

THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

FALL 1975

IN MEMORY OF MAY THEILGAARD WATTS, 1893 - 1975

The front page of this fall issue is a reprint of the letter written by Mrs. Watts to the Chicago Tribune in September 1963 and reprinted as our first promotional material before the Illinois Prairie Path had a name. This was the beginning of the Path, an idea which grew to fruition. Following her leadership we have worked to make her dream a reality. As naturalist for many years at the Morton Arboretum, as author of Reading The Landscape, now in an updated edition, The Master Tree Finder, Winter Tree Finder, and other books, she had a positive and far-reaching influence on people interested in ecology and natural history and desiring to know more about the world in which they lived.

If you have been reading the Newsletter, you know that we have been conducting a usage survey on the Path during the past summer and into this fall. The surveys have been directed and compiled by Gene McArdle, a member of the Board of Directors of the Illinois Prairie Path. As surveys have been completed, reports of the findings have been sent to members of the board including Mrs. Watts. We would like to share with you a letter written to Gene McArdle by Mrs. Watts commenting upon a survey. The letter was written two weeks before her death and is an update on her feelings and thoughts about the Path.

Gene McArdle
Villa Park, Ill.

August 4, 1975

Dear Gene McArdle,

Yes, indeed, I am pleased to see your report on the surveys of the Prairie Path usage. It is an impressive and rewarding account, and seems to justify the existence of the venture.

That the Path has become mainly a bikeway is evident. And I am glad for every bike that uses it, and for everybody that breathes a little deeper in safety because the Path is there.

But the minorities are important, too; the poet, the slow-moving philosopher, the observer of life and land forms. Could there be, I wonder, a method of checking on such usage? Would a page on the teachers' bulletin board in schools along the line, with questions like: How often have you had a class unit based on the Prairie Path, --a bird nest count; a plaster cast of some footprint; a collection of naturalized plants of other lands; a "What eats what" list; a sketch; even a poem, and so on...? Even if such a questioning didn't result in a statistic, it might plant an idea?

Probably we should be content with the use to which the Path is put. But, as I read the Record and tried to visualize being one of five walkers along the Path in Lombard and trying to watch a cicada emerge while 75 cyclists went by, I wondered.

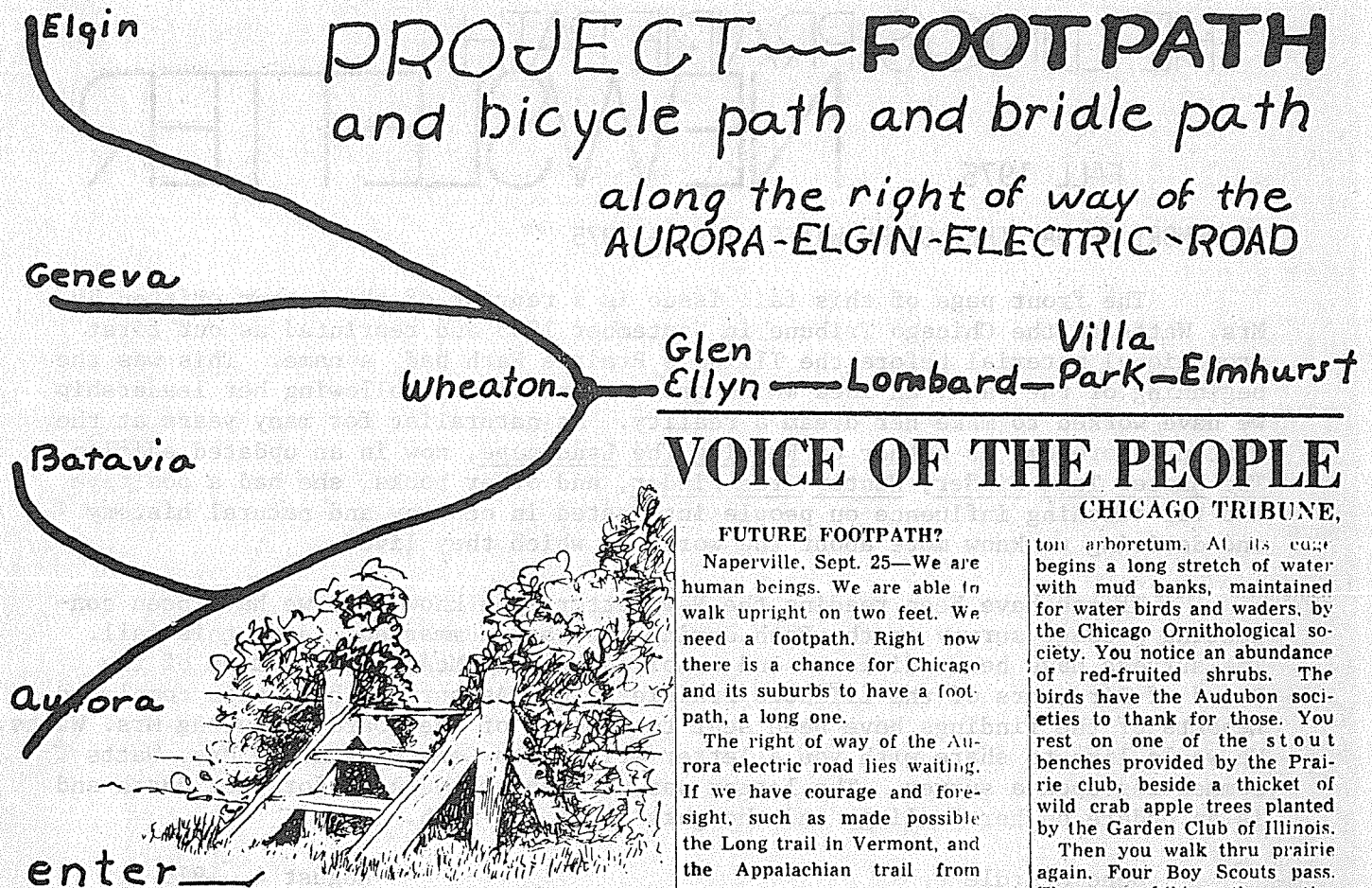
Thank you for sending the report.

Sincerely,

(Signed) May T. Watts

PROJECT—FOOTPATH and bicycle path and bridle path

along the right of way of the
AURORA-ELGIN-ELECTRIC-ROAD



VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

CHICAGO TRIBUNE,

FUTURE FOOTPATH?

Naperville, Sept. 25—We are human beings. We are able to walk upright on two feet. We need a footpath. Right now there is a chance for Chicago and its suburbs to have a footpath, a long one.

The right of way of the Aurora electric road lies waiting. If we have courage and foresight, such as made possible the Long trail in Vermont, and the Appalachian trail from Maine to Georgia, and the network of public footpaths in Britain, then we can create from this strip a proud resource.

Look ahead some years into the future. Imagine yourself going for a walk on an autumn day. Choose some part of the famed Illinois footpath. Where the highway crosses it, you enter over a stile. The path lies ahead, curving around a hawthorn tree, then proceeding under the shade of a forest of sugar maple trees, dipping into a hollow with ferns, then skirting a thicket of wild plum, to straighten out for a long stretch of prairie, tall grass prairie, with big blue stem and blazing star and silphium and goldenrod.

You must go over a stile again, to cross a highway to another stile. This section is different. The grass is cut and garden flowers bloom in great beds. This part you may learn, is maintained by the Chicago Horticultural society. Beyond the garden you enter a forest again, maintained by the Mor-

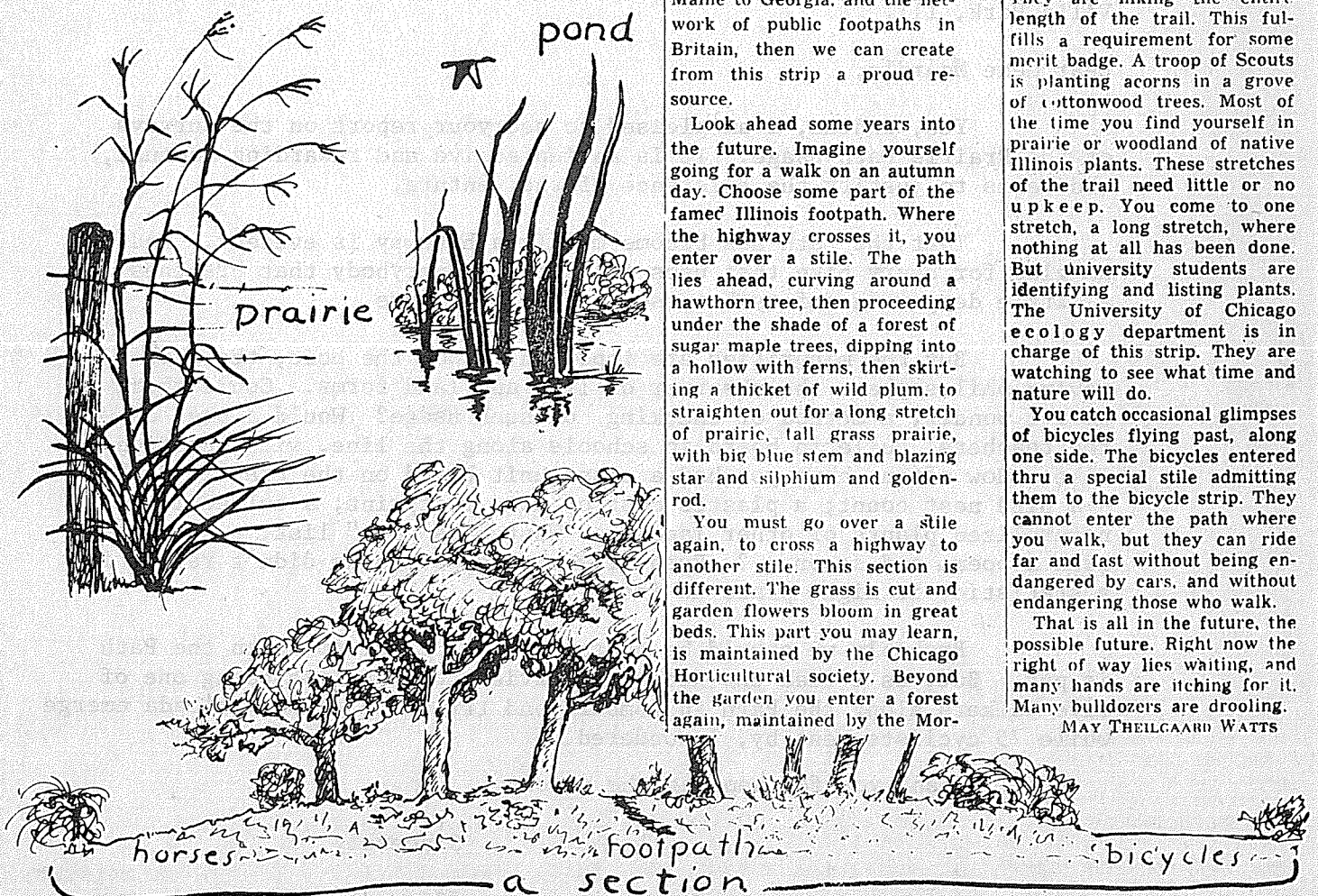
ton arboretum. At its edge begins a long stretch of water with mud banks, maintained for water birds and waders, by the Chicago Ornithological society. You notice an abundance of red-fruited shrubs. The birds have the Audubon societies to thank for those. You rest on one of the stout benches provided by the Prairie club, beside a thicket of wild crab apple trees planted by the Garden Club of Illinois.

Then you walk thru prairie again. Four Boy Scouts pass. They are hiking the entire length of the trail. This fulfills a requirement for some merit badge. A troop of Scouts is planting acorns in a grove of cottonwood trees. Most of the time you find yourself in prairie or woodland of native Illinois plants. These stretches of the trail need little or no upkeep. You come to one stretch, a long stretch, where nothing at all has been done. But university students are identifying and listing plants. The University of Chicago ecology department is in charge of this strip. They are watching to see what time and nature will do.

You catch occasional glimpses of bicycles flying past, along one side. The bicycles entered thru a special stile admitting them to the bicycle strip. They cannot enter the path where you walk, but they can ride far and fast without being endangered by cars, and without endangering those who walk.

That is all in the future, the possible future. Right now the right of way lies waiting, and many hands are itching for it. Many bulldozers are drooling.

MAY THEILGAARD WATTS



The illustrations on the first page are Mrs. Watts'. The bottom illustration shows the path divided into three separate sections; one for foot traffic, one for bicycles and another for traffic on horseback. This is one of her ideas that we have been unable to carry out because of the narrowness of the Path in some areas and the lack of funds generally.

ANNUAL MEETING - The Illinois Prairie Path will hold its annual meeting on Sunday, November 2, 1975 at 2:00 p.m. at the Thornhill Building in the Morton Arboretum. The principal speaker will be Professor Robert F. Betz of Northeastern Illinois University. Dr. Betz will speak and show slides on "Prairie Preservation and Restoration". He has been instrumental in identifying, managing and saving most of the prairies remaining in the Chicago area. As in past years, refreshments will be served.

PROJECTS AND IMPROVEMENTS - The Path usage survey continues this fall. There have been two continuous day-to-day surveys at the same location. One was for three days and one for five days. Gene McArdle is compiling these surveys into statistical data which can be used at many levels, state and county. To those members of the Path and friends who helped in taking the survey, Thank You. Our thanks also to those of you who were kind enough to fill out information cards and give your thoughts and comments about the Path. A summary of findings will be in a future Newsletter.

Villa Park - Litigation has been instituted by the village of Villa Park to force Foster and Kleiser, Division of Metromedia, Inc., Chicago, to remove the billboards illegally occupying the Prairie Path right-of-way.

Wheaton - Day Lilies have been planted on a portion of the Demonstration Block by the Seedlings Garden Club. Additional improvements have been pruning and mulching of trees and shrubs. The city has assisted by spreading black dirt over some of the area and seeding it.

Kane County - A \$1,000 expenditure has been approved by Kane County for limestone screenings for a section of the northwest branch of the Path. Also Glenwood Park on the Fox River has been purchased by the County making use of grants from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Glenwood Park adjoins the Prairie Path and was once a popular amusement park where the old C.A. & E. carried as many as 120 carloads of passengers in a single day.

WORK DAY - A work day has been scheduled for Saturday, October 18, rain date, November 1, to work on the Great Western Railroad embankment northwest of Prince Crossing. The plan is to build steps on either side of the embankment to make for safer travel in this area. Volunteers will meet at 9:30 a.m. at the intersection of Prince Crossing and the Path and walk approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ mile NW. It is suggested that volunteers bring lunch and beverage as well as tools. For further information, call Dick Wilson (299-7882) or Paul Mooring (469-4289).

Prairie Path Patches - \$1.00

"Guide to the Illinois Prairie Path" by Helen S. Turner - \$1.25

- Bobbie Lively, Editor -