

# ParkLands Foundation Collection

Illinois Wesleyan University  
Tate Archives and Special Collections  
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**Organization History:**

The ParkLands Foundation was founded in 1967 by Pantagraph publisher Loring Merwin and other concerned citizens in McLean County as a member-supported nonprofit organization dedicated to the acquisition, preservation, ecological restoration, and management of natural lands in Central Illinois, especially along the Mackinaw River. Multiple properties in McLean and Woodford counties have been designated Nature Preserves or Land and Water Reserves by a state agency, the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, which offers additional legal protection. The Merwin Nature Preserve in McLean County has an extensive trail system and is open to members and the public for passive recreation (e.g. birdwatching, hiking).

Loring Merwin was the great-grandson of Jesse W. Fell, who founded the town of Normal and was instrumental in creating Illinois State (Normal) University. Davis Merwin (Loring Merwin's son and successor), Pantagraph farm reporter Stanley Lantz, attorney Guy Fraker, CPA Dorothy Sands, Illinois Farm Bureau secretary for natural resources Bill Brow, McLean County board member Bill Brown, WJBC president Timothy Ives, and State Farm Insurance Companies regional vice president Ray Danielson were among those who guided ParkLands' early years. The board was also inspired by William Rutherford, who founded the Wildlife Prairie Park and the Forest Park Foundation in Peoria to acquire and conserve land along the Illinois River.

ParkLands' first land acquisition was a five-acre tract in Funks Grove, the largest remaining prairie grove in McLean County, which was donated by Elisabeth Stubblefield and her sister, Louise Stubblefield. Illinois State University History professor Mark Wyman wrote ParkLands: A History, which summarizes the foundation's development to 2001, and provides color maps of the properties.

**Scope & Content Note:**

The collection contains organizational documents, including corporation records, minutes, correspondence, land records, management plans, subject files, and newsletters. The bulk of the collection is from the 1960s to the 2000s.

Processing was performed by consulting archivist Gretchen Knapp (ParkLands Foundation) by removing rusty staples and paper clips where necessary and respecting the original order of the records based on the organizational structure of ParkLands. Properties were arranged according to the preserves to which they belong. One map, stored in a tube, several photographs, and a video cassette are also part of the collection.

The collection is organized in the following series:

- I. Board of Trustees
- II. Committees
- III. Correspondence
- IV. Properties Owned
- V. Formerly Owned Properties
- VI. Other Properties

**I. Board of Trustees**

**Box**

- 1 Bylaws & Articles of Incorporation  
Minutes (chronological)  
Annual Meeting  
Directors

**II. Committees**

Management  
Parks and Recreation  
Membership  
Publicity  
Fundraising  
History

**III. Correspondence**

General by Year (chronological order), 1967-1999

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**IV. Subject Files (alphabetical order)**

Acquisition plans  
Brochures  
Budget  
Forest Park  
Funks Grove  
Job descriptions  
Land trust exchange  
Letterhead  
Mackinaw River Tract  
Mackinaw Recreation Area

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Management, Lexington  
Management, 1996  
Maps  
Maps & Promotions  
Membership  
Membership Brochures  
The Nature Conservancy  
Newsletters  
Orchid Award (EAC)  
Other Recreation Organizations  
Parks & Recreation  
Projects  
Property Directory  
Rails to Trails  
SCORP  
Signs

**Box**

3 (cont'd)

Ski Trail  
Surveillance, Wyatt's Ford  
Trail Information

**IV. Properties Owned**

McLean County Preserves

Breen I/Champion Federal  
Breen II  
Frey  
Hubert

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Merwin  
Mohr  
Moon  
Newlin  
NIG  
Shelley  
Sweeney  
Weston Cemetery Buffer

Woodford County Preserves

Hazle  
Kenyon  
Letcher  
Wyatt's Ford

**V. Formerly Owned Properties**

Armstrong & Ohlendorf

M. Benedict  
Brennan  
Burnett  
Finnegan

5

Hall  
Henline Farm  
Howe  
Lilly  
L. Merwin  
Long  
Park Hill  
Parker  
Stubblefield  
White

**Box**

5 (cont'd)

**VI. Other Properties**

Bateman  
Berenz  
Boertlin  
Brandt  
Bunney  
Franklin Farm  
Grieder  
Gronemeier  
Ivey  
Kirkton  
McDaniel  
Peine  
Turner  
Wolf