

Como Park History Tour: With More Details

In 1872, the Minnesota Legislature authorized a bond issue of up to \$100,000 for the city of St. Paul to acquire land for a major public park. During the 1870s, famous landscape architect Horace W. S. Cleveland urged growing cities to set aside land for parks before land became scarce and prices skyrocketed. He identified many natural features in St. Paul worthy of such preservation. St. Paul city leaders responded to Cleveland's message with the 1873 purchase of 259.95 acres of farmland on the north and west sides of beautiful Lake Como, then located outside the city limits. The subsequent Panic of 1873 led many prominent St. Paul citizens to regret this extravagant purchase of land and call for its immediate sale. Only when a real estate firm offered to buy back the land, thereby guaranteeing the investment, did this opposition finally die down. Development of the park, however, would be delayed for 14 years until funds finally became available in 1887. Como Park, a place of "quiet rural beauty," then began its life as St. Paul's well-loved landscape park, our "heritage of beauty" from those wise city leaders of long ago.

I. Streetcar Station

In the 1890s and early 1900s, before the era of the automobile, this was the main entrance to the park. The St. Paul City Railway first reached Como Park in the summer of 1893; thereafter streetcars carried crowds of up to 20,000 on the half-hour journey from St. Paul. In 1894, the contractor who owned the refectory privilege at the park erected a small station by the end of the tracks from which to sell refreshments. This "excuse for a waiting room" was torn down in 1898 and replaced with an open-sided wooden waiting station north of the tracks. Despite the park board's reluctance to "hideously disfigure" the park, the railway was granted permission in 1898 to build a line through the park. The Como-Harriet line connected Minneapolis and St. Paul from Lake Harriet to the Ryan Hotel in downtown St. Paul. In exchange, the railway agreed to build several bridges, add electric arc lights along the park drives, build a new station and contribute \$30,000 toward the construction of a new lakeside pavilion.



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The new stone station was built on the south side of the tracks in 1905 with cobblestones picked up from the fields and the area was planted with "an old-fashioned" colonial flower garden. The station had one large waiting room with a fireplace in one corner. The trolley was an affordable and convenient way for many people to enjoy the "restful rural loveliness" of Como Park. A 1911 trolley guide described the park's natural landscape, "with its hills and dales, groves and meadows, and its charming lake nestling in the encircling arms of its tree clad hills."



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People coming to the park stepped off the streetcar and walked up a path on the west side of the station. A three-arched stone drinking fountain stood at the top of the hill. Visitors passed through a vine-draped enclosure leading to the footbridge. On the other side of the footbridge were beautiful gardens with a bronze statue of a lion standing in greeting along a path across from the station.

The rise of the automobile ultimately led to the demise of the streetcar and in 1926 the stone station was remodeled into a park office building with heated waiting station facilities and public toilets. The offices served park police and later, forestry personnel. The old wooden station stood until this time, when it was removed and the area grassed over. The St. Paul portion of the Como-Harriet Streetcar Line was fully abandoned in 1953.

In 2001, the streetcar station was restored. Inside, the ceiling was returned to its original height. Outside, the stonework was cleaned and restored, and new windows in keeping with the original design were added. It now serves as a meeting place, an office for the District 10 Community Council and a museum, open Sundays from 12-4. Can you find one of the streetcar's old iron overhead wire poles still standing not too far from here?



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Warrendale

The neighborhood of Warrendale, to the east of the streetcar station, was platted in 1884 by Cary I. Warren, who resided at 1265 West Como Lake Drive. It is located in part on former farmland that belonged to W. B. Aldrich, whose hotel stood on the lake until 1883, when it was lost in a fire. Many of the Victorian homes in the neighborhood were designed by Augustus F. Gauger, an architect of national repute who designed many fine churches, courthouses, schools and residences from 1878 until the late 1920s. He lived here at 1183 Como Boulevard.

In 1886, the Northern Pacific Railway built depots at Warrendale, Snelling and St. Anthony Park for its "Short Line" service. The land all around the lake was being annexed to St. Paul in the mid- to late-1880s and many new neighborhoods were cropping up all around the park. By 1892, only 30 lots had been sold. Warren, unfortunately, went bankrupt in the depression of 1893 and the rest of the lots were sold at a sheriff's sale.

Speed Limit in the Park
 "No person shall drive or ride in any park in the city of St. Paul at a rate exceeding seven miles per hour."
 --Circa 1888

2. Footbridge L-5853 3. Lexington Bridge #92247

Both of these bridges were designed and built by noted bridge builder William S. Hewett in 1904 as part of the agreement between the railway company and the city to run the line through the park. The bridges were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 as early examples of concrete arch bridge construction in Minnesota and for the use of the patented Melan reinforcing system in their designs. The Lexington bridge, notable for being wider (53') than it is long (47'), has been virtually unaltered and still carries traffic today. Funding for the restoration of the footbridge is currently being sought.

4. Submariner's Memorial

This memorial, a torpedo mounted on a masonry base, was donated and built by the Minnesota Viking Squadron of the U. S. Submarine Veterans of World War II in cooperation with the St. Paul Parks Department. Dedicated on June 13, 1965, it is a memorial to submarine veterans who died in World War II. The bronze plaque on the front lists the members of the crew of the USS Swordfish, which was lost on its thirteenth war patrol near Okinawa, Japan in 1945. On the back, a plaque memorializes all 52 U. S. Navy Ships lost during the war. Submarine veterans have held memorial services here.

5. Lake Como

Prior to the arrival of Europeans this area was home to the Dakota. A group of Mdewakanton Dakota lived at Kaposia, a village on the Mississippi below Dayton's Bluff. (In the 1840s, this village was moved to a site in South St. Paul.) Another group lived at Lake Calhoun. The Dakota followed trails through this area to reach more northern hunting grounds and wild rice harvesting lakes. The Dakota and Ojibwe had struggled with each other for generations over possession of the northern forests and sometimes, battles erupted between them. The Dakota sold or traded furs, game and fish for supplies from the European settlers in what was fast becoming the city of St. Paul. In 1851, with the Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota, the Dakota were forced to give up most of their land for cash payments and two narrow reservations along the Minnesota River in western Minnesota. Treaty violations and late or unfair payments of annuities led to hunger and increasing tensions between the Dakota and settlers near their reservations, and culminated in the Dakota Conflict of 1862 and the subsequent expulsion of the Dakota from Minnesota. After this, the Dakota followed their trails no more.

By 1845, there were only a small number of cabins belonging to mostly French-Canadian families scattered from present-day Seven Corners to Lake Phalen. In 1848, the son of one of these settlers, Charles Perry, took possession of a 160-acre claim on land that would later become Como Park. For a year, he raised cattle and grew potatoes by the lake he called Lake Como, after the famous lake near his birthplace in the Swiss-Italian Alps. However, because his neighbors were "becoming too thick and interfered with his cattle-raising," he moved further north to Lake Johanna in 1849, where he became the first settler of what is now Arden Hills.

Henry "Broad Acres" McKenty came to St. Paul in 1851. He took advantage of the boom in real estate during the 1850s to buy and sell land, becoming the heaviest dealer in the Northwest. He acquired most of the land around Lake Como and laid out several plats on the east end of the lake. The lake was known as Sandy Lake up until 1856, when McKenty is credited with

Me-de-wa-ka Legend

Author T. M. Newson recounts an Indian legend set on the shores of Lake Como in his 1879 *St. Paul Illustrated*.

In the tale, a group of Dakota silently observed a beautiful 18-year-old Ojibwe girl, He-le-o-pa, sitting on the banks of Me-de-wa-ka ("Lake Mysterious," now Lake Como). She saw these enemies, screamed and ran back to the tepee, which was located in the same spot occupied by the former Aldrich Hotel in 1879 and by the pavilion now. Her brother Nim-pe-wa-pa and the band of Ojibwe chased the Dakota back to their lands, and returned to Me-de-wa-ka.

That evening by moonlight He-le-o-pa wandered up a short distance from the lake while the others puffed their pipes and recalled their earlier confrontation. Suddenly He-le-o-pa's screams broke the night. She had been seized by a group of 30 Dakota, who bound her to a pony and raced away with her.

Nim-pe-wa-pa rushed after them with nine of his friends. When he reached the fleeing group, he fired upon them and a fierce battle ensued. Though dangerously wounded, Nim-pe-wa-pa grabbed the Ojibwe upon whose pony He-le-o-pa was bound and in the act the pony fell dead. Nim-pe-wa-pa staggered and died. The battle was over. Both Nim-pe-wa-pa and He-le-o-pa's lifeless bodies were carried back to the lake and laid side-by-side. Stuningly, He-le-o-pa awakened, alive!

Nim-pe-wa-pa was buried on a little knoll overlooking Me-de-wa-ka (now the picnic hill?), near the old tepee ground, and for 50 more years He-le-o-pa visited and planted flowers on his grave.

Newson noted that visitors to the lake could still see his grave, which was marked by a body of stones, placed there by the tribe, who revered the memory of the "great and good Nim-pe-wa-pa."

naming it Lake Como. Described as “ardent, irascible, erratic, broad-gauged,” and “generous-hearted,” McKenty used \$6,000 of his own money to build a road from St. Paul to Lake Como. The road—“one of the straightest, best constructed and levellest carriage roads near the city”—was completed in 1857. A large brick hotel was to be constructed on a high knoll overlooking the lake. “This beautiful lake is becoming a place of resort for persons taking pleasure rides,” stated the *Daily Minnesotian* on September 9, 1857.

Despite the “hard times” of 1857, McKenty pressed forward his improvements at a “rapid rate.” Unfortunately the crash ultimately claimed McKenty as one of its victims and with “nearly all his immense wealth” in “wild lands,” his “colossal fortune melted rapidly away.” He spent the next twelve years trying to recoup his losses before, despondent and broken-hearted, he took his own life in 1869. His widow belatedly received \$5,000 from the county in repayment for his road to Lake Como. By the late 1870s the road had fallen into disrepair and the Chamber of Commerce derisively dubbed it the “Swamp Route.” In 1878, the city council adopted a plan to build the new Como Avenue.

Development around the lake continued in the 1860s and after the Civil War, several hotels operated on its shores. The Aldrich Hotel was located near the present-day lakeside pavilion on the farm of William B. Aldrich. The hotel had a lookout tower, bowling alley and merry-go-round. Ownership of the hotel passed to W. B. Benjamin in the early 1870s, and by 1879 Col. Knauft operated it. The hotel was destroyed by fire in 1883. The red brick Adler Hotel opened in 1857 and was located near the east entrance to the park. Otto Adler was a prominent restaurant businessman, and he and his family lived in the house until 1900, then purchased a home at 927 Como Avenue. A



Minnesota Historical Society, Charles Alfred Zimmerman

Haine’s Hotel on Lake

Como is listed as destroyed by a fire. The Lake Como Hotel operated in the 1880s at the southeast end of the lake.

James C. Burbank, who established a stagecoach line that linked the Northwest with the city of St. Paul, operated an omnibus to the lake three times a week during warm weather, at 50 cents for a round trip. In 1872, he’d become one of the five members of the commission charged with purchasing land to become a new public park.

The lake itself has undergone many changes in size, shape and depth. The lake was wider in the past and its northern section extended far into the golf course across Lexington. A small, separate lake, Cozy Lake, was attached to the northern arm of Lake Como by a narrow channel. An 1847 survey showed Lake Como at 120 acres. In the mid-1880s the northern arm of the lake began to recede. By 1895, both lakes consisted of 102 acres of water. An 1895 plan to dredge the area where the lake had receded and make a lagoon was never carried out. Presently only 72 acres remain.

Napoleon’s Willow

In 1915, Superintendent Frederick Nussbaumer planted a graceful *Salix babylonica*, or Weeping Willow, near the Schiffman Fountain. The willow originated from a 1907 cutting taken from a tree propagated from a willow at Napoleon’s grave in St. Helena. Napoleon died in exile in 1821 on the island of St. Helena and was buried in the Valley of the Willows. His remains were moved to France in 1840. Visitors to his gravesite in St. Helena often took cuttings of the willows near his grave to propagate at home. Willows all over the world claim this heritage and *Salix babylonica* are also known as Napoleon’s Willows.

“The summer sunshine falls in sparkling drops down its pendulous leaves and fine trailing branches,” former Superintendent George Nason wrote of the willow in a 1932 article. Sadly, Como Park’s beloved old willow was cut down in 1949.

Como was a shallow, swampy lake, with average depths of only five feet. Maintaining lake water levels was always a problem. Three artesian wells had been sunk by 1893 to supply water to the lake and for irrigation purposes. Lake water levels fell abruptly in the 1890s. An April 1891 *Pioneer Press* article noted “a fearful stench” arising from Lake Como and authorities were urged to take precautions against the spread of typhoid. Josiah B. Chaney recalled that in September 1891 he was able to walk entirely around the lake on dry ground at least one hundred yards inside the water line of 1876. This dry ground was put to use in 1892 with the construction of Como Boulevard around the lake. In 1895-96, in order to combat this swampiness, the lake was dredged to an average depth of nine feet and a brick and sandstone pump house was built along the channel connecting Como and Cozy Lakes to help maintain the lake at stable water levels.

Those pumps worked day and night and pumped hundreds of millions of gallons of water into Lake Como at a considerable cost to the city. In 1913, 550 million gallons were pumped into the lake and 57 million more had to be purchased from the water department. By 1921, the steam-powered pumps couldn't keep up. The *St. Paul Daily News* reported in August 1921 that “for some reason Lake Como has been seeping away and although steam pumps were worked and water purchased from the water works, the level of the lake still went down...Cozy Lake became almost a muddy swamp and ceased to be the little beauty spot which captures the affection of visitors. The main lake began to grow weedy and its appearance was seriously affected.” New electric pumps were installed and lake levels increased. Two years later, the lake was drained to seal the bottom and make repairs. It was determined that big leaks existed in the northwest arm of Lake Como and the city made plans to cut it off and fill it in to stem the outflow of water and cut down the annual cost of pumping water into the lake. In 1925, the leaky northwestern portion of the lake was filled and dammed and Cozy Lake dried up.

Lake Como stopped leaking, but as early as 1945 odor problems related to the excessive growth of algae were documented. The neighborhoods around the lake had filled in and the amount of water running off roofs, roads and parking lots increased while the natural wetlands

What happened to Charley Pitts' bones?

On September 7, 1876, seven men from the Jesse James gang rode into Northfield and raided the First National Bank. Two weeks later, a posse caught up with four of them near Madelia and shot one of them—Charley Pitts—dead. His body was packed in ice, transported to St. Paul and displayed at the State Capitol. After exhibition, his bones ended up submerged in a box in Lake Como.

Dr. Henry F. Hoyt recalled in his autobiography *A Frontier Doctor* that in March 1877, his uncle, Minnesota Surgeon General Dr. J. H. Murphy, turned Pitts' body over to him since he had recently returned from Rush Medical College at Chicago and needed a skeleton. To bleach the bones, Dr. Hoyt and one of his brothers sank the box with the bones in the middle of Lake Como, intending to leave them there for a year. Dr. Hoyt then left for the West and during his absence the box was discovered protruding from the ice on the lake by August Robertson while he was out hunting muskrats. After a lot of wild speculation and publicity and the opening of an inquest, Dr. Hoyt's brother heard about the discovery and explained. Dr. Hoyt didn't return as planned, so Dr. Murphy gave the bones to a young physician in Chicago.

For decades, the bones believed to be those of Charley Pitts resided at the now-defunct Stagecoach Museum. Those bones were transferred in 1981 to the Northfield Historical Society when the museum closed. In 2008, these bones ended up in a biology lab at Minnesota State University in Mankato, where a pair of professors and a couple of graduate students finally determined that the bones were much older than thought and could not belong to Charley Pitts.

Some say Pitts' ghost still haunts the lake.

in the area decreased. Twenty-two storm sewers empty into the lake and contribute to poor water quality, sedimentation and the growth of algae. In 1998, in an effort to improve water quality, a small group of citizens petitioned the Board of Soil and Water Resources to create the Capitol Region Watershed District. CRWD has removed sand bars in the lake that impeded the flow of water, created rain gardens to collect some of the water that would normally run into the storm sewers and flow out into the lake, and added native plantings along the shores of the lake to protect the shoreline and add wildlife habitat.

6. Boat Landing

Boating was a popular warm weather activity at the lake. In 1893, the first boathouse and docks were constructed along this shore south of the lakeside pavilion. The park maintained a fleet of up to 160 rowboats, available to park visitors for ten cents an hour. A sailboat was added in 1894, and an electric launch, in 1900. (In 1905, a gasoline launch was added.) The park added 50 canoes in 1913.



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The lake was stocked with fish in 1898 and fishing was first allowed four years later. The price of a fishing boat was set at \$1, “a good check to small boys who were in the habit of fishing all day.”

Huge crowds of people enjoyed skating on a four- to ten-acre rink cleared on the icy lake in the winter. A

skating house was added in 1895. In the 1920s, winter bands played for the enjoyment of skaters. A half-mile ice horseracing track was also maintained.

By 1919, it seems, the popularity of boating on Lake Como had declined and the boats and canoes were operated at a loss. By 1925, the shallow lake area by the old boat docks was filled in and a large automobile parking space was built.



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7. Schiffman Fountain

In 1894, the park board complained that the park was “destitute of fountains,” but not just any fountain would do. It must be “of original and artistic design,” the park board stressed, to be admitted to the park. In response, wealthy patent medicine manufacturer Dr. Rudolph Schiffman, a member of the original 1887 park board, donated this fountain, modeled on one in Barcelona, Spain, in 1895. The fountain, with a cast iron mermaid in its center, was the first fountain installed in the park in 1896 and sat in the middle of a former roundabout connecting four park drives.

8. Gates Ajar

This topiary feature was first planted in 1894. Park Superintendent Frederick Nussbaumer (1891-1922) built the Gates Ajar from a design he had seen in Germany. Originally, they stood about 150 feet east of the Schiller Monument on the west side of Lexington. They were moved to a second location near the Conservatory, and then to their current site in 1951, where they were rebuilt to four times their original size.

The park had several topiary figures meant to amuse the public in the mid-1890s, including a full-size elephant that stood on the island in the middle of Cozy Lake, a globe, and a floral fort built in the spring of 1896 in honor of the Grand Army of the Republic, which held its National Encampment in St. Paul that fall. The Gates Ajar have been reproduced almost every year, except for a stretch before 1930, which may have corresponded with the tenure of George Nason, who served as Park Superintendent from 1924 to 1932, and had a disdain for such “unnatural” planting schemes.

9. Lakeside Pavilion

The first lakeside pavilion was built in 1894. It had broad verandas, refreshment stands and a hall that could accommodate 1,200 people. A music float was added in 1901 and connected by a platform to the pavilion. For a cost of \$38,000, the majority of which came from the St. Paul City Railway, the city began construction of a new one in 1905. It was completed in time for the concert season in 1906. With leftover materials, a long classical concrete pergola was built west of the pavilion. In 1907, a new bandstand that extended out onto the lake on piers was constructed, replacing the old music float. The



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Minnesota Historical Society, Northwestern Photographic Studio, Inc.

new pavilion had a restaurant, an assembly room and an outdoor covered auditorium with enough room for 2,000. The lower level had a warming house for skaters and room for winter boat storage. Lexington Avenue ran right in front of the pavilion until the mid-1980s, when many roads in the park were rerouted or removed to reduce traffic in the park.

The pavilion has been the focal point for many activities at Como Park. The auditorium provided ample room for promenading, and people strolled along the paths by the lake and in the park. In 1894, music was provided every afternoon and evening. For many years the park shared the cost of concerts with the railway company, insisting that all music in the park must be free of charge to visitors. In the early 1900s, the cost of concerts equaled nearly ten percent of the total appropriation to the park fund. Earnings from boats, refreshments and sightseeing cars often did not cover the cost of concerts. Though concerts were scaled back to every evening and afternoons on Sundays and holidays, music continued to be a necessity, as it is today, with concerts held most evenings during the summer months. Music was the impetus for the first parking lot in the park—in 1910, an area across the lake from the bandstand was graded for the multitudes of concertgoers who listened from their automobiles and had blocked traffic along the road.

The Bureau of Playgrounds and the *St. Paul Daily News* sponsored dog sled races on a course around the lake each winter. Thousands of spectators attended these races in the 1920s. The lake had a hockey practice rink and the park had toboggan slides and a children’s ski scaffold.



Minnesota Historical Society, Charles P. Gibson



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Pavement dances, though somewhat controversial, were all the rage in recreation in 1925.

The pergola and bandstand were removed in the later 1930s. The pavilion was rebuilt in 1992 using the original blueprints for the 1905-06 pavilion, minus the bandstand.

10. Hamm Memorial Water Falls

The Hamm family gave a gift of \$43,000 for construction of a memorial garden for William Hamm, Sr., former president of Hamm Brewing Company. Hamm, Sr. became a member of the park board in 1895 and served for many years. The memorial was completed in June 1967 and reconstructed in 2007. Its design symbolizes the Hamm Brewing Company slogan: “Land of Sky Blue Waters.” If you follow the path across the bridge to the north you will come across the old 1899 Commercial Club fountain, nearly hidden in a circle of bushes.

11. Picnic Grounds 12. Pedestrian Bridge #62599 13. Banana Walk or Palm Avenue

In the mid-1890s park visitors could stroll along a path lined with tropical plants, including banana plants and palms, in the summer. The path was located at the base of the picnic grounds hill where Lexington Parkway is now. The tender plants overwintered in greenhouses. The picnic grounds had been completed early on in the development of the park. In 2001, the pedestrian bridge was added, providing a safe link between the park and the lake.



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14. Global Harmony Labyrinth

The Global Harmony Labyrinth was dedicated on August 21, 2005. It commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the St. Paul-Nagasaki Sister City relationship and is also in memory of Karen S. Kunzman, a musician who traveled to Japan several times and who had “a Japanese heart.” The sister city relationship began in 1955 as a way to promote cultural understanding and appreciation between the two cities. Gifts and delegations on important occasions have been exchanged throughout the years. There is a street in Nagasaki named after St. Paul and St. Paul had a Nagasaki Street for a time after 1961.

The labyrinth is based on a Global Harmony symbol created by artist Cynthia McKeen in 1995. Her design is a symbol of peace and attempts to bridge all faiths. On the Global Harmony Labyrinth website, she describes her design’s elements in this way: “The sphere represents the earth. The line expressing yin/yang represents the relationship of opposite elements, mutually essential to the wholeness of both. The hands represent human effort to maintain balance.”



Minnesota Historical Society, Charles Munson

A labyrinth, unlike a maze, is a single winding path that allows a person to follow the path from its beginning to its center and back again without fear or decision-making. Walking a labyrinth is said to allow a person to approach his or her own center or spirit.

15. Lily Pond or Aquarium

The Lily Pond, formerly called the Aquarium, was added in 1895. A wooden footbridge originally crossed the pond,

and the pond was encircled by a flagstone pathway and exotic vegetation. Huge Victorian Water Platters, large and strong enough to support the weight of a small child, grew in the pond. Boilers at the nearby Park Superintendent's house located west of the pond warmed the water for the lilies. In 1903, the original wooden bridge was replaced with the current fieldstone and mortar bridge. By 1926, the lilies were removed from the pond because the large elm trees growing nearby provided too much shade.

16. Greenhouses, Park Office Building and Superintendent's Residence

The first propagating house in the park was erected in 1888 as a lean-to attached to the southeast end of an old white farmhouse in the park. Waste wood from the park was used as fuel for its single furnace in mild weather and anthracite coal was used in severe weather. Bedding plants for summer display were cultivated. In 1893, a new greenhouse constructed of iron, glass and brick, and connected to the steam plant replaced the small wooden one. The "unsightly" old farm house and barn that had served as the superintendent's quarters were removed also, and a "neat cottage and stable" were erected instead. This stable was subsequently remodeled into an attractive office building in 1900 when a new barn was built at the southwest end of the park. In 1907, the "old and dilapidated range" of greenhouses was taken down and replaced with seven new greenhouses designed to last for only a limited number of years of service. In 1913, plans for a new, spectacular, glass-domed greenhouse were made and the Conservatory was completed in 1915, fulfilling one of Superintendent Nussbaumer's long-held dreams. Nine old greenhouses were removed and in 1922, real estate developer and former Lieutenant Governor Thomas Frankson bought both the park office building and the Superintendent's residence and moved them to lots in his new housing development west of the park. The Superintendent's house is now at 1427 Midway Parkway and the office building is next door at 1431 Midway Parkway.



Minnesota Historical Society, Sweet

17. Mannheim Memorial

The Mannheim Memorial was presented to the park board by the family of Robert Mannheim and was erected in 1906. Robert Mannheim was born in Germany and emigrated to the United States in 1854. He came to St. Paul in 1876 and established the firm of Mannheim Brothers with his brothers Emil and Jacob. The largest retail and imported dry goods establishment west of Chicago, the firm occupied the "Mannheimer Block" at Third and Minnesota Streets in downtown St. Paul.

Under the wooden pergola stood a sparkling white marble fountain designed by famous architect Cass Gilbert. (Gilbert designed our Minnesota State Capitol building, completed in 1905, and the U. S. Supreme Court building, as well as various skyscrapers, museums, libraries and homes along Summit Avenue and elsewhere in St. Paul. In 1903, he was appointed "Official Advisory Architect" of the park board.) The pergola sits on marble columns and on either side were two marble seats. The memorial connected the Lily Pond with the gardens at the top of the hill.

18. Ibsen Monument

A bronze bust of Henrik Ibsen was donated by the Nordkap Lodge No. 8, Sons of Norway and dedicated before a crowd of 1,000 on May 19, 1912. It is one of three busts created by

Norwegian-born sculptor Jacob Fjelde from a life-size mould he'd made of the 47-year-old playwright in 1885. Henrik Ibsen's works of realistic drama include *Peer Gynt* and *A Doll's House*. He died in 1906. In 1982, Ibsen's bust was stolen from the park. It turned up eleven years later in a Robbinsdale video store dressed in a t-shirt and baseball cap. After some wrangling as to ownership, the bust was recovered. Public Art St. Paul restored it and reinstalled it in 1999. The other two bronze busts are in Wahpeton, North Dakota and Tacoma, Washington.



Minnesota Historical Society, Kenneth Melvin Wright

19. Floral Parterre, Flower Hill or Peony Hill

The floral display gardens were first developed in 1895 and included circular walks through tropical plantings and the Aquarium. The gardens occupied the broad open meadow in the center of the park, the high ground east of the present Conservatory. "In our brief Northern summers the people revel in the pomp of flowers," stated the park board president in 1895. Park records for 1909 show over 112,000 plants were used for floral decoration in Como Park. In 1926, a perennial border was established in the low-lying area north of the

Mannheimer Memorial and overlooking the golf course. The border was in bloom from earliest spring until the first frosts. Seven thousand peonies were planted on the hill in 1929.

20. Cozy Lake and Como Golf Course 21. Original Japanese Garden

Como Golf Course occupies the basins that once held Cozy Lake and the northern arm of Lake Como. In the mid-1880s, the northern arm of Lake Como receded leaving a swampy area that local farmers claimed as their own. The park board fought for several years to regain this lost acreage and finally succeeded in condemning it in 1900 and adding the thirteen acres back to the park. In 1905, Superintendent Nussbaumer developed a plan for an extensive playground in the area and four years later a beginning was made on its grading and filling. The best feature, according to Superintendent Nussbaumer in 1914, was the terraced hillsides that would allow thousands of spectators to watch games as in a natural amphitheater. A 1917 trolley guide contains a map that shows a running track, playground, shelter pavilion, wading pool and swimming pool in the area, though no mention of these features ever being built is found in park annual reports.



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Cozy Lake filled the low area between the Conservatory and the current golf course clubhouse. In 1894, a narrow channel was excavated for boats and the freer flow of water between Lake Como and Cozy Lake. A stone and brick arched bridge was built to carry Lexington Parkway over the channel and a wooden footbridge brought pedestrians across. The stone arch bridge still stands to the east of the clubhouse, though Lexington no longer crosses over it. A pump house stood on the east side of the lake.

The north shore of Cozy Lake was the site of Como Park's original Japanese Garden. It occupied the hillside between the narrow channel and a 1903 boulder footbridge further west that crossed over a former park drive. Dr. Rudolph Schiffman attended the World's Fair in his hometown of St. Louis in 1904. One of the biggest attractions at the Fair was the 150,000-square-foot tea garden that was part of Japan's exhibits. Yukio Ichikawa, a gardener from the

Japanese Imperial Household, had recreated sections of the Imperial palace grounds on a hillside. Dr. Schiffman bought trees and shrubs that had been part of the exhibit and invited Ichikawa to scout for sites in St. Paul to recreate the garden. He selected Como Park and the three-acre garden opened in 1905. Tall, bamboo gates opened into the garden. Superintendent George Nason recalled in a 1932 *Pioneer Press* article that the garden was “part of a large setting that included small artificial ponds, a miniature falls and a cloistered walk that brought long-skirted ladies and their stiff-collared swains across a strange wooden bridge almost hidden by the low hanging boughs of cherry trees.” In 1906, excessive rains led to high lake water levels that damaged Japanese Garden shore plantings and covered that “strange” wooden bridge. In 1909, a new concrete footbridge over the channel between the lakes was completed and a new entrance gate, or *torio*, was built for the garden.



Minnesota Historical Society, Sweet

No one seems to know how long the Japanese Garden on Cozy Lake existed, but in 1923, when Lake Como was drained to attempt to repair the leaks in the lakebed, four old stone lanterns that had belonged to the garden were found on the lake bottom. By 1923, the idea of shutting off the northern section of Lake Como to try to stop the endless pumping of so many millions of gallons of water into the lakes had already gained momentum. A sunken garden and additional parking spaces were envisioned to take the place of the northern arm of the lake, though because of lack of funds, these plans never materialized. Cozy Lake had already been dry for some months when it was shut off from the main lake. In 1925, the leaky northern part of Lake Como was filled and dammed.

As early as 1908, St. Paul began searching for suitable sites to build public golf links and a few years later the park board advised the purchase of forty acres of farmland between the park and the State Fairgrounds for such a purpose. Their wish coincided with lean years for park board funding and this was not accomplished. However, some twenty years later, the newly reclaimed land in Como Park, along with 29 acres donated to the city by the Como Park Golf Improvement Association, became the city's third municipal golf course. Its first nine holes opened in 1930 and its second, in 1932. The old Cozy lakebed was composed of peat and for many years after the completion of the golf course, underground fires burned beneath the grass. The fire department doused the occasional hot spots. In the winter, passersby could see the strange sight of steam escaping from the ground. Tickets (25 cents for nine holes) were sold from a small shack near the footbridge and pump house until 1934, when a horse barn, which was relocated from the southwest corner of the park to the northwest corner of the park at Hamline and Arlington, was remodeled into a clubhouse by Civil Works Administration employees. Superintendent W. LaMont Kaufman (1932-1965) recalled that for many years one could still smell its former occupants. The golf course closed for a complete redesign in 1986 and reopened in 1988, with a new clubhouse situated further east off Lexington Parkway.

22. Schiller Monument

U. S. German Societies of St. Paul and private citizens of German descent donated the bronze standing figure of Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller to the park in 1907. Schiller was a renowned German philosopher, poet and dramatist best known for his poem *Ode to Joy*, which was set to music by Ludwig van Beethoven. The dedication ceremony was attended by 5,000 and included German music and toasts by local German Americans and city officials.

During the ceremony a cablegram arrived from German Emperor Wilhelm II. Ignatius Taschner, a German sculptor, created the statue, which is mounted on a granite base. Superintendent Nussbaumer and Park Board Commissioner Hamm selected the site. After this monument was erected, the park board decided that future decisions on the artistic merit and placement of monuments should be referred to an Arts Commission. The monument is in the process of being restored by Public Art St. Paul.



Minnesota Historical Society, Charles P. Gibson

23. Frog Pond or Nelumbium (Lotus) Pond and Rockery

The Nelumbium Pond and Rockery was completed in 1910 after a delay of some seven or eight years. It is located in a natural depression and is built of gray limestone brought in by rail from Newport, Minnesota. Originally, its western end was “a pretty little grotto” in the hillside, but that end was buried (and still remains under the fill) when the Conservatory was built in 1915. The Excedra, a semi-circular pergola, and the granite bullfrog that gives the pond its current name were added in 1929. Lilies from the Aquarium were transferred to this pond in 1926, when the Aquarium became too shaded by large trees. Water lilies and lotuses are now displayed during the summer in the heated pool that wraps around the new Visitor Center.

Early Arrests in the Park
 In 1896, park police made seven arrests in Como Park: three for picking flowers, one for driving over a grass plot, two for violating the bicycle ordinance, and one for stealing wood and hay.

24. Marjorie McNeely Conservatory

Frederick Nussbaumer developed plans for the Conservatory in 1913 for \$50 and in 1914, the King Construction Company of Tonawanda, New York won the contract to build it. For a total of \$58,825, it was completed in 1915. Huge blooming chrysanthemums were exhibited at the first chrysanthemum show that year and a large number of plants from the old greenhouses were transferred to the new conservatory. The holiday and spring flower shows began in 1925. The sunken garden and flagstone pathways were added in 1927 and the fern room in 1932. Newspapers of the time seemed to be fond of printing photos of bathing beauties posed within the gorgeous floral displays. During the Depression years, the Conservatory fell into a state of disrepair and some questioned the wisdom of maintaining such a “luxury” in hard times, but funds and “makeshift methods” were used to keep it running. In 1974, the Conservatory was added to the National Register of Historic Places. It underwent a renovation in 1993 and in 2002, received its new name when the Donald McNeely family made a major donation of \$7 million as a memorial to Marjorie McNeely, who died in 1998. The attached Visitor Center opened in 2005, along with a new fern room, orchid house and bonsai display room in the Conservatory. The Tropical Encounters exhibit, displaying both plants and animals, opened in 2006.

25. Como Ordway Memorial Japanese Garden

The current Japanese Garden was constructed in 1979 as a memorial to Charlotte Ordway with funds donated by her family. Masami Matsuda, a renowned ninth-generation landscape designer from Nagasaki, designed the one-acre garden. The city of Nagasaki made a gift of the plans to honor the sister city relationship between St. Paul and Nagasaki. The garden is designed in the *chisen-kaiyu* (strolling pond) style and reflects a natural, unplanned landscape. In 1991, the garden was extensively renovated under the supervision of Matsuda. He added a

teahouse and *roji* or tea garden. More than 400 tons of igneous and metamorphic rocks were hauled in from a quarry in Apple Valley. Trees from all over the park were personally selected by Matsuda and moved to the garden. The garden blends Minnesota plants and trees with Japanese garden design principles. Three of the lanterns in the garden had once been part of the original Japanese garden on the northern shore of Cozy Lake. The lantern at the entrance to the garden was created from stone salvaged from an old park drinking fountain. When the garden first reopened, black swans with clipped wings roamed freely within its fences. Matsuda hoped the garden would be a bridge between the two cities and countries, a place of “cultural exchange, understanding and peace.”

26. Como Zoo

The zoo began informally in 1897 when the park accepted a gift of a deer from Mr. Charles Haas, and two more from the Minneapolis Park Board. A year later Mr. J. J. Hill made a gift of two zebras and two goats to the zoo. The animals were initially housed in one large enclosure and a note was made in the park board’s 1900 Annual Report that one elk and one female deer had died from injuries received by “an enraged deer buck.” Donations continued in this haphazard fashion and in 1915 included two bison from former Lieutenant Governor and real estate developer Thomas Frankson’s private bison park located on the north side of Midway Parkway at Pascal.

The first small animal cages were erected in 1928. By 1930, over 100 animals were housed at the zoo, including buffalo, deer, elk, bears, coyotes, red foxes, rabbits, goats, raccoons, porcupines, a badger, woodchucks, monkeys, guinea pigs, opossums, rats, alligators, pheasants, pigeons, crows, a chicken hawk and owls. After the Longfellow Zoological Gardens in Minneapolis closed in 1934, its stock of 195 animals was donated to Como Zoo. In the early 1930s, the cages were realigned, new cages were built and cement sidewalks were added.

Many Works Progress Administration construction projects took place in the zoo and the park in the mid-1930s. Monkey Island, described in an old brochure as a “man-made, moated mound of merry monkey mischief,” was built with limestone quarried from Dayton’s Bluff in 1932. Three limestone slab bear grottos were built in 1937. City Architect Charles M. Bassford designed the Moderne-style Zoological Building built by the WPA that same year. The legendary Frank “Bring ‘Em Back Alive” Buck, world famed for his talent of capturing wild animals, laid its



Minnesota Historical Society

A Tragic Death in the Park

Twenty-nine-year-old Christmas wreath salesman Oscar Erickson was shot in the head on December 16, 1932 when he slowed down to watch bandits from the Third Northwestern National Bank robbery switch cars near Monkey Island. Fred Barker, a member of the Barker-Karpis gang, shot him as they changed cars in Como Park while making their getaway. Erickson was at the wheel, on his way to sell wreaths in St. Anthony Park with his boss, Arthur Zachman, who ran a florist shop with his brother on Grand Avenue. Zachman took control of the wheel and drove Erickson to the hospital.

Prior to reaching the park, the bandits’ green sedan stalled near the west entrance of Como Park. Mrs. D. A. Williams, of 1400 Midway Parkway, stopped to offer assistance. She was told to “beat it” and moments later heard the gunfire. Erickson had been unemployed for a several months and had recently accumulated doctor bills from an operation for appendicitis. He left behind a young widow.

cornerstone. A restroom building and the bird yard, its retaining wall and its limestone block building were also built in 1937. The octagonal-shaped Hoofed Stock Barn was added in 1938, as well as the limestone retaining wall along the service road circling the zoo.

The zoo hired its first director, John Fletcher, in 1957, after city officials' recommendation to close the zoo was successfully fought by a citizen's volunteer committee. After the completion and funding of a Master Plan for Como Zoo in the mid-1970s, many more new buildings and exhibits were constructed. The old zoological building is now used for administrative offices, the former Monkey Island is now the site of Seal Island, the bear grottos were recently removed to make way for the new polar bear exhibit, and the Hoofed Stock Barn is still in use.



Minnesota Historical Society

27. Cafesjian's Carousel

In 1914, Austin McFadden purchased this carousel from the Philadelphia Toboggan Company and operated it as a concession at the Minnesota State Fair for many years. When the carousel was slated to be sold at auction in 1988, in pieces or as a whole, historic carousel enthusiasts Peter Boehm and Nancy Peterson quickly formed a nonprofit organization, Our Fair Carousel, Inc., to purchase, restore and continue to operate it. Gerard L. Cafesjian provided a major donation for the purchase of the carousel and for its new pavilion in Como Park. He had been an executive with West Publishing and was then retired in Florida. He was motivated to contribute to the effort to save the carousel, according to the carousel's website, by his memories of summers he spent as a child in Atlantic City, listening to the music and seeing the lights of a nearby carousel as he fell asleep. Volunteers operated the carousel at the State Fair for one year and then it was moved to Town Square Park, an enclosed city park on the top level of a building in downtown St. Paul. The restoration of this antique carousel began in 1990 and was completed in the spring of 2000, at which time it moved into its \$1.1 million copper-roofed pavilion in Como Park. The carousel has 68 horses and two chariots.



Minnesota Historical Society, George Herbert Herrold

28. Formal Gardens

In 1929 the park added formal gardens south of the conservatory. A hedge surrounded the gardens and on the southern end was a Doric-columned pergola and small, hip-roofed teahouse. In the center of the garden stood a fountain and statue of Aphrodite. A replica of Giovanni da Bologna's "Mercury" statue was moved to the garden from the old Courthouse site in St. Paul in 1937. Two large granite vases flanked the pergola and the garden also contained a large granite basin. Roses, irises and peonies were grown in the garden. By the time a parking lot was built here in the mid-1960s, the gardens had already been grassed over.

29. Dietrich Lange Memorial

Several acres of land adjoining the rose garden at were set aside in 1941 as a bird sanctuary and arboretum in memory of Dietrich Lange, a noted area author, educator and conservationist. Dietrich Lange was born in Germany and emigrated to the United States at age 18 in 1881. He

moved to St. Paul in 1887, where he taught for several years in elementary schools and at Central High, and served as supervisor of nature studies for the city's entire school system. He was principal at Humboldt High for eight years and St. Paul Schools Superintendent from 1914-1916. For twenty-three years after that he served as principal of Mechanic Arts High.

Lange was an author of popular boys' books and a pioneer in the Boy Scout movement. He was considered one of the leading authorities on bird life in the Great Lakes region and throughout the years spent many hours observing birds in Como Park. In his handwritten document *In the Wild Woods of Como Park*, written sometime in or after 1934, he praises the "superintendents and administrators of the parks...for leaving in this great park a considerable number of patches of natural woods." Dead trees and stumps, he noted, provided habitat for birds and small animals. He considered it fortunate that a few "real thickets" were left in the park. These thickets, he wrote, "should remain sacred to the birds. No workman's hands should touch them..." According to Lange there were always several pairs of wood thrushes nesting in the thickets.

Lange died in November 1940. Students from Mechanic Arts High designed the plaque set upon the stone at the entrance to the sanctuary. The wooded areas of Como Park continue to provide sanctuary for numerous species of year-round and migratory birds and many small animals.

Wildflowers in the Park

Back in 1888, Como Park gardener and future superintendent of parks, Frederick Nussbaumer, surveyed the park and made a list of plants entitled *Flora of Como Park and Vicinity*. His list included pasque flowers and hepaticas; meadow rue, columbine, and larkspur; water lilies in Lake Como; bloodroot, and dog-tooth violets; wild geraniums, lupine and false indigo; wild strawberries, blackberries and raspberries; wild roses and currants; blazing star, joe-pye-weed and asters; wild calla, skunk cabbage and cattails; blue flag irises and blue-eyed grass; trillium and Turk's cap lily; maidenhair, wood and lady ferns; wild rice and hundreds more.

30. Hamline Picnic Grounds 31. Comfort Station 32. Fire Rings

The park board retained Landscape Architect Horace W. S. Cleveland to design St. Paul's parks and parkways in 1887. He developed a plan for Como Park and oversaw the construction of roads, the clearing of underbrush, and the grading and seeding of the Hamline picnic grounds with short grasses, which was completed by 1890. Picnic tables and fountains were placed in 1895. A picnic shelter building was constructed in 1902. It had benches and tables, a roomy kitchen with a range, and free hot water. A ten-foot porch encircled the entire structure. The shelter burned down in 1983. The ball fields were added in 1911 and a playground with swings and teeter-totters was added south of the picnic grounds in the early 1900s. The Prairie-style comfort station was built in 1907 and restored in 1998. Three limestone fire rings were built by the WPA.



Minnesota Historical Society

33. Streetcar Bridge

This bridge was constructed in 1898 as part of the park's agreement with the rail company to extend their line through the park. It carried Como-Harriet streetcars over Beulah Lane, which was named in 1954 for Beulah Bartlett, who served as executive director of the St. Paul Humane

Society from 1923-1963. The organization's headquarters were built on park land east of the park maintenance buildings in 1954. The city reconstructed the bridge in 2008 as part of a new combined pedestrian and bike trail.

34. Park Nursery

In 1888, on a tract of land between Beulah Lane and Hamline Avenue west of the workhouse, the park began its nursery. A thousand deciduous trees and 300 shrubs obtained for the cost of transplanting were moved from the site of an old nursery at Lexington and St. Clair that was being cleared out for the building of new roads. Other trees and shrubs were acquired from city lots that were to be sold. The nursery contained 587 small evergreens, 1,050 deciduous trees and 540 shrubs and vines planted in rows on less than 4.5 acres. In 1896, irrigation pipes were extended to the nursery, to protect plants from drought. Two more acres of land planted with young elms trees were added to the nursery in 1898 and it was enlarged again the next year. The nursery supplied all the city parks and streets. A 1907 list of trees and shrubs in the nursery included 2,588 box elder, 1,244 buckthorn, 6,000 catalpa kaempferii seedlings, 11,376 elms, 1,702 horse chestnuts, 700 lilacs and 2,132 assorted willows. By 1925 the nursery's stock was overgrown and the nursery was completely renovated. During World War II, a lack of labor led to the abandonment of the nursery. The area was later dedicated to the Audubon Society as a bird sanctuary. Today, north-south rows of 60-year-old hackberry, ash and elm are still visible if you look closely.

Como Park Bridle Path

A bridle path was established in 1928. From the State Fair Grounds, riders could make their way along Midway Parkway and through Como Park. In 1930, park policemen were instructed to watch horseback riders carefully as they were having considerable trouble with riders driving off the bridle path and onto park lawns. Errant riders had caused costly damage to golf course tees and newly seeded greens.

35. Barn and Blacksmith Shop

In 1900, a new barn was erected in the far southwest corner of the park near the intersection of Hamline and McKenty Street (which became Jessamine Avenue in 1960). In 1901, a small blacksmith shop was constructed near the barn, and horse teams were purchased. Prior to this, the park had to hire costly teams to complete necessary work in the park. The barn housed nine horses, five sprinkling wagons, five heavy wagons and four bob sleighs in 1902. The blacksmith made horseshoes, repaired wagons and made other metal items needed by the park, including the Astrolabe Dial, an ornament designed in 1937 by Superintendent George Nason for the formal gardens. In 1926, the barn was remodeled with a new concrete floor and used as a garage and storehouse for trucks and heavy tools. A house for the park foreman was constructed nearby, to provide "watchman protection" for this area of the park. After the completion of the golf course, in 1934, the barn was moved to the northwest corner of the park and remodeled into a clubhouse for the golf course. In 1955-56, the current park maintenance building was built up around the old blacksmith shop.

36. Como Woodland & Outdoor Classroom

This nearly 18-acre woodland, the largest tract left in the park, is in the process of being restored and made into an outdoor classroom. When the restoration is complete there will be eight different ecological regions, including a coniferous forest, display gardens, transitional woodland, oak savanna, oak woodland, sedge meadow, tall grass prairie and ephemeral wetland.

Trails will lead to each of the regions and marked posts will correspond to educational curricula posted online for all to access.

37. Joyce Kilmer Memorial Fireplace

Located near what will be the main entrance to the Como Woodland & Outdoor Classroom, this feature was dedicated in June 1936 as a memorial to the poet Joyce Kilmer, who enlisted as a soldier during World War I and was killed in France in 1918. A plaque with Kilmer's famous



poem *Trees* hung from an oak tree in the larger arboretum. The Joyce Kilmer Post of the American Legion, of which Superintendent W. LaMont Kaufman was a charter member, donated the memorial to the city. The Joyce Kilmer Arboretum, planned out by Kaufman, also included a cascading waterfall. The old three-arched drinking fountain that stood near the streetcar station was built into the fireplace, the rest of which was made with stones from the "old Foley house" on Summit Avenue. The fireplace is also known

as the "Dutch Ovens" and area young people have used the clearing around it throughout the years as a secluded party hangout. Funding is currently being sought to restore the crumbling and neglected fireplace. When it is restored it will serve as the central meeting place for groups of students using the outdoor classroom.

38. Joyce Kilmer Cascades

This sunken pool with miniature falls was completed in May 1936. The WPA, under the direction of Superintendent Kaufman, constructed it. At that time Como Avenue ran right by it and connected to Hamline. Its limestone ruins are almost hidden by trees and undergrowth, but its grassy pool is clearly visible.

39. McMurray Fields

This former gravel pit was partially graded and used for soccer fields in 1925. A 32-acre athletic field was initiated in 1927 and named for William McMurray two years later. A successful tea merchant and extremely generous man, he gave away large sums of money and wrote off debts owed to his company in the ten years before the end of 1923. Battle Creek Park was started with his 1922 donation of 25 acres of land on Battle Creek. When his firm declared bankruptcy in 1930, McMurray, then chairman of the park advisory board, poured his personal savings into the company. In 1944, he was living on \$15 a week in a downtown St. Paul hotel when he was quoted as saying: "Where is the money? I haven't the slightest idea, but I hope it did some people some good. I guess I was just in business for the fun of it anyway." Three new artificial turf soccer fields took the place of two old soccer fields and one softball field in 2007.

40. St. Paul Workhouse and Como Pool

"The maintenance of a penal institution on park grounds is entirely out of place and contrary to all implied purposes of a park, and should be eliminated as soon as possible," the park board recommended in their 1907 Annual Report. It wasn't the first time they'd complained about the workhouse and it wouldn't be the last. In 1882, the workhouse had been erected "out in the woods" on 40 acres of land in Como Park while the park sat awaiting funds for development.

Early in the development of the park, workhouse inmates provided labor for grubbing, clearing and grading park drives. They participated in grading unsightly gravelly slopes

bordering the lake shore drive and filled in portions of low ground around the lake caused by receding waters. Gravel excavated from ridges in the park was used to surface park drives. On average, a group of about 28 inmates worked in the park each day. However, the inmates could only work in one compact mass under the watchful eyes of workhouse guards. The hours of labor were short and according to the park board, inmates had “no interest at all in their work.” For these reasons, inmate labor could not be used for park maintenance.

Twenty acres of woods were cut down to make room for the workhouse farm. In 1929, the farm produced apples, beans, beets, cabbage, carrots, corn, cucumber, currants, eggs, hay, milk, onions, peas, plums, potatoes, pumpkins, radishes, raspberries, rutabagas, spinach, tomatoes and pork. The produce was used in the workhouse kitchen and sold, with milk, potatoes and pork bringing in the most money.

The workhouse operated a broom factory from 1895 to 1916. In addition to working in the park and operating the farm, inmates made brooms, worked in a gravel pit, loaded cinders, performed workhouse duties, operated a shoe shop and tailor shop, hauled coal and packed ice. The majority of inmates were sentenced for drunkenness. Other common offences included vagrancy, trespassing, larceny, disorderly conduct and begging. Sentences ranged from \$5 or ten days to up to a year and the workhouse generally admitted over 1,000 prisoners each year.

The workhouse’s proximity to the main entrance of the park presented a problem for park board plans for a dignified and beautiful entrance. By 1920, the workhouse was already old and obsolete. Its cells had no running water or toilets, it was too small and cost too much to operate, the building was not fireproof, the grounds were too small to produce what was needed by the institution and the inmates had to be marched to and from work through a well-settled residential neighborhood. It was condemned again and again, but remained until 1960.

In 1962, the original Como Pool was built by a private firm for \$161,000. Public Pools Inc. operated it on land leased from the city until 1965, when the firm went out of business. The city then bought the pool for only \$15,000. Because of mechanical and electrical problems, the pool was closed after the 2008 season and was torn down in April 2009 to make way for a new pool scheduled to open in 2011.

41. Hodgson Field

As early as 1917, this area was designated as a playfield for recreational sports. It was dedicated in 1940 to Laurence Curran Hodgson (also known by his pen name Larry Ho) who died in 1937. Hodgson was Mayor of St. Paul from 1918 to 1922 and from 1926 to 1930. He wrote for St. Paul newspapers and resided near Como Park. He was a poet, and was considered the highest baseball authority in the Northwest. A bronze plaque on a stone base located near the picnic pavilions (added in 1998) includes a verse by Hodgson: “I’d like to live so humanly/That in some after year/a comrade happily may say/‘He left the Roses Here.’”

Harvesting Hay in the Park

Twenty big stacks of hay were harvested from Como Park in 1916, according to an article published in the June 29, 1917 *Pioneer Press*. The hay, stored in barns at Como, was used to feed the city’s horses and the deer, elk and buffalo at the park. Excess hay from Como and Phalen parks and Wheelock Parkway was expected to be sold for in excess of \$1,000.