

Como Park History Tour: Part I

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

Before the era of the automobile, this was the main entrance to the park. The St. Paul City Railway first reached Como Park in 1893. In 1894 a small station was erected by the end of the tracks from



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which to sell refreshments. This "shed" 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 the Como-Harriet line through the park. 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.

The new stone station was built in 1905 with cobblestones picked up from the fields and the area was planted with a colonial flower garden. Visitors passed through a vine-draped enclosure and crossed over the tracks on the footbridge. The rise of the automobile ultimately led to the demise of the streetcar and in 1926 the stone station was



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remodeled into a park office building with a smaller waiting area. The old wooden station



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was removed and the area grassed over. Streetcars ran until 1953 when St. Paul's portion of the line was fully abandoned. In 2001, the streetcar station was restored and 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?

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 to run the streetcar 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.

4. Submariner's Memorial

This torpedo was donated in 1965 by the U. S. Submarine Veterans of World War II as 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. They followed trails through here to reach more northern hunting grounds and wild rice harvesting lakes.

In 1848, 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 naming it Lake Como. McKenty used \$6,000 of his own money to build a road from St. Paul to the lake. The road was completed in 1857, the same year a large brick hotel was built on the east shore of the lake. Unfortunately,



Minnesota Historical Society, Charles Alfred Zimmerman

McKenty lost much of his wealth in the crash of 1857 and after twelve years of trying to recoup his losses, took his own life.

Development around the lake continued in the 1860s and after the Civil War, several hotels operated on its shores.

The lake itself has undergone many changes in size, shape and depth. From an 1847 high of 120 acres it is presently only 72 acres. The lake was wider and its northern section extended far into the golf course across Lexington. A small separate lake, Cozy Lake, was attached to that arm by a narrow channel. Como was a shallow, swampy lake when it was dredged in

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. Stunningly, 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 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."

1895-96 to increase its average depth. Maintaining lake water levels was a constant struggle due to droughts and leakage through the lakebed. Pumps worked day and night, pumping hundreds of millions of gallons into the lake. Eventually even the pumps couldn't keep up and in 1925 the leaky northern portion of Lake Como was dammed and filled.

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 in the area decreased. The Capitol Region Watershed District, formed in 1998, has removed sand bars and created rain gardens to address water quality issues, and has added native plantings along the shores of the lake to protect the lake and shoreline, and to add wildlife habitat.

6. Boat Landing

Boating was a popular warm weather activity at the lake. In 1893, the first boathouse and docks were built along this shore. The park maintained a large fleet of rowboats and canoes, a sailboat and a sightseeing launch. Fishing was first allowed in 1902 and the price of a fishing boat was



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set at \$1 to deter “small boys who were in the habit of fishing all day.” A large skating rink and a skating house were maintained for the hordes of skaters enjoying the park

in winter. Winter bands entertained the skaters. The park also maintained a half-mile horseracing track on the ice.



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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, 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.

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.

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, a mermaid, modeled on one in Barcelona, Spain. It 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 located near the Schiller Monument, in 1951 they were rebuilt to four times their original size and moved to their third and current site. 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 and a globe. The Gates Ajar have been reproduced almost every year, except for a stretch before 1930, which may have corresponded with the tenure of Superintendent George Nason (1924-1932), who had a disdain for such "unnatural" planting schemes.

9. Lakeside Pavilion

The first wooden pavilion was built in 1894. A music float was added in 1901. Musicians played on the float and crowds of hundreds listened from settees on the platform or from boats on the lake. A new concrete pavilion was built in time for the 1906 concert season. Music, free of charge to the public, was a must for the park and for many years concerts were its greatest expense. With leftover materials, a long classical 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 lower level of the pavilion had a



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Minnesota Historical Society, Northwestern Photographic Studio, Inc.

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 bandstand was torn down in the late 1930s. In 1992, the pavilion was rebuilt using the original 1905 blueprints, minus the bandstand. Free concerts are still held here during the summer months.



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10. Hamm Memorial Water Falls

The Hamm family donated the waterfalls as a memorial garden for William Hamm, Sr., former president of Hamm Brewing Company. Hamm, Sr. was a member of the park board in 1895 and served for many years. The memorial was completed in June 1967 and reconstructed in 2007. 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 were 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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Como Park History Tour: Part II

14. Global Harmony Labyrinth

The Global Harmony Labyrinth was dedicated in 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. Artist Cynthia McKeen created the design as a symbol of peace. 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 enough to support the weight of a small child, grew in the pond. Boilers at the nearby Park Superintendent’s house 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. Water lilies and lotuses are now displayed during the summer in the heated pool that wraps around the new Visitor Center.



Minnesota Historical Society, Charles Munson

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 an old white farmhouse in the park. In 1893, the park removed the “unsightly” old farmhouse and built a new greenhouse, a cottage that served as a residence for the park superintendent, and a new stable. In 1900, the stable was remodeled into an attractive office building and a new barn was built at the southwest end of the park. The Conservatory, a new, spectacular, glass-domed greenhouse was completed in 1915 and the old greenhouses were removed. 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 family of Robert Mannheim donated the Mannheim Memorial, which was erected in 1906. Robert Mannheim came to St. Paul in 1876 and with his brothers Emil and Jacob, established the firm of Mannheim Brothers, the largest retail and imported dry goods establishment west of Chicago at the time. Under the pergola stood a sparkling white marble fountain designed by famous architect Cass Gilbert, who also designed our State Capitol building and the U. S. Supreme Court building. 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 on May 19, 1912. It is one of three busts created by Norwegian-born sculptor Jacob Fjelde from a life-size mold 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, the 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. It was restored and reinstalled in 1999. The other two bronze busts are in Wahpeton, North Dakota and Tacoma, Washington.

19. Floral Parterre, Flower Hill or Peony Hill



Minnesota Historical Society, Kenneth Melvin Wright

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. 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. 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 still stands today though the road no longer crosses it. A wooden footbridge brought pedestrians across.



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Como Park's original Japanese Garden was located on the north shore of Cozy Lake. It began with a gift from Dr. Rudolph Schiffman of trees and shrubs he bought from Japan's exhibit at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. The three-acre garden opened in 1905. Superintendent George Nason recalled the garden had "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." No one seems to know how long this Japanese Garden existed, but it was probably gone by 1923 when four of its stone lanterns were found on the bottom of a drained section of Lake Como. Cozy Lake dried up after the leaky northern section of Lake Como was dammed in 1925.



Minnesota Historical Society, Sweet

In 1930 this newly reclaimed land, along with 29 acres donated to the city, became St. Paul's third municipal golf course. It opened with nine holes and added nine more in 1932. In 1934, the horse barn on the southwest corner of the park was moved to the northwest corner of the park and remodeled into a clubhouse. For years, golfers could still smell its former occupants. The golf course closed for a complete redesign in 1986 and reopened in 1988, with a new clubhouse off Lexington.

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 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. Ignatius Taschner, a German sculptor, created the statue.



Minnesota Historical Society, Charles P. Gibson

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

The Nelumbium Pond and Rockery was completed in 1910. 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.

24. Marjorie McNeely Conservatory

Superintendent Frederick Nussbaumer developed plans for the Conservatory in 1913 and in 1914, the King Construction Company of Tonawanda, New York won the contract to build it. It was completed in November 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. Since 1925, the Conservatory has been known for its beautiful holiday and spring flower shows. 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. 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. 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. Donations of animals continued in a haphazard fashion until by 1930, over 100 animals were housed in cages at the zoo. They included 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



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Longfellow Zoological Gardens in Minneapolis closed in 1934, its stock of 195 animals was donated to Como Zoo.

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 in 1932. Other WPA projects included the limestone bear grottos, the main zoo building and the octagonal-shaped Hoofed Stock Barn. 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.



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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, a nonprofit organization, Our Fair Carousel, Inc., was created to purchase, restore and continue to operate it. Gerard L. Cafesjian, a retired West Publishing executive, provided a major donation for the purchase of the carousel and the construction of its new pavilion. 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 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. The gardens included a small teahouse, a fountain and statue of Aphrodite, a pergola flanked by two large granite vases and a replica of Giovanni da Bologna’s “Mercury” statue that was moved from the old downtown Courthouse in 1937. 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.

Como Park History Tour: Part III

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.

29. Dietrich Lange Memorial

Several acres of land adjoining the rose garden were set aside in 1941 as a bird sanctuary and arboretum in memory of Dietrich Lange, a noted area author, educator and conservationist who died in 1940. Lange spent many hours observing birds in Como Park. In his handwritten document *In the Wild Woods of Como Park* he praised park officials "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..." Students from Mechanic Arts High, where Lange served as Principal for many years, 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.

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. A picnic shelter building was constructed in 1902 and burned down in 1983. Ball fields were added in 1911 and a playground with swings and teeter-totters was added in the early 1900s. The comfort station was built in 1917 and restored in 1998. Three limestone fire rings were built by the WPA.



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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 streetcars over Beulah Lane, which was named in 1954 for Beulah Bartlett. Bartlett was executive director of the St. Paul Humane Society when its headquarters were built on park land in 1954. The city reconstructed the bridge in 2008 as part of a new combined pedestrian and bike trail.

34. Park Nursery

The park began its nursery in 1888, on a less-than-five-acre tract of land west of the workhouse. Tens of thousands of trees, shrubs and vines were planted here in rows. The nursery supplied all the city parks and streets. By 1925, the nursery's stock was overgrown and the nursery was completely renovated. The nursery was abandoned during World War II due to a lack of labor. 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.

35. Barn and Blacksmith Shop

In 1900, a new barn was erected in the far southwest corner of the park. 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. 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. In 1934, after the completion of the new golf course, the barn was moved to the northwest corner of the park and remodeled into the first clubhouse. 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 38. Joyce Kilmer Cascades

Located near what will be the main entrance to the Como Woodland & Outdoor Classroom, the fireplace 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 donated the arboretum memorial to the city. The Cascades, a sunken pool with miniature falls, was completed in May 1936. Its limestone ruins are almost hidden by trees and undergrowth, but its grassy pool is clearly visible. An old three-arched drinking fountain that stood near the streetcar station was built into the fireplace. 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. When the fireplace is restored it will serve as the central meeting place for groups of students using the outdoor classroom.



39. McMurray Fields

This former gravel pit became a 32-acre athletic field in 1927. It was named for William McMurray in 1929. A successful tea merchant and extremely generous man, McMurray gave away large sums of money and wrote off debts owed to his company. 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 were added 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. Though it was condemned as a firetrap

and for its illegal placement in the park again and again, it remained in the park until 1960. Early in the development of the park, workhouse inmates provided labor for grubbing, clearing and grading park drives. However, the inmates were not the ideal work force for park maintenance. In addition to working in the park and operating a 20-acre farm on the workhouse grounds, inmates toiled in the workhouse's broom factory, shoe shop and tailor shop, and did other heavy labor.

In 1962, the original Como Pool was built by a private firm and operated 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 1918-1922 and from 1926-1930. 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 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.'"

Researched and written by Sharon Shinomiya for Como Park Alliance, May 4, 2009