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"One Narrow Thread of Green": The Vision of May Theilgaard Watts, the Creation of the Illinois Prairie Path, and a Community's Crusade for Open Space in Chicago's Suburbs

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"One Narrow Thread of Green":
The Vision of May Theilgaard Watts, the Creation of the Illinois Prairie Path, and a Community's Crusade for Open Space in Chicago's Suburbs

by

Anne M. Keller

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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Dedicated to
my mother and my father:
there is no font size large enough to show my gratitude.

In loving memory of
Adela Beckman,
who taught me how to read the landscape

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Abstract

Women's environmental activism prior to the early 1960s in America focused on women's roles as municipal housekeepers or emphasized wilderness conservation. I offer in this dissertation the story of the Illinois Prairie Path, the country's first rails-to-trails conversion to apply for National Recreation Trail status, and the innovative women who fought for nature preservation in a suburban setting rather than in a wilderness area. Led by renowned writer and naturalist, May Theilgaard Watts, these women built support for the public footpath project by fostering an ecological awareness throughout their region. I place them in the tradition of Chicago female reformers as a bridge between women of the Progressive Era and members of the modern environmental movement. My aim in this research is to show the ways in which May Theilgaard Watts and the Illinois Prairie Path founders cultivated a new post-wilderness era model of environmental thinking through their emphasis on the restoration of a suburban open space. These women scientists and naturalists worked for democratic equality through ecological restoration and access to nature. Through an interdisciplinary focus on ecocriticism, the politics of place, and the history of the suburban landscape, specifically in Chicago's metropolis, I examine how these women redefined space by linking communities across a region. By analyzing the documents, letters, speeches, and photos generated by founding leaders of The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation, I demonstrate that this community of women challenged the hierarchies of the day. Their vision for conservation and connecting people to nature continues to serve as a model for the future of the Illinois Prairie Path and other rails-to-trails conversions.

Abbreviations

CA&E	Chicago, Aurora & Elgin Railroad
IPP	Illinois Prairie Path
The IPPc	The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation
IPPc	The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation

"About the capital T. There are two distinct entities known popularly as the Illinois Prairie Path, a not-for-profit corporation and a trail. The legal, official name of the not-for-profit corporation according to the State of Illinois is 'The Illinois Prairie Path', no more, no less, spelled with a capital T. To distinguish the trail from the corporation, the board long ago decided that the trail would be called the Illinois Prairie Path with a lower case t. So when we are writing about the organization we use the capital T (as in The Illinois Prairie Path or The Path or The IPP) and when we are writing about the trail we use the small t. It's that simple."

J. Mooring

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Learning to Know Your Oaks

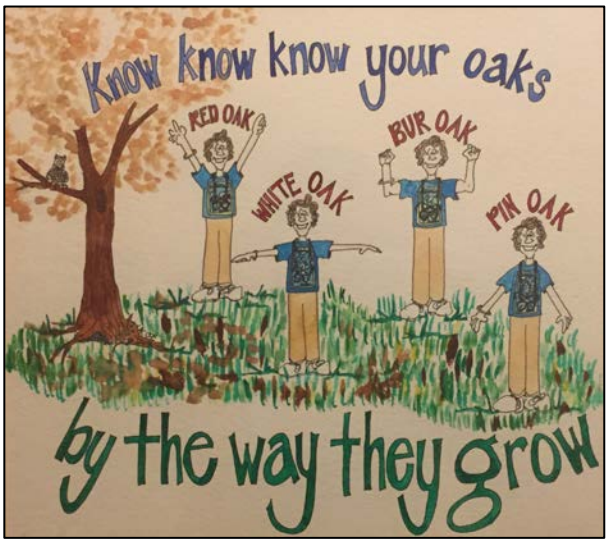

Figure 1. Know, know, know your oaks (Keller)

I was eleven years old when my sixth grade teacher stood before us one autumn day and started singing and waving her hands in the air. It was a familiar tune ("Row, row, row your boat") with new words: "Know, know, know your oaks by the way they grow." Her arms became the branches of different oak trees, pointing skyward in various directions (Fig. 1). We sang with her, all part of training to teach groups of younger children about how nature prepares for winter. The best way to learn something, she told us, was to teach it to someone else. She asked us questions about which oak tree would be ideal for building a treehouse, and we all agreed that the white oak, with its straight branches parallel to the ground, was the best option. We laughed as we imagined the treehouse sliding down the branches of the pin oak.

We learned about nature through stories and songs. On the trails, our teacher transformed holes in tree trunks into animal drinking fountains, gray smooth bark into elephant skin, and ferns into Christmas stockings. She guided us through this new world, where insects rolled up in sleeping bags and seeds became parachutes and poppers. The sassafras tree came to life before

our eyes, as our teacher held its leaves in the air and shared the story about a grandmother knitting three different mittens until she found the perfect design. "And that," she told us, "is why the sassafras tree is called the mitten tree." Once, our teacher bit into the center of a tulip tree seed just like a squirrel, so we could smell the lemon scent. Everything in nature had a connection and a story.

That year, we identified trees, wildflowers, amphibians, and birds. We learned all of their names, because we were budding ecologists, but also because they became familiar friends. Welty writes, "It is by knowing where you stand that you are able to judge where you are. Place absorbs our earliest notice and attention, it bestows on us our original awareness; our critical powers spring up from the study of it and the growth of the experience inside it" (128-9). While we learned, we gained awareness and responsibility; we became the storytellers.

It is a combination of experiences, guides, and inner workings and connections that create an ecological framework for each person. I had always loved nature, but until I had a teacher who combined her love of ecology with her gift for storytelling, I never understood the power to communicate observations in nature in such a way that compelled others to increase their own awareness and understanding. My teacher, like naturalist and educator May Theilgaard Watts, helped us develop our own ecological identities and then motivated us to share our knowledge with others.

This practice defines my teaching and my research today. By learning to read the landscape, I am now able to teach my own students the stories that each season tells. I help them learn to read their environment and to think critically about it. I show them how ideas relate to each other, how ecologists build on each other's knowledge, and how knowledge about the natural world can help us protect the places we love.

My research has been an extension of my teaching process. One presentation on Henry Chandler Cowles and his theories about succession for an ecology course took me on a field trip to nearby Lake Michigan, where I walked from the shoreline to the back dunes on a summer afternoon. Later, as I searched for more information about Cowles, I discovered a photograph from one of his field trips to Big Bay, Madeline Island, Wisconsin (Fig. 2). He appeared to be punting on a barely floating board. Waist high in the water, May Theilgaard Watts, Cowles' student, seemed to be clearing the way to propel him forward. In the photo, they are both smiling, clearly enjoying being immersed in this natural setting and sharing their experiential learning.

Figure 2. Wisconsin
(University of Chicago Photographic Archive [apf8-04479],
Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library)

Botanizing with the famous ecologist, Watts kept careful and copious notes from her field experiences. However, she was able to transport her learning by taking it from the academic setting of the University of Chicago and making it accessible to the students she taught, to garden club members, and to people from her community who joined her field trips and read her books. Sharing her knowledge in this way, Watts invited everyone who learned with her to be aware of the natural world and become participants in its protection. She nurtured an open and

democratic community of learners, and out of this community, she was able to channel her activism.

For years, I had used Watts' books to help identify trees and twigs and wildflowers, but I didn't make the connection until I researched her life and work for an environmental history course. As I sifted through her papers in the Sterling Morton Library at The Morton Arboretum, I found, amidst folders and sketchbooks and news articles, a piece of paper with words to a song about knowing your oaks. Watts had written the song! Here was another connection between my early environmental education and May Theilgaard Watts. She was both ecologist and educator, and from these two professions, she was able to communicate ideas that helped people become informed and engaged stewards.

One of the first people to implement environmental education materials for an arboretum, Watts was a pioneer. She gave lectures, sold curricular materials, and taught hundreds of students, in addition to publishing several books on ecology and related topics. How did this seemingly unassuming woman—a schoolteacher, a wife, and a mother of four—acquire knowledge enough about the natural world and its people to impact so many and leave such a legacy? While her early childhood laid the foundation for her love of plants and the natural world, Watts directed her own learning in her adult life, where she took advantage of opportunities made available to her and capitalized on her own determination to advance her studies. The training and commitment to ecology, instilled by Cowles, continued to shape Watts' career as a naturalist and promoter of connecting people to nature. She was able to communicate her knowledge and passions so effectively that people thronged to take her classes and to join her crusade to protect the threatened prairie remnants near her home. Her final project, creating the Illinois Prairie Path, modeled the power of education to lead to service and activism.

When I first walked on the Illinois Prairie Path in 2012, it must have been a hundred degrees. It was certainly one of the hottest days that summer. Weather forecasts called for rain, and the sky appeared hazy. Severe storms had already moved through the area in the days before my arrival. Whole trees had been uprooted in local parks, and branches had yet to be cleared from sidewalks. My shirt stuck to my back.

I had prepared for months, it seemed, to walk on the path. I had read May Watts' books, pored over newspaper articles about the early development of the path, and interviewed one of the path's charter members. I even planted my own prairie plants at home: big bluestem, little bluestem, and compass plants. I couldn't wait to see them rise to heights of over five feet. Prairie plants were engineered to be resilient. I pictured May Watts driving out onto the abandoned CA&E railroad right-of-way, the dust rising behind her car. I imagined her shaking her head in disgust at the debris and trash along the corridor, but then bending down to inspect the railroad tracks and finding prairie plants. The railroad may have destroyed the prairie, but it ended up saving the prairie remnants from further destruction. Right there, Watts discovered the perfect spot for the public footpath she envisioned for the Chicago region.

I wanted to hike the path May Watts' style, on foot. I stood at mile marker 0, amazed to see in front of me the place I had been reading about for so many months. As I walked down the main stem, I tried to imagine what it must have looked like when it was an overgrown, neglected space, fifty years earlier. I thought about Watts stepping from her car and seeing this open corridor with a new vision for what it could be. I wondered how she must have described her idea to the women at the garden clubs. I could picture the looks of excitement on their faces.

One of the most important details of this story is the role of education in shaping how Watts delivered her message and how the women she inspired received it. After all, Watts' first

job was teaching. She knew the craft of using stories and songs, chalk talks and demonstrations, to explain the wonders of nature. The women who joined her crusade had been fellow educators and students. I wondered if there would have been the same kind of public response to volunteer for the path if Watts did not have former students in her midst. Like Cowles before her, Watts helped her students develop awareness and responsibility. They had a unique ecological framework that emerged from everyday experiences as women in their suburban landscape. Their desire to serve and act came from within, from the knowledge and experiences they had, in response to external pressures on the landscape.

Ecological awareness begins this way, by learning something and making a connection to the world. Finding relationships in nature helps us build communities, and there are countless benefits to spending time in nature. The western suburbs of Chicago now have an incredible opportunity to link communities and encourage connecting to nature. The path is right outside their door, and there is an amazing network of paths joined to the Illinois Prairie Path. This confluence of paths offers the possibility for building a regional community of nature enthusiasts, recreationists, and ecologically-minded stewards. Education needs to be a part of the process.

There is great potential for the future of the Illinois Prairie Path in the story of a group of children from Maywood, Illinois whose activities on the path skewed the results of the most recent trail-use study. Surprised by the sheer volume of path users in this post-industrial, lower socioeconomic, and largely African-American city, some survey volunteers discovered a group of children from a daycare center playing near the path. With each pass of their games of tag, the children set off the counter. Unfortunately for the researchers, the activities of the children failed to fall neatly into prescribed trail-use categories of running, biking, or walking. There was no

category for "play" on the Illinois Prairie Path survey. Watts would have loved this story; her primary goal was to create a public footpath that connected *all* people to nature. Play was certainly part of her broader vision.

The playing children can help us see that there is a place for increased path user diversity and for path *use* diversity as well. What can be done to foster a love for the outdoors and an awareness of ecology along the path in communities such as Maywood? Making space for children to experience nature through play along this linear park is one possibility. How can the path's organization engage more young people, through their schools or community groups, to immerse themselves in experiences on the path so they, too, can build an ecological framework? Watts had a captive audience; they already understood the value of nature. They were willing to help build the path because they believed that people working together could make a positive change and safeguard open space. How can learning to read the landscape become part of the everyday experiences of all the communities the path reaches? Building this kind of literacy requires the organization's leaders and path advocates to reach out to communities through education and stewardship.

Where I teach now, there is a small patch of overgrown woods. At one time, the area was used for outdoor study, but it had been neglected. The pavilion gathering place was covered in rust. Trees had fallen. Poison ivy carpeted the main clearing beneath the canopy. During the first months of school, we began to clear the downed branches, treat the poison ivy, and redefine the trails that had become overgrown. We painted the pavilion.

When students got involved, spread woodchips, and raked the paths, they became more invested in their learning and in their stewardship. They were ten years old then, beginning fifth grade, and they had varying levels of experiences in nature. Some students played outside all the

time, some enjoyed helping their parents with yard work, and others went camping with their families. When they saw the transformation in the outdoor learning space, their awareness, stewardship, and activism became part of their core ecological framework. Just as with the early founders of the Illinois Prairie Path, I am hopeful that this new understanding in my students may lead to more engagement and more service. May Watts understood the value of education as one important way to share her knowledge about ecology with people whose views and decisions about the environment had a lasting impact on the landscape. She believed that education for all ages needed to become part of the process. Using Watts' vision and approach as a model, every person will be able to access nature.

Those first days in the outdoor learning space at my school, after all of our hard work, we sat together beneath some tall trees. It was one of those last warm autumn days, and the sun filtered through the canopy overhead. We all drew pictures of leaves. My students wondered what kinds of leaves they were. "Let me teach you a song," I said. Now they know.

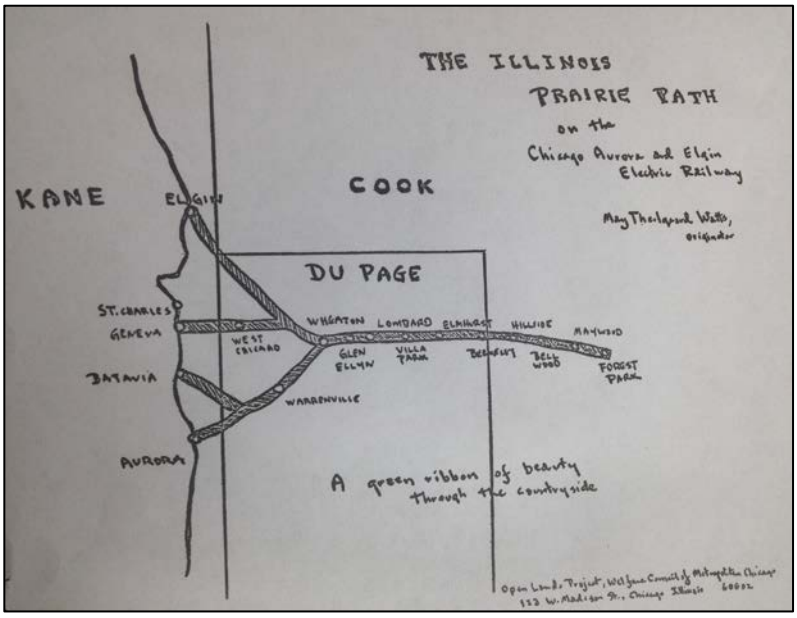

Figure 3. Original Map, Illinois Prairie Path, 1965
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

Figure 4. May Theilgaard Watts on the Illinois Prairie Path
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

Introduction

Even though the Illinois Prairie Path was singled out as a remarkable preservation effort in the 1960s and 1970s, its story remains largely untold today. The Illinois Prairie Path achieved national acclaim as the first successful rails-to-trails conversion and served as a model for other similar initiatives throughout the country (Fig. 3). Few people or organizations recognize the path's founder May Theilgaard Watts for her significant role in spearheading the campaign to create a path whose history spans more than fifty years. Everything about the path's story reveals extraordinary strides in women's environmental activism to secure open space, spark grassroots involvement, and impact national legislation. Why has this story been neglected and why is it worth telling?

In telling the story of the Illinois Prairie Path, this study will provide an ecocritical analysis of the path and its authorship to understand women's responses to the landscape. The women, who crusaded to transform the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin railroad right-of-way into a public footpath, applied their background and training in ecology, natural history, and gardening to address an environmental problem that impacted not only their local neighborhoods, but also the region where they lived. While it is not the first example in history of women banding together in a conservation effort, the story of the Illinois Prairie Path is a unique example of women fighting for nature preservation in a suburban setting rather than in a wilderness area. Unlike women reformers of the Progressive Era, whose volunteer efforts focused on urban issues related to health, sanitation, and education, Watts and her female colleagues worked toward the goal of democratic equality through ecological restoration and advocating for access to nature. They created a new model of environmental activism, founded on ecological science and

community engagement, that bridged the Progressive Era and the modern environmental movement.

My research focuses on the primary and secondary archival sources and the history related to the ways in which these women worked together to develop the Illinois Prairie Path. In this study, I "read" the documents, the landscape, and the women's responses to the landscape as texts that can be interpreted through an ecological lens. I analyze and interpret where these "texts" intersect to illuminate how the women redefined nature across a region, encompassing not just one neighborhood or city, but multiple communities along a repurposed, linear, natural corridor. As the women reframed the environmental mindset of these communities, they also shifted the focus on environmental activism from urban areas and the wilderness to the suburbs, a place believed to have no nature at all.

I also interpret historical, geographical, social, gendered, and political contexts in which the path's founders—all women—engaged in environmental activism alongside key male community leaders and path advocates, including their own husbands and Open Lands Project executive director, Gunnar Peterson. My research addresses the question: In what ways do May Theilgaard Watts and the Illinois Prairie Path founders, as a community of women, cultivate a new post-wilderness era model of environmental thinking with their emphasis on the restoration of a suburban open space?

Blazing New Trails: The Vision of May Theilgaard Watts

When May Theilgaard Watts, renowned writer, illustrator, teacher, ecologist, and The Morton Arboretum naturalist emeritus, traveled to England to walk the ancient footpaths in 1961, her journey led her back to her home in Naperville, Illinois. She wanted to build a public footpath in the Chicago suburbs and create a "proud resource" ("Future Footpath?"). When Watts

walked onto the abandoned Chicago, Aurora & Elgin (CA&E) railroad right-of-way, she saw more than a dumping ground (Fig. 4). In the western suburbs of Chicago, she recognized the potential for a public footpath where humans could walk, unimpeded by automobile traffic. Watts also identified the path as a democratic place where all people, no matter their social class, would be able to access nature, just as people in England had done for centuries along their public footpaths.

Watts' work and writing focused on *reading* the landscape, on noticing changes that occurred over time, and on using an ecological framework of the Chicago School of Ecology to provide a broad model for understanding the natural world and human responses to landscape. Her focus was native plant communities and the prairie landscape of Illinois. It was the scene outside her window and in her backyard. It was the the prairie plants that ran along the corridor of the abandoned railroad right-of-way. It was the spaces between towns, along rivers, and in fields. People were also part of that prairie landscape. Watts' response to nature included the intersection of people and place, both a part of the landscape she wanted to preserve.

Watts dedicated her life's work to educating people, including her readers, garden club members, and students in her nature classes, about ecology and human impacts on the environment. An avid naturalist, she drew on her ecology background to identify prairie remnants, plants she knew to be of ecological importance to support many forms of life. These plants had given Illinois its name of the "Prairie State," and Watts recognized their significance to the region where she lived. In her article "Herbs of the Prairie," she outlined how prairie plants tenaciously formed a community: "Like plants of other treeless places, desert, tundra, moors, downs, each plant of the prairie records a story of high tension, the account of coming to terms with sun and rain. We see the current chapter of a long story of how, from a long ancestral line,

sun and rain--and time--and chance have selected out each member of this community" (13). The prairie-as-story resonated for Watts, who valued the native plants that grew there and built a community over time only for human impacts to disrupt the narrative.

Even though the railroads had destroyed the prairie in its original glory, Watts knew that prairie plants, protected from mowing, continued to grow along abandoned railroad corridors. She believed there was still a place for the prairie in the midst of suburban sprawl and encroaching cement and wanted to protect prairie remnants. "When one watches the foreign plants, with their human stories," she wrote, "invading the prairies in the wake of bulldozers, and replacing the natives which kept their stories to themselves, anyone who has learned to read the stories written on the prairie mourns at seeing these richly-storied pages ripped from the book of the landscape" (15). The right-of-way served as a reminder of the history, culture, and continuity in the development of Chicago and its surrounding environs. Watts wanted to keep the connections of history, regionalism, and ecology alive through the prairie path project.

The work of building the Illinois Prairie Path resulted from a small group of women's belief in the value of natural space in a suburban setting. The five pioneering women whose help May Watts enlisted on the prairie path project represented the hundreds of civic-minded citizens who eventually joined her crusade to secure the right-of-way for something other than a new highway system, parking lot, or water pipeline. Watts managed to persuade governmental leaders at all levels that her vision was the best choice for the open land. She became a trailblazer for environmental change, but she could not have accomplished all that she did by working alone. By investigating Watts' and path founders' responses to place and the prairie landscape, I develop a broader model for understanding both the ideology of the time period and women's responses to landscape. Not all of the women involved with the Illinois Prairie Path shared the same

ideology, but they were joined in common ground in their response to the landscape. Their response was suburban, ecological, and informed by an extensive community of engaged citizens. Working within these contexts, Watts and her neighbors were able to advance a new era of environmental thinking that emphasized restoration as a means of securing "one narrow thread of green" ("The Illinois Prairie Path" 14).

One of the most innovative outcomes this unique group of women's work yielded was the partnership they developed with the Open Lands Project, under the leadership of Gunnar Peterson. As members of their respective fledgling organizations, the women and Peterson recognized they shared a similar goal in protecting open space for access to nature and recreation. Peterson was able to provide the initial support the women needed to develop their organization and to secure the CA&E railroad rights-of-way in continuity. When Peterson approached Watts about her idea for the public footpath, the Open Lands Project was a new program of the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, an organization originally founded during the Progressive Era to provide social services for residents of the Chicago area. This social mission imbued the larger vision of the Open Lands Project to promote conservation as a means of improving quality of life. Watts' goal to connect people with nature emphasized improving quality of life as well, and the regional scope of her vision for the public footpath fit the Open Lands Project's focus on regional conservation.

The partnership between the Illinois Prairie Path and the Open Lands Project, not without its challenges, enabled this group of women to become a key early model of a new type of environmentalism that defined the environment as the place "where we live, where we work, and where we play," a definition of environment later coined by environmental justice advocate, Dana Alston (Gottlieb 34). This new type of environmentalism practiced by Watts and her

colleagues combined addressing environmental issues, implementing ecological practices, and raising social concerns. There were direct connections among securing open space, saving the prairie, and helping people learn more about natural history and ecology through access to nature. The ultimate goal was to improve the quality of life for people living in Chicago's suburbs. This emphasis on quality of life and access to nature, directed as it was by a group of suburban white women, made an important contribution to what would emerge as the environmental justice movement. A new definition of "environment" also began to emerge from the initiative to create the Illinois Prairie Path.

Together Watts and the Illinois Prairie Path founders and volunteers helped to define the importance of place and the value of nature. They altered the fixed American mindset that nature equaled wilderness by naming nature in neglected suburban spaces. They worked with an educated and engaged community of women and men who also recognized the necessity of open space in their region. Their example fueled national campaigns and conversations that led to improved legislation for environmental issues related to open space and recreation in the 1960s and 1970s. In her *Landscape* article "The Illinois Prairie Path," Watts encouraged the development of more paths: "We hope that other paths, in other parts of the country, may succeed because ours succeeded. We hope that some day some individual wanting to make a bequest to posterity will decide to leave Americans another footpath" (14). This example of regional, collaborative volunteerism and collective citizen action still serves as an important prototype of innovative approaches to conservation and environmental thinking.

An Innovative Model of Environmental Thought

The development of the Illinois Prairie Path was innovative in several ways. The women who initiated the idea for the path, May Theilgaard Watts and Helen Turner, Watts' neighbor and

colleague, cannot be lumped into the broad category of middle-class housewives who needed an outlet for their volunteerism. In his article, "'Give Earth a Chance,'" Rome argues that women's environmental activism and the feminist movement were not necessarily meshed: "For some college-educated housewives, environmental activism resolved a tension between traditional expectations and unfulfilled ambitions. . . . For other women, however, environmental activism was the first step toward new responsibilities outside the home. . . . Though many didn't consider themselves feminists, they helped advance the feminist cause" (541). Trained in the sciences of biology, botany, geology, and ecology, employed as educators and naturalists at The Morton Arboretum, and of retirement age, Watts and Turner did not fit the descriptions or demographic patterns applied to women who took up environmental causes in the 1960s. Documents from the early days of the Illinois Prairie Path also suggest that even the younger women, who fit more closely the profile of civic-minded suburban housewife, joined Watts and Turner because they were dedicated to this particular environmental project and not necessarily to a budding feminist ideology.

At the time the women began their work, none of them identified themselves as feminists or environmentalists; the second-wave feminist movement was just beginning, and the modern environmental movement began later. However, combining a passion for ecological preservation with a demand for equal and safe access to nature, the women were committed to environmental quality and protection at the grassroots level. Watts and the other founders were unwilling to accept technological progress, ushered in by male civic and political leaders, as the answer to unchecked exploitation of natural resources and human health and welfare. They saw a direct link between the bulldozing of open space in the suburbs and the erasure of the human

connection to the natural world. This belief in accessibility to nature motivated the women's dedication to the path project and spurred their activism.

The place that the path's founders identified for restoration also did not fit typical open space restoration projects of the time. While suburban open space crusades often focused on woods, fields, or other beautiful places threatened by development, Watts and her supporters wanted to reuse an abandoned space—a neglected railroad right-of-way—as a public footpath. This type of restoration project marked a shift in conservation efforts in America. Prior to Watts' idea for a footpath in 1963, open space *was* an issue of national importance, but organizations such as the Nature Conservancy, Watts wrote, "were committed to the preservation of pieces of wilderness—nature areas. They could hardly be expected to lower their sights to an old railroad track" ("The Illinois Prairie Path" 12). The move away from a focus on wilderness areas to local sites that were abandoned or neglected, even though they offered unique ecological features such as prairie remnants, represented an innovative shift in environmental thinking. According to Watts, conservation included reimagining, reusing, and restoring the landscape—a cutting-edge approach in environmental activism at the time.

One other innovative element in the design of the Illinois Prairie Path's development was the shift to a regional scale. The IPP founders' environmental activism differed from the municipal housekeeping of urban reformers, the wilderness conservation efforts of the Progressives, and the clean-up measures of the environmentalists. Unlike other early Chicago area urban planners, reformers, and landscape designers, such as Jane Addams and Jens Jensen (designers of local neighborhood playgrounds and city parks), Watts' vision for a public footpath encompassed miles of land that connected diverse cities and landscapes. Her vision for the public footpath, as well as the project's success, depended on the cooperation and inclusion of the right-

of-way in continuity. In this way, Watts and the women she enlisted in her environmental cause redefined place—not just their homes, their neighborhoods, and their suburbs, but the space linking local communities. Their focus on the spaces between communities, as a means of restoring landscapes and uniting people with place, was a significant innovation.

Currently, we have begun to recognize the importance of preserving green space and restoring prairies and other threatened habitats. Our approach to environmental problems requires the kind of innovative thinking that the founders of the Illinois Prairie Path developed and implemented over fifty years ago. Conserving wilderness landscapes with beautiful vistas, opening national parks, and beautifying areas adjacent to highways were admirable steps in environmental protection during the 1960s. However, environmental thinking focused on restoring and redefining regional space to improve people's health, quality of life, and connection to nature in suburban and urban areas gained ground because of initiatives such as the Illinois Prairie Path.

For these reasons, this study addresses a significant shift in environmental thought and activism that had its beginnings during the 1960s, in a suburban setting, with a group of women who responded to the landscape at the regional level. My research examines the work of women trained in ecology, committed to fostering a regional citizenship, and dedicated to building democracy along a public footpath. There has been an increased effort to include women's environmental activism in the field of environmental history and to understand it through the lens of gender. Just as the railroad right-of-way and the prairie became neglected spaces, so too has the innovative thinking and problem solving of women between the Progressive Era and the modern environmental movement. In telling the story of this community of women, I extend the

work of environmental historians to add the initiatives of these women to the history of environmental thinking and gendered responses to the landscape.

My research also considers the role of place in the development of environmental thinking about the prairie within a suburban context. To this end, I investigate the neglected site of the prairie in an effort to place Watts' vision for restoration in geographical and ecological contexts. Finally, this study analyzes a model for converting neglected space into a usable place to address current environmental problems related to outdoor recreation and to call into question the lack of diversity in trail users. I evaluate the future of the Illinois Prairie Path, compared to similar types of recreation trails, and the ways in which Watts' vision has both limited and expanded the current direction of the volunteer organization that safeguards the path's legacy.

Women's Responses to the Landscape

Women have participated in community organizing, environmental activism, and social reform throughout history. The tradition of women's contributions to the conservation movement in America began well before the 1960s and spanned the country. There has been an increased effort to include stories of women's environmental activism in the field of environmental history and to understand these stories through the lens of gender. Throughout the twentieth century, women campaigned for a wide variety of environmental causes: "In the Progressive Era women actively supported the conservation movement. They also lobbied for smokeless skies, clean water, pure food, and urban parks, and they often justified their efforts as 'municipal housekeeping' and 'civic mothering'. Women continued to press for environmental protection in the decades after World War I" ("'Give Earth a Chance'" 534-5). Watts and her colleagues organized their community of activists from the places they knew, generating support from

students and garden club members, to convince a larger public that all humans should have access to nature.

Environmental historians and ecofeminist critics have identified the lack of attention paid to the environmental activism and important work of women like Watts and the other path founders. Evidence of their work can be found in diverse settings and forms. Gaard argues, "Ecological feminism is neither a second- nor a third-wave feminism; it has been present in various forms from the start of feminism in the nineteenth century, articulated through the work of women gardeners, botanists, illustrators, animal rights and animal welfare advocates, outdoorswomen, scientists, and writers" (646). Watts and Turner both possessed an incredible background and understanding about the natural history of their region, and they shared their knowledge through articles, books, illustrations, informational lectures, and teaching. They captivated audiences by the vivacity of their storytelling and the breadth of their ecological understanding.

This knowledge set Watts and Turner apart from someone like Peterson, trained more in the areas of urban planning and land conservancy. To credit Peterson's efforts through the Open Lands Project with securing the Illinois Prairie Path is to undercut the extensive ecological background Watts and Turner used to read the landscape in the first place. They knew that place intimately, identified the prairie remnants, and understood the necessity for protecting the space as a linear park. These women sparked an interest in a new kind of conservation, but aside from bylines in the literature on rails-to-trails conversions, their story is largely unknown.

In *Made from This Earth: American Women and Nature*, Norwood exposes a major gap related to gender in the field of environmental history. "We know a great deal," she says, "about the men who framed America's environmental agenda, and we know something about how

men—naturalists and historians—have viewed women's contributions to nature study and the environmental movement. But we have very little information on the nature study and preservation work that women actually performed or the meanings such activities held for them" (xv). Norwood's study began to fill this gap in environmental history. While attention has been given to prominent, important women, the work of communities of women at many levels impacted environmental history. Merchant argues, "Although only the most prominent women appear in recent historical studies, without the input of women in nearly every locale in the country, conservation gains in the early decades of the [twentieth] century would have been fewer and far less spectacular" ("Women of the Progressive" 57). By introducing new stories of contributions by lesser known women, Merchant and Norwood present a more complete picture of women's responses to the landscape.

In the decades following Norwood's study, research in women's and gender history of the United States has gone through several phases. According to Dayton and Levenstein, there has been a shift in the scholarship to a focus on gender that has furthered "our understanding of women's and men's diverse historical experiences" (796). This shift provides a way to consider the founders of the Illinois Prairie Path who did not identify themselves as feminists, but who were able to negotiate a patriarchal system to identify a social and environmental issue and make their vision a reality. As white suburban women with values rooted in democracy and ecology, their response to the landscape emerged during a time period in which securing open land and fighting for quality of life meant navigating a bureaucratic political system dominated by powerful men. Looking at the intersection between the work of this community of women and the social concerns and political goals raised by Peterson's Open Lands Project, the activism of

the path's founders created new opportunities for the development of the environmental justice movement.

Another way that this shift in scholarship has aided the understanding of environmental work is by shedding light on the connections between women's activism and social movements (Dayton and Levenstein 802). Women conservationists enlisted the support of women's groups to link environmental concerns with social activism. Rome highlights this emphasis as a major influence on the surge of women environmental activists during the 1950s and 1960s: "Some activists worked through old conservation or women's organizations. More often, women formed ad hoc groups to stop pollution, save open spaces, or protect wildlife" ("'Give Earth a Chance'" 534). Watts and path founders sought out these community allies in their work as well. They turned to organizations such as garden clubs and Audubon clubs, as well as to groups like the Open Lands Project that could offer the kind of support they needed to make the path a reality. Through the path project, the women's focus shifted from the yard to the region, from an insular and privileged position to a more open view of the landscape. In fact, by advocating democratic access to the path, the women's project challenged and radicalized the established roles and definitions of 1960s garden clubs and their privileged members.

The longstanding tradition of women's activism in Chicago, specifically, laid the foundation for the Illinois Prairie Path's founders' grassroots efforts in conservation. In *How Women Saved the City*, Spain explains, "Women volunteers were also highly visible in Chicago. The white Woman's Club of Chicago, counterpart to the elite white all-male Commercial Club, pursued a mission to clean up the city. . . . The club's municipal housekeeping agenda encouraged members to participate in settlement work, public bath campaigns, and the playground movement" (208). The Chicago region had a history of women's involvement in

environmental issues from the end of the nineteenth century and through the end of WWI. Spain argues, "As in other cities, women were at the forefront of voluntary efforts to deal with the city's problems" (210). Watts and Turner extended this tradition of volunteerism and environmental activism in Chicago's western suburbs, but they applied an ecological framework to redefine this tradition for a new generation of women.

The shift in gender analysis in environmental history also addresses how women define their identities in relation to each other (Dayton and Levenstein 798). Watts, Turner, and the other founders involved with the IPP highlighted the need for *all* people to have access to nature, not just the wealthy and not just people on vacation in wilderness areas. In this way, their environmental activism was guided by their core belief in democracy. Their ecological approach provided a unified democratic vision for an entire region, as well as a model for national trails. While the path project was designed in many ways to erase class or social divisions, and become a democratic public footpath, the women who worked on the project had clearly defined social positions within their community. The story of the Illinois Prairie Path reveals a range of women's experiences and responses to the landscape.

Blurring Suburban Boundaries to Foster a Regional Citizenship

These women were also residents of Chicago's western suburbs, and they recognized the power dynamics involved in trying to connect the communities in their region. Clear power struggles developed over the place Watts and her neighbors identified as their future footpath. The ways in which the different groups responded to the landscape revealed those power dynamics, allegiances, and tensions that developed within the community, at all scales from local to national. Regardless of how these various groups experienced place, it is clear in the literature that there is power in place, and places become sites of contested power and politics. Place is at

the center of political culture and shapes political thought. The IPP founders viewed the public footpath as a physical and geographical link between suburban communities. Their vision for the path blurred the boundaries between suburbs and invited all people to participate in a regional form of citizenship.

In *Chicagoland: City and Suburbs in the Railroad Age*, Keating sets the stage for how this notion of regional citizenship was established in the greater Chicago area. Chicago and its outlying cities were physically close: "Choose any swathe of the Chicago metropolitan area and one is likely to find a mix of commuter suburbs, industrial towns, farm centers, and institutional/recreational towns. . . . Farmers, workers and commuters were neighbors" (11). This neighborliness defined how people interacted with each other and with place. According to Kemmis' *Community and the Politics of Place*, "what 'we' do depends on who 'we' are (or who we think we are). It depends, in other words, upon how we choose to relate to each other, to the place we inhabit, and to the issues which that inhabiting raises for us. All of those 'we' questions are about our way of being public" (41). Kemmis cites examples of barn building, softball games, and steer raising to illustrate his idea that communities must have shared values and an understanding of what will benefit the common good. How do these seemingly small-town, somewhat rural examples translate to urban places and their environs, where issues of social and environmental justice complicate the idea of a conflicted or contested common good?

The path founders represented different Chicago suburbs along the CA&E Railroad right-of-way and firmly believed that a public footpath benefitted the common good. They knew the people of Wayne and Glen Ellyn, suburbs where they had worked and learned together, planted gardens, and raised families. The women developed the footpath as a kind of invitation to the community so that everyone could feel empowered by having access to it and using it.

Rather than impose some scientific way of doing things, the women gave the people ownership, relied on their expertise, and solicited their aid in turning the vision into a reality. This act of engaging the community produced many stalwart supporters and a long tradition of volunteerism associated with the path throughout its history. It was a truly grassroots effort in every way, from the earliest walks on the path to laying the miles of limestone screenings. The more people got involved, the greater the connections developed between the suburbs and the stronger the regional vision became. Because the women came from different suburbs and life experiences, they understood the regional scope of the path's potential to join disparate people through experiences in nature.

The IPP founders understood the concept of regional citizenship from the beginning of their work together. Their vision joined environmental activism with social consciousness and commitment. Common values about the environment, an ecological framework, and a commitment to democracy brought the women together and helped their project find receptive audiences throughout the region. They cleared a path, created a consciousness, and crusaded to preserve neglected open space. They believed in the idea of the common good and were, as Kemmis depicts, "people who had learned by repeated experience that they could count on each other, and in doing so, accomplish difficult and important tasks together" (72). They were neighbors who shared common values, and these values contributed to their political puissance. They possessed civic virtues, "those habits which would be necessary if people were ever to relate to each other in a truly public way" (76).

It was this combination of being neighbors, living in the same place, and sharing common values that resulted in a politics of place. Kemmis argues, "What holds people together long enough to discover their power as citizens is their common inhabiting of a single place. . . . We

have to learn, somehow, to live together. Before they become citizens, then, these people are neighbors; this is a neighborly citizenship" (117). There is greater success, according to Kemmis, of problem solving in smaller political entities, and it is in these smaller units where there is hope for renewed politics. The IPP founders' success was the result of shared values, a commitment to Watts' vision, and the ability "to think beyond their neighborhood or suburbs in order to address critical issues related to housing, employment, transportation, and the environment" (178).

Land use and open space directly impacted the suburban way of life. In *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, Rome links homebuilding to the origins of environmentalism. He positions the symbol of the bulldozer at the center of his analysis: "In new subdivisions, the bulldozer seldom was far from the living room, so the environmental destructiveness of postwar industry often intruded on the comfort of postwar prosperity" (6). This image of the bulldozer resonated for Watts and the other path founders and added to their sense of urgency. Rome argues that environmentalism began with the increase in homebuilding: "During the first stage, from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, the major environmental issues were outdoor recreation, open space, and wilderness preservation" (6). Sellers calls this stage of suburbanizing "nature erasing" (41). Watts understood that there was a possibility for restoration in the "erased" and neglected right-of-way.

A shift from conserving wilderness to conserving open space marked a significant turn in environmental thinking in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The IPP founders turned their attention to places where they "lived, worked, and played," and to the people doing the living, working, and playing. This emphasis guided their efforts and shaped their identities as open-space conservationists, civic leaders, and ecology advocates. The politics of identity, according to Hayden's *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public Histories*, structure the built

environment to tell its story within a particular context. She argues, "Debates about the built environment, history, and culture take place in much more contested terrain of race, gender, and class, set against long-term economic and environmental problems" (6). The IPP founders stepped out of their privileged garden club world to address issues about the built environment in an effort to improve the quality of life for people in their region. How and where they shifted their practice opened opportunities for future generations to tackle environmental justice problems more consciously.

This story of the IPP founders showcases how the intersection between place and people laid the foundation for developing a regional citizenship of likeminded suburban residents, united by a public footpath made from a neglected space. According to Sellers, people living in the suburbs innovated "new ways of thinking about nature under threat: not as distant resources in need of conservation, but as 'the environment'" (4). Watts' vision for this regional citizenship, while innovative and of enormous ecological value, had limitations, however. Fifty years later, it is clear that her vision for democratic access to nature targeted a very specific demographic: people who shared her values and those of the suburban women who developed the project. This outcome mirrors, on larger environmental scales, the ways in which access to nature has been limited to certain privileged groups of people. How these limitations have impacted the Illinois Prairie Path and its users, fifty years since Watts initiated the idea, offers ways to challenge and expand her vision, especially in regard to environmental justice issues.

Reading the Landscape

This study, like the narrow thread of green that became the Illinois Prairie Path, is a thread of a story. There are stops and turns as with any story. Themes emerge to stitch together

the whole and offer a broader understanding of the innovative environmental thinking of a group of suburban women during the 1960s.

Voices communicate from the letters of those early days, written by the women who recorded their thoughts and dreams for a project they so vigilantly supported. Through my own selection and weaving of the documents, I have helped to construct this conversation about the Illinois Prairie Path as well as to frame the women's responses to their landscape (see Appendix). Creating a narrative out of texts from the past presents opportunities and poses obstacles for any researcher, especially when looking for a model for the future of the Illinois Prairie Path and other similar kinds of recreation and restoration initiatives. Following Watts' ecological framework, this study interprets accounts of the past to consider predictions for the future, while providing comments on the present. However, other considerations about how nature is defined, and by whom, complicate current and future readings of the landscape.

In this study, I bring my own lens as a Midwestern, white woman, and as someone who has been able to connect with nature and participate in outdoor recreation with relative ease and economic resources. I realize that while I call attention to some of the problems inherent in Watts' democratic vision, observed fifty years later, I do so from a position of privilege, as well as from the authoritative stance as an interpreter of the texts with which I have chosen to weave my story. Recognizing my own limitations, as well as the limitations created by the IPP founders and perpetuated by the organization today, situates my work in an ideal, albeit uncomfortable, position to identify where weaknesses in the framework continue to exist and ways that we can begin to facilitate the kind of democratic access to nature and outdoor recreation that Watts envisioned.

The voices that are featured in this study tell one version of the story, and even they do not always agree. However, by placing them in conversation with each other, against the background of Watts' published writing about ecology, and within their historical and social milieu, they help us think about reusing neglected spaces, question definitions of nature and environment, and challenge us to evaluate the degree to which nature has been made accessible for all people. My research offers an ecocritical analysis of these historical texts to showcase the new post-wilderness era model of environmental thinking a community of suburban women developed that led to ecological restoration efforts, redefining nature, and future questioning of the democratic ideal of accessibility.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of May Theilgaard Watts' life and career, and her work as teacher, writer, educator, and activist. Mentored by ecological thinkers Henry Chandler Cowles and Jens Jensen, Watts honed her ability to read the landscape and to shape her ecological world view. Both Cowles and Jensen had an enormous influence on ecological thought in the Chicago region as well as nationally, but Watts' vision focused on abandoned space, rather than on parks or wilderness preservation. Her efforts to preserve prairie remnants also led to prairie restoration efforts in her region. Here, I trace the history of the prairie, as discussed in literary texts about the region, and its importance specifically to the Chicago region, both from its ecological value and in the symbol of the path itself—a rooted community in the midst of dramatic change to the environment and the people who "live, work, and play" there.

Chapter 2 follows Watts' seed of an idea as it became her vision for a public footpath and engaged other women from her community. This chapter introduces the community of women who supported Watts' idea and made it a reality. In this chapter, Watts and her colleagues are situated within the tradition of Chicago women's service to environmental justice and healthful

living. As residents of Chicago suburbs, these women drew on experiences and fueled their passion for preserving open space because of the place where they lived. This chapter explores the ways in which the women became a force in their region for effecting environmental change.

Chapter 3 is a companion piece to Chapter 2, because of the emphasis on the Open Lands Project and the professional men who helped the development of the path. It also offers a more expanded view of the Illinois Prairie Path as a regional and national project. I examine the relationship between The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation and the Open Lands Project as a means of interrogating Watts' and Peterson's different approaches to securing open space, as well as how power dynamics shaped their individual goals and organizational missions.

Chapter 4 considers the legacy of the Illinois Prairie Path and evaluates its future goals within the context of national goals for recreational trails. In this chapter, I analyze recent surveys completed about trail use nationally, as well as specific trail use recorded for the Illinois Prairie Path. I address the problematic lack of trail user diversity on the national level and on the Illinois Prairie Path from a critical environmental justice framework. I also outline possible directions for the current volunteer organization and highlight the importance of the organization as an instrument of environmental change and inclusivity.

I explore both the limitations of Watts' original vision for the path and the ways in which her vision now motivates historians, open space advocates, recreation enthusiasts, and environmental stewards to ask new questions about who has access to nature and *whose* nature it is. By evaluating current trends in increasing user diversity along similar recreation paths, as well as engaging less-privileged voices in the current conversation, my research expands the purview of Watts' vision and recontextualizes the Illinois Prairie Path as a model for future rails-to-trails initiatives.

CHAPTER 1

May Theilgaard Watts and a New Vision for Conservation

Figure 1.1. May Theilgaard Watts, Illinois Prairie Path Fall Walk
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

In a series of sepia-colored and black and white photographs from 1965, May Theilgaard Watts appeared to be in her element, teaching about the natural world in an outdoor setting. The occasion was the Illinois Prairie Path Fall Walk, where Watts sat with a group of students in a tunnel used for cattle crossing beneath the path. She lectured on the methods of teaching natural science. A wool cap, encircled by wisps of white hair, and a jacket with a fur-lined collar served as protection against the cool October wind, but the warm smile on Watts' face and the close-knit group gathered at her feet provided an intimate glimpse of the dynamic person Watts was as an educator, an ecologist, and a community leader.

Each image showed the joy in the attentive faces of the students against the backdrop of an Illinois October, colored in muted browns and subdued greens. The shelter of the cracked cow tunnel, autographed by someone's graffiti, was the one reminder that this was no wilderness. Like so much of Watts' writing, teaching, and ecological practice, this scene showcased an

ordinary place, just northwest of Illinois Route 59. It was one stop along a future footpath designed to link communities in the region and to connect suburban and urban residents to nature.

The 1965 Illinois Prairie Path Fall Walk focused primarily on education. Twenty-three field trips offered community members the opportunity to learn about nature on the neglected land along the abandoned railroad right-of-way. Experts from many fields served as leaders for the various trips, stationed at different places along the proposed public path. The field trips were as much about sharing the leaders' content as marketing the idea of the path project to the communities within its reach.

Watts taught the students on her field trip how to "read the landscape," her method of practicing ecology. Her early connections with pioneer ecologist Henry Chandler Cowles and landscape architect Jens Jensen initiated her into a community of civic-minded environmentalists in the Chicago area who advocated for projects as diverse as the use of native plants in landscaping and the protection of the Indiana Dunes. Combining her teaching of ecological practice with the purpose of promoting the path project, Watts linked ecology and activism by using educational opportunities to enlist support for a new kind of conservation: repurposing neglected space in an effort to provide all people access to nature.

This chapter will outline the ways in which Watts drew on her background in ecology and her practice of reading the landscape to engage communities in her democratic mission to connect people with nature through environmental awareness and social activism. I will also highlight how Watts' understanding of plant communities framed her ideas for the path. Trained as an ecologist, Watts was able to educate her region about the value of the prairie ecosystem and the importance of preserving native plants in Illinois.

A Foundation for Ecology

The daughter of immigrant Danish parents, May Theilgaard Watts' upbringing and combination of talents shaped her passion for storytelling and provided a strong foundation for what became her energetic and inspired teaching. She grew up in the Ravenswood neighborhood of Chicago, a typical immigrant neighborhood in the late 1890s to early 1900s. Watts' interest in plants and nature came from her father, who was a gardener and landscape designer. Watts and her three sisters were also musical, artistic, and focused on education (B. Watts). Three of the girls in the family received a high school diploma in the public schools, and with that diploma, Watts was able to find employment by teaching in a country school in one of the rural outskirts of Chicago.

Several sources credit Watts' ability to relate to so many different audiences to her experience teaching in a one-room schoolhouse. One account of her teaching explained, "Educational strategies which she had employed as a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse were applied to classes at the [Morton] Arboretum. Children and adults, advanced and beginners, and tenderfoot and expert, learned from each other. Lectures were interspersed with chalk talks, poems, songs, games and finger plays" (Cassidy 8). By working during the year, Watts saved money and paid for her own education during the summers when she took courses at the University of Chicago. Unlike students with greater economic means, Watts and her sisters were unable to attend school full time. Many young women who came from a working-class background needed to work for a living. Watts' experience was similar to many of the other female students enrolled in summer classes at the University of Chicago.

The University of Chicago was an innovative and energized educational institution when Watts attended classes during WWI. As the city expanded, a topic outlined in Cronon's *Nature's*

Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West, there were fewer places reserved for recreation. Natural places and landscapes that retained their native elements moved to the edges and in-between places of Chicago. In many ways, the scientists who developed the ecology program at the University of Chicago mirrored these edge-scapes. They were willing to take risks and be innovative, and there was a distinct focus on community. They were also less interested in the idea of controlling nature: "Chicago's ecology was concerned less with controlling than preserving the natural world" (Tobey 126). As a University of Chicago student, enrolled during the summers to complete her degree, Watts embraced the philosophy of the university's ecology program and the use of vacant lands as an ecological laboratory (Adams and Fuller 41).

The University of Chicago was also seeking ways to bring its botany program into the community: "In the early decades of the twentieth century, University of Chicago botanists brought science not only to college students but to the general population through countryside field trips, and to high school curricula" (Maloney 31-2). Through this partnership with the university, many women who were working as high school teachers were able to secure a foothold in botany departments. With experience in horticulture, gardening, and landscape design, Watts found familiar territory in the botany department at the University of Chicago, ranked as the leading institution for botany.

During one of the university's summer sessions, in 1916, Watts found her early role model for her teaching and activism when she enrolled in Botany 36, taught by the dynamic professor and ecology pioneer, Henry Chandler Cowles. According to Cassidy, "Cowles originated Botany 36 (Field Ecology) in 1900-1901 and it became his signature course. For four weeks at a time, he took students into natural areas all over North America. These were teaching expeditions, but Cowles used them for personal research and his primary destinations over the

years were the shores of Lakes Michigan, Superior, and Huron, which have a common geological history" (80). Cowles' example of helping people understand nature by bringing them out into the natural world was a teaching model Watts embraced in her own practice. With Cowles, she also learned the science of ecology in landscapes close to home. While many students accompanied Cowles to more distant sites out west, Watts was only able to afford the field trip through the Great Lakes region. Cowles' courses helped Watts form an understanding of ecology through experiences in places connected to her region.

During the Botany 36 course, Watts joined her fellow students and Cowles in August 1916 on a field trip that "toured the Lake Superior region . . . . In five weeks, the party visited sixteen towns, observed climax forests, hydrarch, bog, xerarch, and retrogressive successions, and identified numerous plants. When she returned home, [she] transformed her field notes into an eighty-seven-page expedition notebook with hand-drawn maps, photographs, and plant lists" (Cassidy 82). Field trips with professor Cowles were fun, educational, and life changing for his students because of the level of engagement he demanded, tempered with a strong sense of humor.

Cowles' field trips had a lasting impact because of his high expectations and engaging delivery. In his tribute, "Henry Chandler Cowles," William S. Cooper stated, "Even greater [than his research] is the number of teachers who have learned from him how to use the out-of-doors, how to bring their pupils directly to nature, and, above all, how to unfold to them the myriad mysteries of biology without recourse to the cheap and easy fallacies of anthropomorphism" (283). Cowles' requirements for field trips included having a positive attitude and tolerating even the worst weather conditions, "putting up cheerfully with rain, hot or cold weather, mosquitoes, black flies, and with inadequate or unsatisfactory accommodations" (Cassidy 82). Necessary

supplies included "stout tramping shoes, with leggings if the shoes are low" and trousers, and for the women the "most satisfactory field garb . . . [was] a riding habit made of khaki or some other suitable material" (82).

Cowles' students described his abundant energy and the need to keep up with him out in the field. One student, Hazel Wiggers (née Olmstead) shared, "It was often strenuous to keep up with instructors and jot down notes. . . . Observers were crowded, plants often small, and transitions brisk. . . . Few students had cameras. No one had a portable recorder, and accurate field notes were imperative. For survival we grouped spontaneously. In our trio, one got [a] view of the correct specimen, and even a scribble-sketch. Another got the Latin and common names. The third tried for specifics on soil, microclimate, and so forth" (Cassidy 43). Ecology was the focus, but other important lessons were ingrained. Olmstead explained, "We were sensitized for life to our surrounding natural world. We became aware of its vulnerability and our responsibility for it" (43).

As a student in Cowles' class, Watts became part of the larger community of ecology scholars Cowles mentored. Cowles' field trips and charismatic teaching left a lasting impression: "As these small groups cooked, hiked, and camped together, sometimes for extended periods, Cowles was able to generate an interest in botany and an uncommon rapport. It was here that Cowles had his most profound impact on the study of ecology. His students often published far more than he ever did, but it was Cowles, the effective teacher, who helped lay the foundation for the lifelong interest in ecological studies" ("Henry C. Cowles, Botany").

Cowles had everything he needed to develop his ideas about plant succession and ecology near Chicago. This geographic location became the site of his research and his activism, projects that involved Watts and other likeminded friends, colleagues, and students as well.

Cowles explained, "The Indiana Dunes are situated at the meeting point of the northern boreal forest, eastern deciduous forest, and the tallgrass prairie peninsula that traverses Illinois from west to east. This unique location and the many habitats at the Indiana Dunes result in a greater diversity of plant species than exists in any comparably sized area of North America" (Cassidy 32). Location was critical for Cowles, who became such a familiar figure on the Indiana Dunes landscape that even train engineers indulged him: "Also, when he wanted to work in the field, Cowles could take the train from his home to the dunes and return in the same day. Obliging engineers sometimes stopped between stations so he could unload his equipment near a study site" (36). Teaching became the driving force behind Cowles' work, and the training and commitment to ecology instilled by Cowles certainly continued to influence Watts' career as a naturalist and promoter of connecting people to nature.

The depth of Watts' learning reflected the quality education she received during these summer courses at the University of Chicago. Her tribute to Cowles in her own writing, when she became a published naturalist while working at The Morton Arboretum, illustrated the influence Cowles' work had on her future projects. Later, Watts joined Friends of Our Native Landscape, the activist group that Cowles formed with Chicago landscape designer Jens Jensen. These three civic-minded individuals were committed to preserving Illinois habitats in their native state and to conservation efforts in the region. With the continued growth of Chicago, there was a need for increased environmental awareness and responsibility.

The idea of taking responsibility was a key lesson in Cowles' courses and shaped Watts' life and work as well. The combination of learning outdoors in the field, understanding ecology at the ground level, and seeing human connections with communities in the natural world helped Cowles' students develop both awareness of the natural world and responsibility for protecting it.

Here ecology and activism came together. Add to the joining of these two forces the roles of female students, many of whom were educators during the year and students during the summer, as future educators. Women such as Watts, her neighbor Helen Turner, and many others took Cowles' teachings back into their own communities. These women were educators, in schools and in other kinds of groups, but they also joined the community of pioneer ecologists in a field that was still relatively young when they studied it. They were able to shape their communities through their knowledge of ecology.

Women and Ecological Science

Both Watts and Turner were trained ecologists, educated at the University of Chicago. With this training came a unique view of the world, relationships in the environment, and definitions of community. They coped with the rapidly changing world around them by looking for ecological explanations and solutions. According to Kingsland's *The Evolution of American Ecology, 1890-2000*,

> Coping with change began by identifying what was stable and "natural" and determining how the future ought to proceed. . . . The American landscape had been changing with astonishing speed after the advent of the railway. Responding to those changes, Americans created a new science that might help them to adapt and to control the ecological interactions occurring between organisms and their environment. (153)

Watts and Turner met during their time at the University of Chicago, when they studied ecology during WWI. For Watts, her education at the University of Chicago shaped her work and understanding of plant communities from the early twentieth century through her work as an educator. Later in her career, she continued to share her version of Cowles' teachings at The

Morton Arboretum and through speaking engagements with area garden clubs. Her understanding of community and plant communities framed her ideas for the Illinois Prairie Path.

Watts outlined her ecological framework in her book *Reading the Landscape of America*, first published in 1957. Through a practice of "reading" the landscape, she studied the ways in which ecological communities changed over time (ix). For Watts, the field of ecology included a human presence, not only the story about dynamic plant communities advanced by Cowles, her mentor. Watts' view of ecology relied on "interpreting this reading matter, in place, on the land, [and] seeing living things in their total environment" (ix). Interpreting the impacts of human activity on the land became Watts' signature contribution as an ecological scientist. Her focus on the Midwest, and specifically on the prairie, showed how natural history and human history were "interwoven strands" (ix). People and place combined to provide the good "reading" material in the land that Watts shared with Turner and her garden club students. Watts used the abandoned railroad corridor to showcase the regional ecological story of the Illinois prairie, connected so intimately to the history of Chicago, its railroads, the development of the suburbs, and the erasure of open space.

Watts and Turner had the educational background to understand the complexities of urban development and open space. For Watts, the prairie was symbolic of all threatened plant communities, but it also represented hope for restoration of plant communities destroyed by human domination. She described the prairie plants that grew along a typical Midwestern fence row: "We got out, and crossed the green strip of Europe, to the fence row; the purple claws of the turkey-foot grass waved above our heads, just as they waved above the heads of the first Spaniards, the first Frenchmen, the first trappers, the first oxen drawing the first covered wagons on the long journey from the East" (107). By looking at the plants along undisturbed fence rows,

cemeteries, and railroad rights-of-way, Watts was able to piece together the story of the prairie's past. Her desire to protect these plants—links to the prairies of early Illinois—guided her work as an advocate for preserving open space.

Preserving the Prairie; Preserving Open Space

All landscapes have stories to tell. Watts focused on prairie restoration through her work on the path. By preserving prairie remnants, Watts was able to contribute to restoration projects in her region, cultivated by renowned conservationist, Aldo Leopold, at the Madison Arboretum's Curtis Prairie Restoration and carried out at the nearby Fermilab in the 1970s and by organizations like Chicago Wilderness in the 1990s. These prairie restoration efforts grew from the path idea, for example in places where prairie grasses were replanted along highways. Even though community members had used the CA&E railroad right-of-way as their dumping ground, Watts identified the prairie plants that had survived there in spite of Chicago's expanding suburbs. Watts realized the potential to utilize open space that was available in the suburbs to promote good health, recreation, nature study, and walking. She also recognized the prairie landscape's value for ecological reasons and for its important connections to the region's ecological history.

In the early development of the frontier, the prairie landscape lacked elements that settlers believed were essential to successful living. In *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915*, Myres argues, "Once they arrived at their destination most were not attracted by the open prairies in the new country. Earlier experience on American frontiers had seemingly taught pioneers that fertility of soil could be judged by the forest growth and that open fields indicated barren lands. Anglo-Americans generally were a forest people who distrusted

open places, and early Western settlers preferred land with wood and water" (21). Viewed as barren wastelands, the prairies were neither a beckoning wilderness, nor a promising garden.

Ambivalence toward the prairie landscape permeated nineteenth-century literature. Lacking the allure of the West, the prairie created a sense of discomfort, especially for travelers new to the landscape. In her travel narrative, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*, Margaret Fuller described the Illinois prairie as she saw it for the first time:

> At first, the prairie seemed to speak of the very desolation of dullness. After sweeping over the vast monotony of the lakes to come to this monotony of land, with all around a limitless horizon,—to walk, and walk, and run, but never climb, oh! it was too dreary for any but a Hollander to bear. (22)

Fuller's view echoed similar accounts of women and men who settled the new frontier. Myres suggests, "Women, like men, evaluated the productivity and potential of the landscape, but, also like men, they were influenced by nineteenth-century ideas of sublimity and the romantic wilderness cult" (36). These influential ideas drew attention to landscapes where mountains loomed overhead and mysteries lay behind crags and in valleys. The prairie landscape failed to attract the same kind of attention as other types of landscapes.

The prairie landscape offered beauty in an unexpected place. Myres foregrounds the importance of this theme in women's responses to nature. She says, "They saw beauty in even the most unexpected places—in the rocks, the barren spaces, the solitude of open prairies" (36). Even Fuller adjusted to the prairie landscape in time and recognized the beauty it held: "In this country it is as pleasant to stop as to go on, to lose your way as to find it, for the variety in the population gives you a chance for fresh entertainment in every hut, and the luxuriant beauty

makes every path attractive" (25). According to these early accounts, there was value in the prairie landscape, even though it served in many cases as a stop for many pioneers on the way to someplace else.

The Chicago suburbs seemed an unlikely place for a natural public footpath to emerge as a model for rails-to-trails conversions in America. However, several factors contributed to this first successful rails-to-trails effort, and they were largely due to geography. Cronon explains, "Before Chicago gained its version of the line separating city from country, the lands around it already carried a complex set of natural markers, each with its own meaning and story: gravel and stone, rivers and lakes, clay and loess, grasses and trees, flock and herd" (25). During the mid- 1800s, Chicago became a thriving metropolis, and its position at the heart of a young country helped the city emerge as the gateway to the yet undeveloped West.

Chicago's key geographic location—near Lake Michigan and surrounded by fertile soil—and the implementation of the railroad system put the city on the map as a major hub of commerce and enterprise. Soon the population exploded and expanded to outlying areas. As a result of this development, the prairie landscape was threatened from the earliest settlements in Illinois. Greenberg argues, "With the passing of every decade, prairie tracts dwindled in number. Those that survived did so only because specific circumstances prevented their annihilation" (44). Railroad rights-of-way became one pressure on the landscape that ultimately safeguarded prairie remnants.

Implementing an Ecological Framework

The prairie, and the rich environmental history of the prairie landscape in Illinois, had the power to unite communities of people, not just communities of plants, through the public footpath project. Training in ecology spurred Watts to educate the public about important

relationships and communities in the natural world, of which humans were a part, and to challenge the systems of power in place that demanded more pavement and parking lots for a capitalist and consumer-based society. True, Watts and her colleagues wanted to maintain open space in their neighborhoods and in their suburbs, but more importantly, these women developed an ecological framework to build a case for human connections to nature and democratic trail use. Because they viewed nature differently, as something neither wild nor pristine, and from an ecological worldview, these women were able to forge a new frontier in environmental thinking.

The ecological framework developed and taught by Watts shifted environmental thinking from a post-wilderness era mindset focused on conserving pristine nature to an emphasis on reimagining nature in a suburban setting. Her goal was to improve the quality of life for her region while helping the people who lived there understand the importance of ecology. Watts' unique outlook on open space shepherded new approaches to environmental thinking and offered alternative definitions for the "environment." She recognized the role of human activity as part of the ecological stories she witnessed, and she understood the importance of human access to nature. She believed that providing access to nature ensured its protection.

Fostering an ecological awareness in her audiences, Watts educated people with stories and helped them become stewards. Watts and Turner both shared extensive ecological knowledge. Through her travels in Europe, Watts understood that a public footpath was a viable option for restoring open space in a suburban setting. Turner was a geologist and knew the topography, along with the plants and the animals, that made up the prairie landscape. Contrary to the stereotypes perpetuated by male professional elites that women were merely old lady bird watchers (Norwood 171), the Illinois Prairie Path founders were informed citizens, who used

their training in ecology to respond to the landscape in ways that provided a new vision for a used space.

Watts and Turner addressed the changing suburban landscape, where they lived as next-door neighbors in Naperville, from an ecological framework to help their students understand the relationships among plant communities as well as humans' place in the natural world. They were also avid gardeners and shared their love of plants with other female gardeners. Women's garden clubs gained in popularity from the beginning of the twentieth century into the late 1950s and through the 1960s. In fact, it was Jean Cudahy, president of the Garden Club of America and Joy Morton's daughter, who invited Watts to offer classes at The Morton Arboretum (Ballowe 13). Women were part of the larger conversation about horticulture, landscape, native plants, and preservation. Many of the women in the garden clubs had botany training. For the younger women involved in the prairie path project, their participation in Watts' nature classes, their garden club memberships, and their interest in local history sparked their willingness to join the crusade to save open space.

Watts, especially, executed her vision for ecology and environmental activism after studying with Cowles. She once explained that her purpose was "to encourage individuals to learn more about the land about them--streams, gravel prints, abandoned rural schoolyards, roadsides, fencerows. She [was] particularly eager that they become acquainted with the relationships of trees, birds, and plants to one another" (Decker). In her later life, she was married and became a mother of four, but still her work focused on community, not only on household and family. She never fit the mold for women of the time, and the model of her work continues to challenge the practices of so-called environmentally conscious women of today.

Developing a Model of Ecological Literacy

After Watts enrolled in his class at the University of Chicago in 1916, she became a loyal devotee and a lifelong supporter of Cowles' research and teaching. In her preface to the 1957 edition of *Reading the Landscape of America*, originally published as *Reading the Landscape: An Adventure in Ecology*, Watts credited Cowles with laying the foundation for her work, her methods, and her ideas. She claimed, "If these stories are good ones, if they show any breadth of vision, it is because I, as the narrator, am bestriding the shoulders of a giant, the wide and deep understanding of Doctor Henry C. Cowles, inspired teacher at the University of Chicago, great and first American ecologist. He taught me to read" (*Reading the Landscape of America* ix). Cowles' influence on his students was profound. His seminal papers on the succession of vegetation in the Indiana sand dunes secured his place in the field of ecology, but the lasting impact of his teaching was his legacy. Watts modeled her own techniques for teaching and writing after Cowles' methods of reading the landscape.

Cowles knew how to read the land and helped his students interpret it. He was also highly regarded for building and bridging international relations among ecologists in America and abroad, and the list of his connections, organizations, and associations was extensive. However, Cowles was best remembered for his teaching. Many students, protégés who later had successful academic careers of their own, continued or challenged his ideas. Cassidy argues, "Cowles presents much new information, but provides no survey data, and his results are neither reproducible nor usable as a baseline. Also, Cowles was cautious in the claims he made and never announced a complete theory of succession. A new generation of ecologists—some were his students—refined, amplified, and challenged his conclusions. But everyone started from Cowles, for he was the pathbreaker, the pioneer" (35).

This kind of legacy was not uncommon for Cowles' students, Watts among them. However, Watts' work was no mere duplicate of Cowles' teachings. Her style of communicating ideas about the field and practice of ecology was very direct. She was determined to help people understand ecology in simple terms. She wrote, "I have worked with mixed classes of all ages and backgrounds, and have come to feel that cryptic terminology is a hiding place for weaklings. I have developed a disdain for ecologists who can only be understood by a few of their peers" (Watts to DeSelm). Watts developed her own approach to reading the landscape. Most importantly, she used understandable language and ideas to inspire urban and suburban audiences.

As with her teaching, Watts' writing invited readers to walk with her through the many landscapes she visited and interpret the mysteries that nature presented. At the time her book was published in 1957, a journalist explained, "It is this aspect of discovering the future by observing the past that caused one reviewer to dub the book, 'Not a whodunit but a whatdunit'" (Williams). Watts was a natural storyteller, and many critics praised her work for its narrative style. A review in *American Forests* claimed, "Mrs. Watts is a distinguished naturalist who knows her business, which is to give to laymen eyes with which to see the world about them. This book, as a case in point, leads us directly to perceptions we had not imagined, to understandings of the natural world that had escaped us completely. Scientifically, it is the finest sort of interpretive writing" (Bush 35, 70). Other reviewers seemed eager to join one of Watts' walks: "This is a book to read and enjoy. It makes you want to take a field trip with the author and have her help you Read the Landscape" (Link 41). Watts told a compelling story so that readers felt as though they were solving a nature mystery with her as a guide.

Watts brought to life landscapes that may have been overlooked or ignored because they were seemingly so very common. Unlike nature writers of her era, primarily men who may have had more opportunity to venture into the wilderness and hike distant regions, Watts worked close to home. She was a wife and mother, in addition to her vocations of teacher, naturalist, and author. She focused her work primarily on the Midwest region and specifically on well-used, well-worn areas where most people failed to see any natural features or redeeming qualities. Watts' poetic sensibility, her scientific mind, and her visual, artistic representations infused the ordinary scenes in her book with renewed life. Using experiences from her coursework with Cowles, along with trips she took with her family, Watts made the ordinary seem extraordinary in the way she structured *Reading the Landscape of America*.

The practice of "reading the landscape" and interpreting what is written there, Watts wrote, became "an adventure into the field that is called ecology" (ix). She explained that one must learn to see the total environment to experience the living things a place offers. Her book provided various examples, or lessons, of how to read. Her narrative was a collection on "diverting" stories about varied landscapes, everything from the Indiana Dunes to a window box (ix). "The dunes," she wrote, "are certainly a good place for travelers to visit, to revive old friendships with plants met in diverse and distant places" (64). Observing, studying, and appreciating plants were the foundation of Watts' ecological practice. Her goal was to help readers apply an ecological framework, and in doing so, learn more about the field of ecology and the stories from the natural world.

One of the stories Watts told recounted the changing styles of one house's landscape through the ages. For Watts, reading the landscape meant looking for the details of relationships among living and built environments. She also helped readers focus on clues about the passage

of time. In the final chapter of *Reading the Landscape of America*, Watts labeled the changes in the house she described, "Fashions as an Ecological Factor" (320). Beginning her fictional accounts in the 1850s, Watts explained how the landscape of the stylish house experienced a "succession" of plants, from the white pine tree and lilies of the valley that the first occupants of the house planted to geraniums and barberry hedges of later years. The shape of the landscape changed as well, and Watts documented how style dictated whether straight rows or curving borders were the preferred design of the day.

Another of Watts' techniques was reading her audience. Her work as a naturalist and popular garden club lecturer contributed to the ways in which she connected the threads of her story. For example, garden clubs were an influential part of the world of the stylish house's occupants: "With a house so abreast of the times to be embowered in bridal wreath, ringed with barberry hedge, and edged with a row of Lombardy poplars, it was to be expected that Elizabeth would be invited to join the new garden club" (328). What to plant outside soon evolved into what kinds of flower arrangements to bring inside the home, and these arrangements changed with the styles and times as well.

Watts' own house on E. Jefferson Avenue in Naperville, Illinois, where she lived from 1941 until the end of her life, became the model for "The Stylish House." She began to inventory and document the plants in her yard from the moment she and her family moved into the house. Lists of plant names filled the pages of a composition book, along with sketches of the yard with numbered plant groupings and clearly labeled compass directions. Watts used her own yard as inspiration. It became her most immediate experience of reading the landscape through the seasons. As a Naperville resident, Watts understood the dynamic quality of ecology in her own suburban neighborhood as well as in the natural world of her region. She connected with other

women in her community through their shared love of gardening. One of her students remarked in a letter about her: "She was a teacher in the fullest sense. In a lovely calm and reasoned voice she told us about nature—how plants grow—and how the environment affects them. . . . Her sense of humor was delicious! Her talk on suburban landscaping and the changing styles was laced with humor and just a touch of gentle criticism" (Boal).

Watts' humor permeated her writing about the stylish house, and she poked fun at attitudes about gardening and landscape design. She critiqued Elizabeth, one homeowner of the stylish house, for adopting gardening hints from the *Ladies' Home Journal*: "She found out about foundation planting. Simultaneously she found out about bridal wreath, *Spirea Van Houttei*. Soon the high house was set afloat in a billowing sea of bridal wreath. No slightest contact with the earth was visible, except at the steps of course, where a gap was necessary" (328). Watts highlighted the obsessive need of some homeowners to prune their shrubs. She explained, "When John Edward and his young wife, Nancy Ann, took over the old house, one of their first purchases was a pair of pruning shears—which, unfortunately, then as now, could be purchased without a license. Then John Edward proceeded to give his shrubs prison haircuts" (332). Watts lived in a community and culture that promoted maintaining stylish homes, but she was one to advocate shaping the landscape a different way, by considering the use of native plants.

Watts' writing expressed her love of gardening and the landscapes just outside her window, but she was also critical of her own city's erasure of open space. In a poem she wrote for *The Naperville Sun* in 1974, Watts described a lament for Naperville's Central Park and condemned the way "the landscaper lines, and the green ink/ Could . . . not . . . quite . . . mask/ The death stink" ("Lament" ll. 4-6). The poem, "Lament for Central Park," offered a similar kind of tracing the landscape through the ages as in "The Stylish House." Watts described the way the

landscape once was: "You were a piece of the prairie once—lonely,/ But alive!/ You were fenced with horizon only,/ With never a tree to shade you/ But tall with native grasses that all/ Bowed with the west wind that made you" (ll. 7-12). The park as it was first developed, once farmers came in and houses were built, became "the big green heart/ Of the small community—/ Naperville's bounty" (ll. 19-21). Quickly, though, the poem shifted in tone from praise for the wise people who created the park to a critique of "hucksters with itching palms" who found ways to gain from selling off parts of the park to "improve" the town. This poem, written toward the end of Watts' life, outlined many of her core beliefs: honoring the native environment, protecting the human right to have access to the outdoors, and safeguarding open space.

All of Watts' work was infused with lessons about ecology. From detailed articles about experiments in her own yard to her accounts of travels through the region, across the country, and to other countries, Watts opened other people's eyes to an understanding of ecology by helping them read the landscape. At The Morton Arboretum, where Watts worked as the staff naturalist and spearheaded the educational programming, she designed courses on nature study for area residents. Her nature workshops emphasized: "1. understanding the life of fields, forests, waters, fence-rows, roadsides, gardens; 2. identification as a means to understanding and appreciation; 3. acquiring, developing, trying out ideas for enriching the Nature experiences of others; 4. participation, and first-hand experience, rather than passive reception of information" (The Morton Arboretum). Watts' illustration on the workshop's brochure showed one person looking through binoculars, another investigating a flower through a hand lens, and a third person reading beneath a tree. The workshops were an invitation to any adult "who can walk, talk, wonder, and laugh; and who cares to know more about living things, their relationship to their total environment, their life histories, their daily patterns, and their role in the story of the

land around us" (The Morton Arboretum). Students were expected to be prepared. The brochure advised, "Clothes should be simple, tough, not too warm. Blue jeans will be most suitable for field trips. Slip a knife in the pocket" (The Morton Arboretum).

The Morton Arboretum also offered a Nature Study School for members of the Garden Club of Illinois. The outdoor space of the Arboretum, with its "native woods and wild flowers, its lakes and streams, and its great collection of evergreens and deciduous trees and shrubs from all over the world," became the ultimate classroom for interested horticulturalists (Garden Club). Staffed with renowned botanists and naturalists, the sessions offered courses on tree characteristics, flower relationships, birds that nested in Illinois, and botanical gardens of northern Europe (Garden Club). Watts taught the classification of flowers in a course on Systemic Botany. She was truly an expert on botany and natural history, a lifelong passion that she was able to share with many students during her tenure at The Morton Arboretum.

Around the time Watts published *Reading the Landscape of America*, a book she wrote during her lunch breaks at The Morton Arboretum, a local television station asked if she would prepare a series of programs focused on various nature topics to be aired weekly on television. The program series, aptly titled "Reading the Landscape," described the program as "experiences in observing and interpreting the living things around us" ("Outline for Series"). This practice of observing and interpreting living things was Watts' primary focus in all her teachings and the foundation of her training in the study of ecology. The first show in the series paired the timing of the show in late September with what viewers would be able to see along the fence-rows in the region. Watts explained, "It is placed at this date because people will enjoy watching, on their drives around the country, for the turkey feet of the big bluestem grass waving high above the barbed wire. This subject is timely too because September is the season of plowing matches held

on old prairie land within our area" ("Outline for Series"). That the first program emphasized prairie natives was no surprise. Watts read her landscape with a keen awareness of its prairie beginnings and its prairie plants' roots.

In the program on reading the edge of the forest, Watts helped her viewers understand how ecology worked, the ways in which living things related to and depended on each other, and how edges could be read as dynamic, living stories. She used visuals in her presentation to illustrate the various landscapes she described, and her words also created visual images that brought her subject to life. "Edges have their own attraction," she explained. "We enjoy the edge of the ocean, the bank of a stream, the edge that a mountain, or Chicago, lifts against the sky—the fringe of a shawl, the crisp edge of a pancake. We have to pull our children back from the edge of a cliff—the edge of a lake. The forest margin has something in common with each of these edges. It stands between vertical woody forms with filtered sunlight and horizontal stretches with full sun,—and is a transition zone holding something of each" ("Reading the Edge of the Forest" 1). With each detail, the story of the forest's edge unfolded. According to Watts, each change in the forest became a new chapter: "Another chapter may be added. I knew a pasture like this where the hawthorns in every stage were crowding like this" (5). Watts' treatment of the landscape as a book educated her viewers in interpreting landscapes.

Other projects that showcased Watts' teaching about the landscape appeared in the form of a filmstrip called "Niches in the Environment" and in a weekly *Chicago Tribune* article, "Nature Afoot." The fourteen-minute filmstrip, written by Watts and with photographs provided by her husband, Raymond Watts, offered a comparison of the earth's surface to a giant jigsaw puzzle; each piece of the puzzle was an "ecological niche" (International Film Bureau). Watts illustrated how a niche, as big as a desert or as small as a sidewalk crack, was dependent on

water levels, and she created plant leaf models to show how different levels of moisture impacted plant growth.

During the 1960s, prior to making "Niches in the Environment," Watts wrote a weekly article for the *Chicago Tribune* where she presented local nature findings and points of interest. Her articles shared the stories of her region: "We can drive up the hill to the old cemetery, walk around the stone church, and look down the long slopes to evidence of basic forces that shaped Chicago: oceans, glaciers, drainage" ("Nature Afoot" 30 Jan. 1966). Watts walked the neighborhoods of Chicago in search of stories that captivated her readers, and in doing so, she expanded her following as well. She educated her readers about native plants and trees, such as native black willows, "sprawling shaggy natives of the riverbanks," and young bur oaks "found in the section of the former right of way running west of Illinois highway 59" ("Nature Afoot" 5 Mar. 1966; 20 Feb. 1966). Always a guide, Watts pointed out details for Chicago-area residents to attend to as they walked around their city and its environs. She took advantage of every chance availed her to share her knowledge about ecology and natural history with others.

Although *Reading the Landscape of America* was published in 1957, many of the stories relied on details from the courses in which Watts enrolled at the University of Chicago, between 1914 and 1918. Two early chapters in the book recalled her coursework with Henry Chandler Cowles. In the chapter on the Indiana sand dunes, Watts used sand dune succession as a metaphor for her own succession of forty years' work in the field of ecology. She began the chapter with a witty problem of how to eat lunch in the dunes on a windy October day without getting quartz caught in your teeth. Watts and a group of artists had made the trip to the dunes to sketch, and the search for a sheltered place to eat became the vehicle for reading the story of the dunes and the story of Watts' development as an ecologist.

Watts' changing viewpoint of ecology was comprised of the many lessons she learned on her visits to the dunes as a young student. She took her first trip in professor Elliot Downing's course, and she explained that at that time, she only had a cursory knowledge of the dunes: "Our viewpoint at that period might have been the viewpoint of a crayfish or a clam" (*Reading the Landscape of America* 53). Professor Cowles inspired her next visits, and she compared herself and fellow students at that time to the pioneer grass: "On the many trips when with eager ears cocked forward we followed in the quick footsteps of Doctor Cowles, we were still much too young and vigorous, and too enchanted with the new field of ecology, to care about sun or wind, or sand between our teeth. Our viewpoint was that of pioneer plants, such as marram grass and wormwood and tough cottonwoods" (54). Watts continued the story of her succession with references to important figures in the world of Chicago land conservation, including landscape architect Jens Jensen, poet Harriet Monroe, and naturalists E.L. Palmer and Edwin Way Teale, all of whom influenced her at different points in her life. The story of her succession ended with the "shaded and sheltered maidenhair fern . . . [and] elderly, hungry botanists" (54). Watts opened readers' eyes to Cowles' vision of succession by identifying with the "characters" of the story of the dunes before her.

The chapter on the dunes, enhanced by Watts' beautiful and telling ink illustrations, showcased her ability to capture beauty in simple objects. Like a collector of stones or shells on the beach, Watts gathered images in such a way in *Reading the Landscape of America* that she conveyed scientific meaning unobtrusively. Her words became an ecological show and tell. Her senses were alive with wonder, as she described plants that were, for her, old familiar friends: "I paused to squeeze a leaf of the aromatic sumac to enjoy its pungency. The leaves in the dunes were broader, I noticed, and not so thick-feeling as the leaves on the stunted specimen of

aromatic sumac that I had been surprised to find once growing at my feet, far from any other plant, on a sterile gray expanse in the Badlands. The dunes are certainly a good place for travelers to visit, to revive old friendships with plants met in distant and diverse places" (64). For Watts, past and present, distant and near converged in the dunes.

Watts understood the dynamic quality of the places she visited and wrote about, and she helped readers identify with places by immersing them in her stories about the landscape. In her chapter "History Book with Flexible Cover or The Records in a Quaking Bog," Watts began with complete immersion. It was a story of a field trip with Cowles, when one of her classmates broke through the "flexible cover" of the "history book": "[She] had to lie down on the sphagnum moss and cranberries before we could pry her out. She never did retrieve her shoes" (*Reading the Landscape of America* 74). A catalog of bog stories followed as Watts moved across the chronology of the bog. She recreated the field trip and pointed out clues to the development of the bog as she narrated the "story, from open water to forest, [that] is written over and over again. It is the story of undrained depressions" (76).

As she reflected on her first experience of the bog, Watts realized that much had changed in the field of ecology. Botanists of the 1950s, she felt, would ask different kinds of questions about the bog than she and her fellow students did at the time of their field trip: "Today, when you talk about a bog to a botanist, he is likely to ask, 'Has it been bored?' No one asked us that in 1914, because no one was conscious of the fact that we were walking over layer upon layer of ancient pollen, scattered through peat formed of plant remains--pollen waiting to reveal its records" (*Reading the Landscape of America* 88). As new developments in the field of ecology became standard practice, the stories Watts presented were revised as well. Nature, too, changed

during the course of her writing. Even before her additions to the second edition of the book in 1975, much had happened to alter the landscape.

Protecting the Land: Friends of Our Native Landscape

Jens Jensen founded the Friends of Our Native Landscape to help diminish threats to native landscapes. The main objective of the group, according to the Friends of Our Native Landscape, was "to secure and preserve for the people of today and of all future generations typical examples of: Streams with their adjoining bluffs, and flood-plains with their native trees and flowers; woodlands of all types, including oaks of the various species; . . . dunes with their rare and marvelous floral carpets, such as are found along Lake Michigan and the Illinois River; the fast-vanishing prairies, once the most characteristic feature of Illinois with their remarkable and beautiful flowers" ("Constitution" 15). From its beginnings, the organization worked on projects that protected landscapes and educated people about the natural world. Some of their initial efforts included spreading information about park and forest policy, awakening a "livelier public sentiment for conservation," and striking a balance between recreation in and reverence of the natural world ("An Association"). Jensen had seen the changes to the landscape since his arrival in Illinois, and he understood that he needed the power of the organization behind him to change policy.

Jensen and other members of the Friends of Our Native Landscape worked to develop policy for parks and forests in Illinois. According to Tishler, "the group, which included some of Chicago's most influential citizens, became the organizational tool Jensen needed to call attention to opportunities for conservation and thereby create an atmosphere conducive to new public policies. The group's publications were an important vehicle for informing the public about conservation issues" (xxiv). In his "Park Policy for Illinois," Jensen advocated a park

preservation program that would protect indigenous plants. In addition to protecting plants, Jensen envisioned that state parks would showcase scenic natural features to represent the locality (1).

Jensen, like Watts' parents, had immigrated from Denmark, and his background was connected to agriculture and landscape design. When Jensen and his family settled in Chicago, they took weekend trips "into the prairie countryside. Traveling on the rail lines to their outermost limits, Jensen came to know the remaining wild places of northern Illinois and northwestern Indiana and started what was to be a lifelong study of the landscape and plants of the Chicago region" (Grese 7). Jensen also developed a strong friendship with Cowles. Jensen's writing "began expressing his growing knowledge of landscape ecology gained from his extensive fieldwork and his friendship with University of Chicago Professor Henry Chandler Cowles . . . . Together they explored the Indiana sand dunes on club outings organized in Chicago" (Tishler xv).

At the core of Jensen's work and ethos was his defense of the environment: "He considered the experience of environment to be a paramount determinant in shaping human behavior and character. Given this belief, he acted to improve built environments and worked to save prime areas of the natural world, including wilderness areas and native landscapes of North America. He was an environmentalist long before the term became popular during the 1960s" (Tishler xii). Working with Cowles, Jensen's knowledge of ecology grew, and he coupled this background in ecology with his philosophy about the freedom of open space and its potential for democracy. He believed that access to parks was essential for all humans. "The creation of parks by any city," Jensen wrote, "must be commended as the first step of municipal art out-of-doors, and a prime necessity for improving the health and morality of those that have to pass their lives

in these congested spots" ("Parks and Politics" 12). Jensen's work planted the seeds for Watts' path project to develop a relationship among science, landscape design, and activism. The Illinois Prairie Path became Watts' response to a region's need for open space and democratic access to nature.

Jensen's efforts to reform the park system emerged out of Chicago's tradition of municipal housekeeping—Jane Addams being a notable crusader for human rights and livable spaces. Unlike many men of the time, who "found the idea that resources should be preserved rather than exploited to be not just wasteful but unpatriotic," (Unger 79) Jensen's patriotism focused on using native plants and preserving native landscapes. He also expanded the idea of the kinds of people who should be using parks, erasing class and cultural divisions and barriers. Jensen advocated a holistic approach to city living, where parks and playgrounds were mutually beneficial as centers of cultural and recreational development.

Jensen recognized the plight of Chicago's city residents and the unequal access to recreational spaces: "To further every movement that stands for a better city—to make our cities more livable, home-like, places for all our people, especially for those who through the force of circumstances must endure the city year around—proper regulation guided by high ideals and common sense ought to be effective" ("Regulating City Building" 40). One hears echoes of Jensen's plea to connect people with nature in Watts' writing, teaching, and advocacy. The tension between the constraints of a metropolis as large as Chicago and the need for people to have access to nature and recreational opportunities provided the momentum and motivation for activism in its community leaders, among them Jensen and Watts.

One of Jensen's iconic design features was the council fire, where everyone gathered in a circle to share in the company of others and the natural world. This image of the gathering place

inspired his ideals for park building. For Jensen, parks were designed to bring people together. Many of Chicago's residents did not have the resources to leave the city. Jensen argued, "The great mass of citizens living west of the river are not favored with large worldly possessions. They have little or no means to travel or to spend their vacations in the Michigan or Wisconsin woods, and still less to visit our National Parks. Many indeed cannot even afford to spend the week ends [sic] in our forest preserves. These are the people who keep industry and commerce moving. Both their and their children's requirements in healthy recreation are supremely important to the future development of the city" ("A Greater West Park System" 48). In creating ample and accessible parks, Jensen also believed that the bits of "primitive" Illinois, the prairies and the forest preserves for example, stood a greater chance of avoiding destruction by the masses.

The suburbs of Chicago had an ecological past that impacted how the community responded to the landscape. In *Siftings*, Jensen expressed a view of the prairie landscape he shared with Watts: "The primitive prairies of Illinois have not been entirely destroyed. Here and there has been left something of the primitive that the plow had not turned under. It seems a pity, rather a stupidity, that some section of this marvelous landscape has not been set aside for future generations to study and to love—a sea of flowers in all colors of the rainbow" (56-7). When Watts walked onto the abandoned railroad right-of-way, she wanted to protect the prairie plants that grew there. Jensen explained it best, "Along our railroad rights-of-way one meets the last stand of these prairie flowers" (57). He advocated, as did Watts, for the protection of native plants. Jensen also considered the region in his thinking about landscape design and preservation.

Projects like developing the Cook County Forest Preserve District illustrated Jensen's vision for securing open space to preserve landscapes in their native state. Over the course of his

career, Jensen learned to appreciate the many landscapes of Illinois and started to design Chicago parks and residential gardens with native plants and features. He had a special affinity for the Illinois prairie landscape: "For me, I like our Illinois landscape best . . . . This is the garden of the prairie country, a motive for landscape art, full of imagination, mystery and poetic charm—a hidden garden, as it were, in the broad expanse of the prairie landscape" ("I Like Our Prairie Landscape" 54). For Jensen, there was a patriotic connection between native plants and American democracy, and he wanted his work to be original, part of the American landscape, not a copy of European aesthetics. Jensen learned from Cowles about the relationship between native plants and soil, and that relationship became the driving force behind his American design practice: "If America shall ever pride itself for any art of its own, that art must grow out of the native soil. We shall never receive credit for things that we steal or copy from others. Landscape gardening is the one art that is dependent upon soil and climate" (54). Jensen's organization, Friends of Our Native Landscape, advocated the use of native plants to maintain Illinois' unique landscapes.

Jensen also had a vision of connectivity for the parks and preserves. This vision for establishing connections in the region guided a similar philosophy for Watts' work on the Illinois Prairie Path as well. Jensen argued for access to the parks: "A well designed system of roads should connect all State parks and the main arteries of through highways. These roads should go through the finest part of the state, whether of scenic importance or beautiful farm lands. They should be planted with native plants, indigenous to the region and in a way not to hide the adjoining country or destroy the spirit of the open, as we find it is here on the plains" ("Park Policy for Illinois" 2-3). He outlined a plan for trails, parking facilities, and campsites.

In his proposal, Jensen shared his plan for how to maintain these reservations. He wrote, "The maintenance of these reservations should be by state taxation. The maintenance should be of the simplest kind, keeping the parking and camping places clean and in good repair" ("Park Policy for Illinois" 4). In a letter Jensen sent to Watts in 1944, he shared many of his views about the government's responsibilities as pertaining to forests and lakes. He wrote, "The parks are to conserve with," and argued that the government needed to have "more of a role in supervising how resources were being used" (Jensen to Watts). He claimed that fishermen were heading to Lake Superior, because Lake Michigan was "being fished out," and that the woods were being cut down (Jensen to Watts). Jensen explained to Watts that he once believed differently about natural resource monitoring, but his experiences in Door County changed his views. Both Jensen and Watts shared a regional mindset in their approach to environmental issues.

Jensen's plan focused on parks at the regional level. He explained, "To most persons Illinois is a prairie state, but to those who are acquainted with its landscape as a whole, Illinois has varied aspects. It has many prairies, it is true,—rich lands that are yellow with ripening corn in autumn, and it has great marches along its slow-moving rivers, but it also has rock formations through which, during the ages, the streams of Illinois have cut deep, forming picturesque crags, canyons, and bluffs" ("The Park Policy" 67). Jensen's ideas emerged from a tradition of regional planning in Chicago. He credited leaders of the Chicago park system with innovative design that connected parks and infused the city with beauty:

> First of these were those giants who in 1869 planned the present large park areas, with their continuous system of connecting boulevards. In no other city in the world can you ride for so many miles through parks and boulevards. Then there were those who planned the World's Fair, those

> who made the famous City Beautiful plan; those who in the beginning of the twentieth century established the playground system, and a few years later secured the enabling act for the forest preserves—that stretch of natural wooded and cut-over lands that lies like a great green belt around the city proper and its suburbs. ("Natural Parks and Gardens" 81)

Jensen's work became part of this extensive tradition of regional planning of Chicago's parks and surrounding areas. He gained a following because there were so many who believed in what he fought for in protecting native landscapes.

Saving the Dunes

One of the earliest campaigns of the Friends of Our Native Landscape was to save the Indiana Dunes, spearheaded by Jensen and Cowles. At the time Watts was enrolled in Botany 36 in 1916, Cowles had already been an active participant in efforts to save the Indiana Dunes from development and destruction, having joined the Friends of Our Native Landscape in 1913. Watts' early environmental activism developed through her involvement with this cause and her association with the Friends of Our Native Landscape. During the early days of the Friends, Jensen and Cowles fought to protect the dunes, woods, and wetlands (Cassidy 68). Their activism in the dunes was motivated by the Friends' mission to protect the land.

Cowles had been actively involved in testifying to the government on behalf of threatened ecosystems. In 1916, Stephen T. Mather, an early member of the Friends of Our Native Landscape, became the first director of the National Park Service, and Cowles "testified in hearings that Mather held on a Senate resolution calling for creation of a Dunes National Park" (Cassidy 68). Cowles was clearly the expert during this testimony: "For 20 years, I have been studying the dunes more than anything else, more than everything else combined. In fact,

that has been my chief reason for existence, perhaps, for those 20 years. During those 20 years, I have studied not only the dunes of Lake Michigan but nearly all the dunes of the world, having personally visited most of them and read about the others" (Mather 261). At the end of his testimony, Cowles argued that the Lake Michigan dunes were unique and "without parallel," and should be preserved as a national park (Mather 264).

Jensen and the Friends of Our Native Landscape strove to educate the community about the importance of the dunes landscape. To this end, he created a nature school in the dunes. In one newspaper article by James O'Donnell Bennett about the school, Jensen announced, "More and more in these uncertain times the people of Chicagoland are turning to their nearby forests and dunes for rest and amusement" (11). The School in the Dunes, as it was called, brought together eminent scientists, scholars, and artists to teach the courses. Watts was one of the instructors of the "outdoor summer school for systematized but not routinized study of natural history" (Bennett). She was actively involved in the planning and executing of ideas. She wrote to Jensen, "We have been working on plans for the Dunes school. I should be glad to give you a day as you suggest doing, and I feel that Doctor Fuller will do likewise. I confess I am a bit dubious about a program arranged on this basis. Perhaps our various charms would better complement and offset each other with a regular schedule of classes and field trips" (Watts to Jensen). Watts clearly felt comfortable enough with Jensen to share her views about the design of the school.

Watts' letter to Jensen revealed a shared vision for educating others about the dunes and about nature. Watts looked forward to her involvement with the School of the Dunes. She explained, "These should be days of enriching experience, with early morning bird walks, evening star walks, a spicing of song and dance, and plenty of real meat. This school will meet a

great need" (Watts to Jensen). The list of instructors, the location in the dunes, the endorsement by the press, and the involvement of the Friends of Our Native Landscape all suggested that people at this time, in 1938, were looking for some way to connect with nature and to share that experience with others. Both the students *and* the educators sought and benefitted from a shared community of learning. Watts recognized the value of Jensen's goals for the new school: "Certainly if the one requirement for education is, as Yeoman suggests, 'a teacher with incandescence of the soul,' then there should be real education wherever you are" (Watts to Jensen). Real education is what Jensen, Cowles, and Watts promoted and lived; they learned from each other and passed that learning on to others.

Watts taught in the School of the Dunes for at least two of the sessions. She saw the fruits of Cowles' and Jensen's fight to preserve the dunes, with the creation of the Indiana Dunes State Park. However, she was also aware of the increasing destructive impact development had on the dune landscape. Part of her work in *Reading the Landscape of America* was a kind of lament for the changes wrought by human activity. In her chapter on the Indiana Dunes, she recalled a section of the dunes, "now part of the Dunes State Park, [had become] acres of parking space for the cars of swimmers, ball players, and picnickers" (67). She recognized, as had Cowles, that the landscape she had visited early in her life was already "greatly imperiled." Watts realized that this ecosystem would not remain stable for long, and she helped readers understand that their actions had lasting consequences on the landscape.

Watts' tone reflected more than mere nostalgia for the reminiscences of her youth. Her writing became a call to action for people to see the environmental changes that were the direct result of human impact. Of a former dune, she wrote, "The Edgewater Beach Hotel, many tall apartment buildings, acres of cement walks and highways now fill that flattened surface, and

even the edge of the lake has been engineered far away to make a place for a newer highway" (67). Watts recorded these changes to the dune landscape from her 1957 vantage point and revisited them in her 1975 edition. In the later edition, Watts used Cowles' framework of succession to explain the succession of residential developments in the dunes. The language in these passages included words of invasion, destruction, and annihilation. The scene became dynamic in a different way, because of changes caused by human actions: "Jack pines with their nonconformist gestures were replaced by imports from other places," "the wind-shaped curve of the dunes were reshaped by bulldozers," and "dunes taut under the tension between wind and sand . . . had been obliterated" (68-9). Watts' familiar personification of the "drooling bulldozers" became the harbinger of industrialization and commercialization of the dunes, the result of sand mining and the establishment of steel mills.

The two editions of *Reading the Landscape of America* framed a period of activism in Watts' life and work. Having lived her whole life in or near Chicago, Watts recognized changes in the landscape. She understood that even though efforts to stabilize the dynamic dunes were under way, the lake itself was also attacking the landscape. 1973, she wrote, "was a time of phenomenal flooding and high water and winter storms; the lake is taking back what it had brought over a long period" (70). The landscape Watts knew had always been in flux. With the increase in transportation on railroads and highways as well as an increase in leisure time, people in and around Chicago looked to the development of the lakeshore and dunes to entertain them and provide a recreation area. Watts' 1975 "revisit" to this site was as much an account of the ways it had changed, as it was a record of conservation efforts in place to save it from further destruction.

Watts carefully presented all viewpoints as she read this familiar landscape. While "there was a certain sorrow and outrage at things changing," Watts' tone shifted from that of observer to that of activist (B. Watts). By educating her readers, she showed that "ordinary" landscapes needed protection and that everyone benefitted from connecting to the natural world. Compelled to protect ordinary landscapes for public use, Watts took on an activist role that defined her, a role not unlike that of Cowles and Jensen in their increased involvement in conservation efforts.

As part of a larger tradition of conservation in Chicago, Watts learned from community leaders, such as Cowles and Jensen, the value of preserving native landscapes. However, she took a slightly different direction than her predecessors. Whereas they looked at preserving scenic landscapes and protecting natural resources, Watts' activism led her to the abandoned right-of-way of the Chicago, Aurora, and Elgin electric railroad, where she envisioned a multi-use public footpath and prairie restoration project. Reusing a neglected suburban landscape and reimagining its possibilities—Watts' vision for a new kind of conservation—shifted the emphasis from saving the wilderness, exemplified by the work of Jensen and Cowles, to safeguarding the right to walk, breathe fresh air, and access open space.

A New Vision for Conservation

In September 1963, Watts had returned from England, where she walked the ancient footpaths, and she began to wonder if similar paths could be created in the burgeoning Chicago suburbs. In a section of her last chapter on Britain in *Reading the Landscape of Europe*, "Public Footpaths," Watts marveled at the age-old tradition of walking in the countryside that the British maintained throughout their history. She saw American culture with its emphasis on private property in contrast to the public footpaths of England that could be accessed by anyone. While she had used the public footpaths during her vacation, Watts recognized that the footpaths were

not just for adventurers, or holiday-makers such as herself, but were also for people to use in their everyday activities and their comings and goings. Watts firmly believed that "the English footpath is surely one of the world's most steadfastly democratic phenomena. Footpaths are created by human feet to fill a variety of human needs. . . . They are defended—with spirit—by their users" (*Reading the Landscape of Europe* 307).

The democratic nature of the paths fueled Watts' imagination. Watts described the universality of the paths in an article she wrote in 1968 for *Landscape*: "Along the paths we met women with shopping baskets; men with their leashed dogs; children going to school . . . . That network of public footpaths seemed to be making silent testimony to England's respect for the human individual, unencumbered by status" ("The Illinois Prairie Path" 11). Watts believed in the power of people walking together and working together, as humans, to create a democratic relationship with each other and with nature.

When she returned to the United States, Watts lamented that there were no footpaths in her region. The Appalachian Trail and the Long Trail, she argued, were available primarily to people on vacation or holiday. Bob Marshall, who was instrumental in creating the Appalachian Trail, was a socialist who saw the trail as a democratic institution. He espoused similar ideas to Watts' about access to nature. Marshall argued that "wilderness belonged to all the people, not simply to an elite who wanted such areas available for their own use" (Gottlieb 49). Watts also wanted a path designed for everyone's use. The Midwest had no such trail, nothing that could be used for the kind of everyday walking that Watts had observed and practiced during her visit to England. "Illinois," she said, "with its landscape proudly encased under a tightening mesh of ever expanding strands of concrete, seemed to me to offer no aperture into which the merest thread of a footpath could be inserted" ("The Illinois Prairie Path" 11). It was not until she stumbled across

the CA&E right-of-way that she found the space to create the footpath she had been dreaming about.

Watts recognized that the CA&E right-of-way could be repurposed as a regional path, connecting many towns and offering multiple recreational uses. Public footpaths, she argued, were "for the unmechanized, air-breathing, blood-pumping, functioning human being, savoring his own rhythmic swing" ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 76). Native plants could thrive there, and in the Chicago region, among this group of scientists, the preservation of native plants was a cause Watts championed. Native plants caught her eye when she first began to think of the CA&E right-of-way as a possible location for a public footpath: "There were prairie flowers, and six-foot high prairie grasses, and the fence row was full of hawthorns, wild crabapples, sumac and gray dogwood" (76). At a time when people in the Chicago area were demanding wider and faster roads, Watts was planning her public appeal for space designated to appreciate nature along a narrow railroad corridor.

Using her writing as a vehicle for change, Watts submitted a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* to urge support for securing the Chicago, Aurora, and Elgin right-of-way to become a footpath like those she admired in England and Appalachia. She had a relationship with editors of the *Tribune* because of her *Nature Afoot* column. According to one account, a *Tribune* reporter had been assigned to assess the feasibility of the project: “He had talked with the companies concerned: the Illinois Gas Company with pipes under the right of way, the Public Service Company with poles along the fencerows, and the owners of the railroad. It had been decided that the project was feasible. The *Tribune* would further it. And so they did, by publishing the letter—and the many letters that poured in in answer to it—and by new stories and

pictures" ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 76). The *Chicago Tribune* played an important role in supporting the project.

In her editorial letter to the *Chicago Tribune*, Watts built a strong case and vision for a prairie path. Her writing was descriptive and emotionally charged, reminiscent of the opening to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*:

> We are human beings. We are able to walk upright on two feet. We need a footpath. Right now there is a chance for Chicago and its suburbs to have a footpath, a long one. . . . Look ahead some years into the future. Imagine yourself going for a walk on an autumn day. Choose some part of the famed Illinois footpath. Where the highway crosses it, you enter over a stile. The path lies ahead, curving around a hawthorn tree, then proceeding under the shade of a forest of sugar maples, dipping into a hollow with ferns, then skirting a thicket of wild plum, to straighten out for a long stretch of prairie, tall grass prairie, with big blue stem and blazing star and silphium and goldenrod. ("Future Footpath" 20)

The final image of her letter presented a stand-off between the CA&E right-of-way and the "drooling bulldozers." Watts wrote, "Many hands are itching for it" (20). Her plea to the masses was a form of democratic rhetoric: "If we have courage and foresight, such as made possible the Long Trail in Vermont, and the Appalachian trail from Maine to Georgia, and the network of public footpaths in Britain, then we can create from this strip a proud resource" (20). Watts' remarks also seemed reminiscent of Cowles' testimony to save another resource: the dunes of Lake Michigan. This path was her call to action, and with that letter, Watts launched her crusade.

Watts led walks along the right-of-way to encourage the support of conservation organizations, and eighty representatives of these organizations joined the cause ("Nature Walk Proposal Gaining Favor"). Another group of supporters included the “people, whether individuals, families, or groups, who volunteered to be responsible for certain assigned sections of the path, for upkeep, cleanliness, and planting" ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 77). Even after the group became an official organization with an executive board, financial support, a name, and a twelve-year lease from Du Page County for the Illinois Prairie Path, there was still pressure to make the IPP a household name. It had to be “so well-known, so used, that when the clock strikes midnight on May 10, 1978, the bulldozers will not rush into action and start chewing up the path" (78). The development of the Illinois Prairie Path required determination from its supporters; its success depended on them.

Other community members had different views and designs for the abandoned land. From the start, there were people who opposed the footpath: “One firm graveled a section for customer parking. One community in which every house had a driveway, fenced off and circled a section for parking . . . . Many used it as a place for their trash burners and trash that would not burn" ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 78). The Park Board of Wheaton was even more pointed in their opposition. Wheaton “paved the entire width, and barricaded and marked it all for parking,” and when Watts and her group objected, they were told “our hikers and our bicyclists could find their way between the cars" (78). Plans for new highways were also in the works, which threatened taking over the footpath as soon as the lease expired. There was considerable confusion about legal ownership of the land and because of the way the land had been acquired by the railroad: “Untangling the ownership issues occupied the Prairie Path promoters for two years after the group incorporated in 1964 as a not-for-profit corporation (Young 212). Obstacles

that would have seemed insurmountable by some were quashed and overcome by Watts and her group.

Even though Watts had little patience for local government, she and Turner led walks and talks that others organized to promote the path. Watts knew from her experiences in England that great efforts by many organizations were needed to circumvent the opposition. Small towns, such as Glen Ellyn, Villa Park, and Aurora wove the path into already existing parks. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts planned hiking trails, rest stops, path markers, council circles, and clean-up brigades ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 80). There was no shortage of naysayers. One reporter had even told the group they had "no more chance than a snowball in hell" ("The Illinois Prairie Path" 13). However, Watts and the many active groups that supported the IPP prevailed.

The group faced additional roadblocks to securing the right-of-way for the Illinois Prairie Path. The city of Chicago "had long planned on using it for bringing Lake Michigan water to the western suburbs which are still using their own wells. Many felt that a highway was needed from Wheaton to Elgin . . . . Many were convinced that the traffic problems of commuters to Chicago could only be solved by a monorail on the right of way. . . . The hunters and the Hondas have found it" ("The Illinois Prairie Path" 13). However, there were successes as well, accomplishments by caring and service-minded citizens who were committed to Watts' dream.

Something in her understanding of nature, her work of connecting people with the outdoors, or her appreciation for places she visited sparked Watts' dream to create the public footpath in the western suburbs of Chicago. At an age when many people were enjoying retirement, Watts continued to advocate for the health and welfare of people in the Chicago region. She was driven to make her vision a reality; she spent her life helping others make

connections with nature. One reason she was so successful in this enterprise was because she nurtured her own curiosity about and engagement with landscapes she knew or visited.

In her correspondence with neighbor, friend, and fellow Illinois Prairie Path advocate Helen Turner, Watts shared her excitement and her discoveries about the many places she visited. Watts' ability to read the landscape, any landscape, laid the foundation for the active role she took in her region to see the potential in a neglected landscape for public use. When she traveled to France, Watts documented animals and people in the places she visited: "We saw our first oxen, our first sabots [lower class people wearing clogs]; an itinerant tinker; a man splitting barrel stoves with an axe out of great chunks of oak" (Watts to Turner, June 4). Flowers, wheat fields with poppies, buttercups—Watts recorded her sightings of plants as though she were seeing old friends. She also became a kind of guide, clearly collecting images and ideas, noticings and questions to write her *Reading the Landscape of Europe*.

One letter in particular captured Watts' feelings about fields and the human relationship to them. Plant communities and the human relationship with nature resonated with Watts during her time abroad. When she was traveling from England to France, she wrote Helen Turner, "First thing this morning we could see the fields and hedgerows of England, and many yellow flowers in the fields. It is good to see the fields. Humans leave more lasting marks there. It is discouraging to see the big waves and spray that our great boat stirs up at the prow, and then to watch how fast the sea erases all memory of us from the bow" (Watts to Turner, Thursday afternoon). In another letter recording her thoughts about Switzerland, Watts again combined her views of the fields with their human impressions. She wrote, “This combination of used fields, and the handiwork of man, with the stark bulk of untamed mountains, is a satisfactory one. I love it all” (Watts to Turner).

In her musings to Turner, Watts shared information about the landscape that she knew a fellow ecologist and geologist would appreciate. Attention to flowers, trees, and human impact filled Watts' letters with the kinds of details that later appeared in her book on Europe. "Today Raymond and I have been at Burnham Beeches," she wrote. "Such massive, bulbous antiquities I have never imagined. This great forest was first heavily grazed. At that time it became covered with heather and hawthorn. Then the grazing was reduced, part was fenced. Birches came, then oaks, then beech. But always some cows around" (Watts to Turner, July 20). Wherever she traveled, Watts looked for mysteries to solve and stories to tell about the landscape.

While Watts respected the natural world and had a sense of wonder about it, she also valued the place of humans in the landscape. Ever eager to find the story in the landscape, Watts attended to each detail with the careful eye of the naturalist and the sensitivity of the artist. On the ship to France, she remarked on one scene that she enjoyed observing: "A Frenchman up here on the boat deck sings songs to his little boy, that are perfectly enchanting—long long songs that must tell a story, because the little boy listens, big-eyed and breathless to every word. Then the whole line of French men and women, who all seem to be related, burst into an exuberant chorus that always seems to end in laughter. They seem to be the very essence of France" (Watts to Turner, Thursday afternoon). Capturing the essence of something was one of Watts' specialties. For example, in Provence, Watts looked at the landscape with the eyes of Van Gogh and Cézanne. She wrote, "This morning we spent looking at Van Gogh's favorite forms in the landscape, cedar trees, (or cypress?) olive trees, wheat fields, and at Cezanne's colors, and his much-painted mountain, and pines" (Watts to Turner, June 10). She knew how to appreciate simple landscapes, form and color.

Watts' attention to language showed the importance of communicating her ideas, written or spoken, accurately and effectively for her audience. Throughout her life, she was keenly aware of the changing labels for the kind of environmental and ecological awareness she taught and practiced. In a letter to then Naturalist at The Morton Arboretum, Alfred Etter, Watts responded to his inquiry about the term *ecology*, "Yes, words can be shopworn, – especially abstract words, and especially those abstract words that are 'caviar to the general' for a time. Unfortunately, too many speakers and writers confined their application of the word to unhealthy aspects of our scene. Now 'ecology' seems doomed to follow 'conservation' onto the shopworn heap of fashion's discards" (Watts to Etter).

This letter, written just a few months before Watts died, illustrated the ways in which she progressed through different periods of environmental thought but remained true to her beliefs and her commitment to sharing a love for reading the landscape. She explained, "I remember the excitement of having the concepts of ecology unfolded by Doctor Cowles, even as he himself was having the exhilaration of some new unfolding. Years later, at the Arboretum, when it seemed that the time had come to expose one of the classes to ecology, I avoided that word as being too unfamiliar, and called the course 'Reading the Landscape'" (Watts to Etter). It was the effort to help her students understand their own "unfolding" of ideas that directed Watts to create her unique label for her ecological practice. Even at the end of her life, she wondered what new trend, what new term, would emerge: "Now, the conservationists, who became ecologists, have become environmentalists. Next??" (Watts to Etter). Throughout her life, Watts' own sense of wonder compelled her to continue sharing her readings of the landscape and motivated her community activism to protect open space.

Many experiences and events provided the impetus for Watts to emerge as a renowned educator and advocate for the natural world. As a naturalist for the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois, she offered lectures, nature classes, and how-to seminars for gardeners, nature enthusiasts, teachers, and other individuals interested in topics ranging from plants, trees, and gardens to nature teaching and landscape architecture. Her work included books that served as educational resources in plant identification and nature appreciation. She organized outings for teachers and students to learn about nature, using the instruction she had received in ecology and her gifts as a storyteller and teacher as her models. In many ways she pioneered the role of naturalist educator in a botanical setting; as she brought national recognition to The Morton Arboretum, her design for nature education programming was replicated in similar institutions.

Watts' writing was instrumental in the conservation effort both in the Chicago area and in the country at large, and her letter to the *Chicago Tribune* editor helped to initiate and develop a rails-to-trails movement in America. At every turn, Watts promoted active community involvement and engagement with the natural world. She had little patience for passive bystanders. She once said, "Too many people are ready to listen to a lecture, say 'isn't that awful,' give somebody some money and let them go fight the battle. More people should do things like take an active role like we did with the Prairie Path" (Elsener). Well known at the end of her career in national circles, Watts remained true to her ideals and convictions, and to all that was important to her region.

Watts' new vision for conservation emphasized a focus on democracy in the physical space of the footpath, how she viewed different people using the path, and the ways in which people could work together to make the path a reality. Cowles' teaching and Jensen's belief in the potential for democracy in open space inspired Watts to combine her passion for ecology with

her mission to help people of all backgrounds have access to nature. She combatted the degradation of the environment by seeking out the most neglected of sites and transforming it into a usable and ecologically restored site of nature study and recreation. In this way, she offered a different kind of model for environmental change than either of her mentors. She also navigated organizations run and populated by women in order to advance her project. With the help of her neighbors, former students and area garden club members, Watts moved her idea from the private space of the garden club meeting into the public sphere. While this approach was certainly not a new one, the outcomes were truly original and innovative at the time.

CHAPTER 2

A Community of Women and Their Response to the Suburban Landscape

Figure 2.1. Lil Lasch and Elizabeth Holmes working on a mailing
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

"Just get it for me!" was May Theilgaard Watts' call to action. After a winter meeting of the Wayne Women's Club and Wayne Garden Club on March 3, 1964, where Watts lectured and presented her idea for the footpath, Watts and five other women gathered at the Holmes' house on Dunham Road in Wayne for more discussion about the plan. The women were enthusiastic, but they wanted to know how to make the path idea work and where to begin (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 2). Watts' response had been simple and direct, and the reaction to her response was immediate. According to Holmes' account of the early events of the Illinois Prairie Path, "we went to work on it" (2). Thus, this group of women, coming from different towns and representing different backgrounds, interests, and age groups, united for a common cause and went to "work" (Fig. 2.1)

In a speech given in 1979 to recount the early history of the Illinois Prairie Path, Elizabeth Holmes and her husband, Sam, documented the trials and triumphs of the volunteers who united around this common cause. Motivating the path's development, they agreed, was the

inimitable charisma of its foremost promoter, May Theilgaard Watts. Elizabeth Holmes explained, "Those here tonight who did not know Mrs. Watts must remember that she generated the deepest kind of admiration and loyalty. She possessed some special magic to arouse in all of us who studied with her a vivid AWARENESS" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 2). The common ground that brought these women together was this awareness that Watts had nurtured in them, at a time when "urban and environmental problems were bursting into national headlines" (2). These women shared a love of gardens and the natural world, but they also shared a response to the suburban landscape in which they lived.

At the time Watts conceived of her idea for the path, her vision contrasted with what was *au courant* in terms of suburban landscape design. Watts wrote, "No one is going to give space to such an idea as a footpath, when most people are pleading for wider, faster roads, and bigger and better parking spaces" ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 76). Even though the mighty automobile and all it offered to suburban residents captured consumer interest during the 1960s, there was still a desire from many suburbanites to secure open space. There was also a realization that open space was vanishing in the Chicago area (Gapp). Support for Watts' idea quickly amassed, and "before long the footpath had acquired an executive board including a businessman, a lawyer, a teacher, a Scouter, a colonel, a railroad man, a golf-club manager, an antique-shop owner, a white-water canoeist, a leading horsewoman, a public-relations expert, a naturalist, an airlines pilot and a civic leader" ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 77). However, before Watts' idea gained favor at the regional level, and before the executive board formed, first there was a group of six women who all believed in the footpath idea.

These women dedicated themselves to service, civic engagement, and shared responsibility for social and environmental issues. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which

the founders of the Illinois Prairie Path defined their work as a community of women committed to an ecological cause within a suburban and post-industrial landscape. They experienced the changing suburbs in their own lives, watching open spaces become fewer and their way of life become threatened by highways and automobiles. The women witnessed what they loved about suburban life begin to disappear, and their response was to stop further encroachment on the open space that remained.

The women designed the path with democracy in mind and developed a collaborative and innovative approach to solve a pressing environmental problem. Their grassroots project enlisted volunteers from the suburbs along the CA&E railroad right-of-way. This spirit of volunteerism sustained the path's leaders, and the strong core of volunteers remained a defining feature of the organization's development. As the women expanded their organization, beginning with including their husbands, they sought guidance from other groups, specifically the Open Lands Project, under the leadership of Gunnar Peterson. While Watts and Peterson had distinct visions for the Illinois Prairie Path, their influence helped both of their organizations define and shape themselves.

I also address the role of gardening as instrumental to uniting the women around the subject of plants and as shapers of the landscape. These women understood the landscape because they had planned and planted it with their own hands. Flowers, shrubs, and trees were old friends to them; they knew them like they knew their neighbors. Persuaded by Watts, the women joined the mission to protect not only the prairie plants, but also the land on which they grew. In doing so, they were also protecting the people who benefitted from experiences in the natural world. Their environmental activism contributed to, as well as extended, the extraordinary work of many early Chicago women activists and social reformers from the

Progressive Era. As a result, these women helped begin to define the "environment" as the place where people live, work, and play.

Grassroots from a Thread of Green: Shaping Environmentalism in the Suburbs

On the day Watts first discovered the potential site for the footpath, she considered how sections of an abandoned railroad right-of-way could be connected. She identified some of the essential elements she believed a footpath needed: "One day, not far from home, I drove across a railroad track without gates or warning signs. Somehow, in spite of the sedentary, padded ease of my car, the sight probed into my consciousness. I backed up, and got out. Here was a possible footpath, lying on an abandoned railroad. It extended as far as I could see in both directions" ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 76). Three ideas emerge as significant in her retelling of this moment: 1. the path was not far from home, 2. the path was *possible* and 3. it extended in *both directions*. Watts envisioned the potential for building community in this open space.

As an ecologist and longtime resident of suburban Chicago, Watts understood how communities developed over time. She witnessed the new suburban influx, people who were "giving up the grayness of Chicago for the pastels of DuPage County" (Ehrenhalt 197). She also recognized the fervor with which a group of suburban residents would support a project that emphasized community over commerce and prairie over parking lots. By identifying and addressing the civic-mindedness of her community, Watts was able to elicit the kind of volunteers she needed to carry out her dream of a public footpath. A careful observer, Watts assessed the open space available "not far from home" to facilitate unmechanized recreational opportunities for the numerous residents of her community ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 76).

Even though Chicago suburbs developed as early as the mid-1800s, the extensive growth in these towns during the 1950s created new community dynamics and tensions, especially in regards to personal choice and physical space. The women who joined Watts all responded in some way to these new changes in their region. For example, in Elmhurst, one of the towns along the CA&E railroad right-of-way, community living became public living, both because of the limited choices for recreation that people had and their close proximity to each other within a small space. Erhenhalt argues, "To be a young homeowner in a suburb like Elmhurst in the 1950s was to participate in a communal enterprise that only the most determined loner could escape: barbecues, coffee klatches, volleyball games, baby-sitting co-ops and constant bartering of household goods, . . . all these were the devices by which young adults who had been set down in a wilderness of tract homes made a community" (29).

Neighbors were friends by geographical default. They joined the same clubs, participated in the same PTA groups, and held the same values. Motivated to flee the city, they settled in new developments away from "landlords and cooking smells, neighbors one flight above or uncomfortably close next door, [and] physical surroundings that carried indelible reminders of hard times years ago" (Ehrenhalt 197). In their personal and public lives, these newcomers to suburbia clung to each other and to a shared sense of community.

There was no denying that population growth transformed the Chicago landscape considerably during the 1950s. As populations grew, open space dwindled. From 1940 to 1957, the population of Elmhurst, for example, tripled its size. In that old Chicago suburb, "at the start of the 1950s, pheasants could still be spotted within a half-mile of the ranch houses that were starting to spring up. Pupils at York High School walked to class across farmland. A blacksmith was in business on York Road as late as 1950. Just a few years later, those were folktales"

(Ehrenhalt 195). While this bucolic landscape rapidly changed, a visionary like Watts was able to see the possibility and potential in used land because her scope for reading the landscape was broad enough to see the parts for the whole. Her environmental activism emerged in response to this suburban landscape.

The momentum for the environmental movement had its roots in the suburbs. Sellers explains in *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism*, "At the heart of this mass mobilization, shared by expert and nonexpert alike, was a local knowledge, born of living in a particular sort of neighborhood and in a particular type of metropolitan region" (290). Suburban life offered shared experiences and knowledge. However, even though Chicago's suburbs shared similar characteristics, they were no monoculture. There was also a wide range of experiences that informed suburban thinking, as well as diversity in the landscapes.

In *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*, Hayden suggests, "Describing suburbia as a residential landscape would be wrong, however, because suburbs also contain millions of square feet of commercial and industrial space, and their economic growth outstrips that of older downtowns. Most confusing of all, suburbia is the site of promises, dreams, and fantasies" (3). Understanding the different qualities of the suburbs along the CA&E, as well as their residents, posed challenges for Watts and her neighbors. It soon became apparent that they would need to bring people together and persuade community members that the path could be an incredible resource. The women were not just building a path; they were also creating a regional citizenship.

From the early development of the suburbs, there was a sense of community and regional citizenship in the Chicago area. Keating argues, "All of these settlement types (agricultural,

industrial, commuter, and recreational) share similar origins, which often made them competitors in the region for businesses and residents" (*Chicagoland* 10-11). The railroad was the common link: "Farmers, manufacturers, workers, and commuters all reoriented their understanding and use of metropolitan space, based on the geometry and schedule of railroad operations" (5). In Watts' time, the railroad right-of-way as the future footpath became the physical link. The future of the Illinois Prairie Path has also been shaped by Chicago's regional past: "With the advent of the railroad, manufacturing and processing companies established themselves in suburban locations. Over several generations, these suburban locations became tightly knit into the urban fabric of Chicago, virtually obliterating their suburban origins. In the late twentieth century, with the decline in many of these same industries, acres of abandoned factories and warehouses were available for redevelopment" (67). Cities such as Elgin, Villa Park, and Maywood, literally the end of the line for the IPP, are still recovering from these changes.

Despite the changes that permeated the burgeoning western suburbs of Chicago in the early 1960s, diversity in these suburbs surfaced because of the different needs of each city. This development was not a new one. Keating argues, "Neighboring settlements with competing visions of land use, development, and appropriate public behavior led to (and continue to lead to) compromise and conflict" (*Chicagoland* 142). Looking at the relationships among these neighboring settlements offers a more complete picture of their history and their lasting impact. Keating suggests, "Over time, many of these suburbs have evolved into city neighborhoods tightly woven into the urban fabric. More than 20 percent of the suburban communities and outlying neighborhoods founded in the region during the nineteenth century owe their existence to the processing and manufacturing enterprises. These places have had to deal with dramatic changes as industrial enterprises have scaled back and shut down" (89). The IPP's founders faced

these changes as their vision came up against city leaders' plans to boost the economy with larger scale development, highway access, and creating space for an increasing automobile industry.

Open land in the Chicago area was certainly becoming more limited at the time Watts introduced her idea for the Illinois Prairie Path. According to Platt's *Open Land in Urban Chicago*, there was a seeming lack of open land available in metropolitan Chicago by the early 1970s: "Federal preservation of open land is conspicuous by its absence in Illinois. The national government owns no recreational or wildlife areas except in the extreme southern part of the state" (70). Open land at the state level was no different. Ranked the lowest of the fifty states in "acres per capita," the majority of the state lands were also located in the southern part of the state. The biggest hope for preserving open land remained with the counties. In the early part of the twentieth century, populations in Cook County increased and "reflected an expansion in suburban settlement in these areas, as the automobile, interurban, and improved railroad connections combined with [Chicago's] continued outward expansion to adapt rural Cook County to suburban purposes" (*Building Chicago* 29).

While Cook County had a well-established forest preserve, created in 1916 by environmental advocates Daniel Burnham and Jens Jensen, DuPage County felt more pressure and urgency in the late 1960s and early 1970s to hold onto any land that remained open because of the dramatic population increase. Platt explained,

> The pace at which a Forest Preserve District must operate is proportional to the imminence of its engulfment by urbanization. Cook County has long perceived this urgency and has nearly reached its statutory limit of land ownership. Five-sixths of all land held as forest preserves in Illinois are located in that county. Just west of Cook, DuPage County experienced

> a doubling of its population in the decade 1950-1960. During the same period some 45 of the county's 331 square miles were added to the area already urbanized. (74)

The proposed idea of the Illinois Prairie Path offered an alternative way to consider land use in DuPage County.

Local journalists, such as Edna Dornfeld, addressed the Chicago area open space issue and appealed to Illinois residents to support Watts' dream. In her article, "Illinois Prairie Path," Dornfeld highlighted some of the problems associated with the dramatic population growth in the Chicago suburbs. She wrote, "Perhaps the dwellers in other, less crowded parts of Illinois feel that a great deal of fuss is being made over a narrow strip of land. But these Chicago suburbs have grown so fast in the last decade that the formerly quiet side roads are now lined with ranch houses" (17). This sentiment, expressed as well in the July 1964 issue of *Outdoor Illinois*, captured the changes experienced by so many people in these increasingly crowded areas. Dornfeld's article distinguished between suburbs outside of Chicago and "lucky down-state people [who] have unlimited open spaces and beautiful hills." There was a dramatic difference felt by the residents who lived alongside the abandoned CA&E railroad right-of-way. Targeted as something that would enhance the area and enrich the lives of "most householders in these areas"—the "ardent gardeners" who maintained beautiful yards—the Illinois Prairie Path represented an innovative way to solve the problem of diminished space and overcrowding.

Progressivism, Chicago Women, and a Tradition of Service

Addressing problems related to increasing populations was certainly not a new story during the early 1960s, especially in large metropolitan areas like Chicago. Only at this time, *suburbs* became the locus for massive population growth. The spaces that suburban residents had

created for themselves to achieve a better quality of life became threatened. This pattern in urban and suburban growth began at the turn of the twentieth century, and with it came a surplus of social concerns related to health, welfare, and quality of life.

Surges in population at the end of the nineteenth century also contributed to growing environmental problems during the Progressive Era. Women's responses to these problems laid the foundation for women in later decades to tackle issues related to the environment and quality of life in large metropolitan areas. In *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers,* Unger explains, "The United States experienced dramatic population increases in the decades following the Civil War. Between 1870 and 1920, the population grew from fewer than 40 million to more than 105 million. Most of that growth was in the cities, as the nation changed from one with three-quarters of its people in rural areas to one with just over half in urban areas" (77). Women, out of necessity, became adept at preserving resources. They also "often led the way in urban environmental reforms, playing crucial roles in identifying and publicizing problems, proposing solutions, and demanding action" (85). Chicago women were especially active in service during the Progressive Era, and they provided models in environmental reform for women in other regions and for future generations.

Many of the environmental issues that Progressive Era women addressed overlapped areas where quality of life was impacted. According to Unger, "women's educational programs to promote public health ranged from persuading citizens not to spit on city sidewalks to alerting tenement dwellers to the dangers of lead poisoning" (85). There was a direct link, in many cases, between environmental hazards and women's occupations. In this way, much of the work of the Progressives focused on the working class and the neighborhoods in which they lived. Efforts to ameliorate poor living conditions and work environments were engineered by groups of women,

who joined together to raise awareness and resolve issues. They did so by raising social concerns and working to break down barriers of class and race: "Whatever their prejudice and however imperfect their solutions, middle-class women of all races sought to improve the conditions of the working poor, becoming the forebears of modern environmental justice activists" (90). These women dedicated their lives to civic responsibility and to public service.

As Chicago grew from an influx of immigrants at the end of the nineteenth century, volunteers recognized a need to effect changes in the built environment. In *Chicago Gardens: The Early History*, Maloney explains the response to social ills in Chicago's expanding tenement housing, "Chicagoans were energetically pursuing solutions to these social ills through settlement houses such as Hull-House, philanthropic programs, and public-awareness campaigns of the Progressive Era. Conservation fervor also flourished at this time as a way to preserve the unsullied innocence of Nature. Chicagoans were major players in this new national environmentalist movement" (23). Some of the most influential forces in this effort included the Prairie Club of Chicago and landscape architect Jens Jensen. The biggest priority at this time was to give everyone, even the working poor, access to green spaces (25).

Jane Addams, creator of Hull House, became an early model for female environmental reform crusaders. According to Gottlieb, "when Jane Addams established Hull House on the west side of Chicago in 1888, new movements for social and environmental reform appeared ready to emerge as a major social force in the industrial city" (97). While Watts and the other path founders dealt with a different kind of landscape, the suburban setting, Addams and her Hull House colleagues confronted similar kinds of issues related to environment and health in the tenement housing of a major metropolis. "Focused on the conditions of daily life in their neighborhoods," Gottlieb argues, "the settlements immediately confronted questions of housing,

sanitation, and public health" (98). Female social reformers looked first to their immediate neighborhoods for the sources of environmental problems. Through networks and more analysis of the ways in which systems were failing, they widened their geographical sphere to look at the larger environmental issues impacting their work.

Chicago in the late 1800s became the perfect location for a settlement house, and Addams recognized the potential for relationships to develop between residents of the settlement house and the neighbors of the Nineteenth Ward. She envisioned that "the mere foothold of a house, easily accessible, ample in space, hospitable and tolerant in spirit, situated in the midst of the large foreign colonies which so easily isolate themselves in American cities would be in itself a serviceable thing for Chicago" (Gottlieb 91). Inspired by the mission of England's Toynbee's Hall to serve the poor, Hull House became a similar kind of public service institution. Seigfried argues, "Hull House in Chicago developed a pragmatist experimental model of transaction that criticized top-down approaches to problem solving in favor of working with others in a way calculated to change the attitudes and habits of both the settlement workers, mostly middle- and upper-class women, and members of the impoverished working-class neighborhood with whom they worked" (212-13). Hull House, located in such a neighborhood on Halsted Street, became the perfect place for Addams and its other residents to develop programs that would benefit both Hull House members and the neighbors they served.

Even though Addams envisioned working with a certain type of immigrant population at first, the programs she encouraged and nurtured, as well as the issues she faced, evolved with the times. She described how Halsted Street changed during the first twenty years of Hull House because of "the withdrawal of the more prosperous Irish and Germans, and the slow substitution of Russian Jews, Italians, and Greeks" (Addams 97). With the influx of immigrants to Chicago,

the city expanded and grew up around houses that once made up what became the suburbs. Many problems originated from this increase in population, and with it, the increase in sewage and waste problems. Addams and the residents of Hull House devised new programs and space for all community members to work on solutions; any work that needed doing was done. Addams described how her team of women "understood that we were ready to perform the humblest neighborhood services. We were asked to wash the new-born babies, and to prepare the dead for burial, to nurse the sick, and to 'mind the children'" (109). Addams viewed these roles not as a benefactor of the neighborhood, but as a partner ready to overcome the challenges and to serve the community.

At the same time as the settlement movement developed in Chicago, programs at the University of Chicago looked at Hull House and Addams' efforts in social work as models for shifting educational paradigms from the classroom to the community. Everything, from how Hull House was organized and operated—with cooperation and contributions from all of its members—to how the community made use of the space with its clubs and committees, emphasized the importance of collaboration and a united voice and vision. The settlement movement was an experiment to see how different classes could join together to carry out social reform. Community and collaboration became the trademark of Addams' vision for public service. As a result, Hull House became known for its many programs that involved the community. Hull House residents were part of the neighborhood rather than mere providers of outreach to help neighbors: "Hull House created the first public playground in Chicago, the first kindergarten, citizenship classes, English classes, and Labor Museum. Hull House residents and neighbors fought for clean streets, child labor laws, and campaigned against corrupt politicians" (7).

Addams' educational vision advanced the position of both residents and neighbors as teachers and learners. The programs that evolved in Hull House, and the expansion of one house to many buildings, illustrated the far-reaching impact of her idea of reciprocal learning and teaching: "The emphasis on mutual education was evident in much of Hull House's programming—which grew rapidly. . . . Hull House soon became the equivalent of a modern-day college campus with multiple buildings for residency, programming and entertainment. By 1891, the settlement offered more than fifty clubs and classes utilized by more than a thousand people every week" (Longo 50). She advocated that the settlement house model offered the best educational practices to meet democratic values. Addams, "who believed so strongly in the significance of personal experience, [felt] any institution that gave itself over to research, abstraction, and specialization was an institution that failed to support democracy" (Daynes and Longo 7). This strong belief in democracy informed many of the programs carried out by Hull House residents.

Women advocates of better health conditions, sanitation, and public services worked in the early years to mobilize support for these "democratic" causes. They turned to organizations—many of them women's clubs—of likeminded groups and individuals that would help them: "Clubs were the greatest catalyst urging women to put their conservation practices and housekeeping ethic to broader use. In 1890, the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) was founded by Jane Croly, who realized the potential for power if the many women's organizations in the United States worked together to achieve common goals" (Unger 83). For Addams, there was a need to address the relationship between environmental hazards in the home as well as in the workplace. To understand this connection, Addams and her colleagues, including Florence Kelley, Ellen Starr, Mary McDowell, and Crystal Eastman initiated "the first

women's labor groups in the country, such as the National Women's Trade Union League and trade unions for the shirtmakers and cloakmakers" (Gottlieb 102). The idea that groups of women working together could solve problems, improve conditions, and effect environmental change underscored all of these reform efforts.

The problem of open land use that Addams faced in the late 1800s resurfaced in the work of Watts and the path founders in the 1960s. Whereas Addams focused on the creation of playgrounds as a way to safeguard space for recreation in an industrial setting, especially for young children, Watts emphasized the reuse of neglected space to create a linear footpath. Both groups of Chicago area women identified the necessity for these green spaces to be accessible by everyone, not just elite or affluent residents. Throughout history, Unger argues, women joined in conservation efforts:

> Following the Civil War, women continued to wield significant influence as they served as midwives to the conservation movement, became empowered by the natural world through scouting and other organizations, contributed to the American victory in two world wars and combatted the effects of the Great Depression by producing, preparing, and preserving their own food in order to avoid waste, and led efforts to save the planet while carrying out environmental justice. (11)

Shaping public spaces in Chicago was an important way in which these women enacted social and environmental change and became empowered.

Garden Clubs as Environmental Reform

Garden clubs served several important roles for women from the Progressive Era through the 1960s. They provided a social gathering for women from a similar socio-economic

background, and they also brought women together who shared a common interest in horticulture and botany. While not always as political as some other women's groups and clubs, the garden club "was representative of the ways in which early twentieth-century women's interests in growing decorative plants, especially flowers, to beautify their homes gradually led them to a greater appreciation of nature" (Unger 91-2). These women extended their thinking about conservation, protection of resources, and fostering ways to improve quality of life through access to the natural world.

Garden clubs were early advocates for open space and native plant preservation. The lack of documentation of the involvement of garden clubs in environmental reform speaks to the emphasis on wilderness and wildlife over open space initiatives. In her dissertation *American Garden Clubs and the Fight for Nature Preservation, 1890-1980*, Cohen argues,

> Although the nature preserve and open space movements that arose to safeguard 'ecologically pristine areas' such as marshes and prairies are full of grassroots female activists, they have garnered considerably less ink from historians than have the topics of wilderness and wildlife. Of the few analyses that exist, discussions of the efforts to contain the march of tract homes and freeways tend to favor the evolving management styles, scientific rationales, and legal maneuverings that brought groups such as The Nature Conservancy to the forefront of professional land acquisition. (8)

The fact that national conservation organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, are more known for their work in conservation, however, does not diminish the contributions made by garden clubs, oftentimes advocates and financial backers of the larger conservation organizations.

The role of garden clubs as educators for ecological practice is another area to consider in thinking about Watts' circuit of garden clubs in the Chicago area. Her lectures to area garden clubs focused on horticulture and natural history, certainly, but as a trained ecologist, Watts also challenged garden club members to understand connections in the natural world and to become actively involved in shaping and protecting the landscape. Rather than publish esoteric papers on ecology or turn her attention to ecological research, Watts, like Addams, believed in sharing her knowledge, background, and experience to support democracy. Watts wanted everyone to have personal experiences in and connections to the natural world. One way she helped other women, in particular, experience and understand ecology was through gardening.

According to Cohen, garden clubs "became central in the movement by educators to develop Victorian nature study into a new discipline of environmental education. Finally, they popularized the practice of purchasing pristine wetlands, meadows, and coastal areas for ecological and open space preserves. Far from viewing these activities as mere cosmetic improvements to the landscape, the leaders of the garden clubs evolved a complex synthesis of aesthetic, ecological, educational, and recreational arguments on behalf of environmental protection" (11-12). There was a broadening of scope within the garden clubs from a focus on backyard gardening to town beautification to a regional plan for plantings and preservation.

Women's involvement in horticulture in Chicago was an important development in the field of environmental work and improvement. Maloney argues, "Chicago's women gardeners brought yet another new perspective to the field of horticulture. Chicago's women's clubs were among the most numerous and influential in the country during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Most clubs included a horticulture or forestry subcommittee, which was often focused on conservation matters, or a gardening group that targeted civic improvement" (28). The garden

clubs that evolved out of women's experiences in horticulture in Chicago were the result of a realization that women could accomplish more if they worked together. According to Maloney, "women united in horticultural pursuits began to change the physical and social fabric of Chicago. . . . Chicago women have a long history incorporating flowers into various social causes" (74). Watts was an iconic figure in the suburban garden clubs because of her background and connection to The Morton Arboretum. She was able to influence so many women because she worked in a tradition of gardening that they understood and valued.

Chicago became a leading city for its women's clubs, garden clubs, and garden shows. Women's clubs began as a way for women to exercise their influence on social reform through an acceptable format: "The clubs were a way for women to exert influence in society, within the constraints of their gender-based roles" (Maloney 77). In the early thirties, the Garden Club of Illinois, formed from twenty-nine clubs, hosted its own Chicago Flower and Garden Show planned and organized by women, and "its august matriarchs . . . invited University of Chicago professor Henry C. Cowles into their living rooms to lecture on the ecology of the Lake Michigan sand dunes" (Cohen 110-11). There was a connection between garden clubs and a desire to understand and practice an ecological approach to nature preservation. Garden clubs also worked on multiple geographical levels, from local to national, to engage women in sharing botanical knowledge and shaping the landscape.

In 1942, The Morton Arboretum offered the venue to host the show for the Garden Club of Illinois. Joy Morton's daughter, Jean Cudahy, was the president of the Garden Club of America, so there was an early connection between garden clubs and The Morton Arboretum. In fact, "A generous contribution from [Cudahy] . . . started the Illinois Nature Study School in 1936 on land close by Chicago's Morton Arboretum" (Garden Club of Illinois 188). Around this

time, in 1940 when she served as the arboretum's chairman of the board, Cudahy had hired May Theilgaard Watts to offer classes at the Morton Arboretum (Ballowe). Women's clubs, garden clubs, and arboretum class offerings attracted the same groups of women seeking ways to enrich their suburban lives and make a difference as civic leaders. There was a strong emphasis on education, service, and civic leadership that permeated the groups in which these women participated.

The Garden Club of America held a national meeting in Chicago, which included a tour of The Morton Arboretum, again in May of 1957. A preface to the program outlined the history of the Chicago region and its garden clubs, as well as identified the problems of urban sprawl. The preface also identified some of the changes from 1932 to 1957: "All but one of the gardens listed in the booklet for the 1932 meeting have shrunken in size, hemmed in by the vigorous growth of our city and the consequent demand for suburban home sites. For many American citizens the country over have chosen suburban life in order to combine a demanding business or professional career in a metropolitan area with daily retirement to a home shrouded by an individually owned fragment of the earth's surface" ("The Garden Club of America" 1). According to Maloney, "one way to understand the changes in Chicago's suburban gardens is to trace the evolution of land use from farms to suburbs to city" (234). The 1957 Garden Club of America meeting program highlighted changes that the land of Chicago experienced throughout its geologic history to remind club members of the many ways in which the Chicago landscape changed over time.

Involvement in Chicago area garden clubs focused on flowers and plants and landscape design, but members of these clubs were not limited to thinking only about suburban lawns. In many ways, involvement in garden clubs helped women participate in other areas of

environmental and social reform. There was a connection between beautifying a landscape and offering people access to green space and a healthful environment. Watts and her garden club supporters also focused on the importance of good health. When Watts spoke to the Wayne Garden Club in 1964, women from the group, all residents of neighboring suburbs, came together to support Watts' vision for the public footpath. Each of the women had a unique skill set to offer the project, and together, these women were able to engineer both a path and a collaboration that fit an ecological framework and a tradition of democracy in the Chicago region.

The Committee of Exploration

The group of women who formed a "Committee of Exploration" included Watts' neighbors, colleagues, former students, other local supporters, and friends of friends. Along with May Watts and Helen Turner (both from Naperville, former educators, and retired from the Morton Arboretum), Jane Sindt (a part-time actress, antique collector, and Naperville neighbor of Watts), Lillian Lasch (night supervisor of Donnelly presses in Chicago, chairman of the Prairie Club canoeing council, and Arboretum student), Phoebe Ryerson and Elizabeth Holmes (housewives and mothers of young sons in Wayne) became the path's first crusaders. Each of the six women took on various roles for the project, filling the elected offices that soon developed from their committee work, researching the legalities of acquiring the railroad right-of-way, communicating with the public, soliciting and managing other volunteers, promoting the path idea, and implementing the plans for making the path a reality.

At a time when women were looking for ways to contribute to their community, the first Illinois Prairie Path Committee discovered their common purpose in repurposing the neglected green space that connected their towns as well as their vision for a safe and healthful recreational

outlet. The project represented for them a "verdant pathway, safe from high-speed traffic, for the use of the serious hiker, the casual stroller, the student of wildlife, and, most importantly, for the harassed individual seeking surcease from the strain of metropolitan living" (Dornfield, "This Path Was Meant for Walking" 47). Early photos and documents featuring these committed volunteers show them pitching in and working, redefining what women's work looked like at that time. They tell a story of women who were not afraid to get dirty, who were as comfortable walking in the field as meeting in the boardroom, and who facilitated collaborations with people in their communities.

Helen Turner

Picture Helen Turner, sunhat protecting her face, atop a stile with an Illinois Prairie Path sign in hand. The stile marked an entry point to the path, and the photo reflected the hopefulness of the project as Turner readied herself to hang the sign. In another photo some years later, Turner stood on the path with representatives of the U.S. Interior Department and other path supporters. Who better to serve as a guide? Turner walked every mile of the path in those early days and recorded the natural features of the path. Author of *The Illinois Prairie Path—A Guide*, and of the path newsletter in the early years, Turner was known as the "strong, devoted heart of the Prairie Path" ("Helen Turner Dies" 4). Helping a Girl Scout troop construct a garden site, writing the path newsletter, or leading groups on nature walks along the path, Turner was the first to offer assistance to carry out Watts' dream.

Figure 2.2. Helen Turner, 1967
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

In one photo, Turner stood on a bridge looking over some construction (Fig. 2.2). A trained geologist, and once an instructor of meteorology in the Civilian Pilot Training Program for pilots during WWII (for which she herself learned how to fly), Turner combined a wealth of knowledge with an unassuming personality. She kept notes from her walks along the path, identifying where there was trash, what plants were growing, and which railroad ties would make good resting spots. Known to be practical, from her no-nonsense attire of bandana and comfortable walking shoes to her ability to work with all ages, Turner exhibited "sheer stamina" and dedication that inspired all who worked with her on the project (E. Holmes to Turner). Creator of the first map and keeper of the path's early history, Turner recognized and shared Watts' vision.

Jane Sindt

Jane Sindt, Watts' Naperville neighbor and preservation enthusiast, took pride in being among the first to embrace Watts' vision for the path. "I was one of the first that helped plant the seed," she wrote in April 1973, "saw it sprout—helped nurture it" (Sindt to P. Mooring). Sindt

was loyal to many causes in Naperville, and she spearheaded many grassroots preservation projects, including the establishment of Naper Village, to preserve historic buildings.

Having traveled extensively during her childhood, living a rootless life on a Pullman, Sindt valued a sense of place when she settled in Naperville. For this reason, she developed a deep appreciation for the history of her town. One reporter wrote of her, "In her 38 years of citizenship in Naperville, Sindt has arguably done more to preserve the historic, small-town charm of the community than anyone else" (Leland 1). Saving buildings, envisioning an area for a Riverwalk project, and understanding the value of history while thinking about Naperville's future, Sindt was able to see possibility beyond the limited scope of other people's ideas about progress (Fig. 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Jane Sindt
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

With experience in taking on preservation projects, Sindt was a natural fit for Watts' path project. She believed that "everything for the auto is what takes away history," an idea that echoed Watts' frustration with big highways and expanding parking lots devouring open space (Leland 1). Sindt was part of an early campaign in Naperville to establish trees along the city's streets (Barnes 1). She had worked with Watts at The Morton Arboretum and later joined the

original group of women who endorsed Watts' idea for the footpath. One record from the early IPPc documents revealed that Sindt was involved with the project well before the March 3 meeting at the Holmes' house in Wayne. Holmes and Sindt were actively promoting Watts' path idea through interviews and networking (E. Holmes to Sindt). After that initial March meeting, Sindt recalled, "There were five of us who met every Saturday morning at May's house. Each meeting we'd make a battle plan for the coming week" (Barnes 6). Sindt recognized in Watts a commitment to their shared Naperville home.

Lillian Lasch

At least one of the members of the Committee of Exploration took more of a behind-the-scenes approach to working on the path project. Even in more secondary roles, Lillian Lasch dedicated fourteen years of her life to making the Illinois Prairie Path a reality. She was the first recording secretary for the organization and carefully kept the notes for the board meetings. Later she took charge of path membership and served as chairman of the board as well: "The countless hours spent in tending to the tasks of membership, as well as other duties will be measured in the pleasure of those that use and enjoy the Illinois Prairie Path" ("Lillian A. Lasch Tribute"). As an avid outdoor enthusiast, Lasch understood how to increase and sustain membership. She had experience working on the conservation of Illinois' waterways and was also membership chair of the Illinois Paddling Council (Lasch to Marathon Paddler). From her love of canoeing, Lasch understood the value of the natural resources in Illinois, and she wanted to build connections among the area's forest preserves, waterways, and the prairie path.

Even after her retirement from The IPPc board, shortly before her death, Lasch continued to promote the path in her capacity as membership chair through mailings. Lasch encouraged friends of the Prairie Path to become members, "Surprisingly few of the estimated 300,000

hikers, bikers, and horseback riders who use the Path every year know of the key role played by our one thousand loyal members in the trail's success story" (Lasch to Friend). Lasch was instrumental in securing the continuity of the Illinois Prairie Path. She was eager to share the news of the Cook County segment being added to the Illinois Prairie Path with her friends, Phoebe and Liz, who were also part of this group of women. She felt useful in her role as chairman of the board: "For the first time I was in the middle of a photo when something outstanding came about for the Path. Up to today *No* picture of me had ever gotten into print" (Lasch to E. Holmes and Ryerson). It was this shared sense of accomplishment, coupled with a feeling of usefulness that conveyed the passion of these early path pioneers. They were in it together.

Phoebe Ryerson

Phoebe Ryerson, Holmes' neighbor in Wayne, became involved with the path when she joined the Wayne Garden Club. Ryerson explained, "Friends finally nailed me to garden club membership. . . . At my first meeting May Theilgaard Watts spoke" ("Public Relation Statement" 1). Watts' message struck Ryerson for personal reasons, both in terms of its delivery and in how it stirred up feelings in her about local activism. Ryerson came from a tradition of social activism: "Mrs. Watts presented that day not a dream—but a practicality—to me, the daughter of an engineer—a park board and community house chairman—a precinct committeeman and churchman—and because I am an ex-resident of Winnetka; a town whose pride in the leadership of responsible individuals at the local level in education and village management exceeds that of ancient Athens" (2). Ryerson took great pride in her involvement with the path.

Figure 2.4. Phoebe Ryerson and Marv Chandler, Northern Illinois Gas, 1971
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

A combination of tactics and tenacity helped Ryerson navigate her many interactions with organizations in the community in discussing path matters. In one photo, Ryerson pointed to a map of the Illinois Prairie Path (Fig. 2.4). Beside her was chairman of Northern Illinois Gas, Marv Chandler, but even the photo seemed to give Ryerson the upper hand. Ryerson recognized that enlisting the help of the organizations that impacted accessing the right-of-way would ultimately lead to the desired goals for the path. In a letter she wrote to Chandler, Ward, and McDowell, Ryerson appealed to their willingness to conduct relations in a new way:

> Why not, for my sake and yours, (before we all lose our speed) officially set a new public relations pattern? Public Utilities can lead the field by donating the use of power and pipeline rights-of-way and access easements to public walking, bicycling and riding trails. It would be an immense and popular contribution to the nation—and would get great coverage in the conservation-mad press! You are such public spirited and cooperative companies, that I cannot bear to have you not get credit for pioneering the coming network of interlocking trails. (Ryerson to Chandler et al. 1)

Ryerson's strength lay in finding new working relationships to collaborate with organizations and make their leaders feel empowered and engaged as a result.

In 1970, Holmes listed all of Ryerson's many accomplishments for the path, among them the ways in which she persuaded local officials to acquiesce to her wishes. For example, "It was Phoebe Ryerson–who received original permission from Edison to walk on their easements–who 'conned' the DuPage supervisors into LISTENING to us; –who convinced Northern Illinois of our WORTH so that they paid for and produced our first mailing, who 'sold' the president of DuKane Corporation on the PATH idea so that he simply GAVE us 6 projectors (with sound) as our first 'sales tool'" (E. Holmes to Bill Nemec 1). Ryerson used her connections to secure help and to show the ways in which the IPP promoted community connectivity.

Ryerson's forte seemed to be in building relations with agencies and organizations within the region. She held dinner parties with the mayor of Wheaton and attended council meetings, lunched with Kane county supervisors, and worked with the National Accelerator Laboratory (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 1-2). Ryerson "believed in tackling the TOP MAN, whether of a utility company or a planning commission or the CNW railroad. She had her vital facts, but – to use her own phrase – she 'just flirted them up a bit', and led them to see what a terrific public relations opportunity we were offering them" (3). In her own account of the path project's relation with the Edison Company, Ryerson defined the purpose of the path: "The Illinois Prairie Path has been designated a National Recreational Trail and has won international recognition as a pioneer effort of coordination between private, public, governmental and quasi governmental bodies to create inter-urban recreational passages of open space" (Ryerson to Ayers 3). She prided herself on the group's initiatives to coordinate community connections. One thread that united many of the commentaries about the women's efforts was the idea of people coming together to build

connections, both within the continuity of the path and in the grassroots efforts of the path's promoters.

While Watts wanted the Illinois Prairie Path to be the result of citizens participating in a grassroots effort, Ryerson and some of the other women realized that bureaucratic agencies needed convincing to have some buy-in for the project (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 9). The newly formed group and the IPP became a model for other organizations. Ryerson explained, "We have become the pilot for other areas – coordinating local government utilities – businesses, conservationist scouts, and schools and thousands of individuals into a home grown multi-purpose solution to the fearsome future, concrete jungle megalopolis" (Ryerson 3-4). She knew the appeal of a grassroots effort.

Ryerson also understood how to help people work together so everyone emerged from the meetings feeling as though each party achieved its goals. To be a cooperative third party, Ryerson said, "has been our constant endeavor – helping each person in each of the many interested functions to trust the others – for a mutually satisfactory number of years" (Ryerson 8). Ryerson's networking skills and understanding of the nuances of bureaucratic and agency dealings, along with her persuasive and winning personality, gave the path project direction and purpose. Holmes argued, "Feeling as I do: . . . we have EACH contributed what we could . . . . Mrs. Watts' project would never have become today's PRAIRIE PATH without Phoebe" (E. Holmes to Bill Nemec 2).

Elizabeth Holmes

Testimonies, speeches, and letters built the narrative of the path's early history. These documents recorded the voices of the organization, and the personalities and insights of the women emerged through the words on the page. As the path's first corresponding secretary,

Elizabeth Holmes wrote countless letters to request, urge, appease, and explain. Her typewritten notes were easily identifiable by her use of hyphens, stitching together ideas and phrases, and capital letters, showing her enthusiasm and emphasis. Holmes had a way of using self-deprecation to build others' egos as she continued to share her own interests and commitment to the path project. To one board member, she wrote, "Your letters to Volpe and Turner are SUPERLATIVELY, insidiously GREAT. Ah me– why should I ever even TRY??" (E. Holmes to McCardle).

Holmes practiced the art of making her readers feel important. As she constructed her written arguments, she used humor, networking, and persuasion to inspire them to become involved and take action. She also expressed strong feelings about what she wanted in the place where she lived. In one political letter to fellow Wayne residents, she and Phoebe Ryerson endorsed George Pratt for the position of Wayne Township supervisor: "Wayne Township needs him on the County Board as Wayne's voice now, as the Chicago area threatens to engulf us. He has been a tireless, stalwart, and accurate guide on countless Wayne Township and DuPage County projects" (E. Holmes & Ryerson). Holmes and Ryerson wanted leadership that would protect their town from being "engulfed." The path project was a means of helping in that process, and electing officials who supported the project became a priority.

Watts' idea for the footpath brought the women together as a group, and they operated out of fundamental feelings they had about the landscape and about how to solve a problem together. In a commentary for her alma mater Holmes wrote, "The important aspect to me is that I have really contributed nothing to Conservation, except as the member of the GROUP EFFORT on a GRASS-ROOTS project. The value of any telling of the Illinois PRAIRIE PATH is in how it 'grew' (like the *FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS*!)" (Ferry Hall School 4). Holmes learned her

appreciation for the natural world from her parents, as well as from her many summers spent in the Upper Peninsula, and then shared that passion with her own children. She was a gardener, attended classes at The Morton Arboretum, and became captivated by the idea of ecology and the teaching of May Watts.

Figure 2.5. Elizabeth Holmes, 1967
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

Photos of Elizabeth Holmes depicted the ways in which she worked on the path (Fig. 2.5). Standing on a bridge overlooking construction, photographing the hanging of the first sign on a drizzly day, or carrying boxes for a mailing with Lillian Lasch, she was clearly an important part of the operation of the group. Holmes believed in focusing one's efforts on one cause, even while supporting many conservation projects. She explained to Paul Mooring on February 10, 1973, "Yes – as individuals we do care about eagles along the Mississippi, about population explosion and flooded Managua and wild rivers and proper sewerage and a hundred other good solid causes. But we have felt that the PATH organization could not spread itself so thin – and have it MEAN anything" (E. Holmes to P. Mooring). In this response, as in other of the women's

writing, Holmes referred to the work of the original group from 1964-1968 as the true fight for the path that she and the others so valiantly fought.

A Group Effort

All six of the women believed in stewardship and in safeguarding experiences in nature. They wanted their suburban towns to keep the open space they valued when they had moved there. They also valued the idea of group work, even with its potential for friction or ego to interfere. Holmes wrote to Paul Mooring, when he assumed the leadership role later in the path's development, "Believe me: we WANT to work with you!! . . . I guess we're just used to expressing our feelings 'out-loud', but disagreement (or misunderstanding) does NOT mean MUTINY!" (E. Holmes to P. Mooring, Wed. a.m.). The fight for the footpath was the central synergizing force for these women, as well as for the other members who made up the path's story. In their minds and memories, the footpath project was always a group effort. Holmes cited a line from William H. Whyte's *The Last Landscape*, where he referenced the Illinois Prairie Path, "'It is a rare r/w which does not have an incredibly complicated legal and political history behind it, and unsnarling questions of title and jurisdiction is difficult under the best of circumstances. It takes a hard core of screwballs to see this kind of project through.' You'd think he knew us personally!" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 12).

The six women believed that belonging to a group such as the Illinois Prairie Path's Committee of Exploration meant feeling like part of a family. They stood up for each other, even though they may not have always agreed on how to run their newly forming organization. When new board members wanted to solicit more affluent members for donations and fund drives, for example, Lasch explained, "In the past, we have found it advantageous to encourage the local groups to assume expenses in their own areas. . . . Many individuals and groups have asked to be

included in the work force when needed. Isn't this feeling much more important than a few dollars?" (Lasch to P. Mooring). She advocated for the members of the organization; it was the feeling of belonging and working together that made the group strong and successful, not the emphasis on money.

As the path project moved forward, the women drew on the common interests and values that brought the group together. The women were quick to respond to negative feedback about their organization. When supposed critics called The IPPc board "'uncooperative, lackadaisical, indecisive and rather weak,'" Lasch repudiated their comments. She responded, "Somehow that doesn't sound like the group of people who fought for IPP from an idea to the Path as it stands today. You [Paul Mooring] were not present when we had to pull all the stops to fight the County board until they passed on the word 'If you don't listen we'll turn loose that bunch of women on you,' which threat resulted in various committees giving second looks at our requests" (Lasch to P. Mooring). All of the women emphasized the importance of the *group's* efforts in leading the future direction of the IPP, and not only one member's ambitions. This important distinction helped the women remain true to their mission and work toward their goals as collaborators.

Building a Broader Network of Support

Once Watts' original Committee of Exploration assessed the potential for using the abandoned right-of-way, the women recognized that they needed a broader network of support. They also wanted to find some existing organization, be it forest preserve or another conservation group, to which they could connect their vision and possibly their source of funding. By joining with another organization, the women hoped they could build a stronger core of supporters as allies to confront county leaders who had different ideas for the abandoned land that did not include a footpath.

Frances Follin, one of Watts' many supporters as well as a prairie path donor, had originally reached out to the new director of the Open Lands Project, Gunnar Peterson, as a potential connection, after she heard about Watts' idea for the footpath. Peterson replied, "I had read with interest the *Daily News* story on the Society pages of the work that Mrs. Watts has been doing for the trail and I have known of her good work with the Morton Arboretum for a number of years. It sounds like a very interesting project and one that ought to be developed" (Peterson to Follin).

Peterson wanted to get the word out about the path. He felt the Open Lands Project would be a good organization to further this process:

> I am working currently on a project for the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago that is devoted to the preservation of open space and the establishment of as many recreational areas and conservation areas as is possible. It is supported by three foundations here in Chicago—is called the Open Lands Project—and has a committee to guide its activities. The Committee is composed of persons interested in conservation and who are taking a look at all of the potential sources for open space preservation in the area. (Peterson to Follin)

Peterson's focus on open land conservation was the perfect fit to help Watts and Turner develop the public footpath. The project became instrumental for Peterson, as well, whose organization was just beginning to define itself as a proponent for conservation in the Chicago region.

The Open Lands Project began in 1963 as a response to the increasing urban sprawl in metropolitan Chicago. As outlined in "Open Lands Project: Background Information, Program Proposals," one of the most important features of the organization was that it helped individuals

and groups achieve their goals in regards to preserving open space: "The project's basic function is to carry out and help others engage in a program of public education, understanding and action on the problems of open lands preservation, acquisition, and enlargement" (Open Lands Committee 1). The group working on the Illinois Prairie Path seemed a perfect match for the Open Lands Project. Both organizations focused on developing opportunities for recreation close to home, because so many Chicago area residents were limited by geography to the metropolitan area and by time to free hours after work or on the weekends.

In its program description, the Open Lands Project outlined the main reason for this need to preserve open space: population growth. The organization identified some of the statistics, more surprising at that time than now, illustrating the problem of growth in the metropolitan Chicago area. The numbers were dramatic: "In the Chicago-Northeastern Illinois area, according to the population predictions, by 1980 there will be an increase of 1,940,000 persons (a twenty-eight percent increase) bringing the total to 8,161,000. To accommodate these residents with housing, shops, industry and facilities, between 400 and 450 square miles of land will be used up—some 288,000 acres—about twelve percent of the total land area in the six counties. By 1980, only one fourth of the vacant land will exist that was available in 1956!" ("Background Information" 2). Leaders at all legislative levels were focused on this problem during the early 1960s. Citizens began to take action as well, and the group leading the Illinois Prairie Path project served as a prime example of citizen action.

Chicago had a history of citizen action when it came to establishing parks. Up to 1880, "public-spirited citizens gave the city a few park areas and City Council action . . . established the Chicago Park system as the pride and glory of the city and gave it a rating of second place to Philadelphia in all the park areas of the United States" ("Background Information" 4). However,

acquiring land for parks came to a halt somewhere at the turn of the century, and Chicago's position dropped dramatically to 32nd place compared to other cities' park acquisition in the country. Working toward increasing the amount of land for parks was not a new phenomenon when the Open Lands Project was established. Yet the urgency to do so became increasingly important. The Open Lands Project identified and categorized different types of parks and their recreational uses and also linked them to organizations from levels of neighborhood to region that operated them. As outlined by Watts, the Illinois Prairie Path was a local or neighborhood linear park that extended throughout the region, so it had unique characteristics that Peterson recognized early on as beneficial on multiple levels.

One of the first initiatives for the prairie path project was a meeting that would bring together key people from the community whose input was needed to develop the path. The first meeting took place in Watts' dining room in early 1964. There, she and the other Committee of Exploration members met with "Gunnar Peterson of Open Lands, a Villa Park city planner, a Cook County Forest Preserve representative (Eisenbeis), and Elmhurst Park District director (Ron Johnson)—there were others but chief among them, for us, was Commonwealth Edison's Ray Franke, head of their real estate department" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 3). After this initial meeting at Watts' home, the efforts of the committee continued to increase and became more focused.

Peterson mentored the fledgling group. With the same kind of verve expressed by Watts, Peterson realized that they had to "get" the path and act quickly. "I will be happy to meet with your group at some time in the near future," he wrote Watts on January 16, 1964, "to discuss further what kinds of action might be taken from here on, to see that the plan can develop into full fruition. There are so few places where it is possible to do an adequate job of open space

preservation and when an opportunity like this comes along, it certainly should be pursued as vigorously as possible" (Peterson to Watts). The initial committee formed during the January 28, 1964 meeting at Watts' house, where the primary issues discussed by Watts and Peterson were ownership and the battle for land acquisition.

In February of 1964, the group settled on a name for the path, "Illinois Prairie Path." Watts wrote, "We soon chose a name. We decided against 'Trail' because that seems to belong to the longer, dramatic, vacation-type of walks. We chose 'Illinois Prairie Path' remembering that this section of the country was roaming-ground for buffalo, and Indians hunting them through the tall grass" ("The Story of a Single Footpath" 78). Peterson was on hand at the meeting to report that the DuPage County Forest Preserve, North Eastern Illinois Metropolis Planning Commission, and the Nature Preserve Committee would all endorse the footpath project (Turner 2). By mid-February of 1964, the interest in the group and the project had increased, and representatives from various organizations were present. After the February 17 meeting, Peterson and the Open Lands Project continued to work extensively with the group for several years, until they were well established (3). By the end of 1964, the committee had become a board. These first months the group dedicated to surveying the land, mapping the area, promoting the project, and working to secure the right-of-way for path use.

"What Are the Next Steps?"

In those early months, the original Committee of Exploration, along with some of their husbands and other interested volunteers, began to do their research. Holmes remarked, "First, we had to know who really owned the CA&E r/w. Through George Pratt, our Wayne township supervisor, we learned that the Aurora Corp. held title to about a quarter of the 28 miles in DuPage County; that Commonwealth Edison Co. owned a somewhat larger portion and (most

important) held easements in perpetuity over nearly ALL of it. Furthermore, Northern Illinois Gas Co. had title to a number of short narrow bits and pieces for their pipe crossings, plus some easements" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 2). Working with the utility companies posed major challenges for the women as they tried to secure the railroad right-of-way in continuity. Franke, who worked for Commonwealth Edison, had explained that having a recreational path in conjunction with a utility company posed certain problems with liability. As a result of this information, winning over Commonwealth Edison emerged as a new priority.

The women became more determined than ever to convince the utility companies their idea could work, explaining how the utility's willingness to join the effort would build good community relations and result in positive publicity. Ryerson's plea to Northern Illinois Gas Company, Commonwealth Edison Company, and Peoples Gas Company relayed the message best: "Public utilities can lead the field by donating the use of power and pipeline rights-of-way and access easements to public walking, bicycling and riding trails" (Ryerson to Chandler et al. 1). Although Ryerson and her husband, who worked for Northern Illinois Gas Company, negotiated with the utilities, the struggle to gain these companies' support was ongoing.

Northern Illinois Gas was interested in helping the women, but as the chairman, Marvin Chandler, explained, "Unfortunately, all but three of our rights of way are single purpose easements where only the rights for underground use have been purchased. In some cases, where full use is legal, we have leased some land for farming. In another case, there is only about a quarter mile of uninterrupted right of way, hardly enough for a useful path" (Chandler to Ryerson). Northern Illinois Gas eventually granted The IPPc a license to use the company right-of-way for the path. Commonwealth Edison was bigger challenge: "Edison had power poles the entire length of the Path and some of them were high voltage. Edison was extremely wary of

adding to its exposure to public liability which it thought traffic on the path would increase. The company's original requirement was for a 6-foot chain link fence, enclosing the path" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 8). After a legal struggle, the issue was resolved in favor of The IPPc, and "the Edison lease was signed." Battles with the utility companies presented some of the early struggles of the group to secure the railroad right-of-way.

Another major issue for path development focused on where the interest was in buying the right-of-way. The women were determined to find some way to buy the land before "developers" and city planners could obtain it. This undertaking became the source of their greatest obstacle and their proudest triumph. It turned out that DuPage County had the biggest interest in purchasing the land, and county supervisors, like Watts and Peterson, recognized the value of the right-of-way in continuity. To lose control of the whole linear corridor because many people wanted individual parts, they believed, would compromise its capacity for multiple uses. Suburbs along the right-of-way began to vie for their own interests.

When Peterson joined the group to assist the project, DuPage County was determined to purchase the rights-of-way in continuity, but individual villages and towns, such as Wheaton and Glen Ellyn, wanted to have sole ownership of their section of the right-of-way to use it as they wished. This battle over land was familiar territory for Peterson. His experience in negotiating with different representatives from the various interested parties was useful in helping the Illinois Prairie Path Committee achieve its goals. One Open Lands Project report stated, "The Open Lands Project Committee asked its director, Gunnar Peterson, to visit with the various officials, to attempt to determine the facts and find some way of reconciling differences in order to expedite the Prairie Path in which we are so interested" (Peterson, "Report of Conferences" 1). The biggest stumbling block in the negotiations was the perceived motives of DuPage County to

reserve the rights-of-way for future highway projects; Wheaton and Glen Ellyn opposed this plan. Peterson saw his role as mediator and path advocate. The next step included broadening the sphere of influence and organizing another meeting, this time at a neutral space, The Morton Arboretum. In this way, representatives from the various towns, cities, boards, and organizations met on even ground. Moving out of the dining room and into a larger setting marked a shift in the group's activities and approach.

Watts' idea prompted a series of questions, and some of the answers came from individuals gathered in those first meetings during those early months of planning. In fact, the June 27, 1964 meeting agenda consisted primarily of questions to promote discussion and generate a plan for the next course of action. The questions ranged from logistics about finances, maintenance, landscaping, and gauging public interest: "Where are we in acquisition? What plantings are possible? What are the legal problems? Is any of the Path open for use? What do the communities think of it? What about finances? Who supervises the Path? Where do we get bridges? How do we answer objections? Who keeps it clean? Are maps available? Where can we get drinking water? What are the next steps?" (Open Lands Project, "Illinois Prairie Path Meeting"). The goal of the meeting, in addition to understanding their current status regarding the path as well as future plans, was to involve "selected individuals who share our concern for the establishment of the Illinois Prairie Path, and who are involved in the matter at a variety of levels: legal, natural, commercial, recreational, governmental, and educational."

During this phase, Peterson and the Open Lands Project invited a new way of looking at the initiative for a public footpath from a regional perspective, involving input from the many different parties involved. For Watts and Turner, the focus for developing the path remained a grassroots approach, enlisting the support of community members to get involved and get their

hands dirty. Peterson's vision for the project introduced more layers of governmental involvement from working with DuPage County officials to enlisting help from state and national levels to help secure the land for the path.

Soon after the first meeting at The Morton Arboretum, Peterson wrote a letter to Helen Turner to be shared with the Committee of Exploration. The records indicated that Peterson was a mentor to the group, but at this early stage, it cannot be denied that he had an organizational vision for Watts and her committee. His July 8, 1964 letter to Turner captured this vision. "It seems well for us," he wrote, "to think of some kind of formal structure for the Illinois Prairie Path Committee. While we have gone along very well on the informal basis that we have up to this point, there may be real advantage in having a regular Illinois Prairie Path Committee that is following this whole matter through to completion and to also develop the kind of sub-committees around various areas of interest and concern that we ought to be engaged in" (Peterson to Turner). Peterson's careful wording, his use of "we," illustrated that he considered himself part of the group. Addressing Turner about the group's organization indicated that she, more than Watts, dealt with specific details about the organization.

Peterson outlined for Turner and the committee that he believed in starting small, even while he had a broad vision. In his letter to Turner, he advocated for a more formal structure, indicating a desire to expand the framework of the organization, at the same time as he stressed the need to "keep the groups small until we have done some preliminary thinking about this," in reference to formalizing a proper operating committee. Peterson recognized the benefits of working with the existing dynamic of the organization in a way that he could then expand the framework to meet future needs. He knew how to communicate with the committee to find a

common ground and nudge them in ways that would benefit the organization and the path project itself.

In *Community and the Politics of Place*, Kemmis describes a model that Peterson and Watts shared, as "people who had learned by repeated experience that they could count on each other, and in doing so accomplish difficult and important tasks together" (72). They were neighbors, residents of the same place, who shared common values and knew how to relate to each other in a public way. According to Kemmis, there is greater success of problem solving in smaller political entities. Peterson understood this concept, but he also recognized that smaller entities coming together had more political clout and influence when united around a common cause.

As the group expanded to include other members, it became even clearer that these citizens shared common values about land use, recreation, and good living. Kemmis argues, "People who engage in these kinds of activities experience what it is to operate within a system of shared values" (75). Watts and Peterson fostered the values that the early members of the organization shared. Peterson was certainly an instrumental figure in the story of the Illinois Prairie Path's development. However, many other important professionals emerged as integral to the prairie path project.

Several of the women's husbands whose jobs provided helpful contacts served the organization through their professional roles. For example, Holmes' husband helped as the prairie path organization's lawyer, and Ryerson's husband, an employee of Northern Illinois Gas Company, served on The IPPc board as well. Watts' husband, Raymond Watts, was also actively involved in the path's development. Bill Nemec and his wife Betty joined the group in the early

stages, and while she became the path historian, he eventually served as the board president who led the trail to its National Recreation Trail status. Everyone involved shared a common vision.

The women needed their husbands to fill out the board. Sam Holmes explained, "Looking to the future, we thought we should have a 13-member board, that there would be enough work for that many people. At the outset, however, there were so few persons actively involved with the Path that 4 husbands had to be recruited as board members for the time being" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 7). The men who participated in the project were certainly sympathetic to the cause. These influential men worked alongside their wives and the other women in the group toward a common goal. They were also able to communicate with Peterson through their roles as professionals in the community. In this way, Peterson's vision of broadening the group to work on different levels was initially realized through the participation of these men. Their involvement helped advance the path in the years to come.

Educating the public became one primary function of the Open Lands Project, and in these efforts, Peterson worked tirelessly to assist the prairie path group. He and Watts shared a vision for helping the public understand why there was a need to preserve open space in the Chicago area. Groups such as the one working on the Illinois Prairie Path identified and understood a need for public recreation space in their community. However, many people found it more challenging to recognize the need for open space and to seek action, labeled by the Open Lands Project as a "public acceptance lag" (Open Lands Committee, "Open Lands Project" 10). Wanting to inform area residents that improvements were necessary and beneficial became a driving mission. Both Peterson and Watts had their work cut out for them. The prairie path group needed a stronger internal structure to be able to unite, take action, and get the word out;

Peterson realized the path group would be instrumental in convincing the public that the path was a good idea.

Building a Platform for a Public Footpath

Peterson's organization, the Open Lands Project, produced an overview of the Illinois Prairie Path to build support for the project. In much the same format as the early histories of the path, Peterson's document provided background for the project, starting with the railroad's cease of operation and uses for the right-of-way. One of the largest obstacles the group had to face was the barrage of garbage that littered the linear corridor: "In some areas the original land owners have cultivated portions of the right of way. The remainder of the property is standing idle. There is some usage of the road bed as an alley and as a dumping ground" (Open Lands Committee, "The Illinois Prairie Path" 1). One of Watts' initiatives was forming a planning committee "which immediately started assigning sections of the path to the care of volunteers" (S. Holmes and E. Holmes 13).

The Open Lands Project also promoted the idea of many volunteers and communities becoming involved with the project. In this way, Peterson's vision was very much in line with Watts' original idea of individuals and groups adopting path segments. Watts explained, "Some volunteers of the various sections were: Girl Scout groups, Boy Scout groups, the Isaac Walton League, the Prairie Club, the Friends of Our Native Landscape, the Sierra Club, various garden clubs, the Illinois Audubon Society, the DuPage Audubon Society, a cyclist group, a public school, a college biology department, a community, families, a prairie specialist, other individuals" (Watts, "The Illinois Prairie Path" 13). At the same time as groups volunteered their services to improve the physical space of the abandoned corridor, the committee worked to understand the legality of title and jurisdiction and to consider how the project would be funded

and by whom. Watts and Peterson were both determined to find the best way to achieve their common goal.

Promoting the Path Project

One of the first collaborations between Watts and Peterson was a filmstrip they produced together to publicize the path. Many references to the showing of the filmstrip appeared in the group's reports and documents, including the way in which the group received a welcome donation of film projectors on which to show the filmstrip. This form of publicity facilitated the mass dissemination of information about the project that any group member could oversee. Unlike Watts and Turner whose command of the room and ease of presenting carried the message about the path dream, other members such as Holmes and even Peterson made use of the filmstrip to reach audiences of potential supporters.

The Open Lands Project had assisted with the first mass mailing, offering memberships in the Path group for $1.00, and Northern Illinois Gas helped cover the cost of postage. From the introduction of the idea in a public mailing, the group then moved to creating the informative filmstrip. Written by Watts and narrated by another neighbor, Clint Youle (a former local weatherman at one of the Chicago stations), the filmstrip served as a united community effort to persuade the public to support Watts' idea. Holmes recalled,

> We put together a 9-minute film-strip to spread the word throughout the area contiguous to the r/w. We each dug up a few of our own color transparencies that might look like a future footpath – or that showed the current condition of the old CA&E roadbed. Next we consulted a film company in Wheaton, and finally we propositioned Mac Stone, president of the DuKane Corp., manufacturers of communication

> equipment in St. Charles. We said we needed a projector – with sound – to help us sell our 'product.' 'Take half a dozen of'em m'dears!' was his response. (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 4).

Beginning with a picture of a "drooling bulldozer," an image that resonated with an early 1960s suburban audience, the filmstrip became a visual history of the right-of-way. Next it had "a picture of the dear old Roaring Elgin bucketing down the track. Pictures of prairie dock and big bluestem grasses and blazing star show why the Prairie Path was so named. There were pictures of gray dogwood hedges and wild plum thickets, cows in pastures and sheep in farmyards, hawthorn blossoms and scattered piles of trash along the way. You caught a glimpse of hikers on a snowy winter trail and bikers enjoying a summer jaunt" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 4). By watching the filmstrip, audiences were able to see the potential for the footpath. Peterson's involvement with the project included traveling with the projector and showing the film. One estimate he gave suggested that the filmstrip had been seen by as many as 6,000 people (Maersh). The variety of individuals and groups interested in the project rose steadily with each showing of the filmstrip. He said, "Clean streams committees, garden clubs, park districts, civic and service clubs, forest preserve officials, bridle clubs, hiking clubs, conservation groups and community officials have all shown interest in the nature trail idea" (Maersh).

The filmstrip became the primary vehicle for communicating the path's potential as well as its vulnerable state. Ryerson, Sindt, and Holmes relied on the filmstrip, not having Watts' and Turner's chalk-talk and lecture repertoire "on their circuit, gathering fame and fortune for the Path as they went" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 4). Showing the filmstrip became an easy way for the women to introduce the IPP and then answer questions. The majority of their 400 showings were well received in Cook, DuPage, and Kane Counties by "garden clubs, Girl Scouts, Jaycees,

Audubon Societies, civic and conservation and church groups" (4). Holmes explained that some of the town meetings and county hearings met with more resistance and criticism. She recalled,

> I remember one stocky man, with his hat on the back of his head and a cigar sticking belligerently out of the corner of his mouth, rising up from the rear of the room (after my usual enthusiastic presentation) and calling out – "Listen, lady, you just try and gimme one good reason why I should vote for one damn penny of my taxes to go for some kinda trail where my daughter could be raped!"
>
> Fortunately, I could answer by quoting the superintendents of both the Chicago Park District and Elgin's Trout Park – "There'll be fewer opportunities for crime on a popular Prairie Path than on an old abandoned railroad grade!" (4-5)

Peterson used the filmstrip to persuade Chicago foundations, planning commissions, and the utility companies. The filmstrip became the most important marketing tool for the organization.

The boy in the bulldozer in the first image was Peterson's son, an image created to symbolize "the path itself—young, tender, vulnerable, and a little worried about the power of those efficient jaws that can gobble up the whole idea and spit it out unrecognizable" (Open Lands Project, *The Illinois Prairie Path* 1). Whereas the prairie path group had no funds to purchase the land or pay for legal fees, the filmstrip served as a medium of far-reaching influence. According to Platt, "Most persuasive among the IPP methods of arousing voter interest was a ten-minute film strip, made with the help of the Open Lands Project and a film company, with projectors donated by a manufacturer. Shown to hundreds of residents and officials in the various contiguous communities, it aroused wide public sentiment for the project"

(35). The end of the filmstrip featured important local community members, all of whom were shown participating in some enjoyable recreational aspect of the path. The filmstrip mentioned influential organizations as well, including the DuPage Forest Preserve Commission, Boy Scouts, Northern Illinois Gas Company, DuKane Corporation, and the Illinois Izaac Walton League (Open Lands Project, *The Illinois Prairie Path* 8-9). Volunteers using the filmstrip, and other means, to promote the path gained both support and publicity.

Later in 1966, the group wanted to create a documentary film. They envisioned that the twenty-minute movie might be shared with governmental officials on all levels in order to aid in securing the footpath. With sponsors supporting the documentary, including the Open Lands Project, and more projected to come forward, including the Department of the Interior and Agriculture, Ryerson urged the Prairie Path board to move forward with the film (Ryerson to Prairie Path Board). Ryerson also sought sponsorship from the *Chicago Tribune*, persuading its editor to join other sponsors, such as Northern Illinois and Commonwealth Edison. In her letter, written on *Cavalcade Productions Inc.* letterhead, Ryerson wrote, "We believe that [the film] will inspire the Federal Government agencies, who will be using the film extensively, to recognize that there are still individuals and local organizations capable of coordinating projects in their own behalf" (Ryerson to McFall). The film was to be a documentary that showed its viewers the steps it took for the Illinois Prairie Path to transform from an idea into an actuality.

As they outlined the movie project, its purpose was twofold. First, the group hoped the film would be used at national levels to help other communities gain interest in developing their own projects. Second, they wanted the film to be broadcasted and shown extensively in the Chicago area to raise awareness and interest in the Illinois Prairie Path and to showcase all that the path had to offer. The film would serve as both educational and publicity tool. The proposal

for the movie project highlighted some of the developing dynamics and roles within the group as well. The movie would include an ecological profile, leadership roles (listing Watts and Peterson specifically), citizen volunteers and committees, and other components of the process of path development. According to the proposal outline, "All of these elements would be interwoven in a fast-paced, exhilarating film document of a notable community achievement" ("A Film Presentation" 3). Film became an important promotional resource for the group during its early stages of development, and Peterson and the prairie path board capitalized on this new medium to promote their project.

Another important source of promotion was walks along the path. Holmes recounted, "Another effective stick we used to stir up public interest and convince the supervisors to support our use of the r/w as a 'Path' was a series of WALKS. They were planned by the Naperville group as they had scouted every foot of the r/w, and each WALK was led by one or more talented volunteer from among our friends or by our own Board members—a botanist or a geologist, perhaps an ornithologist or a historian or a railroad buff" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 5). The first of these walks took place in only a day's notice. Eighty people showed up, including hikers, students, museum experts, Arboretum members, and residents from towns in the Wayne area. According to Dornfeld's "Illinois Prairie Path," attendance on such short notice on a Saturday, "the busy day for suburbanites and farmers," was remarkable. Turner led the first stretch of the walk and highlighted features of the path, including limestone bedrock outcroppings, a swamp, and an old hemp mill (16). Watts conducted the segment of the walk near Wheaton, where she led the group through "tall native grasses." At the end of the walk, everyone was convinced "that the footpath was the proper answer for what to do with the Chicago, Aurora & Elgin Right-of-Way" (16). This first walk drummed up interest and led to

other walks, including those focused on bird watching and wildflowers as well as annual path walks for members.

One of the most popular and promoted walks occurred on October 23, 1965, when the group organized twenty-three specialized field trips (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 5). Topics ranged from prairie plants and nature photography to land forms and rocks. "Mrs. Watts," Liz Holmes recalled, "statuesque Earth Mother – was seen giving her talk on 'methods of teaching nature classes' crouched on a camp stool in the shelter of a big culvert!" (6). Even though it was a miserably cold and wet day, the group felt positively about the turnout. Lil Lasch took one group out canoeing at South Elgin and got nearly blown off course because of the winds, but the group wanted the public to see that the path had potential connections with regional waterways as well. It was a magnanimous effort by the group to invite the public to see everything that the Illinois Prairie Path had to offer.

During these many events and promotional planning periods, Peterson was busy behind the scenes networking. The group had become a not-for-profit corporation (The IPPc) under Peterson's guidance. After the meeting on February 17, 1964, Turner wrote, "Gunnar Peterson and the Open Lands organization continued to work with and for us for several years—until we were so well established that we could stand alone" (Turner, "The Early Days of the Path" 3). Peterson worked diligently in 1965 to help secure the lease for the right-of-way. With his regional, state, and national connections—because of his work with the Open Lands Project—he was able to mediate between sparring groups.

When negotiations between The IPPc and the counties were fraught with tension, "the Open Lands Project committee asked [Peterson] to talk to all parties concerned. His investigation brought out assurances that all were interested in the idea of the Prairie Path, and when the

county commissioners said that no highway could be constructed without the approval of the municipalities, reconciliation became apparent" (Open Lands Project, "Illinois Prairie Path Progresses" 1). Peterson needed the prairie path project to mobilize his organization, and Watts, Turner, and the other path founders relied on help from the Open Lands Project. Holmes wrote, "The truth of the matter is that there might not have been a PATH if Gunnar had not supplied secretarial & tel. services, had our mailing labels addressed, taken our 'cause' to Washington, D.C., chaired the meetings (at Arboretum and Forest Preserves, etc.)" (Holmes to J. Mooring). The filmstrip, sponsored by the Open Lands Project, also worked to spread word about the path, and was even shared with the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in 1965. Peterson helped the IPP's impact spread to national levels.

With each momentous occasion for path promotion, Peterson wanted Watts at the center. In a more personal note to Sam and Liz Holmes, Peterson explained, "Mr. Van de Houten agrees that we should have some kind of good news coverage, picture, etc., when the lease is actually signed. It would be my suggestion that this be done with Mrs. Watts and whomever the county designates, plus any others whom the county and our committee thinks appropriate" (Peterson to S. Holmes & E. Holmes). Peterson wanted the group, and Watts specifically, to receive credit for the project. He recognized the wide reach of her influence. On July 8, 1964, Peterson wrote to Watts about some connections she had with a group in Winnetka, "I just thought you would like to know how the circle has expanded. . . .You see how far and wide your influence has spread again!" (Peterson to Watts, July 8, 1964). Peterson genuinely respected Watts and her vision, and, according to Holmes, he admired her (Holmes to J. Mooring).

Even in these first stages of promoting the path, Peterson was already thinking in terms of larger, national scales. Holmes recalled, "He was so very good with people — an optimist, a

listener, and a real 'communicator.' The Open Lands Project had made friends among the legislators in both Springfield and Washington, plus in the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and the Illinois Dept. of Conservation. How VITAL those two authorities were to be for the Path!" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 5). Both Peterson and Watts were making the rounds to promote the path, and their ability to reach multiple audiences helped the path idea spread throughout the region. They were on the ground working with different groups, using their highly honed communication skills, and fine-tuning their plans for path development and organization of the group. Watts worked from the ground up, using a grassroots approach to recruit volunteers, whereas Peterson pushed more of a top-down agenda. The success of the path depended on the skills of both leaders, along with the determination and hard work of the women who carried the mantle of the cause.

CHAPTER 3

The Illinois Prairie Path as a Regional and National Resource

Figure 3.1. Photo of Gunnar Peterson and May Theilgaard Watts
(Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

Pictured in a blurry black and white photo, May Theilgaard Watts and Gunnar Peterson consulted together near the prospective site of the future Illinois Prairie Path (Fig. 3.1). Leafed out branches framed their conversation, and seated on the same stone step, they appeared as equals. He looked respectful; she displayed confidence. Peterson's head carefully tilted toward Watts, who seemed to be explaining something, her hands mid-gesture. This picture captured the beginning of a joint effort to develop the Illinois Prairie Path.

In two other photos, they appeared individually. Peterson inspected some kind of overhead pass, and Watts leaned down to investigate some plants along a power line. Peterson's gaze looked toward the sky, while Watts' gaze regarded the earth. They were both observers, readers of the landscape. These photos recorded a meeting where the two conservationists were actively engaged in the same pursuit. They were explorers, both interested in scoping out the possibilities for the CA&E railroad right-of-way, even though their approaches to coalition

building differed dramatically. Watts and Peterson together needed each other in order to conserve open space. The path project became mutually beneficial for both community leaders.

"Open Lands and Prairie Path Grew Up Hand in Hand"

While every written document corroborated the story that Watts had the original idea for the footpath, many of the records indicated that she could not have fully realized her vision and dream without the help and support of certain critical individuals. Credit was given to the many volunteers who aided in the path's development, but behind the scenes securing resources, paying for publicity, supplies, and postage, and establishing networks throughout the region was Gunnar Peterson. Holmes wrote in her account:

> Gunnar was the director of the recently formed OPEN LANDS PROJECT, an organization which began under the wing of the Chicago Metropolitan Welfare Council and then rapidly developed into a valuable independent clearing house for land use problems and conservation causes. OPEN LANDS and Prairie Path grew up hand in hand, with Gunnar officiating as our advisor and his office staff supplying enthusiastic support, broad contacts and (Oh how we needed this!) – secretarial services! (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 2)

From the beginning of his involvement with the Illinois Prairie Path, Peterson had his own vision for how to move the project forward.

The Illinois Prairie Path became the first project that Gunnar Peterson took on in his role as Director of the Open Lands Project of the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago. Early in his career Peterson had focused on outdoor education, worked at summer camps in the east as well as in the Chicago area, and served as the vice president of the American Camping

Association. His work emphasized recreation and education, and so when he became director of the Open Lands Project, Peterson devoted his time to helping other individuals and groups work "to conserve land for recreation and beauty" ("Biography"). One *Chicago Tribune* journalist said of him, "I've never found anybody who can duplicate (his) insight and (his) ability to explain in understandable terms the relationship between people and open space" ("Open Lands News"). He shared this skill with Watts, who translated the study of ecology into readily accessible vocabulary and practice for her community.

Members of Chicago area groups valued Peterson's ideas, his ability to complete projects, and his good humor. Other traits he had in common with Watts included his ability to "inspire and encourage others," and according to Lee Botts, a former co-worker of Peterson's, the "true measurement of Gunnar's accomplishments [was] in the number of projects and programs that he helped to start and helped preserve" ("Open Lands News"). Peterson's commitment to prairie preservation was not restricted only to the prairie path project. In 1966, "when the [Peacock Prairie, in Glenview, IL] itself was under immediate threat," Peterson and board members of the Open Lands Project raised the money for the private half of the purchase price (Platt 20). Peacock Prairie's location between two major highways made it difficult to reach, but developers felt it would be an ideal location for office buildings, situated as it was near highway access. Peterson's leadership helped to preserve the prairie. As Holmes remarked, there were "a million ways in which Gunnar was helpful" ("Open Lands News"). All of these qualities surfaced during Peterson's involvement with the Illinois Prairie Path.

Peterson was well connected in the community and facilitated discussions about open space with representatives from all levels. According to brochures about the path and an article written by Isabel Wasson in 1964, Peterson had "worked closely with the DuPage County Board

of Supervisors, the DuPage, Cook, and Kane County Forest Preserve Superintendents, Commonwealth Edison property men, the Director of Planning for Kane County and Northeastern Illinois Metropolitan Planning Commission" (Wasson, "An Illinois Prairie Path" 3). Peterson's experience with these organizations proved invaluable to Watts and the other path founders because they needed to convince all of these community "partners" to keep the abandoned railroad right-of-way open for recreational use and access to nature. All of the organizations involved had a vested interest in the land.

Increased efforts to "manage" natural resources manifested themselves in the outgrowth of conservation organizations, including the Open Lands Project. Several of the organizations formed in the Midwest, and they focused on the interplay between aesthetics and economics. Sayre argues in *Recovering the Prairie*, "How land is seen and how it is used are, of course, integrally connected. . . . The aesthetics and economics of the prairies, the artistic representations and economic promotions, were managed together" (4). Watts and Peterson shared both a vision for how to safeguard open land and a mission to conserve and protect it. According to Rome, "from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, almost a million acres of marshes, swamps, bogs, and coastal estuaries were destroyed by human development. . . . To prepare the land for construction builders often bulldozed all vegetation, leveled all rises, and filled or channeled all streams" (*Bulldozer in the Countryside* 121). For Watts and Peterson, the CA&E abandoned right-of-way presented itself as the sole possibility of preserving the prairie landscape and its remaining plants. It also represented an open space for recreation in an otherwise developed area.

Inroads and Road Blocks

When the original six women recounted their involvement in the path's development, particularly when they had to become assertive with "newcomers" to the group, they referred to

the early battles to secure a lease for the right-of-way as one of the most challenging hurdles they overcame. This first struggle occupied much of their time in terms of research, negotiation, and strategic planning. Peterson was especially helpful in this area because of his many contacts and connections in the Chicago region and at national levels. It was a delicate balancing act for Peterson, however, who worked to put the group's interests at the fore, but who also knew that he needed to steer them deliberately in certain directions in order to make the dream a reality.

Even when the group encountered setbacks, they remained persistent in the face of adversity. One such obstacle turned out to be the city of Wheaton. In 1965, Wheaton imposed a condemnation suit because the town was more interested in acquiring a four-block section of the right-of-way for parking lots rather than for a path (Illinois Prairie Path, "Bulletin from the Committee" 1). One overriding concern about maintaining the continuity of the right-of-way was the potential development of a highway through these towns, an idea that they all seemingly opposed ("Path Plan Organizers Get Shock"). DuPage County had offered Wheaton "a 10-year lease (with option to renew) at $1.00 per year, covering the entire right-of-way within the city limits. Wheaton's only obligation was to be maintenance, i.e., keeping the area free of weeds and debris. Wheaton would be permitted its development of parking in the central area." Obtaining Wheaton's cooperation was critical because the three stems of the path converged there. Without Wheaton's commitment, chances of the project succeeding were minimal.

Just when the prairie path board thought they had solved the problem with Wheaton, the Wheaton City Council failed to compromise. According to the Open Lands Project Newsletter of April, 1965, titled "Prairie Path Proponents Gird for New Challenge," "Acquisition of the old Chicago, Aurora & Elgin Railroad right-of-way has hit another snag. . . . In the latest setback, the Wheaton City Council refused to accept an offer from DuPage County for lease of space for

parking facilities for a 10 year period, with options to renew, and voted to proceed with condemnation of four blocks of the rail right-of-way in central Wheaton" (2). The city council's reasoning was that in pursuing the condemnation suit there would be no entrée for a highway project through Wheaton. Wheaton's opposition threatened acquiring the path in continuity, and it was a setback the group had not anticipated.

Undaunted, prairie path advocates worked vigilantly to convince residents of Wheaton that the condemnation suit had to be dropped. At this time, the prairie path board launched their own campaign to promote candidates running for the Wheaton City Council who would be more sympathetic to the path's development. Holmes recalled, "We took the only means available to us: we enlisted in our 'cause' every Wheaton resident or group we knew; we found out about the candidates running for city office in the approaching election (and discovered how susceptible candidates can be at such a time!). We attended city council meetings until we learned more than we really cared to know about sewage disposal, zoning problems and secondary lien bonds" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 6). At one point, the Ryersons even gave a dinner party for the mayor and his wife. However, even that effort was not going to be the turning point. It would take the April election in 1965 to change the makeup of the city office to include more path allies and for the group to achieve, at last, their goal of securing the lease.

In 1966, the DuPage County Board purchased the right-of-way. Headen reported that the county board "having no argument against its use as a nature trail, and influenced in part by Commonwealth Edison's invitation to the Path to share its easement along the right-of-way . . . granted the Illinois Prairie Path a 12-year lease" ("The Illinois Prairie Path: Its Beauty Beckons " 3). Securing the lease was a major feat, considering the many obstacles encountered from different cities along the right-of-way. This success revealed that the prairie path board,

mentored by Peterson, had managed to negotiate with various groups, each with a unique investment in the right-of-way's use, and convince them that the footpath was a good idea for the region. The utilities, "to the surprise of many," became a real advocate for the path project and "granted the use of their land for the path, with the reasonable proviso that the vehicles of the firms could use it when necessary" ("This Path Was Made for Walking" 50).

Some obstacles remained, however, created primarily by residents along the path who resisted the project. According to Dornfeld's article, "one homeowner on the edge of a village complained that ragweed on the path adjacent to his was aggravating his hay fever. The village fathers obligingly grubbed out the ragweed and in their enthusiasm uprooted wild plums and crabapples in blossom. This opened an even larger area for ragweed to take over" ("This Path Was Made for Walking" 50, 52). This period of planning met with individuals who paved parts of the path, mowed prairie plants, or campaigned for mechanized transportation options along the path, namely a short trolley line. These setbacks further fueled the women's drive to achieve their goals. Even though the DuPage County lease granted the path board twelve years of use, there was no real guarantee for the years after that lease ran out. Battles small and big were a constant for the organization.

Even within the organization, there were obstacles, identity crises, and misunderstandings. These internal struggles shaped the organization and challenged the individuals involved to define the structure of the group, its purpose, and the goals they wanted to achieve. Sam Holmes addressed one of the early problems with the group shortly after DuPage County announced the agreement had been reached. During 1965, he worked to have the group become a not-for-profit corporation, a process that helped them navigate new ground as footpath developers. "This footpath idea was a new one, then," recalled Holmes, "and it was hard to

imagine that a privately organized group could acquire the right to use a 27 mile strip to walk on, or that, having acquired it, the group would grant to the public the right to use it. But beyond that, the government was not in the business of subsidizing some place for people to WALK. The 'purpose' had to be 'educational, religious or recreational (the bike)'" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 7). The application for IRS exemption took eighteen months to complete because the organization was a new kind of group that did not fit the usual categories.

Turner and Peterson: Divergent Visions

The relationship between Watts, Turner, and Peterson was also fraught with tension at times. Peterson had more experience in organizing groups and helping them network, and he pushed for the group to broaden its scope. In 1968, when he outlined a proposal for the newly formed board of the not-for-profit corporation to approve and address, Peterson advocated for the ownership of the IPP to be transferred from DuPage County to the DuPage County Forest Preserve. He argued that in doing so, the right-of-way would be developed into something more desirable from an open space and recreational viewpoint. Peterson cited the recognition that the path had already received by the Illinois State Recreation Plan, "the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, the State Department of Business and Economic Development and the State Department of Conservation" ("Proposal for the Illinois Prairie Path" 1). He explained, "We need to recognize that for the Path idea to be successful, it must move to 'the big time,' and be built up as a nationally significant demonstration trail. We should seek designation as an urban trail and build national publicity for it" (1). Throughout his proposal, seeking and securing funding emerged as one of Peterson's priorities.

Turner was reluctant to jump on board with all of Peterson's ideas. She and Watts had their own vision for the path project and could be distrustful of governmental officials, and with

good reason. Peterson wanted a complete plan for the path, but Turner felt this idea was unrealistic. "I believe," she wrote, "it is better to express my views than to hold them in" (Turner to Peterson 1). She wanted Peterson to understand that the group was a volunteer organization without funds, and because of this unique position, she felt it was unwise to go into the small towns with guns blazing. Turner preferred to proceed with a "light touch." She had been working with many of the towns to build support, and she may have seen Peterson's large-scale and more national agenda as a threat to her working relationships with the towns. She wrote, "Elmhurst, Villa Park and Lombard, as well as Glen Ellyn, have all indicated an awareness of the path. I am hoping that they will take a more active interest in the near future. I have started the ball rolling in Villa Park and am trying to do the same in Lombard. The fine work being accomplished in Glen Ellyn is being done by the city with many conferences between the manager and Prairie Path representatives" (1).

Turner's vision for the project also emphasized building regional relationships, developing the regional citizenship she and Watts had envisioned from the beginning of the project. Peterson, however, looked to larger publicity, bigger events, and more political savvy in the board to advance the path project and secure more funding on a national level. Peterson explained, "We need added promotional materials such as an expanded trip guide, self-guiding trail signs, displays at shows, and spring and fall field trips that will attract at least 1000 participants each" ("Proposal for the Illinois Prairie Path" 1). Turner countered that such a walk would not be feasible with leaders to showcase the path's highlights. She challenged, "How do you think we could get 1000 people to come?" (Turner to Peterson 1). Peterson argued for more news releases and getting people out on the path.

Peterson recognized that The IPPc needed to be more forceful in making the case of the path's value to the county. On February 20, 1968, He responded to Turner's challenge, "If it is necessary to demonstrate to the county and leaders of the communities the significance of the Illinois Prairie Path, we need to do it in numbers. I am talking about helicopter coverage, newsreel work, and getting every person we can to get out and use the trail in a coordinated effort throughout the length of the trail" (Peterson to Turner 1). Peterson wanted helicopter footage when the masses of people gathered on the path. He added, "This is also the kind of approach in which the federal government indicated interest and wants to see a proposal (I was in Washington on Monday, February 5)" (1).

One of the primary ways for the path idea to move to "the big time," according to Peterson, was to elect people to the prairie path board who had more connections and greater political savvy to wield power and influence people. Peterson's use of the word "power" put Turner on guard. "In regard to the board, the one word I used was 'power'," he wrote, "and what I am referring to is getting people on the board who have a major influence in governmental circles" (Peterson to Turner, 20 Feb. 1968 2). Peterson approached the path project from a policy and political point of view, whereas Watts and Turner believed in the hard work of people coming together to build the path. Their focus was on the volunteer efforts of the group, the people who were willing to pitch in and be part of the community and not just sit around and discuss politics.

Turner and Watts were proponents of grassroots efforts, especially as residents of the region and crusaders for the people who lived there. Verchick argues, "Grassroots environmental movements grow from the values and experiences of real people. Environmental justice advocates, mainly women and people of color, bring previously unheard 'bottom-up' perspectives

to environmental issues. . . . Traditional environmentalists often promoted an image of 'environment' as something removed from everyday experiences" (66). While Peterson's work also emphasized social justice and preservation of open space, a more legal, governmental, and political emphasis guided his activism. Peterson's proposal recommended a dramatic shift to The IPPc board from a group of mostly women concerned with democratic and grassroots modes of civic engagement to one made primarily of men with more political experience. By framing the proposal for the path in national terms, Peterson also shifted the project's regional focus.

Turner believed that a grassroots project needed leaders willing to pick up a shovel and work. She explained, "We don't need more to advise and direct" (Turner to Peterson 2). Her final comment was likely a barb directed at Peterson himself. In a rhetorical turn at the end of her letter, she deflected her views by suggesting maybe she was too close to the organization to notice its shortcomings or that the board needed younger members. Peterson's response to Turner's letter worked to smooth over any hurt feelings: "Your leadership and contributions are continuous and excellent; you have given stability and strength to the board which has brought it to its present high level. My comments in no way implied criticism of the present group, but there is a great need for persons conversant with the political scene" (Peterson to Turner, 20 Feb. 1968 2). Peterson was very clear about his vision, even though it disagreed with Turner's concerns. He wanted the organization to advance to the national level of recognition, and in order to do that, he advised that there needed to be an all-encompassing master plan for the path. With such a plan, there could be fundraising and more governmental and foundation support.

Turner and Peterson had different views on the purpose and the involvement of the path's board. Peterson disagreed with Turner that board members needed to know how to pitch in and pick up a shovel: "This is not the function I see with the work of a board. Granted, it is

necessary, but the kind of effort of which I am speaking is people who know and can discuss policy questions with which we must deal" (Peterson to Turner, 20 Feb. 1968 2). Peterson's recommendation was to create an advisory committee, with representatives from the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, Cook County Forest Preserve District, Chicago Department of City Planning, Department of Business and Economic Development, Elmhurst Park Board, among others, including designated members of the Illinois Prairie Path board. He worked initially to get approval of this plan from Turner, Sam Holmes, Bill Nemec, and others before presenting the plan to the board. Later letters from the Open Lands Project to the prairie path board indicated that Peterson met with no further resistance about his proposal.

All of these preparations and proposals for long-range planning were an effort on Peterson's part to look to the future of the path. With only an initial twelve-year lease, there was no guarantee that the path's existence would be secure once the lease expired or even if the lease could be renewed. Peterson wanted to capitalize on the nation-wide interest in trails and trail systems, and he saw the Illinois Prairie Path as a model for other trails. However, the path's future existence, he believed, was contingent on a well-developed, long-range plan executed by people who had familiarity with and clout in political circles. "The future of this development," Peterson wrote, "will depend on its long range plan which we hope can be drawn up by professional planners" (Peterson to Illinois Prairie Path Board 1). He wanted to expand the board to increase its influence. Turner and Watts remained uncertain and wary about Peterson's initiatives.

With the creation of this additional committee to advance the path's development came new misunderstandings between Watts and Peterson. Peterson viewed the members of his newly designed committee as consultants. They suggested action be taken in different areas, including

legal work, administration, finances, and building relationships with governmental units, along with identifying present uses, demands, needs, and benefits (Peterson to Illinois Prairie Path Board 1). These recommendations made by the consultant committee would then be evaluated by another kind of organization to assess funding options. Possibilities included the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, various universities, and other private sources (2). This process required many months for the organizations to provide a complete evaluation, and Peterson was eager to begin the work that would "point out the full scale development of the Illinois Prairie Path as a national demonstration of an urban trail system for which federal funds could be made available" (2).

Confusion arose when some representatives from a Lake Geneva conservation committee drove Watts from her Wisconsin cottage to Lake Geneva so she could explain to them how to go about making a path. They happened to mention to Watts that they had invited Gunnar Peterson to speak with their group, since Watts had mentioned the Open Lands Project in one of her magazine articles. From this interaction Watts heard some disturbing news: "We understand that your Prairie Path Board is not really a functioning committee—that you have a rival in your Steering Committee, and the Board is subsidiary to it" (The Illinois Prairie Path, "Minutes of IPP Bd. Meeting"). Peterson, quick to reply to this statement in the path board meeting minutes, wanted it known that the steering committee had fulfilled its purpose and had disbanded. He sent letters to the board, to Watts, and to one of the Williams Bay representatives to clarify the position of the board. "I don't believe anything I said at the meeting in Williams Bay could be taken to construe that there is a 'rivalry' with regard to the Illinois Prairie Path," Peterson explained. "With groups cooperating fully, there is no rivalry and no discord" (Peterson to Dahir).

Watts and Turner maintained their roles as watchdogs for the organization, and for their idea. Watts was reluctant to deal with any governmental body. According to Holmes, "she wanted her Prairie Path to be successful through an upsurge of HUMAN BEINGS, and indeed it was just that. But victory in this bureaucratic society could only have been won through various public authorities" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 9). While Peterson seemed to be genuinely interested in the best plans for the path, though his methods and approach may have differed from those of Watts and Turner, there were other situations where promises were broken and plans waylaid. Even though the city of Wheaton, for example, had agreed to proceed with plans for sharing the right-of-way, they ended up interpreting the language of the agreement differently. Wheaton's city officials ended up turning the right-of-way easement earmarked for the path into a parking lot. Holmes explained, "Mrs. Watts was half-right in distrusting Wheaton . . . . Yes, they respected our right to a 10 foot path. Not along the grassy edge as had been planned, but right down the middle of three blocks of parked cars!" (9).

Although there were many challenges, both within the organization and with the development of the path, the board remained vigilant. On May 10, 1966, DuPage County finally signed a lease for The IPPc to use the right-of-way as a public footpath. Two years of hard work had paid off, but the board continued to be vigilant in securing the path's future. Sam Holmes handled issues that required a lawyer's authority, and Bill Nemec, member of the board, stepped in to ensure that bridges, which had been vandalized, did not pose a danger to path users. There was still a need to educate communities about the benefits of the path.

Peterson worked throughout the 1960s to help the group navigate the bureaucracy involved with developing, maintaining, and, most importantly, sustaining the path. Posting signs, sending out newsletters, and raising awareness all became part of the shared work of the

organization. With each success or each challenge, the group wanted the path to remain in the public eye. Their sights were set on a larger goal, one that Peterson had been guiding them towards through his initiatives. They wanted the Illinois Prairie Path to be recognized officially as part of the National Trail System. With this designation, The IPPc hoped the path would be less vulnerable to other land use interests.

All of these developments informed each other at regional and national levels. What happened in Illinois with the path project–volunteer groups adopting sections of the path to maintain, board members bringing in loads of limestone screenings to surface the path, and efforts continuing to rid the right-of-way of litter and junk that people continued to dump–served as both model and inspiration for other trail efforts. Holmes' responses to letters received while she was recording secretary highlighted both how news of the path had spread and how other people wanted to expand the footpath idea in their own areas. In one letter, Holmes encouraged an Indiana resident, Mark Davis, "Each trail or 'path' has a unique setting, and a different beginning, and its own set of special problems. Of course, some problems seem to occur on all trails, from the tremendous Appalachian Trail in the East to the little Fox Path just being developed near here, north of Elgin. . . . After 10 years of working HARD at it, we are still not a secure or 'completed' project. Keep plugging! –once you begin. The achievement will be worth the effort – or so we still believe" (E. Holmes to Davis).

IPP volunteers were also actively carrying out the work promoted by Lady Bird Johnson's natural beauty campaign. While it is difficult to say if The IPPc's efforts prompted officials in Washington D.C. to develop these national initiatives, it is clear that activism on the Illinois Prairie Path was in sync with the nation's and the president's vision for preservation, recreation, and beautification.

The Value of Natural Beauty

During the 1950s, open space began to be viewed as a resource for recreation. As such, there was also potential for it to be overexploited just as other resources, such as trees, air, and water, had faced similar threats (*Building Suburbia* 127). Because of new technologies in the work place, there was an increase in leisure time and an increase in recreational use of the land. Inherent in these developments was a strong link between land use and social issues (126). Making land accessible to all was one driving theme of the debates surrounding open space, and grassroots campaigns evolved in response to the overdevelopment and overexploitation of natural resources. Steered in large part by women who advocated for clean air and green spaces for their children, environmental reform began to emerge from suburban neighborhoods: "Women activists were simply fostering the proper environment for a healthy and comfortable suburban family life" (Hurley 56). The work and vision of both Watts and Peterson emerged against this backdrop.

Regional momentum and national recognition for the Illinois Prairie Path developed simultaneously during President Johnson's campaign for Natural Beauty in America. One of the primary goals of Johnson's environmental agenda, with Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall leading the campaign, was to "hold open spaces against the sprawl of suburbia" (*Building Suburbia* 133). Endorsed by President Johnson in his "Special Message to the Congress on Conservation and Restoration of Natural Beauty" in 1965, the Illinois Prairie Path was cited as a model for citizen action and for efforts to beautify America. Peterson had sent a copy of the IPP filmstrip to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, thus securing Johnson's attention. "There are many new and exciting trail projects underway across the land," Johnson explained. "In Illinois,

an abandoned railroad right of way is being developed as a 'Prairie Path'" ("Lyndon B. Johnson").

The example of the Illinois Prairie Path represented exactly what Johnson called for in conservation efforts: creativity. He explained, "Our conservation must be not just the classic conservation of protection and development, but a creative conservation of restoration and innovation. Its concern is not with nature alone, but with the total relation between man and the world around him. Its object is not just man's welfare but the dignity of man's spirit" ("Lyndon B. Johnson"). Watts and Peterson had rallied their volunteers around this idea of creative conservation from their early work with the path project; they had already been engaging in and leading innovative conservation practices.

Johnson capitalized on this grassroots momentum to procure legislation to protect the natural beauty of America's resources. In this way, the federal government became actively involved as a protector of the environment. He identified the primary threat to natural areas of beauty, as well as to recreational opportunities: "A growing population is swallowing up areas of natural beauty with its demands for living space, and is placing increased demand on our overburdened areas of recreation and pleasure" ("Lyndon B. Johnson"). Urban sprawl and the accompanying overexploitation of the natural world were the results of a growing middle class with an emphasis on living an easier, more convenient life. However, the "bucolic settings" that the middle class sought in the suburbs began to disappear. President Johnson's administration attempted to ameliorate the problem by shifting America's focus to a value on beauty.

Beautification of the land had been a priority for America's middle class even before WWII. According to Gould, "most of the women who pursued beautification and sanitation causes during the Progressive Era came from the middle class or the upper class of their

communities" (3). In the 1960s, Johnson's natural beauty campaign was spurred in large part by his wife, Lady Bird Johnson, and supported by many women from garden clubs and other councils who opposed the blight of billboards and wanted legislation to control their display on new interstate highways. Lady Bird Johnson also appealed directly to women and their efforts to conserve in the smaller scales of home and neighborhood. "We are—and women particularly are—cleaning up the cities of our country," she said (Gould 45). However, the First Lady, in looking at the impact of businesses on the landscape as well as focusing on urban areas, hoped to move "'from the garden club to the hardware stage of the problem'" (Gould 62). Johnson's administration, with Lady Bird Johnson's beautification campaign, marked a shift in environmental thinking and conservation at the time that reflected a broader interest in and understanding of ecology. The new conservation movement that both the president and first lady championed required innovative thinking about land use.

Watts was a huge advocate for looking at the "hardware stage of the problem." She and Turner demonstrated the kind of innovative thinking needed to offer new uses for reused land. While Peterson worked for an organization dedicated to issues of social and environmental justice, he focused on the political networking he felt the path needed. The women networked with the communities. Even someone like Liz Holmes, who was married to an attorney and saw the necessity of overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, elevated Peterson's role over their own work. She emphasized what she perceived to be the defining characteristics of the two organizations: "I'll bet you would be surprised at how much REALLY interesting stuff there is in OUR file! Yours is GREAT – and IMPORTANT, and shows how MUCH the Open Lands really did; ours is full of fights & fires, love and hate" (Holmes to Peterson). The documents of the Open Lands Project, while professional and free of typographical errors, presented the story of The IPPc as

the first project of the Open Lands Project. However, for Watts and Turner, the story of the Illinois Prairie Path was the culmination of their life's work, commitment to ecology, and belief in human democracy.

President Johnson and his wife both recognized the need for committed visionaries like Watts and Turner. In fact, their motivation to address urban environmental problems may have been motivated by individuals like Watts and Turner. The circle of influence reached from the Midwest to Washington, D.C. Certainly, Stewart Udall made significant environmental contributions as the Secretary for the Department of the Interior during both Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and his written work on the environment was read and discussed by the members of The IPPc. Johnson and Udall operated from within the political sphere, where Peterson was better able to connect with their programs and initiatives. As far as reaching a national audience, Peterson's promotion of the path captured the interest of Udall and Johnson. However, the story of Watts' grassroots momentum ultimately contributed to changes in legislation. Her initiative changed America's mindset about access to recreation in urban and suburban space.

Johnson's message called for more space for recreation and for ruined space to be restored to its natural beauty. Recognizing the problematic nature of the housing boom, he said explicitly, "More of our people are crowding into cities and being cut off from nature. Cities themselves reach out into the countryside, destroying streams and trees and meadows as they go. A modern highway may wipe out the equivalent of a fifty-acre park with every mile. And people move out from the city to get closer to nature only to find that nature has moved farther from them" ("Lyndon B. Johnson"). Johnson's speech, Watts' dream to create a public footpath, and Peterson's development of the Open Lands Project all coincided at a time when a marked shift

occurred between the conservation movement, with its emphasis on resource management, and the environmental movement with its focus on the ethics and values related to environmental issues.

Johnson, Watts, and Peterson took a stand to place value on beauty, ecology, recreation, and human health, even when these intangibles were unpopular in communities driven by consumerism or other interests. Johnson explained, "Beauty is not an easy thing to measure. It does not show up in the gross national product, in a weekly pay check, or in profit and loss statements. But these things are not ends in themselves. They are a road to satisfaction and pleasure and the good life" ("Lyndon B. Johnson"). Human impact can be a negative choice, a "costly" choice in terms of health and happiness, as Johnson argued, or it can be a positive decision by individual citizens to become "alert to danger, determined to improve the quality of their surroundings, resisting blight, demanding and building beauty for themselves and their children" ("Lyndon B. Johnson").

At a national level, President Johnson balanced the need for better and more efficient roads and the desire to maintain the country's beauty and recreation. The automobile industry was a major player in determining how land was parceled and where highways were constructed. Johnson viewed highways as necessary to the development of the nation's infrastructure, but maintained that there needed to be room for nature and humans to co-exist: "Our task is two-fold. First, to ensure that roads themselves are not destructive of nature and natural beauty. Second, to make our roads ways to recreation and pleasure." Watts and Peterson held a different view, in large part because they wanted to have continuity within open space. Their work emphasized connectivity, and in the Chicago suburbs laid great potential for forest preserves, parks, and linear corridors such as reused rights-of-way to link areas of open space together and combat

sprawl. As they watched their open spaces disappear, Watts and Peterson were motivated to convince their communities that a regional resource included benefits related to health and happiness. They wanted to make Watts' idea for a thread of green a reality.

For Watts, it was not enough to pick up the trash along the abandoned railroad corridor. Building a path was more than a beautification project, and more than merely planting native plants along utility lines. Watts promoted the path in ways that invited people to participate, including people who had limited access to the natural world. Her special form of advocacy combined ecological ideology with social activism. She was a regular speaker at many garden clubs, and through these speaking engagements, she inspired many white, middle-class women to learn about ecology. Suburban women began to see connections between ecology and the relationships between people and nature in the region. Watts united the various communities along this linear park, which restored the prairie ecosystem at the same time as it restored people's relationship with and access to nature and open space. Her determination, and the hard work of her loyal friends and path volunteers, generated enthusiasm and increasing buy-in from communities along the path.

Seeing the Project Through

Public relations became one primary vehicle for advancing Watts' idea for a footpath. From the first appearance of her letter in the *Chicago Tribune*, the Illinois Prairie Path became a source of discussion and debate in the news. Watts' goal was to change the public's thinking about the definition of a regional resource, and her call to action was linked to fighting for what she believed was advantageous for all. Unlike news articles at the time that reported the cost benefit analysis for the CA&E right-of-way, her writing, with its focus on humans and nature, changed people's thinking. In her 1968 *Landscape* article, Watts explained how her letter to the

editor motivated more responses from the public. She said, "Following the publication of this letter, many others favoring the footpath were published. In time a group of able enthusiasts became the Path's forceful executive board and started pouring their varied skills into achieving one goal" ("The Illinois Prairie Path" 12).

Louise Headen, early publicity chairman for The Illinois Prairie Path, used her skill in writing a weekly column "Along the Prairie Path" to promote the path project. It was through Headen's weekly column that the group gained more "believers," and Headen quickly became an important asset to the group. According to Holmes, "Louise soon joined the Board, thank goodness – and continues to be a real 'pro' at press releases. She's a speedy trouble-shooter, too, whizzing out on her bike to inspect a problem area, once for instance, stopping an eager gardener from fencing off a plot square in the middle of the Path in which she was planting her tomatoes and zucchini crop!" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 15). At a time when the press was so vital in keeping the topic of the path in the public eye, Headen's work contributed significantly to that effort.

In an article published in *Arizona News* in 1978, Headen described the early work of path supporters. She noted the many obstacles that needed to be overcome in the process of securing the right-of-way to be used for the path: "As a start, volunteers gathered tons of refuse from the right-of way. Civic and conservancy groups, clubs and individuals 'adopted' sections for maintenance and development. Funds from supporting members paid for trail signs, guide maps, literature, and mailings. And the public began to use the Path" ("The Illinois Prairie Path" 3-4). Headen reported on early efforts of the group to drum up support for the path idea. Her October 31, 1968 "Along the Prairie Path" article outlined events such as the popular Fall Prairie Path walks. These walks appealed to members who gathered to learn more about the path's natural

features. Dr. Warren Keck, "former head of the Biology department at North Central College, was our distinguished leader," Headen wrote. "His enthusiasm for the Prairie Path brought him back to conduct this walk." Readers of the column learned both about the events related to the path and the types of plants that members learned about on the walk.

Headen addressed people who opposed the path by emphasizing how the path was being used. Her tone showed her displeasure with authorities who countered the path project: "There are those who ask 'Who, if anyone, walks the Prairie Path?' This doubting has chiefly come from those in high places who seek to use the Path for such purposes as parking lots, potential highways, and extension of in-town streets" ("Along the Prairie Path" 9 Feb. 1970). A kind of catalog of path uses followed in Headen's column, everything from the snowy footprints left along the path in winter to children using the path for recreational purposes or just to get from one place to another. Headen explored the ways in which the population of northeastern Illinois was "expected to have about two million more people occupying 400 additional square miles of land with homes, job sites, and shopping facilities" ("Along the Prairie Path" 9 Feb. 1970). She noted the potential for the path to extend and connect to other area paths and to preserve plant life. Her newspaper columns urged for support from readers to help the path become secured against the "'convenience' of concrete" ("Along the Prairie Path" 9 Feb. 1970).

A call to pay attention, "Along the Prairie Path" served as a reminder to readers about the hazards of accepting progress too easily. Headen explained, "Perhaps it is the rapidity with which a familiar landscape can become alien territory that tends to push even fairly recent events into a seemingly remote past. One can't quarrel with progress, exactly, but one can panic at the thought that progress can gobble up our treasure of open lands if someone doesn't pay attention" ("Along the Prairie Path" n.d.). "Along the Prairie Path" showed readers that the board and the

members of The Illinois Prairie Path were determined to safeguard open space, and each community along the path was represented. Headen even listed how the membership dues supported various activities, including "path signs marking access points at road crossings, lumber used by the ILLARNG Engineers to bridge the East DuPage river, booth exhibits at two Chicago World Flower and Garden shows and County fairs, official patches designating Path Security Observers, and for the detailed 'Trail Guide' and other printed material" ("Along the Prairie Path" n.d.). Membership support and the work of volunteers were essential to the path's growth and development. With each article, Headen advocated for the path, solicited support, and showcased the many benefits the path offered.

Benefits of the path included creating more space for recreational activities where there was demand for more parks and open spaces. In addition, the path served as a link between other paths, parks, and open spaces. It was this additional focus that made the path unique, especially in such a heavily populated area. As Headen argued, "Consider that the State of Illinois is low man on the Totem Pole as far as open lands per capita are concerned, and that the majority of these open lands are in the southern part of the state—many miles from the highest population concentration—it behooves us to look seriously at the Illinois Prairie Path, its development and preservation ("Along the Prairie Path" 11 July 1969). The path seemed always to be under threat of being stalled in terms of development and maintenance. Streets and highway projects took precedence, and there was also always the question of funding. As a persuasive and informed advocate, Headen used publicity to relate to her suburban readers. She included references that they would have understood at the time. She also combined a close look at the Illinois Prairie Path with a regional context. In this way, the project became more than a footpath through some communities. It was a kind of linear park that connected many parks, forests, and paths

throughout the region. This connection, both in terms of the path's development and how Headen portrayed it in the news, helped readers see its value.

William H. Whyte's work at this time was a source of inspiration for path supporters, and he also featured the Illinois Prairie Path in his discussion of open space. Headen made use of Whyte's work to inform her own publicity. The women involved with The IPPc board were reading his book *The Last Landscape*, and Whyte's readership would have included other suburban residents concerned about their loss of open space. Headen explained that, according to Whyte, projects such as the IPP served as "an example of what many communities throughout the country are doing to answer the need for more park and recreational areas. Abandoned aqueducts, tow-paths along canals, dry stream beds, utility easements, railroad rights-of-way are among the many areas that have been utilized" ("Along the Prairie Path" 11 July 1969). Watts' vision extended, however, beyond mere reuse of neglected space. She and the women who championed her cause recognized the opportunity for connectivity. In the early days of path promotion, Headen wrote, "The Prairie Path is a ready-made linear park occupying the 27 miles of the former Aurora & Elgin right-of way within DuPage County. It ties together the several towns along its way and provides a link between five DuPage County forest preserves" ("Along the Prairie Path" 11 July 1969). Trying to keep the continuity of the path meant making it less vulnerable from vying interests for its use.

Headen recognized that an important way to protect the path was to publicize it. She understood that the "answer to these problems is wide spread [sic] public interest in the form of membership contributions and letters to local and county governments asking for cooperation in protecting the Path. Once lost it can never be regained" (3). The women of the Seedlings Garden Club of Wheaton tried to take some initiative in this act of protecting the path. They had adopted

a section of the path that was "a block-long, patch of bald mud bordering Liberty Drive" ("Along the Prairie Path" 16 Dec. 1969). Turning it into a demonstration area with plantings, the Seedlings group originally worked with Wheaton officials and the Prairie Path Planning Committee to develop a landscaping plan. The women, with the help of their husbands and children, worked to plant the garden and overcame issues of financing the project. However, even before the threat of parking spaces, some city workers unknowingly "destroyed many of the wild flowers mistaking them for weeds" ("Along the Prairie Path" 16 Dec. 1969). Headen pointed out to her readers that the work of the Seedlings Garden Club benefitted the community without adding additional tax costs, unlike parking lot spaces that had been proposed.

"Along the Prairie Path" became a voice for the Illinois Prairie Path. It was necessary to keep the spotlight on the path because "rumors of disaster" threatened the path's development from its beginnings. Headen realized that her use of the media could recruit volunteers and supporters, and her column encouraged membership. Her role as publicity chair advanced the path's progress. In a letter written by her daughter, Nancy Headen, she acknowledged her mother's important role in the development of the path: "My mother's work on behalf of the Prairie Path went a long way to making the Prairie Path a reality. She launched a letter writing campaign to lawmakers which certainly helped to bring it about" (N. Headen to J. Mooring). Headen believed that the public voice, hers included, could make a difference. In her February 4, 1969 column, she wrote about the "continuing vigilance . . . required to keep [the path] and keep it intact" ("Along the Prairie Path"). Headen's letter writing campaign became another measure to encourage the public to preserve the Prairie Path and to see the project through. From the beginning, the project needed its volunteers to build support for the idea and to build the path itself.

Special Projects to Make the Path Accessible

Volunteer efforts have been the mainstay of The IPPc during its more than fifty years of existence. Women devoted countless hours to making the path project a reality, and they enlisted their husbands and other community members to help the cause. More than the hours of putting mailings together or fundraising, the work the prairie path women engaged in advanced a new kind of environmental thinking, that bridged the work of early reformers such as Jane Addams and later work in the environmental justice movement. Concern for open space, demand for recreational use and better health, and determination to connect people to their environment combined in an effort to create special projects for underserved members of the community.

Some of the special projects that the women pursued in connection to path development included establishing a path for the blind and a path made accessible for people with disabilities. Finding ways to offer handicapped people access to outdoor recreation was a pressing issue at the time path volunteers developed their special projects. In a speech given by Mary Gaylord, Interpretive Planner for the Forest Service, at the 1973 National Symposium on Trails, she explained, "Usually our expansion programs benefit the healthy and the active. By contrast, for those with physical limitations due to age or chronic illness, handicapped by impaired vision or bound to a wheelchair or crutches, mentally ill or retarded, recreation possibilities of any sort have been almost nil" (Gaylord 1). Women who worked on the special projects often had personal connections to the underrepresented groups they wanted to include. Unfortunately, these benevolent projects met with heavy, and often destructive, resistance from the communities in which they were built.

Path organizers and volunteers wanted to serve typically underserved populations, specifically in regards to access to outdoor space. The Fox Valley Girl Scout Council worked

with The IPPc to create several projects for underrepresented populations. Serving the public in this way, Fox Valley Girl Scout Council leader Mrs. Robert W. Anderson, argued, "Our own Fox Valley Girl Scout Council recognized that a project such as this would afford wonderful opportunities for Girl Scouts to serve their community and to enrich their program along the lines of conservation, beautification, education and enjoyment" ("Illinois Prairie Path by Fox Valley Girl Scouts"). Girl Scout Troop 488 built a rest area at the triangle where the Batavia and Aurora spurs of the path intersected. They also maintained a one-mile segment of the path they designed to honor Charlotte Marous, a "handicapped, elderly lady," for whom they completed household chores. Marous operated a small flower shop from a wheelchair in her home in Naperville, and when she deposited money in an account for the troop (The Grapevine, "Nature Trail Named"), the Girl Scouts worked with Helen Turner and used the money to create the Charlotte Marous Nature Trail.

This special path was designed to educate its users. Building posts that marked points of interest, Turner helped the Girl Scouts become path interpreters. What began as a service project to assist Marous turned into a 17-year relationship with her. In honoring Marous, the girls eventually designed their segment of the path to be a kind of educational experience. They cleared the portion of the path, built signs, and placed posts near trees and shrubs to be used for educational purposes or in working toward attaining Girl Scout badges.

One of the challenges the group overcame was the onslaught of vandalism. Turner commended the project chairman, Teresa Jones, for taking on the challenges in spite of the obstacles, "[She] accepted the full responsibility of this big project against odds that seemed insurmountable. Vandalism forced replacement of posts, relocation of check points and rewriting

of the trail guide, but she never gave up" ("Girl Scouts Dedicate"). These challenges resurfaced in other advocacy projects undertaken by the path leaders.

The Path for the Blind was another initiative launched by a special committee of the prairie path organization. This "special path" originated from a fund set up to honor the memory Watts' husband, Raymond Watts. May Watts had an "imaginative" vision for the path that would have required constant monitoring, but other committee members who got involved with this new project tried to make it work in a more practical way. Holmes became a major advocate for the path, and her vision-impaired sister-in-law, Allie Monroe helped as the "guinea pig" for the project. In her February 20, 1973 letter to Watts, Holmes offered some early suggestions for consideration about the Path for the Blind: "1. General surrounding scene needs to be set somewhat - fields? woods? low-ground? . . . 2. Define Ill. Prairie Path to some extent – explaining that it runs on a former r/w . . . 3. Dispose of 2 threats by explaining that the regular PATH runs parallel to the special one for the blind, so that the sound of swift bikes would not frighten, and state that – in spite of variations in terrain – the PATH is consistently flat unless warning is given." This initiative became another means of outreach for the prairie path organization.

Holmes wanted Watts' approval to move forward with this special path project, and she created a list of the many people who would benefit from it. Several area schools with services for the blind were identified as potential users of the path, including "Hadley School (Winetka), Lighthouse for Blind (Chgo.), Family Service (Wheaton) (Aurora -Arthur Hoppenstedt), Bob Seanlon who is himself blind and a superb 'social worker' with Div. of Voc. Rehabilitation in Aurora (lives in St. Charles), local clubs for the blind in most communities (of Aurora), visually handicapped classes in public schools (Sight-saver Class, Elgin), and Talking Books TOPICS"

(E. Holmes to Watts 20 Feb. 1973). Even though there was agreement about the many benefits of the path, there was also friction in the group putting the project together because of a difficulty in delineating responsibilities and being able to hold people accountable. The misunderstandings were so prevalent that Nancy Wilson, whose husband served on the path board at the time, became a liaison between The IPP board and the Path for the Blind committee (E. Holmes, "Minutes of the Meeting" Aug. 6, 1973). Once some of the confusion in the group was ameliorated, the Path for the Blind committee moved forward with clarifying their mission for the project.

The vision for the Path for the Blind emphasized use by small groups. There was consensus among the various individuals developing it about restricting busloads of students from using the path. They decided, "All committee members want to start with Mrs. Watts' basic plan and develop thru trial and error the best possible Path for the Blind, utilizing knowledge and experience of all committee members, plus research on other such paths" (E. Holmes "Minutes of the Meeting Aug, 6, 1973" 1). Reports from some of the committee members identified potential work days to begin building the path, reasons to avoid using Braille signage ("only 5% of blind people can read Braille — Braille signs are among the most frequently vandalized"), perspectives to consider, safety risks and concerns, plans to gather building materials, and other priorities.

Navigating these kinds of special projects within a larger group organization required good communication and problem solving from the parties involved. Efforts to extend the path to include underserved or underrepresented individuals and groups were motivated by a desire to make the path truly democratic and by a mission to engage as many people as possible in the act of experiencing nature. The group dynamics behind the planning of the project, however,

illustrated the ways in which these types of efforts were challenging even within the organization. Holmes wrote to Nancy Wilson, "You will see from our discussion (if I have projected it properly) that every big issue was smoothed out, and in talking about conflict there were no holds barred! . . . We're all working on an equal basis, and whereas there may be much discussion later about details, it will be uninhibited and open and NO one's feeling lacerated!" (E. Holmes to Wilson Tues. aft. 1). Navigating the committee meetings posed as many challenges as designing Watts' "special path."

Personal challenges arose for committee members as well, from trying to balance home and path responsibilities to making sure that everyone felt included in the process. In an attached note to Wilson, Holmes revealed her own anxiety, "Guess I was wound-up so that I couldn't drop off to sleep last night! So I worked over my scribbles – and did up the minutes this a.m. (cooler than ironing!) Hope I didn't leave out anything important. Please TELL me" (E.R. Holmes to Wilson 31 Aug. 1973). Holmes, in particular, served as a kind of intermediary in her role as recording secretary.

At one point during the development of the Path for the Blind, Holmes apologized to fellow committee members for not being as focused on the path because of personal issues with her family. Moving her ailing mother-in-law to a nearby facility, trying to help her youngest son (who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia), and dealing with her sister-in-law Jane's recurring cancer and death posed challenges to Holmes' ability to stay current with concerns and meetings about the path. She wrote, "I feel that I have let you all down! It's obvious that I have certainly been a flop as a 'coordinator/communicator.' But Sam and I have been living in a kind of continuous nightmare" (E. Holmes to "Blind Path" Co-workers 1). Through all of the personal

"crises" in Holmes' life, the one activity she consistently maintained at the time was keeping up with the prairie path correspondence.

Also challenging during the work on the Path for the Blind was the instability of the committee. Some of the members moved away, others became busy, and new members joined the cause. This kind of flux within the group made getting the path completed a more insurmountable task. Added to that was the problem of vandalism. Committee members met to think of new ways to deal with this increasing problem. When the project first began, about thirty of the guideposts were stolen (Zefinder). Fifty feet of the guide rope had also been cut. Despite these setbacks, the committee working on this project valued the outreach that could be made by its use. Leaders in park planning at the time emphasized the need for this type of outreach. According to Gaylord, Interpretive Planner for the Forest Service, "the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, has been one of the agencies working towards providing better and more varied facilities for the handicapped. It dedicated its first nature trail for the visually handicapped in 1967 on the White River National Forest near Aspen, Colorado. Since then it has helped develop more than two dozen other nature trails around the country for the handicapped" (2).

Part of the development process for the Path for the Blind committee was to research other models and make recommendations. Turner was instrumental early on in this process. She said, "We must remember that all facilities should accommodate both adult and juvenile physical heights. Railing on the stile should have a second (lower) rail. Rope should be taut and at an even height above ground level" (E.Holmes, "Minutes of Meeting-March 13, 1974"). A rough draft drawing of the path showed its emphasis on the senses of hearing, smell, and touch with stations geared to engage these other senses. Each knot in a rope was intended to indicate something new

to learn or experience along the path, including limestone rocks, a fossil, last year's robin's nest, and a woodpecker hole in a tree ("The Message" 1). The group began ambitiously to include all of the elements a dream path might need, but the reality of the work revealed how challenging such a project was to complete.

Further meetings of the committee focused on next steps, including ensuring posts would not be pulled from the ground, checking the rope height for sightless people, and clearing poison ivy (E. Holmes, "Minutes of the Meeting Aug. 30, 1973"). Holmes, Turner, and Wilson all "donned raincoats, gloves and boots, and took up arms (Ortho Brush-killer) against the poison ivy climbing up and around the pine at the south end of the Special Trail" (E. Holmes to Watts 6 Sept. 1974 2). Additional tests were completed on the newly forming path. Allie Monroe tested the path and "only one branch (which Helen Turner and [Holmes] had missed) slapped her head!" (E. Holmes to Herboth). The efforts of the group never diminished, even though the results never quite matched the original dream and plan. Holmes wrote to Watts, "Wasn't it you, Mrs. Watts, who reminded us – in about 1967 – that it took John Muir 14 (or was it 12?) years to achieve HIS goal? If it has taken 11 years to develop the Path itself thus far, then I suppose we are only beginning on the R.W.S. Trail!" (6 Sept. 1974 2). Holmes represented the determination and dedication that motivated all of the women involved with the prairie path.

Dedication to Democracy

The special projects of the early 1970s highlighted the mission of the original six women who took Watts' vision and went to work. They truly wanted nature to be accessible by all. The challenges they faced with these projects exposed some of the larger societal ills at work. Gaylord's talk at the National Symposium on Trails best summarized the problem when she wrote about the lack of recreation opportunities for people with physical limitations and other

handicaps. Watts, Turner, and especially Holmes worked to change that inequity. Their special projects became part of Watts' vision of a "footpath for all," even if the public was unready to accept their lofty goal. The early 1970s also represented a shift in leadership in the organization. Turner and Watts actively initiated the projects, but Holmes carried the torch to complete them after Turner retired to North Carolina and Watts died in 1975. A new group of volunteers emerged, and with them came different objectives for the future of the path.

The community of women who developed the Illinois Prairie Path and the shift in environmental thinking that defined and drove their activism produced written testimonies that illustrated the evolution of their response to a suburban landscape. It is primarily the unknown writing of the path's founders—the letters, meeting minutes, speeches, and news releases—that identifies the issues they faced and the obstacles they overcame. Their voices, recorded in letters "hastily" dashed and in historical accounts of the early days, offered variations on the same story. The women worked together as they built a collaborative model for navigating a public and political sphere. They used education as a means of communicating with the public, and under Watts' guidance, they fostered a framework of ecological awareness. This awareness undergirded their volunteer efforts. The documents they created, exchanged, and vigilantly saved as part of a history they recognized to be important over fifty years ago were intentional records of their commitment to providing better health, recreation, and connection to nature for all people.

At the same time as Watts and her colleagues were developing a new approach to conservation, these women were also defining new roles for themselves as leaders in a campaign for open space in a suburban setting. This evolution of environmental thinking and activism had its roots in earlier efforts by women conservationists. In *Made from This Earth: American Women and Nature*, Norwood recognizes the new roles women defined for themselves as

conservationists. She also extends Merchant's argument by tracing the study of nature from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, where "it came to fruition when women became major voices in nature writing and artistic depiction, in gardening and landscape design, in wildlife conservation, and in the development of environmental philosophy" (xvi). Watts had studied nature and educated others about ecology, but by generating a grassroots effort to restore a suburban landscape, she adopted a new role as environmental activist and helped the next generation of women enter into a new era of conservation. She also served as a model for citizen engagement and environmental activism.

Seeking National Recreation Trail Status

Recognition for Watts' model of conservation innovation began as early as 1964, when governmental officials offered encouragement for the Illinois Prairie Path Project. One letter from Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall communicated his support for Watts' idea: "I am always interested in this sort of endeavor–to see something beneficial made of an area that is otherwise useless and an eyesore. I hope your enthusiasm will meet with success" (Udall to Watts). A letter to Peterson from Illinois Governor, Otto Kerner, soon followed. Kerner also endorsed the project: "May I express to you my pleasure at seeing your Committee taking a lead in the effort for the establishment of such Prairie Path through DuPage County and perhaps into the neighboring counties. It is indeed vitally needed in our modern society of urban concentration and a project that may supply to the urban population the opportunity to walk somewhere other than on crowded streets and pavements" (Kerner to Peterson).

During this time, Peterson was nurturing the idea of the path being part of a push to develop a national trail system. Several critical actions occurred just prior to President Johnson's message to the Congress in February 1965 that placed the Illinois Prairie Path in a prime position

for recognition. Peterson had sent a copy of the IPP promotional filmstrip to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, Department of the Interior, in Washington. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation had also supplied the president with a statement about the Illinois Prairie Path. In January 1965, *Recreation* magazine reported extensively on the path, and Wisconsin Congressman Henry S. Reuss had inserted material on the Illinois Prairie Path into the Congressional Record (Peterson to "Friends"). These steps ensured that the prairie path gained attention and interest from governmental officials.

Ever wary of governmental officials, however, the tone of Watts' letters was both pointed and persistent when it came to securing the prairie path's place as a recreational resource for her community. She even wrote a letter to Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, expressing her frustration with governmental officials at all levels, for not doing more to help the cause. Her response illustrated the kinds of obstacles the group faced trying to establish the path: "Dear Mr. Udall, The Illinois Prairie Path needs help. Not a reassuring pat on the back. You have given that (as has the president, the Illinois senators, the Illinois governor, the local representative)" (Watts to Udall). Watts felt that the federal government was "working against us, wiping us out." Her biggest source of contention was the plans by the highway department to use the path for on and off ramps, and these changes were to be ninety percent paid for by federal funds. Watts minced no words: "The highway department is planning to buy up all rights-of-ways as they become abandoned. This is what the federal government should be doing, instead of financing the destruction of all useful and imaginative futures of these strips under concrete" (Watts to Udall). She did have faith in Udall, however, and had read his book with a discussion group at The Morton Arboretum. "We found it great," she said at the end of her letter. "I plead for your help,

your own personal help, for keeping this small crack in the wall to wall pavement" (Watts to Udall).

Udall's actions revealed that he was working toward a solution to the problem of saving space for recreation and beauty. After a twenty-month legislative process, with amendments recommended by both the Senate and the House, the National Trails System Act became law on October 2, 1968 (U.S. Dept. of Interior, *Proceedings: National Symposium on Trails* 13). Under the new law, there were three classes of trails: national scenic trails, national recreation trails, and connecting or side trails. A. Heaton Underhill, Assistant Director for State Grants and Resource Studies, indicated that the criteria for eligibility had not yet been established, when The IPPc expressed interest in applying, but the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation thought "the Prairie Path would best fit the category of national recreation trail" (Underhill to Ryerson). What Udall had initiated in his role of Secretary of the Interior became the next goal for the Illinois Prairie Path board: national recreation trail status.

The Illinois Prairie Path was the first trail to apply for this designation. On August 15, 1969, The IPPc had received the preliminary criteria for national recreation trails. There were seven criteria the trail had to meet: readiness (ready for public use), use and availability (provide a variety of outdoor recreation uses), length (continuous, short or long), location (available to the greatest number of people), design, administration (provide proof that the trail would be available to the public for at least ten years), and management (an overall plan for its use) (Underhill to Lewis). Path secretary, Eugene Lewis, sent the formal request to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. The board had assembled the necessary paperwork and "exhibits" to support the application (Lewis to Koenings).

The path board hoped that being designated a National Trail would help in the "continuing struggle against an enveloping urban environment." However, there was one major battle that remained. To qualify, the trail had to have a lease of at least ten years. When Watts and Turner signed the initial agreement authorizing the lease on the CA&E right-of-way, the final lease specified that it would run only until January 27, 1978. This amount of time failed to meet the requirement for national recreation trail status. Holmes documented the struggle to work with the county and secure a new lease: "We are told that the PRAIRIE PATH qualifies in almost every requirement, with one exception. We cannot guarantee that 'the trail will be in existence for the next ten years.' . . . We are working very hard indeed to convince Mr. Ronske, Mr. Rickson, Mr. Raymond, Mr. Bolinger, Mrs. Nahnke – and the others – of the real value and need of the PATH for DuPage County" (Holmes to Crum).

The IPPc worked diligently to persuade DuPage County to extend the lease and to address other issues that inspections of the path revealed to be problematic. Parts of the path were still rough for walking. Holmes recalled, "The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation inspectors, hiking the entire length of the Path with Bill Nemec and Eugene Lewis (Path Secretary) pointed out that we had not yet put up signs at all street and road crossings. We could and did correct those failings, but our hardest job was to persuade the DuPage County Board to give us an extension of our lease" (S. Holmes & E. Holmes 15). Part of the reluctance on the part of the county was the issue of potential federal funding for the path and the desire to maintain control of the rights-of-way at the local level. Ryerson tried to reassure county supervisors, "If you can find it in your hearts to extend our lease, we probably will need an extra year or so to [accommodate] [bureaucratic] red tape. We promise not to seek federal funds. (You may of course, and if you wish to amend our current lease to include this provision our Board will accept

it)" (Ryerson to Members 1). It seemed that everything was in place for the path to achieve the national trail status, but the county continued to remain opposed to extending the lease.

First, the county board passed off The IPPc's request for lease extension to the county board's highway committee. That group refused to discuss or vote on the proposal, but instead just let it sit in committee for an extended period of time. This delay cost the Illinois Prairie Path receiving the designation of the first official national recreation trail. Another group was able to take that honor, even though the Illinois Prairie Path had been the first to apply for the designation. Secondly, the highway committee's refusal was based on the idea that if the federal government supported the path and gave it national status, then there could be no means of using the right-of-way for its original purposes, including as a road or area for a water line (DeMuth). Bill Nemec, The IPPc board president at the time, explained, "Some board members fear that if the path is designated a national trailway the federal government could tell the county what it can and cannot do with the land" (DeMuth).

Peterson continued to persuade locally and in his political circles in Washington. He wrote Nemec about the county's refusal to extend the lease, "Let me know if there is any way I can help in providing some additional testimony to the Board's Executive Committee or to the full County Board when you meet with them. As you may know, the Illinois Prairie Path is being used nationally as a splendid example of citizen effort and it should get the recognition that you are seeking" (Peterson to Nemec). Even though approval of the lease extension had yet to be granted, Peterson was already making plans for the path to be recognized and honored at the first national symposium on trails. The Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, and the Open Lands Project all planned to sponsor the symposium. Peterson was in the middle of the planning for this event in Washington: "I will be in Washington in June . . . . And, of course, the

Prairie Path will be represented and will undoubtedly be recognized as it is already by the national group as having a significant impact on trails" (Peterson to Nemec). It was Peterson's involvement with the Open Lands Project that helped strategically to position the Illinois Prairie Path as a model for national recreation trails.

By March 7, 1971, DuPage County had finally agreed to approve the lease extension for the Illinois Prairie Path. With this last obstacle cleared, and with the smoothing of the rough areas of the path's surface, 12.5 miles of the Illinois Prairie Path achieved national recreation trail status. While The IPPc worked all possible angles to ensure that the path would achieve this designation, Peterson and the Open Lands Project were instrumental in guiding the group toward this goal. All of the supporting materials in the "exhibits" originated as ideas Peterson had expressed to Turner and other board members to help ensure the result of national trail status. That he was at the center of the national trails symposium in Washington came as no surprise. Peterson was poised to make his project succeed.

Saving an Open Area for All Time

The National Symposium on Trails marked a significant point in the careers of both Watts and Peterson. Secretary of the Interior, Rogers C. B. Morton, named 27 new National Trails and remarked on the exciting prospect that even more trails would be added to the growing list. His message echoed Watts' original mission: "The trail experience excludes no one" (Morton 1). He also included another important component of Watts' core belief, the idea that teamwork, prompted by an individual's passion, can accomplish great feats. Morton singled out Watts in his speech for her personal contributions and her ability to involve others to take action. Watts became a symbol representing "a growing community of concerned doers" (1).

Praise came from all corners for Watts' efforts and achievement. A letter from Senator Adlai Stevenson congratulated Watts, "I was delighted to hear that the Illinois Prairie Path has been designated a National Recreational Trail. It is a tribute to your many dedicated years on behalf of our environment" (Stevenson to Watts). Newspapers covered the story, reporting on the ceremony held in Watts' honor back at The Morton Arboretum (Seslar). Nemec also shared the good news with the members of The IPPc, emphasizing the group effort and the hardworking attitude shared by them all. Nemec, Watts, and Peterson were all featured in the photos from the symposium as representatives for the Illinois Prairie Path, and shortly after the symposium, other sections of the Illinois Prairie Path were included in the designation. With hope for continued expansion of the path, the journey to develop sections in other counties, including Kane and Cook Counties, continued.

Along the journey, and despite the many obstacles, both Watts and Peterson shared the same dream, mission, and motivation. They wanted to secure the future of the Illinois Prairie Path and save it as an open area for all time. Although they approached their work in different ways, and certainly at different governmental levels, they shared a mutual respect for each other. Peterson articulated his respect for Watts' work in his letter to Stuart P. Davey at the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, prior to the national trail symposium:

> It would be very fitting to have Mrs. Raymond Watts (May Theilgaard Watts) present on this occasion. She has been the founder of the Path, its tireless promoter and should be the person recognized as its founder. A life-long career as a naturalist, one of the earliest ecologists and a person who is recognized across the country for her writing and leadership, she is deserving of all honors. Many of us in the Midwest owe our enthusiasm

> for the Path, for good landscape planning, for the natural quality of the environment to the inspiration of Mrs. Watts and we would like to see her in Washington for the meeting. (Peterson to Davey)

The success of the Illinois Prairie Path was a testament to the efforts of both of these civic and environmental leaders.

CHAPTER 4

The Legacy of the Illinois Prairie Path

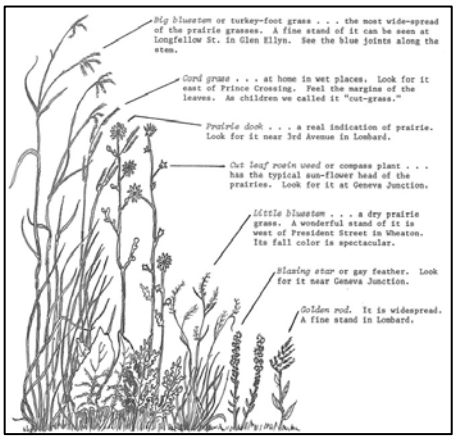

Figure 4.1. Illustration and description of locations for prairie plants, Illinois Prairie Path Newsletter, Summer 1969 (Courtesy of North Central College Archives and Special Collections)

Even before the Illinois Prairie Path became an officially designated National Recreation Trail, Helen Turner showcased path highlights for every season in the organization's newsletters. These newsletters served as invitations to path members and path goers to explore, walk, and discover. In the Summer 1969 issue, Turner wrote, "Some who come to walk hope wistfully to find themselves on a narrow footpath, once beaten down by buffalo or Indian, and winding through seven-foot grass. Such a trail was made by feet following the contour of the land. Our path was originally surveyed for a railroad" ("What to See" 1). In a few simple sentences, Turner outlined the complex layers of the path's history and users' relationship to it. The path founders' goal was not to recreate a prairie pastoral in the Illinois Prairie Path, but rather to infuse the landscape, shaped by the railroad and by various settlement patterns, with elements of the native prairie that once grew there. Old and new landscape forms and features combined along the path to link diverse communities and residents in a regional space.

Turner explained, "You won't find the 'sea' of waving grass that delighted, and at the same time frightened, the pioneer. That is gone. But wherever we have managed to keep the earth-moving machines off, you will find the margins rich with the native prairie plants, a reminder of the time when Illinois was really the Prairie State." Initially, path founders worked to reclaim the abandoned landscape in order to provide a space for its many users to experience nature, recreation, better health, and stronger connections to each other and to the world around them. Restoring the native plants was one direction path founders took to preserve the remnants of the prairie landscape and to name the path (Fig. 4.1). They also had to plant and nurture supporters in each of the towns along the former railroad right-of-way. The path's strength as a regional resource depended not only on its continuity across multiple towns, but also on its capacity to support and welcome its many diverse users.

Developing a Regional Citizenship

Watts, Turner, and the other path founders framed their understanding of the environment within the context of suburban living. They designed a path that connected suburban communities made up of people who shared common values and interests during the 1960s. As residents of Naperville, Watts and Turner looked outside of their neighborhood to other suburbs in DuPage County to build a regional citizenship of people connected to their environment through a reuse of linear open space. Their model of conservation and ecological thinking joined diverse suburban landscapes, from twee downtowns to reinvented post-industrial spaces, through heavily populated city centers overrun by commuter trains and across open swathes of wetlands, farmlands, and prairie remnants.

In this way, the Illinois Prairie Path united the region around recreation and access to nature. Watts promoted all uses for the path, including the three primary activities represented on

the IPP logo: walking, biking, and horseback riding. She welcomed the idea of scouting groups and school groups, college classes, and conservation groups all using the path, along with everyday people traveling from one place to another during a typical day. These multiple uses and users, along with the grassroots efforts of volunteers who built the path and fought to sustain it, democratized the Illinois Prairie Path. The path had the capacity to bring people together from all socio-economic classes and all walks of life to develop a regional citizenship and to address environmental problems.

Like their predecessors from the Progressive Era, Watts and the female founders used civic engagement, volunteerism, and service to their communities to solve environmental problems. They were committed to preserving the land and the lifestyle they valued. The women enlisted the help of other influential open lands activists, such as Gunnar Peterson, to secure a foothold in the region as environmental change advocates and to advance their cause. These leaders believed that grassroots efforts to work together and build community support had the potential to shape the landscape as well as people's attitudes towards environmental problems. The women worked from the ground up to recruit supporters from each of the communities along the Illinois Prairie Path. They canvassed for the path with many different kinds of groups, always working to broaden the range of their volunteer base and to cover the many miles the path linked. Initially, they worked with groups that had an interest in plants and the environment. These common interests allowed them to facilitate a conversation about open space conservation with representatives from many communities.

By looking at these problems through an ecological lens, the women were able to lead their communities through innovative thinking and practice. Using these women as role models, current leaders of The IPPc also have the opportunity to educate their communities about the

many benefits offered by recreation and being in nature along the Illinois Prairie Path. The socioeconomic and racial backgrounds of some of Chicago's western suburbs have changed significantly over the past fifty years, making the need to connect diverse communities of users more urgent and more challenging. The Illinois Prairie Path can serve that role, and its volunteers can facilitate linking communities and strengthening the regional citizenship fostered by Watts, Turner, and Peterson.

Has today's Illinois Prairie Path fulfilled Watts' dream for democratic access to nature and recreation? What was the context for democracy in recreational trail use in the 1960s, and how have attitudes about democracy in recreation changed? This chapter seeks to answer these questions and consider the ways that Watts' vision for the public footpath has met or limited the needs of its users fifty years after its creation.

Fifty Years of Recreation Trails: Learning from the Past

The Illinois Prairie Path has grown from twenty-seven miles to sixty-one miles and encompasses towns with greater racial and socioeconomic diversity than during its beginnings in the 1960s. The path's physical appearance shifts from one town to the next, from picturesque wooded areas to disjointed industrial streets. Yellow coneflower, royal catchfly, butterfly weeds, and asters populate assorted prairie restoration projects along some parts of the path today, but graffiti, broken glass, and abandoned buildings are also part of the path's physical landscape.

While the path may still be a place with the potential to foster democracy—Watts' idea that "footpaths are defended with spirit by their users"—there are obvious inequities along the Illinois Prairie Path. As the demographics of these suburbs have changed over time, not all users have equal access to the path and its many health and recreation benefits. Safety concerns, racist attitudes, and weakened community connections and partnerships have created obstacles for path

users of all backgrounds, as well as for the board of The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation. The needs for the path have evolved as well, and the evaluations and surveys of path use must take into account these changes. The IPPc has an incredible opportunity to expand the communities' understanding of the many possibilities for what recreation can be and who may participate. Moving forward, it is necessary to place Watts' vision and the work of the early path founders in a context that helps to illuminate our understanding of the path's present uses and challenges.

Fifty years after Watts shared her idea for a public footpath, we are faced with the same kinds of challenges that she and Peterson combatted in their quest to preserve open space. The Illinois Prairie Path emerged at a time in history of changing technologies, increasing consumerism, and disappearing open land. Today we experience all of these issues, compounded by global concerns about climate change, food scarcity, environmental justice, and the urgent need to provide children with opportunities to connect with nature. Unlike the volunteers who championed the Illinois Prairie Path during the 1960s—many of whom were lifelong residents of their respective towns—people today lead more mobile lives. They do not often have the luxury of staying in one place to know it in a rooted way through a prolonged residence. Recreation trails can serve as one means of connecting disparate people and communities to a specific place, and in the case of the Illinois Prairie Path, to a specific region, making the path a shared and unifying resource.

In the last fifty years, the number of trails in America has increased dramatically. The demand for more trails and access to the outdoors suggests that people still want what Watts, Turner, and the other IPP founders worked to provide: a place to experience nature. In his study *Place and Placelessness*, Relph argues that people today, living primarily mobile and displaced

lives, are more likely to experience landscapes with an "attitude of placelessness" (145). I argue that the Illinois Prairie Path, an urban recreation trail, can be a model for *the* place—*the* regional resource—that connects communities with each other and with nature. As part of the nationwide system of trails, first developed fifty years ago, the Illinois Prairie Path has the potential to create a kind of continuity for people living in a mobile world. However, the IPP has to remain open to and accessible by all people in order to provide this link between people and place.

Whose Path Is It? Whose Nature Is It?

The original IPP Committee of Exploration understood the need to gain the support of public and private organizations as they planned the path project. Fifty years ago, there was no real plan in place to help develop trails at any level–local, regional, or national. Nor was there any funding. Turner explained, "The Prairie Path is unique not because it is on an old interurban line, but in part because it is in a densely settled area, but more because it was developed by a group of volunteers–no salaries, no federal, state or county funds" ("This Is the Story" 1). Watts and path advocates were literally forging a new path in terms of how to integrate a trail into an urban/suburban landscape, and they made huge strides for redefining women's suburban roles through their activism and engagement. They also redefined "nature," at a time when wilderness preservation held greater value than reusing neglected space. While the goal was to make the IPP accessible to all, and the women worked vigilantly to provide access for some marginalized groups, there was not a lot of diversity in terms of path users.

The women focused first on the ecological diversity of the prairie plant community, and then shifted to thinking about the different groups who could adopt the maintenance of the path, including organizations such as the Audubon Society and Isaac Walton League, or groups of Boy Scouts and local college students. All of these groups mirrored the ethnic make-up of the

suburban towns from which they drew their members. In 1963, when Watts first proposed the idea for the path project, the towns along the twenty-seven miles of the abandoned railroad right-of-way were fairly homogeneous, not because all suburbs were identical, but because they were populated by primarily white, middle-class residents.

One example of the types of communities along the IPP was Elmhurst, which got "a rare burst of embarrassing publicity" in 1957 "when York High School students organized an assembly performance by a black singing group from Bronzeville, on Chicago's South Side, then had to cancel it because none of the suburb's hotels or motels would allow the group to stay overnight" (Ehrenhalt 82). More attention was paid to class boundaries at that time within the different suburbs than to racial boundaries. The IPPc leaders wanted to reach a constituency of supporters from all of the towns along the path, but they focused their energy more on how to secure the land, negotiate with the utility companies and city officials, and enlist help from local conservation-minded groups to maintain the path. Watts' vision for a democratic footpath had not reached the level of consciously breaking down racial or socio-economic barriers. However, the path provided the impetus to do so, even though the group faced many challenges.

Attitudes in Elmhurst, as in other growing suburbs, showed resentment over changes to the place they once knew as the "'small town where you can be sure that there is no one on the streets who does not belong there'" (Ehrenhalt 196). This resentment first targeted issues of class differences. Having more space was a sign of better living, and losing that space to further development compromised the standard of living suburbanites sought. Suburban life was as much about seeking open space as it was about defining a lifestyle based on likeminded living.

Even as Watts worked to reclaim neglected space and label it "nature" in a suburban landscape, she seemed to overlook the natures of the broad range of suburban landscapes she

attempted to join in her regional plan for outdoor recreation. In its early days of fighting for the path, The IPPc recognized that continuity was essential to make the path a physical reality. One town's refusal to participate threatened to ruin the entire project. Buy-in from each town was necessary, but having a path connect these towns physically did not necessarily mean all residents subscribed to the vision for recreation the women promoted, or were even represented in the vision. These women had to change people's ideas about what "nature" was, and to help them see it as something that could exist in an urban or suburban setting and also be regional, not a distant national park of resplendent wilderness. Their actions also challenged people's notions about women's roles in defining nature. Defining nature in America had been men's domain.

According to Hayden's *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820-2000*, "if suburban space has sometimes resisted ethnic diversity, it has been even less accommodating to changes in household composition and women's roles" (13). Watts and the other women involved with the prairie path project did modify, if not completely reject, these roles to crusade for their cause. However, they did not extend themselves to challenge other inequities related to their environmental and recreation work. Foregrounding the complexity of diversity in their efforts to get the path built, and to secure the path's place as part of the nationwide system of trails, never seemed to have entered their consciousness or their cause. Even though "developers of affluent suburbs increasingly wished to exclude potential buyers on the basis of race, religion, and social class," the women who worked on the prairie path project aimed for inclusivity, at least from a geographic standpoint. They had a regional vision for the path as connecting places and people through a unified access to nature and recreation, but there was an unresolved tension in their vision, as in the suburbs themselves. Social inequities problematized efforts to have

unified regional opportunities to experience nature (69). Outdoor recreation in metropolitan areas emerged out of this environment and social climate.

Increased Demand for Recreational Activities

The goal of the nationwide system of trails was twofold: to secure land for recreational use and to provide recreation outlets for an ever-increasing population, particularly in metropolitan areas where there was more competition for land use. In 1966, the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation delivered a report on the nationwide system of trails. The report highlighted attempts that had been made to institute a broad plan to construct and maintain recreational trails. Efforts to introduce legislation as early as 1945, and again in 1963 and 1965, were stalled in the House of Representatives and the Senate (*Trails for America* 19). The urgency in 1966 for legislation regarding a nationwide system of trails corresponded to an increased demand for recreation opportunities, as a result of the country's burgeoning population. President Johnson believed all people should be able to enjoy nature: "Beauty must not be just a holiday treat, but a part of our daily life. It means not just easy physical access, but equal access for rich and poor, Negro and white, city dweller and farmer" ("Lyndon B. Johnson"). In this way, advocating for a developed nationwide system of trails was not merely about increasing recreation opportunities, but rather it was an enterprise geared toward making places *equally* accessible.

Plans to implement new trails considered several important features of metropolitan areas: "Population, size, density, and distribution are key determinants of metropolitan trails programs. Where population pressures are greatest, efforts to provide the types of outdoor recreation that trails afford should be intensified" (*Trails for America* 120). While the report targeted "virtually" all citizens, for whom "walking, hiking, and bicycling [were] simple

pleasures within economic reach," people who had both increased leisure time and disposable income were the primary audience for the study (13). The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation report also identified the type of trail most effective in boosting urban recreation: "Trails located near metropolitan areas and adapted to the use of walkers, hikers, horseback riders, and cyclists are among the best means of accommodating urban recreationists." Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, selected twelve urban areas as potential grant recipients from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. While the intent of the Land and Water Conservation Fund was to provide additional recreation opportunities for citizens of specific metropolitan areas, these opportunities were really only accessible by people who had the leisure time and money to enjoy them. Chicago was among the twelve cities in the country recommended to receive grant money to develop more trails.

One section of the report focused on Chicago and what it already offered urban recreation enthusiasts. Chicago "has provided about 50 miles of bicycle paths including 17 miles along the shore of Lake Michigan. As many as 10,000 cyclists use these in a single day. Recently a bike path was constructed along the North Shore channel on land leased from the sanitary district" (*Trails for America* 124). These accomplishments suggested that there was already public interest, a plan in use, and a desire for more trail development in the Chicago area. The report went on to discuss the exciting new trail possibility along the CA&E railroad right-of-way: "One excellent trail exists along the abandoned right-of-way of the Chicago, Aurora, and Elgin Electric Railway. There is strong support to have the counties acquire this right-of-way and establish a 'Prairie Path' for hiking, cycling, and riding" (124). From the earliest conversations about expanding recreation trails, the Illinois Prairie Path served as a model for other trail development projects at regional and national levels.

The idea of "possibility" was a key component of looking for new opportunities to introduce recreation into the urban landscape. Potential for a variety of trails existed in urban open spaces, according to the report: "Stream valleys and their flood plains, in particular, offer possibilities for extensive trail networks, linking homes and subdivisions to stream valley parks, to downtown centers, and to the distant countryside" (U. S. Department of the Interior 130). All of the IPP advocates recognized these possibilities in their own vision for the prairie path project. They saw where it could connect to the forest preserves and to the various riverways. Of course, they also realized the potential of abandoned rights-of-way. The report identified these options as well: "Prime possibilities lie in the use of utility rights-of-way. Natural gas lines, power lines, abandoned railroad or street car rights-of-way, and easements for underground cables all have potential value. Often, these rights-of-way and easements pass through or around cities and are ideally located to provide a network of trails."

Here, the report identified the spaces that could meet the needs of the growing population. Maximizing unused or neglected spaces was an integral component of the plan to increase outdoor recreation opportunities in metropolitan areas. With these kinds of recommendations, the report satisfied its first goal, that of securing space for outdoor recreation. However, the report was less clear about what members of the population would actually take advantage of the new recreation opportunities and have access to this nationwide system of trails. While the report offered both insights and recommendations, it generalized the discussion of "population" in large metropolitan areas. The population depicted and described in the report was primarily white and predominantly male. This generalization failed to address the specific needs of diverse groups of individuals to access these new recreation opportunities. In the 1960s, there was unequal access to public spaces for both women and people of color, so to imagine that the

population addressed in the report was inclusive would be misguided and naive. In this way, the report perpetuated the idea that the greatest need for additional recreation outlets and opportunities was for a very specific group of citizens, what President Johnson called the "forgotten outdoorsmen of today" ("Lyndon B. Johnson" 3).

In her study *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*, Carolyn Finney problematizes this generalized view of American citizens' experiences in the outdoors depicted in publications such as the 1966 Bureau of Outdoor Recreation report. Finney argues, "The narrative of the Great Outdoors in the United States is explicitly informed by a rhetoric of wilderness conquest, Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and the belief that humans can either control or destroy Nature with technology. . . . Implicitly, it is informed by a legacy of Eurocentrism and the linkage of wilderness to whiteness, wherein both become naturalized and universalized" (28). Looking for any sign of African Americans in this narrative, Finney notes their absence. She writes, "Along with environmental organizations, environmental participation in outdoor recreation appears to have a primarily 'white' face" (26). Documents such as the 1966 report by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, as well as legislation for the Wilderness Act and the Civil Rights Act in 1964, influenced how "we frame, name, and claim issues relating to environment and race" (43). The organizations and government programs that supported these documents and legislation have shaped our views of who belongs in the outdoors and who has access to the outdoors.

Watts' vision of the Illinois Prairie Path began to rewrite the "narrative of the Great Outdoors" with a focus on women's efforts to include neglected suburban space, not just wilderness, as part of the natural world. She also believed in the power of the public footpath to break down differences among social classes, even though she and her co-founders represented

the privilege of their own social class in their lives and work. The issue of race entered into IPP planning only in terms of the connections Gunnar Peterson brought to bear as part of his work with the Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, not as a conscious part of the women's grassroots efforts to make the path accessible to everyone. Watts framed her ideology from an ecological viewpoint, not a political one. She and Peterson had different priorities and goals for their work related to the path. This difference reflected their purview of the world as well—Watts responding to regional issues of the suburbs and Peterson to national trends. Peterson had broader horizons, developing the IPP with attention to the Civil Rights Movement and national conversations about conservation.

Unlike Watts, Peterson's work had a foundation in addressing social issues and concerns. Recreation was one of the primary areas of social concern for Open Lands, along with housing, employment, and other social issues. By creating opportunities for recreation, and equal access to healthful living, Peterson believed that trails were one way to improve social ills. While he recognized that trails were not the answer to all of the problems related to environmental degradation and social inequality, he definitely saw them as the link to bringing people of diverse backgrounds together in a common cause. "We have seen the necessity for trails in and out of the city," Peterson wrote. "At the same time we need trails back into the city so that they may provide a two-way line out of the central city and at the same time bringing the concern of the suburbanites back into the heart of the city. Trails may be a way by which we can lead people out of the ghetto, out of poverty, out of war with a reordering of priorities to place new emphasis on people" ("Citizen Action" 23).

By the time of the first program published for the National Recreation Trails Symposium in 1971, ideas about how to encourage more citizen action and involvement were a central part

of the discussion on implementing a nationwide system of trails. In his talk, Peterson also cited the example of Watts as a symbol for the "tremendous progress of the development of the Illinois Prairie Path." The citizen's responsibility, Peterson argued, was to know the territory, to be familiar with the landscape and the possibilities that existed there for trail development.

Watts knew the territory. She was the model of one citizen who took responsibility. Peterson acknowledged her efforts and encouraged similar kinds of involvement: "We are the ones who have lived in the area for a long time, that know the personal contacts that can be very helpful. There is a tremendous knowledge that can be pulled out from the grass roots and brought into focus in the development of our trails system. We have got to see how we can involve the total range of our population" ("Citizen Action" 24). Peterson also acknowledged the need for people willing to challenge the status quo. He explained, "We need to find the citizens who are willing to make waves, to change the usual, to move, to dare to be innovative. We need to upset some of the traditions and be creative in our approach."

Lessons for Today

Examples of current efforts to diversify recreation opportunities come up against the same kinds of attitudes about gender, race, and class that shrouded institutional mindsets and national organizations during the 1960s. Today's environmental and recreation organizations seeking input and ideas to invite more diversity into their groups have difficulty seeing their own role in setting the barriers to make that shift possible. The questions being asked today about ways to diversify and expand both the organizations and the access to recreation sound familiar. "Hiking Trails in America: Pathways to Prosperity," an updated report on our nation's trails, released in June 2015 by the American Hiking Society, asks the same kinds of questions that the 1966 Bureau of Outdoor Recreation's original report took to task: *What are the benefits of trails?*

Who is using the trails, and how can we get more people from diverse backgrounds to use the trails? It seems as though not much has changed in the last fifty years, if the questions being raised are echoes of the past. Like Watts, Peterson was a visionary, but diversity on the Illinois Prairie Path has not been achieved.

The problem seems to lie with who is asking the questions and who is conducting the research. If the environmental organizations and institutions continue to be run by a homogeneous group of people, then the effort to engage increased diversity in recreation users rings false, as there is no one in the room to represent the diversity being sought. Finney asks, "So, whose stories are being told? Whose pictures do we see? What messages are being given? Who is being targeted? Through what processes are these meanings/representations channeled to the public? The 'possibility to make visible' is a concrete form of power. What about the person who is made visible or invisible?" (69). Finney's questions push the discussion to a new level of critical inquiry into the ways in which environmental organizations today retain clear hierarchies both in how they structure the power within their organizations and in how they communicate their message to a broader public. Finney argues, "You can't build the foundation of your organization and then put in diversity afterwards" (88). Promoting diversity, while good, and fighting for environmental justice, also good, are moves in the right direction for environmental organizations seeking change, both processes are a response to the problematic system currently in place, not a restructuring of the system.

The American Hiking Society June 2015 report highlights all of the growth and interest in the trail system, to which the Illinois Prairie Path belongs as a national recreation trail. According to the current report, in 2013 there were more than 34 million hikers, 9 million backpackers, and 8 million mountain bikers recorded as trail users (Outdoor Industry Association

Data qtd. in American Hiking Society). Recreationists continue to seek options and opportunities, and cities are realizing that they need to capitalize on the available possibilities for open space in urban landscapes to continue to accommodate all of the walkers, hikers, cyclists, and other recreation users. The American Hiking Society identifies three areas for improvements in the trail system: closing the gaps in the trails, building more urban trails, and increasing user diversity (American Hiking Society 1). The third area for improvement requires closer scrutiny, because of its focus on the diversity and empowerment of trail users, than the first two areas that focus more on trail maintenance and development.

One goal is to continue to build and develop new trails, but connected to this outcome is the need to make trails safe and welcoming for their users. According to the report, "we must help make more Americans from diverse communities aware of trails, both near and far, that are available for public enjoyment. Efforts should also be focused on educational outreach to ensure new trail users feel safe and empowered when making initial visits" (American Hiking Society 1). Trail development should be part of urban renewal plans helping to rejuvenate communities and provide educational as well as recreational opportunities for people in the community. The quality of life in urban areas is linked directly to the kinds of opportunities that green spaces and trails provide. Cities are measured by the ways in which they integrate a green infrastructure into the community: "Parks and trails help move cities and counties 'up the ladder' in public perception and desire for quality of life. There is a direct and positive impact of parks, trails and open space on property values which help contribute to nature-focused, economically valuable neighborhoods" (15). However, there is an even stronger sense of urgency to create green spaces for communities that have little to no access to them. In this way, there is a strong link between developing additional urban and suburban trails and fostering an awareness in metropolitan

communities that linear parks are viable places for recreation. It is difficult to determine from this report what the driving factor is in the lack of diversity of trail users: lack of trails or inaccessibility for some other reason.

While the number of Americans who participated in backpacking increased from 7 million to 9 million in a three-year span, the report highlights the lack of diversity in this growing area of outdoor recreation. Hiking "tends to be one of the more inclusive outdoor recreational pursuits . . . . Despite this, outdoor recreation, including the hiking community is not a complete reflection of American diversity—at least not yet. In 2012, among those Americans between the ages of 25-44, while 60% of Caucasians had participated in outdoor recreation, in that same age group, only 54% each among Asian/Pacific Islanders and Latinos and 47% of African Americans had" (American Hiking Society 10). By increasing the number of trails in urban areas and helping people become more aware of the trails near where they live, the American Hiking Society believes that there will be more opportunities created for diverse users.

One problem with the plan presented in the report, however, is that the "diversity of users" is generalized into one category. There is no differentiation among the groups mentioned, nor is there any reference made to specific urban areas. While an undeniable need for additional trails in urban and suburban areas exists, as well as outreach to underrepresented communities, the actions the American Hiking Society outlines as solutions are also generalized: "Working with underrepresented communities, establish a strategy to engage, educate, and encourage members of those communities to enjoy the benefits that trails offer" (17). If one of the long-range benefits of trails is to build stronger communities, then there needs to be a better articulated plan for how to engage and involve the many different people within those communities.

How national environmental organizations promote their group and represent the opportunities available to members impacts a community's response. The ways in which the American Hiking Society, for example, showcases its recreation opportunities will determine how community members view those opportunities, as well as the organization itself. When Finney studied the American Hiking Society as part of her research, she discovered some troubling, but not surprising, tensions in how the group advertised its recreation opportunities for trail users:

> Like the NPS [National Park Service], other environmental institutions and organizations are vulnerable to the power of representations affecting the way they promote their cause while asking for greater participation from diverse constituencies. One case in point is the American Hiking Society. This organization emphasizes volunteer trail work and fun as part of the experience it offers. However, on their website, all the pictures of white people showed them relaxing while the one picture of a black person was shown working. The people who created the site did not see anything wrong until a black woman, who was hired to help them address the lack of diversity in their membership, pointed it out to them. (85-6)

Even more problematic than the images used to represent the involvement of diverse communities in this organization was the fact that the people involved with creating the website saw no problem with it. "Getting everyone concerned to agree that there is a problem in the first place" seems to be the first, and largest, challenge (96).

Finney's example of the American Hiking Society media website foregrounds two important efforts to change the American environmental narrative. First, the organization sought

representation from the African American community to help address the lack of diversity in the organization. This step suggests that the organization cared about broadening its membership and reaching new communities. Second, the woman who pointed out the oversight on their website made visible the problem of how to frame what Finney calls the "black environmental experience" (108). By questioning the organization's assumptions about what the "black environmental experience" looks like, the woman hired to aid them in diversity efforts called attention to the stereotypes used to depict the black environmental experience in their promotional media.

Finney suggests, "The African American environmental relationship, like any human/environment relationship, is complex and always changing. Engaging the diversity of ideas within the black community on their own merit without automatically allocating them to a particular framework simply because of race creates the possibility of new collaborations and new iterations of human/environment interactions" (110). For environmental organizations such as the American Hiking Society, the goals extend beyond trail completion, new trail development, and increasing user diversity. Efforts to increase diversity, while needed, depend on additional next steps, including more conversation and action to create possibilities for new collaborations from people of all backgrounds.

Benefits of Paths as Community Connectors

Making these kinds of connections through trail use, outdoor recreation, and involvement with environmental organizations fosters social, economic, and health benefits, as well as environmental awareness, all objectives that early Illinois Prairie Path advocates promoted and current IPPc members continue to promote. According to the American Hiking Society 2015 report, since the 1960s, the "abundance of trails has demonstrated new ways to connect

communities with each other as well as with surrounding landscapes and businesses, even while improving the home values in the neighborhoods through which they travel. They have helped numerous Americans improve their health by walking and bicycling and for many children they are one of the few opportunities for them to experience nature first hand" (16). Now organizations need to foster ways to be more inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds and to generate ways to get more people active in recreation and involved. All of the positive growth and development of recreation in America will remain limited unless direct action is taken to revise the environmental narrative and make recreation a truly democratic endeavor.

Organizations focused on connecting minority populations with the natural world provide an important model for developing partnerships to encourage young people in the cities to connect with the natural world through recreation and science education. The Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc is one example of an organization working to promote diversity in outdoor recreation among children in black communities. In July 2015, the sorority of African American women, "signed a historic memorandum of understanding in Washington, D.C., to work cooperatively to engage urban youth in outdoor recreation, biological sciences and healthful activity in nature" with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made a similar agreement and partnered with the fraternity organization.

These initiatives help both organizations develop and implement programming to increase diversity in recreation and in governmental organizations like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: "The partnership unites Zeta members and the Service in engaging youth in recreation on national wildlife refuges and helping them understand how such activity promotes healthful living . . . . The partnership also aims to boost opportunities for young people to pursue science,

technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers, and give Zetas a greater voice on conservation issues. In addition, the pact is meant to encourage African American students and professionals to consider Service careers" (Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.). Both Watts and Peterson would have lauded this effort to educate young people about the importance of recreation and the value in connecting to nature. They modeled the benefits of connecting community partners to promote healthful living, and the legacy of their work has shaped this kind of innovative partnership. The work of these organizations also illustrates that the benefits of recreation in the outdoors are not restricted only to economic gains, which seems to be a primary focus of many current assessments of trail use.

Today's urban planners are looking for ways to capitalize on green infrastructure because it boosts the economy at all levels. Providing "pathways to prosperity," trails build economic prosperity, educate, provide good health, and connect people to their American heritage (American Hiking Society 9). The number of trail miles has increased from 14,810 in 1965 to 42,434 miles today, and these many miles of trails have provided the kinds of community connections physically and geographically that will also work to bring together the people who live near them through recreation, civic engagement, and boosting the economy (16). According to the American Hiking Society report, "in 2012, the annual economic value of outdoor recreation in America was estimated by the Outdoor Industry Association (of which American Hiking Society is a member) to be $646 billion in spending ($81 billion directly from trail recreation) and supporting 6.1 million direct jobs (over 768,000 jobs from trail recreation), more than double that of the oil and gas industry in America" (13). There is no doubt that trails are important to our cities' growth, vitality, and ability to create connections between people and place.

The research in the American Hiking Society's 2015 report outlines the importance of making new connections to nature possible given the ever-expanding built environment in our metropolitan areas. In order for people to gain access both to the trails and to the larger conversation about environmental awareness and engagement, urban and suburban trails, like the Illinois Prairie Path, have an important role to play in including and involving more people. As suburbs become more urban today, it is even more important to make trails available to help people connect to nearby nature: "8 of 10 Americans live in urban environments and we are faced with a new frontier—how can we venture out from our built environment and reconnect with nature? The challenge now is the larger built environment—our neighborhoods, suburbs, cities and countryside. . . . Working together we can revitalize our communities by making trails more accessible and relevant to kids and adults across our nation" (American Hiking Society 15). Civic engagement along the trails can become the new means of reestablishing those values that suburban dwellers nurtured in the past and continue to promote today.

Civic engagement, however, also needs to include new voices, challenges to the status quo, and a breakdown of power structures that seek only to maintain inequities in terms of access and voice in decision making processes. Unless everyone is welcome to participate, and not only within the dominant framework, the trails may increase in number and miles, but the users will largely remain the same, favoring the dominant culture that has shaped the environmental narrative in America since its beginning. The country's environmental organizations have not laid out clear guidelines for achieving the next steps, specifically to increase diversity in trail users. State and regional groups have faced similar challenges. Do Illinois trails offer any answers for urban and suburban efforts to increase diversity and revise the environmental narrative in America? Is the Illinois Prairie Path still a model footpath for all?

Making Trails Count

A new sense of urgency has taken hold of environmental and recreation organizations in Illinois. Motivating trail initiatives in Illinois is the "competition in public infrastructure and economic development [which] is fierce. Proposed projects must build a returns-based case to convince Illinois officials, private funders, and the tax-paying public to invest" ("Making Trails Count in Illinois" 2). In order to justify trail development and maintenance in Illinois, proof of the number of users and multiple trail uses must be procured to support further action. It is no longer adequate to say that trails matter to people, but now there must be evidence to show the many ways in which trails "count." The research provided in the American Hiking Society report speaks to the benefits of trails in providing economic gains for communities in real estate, transportation, and outdoor recreation industries. However, now the push is to show the impact of trails on the "Triple Bottom Line—economic activity, the environment, and health—[that] will encourage agencies and communities in Illinois to expand and promote trails systems state-wide" (2). If there is a state-wide connection among Illinois trails, the organization reasons, then there will be more buy-in from businesses, agencies, and tax-paying citizens because of a more expansive and all-encompassing regional network of trails.

Trails for Illinois' executive director, Steve Buchtel, collected data on six Illinois trails in an effort to analyze the "triple bottom line" impact of trails in Illinois. Buchtel recognized that while Illinois was rich in trails, the impact of trails on the communities was not the same as in neighboring states. He explained, "Illinois has comparable trails to what you find in Wisconsin and Michigan. But while their trails are reviving communities and inviting locals and visitors to explore the state, ours are largely ignored, difficult to find, in poor condition with few amenities that make trail use and tourism easy and pleasant" (Adventure Cycling Association). Buchtel

relied on counts and surveys for six Illinois Trails: Fox River Trail in Chicago's western suburbs, MCT Goshen trail in the St. Louis metro region, Hennepin Canal State Trail in north central Illinois, Old Plank Road Trail in Chicago's south suburbs, Rock Island State Trail in central Illinois, and Tunnel Hill State Trail in southern Illinois ("Making Trails Count in Illinois" 1).

The "Making Trails Count in Illinois" study revealed some important information about creating a regional plan to help policy makers and potential funders recognize the value of trails in their communities. While this may be a new systematic approach to this work, The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation had conducted many trail use studies on the Illinois Prairie Path; in fact, these studies were vital in securing and developing the path. At the time it was created, of course, the IPP was the standard for a regional trail. There was simply no other trail like it. Buchtel seemed to overlook this important body of knowledge about Illinois trail use. He claimed, "I decided to start with recasting trails primarily as health and business infrastructure. Making legitimate claims about either require[s] knowing the numbers, and Illinois had zero numbers about the benefits of its trails" (Adventure Cycling Association). One could argue that Trails for Illinois has developed a more uniform or standardized, as well as replicable, means of collecting data to be applied throughout the state than has been used prior to the organization's work in 2012. The IPPc even hired Trails for Illinois to conduct a study of trail use on the Illinois Prairie Path in 2013, suggesting that the board values Trails for Illinois for beginning to reach all areas in Illinois. In this way, the data collected is generating a larger body of knowledge with which to evaluate trail use in Illinois. However, trail counts and surveys have been part of the Illinois Prairie Path's ongoing work to advocate for and promote its trail use.

Other results of the "Making Trails Count in Illinois" report focused more on what businesses along the trails could gain, going as far as "reinterpreting trail users as customers"

(Adventure Cycling Association). Even though Buchtel's approach emphasized a triple bottom line, including health, environmental, *and* economic benefits of trail use, it is the economic component that appears to draw the most attention. Trails for America foregrounds its need to compete for investment, and by engaging businesses as partners in this process, the organization sees an opportunity for garnering additional support: "More than 1/3 of trail users purchased something during their trail use in our study. Mostly small purchases, a handful of really large ones. If you're in the grocery, restaurant or bar business near a trail, and you don't think the trail's doing much for you, you're either unaware of their patronage or something is discouraging trail users from being customers. This is going to get merchants on the side of trails, and it's going to help trail groups build support for their projects" (Adventure Cycling Association). By capitalizing on the benefits for businesses, the anticipated result will be a bigger tourism draw, attracting people from outside the state. I argue that this approach, while leading to a more secure economic relationship between trails and adjoining communities, does not speak to the issue of representation and accessibility for diverse users *within* the communities along these trails. Whereas the American Hiking Society recognizes the need to increase user diversity, even if they cannot yet fully articulate a plan to make the necessary changes, Trails for Illinois fails to make this change a priority.

Of the 740 survey participants for these six Illinois trails, selected to represent a range of geographical locations across the state, only 26 people identified themselves as African American, 5 as Asian, 10 as Latino, 2 as Middle Eastern, 6 as Native American, and 9 as other, compared with 682 identified as Caucasian ("Making Trails Count in Illinois" 20). These numbers indicate a significant gap between the dominant ethnic group and those of minority groups participating in recreation on these trails, a direct correlation to findings from the 2015

research conducted by the American Hiking Society. Two of the trails in the Illinois study, Hennepin Canal and Rock Island, reported zero African American users. Old Plank Road Trail reported the largest number of African American users, a total of 17, but "while African-Americans comprise about 20% of the populations in communities connected by the Old Plank Road Trail, only 7.5% of trail users surveyed identified as African-American" (17). Both the cities of Matteson and Joliet reported that counting equipment had been lost during the study, so the accuracy of the numbers for this particular trail are seemingly incomplete, certainly skewing the average of estimated annual use (8). In addition to the quantitative data, the qualitative survey results fail to identify existing trail programming and future needs or ask questions related to the diversity of trail users.

There is one small section in the report that addresses the issue of accessibility related to trail users, and not accessibility in terms of trail signage or routes. Groups based on gender, socio-economic background, and race all get mentioned in the section on "trail programming opportunities" ("Making Trails Count in Illinois" 17). The report identifies that "fewer women than men may be benefiting from using Illinois trails—12% fewer trail users surveyed identified as 'Female' than 'Male', even though females slightly outnumber males in Illinois" (17). Fewer Illinois residents from lower income households may also be benefitting from trail use, as well as fewer minorities. Oddly, the report offers no plan for how to increase trail programming opportunities or for outreach to these underrepresented groups. They note only that "under 1% of all trail users reported learning about the trail through an event" (17). However, the report claims that it is neither conclusive nor comprehensive. What the report does highlight is primarily the economic benefits that these results illuminate, including that the trails "attract hundreds of thousands of trail visits a year, generate local economic activity, encourage sales of trail use-

related gear and accessories, [and] attract tourism and overnight stays" (15). The other benefits are minimally addressed, and the section on environmental findings has a paltry three statistics noting time spent on the trail and miles traveled to the trail, with a slight connection to research that "shows that time spent in nature strengthens interest in environmental stewardship" (11). Nowhere else in the survey results is there any mention of environmental stewardship.

Taking into consideration that these findings are an initial step in collecting data about Illinois trails, the report is simply a gathering of information with no real action plan attached to it. The hope for the report's results is that they influence "decision makers and the public at large to invest money in trails to build them, improve them, program them and promote them" ("Making Trails Count in Illinois" 18). However, Buchtel states his goal more clearly in the interview he gives the Adventure Cycling Association: "We will begin pushing for a focused tourism program in Illinois, akin to what Illinois Scenic Byways has, and for a pilot Trail Towns program hopefully in partnership with Student Conservation Association/Americorps. Tourism, I think, is the biggest card we can play." Another way Buchtel frames his work is by developing trails with benefits beyond recreation (Bentley).

Trails for Illinois, under Buchtel's leadership, launched a new trail project in 2014 along the Cal-Sag channel: the 26-mile Cal-Sag Trail. Like today's Illinois Prairie Path, which has become much more diverse racially and socio-economically, the Cal-Sag Trail will link a socio-economic range of communities, including "wealthy, largely white bedroom communities, post-industrial areas, and middle class, African American neighborhoods in greater Chicago's Calumet region" (Bentley). One particularly racially diverse city, Blue Island, clearly recognized the benefits beyond recreation: "Blue Island, . . . hit hard by the financial and foreclosure crises, hopes the trail will catalyze development by connecting trail users to area businesses and other

transit. Blue Island's Metra commuter rail station is just steps from the trail" (Bentley). Using a process not unlike the one implemented by Watts and IPP founders to link cities in a regional plan centered on recreation, Blue Island officials helped to organize the cities along the Cal-Sag Trail so they could all apply for funding at the same time. In this way, the cities accomplished more by working together and not competing with each other (Bentley). They also strengthened their regional presence with policy makers and major funders.

It is promising to see Trails for Illinois looking for innovative solutions to tackling the problem of access to trails in densely populated areas that need revitalization. Their regional vision is one that Watts would have shared. In this way, Trails for Illinois carries on the tradition of developing trails that will bring people together. However, the emphasis on building more consumerism into trail development and treating trail users as potential customers seems a less lofty pursuit. While there is a great need for finding new ways to fund trails, especially with increased demands for space in urban and suburban areas, the process of looking for benefits beyond trails may overlook other pressing issues that the current trail network and programming have failed to address. The new "triple bottom line" approach, at this time, fails to challenge the status quo of environmentalism and recreation and has not yet implemented an effective plan to break down social hierarchies and make trail use more democratic.

Promoting tourism as the "biggest card" also does not seem to fit with national trends for recreation development opportunities, specifically outlined by the American Hiking Association. Economic benefits of trail use are important, as these trails need development, maintenance, and support, but seizing economic benefits should not come at the cost of the many other reasons trails are valued. This new direction also fails to carry out the principles on which the Illinois Prairie Path was built. Trails for Illinois seems more interested in creating external partnerships

in an attempt to raise and secure funds for trails and less interested in finding innovative ways to broaden the conversation, to develop programming that will reach a diverse audience, and to refocus on the communities of users, not users as consumers (or customers). If the Illinois Prairie Path follows the goals and direction set in place by Trails for Illinois, it will lose its emphasis on democracy and on the footpath as an everyday recreation opportunity. Can the Illinois Prairie Path still achieve what Watts, Turner, Holmes, Ryerson, Lasch, and Sindt envisioned? Or will the hype of a primarily white view of what a regional plan for recreation should look like dismantle the foundation that Watts and the other five path pioneers so carefully laid?

Finding Models for the Footpath's Future

By comparing the Illinois Prairie Path to paths in other states, there has been a shift in emphasis from the regional view Watts promoted to a need to fit national norms for trail development. With this shift, there also seems to be an absence of thoughtful planning for increasing path user diversity on the Illinois Prairie Path as well as on trails in Illinois. One of the strengths of paths like the Illinois Prairie Path is how it helped create a regional citizenship for the metropolitan Chicago area. Neither Watts nor Peterson envisioned the path to be a tourist attraction or a means of revitalizing failing businesses in the area. Their primary goals for the path—healthful recreation, education, connection to nature for all people—focused on people who could access the path every day by everyday means. Peterson recognized the path's potential to save open land, connect the path to other green spaces, and reconnect the suburbs to the city, while Watts emphasized reusing neglected space to connect the suburbs to each other and their communities to nature. These connections and coalitions were intended to bring diverse people together with an ecological mindset.

The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation does continue to value the kinds of connections early path advocates made possible with their vision and their model of citizen action during the 1960s. Their current efforts to analyze trail use and gain feedback from trail users indicate that it is time now to look ahead to the next fifty years and what roles the footpath will play in the future. The IPPc hired Trails for Illinois to conduct a study in 2013 that measured the impact of the path on economic activity, environmental stewardship, and health and wellness ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 3). In "Making Trails Count: The Illinois Prairie Path," the study highlights the fact that the path connects eighteen communities in three different counties. Seven counters were placed at critical junctions on the path, including two on the main branch (at Maywood and Villa Park), two in Wheaton (one on the north branch and one on the south branch), one on the Aurora branch, one on the Batavia branch, and one on the Elgin branch. The placement of these counters in a diverse range of communities provided a cross-section of the possible recreation use and user background along the path near these cities.

The data collected from these trail counters and surveys created a portrait of trail use at these points along the Illinois Prairie Path. It is also important, however, to contextualize the data within a broader historical demographic analysis, especially to show that the communities that connect to the IPP have changed since the time the path was first initiated. These changes in demographics highlight the need for The IPPc to create and develop programming and marketing strategies that reflect the diversity of the communities currently along the path and to address the "triple bottom line" for each community's specific needs. In doing so, there can be a regional plan that will work for all communities connected to the path. Looking at three of the cities on the IPP's main stem (Wheaton, Villa Park, and Maywood) illustrates that because of the changes

in the communities over the past fifty years, there is a need for thoughtful planning for *all* prospective path users.

Demographics in three of the surveyed towns along the IPP, including Wheaton, Villa Park, and Maywood, reveal changes in the communities' populations from the 1960s to 2013, when the trail study was performed. Wheaton, Illinois is the central hub where the three stems of the IPP converge. Volunteer Bridge, one of the major struggles and achievements the volunteer group encountered at various times in the IPP's history, looms large over the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad line (Fig. 4.2). Wheaton's demographics shifted slightly from 1960, when 94% of the population was White and only 1.4% of the population identified as Black or African American, to 2013 when the White population decreased to 81.9% and the Black or African American population increased to 3.4% (Kay; "Wheaton, Illinois").

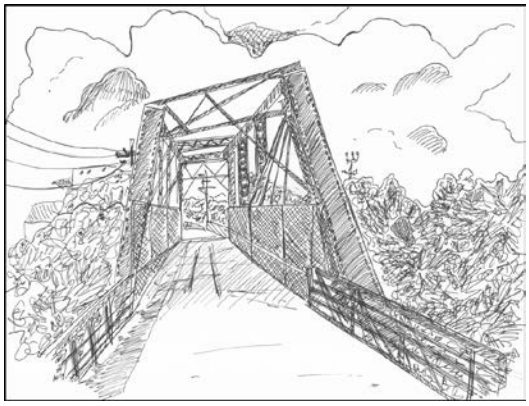

Figure 4.2. Volunteer Bridge, Wheaton, Illinois (Keller)

Villa Park, Illinois–home of the Ovaltine factory–experienced considerable growth in the early 1960s. The CA&E was largely responsible for the town's increasing population, and the train station on Villa Avenue serves as a reminder of the railroad's contribution to this town's

development (Fig. 4.3). Even after the CA&E was no longer operating in 1957, the community continued to expand. According to Harwig, "between 1950 and 1970, Villa Park grew from 8,821 to 25,891 residents" ("Villa Park, IL."). In 1960, the White population was 99.8% with no residents identified as Black or African American. The White population decreased to 70.1% in 2013, with a presence of 4.1% of the Black or African American population ("Villa Park, Illinois").

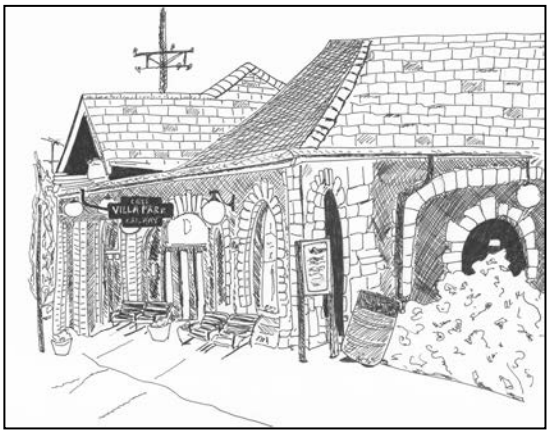

Figure 4.3. Villa Avenue Train Station, Villa Park, Illinois (Keller)

The suburb that changed most dramatically from 1960 to 2013 in its demographics was Maywood (Fig. 4.4). An industrial town in its early beginnings, during the 1960s and into the 1970s, Maywood's industries ceased operations. Maywood residents no longer supported area businesses, the result of which was economic decline (Guarino). Demographics also changed during this time period. In 1960, the White population was 80.5% and the Black or African American population was 19.1% ("Maywood, Illinois"). These numbers shifted dramatically by 2013, when the Black or African American population rose to 73.8% and the White population declined to 3.7%. Implications of this significant population turnover played out in the trail

surveys conducted on the IPP in 2013, as well in some of the feedback and attitudes expressed in surveys collected from IPP trail users. By comparing demographics from 1960 and 2013, there is increased awareness about the communities, the diverse groups of people, who make up the towns along the IPP. The IPPc needs to look closely at actively engaging these communities, and not only focus on recruiting trail users from out of town.

Figure 4.4. View of Maywood, Illinois (Keller)

Twenty-eight volunteers dedicated 200 hours of their time to survey trail users. The data collected was then analyzed by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office of Recreation and Park Resources as well as the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. The surveys of Illinois Prairie Path users indicated that they enjoy the path during different seasons, and they boost the economy in the area in different ways because of trail use. Many of the 700 users surveyed in the study acknowledged selecting their home because it was within walking distance of the path. People surveyed also spent money related to path activities, either at local establishments or for equipment related to exercise ("Making Trails Count" 14). According to the report, "86% of respondents said they had spent money in the last year specifically related to

their trail use. . . . Those making trail-related purchases in the last year spent on average $435" (14). The data presented on the economic benefits of trail use overshadows the other two elements of the triple bottom line: environment and health. This emphasis in the report raises the question about the focus of the trail use surveys. Again, in this report, the primary area for analyzing trail use data is the economy.

The least amount of data gathered in this 2013 report was on the environmental impact of trail use. The limited data that was provided emphasized transportation and recreation uses. However, one of the primary goals of The IPPc has been prairie restoration. In fact, the majority of membership contributions, according to The IPPc, goes to this effort, about 25% of membership dollars ("A BIG Thank You" 1). It is surprising, therefore, that the survey results did not highlight this project in its environmental impact section. Part of the problem stems from the standardization and uniformity of the survey format for all Illinois trails. Trails for Illinois is looking for common data to present their triple bottom line to policy makers, but in that effort, some of the unique features of trails such as the Illinois Prairie Path get lost. Another reason this important work of The IPPc remains ignored is that more people see transportation or recreation benefits of trails and overlook other kinds of environmental benefits. According to an article on saving the prairies in *railstotrails*, "these trails often provide tangible, measurable environmental benefits that are less obvious to typical trail users, such as improved water quality in adjacent streams and rivers, habitat preservation and creation of wildlife corridors, and mitigation of the effects of climate change. In some areas, all these benefits come together in the protection of an entire ecosystem, a situation perhaps no more evident than in East Central Illinois" (Striano 9). Focusing on ways to showcase these benefits should be a priority for an organization like The IPPc, dedicating so much of its financial resources to prairie restoration.

Finding model paths for promoting environmental benefits requires looking no farther than the neighboring Kickapoo Rail Trail, a 24.5-mile recreation trail that links Champaign and Vermilion counties in Illinois. While this trail is smaller than the Illinois Prairie Path, it shares the regional focus of its older neighbor. Heartland Pathways, another trail project near the Kickapoo Rail Trail, is directed by a non-profit organization working on prairie restoration. A future goal would be to join the two paths. Trails for Illinois executive director, Steve Buchtel, sees tourism potential for these trails and this area, stating, "The world is in love with rural Americana, but there's no easy access to that for most people . . . . What's really cool about trails like the Kickapoo and Heartland Pathways is that they connect to a lot of main streets and get people off the interstate" (qtd. in Striano 10).

The environmental benefits of trails speak to two different groups' interests, one being conservationists and the other, recreationists. Buchtel recognizes that the two groups can work together and mutually benefit from each other's work. The Kickapoo Rail Trail manages to combine these two efforts through their collaboration with conservation groups and their educational outreach. Bike groups have organized events along the trail, and "schoolchildren are bused in to help plant seeds and seedlings while learning about the prairie ecosystem" (Striano 12). There is even an effort to work with area farmers to learn from each other about invasive species control and storm-water management. In many ways, the projects and programs initiated and carried out on the Kickapoo Rail Trail would work on the Illinois Prairie Path as well. One of the key players in the Kickapoo Rail Trail's successful efforts to make prairie restoration a priority is the involvement of researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, whose work in the Prairie Research Institute produced survey results and educational outreach. Many research and higher education institutes surround the IPP, and capitalizing on their

involvement in projects and programs on the IPP would enhance future path use and development as well.

"Making Trails Count: Illinois Prairie Path" fails to highlight the important prairie restoration work of The IPPc. Instead there is a generic statement, echoed in Buchtel's interview in "Saving America's Prairies," about the benefits of spending time in nature. This section on environmental impacts in the report, instead of being able to showcase noteworthy progress in prairie restoration, focused on topics people more typically understand: how many days trail users typically spent on the Illinois Prairie Path and how many miles they traveled in order to use the path. Two important statistics, however, did emerge from this data. The first was that the majority of trail users travel a very short distance—five miles or less—to get to the path ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 12). Of the 66% of people who travel to the path, 23% use a motor vehicle to travel to the trail. This information suggested that the Illinois Prairie Path is a recreation trail that continues to maintain its local and regional appeal. It is a path people want to access on a more everyday basis. About 6% of trail users also find the Illinois Prairie Path to be a means of transportation for commuting (12). Increasing this percentage would be an excellent way for The IPPc to build more support for trail use, especially as transportation issues become more prevalent in overcrowded and densely populated areas.

Minneapolis is a city that sets the bar for trail use as an alternate form of transportation. Their Midtown Greenway is an example of a "rags to riches" trail, not unlike particularly urban sections of the Illinois Prairie Path. While Minneapolis is well known for its extensive biking community and network of trails, the Midtown Greenway had been an abandoned eyesore. According to the Midtown Greenway Coalition, the group of volunteers who came up with the idea and raised funds to complete it, "the corridor used to be a trash-filled trench that was a

disgrace to our city. Now it contains a world-class biking and walking trail that's the envy of cities across the nation. In fact, the Midtown Greenway has been named the best urban bike trail in the USA!" ("About the Coalition"). Some of the features the coalition has capitalized on include ease of transit, connections to community businesses, connections to other trails within and around the city, and integrating the trail with a larger mass transit plan. The Illinois Prairie Path could learn from this innovative project.

This 5.5-mile trail has a history not unlike that of the Illinois Prairie Path, except that it is a small trail in comparison to its predecessor. What's exciting about the Midtown Greenway is that a person traveling on it can actually get across town faster than traveling by car—there are no traffic obstructions on the trail. It also connects to a group of paths and "serves a very ethnically and economically diverse community" ("About the Greenway"). The goal is to build a mass transit express rail to run parallel to the trail. This path represents the kind of democratic leveling that Watts envisioned for her public footpath, but the Midtown Greenway Coalition is making more of a concerted effort to foreground inclusion and diversity for its trail users: "We partner with organizations serving immigrants, refugees, and communities of color on projects that support and promote transportation, recreation, connections between people and the land, and a say in future development in the Midtown Greenway" ("Community Outreach"). In this way, all users and community members are themselves partners; it's not only the business owners or real estate developers who stand to profit. Rather, "the Midtown Greenway is for EVERYONE."

One of the outreach programs includes a partnership with neighborhood organizations to provide opportunities for those people who may not have access to bikes or who want to learn more about them and how to ride safely. The neighborhood partner, Cycles for Change,

dedicates itself to building "a diverse and empowered community of bicyclists. C4C implements a variety of programs that support people in getting access to a used bicycle, free bicycle repair, training in safe, confident cycling, and opportunities to help grow a broad-based, equitable bicycling movement" (Cycles for Change). This organization, while emphasizing access to bicycles and the tools and knowledge to ride safely, believes in racial and gender equity as integral to the transportation system. These types of partnerships benefit the community in many ways, including the positive economic impacts. However, the Midtown Greenway Coalition's foundation is building coalitions within the community, and therein lies their success as an organization promoting healthful recreation for everyone. In an urban area, the emphasis is on creating strong connections, but also realizing that those connections can be achieved through outreach to underrepresented communities.

The Midtown Greenway Coalition also has clearly defined program areas. Whereas the American Hiking Society and Trails for Illinois have only cursory plans for action, the Midtown Greenway Coalition has outlined the focus and specific goals for their group and for their trail. Among these projects are "greening and cleaning" with a committee on GreenSpace cleaning and gardening, "public art" which works to bring temporary and permanent art installations to the corridor, and "transit advocacy," working to bring a turf-track streetcar to accommodate community transportation needs ("Projects and Programs"). One of the primary programs for the Midtown Greenway is its community outreach program. The coalition strives to make all groups feel welcome on the path: "Community outreach . . . works with local families to encourage use of the corridor for biking, walking, relaxation, and transportation. We partner with local nonprofit agencies to engage Hispanic, Somali, and Native American families in activities that let them know the corridor is for everybody."

The Midtown Greenway Coalition has identified similar areas as the Trails for Illinois' triple bottom line, but the area of outreach and working with underrepresented groups emerges in Minneapolis as a stronger initiative and priority. The coalition's commitment to making the trail work for its users, and not focusing only on the economic gains for the community, have catapulted the Midtown Greenway to the top of the list for the best urban trails in the country. The Illinois Prairie Path, while much more expansive and with a greater diversity in individual communities connected to the path, can learn from the coalition's efforts to make a trail accessible to everyone, and specifically accessible to underrepresented groups.

One of the most exciting prospects for trail use along the Illinois Prairie Path is its role as transportation infrastructure. The number of other trails and paths that can be accessed from the IPP make it a more central and significant hub for people traveling from one location to another. According to the research, "count data from Villa Park and Wheaton, in particular, are the highest we have recorded on seven trails we have studied in Making Trails Count" ("Making Trails Count: Illinois Prairie Path" 18). Working with this kind of data will help The IPPc find new ways in which the path can be connected within a larger community structure. The report also shows the importance of trail use in people's lives. There is no doubt that the Illinois Prairie Path has become a valued linear park within the communities it spans.

While Trails for Illinois wants to see increases in IPP users from out of state, a goal which would be a boon for the region and its economy, researchers may have overlooked the fact that the Illinois Prairie Path is a different kind of path. The data collected from the surveys to "make the Illinois Prairie Path count more" indicated that there can be more done to attract new users to the path, but the survey revealed that most path users come from areas within a short distance from the path itself. Yet, the report suggested that more could be done to attract visitors

and users from outside the region: "The Illinois Prairie Path is well known nationally as the first rails-to-trails conversion in America. The handful of out-of-state visitors in our sample seems low given its notable history, overall length and interesting connections" ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 17). Given the lack of diversity in current users of the IPP, juxtaposed with many underrepresented groups in the communities that surround the path, The IPPc needs to have a stronger commitment to reaching more people from nearby communities. The strong tradition of service from within the communities, modeled by Watts and Peterson (and by Addams, Cowles, and Jensen before them), provides a guide for the current organization to set priorities in line with what the path founders envisioned.

There must be a focus on this type of outreach, rather than on developing programs and investing in projects to attract tourists from outside the region. Even Peterson, whose work spanned the country and integrated national trends, recognized the power of Watts and Turner to engage their communities in a movement that created something vital out of abandoned space. Their emphasis on connecting with their communities, and educating them, built not only the path, but also a huge contingent of loyal supporters and volunteers. People were engaged, informed, and active. Capitalizing on the regional strength of the Illinois Prairie Path, The IPPc can strengthen its connections with communities by increasing its outreach to the underrepresented members of those communities.

Unfortunately, opportunities for trail promotion and trail programming in the Trails for Illinois report relied solely on ideas that will attract out-of-state visitors and a largely homogeneous population of users. First, the report indicated that the Illinois Prairie Path should set goals to become a "successful destination trail—regional or state-wide trails catering to tourism" ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 17). Unlike Wisconsin's Elroy-Sparta Trail, the suggested

model for trails with focused marketing programs, the Illinois Prairie Path runs through a very different kind of topography in a more diverse urban setting. Because the data revealed that "only .15% reported learning about the trail from a visitors bureau, 2% learned about the trail from a trail agency or trail organization; less than 3% learned about the trail from a bike shop," the number of out-of-state visitors to the Illinois Prairie Path in the sample seemed low to the researchers ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 17). However, the Elroy-Sparta Trail offers more amenities than the IPP, including several camping sites close to the trail, family-friendly restaurants and shops, and more access to wilderness areas. For this reason, Wisconsin's oldest rail-trail holds more attractions and recreation opportunities for out-of-state tourists. The geographic and socioeconomic compositions of these two trails could not be more different.

The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation can learn from other trails' achievements. There is no reason why The IPPc should not have outreach programs to draw in users from other states. However, The IPPc needs to develop outreach for residents who live along the path, especially with an eye to drawing in supporters from underrepresented areas. Just because the Illinois Prairie Path has a rich history, as the first rails-to-trails conversion to apply for National Recreation Trail status, these events do not necessarily make it a tourist destination, and the path's leaders need to be realistic and innovative in thinking about how to grow and diversify path use. Using the Trails for Illinois data as one possible measure of the benefits of the Illinois Prairie Path provides some good information and feedback, but it does not necessarily highlight the extensive range of the IPP's benefits and needs.

Efforts to Increase Trail User Diversity

The Illinois Prairie Path now spans more than sixty miles across three counties. There has been an increase in path use, but not necessarily an increase in the diversity of its users. In an

effort to make the Illinois Prairie Path "count more," researchers compared U.S. Census Bureau information to survey findings: "According to the US Census Bureau, 18% of residents in Villa Park identify as Latino. Near Wayne, 14% of residents identify as Asian descent. African Americans make up 74% of Maywood, 2% in Batavia, and 4% in Wheaton and Villa Park. Yet only 1-2% of survey respondents identified as belonging to these ethnic groups" ("Making Trails Count: Illinois Prairie Path" 17). Two additional factors may have contributed to this disparity in the findings, the report suggested. The first is that similar studies conducted previously in the Chicago area revealed that populations of color were reluctant to participate in the survey. Another issue arose from the attitudes of the volunteers: "In our study, volunteer reluctance to survey trail users in Maywood led to fewer shifts collecting surveys, and likely contributed to people of color being underrepresented" (17). Therefore, obtaining an accurate portrayal of diversity in path use posed some challenges for the organization.

While the report offered no plan of action to address these disparities, it did suggest that further studies needed to occur in order to assess the "trail use, perceptions and attitudes among people of color along the Illinois Prairie Path" ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 17). It seems that attitudes, both those of users and those of organizers, required further analysis. This section of the report missed an opportunity to consider some of the issues of access and equality both Watts and Peterson advocated. Due to the lack of information from surveys by people of color, this complex problem of diversity in trail use—a concern identified at the national level—gets lost in other points and paragraphs about trail programming opportunities.

These statistics framed the report's section on trail programming opportunities, so evidently, working toward increasing the number of diverse users appeared to be one of the organization's goals. However, the suggested trail programming opportunities targeted the same

homogeneous group of users that already dominate the numbers in the trail study. The recommended ideas, including themed runs, pub crawls, and progressive dinners to "attract new visitors, grow trail use, and benefit local merchants" cater to the largely white, middle class to affluent population along the path that already uses the path in high numbers ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 17). There are clear limitations in the thinking behind the organization's plans to attract more diverse users. A greater number of pubs, restaurants, and other social venues exist in the more affluent towns. The path along the stretch in Maywood is highly industrial, has busy street crossings, and seems to have a lot of vandalism. A progressive dinner or themed run along this section of the path seem to be unlikely possibilities given the fact that people feel unwelcomed and unsafe in this area. The tension in the report between lack of trail user diversity and programming geared toward increasing the dominant group of trail users highlights a disconnect between The IPPc board, Trails for Illinois, and the populations along the Illinois Prairie Path. What other kinds of outreach and programming could potentially involve and engage participants from the wide range of diverse communities that connect to the path?

If The IPPc wants to attract more people of color to use the path, more innovative kinds of event planning and path marketing strategies need to be implemented. For example, further research along sections of the path in underrepresented areas could focus on how the path is being used in ways specific to those cities. One finding, first thought to be negatively impacting the results in Maywood, revealed that a daycare center was using the area along the path as its play space. The numbers for Maywood's use seemed particularly high compared to the counts at other locations: "A local day care center used the trail right-of-way each afternoon as a playground in line of sight of our counter, the sensor tallying games of tag, impromptu wrestling, and jump rope as trail use. Since a common feature of trails is providing safe recreational space,

we included it in Maywood's count data" ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 5). On the one hand, these counts skew the results because they do not fit the kinds of counts the research intended to record, and no other location makes mention of these kinds of counts. On the other hand, these results fit perfectly the intent that Watts had with her original vision for the path being used for all kinds of activities.

These results in Maywood show there needs to be more innovative thinking about path use, as well as about the diversity of its users. If the goal at the national level is to increase efforts to provide educational outreach and to ensure that all users feel safe and empowered, then more planning should be implemented to design appropriate outreach for underrepresented communities. The surveys designed to make the Illinois Prairie Path count more require a more expansive definition of path use. Trails for Illinois' one-size-fits-all triple bottom line approach wants to present a unified report on trail use in Illinois, when what the Illinois Prairie Path offers is much broader in scope. If children are identified as a primary group of path users in Maywood, events planned to showcase the path in this area need to focus on children's and family activities. As Watts and Turner generated a list of groups and organizations that could help maintain the path, The IPPc today can expand their education, programming, and outreach to health groups, senior centers, churches, and scout groups.

One photo featured in the March 2015 IPP newsletter showed a group of Maywood volunteers from the 2014 Annual Earth Day Trail Cleanup. In the photo, representatives from all age groups were present, including what appeared to be some type of scouting group members. While The IPPc has made attempts to beautify the path along sections of Maywood, including planting native plants and installing benches, the community does not seem to have complete buy-in yet, as was evident in recent years of benches being vandalized and plants removed.

Finding some way for the young people in Maywood to connect to The IPPc and see the many benefits of the path in their town could go a long way in educating the general public and encouraging more path use. If Maywood residents continue to invest in this green infrastructure, with the support of The IPPc and with innovative planning for educational outreach, they will have a greater sense of ownership and stewardship.

Maywood is also one of the cities along the path that has a negative reputation among path users in terms of safety. One person surveyed complained about the amount of broken glass on the path between Maywood and Bellwood. Another path user surveyed stated, "My biggest concern is biking through Maywood. I've been threatened for being a 'white boy in the wrong neighborhood'" ("Making Trails Count: IPP" 27). Ways to shift the thinking about safety along the path in Maywood are also necessary. Compared with the towns surrounding it, Maywood currently has the highest crime rate, and its crime rate is significantly higher than other towns along the Illinois Prairie Path. Maywood's location may also contribute to how people use the path there.

The last town on the main stem of the path, Maywood is the end of the line. There is no reason for someone from Elmhurst or Glen Ellyn, two of the more affluent towns along the path, to pass through Maywood. Unless someone intended to bike the entire main stem, it would be very easy to bypass Maywood completely. While the main entry to the path at 1st Avenue in Maywood has a beautiful arch and stonework, the section of path itself is more industrial and not as aesthetically inviting as some of the other sections along the path. The issue of safety is a prime concern to path users, and if the safety in Maywood is compromised for path users, the negative perceptions will persist. Working with the community to increase more safety precautions and to help the city connect better with The IPPc will help improve these problems.

Looking Ahead

Modeling programming utilized by organizations like the Midtown Greenway Coalition would provide a better means of increasing participation and educating a new generation of path users about the benefits of recreation and being in nature. How is The IPPc involving members from underrepresented communities in their decision-making process? Having only the residential information of IPPc board members, and not specific information on their ethnicity, race, or age, it is difficult to assess the representation of people of color within this group. Cities represented include Winfield, Naperville, Downers Grove, Glen Ellyn, West Chicago, Warrenville, and Batavia, and all of these cities have predominantly white, middle class to affluent constituencies. Ensuring that the board had some members from underrepresented areas would be one step in pursuing more democratic access to the Illinois Prairie Path and a more expansive view of how to increase user diversity.

If the users of the Illinois Prairie Path recognize their role in shaping the future of the path, then there will be a more substantial participation and buy-in for the programs and projects that The IPPc develops. Creating this kind of plan to increase participation requires that everyone involved has equal access to information. Identifying the barriers along the Illinois Prairie Path that prevent full participation is a needed step for The IPPc to take in designing their plan for the path's future use and development. In order to build these connections, The IPPc must work to overcome certain American values (and one might say, suburban values) that pose obstacles: "mobility, affluence, standardization, technology, and specialization" (Hester 17). The Illinois Prairie Path can serve as the place where these challenges can be addressed. The public footpath

has incredible potential to bring people from very diverse communities in contact with each other. The way for The IPPc to foster these kinds of shared values and experiences is to develop programs, projects, and community outreach that will invite users from all of the path's communities to participate.

Conclusion

Figure 5.1. The Illinois Prairie Path Main Stem, June 2012 (Keller)

Picture prairie flowers in bloom, with yellows and purples surrounded by greens. The air is heavy with summer's heat. Flies are biting. Up ahead you see a bench, engraved with a plaque dedicated to one of the Illinois Prairie Path's many caretakers and supporters. It's the only place shaded from the bright afternoon sun. You sit down, look right, and then left. The path seems to go on forever in both directions, each mile marked for the eager runner or biker, and maybe even for walkers like you, daring to risk the heat and humidity and insects jabbing at your ankles and neck (Fig. 5.1).

Leaning back, you imagine what it must have taken the path's founders and many volunteers to carry the limestone screenings, one wheelbarrow at a time, to the place where your tired feet now rest. You consider the determination it took to build a bridge multiple times because of destructive vandals or the sweeping power of heavy rains making the river rise and wash it away. The path's advocates could have become discouraged and given up, but instead they persevered and rebuilt, renegotiated, and reimagined the possibility for a public footpath.

Imagine the group of women walking this very path, making sure there was no litter, teaching fellow walkers about the plants, and spending hundreds of hours working to make their project succeed. If the path's founders walked along the Illinois Prairie Path now, what might be their responses to the landscape?

On any typical day, they would see different people using the path—the high school track team warming up for practice, the families on an afternoon bike ride to get ice cream, or the stocky couple trying to lose a few pounds. They would notice the runners, fast cyclists, and all of the dog walkers. Off to one side, there would be a group of nature lovers gathered to learn about plants and birds along the path.

The path is very much as they envisioned it. It meanders through neighborhoods and natural areas, and it extends next to apartment buildings, old factories, and small businesses. It crosses parks, rivers, and fields. If the women drove five minutes from the path, they would find busy roads, strip malls, and countless restaurants. These changes to their region would not shock or surprise them. After all, even Watts had to contend with a highway dividing The Morton Arboretum into two distinct sections. The women saw all this development coming.

Despite the preponderance of coffee shops, gas stations, and cars, the founding women would delight in seeing the network of paths emanating from the Illinois Prairie Path. Signs marking the different paths, named for defunct train lines, would likely make them want to hike all of the paths and see everything. This network of footpaths and bike paths is a physical reminder of the strides the women made in building a regional citizenship. Though the people may move in and out of communities, the paths remain, a continuous and constant connector. Behind the making of those signs are the volunteers who continue to maintain the paths' upkeep and promote the health and recreation benefits that can be found along these linear parks.

The six women would walk every stretch of the Illinois Prairie Path and note the prairie remnants and restoration projects. They would remark on plants that no longer grew there, and Watts would lead them in reading the landscape to tell the story of what had happened in the fifty years since she launched her idea. The women would marvel at the immensity and solid structure of the Volunteer Bridge. And after they had done all that marveling, they would wonder about who was using the path now, how many people access it each day, each year. They would ask about financial support and governmental backing and then share the story about how they won over DuPage County. Would they pay attention to diversity on the path? Would they care about the triple bottom line? What would Peterson be urging them to do today, and what major plan would he have?

Thinking about the environment as the place where we live, work, and play, I believe that Watts, Turner, and the others would approve of the ways that recreation opportunities have expanded since they developed the Illinois Prairie Path. They would be amazed by the many initiatives in their region and across the country. They would not be the type of engaged citizens to be satisfied with the status quo, however. So much of their work focused on building the path and securing it for the future. With the path built, they could turn their attention to what they always loved: discussing plants and educating people about ecology. If I were leading Watts and Turner on the path today, I would take them to Maywood. The image of those children playing on the path would give them the kind of hope and inspiration to motivate community members to come together for a worthwhile cause: connecting people with nature.

The key to continuing to build and draw on a regional citizenship, centered around this path, is through education. The IPPc still organizes path clean-up days and different events on the path. There is a lot of flashiness now to biking trips that frequent all of the pubs or fancy

eateries in some of the more chichi suburbs. These activities are positive in that they encourage people to get outside and be healthful. The founding women would not have stopped there, however. They would have pressed on to ensure that everyone had access to the path. I think that at this time, fifty years later, the women would be more mindful about *equal* access to the path and whose experiences in nature should be valued and supported.

I imagine Watts, Turner, and the other founders would have been like the members of the Minneapolis Midtown Greenway Coalition, seeking neighborhood partners and working to help people lead healthful lives. Similar kinds of initiatives were the driving force behind their work, especially with Peterson nudging them to expand their horizons. A prairie path might mean something different in the twenty-first century to the communities that connect with it than it did fifty years ago. There are now more threats to the environment, and there is a more substantial rift between people and nature, especially for young children who may have few opportunities to experience being outdoors. For the densely populated suburbs of Chicago, the Illinois Prairie Path still provides a haven for people seeking open space. However, it also poses dangers to people in some of the more at-risk communities. Ensuring that everyone has the option to use the path, and then accepting how the path gets used, are two issues the founding women would have championed.

I like to imagine Watts pulling up in her car, stepping out onto the Illinois Prairie Path today, and casting her eyes back and forth. She'd be looking for clues about how the path was being used, what areas were abandoned, and where the improvements needed to be made. Then, in true fashion, she would phone her friends, regale them with stories about what she had seen, and inspire them to take action and get involved. Her car would pull away, head to a meeting to

plan the next steps, and the women would all get to work. After all, there is still much important work to be done.

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Appendix A

Overview of Archives Consulted

For fifty years, members of the volunteer organization, The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation, toiled to create, maintain, and share a public footpath. The group's artifacts, articles, and accounts have been stored in attics and basements until recently being donated to the North Central College Archives in Naperville, Illinois. This collection of archival material provides the primary source material for my research, along with archival collections at The Morton Arboretum that include works by and about May Theilgaard Watts and the University of Chicago that feature documents about the early development of the field of ecology.

I use archival methods to analyze women's responses to landscape. According to Merchant, "sources for research in the area of women's responses to the landscape include women's diaries, literature, art, and novels as well as scholarship in the related fields of women and nature, women and the environment, and women and space" ("Women and the Environment" 5). For these reasons, archival collections that include sources, such as letters, speeches, photos, and news articles, by women about their responses to the landscape become particularly useful in analyzing the ways in which May Theilgaard Watts and her collaborators—women of a particular time, place, and social milieu—experienced and responded to nature. The archival material features letters that reveal how the six women related to each other, how they

solved problems together, what issues they needed to resolve, and the ideas they brainstormed to advocate their plan for the future footpath.

Appendix B

Permissions

B.1. Permissions letter to North Central College Archives and Special Collections:

Rebecca Skirvin
Coordinator of Archives and Special Collections
North Central College Archives
Oesterle Library
320 E. School St.
Naperville, IL 60540

Dear Rebecca Skirvin:

I am currently a PhD student at Antioch University New England. I have been researching the history of the Illinois Prairie Path for my dissertation. I have conducted extensive research in the Illinois Prairie Path Archives at North Central College, and I request permission to reuse photographs and a map from the collection. I plan to deposit my dissertation in Spring 2016.

My dissertation will appear in several electronic formats, including:

1. Proquest Dissertations and Theses Database:
http://www.proquest.com/products-services/pqdt.html

2. Ohiolink Electronic Theses and Disssertations Center:
https://etd.ohiolink.edu/

3. AURA: Antioch University Repository and Archive:
http://aura.antioch.edu/

Proquest is a Print on Demand Publisher. Ohiolink ETD Center is an open access archive, and AURA is an open access archive. My dissertation will also be published in a printed format.

Please find attached a copy of the photographs and map that I wish to include in my dissertation and for which I am seeking permission for publication.

Please indicate your agreement by emailing me, specifying any credit line or other conditions you may require. If you do not hold the rights for these images, please inform me whom I should contact.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Anne M. Keller

B.2. Response letter granting permission from North Central College Archives and Special Collections:

North Central College Archives and Special Collections
Photographic Use Form

Photographic copies in any format are provided by the North Central College Archives and Special Collections for use with the following understandings:

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Description of Photograph: see next page _____

Intended Use: doctoral dissertation with publication in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database, OhioLink Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center, and AURA: Antioch University Repository and Archive _____

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Publication Title or Web site (if applicable):

"One Narrow Thread of Green": The Vision of May Theilgaard Watts, the Creation of the Illinois Prairie Path, and a Community's Crusade for Open Space

Name: Anne M. Keller
Affiliation: Antioch University New England
Address: 40 Avon St., Keene, NH 03431
Phone: on file at NCC
E-mail: akeller@antioch.edu

Signature: on file at NCC _____

Date: _____

Rev rms 3/16
cas/kjb
9/04

Figure 1.1 May Theilgaard Watts, Illinois Prairie Path Fall Walk (Individuals – May Theilgaard Watts, Photos)
Figure 2.1 Lil Lasch and Elizabeth Holmes working on a mailing, February 1974 (Individuals – Elizabeth Holmes)
Figure 2.2 Helen Turner 1967 (Individuals – Helen Turner)
Figure 2.3 Jane Sindt (Individuals – Jane Sindt)
Figure 2.4 Phoebe Ryerson and Marv Chandler, Northern Illinois Gas, 1971 (Individuals – Marv Chandler)
Figure 2.5 Elizabeth Holmes 1967 (Individuals – Elizabeth Holmes)
Figure 3 Original Map, Illinois Prairie Path, 1965 (Individuals – Gunnar Peterson)
Figure 4 May Theilgaard Watts on the Illinois Prairie Path (Individuals – May Theilgaard Watts, Photos)
Figure 3.1 Photo of Gunnar Peterson and May Theilgaard Watts (Individuals – May Theilgaard Watts, Photos)
Figure 4.1 Illustration and description of locations for prairie plants, Illinois Prairie Path Newsletter, Summer 1969 (Administrative – Newsletters)

B.3. Permissions request to the University of Chicago Library:

I am completing my doctoral dissertation through Antioch University New England and would like to include the image of Henry Chandler Cowles and May Theilgaard, titled "Wisconsin" (University of Chicago Photographic Archive, [apf8-04479], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library).

My dissertation will be printed and appear in publication in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database, OhioLink Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center, and AURA: Antioch University Repository and Archive.

Thank you,
Anne Keller

B.4. Response granting permission from the University of Chicago Library:

On behalf of the University of Chicago Library, and in accordance with the "Policies Governing the Use of Archives, Manuscripts, and Special Collections," permission is extended to you for reproduction of material held in the Special Collections Research Center as identified in your request.

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Please credit the Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Daniel Meyer
Director
Special Collections Research Center
University of Chicago Library