

# BERRY'S NEW KAHL HALFWAY PRAIRIE PARK

– A WORK IN PROGRESS

## Origins

Town of Berry lands were originally part of the Sauk and Fox Indian Nations. Surveyed in 1834 and settled by English, German, and other immigrants seeking agricultural lands, the Town was organized on April 2, 1850.

The 1834 Surveyor notebook shows prairie as a significant feature of what is **now** the Town Hall property.

## A Gift to the Town

The Curtis and Willetta Kahl family purchased the land on which the new Town park sits from the Jacobi family in 1956. On August 15th, 2005 the Kahl family donated 3.4 acres to Berry to "be used only for conservancy or parkland purposes." The Town subsequently budgeted \$5000 toward creating a Town park.

## Planning Begins in 2005

A Town Park Committee was formed to establish a plan. The original members were Berry Supervisor Fran Tourdot (chair), residents Kendall Kahl (Kahl family representative), Kent McDonald, Paul Boutwell, Lee Swanson, and Tim Hook. The committee envisioned a multi-use park with a conservancy with native prairie and wetland plants, and a pond for waterfowl and aquatic habitat. A playing field and park shelter near the Town Hall site were also part of the plan. After committee chair Fran Tourdot retired from the board in 2007, Supervisor Sue Studz replaced him as chair.

Planning and permitting for a duck scrape pond were done in cooperation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and Dane County Land and Water Resources Department. Craig McCallum of Dane County Land and Water Resources did the original pond construction design and shepherded the permitting process.



*Photos by Christine Moiling*

## Native Plants Reintroduced

The first growing season, the park was planted in soybeans for ground cover and weed control. After harvest, Fran Tourdot tilled it for seeding.

Paul Boutwell led the effort to acquire native plant seed for the park. With permission to collect seeds from Holy Wisdom Monastery and Swamp Lovers, Paul led Berry volunteers in nine collection events in 2006-2007. Boutwell also dried and mixed the seed prior to first group of volunteers hand-seeding some two acres on November 5th, 2006. Working were Jerry Anderson, Torie Clasen, Ron Endres, Gerald Goth, Tim Hook, Tim Henneman, Dave Lucey, Christine Moiling, Thaddeus Moiling, Sue Studz, Fran Tourdot, and Flo Bayer.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, through Art Kitchen, donated some 12 lbs. of prairie grass seed mix. All together, about \$4000 worth of seed (over 80 species) was sown at the park with well over 100 volunteer hours spent.

2007 was the first growing season for the native plants. Paul Boutwell and town patrolman Odie Danz mowed for weed control. Boutwell spot-treated for reed canary grass. Several native plant species bloomed the first year, although most would not bloom until year 3 or so. Additional native seeds were collected and applied in 2007 and 2008.

## Park Gets a Name

At its January 2009 meeting, the Town Board chose Kahl Halfway Prairie Park as the new park name, recognizing both the Curtis Kahl family-donors of the land-and Halfway Prairie, the one-room school that stood on the Town Hall campus. Lifelong resident Willetta Kahl has many memories of attending "New" Halfway Prairie School as a child.



### **Donated Benches Made by Students**

Crafted by Mount Horeb Middle School students under the direction of the 'shop' teacher, three wooden benches of an Aldo Leopold design were donated to the park thanks to Berry resident, Diane Soward with funding from *Thrivent Financial for Lutherans - Join Hands Day Projects*. Soward, with help from brother Bruce Meister and mother Lorene Meister, applied preservative, wrote the name of the group that built the benches on the bottom of each bench, and delivered the benches to the Town Hall. The *Thrivent Join Hands Project* also provided \$250 for grass seed for the playing field.



### **Duck Scrape Pond Created With Grant Money**

In late 2007 and early 2008, plans for the wetland and duck scrape area were refined. Paul Boutwell contacted Jeff Nania of the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association for help constructing the pond. Nania made soil borings to determine the optimum location for the pond and oversaw the pond's construction

in fall, 2008. Wisconsin Waterfowl not only donated the cost of project supervision and environmental engineering, but also provided a \$500 grant toward the pond construction costs, matching another \$500 grant awarded by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

In 2007-08, Steve Richter wrote grant applications resulting in a \$1500 Besadny Conservation Grant from the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin and a \$2959 Dane County Environmental Grant. Grant money covered pond construction, prairie and wetland restorations, and the park's walking paths.

### **Paths and Playing Field Added**

Walking paths around the restoration were laid out by Paul Boutwell and Tim Hook soon after pond construction. Material excavated from the pond was used to form the base of an athletic field between the prairie/wetland and the Town Hall. Berry resident. Randy Hacker, Associated Landscaping, did the work on the field and paths, donating several hours of labor.



*Photo courtesy of Miller & Associates*

### **Shelter and Landscaping to be Added When Funds Are Available**

A comprehensive plan of the vision for the Town Hall Campus showing shelter placement and landscaping is on display at the Town Hall thanks to Berry resident, Dick Handschke, landscape architect with The Bruce Company.

The Park Committee is looking to raise \$20,000 in grants and donations to construct a 24'x28' shelter and add improvements hopefully by 2012. The park officially opened in 2010. If you have ideas to share, or if you or your company can help, contact committee chair Bill Carlson, [twberry@chorus.net](mailto:twberry@chorus.net)