

Elgin FALL 1993

THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

Geneva

Wheaton—Glen Ellyn—Lombard—Villa Park—Elmhurst

Batavia

Aurora

enter

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

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-

CHICAGO TRIBUNE, 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.

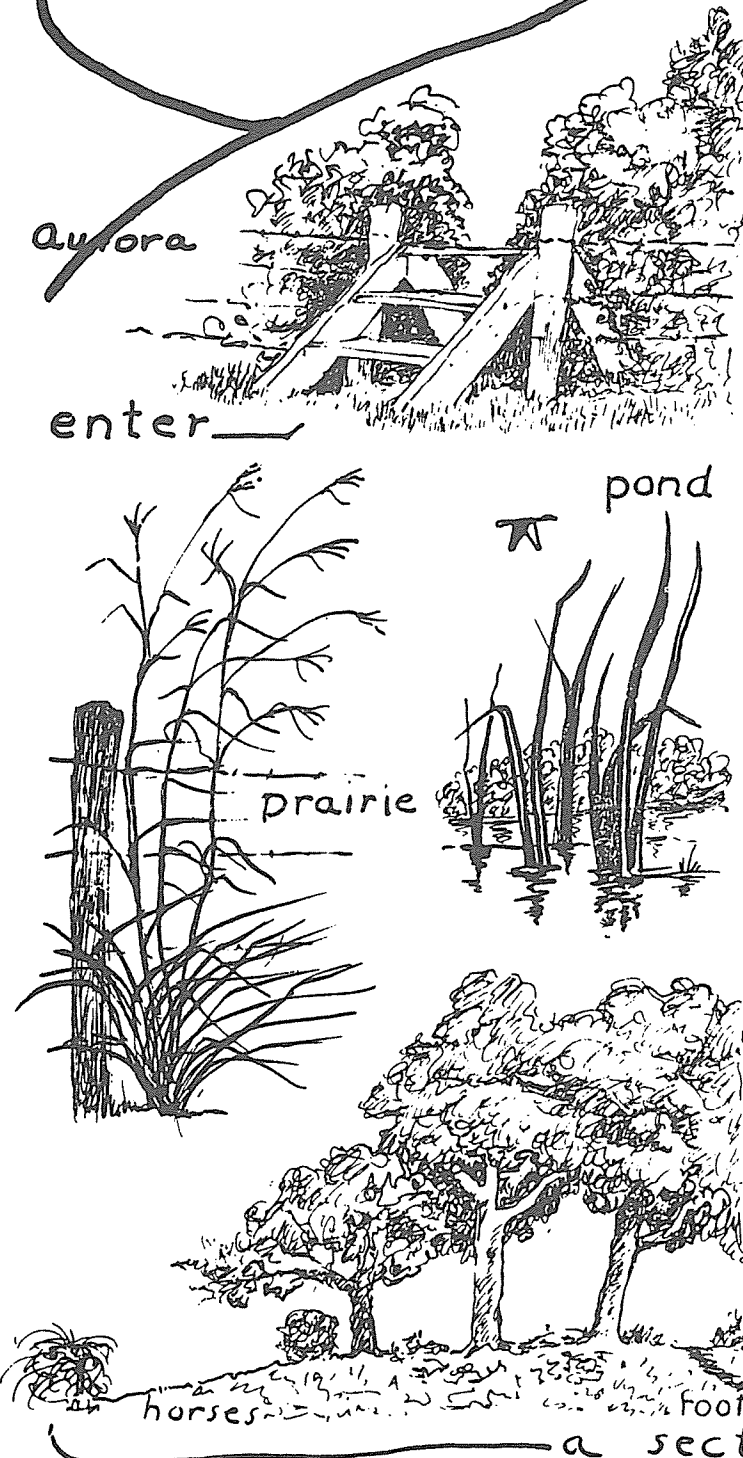
Then you walk thru prairie again. Four Boy Scouts pass. They are hiking the entire length of the trail. This fulfills a requirement for some merit badge. A troop of Scouts is planting acorns in a grove of cottonwood trees. Most of the time you find yourself in prairie or woodland of native Illinois plants. 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

1963



horses a section bicycles

1993 VILLA PARK CARNIVAL VIOLATED STATE LAW

Villa Park held its Summerfest Carnival on the Illinois Prairie Path again this year from July 15 to July 18 with two additional days for set-up and take-down. Local residents had sought a temporary injunction to prevent the carnival from being held on the Prairie Path. Their petition was denied by Judge S. Keith Lewis, who reportedly told the plaintiffs they were un-American to pursue a legal remedy after exhausting all administrative channels. The judge did not admit evidence about last year's noise, lights, crowds that obstructed the Illinois Prairie Path, improper signs, and damage to the Path and its surrounding right-of-way by heavy carnival trucks. He was interested only in the promises of carnival promoters who swore this year would be different.

In all fairness we can state that some improvements were made. The Prairie Path was not completely blocked by a ride as was the case last year. However, Path bicyclists still had to dismount and walk their bikes through the crowds as they did last year. There were no electrical cables snaking across the Path to trip the unwary; this time they were buried. There were fewer rides but they were still very noisy, and the heavy trucks again damaged the grass and made ruts in the surface of the county-owned DuPage Parkway. The IPP logo sign at Ardmore Avenue was covered with a makeshift taped-on sign reading "Please

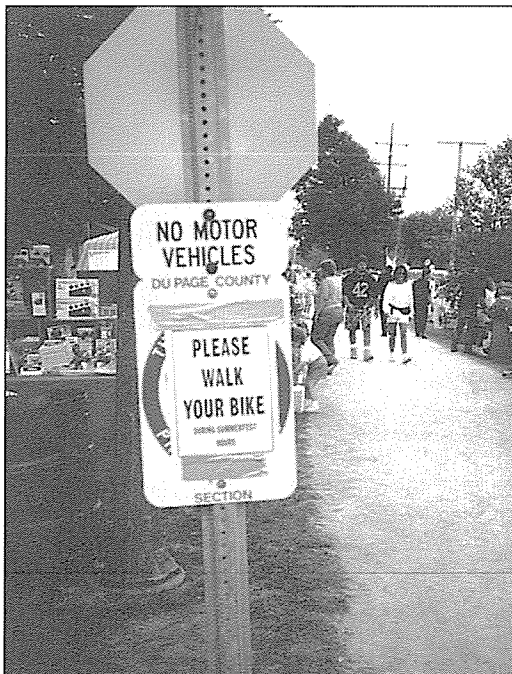


Patrons of this ride swing high over Prairie Path.

Walk Your Bike". The large Summerfest sign located six to ten feet west of the sidewalk was obviously installed on county property without a permit.

The promoters of the carnival, the Village of Villa Park and its Summerfest Commission, and the Villa Park Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, swore in court that they would obey all applicable local laws and obtain the necessary permits; the Rotary Club put this in writing when it obtained the special use permit from DuPage County, owner of the site in question (except the gazebo).

Believing that the carnival should comply also with state law, the homeowners decided to test the carnival's compliance with the Illinois EPA noise regulations for residential areas. Accordingly, they commissioned Richard Gullickson, a Certified/Industrial Hygienist at



IPP logo sign is obscured by carnival sign reading "Please Walk Your Bike."



IPP cyclist walks his bike through crowds.

Triodyne Environmental Engineering, who specializes in acoustical measurements and often testifies in court on noise pollution cases, to make some scientific measurements with his state-of-the-art equipment. The readings were taken on Friday night, July 16, between 7:15 and 11:10 at four residential locations across the streets on both sides of the Prairie Path right-of-way (DuPage Parkway). The results were shocking. The house farthest away, 250 feet from the gazebo, toward which the loudspeakers were turned, received the greatest amount of sound energy, whose decibel levels far exceeded permissible sound pressure levels at virtually every frequency tested. The readings



Carnival crowds block Prairie Path.

violated permissible statutory levels even for AVERAGE BACKGROUND noise from the carnival rides and loudspeakers and other festival activities when the rock bands were NOT playing and also even INSIDE the home with doors and windows closed.

Acting on this information, the homeowners have filed a complaint with the Illinois Pollution Control Board and have sent copies of the Gullickson report to all interested agencies, including

the DuPage County Board Transportation Committee. The ultimate relief sought is a denial of next year's and all future permits by DuPage County because obviously no carnival can be conducted without loudspeakers.

NEW LOCATION FOR ANNUAL MEETING

Board member Ken Moss announces that The Illinois Prairie Path annual meeting this year will be held at The Abbey, 407 W. St. Charles Road in Elmhurst at 2:00 p.m., Sunday, November 7. Ken, who is an Elmhurst Park Board member, chose The Abbey as our new meeting place because it is easy to find (about one-half mile east of Rte. 83 just west of York High School), accessible (plenty of parking close by and no steps to climb), spacious, attractive and comfortable. The Abbey is owned by the Elmhurst Park District.

The featured speaker will be George Berndt, Interpretive Specialist for the Illinois-Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor. He will make a visual presentation and answer questions about this jewel of the National Park System, which is right on our doorstep and, we hope, will some day be connected to the Prairie Path.

The report of the president, election of board members, annual slide show, good conversation, and delicious refreshments will round out the meeting. Come one, come all, and enjoy!

CHAINSAW ARTIST RETURNS!

One bright spot in the Oak Meadows gloom (see bridge story, p. 4) is the appearance of another tree stump mushroom, probably the work of the same chainsaw sculptor we reported on in the Summer, 1992 *Newsletter*. Regrettably, his identity remains a mystery. However there is a chance someone may yet catch him in the act because nearby stumps stand neatly cut and ready for shaping. Let's be on the lookout for this shy guy, who has all of us stumped. When we do nab him we can thank him at last for adding a touch of whimsy to our woodsy trail.



New mushroom nestles in clump of luxuriant poison ivy. Protective cover?

SUPPORT SOUGHT ON TWO MAJOR PRAIRIE PATH ISSUES

Two special mailings have gone out to Illinois Prairie Path members and friends this summer. The first was a letter-with-postcard campaign directed to the Illinois Commerce Commission to demonstrate the firm opposition of DuPage County residents to the installation by Commonwealth Edison of high tension 138,000-volt power lines on the Prairie Path in Warrenville and Wheaton. The public response to this appeal has been excellent. Although the hearing examiner has recommended approval of Com Ed's request, the full Illinois Commerce Commission has not yet rendered its decision; therefore, cards and letters may still be sent to:

Chairperson and Commissioners
Illinois Commerce Commission
P.O. Box 19280
Springfield, IL 62794-9280.

Pre-printed postcards are available from Bob Rawls, Friends of the Prairie Path, 393-6720.

The second special letter-postcard mailing from President Paul Mooring went out in late August asking Prairie Path members and friends to call DuPage County Board member Michael Formento (Office, 858-1800) or to write to him as chairman of the DuPage County Board Transportation Committee, 130 N. County Farm Road, Wheaton, IL 60187 in support of the pedestrian bridge now under construction to carry Prairie Path users over Rte. 59 north of North Avenue on the Elgin Branch. The



Blacktop trail section through marshy area east of Rte. 59, built by IDOT to bypass bridge construction.

Illinois Department of Transportation is building the bridge as a part of its project to widen Rte. 59 to four lanes north of North Avenue. Some homeowners in nearby Oak Meadows have recently mounted a strong campaign to stop construction of the bridge and thus slow the encroaching urbanization of their area. The IPP board of directors urges a countywide show of support for the bridge, which is the only safe way to separate Path users from vehicular traffic at this dangerous intersection. We believe the promised new traffic signal is just not good enough. Keep those cards, letters and phone calls coming!

IPP Fall Walk to Remember May Watts

On September 25, 1963, May Theilgaard Watts sat in her historic home in Naperville and wrote a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. The letter was published five days later and created an immediate sensation among Mrs. Watts' legion of friends and admirers because of the novel idea she proposed. A nature trail, a simple footpath (with parallel trails for horses and bicycles) on an abandoned railroad right-of-way. We reprint the letter on the front page together with line drawings Mrs. Watts added later.

Nobody knew it then, of course, but the Illinois Prairie Path was born on that day. Less than four weeks later on October 19, 1963 the trail began to take shape when some 80 people joined Mrs. Watts, Floyd Swink, Helen Turner, and other naturalists from the Morton Arboretum for the first organized walk on the old Chicago, Aurora, and Elgin right-of-way.

On Saturday, September 25, 1993, the thirtieth anniversary of the writing of that famous letter, Prairie Path members and friends will meet at Army Trail Road and the Path in Wayne and retrace that first walk in part.

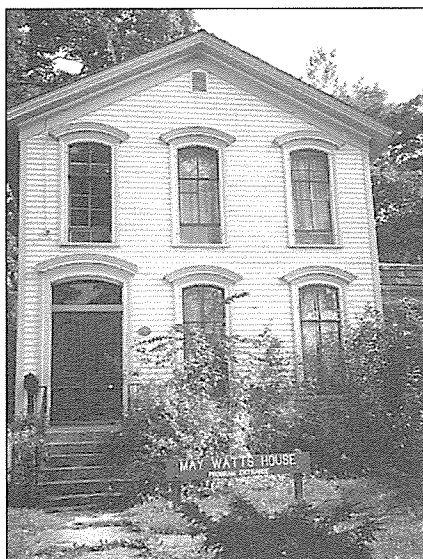
The first walkers were divided into three groups, two of which took separate paths on the Geneva and Batavia Spurs; in '93 we will walk only on the Elgin Branch near Wayne south to the EJ&E tracks and north into the marsh at Pratt's Wayne Woods. Our leaders will be Floyd Swink and Carol Doty, two of Mrs. Watts' good friends from the Morton Arboretum. We'll revel in fall color, laugh at Floyd Swink's puns, and relive with Carol Doty some of the memorable events of Mrs. Watts' life. We'll also see how closely our beloved present-day Prairie Path approaches May Watts' dream. Join us!

MAY WATTS' GARDEN WILL BE RESTORED

On July 23, 1993 The Growing Place Nursery and Flower Farm, Inc. on Plank Road, Naperville, sponsored a Garden Walk "to benefit the gardens of the May T. Watts Society". Carol Massat, owner of The Growing Place, organized the walk, ably assisted by members of the Naperville Garden Club, the May T. Watts Society, and the owners of the four beautiful gardens on display. The lovely weather made it a perfect day for the many appreciative attendees, topped off by refreshments served at The Growing Place, including small cakes, fresh fruit, iced tea and lemonade. The sponsors of the benefit have presented a generous check to the May T. Watts Society to be used for restoring the garden at her home, 227 E. Jefferson Street in Naperville.

Mrs. Watts' garden was the fifth on the walk. It does need a lot of work; but some of the original features remain, such as flowers and shrubs she planted, a maple tree that towers over the house, the white picket fence, the pond with stone benches, the sturdy arbor covered with Dutchman's Pipe, and the coach house, embellished with a charming little greenhouse, which was given to Mrs. Watts by Joy Morton.

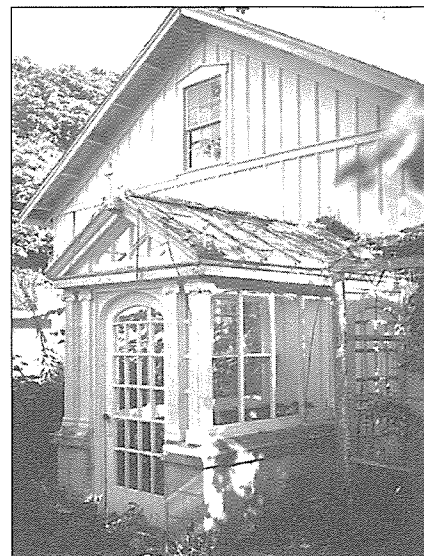
It is fitting that the restoration of this garden has begun in the May Watts Centennial Year. (She was born on May 1, 1893.) It will continue under the direction



May Watts House, built in 1866 by G.N. Gross, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

of the May T. Watts Society. Board member Carole Mayer, head of garden restoration, says the Society intends to develop a master plan in consultation with a professional landscape architect before any major work is undertaken, this winter, she hopes. Some important preliminary work has already been done. For example, Jason Elderedge of Boy Scout Troop 162, Naperville, recently led his troop in completing renovation of 150 feet of wood fencing at the house as his Eagle project. Next on the Society's agenda is a general cleanup and professional pruning of trees and removal of trashy woody plants that have sprung up and are choking the garden. A wealth of material about how the garden looked when Mrs. Watts lived there is available from the archives at the Morton Arboretum. Mrs. Watts' own ideas, some tongue-in-cheek, about the evolution of gardens and homes are set forth in the last chapter of her book, *Reading the Landscape of America*, headed "The Stylish House or Fashion as an Ecological Factor". The Society envisions the garden as a teaching center, blending a reconstruction of the original with new plants and landscaping ideas, which were also enjoyed by Mrs. Watts.

Donations for the garden restoration may be sent to the May Watts Society in care of Carole Mayer, 131 N. Wright Street, Naperville, IL 60540.



Small but still elegant greenhouse, recalling bygone era, needs repair.

FERMILAB LOOP TRAIL HIKE: A GOOD WAY TO GO

Dick Wilson, who led the hike on June 5, reports that "Thirty-three very diverse hikers enjoyed the National Trails Day Fermilab and Illinois Prairie Path trail hike. A small group wanted to do the loop at a fast pace (walk and run), so after they took off we never saw them again. There was a group that did not want to go the full fifteen miles, so they started off with us and turned around when they wished. The rest went the distance at a brisk walk. The weather was perfect and everyone enjoyed the loop trail. Several people requested information to join the IPP."



Pausing for a picture at start of Fermilab - IPP loop trail hike. Wilson Hall in background.

FALL ACTIVITIES — RAIN OR SHINE

■ Saturday, September 18

Work Day. Replace logo signs. Information: Paul Mooring, 469-4289.

■ Saturday, September 25

Walk to Remember May Watts. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Army Trail Road and Illinois Prairie Path in Wayne. Walk until noon. (See story on p. 4.) Leaders: Floyd Swink, Carol Doty, Paul and Jean Mooring, 469-4289.

■ Saturday, October 2

Ten-mile Hike on Illinois Prairie Path Aurora Branch to celebrate national Rails-to-Trails Day. Meet at 9:00 a.m. at Rathje Park in Wheaton on northwest corner of Roosevelt Road (Rte. 38) and Delles Ave. — two blocks west of West St. stoplight. Bring lunch and drink. Leader: Dick Wilson, (708) 299-7882; call 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

■ Saturday, October 16

Work Day. Information: Ken Moss, 833-9159.

■ Sunday, November 7

Annual Meeting. (See story on p. 3.) Meet at 2:00 p.m. at The Abbey, 407 W. St. Charles Rd., Elmhurst. This will be Paul Mooring's last annual meeting as president.

— 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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West Chicago Prairie Events

■ Saturday, September 11

Seed Collection. 9:00 a.m. to noon.

■ Saturday, September 25

Field Trip. Good displays of Asters, Goldenrods, Bottle Gentian and tall grasses in seed. 9:00 a.m. to noon.

■ Saturday, September 25

Seed Collection. 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

■ Saturday, October 23

Field Trip. "What Flower Was This?" A look at seed heads instead of flowers (just as striking and interesting). Fall colors at peak. 9:00 a.m. to noon.

■ Saturday, October 23

Seed Collection. 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

■ Saturday, November 6

Restoration Workday. Clearing invading brush and/or raking in seed. 9:00 a.m. to noon.

■ Saturday, November 20

Restoration Workday. 9:00 a.m. to noon.,

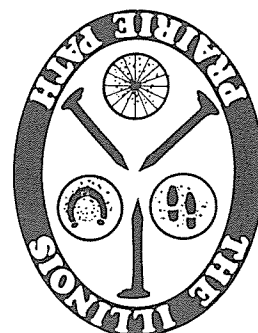
■ Saturday, December 4

Restoration Workday. 9:00 a.m. to noon.

All events start from the new West Chicago Prairie Forest Preserve parking lot located on the east side of Industrial Drive 3/4 mile south of Hawthorne Lane. Please be on time or you may have difficulty finding us. Information: Mel Hoff, (708) 393-4715.

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DATED MATERIAL



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