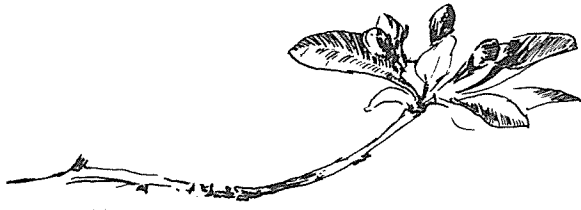




THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1985

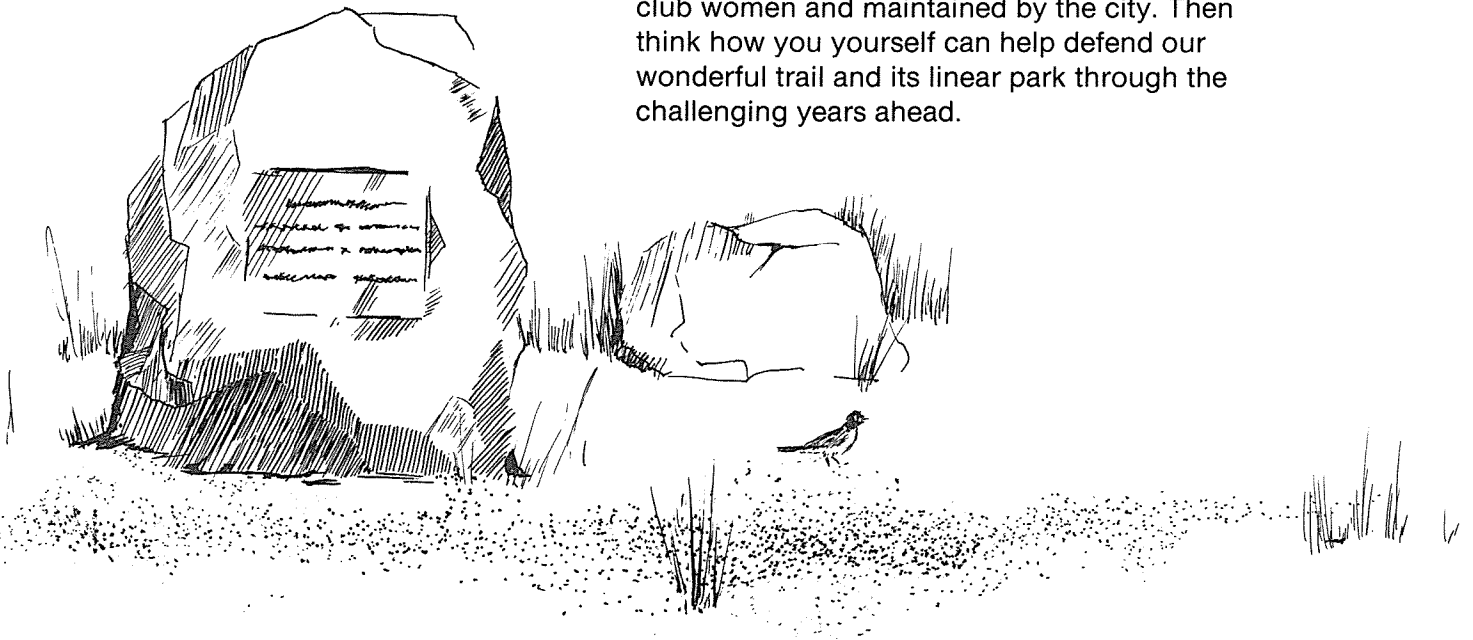


What to look for:

Founders Park — Where History Blooms in Wheaton

It's a small green oasis only a block long in the heart of Wheaton, surrounded by city streets and railroad tracks with a limestone trail running through it. Yet spring is here too as a redbreasted robin grubs for worms in the damp earth under a yellow forsythia bush and a flowering crabapple tree perfumes the air. "The Illinois Prairie Path Founders Park", a rustic sign proclaims. As you pause to rest in the shade, you can read the inscription on a large granite glacial boulder: "Footpaths are defended with spirit by their users." May Theilgaard Watts, founder of the Prairie Path more than twenty years ago, wrote these words, which sum up the history of the Path as well as its future.

As you enjoy the beauty of this tiny park, think about the history of this land and people: the vast seas that once covered Illinois, the great glaciers, the rolling prairies, the Indians who lived here, the railroads, the settlers, the growing, bustling city. Think about the long trail in a linear park envisioned by Mrs. Watts and also about the small park before you, an important part of the whole, planned and planted years ago by garden club women and maintained by the city. Then think how you yourself can help defend our wonderful trail and its linear park through the challenging years ahead.



Prairie Path to be cut in Wheaton?

On January 14 at a meeting in the Wheaton city hall, Chicago and North Western Transportation Company officials informed representatives of The Illinois Prairie Path, the City of Wheaton, and the DuPage County Highway Department that the railroad station platforms between Cross and Hale Streets will be torn up and removed as soon as possible this year. They will be replaced with rough railroad ballast, which will keep pedestrians and cyclists away from railroad property. Assistant Vice President and Division Manager William Otter explained that safety considerations and drainage problems oblige the railroad to take this action.

Prairie Path board members in attendance pointed out that the platforms have constituted our de facto trail in this area for approximately fifteen years, ever since the city took over and paved our entire right-of-way for parking lots in violation of the Prairie Path lease with DuPage County, owner of the property. [The lease states that on the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin property located within the corporate limits of any municipality the Prairie Path "shall be demised and leased a ten (10) foot wide strip on and along the entire length of the said property located within such corporate limits. The LESSOR shall have the right to designate the location of the said ten (10) foot wide strip on the said property."] They added that all these years, thanks to the North Western, the railroad platforms have provided a smoothly-surfaced, accident-free, and direct substitute route for Path users. Unless a satisfactory new trail is built, these users by the thousands are now going to have to climb steps and cross parking lots between rows of parked cars or else bike and walk for two blocks along the north side of Liberty Street dodging traffic because there is not even a sidewalk here.

After due consideration of all these facts, the Prairie Path board voted at its regular meeting on February 5 to urge that a new trail be built to comply with the terms of the lease, and that it should meet the following standards:

1. The trail should be continuous, direct, clearly-marked, and on our own right-of-way.
2. It should be safe (separated from both cars and trains).
3. It should have a smooth, well-drained surface, a minimum of eight (8) feet wide with a maximum 2½% grade.
4. It should be well-landscaped, clean, and aesthetically pleasing since it is in the heart of downtown Wheaton.

We thank the North Western Railroad for helping us out all these years. Now it is time to ask DuPage County and the City of Wheaton to end the impasse at last. Thousands of Path users are waiting.



Lonesome Prairie Path sign beside parking lot steps west of Main Street, Wheaton. Where is the trail?



Same steps, same sign, view is east across Main Street toward another parking lot and more steps. County Courthouse is in background.

Glen Ellyn Needs a Bridge at Taylor Avenue

"Wheaton has one and Lombard has one; Glen Ellyn should have a Prairie Path bridge too!" says Jean Mooring, Path board representative for Glen Ellyn.

In a statement read at the Glen Ellyn Park District public hearing on January 21, held to discuss allocation of funds from a recent \$600,000 bond issue, Jean said on behalf of the Prairie Path board:

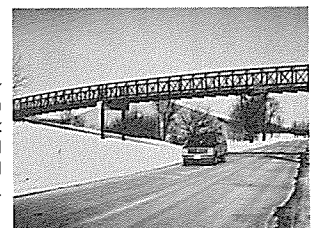
*"Many Glen Ellyn residents who enjoy the park district programs and facilities also ride their bikes and jog on the Prairie Path. Therefore, our board would like to propose a different use for some of the \$600,000 bond issue funds, which we think would be supported by most Glen Ellyn residents. It is this: Spend *\$50,000 of those funds to build a Prairie Path bridge over Taylor Avenue. Our board gets many complaints about the situation at Taylor from bicyclists and joggers, who tell us that a pedestrian bridge is urgently needed to eliminate the necessity of travelling up and down those steep slopes and crossing a rather busy and dangerous street at the bottom. Judging by our Path usage surveys, we can say that such a bridge would be used by many more people every year than swim at Sunset Pool, especially since it would be, of course, a year-round facility. We hope you give our proposal serious consideration. We will be happy to discuss it further and to help with all phases of the project if it receives your approval, including planning, funding, and construction."*

The Prairie Path asks everyone who has ever complained about the Taylor Avenue crossing to sit down and write a short letter supporting the bridge proposal.

Send it to:
Penny Devin, President
Glen Ellyn Park District Board
501 Hill Avenue
Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137

Send a copy to:
Don Althaus, Editor
The Glen Ellyn News
460 Pennsylvania Avenue
Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137

Gracefully arched Cor-Ten steel pedestrian bridge carries Great Western Trail cyclists and hikers over Peck Road west of St. Charles.



This may be our only chance to solve this problem!

* The Kane County Forest Preserve District spent approximately \$50,000 to build a similar-length, Cor-Ten steel pedestrian bridge over Peck road on the Great Western Trail.

Spring Activities

(Rain or Shine)

- Saturday, April 20 **Annual Prairie Path Cleanup** in all villages and along entire length of Path. Wear gloves and bring garbage bags. Coordinators: Larry Sheaffer, 665-4408, and Bob Hargis, 668-7377.
- Saturday, May 11 **Work Day** to build railings at north end of Volunteer Bridge. Meet at 9:00 a.m., F. E. Wheaton Lumber Co. parking lot, Wesley at Western, Wheaton. Leader: Paul Mooring, 469-4289.
- Sunday, May 19 **Horseback Ride** to Pratts Wayne Woods and West Branch Reservoir Forest Preserves. Meet at 9:30 a.m., Smith Road and Munger. Chuck wagon lunch provided, \$2.50 per person. Leader: Jerry Martin, 289-1983.
- Saturday, May 25 **Bird Walk** along Path and in adjoining forest preserves. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at County Farm Road and Geneva Road. Bring binoculars and bird books. Leader: Paul Mooring, 469-4289.
- Saturday, June 8 **Work Day** to install signs along trail. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Members' Room, Rathje Park, Roosevelt and Delles, Wheaton. Leaders: Dick Wilson, 299-7882, Nancy Hesler, 293-1062, and Bob Hargis, 668-7377.
- Sunday, June 9 **Hike** to Warrenville Grove Forest Preserve. Ten-mile round trip. Meet at 9:00 a.m., Members' Room, Rathje Park, Roosevelt and Delles, Wheaton. Bring lunch and drink. Leader: Dick Wilson, 299-7882.
- Saturday, June 15
Sunday, June 16 **Two-Day Bike Trip Overnight** to Rockford. Experienced bikers only. Bring own gear. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Nancy Hesler's, Oak Meadows. Leader: Nancy Hesler, 293-1062.
- Saturday, June 29 **Hike, Picnic, and Trolley Ride** on authentic C.A. and E. electric car at Trolley Museum in South Elgin. We will hike along and explore a new section of the beautiful Fox River Trail. Less than five miles round trip for the hike. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at Blackhawk Forest Preserve, Route 31 in Kane County. (Take Ill. Route 64, North Ave., to Route 31, first street west of Fox River in St. Charles. North 5.6 miles to Blackhawk Forest Preserve entrance. East .4 mile to parking lot beside river. Meet a shelter house.)

Bring lunch and drink, and \$1.50 for the trolley ticket. Leader: Jean Mooring, 469-4289.
- Saturday, July 13 **Work Day** to build steps opposite entrance to Blackwell Forest Preserve. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in parking lot on Path at Winfield Road south of Butterfield. Bring shovels, hoes, pruning saws. Leader: Paul Mooring, 469-4289.

Prairie Path T-Shirts Now Available!

—Good quality white cotton, short sleeved, knit shirts. Green trim on neck and sleeves. Prairie Path logo on left front. Sizes: Children - medium and large; Adults - small, medium and large. Extra Large, special order. Each \$6 plus \$1 for handling and postage. Please send check payable to Illinois Prairie Path and order to Hillside Cyclery, 4049 Washington Street, Hillside, Illinois 60162.

—Prairie Path Patches \$1.25 each.

—*The Illinois Prairie Path - A Guide* by Helen Turner. Gives history, geology of Path. Many illustrations of wild flowers, trees, animal tracks seen on the Path. Each \$1.50. For quantities of 10 to 20-\$1 each; 20 or more-75¢ each. For patches and book please send order to Illinois Prairie Path, Box 1086, Wheaton, Illinois 60189.

Come One, Come All — Let's Ride the Trolley!

The Prairie Path board invites all members and friends to enjoy a special treat—a trip into the past with us. Come to the Electric Railroad Fair on June 29 at the famous RELIC Fox River Trolley Museum in South Elgin. On display will be the collection of historic railroad cars from the glory days of the electric interurbans. We will see cars from the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway built for the “Great Third Rail” and now operating exclusively from overhead trolley wires on a 1½ mile-long remnant of the Fox River Line. If we are very lucky we will ride on Roaring Elgin car #20, the oldest surviving wooden interurban car in this country, built eighty years ago and still going strong!

Like the Prairie Path, the Trolley Museum is run by unpaid volunteers who do all the work themselves, restoring and maintaining the priceless old cars. On weekends these same dedicated railfans put on authentic railroad uniforms and serve as motormen and conductors explaining the history of interurban railroads to fascinated museum visitors. They will, as their brochure says, “take you back in time aboard a gently swaying car, accompanied by the clang of the gong, the throbbing of the air compressors and the hum of powerful motors” against a backdrop of lush forest and glimpses of canoes and fishermen on the peaceful river.

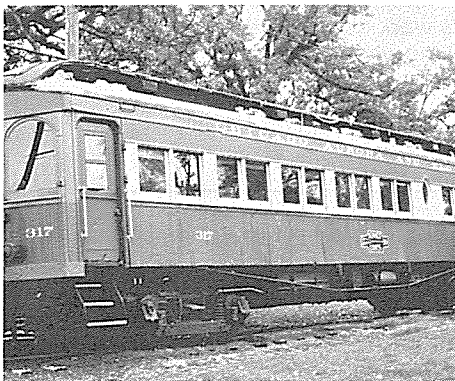
We hope many Path members and friends will join us for this unique excursion, which will combine a 5-mile round trip hike along the newest section of the beautiful Fox River Trail with a picnic at the Trolley Museum and a 3-mile round trip ride on the Fox River Line. See the listing under Spring Activities for directions. Don't forget to bring a picnic lunch and \$1.50 for your trolley ticket. Y'ALL COME!



Interior of CA and E car #20 making run to Blackhawk Forest Preserve



Railfan plays motorman



“Sunset Line” CA and E car #317 at Museum

Prairie Path Signs New Lease With DuPage County

At the regular monthly meeting on February 4, the Prairie Path board voted to approve the newly-revised DuPage County lease prepared by the state's attorney's office under the direction of the county highway committee. The lease, to run until January 1, 1990, will take effect after approval by the full county board.

New wording in this lease specifically states that the Path-leased property (most of the former right-of-way of the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railroad, which is known in its entirety by the county as the DuPage Parkway) is also “known and referred to as ‘The Illinois Prairie Path’.” The Path-leased property is the entire county-owned right-of-way in the unincorporated areas and a continuous 10-foot strip through all municipalities.

Interesting also is the actual value of the leased premises, which the county and the Path agree is \$56,000 per annum. The parties further agree “that the providing of maintenance. . .and the LESSEE's effort to further the scientific, educational, esthetic and recreational purposes have a value equal to or in excess of the actual value of leased premises per annum.”

To accommodate the different maintenance styles developed by the various municipalities over the years the new lease divides the property into zones or areas of four different characteristics: parklike (as in Villa Park); suburban—more trees, foliage, and under-growth (as in Glen Ellyn); rural—natural state with minimal disturbance to natural flora (as in unincorporated areas); and special use—buildings, parking lots, demonstration prairies, etc. (most municipalities).

Elmhurst Park District Signs Prairie Path Lease With DuPage County

On January 30 the Elmhurst Park District Board of Commissioners took two actions to benefit the Prairie Path. The board voted to accept a lease for the DuPage Parkway, the entire CA and E right-of-way in Elmhurst (except for the 10-foot strip leased to The Illinois Prairie Path). This new lease replaces the former lease held by the city, which lapsed in 1978. Under the terms of the lease, the park district agrees to maintain and develop the land in cooperation with the City of Elmhurst.

The board also passed a motion to notify the city that it disapproves of a proposal to construct a 13-space parking lot on the DuPage Parkway north of Prairie Path Lane east of Spring Road. Commissioners stated the lot would be an inadequate solution to the Spring Road parking problem as well as an improper use of green space.

The Prairie Path Board of Directors thanks the Elmhurst Park Board for these two votes of confidence. We believe the Elmhurst Park District is leading the way to a new era: Prairie Path management by a coalition of park districts in the various municipalities acting together with the DuPage County Forest Preserve District in the unincorporated areas. This would be only logical, after all, since the Path is essentially a linear park and the Prairie Path as a private not-for-profit corporation does not have the resources of a taxing body to maintain the trail to the highest standards.

Membership Notes

A large "thank you" to all who responded to our membership drive. In December and January 270 people renewed their memberships and we gained 17 new members. A word of explanation: In order to take advantage of bulk mail rates we sent renewal notices to all members whose renewals would have come due in the first four months of 1985. The mailing label on this **Newsletter** shows the date your membership expires. Labels which do not include a date mean we have no record of receiving membership dues from you since 1983. If you have any questions about membership and/or your status, please call Dee Tevonian, 668-1976. Regular contributions help make the Prairie Path what it is; we need ALL of you.

In Memoriam — Walter Clay Lowdermilk

Mr. and Mrs. Richard B. Kemp of Chicago have sent us \$500 for a lifetime membership in the Prairie Path, together with the following letter:

"In the December, 1984, issue of American Forests there is an article about a man named Walter Lowdermilk. The first paragraph says: 'This year's 50th anniversary of the Soil Conservation Service is a good time to revive the memory of the man who was not only the number 2 man in SCS but also the number 1 man in soil research, erosion control, and water conservation. Walter Clay Lowdermilk was a scientist of many parts: forester, hydrologist, food-producer, land-use expert, agriculturalist, and geologist. ... Walter died in May, 1974. There is no monument to his memory, but his name is enrolled among the famous dead as having been the founder of the scientific basis of soil conservation.'"

Mrs. Kemp writes, "That 'no monument' made me sad so I'm sending this lifetime membership in his honor or memory from us for us." She adds, "What I'm trying to say is that this man's work has inspired me to make this decision. Also weighing in it is the fact that I shall have to retire soon and no telling when I'll have this kind of money again."

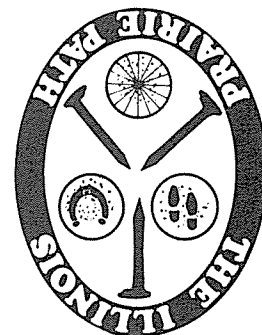
The Prairie Path board thanks Mr. and Mrs. Kemp for their generosity and also for telling us about the work of a great American, to whom we are all indebted for expanding our knowledge of the life-giving earth.

— Jean C. Mooring, Editor —

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