbara Delaney conducted a plant survey of the Garden. She identified 492 species.

NOTE: More detailed information about Ken Avery can be found at www.friendsofeloisebutler.org

Mary Maguire Lerman

Although she was not the gardener or the curator assigned to the Garden, Mary Maguire Lerman had a major impact on the site. Hired as the Environmental Coordinator of Horticulture Programs in 1976, her first day of work included a tour of the Garden led by Gordon Morrison, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board's first Environmentalist. Morrison encouraged Lerman to make suggestions to improve the site and to work with the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden to create an educational guidebook. Lerman took this encouragement to heart, and over the next 33 years, she worked to improve the Garden.

Lerman worked with Avery to locate and order tamaracks and other wetland native bareroot woody plants for installation. At that time, neither Out Back Nursery nor Landscape Alternatives had opened, so native plants had to be obtained from small in and out of state nurseries.

The 1977 Spring issue of the *Fringed Gentian* notes that Lerman supported the aim to “acquire every possible herbaceous, if not woody, material native to Minnesota so people can go to the Garden and see an actual collection of Minnesota materials.” She was also interested in developing the Garden's prairie area and expanding its collection of cacti, which are native to southwestern Minnesota.

Providing people with opportunities to learn about the Garden was a priority for Lerman. She gave regular lecture slide shows (including one on poisonous plants) and led hikes of the Garden and the Quaking Bog. Together, Lerman and the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden created an educational guidebook for the Garden. Several versions of the guidebook were published for visitors' education. The Prudential Insurance Company, whose offices were located on the west side of Brownie Lake, donated the printing.

Lerman's commitment to increasing the public's access to the Garden led to a change in hours as well as staffing. Prior to 1984, the Garden was only open from 7am to 3:30pm, standard working hours for the Minneapolis Park & Recreation gardeners. Lerman convinced administration that the Garden should be open longer hours in order to better serve the public. The

new garden hours would be 7am to dusk, or one-half hour before sunset. These extended hours allowed for the average working citizen to come to the garden on weekday and weekend evenings. To staff the Garden, Lerman interviewed and hired a number



of individuals, all having educational background with an environmental focus. She required that they provide program activities for garden visitors – and thus began the naturalist programs. Family and youth programs were part of the focus.

Lerman was also responsible for changing the Garden's main roadway access to a one way. Prior to the change, speeding on this roadway occurred during rush hours as drivers tried to avoid the backup of traffic at Glenwood Avenue. The roadway change eliminated speeding hazards and accidents for visitors to the Garden.

Cary George, Gardener 1987-2004

“So, I think, the true ‘State of the Garden’ should be examined not by plant surveys, programming, and architectural adornments, but by asking the question, ‘Is the primary purpose of the Garden—to comprehend the grace of nature— still valid?’”

—Cary George

Cary George inherited a garden that was in recovery mode, and at the same time, under attack by invasive species. George had worked with Ken Avery for two seasons, part-time, before he took on the role of Head Gardener upon Ken Avery’s retirement. The Garden had suffered big losses with the removal of 175 diseased, mature elm trees in the 1970s. A plan to replant the lost canopy was not created or implemented, and so trees that naturally regenerated in the area were the ones that were allowed to grow into the next generation of canopy trees. Black walnut, boxelder and green ash became prevalent.

George saw the damage to the native plant collections caused by invasive species, in particular buckthorn. Buckthorn was an issue in all areas of the Garden when George started. He waged a continuous battle to keep the populations of both glossy buckthorn and European buckthorn in check. In the upland garden area both leafy spurge and Grecian foxglove were problematic non-native plant species. Garlic mustard started to become a problem in the early 1990s. As a reproducing population of this invasive became established in greater Theodore Wirth Park, it quickly moved throughout the Garden. In the 1990s despite his consistent efforts to keep invasive species at bay, several species proliferated in the Garden. Invasive plant seeds were introduced by wind and wildlife from greater Theodore Wirth Park and the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The devastating impacts of invasive species were just being realized by the community at large and few resources were dedicated to removal efforts. Portions of the Garden’s native plant collections were compromised by the invaders. In spite of the presence of invasive species, a few uncommon plants survived in greater Theodore Wirth Park and were found by George including twayblades and kitten tails.

George’s focus on keeping the simplicity and natural beauty of the Garden intact was paramount to his management style. As he stated, “Much like the Japanese philosophy of Wabi-Sabi, the beauty of the Wildflower Garden is found in the imperfect, incomplete, and impermanent. Indeed, it is just this discovery of truth in the inconspicuous that comforts us with the calculus of nature that surpasses mathematics and man. At a time when ‘Open Space’ means tot lots, paved bike trails, crushed aggregate softball fields and beach parking lots, when wetland restoration is a filtering system for urban runoff, let us begin again at the Garden.”

Over the years he made many subtle, but significant, changes to fence and trail locations in an effort to give the Garden more depth of field and to remove visual barriers from the view shed of visitors. George contributed to the development and installation of the self-guided tour program, which included the installation of 49 station posts throughout the Garden and the development of an associated guidebook highlighting plants found near each post.

George felt that one of the guiding management goals was to work towards replicating a pre-settlement experience. As he stated “what would it be like if you walked around these areas pre-development?” To this end he thought that it was important to bring in as many indigenous (to the site) native plant species as possible because many had been lost throughout the years.



He was also consistently concerned that the simple and yet very particular aesthetic of the Garden could be impacted by management practices and decisions not in keeping with this look and approach. He spoke to trying to keep out any sort of “Disneyland falseness” but rather to keep the experience intimate and natural for visitors. As head gardener he was very aware of the fact that it was essential to “maintain what you have; don’t go backwards” and he worked to that end during his 17 years at the Wildflower Garden. Although, for several seasons early in his career, he had the assistance of a fellow gardener to aid him, part-time, in the care of the Garden’s plant collections in the early spring and fall months, George eventually was left to do all maintenance work on his own.

George oversaw the addition of 1-acre to the upland garden and managed the resulting transformation while adding diversity to the plants collections in that section of the Garden. The physical boundaries of the Garden had expanded and contracted throughout the years and with this final 1-acre addition, the Garden reached 15-acres. Large swaths of underbrush were removed to make way for the prairie plantings in this new section of the Garden under George’s direction.

George was quite philosophical when it came to matters regarding the Garden’s importance and care. As he stated in an article that he wrote for the Fringed Gentian publication, “My contention is that more so than ever, a sanctuary that protects all life, both human and non-human, should be a touchstone for living our daily lives, not just a quaint natural history lesson.”

Ecologically, George felt that the Garden had a unique standing in the community. “The Garden is more than a remnant of what Wirth Park used to be. It is different geographically. It also has a transcendental spirit. Has Wirth Park been lost to invasive plants and a labyrinth of eroded trails . . . ? Maybe, but I trust the Garden. Yes, it’s being squeezed by a consumer-oriented world, but in the end there will always be the Garden. The Garden is non-materialistic. It’s a humble, modest place, unaffected by affluence.”

There were several major obstacles that were notable during his tenure. The non-native species invasions, previously mentioned, and the resulting decline in plant community health was a significant one. Also impacting the Garden’s plant collections were the boom and bust rainfall cycles that occurred throughout the years that he was gardener. George was also the first gardener who dealt with a disease which was making its presence known in Theodore Wirth Park, Oak Wilt.

Upon Cary George’s retirement in 2004, the gardener position was revised. The goal was to have the new Garden Curator oversee all aspects of the Garden including gardening, environmental education programming, staff, outreach, volunteer programs, planning and plant collection development.

NOTE: More detailed information about Cary George can be found at www.friendsofeloisebutler.org