

May Thank-yous:

- to Darci Vetter and Jason Hafemeister for suggesting contributions to Prairie Plains in lieu of wedding gifts (and best wishes to the newlyweds!);
- to Randy Ruppert for the use of a truck for the remainder of burning & planting season;
- to Curt Twedt for donating a dozen dwarf Chinkopin oak trees;
- to Scott & Cale Jones and Bill Snyder for contributing many hours of mowing, burning, barn work and other site preparation for events;
- to Lynda Ochsner for assistance with the last *Link* mailing; and
- for all memorial and SOAR contributions.

Approaching Events:

**Annual Sioux County Ranch Trek
June 13-15
See prairieplains.org for details!**

**Bader Park Natual Area Hike
Saturday, June 21, 9:00 a.m. at the park
8:30 at office in Aurora for carpooling**

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MISSION:
Maintaining and restoring Nebraska ecosystems -
Creating opportunities for education, research, stewardship and community development.

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Photos by Prairie Plains staff members unless noted otherwise.

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Spring outings with area students:

Above - Giltner third graders enjoying a quiet moment at Griffith Prairie;
Below & across bottom of page - Giltner group listening to bird song along the trail at Bader Park; Giltner girls having no problem with their study of well composted "prairie pie;" Sandy Creek student enjoying plum blossoms at Bader Park; Sandy Creek students displaying their exciting find - morels along the Platte; and a "silent minute" while viewing the river.

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OF



May, 2008

Weather or Not

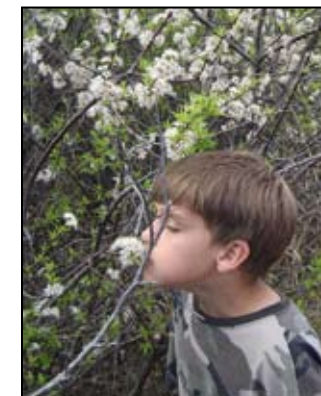
May found us anxiously studying online regional radar more than we care to. As the May 23 festival date drew near, stormy nights and rainy days prevailed and the "rain date" of May 30 was chosen. But turbulent weather continued, punctuated by a May 29 tornado near Aurora that left a trail of destroyed farmsteads in its wake. Once again, no spring festival this year. Storms also interfered with the two Bader Park birding hikes.

This misfortune was nothing compared to the losses suffered by our rural neighbors, including Prairie Plains members Doug and Pat Anderson (son Steve is a board member and former intern). Their farmstead - including their house - suffered extensive damage. Doug survived the harrowing experience in his truck. First, the back window blew out, and then the truck was lifted up and set down in a ditch.

On the brighter side, we did have two beautiful spring days - May 5 & 6 - for Bader Park and Griffith Prairie outings for Giltner and Sandy Creek elementary students. A few moments from those days are pictured here.

We also managed to find a few gaps in the storms to plant 401 acres of prairie and wetlands (see next page) - and were pleased with the rains that followed.

We do look forward, however, to the day when our festival can happen - weather or not - as a completed Education Center offers an indoor option!



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Charles L. Whitney Education Center Progress
Concrete has been poured for the kitchen and restroom/shelter floors, and a large concrete slab (shown in photo) has been installed, forming both the entryway floor and the storm shelter roof. The slab will also collect solar heat. The next step is framing up this area of the Center.



Restoration
May, 2008 may be our most intense planting frenzy to date. All were Wetland Reserve Program sites: Larson, 238 acres on the Loup River northeast of St. Paul; Ziemba, 93 acres just north of Clarks; Borowiak, 31 acres also north of Clarks and Lower Decatur Bend, 39 acres of an Army Corps of Engineers site on the Missouri River near Decatur.



The Last Burns
of the season took place on Mother's Day at the Lincoln Creek Prairie and the following Friday at The Leadership Center. Ideal conditions have no regard for holidays! Trail hikers now can enjoy the greened-up prairie and its wildflowers.



Selma: A Life

by Emily Whitney

First published in *Prairie Plains Journal*, Summer, 1983

She left her car in the barnyard by the summer kitchen and the brick washhouse, a few steps from the back stoop, just as she had done a thousand times before. Only this time it was different. It was the last time. Shortly after that she died.

The old woman was 79 - an old maid, people had called her. She spent her whole life on the home place. She had buried her parents and brothers and sister from the old house and now she, too, was gone. The only time she left was when she went to a retirement home for a year. She wasn't happy, though. Her animals, her cats and dogs, were a constant worry. And so, at the end, she had come back when her final illness claimed her.

What secrets had she learned from so sparse a life? Was she often lonely? Had she ever dreamed of far-away places or romance as she walked beneath the thick old trees? Were her beloved animals her children and grandchildren? Did she find peace tending her flower garden?

If a life is measured in possessions, hers was lacking. She hadn't even bothered to put in running water. Perhaps she liked stepping outside to the pump, feeling the newness of each morning and the quiet dark of the night. She certainly wasn't poor; she owned a half-section of good farm land.

Now that she's gone the land will be even more productive, what with gutting the place, trees and all, and planting corn right up to the road. Then, like her, everything will be gone. A family, traditions, the old ways, gone.

The old woman lies buried up the hill a few miles, in the German cemetery under the shadow of the tall church spire.



Emily Louise "Emmy Lou" Rothman Whitney

(July 12, 1920 - May 27, 2008)

Friend, mother and one of the first Prairie Plains champions



photo by Linda Davis

Emily with the last of a long line of beloved pets, "Lady."

Although most of her life she was known as Emmy Lou, she came to prefer Emily in her later years. Those years brought about a change in her that at first was only noticed by her family and closest friends. For us, it was a sad and rocky road, witnessing the gradual decline of Alzheimer's, or something like it. We are grateful that she retained the essence of her personality throughout her entire journey, and was still able to recognize and greet her children up until the day that she departed.

Emily was a native of York, Nebraska. She graduated from York High School in 1938 and York College Business School in 1940, where she met Charles L. Whitney of Aurora. After business school, she moved with her family to Wichita, Kansas, where she worked at Beech Aircraft until she and Charles married in 1942. The couple then moved to Seattle where Charles was stationed as a naval officer. After Seattle, they lived briefly in Miami, New York City and Chicago. When the war ended, they returned to Aurora and raised their four children - Chuck, Anne, Mary and Bill - as they established a law practice for Charles.

Over the years Emily was an active member of the



Methodist Church, the P.E.O. Sisterhood, the Aurora Public Library Board, Hamilton Community Foundation Board and her bridge club. She held a lifelong interest in journalism, contributing original articles to statewide newspapers, as well as writing poetry and an unpublished novel. She was a charter member of Friends of Loren Eiseley, founded in May, 1981.

Emily was outraged by social injustice and consistently worked at bettering the lives of others. She actively supported a Laotian refugee family through her work with the church resettlement program, and she and Charles were foster parents for several years. Emily was characterized by the virtues of compassion and contentment - an inspiration to her children and grandchildren.

Emily's writing has appeared twice in Prairie Plains publications - the piece reprinted on the opposite page, and "Loren Eiseley, Plains Author," published in *Prairie Plains Journal*, Summer-Fall, 1981. "Griffith Prairie, 2005" by Anne Whitney was first published in *Prairie Plains Quarterly*, April-June, 2005, and appears here now as a tribute.

Griffith Prairie, 2005

by Anne R. Whitney

My tiny mother hung on
for dear life,
ferried over the waving sea of bluestem
by a staff member driving a golf cart.
My dad, sitting behind, likewise
gripped the bar, and gritting his teeth
the corners of his mouth turned up,
as he watched wheeltracks,
knowing where they'd been -
sixty years married, two houses,
a family and lifetime, imagined and built.
Familiar landscape.
Looking down the hill just ascended,
he knew what lay ahead.
But mom, squinting against wind,
leaned back and smiled heavenly.
Like a veteran aviator, old sailor, cyclist,
delighting in speed, her hair raising ride
took her further than anyone could see.
Akin to the trilling motor-run song
of the grasshopper sparrow
that crisscrossed the prairie
As the evening sun glanced off the horizon,
and the shadows of the loess hills fell
across the grass longingly.



Anne, Charles and Emily Whitney at the Prairie Plains 25th Anniversary Festival, May 27, 2005