

Timberhall Times

November 13, 2022

"Keep up with the Times, because things always change."

Reported by the Steward of Alice's Woods, featuring items of significance in the area

Fall in Michigan; but every fall is different. I always prefer the drier cooler weather of autumn, which used to end in early October, but who knows. We had 70° last week, snow showers today, and it seems that our first frost will be tonight. TH is above the cooler river valleys, up at 940 feet, and protected by the tree canopy. The gardens know it's time to sleep, and the leaf fall from our Northern Red Oaks was finally complete after a windy period November 4. We've learned from experience that TH grass, flower gardens, and driveways are incompatible with a thick oak leaf cover, and so these must be at least partially cleared before winter. Deciduous leaf removal is an annual activity, with its joys and challenges. Maples in the TH Woods had lovely colors this year. (see photo)

Laura has developed efficient strategies for collecting the oak leaves into piles, and then transporting them to a leaf compost area in the TH woods. By weighing the leaves, we have previously calculated that the roughly 3/4 acre hilltop area south of the TH woods, is typically covered by about 1.5 million Northern Red Oak leaves. Although not colorful (other than brown), they are fun and noisy to scuffle through if dry and crunchy, as was the case this year. The Guinness record leaf size is 16.5" long, and Laura found one this year measuring 14.5", plus a wide variant, shown next to a typical oak leaf; not too shabby. (see photo)

Meanwhile, at the south end of Alice's woods, Cam Mannino and her colleagues were busy recently documenting the latest bird activities at the Center Pond.

<https://oaklandnaturalareas.com/2022/10/26/autumn-at-bear-creek-nature-park-a-rich-harvest-for-the-multitudes/>

Still a few marigolds, cleomes, and fuchsias in our TH gardens. Two years ago we decided to extend the flowering season by potting up some favorites, and moving them into the inside greenhouse, a northeast corner room on the first floor of TH. The first owners designed the area as an outside porch, but then closed it up with storm windows and screens (because this is Michigan). We remodeled adding windows and insulation. Our first use was a playroom for children, then a storage area, then a first-floor bedroom. Next it became a second office for Alice, and now it's for flowering and exotic green plants, with LED Grow Lights. A true "multi-purpose" room, over time. (see photo)

The legacy and inspiration of Nature Study. Alice enjoyed small plants and big trees alike, and I learned recently that her botanical interests had a traceable source.

In the early part of the 20th Century, a new subject area was introduced into teacher education curricula. One of its champions was Anna Botsford Comstock, committed to the education of elementary school teachers. Appointed the first female professor at Cornell University, her 900-page work, *Handbook of Nature Study* is currently in its 24th Edition, and still engaging readers after 111 years.

One of Comstock's students was Mary Whitson, later to become Alice's grandmother. Mary passed on the excitement and teachings about nature to Alice, who also developed a contagious enthusiasm and love of nature, carrying on the tradition and legacy to her family and their activities (see photo page) and of course, to landscaper Mark in Seattle. So the botanical trowel was passed.

Changing times in 1969. As a recent arrival in Oakland Township, Alice discovered a grass-roots organization focused on improving local government, the Oakland Township Association [OTA]. Sporting the slogan "*Change is inevitable, but only intelligent change is progress,*" the OTA realized that the pattern of suburban sprawl heading toward the Township was not inevitable. Alice was always guided by one of her favorite sayings "*Trend is not destiny.*"

Whose land use plans? In concert with other OTA members, we came to realize that in many counties in southeast Michigan, suburban sprawl was being funded at public expense, orchestrated by self-serving county agencies such as the public works departments, encouraged by health departments. One day, Alice and I made the surprising discovery of a county plan to run a sewer line through the TH woods, apparently to serve any future potential land use. Clearly, these county public works goals were inconsistent with local land use planning.

Modernizing Township Policies. Alice found ways to involve herself in important public issues as the first chair of the Open Spaces Committee of the OTA, completing an inventory and map of significant natural resources. Alice's successes with the OTA were a prelude to her subsequent political career, starting with her election to the Township Board in 1972, and her appointment to the Planning Commission, the first year of her 44 years in public service. Her leadership style in showing the policy makers the importance of environmental resources came naturally. Alice understood and implemented the famous quote of Bismarck: "*Politics is the art of the possible.*" And so things changed.



Sugar Maple color October 18, 2022



Alice on back porch enjoying
Timberhall Woods October 23, 2020



Alice and children at Center Pond
of future Alice's Woods July 13, 1970



Northern Red Oak leaves
October 2022



Greenhouse
November 11, 2022