



1958

History of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden

Winter 1957/1958

1958 was the 52nd year of the Garden and Martha Crone began her 26th and final year as Garden Curator.

In the Friends' newsletter (Vol. 6 No. 1, January 1958), Editor Martha Crone wrote about winter birds, the Brazil Nut, Twinflower, well known vegetables in the Mustard family, trees not affected by city pollution, pine nuts, the growth rate of popular trees, an easy way to propagate Large-flowered Trillium, and the difference between yams and sweet potatoes. About the winter season she wrote:

Winter is the most alluring season for a walk in the Wild Flower Garden. Along the silver-clad aisles of the winter woodlands one becomes conscious of the stillness and peacefulness of the white forest. The beauty of tree architecture can now be seen which the foliage concealed in summertime.

In her column on winter birds she noted:

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.



A bed of Large Flowered Trillium, *Trillium grandiflorum*, photographed in the Garden on April 29, 1952 by Martha Crone. She wrote about their propagation in the newsletter.

The Friends held their annual meeting in January at the offices of the Burma Vita Company at 2318 Chestnut Ave. West, in Minneapolis.

Elected to the Board of Directors were: Russell Bennett, Earle Brown, Dorothy Binder, Elizabeth Carpenter, Martha Crone, Donald C. Dayton, Clinton Odell, Leonard Ramberg, Carl Rawson, Mrs. Clarence (Ebba) Tolg.

Friends officers elected at the board meeting following the annual meeting were Clinton Odell, President; Donald C. Dayton, Vice President; Mrs. Carroll (Dorothy) Binder, Vice President; Martha

Crone Secretary/Treasurer. Martha Crone was also in charge of membership and was editor of *The Fringed Gentian*TM.

It was voted to give \$500 to the Board of Park Commissioners to assist in maintenance of the Wild Flower Garden, the same amount as in past years since the founding of the Friends in 1952.

Spring 1958

In the spring newsletter, Martha wrote about the joy of spring, birds, Oconee Bells (*Shortia galacilolia*), the ten easiest wild flowers to start a garden with, frogs, and Wild Leek (*Allium tricoccum*). She also wrote about Purple Loosestrife - words which in later years she may have regretted:

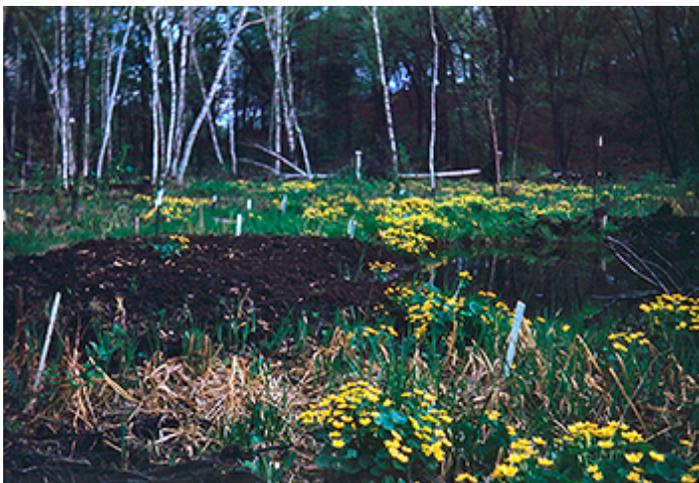
Altho the Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is not a native, it is a good plant to grow along streams, margins of ponds or in wet meadows. Especially where the competition is too severe for less aggressive plants to grow. The plant is a long-lived perennial, 4 to 6 feet tall and produces graceful spikes of purple or pink flowers. They bloom during July and August.

When once established it is hard to eradicate and will crowd out other weaker growing plants. It can also be grown in garden borders where it remains smaller and does not readily spread.



To illustrate the invasiveness of Purple Loosestrife, this photo of Birch Pond, just outside the Garden shows extensive growth; photographed on August 5, 1950 by Martha Crone. Yet in 1958 she was still advocating it.

This six-petaled flower has 12 stamens of two different lengths, and the length of the single pistil varies in different flowers; this is termed by botanists as trimorphous. Only pollen from stamens of the same length can pollinate the stigmas, therefore each flower is sterile to its own pollen, thus ensuring the vigor of the race.



A view of the Marsh with Marsh Marigolds and pool, photographed on May 6, 1949 by Martha Crone

She wrote later that:

Spring in the garden was beyond compare with the twelve varieties of Trilliums, the many violets, Mertensia, Hepaticas, Marsh Marigolds and numerous others, it was a spectacular show. The ferns have never been taller or lovelier. The six-foot tall Pink Azalea was a mass of breath-taking bloom being literally sprinkled with flowers of purest pink, fragrant and with long projecting stamens. The glowing patches of orange Flame Azalea followed.

Martha had opened the Garden on April 1st with the ground free of snow and the Snow

Trilliums in bud. There had been heavy snow back in November 1957, but little thereafter. April 5th was a day of rain, turning to snow on Easter Sunday, April 6, leaving 2 inches on the ground. It was sunny the next day but heavy wind during the snow had brought down branches. The juncos were unaffected by the snow and wind. (1)

By April 14th, the Hepaticas were in full bloom. The spring weather was ideal for the two weeks leading up to April 20, the trees were budding, there was no rain, the forests in northern Minnesota were the driest on record. Then there was a killing frost on the night of April 22nd, and although the flowers seemed to be unharmed the buds on Oaks and Ashes froze. (1)

Later in the spring Martha planted one new species:

May 17 - *Salix caprea*, French Willow, not native, no source given.

She replanted on April 28 - 2 *Ginkgo biloba*, the Ginkgo Tree. The first ones from 1948 must have died.

Summer 1958

In the summer newsletter (Vol. 6 No. 3, July 1958), the death of Clinton Odell was announced. Friends Vice President Dorothy Binder wrote the following:

With the death of Mr. Clinton M. Odell June 4th at the age of 80, the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden have lost their founder, their president and their most devoted and enthusiastic member.

All his life Mr. Odell had been concerned with conservation. He was awarded the plaque of the Minnesota Conservation Commission, April 1957, in recognition of his many contributions. His interest in the Wild Flower Garden began in his high school days for Eloise Butler was his botany teacher.

For many years Mr. Odell contributed privately to the Park Board's limited funds for maintenance of the garden. He was responsible for development of the Upper Garden, for the fence surrounding this garden and for the employment of extra manpower. Often Mr. Odell could be found in the Wild Flower Garden in his spare time digging weeds and helping Mrs. Crone the Curator with new plantings. He preferred this to playing golf with his friends.

With the future of the garden in mind Mr. Odell was instrumental in organizing the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden in the summer of 1952. He was its president until his death. It was his dearest wish that the Friends would guarantee the continuance of the Garden in the event of his death. Membership fees and donations would supplement the allocations of the Park Board and would continue the unique contribution the Wild Flower Garden makes to Minneapolis.



Clinton Odell, shown with spouse Amy and daughter Moana, in the early 1950s at the Odell's 50th Wedding Anniversary.

The future of the Wild Flower Garden now lies with the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden. The memorial which would mean most to the man who gave so much of this time, his devotion and his money to the development of the Wild Flower Garden as a sanctuary and an educational project for Minneapolis is its continuance. Two or three years of neglect because of insufficient maintenance and the garden would be an overgrown mass of weeds, its significance lost, the labor of years destroyed. The challenge now lies with us.[bio follows]

Dorothy Binder took over as president and Leonard Ramberg as Vice-President. Donald C. Dayton left the board at the end of the year.

Martha Crone wrote about the misleading fall foliage of Poison Ivy and Poison Sumac, causing many people to pick the leaves for displays without realizing the toxicity. She also wrote of cloves, Bloodroot, and which wildflowers to avoid trying to plant due to their requirement for acid soil.

In the Garden she noted the Showy-Lady's-slippers in bloom on June 21, tying 1936 for a late bloom date, only exceeded by 1945 when they bloomed on June 28. She planted another 300 Interrupted Ferns (*Osmunda claytoniana*) in the new Fern Glen and July 8th was so cold she had to start a fire in office stove.

Autumn 1958

In the autumn newsletter (Vol. 6 No. 4, October 1958), Martha wrote about the Walking Fern (*Camptosorus rhizophyllus*), White Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), fall leaf color, the clearing and planting of the Upland Garden, the value of wilderness spots like the Wildflower Garden and fall birds. Since she was retiring as Curator at the end of the year, she summarized her planting work of recent years in the Garden:

Plants of many varieties have been purchased and given a start in the garden. Many more have been transplanted from wild areas that have been disturbed or cleared for building expansion, agricultural purposes or swamp draining.

More specimens of those already established are added regularly, since mass plantings add greatly to the attractiveness of the garden. In the last twelve years 38,650 plants have been set out. [in her report to the Park Board after the end of the year she listed 40,999 (2)]

Some rare plants have been encouraged and are doing well, such as Galax, Oconee Bells, unusual Trilliums and various Orchids.

Many notable successes are evident, among them the spreading of the Bloodroot and the Large-flowered Trilliums producing patches of gleaming white in the early spring. The many Hepaticas, Anemones, Azaleas, Rhododendrons, various Lady's-slippers, Spring Beauty, Violets, Foam Flower and Running Myrtle are outstanding.



Martha Crone, photo ca1953.

The Blooming of the Azaleas and Rhododendrons was the center of attraction in spring as well as the Showy Lady's-slipper, the Minnesota State Flower. All this abundance markedly contrasting with the preceding years when many aggressive weeds had the upper hand.

Included in those plants numbered above were 2,843 ferns that had now been placed in the new Fern Grove, 375 (all Interrupted Fern) just this past season. (3)

In her report to the Park Board, Martha Crone noted giving 13 illustrated slide lectures to clubs, garden groups, school groups and others. She acknowledged the passing of Clinton Odell and the contributions of The Friends . Although this would be her last year as Curator and her last report, she made no mention in the report to the Park Board of retiring - presumably it was well known (2).

Membership dues for Friends' membership at this time were unchanged from 1952:

Active - \$3

Sustainer - \$10

Sponsor - \$25

Builder - \$100

Founder - \$200

Benefactor - \$500

Martha estimated that there were 80,000 visitors to the Garden this past season. (3)

Her last log entry as for November 14, which noted:

Warm, sunny, many plants still blooming. Witch Hazel in beautiful bloom yet. No severe frost or snow so far.

Her two helpers in the Garden this year were Ken Avery and Ed Brucklemyer who had last worked in the Garden in 1949. (4)

1958, with just 16.2 inches of precipitation was the driest year since 1910, but as of 2019, the year 1910 still holds the record with only 11.54 inches of precipitation.

Photo at top of first page: Images of Martha Crone from various years in her career at the Garden.

Notes:

(1). Garden Log

(2). Annual Report to the Board of Park Commissioners dated February 27, 1959 to Superintendent Charles E. Doell.

(3). Friends of the Wild Flower Garden Secretary's Report - 1958

(4). Martha Crone records at Minnesota Historical Society.

References:

Martha Crone's Garden Log and her 1951 Census of plants in the Garden.

Various papers and correspondence of Eloise Butler and Martha Crone in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Photos by Martha Crone are from her collection of Kodachromes that was given to the Friends by her daughter Janet following Martha's death in 1989.

Meeting Minutes and correspondence of Friends of the Wild Flower Garden.

Historical Climatology of Minneapolis-St. Paul Area by Charles Fisk.

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