

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