

FRIENDS OF
POPE FARM
CONSERVANCY 
Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy
10333 Blackhawk Road
Middleton, WI 53562



NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF
POPE FARM
CONSERVANCY

Volume 7, Issue 2

PRESERVING THE LAND AND ITS STORIES

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

A Remembrance...The Stone Fence

BY MEL POPE



In this publication, we are featuring a historical article about building the stone fence in the mid-1800s. Today the stone fence is a State of Wisconsin "point of interest" because it is over 100 years old, and historically, it was a working fence. It kept the livestock from crossing from one pasture to another for many years. Then it happened. My father purchased a long-legged Rambouillet ram from Wyoming to improve the wool production of our grade ewes. On his first day in the pasture, the ram casually looked at the stone fence, saw the ewes on the other side, and promptly went right over it. Bad news! The rest of the flock, who up until this time had great respect for the fence, promptly followed the ram over the fence as well. That was the end of the working stone fence. After that incident, fencing had to be put up along the stone wall to make it effective.

Today the stone fence provides the backdrop for different crops and prairie restoration projects at Pope Farm Conservancy. Students learn about the rocks within it and play rock bingo as they identify the names of the various species. For me, the stone fence which has stood silently on the hillside for over 160 years, is part of a picture frame, framing a beautiful green tapestry. It sits on top of three different water sheds, and overlooks the Capitol and Lake Mendota, the Black Earth Creek Valley, and the terminal moraine. Throughout its lifetime, the stone fence has witnessed many stories of the land from the settlers living nearby, to cannons booming while union soldiers trained at Camp Randall, to the CCC boys working on the spillway in the 1930s, to cattle and sheep grazing on the hillside and to the development of the west side of Madison. Today, the stone fence has become an iconic symbol of Pope Farm Conservancy, and is preserved for all to enjoy for many years to come.

MEL POPE



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FOPFC Mission

Our mission is to contribute to the enrichment of Pope Farm Conservancy as a community and educational asset. We strive to protect and preserve the balance of the conservancy's unique natural, agricultural and historical features and volunteer as stewards to promote our passive conservancy.

Contact Us

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FOPFC Purposes

In recognition that Pope Farm Conservancy is an educational and community asset, the FOPFC shall have the following Purposes:

- Through volunteer participation and support, create, advance and facilitate the development and implementation of educational opportunities and programming in, on and around the Pope Farm Conservancy for students of all ages from public and private schools and the general public.
- To assist in the preservation of the balance of wildlife habitat, and historic, geologic, agricultural, environmental and scenic features of the Pope Farm Conservancy.
- To assist in the protection of natural landscapes and grass trails, wildlife and their habitat and the general public's tranquil enjoyment of the Pope Farm Conservancy as a passive conservancy free from commercial activity, motorized vehicles and bicycles, dogs and organized sports that require athletic fields or open space.
- To assist the Town of Middleton with the maintenance, improvement and general enrichment of the Pope Farm Conservancy as an educational and community asset.
- In accord with Article Four of these Bylaws, the Board of Directors shall have the specific authority and discretion to interpret, apply and implement these purposes, provided that at all times, it complies with rules and regulations of the IRS regarding the fulfillment and preservation of the requirements of the Corporation's 501(c)(3) status.

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One of the first things you see upon arriving at the Pope Farm Conservancy is its unique and beautifully constructed stone fence. In fact, it's one of the few remaining fences of its kind in the area and it's a bit unusual to see one. It certainly didn't build itself, so how did it come to be?



INDIGO BUNTINGS

If there's a true show-off within the Conservancy, it might just be the Indigo Bunting. This migratory songbird has been called the Blue Canary and it's easy to see why.

AND JUST IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING...

If you are not familiar with this publication, please accept with our compliments the Winter edition of the Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy News Magazine. We publish this magazine for the members of the Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy. We also have an e-newsletter that provides updates and newsy tidbits on what is happening within the property. We wanted to introduce you to Pope Farm Conservancy and let you know about our Friends group. The Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy is a



THREE WATERSHEDS

On the top of the hill adjacent to the stone fence sits a Pope Farm Conservancy visitor favorite; a picnic spot complete with panoramic views. This spot is also special for another reason. It's where three watersheds or river systems meet; the Black Earth Creek, Yahara River, and the Sugar River.



FEATURE

BUILDING THE STONE FENCE

AT THE POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY MEL POPE
JULIE GRAZIANO
DR. LUCILLE POPE

One of the first things you see upon arriving at the Pope Farm Conservancy is its unique and beautifully constructed stone fence. In fact, it's one of the few remaining fences of its kind in the area and it's a bit unusual to see one. It certainly didn't build itself, so how did it come to be?



Glacier depositing debris



Evidence of glacial debris in Pope Farm Conservancy

Over 15,000 years ago, the Green Bay Lobe, part of the continental glacier, brought millions of tons of stones and debris from Canada into Southern Wisconsin, including the land that is now Pope Farm Conservancy. When the settlers began clearing this land for planting their crops, it quickly became apparent they would need to remove these inconvenient stone remnants and debris, if they had any hope of making a go of it in their new country. But where to start?

That was the quandary facing George Siebert and Charles Brackenwagen when they first started

building the stone fence in the mid-1850s. Constructing the stone fence served a practical purpose; it was a working fence and a physical boundary between their properties.

Clearing the land was very labor-intensive, back-breaking work that also required a bit of ingenuity. It required removing trees, and in some cases, breaking the prairie sod that was thousands of years old. After the trees and their stumps were removed, George and Charles began putting the stones in piles to be picked up and moved, to begin work on the stone fence. ▶



Oxen pulling stone boat

To do this, they used oxen rather than horsepower because oxen have the ability to pull about twice as much as a horse. Oxen power was needed to pull a plow through the prairie sod for the first time, and to pull the larger sized boulders. To move the stones to the desired location, they were piled on a “stone boat.” A stone boat consisted of wooden planks fastened to a couple of logs. It was low to the ground which helped in rolling the stones onto it before being pulled to the fence line.

The challenge of clearing these stones from the land went on day after day, year after year. And, if that wasn’t enough, every spring the freezing and thawing of the earth would grow a new crop of stones that needed to be added to the wall. By 1860, about 40 acres of land were cleared and ready for planting. This was the easy half of the total acreage to be cleared. As subsequent farmers cleared the land and worked their way up the hillside, they encountered more stones.

As you look at the stone fence today, you will see that it gets higher as it goes up the hill. If you look along the crest of the hill, you can see how carefully these settlers placed each stone as they built this stone wall to perfection. In all, it took the settlers, farmers, and their animal companions roughly 25 to 30 years to complete what you see today. This stone fence was eventually completed around 1880.

Here at the Conservancy, we’re fortunate to have such a magnificent example of an early stone fence. While its picturesque to be sure, it also serves as a reminder to us of the hard work and toil necessary in living off the land. □



Clearing the Land—burnt stumps and stone piles



Stone fence gets taller as it goes up the hill.

FEATURE

THREE WATERSHEDS

AT THE POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY DR. ERIC CARSON
STEPHANIE WILLIAMS
JULIE GRAZIANO
DR. LUCILLE POPE

On the top of the hill adjacent to the stone fence sits a Pope Farm Conservancy visitor favorite; a picnic spot complete with panoramic views. This spot is also special for another reason. It’s where three watersheds or river systems meet; the Black Earth Creek, Yahara River, and the Sugar River.

Each of these rivers has its own unique relationship to the previous glacier’s ice sheet, making them distinct. Their river valleys carry water away in different directions with the Black Earth Creek flowing west, the Yahara River flowing east, and the Sugar River flowing south. When snow, sleet or rain fall within the Conservancy,

the resulting water will travel in three different directions depending upon which slope it encounters.

Water that falls on the north side of the hill will move north towards Black Earth Creek. From the crest of this hill and facing north one can see the tall ski jumps of Blackhawk Ski Club. The main, deep valley of Black Earth Creek is just to the north of Pope Farm Conservancy. The highest point at the farm, close to where the amphitheater is now, is 250 feet higher than the valley floor in Black Earth Creek! Today the creek is a narrow, twisting meandering stream that winds across the wide valley as it flows west to the Wisconsin River. ►

Three different watersheds at Pope Farm Conservancy



FEATURE

THREE WATERSHEDS—CONTINUED

But long ago, prior to the arrival of ice, Black Earth Creek was carved deeply into the bedrock and the valley was much deeper than we see it today. With the Wisconsin Glaciation, the glaciers meltwater lakes and massive flooding filled the valley with up to 100 feet of sand and gravel as the glacier's edge melted back out of the valley. Black Earth Creek would have resembled this modern braided stream in Alaska as the glacial melt waters dispersed westward.



Modern braided stream in Alaska



Looking off to the east from Pope Farm Conservancy, you can see Pope Farm Elementary school, Lake Mendota, and the Wisconsin State Capital building. This is the Yahara River valley. Before the glaciers, the bedrock was carved into deep river valleys. When the ice sheet flowed over this area during the Wisconsin glaciation, the valleys were shaved and filled in by glacial till. The once-deep Yahara valley was completely filled creating the four lakes (Mendota, Monona, Kegonsa and Waubesa) of Madison. Today, the modern Yahara River is nothing more than a stream connecting Madison's lakes. For thousands of years, these lakes and waterways were important to presettlement humans that lived and traveled through the area.

Four Lakes Yahara River



Map of the Sugar River Watershed in Wisconsin and Illinois



The Sugar River flows south away from Pope Farm Conservancy, roughly parallel to the Johnstown terminal moraine. The valley of the Sugar River extends both to the west of the terminal moraine into the Driftless Area and to the east into the glaciated landscape. Because of this, the Sugar River valley has some similarities to both Black Earth Creek and the Yahara River. To the east, the landscape was scoured by glaciers and glacial till was deposited across the land. Along its western stream, it contains valleys cut into the sandstone and dolomite.

Author, Jua Cha, Source, Own work based on the USGS Hydrography Dataset, License, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license, Link, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en> Modification made.

Pope Farm Conservancy is located between the Glacial Landscape and the Driftless Area.



The modern stream systems and valleys of the area surrounding Pope Farm Conservancy bear the legacy of the Conservancy being right at the spot between the glacial landscape to the east and the river-carved landscape of the Driftless Area to the west. When snow, sleet or rain fall on the surface, the water will travel in one of three different directions as part of today's modern river systems. □

FEATURE

INDIGO BUNTINGS

IN THE POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY RONA NERI



If there's a true show-off within the Conservancy, it might just be the Indigo Bunting. This migratory songbird has been called the Blue Canary, and it's easy to see why. Buntings belong to the Cardinal family, and like the cardinal, the male bunting is both vocal and brilliantly colored. Arriving at the Conservancy by May, migrating flocks are called a "mural" or a "decoration"—a perfect description of these feathered jewels in flight. At Pope Farm you can find them on the highest perches singing their distinctive song loudly over open fields. The breeding males are a dramatic lapis blue.

While the showy males are unmistakable, you may never notice the females. Buntings display what is called "sexual dimorphism" which means the males and females look very different from one another. Females and immature males are a dusty brown with only a few dots of blue. The female's brown feathers form the perfect camouflage since she must build nests and raise chicks all on her own. The secretive female searches sturdy low-growing branches in shrubby vegetation for a place to build her nest. When she finds the perfect spot, she spends eight days carefully

weaving a cunning cup-shaped nest made from leaves, grass, and stems, wrapped in spider webs and lined with soft materials like deer hair and thistle down. She usually lays 3 to 4 eggs—then incubates them for almost two weeks. Once the chicks hatch, the mother forages alone for insects to feed her babies. While buntings also eat seeds and berries, they feed primarily on insects like caterpillars and grasshoppers during the summer months. The protein gives them the energy they need for raising chicks. Their food choices are also beneficial for farmers, since buntings love to munch on insects that damage crops!

Though the male doesn't spend much time with his young, he may help mom out with feeding once the first chicks are about to fledge, she then turns her focus to raising a second brood of little ones. Meanwhile, dad also indirectly helps chicks in nearby nests. Young male buntings learn how to sing from other males in their "song neighborhood" but not from their fathers. Prolific singers, males may sing 200 songs per hour at dawn and one song a minute for the rest of the day! Buntings in the same territory sing almost identical songs. A song in one area may last for as long

as twenty years. Eventually new bird singers add enough variations to the melody that the local song changes.

As summer comes to a close, Indigo Buntings fatten up to store energy for migration. Beginning in September, they fly from Wisconsin all the way to Mexico or even further south to places like Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Many will even cross the Gulf of Mexico in one energy-draining flight of over 500 miles! Even more remarkable, like many songbirds they do all of their flying at night. How do they find their way in the dark? When Ornithologist Stephen Emlen put Buntings in a planetarium, he discovered that they possess a sensitive internal navigation system that allows them to adjust their path according to the stars.

Be on the lookout for them throughout the Conservancy from May through August. You'll find them along the edges of fields, within the oak Savannas, and especially in the woods by the spillway. If you don't see one right away, look up & listen. You just might spot the extraordinary Indigo Bunting—a bright blue accomplished singer and skilled star navigator with a mate who's a master of disguise. □



Photos and article by Rona Neri