

2009: Stillman Nature Center's 25th Anniversary

Editor's Note: As noted in Helen Reinold's biography, Alexander Stillman died in 1984. The following was written in the fall of 2009 as a brief summary of how far our nature center had come since Stillman's death.

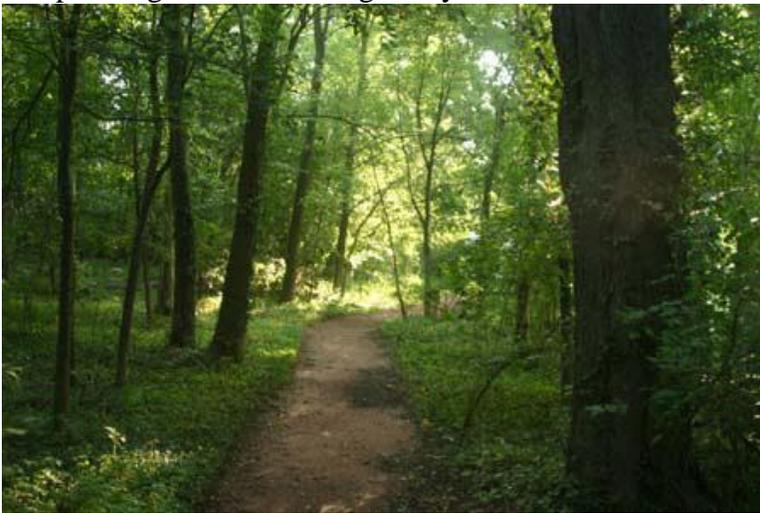
It's hard to believe. We've been working for twenty-five years to turn a former estate into a functional nature center. Given that the nature center owes its accomplishments entirely to individual contributions and thousands of hours of volunteer labor, we've come a long way.

The first challenge was rearranging the property to accommodate school groups and other visitors. Whether it was clearing the way for hiking trails, cleaning old dumpsites, or converting abandoned agricultural fields to prairie, we all learned one lesson in those early years. A donation of land is a wonderful gift: maintaining that land is a never-ending albeit rewarding chore.

As the number of groups increased, so did the need to upgrade our rustic facilities. Over the years, we added two bridges and three boardwalks that span muddy areas in the trails. Kudos to the Eagle Scouts and high school students who assembled many of these structures. We also built a bird blind overlooking the cattail marsh and two docks along the edge of our small lake. The docks are used regularly by pond study classes and Sunday visitors.

About ten years into the nature center's development, it was time to hire a part-time director. With Mark Spreyer on board, the nature center started a quarterly newsletter. We also were able to offer teacher workshops that earned participants college credits. More recently, we have started a summer intern program for college students. These folks have done some remarkable work for us and learned a great deal along the way. It is now hard to imagine running this place without them.

Meanwhile back in the woods, it became obvious that chipped trails were hard on visitors in wheelchairs or pushing strollers. With that in mind, we built an accessibility trail out of compacted gravel. The trail goes by the lakeside docks, a small prairie, and our wonderful display of woodland wildflowers.



It also swings by our two new raptor enclosures. You see, not only is this Stillman's 25th anniversary but it has also been twenty-five years since our director started doing raptor programs in Chicagoland. So, thanks to some incredible fundraising by board members, we were able to construct buildings to display the permanently injured birds of prey that are used for

many of our off-site programs. These include a turkey vulture, peregrine falcon, broad-winged hawk plus great horned, barn, and screech owls.

During the week, the nature center offers programs for groups such as school classes and garden clubs. Drop-in visitors are always welcome on Sundays. Stillman is an independent nature center that is privately funded and *receives no tax monies*. We count on fundraising events and your support to keep our 80-acre center going.