

## Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden - Historical Bird Feeding Stations.

On Thanksgiving Day 1932, the first of several bird feeding stations were established in Glenwood Park, with one principal station near the grove of hemlocks at the Wild Flower Garden. The first was a simple tray tied between two trees and protected by a lattice roof of cattails. This was the work of a local birding enthusiast - Lulu May Aler and a birding friend (perhaps Charles Yelick). Miss Aler wrote "We put our suet on the proffered tray. Chickadees came at once, not daunted by eight onlookers. Nuthatch likewise. Everyone stopped and watched, amazed at little wild birds being so friendly and unafraid."<sup>(1)</sup> Another station was a platform for feeding pheasants. The principal station was on the north side of the path by the hemlocks that was referred to by Eloise Butler as the "tarvia path" that ran east/west through parts of Glenwood park and which also bisected the north and south parts of the Garden at that time. [Glenwood Park was renamed to Theodore Wirth Park in 1938] On the south side of this path was the southern enclosure of the Garden - containing the Woodland Garden space that we know today and on the north side of the path was the northern or "lower" enclosure that was a more open meadow of lady-slippers, birches and beginning in 1932- Eloise Butler's Mallard Pool. That northern part of the Garden was abandoned in 1944. [see article on Garden Pools.] The fact that it was near the hemlock grove is evidenced by Miss Lulu May Aler's correspondence with Eloise Butler.<sup>(1)</sup>

It cannot be precisely known from the photo where along this path the station was located. Instead we need the aerial photo from 1947 and Martha Crone's 1952 map, both showing the location, which in both of those years placed it outside the back gate of the Garden. The original simple tray was replaced several years later by a permanent roofed enclosure, shown in the photographs below.<sup>(1a)</sup> Other information confirms that Miss Aler filled bird feeders in the Wild Flower Garden prior to the 1932 development and was well acquainted with Miss Butler.<sup>(1c)</sup>



Both sides of the hemlock grove path and the tarvia path as it crossed the Garden's space had a fence, first erected by Eloise Butler in 1924 and then replaced in 1938/39. For details of this fencing arrangement see separate article.

**Photos:** The top photo at right shows the bird feeding station on the northern side of Eloise Butler's 1924 fences near the hemlock grove. The structure in the background is a storage shed. There is an access gate between the two. Photo by Lulu May Aler, 1936 in the Martha Crone Papers, MHS.

Miss Aler would walk to the park several times a week, if not daily, to maintain it. When Martha Crone, another avid birder, became Curator in 1933, Miss Aler would visit frequently and many times they would have lunch together.<sup>(2)</sup> Martha and Bill Crone would frequently return to the Garden after closing in those early years to attend to the birds, helping out Miss Aler. For example on October 20 Martha Crone wrote in her diary: "*went down in garden to meet Miss Aler and Mrs. Ure at 1:30 put up bird pan and filled bird bath, real cold but sat in office for awhile.*" Friends member Mr. J. S. Futcher knew Miss Aler and wrote this: Outside the back gate, fenced separately, was a large, open, old bird-feeding table. I became acquainted with the lady who for many years maintained that feeder, a Ms. Lulu May Aler. During the 1950-51 feeding season Ms. Aler told me she was getting too old to continue this volunteer task next season. Would I happen to know of anyone who could take over for her? Well, it just so happened that I did. There were four boys in the Minneapolis Bird Club who lived in the Homewood



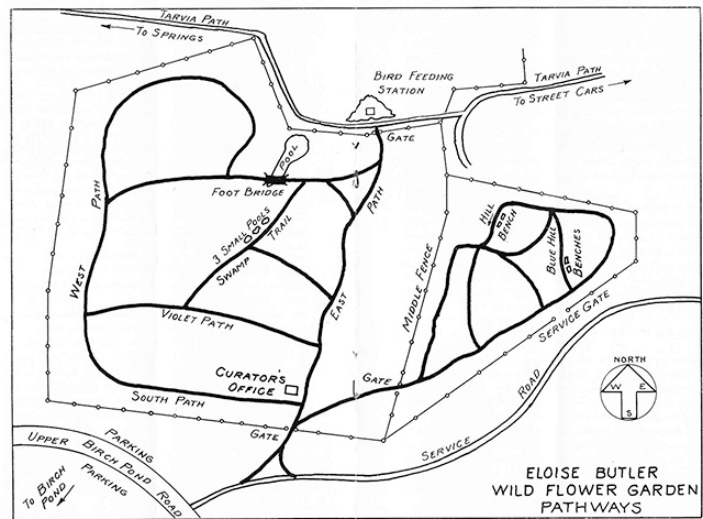
Detail of the Bird Feeding station in 1936. Photo by Lulu May Aler in Martha Crone Collection.

district not too far from the Garden. Yes, they eagerly took on that job. The Minneapolis Bird Club was affiliated with the Minneapolis Audubon Society and took over from that time on.<sup>(3)</sup>

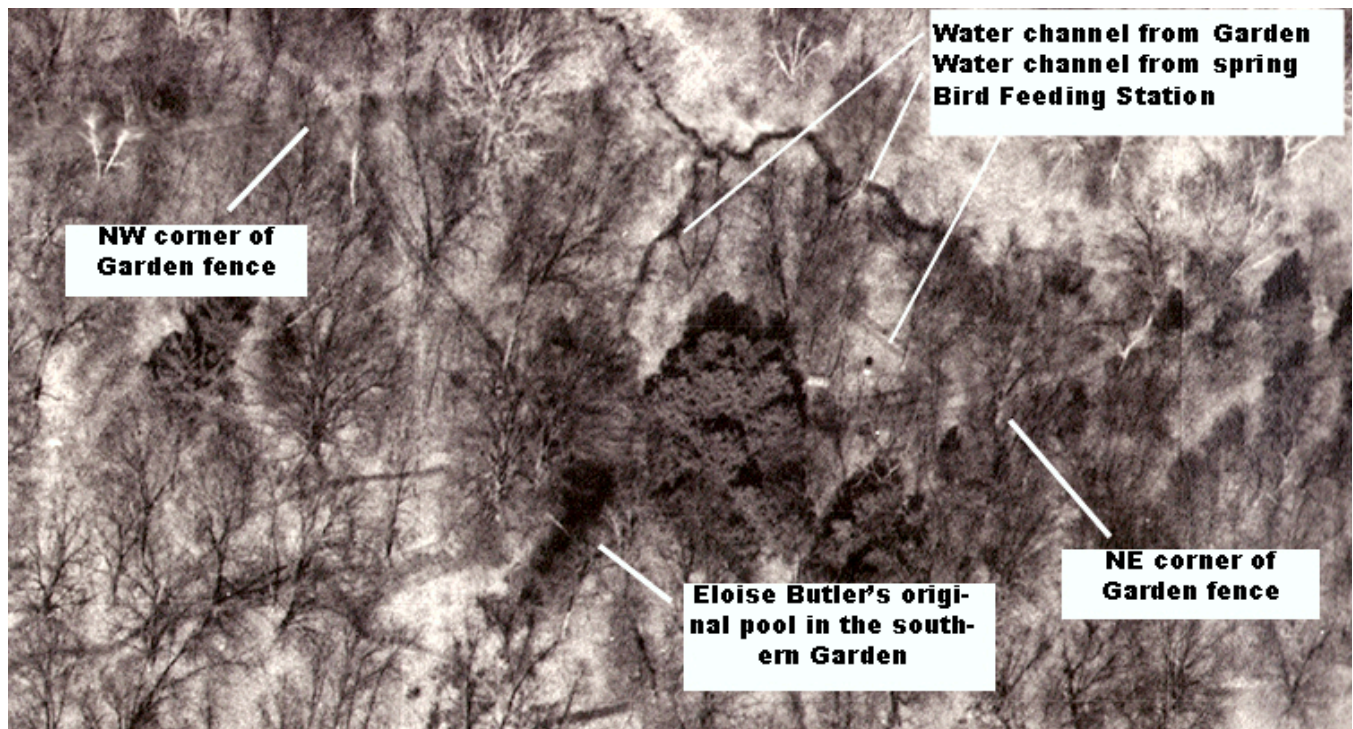
More history about Lulu May Aler is given at the end of this article.

By 1941 something was wrong with the station and repairs were needed. Martha Crone wrote in her diary on September 23 "Ben Johnson early and he came in to get orders for replacing Miss Aler's bird feeding station and chest for storing food. Had a nice visit". [Ben Johnson was a Park Board Employee who later became Supervisor of Maintenance for the Park Board.] We do not know if the station was modified from the what the 1936 photo shows or if it was just repaired.

A depiction of the separate fencing in the 1950s for the bird feeding station is shown on two maps and a photo. First is Martha Crone's hand-drawn (not to scale) map used in her 1952 Self Conducted Tour Brochure. It shows the feeding station, still on the northern side of the tarvia path but now surrounded by its own fence and the fence formerly on the paths north side mostly removed. Map courtesy of J. S. Futcher.



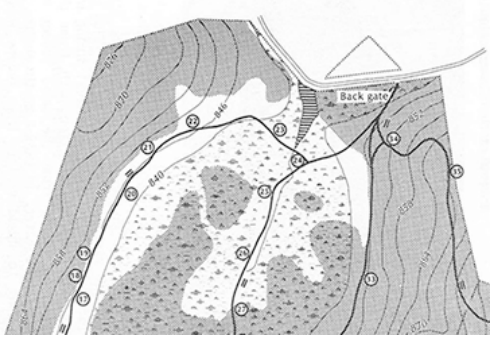
**Below:** This aerial photo shows the features in the area of the back fence in 1956. The area remains this way until the next re-configuration of 1991/95 as explained in the next section. The two water channels that are shown meeting at the top of the photo mark the area where Eloise Butler created her Mallard Pool in 1932.



Martha Crone wrote in 1958 "The mess-tables are in full operation in the Wild Flower Garden. The feeders are filled with sunflower seeds every day. Beef suet is hung nearby and peanut butter placed in convenient places.

Millet seeds and crushed grain are placed on the ground in sheltered places for the Juncos. Save the seeds of Zinnias left over in the garden, the Goldfinches are very fond of them."<sup>(4)</sup>

Next is the 1987 map section, of the north end of the Garden, that was used in the Garden Guidebook. This map is to scale and shows the same bird feeding placement as Crone's 1952 map. Maps below courtesy Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

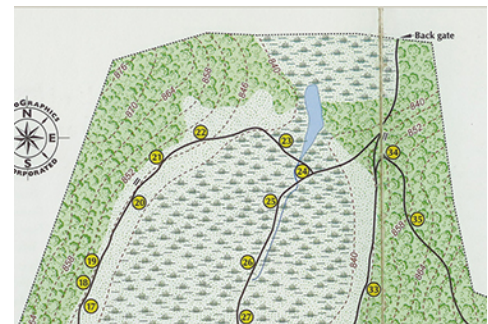


Care of the bird feeding station changed when Ken Avery took over from Martha Crone in 1959. There was a bird feeder on a pole at the front of the Garden (south end) and Ken tended both. He occasionally made written comments about tending the feeders. In 1974 expressed his concern for the increased activity in the area of the Garden - and what may be the affect on the Winter birds?

"Today, January 1, 1974, as I write this it is -30°. We have broken the record for low readings three days in a row and it is supposed to be cold again tomorrow. Last Sunday when it was about 0, my wife and I went to the Garden to fill the bird feeders. Since it was so cold we parked at the south end, rather than at the Spring, to make a quick trip of it. One car was parked at the gate when we arrived there. As we left our car another car pulled up with two young men with skis. When we left, just thirty minutes later, there were four other cars in the parking spot. At the top of the hill there was a family skiing; while I was filling the feeder some skiers went by; we met two skiers at the back of the Garden, two skiers coming down the hill from the hayfield, and two more skiers as we left the hayfield. (Skiers seem to run in packs of two.) [Ed note: The 'hayfield' would appear to be the open grassy area to the north-east side of the Garden which descends quickly to the level of the wetland behind the Garden]. I can't help but compare this with the first few years that I had the Garden. In those days you could spend hours in the park during the winter and never meet anyone. Starting about 1965 a few people started discovering how beautiful the Park was in the winter and with the rise in popularity of Cross-Country Skiing in the last few years, the winter seclusion of the area has almost vanished."<sup>(5)</sup>

It is unclear when Ken Avery had stopped tending the feeders. He apparently did this throughout his tenure but may have passed the job onto Cary George in 1987.

A realignment of the Garden's back fence was completed in 1992 when a new back gate design was conceived. The color 2001 map shown at right shows the fence realignment with the fence moved northward, creating an open area between the pool dam and the fence. The old path outside the Garden space was moved to follow the new fence line.



With the 1992 realignment, the bird feeding station now under goes its third iteration - it was removed from the north side of the tarvia path and a new elevated bird feeder was placed inside the Garden fence. Park Board carpenters built a new rough-cedar bird feeder for both the front and back gates and Audubon had agreed to continue winter feeding as they had done in earlier years before Ken Avery took them over when he became curator.

In the early 2000's those 1992 feeders were replaced with a larger model shown below which had a filler tube on the top of the roof, looking like a little chimney. But Bird feeding at both the front and back gate feeders was soon discontinued. Cary George stopped using the back gate feeder prior to 2003. Susan Wilkins, succeeding Cary in 2004, continued to use the front feeder for a few years but stopped after a few years. It was on a tall pole and access was awkward.<sup>(6)</sup> However with the wild turkey population expanding rapidly in Wirth Park, feeding would have stopped anyway as the feeders attracted them into the Garden where they created



The 1992 bird feeder. Photo G D Bebeau.

much damage. A few small feeders were still in use near the visitors shelter but those are periodically removed when turkeys come into the Garden.



Back gate bird feeder - latest model. Photo G D Bebeau.



Front gate bird feeder - latest model. Photo G D Bebeau.

Ref:

- (1) Three sources: a) Letter of Eloise Butler to Lulu May Aler, Friends archives (also, notes in *The Wild Gardener* by Martha Hellander, page 98. The 1936 date is confirmed by correspondence between Miss Aler and Mr. J. S. Futcher, dated Christmas 1951. Hennepin History Museum. b) *An All-Winter Thanksgiving* by Lulu May Aler, published in *Nature*, December 1941. c) Commentary by Lloyd Teeuwen on audio tape interview May 4, 1988 by Martha Hellander while researching her book on Butler *The Wild Gardener* Tape and transcript in the Martha Crone Collection, Minnesota Historical Society.
- (2) Martha Crone's Diaries- 1933 - 1943.
- (3) J. S. Futcher, "A Birdwatcher's Eloise Butler," 1994 in "50 Years of Friends," published by the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden. The four high-schoolers were Jeremy and Julian Berman, Burton Guttman and Gary Filerman.
- (4) *The Fringed Gentian*<sup>TM</sup>, Vol. 6 No. 1, January 1958
- (5) *The Fringed Gentian*<sup>TM</sup>, (Vol. 22 No.1 January 1974)
- (6) Notes from Curator Susan Wilkins - 2019.

## Lulu May Aler

The following supplements the information on Miss Aler that is given in the previous pages of this article.

### Birding and Audubon

A good summary of Miss Aler's bird activities was summarized by Virginia Stafford in her column in the *Minneapolis Star* on Nov. 27, 1941

Bird feeding time will soon be here, along with the first flurry of snow. But Lulu May Aler, president of the Minneapolis Audubon society, reports they have had their feeding boards up in the Theodore Wirth Park sanctuary for 10 days. Lulu May personally sees that the chickadees, woodpeckers, nuthatches, etc., get their special diets. Every day last winter she walked a mile from her home to put out the feed, donated by Garden clubs, Audubon members and other individuals. She missed on the day of the Armistice blizzard, but shoveled her way through the following day. She thinks it's very nice so many people have saved their squash, cantaloupe and sunflower seeds this summer to contribute in the winter feeding. An article by her on bird feeding is appearing in the current "Nature" magazine. (see note 1 in first section above).

Her home was at 301 Newton Avenue North in the Minneapolis Harrison neighborhood, adjacent to Bryn Mawr on the east side. Miss Aler was involved with Audubon for some time and, based on the Stafford article above, was president of the society in the early 1940s. Examples:

- 1: On the 24th of April 1941 she gave a talk on birds to the sponsors and guardians of Camp Fire Girls.<sup>(1)</sup>
- 2: On 21 November 1944 she spoke about the birds that came to the feeding station in Wirth Park. This talk was at the science museum of the Minneapolis Public Library - where incidentally - Martha Crone was involved.<sup>(2)</sup>



3: In the 1940s she gave Friday morning bird walks in Wirth Park for the Minneapolis Audubon society. These resumed on April 1 of each year, beginning at 9 am. She would meet those interested at the end of the Glenwood streetcar line and walk through the park.<sup>(3)</sup>

A year earlier on November 21, 1940 the *Star* had published one of her photos of a robin sticking around to partake of the food table. She was an accomplished bird photographer, maintaining that you did not need a telephoto lens, just enough patience to allow a bird to be comfortable with you being close.<sup>(4)</sup> She was also an associate member of the Wilson Ornithological Club.<sup>(5)</sup> In November of 1940 Wilson held their annual meeting in Minneapolis. Miss Aler was a member of the local committee, chaired by Thomas S. Roberts of the Natural History Museum.

Sometime after she turned over the maintenance to the feeding stations to the Minneapolis Bird Club, she moved to Indiana and married Charles Yelick<sup>(6)</sup>. Mr. Yelick is mentioned in Martha Crone's logs in 1936, 1937 and 1939 in conjunction with birding notes. One such note was in 1939 after the rare sighting of a Blue-gray gnatcatcher, he took down the nest after the young had fledged and sent it to Dr. Thomas Roberts at the History Museum. Miss Aler's article on the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in Glenwood Park was published in October 1942 issue of *Flicker*, journal of the Minnesota Ornithologist's Union.

She died in Indiana on January 20, 1967, but was buried in Greenlawn Cemetery in Columbus Ohio, near her hometown of Zalesville Ohio.

### Community work

Miss Aler was active in community enterprises such as district 21 of the Community Fund which was organized as the fund-raising division of the Minneapolis Council of Social Agencies that eventually became the local United Way.<sup>(7)</sup>

Her main community work was done as Superintendent of the Minneapolis Maternity Hospital which was located at 2215 Western Ave. (now Glenwood Ave.). We do not know how long she held this position but it began in 1924 and lasted for certain through 1937. That hospital was a direct offshoot of the facility begun in the 1890s by Dr. Martha Ripley. The facility closed in 1956.<sup>(8)</sup>

Miss Aler was also involved with the Minneapolis Hospital Council and was president of that council in 1933. One of the most interesting endeavors during her time as Council President was a plan for group hospitalization where individuals paying 75 cents per month would be entitled to 21 days a year of free hospitalization, operating room expenses and anesthetics. The plan was to be approved also by various medical society members and it is believed it never went any further.<sup>(9)</sup>

Ref:

(1) *Minneapolis Star*, April 14, 1940 pg. 53

(2) *Minneapolis Star*, 20 November 1944 pg. 11

(3) *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 1, 1946

(4) *Minneapolis Star*, November 21, 1940

(5) *Wilson Bulletin*, December 1941, Vol 53 #4.

(6) The information about Miss Aler moving to Indiana and then marrying Charles Yelick in was supplied by the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

(7) *Minneapolis Star*, October 28, 1936

(8) *Minneapolis Star*, various examples: May 5, 1927; January 21, 1930; January 18, 1933; January 16, 1935, January 20, 1937; January 18, 1938

(9) *Minneapolis Star*, January 29, 1933.

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Minneapolis Maternity Hospital in 1925



Maternity Hospital in 2021. It is signed above the entrance - "Ripley Memorial Hospital."