



THE HISTORY OF SOUTH WOODS

By
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SOUTH WOODS PARK ASSOCIATION

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What wilt not woman, gentle woman dare
When strong affection stirs her spirit up. --Southey

This quotation is especially appropriate because of the part women played in the history of South Woods.

There is a common saying "You can't have your cake and eat it too," and that has been true of the American people in the use of our natural resources. Herds of buffalo were hunted until they became almost extinct. Passenger pigeons were sold by the wagon load for a song in Sparta, Wisconsin. Forests were nearly depleted because of the unwise practice of wholesale cutting.

At the turn of the century, there was a small primeval forest southwest of Ripon. There, school children and teachers held picnics and picked flowers. Ripon College Biology classes sought trees, plants, and flowers--living examples of textbook lessons.

Frank Schultz, owner of this land in 1900, advertised in the local paper the sale of young elm, maple, and basswood trees from the woods. A young man from Green Lake bought some of the trees; and when driving home with these in his wagon, he became depressed. He was thinking about the irreplaceable cutting of the trees, and he said to his wife, "If I were rich, I would buy the woods and give it to the city of Ripon."

Some Ripon residents were also concerned about the proposed destruction of the woods. Science Club and Educational Club met in joint session in October, 1900, and they appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of saving the forest. The matter was presented to the Ripon City Council, and the committee was told that the citizens had to vote as to whether or not they wanted to buy the woods for a park.

After the enthusiastic young man from Green Lake heard about this, he published an article in the Ripon paper. This article was addressed to the men of the city of Ripon. In essence, it complimented the men of the city saying that Ripon was among the first of the smaller cities to put in water works and electricity, Ripon sidewalks were the smoothest on earth, and they had gone "low in their pockets" to secure the pickle factory. "Now let the ladies do the directing and give them all the credit, but put your shoulders to the wheel and do all the heavy lifting." He was sure the women would act.

Mr. Schultz was still selling trees, and the women decided that they couldn't wait for a vote of the citizens nor could they wait for action by the businessmen. This situation needed

immediate attention, so they took the project into their own hands. To raise the money for the down payment, each member of each club contributed \$2. They were later reimbursed for this amount.

On November 27, 1900, a contract was secured for 20 acres at a cost of \$2,000. Six months later the two clubs met in joint session and elected the following officers:

President--Mrs. Elizabeth Hood
Secretary--Mrs. M. C. Pool
Treasurer--Mrs. Carrie Stone

In 1901, this group was appointed to organize a legally incorporated association to continue the business of the park purchase, and to prepare a constitution which was adopted the same year. Membership was confined to members of the two clubs, and there were 25 charter members. The treasurer was required to be bonded for \$500.

The primary concern at this time was turned to raising money for the payment of the debt. The first venture was a rummage sale on Oct. 23, 1902 which netted \$500. A post-Lenten party brought in \$10.

Library members were invited to join Science and Educational Clubs in the rummage sale and all would share in the proceeds. The sale closed November 2 and \$470 was realized. Judge Reed's gift of \$25 and Mr. Weller's \$5 brought the total to \$500. The Library received one-half of the \$30 and one-third of the proceeds of the sale as had been prearranged making the Library receipts \$171.65 and the Park receipts \$328.35.

In December, the charter members signed the articles of the constitution and Mr. L. E. Reed, notary public, witnessed the signatures. The same month, this document was sent to the Secretary of State in Madison for filing.

The first meeting of the newly chartered South Woods Park Association was held in February, 1902 at the home of Mrs. Emilie Graf. The by-laws were adopted. There was to be an annual meeting the first Thursday of December and three other meetings. These were to be held the first Thursday of March, June, and September.

In 1902, the Starr family offered to give the South Woods Park Association a 10 acre tract of land east of South Woods providing the name of the entire 30 acres be changed to Starr Park. The offer was refused. In her will, Annie Starr gave the city of Ripon 9 ½ acres with the proviso that if the city fails to retain title to the land, it then reverts back to the heirs of Annie Starr. Annie Starr Woods was to be administered by the South Woods Park Association as a wild life refuge. Therefore, both areas were to be left in their original state.

Plans for a carnival turned into a city-wide affair. The college quartette participated, as did the Ripon band under the leadership of Mr. E. J. Burnside. City merchants were solicited for goods for the purpose of advertising. Booths were set up for the sale of ice cream, cake, coffee, candy, flowers and lemonade. Elizabeth Ellsworth was chosen as Carnival Queen; Leone Oyster and Margaret Maxwell served as maids of honor. Public school teachers prepared their children to form a living flag. The boys gave a flag drill and a hoop drill. In the parade were carts laden with flowers and Mother Goose characters in costume. The last afternoon of the carnival, Mrs. Don J. Fenelon contributed a horse race matinee. Mrs. George Graf had charge of a lunch counter. At this lunch counter Dutch cheese, potato salad, coffee and doughnuts were sold. The whole affair netted \$382 for the park fund.

In 1903, a fall flower show sponsored by the Association also proved to be a city-wide affair. The city band played free of charge. Mrs. Bennie Anderson's orchestra and the High School Mandolin Club gave an afternoon concert free of charge. Premiums were awarded for exhibits of paintings, photography, and needlework. The Library Association sold copies of its cookbook. The profit from this flower show was \$500.

In 1904, another rummage sale and flower show was held. "The Bachelor's Congress" staged in June realized \$102. This was used to pay premiums for exhibits at the Flower Show. Total receipts were \$224, so the \$200 payment due Mr. Schultz was met.

By the close of the fourth year, the debt had been reduced to \$75. This amount plus interest was financed by the proceeds from another flower show. This show featured art work done by grade school children. A Harvest Ball was held in connection with the flower show and it was a huge success.

Five years after the purchase of the woods, the final payment was made!!!

There was a lull in the activities of the group during the next three years--1907-09, but the members still promoted some money making activities--paper collections, a Calico Ball, and a gift from Mrs. Cook of an equal share of the soda fountain receipts for one day.

Card parties were held--25 cents a player. Mrs. Herbert Lyle, Mrs. William Wood and Mrs. Chadbourne hosted whist parties.

Taxes were paid on the park until 1910 when it was learned that the law did not require taxes to be paid on parks.

Ripon College has been interested in the work of the South Woods Park Association throughout the years. In 1910, President Hughes invited members to meet Mr. A. C. Simonds, landscape gardener from Chicago. He advised that the forest be left in its natural state. A contribution of \$8 was made by the college.

The right-of-way for the park from Union Street to the woods through the property adjoining on the south was acquired from the city council in 1911 due to the effective interest of Judge L. E. Reed. Line fences were put up a year later, and the city built a bridge across the stream to connect Annie Starr Woods and South Woods. The bridge is part of Annie Starr Woods and that is why the city built the bridge. In 1911, Mrs. Wood reported that quail were being shot in the woods. Problems with hunters still prevail to this day.

In May, 1911, an "Old Time Concert" was held in the Congregational Church. The program included old time songs and a tableau in which exquisite dresses of long ago were worn. Also, the winding of the May Pole was done by the little tots under the supervision of Mrs. H. G. Lyle.

In 1913, Mrs. L. W. Thayer invited the Association to hold a social meeting at her Green Lake cottage. They had such a good time that at the meeting in March of the next year, they voted to make all meetings social affairs. Five women would serve refreshments at each meeting.

In 1918, after World War I, trees were donated to Ripon College by the Association. They were placed on campus in memory of students who died during the war. Miss Ella Hazen was responsible for this project.

In 1920, the Association filled a supply box for use by the school nurse. Supplies included sheets, pillow slips, towels, washcloths, soap, etc. Later they adopted a family and cared for them.

In 1922, the Association decided to take up the study of nature and parks. They divided into groups alphabetically--one group responsible for the program and the other for the luncheon. America the Beautiful was adopted as the club song, and it was sung at every meeting.

In 1922, each member was required to wear a badge at every meeting.. Fines were assessed if someone didn't wear a badge. The fine was 5 cents.

In 1923, Mr. Jens Jensen, a naturalist from Ellison Bay in northern Wisconsin, published an article on South Woods, illustrated with pictures taken by Mr. William Haseltine of Ripon. Postcards of the pictures were printed for sale.

A committee was appointed to locate a spring in the park and to plan a suitable location for a picnic table. The table had been presented by Mrs. Josephine Davy. A spring was located in 1924. A well was dug and a pump was installed.

In 1926, Mrs. Lena Corliss was president. Another successful flower show was held. One memorable feature of the show was the Baby Contest. Dr. J. S. Foat made the examination

of the contestants in his office in the "flatiron building." John Miller, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Miller of Fairwater, was chosen as the most perfect baby. Mr. Wilbur Sisson of Rosendale exhibited a collection of gladioli. There was a \$100 profit from the flower show.

In 1927, the Ripon City Park Board was appointed to beautify the city. Kiwanis, Rotary, Educational Club, Science Club, Study Club, Library Association, Mother's Clubs of three grade schools and others comprised the board. Each club had a representative. They landscaped and kept attractive the Ceresco and Eureka Triangles and Horner Park. They also were to supervise Annie Starr Woods. South Woods Park Association worked with the City Park Board on these activities.

There was a problem trying to keep cars out of the woods during the years 1928-47. All efforts failed. So the bridge across the creek was removed, and large posts set in cement and connected by chains were erected. The chains were broken by drivers determined to drive in the woods.

In 1928, the last money raising venture of this era was a womanless wedding. The proceeds amounted to \$270 and that amount was given to the City Park Board.

In 1929, 530 loads of gravel were used to grade the entrance to the woods and the low paths. Evergreens and tamaracks were planted under the direction of Mr. Harold Banville. Eight hundred trees were planted during this year. These were planted on the lowlands and did not survive because these trees were not native to this area.

In 1938, the Boy Scouts were granted permission to build a cabin on the top of the ridge above Schoolboy's Glen. In exchange, the Boy Scouts were to protect the property, patrol the grounds and aid in the upkeep of the park. In 1944, the cabin was removed due to extensive vandalism. Remnants of the fireplace are still there.

On October 28, 1955, the Wisconsin Conservation Commission officially designated South Woods Park and Annie Starr Woods as the South Woods Game Refuge.

During 1957 and 1958, Professor Daniel Thompson of the Ripon College Biology Department and his students began to study the vegetation in the woods. Today Professor William Brooks and his students continue a detailed study of the woods.

Throughout the years the Association has continued to keep Ripon city officials aware of the provision of the bequest of the Annie Starr family. This stated that the acreage of Annie Starr Woods be perpetually maintained in its natural wooded state. Ripon city and Ripon town leaders have cooperated with this provision, and they have aided the Association in such projects as bridge construction, trash removal and supervision of the park.

In 1963, a cloud descended on the Association and the woods. In October, trees and the bridge on the right-of-way were burned. The area along the right-of-way had been preserved by the Association as much needed cover for wild life. Lack of knowledge about the right-of-way, both by the man doing the burning and the city officials, was the basis of the problem. The Association's right-of-way was proved, but now the fence rows were destroyed.

On November 15, 1966, Edgar Zobel's musical composition "South Woods Suite" was introduced to the public at a meeting of the Educational Club. The "Suite" was dedicated to the South Woods Park Association. No price was set on the printed copies of the music, but Mr. Zobel encouraged that a generous amount be set aside for a special fund. Later recordings were made by members of the Zobel family and friends. At the time of Mr. Zobel's death in 1969, a memorial was established designating South Woods Park Fund as the recipient. Memorials to Otto Zobel, who died in 1970, and to Erna Zobel Luetscher, who died in 1976, also added to the fund.

There was an arrangement with Esther Limbach Bent that South Woods Park Association would receive acreage south of Annie Starr Woods, and that this acreage would include the spring. The Association then traded some land at the top of the ridge to Allan Brooks in exchange for a piece of property that would allow the Association access to the spring from the west. This also included access to the spring from the ridge and creek trails.

South Woods Park Association leases a triangle of land on the ridge from Allan Brooks for \$1 a year. This lease enables the Association's trails to go across a corner of his land.

In the 1970's, a fence was placed on the north boundary of the right-of-way. At the entrance to the lane on Union Street a sign reading "South Woods Nature Study Area" was erected. Protective rules for the use of the park were enacted, and copies were distributed throughout the community.

An amendment to the constitution was adopted so that close relatives of the members of South Woods Park Association would be eligible for membership. This gave recognition to the many men who had contributed so generously of their time and expertise. In the 1980's membership was open to all who wanted to join. This was necessary in order to maintain tax-free status.

In 1970, the Spring Tour of the Woods was started. Over the years many have taken advantage of this enriching experience. During the school year, many classes often tour the woods.

In the following year, trails in South Woods and Annie Starr Woods were marked. If a tree fell across a path, it was moved to the side of the path. Bill Brooks and his helpers spend many hours enhancing the trails through the woods so that visitors can more readily enjoy walking there. Colored circles on the trees mark the different trails.

As you enter the woods from Union Street, there is a cabinet-type informational sign given by the O'Brien children in memory of their parents, Don and Gladys O'Brien. The sign was constructed by the Ripon High School Tech Ed class under the direction of Mr. Dean Evensen.

In 1994, a new bridge was built across the creek. This was a cooperative effort of the Department of Natural Resources, the Fond du Lac Planning Commission and the Wisconsin Conservation Corps. South Woods paid for the materials for the bridge. These materials were brought to the proper place through Triarch property--thanks to Paul Conant because there was no way to get them there via the road. The bridge was constructed by members of the Conservation Corps under the supervision of the Fond du Lac County office.

The story is that the bridge would not have been built if it had not been for Larry Janssen's expertise and enthusiasm. He spent many hours working on the preliminary details.

In 1998, a new two-sided sign, built by Flyway Signs of Fond du Lac, was installed at the entrance to the woods on Union Street. The letters had been routed, but the sign had not been assembled. Robert and Nancy Royce, Robert Rosenberg and Michael Zambrowicz stained the wood and painted the letters. Robert Royce and William Brooks put the sign together and aided by Michael Zambrowicz pulled out the old sign and installed the new one.

South Woods and Annie Starr Woods occupy a narrow valley formed by limestone embankments on the west and developed sloping land on the east. Crystal Creek, which flows through the woods, begins in the wetlands east of Highway E and flows under the highway. The creek waters are supplied by springs which keep it flowing even in dry seasons.

Some of the flowers that bloom in the woods are Spring Beauty, Skunk Cabbage, Hepatica, Bloodroot, various kinds of Anemones, Trilliums, Buttercups, Violets, Dutchman's Breeches, Phlox, Jack in the Pulpit and many others. Among the trees in the woods are Ash, Sugar Maple, Red Oak, White Oak and Butternut.

In 1933, it was decided to have only two meetings a year--one in April and one in October. Officers are elected in October to serve two years.

Dues for membership in South Woods Park Association are presently \$5 a year. Two meetings a year are held. The spring meeting is usually a morning meeting at Hardee's followed by the Spring Tour under the guidance of Bill Brooks and Skip Wittler. The annual meeting is held in October and this is usually a dinner meeting.

Rules for the use of the woods have been printed in a brochure. All are welcome to enjoy the woods. "Use the woods, but leave behind only your footprints and take with you only photos and memories of all that your senses have enjoyed."

Information obtained from:

A History of South Woods Park Association 1902-1947
South Woods, A Nature Study Area in Ripon, Wisconsin 1976
Nancy Royce (Mrs. Robert)

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