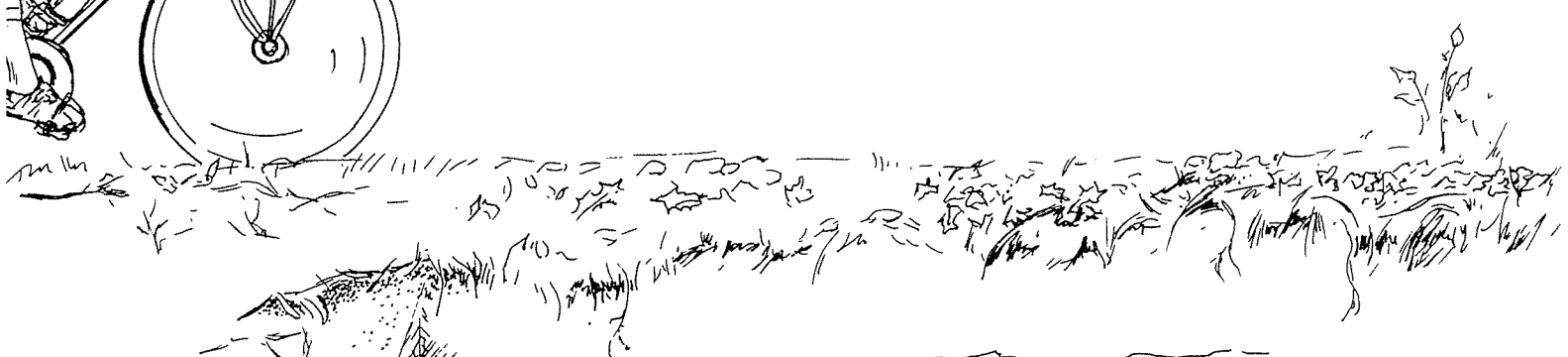
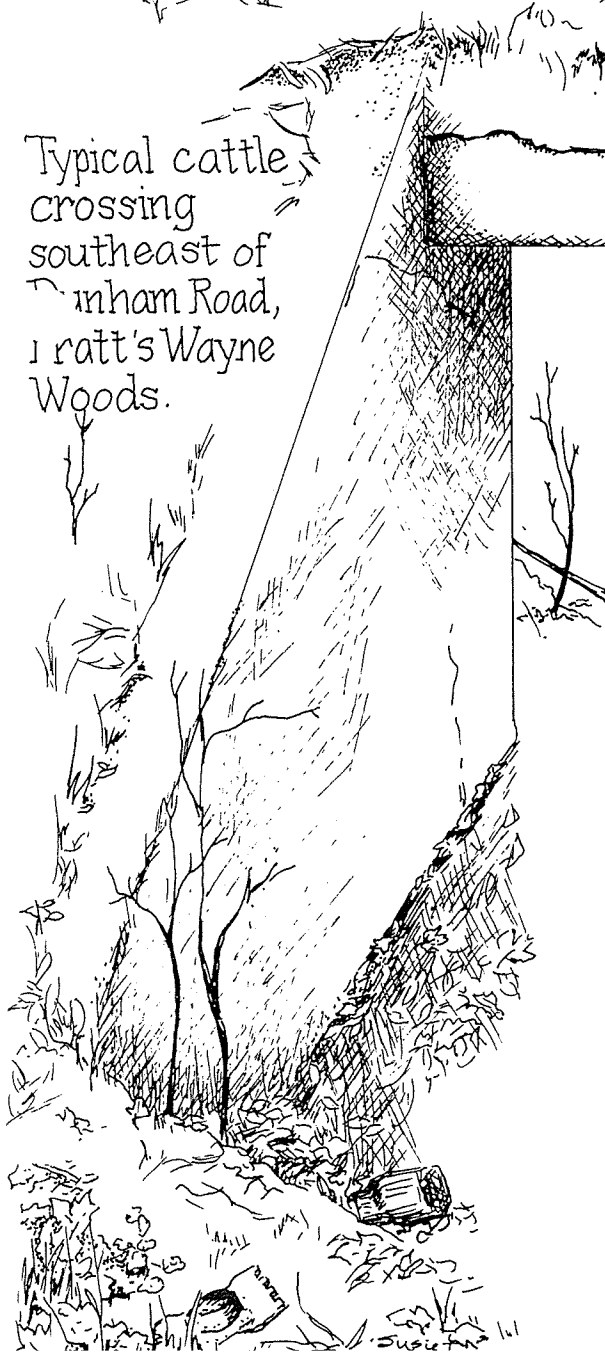


# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

WINTER 1987



Typical cattle crossing southeast of Inham Road, Pratt's Wayne Woods.



## What to look for: Traces of an old railroad

The Chicago, Aurora and Elgin electric line is remembered fondly by many local residents. Speedy and dependable, the "Roaring Elgin" with its fearsome electrified third rail served commuters, farmers and excursionists in the western suburbs of Chicago from 1902 until 1959, when it fell victim to the automobile and had to cease operations.

Many traces of the CA&E still exist to be appreciated by the Illinois Prairie Path traveler with a discerning eye and a taste for history. Among them are: insulators from the "Great Third Rail" — odd-shaped blocks of wood, rarely found completely assembled with an even odder-shaped iron foot and iron rabbit-ear cap to hold the electric rail; rusty railroad spikes, shorter and more delicate than those used by today's railroads; six former stations (yes, six!); one iron truss bridge over a railroad (the C&NW, Wheaton); several concrete bridges over rivers and streets; old concrete cattle crossings through the railroad embankment under the Path to protect adjoining farmers' cows from the lethal third rail; large concrete blocks that once held electric signal towers; bits of rusty rail embedded in intersecting streets; parallel streets named Electric Avenue; old railroad ties scattered along the Prairie Path right-of-way; rotting fence posts marking the property line; and cinder-filled platforms at former commuter stops.

See how many of these you can locate and identify.



## FIRST NATIONAL RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONFERENCE A ROUSING SUCCESS

There are railtrail people at work all over the country and trails are booming! This was the message delivered to the 250 trail enthusiasts from thirty states and two Canadian provinces at the first national Rails-to-Trails Conference held at the Sheraton Hotel, Naperville, October 7-10. Representatives of established railtrails from Washington State to Florida told how they did it and advised proponents of new trails that they can succeed too. The Illinois Prairie Path as the granddaddy of them all was honored when Jean Mooring was asked by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy President David Burwell to help open the conference and set the scene by reading the letter that started the railtrail movement. This was the famous letter to the editor written by May Theilgaard Watts, founder of the Illinois Prairie Path, and published in the Chicago Tribune on September 30, 1963 — the letter that changed history by proposing the creation of a nature trail from a neglected, abandoned railroad right-of-way. A great idea whose time had come!

Illinois Prairie Path members participated in many ways at the conference. President Paul Mooring was a panelist at one of the informative workshops and explained how a group of ordinary citizens, volunteers all, built a successful urban railtrail. (Other workshops covered every aspect of railtrail development from legal problems of land acquisition to methods of construction and maintenance.) Both Paul and Jean took part in several walking and bus tours of the Prairie Path conducted by DuPage County staff members Tom Merrion and Greg Dreyer. Several other Prairie Path members attended the conference, including Vice President Bob Hargis and Bonnie Hargis (Bonnie "manned" the Prairie Path booth, answered questions, sold T-shirts and other materials and kept a watchful eye on the folding screen with its colorful pictorial display of memorable events in the Path's history); Jon Duerr, who conducted tours of the Fox River Trail on behalf of the Kane County Forest Preserve District; and James Mackay, who photographed some of the conference activities.

Prominent guest speakers included: William Penn Mott, Jr., director of the National Park Service; Ms. Day Lohmann, assistant to the president of the National Geographic Society; Paul Lamboley, vice chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission; and Frank Wilner, vice president for public affairs of the Association of American Railroads. Dinner on stage at the Paramount Arts Theatre in Aurora hosted by Philip Elfstrom, president of the Kane County Forest Preserve Commission, provided a fitting climax to the conference. The diners also enjoyed a beautiful film produced by Linda Hanlon, "Bicycling America's Rail-Trails".



*Susan Betcher, Sparta, Wisconsin (center front) at Wheaton Prairie during walking tour of IPP led by Tom Merrion (behind her). Also in group are County Board member Barbara Purcell and Paul Mooring.*

Outstanding presentations at the conference were given by Susan Betcher, executive director of the Sparta (Wisconsin) Area Chamber of Commerce on the renowned Elroy-Sparta Trail (see story below) and by Peter Lagerwey, bicycle coordinator and project manager, Seattle (Washington) Engineering Department on the Burke-Gilman Trail (see story below).

## ELROY-SPARTA TRAIL REVITALIZES RURAL ECONOMY

Susan Betcher, vivacious executive director of the Sparta (Wisconsin) Area Chamber of Commerce, is sold on railtrails. "Tourism generated by the Elroy-Sparta National Recreation Trail brings an estimated \$2.5 million into our area of Wisconsin every year," says Susan. Bicycle shops, family restaurants and homelike bed-and-breakfast inns are springing up in each of the small towns through which the trail passes, as are little municipal parks adjacent to the trail. "We like our trail people," adds Susan with a smile, "and they like us too. Last year 60,000 of them enjoyed our hospitality and our beautiful trail with its three spooky tunnels!" Railtrail

fans may obtain an excellent video promoting the Elroy-Sparta Trail and the whole railtrail idea by sending \$25 to Susan Betcher, 101 S. Water Street, Sparta, Wisconsin 54656. Tel.: (608) 269-4123.

## BURKE-GILMAN TRAIL IMPROVES URBAN QUALITY OF LIFE

Peter Lagerwey, bicycle coordinator and project manager for the Seattle (Washington) Engineering Department, says that the department is making available at no cost to the general public copies of what is probably the first comprehensive survey of the impact of an urban railtrail on the nearby property owners as well as its effect on the quality of life of adjacent neighborhoods. Appendices to the study contain many pages of realtors' ads mentioning proximity to the trail as a selling point and comments of realtors and nearby homeowners, generally favoring the trail. The study indicates that trail-related incidence of vandalism, burglary, trespassing or harassment of livestock has been minimal. The authors conclude, "The recommendation of this report is for the City of Seattle to pursue implementation of its urban trails plan." For copies of the report titled "Evaluation of the Burke-Gilman Trail's Effect on Property Values and Crime", published in May, 1987, write to: City of Seattle Engineering Department Bicycle Program, 9th Floor Information Center, Municipal Building, 600 4th Avenue, Seattle, Washington 98104. Tel.: (206) 625-5177.

## REPORT ON ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH ANNUAL MEETING

An enthusiastic crowd of fifty members and friends attended the Illinois Prairie Path annual meeting on November 1 at the DuPage County Historical Museum in Wheaton. Path Vice President Bob Hargis, who had arranged the program, acted as master of ceremonies and introduced the speakers. The crowd received with pleasure the praise of principal speaker Jerry Adelman, executive director of the Upper Illinois Valley Association, who said, "The Illinois Prairie Path is a group we all look to and admire; you are pioneers in the trail movement — both regional and national." He then showed slides of the Illinois-Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor and explained the tremendous potential of this new type of national park for improving regional environmental and recreational resources, interpreting history, and promoting economic redevelopment. "Some day," he said, "we hope to have a connection between the Illinois Prairie Path and the proposed trail along the I and M towpath, sections of which are already in place." He added that his organization is working closely with the new Prairie Trail Authority, headed by Philip Elfstrom, to promote this connection.

Next on the program was the irrepresible Elfstrom himself, who reiterated his goal of developing 700 miles of recreational trails in the Chicago area and said that funding for the Prairie Trail Authority is needed from the Illinois Legislature. He showed maps of recent additions to the Fox River Trail, which is now directly connected to the Illinois Prairie Path via the Batavia Spur.

The third invited speaker was Tom Merrion, right-of-way agent for the DuPage County Division of Transportation. He explained the absence of Jack Knuepfer, chairman of the DuPage County Board, with tongue in cheek saying, "He's in Europe right now working on the eastern link to the Prairie Path — probably with Joan Hamill!" (Editor's note: Joan was still on a trip to the Far East on November 1, Her treasurer's report appears on page 4.) Tom mentioned various improvements to the Path made by DuPage County DOT in 1987 and also listed areas needing future work, such as building a 400-foot bridge over the EJ&E and North Western Railroads in West Chicago and finding a suitable trail route for the Illinois Prairie Path Geneva Spur through downtown West Chicago. He suggested that IPP members should write to Mayor Eugene Rennels to enlist the aid of the city council in promoting the idea of a famous railtrail through town, which could also promote the city as the historic first railroad community in Illinois.

The last speaker was Jean Mooring, who presented a slide show she had developed as a marketing tool for railtrails in general and the Prairie Path in particular. Entitled "The Story of the Illinois Prairie Path — How Volunteers Built an Urban Trail", the show was well received. She is considering putting it on videotape.

Path President Paul Mooring called the short business meeting to order and reported on various major events of the past year including four generally baseless lawsuits, three of which the IPP has had to defend nevertheless at considerable cost in time and money. He mentioned the recent publication of the third revised IPP trail map and the Prairie Path participation in the first national Rails-to-Trails Conference. He announced that the board had accepted with great regret the resignation of Donna Albue who had served with distinction as Path secretary for many years. "We are going to miss her," he said. Brent Coulter has also resigned because of the press of other commitments. Board membership will be reduced from 18 to 15 (as reported by Bob Hargis earlier in the meeting). Accordingly, four board members were re-elected to three-year terms: Len Chabala, Esther Crydermann, Steve Hagar, and Paul Mooring; Bonnie Hargis was elected to fill the unexpired term of James Mackay, who announced his resignation at the meeting. Bonnie, who is the wife of Bob, has agreed to take on the vital job of membership chair. A graduate of Cedar Rapids Business College, she has been employed as a secretary for many years and has long been a hard worker behind the scenes for the Prairie Path.

The meeting ended with the traditional apple cider, cakes and cookies provided by Donna Albue, Nancy Becker, Bonnie Hargis and Jean Mooring. Larry Sheaffer brought two pretty arrangements of prairie plants.



*Susan Aisenbrey is first to try new memorial bench.*

### **BENCHES INSTALLED AND REPAIRED**

On the Prairie Path Work Day, October 17, Path members Dick and Nancy Wilson, Susan Aisenbrey, and Paul and Jean Mooring installed two benches (one a recycled old bench) and replaced the wood boards on a third. The all-new bench was donated to the Illinois Prairie Path in memory of Jim Blake by his mother Margaret Blake and his sister, board member Susan Aisenbrey. The location chosen by Susan is one of the most beautiful on the Path, in Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve, overlooking the marsh with its multitudes of birds. The recycled bench, which had been donated to the Prairie Path many years ago by the Glen Ellyn Garden Clubs, was removed (by permission of Glen Ellyn village staff) from its former location near Main Street, where it was no longer

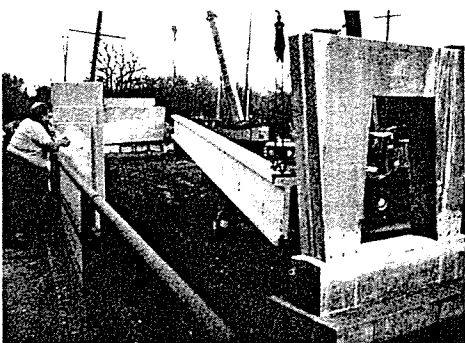


*Paul Mooring, Susan Aisenbrey, Nancy Wilson and Dick Wilson install recycled bench at Geneva Road.*

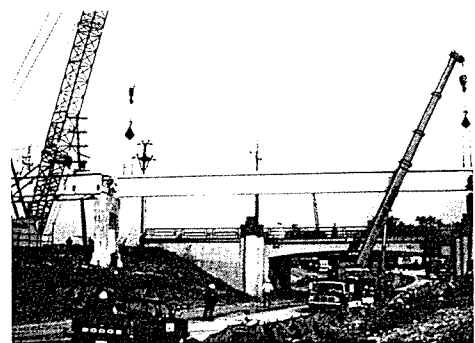
needed, stripped and repainted by Jean, and re-installed with new wood planks near the IPP kiosk at the intersection of County Farm and Geneva Roads. The third bench, which received new boards after having been vandalized, is located near Lake Arrowhead in Wheaton on the Aurora Branch.

### **TOLL HIGHWAY AUTHORITY INSTALLS ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH BRIDGE**

The most spectacular event in Illinois Prairie Path history occurred on Saturday, October 31, when the two center girders for the bridge to carry the Path over Rte. 53 and the new North-South Tollway were installed. Weighing more than 40 tons apiece and over 100 feet long, each girder required two huge cranes to set it in place. Rte. 53 was closed to traffic for more than eight hours. Four other giant girders had already been hoisted into position earlier to form the skeleton of the new bridge, which now arches gracefully over the highway. According to a driver who delivered one of the easternmost two girders (manufactured by Pre-Stressed Inc., Blackstone, Illinois), these two girders are the longest and heaviest (113 feet and 48 tons each) prestressed concrete structures ever built and hauled in Illinois. Each cost \$15,000 at the factory. All costs for the bridge will be paid by the tollway users. Weather permitting, the new bridge will be completed by the end of 1987; the old CA&E bridge can then be taken down without interrupting Path usage.



*Bystander on old Prairie Path bridge watches installation of record-breaking girder on new bridge.*



*The gap is closed over Rte. 53. Old CA and E bridge is in background.*

**TREASURER'S REPORT, November 1, 1986-October 31, 1987 (UNAUDITED)**

Balance on hand, November 1, 1986		
	State Bank of St. Charles	\$ 1,417.45
	SteinRoe Cash Reserves	<u>31,168.46</u>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$32,585.91</b>
Income		
	Donations <sup>(a)</sup>	7,554.00
	Dues	15,966.25
	Sales (Maps, T-shirts, patches, "Guides") <sup>(b)</sup>	1,467.45
	Interest	2,307.14
	Miscellaneous	<u>0.00</u>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$27,294.84</b>
Expenses		
	Capital Improvements	2,935.86
	Maintenance	722.80
	Newsletter	2,964.64
	Membership mailings	464.13
	Printing	943.00
	Office rent and telephone	600.35
	Office supplies	146.36
	Merchandise (Maps, T-shirts, etc.)	827.00
	Legal	491.60
	Villa Park Historical Society <sup>(c)</sup>	500.00
	Miscellaneous	<u>954.77</u>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$11,550.51</b>
Balance on hand, October 31, 1987		
	State Bank of St. Charles	2,990.97
	SteinRoe Cash Reserves	<u>45,339.27</u>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$48,330.24</b>

<sup>(a)</sup>Helen Turner memorial \$2,004.00

<sup>(b)</sup>Villa Park Museum sales \$ 523.25

<sup>(c)</sup>IPP visitor center.

DATED MATERIAL

RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

MEMBERSHIP RATES: Individual \$10; Family \$15; Organization/Supporting \$20; Contributing \$25; Sustaining \$50; Patron \$100; Lifetime \$500

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