

THE FRINGED GENTIAN™

Summer 2026

Vol 74-2



Celebrating the 175th Birthday of Eloise Butler

Celebrating 175 years! by President Jennifer Olson

2026 is the 175th anniversary of Eloise Butler's birth! She was born August 3, 1851 in Appleton, Maine. Her chief childhood amusement was roaming the woods near the Butlers' farm. Her aunt taught "Elo" and her sister Cora to know the plants.

Her teacher at Eastern State Normal School, Helen Coffin, had studied under Louis Agassiz, marine biologist at Harvard, and was an early advocate of science education for women. Although no correspondence exists between Coffin and Eloise, it is likely that Coffin was influential in Eloise's focus on botany.

Eloise taught school briefly in Indiana and arrived in Minneapolis alone in 1874. She immediately found a position teaching 7th through 9th graders Latin and Greek, but by 1878 she was teaching high school botany.

In the 19th century, botanizing became a popular leisure activity – walking in nature, searching and identifying plants. Eloise botanized along the Mississippi River and near Minnehaha Park with groups of friends. She took University of Minnesota summer school classes and learned to use a microscope to study algae.



Eloise Butler, ca 1925, courtesy Minnesota Historical Society.

When the streetcar reached what is now Theodore Wirth Park, Eloise and her fellow Minneapolis female botany teachers (The Big Four) would botanize there. They petitioned the MPRB for a botanical garden, which included signatures from University President Northrup and two botany professors, Josephine Tilden and Fredric Butters, both of whom had been high school students of Eloise Butler.

Eloise Butler was passionate and knowledgeable about plants. She had a vision of a Garden to showcase native plants of Minnesota. We are the recipients of her vision and her dedication to creating this wonderful oasis that we share with thousands of visitors 119 years later.

Mark your calendars for Thursday, November 5, 2026 for a celebration

of Eloise Butler at the Bell Museum and an opportunity to visit the Eloise Butler Wildflower Florilegium! Tickets will be sold beginning in September on the Friends' website:

friendsofeloisebutler.org. ❖
Jennifer Olson



Eloise Butler as a young teacher, courtesy Grace Butler Smith.



The Normal School, Castine Maine, photo Martha Hellander.



Appleton Ridge today at Appleton Maine where the Butler farm was located, showing the hills, woods and lakes of Eloise Butler's childhood; photo Martha Hellander.

The Wildflower Garden is home to dozens of rare MN-native plant species!

by Garden Curator Susan Wilkins

At the heart of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden's mission is the deliberate and attentive stewardship of Minnesota's native plant species. Every day, Garden staff work to plant, monitor, manage, and protect rare native species, ensuring these important plants continue to thrive for generations to come.

Today, the Garden is home to more than 640 native plant species. While some have grown here naturally, most were thoughtfully introduced over the past 119 years to create one of the region's most significant collections of Minnesota native plants. Maintaining this living collection is an ongoing effort, with staff continuously caring for and expanding the abundance of plants and the diversity of plant species found throughout the Garden.

Among these native plants are 23 species listed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Remarkably, 21 of those species were introduced by Garden staff as part of dedicated conservation efforts. The collection also includes numerous rare and difficult-to-find plants that are not listed, including four native orchid species.

One of the Garden's most beloved plants is the showy lady's slipper, Minnesota's state flower. These striking native orchids bloom each June, drawing visitors from across the Twin Cities and beyond. Although showy lady's slippers originally grew in the Garden, the plants visitors see today have been added over time to help maintain a healthy and sustainable population.

The Garden is one of only two public locations in the Twin Cities where visitors can reliably view showy lady's slippers in bloom. The other is the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chaska.

Over the past two decades, I have had opportunities to lead efforts to rescue and relocate showy lady's slipper plants in partnership with the



Minnesota Department of Transportation and numerous conservation organizations and individuals.

In recent years, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum's Plant Conservation Program has also contributed dozens of showy lady's slippers through its Minnesota native orchid propagation program. A separate native orchid donation was also received last year. All of these recent additions have been carefully accessioned, planted, and monitored by the Garden's seasonal Natural Resources Specialist Nicholas Purcell. Please read the wonderful article written by Nicholas in this *Fringed Gentian*TM edition to learn more about this work.

These partnerships play an important role in preserving Minnesota's botanical richness and ensuring the long-term survival of this iconic species. We are deeply grateful to our conservation partners for their ongoing support and collaboration.

If you have never experienced showy lady's slippers in bloom or if you have visited every year for decades, plan a visit to the Garden in mid-June to see them this year. The flowers can be found along the boardwalk trail known as Lady Slipper Lane, where their vibrant pink and white blossoms create one of the Garden's most anticipated seasonal displays.

As Eloise Butler wrote with adoration: "*The showy lady slipper. . . is the crowning glory of the Preserve. It is endemic and has increased from year to year, so that there are now hundreds in large clumps making vistas of beauty through a marsh containing a few scattered tamaracks. Frequently a stalk bears two flowers and often three. . . Visitors are so enraptured with the display in my garden that they feel like falling on their knees to worship them. This *Cypripedium* is. . . considered by many the most beautiful flower in the world.*"

Follow @ebwgmpls on Facebook and Instagram for updates on bloom timing and other Garden news. ♦ Susan



Xiaoman Han with rescued showy lady slippers.
Photos this page - Mpls Park & Recreation Board.

Lady slipper rescue

A special gift to the Wildflower Garden
by Nicolas Purcell, Natural Resources Specialist at EBWG

Thanks to a generous donation made by Carol and Larry Wade, the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden is home to several new lady's slipper orchids. The Wades contacted Garden curator Susan Wilkins in early 2025 to inquire about gifting plants to the Garden. They had decided that they would be selling their house in spring of 2026, which would also mean leaving behind their extensive garden.

Uncertain about what fate their garden would face after the sale, they reached out to see if the Wildflower Garden could provide a refuge for some of their more treasured native plants, including showy lady's slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*), greater yellow lady's slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *pubescens*), and lesser yellow lady's slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *makasin*).

In Fall 2025, Susan and Nicholas Purcell, the Garden's Natural Specialist, traveled to the Wades' garden in Minnetonka to dig up the orchids and bring them back to the Garden. There, they were warmly greeted by Carol and Larry and directed to the orchids, which were situated under a high

canopy of oak trees in a beautiful and wonderfully maintained garden. The orchids were carefully dug up and their roots given a preliminary rinse at the Wades' before being transported to the Wildflower Garden.

Back at the Garden, the roots of the lady's slippers were meticulously but gently washed of all soil and debris to prevent the introduction of any pests such as jumping worms into the Garden.



Photo above: EBWG naturalist Nicolas Purcell retrieving lady's slippers from the Wade garden. All photos courtesy MPRB.

The root systems of the orchids were rather shallow, but quite wide. The density of the root balls required the use of a wood skewer to remove all the non-plant material from the nooks and crannies. The fibrous roots themselves somewhat resembled the noodles in ramen and, to the nose of the Natural Resources Specialist, had an odor reminiscent of an animal pelt. After washing was complete, the lady's slippers were ready for planting.

The two showy lady's slippers donated by the Wades were planted near the others already existing in the Garden, by the gathering area of the boardwalk. Two of the greater yellow lady's-slippers were planted near the south end of



Violet Way on the east side of the trail, while the other was planted under the canopy of the large red oak with the three stones at its base on the east end of the upland area of the garden. The lesser yellow lady's-slippers were planted by the bench near Plum Point.

While time will tell how these new inhabitants will fare in the long run, so far the signs are encouraging. One of the two showy lady's slippers emerged this spring, and in early June, it was the first showy lady's slipper to bloom in the Garden, producing two flowers. All of the yellow lady's slippers sent up shoots and flowered in May. Among the two clumps along Violet Way, there were a total of fourteen flowers, while the clump near the three stones in the upland contributed nine beautiful blossoms. The lesser yellow lady's slippers in particular put on a lovely display. Garden staff counted approximately sixty

of their exquisite, diminutive flowers. At the time of planting, all of the orchids were accessioned into Hortis, the Garden's plant records database. Those entries were updated this spring to reflect the current status of the plants, and staff will continue to track and record the lady's slippers' progress there for, we hope, many years to come. ❖



Above: Artist rendering of the proposed Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden council ring. Drawing courtesy Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board.

Celebrate 175!

This summer, we celebrate a remarkable milestone: the 175th birthday of **Eloise Butler**, the pioneering botanist, teacher, and conservationist whose vision gave us the nation's first public wildflower garden.

For more than a century, visitors have found beauty, inspiration, learning, and connection in the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary. Now, as we honor Eloise's legacy, we have a **unique opportunity to invest in the Garden's future.**

This fall, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board will begin the first phase of a renovation of the Garden's entrance. A centerpiece of the project is a new **Council Ring**—a welcoming gathering space where visitors can connect with one another, participate in educational programs, and begin their Garden experience.

To help make this vision a reality, the Friends of the Wildflower Garden has launched a **Celebrate 175!** campaign.

Our goal is simple and meaningful: **raise \$175,000 in honor of Eloise's 175th birthday.**

We are excited to share that generous donors have already helped us secure \$100,000, leaving \$75,000 still to raise by **November 2026.** Your gift will help advance the Council Ring and front entrance project – phase one of a multi-year effort.

Every gift matters. Whether you give \$25, \$175, or \$5,000,

your support helps ensure that the Garden remains a place of beauty, discovery, and belonging for generations to come. Help us raise the remaining \$75,000 and make this milestone year one to remember.

As we celebrate Eloise Butler's 175th birthday, we invite you to be part of the Garden's next chapter. Together, we can ensure that this beloved sanctuary continues to inspire wonder, foster biodiversity, and connect people with nature for generations to come. ❖

To make a gift or learn more, visit <https://friendsofeloisebutler.org/pages/support.html> or scan the QR code.



If you have questions about the Friends' fundraising efforts or would like to help us reach new supporters, please contact Joelle Hoeft, chair of the Friends Fundraising Committee, at joellehoeft@gmail.com.

Wild Beauty

The Botanical Art of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden Florilegium

by Jennifer Olson

The word is from Latin *flos* (flower) and *legere* (to gather). Botanical art illustrations date back to the 15th century when books of herbals were printed describing culinary and medicinal uses of plants. In 1613, *Hortus Eystettensis*, an illustrated herbal of 367 copperplate engravings illustrating the Bishop's botanical garden in Eichstatt, was published by Basilius Besler (1593-1629), apothecary, botanist and etcher. Many wealthy landowners began hiring artists to create florilegia for a visual record of their garden plants.

Other famous florilegia include Joseph Banks' scientific expedition to the South Pacific on HMS *Endeavor* with Captain James Cook, 1768-1771. Seven hundred forty-three specimens were illustrated by Sydney Parkinson, also on board the *Endeavor*, and these illustrations were finally published in 35 volumes between 1980 and 1990. The University of Minnesota's Andersen Horticultural Library owns a copy of HM King Charles III's Highgrove Florilegium and his commissioned Transylvania Florilegium, 124 watercolors of the flora of meadows and uplands.

Marilyn Garber founded The Minnesota School of Botanical Art in 2001. Within ten years, she had identified gifted students to create a florilegium; but what location? A frequent visitor to the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, Marilyn "had a fondness for native plants and Eloise's own story". She chose the oldest public



Susan Wilkins, Marlyn Garber and Jennifer Olson at the 2024 MIA Florilegium exhibiton. Photo Jennifer Olson.

wildflower garden in the United States for her Florilegium. "I want this little jewel of a place to be remembered five hundred years from now." This became the third American Florilegium, following the Brooklyn Botanic Garden and the Filoli Florilegium in Woodside, California.

Susan Wilkins suggested 110 plants which represented the meadow, woodland, and wetland, and a few more that were important to Eloise Butler. The challenge was that no plants could be removed from the garden. Starting in 2011,

more than 50 artists adopted a plant and researched its botanical history. The illustration was to be scientifically accurate in a naturalistic style within its individual habitat. When the flower bloomed, the artist was there photographing and sketching it. If the bloom was missed or didn't produce pods the way it usually does, the work needed to wait a year. Marilyn painted the Bloodroot and

found a friend who pulled up their garden Bloodroot so she could observe and paint the red roots. The botanical art was created by the artist, then donated to the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and transferred to the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Archives.

Although some of the Florilegium paintings have been displayed in the past and most recently at MIA in 2024 and 2026, the final compendium of 111 watercolor illustrations created by the artists of the Minnesota School of Botanical Art will be at the Bell Museum from September 26, 2026 until January 3, 2027. You are welcome to attend a reception at the Bell honoring the artists on Wednesday, October 7, 2-3:30.

Congratulations to Marilyn Garber and the Florilegium Artists!
Jennifer Olson. ❖



Bloodroot by Marlyn Garber

Exhibition

September 26, 2026 - January 3, 2027

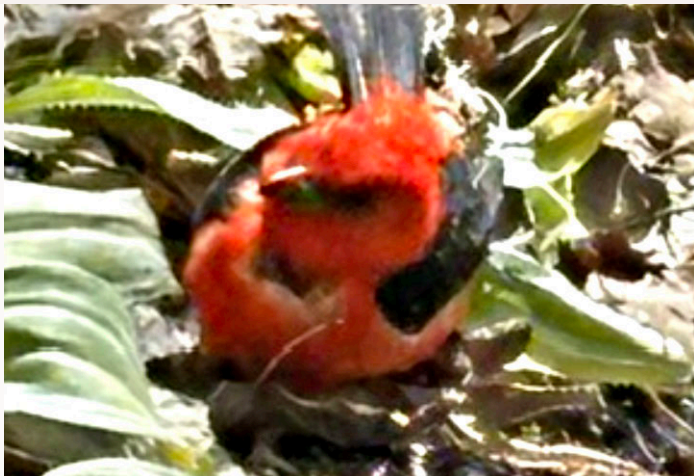
Bell Museum

2088 Larpenteur Avenue W
Saint Paul, MN 554113

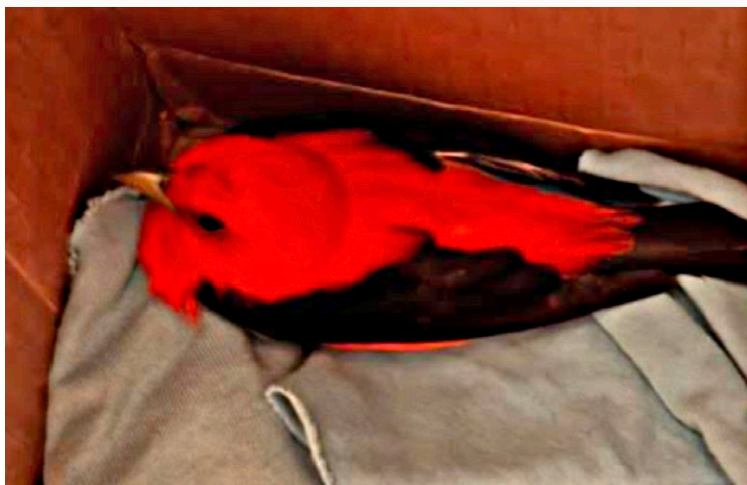
News & Notes

Injured Scarlet Tanager at the Garden 5/16/2026

by Jennifer Olson



A visitor reported there was an injured male Scarlet Tanager hopping around on Lady's Slipper Lane with an apparent left wing injury. While waiting for the naturalist to find a net and a box, it began to climb up a tree, probably instinct to avoid predators. Unfortunately, at twenty feet, it fell to the ground. It now had a gash on its chest but was able to move around. Lisset, the naturalist, came with a net and lifted it into the cardboard box with a soft cloth.



I drove my patient to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Roseville, where the bird was admitted. I needed to fill out the necessary paperwork and left him with the WRC. I emailed them three days later for an update. He had a laceration on his neck and a fractured right scapula. The break was severe as the bones were shattered and not repairable. This bird would not fly again – no more could be done.

How did this beautiful tanager get hurt? Wing injuries often come from hitting cars or windows or attacks by a predator. Was he chased by a hawk and escaped? Did he collide with a tree?

This is a useful website: <https://birdcollector.com/common-bird-injuries-how-to-prevent-them/>.

Story and photos by Jennifer Olson

Support form

Pay on website or mail with a check payable to:
Friends of the Wildflower Garden, P O Box 3793, Mpls MN 55403

✂

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For a complete list of donors please go the "Donor List" link on
our website "SUPPORT" page.



In an area that would be full of garlic mustard and little else if the volunteers of the Greater Eloise Stewards had not weeded it out, these pussytoes are thriving this past spring. This photo showcases the effects of the restoration work of GES over the past years in the oak savanna east and southeast of the Wildflower Garden fence. Photo - Jim Proctor.



The Fringed Gentian™

74 years - Dedicated to Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the interests of The Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary.

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Visit our website to see how you can support the Wildflower Garden: www.friendsofeloisebutler.org



This summer Eloise Butler is greeting visitors as they enter the Martha Crone Shelter. Photo by G D Bebeau