



Land Conservancy OF WEST MICHIGAN

Keeping Nature Nearby

December 2001

"Die Kleine Farm" Becomes Sixth Nature Preserve

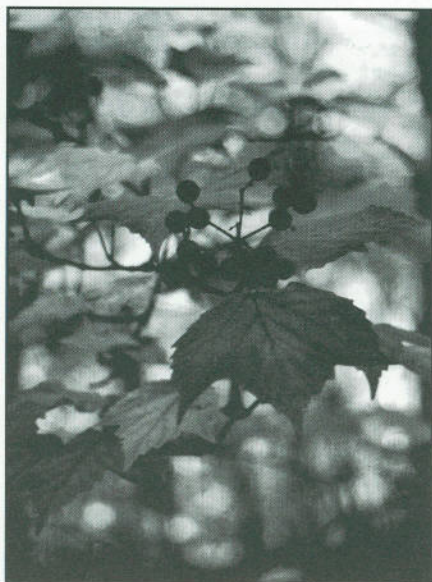
"Die Kleine Farm" was the name Wilhelmina ("Minnie") Skwarek gave to the farm she and her husband bought when they moved to Spring Lake from Chicago. The name is German for "The Little Farm" – an apt name for a 25 acre property where the only farming activity was Minnie's small business of raising and selling mink.

Minnie loved the farm and passed her attachment to the land and the local wildlife on to her daughter, Ruth. After her mother passed away, Ruth inherited the farm and lived in the farmhouse on Leonard Road.

Ruth Skwarek taught languages at Muskegon Community College for many years and was recognized as a dedicated and caring teacher. "Ruth was one of the most intellectually stimulating people I've ever met," says Kim Farmer, her long-time friend. "We could sit down over a meal and spend hours discussing history, foreign cultures, and current events." Mrs. Farmer described her friend as a quiet and unpretentious person whose generosity was demonstrated

by such things as sending promising students to language camp.

As Ruth was planning for her estate, it was very important to her that "Die Kleine Farm" never be destroyed by development. During the decades she lived in Spring Lake she saw many of the fields and woods along Leonard Road replaced by houses and driveways. Ruth wanted to make sure that her property would remain natural – a haven for local birds, wildlife, and wildflowers.



Mapleleaf Viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*) found on Minnie Skwarek Preserve

With the help of friends, the connection was made with the Land Conservancy of West Michigan. "The Land Conservancy was really the only option for Ms. Skwarek," according to April Scholtz, the Land Conservancy's land protection director. "Her property is relatively small, there are an increasing number of houses around it, and yet she understood the value in preserving her natural woodland and wetland habitats."

The Land Conservancy staff worked with Ms. Skwarek's lawyer to create provisions in her will that would allow her to achieve her personal conservation goals. Ruth understood that it was not in the Land Conservancy's best interest to keep her house and outbuildings, so she generously gave the Conservancy permission to sell the residential area and use the proceeds to endow the nature preserve and further the Land Conservancy's work in West Michigan.



Ruth Skwarek, circa 1930

Ruth Skwarek passed away in December 2000, but left a remarkable legacy thanks to her estate planning. The Community Foundation for Muskegon County received funds from her estate for a Muskegon Community College scholarship fund, and this fall the Land Conservancy was honored and pleased to accept title to "Die Kleine Farm".

The new Minnie Skwarek Nature Preserve, named as Ruth wished, in honor of her mother, will have little development and will be open to the public for quiet recreation and nature study. Visitors to the preserve will need to walk to the site from nearby streets where parking is allowed, since no parking lot will be constructed. The Land Conservancy will continue Ruth Skwarek's stewardship of the land, maintaining the quiet beauty and the natural habitats of "Die Kleine Farm".

Minnie Skwarek Nature Preserve

- 23 acres of forest and wetlands.
 - Open to the public for quiet recreation and nature study. Future plans include hiking trails.
 - Parking available on nearby streets.
- Directions From I96: M104 west towards Spring Lake, south on 148th, west on Leonard. Preserve entrance is approximately 1/4 mile down Leonard on the south side of the street.