

THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

Spring, 1996

What to look for: Early woodland wildflowers

Three of our earliest floral harbingers of spring still bloom along the Illinois Prairie Path: skunk cabbage, bloodroot and spring beauty. Most remarkable is the skunk cabbage, which may begin to bloom in late February in its habitat of wet, even snow-covered, soil in woods or swamps. It has a curious mottled green or purple brown spathe which shields the heavy rounded spadix with its flowers containing both stamens (male, pollen-bearing) and pistils (female, seed-producing). The leaves eventually grow very large (one to three feet) and have an unpleasant odor when crushed. Skunk cabbage may be found near Prince Crossing Road.

A different habitat is preferred by bloodroot, which grows in great profusion on the wooded railroad embankment beside the Path near Taylor Avenue in Glen Ellyn. This beautiful flower takes its name from the orange-red juice in the stems and roots, which was used by the Indians for war paint. The pale lobed leaf curves around the stalk, which bears a showy white flower with eight to ten petals. Each flower lasts only a short time, so keep your eyes open or you'll miss this snow-like display.

Much more common is the little spring beauty which proliferates in suburban lawns as well as in moist woody places along the Path. It has two smooth, linear leaves and white or pink flowers with darker pink veins, and blooms from the first week in March for up to two months. "The tuberous roots may be boiled, salted and eaten. They reputedly have the flavor of chestnuts. Young leaves, rich in vitamins A and C, can be used in salads."*

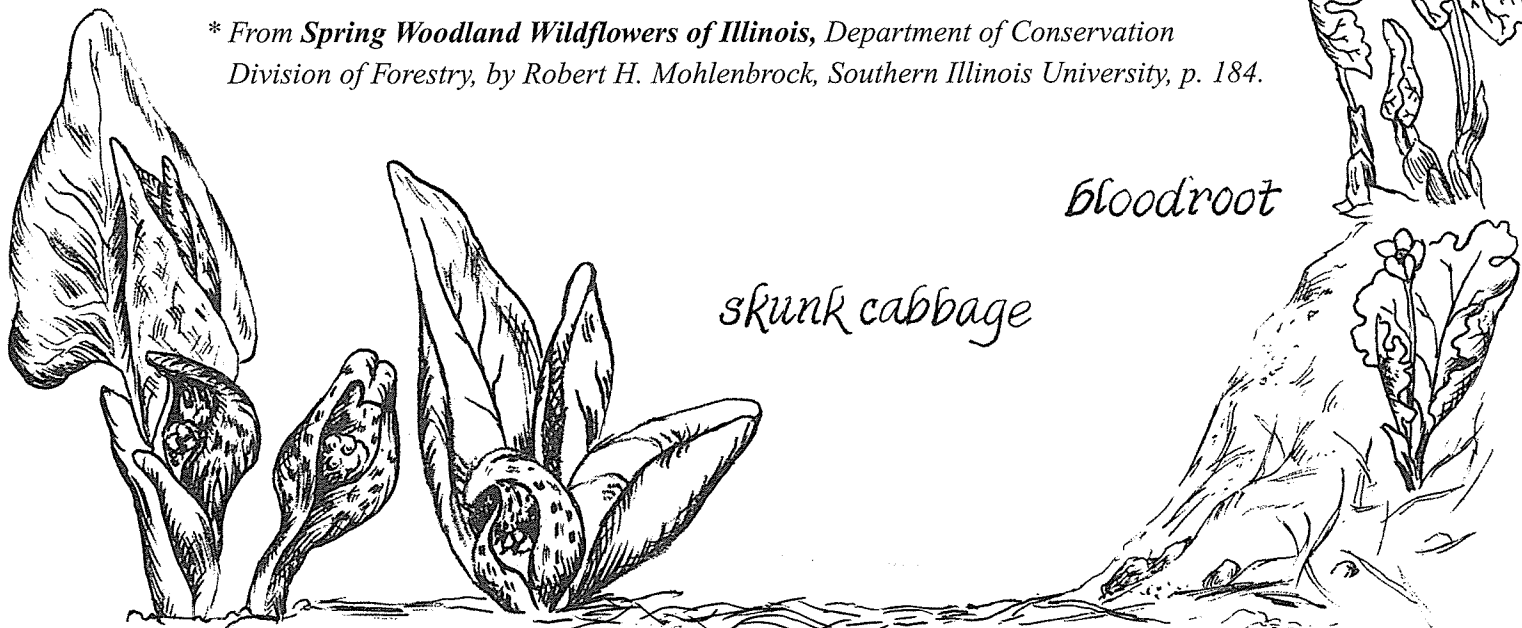
A word of warning: None of these flowers nor any others except noxious weeds like garlic mustard or purple loosestrife should ever be dug up or removed from the Path.

* From *Spring Woodland Wildflowers of Illinois*, Department of Conservation Division of Forestry, by Robert H. Mohlenbrock, Southern Illinois University, p. 184.

spring beauty

bloodroot

skunk cabbage



GENEVA SPUR NEARS COMPLETION!

A thirty-year dream of May Theilgaard Watts and the other Illinois Prairie Path founders will come true this year. The DuPage County Division of Transportation is making every effort to finish the final link in the nine-mile-long Geneva Spur by June first, in time for the National Trails Day celebration. The almost two-mile connecting section runs west from County Farm Road on the south side of Geneva Road to Winfield Road, where it crosses at the light and then runs south along the west side of Winfield Road 600 feet, at which point it turns west and winds through Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve to the new bridge over the West Branch of the DuPage River. West of the river it turns south and continues to the right-of-way of the old Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway, and then heads west to Lake Drive. There it connects to the already-built sections of the trail through the City of West Chicago, the West Chicago Prairie Forest Preserve, the DuPage County Airport, and the City of Geneva in Kane County, where the Prairie Path joins the Fox River Trail system.

Many people will agree that the IPP Geneva Spur is the most scenic and interesting multipurpose trail built in DuPage and Kane Counties since the major parts of the Illinois Prairie Path and the Fox River Trail were completed. This trail boasts rivers, forests, parks, and a tall-grass prairie plus a spectacular award-winning bridge, two historic cities and a modern airport.

To build a great trail like the IPP Geneva Spur takes two things: leadership and cooperation. The leadership has been provided by Jack T. Knuepfer, former chairman of the DuPage County Board, and by the DuPage County



New abutments are ready for installation of bridge across West Branch of DuPage River in Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve. New IPP section heads south to old Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Geneva Spur right-of-way.

Division of Transportation, together with the Kane County Forest Preserve District. Cooperating agencies include the City of West Chicago, the DuPage County Airport Authority, the City of Geneva and Geneva Park District, the DuPage County Forest Preserve District, Geneva Township, and private entities such as Commonwealth Edison Company and Good Templar Park in Geneva.

Our heartfelt thanks to all for a magnificent achievement!

SOS: IPP NEEDS ARCHIVIST ASAP

After thirty years of trail work our Illinois Prairie Path volunteers have accumulated a lot of records: letters, books, notes, newspaper clippings, photographs and slides (the Moorings have thousands), legal documents, construction plans and specifications, and memorabilia like signs and banners celebrating various events in the long history of our trail. Right now most of it is in the attic at the Members' Room in Wheaton, at the home of Path Secretary Nancy Becker, or filling a bedroom at the Moorings'.

The board has decided to seek an experienced archivist, someone who understands the techniques of preserving, organizing and cataloguing all these materials and developing a method of filing and displaying them so that they can be studied and appreciated by persons interested in learning what volunteers have done to develop and defend our treasured trail.

There will be a stipend commensurate with experience. Call Jean Mooring at 469-4289 if you are qualified and want to help with a truly monumental task.