

Annals of the Wild Life Reserve

The Writings of Eloise Butler



Birdbath Acquisition - June 1917



The latest acquisition in my wild garden is a big boulder hauled in on a stone drag by four pairs of horses, and chiseled out by a stone mason into a bird bath with four shelves, each about seven inches wide on a half inch grade. It is much appreciated by the birds who bathe in it early in the morning and late in the afternoon, and stop to take a drink in passing.

That was all she wrote about it in the essay but here is some fill-in from other sources:

In her Garden log she noted that work on the boulder was completed on June 5, 1917, and on July 25, 1917 she wrote: "Saw crow standing in bird bath. Shortly after 5 pm saw as many as thirty birds taking their turn in the bath. Often 6 at once." During the year 1917 she planted Golden Corydalis, Common Blue and Downy Yellow Violets around the boulder and by 1920, clumps of Lady Fern.

In a newspaper article about her and the Garden from 1917 this was written:

"This is the only bit of work that Miss Butler has been known to allow a man to do in her "estate," and it was only when she realized that time had made some claims against her vitality she surrendered this task of love to a mere outsider. . . . Here come the birds in the early morning and sing their matins while they splash and play in the glinting sunlight. They have no fear, for they are never molested nor disturbed."

In a 1924 Newspaper article she said that the birds give regular concerts there early each day as they bathe and sing to their heart's content.

The photos above are two views of the 1917 birdbath as seen in the Woodland Garden today. Over the years soil has filled in around it so it does not appear so tall as in 1917.





Eloise Butler with unidentified friend at the newly installed bird bath - 1917. Photo MHS

The text of Eloise's essay continues with these comments:

My phoebe who raised two broods last year in a nest that she built over a wren box under the eaves of my office, returned this season and is now feeding her second brood.

The first of June, as I was clearing away the dead stalks of perennials near the edge of my swamp, I flushed a bird that I had only seen in pictures or as stuffed specimens in museums. It made a short, low flight and fluttered feebly to the ground as if it were wounded unto death. As I followed it, the bird repeated the feint several times, sometimes running for a little distance and peeking out at me from behind a bush with one bright eye. Of course, I understood that the bird was trying to lure me away from her nest and I recognized from the long bill and bobbed tail that it was a woodcock. The next day I found her in the swamp with three little ones.

Below are two comparison photos of the Birdbath. The black & white from June 22, 1934 (probably taken by Martha Crone or E. F. Pabody) and the color photo from 2015. Note the growth in the cedar trees behind the birdbath.



Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. Contemporary photos G D Bebeau.

The text of this article is one of a number of short essays that Eloise Butler wrote while curator of the Garden that after her death were collected in a series titled *Annals of the Wild Life Reserve*, but most were never published.

The Wild Botanic Garden in Wirth Park, became the "Native Plant Reserve" and was then renamed the Eloise Butler Wild Flower Garden in 1929.