ParkLands Foundation
Collection

Illinois Wesleyan University
Tate Archives and Special Collections
March 2010
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

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

3
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

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

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