
The JURICA NATURE MUSEUM Newsletter

Fall 2005

Ernst-Albrecht Gramatzki

1937-2005
Hamburg - Germany

Amidst his extraordinary artistic creativity our beloved Ernst passed away suddenly — too soon — on September 10, 2005 in Hamburg.

Renowned sculptor, painter, potter and taxidermist (some of his countless talents), Ernst has touched many lives during his museum and artistic career in North America as well as in Europe. His works appear in museums throughout the United States, including the Chicago Field Museum where he was employed for many years. The list of museums, galleries and private installations that Ernst had affiliation with are too numerous to cite. He is survived by his loving family and friends, and his legacy of art.



“The Springbok climb higher, the artist moves on, his work lives and remembering softens our lives.”
(This was Ernst’s motto.)

The Jurica Nature Museum received the above announcement in September from Germany that Ernst Albrecht Gramatzki, our designer, taxidermist and exhibit builder, passed away on September 10, 2005 in Hamburg. We were deeply saddened by this news. Many of you may remember that we wrote last fall about his retirement and moving back to his native Germany to be closer to his family and to pursue his art.



Ernst began working with Fr. Theodore Suchy, O.S.B. in the late 1980’s and the African Savanna exhibit was his first work in the Scholl museum. He stayed over the years as we received grants and transformed Fr. Ted’s ideas into creative and lively exhibits. When we moved into Birck, Ernst graciously helped us recreate some of the exhibits from Scholl even though he said it was not so much

Collection Spotlight: Ernst-Albrecht Gramatzki

We felt it would be appropriate to highlight different works that Ernst did over the years, both for the museum and as part of his art. When we moved into Birck Hall we convinced Ernst that there should be some kind of display of some of his art work to share with our visitors other than the marvelous exhibits and taxidermy specimens. He reluctantly agreed and the cabinet in the picture on the following page is what he put together for us. He was an excellent sculptor, painter, taxidermist and potter, with work exhibited all over the world.



Some of the animals that Ernst taxidermied for us include the black bear climbing the tree (which he also made), red tail hawks, kestrels, a yellow shafted flicker, a great horned owl looking over its shoulder, cardinals, a blue jay, small warblers and thrushes. One of the red tail hawks has been used in the museum for children to touch for over 11 years and it is still in good enough condition to be a delight for our young visitors. Almost every field trip some child asks how the bear stays in the tree.

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fun the second time around! Ernst very much enjoyed when he was working and there were children talking about the different animals and exhibits.

Ernst was an artist who worked with us almost as a side job so he could paint and sculpt. A few of his works are in a case in the walkway between Birck and Kindlon. Ernst had sent us a few letters from his new home expressing his anticipation that the remodeling would go fast so he could paint again. His family indicated that he had just finished his remodeling when he died.

Those of you who were student workers in the museum when Ernst was working will remember a quiet man who really knew his subject and was happy to share his knowledge should you ask. We will miss Ernst for his knowledge of the natural world, his ability to communicate that knowledge, but more for his friendship.

Ernst is survived by several siblings, including his sister, Elke Ibrahim, who lives in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. Elke visited us with Ernst and we have shared extra specimens when possible. Elke started a historical museum in her small town and Ernst created many of the exhibits. He often talked of filling his truck with horse and human sculptures and other strange items and having to explain it all to the Canadian border authorities!

We asked Br. Kevin Coffey, O.S.B., to share his thoughts about Ernst. “My first visit to the Jurica Museum will always be an experience that will be remembered. When a person enters it they are immediately transported to the wildness and wonder of nature. As I walked around I was amazed at how many animals, paintings, sculptures and scenes there were. It wasn’t until I talked with Fr. Theodore that I found out they were the creation of a man named Ernst. It would be a while before I would meet this person that in my imagination I considered to be a giant of sorts. Some time after that I met the real person and was surprised. He was a short and quiet man. I thought to myself, ‘What a little giant.’”

“He was a little giant because of the breadth of his work. He seemed to do everything: painting, drawing and sculpture to name a few. His works are large or small depending on the need in the space. To get the job done he would work in plaster, clay, oil, acrylic or even bronze. His artistic vision is very clear — the wonder of nature. There is a childlike joy that radiates from all of his work. It is welcoming, respectful and peaceful. Ernst’s work will always be a gateway for people of all ages into the beauty of God’s world.”

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DuPage Community Foundation Grant

The Jurica Nature Museum is pleased to announce that we have received a grant of almost \$12,000 from the DuPage Community Foundation to refresh our prairie exhibit and the accompanying educational materials. Our plan is to replace as many of the original dried grasses and flowers with museum quality reproductions. Fr. Theodore has been contacting different vendors and is close to selecting one for our display.

In addition to the replacement plants, Br. Kevin painted a life size Big Bluestem grass, complete with roots, on the column near the exhibit so that our visitors can see how deep and tall these prairie plants are. We will have educational materials about the value of native plants available for our visitors to read and take home, and a list of local prairies so our visitors can go see a live prairie during different times of the year. We will highlight our campus Jurica Tallgrass Prairie designed and planted by Larry Kamin, Ph.D., Benedictine University botany professor.

A final part of the grant is to revise our Prairie Field Trip Discovery Box. The box is popular with teachers and in need of some new specimens and updated information. The original prairie box was developed with a grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 1997.

CURATOR'S CORNER

Our five year plan for the museum includes updating the catalogue with the listing of the vertebrates in the museum. In the Spring 2005 semester, my Biology of Mammals class "volunteered" to do as complete as possible an analysis of the mammals. We plan to have a written description of the taxonomy, habitat, diet, behavior, communication, reproduction and status of about 110 mammals, along with their pictures, as they are found in the main gallery, dioramas or in cabinets in the museum. Most of the descriptions have been composed by the students and pictures taken by museum workers. Now continues the task of putting the picture with the description together and "fine tuning" the whole assembly. I hope to have Clay Runck, Ph.D., who teaches the ornithology classes, do the same with the birds. Hopefully a good portion of this will be completed by Spring 2006.

Education Corner

The summer was busier than anticipated with the growing Passport to Adventure program sponsored by the Kane-DuPage Regional Museum Association (KDRMA). Almost 60 museums in the KDRMA participated this year. In addition to the Passport visitors, the museum hosted several groups this summer. We had weekly visits from the Benedictine day campers who really enjoyed their visits both to the museum and outside for a couple of different activities. The children experimented with solar energy and did a natural history inventory of the area by the Jurica prairie that included an insect inventory.

The Golden Apple Scholars also visited in July. These are college students from around the state who have received scholarships from the Golden Apple Foundation and have agreed to teach after they graduate. They came for a museum activity and a renewable energy lab. The day was a success and the leaders are already talking about next year!

Mary Mickus also participated in a workshop with several other educators from Chicago Wilderness this summer. The title was "Reading Connections" and 30 teachers joined us reading a book and then using the book to develop ways to teach science. Teachers designed field experiments at Fullersburg Woods of the DuPage County Forest Preserve where the workshop was held and presented their findings to the class. The workshop received excellent evaluations and plans are under way to offer Reading Connections II next July.

The museum was also asked this summer to be a site for the lending trunks developed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. They have three trunks that are available statewide for teachers to borrow. The topics are Illinois Fossils, People and Animals from Illinois' Past and Illinois Wild Mammals. The boxes complement the more than 30 boxes that we have for teachers to borrow. At this time, the Jurica Nature Museum is the only lending site in DuPage County and the boxes are bringing a new group of teachers to our museum. For more information about the boxes, please e-mail mmickus@ben.edu or call (630) 829-6546. We also hope to add this information to our Web site.

Jurica Tallgrass Prairie News

This is the short day or warm season for prairies in Illinois. A few flowers from the summer plants here and there hang on — an occasional yellow coneflower, a showy obedient plant with two flowers left, a white prairie clover, etc. But the late season or warm season plants are in all their glory for the last three weeks. Of the seven species of goldenrod planted, two in particular really took off — swamp goldenrod (*Solidago patula*) and especially stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*). The stiff goldenrod is not living up to its name since it is flopping all over the place. This is common in the first three years for a lot of plants because of gigantism; that is, plants get too big and tall too quickly and flop over. After the third year the vegetation is so dense that it is hard to see the ground and plants are a bit more upright. By the way, it is ragweed and not goldenrod that causes hay fever and allergic reactions in the fall.

All 10 species of aster are in bloom — they are white, rose, lilac, blue, purple and for the New England Aster — very vibrant purple with bright yellow disk flowers. I was amazed at an aster more than six feet tall. I keyed it out as *Aster puniceus* or swamp (or bristly) aster. Although the Natural Gardens lists it as one-to-five feet tall, my Britton & Brown flora lists it as three-to-eight feet tall. I didn't think asters got that tall here. The warm season grasses are all in full bloom or in fruit — big bluestem, little bluestem, dropseed, cord grass and switch grass to name a few. But first prize this year goes to Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*). Most are five to six-and-a-half feet tall with a mixture of golden, brown and reddish stems with elongated floppy flower/fruit heads. There are some weeds present (muletail, barnyard grass, foxtail) but they will be taken care of by the burn in February or March.

Lawrence Kamin
Director, Jurica Tallgrass Prairie



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NATURE MUSEUM



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