

MIDWEST HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

ALERT

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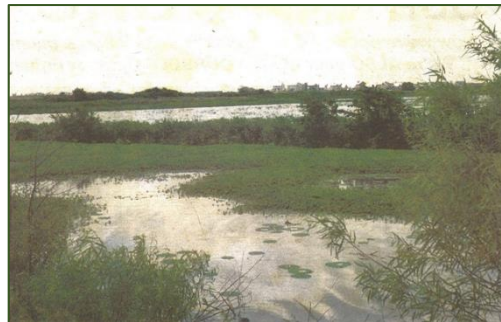
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CADILLAC LAKES AND PRACHT WETLANDS

For hundreds of years, long before the Osage Indians followed the Salt Trail across the Cowskin Creek, or the first white man carried his trade goods to the earliest trading post, the area around 29th and Maize Road has been a natural wetland.

Shallow lakes, pools, and marshlands spread over 300 acres, enhanced by cattails, bullrushes, yarrow, and floating lotus blossoms. A few scrubby sandbar willows bravely hugged the shorelines. The quiet was only broken by the croaking of frogs, the



chatter of birds, and the occasional plop of a fish jumping after a fly. No planes overhead, no cars whizzing by, no train whistles in the distance.

These marshes were home to an estimated 94 species of birds and waterfowl. Every spring and fall migratory game birds stopped by on their journeys north and south.

Eventually, the wetlands were platted, mapped, and homesteaded, and the arable acres were farmed. The Pearsons worked the east side of Maize Road, and the Strykers owned the west. In 1921, Louis Pracht bought 72 acres on the east side of the road to use for duck hunting and fishing. He added dikes and pumps to create a fishing lake and to maintain his portion of the wetland. About the time Mr. Pracht purchased the property, the employees of Wichita's Cadillac agency used the land for duck hunting; the hunters called it Cadillac Lakes, and the name stuck.

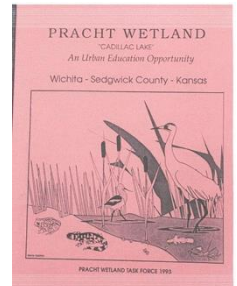
Then Wichita began expanding to the north, and Maize started building to the south. Small parts of the marshes were drained and raised for homes and businesses. In 1992, the Sedgwick County Conservation District had the idea of preserving the wetlands. The officials felt that the Cadillac Lake area was in danger of being sold to development. A multi-agency task force was formed to handle the acquisition of about 50 acres, and create a comprehensive plan for the site. Bill Pracht, son of Louis Pracht and owner of the largest preserved portion, was an enthusiastic supporter of the project. In

fact, the area was named, “Pracht Wetlands,” in honor of the efforts of the Pracht family in maintaining their portion of the wetlands. (The old-timers still call it Cadillac Lakes.)

Well, the task force held meetings. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks talked to the Wichita Department of Parks and Recreation. Parks and Rec sat down with the Audubon Society. Everyone met with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service and the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife. And while they were all having their meetings, Bill Pracht kept on tending the dikes, the pumps, and the shallow lakes in his wetlands, and keeping a worried eye on the housing developments and businesses that were creeping ever closer.

The task force did, however, accomplish some important first steps: they wrote a report that laid the groundwork for a wetlands park; they gained state, local, and federal approval; and they created a budget plan. But then the project just sat there.

Twenty-three years later in 2015, the Slawson Company purchased the adjacent land, planning for commercial property with retail and restaurant space. The good news was that Slawson honored a request by the Pracht family that an additional portion of the wetlands be preserved. Slawson gifted 41 acres to the City of Wichita, to add to the 50 acres the city already owned. The Pracht Wetlands now consisted of 91 acres.



The city budgeted about \$1 million to transform the area to an official wetlands park. Over the next four years, they added galvanized steel boardwalks across the water, two “duck blind” observation points, and a nature trail. Pracht Wetlands Park officially opened to the public in the summer of 2019.

In early July 2023, the City of Wichita announced the beginning of the next phase of improvements at the park. The plan is to extend the boardwalk, add a viewing deck, and extend the walking trail around the entire perimeter of the park. The finances have already been allocated. Once the design is approved, construction will begin and should be completed by next summer.

Pracht Wetlands Park is one of the few remaining Midwestern wetlands, and one of the largest urban wetlands parks in the country. And in addition to that, it is a tribute to the Pracht family and all they did through the years to keep this magical spot as close as possible to how the Indians and pioneers found it.

Troy Houtman, Director of Parks & Rec; *KMUW.org*, September 7, 2015; *Parks and Recreation Magazine*, Jan. 1, 2021; *WestSideStory*, July, 1993; *the Wichita Eagle*, July 9, 2019

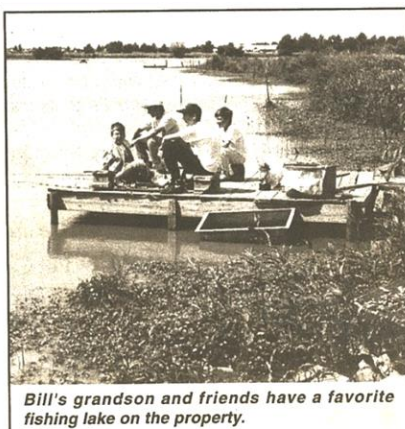


Photo from *Westside Story*, July 1993.



Bill Pracht
Photo from *WestSide Story*,
July 1993



Sign at the park today.
Photo from *IC in the ICT*.



Water lily pool with boardwalk overlook.



Sunrise over the wetlands.

June Johnson

MAIL COSTS ARE CONTINUING TO INCREASE

With the costs of postage increasing at an alarming rate, the MHGS board has discussed ways to reduce our costs. Would you be willing to receive your *Alert* newsletter by email rather than regular mail?

The benefits for you -- getting your copy faster, being able to make the text larger thus saving your eyes, and seeing the pictures in color.

If you would like to change your Alert from paper to email, send a message to the membership chairman at membership@mhgswichita.org. Really want paper? Don't worry -- at this point we're still offering the paper option at no extra charge.

WHAT'S UP WITH OUR LIBRARY CATALOG? SORRY, STILL NOT WORKING!

We're having technical difficulties with our library catalog, so it's not available at the moment. In the meantime, you can try searching for the items that have been added in about the last ten years by doing a site-specific google search:
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GENEALOGY ROUNDTABLE SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP		DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION	
Second Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm Led by Julia Langel		Fourth Tuesday @ 1:30 pm Led by Twila Ackley Brown	
PHOTO MYSTERIES			
Third Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm Led by Rex Riley			

Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society

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