

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 (1967-1990, in 12 folders)
Annual Meeting Agendas (1967 -2017, incompl., in 2 folders)
Other Administrative Information (services, procedures, etc.)
Directors

II. Committees

Management, Publications, 1996
Management, Reports
Parks and Recreation, 1966-1967
Membership
Publicity--Clippings
Publicity--Newsletters (1968-2018, incompl., in 6 folders)
Publicity--Outreach, 1967-1990
Fundraising
History (1986-2001)

III. Correspondence

General by Year (chronological order), 1967-1999 (incompl., in 3 folders)

2

IV. Subject Files (alphabetical order)

Correspondence, cont. (1967-1999, in 29 folders)
Acquisition plans
Brochures
Budget, 1994
Forest Park Foundation, 1965-1971
Funks Grove (1963-1971, incompl., in 2 folders)
Job descriptions
Land trust exchange
Letterhead
Mackinaw River Tract, 1991
Mackinaw Recreation Area (in 2 folders)
Maintenance

3

Management, Lexington Nature Preserve, 1993
Management, 1996
Maps
Maps & Promotions, Merwin, Mackinaw
Membership
Membership Brochures
The Nature Conservancy, 1975-2008, incompl.
Orchid Award (EAC)

Box

3 (cont'd)

Other Recreation and Park Development Organizations
General Materials on Parks & Recreation
Projects
Property Directory, 1995-1996
Rails to Trails
SCORP
Signs
Ski Trail
Surveillance, Wyatt's Ford
Trail Information

IV. Properties Owned

McLean County Preserves

Breen I/Champion Federal
Breen I, Breen II
Frey, 1971
Hubert, 1968
Merwin, Rediger, 1970
Merwin, Thatcher, 1971
Merwin, Gregory, 1971

4

Merwin, Vandegraft
Merwin, Stewart, 1975-1977
Merwin, Kinsella, 1978
Merwin, Benedict, 1977
Merwin, Henline/Berenz
Merwin, IWU, 1994
Mohr, Chapman/Fingen 1992-1999
Mohr, Bigger, 1992-1996
Mohr, Bradford, 1992-1999
Mohr, Tom Mohr I & II, 1992-1995
Mohr, Alyce Mohr, 1995-1997
Moon, 1988
Newlin, 2000
NIG, 1971
Shelley, 1975
Sweeney, 1972
Weston Cemetery Buffer
Woodford County Preserves
Hazle, 1987
Ridgetop Prairie, (1979- 1981, in 2 folders)
Wyatt's Ford (1972-1989, in 2 folders)

V. Formerly Owned Properties

Armstrong & Ohlendorf, 1971
M. Benedict, 1975

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Box	Brennan, 1975
4 (cont'd)	Burnett, 1970
5	Finnegan Tract, 1990-1991, 1999 Hall, 1979, 1981 Howe, 1970 Long Lilly/L. Merwin (in 2 folders) L. Merwin Parker, Funks Grove, 1968 Park Hill Cemetary Tract, 1992-1996 Stubblefield, 1967, 1978 White

VI. Other Properties

Bateman, 1981
Berenz Tract, 1985-1989
Sale to Boertlein, 1999
Brandt Tract, 1969-1987
Bunney Tract, 1998-1999
Franklin Farms, 1998
Grieder Tract, 1979
Gronemeies Tract, 1991
Ivey Tract, 1972
Kinkton Tract, 1979
Clarence G. McDaniel, 1976
Peine Tract, 1969-1989
David Tuines Tract, 1996
Wolf Property Tract, 1997

Parklands Promotion, 1994, VHS