

# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 1974

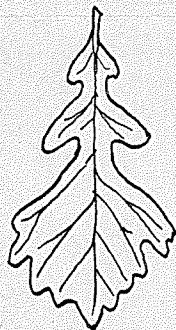
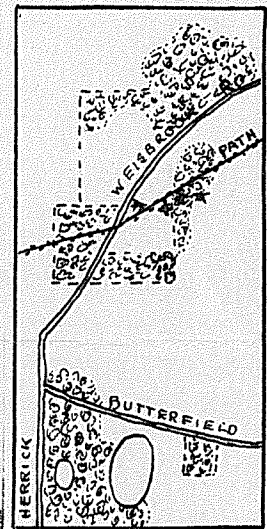
## WHAT TO SEE . . . CLUES

Why is the Prairie Path such an inviting place to walk? We may thank:

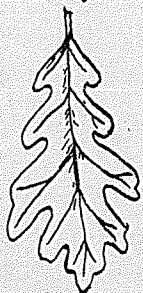
- the glacier that left us a legacy of hills and valleys, marsh-land and streams;
- the climate that was responsible for clothing the land with both prairie and woods;
- the railroad that cut through the hills and built up causeways creating a path with little grade. (It also spread ballast full of a variety of stones for budding geologists.)

As described in the 1874 atlas of DuPage County, Milton township one hundred years ago was "considered as a prairie township although there are some fine groves of timber within its limits". Even then the groves were being broken up into farmers' woodlots and from many of them the timber had been cut. Much of the original prairie had been plowed. About 25 years later the C.A. & E. Railway was built and a strip 60 to 100 feet in width was fenced, preserving, in part, a belt of native plant life. Now with the walking surface improved and with time which heals wounds, the Path offers a trail of great variety and beauty.

Consider a specific area, north-east from Weisbrook Road. This map is traced from the 1874 atlas with the Prairie Path added. There are clues that you could see on a walk along this section today that would tell you how it must have looked 100 years ago. There are several old oaks. They were growing within the right-of-way, but far enough from the center so that they were not in the way and could be left when the tracks were laid. The locations of some are indicated by black stars on the map. One old bur oak is dying but there are many young oaks, its children, to take its place. Growing next to them are some hawthorns and wild crabs, trees that are characteristic of the edge of the forest around here. Are they telling us where the wooded area ended, or were they planted by the birds that found the fences to be good perching sites? There are no prairie grasses; this part of the county had little prairie.



Bur  
Oak



White  
Oak

Many of the shrubs are garden varieties planted first at the stations and since naturalized and spread along the Path.

A footpath on an old right-of-way provides a rich and varied environment. If it was an electric railway it may also provide the RR buff with a chance to find artifacts, the old hardware that supported the third rail.

