

# PRAIRIE FIRE

Newsletter of the Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society

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Editor: Barbara Willard  
256-2801

## PRAIRIE CALENDAR

- SUN  
MAY 2 10:00 AM SERVICE - Social Concerns and Political Responsibility  
A panel discussion with Jane Cloak, David Carson, and Henry Pratt
- SUN  
MAY 2 6:00 PM POTLUCK SUPPER honoring Joe Hoffman. See below for details.
- MON  
MAY 3 7:30 PM PROGRAM COMMITTEE MEETING at Caldens, 4606 Waukesha St.  
Come help us wrap up plans for the remaining May programs.  
If you'd like to work on programs next fall, come to this meeting and get your feet wet!
- SUN  
MAY 9 10:00 AM SERVICE - Swiss Cheese, Wormholes, and Talking Bicycles  
A discussion of ideas and pictures from Bob Toben's Space-Time and Beyond.
- SUN  
MAY 9 7:00 PM SPECIAL PARISH MEETING to resolve problems connected with the prairie site. Background data are provided in this issue of Prairie Fire.
- SUN  
MAY 16 10:00 AM SERVICE - Strange Things that go in a Circular Motion  
A slide show and discussion of artifacts, art work structures and happenings, and planning of final Prairie Ritual for next week.
- SUN  
MAY 23 10:00 AM SERVICE - Final Spring Ritual and Family Ceremony
- SUN  
MAY 30 PRAIRIE PICNIC

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Meet Annis Pratt - Second installment of an interview with Prairie's Lay Minister, conducted by George and Ruth Calden.

Q. How did you get connected with Unitarianism, Annis?

A. I came to Unitarianism by way of being a nature worshipper. Henry and I are very religious. We've always gone to church and we've had a number of wonderful experiences with church groups. But we left the Presbyterian church at Emory College, Atlanta, when we tried to integrate it. We tried to sexually integrate the church by having more women in responsible positions, on the board

of elders. We then had hate calls. I've got some really bitter feelings about the Episcopal church because they wouldn't ordain women. So you can see why I have very good feelings about Prairie. When Betty Friedan came to Atlanta to start the women's movement, the Unitarians gave her a place to speak, so we began going there. That's where we got the idea that we wanted to be Unitarians.

Q. Do you find that the Prairie Society satisfies your religious needs?

A. Yes. The whole Prairie Society comes from a radically different place from anything I've ever done. Prairie is the only place where people have accepted me as a person. It's the only place where people, who come from drastically different places, are willing to put up with one another, even if it's only for one hour on Sunday morning. They seem to get a sense of joy from being together. The immediate inspiration for the whole thing was the poetry reading we did last year, where everyone wrote a poem that was just beautiful. That and being accepted was what did it. I was thrown out of several churches before, and the year Henry began coming to Prairie I was in a state of complete nervous collapse. When I first came to Prairie, it was at Upham Woods. Everyone knew the condition I was in, but they bothered to care. I figured this was one church that wouldn't throw me out if I behaved like myself.

Q. Do you find Prairie lacking in awe and mystery?

A. Definitely not. There's awe all around. For example, on the Kickapoo canoe trip, here were all these other people laughing and shouting. But the few canoes that had the Prairie people were dead quiet, and every time a little, tiny plant would loom its head over the horizon, all the Prairie people would pull over to the bank at once. They'd all jump out. Nobody would jump on the plant. They'd all hover around it. This was in early May, the first warm day. Also at Upham Woods, last fall. We were going around a bend in a canoe, when we came upon the Carsons and some other folk. They said, "Go back about half a mile. You'll find this incredible hornet's nest." So we went back the half mile and here was this incredible hornet's nest. That's all the awe and mystery anybody can want.

Q. Could you tell us a little about your theme of your ministry?

A. Yeah. That service, "Everything goes in a circular motion" comes from the song, "Happiness runs in a circular motion." It has to do with rhythms and things that repeat, and how comforting these things are, and how these things can be worked in to the things we do together to celebrate the seasons as they repeat themselves. Dancing is our feet moving in rhythm. Poetry is what is said in rhythm. Songs are what is sung in rhythm and how people make each other feel better as they move in rhythm. Dorie, at Folklore Village, has been telling me about spring and Easter symbols. And Mary Lou Diehl went to the Ann Halperin workshop to study rituals and how people formulate rituals from within themselves. We're trying to do something unique in Prairie, trying to get something out of people who are different.

Q. The other day, David Lisman asked a question about whether there could possibly be a myth that would bind Prairie people together.

A. Well, we each bring in different things. It's like a patchwork quilt. For a moment we are together. But you can't assume that people will always respond to the same thing, even from year to year. We are just looking for those moments when people come together.

Joe Hoffman Testimonial Potluck - Sunday May 2 at 6:00 pm and thereafter, all are invited to participate in a Prairie potluck supper honoring and sending off Joe Hoffman. Joe is going to Berkeley to begin his training for the Unitarian-Universalist ministry. The potluck will be held at the Carsons' farm, 4341 Vilas Road, in Cottage Grove. Celebrants are requested to bring best wishes for our departing Lay Minister, as well as a dish to pass and their own plates and utensils. There will be music and good fellowship. Take Cottage Grove Road east from the shore of Lake Monona about four miles east to Vilas Road, turn right (south) and proceed about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile. Carsons' is on your right. 221-1244.

Space wanted to rent - Boyce Totz is looking for the whole lower floor of an older, large home. He does not want an apartment. Please call if you know of anything suitable. 255-8647.

By-Law Revision - Anyone with suggestions about the by laws is requested to give them to Al Nettleton, Mary Slabaugh, or Barbara Willard, so that they can be incorporated into the deliberations on the revision.

Prairie Site- The following is a resume of the history of the Brairie site to date, composed by the committee in charge of our relationship to it, namely Charlie Davidson, Roland Parrish and Vivian Meyer. There is also attached to this issue of Prairie Fire a reprint from the newsletter of the Friends of the Arboretum which describes the adjacent piece of land, which was once part of the same parcel as our prairie site. People unfamiliar with the site are encouraged to go and visit it before the May 9 parish meeting, to familiarize themselves with the area.

#### The Prairie Site Story

In 1966, because of growing overcrowding at First Unitarian Society, the parish decided to encourage the formation of a second Madison Unitarian' froup by the purchase of a church site for such a group. After surveying a number of alternatives (including a west side site priced at \$5000 an acre) some property on the southwest corner of Raymond and Gammon Roads was purchased by First Society (largely with money from parishioners) at a bit under \$1,500 an acre. Although the total purchase involved nearly 16 acres, approximately 6 acres was purchased for, and immediately transferred to, the Arboretum, leaving 9.9 acres in the parcel which ahs sine become known as "The Prairie Site." It was the potential availability of this site which was the inspiration and the reference that led to the adoption of the name of the Prairie Society.

The seller, a retired civil engineer named McFarland, was obviously quite fond of this hilltop, and had, in fact, previously refused to sell to the Arboretum the portion they were interested in. He showed much interest in our plans for a church, offering us as a gift some valuable statuary, and setting a purchase price well below the open market value, although he was not a Unitarian. A few months after the sale he died of cancer.

In late 1969, in the absence of any interest at the time by Prairie Society in building, and financial problems having arisen at First, the First Society considered selling the 9.9 acres at commercial prices. To forestall this, a group of First and Prairie Unitarians arranged to buy the propery from First at a price equal to First's actual costs plus interest. In the negotiations leading up to this purchase, it was made clear that the purpose of the group was to hold the property for hoped-for and eventual use as a church building site for a liberal religious group. However, the formal legal agreement (for reasons not now clear), while giving Prairie first option to buy the property at cost plus interest, failed to specify that any such purchase must be for a church building. The agreement does make clear, however, that if the Prairie Site Group (the 16 individuals who bought the property from First in January, 1970) sell the property directly on the commercial market, any profit

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realized (over cost plus 5% annual interest) must be turned over to First Unitarian.

The "cost-plus-interest" price of the property is now approximately \$20,000. Its open market value is probably several times this figure.

According to the agreement, members of the Prairie Site Group have the right at any time after January 1, 1976, upon 90 days notice, to request the return of their investment, plus the 5% interest, and if the Trustees (Roland Parrish, Charles Davidson, Robert Siegfried and Richard Hartshorne) cannot arrange for others to take over the investment on the same 5% interest only terms, part or all of the property must be sold to raise the necessary funds. Several of the Group, while not pressing for an immediate cash-out, have asked that some action be taken towards a decision concerning the use of this site.

In December, 1975, a six-person committee was set up to work on this, consisting of 3 persons appointed by the First Society president (Hove, Bender, and Conkin) and 3 appointed by the Prairie president (Parrish, Davidson, and Meyer). This committee, at a meeting in January, concluded that it appears highly unlikely that Prairie or anyone else will be in a position to consider using the property for its originally intended building purpose in the foreseeable future. They felt, however, that it would be highly desirable if, alternatively, some way could be found to preserve the land in a natural state, and discussed possible actions leading in that direction. They agreed that, as a first step, Prairie should make a formal statement concerning its present plans for the use of this site.

The following statement, (including an amendment adopted at the April 4 parish meeting) has been recommended to the parish by its Executive Board, and is on the agenda for the May 9 parish meeting, (published in the last issue of Prairie Fire.)

- (1) We the members of Prairie Society assert that we have no immediate intention of acquiring the "Prairie Site" for building purposes.
- (2) We further declare that we have no desire nor intention of making a monetary profit by the purchase of this property and its resale at a higher amount.
- (3) We declare our hope that the land can be preserved as much as possible in its natural state, to be enjoyed for occasional retreats, meetings, and outings.
- (4) We declare our wish to work with members of the First Society in exploring mechanisms for attempting to ensure this preservation, such as the acquisition of the land by a municipal body for park purposes, nature conservancy, or the like.

The May 9 meeting is a special parish meeting, called to consider whether the parish wishes to adopt this statement.

If it does so adopt, and if the members of First Society then also express their support for this approach, the committee is expected to reconvene to explore possible avenues for bringing this about.

Spring quote:

My favorite bird is the tree frog  
It's a harbinger branger of spring  
It's a bird without hardly no feathers  
And a big singer sanger of sing.

- Churchy La Femme