

Ode
for the 275 members of
“Friends of Eloise Butler Wild Flower and Bird
Sanctuary”
on the occasion of their 30th anniversary –
and the 75th of the establishment of the Garden*
Betty Bridgman (1916 - 1999)

These people: Let me present them.
Mother Nature sent them
into this world of Real Estate,
of too-little-caring-too-late,
of weed-eradicator promotion,
particulates and pollution.
of mopeds and snowmobiles.
They take care
lest the forest floor be trodden bare,
and the prairie tracked and packed by RV Wheels.
These people are fervently, ecstatically, passionately, irrationally,
obsessively, fiercely, militantly, unequivocally, irreversibly,
non-negotiably, one thousand per cent
in favor of wild flowers.
No pallid sentiment,
no live-and-let-live toleration,
no “make-it-if-you-can-but first comes access and recreation.”
Friends say to them,
“What! You’re volunteering on behalf of worthless weeds
nobody needs?
Think what beautiful homes would fill the scene
in that ravine!
Think of the expanse of lawn
When the clutter is gone!
The happy homeowners out with their mowers
and snow-blowers,
Their dandelion-diggers-
Sales in six figgers!”
These people care all the more
for seed and spore
because at 45° latitude and above
they have a short season for their love.
Here, flowers are few.
They count three British Soldiers, one Sundew,
Compared with the orchid riot
Of steamy jungle, these woods are quiet.
One Calopogon is a summer when they spy it.
The Buck-eye dapples
a spread of May-apples
and imparts a glow
they bask in when it’s twenty-five below.

A high holy-day of their year:
when Showy Lady-slippers appear,
when the gooseberry is ripe
or they find an Indian Pipe.
These benefactors
would lie down in front of tractors
to save a virgin patch of prairie
or a bird sanctuary.
They storm the legislature
to keep one marshland safe for nature.
They ask for grants
to bully bull-dozers and rescue pitcher plants.
A soft cry of delight will pass
from their lips when Ken mentions Blue-eyed Grass.
It brings a flush to their cheeks, and stepped-up pulse
to think that Ken would label any flower "false."
They want our ditches
filled with Dutchmen's Britches.
They scold
pluckers of Marsh Marigold.
They won't pull a stalk
of Spatterdock.
Better not injure
Eloise's Ginger.
Their efforts won't slacken
for hillsides of Bracken.
They dote on the woolen
stalks of Mullein.
They're ready to champion
Bladder Champion,
and keep things from getting worse
for Shepherd's Purse.
They won't let Boneset
ride off into the sunset.
They enshrine Eloise Butler.
No Park Board budget-cut can scuttle her.
They know time will tell
our city's debt to Clinton Odell,
and they'll make known
the long devotion of Martha Crone,
the bravery and slavery
of Kenneth E. Avery,
and his side-kick,
Dick Wick,
Kay Faragher's amazing
shelter-fund-raising.
It's high time
we salute Moana Beim;
and those with effort and intelligence
who keep up the fence, and the defense.
Eloise, you of the trowel and duff-stained knees,
you'd have loved knowing such as these.

The garden that was all yours
endures.
From wood-chip paths and ostrich-fern-lined ways
rises our praise.

*We use the title as Betty wrote it with the slightly incorrect and incomplete
name for The Friends.
Poem ©Betty Bridgman.