

The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden



Development of the Fern Glen Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary

In late 1955, while Martha Crone was Garden Curator, the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden received a gift from the Minnetonka Garden Club of \$750, along with a gift of \$25 from The Little Minnetonka Garden Flower Club for purposes of establishing an entire new Fern Hill in an undeveloped portion of the Garden.(1) It is not entirely clear from Martha Crone's records whether that purpose was specifically designated by the donors or whether Martha specifically suggested such a plan for funding, but the latter is most likely. Contact between the Clubs and Martha may have come from a Friends member or from one of Martha's slide lectures about the Garden given every year in the 1950s, but her earliest contacts with the clubs seems to be when she gave a lecture about the Garden at a Lake

Minnetonka Garden Club meeting on July 29, 1937 at the home of Mrs. Russell Bennett and a May 3, 1937 Garden tour to the Little Garden Club of Minnetonka.(2) Russell Bennett became a Friends founding director in 1952.



Plan map of the Garden. Map courtesy Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

Nevertheless, work began. The area of what is now called the 'Fern Glen' is at the far northeastern section of the upland addition that had been added to the Garden proper in 1944 through the efforts of Clinton Odell, the founder of the Friends. This area, when added in 1944, required extensive development as it was wild and covered with sumac and thistle. The area of the Fern Glen is naturally separated from the remainder of the upland Garden by a ridge line and on the northeastern side of the ridge, the land forms a natural bowl. Some large trees were undoubtedly in place and were left in place in the area as ferns need a fair amount of shade.

The only photograph we have of the development shows mostly open ground on the hillside with plant labels marking new ferns, but that is only a portion of the area. Today there are a number of trees in the glen, most of which have grown up since the glen was developed - many are fast growing green ash. In fact, a number of these were culled out in the winter of 2013/14 by current Garden Curator Susan Wilkins.



A portion of the new Fern Hill with new plants put in. Photo from a Kodachrome taken by Martha Crone on May 14, 1956.

Martha wrote this about her plan for the new Fern Hill

The making of such a garden will be a most delightful experience. An intensive program has been planned to establish many varieties of ferns, including some of the more elusive ones, which so often grow where no eyes can see them. The area consists of a gentle slope and some low land, being splendidly adapted to accommodate many varieties of ferns.

There will be ferns for shade and sun, for dry soil and moist locations. Evergreen wood ferns and Christmas fern. The large graceful Ostrich fern sometimes called Palm of the North, the dainty maidenhair and a score of others. The preparation of the area was started this fall (1955) but the early arrival of Winter has delayed completion until spring. Trails are planned to lead among the ferns, so they can be enjoyed at close range. This is a most fascinating undertaking and surely should help stimulate true appreciation of Nature's most beautiful creations. (3)

On April 11, 1956 she noted in her Garden Log (4) that the "Fern hill was disked and finished," indicating she brought in mechanical help to prepare some of the ground. On April 26 she noted planting the first ferns. By early fall of 1956 development of the new Fern Garden was proceeding



A view of one path in the Fern Glen in Summer 2012.

rapidly. Martha wrote:

A total of 1,630 various kinds of ferns have been planted with utmost care in the new Fern Garden.

Many varieties could not be obtained until fall and they will be set out before cold weather closes the season, while still others are to be planted next spring.

The full result of such a planting cannot be realized until they become firmly established. This new project has greatly stimulated both scientific and popular interest and encouraged other groups to undertake conservation plantings.

(4)

She had actually acquired 2,161 ferns and the last ones were planted by late October. In her log she tallied the first year ferns and their sources as she planted them. The list totals 23 species of ferns.

In her annual report she wrote that she still had \$251 to spend on more ferns. She believed there would be winter loss on the new plants due to lack of snow so far.

(5)



Ferns emerging in spring in a section of the Fern Glen. This area is a portion of the hillside shown in the Crone photo on page 2.

During 1957 she added another 308 ferns to the new Fern Hill, bringing the total to 2,468 and still had \$138 of the original grant of \$775 to spend. (6) Only one new species was added in 1957 - Goldie's Woodfern, *Dryopteris goldiana*.

In 1958 a total of 375 Interrupted Ferns went into the Fern Grove bringing 3 year total of plants to 2,844. Here is the complete list with quantities and her source [shown in brackets]. The most recent botanical name is used for each species.

- Berry Bladder Fern, *Cystopteris bulbifera*, 158 [58 local, 100 from Orchid Gardens, Grand Rapids MN]
- Bracken Fern, *Pteridium aquilinum* 36 [Grand Rapids]
- Braun's Holly Fern, *Polystichum braunii*, 25 [Johnson's Nursery MA]
- Brittle Bladder Fern, *Cystopteris fragilis*, 33 [Grand Rapids]
- Christmas Fern, *Polystichum acrostichoides*, 85 [The Three Laurels, Marshall NC]
- Cinnamon Fern, *Osmunda cinnamomea*, 112 [Orchid Gardens, Grand Rapids]
- Clintons Fern, *Dryopteris clintoniana*, 20 [Johnson's Nursery MA]
- Crested Shield Fern, *Dryopteris cristata*, 102 [Orchid Gardens]
- False Silvery Spleenwort, *Deparia acrostichoides*, 50 [Henderson's Nursery]
- Goldie's Woodfern, *Dryopteris goldiana*, 13, [The Three Laurels]
- Hay-scented Fern, *Dennstaedtia punctilobula*, 85 [50 Grand Rapids, 35 The Three Laurels]
- Interrupted Fern, *Osmunda claytoniana*, 1,086 [265 local, 236 Grand Rapids, 585 no source]
- Lady Fern, *Athyrium filix-femina*, 209 [106 Orchid Gardens, Grand Rapids, 10 Daniels Nursery, 57 local, 36 no source]
- Maidenhair Fern, *Adiantum pedatum*, 229 [129 Orchid Gardens, Grand Rapids, 100 no source]
- Male Fern, *Dryopteris filix-mas*, 30 -[The Three Laurels]
- Marginal shield Fern, *Dryopteris marginalis*, 55 [The Three Laurels]
- Narrow (Long) Beech Fern, *Phegopteris connectilis*, 55 [Orchid Gardens]

- Glade Fern (Narrow-leaved Spleenwort) , *Diplazium pycnocarpon*, 20 [The Three Laurels]
- New York Fern, *Thelypteris noveboracensis*, 10 [Johnson's Nursery, MA]
- Western Oak Fern, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, 2 [GrandRapids]
- Ostrich Fern, *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, 165 [159 Orchid Gardens, Grand Rapids, 9 no source]
- Rattlesnake Fern, *Botrychium virginianum*, 52 [Grand Rapids]



The Fern Glen in Summer 2012

- Royal Fern, *Osmunda regalis*, 55 [The Three laurels]

- Spinulose Wood Fern, *Dryopteris carthusiana*, 55 [The Three Laurels]

- Spreading Wood Fern, *Dryopteris expansa*, 102 [Orchid Gardens]

At the end of 1958 Martha Crone retired as Garden Curator, after 26 years as Curator and 15 years of working with Eloise Butler prior to that. Ken Avery became Curator and in 1960 he added 250 additional ferns to the Fern Glen, comprised of 75 Ostrich Ferns, 150 Interrupted ferns and 25 Lady Ferns. That brings the total count of ferns planted to 3,094. Of course, a number succumbed to winter kill, drought, rodents, and other

calamities, but the total number of plants is impressive. If the entire budget of \$775 was spent, the 3,094 plants cost only 25 cents each - remarkable today, but that was the 1950s when gasoline was 29 cents per gallon.

To winter protect the fragile young ferns Ken had the area heavily covered with oak leaves for a number of years to build up some mulch and organic base. Moth crystals were spread to discourage the mice.

With the exception of the Hay-scented and New York Ferns, all are native to Minnesota. One can see from the list that 40% of the plants were Interrupted Fern, a total of 1,236 planted (including those in 1960). It is long-lived, grows well in the Garden habitat and was well established elsewhere in the Garden. It also tolerates sunlight, thus it and the Lady Fern were planted on the steepest part of the hill exposed to sun. (7)

The only other area of the Wild Flower Garden that would have such a gathering of ferns would be Eloise Butler's "fernery" in the Woodland Garden that was based around the native northeast facing hillside of Interrupted Fern.

At the end of 1963 Martha Crone wrote:

The weedy, brush covered area in the upland garden which was turned into an interesting Fern Hill, under the sponsorship of the Minnetonka Garden Club is reaching a stage of fine development.

A great deal of satisfaction is derived from watching the progress of this lovely addition. Great appreciation is extended to the members of the Minnetonka Garden Club.(8)

The Fern Glen Today

Over the years since the early 1960s many changes have occurred in this area. The elms that provided some shade died out from Dutch Elm disease in the 1970s; Oak Wilt took out any Red Oak that were there. Gardener Cary George reported that as a result of the drought in 1988, he felt the Fern Glen had a

25% mortality rate with Maidenhair and Royal ferns the hardest hit. (9) These two species require moisture and a certain amount of shade.

Given the opportunity, certain weedy plants such as Buckthorn and Green Ash move in and further degrade the conditions needed by the ferns. A number of Green Ash were removed in 2014, Buckthorn was removed earlier, but there are still a large number of trees in the area to provide shade as the photos above indicate, plus a large number of ferns, but fewer species. Many spring wildflowers are found there also, such as Bloodroot, Jacob's Ladder, Wild Blue Phlox, Jack-in-the-pulpit and Sprengel's Sedge.

Below: The lay of the land - photos of the Fern Glen in spring before plant growth starts.



The photo at the top of the page is taken from the entrance path to the Fern Glen (2012)

References:

- (1) a) Annual Report of the Garden Curator to the Board of Park Commissioners - dated February 14, 1956. b) That the money was a gift to the Friends was noted in Martha Crone's 1956 Secretary's Report and was also reported on January 8, 1956 in George Luxton's column in the *Minneapolis Tribune*.
- (2) Minnetonka Club reported in the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* July 31, 1937. Little Garden Club tour announcement, April 4, 1937, same paper.
- (3) *The Fringed Gentian*TM, newsletter of the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden, Inc. Vol. 4 # 1, January, 1956, Martha Crone, Editor
- (4) *The Fringed Gentian*TM, Vol. 4 # 4, October 1956, Martha Crone, Editor
- (5) Annual Report of the Garden Curator to the Board of Park Commissioners - dated February 15, 1957
- (6) Annual Report of the Garden Curator to the Board of Park Commissioners - dated February 8, 1958
- (7) *The Fringed Gentian*TM, Vol. 9, # 4, Autumn, 1961, Martha Crone, Editor
- (8) *The Fringed Gentian*TM, Vol. 11, # 4, Autumn, 1963, Martha Crone, Editor
- (9) *The Fringed Gentian*TM Vol. 37, # 4, September 1989

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