

The Cabin at Cedar Creek Bog

A detail from the life of Martha Crone



Ramshead Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium arietinum*). Photo from a Kodachrome taken by Martha Crone on June 9, 1954.

There is an interesting connection between Martha Crone, wild plants and the University of Minnesota. Martha and her husband Dr. William Crone became interested in a parcel of land in Anoka County, in the area of East Bethel, as a source for plant observation and collecting. The area, then known as Cedar Creek Forest, was swamp and bog with upland areas of dense woodland. In her log of plantings at Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, this is the area referred to when she writes of plants obtained from "Cedar" or "Cedar Swamp" or "North of Anoka", or simply "the woods." On July 1, 1936 Martha recorded digging up 24 Ramshead Lady's-slippers (*Cypripedium arietinum*) and 3 Ground Junipers (*Juniperus communis*) and transplanting them in Eloise Butler. The Ramshead's had 30 blooms the following year. Martha noted in her report to the Board of Park Commissioners, (Dec. 10, 1937) the reestablishment of the plant after many years of failed effort.

On May 23, 1937 Dr. Roberts (Roberts, Thomas Sadler, 1858-1946, who wrote Birds of Minnesota) was in the Garden to examine the clump. He noted it the finest clump he had ever seen. On May 25th W. J. Breckenridge, Director of the Museum of Natural

History at the University of Minnesota, was in the Garden to look at the Ram's-heads. He later sent Martha a photo of them and noted what a fine clump it was.

On December 31st, 1936, the Crone's purchased 40 acres of this area for a total price of \$375 with \$10 down payment. Within this parcel of land there was dry upland that resembled an island elevated above the swampland. Here they built a cabin in 1938, completing the structure on June 29th and then began the interior finishing work and moving in things necessary for daily living. They carried the building materials in their car from Bethel and then carried them through the swamp to reach the dry land. It was not until 1941 that they finished 145 feet of what could be called a causeway, using cedar logs, that reached the "island" without getting one's feet wet. The cabin area became known to the locals as "Crone's Island".

On September 3rd, 1938, they discovered that the cabin had been broken into and all there inside possessions were stolen. The county Sheriff was notified and the Crones proceeded to secure the cabin more tightly and over the next year completed the finishing touches.

The Crone's would drive up there on Tuesday evening and stay all day Wednesday to do their work. Wednesday was Martha's day of and the Wildflower Garden was closed up with the gates locked. Even in the Winter months they would go there when the weather was tolerable, taking along a portable kerosene stove.



Martha Crone in the Upland Garden in 1951.

On April 18th 1940, Martha noted in her diary that she had a visitor while she was at the Wildflower Garden: “Dr. A. N. Wilcox in to get our version of conservation at Cedar Bog”. She is referring to Arthur N. Wilcox, University of Minnesota & director of the Cedar Creek Science Reserve. He was President of the Minnesota Academy of Science in 1950, and was a driving force behind the founding of the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve. As the Chair of the Committee for Preservation of Natural Conditions, Wilcox raised enough funds to purchase large tracts of land in the Cedar Creek Bog and later oversaw transferring care of the land to the University of Minnesota. In 1943 the University purchased over \$2,000 worth of land just north of the Crone property.

This swampy bog area was of great interest to those in the botany profession. The first recorded research interest in the area dates back to 1929 when an aerial survey first disclosed the significance of the habitat. In 1947 a large “Study Area” was outlined by the University of Minnesota - the area included the Crone’s land. The purpose of the Study Area was for students of botany and professionals to be able to observe and study the habitat of a natural swamp and bog. On Sept. 14, 1957 the University of Minnesota dedicated the Cedar Creek Forest Laboratory. Martha was invited to attend. (William had passed away in 1951). Access to the lab area was via the Crone land and that of several other property owners.



The area of Cedar Creek containing the original Crone property. The view is NE across Norris woods, Crone knoll (in the center of the photo), & Cedar Bog Lake just left of center. Photo by Donald Lawrence, 1966, University of Minnesota.

On May 24, 1961, the University, by letter from University attorney R. Joel Tierney, offered to purchase her land if University funding could be obtained. At that point in time Martha was retired from the position of Curator at Eloise Butler. There is not a record in her papers as to the date of sale but it was sold, but on Oct. 20, 1961 she paid to have the abstract updated at the Anoka County Abstract Co.

The Study Area is now known as Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve with an area of about 2,200 hectares (5,400 acres, or about nine square miles). It is important as a relatively undisturbed area where three biomes meet (tall grass prairie, eastern deciduous forest and boreal coniferous forest), supporting 51 species of mammals and 238 species of birds. It is a nationally and internationally famous research center, recognized as a Registered Natural Landmark in 1975. The land where Martha’s cabin was situated is now known as the Crone Knoll.

References:

Martha Crone Papers and Friends of the Wildflower Garden Papers, Minnesota Historical Society Collections. Martha Crone's Kodachrome from her collection, given to The Friends in 1989.

This Satisfying Pursuit, Martha Crone and the Wildflower Garden. By Gary Bebeau, 2021

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