

A Loving Farewell to One of Our Founders
Margaret Halsell Parker 1910-2009
By Suzanne Tuttle, Nature Center Manager

The Nature Center & Refuge lost one of our most loyal and enduring friends on November 4, 2009 when Margaret Parker passed away at age 99. At the time of her death she was residing in Raleigh, N.C. where she moved in 2005 to be near her son and daughter-in-law.

Born in Decatur and formally trained as a violinist at Texas Women's College in Denton Margaret had an artist's eye and appreciation for all things beautiful. Her love of birds began when she spotted a painted bunting in her backyard in Fort Worth. A perennial volunteer who was also very active in Junior League and taught Sunday school at her church, this sighting spurred her to join the National Audubon Society.

It was while serving as the president for the local Audubon chapter that she learned of plans by the City of Fort Worth to develop some of the wildlands around Lake Worth that were frequented by birders. Alarmed at the thought of losing their nearby birding locations she led the chapter into action. Margaret relates some details of this event in the text of a presentation she made to the Texas Recreation and Parks Society (TRAPS) in November 1970:

“I took up birdwatching fifteen years ago as a hobby and as a sort of revolt against organizations and board meetings. I joined the Audubon Society and had about five halcyon years birding in the parks of our city and the woods near Benbrook and Lake Worth. Fort Worth's dean of birdwatchers was my guide and I took great pride in swelling my bird list.

“But there came a time when it began to dawn on me that, for one reason or another, our birding spots were slipping away. Other Audubon members recognized this gradual loss. We requested the park board to set aside an area that could be left in its natural state. The board and Mr. Campbell cooperated to the fullest and this was the beginning of Greer Island Nature Center and Refuge – nearly 400 acres.”

As a member of the Fort Worth Conservation Council, a group comprised of individuals and representatives of 20 local organizations whose purpose was to stay informed on conservation matters and to disseminate this information to the general public, Margaret was involved in setting up a conservation workshop for teachers, assisted with coordinating federally funded Title 1 Head Start tours at the FWNC&R and helped distribute 12,000 copies of a conservation handbook to FWISD schools for use by 7th and 8th graders.

Her influence reached far beyond the city limits of Fort Worth as well. When local parkland was threatened by highway construction the Conservation Council was instrumental in getting a bill passed in the state legislature prohibiting the taking of parkland for any purpose anywhere in the state without a public hearing.

In 1972 grants from the Sid Richardson Foundation and the Junior League funded the first Master Plan for the FWNC&R. One of the recommendations made in the Plan was the formation of a support group for fundraising and volunteerism. Margaret was one of six people in attendance at the organizing meeting for what would become the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge held on March 22, 1974, and she remained a lifelong member.

Even when she could no longer volunteer at the FWNC&R she maintained a keen interest in our activities. She would frequently send handwritten notes of congratulations and encouragement to our staff when she read something that particularly caught her eye in the Bluestem News. I loved thumbing through my mail and finding an envelope or postcard in her distinctive handwriting. We received her last note in July 2009 telling us how pleased she was to learn that we were given the Lone Star Land Steward Award by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Her conservation ethic ran deep and she frequently committed her thoughts very eloquently to paper. Her motivating philosophy is best described in her own words – here in another excerpt from her 1970 TRAPS presentation:

“No doubt in the future there will be great pressure brought to bear to ‘develop’ our refuge – for housing or some other revenue-bearing enterprise (sic). The ‘development’ concept ought to receive a very hard critical look from any person concerned with the quality of the human environment. There are revenues to be gained other than monetary from leaving land undeveloped – namely the health – physical, mental, and spiritual health of the people...

“...I am proud of so many things about our city. It’s a wonderful place to live. I am particularly proud of our parks and recreation department, the executive director Charles Campbell, his staff, the (park) board and the city council for having made possible Greer Island Nature Center and Refuge. May we always have such open spaces where the spirit can be renewed.”

We are all very fortunate that Fort Worth was home to such a gentle visionary. We are committed to continuing her work and will always remember her with love and gratitude.