

Conservation Corner

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This week's encounter with nature will recap the Pocahontas Garden Club's annual outing on June 20. Each year they take a break from tending their community and home flower beds and gardens to enjoy a day viewing area gardens. Perhaps you've also visited this year's destination – the family-owned Prairie Pedlar in Sac County.

Jane and Jack Hogue started a vegetable garden project 33 years ago as a side business but also to encourage their young children to get outside and have fun. When a neighboring acreage became available, they replanted their gardens half a mile down the road. Today their youngest daughter manages the wholesale side of the nursery, and everyone pitches in during the busy season.

Prairie Pedlar's seven acres are home to 30 theme gardens filled with flowers, grasses, prairie plants, shrubs, and trees. The farmstead is also home to an historic barn. Ordered through the Sears & Roebuck Catalogue, the barn was shipped by rail and erected by neighbors in 1943. The barn's bow-truss rafters create an open loft, perfect for storing hay or hosting wedding receptions. Once home to milk cows and horses, guests are now seated among the stanchions and stalls on the lower level.

Jane also shared that over the years several neighbors have offered them old buildings, offers they find hard to refuse. Today a schoolhouse, granary, and other outbuildings have become museums, garden retreats, potting sheds, and gift shops while a chicken coop complete with flowering roof garden has become their grandkids' playhouse. Several of their greenhouses were still open, and many of us took home some new plants for our own gardens, including the ornamental onion 'Millenium,' which attracts butterflies and was named the 1918 perennial of the year.

The rain was picking up, and so we headed into Odebolt, where we were greeted by Sac County Barn Quilts displayed on the side of a huge 1890 Cracker Jack popcorn crib. Our first stop, and my favorite, was the bank. Built in 1915 by the owner of Adams Ranch, the ornate limestone building is a working bank, the officers and cashiers still conducting business at marble counters behind brass and wrought iron teller windows.

Next we walked a block west to the Odebolt Historical Museum where special displays told the stories of the Adams and Cook Ranches as well as the Cracker Jack and Jolly Time popcorn companies. Did you know that by 1915 Odebolt was the Popcorn Center of the World and produced $\frac{3}{4}$ of the popcorn grown in the world?

After lunch at the Old Odebolt Bowling Alley Restaurant, we headed home in the pouring rain, making a quick stop at one of our favorite Garden Show vendors, Thistle Down Nursery. With our trunks now filled, we returned to the Nature Center. Luckily the water had receded enough that everyone could wade to their cars and return home, grateful for a day filled with garden memories and plants. Now for a dry day to put them in the ground!

