

The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden



Our Upland Garden: A Restored Prairie by Elaine Christenson

On December 8, 1992, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board granted approval for a small part of Wirth Park that lay outside the boundary of Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, to be added to the Garden's acreage. This increased the size of the Garden by about one acre. This is one Friends story of her involvement in this process.

One of my volunteer projects, with some help from Sallie Cole and Board Members of the Friends, was to sort through hundreds and hundreds of slides taken by Mrs. (Martha) Crone during her tenure as curator of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden. A slide taken in 1954 looking eastward from "lone oak hill" in the Upland Garden, was a view of a treeless rolling hill covered with only the fall grasses. Yet, by 1993 the view from the same hill had become obscured by overgrowth. The old Fruen Mill was completely occluded.

The view from the same hillside was one of sumac and small trees pressed against the fence line. I couldn't get the beautiful prairie view Mrs. Crone had photographed so many years ago out of my mind. On my walks around the outer perimeter of the Garden I found remnants of the grassy meadow, its size becoming smaller each year as plant growth took it over.

I met with Gardener Cary George and his predecessor, Ken Avery. We discussed expanding the Garden boundary - the pros and cons, gradually acceptance and enthusiasm for the project won. Cost for the new fence line was considerably lessened by the re-use of the old fence separating the Upland and Woodland Gardens - a fence whose purpose was no longer needed and now had become an eyesore.



Cary George and Elaine Christenson, 1993. Photo - Friends of the Wild Flower

Below: Showing a large part of the area added to the Garden. Around the oak tree at far left center are the three granite block seats presented by the Friends in 1995. The fence work was done by Able Fence Co, hired by the Friends for a net cost of \$3,695.



In the fall of 1993 the work began to remove sumac and trees. The following spring showed some stumps peaking through the snow and the beginning of a new and different look. Summer healed most wounds, as if all plants joined hands and danced in the new openness. No scars showed.

There will be much work to be done to make the optimum use of the new prairie addition. New trails will be made and prairie plants will be added to the ones that lived only underground. Take a walk through the Garden again. Be grateful for this special spot of history, its blessing of peace, resurrection, beauty and joyful surprises. Take time to look at the new dimension of the Garden. I think Eloise would approve. Secretly I call the new area of the Garden the "Cary-Laine" expansion.

Below: These photos show where the new acreage abuts the old part of the Upland Garden. In the first photo, the old boundary and trail passed near the young Oak left of center and well in front of the other oak at right center (where one of the new granite block seats is visible) and then the trail went behind the Spruce trees on the left. In the 2nd photo you see on the right side of the photo the trail coming from the front gate and then making a turn near station 39 (leftward in the photo) where it proceeds into the new area toward the far left side of the photo.



Below: The Upland Garden photographed by Martha Crone on Oct. 24, 1955. Note the chain link fence that marked the Garden boundary prior to the 1944 upland addition is still in place. The fence was removed over time and there was enough remaining to be used in 1993 to fence in a one acre addition to the Upland Garden.



Notes:

Cary George was Gardener from 1987 through 2003; Elaine was a regular volunteer at the Garden since 1985. She passed away on April 1, 1995.

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