



June 2021

## Milton C. Potter's Forest - A School Without Walls

Located on the north end of Whitnall Park and Boerner Botanical Gardens, Milton C. Potter's Forest has quietly existed for many years as a school forest. It's easy to drive past the inconspicuous entrance sign on Forest Home Avenue, located just northeast of Sandra's On the Park, without realizing the historic significance of this wooded area.

Students from Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) were planting trees and studying nature at Potter's Forest long before other nature centers and programs were developed in the area, resulting in its description as a "school without walls." First developed for the study of conservation education, Potter's Forest programs evolved into a focus on environmental education.

Prior to the 1830s, the area was not a forest at all. The Potawatomi people who lived there at that time would start fires on a regular basis to keep the area open for wildlife. After that, the land became the property of various farmers, who maintained that open and unforested land.

As early as 1943, individuals from local conservation groups and MPS worked to acquire property for a school forest to develop a conservation education program. **Wilhelmine LaBudde** (see page 2), of the Women's Conservation League of America, and **Walter Nichols**, Assis-

tant Superintendent of MPS, led the search and acquisition of the land for the new school forest.

The land that became Potter's Forest was last farmed by **Adam Roder** in the 1930s and early 1940s. His farm was later subdivided into two parcels: 35.98 acres for **Alma** and **Emma Toelle** and 14.57 acres for **Elizabeth Schwab**. Those two parcels, totalling 50.55 acres, were purchased by MPS in 1947, and on June 5, 1949, the property was named in honor of **Milton C. Potter**.

Potter was a former MPS Superintendent who had a deep love for, and appreciation of, our natural heritage. He was born in 1873 in Otsego, Michigan. His education included a Bachelor of Arts degree from Albion College, a Bachelor of Philosophy degree from the University of Chicago, and a Doctor of Letters degree from Denver University. His career in education began as the Principal of High Schools in Superior, Wisconsin from 1896-1903. He then served as the Superintendent of Schools in three cities: Idaho Springs, Colorado from 1903-1907, Pueblo, Colorado from 1907-1911, and St. Paul, Minnesota from 1911-1914. Finally, he arrived in Milwaukee and was the MPS Superintendent from 1914-1943.



*Milton C. Potter*



*Entrance sign at 10005 W. Forest Home Avenue*

The early years saw a great deal of student activity with the planting of hardwood and conifer trees. That was the start of the forest. In addition,

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Wilhelmine LaBudde - Pioneer in Wisconsin Conservation

One of our society members, **Rose Mary Walecki**, called our attention to a commemorative plaque hidden away in Potter's Forest. While hiking a trail starting near Whitnall Park's Trial Garden, she took a less-traveled path to the right and discovered a very large boulder with a plaque mounted on it. The plaque, erected in 1959, reads:

***In memory of Wilhelmine Diefenthaler LaBudde, 1880-1955.  
A leader devoted to the conservation and perpetuation of our natural resources:  
soil, water, forests, minerals, wildlife and a staunch proponent  
of conservation education in the schools of America.  
Dedicated by The Woman's Conservation League of America, Inc.***

Since Wilhelmine's name is also mentioned in the history of Potter's Forest, we wanted to find out more about this remarkable woman. Below is what we learned.

**Wilhelmine Diefenthaler LaBudde** was born in Elkhart Lake in 1880, a town where she maintained a lifelong summer residence. As a child, she had a love of wildflowers and birds. As a wife and mother, she raised two daughters and a son, and when they went off to college, she turned her attention to the growing conservation movement in Wisconsin.

Wilhelmine took leadership positions with the Milwaukee County Federation of Women's Clubs and other organizations, including the Izaak Walton League. Working with **Curley Radke**, another Conservation Hall of Fame inductee, she successfully fought to preserve and restore the Horicon Marsh. In 1937, she became the first woman to serve on the Wisconsin Conservation Congress.

Wilhelmine's tireless work on forestry causes led to her being named vice president of the Ameri-

can Forestry Association. Soon she was involved in the fight to keep the U.S. Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture and out of the Department of the Interior. She was also among those who successfully pushed for mandatory conservation education in all public schools in Wisconsin.



**Wilhelmine LaBudde**

***“Leave the woods and parks as beautiful as you find them.” — LaBudde***

Wisconsin's early conservation battles were never easy. Her tireless work on a variety of conservation causes soon earned her respect in Wisconsin and across the nation. Working from the 1930s until her death in 1955, she was an inspiration to other women in the conservation movement.

Wilhelmine LaBudde was inducted into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame in 1990.

— Source: College of Natural Resources,  
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point



**LaBudde commemorative plaque in Potter's Forest**



## Remember When Hales Corners Had an Airport?

The Hales Corners Airport was established at some point between 1946-47, like hundreds of other airports in the post-World War II aviation boom. It was located just south of College Avenue, between Highway 100 and Whitnall Park, and featured two unpaved runways and a quonset hut for an office. The smaller runway ran northeast/southwest. During the 1960s, it was used by skydivers who sometimes landed in nearby bean fields, and also by enthusiasts of radio-controlled aircraft.

The main runway (at a length of 2,100 feet) ran east/west. Although larger, this runway was somewhat compromised by high-voltage power lines on the west side. In the spring, the field would flood from melting snow. Because there was a big dip in the center of the main runway, puddling would occur there, so the planes would be moved to General Mitchell Field for a few weeks.



*AT-6 Texan aircraft*

Quite a few “fly boys” lived in and around Hales Corners, including Paul Poberezny, the founder of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA). They were predominantly World War II veterans who had been introduced to flying in the armed services, and returned with the desire to fly again on their own. In the 1960s, you could hire a pilot to fly you around in an AT-6 Texan at a rate of \$10 for 10 minutes.

Their small planes were parked at the Hales Corners Airport until it was forced to close in August 1977. They subsequently found space at Rainbow Airport in Franklin, and at Hunt’s Field in northern Racine County.



*This airplane crash-landed among auto frames when it hit a static line over high tension wires on the west side of the airport, 1950s*



*USGS topographical map depicts two perpendicular runways, 1959*



*Aerial photo of Hales Corners Airport, 1967*

*(Potter's Forest, continued from page 1)*

other conservation work was done to restore the land to create a more natural condition. Students continued to visit Potter's Forest for nature and environmental education field trips.

Today, Potter's Forest is the home of the Milwaukee Public Schools' *Ropes & Challenges* course. This course provides groups with an experience that promotes cooperation, trust, compassion, understanding, and communication, while also developing confidence and a sense of worth for each member of the group.

Since its inception in 1995, the MPS *Ropes & Challenges* course has served more than 60,000 students, including those with significant developmental disabilities. One of the unique features of the course is that it was designed to be accessible to students with a variety of special needs, including students with orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, and cognitive delays.

Potter's Forest continues to be a living laboratory of man's tremendous effect on the environment, from open grassland during Potawatomi management, to barren farmland during the agricultural period, to the present mature forest with open grassland. — *Source: Milwaukee Public Schools*

## TALES OF THE CORNERS

From the files of the  
*Tri-Town News and Hub*

### 90 YEARS AGO (1931)

- At this month's Hales Corners Fair, pigs are sold for \$4 and up, draft horses go for \$70-80, and spring chickens are priced at about 23 cents per pound.
- The Hales Corners School picnic is held at Lake Denoon. Students are treated to baseball, races, swimming, and free pony rides.

### 80 YEARS AGO (1941)

- About 14 Hales Corners area men leave for Army camps.

### 70 YEARS AGO (1951)

- There is a breakfast flight from the Hales Corners Airport to Freeport, Ill. (*See Airport article page 3.*)
- A federal judge orders the liquidation of the Rapid Transit at the end of June. The line is losing \$5,000 to \$6,000 a month.

### 50 YEARS AGO (1971)

- Hales Corners grants a license to its first woman bartender.
- The Hales Corners Kroger store in the Country Fair Shopping Center is closing.

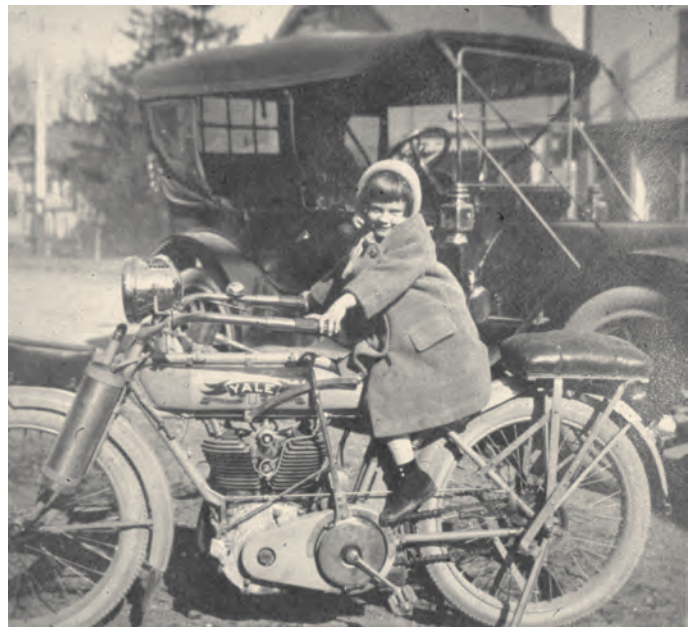
*Research by Katy Galewski*

## From the HCHS Images Collection

One photo at a time, our Society is preserving Village history by making digital copies of photos, slides, news clippings, and printed materials.

One of the problems we face when collecting these images is identifying them. These "MYSTERY PIX" are kept in reserve until we receive information about them. The photo at right is a prime example of a charming scene with no identification. If anyone can provide the missing data, please contact us by phone or email.

Also, if you think you have photos that might be of interest to us, please email us at the address listed below. We will digitize your photos and return them to you afterward.



## HALES CORNERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

5885 South 116th Street, Hales Corners, WI 53130 • 414-529-6150, Ext. 24

[info@HalesCornersHistory.com](mailto:info@HalesCornersHistory.com) • [www.HalesCornersHistory.com](http://www.HalesCornersHistory.com) • [www.facebook.com/HalesCornersHistory](https://www.facebook.com/HalesCornersHistory)