

# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

SPRING, 1989

## What to look for: Vanishing traces of a glacier

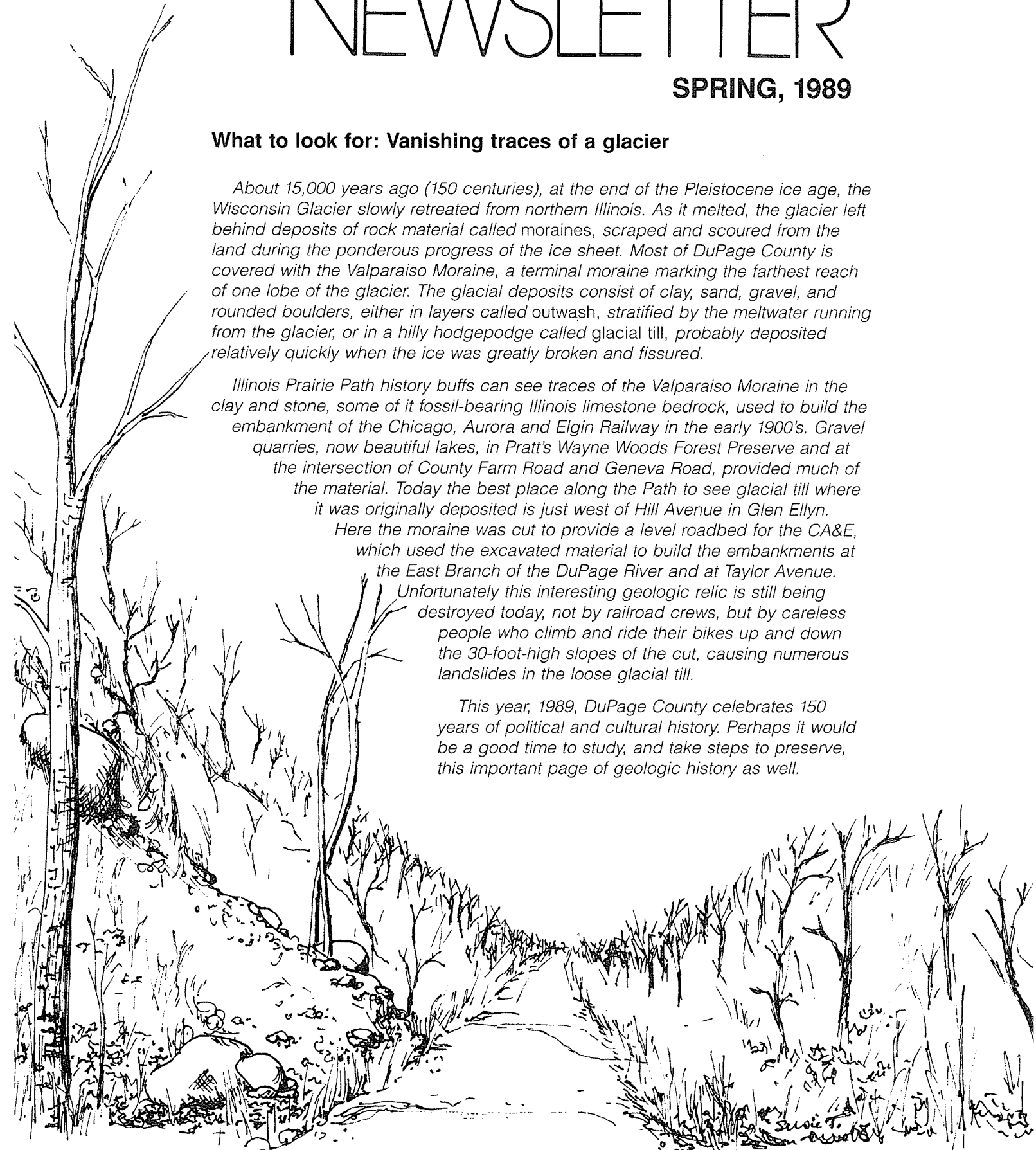
*About 15,000 years ago (150 centuries), at the end of the Pleistocene ice age, the Wisconsin Glacier slowly retreated from northern Illinois. As it melted, the glacier left behind deposits of rock material called moraines, scraped and scoured from the land during the ponderous progress of the ice sheet. Most of DuPage County is covered with the Valparaiso Moraine, a terminal moraine marking the farthest reach of one lobe of the glacier. The glacial deposits consist of clay, sand, gravel, and rounded boulders, either in layers called outwash, stratified by the meltwater running from the glacier, or in a hilly hodgepodge called glacial till, probably deposited relatively quickly when the ice was greatly broken and fissured.*

*Illinois Prairie Path history buffs can see traces of the Valparaiso Moraine in the clay and stone, some of it fossil-bearing Illinois limestone bedrock, used to build the embankment of the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway in the early 1900's. Gravel quarries, now beautiful lakes, in Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve and at the intersection of County Farm Road and Geneva Road, provided much of the material. Today the best place along the Path to see glacial till where it was originally deposited is just west of Hill Avenue in Glen Ellyn.*

*Here the moraine was cut to provide a level roadbed for the CA&E, which used the excavated material to build the embankments at the East Branch of the DuPage River and at Taylor Avenue.*

*Unfortunately this interesting geologic relic is still being destroyed today, not by railroad crews, but by careless people who climb and ride their bikes up and down the 30-foot-high slopes of the cut, causing numerous landslides in the loose glacial till.*

*This year, 1989, DuPage County celebrates 150 years of political and cultural history. Perhaps it would be a good time to study, and take steps to preserve, this important page of geologic history as well.*



## May Theilgaard Watts Proposed For DuPage Heritage Gallery

The DuPage Heritage Gallery is located at the DuPage County Center, 421 North County Farm Road, Wheaton. Its purpose is explained on a plaque beside the door: "That the people, especially our youth, may know the great people of DuPage County." The famous persons with DuPage County connections honored as the first five "Greats" are Elbert H. Gary, John W. (Bet-a-million) Gates, Billy Graham, Harold (Red) Grange, and Robert R. McCormick. Others added later are Sherrill Milnes, Grote Reber, and Kenneth Taylor. The achievements of these men will indeed inspire the young men of DuPage County to strive for excellence.

Yet there is something missing from the gallery, an omission especially painful in the year of the county's Sesquicentennial celebration, namely, the female half of the population. Where are the famous **women heroes** of DuPage County who will inspire the **young women** to greatness? There have been, and are today, many DuPage County women of outstanding achievement; but the one who stands head and shoulders above the rest is May Theilgaard Watts of Naperville. As Staff Naturalist and later Naturalist Emeritus at the Morton Arboretum for a total of thirty-three years, she introduced generations of northern Illinois residents to an appreciation of the beauties and complexities of the natural world through lectures and field trips; her "Reading the Landscape" books are on the study lists of university ecology courses around the nation today. Her most unusual achievement, however, was founding the Illinois Prairie Path which began with her famous letter to the editor of the Chicago Tribune in 1963. It was a revolutionary idea, at the time, converting an abandoned railroad right-of-way into a nature trail, but this charismatic woman, in her seventies, believed in it and spent the last twelve years of her life courageously working to make the dream come true. Her lively lectures, articles, field trips and appearances on radio and television attracted many others to her cause, and today the Illinois Prairie Path is a permanent part of the Illinois landscape. The rails-to-trails movement, which she started with her letter, has spawned scores of trails throughout the country enjoyed by millions of people.

May Watts, homemaker, wife and mother of four, **naturalist and trailblazer**, lived an extraordinary life that will inspire young women *and* men today because she made a difference for her community and for her country. She has already been nominated for induction into the DuPage Heritage Gallery by the board of directors of The Illinois Prairie Path. The letter, dated June 16, 1987, concludes, "Mrs. Watts' work as an educator and conservationist has national significance; and the trail she founded, the Illinois Prairie Path, brings joy to hundreds of thousands of people every year. It is time to induct a woman into the DuPage Heritage Gallery. May Theilgaard Watts should be that woman."

Letters in support of this nomination marking the DuPage County Sesquicentennial should be sent to: Mr. Jerry Bradshaw, President, DuPage Heritage Gallery, Box 77, Wheaton, Illinois 60189.

## May Watts Elementary School to be Dedicated

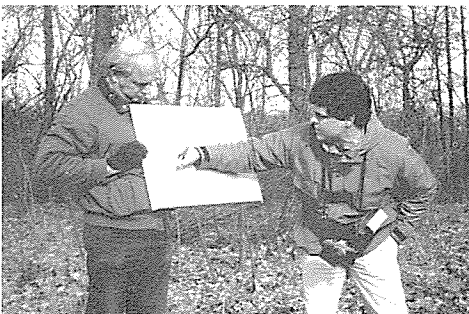
May Theilgaard Watts, 1893-1975, founder of the Illinois Prairie Path, was a distinguished naturalist, teacher, author, poet and artist and a thirty-five-year Naperville resident. She received many honors during her lifetime. Now the Indian Prairie Community Unit School District 204 of Naperville has decided to name a beautiful new elementary school in her memory. Mrs. Watts was nominated for this honor by her longtime friend Marjorie Osborne, who has been for many years a member of the May Theilgaard Watts Society helping to preserve Mrs. Watts' historic home in Naperville.

The school is located at 800 Whispering Hills Drive in the elegant new West Wind Estates subdivision southeast of the intersection of Oswego Road and Rte. 34. The eleven-acre site containing the school and playground adjoins a twenty-nine-acre park to be maintained by the Naperville Park District for active and passive recreation. There will be a combination softball and soccer field, a sledding hill, and a small lake for stormwater management with a naturalized area of native plants allowed to grow along perhaps three-quarters of the pond edge. This will be a good place for the young students to learn about nature, and we think Mrs. Watts would approve. The official dedication will take place at 2:00 p.m. Sunday, April 30. This date was chosen because it is the day before May Watts' birthday, May 1.



May Watts School, viewed from top of nearby sledding hill.

## A Good Hike at Lincoln Marsh



At Goose Island Brook McDonald sketches plants ringing marshy pond.

The first annual Winter Marsh Hike took place on January 28 in almost balmy weather. Twenty-five outdoor lovers, including four Illinois Prairie Path board members and one's spouse, met at Volunteer Park on Liberty at Carlton. After brief introductory remarks by Leaders Brook McDonald and Bob Kelly of the Wheaton Park District and by Paul Mooring, the group headed north over Volunteer Bridge and on to the marsh. The hikers learned about the geology of the area and plant succession at the



IPP board members Jean and Paul Mooring, Ken Moss, and Bob Hargis enjoy bowls of hot stew at Lincoln Marsh. Photo by June Moss.

marsh and about the park district's plans to restore the oak-prairie savanna on Goose Island and to build a nature center with a boardwalk to facilitate study of marsh ecology. Climaxing the morning's hike was a hot lunch of delicious beef stew, cocoa, and cupcakes, prepared and served by Adona McDonald and Lin Hyde, a park district volunteer. There was general agreement that the hike had been fun, even without any snow, and we should do it again next year.

## Trail Straightened at College Avenue, Wheaton



*Bob Hargis and Paul Mooring check out trail relocation west of Hill Ave. parking lot.*

IPP bicyclists have long been endangered by two right-angle turns just west of the College Avenue (Hill Ave.) parking lot in Wheaton. At the suggestion of board member Jean Mooring, the Wheaton Public Works Department has just re-routed the trail in this area in connection with the improvement of the right-of-way between Hill Ave. and President Street. Besides the trail realignment, the project includes: removing undesirable trees, mainly box elders; filling the ditch north of the Cres-



*Wheaton Public Works Department crew begins clearing and grading east of President St.*

cent Street curb, which will help control litter; installing four short side trails for access from on-street parking to the Path; and planting more suitable trees, such as low-growing crabapples, which will not have to be pruned every year to keep them away from the Commonwealth Edison lines. The project will make this section of trail safer, easier to maintain and, with the new plantings, more beautiful.

## “History Treasure Hunt” to Mark DuPage Sesquicentennial and Illinois Trail Appreciation Month

Nineteen eighty-nine is the DuPage County Sesquicentennial year, and the month of May is also (by proclamation of Governor James Thompson) Illinois Trail Appreciation Month. Therefore, the Illinois Prairie Path board of directors has decided to participate in the two celebrations with a special event set for Saturday, May 6. The event will be a “History Treasure Hunt”, a self-guided tour of the Prairie Path to trace the roots of present-day DuPage County through 150 **centuries** of history. A work sheet will be available on the day of the hunt at Volunteer Park in Wheaton and at other locations along the trail; three weeks before the hunt the worksheet will also be available at the IPP office in Wheaton or from Treasure Hunt Coordinator Esther Cryderman and Newsletter Editor Jean Mooring. Illinois Trail Month information will also be distributed.

The points of interest on the work sheet will suggest the history of the land that is now DuPage County and the inhabitants of that land from glaciers and mastodons to Indians and buffalo to railroads and settlements to a high tech society and a famous trail. Participants riding bicycles will compete to see who can visit the greatest number of the listed historical points of interest near to or on the Path between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. in one day, May 6. The sites will be located on or near all five branches of the trail so this will **not** be easy. Participants will sign in at each station where checkers will initial the work sheets. Prizes, IPP T-shirts, will be awarded to the top male and female finishers (those with the most points) in each of three categories: 14 and under, 15-39, 40 and over. The six winners will also have their picture taken for the local newspapers. If a group should win, the group will designate one of its number to receive the prize. For further information call Esther Cryderman, 510-0610, or Jean Mooring, 469-4289.

## Off-Track Betting: Bad News from Warrenville

On February 6, The Illinois Prairie Path board of directors sent a letter to the Illinois Racing Board protesting the proposed development of an off-track betting parlor adjacent to the Path northeast of the Rte. 59 underpass in Warrenville. We believe that this totally inappropriate facility could permanently damage the reputation of the Illinois Prairie Path as a safe and quiet nature trail used by people of all ages from every part of DuPage County for healthful outdoor recreation. Other concerns are: the flooding from the enormous parking lot necessary to accommodate the hundreds of bettors' cars, which will aggravate the flooding problem at the underpass; the large amounts of litter generated by the betting facility, the two associated restaurants and the parking lot which will be thrown or blown into the underpass; the gang members and other juvenile delinquents who may be drawn to the vicinity of the underpass by such an attractive nuisance as a betting parlor.

The Warrenville City Council strongly supports this facility which has just been granted a license by the racing board because it is seen as a major source of revenue, cost-free to Warrenville. The true costs, of course, will be borne by nearby residents, Prairie Path users, and DuPage County, owner and maintainer of the Prairie Path right-of-way. We hope the DuPage County Board can use its influence to mitigate the harmful impacts of this project on the Illinois Prairie Path by requiring major drainage improvements, fencing of the entire OTB site, and police protection for Path users from both the Warrenville Police Department and the DuPage County Sheriff. We urge our members and friends to call their county board representatives to seek their help.

## First National Scenic River in Illinois Needs Our Support

On February 8, the board of directors of The Illinois Prairie Path sent the following letter to Governor Thompson with a copy to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan urging the designation of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River as a National Scenic River. Our members and friends, who enjoy canoe trails on rivers as well as multiple-purpose trails on land, may want to send similar letters to the governor:

Governor James Thompson  
Statehouse  
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Dear Governor Thompson:

On behalf of the board of directors of The Illinois Prairie Path, a not-for-profit corporation with a current membership of 1500, I am writing in support of your proposal to include the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River in the Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Our members are indignant that the original request was turned down late last year by former Secretary of the Interior Hodel although protection for the river was supported by the National Park Service, by members of Congress, by the Illinois General Assembly, and by tens of thousands of Illinois residents from every part of the state.

Please urge President Bush and his new Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan to review this matter and act favorably on it. The beautiful Middle Fork, with its outstanding recreational opportunities, rare plants and animals, archeological sites, and other natural and historic treasures, deserves to be the first National Scenic River in Illinois.

Very truly yours,

F. Paul Mooring, President

**SPRING ACTIVITIES, Rain or Shine**

- Saturday, March 18 **Work Day** to replace signs. Leader: Bob Hargis, 668-7377.
- Saturday, April 22 **Spring Cleanup** in every town and along entire length of Illinois Prairie Path. For information, contact your municipal environmental protection commission; the DuPage County Boy Scout and Girl Scout offices; Tom Merrion, DuPage County Division of Transportation, 665-1155; or Bob Hargis, IPP, 668-7377.
- Saturday, May 6 **"History Treasure Hunt"**, IPP celebration of Illinois Trail Appreciation Month and DuPage County Sesquicentennial. See story, p. 3. Information: Esther Cryderman, 510-0610.
- Saturday, May 13 **Bird Walk** in Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve and along IPP. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in far northwest parking lot. Bring binoculars, bird book, lunch and drink. Leader: Paul Mooring, 469-4289.
- Saturday, May 27 **Spring Hike**, 12-mile round trip on Fox River Trail. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in McCullough Park in Aurora. Use parking lot at southeast corner of Illinois St. and Rte. 31 (Lake St.) on west side of Fox River. Bring lunch and drink. This hike will be one of our activities celebrating Trail Appreciation Month. Leader: Dick Wilson, 299-7882 (8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.)
- Saturday, June 3 **Trail Appreciation Bike Ride**, 40-mile loop trip on Prairie Path/Fox River Trail. Meet at 9:00 a.m., Rte. 59 and IPP (Oak Meadows). Then southeast to Wheaton, southwest to Aurora (on new blacktop in Kane County), cross river at Illinois Street, north on Fox River Trail to St. Charles, via back streets to Smith Road, east to IPP, southeast to Rte. 59. Leader: Nancy Hesler, 293-1062.
- Saturdays, April 22 **Prairie Work Days**, Volunteer Prairie, IPP at Liberty Street and Carlton Ave., Wheaton. Leader: Larry Sheaffer, 790-0313.
- May 20
- June 17

**Other Activities of Interest to our Members**

**West Chicago Prairie Field Trips:** April 22, May 7 — Birds, 6:00 to 11:00; May 20 — Birds, 6:00 to 8:45, and General, 9:00 to noon. Meet at northeast corner of Electronic Support Systems parking lot on east side of Industrial Drive just north of junction with Western Ave. and ½ mile south of Hawthorne. Call 790-4912 for reservations. For information: Mel Hoff, 393-4715 or Mollie Millen, 232-4394.

**Bike Trips To Appreciate Other Famous Trails:** In April, May and June — The Illinois-Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor; the Elroy-Sparta-LaCrosse Trail (Wisconsin); and the Vadalabene Bikeway and Nature Trail (Great River Road, Illinois). Leaders: George and Sandy Burrier, Peoria (309) 266-5085.

— Jean C. Mooring, Editor —

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

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60189

