

The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden



Hepatica Hill - 100 Years of History

In 2005 Garden Curator wrote an article about restoring Hepatica Hill. The article was originally published in *The Fringed Gentian*[™], Winter 2005, Vol. 53 No. 1. Here we intersperse her text with other information from the Garden's history.

Susan Wrote: Spring in the Wildflower Garden is always enchanting. Trilliums and trout lilies are two of the troubadours of the season. Anemones, Toothworts, Hepaticas and so many others find themselves in the spotlight as well. This is the season for subtle and spontaneous beauty in the woodlands of the Garden.



One of the most wonderful things about our spring ephemeral collection at the Wildflower Garden is the history contained within. Many of the groupings still found here today are remnants of what Eloise Butler planted in the early 1900s. To visit a patch of purple trillium and know that the original plants were carefully harvested for and relocated at the Garden by Eloise Butler makes the sight all that much more extraordinary. Other plant groupings found growing today in the Garden are vestiges of what was here before Eloise began her work at what was then Glenwood Park. These historical collections, some planted and some natural, are part of what makes the Garden so special still today.

Unfortunately, many of the historical spring ephemeral groupings died out during a few different periods of drought and disease in the Garden's past. Most recently, a significant portion of the spring ephemeral collection at the Wildflower Garden was lost when over 165 diseased American elm trees were removed in the late 1970s. Shade from the canopy-forming elms provided refuge from the intense summer sun for the woodland wildflowers. Once the canopy was gone, the spring ephemeral species quickly perished.

One such collection that vanished was a quilt-like grouping of Hepatica plants known as Hepatica Hill. It was made up of hundreds of Sharp-lobed Hepatica (*Anemone acutiloba*) and round-lobed Hepatica (*Anemone americana*) - - - the two Hepatica species native to Minnesota (1). Hepatica Hill was a Garden treasure. The annual burst of lavender, light pink, and white from the tightly woven blanket of flowers delighted and inspired visitors as they toured the Garden. [end Wilkins text]

Eloise Butler's records show that she obtained plants of Sharp-lobed Hepatica as early as 1907 from the "Government Reservation" (Ft. Snelling area, Minneapolis), again in 1908, '10 and '19; and from the river bank near the Catholic Seminary (St. Paul) in June 1911; on 3 occasions in 1917 from several

sources. She also obtained plants from Groveland Park in St. Paul in April 1913; from Minnehaha in 1914, '18 and '20. More were planted almost every year thereafter through 1931.

Round-lobed was perhaps first planted in 1912 when on June 28 Eloise Butler records planting two *H. triloba* from Osceola WI. On Sept. 13, 1913 and Oct. 28, 1918 she reports planting some from Pine Coulee near St. Paul and on Aug. 3, 1914, same source. On Oct. 7, 1917 she gets 55 plants from the Battle Creek area of St. Paul. More in 1921, '24 and '25.(2)

In the photo below taken on April 17, 1955, we see an extensive grouping of Hepatica on the west Woodland Garden hillside, appropriately named "Hepatica Hill."



Right: What a difference a day makes. This photo was taken on April 16, 1955 on day after the photo above. On a clear sunny day the entire hillside comes alive on an early spring day.

The plants in the photos above would have been mostly those planted by Eloise Butler's successor, Martha Crone. She planted the Sharp-lobed extensively from 1945 to 1955, setting out 1,225 in 1947 alone. She also set out the Round-lobed plants in 1934, '35, '36, '43, '45 and over 110 in 1946. (3) Not all would have been on the hillside but the majority of the big group in 1947 would have been.



Mrs. Crone made the following report in 1946: The lower Garden has had many plantings added. In careful imitation of nature's way, 550 Sharp-lobed Hepaticas and 225 Large-flower Trilliums were set out on a hillside sloping to the east. This is to be an outstanding display when in bloom. Here also saplings were thinned out to allow some sunshine to filter through the larger trees." (4)

On April 18, 1948 she wrote in her Garden Log: "Thousands of Hepaticas are in bloom, most gorgeous sight. Bloodroots everywhere." [based on her planting thousands of these, no wonder.]

When the hillsides were exposed to summer sun due to the loss of tree canopy in the 1970s some plants were actually moved. Ken Avery was curator/gardener during the Dutch Elm Disease devastation. He reported in 1979 that he transplanted a number of the Hepatica in 1978 that (with the loss of canopy cover from the elms) were now too exposed. Some of the other plants were more protected by taller summer vegetation. (5)

Right: Here is the same hillside as the photos shown above on April 24, 2008. A little early that year for the plants to have bloom but the hillside is the same. The conifers in the background are larger, the path is now timber bordered and young trees are growing in the hillside. The area was extensively replanted in 2005 in an attempt to reconstruct the plant community. A certain number of new young trees have also been inserted to provide summer protection.



More from Susan Wilkins: Although the complete history of Hepatica Hill has not yet been uncovered, it is clear from Eloise Butler's Garden logs that she nurtured a Hepatica plantation in the northwest corner of the Garden for many years. The specimens transplanted to this plantation came from many different locations through the Upper Midwest region. The gorgeous grouping that resulted may have been intended to serve as a holding bed, but instead turned into a living jewel of texture, form and color.

We will continue to research the history of this particular planting and delve into the history of other unique plantings once found in the Wildflower Garden. We will also begin bringing these plantings back to life so that the rich history of the Garden can be appreciated in the 21st Century. To this end, the restoration of Hepatica Hill will begin this spring. The initial planting of 600 *Anemone acutiloba* specimens is scheduled to occur in early -mid May. [end of Wilkins text]

NOTES:

- (1) In the text we have substituted the new classification from the previous scientific names of *Hepatica nobilis* var. *acuta* for the Sharp-lobed and *Hepatica nobilis* var. *obtusa* for the Round-lobed. In Eloise Butler's time they were named *H. acutiloba* for the Sharp-lobed and *H. triloba* for the Round-lobed.
- (2) Eloise Butler's Garden Log.
- (3) Martha Crone's Garden Log.
- (4) Martha Crone's Annual Report of the Garden Curator to the Board of Park Commissioners - dated Feb. 24, 1947 to Charles E. Doell, Superintendent.
- (5) Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden, May 19, 1979.

Below: A section of Hepatica Hill in April 2016.



Historical photos are from Kodachromes taken by Martha Crone on the dates indicated above and are from her collection of Kodachromes that was given to the Friends by her daughter Janet following Martha's death in 1989. Contemporary photos of the Garden ©G D Bebeau unless otherwise credited.

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