

History

- **1829**, Matthew E. Busey became the first Busey to migrate to Illinois
- **1836**, Matthew Whales Busey followed his Uncle, Matthew E. Busey, to the Big Grove. It is from Matthew W. Busey's family that Busey Woods originates.
- Catherine Klassen, great-great-granddaughter of Samuel T. Busey, was the final Busey owner of what is now known as Busey Woods.
- **In the spring of 1963**, Catherine Klassen decided to offer the land for development as an industrial park. In anticipation of this, much of the low-lying woods were filled with brick and rubble, the remains of which can be seen in the woods today. Mrs. Klassen may not have initially realized what Busey Woods meant to the community, but when many letters appeared in the newspapers protesting the destruction of Busey Woods, she offered the land for sale. The Committee for the Preservation of Busey Woods, chaired by Donald Hansen, was formed and actively sought ways to designate the woods as a nature preserve.
- **In the 1970's** the environmental movement swept across the nation, and a small group of local citizens organized themselves and began taking school children on nature awareness walks. The Natural Areas Study Group, founded by Ann Feyerharm, developed trails in Busey Woods and trained volunteers to lead school tours.
- **In 1973**, the Natural Areas Study Group convinced the Urbana Park District to take over the school tour program and assisted the District in establishing the Environmental Awareness Center.
- In 1971 Busey Woods was donated to the University of Illinois Foundation and was leased to the Urbana Park District for their environmental education program from 1974 to 1991.
- One of the Natural Areas Study Group's active members was Anita Parker Purves. In addition to her involvement with this group, Anita was a charter member of the Urbana Park District Advisory Committee, taught nature study in the Leal School enrichment program, was a member of the Audubon Society and the Leal School P.T.A., and was instrumental in the formation and development of the Thornburn Environmental Awareness Center. Tragically, Anita died of cancer on **March 11, 1975** and at her request a memorial fund was established to help secure funds for the construction of the Nature Center.
- **In 1979**, the dream that Anita and so many other concerned citizens worked so hard to achieve became a reality. **On Sunday, June 3, 1979**, the Urbana Park District opened and dedicated the Anita Purves Nature Center with these words: "This (building) is but a small tribute to a spirited young woman who inspired both children and adult members of the community to share her enthusiasm for the kinship of all living things".

- **On September 24, 1989** the Urbana Park District observed the 10th anniversary of the Nature Center by rededicating its commitment to provide opportunities for the youth to become introduced to and immersed in the natural world.
- Funding from the Park District's capital fund and a Lawcon grant administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources allowed the Park District to purchase the woods from the University in 1991 for \$167,000.
- **In September of 1995**, the Nature Center reopened after a yearlong expansion and remodeling project. The original facility was remodeled into staff offices, workspace and a teacher resource room. Expansion to the facility included four new classrooms, an exhibit hall, wildlife observation room, gift shop and lobby.
- **2004-2005** – The Nature Center celebrated 25 years of existence with a yearlong celebration beginning with a rededication and a children's art show. The art show was a celebration of work by children who visited Busey Woods on school tours. The remaining events for the year included a Thought for Food event where a meal from local producers was provided as well as informative booths and demonstrations were held at the Urbana Farmer's Market. The end of 2004 was met with a Winter Solstice event, highlighted by a silent auction, with proceeds going toward the educational animals that reside at the Nature Center. The final event was a bioblitz where scientists inventoried the flora and fauna of Busey Woods during a 24-hour time period. To date, 1266 species have been identified.
- **In the fall of 2004** the Urbana Park District received a grant to build a boardwalk on a portion of the trails of Busey Woods. This allows for more visitors who would otherwise be unable to visit these trails (including wheel chair bound individuals and families with strollers) and decrease the negative impact caused by heavy trail use.
- **In 2011** the district received grant funds to reconstruct and replant the access path from the nature center to the Busey Woods entrance. The *Busey Woods Gateway Trail* offers an accessible link between park and woods and helps visitors transition from open space to wooded space. Both indoor and outdoor interpretive elements explore the unique habitat Busey Woods and the Saline Creek/Crystal Lake offer wildlife with a specific focus on birds. Explore the newly planted wildlife habitat garden as you approach Busey Woods and observe wildlife visiting the feeding areas inside the Wildlife Observation Room. This has been a high priority for the district for the last 8 years – especially making the trail entrance accessible. More than that, the entrance to Busey Woods is now beautiful and inviting and very visible
- In 2017 the district celebrated the grand opening of the Friendship Grove Nature Playscape which is located just east of the Anita Purves Nature Center. It is a hands-on, kid-directed outdoor play space where fun in nature is led by a child's imagination and ingenuity. The playscape provides accessible play opportunities for a variety of physical, mental, cognitive and emotional abilities.

- In 2018 the district redesigned the Wildlife Habitat Garden to include a circulating pond and plantings that provide a complete habitat for area wildlife many of which visitors watch from the observation room windows. The garden completes the Gateway Trail that takes visitors from the built environmental and into Busey Woods' trails and natural areas. The addition of the water feature with its varied depths and flow rates helps to attract a wide array of bird species. The new habitat garden was made possible by the financial support of the Champaign County Audubon Society. Design and installation were assisted by East Central Illinois Master Naturalists. The National Wildlife Federation certified the Anita Purves Nature Center's Habitat Garden.
- The Urbana Park District continues to seek new ways to meet the needs of the community. Some current future plans for the Nature Center include exhibit design and development, wildlife habitat gardens and interpretive information for the Park District's natural areas.