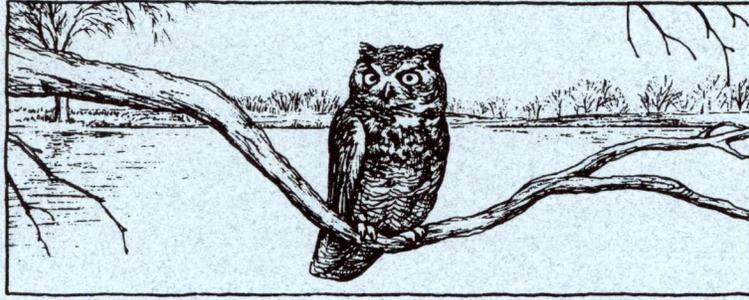


# STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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## BEAVER AND HUMAN COLONIES

-- Mark Spreyer

*The works of the beaver have ever intensely interested the human mind. Beaver works may do for children what schools, sermons, companions and even home sometimes fail to--develop the power to think -- from In Beaver World by Enos Mills (1913)*

Now that beavers have set up shop here at Stillman, I thought it would be interesting to trace their history in North America. With that in mind, I can't think of a better historical guide than Enos Mills.

Who was he? Born in 1870, Mills was a dedicated conservationist who settled in Estes Park, Colorado. Once there, he worked tirelessly for the creation of Rocky Mountain National Park which was established by Congress in 1915. The Denver Post dubbed him "The Father of Rocky Mountain National Park."

As the opening quotation suggests, he was also an author. As you might expect, *In Beaver World*, is set in what is now the National Park.

In 1991, I reviewed *In Beaver World* (which had been reissued by the University of Nebraska Press) for a couple of environmental publications. I shared the review with a friend who was a ranger at the Park. He, in turn, shared it with a member of his congregation, Enda (yes, Enda) Mills, Enos' daughter.

### Beavers in Illinois

A hundred years ago, when Enos Mills was watching his Colorado beavers, they had been nearly or entirely exterminated here in Illinois. At one time, they were common in the state.

In describing his second trip to Illinois (1674 - 1675), Father Marquette said that the local Indians gave beaver skins as gifts. Before the interior, low-lying areas of Illinois were drained, beavers were present. Early settlers in Champaign County found beavers and beaver dams.

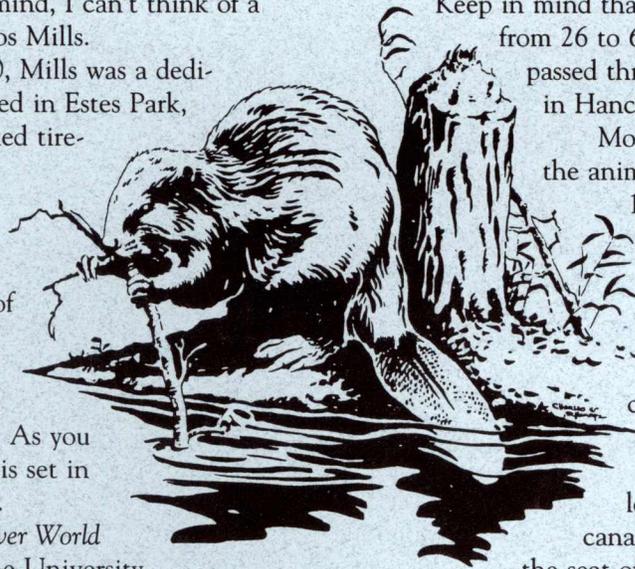
In the 1700's, an inventory for one Illinois trapper indicated that he had taken 4,443 pounds of beaver.

Keep in mind that a beaver typically ranges in weight from 26 to 60 pounds. In 1819, 199 beaver pelts passed through the Fort Edwards trading post in Hancock County.

Money, of course, was the reason why the animals were relentlessly trapped. In 1831, beavers taken along the Rock and Mississippi rivers were worth two dollars a pound.

Ninety years ago, Mills saw what was happening, "In the golden age of the beaver, their countless colonies clustered all over our land."

He continues, "Elm avenues now arch where the low-growing willow drooped across the [beaver-dug] canal, and a populous village stands upon the seat of a primitive and forgotten colony."



### RENEWAL REMINDER.

If you see a 3 after your name, this will be your last newsletter until you renew. If you didn't receive our annual membership letter, just use the form on the back of this newsletter. Please remember, in order to keep Stillman a viable and diverse natural area, *we need your support*. Thank you.

# STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

33 WEST PENNY ROAD • BARRINGTON • IL • 60010 • 847-428-OWLS (6957)

Mills would be surprised to learn that in many of our suburbs today, a healthy beaver might be easier to find than a thriving elm.

How did the beavers return to Illinois? With a little help from Uncle Sam. As early as 1929, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (which just finished celebrating its 100th year) released a pair on the Savanna Army Depot.

In the 1930's, the Forest Service also sponsored beaver releases in Illinois while other beavers were being stocked in Missouri. In the 1940's, they were released along the Mississippi River in Iowa. Other beavers, no doubt, came on their own from neighboring states.

#### **Beaver Problems?**

Beavers are now so plentiful that some villages are trapping them because they are cutting residents' trees. Good luck with the trapping. In a Tennessee study, 169 resident beavers were removed from a wetland site. Within a few years, 162 new beavers had moved in. Migrating two-year-olds, in search of new territory, often move into the vacated ponds and lodges.

Susan Allman, our President and Village Forester for North Barrington, has noted this pattern in her village. A few years ago, beavers were gnawing trees along a stream connected to Honey Lake. Homeowners hired trappers. Beaver activity ceased for a couple of years. Now, she has noticed the tell-tale signs of beaver in the very same area.

Protecting the more valuable trees would be a better solution. I suggest stopping at a hardware store and buying a roll of heavy gauge wire mesh (4 feet high with 2" by 4" squares). Form a cylinder with the wire and place it around the tree. Leave about five to six inches between the tree and the freestanding cylinder. As long as the wire is flush with the ground, the beaver should not go under it.

#### **Back to Colorado**

Since reviewing *In Beaver World*, I've had a chance to visit with Enda Mills. Despite being only three when her father died in 1922, she has done an honorable job of looking after his cabin in the Rockies and keeping his memory alive.

It is a sense of history that Stillman's beavers inspires in me. As Mills correctly observed, "The beaver hastened, if it did not bring, the settlement of the country." Voyageurs, and the fur companies behind them, opened pathways and established trading posts across the continent. When the supply of beavers was exhausted, the settlements often remained.

Now, the once-rare beavers are colonizing our human landscapes. Somehow, that only seems appropriate.

## PROGRAMS

**Program Basics:** PLEASE CALL OR FAX US AT 428-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: stillnc@flash.net TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

### OWL MOON WALK

Native Americans called January's full moon the "owl moon." In honor of the owl moon, Mark Spreyer will present an indoor presentation on owls. Afterwards, with the help of the almost full moon, we will walk the trails in search of Stillman's Great Horned Owls. Space is limited so **call 428-OWLS to make reservations.**

Date: Friday, Jan. 9

Time: 6:00PM

Age: 10 years and up

Member's Fee: Free

Non-member's Fee: \$2.00

### SNOWSHOE SUNDAYS

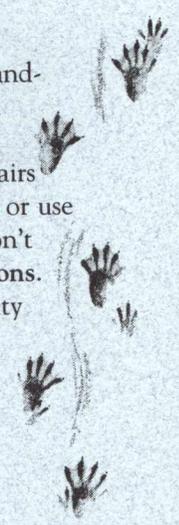
Fresh snow can add a peaceful hush to the landscape and a surface that glitters in the bright winter sun. In order to help you sample the winter scenery in a novel way, we have 20 pairs of snowshoes. So, bring your own snowshoes or use ours and join us on a winter walk. Please, don't forget to **call 428-OWLS to make reservations.** If there isn't a thick layer of snow, the activity will be cancelled.

Date: Sundays, Jan. 11, 18 & Feb. 15

Time: 2:00PM

Fee: None

Please note that the Stillman Nature Center is also available during the week, by reservation, to school classes. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call or check our website at: [www.stillmannnc.org](http://www.stillmannnc.org)



## MAKING TRACKS

Join Susan Allman as she shows you how to recognize the different types of tracks made by winter's active animals. After an indoor introduction, explore Stillman's trails for signs of rabbit, squirrel, deer and fox. If there is no snow on the 25th, we'll try again on Feb. 1st. Snowshoes are also an option on these days. Remember to call 428-OWLS to make reservations.

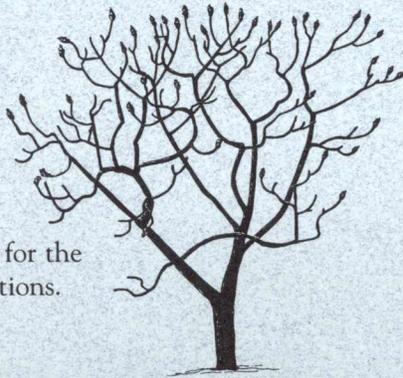
Date: Sunday, Jan. 25 & Feb. 1  
Time: 2:00PM  
Fee: None

## NAME THAT TREE or THIS BUD'S FOR YOU!

Unlike groundhogs, trees don't need a special day to check for their shadows. With the help of Stillman's naturalist, you'll learn how to identify cherry, maple, ash and other midwestern trees.

Easy to remember tips and simple hand-outs will keep you from barking up the wrong tree! Come prepared for the weather and bring your questions.

Date: Sunday, Feb. 8  
Time: 2:00PM  
Age: 10 years and up  
Fee: None



## THE TRIBUTE TREES



Tribute trees are planted to honor or celebrate persons or events that have touched our lives. Call or email us for the list of tribute trees currently available. Tree prices (which includes purchase, delivery, and planting) range from \$500 - \$700.

In addition to the tree, most of which will be 2" in diameter at breast height, the honoree's name will appear on a small plaque which will be located on the white brick wall that parallels the entrance drive.

## SEASONAL SCIENCE - WINTER

### A Class for Educators 1 Hour Graduate Credit

#### Course Description

This course will provide participants with the opportunity to experience a variety of science activities which explore winter. Topics include: tree identification, animal tracking, snowshoeing, owls, bird feeders, and seasonal environmental changes. These activities will be appropriate to a variety of grade levels and will emphasize content background, concept development, and process skills.

Friday evening activities will be conducted in both the classroom and on the grounds at the District 54 Nature Center in Schaumburg. Much of Saturday will be spent in the field at the Stillman Nature Center and will take place rain or shine.

Days	Dates	Times
Friday	1/23	4:00 - 9:00 PM
Saturday	1/24	8:30 AM - 5:00 PM

**Instructors:** Susan Allman, 4th grade teacher, Fox School; Mark Spreyer, Director, Stillman Nature Center

**Fees:** \$35.00 materials fee which includes meals (dinner, breakfast, lunch). \$75.00, 1 hr. graduate credit from Aurora University.

**Materials:** To be provided. Outdoor dress required.

**Min/Max:** 10 Minimum/20 Maximum

## BEAVER FACTS

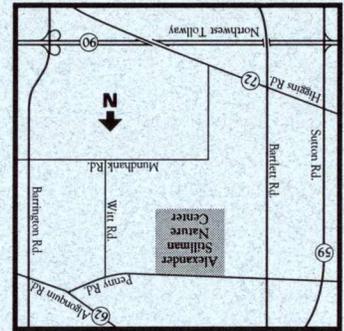
**Weight:** 26 - 60 pounds.

**Length:** 35 - 47 inches.

**Diet:** Bark and cambium of shrubs and trees. In summer they eat more herbaceous material such as grasses, duckweed, and other aquatic plants (i.e. water lily roots).

**Reproduction:** Beavers breed once a year in January or February. Typically, there are 3 - 4 kits in a litter. They are weaned in 2 months.

**Lodges & Burrows:** Stick lodges are 4 - 10 feet high and 12 - 30 feet in diameter. Lodges can contain an adult pair as well as kits of the year and yearlings. 2-year-olds are forced out. Bank burrows, such as we have at Stillman, usually contain only 1 - 2 animals.



STILLMAN  
 NATURE CENTER  
 33 West Penny Road  
 South Barrington, IL 60010  
 (847) 428-OWLS  
 Email: stillnc@flash.net  
 www.stillmann.org



Open Sundays 11-4

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Mark Spreyer, Director & Newsletter Editor  
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*If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.*

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
- Please send a gift membership from \_\_\_\_\_ to the name and address listed below.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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