

# The Writings of Eloise Butler



## The Wild Garden in 1930

It seems amazing that Mother Nature - by blending two factors, temperature and moisture, in different proportions - can form an endless variety, no two seasons alike, [with] constant variations in vegetation.

Spring was late and cold with continual downpours. The early blooms were much belated, but the last heavy frost was later than usual, so that the new foliage had had time to develop a resistant epidermis and did not suffer as in the year before, when May Apple and twisted stalk were blighted and fern fronds seared. The flower buds of dogwoods and viburnums were, however, badly affected, and the food for birds was materially diminished. The unfolding buds of walnuts and hickories were, as usual, frozen, I despair of ever having any nuts develop.

The display of spring and summer flowers was fine - hepaticas bloodroot, spring beauty, anemonella, anemones, marsh marigold, mertensia, trilliums, violets, dentaria, wild geranium, buttercups, showy orchis, habenarias, cyripediums, lilies, etc. Lupine was a great joy. As I have but little sandy soil, I have found it difficult to establish. I think that is now a permanent possession. So also is horsemint which thrives on a coal cinder diet. This plant is particularly effective in masses, growing as it does, in large clumps, with its flower spikes made up of whorl upon whorl of pale yellow spotted corollas subtended by more showy pink, velvety bracts.

Then followed the unprecedented midsummer drought. The wild garden suffers less than other places on account of the lie of the land - drainage flowing into it from three sides. But this season foliage of shrubs on the hillsides shriveled and dropped off. I did not mind the prickly ash dying, of which I have a superfluity. On this shrub during the early wet season there developed a disgusting scale insect enwrapping nearly every twig. The heroic remedy applied was pruning and burning, lest the pest

might spread to other plants. I cannot tell until next season how many plants were killed outright by the drought. The most apparent effect was the smaller crop of autumn blooms and the scarcity of mushrooms. In one respect I was surprised. A year ago a drought prevented the annual appearance of the huge edible fan tuft (*Polyporus frondosus*) at the base of our venerable white oak [Old Monarch]. Sometimes it has attained a weight of over eight pounds. This year it sprang up again and grew to a goodly size. It was taken up while still growing for the delectation of the Mushroom Club.



American Lotus, *Nelumbo lutea*.  
Photo ©Merle R. Black, Wisconsin  
Flora.

Since I left Minneapolis this fall, an interesting discovery was made. A wild duck was given to a pair of ardent nature lovers [Martha and Bill Crone]. In dressing the bird, some undigested seeds of American lotus (*Nelumbo lutea*) were found in the gizzard. This was enough to start an investigation, for the lotus has been nearly exterminated in the vicinity of Minneapolis. The duck was shot near the neighboring town of Stillwater. [actually Shakopee]. My friends thought that they knew every square rod of the territory. But a

vigorous search revealed much to their delight a large tract of lotus that had been concealed in blossoming time by a rank growth of tall grasses. A quantity of seeds were collected and encased in balls of clay to serve as sinkers The ponds around my garden were bombarded with these balls, and a quantity of seeds were sent to me to distribute in Massachusetts. I have sent some to the director of Harvard's botanic garden, and some will be planted in the cemetery where my sister, Mrs. Cora E. Pease, lies buried. The lotus is said to be the largest flower of this latitude. The appearance is striking when the flower in full bloom. And the large top-shaped receptacle is very singular. It breaks off [and] rolls over and over in the water, shedding the seeds through the perforated disk like a patent seed dropper.

### **Editor's additions to Eloise's text**

In a letter to Martha and Bill Crone in October, Eloise writes to them about the Lotus seed discovery: "I never heard of such a wonderful snoopin' ! It reads like a fairy tale or a story out of Arabian Nights. I shall rehearse it for my botanical correspondence club [as she did as quoted above]. I left Minneapolis the 17th, the day after your bombardment, in such a hurry that I did not have time to telephone to any one." (1)

More followup on the lotus seeds was forwarded to the Crones on Jan. 1, 1931 when Eloise wrote them that she had received some of the lotus seeds from them and added "I expect to have "Crone Plantations" in all the ponds hereabout where protection can be guaranteed. I have written to the Director of Harvard Botanic Gardens to ask if he wishes any seeds for his gardens and the Arboretum. What a wonderful discovery you made! I embodied in my annual report to Mr. Wirth your account of the bombardment of Birch Pond. I want your work to be appreciated at headquarters." (2)

(1) Letter to Martha and Bill Crone 28 October 1930

(2) Letter to Martha and Bill Crone 1 Jan. 1931

### **NOTES:**

Since Eloise Butler's time, the scientific names of plants and the classification of plant families has undergone extensive revision. In brackets within the text, have been added when necessary, the revised scientific name for the references she used in her article. Nomenclature is based on the latest published information from *Flora of North America*, USDA and the *Annotated Checklist of the Vascular Flora of Minnesota*. Other information in brackets may add clarification to what she is saying.

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

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. This essay was sent to the Gray Memorial Botanical Chapter, division D, of the Agassiz Association for their circular bulletin. Eloise was a member of Division D (the middle west) from 1908 until her death. Those bulletins were circulated among members by postal round-robin circulation. The Agassiz Association was founded in the late 1800's to be an association of local chapters that would combine the like interests of individuals and organizations in the study of nature but after 1901 was largely defunct and only the Gray Memorial Botanical Chapter, with its several divisions, was still active and remained so until 1943.

Photo of Eloise Butler, ca. 1920, at top of first page courtesy Minneapolis Public Library. The other photos as credited.