



The Katharine Ordway
Natural History Study Area

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ORDWAY BULLETIN
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MACALESTER
COLLEGE

located at 9550 Inver Grove Trail (Dakota County Road 77), Inver Grove Heights, Minn.

NATURAL HISTORY at ORDWAY.

Frequently we are asked: "What's a 'natural history study area'?" Our reaction is usually one of surprise that so few people seem to contemplate the meaning of the two words together - the history of nature. It is written by Nature on her own face and remains there for us to observe and interpret.

"Natural history" means "the study of natural objects, especially by an amateur". In previous generations the practice was more in vogue than in our present age of specialization and many of the basic and profound discoveries of science have resulted when such people gave action to their instinctive curiosity. One day John Bartram, a farmer in colonial Pennsylvania, picked a daisy while in his fields and a whole new and exciting vista opened for him. He had never seen anything quite so beautiful nor perfect and the more he examined the intricacies of the flower the more it became imbedded in his mind and spirit. He became steeped in natural history and along with one of his sons, William, was one of the early figures of natural science in this new country of ours.

As our society grows more congested and complex those things which were "natural" to ordinary people become increasingly unusual and places for observing these things are becoming more difficult to find and use. Thus an area such as Ordway becomes increasingly important. We encourage use of the area for those who consider natural history a matter of importance to them. Certainly it takes on a different role in each life, assumes a different shade of importance. To many it means simply an "awareness" of what is around us - a look at the clouds and the skies and weather conditions, an observation of the passage of the seasons - the squirrels gathering their winter larders or scampering about in nuptial play during those first warming days in late winter. It may take on other complexions - philosophical, meditative, esthetic. We believe that one can read or study better in a surrounding of natural circumstances: an artist or a poet can compose himself and his subjects better; a troubled mind can reach some degree of order and tranquility in the surroundings of a quiet area.

At Ordway, then, one can give expression in some part to this inquisitiveness which seeks release in knowing about natural things. Often one gains great satisfaction in such things without much effort of his own for nature comes to us quite as much as we go to her. Walking in a woods or sitting on a grassy hillside may not seem like much of a way to seek out things but one finds he derives much therefrom, that the natural things come to him as if by some sort of osmosis. The old remark about "communing with Nature" is most appropriate.


R. J. CHRISTMAN,
Naturalist

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