

# Shady Rest

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Shady Rest is a twenty-eight acre natural area on the Sangamon River near White Heath, Illinois, which has been the apple of the Heartland Pathway's eye for years. Heartland Pathways (HP) worked with Mrs. Price, the owner, for many years to preserve this site in conjunction with the preservation of the rail bed that moves through it. When Mrs. Price passed in 1995, HP had the opportunity to buy the site. At that time, HP brought together a number of conservation oriented citizens in order to make the purchase. A not for profit Sangamon Valley Conservancy (SVC), was set up to make the purchase.

Some years later SVC arranged a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation to cover the initial investment made by the conservationists involved in the SVC purchase. That grant enabled the Piatt County Forest Preserve to buy the site for the price that was paid for it when the Sangamon Valley Conservancy bought the site many years ago.

Shady Rest is an outstanding site on the Sangamon River. It is a representative jewel on the Sangamon River corridor between Mahomet and Decatur. Its features include the river with a wetland to the north near Centerville that was probably a lake before the lake broke through the Cerro Gordo Moraine. Other attributes include a moraine, and a bottomland forest with under-story herbs, shrubs and wildlife. A rail-trail that runs through the site and a record of recreational use provided a cultural history.

Shady Rest is only twenty minutes from Champaign on Shady Rest Road off Route 10 and is within easy access of many nearby communities.

## 1. Bottomland and Upland Forest

Shady Rest has been, until the early fifties, a recreational park on the banks of the Sangamon River west of White Heath. Area citizens met and mingled there in an era when there were few cars to take them further.

The 28-acre park is part bottomland and part upland forest with an interesting mix of under-story herbs. The forest demonstrates the park's recreational history in that there are some large trees and many small trees but few in-between trees which is indicative that the site was partially cleared for recreational cabins and activities.

## 2. Access

In the era of inter-urban visitors took the interurban railroad to White Heath then walked down the Illinois Central mainline to the riverside park.

Today's visitors take Rt. 10 west 15 miles to Shady Rest Rd. then south one mile to the park entrance just past a concrete bridge over the Sangamon.

The site is open to the public and close to many communities.

## 3. History

The Price family owned and operated Shady Rest as a recreational park for many years. The Prices also owned the oldest Dupont Paint store in the country at that time; The Price family used the site as a family and client retreat.

In 1934 the Prices built a garage then later a cabin on the ridge. That cottage would be extended several times. On the higher ground of the bottom lands a Club house and about ten small rental cottages were built facing a wooded access road just slightly above the flood plain.

By 1985 David Price had passed and Mrs. Price, who was the sole owner, wanted to ensure that the Shady Rest site

would be preserved as a natural resource along with the related and adjacent rail bed that runs through the site including a truss bridge and trestle across the Sangamon River of which Mrs. Price had fond memories.

Mrs. Price contributed significantly to the purchase of the rail bed and bridge and to the preservation of Shady Rest.

After Mrs. Price's died in 1995 Shady Rest became available and the formal purchase of the park for preservation purposes was negotiated. A not-for-profit agency, the Sangamon Valley Conservancy, was established as a vehicle for the purchase by a number of generous contributors. The SVC owned the site for ten years until the site was transferred to the Piatt County Forest Preserve.

With the aid of Clean Energy Foundation grant the investors were paid for their initial commitment to and holding of the woods. Then the park was transferred to the Piatt County Forest Preserve for in perpetuity preservation and use.

### 3.1 Natural history

The intent of those concerned with the future of Shady Rest was to allow the site to return to nature and to have it dedicate as a natural area.

### 3.2 Cultural history

It was assumed that a natural history designation would not prevent preservation of the recreational (cultural) history of the site but the Forest Preserve and other interested parties did not want to include the cultural aspects in the formula for preservation. The site has since been dedicated as a Land and Water Preserve by Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, which is a sub unit of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The site will be mainly retained for its natural history. What was left of the recreational era buildings were removed and a nature trail has been installed that sample the uplands as well as the riparian areas of the site. The park is open to the public.

### 3.3 Re-growth

As the site has returned to nature over the years the under-story plants have burgeoned and they make a beautiful display in spring. A number of under-story herbs continue to express themselves throughout the summer and fall. Winter is quiet, open and wonderful. The forest has an over-abundance of young trees with maple trees especially numerous. The maple dominance is largely because early immigrants to the area and subsequent dweller who settled in the woods for protection, lumber, wild life and ambiance did all they could to prevent natural woodland fires started by lightning. As a result maples that are susceptible to fire are over represented.

### 3.4 Vernacular housing

The Price family cottage on the ridge and club house and cabin have been removed and the cultural history of the site is not as obvious as it used to be but the history is still present in the dendrology or ratio of older to mid sized and younger trees and the days of a partial clearing for a picnic ground and recreational activities. One recreational cottage remains and it is occupied.

### 3.5 Settlement patterns

The occupants and users of Shady Rest largely migrated to the area from Kentucky and Tennessee and that ethnicity remains in the surrounding community.

### 3.6 Geology

The Cerro Gordo Moraine, which runs through Shady Rest, was the southern border of what was probably a glacial era lake impoundment that covered the lowlands extending north to Centreville. Eventually the lake broke through at Shady Rest. This break-through allowed the Sangamon River to flow through the site as it does now. The river exhibits all the characteristics of a meandering water course and that adds to the geological naturalness of the site.

## 4. Related Rails ,Trails, and Greenways

An abandoned Illinois Central rail-bed trail, owned by Heartland Pathways, runs through the site including with a bridge and trestle over the Sangamon River. The bridge is an attraction. The bridge ties have been condensed so that visitors can walk with comfort and view the river from the bridge.

Shady Rest provides a convenient rest stop for visitor hiking on the HP on a short segment of HP trail between Shady Rest Road and White Heath.

## 4.1 Railroad history

The railway bed introduces an element of railroad history. Steam trains took on water on from the river at Shady Rest. The pedestals of a water tower remain. So does the pedestal for the motor and pump that pumped water into the tank so it could be released quickly when a train stopped for water.

## 4.2 Railway Museum

The Monticello Railway Museum (MRRM) abuts the Heartland Pathways trail at White Heath, just a mile away. There is a Y at White Heath That is a triangle where a train could be directed south to Monticello or east to Champaign or a train can run along another side of the triangle a head for Monticello.

It is possible that the museum could extend to Shady Rest, thus giving museum visitors the opportunity to visit a bottomland forest and historic recreational site.

When the Museum acquired seven miles of Illinois Central trackage in the area it did not acquire an access to the river. Extending the railroad one mile to The Sangamon River is another thought for the future but the though is serious enough that the Museum joined Heartland Pathways in asking the Illinois Department of Transportation to that retain an Rt. 72 highway bridge to allow a train to go down to the river if he occasion arose.

Shady Rest is an attractive feature that is near the railroad museum complex and only a mile away so that prospect is a possibility.

If the railway museum extends to Shady Rest arrangements will have to be made for hikers and bikers to move along a parallel trail if not down the track in the same manner as people reached Shady Rest when they walked from White Heath down the tracks in the past. That scenario raises liability questions and the consideration that there ways of scheduling or controlling people so that both can share the same resource.

## 4.3 Potential tourist circuit

Some historic railroad buffs would like to extend the MRM's tracks further to Lodge to switch onto a Norfolk Southern mainline and complete a 23 mile tourist circuit south to Monticello and back to the Railway Museum but that is only a speculation at this time. The current increase of freight traffic on the NS mainline would probably preclude such a dream. An even more outrageous suggestion would be to add a restaurant car. The problem with such dreams is that there are not enough volunteers, finances or visitor populations to makes such dreams sustainable.

## 4.4 Rail trails to Clinton Champaign and Decatur

Heartland Pathway hopes to extend its rail trail west to Clinton, east to Champaign-Urbana and south west to Decatur. The difficulty is that these three rail beds "spokes" radiate out from a "hub" which is the Railway Museum. It may be possible to connect the three spokes through a cooperative agreement with the Museum but the next difficulty is that none of the spokes reaches a population base because there are short lines at each end of every spoke.

The MRM has indicated its willingness to work with HP and other agencies to extend the rail trail and greenway resources through their complex but, that still leave access to user population in Champaign-Urbana, Monticello Decatur and Clinton a challenge. There is always the possibility that the users will find the hike and bike resources even if they are located out of town.

The possibility that trails could eventually extend at all three ends, east to Champaign-Urbana, west into Clinton and south west to Decatur is possible but it would be a massive achievement that would have to have broad regional support.

## 4.5 The ConRail Trail

Some ten years ago Heartland Pathways initiated a move to create a rail-trail from Urbana to Danville on an abandoned ConRail Bed. That move has made some progress.

The Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation (CCDC) asked to assume a leadership roll and it has recently received a \$400,000 grant from Senator Durban toward that objective. That support will probably encourage other local, state and federal agencies to help establish that corridor as one of the region's first rail trails. If that were to happen, it would then make much more sense to make other connections.

## 4.6 National Trails

The country now has one thousand and thirty local and long distance trails. Many of them are national trails that reticulate across the country, north south and east west. East Central Illinois has none of those trails mainly because the soils are so valuable for crops. But the citizenry of this region has now visited so many successful trails that it is beginning to ask why we have no such trail. The Health Industry is also beginning to ask questions about exercise. The environmental movement is also beginning to support environmental reforms. The current upsurge freight is also saving energy and favoring rail-trails that area form of rail banking. Those how can longer afford to visit other countries are asking what they can do at home. All this points to the fact that the climate for "rails trails and greenways" is positive.

## 4.7 Resources preserved

Many of the essential resources, including the rail beds and bridges, have been acquired by HP and other agencies and that is a major step toward the creation of rails trails and greenways in East Central Illinois.

Much of the plans for the extension of trails of the above nature involve finance that may be forthcoming. If not many of the key resources such as Shady Rest have been captured by for the future by a growing number of local, state, and federal, public and private agencies that can make rail trails and greenways work.

## 4.8 Re Railing.

To confuse the issue further Heartland Pathways is considering the re-railing of 4 miles of abandoned rail bed between White Heath and Seymour that would permit recreational and historic trains to reach Champaign. That would allow a different and interesting access to resources such as the railway Museum, Shady Rest and Allerton Park

To this end HP has acquired a bridge and it is looking for ties and light weight rail that would make this project a possibility.

Then we also need the finance and the volunteers to achieve such a goal.

## 4.8 A parallel inter-urban trail

A parallel hiking and biking trail on the abandoned inter-urban is also a possibility.

## 4.9 Regional planning

All these items connect and raise a challenge for the demand for more open space and trail activities being voiced by the recent Big Small All Planning and visionary process just conducted by Champaign County.

## 5. Activities at Shady Rest

### 5.1 Recreational use curtailed

In its heyday, Shady Rest sported a number of small cabins, a club house, three residences and the space for tenting and recreational activities. Shady Rest will no longer be used as a recreational retreat.

## 5.2 A nature Trail

A nature trail has been established that visits the upland and the flood plain aspects of the park.

## 5.3 Flood plain trails

The flood plains to the north that are spring-wet and are summer-dry could be used as adjunct dry-season trails.

## 5.4 Canoeing

When the river is high there is the potential for canoeing on the Sangamon River from Mahomet to Decatur. One should be careful however. There are many sags in the river and a fast flowing Midwest can be dangerous.

## 5.5 Art and aesthetics

Shady Rest is an ideal site for artists, photographers, poets and people wanting to enjoy the outdoors.

## 5.6 Material storage and workshop

Heartland Pathways has been privileged to store bridge ties at Shady Rest which are used in its bridge repair and trail development work. These ties have been removed to nearby trail sites leaving Shady Rest unencumbered by HP era artifacts but these are some of the materials that are needed to make effective use of resources such as Shady rest.

As HP vacated Shady Rest it lost storage and workshop space. Such space is essential for active and participatory volunteer work such as seed processing, trail maintenance and re-railing. HP is looking for such

# 6. The Community

## 6.1 Long-term care

The Piatt County Forest Preserve now owns the Shady Rest and it uses volunteer help to steward the park in various ways.

The Piatt County Forest Preserve also has a tax base and that will tax base that will facilitate the acquisition of grant money that will help re-establish the natural history upgrade of Shady Rest following many years of recreational use.

## 6.2 Community interest

Heartland Pathways, which did much of the initial preservation and negotiation work at Shady Rest will continue to work with its adjacent bed, trail and bridge and HP will continue to take an interest in the adjacent Shady Rest Park and its related resources.

## 6.3 A Visitor Center and Lodge

HP has had dreams that there might one day be a visitor center nearby that would augment the teaching aspects of Shady Rest. There is a large adjacent lodge style house that is for sale that would facilitate stewards and teachers and relate to the general area.

## 6.4 Land Acquisition

The lodge goes with a 25 acre plot of land but that could augment Shady Rest. The cost is high but the possibility may never occur again.

HP would also like to study the possibility of extending the park to the north of Shady Rest on bottomlands that are wet in spring and fall and, not ideal for agriculture. The thought would be to create summer trails that would augment the

offerings provided by the Shady Rest as a more pristine site.

## 6.5 Monticello Trails

Monticello has established a trail to the east of the city that extends toward the railway museum from the south. It is hoped that trail will eventually bypass the rail museum and reach White Heath and Shady rest and perhaps eventually Champaign.

On the western edge of Monticello the City is negotiating a twenty five year lease with Monticello for a one mile trail and truss bridge across the Sangamon to County Farm Rd that will allow hikers and bikers access and aggress to sub-developments on the west side of the river and to Allerton Park. The lease is in its final stages. A draft of the lease is available through the Heartland Pathways web site.

In the long run H P wants to extend the Monticello Sangamon River Bridge rail to Cisco as a nature trail. A feature of the trail will be the banking of the gravel bed for the return of recreational or freight if the need arises.

## 6.6 Regional Resource

Shady Rest and the related rail trail and greenway resources discussed above form an important geological, biological, cultural and aesthetic resource. That calls for regional planning and inter governmental and agreements. Regional planning is not a high priority in East Central Illinois but in order for some of the resources we are considering regional planning is essential

## 6.7 Real estate values

A word about the cost of conservation real estate.

In real estate terms, Shady Rest not only has traditional real estate value that can be appraised. But, Shady Rest also has what realtors call “value added” for specific reasons, in this case all the diverse features that make this site attractive as a park. This value is very hard to formally appraise.

The 2006 real estate appraisal for Shady Rest was about \$7000 per acre. That was before a nearby comparable 8 acre site sold recently for \$25,000 per acre for 8 acres. Give or take some variables Shady Rest with its “added value” that could be worth \$200,000.

This gives you, the public, an idea of the rapidly growing cost of such resources. We are in fact in competition with people who would like to buy and keep natural history retreat to this sort.

Most granting agencies are reluctant to pay more for a conservation site than the price the conservators paid for the site many years ago. This means that the conservators often do not receive anything like the value of their land and their perspicacity in acquiring the site. In good old American terms this means the entrepreneur that takes the risk and does the negotiation does not get a fair return for the cost of an event that may last thirty years and have to face inflation.

The body that recognizes the value of the site and negotiates the preservation may also lack the money to actually buy the land. This was the case at Shady Rest where Heartland Pathways had to solicit support to buy the land at a very reasonable but unaffordable price for Heartland Pathways. In this situation, the investors usually get compensated for their input no matter how perspicacious it was some many years ago but the conserving body, HP in this case, will get no compensation.

In this case the only compensation the conserving organization can get is the satisfaction of finding an in-perpetuity home for the Site and the good will of the public which hopefully will contribute to the work that groups like Heartland Pathways do.

The actual transfer cost of this site to the granting agency, the Clean Energy Foundation and the Piatt County Forest Preserve was in the vicinity of \$4,000 an acre even though the appraisal was about \$7,000 an acre. The rest of the value

of the park has had to come out of the pockets and entrepreneurial zeal of the primary conservators, HP in this case, and that is a huge contribution in this case.

Heartland Pathway is proud to have been the agency that discovered and nurtured this site in all the early stages of its stewardship and preservation.

Heartland received no real or in-kind compensation for the years of stewardship and work entailed in the acquisition of Shady Rest other than the satisfaction of knowing that the site will be preserved.

When conservators and their supporters spend a lot of time and money saving conservation sites, those conservators also need to gain some monetary or quid pro quo compensation. That compensation may only be nominal but it is the support that HP and other agencies need to continue their activities.

Heartland Pathway's only hope is that the community will recognize the value of the primary work that HP has done in the acquisition of this and other sites and provide the finance that keeps HP active and innovative.

## 6.9 Land costs

It is obvious that the region cannot acquire more sites like this without a heavy cost. But across the country and around the world expensive sites are being purchased for preservation purposes and to provide enough space for creatures and people to move about in a natural manner. The ring counties of Chicago are case in point. They have for years been making huge commitments to the purchase of open space before it disappears.

## 6.9 Land Trusts

In order to facilitate the purchase of sites such as Shady Rest a group of concerned conservationists has recently put together an Association of Illinois Land Trusts with the mission of directing attention of the need that exists for land acquisition.

## External links

- The Association of Illinois land Trusts
- The Nature Conservancy
- Rail to Trails Conservancy