

2023

History of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and the Friends of the Wildflower Garden

Winter 2022/2023

2023 is the 117th year of the Garden, the 71st year for the Friends and Susan Wilkins' 20th year as Garden Curator. Jennifer Olson began her third year as Friends President.

Reelected MPRB Commissioners: The newly elected Commissioners of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB) took office at the beginning of the year. Re-elected commissioners Meg Forney and Elizabeth Shaffer frequently volunteer with the Friends Invasive Plant Action Group (FIPAG). Commissioner Forney was chosen President of the Board.

A board of directors meetings of the Friends was held February 6 at the home of former Friends president Pam Weiner and also on Zoom. Garden Curator Susan Wilkins reviewed her 2023 plans for Garden staffing and Garden projects. This year Susan was assuming the role of Program Coordinator for the Garden as it was difficult to retain from season to season, for a part-time position, a trained person in that role.

Improvements planned for the coming months included a pair new storage sheds for the Garden's equipment which would be built near the restrooms and outside of the current Garden fence. This would free up some space in the current shed which is also used as an office, and take care of much of the Garden's equipment currently sitting outside the existing shed. Construction actually began in April of 2024.

There was discussion about the Friends funding an extension to the new fencing that the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) had installed last year. In the meantime it was thought that shrubs should be bought and planted on both



Comparison of the new fencing with the old 1946 cyclone fence at Eloise Butler.

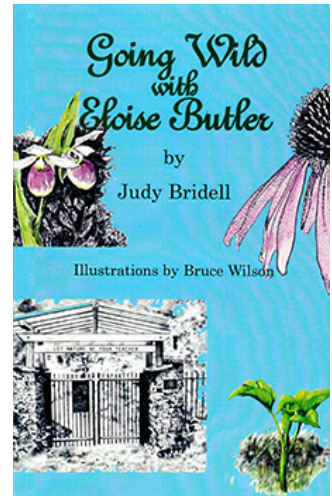
sides of that completed new fence line.

Jennifer Olson proposed doing a survey of Friends members about the timing of the annual meeting and the idea of continuing with guest speakers.

Once again, the board approved buying milkweed seed packets that board member Colin Bartol would package for distribution to young Garden visitors.

On January 13th, Judy Eckhardt passed away. She had written, under the name of Judy Bridel, several books for young people that the Friends had reviewed and promoted in past newsletters. One was *Going Wild with Eloise Butler*, a short biography of the Garden's founding light. A memorial bench in the Garden was being planned by the family.

It was learned that two of the buildings in the new apartment complex being completed off the south edge of Wirth Park would be named "The Eloise" and "The Theodore." The Friends display at the local Sumner Library branch that started last year continued during the winter with a display featuring winter tree identification. Seasonal displays continued all season.



Spring 2023

On April 3rd Friends Invasive Plant Action Group (FIPAG) volunteer and Friends member Liz Anderson passed away. Jim Proctor, FIPAG Co-chair, wrote this to the FIPAG mail list:

Liz did so much more than try: She co-led the group for a decade, adopted her own Legacy Steward plot, and started another program to weed in Basset Creek Park. She encouraged us to adopt more land when I was quite hesitant. While struggling with cancer, Liz STILL watered a planting of mayapple, wild ginger and big-leaved aster in the maple bowl on her regular walks.



Liz Anderson digging buckthorn roots in 2011. Friends photo.

The Friends held a board meeting on April 3 via Zoom. Jim Proctor reported that the Friends Invasive Plant Action Group (FIPAG) would hold three invasive plant pulls in the spring (1 was cancelled due to weather) plus one that involved employees from Aveda, which was almost an annual event for them. FIPAG will be moving to a new area now that the maple bowl area is in good shape. Jim and Susan Wilkins have identified where new shrubs should be planted around the new fence area and in the maple bowl and the board voted to buy up to \$3,000 of shrubs.

Melissa Hansen, Volunteer Coordinator, has 34 volunteers for the spring season. The entrance Kiosk had 22 shifts per week and eight shifts per week in the Martha Crone Shelter. Shelter volunteers must have previous Kiosk experience and additional training. All volunteers were expected to



One of the new shrubs planted in a cage in the restoration area.

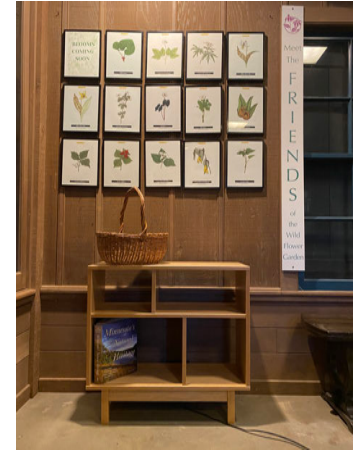


do 6-8 shifts per season. Melissa wants 2023 to be her last season. In order to induce awareness of and to replenish the Friends Student Transportation Grant Fund a postcard size handout that would be available to Garden visitors was approved. Jennifer Olson would produce the card. Jennifer also noted that she has been communicating with MPRB District 4 Commissioner, Elizabeth Schaffer about Garden improvement plans. Someone had to speak with the upper management to see why things were not moving.

The Minnesota Charities Report completed by the treasurer was approved for filing and then the results of the member survey were reviewed. Sixty five members had responded out of 241

requests. On the question on the value of a guest speaker, 96% favored it. On the question of the annual meeting itself, 63% preferred getting advance reports and not at the meeting. It was of no interest to 12.5% and more curiously, 16% did not feel the Garden was very important to them. Strange then, that they are still supporters.

The Garden opened on Tuesday April 18. Naturalists returning from last season were Marie, Tammy Mercer, Jodi Gustafson and Kimberly Ishkov. A new table was available in the Shelter for the Friends to display their materials. This was purchased along with other new furniture for the Shelter last year. It replaces the smaller tree slab end table that was used for years. Jennifer Olson produced a new tri-fold handout for spring featuring notes from "Twigs and Branches" similar to those in 2022.



New Friends display table in the shelter. MPRB photo



Planting around the new fence took place in late May and early June over a 7-day period. The Friends only had to spend \$320 for shrubs as the Park Board came up with 50 shrubs to plant, including nannyberry, wild plum, red osier dogwood and American hazelnut. The friends purchased inland serviceberry, beaked hazelnut, prairie willow, bladdernut, highbush cranberry, pin cherry and smooth rose. All shrubs were surrounded by ¾"

rabbit fence cages. Three special watering backpacks (photo at left) were bought by the Friends for volunteers to use during the summer to water these new plants. During the 2023 season the Friends purchased \$971 of supplies for FIPAG.

Below: A section of the new fencing with new shrubs in protective cages.





The spring issue of the Friends newsletter, *The Fringed Gentian*TM had a new drawing of the fringed gentian by graphic artist Karen Kopacz. The old graphic was original to the newsletter. Articles for spring were about “Garlic Mustard: An Edible Invasive,” by Cheryl Batson; “Rare, Endangered, Deceiving and Special - The Wildflower Garden’s special spring delights” by Gary Bebeau; an article on the Roberts Bird Sanctuary by Constance Pepin.

Summer 2023

At a Friends board meeting on June 26 held at Jennifer Olson’s house, director George Lawton introduced the idea of changing the membership status of the Friends to either being a non-member “supporter” organization or to re-define membership status to include those who provide volunteer time instead of funds. Most non-profits are supporter type organizations. Some study documents were provided as to the pros and cons of each approach and the topic would be one discussed at board meeting well into the following year. The suggested revisions to our by-laws were part of the information distribution.

Meanwhile, it was approved to modify the Articles of Incorporation of the Friends to change the name to have “Wild Flower” spelled as one word. Gary Bebeau prepared and filed the paperwork for this and the change was approved by Minnesota Secretary of State’s office on July 27. The name change idea was first proposed and voted on with approval on June 5, 1969 after the MPRB changed the spelling of the Garden’s name to have “Wildflower” as one word. When the Friends incorporated in 1952, the Friends chose “Wild Flower” to agree with the Garden name. Nothing was ever officially done in 1969 or later about the name change, although it was used on some Friends correspondence and minutes, and the Garden and Friends names were different until now.

Jennifer and Commissioner Elizabeth Schaffer had met with the MPRB Environmental Stewardship staff on the building improvements, but nothing was decided. The Friends position has changed from supporting Shelter improvement to a front entrance welcome center project. This change was prompted as it became clear about the amount of destruction required in the Garden around and the proposed Shelter improvement and in providing access to the site for equipment and materials.

The board then returned to a previous discussion about allocating funds to a continuation of the Garden fence replacement. Since no progress was in sight on improving the Crone Shelter or about a welcome center, the board approved up to \$100,000 in funds to extend the new upland fence all the way to the back gate and in so doing, incorporate several additional acres of invasive cleared land into the Garden.



Alan Branhagen, guest speaker for the Friends Annual Meeting. Photo MN Landscape Arboretum.

A date was set for the annual volunteer event (October 29) and naming a speaker for the annual meeting. Friends life member Alan Branhagen, now director of the Natural Land Institute in Rockford Illinois was to be the speaker.



Garden map showing proposed new fence line. Also marked are the 2022 fence line and the section that was added in 1993.

Based on his schedule a date of October 10 was eventually set, keeping the early fall timeframe on a weekday evening established a few years ago.

At the Garden:

During the 2023 season the Wildflower Garden staff designed seasonal plant identification cards that visitors could carry around with them. Each seasonal 2-sided card illustrated the most common flowers grouped into meadow, woodland and wetland environments.

Twelve Minneapolis schools sent 420 kindergartners to the Garden for a naturalist visit. Bus transportation was provided by the Student Transportation Grant Fund. The Friends also paid \$739 for embroidered fabric Junior Ranger patches for young visitors with sourcing once again arranged by director Colin Bartol.

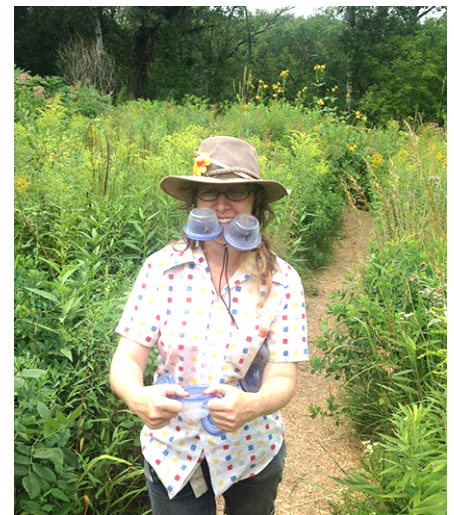


FIPAG Volunteer using the stripping technique for new growth on previously cut buckthorn.
Photo Jim Proctor.

When FIPAG finished the spring garlic mustard work, Jim Procter scheduled several buckthorn maintenance events during which new sprouts are stripped off of previously cut buckthorn. Jim had found that the stripping process resulted in most of the previously cut stems dying. Commissioner Shaffer had Jim meet with the group of other park buckthorn volunteers to explain the process.

It took months but the MPRB finally finished a contract with the University of Minnesota Bee Lab to begin a new 2-year bee survey of the Wildflower Garden. This would update the one from 10 years ago and be under the direction once again of Dr. Elaine Evans. The Friends would pay \$5,000 of the cost.

In the summer issue of *The Fringed Gentian*™ Karen Kopacz provided an article on the ovenbird, Cheryl Batson returned with another article on edible invasives, this time the wild parsnip; Colin Bartol wrote background about the bee survey and Gary Bebeau wrote on Aldo Leopold's theme of tinkering intelligently when dealing with the effects of eradication of certain invasive species.



Dr. Elaine Evans in the Garden during previous bee survey.
Photo MPRB.

Susan Wilkins column was on the theme of "it takes a village" to make the Wildflower Garden such a natural and pleasant place to visit. She wrote:

We have a fabulous group of bright, hard working and engaging staff this season. The Garden would not be such a wonderful place to visit without them. Thanks to the 2023 staff! And it takes a village here at the Garden to keep everything we have set in motion going and to cultivate a space where visitors feel welcome and eager to learn more about the plants and animals of the Garden. I want to thank the many volunteers involved with greeting visitors at the Welcome Kiosk and in the Visitor Shelter.

Jennifer Olson wrote in her column about being a Kiosk volunteer:

I enjoy greeting the variety of visitors at the Kiosk. One visitor has come weekly for 30 years and for others it's their first time. Some are alone and many are families, sometimes three generations. It's fun to engage the children with the touch and see objects and to challenge them to find the flower that looks like pants or a slipper or a shooting star.

One of the last events of the summer was the opportunity to have a table representing the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden at the Minnesota State Fair. The exhibit took place August 30-31 in the Horticulture Building in the section where garden clubs engage the public. It was staffed by 12 Friends volunteers. Jennifer Olson managed the entire affair, arranging volunteer time, parking passes, wildflowers to display from Friends gardens, and input from the archives at the MPRB for old photos taken by Mary Meeker who Eloise called "the photographer of the Garden." This would be the first Wildflower Garden exhibit at the State Fair since Eloise Butler held hers in 1910 through 1917. The flower vases were the old brown slip stoneware that had been in the Crone Shelter attic for years. Photo-Olson.



Jennifer Olson wrote in the Friends fall newsletter about the State Fair exhibit and how it related to that of Eloise Butler:

We did her honor.

A trifold show cased this history including 11 of Mary Meeker's photographs, images courtesy of the MPRB Archives. The majority of Miss Meeker's photographs are black and white, but some she hand-painted the glass negatives before printing them.

About half of fairgoers engaged had not heard of the Garden. Less than half of those who were familiar with the Garden had actually visited. Within days, a couple visited the Garden because of the Eloise Butler Exhibit at MN's Great Get Together. Hopefully more will discover this wild botanic garden.

Fall 2023

The Friends held a board meeting on September 25 at the Kenwood Park Community Center. Susan Wilkins updated the board on many things:

- The first year of the bee survey was completed.
- The bid package for the new fencing was being prepared.
- The new storage shed plans were being prepared.
- A winter bird count was planned.
- One of her long-worked on plans for a year-round programming position for the Garden had finally won approval. This would be a .75 FTE civil service position, partially funded by the Loppet Foundation over the next 3 years. This person would also develop a winter nature programming at the Trailhead in Wirth Park.

All the aspects of the upcoming fall events were discussed as were the membership proposals from June.

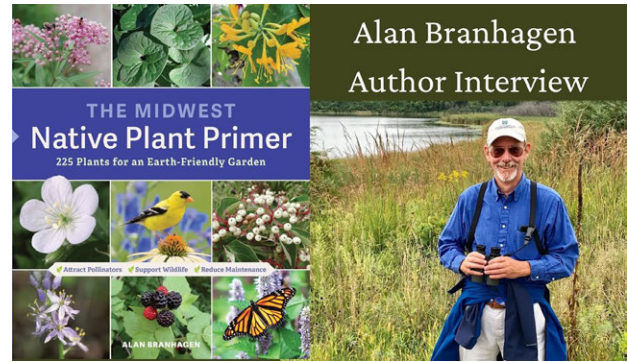
The 71st Annual Meeting of the Friends was held on October 10 at 7 PM in the fireside room of the Chalet in Wirth Park. Friends member Bob Ambler set up the technology end of the meeting with projections and Zoom link. Guest speaker Alan Branhagen arrived from Illinois and his talk titled "Looking forward to a livelier landscape" incorporated the ideas from his recent books *The Midwest Native Plant Primer* and *The Gardener's Butterfly Book*. Notes on his talk were printed in the fall *Fringed Gentian*TM. Mr. Branhagen's recent book was sold at the meeting by Big Hill Books from Bryn Mawr.



The Friends annual meeting held at the Wirth Park Chalet. Alan Branhagen speaking. Photo Colin Bartol

Alan Branhagen is a life member of the Friends. He joined while he was operations director of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chaska. He was just leaving that position for his current work as

director of the Natural Land Institute in Rockford Illinois when Jennifer contacted him. There was a brief business meeting at which these directors were elected for the coming year: Candy Bartol, Colin Bartol, Gary Bebeau, Steve Benson, Bruce Jarvis, George Lawton, Jim Proctor, Jennifer Olson and Pam Weiner. After the meeting the Board of Directors met and elected Jennifer Olson as president, Gary Bebeau treasurer and Candy Bartol secretary.



Continuing in committee roles were: Gary Bebeau - memorials, money management and website, Jim Proctor - Invasive Plant Action Group (with non-board member Kari Christianson as co-chair), Colin Bartol - newsletter editor with Gary Bebeau doing layout, and non-board members Lauren Husting - media communications, Christi Bystedt - donor coordinator and Melissa Hansen - volunteers coordinator.

FIPAG for 2023: The Friends Invasive Plant Action Group (FIPAG) conducted 12 events during the year concluding with three buckthorn events in October with the work concentrated in a new area approved by the MPRB southeast of the upland garden where Jim Proctor discovered a hillside with a pond hidden by buckthorn and honeysuckle. Photo below by Jim Proctor.



Jim Proctor wrote to the volunteers:

In our recent efforts just outside the Garden fence we've uncovered something really exciting—a small un-forested slope which sits above a small pond. This spot was obscured by a wall of non-native trees and shrubs including buckthorn, honeysuckle and Amur maple. Now that the invasive shrubs and trees are partly removed, we can see that it has great potential as a lovely meadow with a view of the pond below.

This is a nice counterpoint to the more densely wooded maple bowl. The new area has an ephemeral pond, but quite open to the sky, surrounded by grassy meadow and open oak woods

and savanna. On Saturday 11-11-23 we finished weeding buckthorn sprouts in a swath along the top of this hillside and seeded it. We also weeded and seeded into the adjacent wooded area just to the north.

MPRB Natural Resources staff provided us a generous supply of buckthorn replacement seed mix from Minnesota Native Landscapes. It contains a mix of grasses, sedges and forbs to compete with any future invasives. Recent research shows this is very important. We've done modest seeding in the past, but we plan to make this a more significant part of our efforts going forward. Thanks MPRB!

In the fall *Fringed Gentian*[™], Cheryl Batson concluded her 3-part series on edible invasives with an article on the Japanese Barberry. Garden Naturalist Keygan McClellan wrote about summer moths in the Garden, Colon Bartol wrote about "The clean energy future is arriving" and the front page featured Alan Branhagen's talk.

Susan Wilkins summed up the 2023 Garden season in the fall newsletter and explained the new Pollinator Garden that was just developed:

Another significant project for the Garden this season is the addition of a pollinator meadow at the entrance to the Garden off of Theodore Wirth Parkway. The project is part of the Turf to Pollinator Garden Program funded by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). Wilderness in the City and Metro Blooms are project partners with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB). The aim of this program is to create pollinator habitat in areas that had been planted as turf within Regional Parks of the Twin Cities Metro Area. By the end of October we will have planted over 11,500 plants in the new meadow! The tremendous number of volunteers, MPRB staff, Conservation Corp of MN & IA staff and youth, Mississippi River Green Team youth, and project partners involved in making this a reality has



The new Pollinator Meadow with numerous planting of native species. Photo G D Bebeau

been remarkable. It's taken a village of enthusiastic, supportive people to bring this project to fruition.

Garden highlights of the year were these:

- 54,351 visitor engagements were tallied by October 31
- of those 24,559 were at the Kiosk
- 16,701 were in the Crone Shelter
- 190 volunteers provided 1,926 hours at and around the Garden
- 4,473 persons participated in a Garden program
- The seasonal education staff was 10
- The back storage area of the Crone Shelter was converted to staff office space
- Entrance drive signs were newly designed
- The parking lot was re-stripped
- One bathroom was converted to all gender use.

The annual Volunteer Appreciation Event sponsored by the Friends and the Wildflower Garden was held on the evening of October 29th for all the volunteers who contributed their time at the Garden. The group includes Friends docents, Friends Invasive Plant Action Group (FIPAG)

volunteers and Park Board Garden volunteers and support staff. The Friends arranged rental space, at Lake of the Isles Lutheran Church, provided food (Moroccan Flavors) and beverages and Susan Wilkins provided desserts and a gift. Thanks to Pam Weiner for organizing the event. Photo below by Elizabeth Schaffer. Susan Wilkins is speaking at far left.



In November the Friends created a special fund raising campaign for the Student Transportation Grant Fund in conjunction with the GiveMN "Give-to-the-Max Day."

Two special emails were sent, separate letters to those not on the email list and 3 special Facebook posts. It was evident from the analysis of how and when funds came in, that the association with Give-to-the-Max was minor and that our advance solicitations were more effective for producing donations than anything that happened via GiveMN.

Below: MPRB Superintendent Al Bangoura attended FIPAG's the final buckthorn pull in October. Jim Proctor showed him how to use a weed wrench. Photos Jennifer Olson.



In December the 2nd Audubon Winter Bird Count was held in Wirth Park. The 2022 count was the first in 60 years. The official count was done on December 15 by the EBWG early birders group and the Urban Collective Bird Group and other folks. One hundred and sixteen people helped.

Wrap-up of the year for the Friends:

The Sumner Library display was maintained by 4 volunteers until October, when the Library closed for a year of remodeling.

Total Friends mission spending was \$9,070 which includes \$3,300 for student transportation.

Donation support other than memberships during the year was \$17,353 from 82 donors. Membership support was \$8,550 from 101 donors. Memorials of \$2,180 were received from 26 donors for 13 different persons. Name plates added to the Eliason Honor Board in the Crone Shelter were for Liz Anderson, Nancy Peterson, Maureen McElderry, and Ila Jean Velleu. The Friends were notified in November that they are a 1/6th beneficiary of the estate of Mary Jo Thorsheim. The estate enter probate in October and may be settled next year.

At the end of the year the Friends active paying membership was 113 plus 49 life members. Courtesy memberships were 21 for a total count of 183. Three new members joined (Amy Hanson, Francis Shen and Mike Tieleman); 3 were reinstated; 22 were dropped from the roster due to death or for being in-arrears. In spite of many members not renewing their support for various reasons, a number of other members at the sponsor and sustainer level continued their high level of support.

Financial assets at year-end were \$255,471 with a substantial portion of that reserved for the Shelter improvement project and the fence replacement project.

During the year the hosting of the Friends website transferred from Verizon to Turbify. One result was a pricing increase and another was the resumption in March of access to website activity stats via Amazon's AWS. Some interesting stats were:

- Average monthly visitor count: 12,766
- Average unique monthly visitor count: 7,056
- Average number of monthly pdf downloads: 843
- Average monthly number of web pages accessed: 34,496
- # of pdf downloads of the history books for the 10 month period: 587

Email's announce all of our publications. The email list at year-end had 484 persons, both members, FIPAG volunteers and anyone interested in our educational activities.

Some results for our emails:

*Fringed Gentian*TM: 70% open, 23% click links

Twigs and Branches: 70% open, 19% click links

Photo top of first page: A contrast between an area cleared in previous years of invasives on the right of the trail and an area not yet cleared on the left of the trail. Area outside the Garden fence. Photo Jim Proctor.

Other references:

Minutes of the Board of Directors and other documents of the Friends of the Wildflower Garden, Inc.

*The Fringed Gentian*TM Newsletter:

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Vol. 71 No. 2 Summer 2023

Vol. 71 No. 3 Fall/Winter 2023

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