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By Jay Blissick

Kleinstuck Preserve

Small Group Has Hopes to Restore Once-Bustling Showcase of Nature

By JAY BLISSICK
Gazette Staff Writer

Kleinstuck Preserve stands today like an unkempt shock of hair jutting from a neatly-cropped residential neighborhood.

Time, litterbugs, vandals and lack of money combined to leave a disheartening mark on the 48-acre woodland south of South Junior High School at the foot of Stearns Avenue.

- A pine stand, badly in need of thinning, stunts itself as the trees choke each other.
- Refuse, paper and beer cans litter clearings and sidepaths.
- Hiking trails, their markers, ripped down by vandals, aimlessly interlace the preserve.
- A project to restore a wildlife attracting marsh lies half-finished because of a lack of funds.

The bright hopes of making the preserve "a showcase of nature" have all but gone out

— this time because it blocked an adjacent property owner's driveway.

Also in the '30s the WMU women's physical education department built a brick overnight cabin.

But the fiery enthusiasm over Kleinstuck cooled during the war years and vandals, litterbugs and neglect left their marks on the woodland.

Brick by brick vandals razed the overnight cabin until all that remains today is its concrete floor.

Despoilers hacked down or topped the best pines for Christmas trees and firewood. The topped pines developed unsightly Y-shaped trunks.

Not only have Kleinstuck's trees suffered in recent years, but the preserve's wildlife also has been affected.

The drying up of a pond in the center of the forest has dispersed several marshland tenants including muskrats, ducks, green heron and sora rail.

Work to restore the pond was halted in 1961 because of a lack of funds. The undertaking was started with a grant from Robert Humphrey, 1415 Spruce Dr. The pond would have been created simply by digging a hole below the level of the water table.

In 1949, Miss Ann Fuller, a WMU biologist, inherited the job of administering Kleinstuck Preserve.

EFFORTS TO SHAPE up the preserve have been frustrated by a lack of money, says Miss Fuller.

She said that a full-time caretaker and fencing are both badly needed. The fencing would cost about \$30,000.

The preserve's only income comes from the sale of Christmas trees, firewood and donations. This totals about \$40 a year.

In a letter to WMU President James W. Miller last fall, Miss Fuller proposed a program of improvement spread over a long period. But action is still awaiting sufficient funds, she said.

At various times, a yearly budget of \$500 has been provided, but this money usually has been spent on paying students to clean the park, she said.

About the only volunteer work being done on the preserve today is provided by fraternities, botany classes and the service fraternity, Alpha Phi Omega.



MRS. C. KLEINSTUECK
Preserve's Donor

over the years, but a handful of citizens are determined to fan hopes back to life.

The preserve was born in 1922 when the late Mrs. Caroline Hubbard Kleinstueck donated the barren, hilly plot to Western Michigan University for a wildlife preserve.

Officially naming the land "Kleinstuck Preserve," an anglicized spelling of Kleinstueck, Western students and faculty set about to transform the plot into a forest showcase

Students flocked to the area. Fields blossomed with activity as the volunteers pruned and groomed bushes and trees.

On Arbor Day, 1927, volunteers marched in mass to the preserve and planted thousands of seedling pines. The Western football team caught a lot of ribbing that day because the team rode to the rally while the rest of the students walked.

As the forest matured, nature trails, overnight camps and campfire sites were laid out. Again volunteers pitched in and tagged various plants, trees and shrubs along the nature trails.

IN ITS PRIME, Kleinstuck drew students from all over the city to observe nature — conveniently labeled — as part of various classroom studies.

In 1931 a rustic entrance gate was erected, but the structure was leveled by vandals. Another gate was built, but it too was torn down

Some work sessions are being conducted by Harry Stevens, a WMU biologist, and Dr. Harriet Bartoo, a botanist. Both are part of the WMU committee administering the preserve.

STEVENS HAS BEEN directing tree-thinning projects, while Dr. Bartoo has been stocking the forest with new plants and shrubs. Some sessions also double as classroom nature studies.

In order to stir up interest in the preserve and find help for more undertakings, Miss Fuller is trying to create a citizens committee. Years ago, committees such as this acted very effectively, she said.

Although no financial windfall is in sight for Kleinstuck, Miss Fuller said she still is optimistic.

"All we want to do is maintain an outdoor laboratory for students and create a place where Kalamazoo residents can go to see and appreciate nature."



GIRLS HELPED ON ARBOR DAY, 1927
Students Attacked Kleinstuck's Hills

—Gazette photo—

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