

From the Archives of the Minneapolis Park Board

OUR NATIVE PLANT RESERVE

Glenwood Park, Minneapolis, Minn.
Now called "Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden"

By Mrs. John H. Jepson

The idea of this institution of Minneapolis arose from the difficulties experienced by the teachers of botany in familiarizing their students with living plants in their natural surroundings. Long journeys were made with their classes only to find but few widely scattered plants, that perhaps by the next season were exterminated by the needs of a rapidly growing city. Thereupon, the plan was gradually evolved of obtaining, before it was too late, a plot of land that contained, or would support, our choicest wild plants; and to introduce, and by all persuasive means, as preferred variations of soil, light, and moisture, to establish therein as much as possible of the entire flora of Minnesota. To secure protection and permanency, it was also decided that the land should be owned by the city and under park management. An ideal spot, fulfilling all requirements, was found in Glenwood Park, the largest pleasure ground in Minneapolis, and of great natural beauty, interspersed, as it is, with hills that afford far-reaching views and containing three ponds of fair extent.

The Park Commissioners responded with ready appreciation to the wishes of the teachers, and granted them the chosen tract, which then comprised about three acres. From time to time more than twenty acres, including outlying marshes, have been added.

Early in April, 1907, the Wild Botanic Garden was installed without any ceremony except by taking a census of the indigenous flora, and by introducing at once, among many others, such distinctive plants as wahoo, bird's-foot violet, early blue phlox, spring beauty, and hepatica.

The core of the reserve is a small tamarack swamp, a sine qua non of wild garden. Here flourish naturally plants most highly esteemed by botanists; orchids of several species, sundew, pitcher plants, *Limnium*, fringed gentians, Turk's-cap lily, and rare mosses and fungi. The surrounding hillslopes, more or less wooded, support many other desirable plants that require different degrees of light and moisture.

On a knoll above the swamp and near the south entrance of the reserve, a small convenient office and tool house has been erected for the use of the curator. Two sides of this building have been recently embellished by a sort of pergola-trellis, which, when covered with vines, is expected to enhance the picturesqueness of the place. Near the office a large boulder has been set and chiseled out for a bird bath, which is often thronged by transients and steadily patronized by birds that nest in the garden. The reserve has become a bird as well as a wild flower sanctuary. Several birds that are doomed to extinction, if not protected, have been noted within the precincts, as the crested wood duck, the great and the smaller bittern, the small green heron, Virginia rail, ruffed grouse, bob white, and woodcock.

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The only other artificial feature of the garden is a broad tarvia walk that cuts through the northern portion and affords convenient access to the park boulevard. On this walk is a dam that forms a small pool in a natural depression and receives the overflow from the swamp. This is a favorite sketching point for artists; but the pool is too shady for water lilies, so it is proposed to form at some time a pond for aquatics by an excavation in an open meadow where two small streams combine that flow from springs in the garden.

Until 1911, the garden was cared for by the teachers of botany as a labor of love and without compensation. Then, on the retirement of one of the botany teachers from school, she was made a salaried curator of the garden, a position which she still occupies. But from the very first, systematic care has been given to the place. A complete record has been kept of the plants and an indexed card-catalogue maintained. The chief duties of the curator besides writing the records, are keeping the place in order, receiving and conducting visitors through the grounds, and planting.

Several hundreds of plants are set out each season. Some of them are newcomers; others swell the number of attractive species already present, native or introduced, or replace those that have dwindled out. The ideal aimed at is to maintain a natural wilderness. So no set beds are permitted, but the plants are fitted as closely as possible to their native habitat, be it prairie, bog, or woodland, and are allowed to grow as they will, without any check except their own well-being, and so long as they do not infringe too much upon the right of their companions. They are not watered after they become well-rooted, and no fertilizer is used except decayed leaves, which are allowed to lie as they fall, unless they form deep windrows. By reason of the varied conditions of the reserve most plantings are successful. Lime and sand are lacking in the soil and have to be imported for such exacting species as trailing arbutus and sweet fern (*Comptonia*). Specimens for planting are dug up on wild land, or obtained by exchange, by purchase, or from the park nurseries.

Certain weeds are taboo in the garden, mainly naturalized plants like the all-pervading dandelion and Canada thistle that are too fierce competitors in the "struggle for existence"; likewise several disagreeable "stick-tights", like burdock and beggars' ticks, that usurp the place of more amiable and lovely denizens.

Exclusive of mosses, algae, and fungi, the garden now contains over a thousand species, more than half of which have been introduced. Students and lovers of nature may see in a few hours plants grouped together in a comparatively small area, that they might fail to find in traversing for many days the length and breadth of the state.

The largest and oldest white oak in Minneapolis is "king of the garden". It is estimated that it is at least 700 years old.