



BRUSH PILES

NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT

WINTER 2006

THE NORTH BRANCH TURNS THIRTY

This issue of Brush Piles kicks off our 30th anniversary year.

Imagine: some of our longest managed prairies and savannas have been restoring back to good health now for three full decades!

Imagine: new volunteers today are joining a community that has three decades of learning under our collective belts.

Brush Piles this year will feature essays from a variety of people on this growing history. We start with two of the early leaders. Larry Hodak is an architect who's worked especially at Sauganash Prairie Grove and Wayside Prairie. Karen Rodriguez was an early editor of Brush Piles and all around volunteer and found her calling at Great Lakes EPA in part through what she learned on the North Branch.

HOW THE NORTH BRANCH CHANGED ME

by Larry Hodak

I'm writing this piece on the Brown Line as we pull out of Sedgewick heading west and the city's skyline to the south opens up in its luminous glory on a low humidity night. This morning, after a meeting to finalize a plan to restore the ComEd right-of-way at Linne Prairie's edge, I was walking chest high in switch grass as a rufous tinged kestrel hovered in an azure blue sky, hunting voles. After nearly 30 years I'm not sure we've made Chicago Wilderness a part of mainstream culture in all neighborhoods, but I can't imagine my life without it.

One of the driving habits I'm continually reprimanded for is "botanizing at 60 mph". I am unable to watch a landscape zip by and not make a stream of judgments about its composition, quality and even its history and restorability. To be able to do this grounds me in this place. This landscape is a familiar face. When I venture more 300 miles in any direction it seems like I'm a tourist perusing a postcard rack. I feel lost and a little stupid.

My daughter is attending grad school in

Oregon so I guess I have quite a bit of catching up to do. What I won't have as I take on this task are my fellow North Branchers to teach me, to study with me and to work with me to learn how to really inhabit a place.

THE NEXT 30 YEARS

by Karen Rodriguez

Volunteers lop buckthorn, pull garlic mustard, slide seeds from brittle stems to scatter beneath oak trees or on soil open to ancient prairie winds. These days, when I participate in a North Branch workday, I don't recognize everyone anymore. But the restoration tasks, the bagel breaks, the sense of satisfaction at the end of a workday feel the same as when I was a regular volunteer and I find that comforting. The landscape has changed over the years though and that is a constant surprise to me. Where restoration was halted because of the moratorium, the landscape is bleak and sad, unsettling. But where restoration has continued for 30 years, the diversity of plant and animal life fills me with pride and hope.

A generation of North Branchers has worked together to protect and restore prairies, savannas, wetlands and woodlands along a river degraded by human activities. Volunteers have recognized the value natural places have in our lives, aesthetically and practically. And the discovery that we don't have to accept degradation and destruction of our landscapes but can increase the potential for long term survival of the region's natural heritage has empowered individuals to act. The North Branch community is a model for what many are now calling ecological citizenship—active participation in restoring what is vital for the greater community. We

need to rejoice in the accomplishments of the first 30 years yet continue to examine our goals so that we succeed in the future. In the meantime, it's almost winter and time to enjoy the sound of saws and loppers and the crackle of a good brush pile fire.



NUGGETS OF LOCAL HISTORY

by Marianne Kozlowski

That fires occurred in this area before heavy settlement, most of us know only thru secondary sources. But in finding the original letters of Chicago's earliest residents, amazing nuggets of local history appear.

In 1837, when Chicago had about 2,000 inhabitants, Stephen Gale and Augustus Burley started a book & music store. For several years it was located near LaSalle & Lake Streets, Lake Street being the main business district at the time. Over the next 15 years, Gale & Burley wrote many letters back to their relatives in New Hampshire, describing the city, their store, and the countryside. One of the earliest letters, from September 7, 1837, sets the scene:

The times are exceedingly dull in this City of Chicago, there is no business, no balls, no parties, some shooting, some riding, and plenty of loafers, and today after the rain a plenty of mud which completes the picture, excepting any quantity of watermelons, ... of the most delicious flavor.

We have started a Circulating Library, and have a room most finished to keep it in, and another room for a sleeping room, which form an addition on the back part of the store.

Chicago is a pretty good place for men that are in business, for making money, but it is a miserable place for loafers, for there is no Valient, no Hampton Beach, no Theatre, no Museum, or any other place except our store, which is generally allowed to be the best loafing place in the city."

These letters offer wonderful insights into life on the prairies. Here are excerpts on nature:

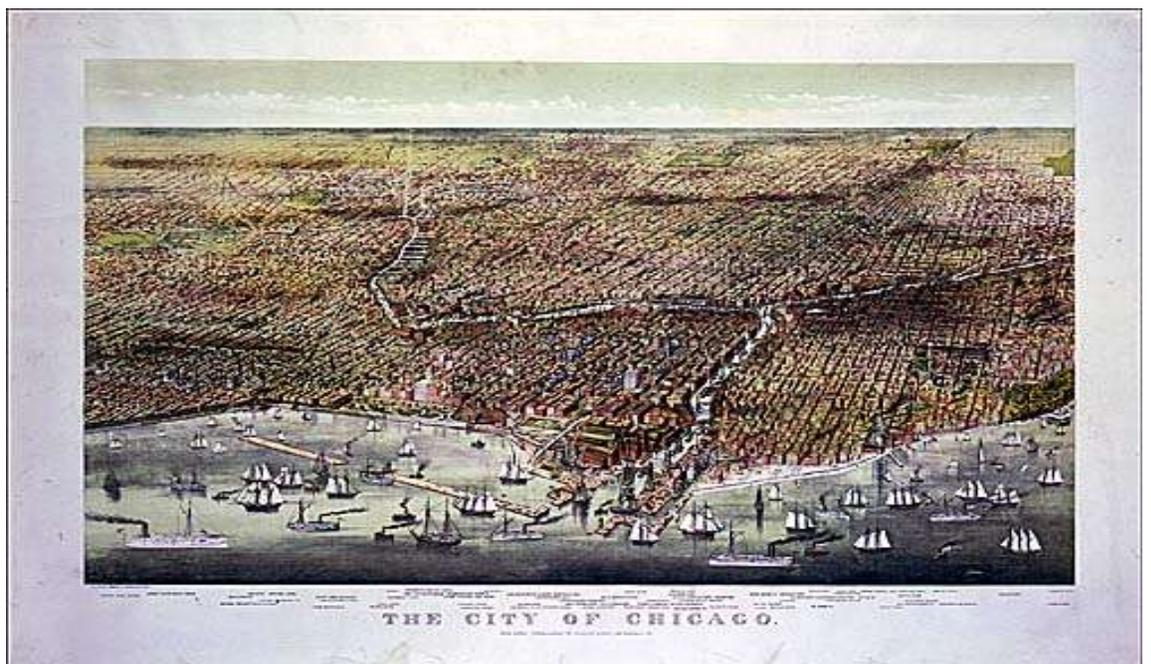
The Prairie takes fire every dry day that we have, and ... burns beautifully in the evening & lights up the whole sky...

The weather is very warm for the season, with more than the usual quantity of rain, the Indians predict an open winter. *November 20, 1837*

The weather, till within two or three weeks, has been very mild, till within that time there has not been snow enough to stop the burning of the prairies. *January 31, 1838*

Since I wrote to you I have been out on the Fox River forty miles from Chicago and stayed several days, the Fox country (as it is called) is the most beautiful that I have ever seen, the whole country is one continued rolling prairie, except close to the river where there is a good growth of timber, as there is also on the banks (not Wild Cat banks) of the creeks & small streams, I say except that the whole country is a rolling prairie, of the richest soil imaginable, the farmers out there are wealthy... and in addition to all these things there are peat bogs which the Irishman say are equal to any in Ireland, and healthier country is not to be found, sickness is only known as a name... *April 24, 1838*

Our weather this spring has been pretty much the same as usual rather cold but changeable of late we have had some warm weather, and a great deal of thunder and lightning, the trees and the earth are now clothed in their beautiful garment of green, the prairies are enlivened by thousands of beautiful flowers and the birds, insects and the snakes (O! delightful idea) are as lively as you can imagine, and I will renew



my promise to get you some flower seeds if I can. *June 20, 1838*

...if the Waters of Lake Michigan continue to rise for a year or two more Chicago will be covered and all the surrounding country with one vast sheet of water finding an outlet through the Mississippi, and the inhabitants of this place must find a home elsewhere, ...
August 14, 1838

For a few days the weather has been very mild, and the mud is up to ones knees nearly, the Ladies ride out in one horse carriages without any seat or top, and a tail board like a potato cart. The River is breaking up and it is very much feared that it will not be closed again. ... During this bad going business is very dull, we have nothing to do but stand at the door and see people get into the mud. *January 11, 1839*

Stephen was out shooting a few days since with another, when they caught a sand-hill crane or as they had been called the North Am. Ostrich they stand 5 ft high - he is now quite tame about the house. *August 4, 1841*

Have you had any pleasant weather since August if you have had, you have luxuries which we cannot claim, as it rains twenty hours out of twenty four all of the time we have the

genuine mud two feet deep from the barn to the lake & not the least prospect of its improving, the roads are impassable for main or beast & I expect we shall all fail in business & retire to the east & live on our friends.
November 30, 1848

And although not of nature, I couldn't resist this "prairie" reference:

I left off writing yesterday to see a new stove put up in our kitchen, called the "Queen of the Prairie" it is the last wonder out, we can roast a turkey, boil four pots or kettles and bake eight loaves of bread at one time. I baked pies and cake in it this morning and it fully answered my expectations, if it does everything as well, it will be a treasure. It is a western improvement of course. *March 3, 1849*

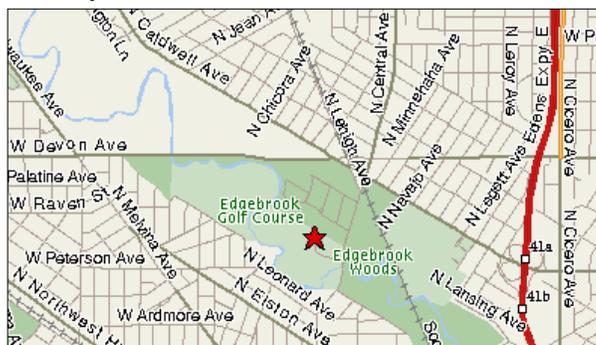
With the help of staff at the Newberry Library, I found these letters while doing research on a music thesis 30 years ago. The Burley descendents said that the original letters had faded so badly they could

barely be read, but that their father had his secretary transcribe them in the 1920's. It was 55 legal-size pages of local history which the family sent to me, providing first-hand proof that the prairies burned – 30 years before I knew to appreciate the insights!

NBRP ANNUAL POTLUCK

SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 6:00-10:30 PM

This potluck will kick off a year of events celebrating the North Branch Restoration 30 year anniversary. It is renowned for the sumptuous food, warm greetings, friendly singing, and congratulatory awards. Please bring a dish to share (and a musical instrument if you play one) and partake of all these with your fellow NBRP volunteers at the Volunteer Resource Center, 6100 N. Central (located on Chicago's northwest side). To help with the potluck, call Nancy Freehafer at 773.342.6665.



WINTER SOLSTICE BONFIRE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2:00 PM

Celebrate the winter solstice with music, a bonfire, and friends at Somme Woods. On the darkest day of year, when the sun sets early for the last day this fall, come gather round a warm fire and reflect on things past and yet to be. We will have spiced cider, hot chocolate, and some treats to tempt your palate. This annual event – jointly sponsored by the North Branch Restoration Project, the Forest Preserve District, and Friends of the Forest Preserves – is a peaceful and sweet celebration. Neither snow nor cold ever stops this event (rain? maybe). Everyone welcome. For more information call Linda Masters at 847.509.0431.

To contribute articles, notices, photos to Brush Piles:

Fax: 847.559.0792

Email: masters2001@comcast.net

Snail Mail: P.O. Box 2154, Northbrook, IL 60062

Deadlines: November 1, February 1, May 1, August 1
Linda Masters, editor

NBRP Workday Schedule - Winter 2006

DECEMBER

3	Sun	9:00-noon	Somme Woods
9	Sat	9:00-noon	* Somme Prairie Grove
		9:00-noon	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
10	Sun	9:00-noon	Harms Woods
		1:00-4:00	Harms Woods
16	Sat	9:00-noon	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
17	Sun	9:00-noon	Harms Flatwoods
		2:00 pm	Somme Woods Solstice Bonfire
23	Sat	9:00-noon	* Somme Prairie Grove
24	Sun	9:00-noon	Somme Woods
30	Sat	9:00-noon	Somme Woods
31	Sun	9am-2pm	Somme Prairie Nature Preserve

JANUARY

6	Sat	9:00-noon	Harms Flatwoods
		9:00-noon	Somme Woods
7	Sun	9:00-noon	Wayside
13	Sat	9:00-noon	Linne Woods North
		9:00-noon	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
14	Sun	9:00-noon	* Somme Prairie Grove
20	Sat	9:00-noon	Somme Woods
		9:00-noon	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
21	Sun	9:00-noon	Harms Woods
		1:00-4:00	Harms Woods
27	Sat	9:00-noon	Linne Prairie
		9:00-noon	* Somme Prairie Grove
		6pm-10:30	NBRP Potluck
28	Sun	9:00-noon	Harms Flatwoods

FEBRUARY

3	Sat	9:00-noon	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
4	Sun	9am-2pm	Somme Prairie Nature Preserve
10	Sat	9:00-noon	Harms Flatwoods
		9:00-noon	Linne Woods North
11	Sun	9:00-noon	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
17	Sat	9:00-noon	Harms Flatwoods
		9:00-noon	Somme Woods
18	Sun	9:00-noon	Harms Woods
		1:00-4:00	Harms Woods
24	Sat	9:00-noon	* Somme Prairie Grove
25	Sun	9:00-noon	Miami Woods Prairie

NOTES:

* Park at Somme Woods (see directions next page)

These workdays will consist primarily of brush cutting and burning brush piles.

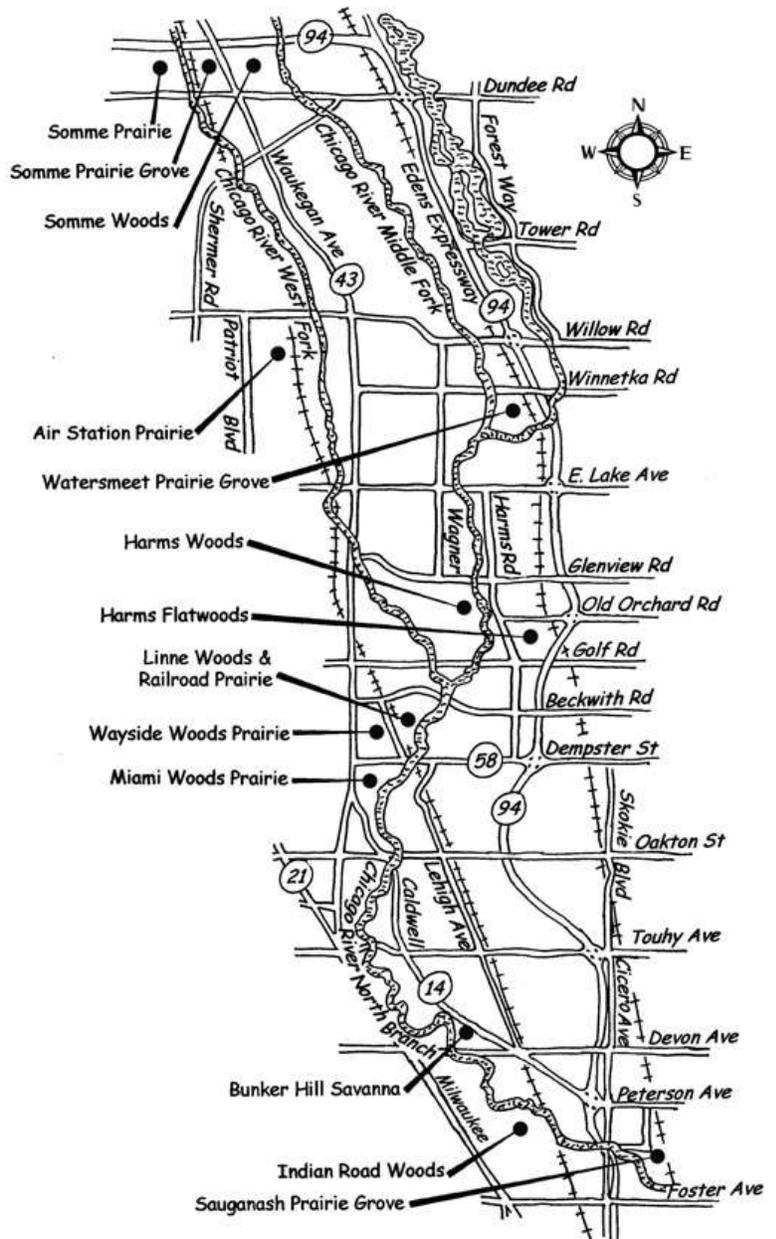
BUFFALO GROVE PRAIRIE

Sundays, 9:00 am - Noon

Dec 3, Jan 14, Feb 11

Bev Hansen, 847-272-6211

Work on Sundays at this piece of virgin prairie located on Hastings Road. It is off Lake-Cook about a mile west of Milwaukee (watch for Hastings on the north after going under the railroad overpass). Turn north on Hastings, then right into the second parking lot. The prairie is under the ComEd power lines.



SKOKIE LAGOONS

Saturdays, 10:00 am - 1:00 pm

Dec 9, Please call Jerry for Jan and February workdays

Jerry Garden, 773-545-4632, jerrygarden@sprynet.com

Meet at the Tower Road parking lot (east of the lagoon bridge - not the boat launch). There will be a sign with directions to the work site in the picnic field adjacent to the parking lot. Come dressed for the weather. We will provide waders, gloves and tools.

NBRP Site Directions and Stewards

Air Station Prairie, Glenview

Kent & Jerry Fuller From the Edens Expressway; go west on Willow Road, past Waukegan Road and over the RR overpass. Turn south at the new traffic signals for Patriot Blvd. (The new main road through the redeveloped Naval Air Station). Turn east on Compass to the gate at the south end of the prairie. Patriot Blvd. is also accessible from the south via Lake Ave.

Bunker Hill Savanna/Oxbow, Chicago

Jane & John Balaban Off Caldwell between Devon and Touhy; entrance located just opposite Tonty Street. For Bunker Hill Meet in first section of parking lot; for Oxbow, follow road until it turns north, then park along the west side.

Harms Flatwoods, Glenview

Neil Peck & Terry Schilling Meet at the Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Road, directly west of Old Orchard Road.

Harms Woods, Glenview

Jane & John Balaban Meet at the Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Road, just south of Glenview Road and north of Old Orchard Road.

Linne Prairie, Morton Grove

Mary Busch & John Thill (847-966-0231) - Meet at the Wayside Woods Prairie parking lot on Lehigh Ave, a few blocks east of Waukegan Road and just north of Dempster.

Linne Woods North, Morton Grove

John & Marian Thill (847-966-0231, mjthill@icsp.net) - From Edens go west on Dempster street about 1.5 miles. The forest preserve entrance will be on the north side of the street directly across from McDonalds. Follow the winding road all the way back until it dead-ends at the turn-around circle.

Miami Woods Prairie, Niles/Morton Grove

Kent & Jerry Fuller Located on the east side of Caldwell, two blocks north of Oakton. Meet in the parking lot for Miami Woods.

Prairie View Nature Preserve, Morton Grove

Kent Fuller From Dempster, 2 blocks east of Waukegan, turn north on Oak Park Ave. Turn left on Churchill and drive to the end. Park in the parking lot on the north side.

Sauganash Prairie Grove, Chicago

Larry Hodak & Pete Leki (watersschool@yahoo.com) Meet at the edge of the Forest Preserve along the south side of Bryn Mawr at Kilbourn, which is south of Peterson and east of Cicero.

Somme Prairie Grove, Northbrook

Stephen Packard (847-509-0431, spackard@audubon.org) **WE NOW PARK AT SOMME WOODS FOR THIS PRESERVE.** Park by the new signs, on the left, near the entrance and follow the new trail. From the Edens Expressway, take Dundee Road two miles west and turn right into Somme Woods parking lot (just before the light at Waukegan Road).

Somme Prairie Nature Preserve, Northbrook

Laurel Ross (312-665-7432, lross@fieldmuseum.org) & Christiane Rey (773-478-2019) From the Edens Expressway, take Dundee Road 2½ miles west (past Waukegan) to Western. Turn north and park in the post office parking lot.

Somme Woods, Northbrook

Linda Masters (847-509-0431, masters2001@comcast.net) From the Edens Expressway, take Dundee Road two miles west and turn right into Somme Woods parking lot (just before the light at Waukegan Road).

Watersmeet Prairie Grove, Northfield

John Berg (Kerg111@aol.com) From Lake Avenue and Wagner Road, turn north on Wagner to Winnetka Road. Turn east on Winnetka for ¾ mile. Park on the north side of the street or a side street.

Wayside Woods Prairie/Linne RR Prairie, Morton Grove

Gladys Bryer & Larry Hodak Meet at Wayside Woods Prairie parking lot on Lehigh Ave, a few blocks east of Waukegan Road and just north of Dempster.

THE NORTH BRANCH SURVEY

My name is Karen Rodriguez. I am a former (perhaps forever) North Brancher who still enjoys coming to an occasional workday and the annual potluck. For a time I have been interested in the work of the North Branch and the value placed upon that work by volunteer ecological restorationists.

As a writer (former North Branch Brush Piles and Prairie Projections editor), it struck me that although there have been several books (Miracle Under the Oaks, Restoring Nature) and many newspaper and journal articles about the North Branch Restoration Project, the stories about who North Branchers are, what North Branch volunteers value, and the structure of the North Branch community have never been told.

I intend to write that book, tell your stories, because I believe the North Branch Restoration Project is a unique community that deserves to be held up as a model for all those interested in protecting and restoring natural areas.

The survey found at the North Branch Restoration Project website (www.northbranchrestoration.org), therefore, is one of several methods by which I will record the stories of the North Branch. In addition to the survey I will be interviewing each North Branch

steward and Forest Preserve District of Cook County staff and conducting a literature search of North Branch articles.

The survey, which has been reviewed by North Branch Restoration Project leaders, has two purposes. First, it will attempt to answer the following questions: Who are North Branch volunteers? How do North Branch volunteers feel about ecological restoration tasks? How important is the work of the North Branch to volunteers? Your responses will form the basis of the book. Second, the survey will help North Branch leaders to better understand the members' viewpoints about restoration tasks and management.

If you are a North Branch Restoration Project volunteer, please print out the survey (www.northbranchrestoration.org), complete it by January 5, 2007, and give it to a workday steward or you can mail it to me - Karen Rodriguez, 17 Dunes Forest Trail, Porter, IN 46304.

For additional thoughts or stories about your North Branch experiences please do not hesitate to write to me at the above address, call me at 219-926-8206, or email me. I look forward to examining the results of the questionnaire, reporting back to you, and writing that book – your story. Thank you.
